

A Coordinated Approach: A Case Study on the Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children

Draft submitted February 23, 2018

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Section I. Introduction

Background and key research questions

In 2015, there were 94,789 out of school children in Cambodia.¹ Addressing the challenge of reducing the number of out of school children has required a coordinated approach, which the Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (referred to as “the Consortium”), funded partly by EAC, has brought to the Cambodian education sector. From its inception in 2014, the Consortium has mobilized 23 NGOs,² and organized them into five key component areas which reflect the major barriers faced by out of school children in the country: children with disabilities, poor and remote children, street children, over-aged children, ethnic minority children. The member organizations, led by Aide et Action have successfully enrolled 57,448 children who were previously out of school across 23 of 25 provinces in Cambodia. While many of these organizations had previously been working to support out of school children, participating in the Consortium was the first time that many of these organizations came together to collectively address this challenge.

As the consortium model represents a new approach in the sector, this study seeks to generate lessons for EAC and the Consortium and contribute to the growing body of evidence around how best to enroll and support out of school children. In particular, this study analyzes the effectiveness and efficiency of the Consortium approach for enrolling out of school children and situates this approach within a set of large-scale approaches used globally to address this challenge. Secondly, given EAC’s major role in fostering the Consortium’s development, and in order to inform EAC’s continued leadership around supporting out of school children, this study also analyzes how EAC’s partnership influenced the Consortium’s activities and impact. Given the focus of previous research, including the Let the Flowers Grow: Mid-term Evaluation of the Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children prepared by the Wellspring Initiative (refer to as “Mid-term Evaluation”), this study does not explore the effectiveness and efficiency of the specific implementing approaches taken by individual Consortium members to enroll and support out of school children.³ Whereas the Mid-term Evaluation primarily focused on analyzing the Consortium’s impact with respect to its key objectives, this study builds on previously identified key strengths and areas for improvement for the Consortium approach with new research.

Consortium Model and Goals

The Consortium has a multi-pronged operational structure including a secretariat, Steering Committee, Advisory Board, Technical Working Group, and five Components. Aide et Action, in its role as secretariat, leads day-to-day activities including management of contracts with member organizations and funding disbursements. The Steering Committee, comprised of five member organizations, guides overall implementation of activities. The Minister of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS) sits on the Advisory Board of the Consortium, and MoEYS technical officials engage with the Consortium through its Technical Working Committee. NGOs within each of the five component areas meet once a quarter or trimester to coordinate their activities and collaborate; each component is led by one NGO selected among the

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2015). Cambodia Country Data. Montreal: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://uis.unesco.org/country/kh>.

² The Consortium started with 17 NGOs and onboarded new NGOs throughout the years of the project. 23 reflects the greatest number of members had at any one time. At the end of 2017, there were 22 member NGOs. 23 members are referred to throughout this report for consistency.

³ For further information on the effectiveness and efficiency of these on the ground approaches, please refer to the following: The Wellspring Initiative. (2017). *Let the Flowers Grow: Mid-term Evaluation of the Cambodia Consortium for Out of School Children*.

component members and supported by Aide et Action’s program coordinators. The Consortium also hosts an annual Learning Forum that brings all members together to share best practices and experiences.

Over the course of Phase 1, which extended from May 2014 to December 2017, the Consortium’s primary focus was on enrolling and retaining 50,000 Cambodian out of school children. Four desired outcomes guided the Consortium’s work:

1. Equitable access: OOSC in project target areas are able and encouraged to complete the primary education cycle.
2. Quality and efficiency of education services are enhanced through improved teaching quality.
3. Capacity development of local actors: Education leaders and providers are better equipped to improve education efficiency.
4. Research and advocacy: Education environment is improved through advocacy and research.

Progress toward achievement of these goals was tracked through measurement of over 100 indicators in an online-based Operational Performance (OP) tracker. All members accessed and entered data on individual children and activities directly into the tracker on a monthly to semi-annual basis.

Overview of operational structure:



Section II. Methods and key limitations

This study draws on a combination of methods including desk review of key program documents, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observation. Documents included in the desk review include the *Mid-term Evaluation* conducted by the Wellspring Initiative, best practices case studies and semi-annual technical reports prepared by the Consortium, and final documents for the Consortium closing conference. Building on this desk research, the research team conducted 25 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus group discussions focused during a 5-day site visit to Phnom Penh in December 2017 with a diverse group of stakeholders familiar with the Consortium and its work over the past three and a half years. These stakeholders included staff at EAC, Aide et Action, and Consortium member

organizations, consultants working with Aide et Action over the course of Phase 1, organizations who were previously part of the Consortium and organizations who are interested in joining in Phase 2, as well as officials within provincial departments of education and MOEYS (Annex 1 provides a full list). Care was taken to ensure representation from Consortium member organizations of diverse experiences and backgrounds across the five component areas in interviews and focus group discussions. The research team also attended the Consortium's closing conference which enabled observation of presentations on the Consortium's activities and impact delivered by Aide et Action, member organizations, and government officials. Qualitative data collected from interviews and focus group discussions were organized into key themes which generated a set of 14 findings.

Limitations include that the study's qualitative data were drawn from a purposive rather than random sample; however, data were triangulated across stakeholder groups in order to mitigate bias. Other limitations of the study include that Aide et Action arranged interviews with key stakeholders; however, R4D provided guidance on selection of Consortium members and feedback to ensure a representative group. In addition, the research team was unable to explore cost-effectiveness due to lack of existing data; however, we do note where cost-savings were generated.

Section III. To what extent is the Consortium an effective and efficient mechanism to address OOSC country-wide?

The effectiveness and efficiency of the Consortium approach are examined in this section through findings that highlight the unique value the collective approach has added to the OOSC sector, identify opportunities that the Consortium could have more fully leveraged, and distill elements of the Consortium's operational structure that have contributed to and/or hindered the Consortium's effectiveness and efficiency in supporting OOSC. The findings are organized around the key topics of coordination and collaboration, membership, management and strategic direction, government partnership, and monitoring and evaluation.

The definitions of effectiveness and efficiency used in this report are based on the DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance⁴ with minor modifications. In the DAC criteria, effectiveness measures the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives and identifies the major factors influencing whether objectives are met. As the *Mid-term Evaluation* addresses the first half of the effectiveness definition, this report analyzes the major factors influencing the attainment of objectives through the lens of the Consortium's operational structure. It also explores whether the Consortium approach contributed value to the achievement of objectives beyond what individual members could have achieved on their own. The definition of efficiency used in this report, which excludes cost-effectiveness, probes whether the Consortium's activities, within the operational structure, adhered to reasonable timelines and leveraged resources to their fullest potential.⁵

⁴ OECD. "DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance." Accessed February 1, 2018.
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

⁵ The definition of efficiency used in this report excludes cost-effectiveness. Reasons for this deviation include limited data on cost-effectiveness on which to draw and consideration of the imbalanced nature of the cost

Coordination and collaboration

Finding 1: The Consortium’s five OOSC-based component structure was effective in encouraging collaboration and coordination among members of the Consortium that target similar categories of OOSC. Encouraging autonomy and respect for each member’s approach also ensured that collaboration did not become restrictive.

Members and stakeholders alike recognized that the Consortium encouraged members to move beyond the status quo of NGOs working in silos and competing for resources.⁶ No such mechanism to facilitate collaboration between NGOs in the OOSC sector existed in Cambodia prior to the Consortium.⁷ By bringing both small and medium-sized local NGOs and larger international NGOs together, the Consortium leveraged a diversity of experiences and approaches which enabled Consortium members to learn from each other and, at times, complement each other’s activities.⁸ The five OOSC-based component division of the Consortium as well as quarterly/trimesterly component meetings were particularly notable for supporting in-depth and regular dialogue, collaboration, and coordination among members of the same OOSC component.⁹ Although the dynamic of each component varied slightly, in general, during component meetings, members shared challenges, advice, implementation plans, and knowledge and materials.¹⁰ These interactions allowed members to gain new skills and knowledge, build on their individual approaches, and better address the needs of sub-populations within each OOSC component.¹¹ For instance, one member shared that during a component meeting they learned how to build and run

comparison given the need for greater resources to reach the most marginalized out of school children, the varying needs of different types of OOSC, and the diversity of approaches implemented by Consortium members.

While cost-effectiveness is not used as a measure of efficiency in this study, there may have been cost savings in the following forms:

- The Consortium was able to leverage partners who have refined existing models through experience.
- The Consortium enrolled more OOSC than its original 50,000 OOSC target, while remaining one million dollars under budget.

The Wellspring Initiative *Let the Flowers Grow: Mid-term Evaluation of the Cambodia Consortium for Out of School Children* also offers a limited analysis of cost-effectiveness.

⁶ Consortium member staff organization interviews 3 and 6; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁷ Consortium member organization staff interviews 3 and 6;

⁸ Expert interview; Aide et Action staff interview 1; Consortium member organization staff interviews 2, 3, 6, 7, and 12; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Non-consortium member organization staff interview 2; EAC staff interview 2.

⁹ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 3, 8, and 9; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

¹⁰ Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10; Consortium member organization focus staff group discussion 11.

¹¹ Consortium member organization staff interviews 3 and 9.

temporary schools from two other members of the component who had previous experience in this activity.¹² In addition, coordination enabled members to reduce duplication of efforts, both in terms of the OOSC that they target and the areas in which they work.¹³ Although such examples were very limited, in some components, member collaboration was used to standardize best practice approaches. For instance, one component worked together to standardize their approach around scholarship activities.¹⁴ Collaboration, however, did not become limiting because a strong sense of autonomy and respect for each member's unique approach were maintained.¹⁵ Most members who were consulted expressed appreciation for the level of autonomy they were granted in their individual activities, which allowed them to make independent decisions about the approaches they implemented.¹⁶

Collaboration and coordination within components improved the effectiveness and efficiency of member activities by:

- Enabling members to gain new skills and knowledge, build on their individual approaches, and better address the needs of sub-populations
- Reducing duplication of efforts
- Allowing standardization of best practice approaches (in some cases)

Although it is difficult to quantify the impact of enabling coordination and collaboration among NGOs, the aforementioned experiences as well as the value placed on this by a majority of consulted members and stakeholders¹⁷ suggests that the resulting synergies helped to more effectively and efficiently support OOSC.

Finding 2: While the Consortium encouraged collaboration and coordination among members of individual components, interaction within and between the five OOSC-based components could have been better leveraged to facilitate greater knowledge sharing and uptake of best practices.

Within the Consortium, more could have been done to standardize knowledge sharing practices among components, increase interaction between components, and encourage identification of best practices. The level of knowledge sharing varied by component.¹⁸ The Poor and Remote and Ethnic Minority components seemed to be particularly active in collaborating with other members by, for example, sharing research and resources that they had developed, standardizing best practice approaches around

¹² Consortium member organization staff interview 8.

¹³ Non-consortium member organization staff 2; Provincial Department of Education staff interview.

¹⁴ Aide et Action staff interview 4; Consortium member organization staff interviews 5 and 10.

¹⁵ Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5.

¹⁶ Consortium member organization staff interview 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9.

¹⁷ Provincial Department of Education interview; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Aide et Action staff interviews 1 and 4; Education expert interview; EAC staff interview 2; Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12; Non-consortium-member organization staff interview 2.

¹⁸ Consortium member organization staff interview 5 and 8; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

The effectiveness and efficiency of collaboration within the Consortium could have been improved by:

- Standardizing knowledge sharing practices among components
- Increasing collaboration across components
- Using member interactions to identify best practices and models for enrolling and retaining

scholarships, and developing joint proposals with other component members.¹⁹ These components may have been more active than others due to their leaders' specific vision.²⁰ While all members valued the ability to collaborate within their components (see finding 1), the level of knowledge sharing in components varied and was often not as intensive as the experience of the Poor and Remote and Ethnic Minority components,²¹ suggesting that there could have been opportunities to deepen these activities.

Several consulted members indicated that collaboration across components was limited.²² While annual Consortium gatherings allowed interaction between all members, the scale of the events and infrequency of these interactions limited the depth of collaboration that could be achieved between members of different components.²³ Collaboration

between components could have advantages by enabling members in the same geographies to work together²⁴ and address intersectionality of needs of OOSC.²⁵ For example, children with disabilities who are also poor and remote could be better served if members from both of these components worked together.

A varied group of stakeholders in government and the Consortium emphasized that the Consortium had missed an opportunity to leverage the interaction of multiple NGOs and approaches within the Consortium to identify best practices and models for enrolling and retaining OOSC, and subsequently to advocate for their uptake by NGOs and government.²⁶

One factor that may have limited the extent of collaboration between members is the relatively short 3.5-year timeframe of Phase 1. In addition, there is an inherent tension between the autonomy of decision-making in implementing activities and the desire to collaborate (see finding 1). A third constraining factor may have been a lack of additional resources needed to facilitate more extensive knowledge

Limitations encountered by the Consortium include:

- A short 3.5-year project timeframe
- Tension between the autonomy of decision-making in implementing activities and the desire to collaborate
- A lack of additional resources for more intensive knowledge sharing activities

¹⁹ Consortium member organization staff interview 2, 7, 8, and 10; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

²⁰ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

²¹ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

²² Consortium member organization staff interview 3 and 5.

²³ Consortium member organization staff interview 3 and 5.

²⁴ Provincial government official, NEP

²⁵ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

²⁶ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4, 5, and 12; Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports staff interview.

sharing²⁷ and intensive focus on best practices. However, greater efficiencies and increased effectiveness could have been achieved in addressing OOSC if the knowledge sharing within and among components, especially through best practice identification and uptake, were realized.

The *Mid-term Evaluation* reports that members felt a strong degree of collaboration with other members and that the Consortium enabled them to share knowledge and collaborate across components rather than compete. At the same time, it indicates room to improve cross-component learning and sharing, asserting that members did not appear familiar with each other, and suggests reorganization of components along practice areas rather than OOSC categories to increase collaboration.²⁸ The latter finding of room to improve cross-component collaboration aligns with the findings of this report. The *Mid-term Evaluation* does not share findings on the extent of collaboration within components.

Membership

Finding 3: Consortium membership produced varying degrees of value for its members. In general, small, local NGOs derived more benefit from membership than large, international NGOs, due to access to EAC's funds, Aide et Action's close support and trainings, and the Consortium's government partnership. The Consortium's Steering Committee could have been more strongly leveraged to produce greater value for large, international NGOs.

Most small NGO representatives who were consulted indicated that they would not have made as much progress or expanded as quickly over the past 3.5 years if they had worked independently.²⁹ They also shared that one of their motivations for joining the Consortium was to collaborate and learn from other NGOs and gain a voice with government.³⁰ Upon joining, small, local NGOs benefited from Consortium

Most small NGO representatives who were consulted indicated that they would not have made as much progress or expanded as quickly over the past 3.5 years if they had worked independently.

Large, international NGOs benefited from the Consortium to a lesser degree than small NGOs and most expressed that they could have made the same level of progress without Consortium support.

membership primarily through support from Aide et Action and EAC that aided expansion into new geographies, approaches, and/or OOSC-focused activities, training from Aide et Action that strengthened M&E and financial reporting practices, and the Consortium's connection with the national government that enabled them to have a voice with policymakers. Some members shared that EAC's funds as well as Aide et Action's encouragement and close support motivated and enabled them to

²⁷ Consortium member organization staff interview 4.

²⁸ The Wellspring Initiative. (2017). *Let the Flowers Grow: Mid-term Evaluation of the Cambodia Consortium for Out of School Children*. Phnom Penh: The Wellspring Initiative, 95-96.

²⁹ Aide et Action staff interview 4; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff interviews 2, 8, 9, and 12.

³⁰ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff interviews 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9.

expand into new geographical areas or approaches that they would not have considered otherwise.³¹ For instance, before joining the Consortium, one member only worked in Phnom Penh, but with the Consortium’s support was encouraged to and able to expand to other provinces.³² Other small NGOs that previously did not have a specific focus on OOSC now do for the same reason.³³ For example, one member previously worked exclusively within centers, teaching children with disabilities, but with the Consortium’s support, they began to conduct community outreach campaigns to dispel parental biases around children with disabilities and enroll children outside of their centers to increase enrollment of OOSC.³⁴ This NGO’s staff indicated a desire to test a new complementary approach to address the needs of their target population as motivation for expanding their focus to OOSC.³⁵

Small NGOs also obtained new knowledge and skills in M&E and financial reporting through a concerted effort from Aide et Action, which not only allowed them to fulfill the requirements of the grant but also strengthened their M&E and financial practices overall.³⁶ In addition, the connection the Consortium provided with the national government was not easily attainable to small, local NGOs. Recognizing the role of policy change in long term sustainability of their efforts and helping OOSC, most small NGO members cited government partnership as a key value add of the

The key benefits to small, local NGOs included:

- Support from Aide et Action and EAC, which aided expansion into new geographies, approaches, and OOSC-focused activities
- Training from Aide et Action to strengthen M&E and financial reporting practices
- A voice with the national government

More value could have been created for larger, international NGOs by leveraging the Steering Committee to tap into the technical expertise of large, international NGOs for decision-making, determining the strategic direction of the Consortium, and guiding discussions with government counterparts.

Consortium, particularly because these small NGOs have limited capacity and access to foster government relationships.³⁷ (Additional information on the Consortium’s government partnership can be found in finding 7.)

Large, international NGOs benefited from the Consortium to a lesser degree than small NGOs and most expressed that they could have made the same level of progress without Consortium support.³⁸ Their vision and motivation for joining the Consortium extended beyond collaboration and learning with other NGOs and acquiring a voice with government, to leveraging collaboration for the identification of best practices and using the Consortium’s collective voice to influence government policy on OOSC – both of

³¹ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5; Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 6, and 8.

³² Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5.

³³ Consortium member organization staff interview 6 and 12.

³⁴ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

³⁵ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

³⁶ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff interviews 9 and 12.

³⁷ Consortium member organization staff interview 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

³⁸ Aide et Action staff interview 4; Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5.

which they expressed were not fulfilled.³⁹ The most commonly-cited reason for this lost opportunity was that their role in the Consortium's Steering Committee did not meet expectations, and the type of support provided by Aide et Action as well as the linkage with government was accessible to larger NGOs even without the Consortium. Because they were on the Steering Committee, the large NGOs had expected their technical expertise to be more strongly leveraged for decision-making, determining the strategic direction of the Consortium, and guiding discussions with government counterparts.⁴⁰ (Finding 5 analyzes the implications this had on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Consortium's approach.) All large NGOs appreciated Aide et Action's M&E and finance support, but viewed this as grant management support rather than new knowledge that influenced their practices.⁴¹ While large, international NGO members also derived benefit from the Consortium's connection with government, it was to a lesser degree than smaller NGOs, as some had existing relationships with government and all felt that the Consortium's government relationship could have been more strongly leveraged to secure government funding and influence on policy change (finding 8 elaborates on the Consortium's government relationship).⁴²

Management and strategic direction

Finding 4: Despite the challenges of coordinating a large and diverse Consortium, Aide et Action was effective in managing and supporting members to achieve a collective goal and meet the requirements of the grant.

Managing the Consortium required a considerable amount of time and human resources and involved simultaneously balancing the diverse backgrounds and needs of 23 member organizations, ensuring compliance and consistency in grant requirements across members, and meeting additional requests from EAC throughout the grant period.⁴³

In order to balance the diversity of backgrounds in the Consortium membership, Aide et Action allowed members to retain a high level of autonomy in implementing activities, but this was not without challenges. The Consortium's members varied in capacity, level of technical expertise, degree of formalization of internal policies, implementing approaches, and geographies of operation. Their perceived value from the Consortium membership also differed as discussed in finding 3. Several stakeholders explicitly recognized the difficulty of managing such diverse actors.⁴⁴ While diverse experiences were mostly an advantage to the Consortium, they also created challenges.⁴⁵ Many members and stakeholders mentioned that initial confusion around the definition of OOSC, caused by differing

³⁹ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5.

⁴⁰ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5.

⁴¹ Consortium member organization staff interview 5; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁴² Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5.

⁴³ Consortium member organization staff interview 5; Aide et Action staff interview 4; EAC staff interview 2.

⁴⁴ Consortium member organization staff interview 5; Aide et Action staff interview 4; EAC staff interviews 1 and 2.

⁴⁵ Aide et Action staff interview 4; EAC staff interview 2.

Aide et Action's good practices

- ✓ Allowed members to retain autonomy in implementing activities
- ✓ Helped members acquire a basic shared understanding
- ✓ Required adherence to only a minimal number of standard policies
- ✓ Managed multiple legal agreements effectively
- ✓ Provided close support for M&E and finance reporting to facilitate grant compliance
- ✓ Created shared M&E and finance systems
- ✓ Creatively addressed co-funding challenges

member and EAC understandings of the term, posed an obstacle to progressing towards their shared target in the beginning stages.⁴⁶ To ensure this level of diversity remained an asset to the Consortium, Aide et Action helped members work towards basic shared understanding and required adherence to only a minimal number of standard policies that ensured ethical practices, quality, and compliance with grant requirements, but otherwise placed decision-making power around implementing activities within individual organizations.⁴⁷

A number of secretariat good practices were embodied by Aide et Action, which led to perceptions of its effectiveness. Aide et Action ensured compliance and consistency of contracting, reporting, and grant requirements

by managing multiple legal agreements, providing close support for M&E and finance reporting, creating shared M&E and finance systems, and creatively addressing co-funding challenges.

In order to maintain a level of membership that would allow the Consortium to reach its spending and OOSC targets, Aide et Action coordinated up to 23 active member contracts at a given time and executed termination agreements for those who wished to withdraw early from the Consortium.⁴⁸ Aside from the initial contracting delays from EAC's side, no contracting issues were brought forth by stakeholders.

Aide et Action's support teams provisioned effective and timely finance and M&E support to fill gaps in grant compliance capacities. Most members consulted expressed satisfaction with the support provided by Aide et Action's finance and M&E teams, including assistance in initial project design, responsiveness to queries, and trainings on finance and M&E tools and processes. This support allowed them to meet the grant's complex M&E and financial reporting requirements.⁴⁹

Aide et Action also created financial and M&E reporting processes and tools to monitor grant compliance, resources use by all members, implementation, and progress towards a shared goal.⁵⁰ Financial reporting was well-organized and straightforward.⁵¹ M&E tools and requirements, on the other hand, were more challenging as explained in finding 10. However, when issues were encountered Aide et Action provided quick and effective troubleshooting support. For example, at one time, the OP tracker lost the data of one

⁴⁶ Consortium member organization staff interviews 5 and 10; Aide et Action staff interview 1; EAC staff interview 2.

⁴⁷ Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9.

⁴⁸ Consortium organization staff interview 5; Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁴⁹ Consortium organization staff focus group discussion 1; Consortium organization staff interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10; Non-consortium organization staff interview 1; EAC staff interview 1.

⁵⁰ Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁵¹ Consortium organization staff interview 2.

child among 8,000; Aide et Action spent a day and half of staff time to assist the member in tracking down and recovering the data.⁵² This allowed Aide et Action to compile and share the data obtained with EAC in semi-annual reports.⁵³

In addition, Aide et Action adopted creative methods to assist members who faced shortfalls in meeting co-funding requirements over the grant period. By pooling funds from all members at varying levels, and averaging them to meet EAC's 50% co-funding requirement, Aide et Action and the Consortium members were able to provide funding coverage to members facing financial challenges.⁵⁴

While overseeing the daily activities of the Consortium, Aide et Action also quickly and effectively addressed unexpected additional requirements from EAC, including requests for more data and accommodations for field visits from auditors and researchers.⁵⁵

Overall, Aide et Action effectively managed the demands of overseeing the Consortium⁵⁶ and did so with limited funds⁵⁷ and under time pressure, but there were some limitations to its management approach. Some members expressed a desire for more transparency and member participation in decision-making.⁵⁸ For this reason, some members also indicated that they did not see their relationship with Aide et Action as different from a lead contractor-subcontractor arrangement.⁵⁹ One contributing factor to the lesser degree of transparency may have been unclear and delayed communications from EAC (see finding 13). More unilateral decision-making could have been the result of limited time and staff capacity to gain consensus across 23 organizations and/or disproportionate responsibility felt by Aide et Action for the success of the Consortium given it was the sole signatory on the EAC grant agreement.⁶⁰

While the *Mid-term Evaluation* identifies the difficulty of managing a consortium of 23 partners,⁶¹ it does not share extensive detail on the effectiveness of Aide et Action as a lead agency. However, it does recognize Aide et Action's role in providing capacity development to members⁶² and suggests room to streamline the Consortium's policies and procedures.⁶³

Finding 5: While the Consortium made some advances towards government engagement, a failure to fully leverage its leadership structure to determine its strategic direction and the absence of a sustainability plan limits its potential for long term impact.

Given Aide et Action's time and resource-intensive role of coordinating 23 members, the lead organization had limited time to contemplate the Consortium's long-term strategy.⁶⁴ However, the Consortium failed to leverage other aspects of its leadership structure, particularly the Steering Committee, to guide its

⁵² Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁵³ Aide et Action staff interview 3.

⁵⁴ Aide et Action staff interview 2.

⁵⁵ Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁵⁶ EAC staff interviews 1 and 2; Consortium organization staff interview 7.

⁵⁷ Consortium organization staff interviews 3 and 5.

⁵⁸ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁵⁹ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

⁶⁰ Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁶¹ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 10.

⁶² The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 96.

⁶³ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 48.

⁶⁴ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

government partnership, develop a purposeful research agenda, and impart technical knowledge for lasting impact.⁶⁵

As indicated in finding 7, the Consortium was effective in developing a relationship with the national government, but, as discussed in finding 8, the Consortium missed an opportunity to strategically influence government policy around OOSC. Regular and more frequent consultation with the Steering Committee – whose members had deep technical expertise in different OOSC categories and more capacity to strategize – could have more purposefully guided dialogue with the national government.⁶⁶

In addition, while the research agenda had the potential to inform strategic dialogue, this did not materialize. Designing and undertaking a shared research agenda, guided by the Consortium’s quality assurance advisor, the Steering Committee, and government partners, as originally intended in the Consortium proposal, would likely have generated evidence to inform deeper government engagement.⁶⁷

The Consortium’s Steering Committee could have been better leveraged to:

- Guide its partnership with the national government
- Develop a purposeful research agenda
- Impart deeper technical knowledge and strategic thinking to members

While some ad hoc capacity development and training was provided to members,⁶⁸ the technical expertise of the Steering Committee members could have been used to regularly impart technical knowledge and help members think more strategically about their approaches.⁶⁹

Furthermore, the Consortium lacks a sustainability plan to maintain and/or expand its current activities and trained staff after the termination of the Phase 1 EAC grant agreement, which would result in inefficiencies. Many of the small, local NGOs in particular expressed concern that they would be unable to maintain their current implementation activities without EAC Phase 2 funding.⁷⁰ Two hundred fifty staff who were hired and trained across member organizations may also be at risk of being laid off.⁷¹ A focus on sustainability should have been incorporated into the Consortium design and a more concerted effort should have been made to secure sustainable funding. Strategic advocacy for government resource support during the grant period could have yielded some sustainable funding, but it is more probable that providing additional fundraising support to members⁷² could have increased the likelihood of securing additional support for the Consortium and individual member activities before EAC funding terminated.

⁶⁵ Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁶⁶ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁶⁷ Consortium member organization staff interviews 5; Aide et Action staff interview 4; EAC staff interview 2.

⁶⁸ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff 8; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁶⁹ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4, 5, and 10; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

⁷⁰ Consortium member organization staff interviews 3 and 12; Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁷¹ Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁷² Consortium member organization focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff interview 3; Non-consortium member organization staff interview 1.

The *Mid-term Evaluation* recognizes the need for considerable leadership, vision, and strategic direction for the Consortium.⁷³ It finds little evidence to suggest a clear research agenda among members to inform policy advocacy,⁷⁴ an absence of an exit strategy, and lack of government ownership over the Consortium. It also shares comparable concerns from the majority of Consortium members over sustainability.⁷⁵

Finding 6: The Consortium contracting model created management efficiencies for EAC and, to a lesser degree, efficiencies around grant compliance for smaller Consortium members.

According to EAC staff who were consulted, funding a Consortium through one lead organization was an effective model for engaging smaller NGOs who could not independently meet EAC's target threshold of 10,000 OOSC.⁷⁶ At the same time, the contracting model created time and resource efficiencies in partner management for EAC⁷⁷ and required only a single tranche of funding be disbursed to the Consortium, since responsibilities of partner management and fund disbursement were shifted onto the lead organization, Aide et Action.⁷⁸

On the other hand, the model yielded efficiencies in grant compliance for smaller members of the Consortium that had less sophisticated grant compliance practices. As noted in finding 3, trainings provided by Aide et Action's support teams helped strengthen the M&E and financial practices of some small, local NGOs, which enabled them to meet EAC's grant requirements.⁷⁹

Government partnership

Finding 7: The collective weight of members, Aide et Action's leadership, the inclusion of government, and streamlined interaction enabled the Consortium to foster a productive relationship with the national government, which has elevated the focus on OOSC in Cambodia and led to opportunities for varying degrees of engagement with government for members.

Engagement with the national government has made it possible to elevate the issue of OOSC at the national level⁸⁰ and provide members the opportunity to interact, and sometimes partner, with the government. Stakeholders recognized that prior to the Consortium, the issue of OOSC was not a priority in Cambodia.⁸¹ The Consortium enabled all members to be represented in dialogue with the national government,⁸² whereas previously only a handful of the Consortium members had engaged at this level of government.⁸³ Some individual members have been able to deepen their engagement with government

⁷³ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 10.

⁷⁴ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 32.

⁷⁵ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 40.

⁷⁶ EAC staff interviews 1 and 2.

⁷⁷ EAC staff interview 2.

⁷⁸ Aide et Action staff interview 2.

⁷⁹ Consortium member organization focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff interview 2, 3, 6 7, 8; EAC staff interview 1.

⁸⁰ Aide et Action staff interview 4.

⁸¹ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

⁸² Consortium member organization staff interview 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

⁸³ Consortium member organization staff interview 4, 5, and 7.

as a result of connection with relevant contacts through the Consortium.⁸⁴ For instance, one member who previously had no connection to the national government, secured an MOU with MOEYS that formally permits it to work closely with the government school system.⁸⁵

Several factors contributed to building the Consortium's relationship with the national government. First, the collective weight of bringing together many disparate local and international NGOs attracted the government's attention.⁸⁶ Smaller local NGOs in particular indicated that fostering a connection with the national government would not have been possible on their own.⁸⁷ Second, Aide et Action as the Consortium lead worked diligently to regularly engage government officials and its staff composition of Cambodian nationals also likely made the government more willing to interact.⁸⁸ Third, national government officials participated in the creation of the Consortium and were included in its leadership structure, which provided access points for initial and regular engagement. The Minister of Education strongly supported the initiative and participated in EAC meetings with NGOs before the Consortium was formed.⁸⁹ Once the Consortium was established he, along with other national government officials, were bestowed with advisory roles to guide the Consortium, which gave Consortium leadership regular access to these government officials.⁹⁰ The Minister of Education chairs the Advisory Board and MOEYS technical officials participate in the Consortium's Technical Working Committee.⁹¹ Fourth, the Consortium's streamlined structure eased national government officials' interaction with the NGOs working with OOSC. National government officials expressed appreciation of the efficiency with which they are able to engage with OOSC-focused NGOs through one representative of the Consortium, and the government is considering the applicability of this unique model to other sectors.⁹² Aide et Action partakes in the National Primary Subsector Working Group on behalf of the Consortium and subsequently shares information with members.⁹³ While the government and most members of the Consortium viewed streamlined engagement as an advantage, some Consortium members expressed dissatisfaction with the level of transparency and clarity around dialogue with the government.⁹⁴ Some members expressed disappointment that Aide et Action did not always share all information from government meetings with the Consortium, and the Steering Committee in particular. Some information also seemed to become less clear as it was shared secondhand.⁹⁵

⁸⁴ Consortium member organization staff interview 2; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

⁸⁵ Consortium member organization staff interview 2.

⁸⁶ EAC staff interview 2.

⁸⁷ Consortium member organization staff interview 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

⁸⁸ Consortium member organization staff interview 5; Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁸⁹ Aide et Action staff interview 4; EAC staff interview 1.

⁹⁰ Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁹¹ The Wellspring Initiative. (2017).

⁹² Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports staff interview.

⁹³ Aide et Action staff interview 1.

⁹⁴ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5; Aide et Action staff interview 4

⁹⁵ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5.

Finding 8: While the Consortium has successfully built a relationship with the national government, failure to fully leverage the Consortium’s leadership structure for guidance has prevented it from securing government funding and limited its influence on policy change. The strength of relationships with provincial government varies and could have been cultivated more deeply.

At the national level, the Consortium has fostered a strong relationship with the government, whose leaders have expressed appreciation for the work of the Consortium and its input. Although the government has not contributed or committed any funding or resources to the Consortium to date,⁹⁶ potentially due to the Consortium only having been in operation for 3.5 years, there is some indication that government is interested in contributing funds to the Consortium if it were to continue for a Phase 2.⁹⁷ In addition, the Consortium has not fully leveraged its relationship with the government to influence policy.⁹⁸ While some Consortium members successfully contributed to government policy in the form of the Multi-lingual Education, these gains originated before the Consortium was established and thus this achievement cannot be credited to the Consortium.⁹⁹

The Consortium’s effectiveness could have been strengthened by:

- Leveraging the Consortium’s leadership structure to inform government engagement and policy influence
- Engaging more deeply with provincial government

As discussed in finding 5, there was scope for the Consortium to influence government policy by better leveraging the Consortium’s leadership structure to strategize and inform government engagement. However, given the lengthy nature of policy change, policy gains may not be realistic to expect within the limited time the Consortium has been in operation.¹⁰⁰ The Consortium had and continues to hold an opportunity to influence government uptake of best practices to address OOSC.¹⁰¹ A national government official consulted for this report expressed a desire for data on cost-effectiveness and best practices for addressing OOSC to inform adoption into government practice.¹⁰² Doing so would significantly raise the number of Cambodian OOSC that can be reached using more sustainable government resources.

In addition to deeper engagement with national government, provincial government engagement could have been strengthened. There was an understanding of the need for provincial-level government engagement. One member expressed the critical role of local level government collaboration in easing activity implementation on the ground and others seemed to recognize the need to collaborate with provincial government given their existing participation in Provincial Joint Technical Working Groups (Provincial JTWG).¹⁰³ In addition, Aide et Action and NEP encouraged members who had not engaged with

⁹⁶ Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports staff interview.

⁹⁷ Aide et Action staff interview 7.

⁹⁸ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4, 5, and 12; EAC staff interview 2.

⁹⁹ The Wellspring Initiative. (2017).; Consortium member organization staff interview 4; Aide et Action staff interview 4.

¹⁰⁰ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; EAC staff interview 2.

¹⁰¹ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4, 5, and 12; EAC staff interview 2.

¹⁰² Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports staff interview.

¹⁰³ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4, 6, and 9.

local government to join Provincial JTGWs and at times provided members with nominal stipends to enable participation.¹⁰⁴

In line with the findings of this report, the *Mid-term Evaluation* indicates that while 80% of the senior staff at consulted member organizations believed that the Consortium raised the profile of the OOSC issue in Cambodia, several members expressed that the Consortium's advocacy efforts underperformed in influencing policy and in engaging local government in a unified way. It also suggests leveraging stronger leadership¹⁰⁵ from the Consortium and the expertise of all members¹⁰⁶ to achieve these ends, and cautions that results often take a long time to manifest in the Cambodian political environment.¹⁰⁷

Monitoring and evaluation

Finding 9: While a strong focus on enrolling and retaining a specific number of OOSC provided a target and direction for the Consortium, it also had the unintended effect of deprioritizing quality in some cases and affected the way Consortium members deployed their resources, which created limitations in supporting sustainability and retention and learning in the long term.

In a Consortium consisting of organizations with different backgrounds and priorities, the Consortium's target of enrolling and retaining 50,000 OOSC served as a shared goal for members to work towards as well as an accountability mechanism with EAC.¹⁰⁸ While EAC's mission and vision gives importance to both

EAC staff, some Consortium members, and outside stakeholders recognized that a simple shared target was essential to developing a common understanding of the Consortium's purpose among members.

However, prioritization of a target number of OOSC came at the cost of efforts to bolster quality and retention in the short and long term.

quality and access,¹⁰⁹ Consortium members perceived its access-oriented numeric targets to be the most prominent aspects of its mission. This may be due to strong encouragement from EAC to align with EAC's orientation around enrolling and retaining 10 million children in school at the Consortium's inception and EAC's policy of disbursing funding based on achievement of target numbers.¹¹⁰ EAC staff, some Consortium members, and outside stakeholders recognized that a simple shared target was essential to

¹⁰⁴ Aide et Action staff interview 1; Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 12.

¹⁰⁵ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 31-33.

¹⁰⁶ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 10.

¹⁰⁷ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 31-33.

¹⁰⁸ EAC staff interviews 1 and 2; Consortium member organization staff interviews 5 and 8; Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports staff interview.

¹⁰⁹ According to the "Who We Are" section of EAC's website, "EAC has a vision of a world where every individual has the opportunity to learn through a quality education" and "EAC works with partner organizations toward its mission to trigger significant breakthroughs in providing out of school children faced with extreme poverty, cultural barriers, and conflict-affected environments an opportunity for a full course of quality primary education."

¹¹⁰ Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5; EAC staff interview 2.

developing a common understanding of the Consortium’s purpose among members.¹¹¹

However, prioritization of a target number of OOSC came at the cost of efforts to bolster quality and retention in the short and long term.¹¹² Consortium members stressed the importance of quality to preventing dropouts, which is particularly salient for the most marginalized who are at higher risk for dropping out.¹¹³ One member noted that once children drop out, they are less likely to rejoin even when later given additional support.¹¹⁴ Two of the members consulted noted they would not be joining a potential Phase 2 of the Consortium for this reason, instead opting to focus on strengthening quality to retain children enrolled during Phase 1 rather than expanding to reach more children.¹¹⁵ In addition, there were challenges associated with the amount of investment per child based on prioritization of a quantitative target, which are discussed in finding 14. The *Mid-term Evaluation* also indicates that ensuring quality was a challenge for the Consortium¹¹⁶ and states that there was recognition among partners that most of the Consortium’s resources were being allocated to reaching access targets,¹¹⁷ but does not directly attribute quality challenges to the quantitative goal guiding the Consortium’s collective efforts.

Finding 10: While M&E procedures, the OP tracker, and associated reporting requirements were rigorous and presented some advantages, the cost of lost staff time and resources, especially in relation to the amount of resources available, seemingly out-weighted their benefit.

Comprised of an online data management system, 100+ indicators, and regular semi-annual data aggregation and reporting,¹¹⁸ the M&E processes, tools, and requirements of the Consortium were rigorous, and valued for tracking progress towards a shared target, exposing members to new M&E practices, and providing an input into building the Consortium’s relationship with the national government. Given the number of members, the diversity of their activities, and the large target number of OOSC to be enrolled and retained, many members and stakeholders recognized the need for a shared M&E system to collect data and aggregate progress.¹¹⁹ One small, local NGO member acknowledged the value in learning a new M&E tool to gain

Advantages of the Consortium’s M&E system:

- Tracked progress towards a shared target
- Exposed members to new M&E practices
- Provided an input into building the Consortium’s relationship with the national government

¹¹¹ EAC staff interviews 1 and 2; Consortium member organization staff interviews 5 and 8; Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports staff interview.

¹¹² Education expert interview; Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 4, 5 and 6.

¹¹³ Consortium member organization staff interviews 2, 4, 6 and 8.; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

¹¹⁴ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

¹¹⁵ Consortium member organization staff interview 1 and 6.

¹¹⁶ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 25-27.

¹¹⁷ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 22.

¹¹⁸ Aide et Action staff interview 3.

¹¹⁹ Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 5, 7, and 8; Non-consortium member organization staff interview 2; Aide et Action staff interviews 1 and 2; EAC staff interview 2.

exposure to new M&E approaches.¹²⁰ Data from the M&E tool are also used to share progress with government stakeholders and serve as a useful, but rarely leveraged, input for the national government.¹²¹ One national government official mentioned that they will be citing statistics provided by the Consortium for the first time in an upcoming Education Congress report and felt especially confident in the data because it was externally audited.¹²²

However, the development of the OP Tracker was a resource-intensive undertaking – approximately 5% of the Consortium’s program budget was spent to develop the OP Tracker¹²³ – and changing reporting requirements, tight reporting timelines, technical difficulties, limited staff capacity, language requirements of the OP Tracker, additional due diligence requirements, and lack of clarity about data usage from EAC have led to an inefficient use of time and resources and caused some members to withdraw from the Consortium.¹²⁴

Challenges of the Consortium’s M&E system:

- Development was resource-intensive
- Changing reporting requirements
- Tight reporting timelines
- Technical difficulties
- Limited staff capacity
- Language requirements of the OP Tracker
- Additional requests to accommodate site visits
- Lack of clarity about data usage

First, as discussed in finding 13, changing reporting requirements and tight reporting timelines made it difficult for members to fulfill requirements and prevented members from streamlining M&E processes.¹²⁵ While the Consortium established its M&E system and indicators at the outset, EAC developed and shared standard key performance indicators (KPIs) and EAC’s new online M&E reporting system in the Consortium’s second year. Integrating EAC’s new requirements does not appear to have been difficult given the Consortium had already been tracking the KPIs. However, receiving this information during project inception would have allowed the Consortium to streamline its 100+ indicators and achieve efficiencies in data collection and reporting.¹²⁶ Although EAC’s semi-annual reporting timelines were clear to Aide et Action and Consortium members, the number of partners from which data was aggregated may have made six-month reporting timelines more challenging for the Consortium than would have been for other individual organizations.¹²⁷

Second, technical difficulties sometimes resulted in an inability to access the OP Tracker and loss of data. One member cited the OP Tracker’s need for computers and

¹²⁰ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

¹²¹ Aide et Action staff interview 2.

¹²² Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports interview.

¹²³ The Wellspring Initiative. (2017).; Aide et Action staff 1.

¹²⁴ Aide et Action Cambodia & Friends International. (2015). “Termination of the Grant Agreement.”; Aide et Action staff 1.

¹²⁵ Consortium member organization staff interviews 1 and 6; Non-consortium member organization staff interview 1; Aide et Action staff 1.

¹²⁶ Aide et Action staff interview 7.

¹²⁷ Aide et Action staff interview 7.

internet to be ill-suited to the Cambodian context,¹²⁸ as it meant that the OP Tracker was not easily accessible in the field and remote areas or when internet connectivity was down.¹²⁹ Another member shared the frustration of small errors requiring re-entry of full pages of data in the OP Tracker,¹³⁰ and yet another shared an instance in which the OP Tracker lost data for 2,000 students.¹³¹

Third, the amount of staff time required to comply with M&E requirements was repeatedly cited as a challenge, especially for smaller NGOs with limited staff capacity and many of which do not have dedicated M&E staff.¹³² Small, local NGOs and large, international NGO members alike expressed concern over the disproportionate amount of staff capacity needed to fulfill M&E requirements, particularly compared against the amount of resources that were provisioned by EAC.¹³³ This perception may have stemmed from Aide et Action and Consortium members' initial underestimate of the M&E budget. Once revised, the budget may still have been insufficient for some members to fulfill M&E mandates.¹³⁴

Fourth, the use of English in the OP Tracker was cited as a challenge by one member who worked in remote areas. Implementing staff at his organization did not speak English and thus challenges were encountered in translating data collected in the field in the local language into English for entry into the OP Tracker. Limited English-speaking staff also complicated data entry within tight timelines.¹³⁵

Fifth, additional requests to accommodate field visits from auditors - such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young - and researchers - like Wellspring and R4D - required additional time from staff who already felt stretched.¹³⁶ While some of these requirements were noted in the grant contract between EAC and Aide et Action, as shared in finding 13, clarifying all expectations at project start-up along with the timing and associated level of effort would have allowed members to better prepare and to budget appropriately.¹³⁷

Sixth, there was a general lack of understanding of how data that was reported was used by EAC.¹³⁸ A lack of dialogue between EAC and Consortium members to streamline indicators once EAC established KPIs and a new M&E reporting system may have contributed to excessive collection of data that may or may not have been used.¹³⁹ Dialogue between EAC and the Consortium could have helped mitigate this issue and streamlined data reporting requirements and formats to reduce the use of time and resources for M&E reporting.

¹²⁸ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

¹²⁹ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11.

¹³⁰ Consortium member organization staff interview 8.

¹³¹ Consortium member organization staff interview 1.

¹³² Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Aide et Action staff interview 1; Consortium member organization staff interview 1, 3, 4, 6, and 9; Aide et Action Cambodia & Friends International, (2015).

¹³³ Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Consortium member organization staff interview 1, 3, 4, and 6; Aide et Action Cambodia & Friends International, (2015); Aide et Action staff interview 1.

¹³⁴ Aide et Action staff interview 7.

¹³⁵ Consortium member organization staff interview 8.

¹³⁶ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

¹³⁷ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

¹³⁸ Aide et Action staff interview 4.

¹³⁹ Aide et Action staff interview 7.

Few consortium members noted being able to use data from the OP tracker outside of donor reporting purposes.¹⁴⁰ Aide et Action used the OP Tracker data for general progress and target tracking and sharing data with government,¹⁴¹ but only one other member reported using M&E data from the OP Tracker to guide the general direction of their organization's strategy.¹⁴² Three reasons for limited usage could include limited staff time, lack of knowledge of how to use the data for internal decision-making, and not having considered using the data for other purposes.¹⁴³

The *Mid-term Evaluation* similarly identifies high-levels of dissatisfaction with the M&E system among Consortium members for reasons including tight reporting timelines, technical incompatibility with the Cambodian context, technological challenges that made data entry difficult, the time-consuming nature of the system, lack of inclusion of Khmer script, lack of feedback from EAC on quality of reporting, and difficulty in learning the system. It also recommends streamlining the OP tracker system¹⁴⁴ and finds little evidence to suggest M&E data was being used by Consortium members for programmatic improvements or advocacy and dialogue with national government. However, while the *Mid-term Evaluation* concludes that opinions of the M&E system have improved over time,¹⁴⁵ consultations with stakeholders for this report indicate that the majority of Consortium members still find the M&E system challenging.

Section IV. In what ways has EAC's values, partnership approach, and procedures enabled or hindered CCOOSC's success and the enrollment of over 50,000 OOSC in Cambodia?

In supporting grantees who can deliver large-scale impact in enrolling and supporting out of school children, EAC's overall approach is one that prioritizes collaboration and serving as a financial and technical partner to on-the-ground implementers. Other key features of this approach include requiring co-financing and allowing partners the autonomy to pursue activities as they see fit provided that they are able to meet and demonstrate progress toward pre-determined targets. This is partly necessitated by the size of EAC's team and existing capacity to provide non-financial support.¹⁴⁶

While EAC's priorities are clearly represented in the partnership with the Consortium and were key to the formation and success of the Consortium, due to misalignment around expectations, including reporting requirements, and the membership composition of the Consortium, some of these priorities presented challenges for the effectiveness and efficiency of its work. The following section elaborates on these success and challenges.

¹⁴⁰ Consortium member organization staff interviews 2, 5 and 8.

¹⁴¹ Aide et Action staff interview 2.

¹⁴² Consortium member organization staff interview 3.

¹⁴³ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

¹⁴⁴ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 13.

¹⁴⁵ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 41-42.

¹⁴⁶ EAC staff interviews 1 and 2.

Finding 11: EAC played an important role in encouraging and supporting collaboration between NGOs in the initial stages of the development of the Consortium. Because of this close involvement in the beginning stages, EAC's values influenced the form that the Consortium took.

Consistent with description of the beginnings of the Consortium from EAC staff, Aide et Action, along with at least one other NGO present during the initial design phase, noted EAC's critical role in bringing together a diverse range of organizations in Cambodia to address the challenge of supporting out of school children.¹⁴⁷ During meetings facilitated by UNICEF, which brought together NGOs of varying size and exposure to one another, EAC signaled its willingness to invest in a large-scale approach, allowing dialogue to begin around how to enroll and support all out of school children in the country. However, as it became clear during these conversations that no single NGO would be able to address the challenge on its own, EAC recommended a Consortium of organizations come together to submit a proposal for funding to EAC.¹⁴⁸ The model suggested by EAC enabled small NGOs to receive funding and support that otherwise would not have been available and allowed for collaboration and coordination between NGOs working to support similar types of OOSC.¹⁴⁹

EAC values infused in Consortium:

- Commitment to the right of education for the most marginalized
- Partnership
- Transparency/accountability

EAC principles operationalized in Consortium:

- Working within the context of national education plans
- Creating added value
- Requiring ownership and sustainability (see finding 14)

Through encouraging a focus on OOSC, bringing together a number of NGOs, and embedding partnership requirements, EAC infused its values¹⁵⁰ of *commitment to the right of education for the most marginalized* and *partnership*. By bringing together and investing in NGOs who had not previously worked together and who would not have been able to engage in work at such scale on their own, EAC shifted the paradigm in the sub-sector from working in silos to active collaboration. Additionally, as EAC made a significant investment in supporting out of school children in Cambodia, it influenced the focus on out of school children within the Consortium and its activities, as well as in the country more generally. Consistent with EAC's operating principle¹⁵¹ of *creating added value*, EAC funds allowed Consortium members to expand into new geographical areas or approaches that they would not have considered otherwise,¹⁵² and also enabled small NGOs who previously did not have a specific focus on OOSC to work in this area (see finding 1).¹⁵³ In addition, EAC support for a Consortium

¹⁴⁷ EAC staff interviews 1 and 2, Consortium member organization staff interview 12, Aide et Action staff interview 1.

¹⁴⁸ EAC staff interviews 1 and 2, Aide et Action staff interview 1.

¹⁴⁹ EAC staff interview 2.

¹⁵⁰ EAC Values, shared in email to R4D on November 21, 2017.

¹⁵¹ Educate a Child. (2018). "Our Operating Principles."

¹⁵² Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11; Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5; Consortium member organization staff interviews 1, 6, and 8.

¹⁵³ Consortium member organization staff interview 6 and 12.

approach operationalized its principle of *working within the context of national education plans*,¹⁵⁴ enabling regular interaction with government on the topic of OOSC and elevating its priority in the country. Also, through financial and M&E reporting requirements, the Consortium shared updates on progress and how funds were being allocated. While EAC was the primary audience for this information, M&E data was shared with government counterparts (see finding 10), and used by Aide et Action for target tracking, reflecting EAC's value of *transparency and accountability*.¹⁵⁵

Finding 12: More sustained engagement between EAC and the Consortium throughout the project timeframe, more opportunities for Consortium members to interact with EAC's network, and greater access to capacity building support may have increased the Consortium's effectiveness and efficiency and infused EAC's values more strongly into the Consortium's work.

Interaction with EAC was described by those interviewed as being more robust in the earlier stages of the Consortium's work, and most active at critical inflection points such as reporting deadlines later in the partnership.¹⁵⁶ While EAC staff were commended for responsiveness to questions around reporting guidelines and financial issues, there was interest in more substantive discussion and reflection on technical matters. For example, as also described in the *Mid-term Evaluation*¹⁵⁷, greater feedback and discussion around the content of semi-annual technical reports submitted to EAC was desired.¹⁵⁸ In-person engagement, which only occurred during the initial project design and at the UNESCO-Bangkok conference, was also seen as an opportunity to better align EAC and Consortium members, allowing EAC to

Strengths of engagement:

- Robust interaction during early stages of partnership
- EAC responsiveness to reporting guidelines and financial issues
- Opportunity offered to participate in UNESCO-Bangkok conference on innovations in supporting OOSC

better understand the Consortium's day-to-day activities and challenges faced, as well as demonstrate EAC's commitment to the Consortium.¹⁵⁹ One individual consulted even suggested that EAC serve on the Consortium's Steering Committee and attend major conferences.¹⁶⁰ While such requests must be balanced against the capacity of EAC's small team and desire to allow funding and technical partners to have ownership over their own work, increased engagement between EAC and the Consortium members, including more regular communication and additional technical support, may have minimized challenges in communication (see finding 13), given the Consortium an opportunity to incorporate new knowledge into their work, and infused EAC's values more strongly into the day-to-day operations.

¹⁵⁴ Educate a Child, (2018).

¹⁵⁵ EAC Values, shared in email to R4D on November 21, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ Interviews with Aide et Action staff, EAC staff interviews 1 and 2, Aide et Action staff interviews 1 and 2.

¹⁵⁷ The Wellspring Initiative (2017), 42.

¹⁵⁸ Aide et Action staff interview 4.

¹⁵⁹ Aide et Action staff interview 1 and 4, Consortium member organization staff interview 12.

¹⁶⁰ Aide et Action staff interview 4.

Consortium members asked for more:

- In-person engagement
- Guidance and feedback on semi-annual technical reports
- Opportunities to learn and connect with EAC's broader network

Aide et Action staff were also eager for opportunities to engage with EAC's network more broadly. Aide et Action staff desired additional opportunities similar to the conference hosted by UNESCO-Bangkok in February 2016, which facilitated learning about innovative approaches being taken in different contexts to support out of school children,¹⁶¹ particularly if they enabled them to exchange ideas with other EAC partners encountering similar challenges and share lessons more broadly from their own work in Cambodia.¹⁶² For example, one Aide et Action staff member suggested that since the Consortium had invested significant time and resources into developing the OP tracker, there could be value in sharing lessons learned from that experience with

others working in the sub-sector. In addition, since the OP tracker was challenging to develop and implement, learning from other organizations who had experience with similar M&E tools could have eased the overall process of designing and building the tracker.¹⁶³ While recognizing EAC's limited capacity,¹⁶⁴ additional support for externally-focused knowledge sharing activities could have further integrated EAC's value for *learning*¹⁶⁵ and allowed Consortium members to leverage lessons from other organizations. Given that the Consortium was a unique type of partnership, EAC could have differentiated its approach to supporting Aide et Action, particularly with respect to the provision of non-financial support. Consortium member organizations required closer support from Aide et Action, and additional non-financial support from EAC in the form of technical assistance and peer learning opportunities could have enabled Aide et Action, who encountered challenges in M&E and other areas, to better support Consortium members.

¹⁶¹ Education expert interview, Aide et Action staff interview 1, Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5, EAC staff interview 1.

¹⁶² Aide et Action staff interview 1, Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5, Consortium member organization staff interview 12.

¹⁶³ Aide et Action staff interview 1.

¹⁶⁴ EAC staff interview 2.

¹⁶⁵ EAC Values, shared in email to R4D on November 21, 2017.

Finding 13: Contracting and funding delays and, at times, unclear communication and expectations from EAC disrupted Consortium members' ability to implement activities.

As also indicated in the *Mid-term Evaluation*,¹⁶⁶ contracting delays at the outset of Phase 1 inhibited members from commencing activities agreed under the Consortium, which reduced the timeline for the overall work and also prevented 7,000 children enrolled during this time period to count towards the 50,000 OOSC target. A number of Consortium members also noted disruption in implementation activities targeting out of school children when a grant installment was delayed in June 2017.¹⁶⁷ While larger organizations were able to utilize other organizational resources to offset this challenge, smaller NGOs had fewer options, with one reportedly having to cease implementation, others having to borrow money from Aide et Action, and another having to borrow money from a matching funder.¹⁶⁸ Aside from the direct consequences to project implementation, contracting and funding delays generated confusion among Consortium members, who did not have clarity around the factors influencing the delays. This had the effect of straining relations with Aide et Action who mediated the partnership with EAC as well as between Consortium members and matching funders.¹⁶⁹ This also lowered morale and raised some concerns about EAC's commitment to the Consortium.

Contracting and funding delays:

- Initial contracting delays prevented 7,000 children enrolled to count toward the 50,000 OOSC target
- Delayed grant installment had significant consequences for some members including suspension of activities and need to borrow money from Aide et Action and matching donors

Intensive and often unclear reporting requirements were also seen as complicating the Consortium's day-to-day work. While EAC typically requires partners to develop an M&E Framework and identifies KPIs that

Reporting and other requirements:

- Reporting requirements not clarified from the outset
- Indicators not streamlined upon receipt of new EAC M&E reporting guidance
- Site visit requests from auditors and external consultants were time consuming

partners are required to report on through an online platform during the proposal phase, Consortium members noted that this process was not in place at the outset of the grant and was only introduced in the second year of implementation.¹⁷⁰ As such, the Consortium developed indicators for tracking, which would be required for grant reporting, without sufficient guidance from EAC. Once this additional guidance was received from EAC, it appears that the Consortium adjusted its data collection approach without much difficulty given it was already tracking the KPIs. However, this did not result in efficiencies for the Consortium given that it had already developed its own online tracking system with approximately 100 indicators and committed to reporting this data. Tracking its expansive set of indicators required

¹⁶⁶ The Wellspring Initiative (2017), 68.

¹⁶⁷ Aide et Action staff interviews 1, 4, and 6; EAC staff interview 2; Consortium member organization staff interviews 3, 5, 8, and 12.

¹⁶⁸ Aide et Action staff interviews 1, 4, and 6; Consortium member organization staff interviews 3 and 8.

¹⁶⁹ Consortium member organization staff interview 3.

¹⁷⁰ M&E interview, follow up interview with Samphors

significant time on behalf of Aide et Action and Consortium members, which may not have been necessary if indicators were streamlined earlier or in consultation with EAC upon receipt of the program's new requirements.¹⁷¹ In addition to changes in reporting requirements, Consortium members noted that requests to accommodate site visits from auditors and external consultants from EAC required significant time from partners and detracted from project activities. These included a visit from Pricewaterhouse Coopers for a review of the M&E system and grant compliance, multiple visits from Ernst & Young for financial auditing, and a visit from the Wellspring Initiative for the *Midterm Evaluation*.¹⁷² While some of these requirements were noted in the grant contract between EAC and Aide et Action, additional information on the timing and associated level of effort would have allowed members to better prepare.¹⁷³

Lack of clarity around other partnership expectations also lead to implementation challenges. For example, Consortium members indicated that difficulty understanding EAC's definition of OOSC created challenges in Consortium reporting as well as in identifying which children to target.¹⁷⁴ While it was difficult for Consortium members to agree on one definition given varying approaches, understandings, and no single national framework,¹⁷⁵ greater clarity from the outset could have enabled more efficient implementation and reporting. In the future, it was suggested that reporting requirements and other expectations be discussed at the outset in a face-to-face meeting, where questions could be surfaced and greater clarity provided. The *Mid-term Evaluation*, also suggested the need for clearly defined partnership expectations and contractual arrangements with the donor.¹⁷⁶

Unclear communication/expectations:

- Lack of clarity around OOSC definition challenged reporting and identification of target population
- Unclear communication around Phase 2 poses potential knowledge loss

Additionally, communication challenges related to a potential Phase 2 threaten effective and efficient implementation in the long-term. While EAC requested a concept note for Phase 2 on an expedited timeline, eight months after submission of the concept note, Consortium members were still unclear about the EAC's timeframe for responding with their funding plans. This lack of clarity has implications for the success of another phase of work as the nearly 250 staff hired across member organizations for the first phase will need to seek employment outside of the Consortium if funding is unavailable.¹⁷⁷ This will necessitate additional hiring and onboarding of staff, as well as a loss of knowledge and experience that could be applied to gain efficiencies in Phase 2. In addition, many of the smaller NGOs will not be able to maintain their current services without EAC Phase 2 funding.

¹⁷¹ Aide et Action staff interviews 1, 2, and 7; Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5.

¹⁷² Consortium member organization staff interview 6; Aide et Action staff interview 7.

¹⁷³ Consortium member organization staff interview 6.

¹⁷⁴ Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC). (2015). "CCOSC Annual Report: July 2014- June 2015." Phnom Penh: Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children.; Aide et Action staff interview 1; Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5; Consortium member organization staff interview 10.

¹⁷⁵ CCOSC, (2015).

¹⁷⁶ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 97.

¹⁷⁷ Aide et Action staff interviews 1 and 4.

Finding 14: Match funding requirements of EAC support were at times helpful in attracting other funding, but also created pressures on Consortium members, as did EAC’s stringent investment per child.

EAC’s financing approach

Strengths:

- EAC willingness to authorize adjustments to budget on a case by case basis
- Co-financing concept creates push for organizations to identify additional resources

Challenges:

- Co-financing requirements are difficult to fulfill leading to inefficiencies and members’ dropping out of Consortium
- EAC investment per child insufficient to reach the most marginalized children given need for technical expertise

Reflecting the impact of EAC’s principle of *requiring ownership and sustainability*, and as also described in the *Mid-term Evaluation*,¹⁷⁸ members consulted for the study appreciated the concept of co-financing and the push to identify matching donors, as it had the effect of increasing resources for the organization, particularly for smaller NGOs who had less access to funding.¹⁷⁹ There was also some flexibility around matching funds requirements which mitigated associated challenges – for example, the Consortium needed 50% matching funds overall and not for each individual organization.¹⁸⁰

However, despite these benefits, Consortium members described co-financing as a major obstacle to efficient implementation over the project timeframe. Matching funds were challenging for a variety of reasons, including due to competition between NGOs for funding from the same donors. In addition, short timeframes for raising funds was particularly difficult for small NGOs who had to find matching donors despite limited fundraising experience and obtain approval from their own Boards once identified.¹⁸¹ The difficulties faced by small NGOs in identifying matching funds are also described in the *Mid-term Evaluation*.¹⁸² Although intended for this purpose, co-financing requirements did not

seem to generate sustainability gains for smaller NGOs as many of them will be struggling to keep their activities going at the close of Phase 1 if Phase 2 funding is not available.

International NGOs were unintentionally privileged through the arrangement, as they could use their own reserves as matching funds, which small, local NGOs did not have. However, even international NGOs felt constrained by co-financing requirements. For example, one Consortium member from an international NGO explained that the organization offered staff time as part of their contribution to co-financing requirements. Because it was difficult to commit to providing these resources over an extended period of time given uncertainty in outside funding, they were only able to offer a minimum amount of staff time for Consortium activities.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 37.

¹⁷⁹ Aide et Action staff interview 2; Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5; Consortium member organization staff interviews 2, 8, and 12.

¹⁸⁰ Aide et Action staff interview 2.

¹⁸¹ Non-consortium member organization staff interview 1; Aide et Action staff interviews 1 and 2; Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5; Consortium member organization staff focus group discussion 11, Consortium member staff organization interviews 5, 7, and 7; EAC staff interview 1.

¹⁸² The Wellspring Initiative, (2017), 43.

¹⁸³ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

Beyond barriers to efficiency, co-financing requirements impacted organizations' ability to participate in the Consortium. One stakeholder mentioned that, due to his organization's inability to secure match funding within the designated time period, the small NGO was forced to withdraw from the Consortium before implementation began, despite staff having already expended significant time designing their project and obtaining approval for it. Another NGO withdrew after implementation began, due in part to the difficulty in raising matching funds, which had the effect of limiting available resources for project activities.¹⁸⁴ Co-financing requirements discouraged others from joining the Consortium and were cited as a consideration for Phase 1 partners when determining whether to participate in the concept note development process for Phase 2.¹⁸⁵

In addition, while budgeting for each individual NGO was determined in internal Consortium negotiations, the overall budget envelope provided by EAC based on an investment per child of \$100 was frequently noted as insufficient for reaching the most marginalized among the out of school population and promoting retention after enrolling children in school. While EAC's goal to enroll and support out of school children at scale requires low per child costs, one Consortium member explained that reaching the most marginalized requires additional technical expertise which is not possible with the limited budget.¹⁸⁶

Despite these challenges, Aide et Action staff consulted for the study noted the benefits of EAC's approach, which emphasizes flexibility.¹⁸⁷ For example, while funding was required to be spent according to established cost categories,¹⁸⁸ if changes were needed, EAC staff were willing to authorize adjustments such that funds could be effectively spent in support of out of school children.¹⁸⁹

Section V. The Consortium within a global context

This section situates the Consortium approach within a selection of other large-scale approaches to supporting OOSC. The selection of programs, presented in Table 1, is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather intended to share a diverse sample of approaches that allow comparison along multiple dimensions in order to understand the unique features of the Consortium approach. Information on mission, categories of OOSC targeted, number of OOSC the intervention intends to reach, geographic scope, primary approaches integrated into the intervention, primary participating actors, and the nature of government engagement is provided for each intervention.

¹⁸⁴ Non-consortium member organization staff interview 1; Aide et Action Cambodia & Friends International, (2015).

¹⁸⁵ Consortium member organization staff interview 5.

¹⁸⁶ Aide et Action staff interview 1; Aide et Action staff focus group discussion 5; Consortium member organization staff interviews 4 and 5.

¹⁸⁷ Aide et Action staff interview 2.

¹⁸⁸ EAC staff interview 2.

¹⁸⁹ Aide et Action staff interview 2.

Table 1: A comparison of select large-scale OOSC interventions

Intervention	Mission	Categories of OOSC targeted	Number of OOSC intended to reach	Geographic scope	Primary approaches	Primary participating actors	Nature of government engagement
Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children¹⁹⁰	Enroll and retain all Cambodian OOSC in schools through equitable access, improved teaching quality, capacity development of local actors, and research and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with disabilities • Poor and remote children • Street children • Ethnic minority children • Over-aged children 	50,000 OOSC over 3.5 years (57,448 reached)	23 of 25 provinces in Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground-level implementation (e.g. teacher training, capacity development of local actors, enrollment campaigns, school construction, accelerated learning programs, multi-lingual instruction) • Capacity development through Peer learning between NGOs • Coordination/ collaboration among NGOs, government, and other stakeholders • Advocacy at national and provincial levels of government • Research (limited) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of 23 large international and small local NGOs 	National level government provides high-level guidance of Consortium activities.

¹⁹⁰ The Wellspring Initiative, (2017).

Strengthening Education Systems for Out of School Children¹⁹¹	Seeks to build collaboration and enhance institutional capacity among Southeast Asian countries to eliminate obstacles that prevent OOSC from accessing education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor children • Children with disabilities • Migrant and stateless children • Girls • Remote children • Ethnic minority children 	3 million (unspecified timeframe), 50,000 OOSC from 2015-2018	9 countries in Southeast Asia: Thailand Philippines Cambodia Lao PDR Viet Nam Indonesia Myanmar Malaysia Timor-Leste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground-level implementation (e.g. implementing and strengthening flexible learning programs) • Research on policy and legislation, programs, challenges, and profiles of OOSC • Advocacy regionally in Southeast Asia through commitment building, regional declaration, and media tools • Capacity development (e.g. knowledge sharing through online networks and conferences, M&E system development assistance, online courses) • Consultations at regional and national levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCO Bangkok • National policymakers of Southeast Asian countries • ASEAN Secretariat • NGOs • Researchers/academics • Education experts • Private sector representatives 	National governments of 9 Southeast Asian countries are supported through capacity development, consultations, research, and commitment building to address the needs of OOSC in their countries
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¹⁹¹ Educate A Child. "Strengthening Education Systems for Out of School Children." Accessed February 2, 2018. http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/library/edocuments/2015Educate-a-child.pdf

Global Initiative on Out of School Children¹⁹²	Provide statistical evidence and systematic analysis to support evidence-based policymaking and implementation in order to accelerate, scale, and sustain enrollment of OOSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 	Unspecified	25 countries in 7 regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research on context-appropriate policy and legislation, existing interventions, profiles of OOSC, and bottlenecks faced by OOSC to provide statistical evidence and systematic analysis Advocacy at country, regional, and global levels (e.g. global conference) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNESCO UIS UNICEF 	The initiative provisions national governments with data and systematic evidence to encourage and inform policymaking and implementation to support OOSC
Educate Girls¹⁹³	Increase enrollment and quality learning for girls in school by leveraging existing community and government resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls 	80,000 OOSC over 10 years (89,225 reached)	2 of 29 states in India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ground-level implementation (e.g. Community and volunteer mobilization, door-to-door surveys, classroom support and training, capacity development of local actors, girls' leadership programs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGO Community 	Educate Girls works closely with government at the local and national levels to implement activities on the ground

¹⁹² UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics. "Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children." Accessed February 2, 2018. https://www.unicef.org/education/files/OOSCI_flyer_FINAL.pdf

¹⁹³ Results for Development. (2018). *Leveraging community and government resources for gender and educational equity in India: a case study of Educate Girls*. Unpublished report, Washington, DC.

As is evidenced by the table above, the Consortium approach is similar to other large-scale OOSC interventions in its broader mission and focus on OOSC; however, it is notably unique in its combined use of on-the-ground implementation activities that immediately support OOSC and higher level approaches directed at long-term impact, the primary actors involved in implementing the intervention, and its adoption of a collective impact approach to address nuances of the context in which it operates.

In the context of these larger OOSC-focused interventions, the Consortium's strong focus on both on-the-ground implementation with immediate impact and activities that foster long-term system change is unique. The Consortium members implement diverse ground-level activities that directly address the needs of OOSC and engage in higher-level approaches like building coordination and collaboration among similar types of actors, facilitating peer learning, and undertaking advocacy and research that allow them to be more effective in enrolling and retaining OOSC in the long-term. Comparatively, the Global Initiative on Out of School Children takes a heavily research-based approach, while Educate Girls takes a direct implementation approach. Strengthening Education Systems for Out of School Children takes a combined approach, focusing primarily on knowledge and capacity building and limited ground level implementation.

Compared to the other initiatives' participating actors, who are either policymakers and international bodies, a combination of different types of actors, or are led by a single NGO working with community level actors, the Consortium's implementers span 23 small local and large international NGOs.

In addition to the factors noted above, the Consortium distinguishes itself from other OOSC initiatives in its embodiment of the collective impact approach, defined in development literature as "a long-term commitment to a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem" that is "supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and... an independent backbone organization."¹⁹⁴ Collective impact approaches are generally well-suited to specific types of environments, distinguished by a particular set of criteria.^{195, 196} These criteria are outlined below and accompanied by a summary on the extent to which they align with the context and model of the Consortium.

1. **The development challenge is a complex problem that requires varied solutions:** OOSC in Cambodia face many different types of barriers, as noted in the Introduction section, that require a variety of different solutions.
2. **No single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change:** As indicated in finding 11, no single entity in Cambodia has the capacity, reach, or resources to address the challenges of all OOSC in Cambodia. Many smaller actors, including local and international NGOs operate all over the country and work with different types of OOSC using different interventions.
3. **All partners, including funding and resource partners, are willing to work together and through the process are open to discovering and adopting emergent and more effective solutions:** Members of the Consortium demonstrated a consistent willingness to work together upon encouragement from EAC (see finding 11). As indicated in finding 1, members also actively collaborated with one another and some were inclined to work together on solutions – such as in

¹⁹⁴ Kania, J. and Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review (Winter 2011)*, 36-41.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Kania, J. and Kramer, M. (2013). Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity. *Stanford Social Innovation Review (January 21, 2013)*. Retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/embracing_emergence_how_collective_impact_addresses_complexity

the case of the scholarship approach developed within the Poor and Remote component. However, the degree to which all members were open to collectively creating and adopting solutions is unclear.

4. **Funding and resource partners are willing and able to support the initiative by facilitating the development of common outcomes and rules for interaction, rather than specifying the solutions to be funded:** EAC is not prescriptive about approaches partners are to take in supporting OOSC¹⁹⁷ (however the mandates of other matching funders are unclear). EAC also provided close support to members in the early stages of the Consortium (see finding 11), but the extent to which rules of interaction were developed with facilitation from EAC is unknown.
5. **Partners are committed to the initiative over the long term:** The duration of the Consortium's operation remains to be seen. If taken at present, its operation for 3.5 years thus far does not constitute a long-term commitment.

Overall, the collective approach that the Consortium adopted was better suited to the Cambodian OOSC context than alternative models of a single organization working independently or several organizations working together. Although one stakeholder suggested that a handful of larger organizations working together with the same resources might have been able to make the same amount of progress as the Consortium in enrolling and retaining OOSC in school,¹⁹⁸ this would have been unlikely in the Cambodian context. Given the complexity of the OOSC challenge in Cambodia - which required multiple solutions - and the inability of any single organization or even several organizations to address this challenge in full, incorporating many diverse approaches and actors appears to have been essential in effectively enrolling and retaining all Cambodian OOSC in school. The additional willingness of these multiple actors to work together towards a common goal and the nonprescriptive nature of EAC's partnership approach made a collective impact approach a viable option. However, the long-term commitment needed for impact is still to be determined.

Section VI. Conclusion

The Consortium offered a unique opportunity to bring together a diverse group of NGOs to address a common and persistent challenge in Cambodia – over 90,000 children out of school and without opportunities to learn.

Several key takeaways illustrate the gains offered by the Consortium approach. At the same time, these takeaways also highlight ways in which the design of the Consortium may have been improved and/or ways in which its members did not fully leverage its potential (Table 2 provides a summary of these key takeaways along with lessons learned and recommendations):

- While the five OOSC-based component structure helped to reduce duplication in NGO activities and facilitated learning among members that target similar categories of OOSC, the Consortium did not fully maximize the opportunity for the shared identification of best practices and greater knowledge exchange between all members.
- Membership in the Consortium enabled small NGOs to reach additional OOSC who they otherwise would not have been able to support; however, large NGOs did not benefit as much and believed

¹⁹⁷ EAC staff interview 2.

¹⁹⁸ Consortium member organization staff interview 4.

that they could have made the same amount of progress in enrolling and supporting OOSC on their own.

- Although the approach only generated limited efficiencies for the Consortium in grants management, Aide et Action was effective in managing and supporting members to achieve a collective goal and meet the requirements of the grant. However, the Consortium could have more fully leveraged its leadership structure to provide strategic direction.
- The collective voice of the Consortium and the efforts of Aide et Action were key factors in building a productive relationship with the national government, but the Consortium missed an opportunity to influence policy change by not fully taking advantage of strategic guidance from its leadership.
- A shared target provided meaningful direction and guidance for the Consortium despite unintentionally deprioritizing quality. Similarly, while M&E procedures and requirements presented some advantages, the cost of lost staff time and resources seemed to outweigh the benefit.

These findings suggest that five key factors contributed to the success of the Consortium:

1. **The support of a committed financial and technical partner who has the authority and respect to bring key stakeholders to the table:** Without EAC's initial investment and convening of organizations to work toward a shared goal, the Consortium would not have formed or been able to impact over half of the OOSC population in the country.
2. **Not only engaging a number of partners but leveraging their diverse strengths, particularly when trying to address complex challenges:** Through the involvement of 23 NGOs varied in size, scope, and level of technical expertise, the Consortium was able to implement approaches to enrolling and supporting out of school children that helped to address the diverse needs of this population.
3. **A strong focal point and day-to-day manager that could coordinate and support all consortium members, facilitate the creation of consortium norms, balance competing priorities, and ensure grant compliance:** Aide et Action's management and support helped foster a shared understanding amongst members, structures, and policies that enabled the Consortium to work together towards a shared goal while also supporting all members to effectively meet EAC's complex grant requirements.
4. **A shared goal that helped to guide the efforts of all members and served as a benchmark for progress:** Consortium member organizations collectively pursued a clear target for the number of out of school children to reach.
5. **Mechanisms for members to regularly collaborate and coordinate their efforts:** When fully used, the component structure allowed NGOs to coordinate activities in order to avoid duplication in target populations and geographies, and enabled exchange of knowledge on how to support out of school children.

On the other hand, a number of factors could have enabled increased effectiveness and efficiency:

- First, the Consortium's leadership could have **more substantively engaged the Steering Committee** to develop and implement a strategy, which included thinking around engaging government to secure funding and influence policy change, sustainability, and increasing capacity among Consortium members. This could have also helped to ensure that large NGOs had a unique role and could contribute specific expertise to shape the Consortium's work.

- Second, a **differentiated membership approach could have strengthened the value add for large, international NGOs and simultaneously provided opportunities for more in-depth collaboration.** Large, international NGOs could have utilized their expertise to support the identification of best practices and models for enrolling and retaining out of school children and provide more technical assistance to small, local NGOs.
- Third, deeper **engagement between the Consortium and EAC** – manifested in technical assistance around topics such as M&E and co-financing as well as opportunities for the Consortium to learn from others working in this area - could have supported continuous quality improvement and sustainability.
- Fourth, **clearer communication** between EAC and the Consortium could have built a shared understanding of expectations and minimized the number of human and financial resources dedicated to those activities not directly impacting out of school children.

Table 2: Summary of key findings, lessons, and recommendations

	Strengths	Challenges	Lessons Learned and Recommendations
<p>Coordination and Collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consortium offered a new mechanism to facilitate collaboration among NGOs • Consortium brought together a diverse group of NGOs • 5 OOSC-based component division enabled learning and reduction of duplication, and in some cases, standardization of best practices within components • Autonomy for partner organizations prevented collaboration from becoming restrictive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within components, level of knowledge sharing varied by component • Across components, collaboration was limited • There was a missed opportunity to identify best practices and models for enrolling and retaining children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging a number of partners but leveraging their diverse strengths helped to address complex challenges. Through the involvement of 23 NGOs varied in size, scope, and level of technical expertise, the Consortium was able to implement approaches to enrolling and supporting out of school children that addressed the diverse needs of this population. • Mechanisms for members to regularly collaborate and coordinate their efforts are critical. When fully used, the component structure allowed NGOs to coordinate activities in order to avoid duplication in target populations and geographies, and enabled exchange of knowledge on how to support out of school children.
<p>Membership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small, local NGOs indicated that they would not have made as much progress or expanded as quickly without the Consortium. Key benefits for small NGOs included that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support from Aide et Action and EAC aided expansion into new geographies, approaches, and/or OOSC-focused activities, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large, international NGOs expressed that they could have made the same level of progress without Consortium support. • Large NGOs expected their technical expertise to be more strongly leveraged for decision-making, determining the strategic direction of the Consortium, and guiding government engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A differentiated membership approach could have strengthened the value add for large, international NGOs and simultaneously provided opportunities to collaborate in greater depth. Large, international NGOs could have utilized their technical expertise to support the identification of best practices and models for enrolling and retaining out of school children.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Training from Aide et Action strengthened M&E and financial reporting practices ○ Consortium had a connection with the national government 		
<p>Management and Strategic Direction</p>	<p>Despite the challenges of managing the Consortium, Aide et Action skillfully did the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allowed members to retain autonomy in implementing activities ● Helped members acquire basic shared understanding ● Required adherence to only a minimum number of standard policies ● Managed multiple legal agreements effectively ● Provided close support for M&E and finance reporting ● Created shared M&E and finance systems ● Creatively addressed co-funding challenges <p>The Consortium approach generated efficiencies for smaller NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● M&E and finance support trainings helped strengthen organizational M&E and financial practices ● Support from Aide et Action enabled meeting EAC's grant requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Consortium could have better: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategized around government partnership ○ Developed a purposeful research agenda ○ Imparted technical knowledge to members ● The absence of a sustainability plan limited potential for long-term impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More substantive engagement of the Steering Committee by the Consortium's leadership could have helped with thinking around government engagement, sustainability, and increasing capacity among Consortium members. ● A strong focal point and day-to-day manager that could coordinate and support all consortium members, facilitate the creation of consortium norms, balance competing priorities, and ensure grant compliance was important. Aide et Action's management and support helped foster a shared understanding amongst members, structures, and policies that enabled the Consortium to work together towards a shared goal while also supporting all members to effectively meet EAC's grant requirements.

<p>Government Partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Consortium was able to foster a productive relationship with national government which elevated the focus on OOSC in Cambodia and led to opportunities for members to engage with government. This was possible through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collective weight of member organizations ○ Aide et Action’s leadership ○ Inclusion of government in the Consortium ○ Streamlined interaction made possible by the Consortium structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was some dissatisfaction among members of the Consortium around a lack of transparency from Aide et Action in sharing information from discussions with government counterparts • The strength of relationships with provincial government varied and could have been cultivated more deeply • While acknowledging the short time frame, there were limitations in the engagement with national government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Consortium did not influence the government to uptake best practices around OOSC ○ The Consortium did not influence policy changes ○ Government funding for OOSC targeted work was not secured by the Consortium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More fully leveraging the Consortium’s leadership structure for guidance could have facilitated conversations that may have led to government funding and increased the Consortium’s influence for policy change. Members of the Steering Committee have strong knowledge and experience in working with government and could have contributed ideas on an appropriate strategy.
<p>Monitoring and Evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong focus on enrolling and retaining a specific number of OOSC provided a target and direction for the Consortium • The M&E system generated several advantages. It allowed Consortium members to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Track progress towards a shared target ○ Provide input into building the Consortium’s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strong focus on enrolling and retaining a specific number of OOSC had the unintended effect of deprioritizing quality and in some cases affected the way Consortium members deployed their resources • The development and deployment of the OP tracker created inefficiencies in terms of resources and staff time • It was challenging to deploy the OP tracker due to changing requirements, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared goal helped to guide the efforts of all members and served as a benchmark for progress. Consortium member organizations collectively pursued a clear target for the number of out of school children to reach.

	<p>relationship with the national government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gain exposure to new M&E practices 	<p>technical difficulties, limited staff capacity, language requirements of the OP Tracker, additional due diligence requirements, and lack of clarity about data usage. Challenges with the OP tracker even caused some members to withdraw from the Consortium</p>	
<p>EAC Partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EAC played an important role in encouraging and supporting collaboration between NGOs in the initial stages of the development of the Consortium. The following were identified as strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Robust interaction during early stages of partnership ○ EAC responsiveness to reporting guidelines and financial issues ○ Opportunity offered to participate in UNESCO-Bangkok conference on innovations in supporting OOSC ○ Co-financing concept which created a push for organizations to identify additional resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initial contracting delays prevented 7,000 children enrolled to count toward 50,000 OOSC target ● Delayed grant installment had significant consequences for some members including suspension of activities and need to borrow money from Aide et Action and matching donors ● Site visit requests from auditors and external consultants were time consuming ● Lack of clarity around OOSC definition challenged reporting and identification of target population ● Unclear communication around Phase 2 leading to potential knowledge loss ● Co-financing requirements difficult to fulfill leading to inefficiencies and members' dropping out of Consortium ● EAC investment per child insufficient to reach the most marginalized children given need for technical expertise ● Consortium members wanted more: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In-person engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The support of a committed financial and technical partner with authority and respect brought key stakeholders to the table. Without EAC's initial investment and convening of organizations to work toward a shared goal, the Consortium would not have formed or been able to impact over half of the OOSC population in the country. ● Deeper engagement between the Consortium and EAC – manifested in technical assistance around topics such as M&E and co-financing as well as opportunities for the Consortium to learn from others working in this area - could have supported continuous quality improvement and sustainability. ● Clearer communication between EAC and the Consortium could have built a shared understanding of expectations, and minimized the number of human and financial resources dedicated to those activities not directly impacting out of school children.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Guidance and feedback on semi-annual technical reports○ Opportunities to learn and connect with EAC's broader network	
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Section VIII. Annex: List of interviews and focus group discussions

EAC Technical Staff

1. EAC Technical Staff 1. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Remote, December 6, 2017.
2. EAC Technical Staff 2. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Remote, January 29, 2018.
3. EAC Technical Staff 3. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Remote, February 20, 2018.

Aide et Action staff and consultants

1. Aide et Action Staff 1. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 11, 2017.
2. Aide et Action Staff 2. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 11, 2017.
3. Aide et Action Staff 3. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 11, 2017.
4. Aide et Action Staff 4. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 12, 2017.
5. Aide et Action Staff 5. Focus group discussion with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 11, 2017.
6. Aide et Action Staff 6. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, January 5, 2018.
7. Aide et Action Staff 7. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Remote, February 20, 2018.

Consortium member organization staff

1. Consortium member staff 1. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 12, 2017.
2. Consortium member staff 2. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 12, 2017.
3. Consortium member staff 3. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 12, 2017.
4. Consortium member staff 4. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 12, 2017.
5. Consortium member staff 5. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 13, 2017.
6. Consortium member staff 6. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 14, 2017.
7. Consortium member staff 7. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 14, 2017.
8. Consortium member staff 8. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 14, 2017.
9. Consortium member staff 9. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 14, 2017.
10. Consortium member staff 10. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 14, 2017.
11. Consortium member staff 11. Focus group discussion with Sonaly Patel. Phnom Penh, December 15, 2017.
12. Consortium member staff 12. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 15, 2017.

Non-consortium member organization staff

1. Non-consortium member staff 1. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Remote, January 4, 2018.
2. Non-consortium member staff 2. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Email, January 9-17, 2018.

Education experts

1. Education expert. Interview with Sonaly Patel. Remote, December 20, 2018.

Government officials

1. Provincial Department of Education staff. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 13, 2017.
2. Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports staff. Interview with Vidya Putcha. Phnom Penh, December 13, 2017.