



## Cambodia Connect

Visit to Ireland 2024



# CAMBODIAN CONNECT VISIT TO IRELAND 2024

## ABOUT: SeeBeyondBorders

SeeBeyondBorders promotes the advancement of education of children in Cambodia, through evidence-based education programmes, research and policy. On the ground in Cambodia we support the continuous professional development of teachers, to improve the quality of teaching and children's learning outcomes. In Ireland, we raise funds, facilitate professional exchange and development between educators in both countries, and we advocate for Irish state and civil society support.



## ABOUT: CONNECT STUDY VISITS BETWEEN IRELAND AND CAMBODIA

Since 2018 SeeBeyondBorders has organised bilateral Connect Study visits between Cambodia and Ireland. These visits have involved educators and government officials from both countries learning and sharing practices and experiences.



## ABOUT: CONNECT 2024

In April 2024, four SeeBeyondBorders staff members and two District Governors from Siem Reap visited Ireland. The visit provided an opportunity for the Cambodian delegation to share, learn, advocate and engage with key stakeholders in Irish education, international development and the Irish Government. The theme for the visit was ‘Communities of Practice for Sustainability’.



## WHAT TOOK PLACE?

While in Ireland the Connect Group visited a number of schools, universities and organisations, meeting various educational and government stakeholders and participating in networking events and panel discussions. The visit strengthened bilateral relations between Cambodian and Irish education departments, education institutions, development organisations and government agencies.

## CONNECT 2024: IMPACT

*“The school visits were really eye opening for me. Teachers possess brilliant soft skills while school leaders are great at motivating teachers to take ownership over their professional pathways. This visit has provided me with many lessons I can apply in Cambodia.”*

**Taing Im Lok, SeeBeyondBorders Senior Leadership Team**

*“This Connect Visit provided me with many new experimental lessons that I had never learned before. It was such a great time for me. I now believe that SeeBeyondBorders has the full capacity and talent to carry out collaborative efforts to support educational projects in Cambodia, especially in my district.”*

**Naret Sok, Kralanh District Governor (Siem Reap Province)**



# CONNECT 2024 PARTICIPANTS



## **Taing Im Lok, General Manager, Shared Services**

As General Manager Shared Services, Taing Im is a member of the Cambodian Senior Leadership Team. She oversees Human Resources, Engagement, IT and Compliance.

## **Ratana Nel, IT and Facilities Manager**

Ratana is from northern Cambodia, he pursued his bachelor degree of Information Technology in 2009 in Siem Reap Province. Ratana started with SeeBeyondBorders Cambodia in May 2018 as the IT and Digital Content Manager and has been IT and Facilities Manager since July 2023.



## **Sambor Kang, Teaching Development Coordinator**

Sambor brings almost 10 years experience in the education sector to SeeBeyondBorders. She is currently a Teaching Development Coordinator focusing on facilitating workshops for continuous professional development.

## **Virak Chea, Districts Manager**

Virak has extensive experience, working both with organisations in Cambodia and in education. He joined SeeBeyondBorders in November 2023 as the Districts Manager based in Srei Snam.



**Naret Sok,**  
District Governor,  
Kralanh,  
Siem Reap

**Wath Meth,**  
Deputy District  
Governor,  
Srei Snam,  
Siem Reap



# CONNECT VISIT HIGHLIGHTS

## Day One: Recuperation

The group arrived into Dublin early on Sunday morning after a long journey from Siem Reap, Cambodia.

They took the opportunity to visit the sea, receive a warm Irish welcome and take some rest before a busy week ahead.



## Day Two: Lesson Observation



The day began with orientation and a visit to Broombridge Educate Together National School. During the visit the group observed classroom lessons, met with the school principal and a number of teachers who will travel to Cambodia in July 2024 to take part in Connect to Cambodia.



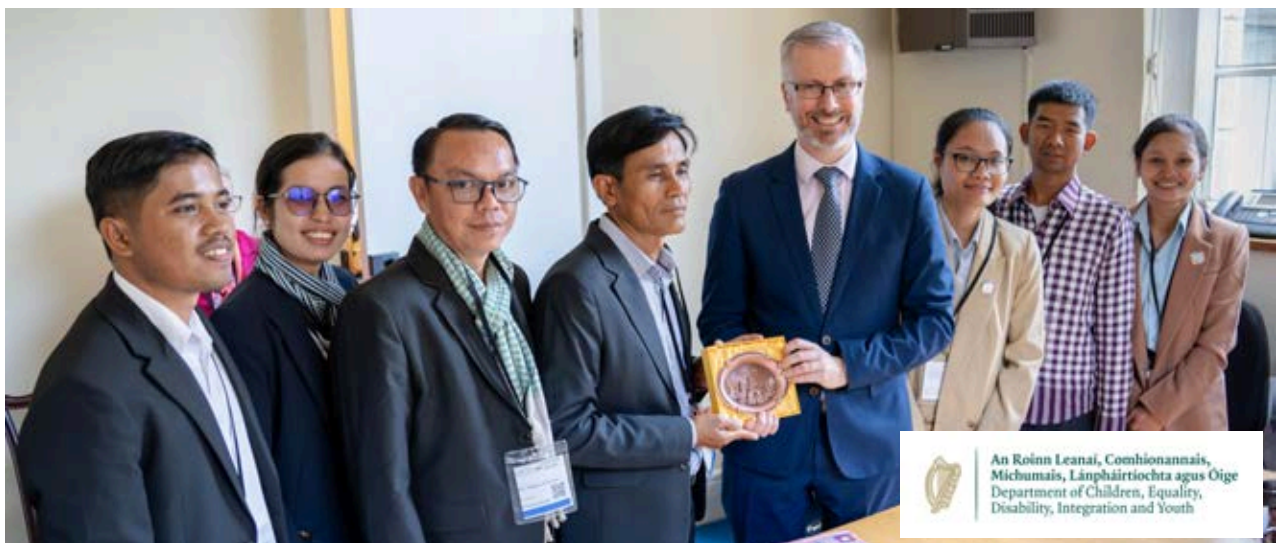
# Day Three Morning: Teaching College, Teaching Centres

The morning featured visits to Drumcondra Education Centre and the Dublin City University Campus. They met Helen Heneghan, the Director of the Education Centre and DCU lecturers who have responsibility for Teaching Practice for the Bachelor of Education programme. In addition, the group had a meeting with Catherine Tracey from the Inspectorate at the Department of Education. This was a particular highlight for the District Governors.

# Day Three Afternoon: Government

A key focus of SBB is to enable system change in Cambodia through government partnerships. The group were therefore pleased to have meetings with the Minister of Education Norma Foley and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O’Gorman. Matters discussed included education for social change, why quality matters in international development and how Cambodia and Ireland can better collaborate.

*Governor of Kralanh District, Siem Reap Province, Naret Sok, with Minister for Education, Norma Foley.*



*The Connect with Ireland delegation meeting with Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O’Gorman*

## Day Four Morning: Home School Liaison

St Malachy's school in Edenmore is an all-boys Catholic school that places a strong emphasis on home school liaison and community engagement.

The group drew parallels between how best to engage parents in education in Cambodia and Ireland.

*Opening doors for Cambodian education. Observing development education through a Cambodian lens in St Malachy's National School, Edenmore.*



## Day Four Afternoon: Teacher Solidarity



Meeting INTO President Carmel Browne was significant, given the INTO's longstanding support for Cambodian education and SeeBeyondBorders.

In the INTO HQ, the Connect Visit had the opportunity to meet and discuss education with a number of INTO and RTAI members, including RTAI General Secretary, John O'Brien.

**into**  
Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

**RTAI**  
Retired Teachers' Association of Ireland



# Day Four Evening: Irish Aid and DICE

The day ended with the group attending an Irish Aid event to mark 20 years of the Development and Intercultural Education Project (DICE). SBI Chair Catherine Byrne provided the keynote at this gathering and the group also met with the Irish Aid Director General Michael Gaffey.

*Right: Irish Aid Director General, Michael Gaffey, addressing the DICE anniversary event.*

*Below: SBI Chair, Catherine Byrne, delivering the keynote speech.*



# Day Five Morning: SDG Education



Donabate Portrane Educate Together National School is where the educational links between Cambodia and Ireland began. The school places a strong emphasis on development education.



## Day Five Evening: Communities of Practice



Taing Im Lok participated in a panel discussion on Communities of Practice for Sustainability at an event in TU Dublin, to celebrate the launch of its partnership with SeeBeyondBorders and PEPY Empowering Youth. The panel engaged with keynote speaker, Professor Tom Collins. A number of teachers from our Solidarity Schools network joined, as well as TUD staff, Fiachra Brennan, Solidarity and Capacity Development Officer with Comhlámh, and Maire Ni Chuinneagáin, RTAI Deputy President, along with RTAI General Secretary, John O' Brien.

## Day Six Morning: Reflection



The group gathered together to reflect on progress thus far. Read further below in this report to learn what was said.



## Day Six Afternoon: Irish Culture



Croke Park was the venue as the group soaked up some Irish culture, and some of the visitors even ran the Malahide ParkRun!

## Day Seven: Irish Aid Fellow in Maynooth

[Limon Bunn is an Irish Aid Fellow](#) who works with SeeBeyondBorders. She hosted the group in a visit to Maynooth town and the University Campus.





## Day Eight: Cornmarket Presentation



Cornmarket have been supporting SeeBeyondBorders' mission for a number of years, and the team were delighted to be able to present results in person and to look towards the future.

## Day Nine Morning: Educational Research

The group visited Professor Leo Casey at the National College of Ireland. Leo is Principal Investigator in the [Professional Identity for Khmer Teachers Research Project](#).



## Day Nine Afternoon: Electric Aid Visit



Electric Aid have provided significant support to SeeBeyondBorders so the group relished the opportunity to present to staff and board members from the ESB and EirGrid.

# Cambodian reflections on the Connect Visit to Ireland

During the study visit the Cambodian participants joined with their hosts at SeeBeyondBorders Ireland on two occasions to reflect of what they were seeing and learning and how they could apply that learning in Cambodia.

## Themes and Ideas

- Technology in the classroom can help teachers to teach better.
- We saw teachers supported to be leaders, to undertake continuing professional development, to build their capacity.
- We saw attention to school leadership, teamwork and ownership of roles.
- At the TU Dublin seminar we heard practical case studies of communities of practice and how to make them work.
- We saw high teacher creativity – their positivity, and methodologies used.
- In Cambodia, we need to help change school leadership by providing more training – and to turn written (education) policies into practice.
- Proverb: “Hearing one hundred times does not mean learning”.
- The children were “brave” – not afraid to speak up and participate.
- There was an overall positive feel - an empowering culture.

## What to Apply in Cambodia

- Start small. Change happens over time as we see in Ireland’s history.
- Professor Tom Collins outlined how change happened from landmark decisions on free education for all children in Ireland in the 1960s
- We can apply what we saw e.g. mentoring, quality teaching to our Teacher Development Centre programme.
- We can help and encourage Cambodian teachers to buy into their self-development and skill building – we saw how this can be done.
- We saw how schools can work within communities – we can adopt that.
- We can adopt tighter programming e.g. at our teacher events (timetabling).

## Support in Ireland

I have a strong belief in the Communities of Practice approach and was glad to be able to discuss it while participating in a panel discussion in TU Dublin. The individuals who engage with and support SeeBeyondBorders in Ireland play a key role in our journey of Education Development in Cambodia.

**Taing Im Lok, SeeBeyondBorders Senior Leadership Team**



## Organisation of Visit

- The access to Government Ministers, the Department of Foreign Affairs, INTO, schools etc showed how well connected SBBI is and its power to influence.
- The visitors were warmly welcomed and hosted
- The visit was well paced - and inevitably also tiring!
- Participants enjoyed the differences – the climate, environment.

## Suggestions for Future Visits

- A longer visit (eg. full 2 weeks) would allow for progression to more in-depth or specialist study in week 2 (eg individual shadowing, looking at an aspect of teacher development).
- Consider encouragement of deeper and more systematic reflection by participants eg through a personal daily diary, and more frequent and deeper debriefs after sessions.
- Continue to empower participants to manage their time in Ireland– eg increase induction on local travel, cultural life and events.
- Consider the different needs between staff participants and SBBI ‘guests’ (the District Governors this year) in terms of e.g. length of stay and focus.



## MOVING FORWARDS

Since returning to Cambodia, the participants have organised focus group sessions with other Cambodian educators to share experiences in Ireland and lessons learned for applying in Cambodia. SeeBeyondBorders has launched its new three year Transform Education Programme in Srei Snam and Kralanh districts in Siem Reap Province. Connect Participants Wath Meth is Deputy District Governor of Srei Snam, while Naret Sok is the District Governor of Kralanh. In July, ten Irish teachers will participate in the Connect to Cambodia Programme in Siem Reap.

## Final Word

*“Without doubt, once basic and home needs are satisfied, access to a fully trained, well resourced teacher is the single most important ingredient for childhood flourishing. As fellow educators we need to embrace our colleagues in Cambodia. They have suffered an absolute loss of pedagogy. However, it can be recovered through appropriate training and support.”*

**Prof. Leo Casey Principal Investigator, PIKT Research Project**

The work of SeeBeyondBorders is made possible through support from our partners and supporters, including organisations mentioned in this report, as well as these supporters.





# SeeBeyondBorders

**Can you help SeeBeyondBorders deliver change  
for Cambodian children?**

Contact us today [ireland@seebeyondborders.org](mailto:ireland@seebeyondborders.org)

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