Section 1: Introduction and Background

Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia and it is bordered by Thailand to the west and northwest, Laos to north, Vietnam to the east and the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest. It has a population of over 16 million people, which is made up of five million Khmer Rouge (KR) survivors. Cambodia’s minority groups include Vietnamese, Cham, Chinese and hill tribes. Cambodia was a French Protectorate for 90 years (1863-1953) and the country gained independence from France on November 9, 1953. The country was ruled by King Sihanouk from 1953 until 1970. During the King’s rule (Sangkum Reastr Niyum), the country was prosperous and the educational system was very developed. After independence from France, Prince Sihanouk made education a priority, spending more than 20 percent of all government expenditures on education. Taking inspiration from the French and Buddhist education systems, Cambodia was the model of education in the region: educational attainment rates grew steadily at a rate of more than 2 percent. Scholars and researchers alike agree that the development of Cambodia’s education system was one of the great achievements during Sihanouk’s regime (Clayton, 1998 in Headley, 2018, and in Dy, 2015, pp. 83-84).

Prince Sihanouk, however, was ousted from power by a military regime led by his top military commander, Marshal Lon Nol, on March 18, 1970. With the support of the U.S. government, the Lon Nol regime established the Khmer Republic. The Lon Nol regime ruled the country for 5 years (1970-1975) before it was toppled by the Cambodian communists, better known as the Khmer Rouge, whose movement existed in Cambodia since the 1940s (Dy, 2007, p.5).

The KR seized the capital city on April 17, 1975, and they began the forced transfer of urban populations to remote rural areas of the country under the assertion that the Americans were going to bomb the city and other towns. They also stated that the forced emptying of cities and towns would facilitate food transportation, agricultural work, and the cleansing of enemies in the city. The KR shut down schools, banks, pagodas, mosques, churches in the city and all over the country. Monks were disrobed, and religious leaders were targeted. Many Cham religious leaders were killed. Civilians and non-civilians were subject to attack. Former soldiers and those found to be affiliated, including their families, were persecuted. Intellectuals, students and teachers were also targeted as they were seen as the barriers to the Khmer Rouge revolution. People were forced to conduct hard labor from morning until evening, with little rest, food and almost no medical care. Those individuals who were found “stealing” food were reeducated or punished or killed. Academics, teachers, former

civil servants, and people with a professional background were targeted and killed. Religious practices were prohibited (Dy, 2007, pp. 13-19; So, 2011, pp.14-16).

Children and youth were proclaimed to be the property of the Angkar, or what was the Khmer Rouge term for “the organization.” The KR named the country Democratic Kampuchea (DK) and dissolved the formal education system at all levels. Education would instead be reflected in one’s commitment to work and the revolutionary struggle. Some basic reading and writing for children were introduced in some working collectives, but these activities were minimal—in some cases only about two to three hours every 10 days. The Khmer Rouge claimed that, “Study is not important. What’s important is work and revolution” and “There are no more diplomas, only diplomas one can visualize. If you wish to get a Baccalaureate, you have to get it at the dams or canals.” (Dy, 2015, p. 190; Chigas and Mosyakov, 2001). Many school complexes were converted into prisons, reeducation centers or warehouses. Obviously, Tuol Svay Prey (literally meaning “a wild mango tree hill”) High School and Tuol Sleng (literally meaning “a hill with poisonous tree”) Primary School, together with the surrounding flats were converted into the KR top security center (Office S-21 or Tuol Sleng prison), where a number of prominent educators and intellectuals were interrogated, tortured and eventually executed. At least 75 percent of all teachers and 96 percent of all tertiary students were killed (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2000 in Clayton, 1998 and Dy, 2015, p. 85).

The KR was toppled on January 7, 1979, by a Vietnamese military force, that was supported by a smaller force of Cambodian soldiers. During this genocidal regime, about 2 million people—one quarter of the country’s population—died of overwork, starvation, disease, and execution. About five million people survived the regime and they were greatly affected by the regime and its legacy (Dy 2007, p. 103; So, 2011, p.15).

History of Education System and School Curriculum Prior to Reconciliation-Oriented Reforms

After the regime collapsed, the country was controlled by the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), a Vietnamese-backed Cambodian government. Education and other social sectors were reestablished with financial and technical support from the Soviet Union, Eastern European and other Soviet satellite countries, with the principal support coming from Vietnam. The education system in particular had to undergo significant rebuilding (Dy, 2015, p. 96; Ly, 2017, pp. 20-30).

The first academic year, 1979-1980, officially started on September 24, 1979. PRK President Heng Samrin declared that date as the National Day of Education. He added, “the reconstruction and expansion of cultural, educational and national study foundation are the most important and urgent tasks.” (Speech by Heng Samrin in Dy, 2015, p. 90). Education had to be re-started with 2,481 primary schools, 13,619 teachers, 724,058 enrolled students. Approximately 6,000 educational institutions were built and thousands of teachers trained within a very short period.

In an attempt to recruit more teachers, the regime appealed to all surviving educators and encouraged people nationwide to register as teachers and put children back to school. The government’s strategy to rescue national education at that time was to have “the literate teach the semi- illiterate, and the semi-illiterate teach the illiterate,” which was the motto of the PRK Ministry of
Education. Another common slogan of that time was: “Going to teach and going to school is nation-loving.” (Dy, 2015, p.91).

The Ministry of National Education was significantly hampered by the lack of human and capital resources in its pursuit of developing curricula and textbooks for school children. The first education minister of Cambodia, Chan Ven, recalled how the Ministry had no clear direction of what to do, except they were committed to putting as many students in school as possible (Dy, 2015, p. 193). Another significant challenge for the regime was the struggle over political doctrine. Teachers were required to incorporate political doctrine and messages into even the most technical courses. Supplementary teaching materials included a propaganda magazine, songs, poems and slogans. These materials were used to ensure students learned about the concepts of socialism and revolutionary consciousness as reflected in stories about revolutionary fighters and the heroism of “Vietnamese voluntary forces. (Ayres in Dy, 2015, pp. 95- 96).

The regime incited revolutionary anger and sentiments of vengeance toward what it called the "Pol Pot-leng Sary-Khieu Samphan genocidal cliques." The regime built messaging around certain themes such as, "KR genocidal massacres of innocent people"; "expansionist China"; "Beijing genocidal ambition"; "Nazi fascism"; and "American imperialism.” The PRK national anthem clearly stated these objectives. The PRK used genocide education as a tool to rebuild Soviet-oriented socialism in Cambodia, to condemn Chinese expansionism, to absolutely prevent the return of the KR regime, and to keep the "7 January 1979 Day" alive in the people's hearts, all of which contributed to a long-lasting political survival of the regime. In this respect, the PRK employed the term "genocide" as a proxy word for the KR regime. The term had been contentious outside of the PRK framework, and Cambodia once again became a proxy battleground for the political and ideological competitions between super powers. Regardless of the ideologies the PRK subscribed to, educational rehabilitation was one of the regime's greatest achievements, even though the PRK faced severe capacity constraints. During this period, the concept of reconstructing the educational system was integrated with the concept of national reconstruction and development. (Dy, 2015, p. 73). These few lines about the Khmer Rouge regime were taught in school along survivors’ stories and revolutionary consciousness.

However, as Cambodia was in transition from a socialist country to a democratic country in 1989 to 2000, these few lines were removed from the PRK textbook and the PRK’s textbooks were replaced by new ones. The new textbooks did not include an account of the Khmer Rouge era in 1991-2000 for the sake of national reconciliation, and building peace and political stability. The teachers were instructed not to mention the KR in the classrooms (Dy, 2015, p. 18).

During this period, the role of informal education through memorialization, truth-telling, and other initiatives which will be discussed below contributed to transitional justice process in Cambodia.

Pathways and Processes of Reconciliation

Many local initiatives were undertaken by both state and non-state actors since the fall of the Khmer Rouge to promote peace and reconciliation in the country. These initiatives or mechanisms ranged from truth and justice seeking processes, peaceful co-existence, memorialization, peacebuilding, democratization, education, and religious approaches.
Although there were sporadic incidents of reprisals and acts of vengeance that occurred after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea in 1979, the sentiments that fueled these acts gradually transitioned to support for acts, initiatives, and mechanisms associated with the rule of law, a collective sense of humanity, a shared victimhood, and the memorialization and teaching of Khmer Rouge history. Although religion was a crucial proponent for this shift in sentiments, there were also social and economic reasons for supporting transitional justice. The process of reconciliation has been described in the proverbs, “every single drop of water falling onto dry soil penetrates in all directions” and “each single drop of water can break a rock.” These proverbs illustrate that individual Cambodians and the government considered a variety of practices that bring closure to survivors and adapted these practices to their own circumstances. Little by little the nation will be healed after the rocks are saturated. (Ly, 2017, p. 18).

**People’s Revolutionary Tribunal (PRT)**

In August 1979, a People’s Revolutionary Tribunal was set up by PRK in order to prosecute the Khmer Rouge senior leaders, including Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan, in absentia. The tribunal lasted for seven months and heard many testimonies of survivors. A death penalty was handed down against the accused, although the sentences were never carried out. The hearing, despite some flaws, helped calm public outcries for reprisal killings that took place in early 1979. Many victims murdered perpetrators single or en masse. Some hired assassins. (Ly, 2017, pp.38-40).

**Truth-telling Process Through Petitions**

In 1982 and 1983, Cambodia began a nation-wide truth-telling process that was similar to a truth commission. The process involved a massive collection of petitions. These petitions were written, signed or thumb-printed by thousands of survivors of the Khmer Rouge. A crime research committee (“Research Committee) charged with the responsibility to investigate the crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge era was created by the PRK’s Solidarity Front on October 5, 1982 (Schulte, 2012, p. 1; Gordon, 2012, p. 17). The vast collection of victim’s petitions is known as Renakse records or “million documents” and each document contains many authors which in many instances entail gruesome details such as the suffering that they and others went through. The petitions were mainly group petitions, and they reflected a wide range of claims and experiences, such as: the number of people in a village who were killed or disappeared; the number of homes destroyed; animals killed; methods of torture used by the Khmer Rouge; forced marriages; locations of mass graves; desecration of Buddhist pagodas, mosques, and other religious temples; monks were disrobed or killed; words expressing anger or condemnation against the Khmer Rouge; among other things. The records became one of the most important and useful sets of preliminary documents on the activities and experiences of people under the Khmer Rouge. The PRK attempted to submit these petitions to the UN to recognize the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979 for the purpose of removing the Khmer Rouge representatives from Cambodia’s UN seat. Although a large number of petitions were collected, they were never sent to the UN for unknown reasons. They were held at PRK’s Solidarity Front Office until 1997, when they were handed over to DC-Cam. Of the nearly 9,000 petitions that were reportedly drafted, DC-Cam acquired approximately 1,250 (Ly, 2017, p. 69, Gordon, 2012, pp. 2-3). As described by some survivors, the petitions are like: “Cold Water in hand

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for drinking, to extinguish anger.” To some victims, they are seen as promoting unity and solidarity among survivors. (Ly, 2017, p. 81).

**Day of Anger/Day of Remembrance**

The Cambodian Day of Anger/Day of Remembrance was established in May 1983 in order to commemorate and memorialize when the Khmer Rouge created the first official cooperative on May 20, 1973, which led to the eventual national collectivization of private property and mass killing during the regime. The day used to be recognized as a national day of remembrance. This holiday allowed survivors to express anger in a peaceful way, to pay tribute to the dead, and to show a commitment to building a shared future. (Ly, 2017, p. 23).

**Unearthing and Preservation of the Remains**

Cambodia began unearthing the mass graves after an announcement from the PRK’s Ministry of Information and Culture, Municipal and Provincial Officers in October 1983. People were instructed to unearth mass graves in their locations and report on the death toll to the Ministry. (Ly, 2017, p. 88). They were also instructed to build memorials for the deceased. In December 2001 the new government issued another circular directing all people and relevant institutions to preserve the bones of Khmer Rouge victims. The intent behind this circular was to encourage the preservation of remains for future physical evidence, remembrance, and education of the younger generation (Ly, 2017, p. 89).³

**Paris Peace Agreement**

In the early 1980s, Khmer Rouge forces grew when two other resistance groups—the United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) and the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF)—formed a political alliance with the KR called the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). They fought against the PRK government (Ly, 2017, p. 28). Peace negotiations among all warring parties were brokered by the international community, consisting of 18 countries that met in Paris from July-August 1989.⁴ The negotiation process actually took place over the course of many occasions and eventually an agreement was reached on October 23, 1991 in Paris, France. The warring parties agreed to hold the first national election in 1993 under direct supervision of United National Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

**Transitional Period and Democratization**

Following the Paris Peace Agreements, UNTAC was set up by the United Nations and its members in 1992 following a request by then Prince Sihanouk and Hun Sen to execute the key points agreed upon (Ly, 2017, p. 151). Therefore, the UN was mandated to hold a free and fair election for the country which brought together the warring parties, provide a neutral, unbiased, and secure environment to force a phased and balanced demobilization (p. 156). The election took place as planned, but the KR boycotted the election and then continued to struggle against the newly elected Royal


Government of Cambodia until 1998. Under this new government, a constitution was established and is in use until present day.

The coalition government, which was led by FUNCINPEC, received a majority of votes. However, the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) did not recognize the electoral results, forming a deadlock. To compromise, the UN proposed a Co-Prime Ministers resolution in which the government should be governed by two Prime Ministers, Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddth. This system was short lived because of unequal share of power. In 1997, the prince was overthrown by the CPP in a coup.

Although the KR was outlawed for its refusal to comply with the peace plan of UNTAC in 1993, the CPP began to court the KR in 1996 to gain their support. The government established a policy known as the “Win-Win policy” to incentivize rank-and-file KR members to give up their arms and association with the movement in exchange for retention of their property rights and a promise of full reintegration in society (Ly, 2017, p. 166). Nationwide networks were established to conduct outreach to members of the Khmer Rouge resistance (Ly, p. 21), and the outreach was implemented through a number of mechanisms, one being a radio program known as the “Motherland Appeal program” (p. 118). Many people defected to the government as a result of this policy. Anlong Veng of Oddor Meanchey province was the last area to join the government following the death of Pol Pot, the KR most senior leader in 1998 and the arrest of Ta Mok in 1999 (Dy and Dearing, 2014, pp. 126-127).

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC): A Retributive justice

It took Cambodia three decades to establish a court which is recognized by the international community to bring justice to the victims. The history goes back to 1997 when the Cambodian government requested the United Nations to assist in establishing a trial to prosecute the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge for the crimes committed between 1975 and 1979. On Dec 12, 1997, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution 52/135, which called on the Secretary-General to examine Cambodian request. On July 23, 2003, the Cambodian National Assembly passed a law to establish the tribunal. For the sake of the Cambodian people, the government requested that the trial be held in the country using Cambodian staff and judges together with foreign judges and personnel. DC-Cam played an important role in this process as it provided research support and help draft Khmer Rouge Tribunal law. It also provided essential documents to the court. Although we advocate for the court, we remain independent, yet critical in order to ensure justice is done and survivors participate in the proceeding meaningfully.

Religious Approach to Forgiveness and Healing

Religion played an important role in the reconciliation process for Cambodia. Buddhism, Islam and Christianity helped many Cambodian people to come to terms with the past and find inner peace. When asked how to heal, Buddhist people said they use the Buddhist concept of “Vindictiveness ends by not being vindictive” to end a cycle of violence. In addition to this concept, they use rituals and ceremonies such as Bangskol (paying homage to the dead) and giving offerings to Buddhist monks, among other activities. Individuals who were former Khmer Rouge (or who self-identified as having committed horrible acts) would use these rituals and ceremonies as a way to find inner peace as well as to admit their guilt. Some victims or perpetrators become a-char or monks or nuns, so they have

peace and merit is accumulated. As a second largest religion in the country, Islam promotes peaceful co-existence and teaches its followers to forgive. Many Cham Muslim survivors said no matter how much hatred or anger they hold, they were able to find peace in pursuing their religious faith. Similar to Buddhists, Cham Muslims said that if they were to take revenge, it would ensure a cycle of violence (So, 2011, pp.101-102; Ly, 2017, pp.51-52).

Believing that Christianity promises release from past sins for embracing God, many people converted to Christianity after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Both victims and perpetrators find religion a helpful means to healing and a solution as this also comes with economic incentive that can address their social needs. Reportedly, many Khmer Rouge cadre or perpetrators converted to Christianity. Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch, former Chief of S-21 security center, better known as Tuol Sleng prison, embraced Christianity around his trial in 2009 asking for forgiveness. Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch, former Chief of S-21 security center, better known as Tuol Sleng prison, embraced Christianity around his trial in 2009 asking for forgiveness. Im Chaem, a former suspect of case 004 converted to Christianity in 2018 following a dismissal of her case and a recovery of her son from mental illness. Pastor LaPel helped pay for her son’s mental health treatment in Battambang. Chaem told VOA that her case was finalized by dismissing the charges, so she was cleared. She was happy to hear that her son got better. She believes that God (Jesus Christ) redeems any sins she may have committed, although she did not specify if these sins are linked to alleged crimes committed. She also expressed that only God can help her out.

Section 2: Reforms and Innovations

Formal and Informal Education and Curriculum Reforms

Formal Education Curriculum

Curriculum reform is a multi-faceted, incremental pursuit that requires extensive coordination and consensus-building in addition to actual curriculum development. Civil society was often the key driver of curriculum reform in post-conflict Cambodia, particularly in the last twenty years in which genocide education became institutionalized within the formal education system.

The institutionalization of the formal education curriculum took approximately 7 years of work. Between 2002 and 2009, Khmer Rouge history curriculum was developed, refined, and packaged into a national curriculum with clear contents, objectives and methodology. The curriculum comprised several essential components such as: peer-reviewed sections detailing historical facts surrounding the Khmer Rouge regime; stories of victims, survivors, and perpetrators; and a set of lesson plans that combined traditional teacher-centered learning methods with more contemporary, student-centered methods. The final stage of curriculum development was a coordination and

6 Duch was sentenced to life imprisonment by the ECCC for war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2017 and died in 2020.
packaging process, in which key stakeholders, namely government officials, were engaged to ensure the curriculum was appropriately nested within mandated public school curriculum. In many respects, this piece was part and parcel to all work in developing the curriculum; however, it assumed greater prioritization as the curriculum was finalized. Many civil society organizations, especially DC-Cam played an important role in initiating and developing a history textbook. DC-Cam started to engage with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYs) in 2002 after its survey findings which indicate that 85% of respondents favor formal education on the history in secondary school (Dy, 2015, p. 197). It was supported by one of the remarkable statements expressed by a Cham Muslim woman survivor Sos Seiha who stated the following:

“I asked myself whether or not the young generation of Cambodians believe that the Khmer Rouge crimes did exist in Cambodia. Do they believe what their parents and grandparents have told them about their suffering at that time? Has any author or historian written about this history for official school curriculum yet?” (in Dy, 2012, p. 129).

In 2004, DC-Cam began recruiting a young Cambodian researcher who was born after the regime to conduct research and spearhead its genocide education project. After two years of research, a draft was produced and reviewed by a leading international historian David Chandler, one of the foremost scholars on Cambodian history.

In September 2006, DC-Cam sent 4 copies of the draft manuscript to 4 key government officials for review. These included the incumbent Prime Minister, the then Minister of Education and two education secretaries. The Center tactfully approached the Prime Minister since it believed that he was the only person to truly endorse this politically sensitive history. This review process had to go through a round of censorship and scrutiny, but eventually the Prime Minister approved the text. The Prime Minister thereafter ordered his cabinet to establish a government working commission to further review the text. The commission consisted of seven persons, including two leading historians, the late Minister of Education, and the current undersecretary of state. After several months of review by the commission, DC-Cam received mixed comments from the reviewers. The two leading historians suggested that we should avoid giving personal opinions or analyses to the history. Another reviewer suggested the deletion of a chapter on the birth of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) because of its political sensitivity. Other comments focused on the violent descriptions of certain events (Dy, 2015, p. 221).

Despite the critical comments, the late Minister of Education, ultimately rejected all of the changes suggested by the other reviewers. They then sent DC-Cam an approval letter which reads, “The text can be used as a core reference to write a history textbook, but cannot be used as a history textbook for general education.” (in Dy, 2015, p. 223).⁹

After the text was approved, DC-Cam printed 3,000 copies of the textbook in Khmer and began distributing these copies to secondary students, teachers, and academic and non-academic institutions. It also published an English version. To date, DC-Cam has distributed over 1 million copies of the textbook with translations in five other languages.¹⁰

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¹⁰ http://dccam.org/a-history-of-democratic-kampuchea-1975-1979
DC-Cam also developed a Teacher’s Guidebook, co-authored by Chea Phala, Cambodian educator, and Christopher Dearing, an American educator. The guidebook underwent a similar review process as the textbook. The working group consisted of 24 national teachers, experts and the secretary of state who reviewed the textbook. After several rounds of comments and meetings, the text was approved by the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. The guidebook relied upon a mixture of teacher-centered and student-centered learning approaches to support critical thinking, self-reflection, and empathy. It was printed in 2009. The guidebook was followed by train-the-trainer sessions starting at the national and regional levels, and ending with commune teacher trainings. National trainers were certified and, alongside DC-Cam staff, they became the trainers for provincial teacher trainers, who thereafter became trainers for commune teachers. After several years of training, several thousand history teachers were trained in schools.

A formal Khmer Rouge history curriculum is now integrated within the official Cambodian history curriculum, which is subset of the core curriculum of Social Studies. Chapters on the Khmer Rouge history were included in the social studies textbook and became mandatory materials for students in grades 9th and 12th grade. The 2015 national exam also included questions on the Khmer Rouge history. It was also integrated in the foundation year at the university level. Finally, pre-service teachers (i.e., student teachers) were trained in the curriculum. To date, at least 3,000 of pre-service teachers have been trained.

Informal history education

As discussed above, many informal initiatives were established before the existence of the formal history curriculum. The existing informal education activities were expanded and many new initiatives were developed after the introduction of formal curriculum in national schools. These included public education forum, peace and human rights tour, home visits, memorial slogans, museum and exhibitions, intergenerational dialogue through a massive oral history collection, among other initiatives.

Memorialization (museum, memorial sites and slogans and exhibitions)

Preservation and memorialization of the killing fields, prisons, and other historical sites and turning them into site of remembrance is a significant contribution to increasing an understanding on the Khmer Rouge period. S-21 prison, a top KR security center, was converted into a museum in 1980 and Choeung Killings site where Khmer Rouge prisoners were sent to be executed, was renamed a memorial site. The museum and the Killing Fields which are located in Phnom Penh have received hundreds of thousands of both Cambodian and international visitors which they can learn about the Khmer Rouge reign of terrors, especially against their own cadre. The preservation and development of 14 historical sites in Anlong Veng district, a last Khmer Rouge strong area and 400 kilometers away from the city, offers an educational platform and reflection on how the Khmer Rouge guerrilla survived after its demise in 1979 and why ongoing struggle continued to ensue until 1998.

Memorializing a tragedy where millions lost their lives could also be done through a nationwide memorial genocide prevention slogan which started first in a school yard in 2010 and now expanded

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11 [http://dccam.org/teachers-guidebook](http://dccam.org/teachers-guidebook)
12 It was paused during COVID-19 pandemic.
in communities. These two slogans that both memorialize the tragedy of Democratic Kampuchea and promote post-genocide reconciliation are inscribed in marble with different look read: (1) “Talking about experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime is to promote reconciliation and to educate children about forgiveness and tolerance;” and (2) “Learning about the history of Democratic Kampuchea is to prevent genocide. When such banners are hung across every high school in the country so that school children, parents, community members, and passersby read their message, then the collective impact of these banners can be more powerful and wide-reaching than even traditional memorials.

Equally important, exhibitions whether permanent, temporary, or travelling curated in a museum or anywhere are a useful tool to engage younger generation, survivors and general public in dialogue about daily experience.13

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)
The ECCC proceeding and hearing where survivors were invited to testify, the accused made statements, and experts addressed the questions posed by the judges and all parties are important platform for education.14 So far, the court concluded two cases: Case 001 and 002 and convicted the surviving leaders for crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.15 The remaining cases--003 and 004--are unlikely to proceed due to disagreements over jurisdiction between Cambodian and International Co-Investigating Judges. While the International Co-Investigating Judge wanted to proceed, the National Co-Investigating judge dismissed the case.16 As the court is winding down its operations, documents and information—many of them obtained from DC-Cam—have become (and will be) useful resources for students, academia, survivors and the general public.

Public Education Forum
The public education forum began operating in August 2010. The forum’s aim is to raise public awareness and understanding of Khmer Rouge history in community forums, focusing particularly on communities in remote areas. Remote communities are the target audience for public education forums because they have little access to textbooks and publications related to the Khmer Rouge history. The villagers have the opportunity to tell their stories to youth and discuss history in guided discussion sessions overseen by DC-Cam staff, local leaders, and teachers. The discussion and personal accounts are supplemented with the textbook, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*. The forum is intended to complement DC-Cam’s support for formal education about Khmer Rouge history in Cambodian classrooms nationwide. The forum also aims to link textbook material to the particular stories of each community—allowing teachers and students to make the best use of their own resources and encourage the villagers to participate with teachers in educating the younger generations about Democratic Kampuchea of Pol Pot.

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13 [http://dccam.org/exhibitions](http://dccam.org/exhibitions)
The forum does not aim to train the villagers to be teachers for their children in a pedagogical sense, rather the goal is to increase community awareness on the larger historical context as well generate a discussion on personal experiences. The forum discussions are led by three local history teachers who have participated in teacher training sessions on DK history, with the assistance of DC-Cam staff.

*Peace and human rights tour to site of remembrance (other than Tuol Sleng) Anlong Veng*

The peace and human rights tour is centered on teaching peace and human rights-related topics to students through a physical tour of the history of Anlong Veng and a focused study of the Khmer Rouge period. The project leverages local survivors, who tell their stories during the Khmer Rouge period. Many individuals are former Khmer Rouge cadres, which is important as it gives students an opportunity to ask direct questions on why people participated in the Khmer Rouge movement and how it affected them. The tour also engages persons who were victims of the Khmer Rouge movement (both people who suffered and those who lost family members). The tour is an important mechanism for expanding the teaching of this history beyond the school textbook by providing in-person accounts of the history. The tours are also important as they serve as a bridge between communities dominated by former Khmer Rouge and communities of surviving victims and the next generation. As part of the tour, they were brought to visit one of the 14 historical sites and exhibitions organized by Anlong Veng Peace Center, DC-Cam’s mini center in the area. At least, 200 university students and civil society organizations staff attended the tour since 2017.

*Village History*

Exploring and writing local history in each village increases a sense of ownership of history and a means for education. Researchers, mainly teachers and pre-service teachers, are empowered and encouraged to conduct this local history research picking a location and this can be either their hometown or village they know best to conduct a research and write about it in a length between 15 to 20 pages long. There is a wide range of topic, a prison site, a work site, a mass grave site, a cooperative, a dining hall, a Khmer Rouge office etc. The paper should be based on documents, survivors’ testimonies, and physical site visit. DC-Cam has collected over 100 papers from researchers. A few examples of the project is available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSwmxaBKTx8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSwmxaBKTx8) and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6EBpl0jQOE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6EBpl0jQOE).

*Home Visits*

Home visits, especially during covid-19 circumstance, play a significant role in staying connected with survivors and their children as well as offer an educational platform (one-on-one coaching) for children of survivors who are currently home taking online study. The first part of the visit is an interview with head of household and their spouse about their experiences under the Khmer Rouge. The second part consists of a presentation on Khmer Rouge history and genocide prevention strategies to their children. There is a short break between these sessions and normally it lasts about

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2 hours. Each household receives a gift box from the DC-Cam’s team during the visit. The visit means a lot to survivors.19

*Intergenerational dialogue*

DC-Cam began a nationwide intergenerational dialogue in August 2021. Youth, mainly students, were recruited as CamboCorps volunteers to conduct a dialogue with Khmer Rouge survivors, including their parents and relatives, across the country. The objectives of the dialogue are to 1) provide students an opportunity to listen to survivors’ stories in order to help them build historical empathy and archive the unrecorded stories of survivors, approximately 5 millions, 2) improve their survivors’ health condition by assessing their health and offering free medical check up, 3) enhance students’ knowledge on the history and strengthen their leadership skill, so they can give back to their community.

To achieve these objectives, the students were trained in Khmer Rouge history, oral history, including secondary trauma, leadership skill, and public health by our experts in those fields before they began their volunteer work. At least 500 volunteers representing 25 cities and provinces in our first batch and each DC-Cam staff supervises at least 20 volunteers. They also continue to receive a series of training during their work. Their assigned tasks include 1) identifying and approaching survivors in their community, including their parents whose age 50 or above, 2) listen to and record at least 1 story a day, 3) learn about survivors’ health and inform them about a free health check up offered by DC-Cam. Between August and October, 2021, at least 10,000 stories collected by the 500 volunteers from 25 cities and provinces, especially remote and most remote areas of Cambodia.20

*Art and Art Performance—Breaking the Silence, Educational Music and Film*

While each measure is valuable for the country’s healing process, there needs also to be measures which focus on the emotional and psychological components of reconciliation and healing. This is where art can make a significant contribution. Cambodian people are very artistic and it is their way of life. The Khmer Rouge have killed many artists but not the artistry of the Cambodian people. It is Cambodian soul. This play, “Breaking the Silence” is the most powerful play since the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. It is a play which seeks to break Cambodia’s silence, as evident by its title. It is a play about the Cambodian people, their suffering, anger, and courage to move on no matter the circumstances. Khmer Rouge victims are emotionally broken people living in a broken society; a people without souls or that our souls are wandering around.21

In addition to performance, music, song and film are also considered as one of the most powerful tools to educate people about the period and at times help them heal. There are many music, song and film about the period and its legacy as well as reconciliation. One of the most stunning and touching ones is “The Killing Fields” which was released in 198422. The most recent ones are about

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19 http://truthcambodia.com/archives/979
20 https://photos.app.goo.gl/caubMNG8zmdotS84A
21 http://dccam.org/performing-arts
22 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlmpSBF2hp4
Anlong Veng which are available on website, Youtube, and Facebook and these are seen by many people as a healing process.23

Media and Outreach (Newspaper, Radio Program, Magazine, Website and Facebook)

Newspapers, especially local ones, provide a good platform for learning about the Khmer Rouge period. DC-Cam has a column in Raksmei Kampuchea newspaper which is now available online. We publish about Khmer Rouge related topics daily.

Radio programming is an important means of outreach to Cambodian people throughout the country. The majority of Cambodians, especially survivors of the Khmer Rouge period who live in predominantly rural areas, have little access to print and news media. Thus, radio remains a culturally popular medium and is often the sole source of national news and information for many Cambodians. The reliance of citizens, especially rural citizens, on radio broadcasts can lead to the manipulation of public perception when the radio messages are used for purposes of political propaganda. In general, because of this risk, the creation of accurate and objective educational programming remains a pressing need in Cambodia. Since 2002, DC-Cam has broadcast readings excerpted from Searching for the Truth magazine and other publications in various local radio stations and Voice of America (VOA), which have a wide coverage of the country.24 It also explored various formats, such as forums and listener hotlines, on various topics, including famine and starvation, to encourage audience participation in discussions of issues related to Democratic Kampuchea. In September 2021, another radio program on access to health and social services which is part of a reparation project for Khmer Rouge survivors was developed and broadcast nationwide. This program is to orient the audience who are mostly Khmer Rouge survivors, their children and general public to the work carried out by CamboCorps volunteers who are collecting oral histories from survivors and assessing their health conditions. This one-hour program is on air daily. The program consists of reading and analysing each chapter of Khmer Rouge history by DC-Cam’s national trainer and consider supplementary tool to in-class learning.

Magazine: Searching for the Truth

Published in 2000, Searching for the Truth, a monthly magazine, is considered a useful tool to connect with survivors, students, and general public about the period and a means to educate them about the period and other various related topic. The magazine consists of five main sections, including documentation, history, legal, debate, and family tracing. Both experts and non-experts, including survivors, are welcome to contribute their piece to the issue. Hundred thousands of copies were distributed nationwide since its first publication until 2018. The English version, a quarterly basis, was printed in 2003 and were also distributed to its readers. Both Khmer and English edition is now available online which contributors and readers can continue to communicate.25

23 http://dccam.org/enthanou-music-anlong-veng-my-love-a-rainbow-no-love
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlmpSBF2hp4
25 http://dccam.org/magazine-searching-for-the-truth
Role of History, Arts, Culture and Human Rights Education in Post-Conflict Curricula

It took Cambodia thirty years (1979-2009) to have a formal history curriculum on Khmer Rouge genocide. History is always contested, involves multiple narratives, and at times it can be distorted. The public memory and its narrative was political and propagandized during the last decade of Cold War era (1979-1989) since the country was at a tug of war between the Communist bloc (Vietnam, Russia, and Eastern countries), the Free World (US, ASEAN nations) and China. Although China is a communist, it teamed up with US and ASEAN in order to break communist support to the country. Suspicion about the role of foreign country US and China and the sensitive top on who supported the Khmer Rouge as well as liberation or invasion of Vietnam since 1989-1993 or later. Some did not want to believe such brutality was done by Khmer (xx).

Thus, the role of history teaching is important to prevent denial, help us know ourselves better, and to help us prevent. Thanks to memory, experience felt by Cambodian survivors, and the ECCC that uncover the truth. DC-Cam Director always reminds us that, “Cambodia will never escape her history, but she does not need to be enslaved by it” and “a society cannot know itself it does not have an accurate memory of her own past.”

The teaching of KR history is about teaching past human rights abuse which is one of the tragic pasts since the Holocaust. Help us avoid violence and respect differences, promote tolerance, empathy. This will help Cambodia follow rule of law and build a good citizenry.

Another important role is learning and listening to survivors’ stories, it helps build historical empathy. The ability to reflect and understand what and how their parents or those lived through the period had to endure and survive, so that they would not cause any trouble.

Likewise, understanding why Khmer Rouge joined the revolution or did what they were told or ordered to do to the victims, it helps reduce anger and discrimination against former KR cadre and their children. The more they listen and have a dialogue, the more sensitivity toward the issue increased and the more commitment they have toward non-recurrence and always favor peaceful means to address any issues. All these factors contribute to peace and reconciliation.

As Dy (2015) stated, genocide and human rights education has many things in common as it addresses past human rights abuses and violent conflicts, promotes equality and sustainable development and the enhancement of people’s participation in decision-making processes within democratic system, stability and harmony within communities, mutual understanding, tolerance and peace (pp. 19-22).

Development of Resources and Initiatives

The Site of Conscience has done many activities which advocate memorialization and education among other topics. In collaboration with its members in Cambodia such as Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (TSGM), state-run museum, and Youth For Peace (YFP), a local Non-governmental organization, it helps promote informal education through intergenerational dialogue and visit to memorial site. In collaboration with its partners-- DC-Cam, FAFG and AJAR, it is focused on the role of education in transitional justice. This project brought together educators from those countries in
workshop and exchange in which educator received a small grant to work on their pilot project that benefit their teaching about the past.26

Successes and Challenges

History education or genocide education in Cambodia or elsewhere brings about impact and at the same time faces many challenges. The former is linked to the role and objectives of history teaching/genocide education in formal and informal settings. The latter is drawn from the implementation of activities during curriculum development and after incorporation into the curriculum.

After 12 years of building the history curriculum into national schools, we can say that the curriculum has been effectively disseminated across all key institutions of Cambodia, although sustaining the training in these institutions is an enduring requirement.

In building sustainability, we can point to the following successes: 1) Knowledge of history, 2) Attitude changes and 3) Global Experience and exchange.

Increased Knowledge and Genocide Prevention

There is a significant knowledge increase on the Khmer Rouge history among teachers, students and general public. According to reports on teacher training and classroom forum conducted in recent years, students demonstrate that they know a great deal about the regime after attending classroom forum or teacher training.

Recognition and Attitude Change

Formal and informal genocide education increases a sense of recognition toward survivors’ suffering. This leads to a change in attitude toward victims and also perpetrators after the truth and nuances are revealed. Empathy, which is a core goal of the curriculum, begins with empathy with victims and moves to empathy as well for perpetrators who in many instances were victims as well. Historical empathy then becomes the basis for contemporary empathy in one’s everyday lives.

Learning and Sharing Experience

Learning about mass atrocities in national history has led to greater interest and comparative analysis of other atrocities. This interest in other countries’ experiences with conflict, mass atrocities, and inhumanity has contributed to an expanded curriculum in global mass atrocities and inhumanity in the ASEAN region. We share Cambodian experience with other ASEAN countries and begin our Peace and Human Rights Education program in the region. We are developing a text that can be used as teaching materials in ASEAN classrooms.27

Global Experience and Exchange

We also learned a great deal from a global exchange initiated by ICSC and DC-Cam, which brought together two other ICSC partners, FAFG and AJAR in a joint project in 2018. As a lead organization,

26 https://giitr.org/our-work/
27 https://twitter.com/drzarni/status/1430451600120852481
DC-Cam coordinated a range of activities including international workshop in Cambodia, in-country activities, exchange workshop and a sub-grant project component. DC-Cam participated in an evaluation study and worked as a lead organization in developing a chapter on memorialization and education for GIJTR Toolkit’s *Pathways of Innovation*. The toolkit entails both successes and challenges that encountered during the implementation. It indicates that both global exchange and site visits developed great impact on participants’ knowledge and professional development. A visit of the site of memory, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, provided concrete examples of what happened during the Khmer Rouge period and increased participants’ knowledge on the history. A visit to a memorial site in Timor-Leste increased teachers’ capacity to teach and broaden participants’ understanding of transitional justice mechanisms taken there (Robins, 2018, pp. 156-157).

Through this exchange, we also learned that post-conflict societies that have recently achieved a semblance of peace and stability find it difficult to include the history of mass atrocities in public schools and institutions because it important to avoid controversy or any topics that could trigger renewed violence or tension. There may also be national or local considerations tied to persons or groups that, having negotiated a settlement, may want to avoid public inquiry and debates that may undermine their legitimacy or negotiations with counterparts, rivals, or other communities. Among the three countries, Cambodia was able to eventually integrate the history of its genocide into public schools in a rather direct way that focused on the history of the Khmer Rouge, other societies may find this direct approach too controversial for the near-term, in which case they may use curricula addressing mass atrocities committed in other countries as an alternative path to achieving similar outcomes related to teaching human rights, justice, and humanitarian law.

This is not only “a safer first step, but one that is actually productive by way of giving attention to the value of the human being through the experiences and stories of survivors in other societies.” (Robins, 2018, p. 161-162).

**Section 3: Lessons, Reflections and Recommendations**

**Lessons Learned: Peace and Human Rights in Curriculum Reform**

When looking back, we learned that a formal curriculum development or reform is an incremental, multi-faceted struggle, which can only be progressed after the country has gone through a period of peace, stability, and some form of justice and national reconciliation. These concepts or phases (and the time it takes to effectively implement them) build space for the country to process, debate, and ultimately move forward from extraordinarily controversial and sensitive issues and questions. We learned that the role of civil society is to support (and in many cases drive) these phases through clear objectives, expertise, and resources, and most importantly ownership by survivors.

We also learned that justice through the ECCC can accelerate the integration of society and operate as counter to persons or entities that would deny or change history. We use the ECCC to teach about human rights, rule of law and atrocity prevention. In general, we learned that the intersection of memory, justice and education are the foundation for human rights study and practice, atrocity prevention and reconciliation.

Using a humanistic and innovative approach in the curriculum is important to help students understand the rationale behind the other side of the history and develop their critical thinking in
learning about the history which dehumanized people and destroyed the educational system under its rule.

**Role of Multi-Stakeholder Participation**

In this context, engaging with multi-stakeholders or multiple organizations on the curriculum may not have desired effect as we see now since it was hard to ensure a concerted effort and commitment toward a shared goal. Given the sensitivity and controversy the history is, DC-Cam chose to work more exclusively with top level (the government and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport) and the grassroots using its available resources obtained from both local and international supporters in developing the curriculum and informal education activities. However, DC-Cam often extends its expertise and support of other civil society organizations when they approach for ideas or support.

**Outcome of Informal Initiatives**

Although informal initiatives are not systematic and well-structured as the formal ones, they require political and administrative support, adequate resources, sensitiveness to the issue and good management of expectations and psychological problems in order to achieve program objectives.

Political and administrative support such as obtaining permission letter and cooperation from local authority is important when we organize activities or events. In other words, trust building is crucial when we work with local authority and people. This could be done through a genuine and proper introduction of our program objectives and respect.

Another important factor is to ensure adequate resources necessary available to implement planned activities. These can be both human capacities to organize and facilitate the activities and financial support for the operation.

We have observed that being sensitivity to the topic discussed enables us to gain trust and manage emotional and psychological problems arise during the implementation process and beyond. This means the team needs to be trained on trauma and mental health as we are dealing with traumatic experience and this will enable the team manage emotions and mental health conditions.

All these factors enable the team to manage expectations and measure outcome effectively. This is after all contribute to sustainability. A few examples are on public forum and visit to the memorial site, which bring together survivors who are either victims and former KR cadre/perpetrators.

**Adoption and Inclusion of Curriculum Reforms**

A system-wide adoption of the initiatives requires sound strategies to facilitate the process. One of the key strategies is state your objective clearly and present it wisely. When approaching the top level, we stated our objective to produce a textbook and how important to have this text for secondary school students who are children of survivors.

**Local Initiative and Innovative**

It is important to know a common value of the influenced. A local initiative on this controversial and sensitive topic is ideal. This gives people a sense of ownership of their history which they can be proud of. As survivors themselves, the top level, the civil society organizations, and the grassroots
feel resonate or are familiar with all stories or information contain in the text. It is important to have a text which is written by Cambodian researcher/historian. We cannot avoid censorship and scrutiny as discussed above, but it is less sensitive and eventually gain their support.

A Wide Reach to the Grassroots

As discussed above, informal education is used to address public opinions and encourage people to join this effort nationwide. Forum and dialogue are powerful tool because these allow students, parents, teachers and community to meet, discuss and share their thoughts and experiences.

Improvements for the Future

Despite the outcome, an improvement on the current formal and informal education is deal in order to bring more desired effect. The concept of genocide and mass atrocities are still puzzling and difficult to comprehend, especially among secondary school students. Therefore, it is ideal to explain the UN definition and elements that constitute genocide or mass atrocities and encourage students to focus on thematic issues or root causes that carried out by the KR and examine how these thematic issues constitute a genocide or crime. These thematic issues include class struggle, xenophobia, starvation, gender-based violence, hatred and intolerance.

Secondly, it is important to engage more in global experience in order to leverage our teaching strategies and that enable us to update our teaching materials that can be used more effectively.

Recommendations for Other Contexts

Although social and political context is an important factor in understanding how a formal curriculum is developed, there are certain areas that may work for all contexts. First, we should consider the role of documentation. Documentation that is well equipped with good technique, authentication, and chain of custody that can serve as essential information for truth and justice seeking process.

We cannot deny an important role of civil society organization in transitional justice process, especially educational curriculum development and reform. But just having a CSO is not sufficient, it is important that CSO is to be capable enough to influence the government. A sound approach and strategy as well as resources to do so.

Initiate and the make use of informal education exhaustively in order to advocate for a formal education and then continue or even expand this effort in order to supplement the formal curriculum.

Last but not least, make use of media in an effective way, being responsive to media request and sticking to our objectives.

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