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## **GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA**

### **DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA HISTORY EDUCATION**

#### **REPORT**

#### **CLASSROOM FORUM ON THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA (1975-1979) BOENG KENG KANG HIGH SCHOOL**

**29 JANUARY 2016**

#### **TEAM:**

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## I. Introduction to the School and Forum

Chea Sim Boeng Keng Kang high school lies on 164/240 meters of land in Khan Chamkamon, Phnom Penh capital. This high school, formerly with one building of ten rooms, was built in 1965 of Sangkum Reastr Niyum period under the reign of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. After Pol Pot regime in 1979 this school was known as *Sala Antarak-Pheasa* [International Languages School]. In 1992-1993 the Ministry formally allowed students in general to study in the school which was later renamed as Boeng Keng Kang Secondary School consisting of 6 buildings in total with 24 rooms and one wooden building, a former dining hall. The increasing number of students in 2000-2001 transformed the school's status—from a secondary school to high school. In 2002-2003 LION CLUB association contributed to the construction of another building of 5 rooms in addition with other 3 buildings of 25 rooms given by the former Senate President, Samdech Chea Sim. Therefore, the school was officially renamed to Chea Sim Boeng Keng Kang high school on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

With a focus on historical narratives as content and critical thinking, debate and reflection as process, the forums are crucial to building sustainability of genocide education in the capital. They will build on the schools' pre-existing education programs that were established using SRI/DC-Cam's curriculum, and they will provide additional opportunities for student learning as well as teacher mentoring.



(Fig 1: Pheng Pong-Rasy asking questions during KWL technique.)



1. To provide students with an opportunity to share and express their personal knowledge on what happened during the DK regime.
2. To let students think critically on the transitional consequences of this legacy of the current Cambodian society.
3. To encourage discussion over this legacy in families and communities.
4. To distribute Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) textbooks to participating students.

The class forum at Boeng Keng Kang high school was led by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy with assistance from his program coordinators including Ms. Min Sanas and Mr. Veng Seanghai, based on the following agenda:

Activities	Times
Delivering post-forum surveys to students	9:00 – 9:20
Evaluating students’ pre-existing knowledge through KWL chart	9:20 – 9:35
Displaying “Children of Cambodia”	9:35 – 9:45
Presentation on the importance of studying the history of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)	9:45 – 10:10
Q & A session	10:10 – 10:25
Delivering post-forum surveys to students	10:25 – 10:50
Delivering the textbooks “The History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)”	10:50 – 11:00

## II. Forum in Practice

### 1. Participants

Boeng Keng Kang high school was the very first school to host the classroom forum for high school students initiated by DC-Cam in collaboration with the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports of Cambodia. The forum was done on 08<sup>th</sup> January 2016, shortly after the memorial day of the victory over Khmer Rouge regime (07<sup>th</sup> January), which seemed as the precursor to student’s attention to the forum.

The forum itself was conducted inside a very old but memorable structure which was a former dining hall of Vietnamese troops but now is used as the meeting room for the school (See Fig 2). The forum was joined by 60 students with majority of grade-12 students, a school deputy director and two local teachers in addition with Dr. Path Kosal leading his four US-based students who wished to learn about genocide education in Cambodia. Those four international students, both graduates and undergraduates, were able to absorb the content delivered in the forum due to linguistic assistance by Dr. Phat

Kosal himself and a program coordinator Veng Seanghai, so there is no doubt about language barrier for them at all (See Fig: 3). More than those participants mentioned earlier, there were also other two DC-Cam staff from different projects, playing as observers over the whole forum process.



(Fig 2: Total participating students)



(Fig 3: Linguistic assistance to international students)

## 2. Opening Stage with Pre-Surveys and K-W-L Method

Slightly veering off the prior-planned agenda, the forum in reality started at around 10:00 PM since we had to wait for the break-time of all students so that the participation was going on without interruption to the intra-curriculum teaching time. As the matter of fact, such the delay was somehow caused by miscommunication between the Center and school director with regard to the starting time. However, it was not a big concern for us as we decided to prolong our forum up to 12:00 PM to ensure that the forum duration still stuck with our prior plan (2 hours long).

To get the forum started, pre-surveys were handed to all students with a purpose of gathering information related to their knowledge and perspectives on Khmer Rouge history as well as intergenerational education informally told by their parents (See the survey section below for detail). The surveys conduct was limited within 20 minutes enough for the completion of all questions before it came to another method called K-W-L (Know-Want-Learn) which required Mr. Rasy to write three different columns on a white board dedicating what students already KNOW, what they WANT to learn and what they LEARN from the forum afterwards. The forum designers of DC-Cam agreed upon using such the methodology on the account of its significance to produce effective and comprehensive output for students who simply generated their knowledge inside K-W-L cycle (See Fig 4: ).



(Fig 4: Pheng Pong-Rasy noticing down on KWL chart)

<b>Know:</b>	<b>Want:</b>
Execution	Purposes of killings
Torture	Controversial practice of DK
Family separation	Main goals of DK
Forced marriage	What did they receive?
Forced Transferred	Why they did forced transfer
Religion elimination	
Regime change	
Intellectual Uprooting	

Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy tended to spare the LEARNT section/column until the end of his presentation during which he summarized all his delivered information and helped the students answer what they wanted to know as noticed down in *Want* column earlier. It seemed that the students were encouraged to answer their own questions with guidance from the presenter.

### 3. Documentary Play and Presentation

Before jumping into the presentation, the team played a documentary film called “Children of Cambodia” in the light of encouraging the students to compare two completely different lives between children in post-conflict Cambodia and those in better-off Western countries. All stayed still and noiseless with their concentration to the video being played and touching their heart and soul. All students seemingly lost the sense of time to the view until it came to a little discussion about the film (See Fig 5). In the meanwhile, some students at the back burst out laughing at a view of some children who looked incredibly inhuman—their head looked bigger than body and swollen stomach. When the forum ended, a team coordinator came to informally ask a few students about the sentiment behind such the laughter. Their response was that they could hold it because the children looked absolutely weird and somehow funny to them. This controversial situation can depict that genocide education in Cambodia must be fortified indeed especially within Phnom Penh city due to the decreased attention to the history. The real Khmer Rouge education will not happen unless young generations stop making joke of history like this. Such the experience, instead, has motivated the DC-Cam’s



genocide education team to go further and stronger in favor of enhancing Cambodian genocide education.



(Fig 5: Students watching “Children of Cambodia”)

Next came the slide presentation lasting about 25 minutes. The presentation was designed into a content of KR history overview with “pre-while-post” order so that students fully got informed of how the Khmer Rouge came to power and how it collapsed as well as lessons learnt from the history.

#### 4. Q & A session

The presentation was followed by Q&A session during which students were encouraged to ask any questions coming to their mind about the Khmer Rouge legacy. Eventually, we could notice main asked questions as the followings:

1. What initially led to the creation of Democratic Kampuchea regime?
2. What did the Khmer Rouge received then?
3. Why did Prince Sihanouk transfer this title as the chief of state to Khmer Rouge in 1976?
4. Did the Prince Sihanouk ever visit his people?
5. Why is the name of Democratic Kampuchea controversial against its practice?

## 5. Textbook Distribution

The forum was finally closed by distribution of important textbooks called “*The History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*” approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Individual students were bestowed with one textbook upon their participation in the forum while the Center also delivered some remained textbooks to the school’s library so that the other students who missed sitting the forum could also read the book comprehensively. In addition to “*The History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*” textbooks, the Center provided “*Searching for the Truth*” magazines to the students, allowing them to learn extra personal stories of different victims in different locations as written on the magazine. The textbook and magazine distribution was aimed at equipping the students with hard-copied resource of Khmer Rouge history which is useful for their extensive reading and is possibly spared for their younger siblings or other third persons (See Fig 6). Hopefully the textbooks bless our goal of genocide education sustainability.



(Fig 6: The deputy director distributing the textbooks)

## III. Surveys and Concrete Statistics

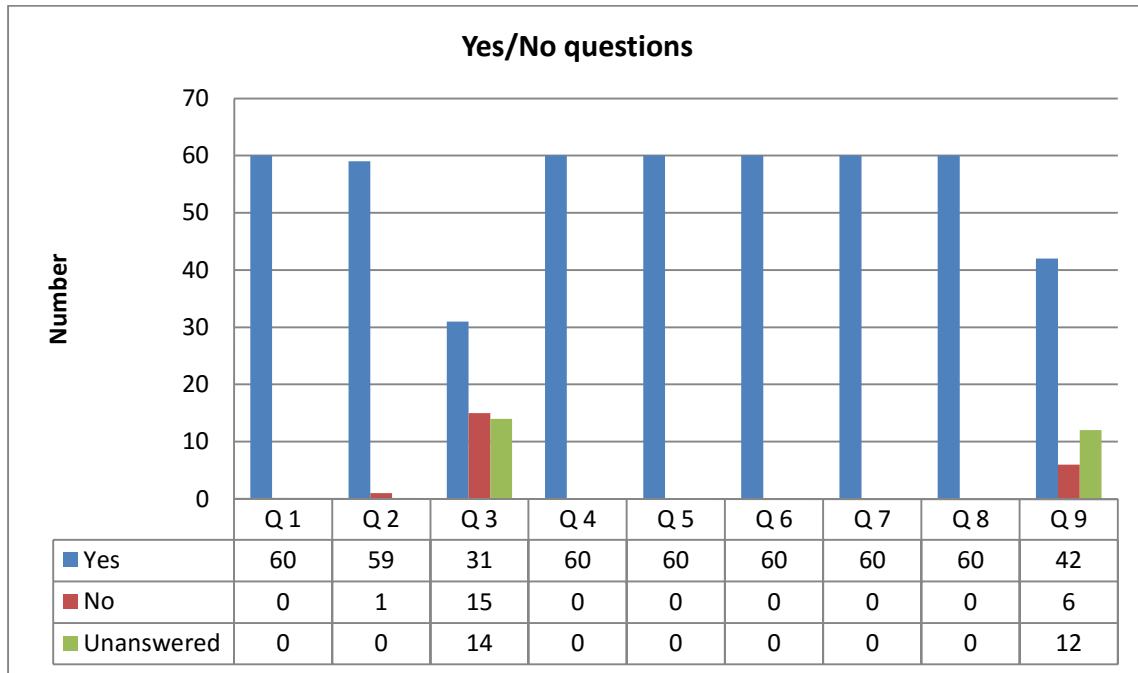
The pre-surveys consisted of 19 questions in total including both yes-no questions and extent-inquiry questions which required students to take an extent ranking from “*Strongly agree*” to “*Strongly disagree*”. Completing all questions took at least 20 minutes since the very beginning of the forum. We unfortunately found that the survey was too long for the students to complete all 19 questions and that we consumed much unnecessary time as some students made it very late for it. To get things better, we decided to revise the survey for a shorter but critical one with wiser time management.

In terms of the sample number, we tended to select all 60 students though some of them did not complete all the questions. The following are the finalized date findings



represented in two different diagrams of different types of questions (Yes-No/extent-inquiry questions).

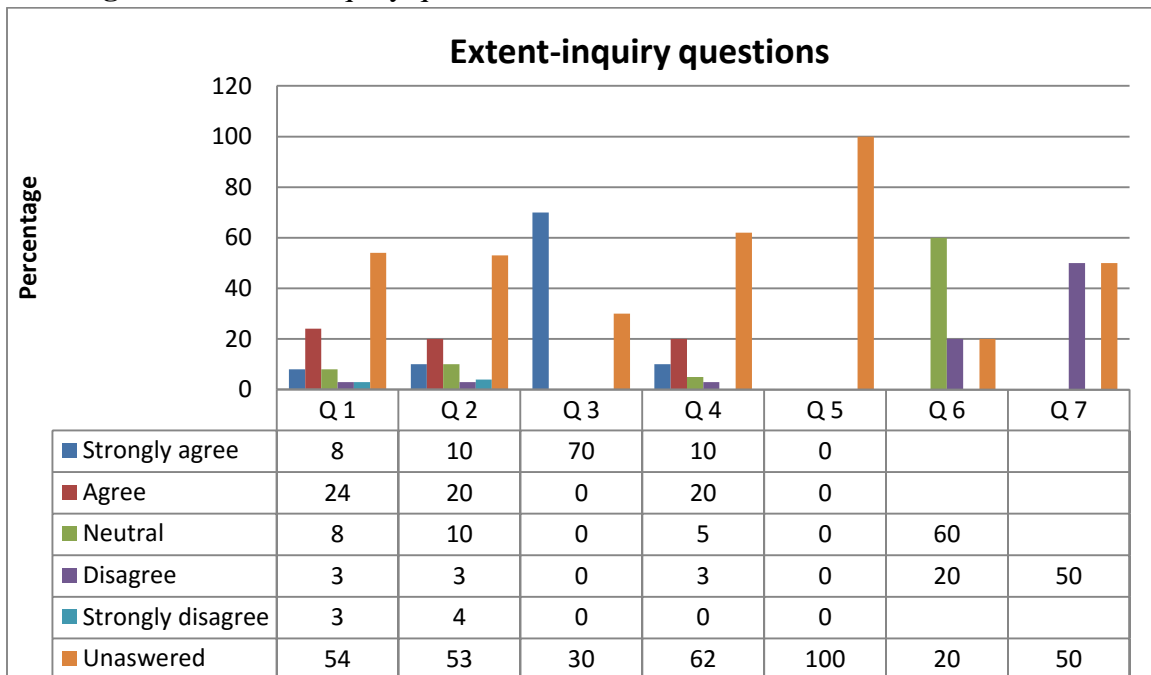
**Diagram 1: Yes-No questions**



**Questions**

1. Do you believe that “A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)” will enhance your learning of Khmer Rouge history?
2. Do you think it is important to study the history of the Khmer Rouge?
3. Do you think that all ethnicities (Cham, Hill Tribes, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc) were equally affected by the Khmer Rouge?
4. Do you believe that there were executions under the Khmer Rouge regime?
5. Do you believe that there was torture under the Khmer Rouge regime?
6. Do you believe that there were famines under the Khmer Rouge regime?
7. Do you believe that there were forced evacuations under the Khmer Rouge regime?
8. Do you believe that forced separation of family members occurred under the Khmer Rouge regime?
9. Should the children of former Khmer Rouge cadre feel guilty for their parents’ deeds?

**Diagram 2: Extent-inquiry questions**



### Questions

1. Learning about Khmer Rouge history contributes towards reconciliation in Cambodia.
2. Learning about Khmer Rouge history helps prevent future atrocities.
3. The Ministry of Education should increase the amount of class time dedicated to learning Khmer Rouge history.
4. Cambodia is no longer affected by the Khmer Rouge period.
5. We should forgive the perpetrators of atrocities.
6. I feel comfortable asking my parents about the Khmer Rouge period.
7. I know significant amount about the Khmer Rouge period.

As stated in the survey, some students are satisfied with the forum’s role as genocide prevention. Students realize the importance of Khmer Rouge history study so they may prevent it at the individual level. Further, other students view a lesson learnt from the past regarding to regime changes within Cambodian civil war context. They claim that the forum with its narrative content helps guide students to be more critical before choosing a right political leader. Another hope of students is the intergenerational oral history from a generation to one another. At the meantime, questions 12 and 17 seem to be problematic. For question 12, the students provided explanations totally mismatched to the question, while question 17 received no responses at all.

## IV. Success Stories



**Experience Sharing and Critical Discussion:** An overall achievement is that students grabbed a nice opportunity to share their experiences told by their parents and to discuss the subject matter in the forum. As fueled by the project’s objectives and their own principles, DC-Cam team worked energetically to magnify the discussion by allowing all students to talk actively and confidently. Mr. Pheng Pong Rasy

gave his interesting elaboration and built up good rapport with student as walking all around the hall, which means that the forum itself seems to have changed the traditional behavior of students—from being passive to active. In the same way, experiences shared individually also let other students know what really happened in different places. In the discussion, the more questions were raised up, the more new questions came—until it reached the end due to limited time. However, students were encouraged to write questions down on a paper and gave it to the team behind the forum’s end.



**Wake-Up Call for Khmer Rouge Study:**

Additionally, the alert of the importance of studying Khmer Rouge history is another success of the forum at the first start. With the diversity of participants including old, young generation and even the foreigners, the forum metaphorically was compared to a wake-up call nudging the students to be aware of why they needed to study the legacy of Khmer Rouge

while this matter becomes international focus. Even more interestingly, the forum as a non-formal education entity reveals that it is not enough to study in only state textbook—the attention should be stuck to the outside resources either off-line and online.