



Ponheary Ly Foundation

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## Children who are hungry cannot learn.

Education and learning depend on good nutrition and health. Poor nutrition and health among schoolchildren contributes to the inefficiency of the educational system. Children with diminished cognitive abilities and sensory impairments naturally perform less well and are more likely to repeat grades and to drop out of school than children who are not impaired; they also enroll in school at a later age, if at all, and finish fewer years of schooling. The irregular school attendance of malnourished and unhealthy children is one of the key factors in poor performance.

Even short-term hunger, common in children who are not fed before going to school, can have an adverse effect on learning. Children who are hungry have more difficulty concentrating and performing complex tasks, even if otherwise well nourished. Research and programme experience show that improving nutrition and health can lead to better performance, fewer repeated grades and reduced drop out. The extra demands on school-age children (to perform chores or walk long distances to school) create a need for energy that is much greater than that of younger children. Indeed available data indicate high levels of protein-energy malnutrition and short-term hunger among school-age children.

Iodine deficiency is associated with an average 13.5 point reduction in IQ for a population. School-age children living in iodine-deficient areas have lower IQs and poorer cognitive and motor function than children living in iodine-sufficient areas. There is substantial evidence that anaemia in children is associated with decreased physical and mental development, impaired immune function, poor growth, increased fatigue, reduced cognitive abilities and poor school performance.

Parasitic worms that infect the intestines or the blood are a major source of disease and undernutrition in school-age children. These parasites consume nutrients from the children they infect, and so may cause or aggravate malnutrition and retard children's physical development. Studies have shown that worm infections (particularly hookworm) cause anaemia, reduce growth and may negatively affect cognition.

Cambodia is a least developed, low-income food deficit country emerging from decades of civil conflict and economic stagnation. It is ranked 137 out of 182 countries in the UNDP 2009 Human Development Index. Despite recent socio-economic progress, over 30 percent of Cambodians still live under the national poverty line with 1 in 3 Cambodians considered food insecure. Cambodia remains one of the worse Asian countries on the global hunger index with current levels of hunger classified at an alarming level.

Malnutrition rates in Cambodia are among the highest in Asia; almost 40 percent of children are chronically malnourished and micronutrient deficiencies, especially iron, vitamin A and iodine, are high among children under five and pregnant and lactating women. The maternal mortality is 472 per 100,000 live births and life expectancy is low at only 58 years for men and 64 years for women.

29% of Cambodian children are under weight for their age.

The Global Hunger Index updated annually by IFPRI is "Alarming"

[\(This data assembled from the World Food Programme Website\)](#)

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