



CAMBODIA

FAMILIARIZATION IN THE VILLAGE DAYCARES (CBCC)

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WHO WE ARE ?

Planète Enfants & Développement (PE&D) has been working since 1984 to protect, educate, and integrate the most vulnerable children. It empowers families, educators, local associations, and public authorities to provide children with a protective, non-violent, stable and stimulating environment. This is in fact an essential condition for their development and well-being, which begins in early childhood, a critical period for a child's growth and development that shapes the rest of their life.

In August of 2020, the AFD (Agence Française de Développement) co-financed a multi-country program agreement (Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Nepal, Vietnam) entitled "Investing in Early Childhood" (Investir dans la Petite Enfance), which notably includes projects such as the establishment of nurseries, provision of professional training, improvement of preschool conditions, creation of play areas and more. The first three year phase concluded in July 2023, allowing for deeper understanding of the main takeaways for certain activities.

IN CAMBODIA

In Cambodia since 1984, PE&D has developed different projects to support early childhood development. One project co-financed by the World Bank (2020-2024) aims to open 13 daycares in the villages, the CBCC (Community Based Childcare Centers).

Population: 16,5 million

Capital: Phnom Penh

Official language: Cambodian

Infant mortality rate (under 5): 21 per thousand*

Pre-school gross enrolment rate: 34%*

*World Bank, 2021

WHY?

● INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "early childhood development (from pregnancy to 8 years old) is crucial for upholding every child's right to survive and thrive [...] The period from pregnancy to the age of the 3 is the most critical as the brain develops more rapidly than at any other period. 80% of a baby's brain is formed during this age. For healthy brain development during these years, children need a safe, secure, and nurturing environment, along with proper nutrition and stimulation from their parents or caregivers. It is a window of opportunity to lay the foundation for lifelong health and well being, which also has an impact on the next generation." ¹

● INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia is growing fast, but is still classified as a Least Developed Country. Its economy is driven by tourism, construction and textiles. Nearly 700,000 people are employed in the textile industry, 90% of whom are women.

The lack of childcare services, particularly outside the major cities, and the high cost of those that do exist, leave parents with no choice but to resort to alternative solutions. Children are generally entrusted to relatives who are unable to provide adequate education, stimulation and nutrition for young children.

WHAT & WHEN ?

Private daycare services in the country are regulated by the Cambodian Labor Law of 1997. According to Article 186,³ companies employing a minimum of 100 women or girls (of legal working age) must offer a nursing room and a daycare, either on their premises or nearby. If the company does not offer this option, it must pay a monthly contribution towards the cost of childcare in any form for workers with children below the age of 18 months.

In 2020, a study carried out by PE&D and the World Bank's International Finance Corporation⁴ showed that employers surveyed were not very familiar with the law regarding their responsibility for childcare assistance.

3. Article 186: "Managers of enterprises employing a minimum of one hundred women or girls shall set up, within their establishments or nearby, a nursing room and a crèche (daycare center). If the company is not able to set up a crèche on its premises for children over eighteen months of age, female workers can place their children in any crèche and the charges shall be paid by the employer" (<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/701/Labor>). The Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training has further clarified in a letter that the workers can claim childcare charges for their children from 18 to 36 months old (http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--asia/--ro-bangkok/--sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_203802.pdf).

4. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwUroi9_r3_AhUdUaQEHLRCykQFnoEAgQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fecdan.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2022%2F08%2FacklingChildcare-Cambodia.pdf&usq=AOvVaw0y_pt8kCSPI0BOBXuDTVON

“**The first 3000 days (from conception to 7 years old) are a period when learning is most intense and effective, almost effortless**

Agnès Florin

Agnès Florin, Professor Emeritus of Child Psychology and Education at Nantes University ²

Agnès Florin highlights, "the importance of stimulating [the child], meeting their needs, whatever they may be, surrounding the child with love and support during the critical period [...]". "Providing the child with regular opportunities to be active, solves problems with the help of an adult if needed, and having positive interactions with their surroundings allows them to become truly independent, responsible, and aware of their actions [...] Engaging in object manipulation, play, walks, reading, music, sharing ideas and emotions and eliciting laughter nourishes the child's brain and contributes to healthy physical and mental growth."

1. <https://www.who.int/fr/publications-detail/9789241514064>

2. <https://www.cerveauetpsycho.fr/sd/developpement-enfant/cerveau-psycho-n143-23634.php>

54% of employers interviewed were aware of the law, and 42% did not know the details. The employers interviewed said that there had never been clear communication about the law or the legal penalties for non-compliance. Some are unsure about the legal provision making childcare an employer's responsibility.

PE&D's initial experience with textile factories demonstrated that employers were not ready to take the responsibility of a daycare on their premises.

A study carried out in 2018 demonstrated parents' need for childcare options at the village level. In 2020, in consultation with the government and factory managers, PE&D launched the "CBCC" Community Based Childcare Center project in the provinces of Kampong Speu and Kampong Cham, prioritizing the children of workers in textile factories, aged 3 to 36 months.

As of July 31, 2023, PE&D has created the first training for early childhood assistants in Cambodia, trained 18 trainers from Ministries and provincial offices, recruited and trained 40 staff members, constructed 9 daycares, and supported municipalities in the management of these structures.

This technical and practical information sheet focuses on Familiarization, a key concept for children's arrival at the daycare and an innovative one for Cambodia. For this sheet, we carried out interviews with the CBCC supervisors who train the early childhood assistants in the field and ensure that the daycares run smoothly, as well as daycare managers and some of the parents of enrolled children.

WHAT IS THE FAMILIARIZATION PERIOD AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Because daycare is a completely new concept in the provinces, parents and children are encountering a new environment with unknown people. The decision to entrust their child to the hands of strangers is often a source of apprehension and prompts questioning.

Familiarization is the **transition period** during which the child can prepare to leave their family environment and be separated from their parents so that they can enter the daycare and discover another living environment with other children and adults. It helps to minimize a stressful and possibly frightening situation.

Familiarizing themselves with the daycare means that new bonds are established with new adults and children in a new environment. This especially happens through the establishment of new reference points in the presence of parents. We call these *points of reference* the repetition of identical situations (same place, objects, professional...) and the regularity of experiences. Thanks to these reference points, the child can feel secure.

It is only with this feeling of security that the child can devote his energy to meeting the Other (adult and child).

Familiarization differs from adaptation because it is not only the child who adapts to the daycare, but also the entire structure and team that adapts to him. Adaptation, the traditional method in France, allows the child to spend time at the daycare for longer and longer periods of time without their parent. On the other hand, familiarization allows the child to experience repeated moments (same length, place, professional and games) with his parent. Secured, the child can then confidently spend the rest of the day without his parent.



" Concerning familiarization, the concept feels foreign to me but I find it interesting. In the Cambodian context, familiarization doesn't take place within families: for example, grandmothers stay with their grandchildren every day, but never ask specific questions about their grandchildren's likes and dislikes "...

" If I had never done this training on familiarization, I would not have really known what it was. Even for my child, when she entered elementary school, there was no familiarization. "

CBCC supervisors

Note: In English, the word 'familiarization' is not known and in Khmer it does not exist. We therefore decided to use the term 'familiarization' in English, and the teams do not translate it in Khmer. After explaining the concept, the teams and project professionals use the term "familiarization" even when they are talking in Khmer.

The French model of familiarization asks parents to come to the daycare for an extended period of time so that their child can adapt step by step to the new environment. However, this is not viable in Cambodia: the parents cannot always be free for several days to stay at the CBCC during the familiarization period. A reorganization of the familiarization period was developed to adapt to the reality of the Cambodian context and to offer the child similar points of reference in terms of time, space and relationships during several consecutive days, while taking into account the constraints of the parents' schedules.

The familiarization process for the CBCCs offers 3 hours of care per day at the same time for 3 consecutive days in the continued presence of the parent and, to the extent possible, the same professional.

FOR WHO ?

In Cambodia, familiarization is a completely new concept. With the teams, we offered reflection time on the subject and, thanks to numerous discussions, exchanges and trainings, the local team progressively made the concept their own while adapting its feasibility to the local and cultural context.

For the child, the process is about familiarizing themselves with their new environment: with the new sounds, smells, colors, materials, games, toys, etc. It is also equally about familiarizing themselves with new people, including the professionals, the other children and the other parents.

For the parents, the process is about trying to allay the fears inherent in entrusting their child to other people. Because the concept of a daycare was new in the villages where we work, families may have more or less conscious fears about bringing their child to a daycare (guilt, fear, etc.).

The process is also about the parents getting to know a new type of childcare: the schedules, routine, pedagogy, care, hygiene, safety, etc., all subjects covered during the familiarization period. Finally, the process is also for meeting the team, getting to know them, learning to trust them and each other, observing how the professionals take care of the children and how their child behaves and reacts with the professionals. The familiarization period also allows parents to communicate useful and necessary information to the educational team: their family situation, their habits and food allergies, their routine and signs of sleepiness, their motor development, etc.

Finally, it is important that the professionals get to know the families and the child in order to create a bond with the child and the parents, to reassure the parents of their parenting skills and to provide support and guidance in their role as parents.⁵



"They stay close to the person taking care of them, become familiar with the routine of separating from their parents, learn to wait for their return, develop relationships with other children and do not cry excessively."

"Children who haven't had any familiarization cry a lot, and that tires out the teams."



One of the CBCC supervisors said that *"with the opening of the daycares, the early childhood professionals have been able to put the familiarization process into practice and now explain its importance to parents. Most parents understand this period and the familiarization to be useful. At first, some parents refused to enroll their child in the daycare center because of the familiarization period, lack of knowledge and/or lack of time. Today, this is no longer an obstacle to enrolling their child."*

"They are friendly and trust the staff when it comes to the care, indoor and outdoor environment and nutrition of the children." **Supervisor**

HOW ?

Beginning on the first day, the children start the familiarization process:

- The first hour consists of an administrative appointment, during which the parents of the child meet with the daycare manager to make sure they have all the information they need, and the team receives information on the child
- Then three hours with the parent for three days

The administrative appointment is a mandatory exchange needed for enrollment. However, in order to guarantee the best reception conditions possible, the three days of familiarization are highly recommended, but are discussed on a case by case basis with the family to take their constraints into account. There is still room for maneuvering when parents are unable to attend all the three days. For example, we have had parents who would stay the entire day with their children to help acclimate them and build trust. Other parents who could not be present requested the support of grandparents to accompany the child. Other times, the parents were only present for a few hours or not at all. Some administrative appointments even took place over the phone when parents were unable to find the time to come in.

Adapting the care center to the parents is key to successfully welcoming young children.

"In certain situations, if we insist on having the family present for the familiarization process, it can have negative repercussions. For instance, if the family requests their eldest daughter to come along then she does not go to school," explains one of the daycare managers.

5. FRAJE asbl - Carine Lesage et Marie Masson - La période de familiarisation - 2005

Familiarization table

We have provided logistical and planning tables for the different familiarization processes (or familiarization tables) so that child care center teams can suggest time slots to the families and the professionals can welcome the child in an individualized and personalized way.

HERE ARE A FEW GUIDELINES:

- Day nurseries are open Monday to Saturday from 6:30am to 4:30pm.
- There are two groups of children: "babies" aged 3 to 12 months and "walkers" aged 13 to 36 months.
- Three professionals look after the children:
 1. **A baby caregiver**
 2. **A toddler caregiver**
 3. **A manager** who divides her time between the office (meetings with parents, orders, administration, etc.) and the field where she mainly supports the "walkers" advisor.
- "FAM" is short for Familiarisation
- "Admin." is short for administrative meetings and welcoming families.

EXAMPLE OF A FAMILIARISATION CHART FOR A CHILD :

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6:30 - 7:30	Admin. with the Manager	Home	Home	Full day in the Daycare center	Full day in the Daycare center	Full day in the Daycare center
7:30 - 8:30	FAM with the Caregiver	FAM with the Caregiver	FAM with the Caregiver			
8:30 - 9:30						
9:30 - 10:30						
10:30 - 11:30	Home	Home	Home			
11:30 - 12:30						
12:30 - 1:30						
1:30 - 2:30						
2:30 - 3:30						
3:30 - 4:30						

EXAMPLE OF A FAMILIARIZATION CHART FOR 2 BABIES AND 2 TODDLERS:

	Day 1		Day 2		Day 3	
6:30 - 7:30	Admin. Baby 1 + Manager					
7:30 - 8:30	FAM Baby 1 + Caregiver Baby	Admin. Toddler 1 + Manager	FAM Baby 1 + Caregiver Baby	FAM Toddler 1 + Caregiver Toddler	FAM Baby 1 + Caregiver Baby	FAM Toddler 1 + Caregiver Toddler
8:30 - 9:30						
9:30 - 10:30						
10:30 - 11:30						
11:30 - 12:30	Admin. Baby 2 + Manager					
12:30 - 1:30	FAM Baby 2 + Caregiver Baby	Admin. Toddler 2 + Manager	FAM Baby 2 + Caregiver Baby	FAM Toddler 2 + Caregiver Toddler	FAM Baby 2 + Caregiver Baby	FAM Toddler 2 + Caregiver Toddler
1:30 - 2:30						

	Day 4		Day 5		Day 6	
6:30 - 7:30	Toddlers 1 & 2 full day at the daycare center with the Caregiver Toddler	Babies 1 & 2 full day at the daycare center with the Caregiver Babies	Toddlers 1 & 2 full day at the daycare center with the Caregiver Toddler	Babies 1 & 2 full day at the daycare center with the Caregiver Babies	Toddlers 1 & 2 full day at the daycare center with the Caregiver Toddler	Babies 1 & 2 full day at the daycare center with the Caregiver Babies
7:30 - 8:30						
8:30 - 9:30						
9:30 - 10:30						
10:30 - 11:30						
11:30 - 12:30						
12:30 - 1:30						
1:30 - 2:30						
2:30 - 3:30						
3:30 - 4:30						

RESULTS & LESSONS LEARNED

1 *Neuroscience demonstrates: the brain of a child is like a computer and the child is like a statistician!*"

It is through repetition that the baby's brain can organize the perceptions of their human and material environment by making connections. The child first records all sequences (behaviors of others, actions they will take), and then identifies, anticipates, and understands them. They use a logical approach to calculate or revise the probability of a hypothesis. The brain of young children processes information in a logical manner, making inferences based on familiar situations.⁶

"Applied to familiarization, we understand that to apprehend novelty, the baby must experiment in a context of regularity, so it's a question of proposing a repetition of identical situations (same place, same toys, same person, same moment...) each time the child is welcomed. So, no matter how much time is spent, it's almost more important that an identical sequence is repeated. The child will quickly find repetitive situations and be able to anticipate what's coming next. **This anticipation of events will then enable him to develop a real sense of security.**"⁷

2 By implementing familiarization in communal childcare centers in Cambodia, children, at the heart of the project, have been cared for in conditions that take into account their needs and development. The teams, families and professionals have been able to enhance their knowledge about the importance and impact of familiarization. Convinced of the relevance and observed results, they have made every effort to ensure that children are received in the best conditions possible.

3 As it is a new concept in Cambodia, it is crucial to closely monitor and support the teams. In our project, the supervisors dedicate a significant amount of time to coaching the early childhood professionals, emphasizing the importance of familiarization.

4 **Adapting the childcare setting** is a key to successful familiarization: it's important to ensure that the same person is always present for the child, or to prefer two days with the same person rather than three different people over three days.

"During the period of familiarization, I observed that teachers were patient and attentive while caring for the children. They established a healthy relationship with the children and the parents and ensured that parents felt confident in them taking care of their children. They have detailed knowledge of the child's daily routine and dietary needs."

Supervisor



"I support and help the teams in preparing familiarization tables. I explain to them the importance of familiarization as it is very new in our country. This takes time and we still run into some difficulties."

Supervisor

"Obstacles to familiarization include: The children cry, sisters or grandparents sometimes take the place of parents, which makes collecting information about the child's habits more difficult. The children who do not take part in the familiarization process cry a lot, tiring the teams."

Supervisor

RESULTS & LESSONS LEARNED

5 **Observing Children** plays an essential role in welcoming the children. The team could clearly see the difference between children who were welcomed through the familiarization process and children who were not: unfamiliar children are more emotionally insecure, and have more difficulty forming bonds with their peers and with adults. For their part, professionals who take in unfamiliar children find it harder to understand the child, his or her cries, fears and needs, due to a lack of information.

"Without familiarization, the teams who take care of the children do not receive sufficient information on the education of the children; this explains why they are unable to adapt to them in a timely manner."

"The familiarization period is like a welcoming. It creates a trusting and warm environment between the parents, the children and the those who care of the children."

Childcare center manager

6 **The adaptation of child care centers to the realities and constraints of parents**

The daycare center is a place that welcomes young children and their families, with all their constraints and difficulties. Familiarity should not be an obstacle to welcoming a child. It is therefore important to remain attentive to the realities and needs of families, while offering a secure framework for quality care.

Some families experienced the familiarization period as a constraint or even a waste of time, but little by little, by observing their child and the team being together, they were able to conclude that familiarization was ultimately a time-saver in their child's adaptation to the daycare center: their child, confident and secured, cries little or not at all, finds comfort with the professionals and shows no great anxiety.

"At the beginning of my child's enrollment in the childcare center, I would sometimes visit him during my lunch break because I was worried about him. However, thanks to the familiarization process, my child quickly adapted, and gradually, I stopped going to see him during the day."

Parent

CONCLUSION

Familiarization is a new concept in Cambodia. Thanks to numerous team training sessions, presentations to families and adaptation of the concept to parents' constraints, familiarization has been very well received in the daycare centers by professionals and parents alike. Children who have been welcomed with the familiarization period are described as more serene, confident and form a secure bond of attachment with the professionals who look after them. This shows how important it is to keep this concept for future daycare center openings in Cambodia, and to be able to continually adapt it to the constraints of the country's families and culture.

What's more, if new childcare concepts emerge (home-based care, maternal assistants, grouping together early childhood auxiliaries to form the equivalent of MAMs (maisons d'assistantes maternelles), it seems necessary to continue introducing familiarization and adapting it to the family needs.

The success of familiarization in Cambodia may be a precursor to the introduction of this concept in other cultures and countries, subject to contextualization and adaptation to family traditions and constraints.

NOLWENN DESCHARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERT

FROM PLANÈTE ENFANTS & DÉVELOPPEMENT

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CAMBODIA

WHO WE ARE ?

Planète Enfants & Développement (PE&D) has been working since 1984 to protect, educate and integrate the most vulnerable children.

IN CAMBODIA

In Cambodia since 1984, PE&D has developed various early childhood development projects. A project co-financed by the World Bank (2020-2024) aims to open 13 crèches in villages, the CBCCs (Community Based Childcare Centers).

FOR WHO ?

For the child, it's a matter of becoming familiar with their new environment

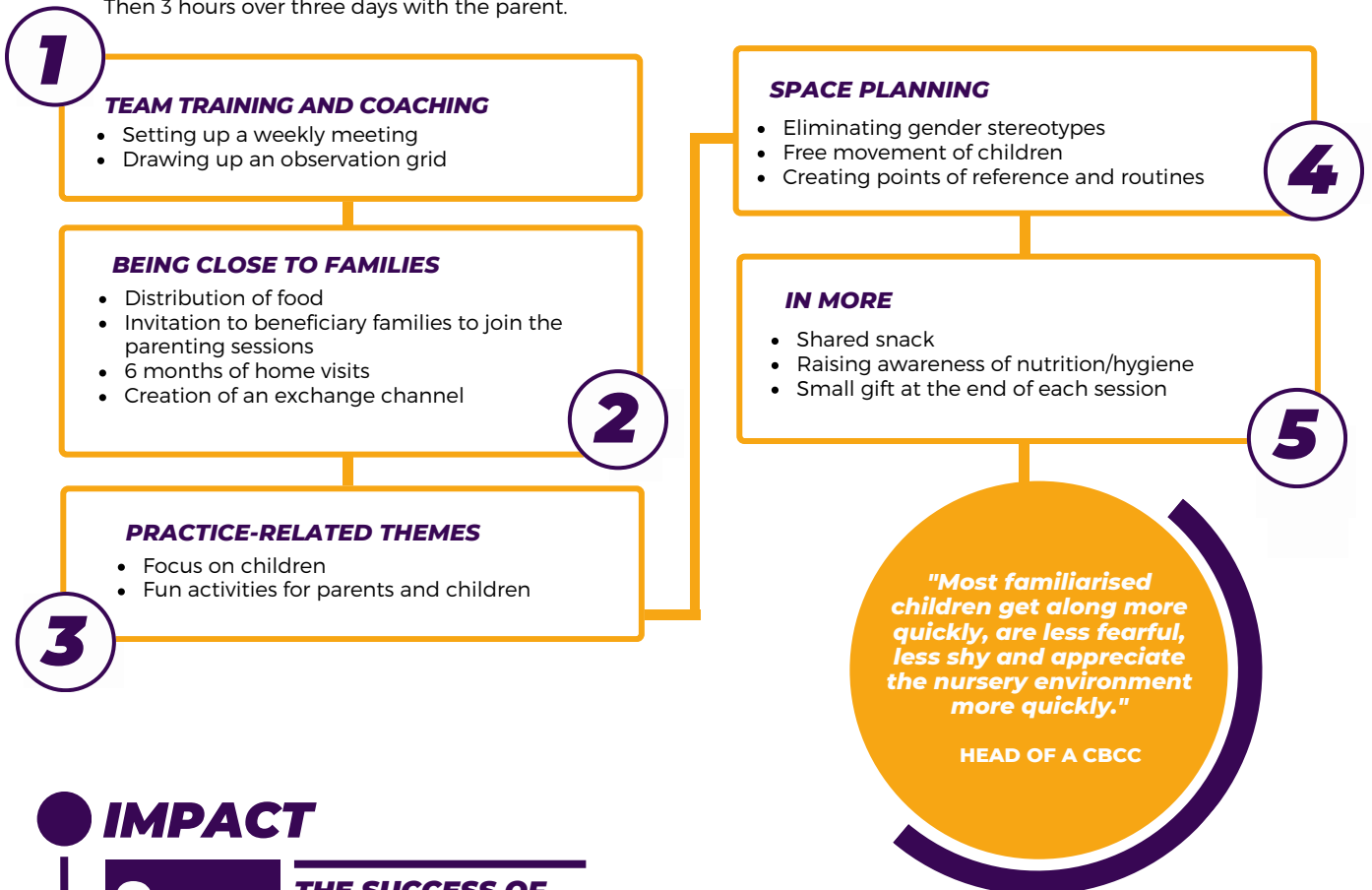
WHAT / WHEN ?

This technical and practical information sheet focuses on Familiarisation, a key concept for the arrival of children in crèches and an innovative concept for Cambodia.

HOW ?

From the very first day, the child begins his or her familiarization with :

A first hour for the administrative appointment, during which the child's parent(s) meet(s) the daycare center manager, who provides all the information on the service, and the team receives information on the child. Then 3 hours over three days with the parent.



IMPACT

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CBCC
OPENS

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CHILDREN IN
CBCC

THE SUCCESS OF FAMILIARISATION IN CAMBODIA MAY BE A PRECURSOR TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THIS CONCEPT IN OTHER CULTURES AND COUNTRIES.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSION

FAMILIARISATION HAS BEEN VERY WELL RECEIVED BY DAYCARE CENTER STAFF AND PARENTS. THE CHILDREN ARE DESCRIBED AS MORE SERENE AND CONFIDENT, AND AS FORMING A SECURE BOND WITH THE PROFESSIONALS WHO LOOK AFTER THEM.

AS A RESULT, THIS CONCEPT SHOULD BE RETAINED FOR FUTURE DAYCARE CENTER OPENINGS IN CAMBODIA.