



ផលប៉ះពាល់នៃវិវាទព្រំដែន

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**Impact of Border Dispute on
Cambodian Children's Education**



Overview

The border dispute has had a significant impact on Cambodian children's education, particularly in areas directly affected by tensions. Schools in these regions were forced to close for extended periods, leaving children unable to return to their classrooms. This disruption not only interrupted their learning but also created uncertainty about when and how education could resume safely.

Beyond the immediate closure of schools, the dispute strained families and communities, reducing resources available for children's education. Many households faced economic hardship, making it difficult to prioritize schooling. In some cases, children were required to support family livelihoods instead of continuing their studies, further widening the gap in educational attainment.

In April 2026, the ACT team visited primary schools in Oddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey provinces that had been severely affected by the border dispute. Many of these schools were destroyed, leaving children unable to return to their classrooms or even to their homes. The visit highlighted the scale of disruption, with students displaced and communities struggling to provide safe learning spaces amidst ongoing uncertainty.

Acknowledgement

ACT gratefully acknowledge the compassion and generosity of all individuals and organizations who have contributed to assist families and children along the border. Your charitable support has provided vital relief whether through supplies, resources, or encouragement at a time when communities face immense hardship. These contributions not only meet urgent needs but also restore hope and dignity, reminding affected families that they are not alone in their struggle.

We recognize the hardship faced by families and communities who, amidst economic strain and displacement, continue to struggle to provide even the most basic educational opportunities. The testimonies gathered during the ACT team's April 2026 field visit highlight the scale of this disruption and the urgent need for coordinated support.

This acknowledgement serves as a reminder that education is not only a fundamental right but also a cornerstone of stability and hope. We stand with the affected children, families, and communities, and commit to amplifying their voices while working toward rebuilding safe, accessible, and resilient learning environments.

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Child education in Cambodia

Cambodia has made notable progress in expanding access to education. By 2024, **82% of children completed primary school**, a major improvement compared to the 1990s. Enrollment has increased, repetition rates have declined, and the government, with support from UNICEF and partners, has launched nationwide campaigns to reduce dropout rates and promote inclusive learning. However, **around 300,000 children and adolescents remain out of school**, and **15.5% of students leave school at the lower secondary level**. Access to preschool is also limited, with **30% of five-year-old not enrolled**. These gaps highlight the need for stronger interventions to ensure children not only enter school but also complete their education with the skills needed for life and work¹.

The armed clashes in July and December 2025, along the Cambodia–Thailand border displaced more than **134,000 people**, most of them women and children. Schools became unsafe or were destroyed, leading to widespread closures. According to Cambodia’s Ministry of Education, **600 schools shut down in five provinces**, directly affecting **about 150,000 students and 6,500 teachers**. These children lost access to classrooms, textbooks, and structured learning, while many were forced to remain in makeshift shelters.

In 2026, children in Oddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey provinces continued to face educational disruption following the 2025 border dispute. Many schools in these areas had been destroyed during the conflict, leaving students unable to return to their classrooms. Families displaced by the violence were forced to shelter in pagodas, camps, or temporary structures, and children were left without safe learning environments or access to basic educational materials.

¹ [Cambodia Launches National Campaigns to Keep Every Child in School](#)

Primary School Situation:

Visited primary schools at Oddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey provinces, we observed that three primary schools Monorum 1 & 2, Ta-Moan Saen Chey, and Preychan had been destroyed as a result of the border dispute. This devastation has left approximately 400 children without classrooms, teachers, or safe learning spaces. Many of these children are now displaced, living in temporary shelters or with relatives, and face significant challenges in continuing their education.

The loss of these schools has not only interrupted formal learning but also deprived children of the social and emotional support that schools provide. Without access to education, they are at risk of long-term setbacks, including dropping out permanently, reduced future opportunities, and heightened vulnerability to poverty. The destruction has also placed additional burdens on families, who must cope with both the loss of infrastructure and the uncertainty of their children's future.



Children’s Concern and Fear:

The findings reveal the deep emotional and social impact of the border dispute on Cambodian children. Many expressed fears of war and violence, which has shaken their sense of safety and stability. With schools destroyed or closed, they are unable to continue their education, leaving them isolated from learning opportunities and their peers.

Children also reported being away from home, displaced into temporary shelters or host communities, which intensified their anxiety. Their concerns extend beyond themselves they worry about the wellbeing of their parents and grandparents, fearing for their families’ safety and livelihoods. Economic uncertainty adds another layer of distress, as children are aware of the financial struggles their families face due to disrupted income and loss of stability.

“The children shared that they feel frightened and unsettled by the conflict. They are shocked by the destruction around them and expressed sadness that they cannot go back to school, as their classrooms no longer exist.” “We are deeply afraid and shocked, and we cannot return to school because our classrooms have been destroyed.”²



² [Child Education Affected by Border Dispute Apr26](#)

From interviews conducted with many children in Oddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey provinces, a consistent pattern of fear and distress emerged. The children repeatedly expressed their deep anxiety about not being able to return to school, as their classrooms had been destroyed during the border dispute. For them, education is not only about learning but also about safety, routine, and hope for the future yet this has been taken away.

Beyond the loss of schooling, the children shared a common fear of the sounds of explosions and gunfire. The constant memory of “booms” has left them traumatized, making them feel unsafe even in temporary shelters. Many also spoke about the hardship of living away from home, separated from familiar surroundings and community support. Their worries extend to their families, as they voiced concern for the wellbeing of their parents and grandparents, particularly regarding economic struggles and the uncertainty of daily survival.

Together, these testimonies highlight the profound emotional toll of the conflict. The children’s voices reveal not only the disruption of education but also the erosion of their sense of security, family stability, and future opportunities. Their collective fears underscore the urgent need for humanitarian assistance, psychosocial support, and education recovery programs to restore hope and stability in their lives.



The interviews revealed that children are living with constant fear and uncertainty. Many expressed being afraid of the war and the sounds of explosions, which continue to haunt them even when they are away from the conflict zones. The loud noises of gunfire and bombs have left them traumatized, making them feel unsafe and anxious in their daily lives.

A major concern raised by the children is their inability to return to school. With their schools destroyed, they worry about losing their education and future opportunities. For them, school is not only a place of learning but also a source of stability, friendship, and hope. The absence of classrooms has created feelings of isolation and despair.

Children also spoke about the hardship of living away from home. Being displaced into shelters or host communities has separated them from familiar surroundings, friends, and extended family. This displacement has intensified their anxiety, as they feel disconnected from the life they once knew.

Together, these findings highlight that the border dispute has not only interrupted education but also created a climate of fear, and insecurity that affects children's emotional health, family bonds, and future prospects.



The team observed that the loss of school infrastructure not only interrupted education but also created emotional and social challenges for the children. Without access to classrooms, teachers, and peer support, many young learners faced setbacks in their development and confidence. The ACT team emphasized the urgent need for humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts to restore education, rebuild schools, and ensure that children in these provinces can regain stability and hope for their future.

The long-term consequences are serious: prolonged absence from school risks increasing dropout rates, limiting future opportunities, and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts, including humanitarian aid, psychosocial support, and investment in rebuilding safe and accessible learning environments for all affected children.



Destroyed Schools & Displaced Children

Mr. Kamsat, Head of Monorum 1 & 2 Primary School in Oddar Meanchey province, expressed his deep concern about the devastating impact of the border dispute on children’s education. He explained that after the conflict, the school buildings were completely destroyed, leaving hundreds of children unable to return to their classrooms. As of April 25, 2026, many of these children are still living in refugee camps or with relatives, far from the stability of their own homes. I don’t know when we able to retune back to our place!

He further noted that during the dispute, ten bombs were dropped on the school compound, causing extensive damage and making it impossible to resume classes there. In response, the displaced students have been temporarily relocated to Kouk-Mon Primary School in the district. While this arrangement provides some continuity, the overcrowding and lack of resources highlight the urgent need for rebuilding efforts and psychosocial support for the affected children. Mr. Kamsat’s testimony underscores the gravity of the situation, where education has been disrupted, families displaced, and children left fearful of both the conflict and their uncertain future.



Village Chief's Harrowing

Mr. Plun Ploun, (ភ្នំ ឆ្មារ) Chief of Monorum 2 village shared his harrowing experience during the border conflict in December 2025. When the fighting intensified, he was forced to hide in a bunker next to his home. Tragically, bombs were dropped directly onto the bunker, leaving him injured and causing severe harm to others in the community. One villager lost his leg in the blast, and despite his own wounds, the chief carried the injured man to the town, where provincial authorities arranged for medical treatment in Siem Reap province.

The chief explained that his own house was nearly destroyed, with about 80% of it reduced to rubble. Since then, he has been unable to resettle, as the area remains classified as a “red zone” or hot area, unsafe for return. As of late April 2026, there has been no official information or plan for resettlement, leaving families displaced and uncertain about their future. His testimony reflects not only the physical destruction caused by the conflict but also the deep sense of insecurity and loss felt by the community, where homes, livelihoods, and children’s education have all been disrupted.



Months later, his health has still not fully recovered. He continues to suffer from the injuries sustained during the bombing, which limit his ability to work and provide for his family. His house was 80% destroyed, and as of late April 2026, he remains displaced, with no clear information about resettlement. The area is still classified as a “red zone,” unsafe for return.

He further explained that since the first and second disputes in 2025, more than 1,000 bullets and bombs remain scattered and unexploded across the village. These remnants of war have not yet been cleared, leaving the area unsafe for families to return. The AoT (authorities on territory) have visited his village several times since the conflict, but there has been no clear information about compensation or recovery support yet up to this April 2026.

Mr. Plun Ploun emphasized that he has already submitted a detailed report of this tragedy to the top leadership, yet up to late April 2026, no updates have been provided to allow villagers to resettle or begin repairing their destroyed homes, schools, temples, and community infrastructure. His testimony reflects not only the physical destruction but also the ongoing insecurity, frustration, and uncertainty faced by displaced families who remain in limbo, waiting for assistance and the chance to rebuild their lives.

In his testimony, the chief appealed for urgent support for his village. He emphasized that families remain homeless, children are unable to attend school, and livelihoods have been shattered. Without external assistance, the community cannot rebuild or recover. His words reflect both personal suffering and the collective hardship of his people, underscoring the need for humanitarian aid, reconstruction of schools and homes, and psychosocial support for those traumatized by the conflict.



Expression of Communities:

The community has shared their deep concerns about the ongoing hardship and insecurity they face. Families explained that they cannot return to their homes because of constant surveillance from Thai soldiers stationed on the mountains, leaving them trapped in fragile tents. They described how life in these temporary shelters is unbearable rain, storms, and heat make survival extremely difficult, while the lack of food, supplies, and proper housing erodes their dignity. Parents worry about their children growing up in fear, without education or stability, and elders feel the weight of displacement with no clear path to rebuilding. Their voices reflect not only the physical suffering but also the emotional toll of living under threat, uncertainty, and neglect. The community's testimony highlights an urgent need for protection, humanitarian aid, and long-term solutions to restore safety and hope.

They also has voiced strong concerns about the insecurity they endure whenever they attempt to return to their homes and farmland. They explained that helicopters frequently hover overhead and guns are constantly pointed toward them, creating a climate of fear and intimidation. Families feel exposed and unsafe, as if any movement could trigger danger. This constant surveillance from above, combined with armed threats, prevents them from reclaiming their houses and cultivating their land. Instead, they remain trapped in fragile tents, unable to rebuild their lives. The community's testimony reflects not only the physical hardship of displacement but also the emotional toll of living under the shadow of weapons and helicopters, highlighting the urgent need for protection and humanitarian support.³



³ [Visit refugee effected by Border Dispute April26](#)

The community has suggested that urgent measures be taken to ensure their safety and restore their livelihoods. They emphasized the need for stronger protection from ongoing threats, particularly the helicopters and armed soldiers that intimidate them whenever they attempt to return to their homes and farmland. Families called for clear guarantees that they can safely resettle without fear of surveillance or violence. They also urged authorities and humanitarian actors to provide secure housing to replace fragile tents, along with sufficient food, supplies, and psychosocial support for children who are growing up in fear.

In addition, the community requested transparent information and concrete plans for resettlement, so they can begin rebuilding their houses, cultivating their land, and restoring education for their children. Their collective voice highlights the urgent need for both immediate humanitarian aid and long-term solutions that prioritize dignity, security, and stability. Importantly, women in the community highlighted their unique vulnerabilities and responsibilities in this crisis. They stressed that insecurity not only prevents them from rebuilding homes and cultivating land but also undermines their role in caring for children, sustaining families, and contributing to peacebuilding.

Women requested that their voices be included in decision-making processes and that specific support be provided to address their safety, dignity, and economic empowerment. Their testimony underscores the urgent need to integrate Women, Peace, and Security principles into humanitarian response ensuring that children and women's protection, participation, and leadership are central to both immediate aid and long-term solutions.



During the field visit from 24–26 April 2026 to Oddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey provinces, the ACT team not only documented the destruction and displacement but also delivered essential support to the affected communities. Using funds raised since August 2025, the team purchased and distributed vital supplies for children, women, and men who remain refugees and unable to return home. In total, 350 packages were provided, including school materials such as books, pencils, and teacher guides, as well as basic necessities like mattresses, mosquito nets, blankets, and tents. These items were given to help ease the immediate hardships of displaced families, offering both educational tools for children and practical support for daily survival. The distribution reflected the team’s commitment to addressing urgent needs while highlighting the importance of sustained humanitarian assistance for communities living in insecurity and uncertainty.



Impact of Conflict on Communities

During trip to the border conflict areas in April 2026, the ACT team visited sites in Oddar Meanchey and Banteay Meanchey provinces to assess the scale of destruction caused by the dispute. The team observed that critical infrastructure including schools, homes, temples, and community facilities had been severely damaged or completely destroyed. Roads and farmland were left unusable, further isolating families and preventing them from returning to their normal lives.

Beyond the physical devastation, the visit revealed the emotional toll on communities: families expressed deep stress, trauma, and fear as they struggled to cope with displacement and uncertainty. Parents worried about their children growing up in tents under constant insecurity, while elders lamented the loss of dignity and stability. These findings highlighted not only the long-term impact on education, livelihoods, and community cohesion but also the urgent need for psychosocial support alongside reconstruction, humanitarian aid, and coordinated efforts to restore safety and stability for displaced families living under the shadow of conflict.





Recommendation

Based on the above findings is that urgent action should focus on both immediate relief and long-term recovery. Families need secure shelters, food, and psychosocial support to cope with trauma, while reconstruction of schools, homes, and community facilities must be prioritized to restore dignity and stability. Protection measures are essential to ensure safe resettlement without intimidation, and women's voices should be included in decision-making to strengthen peace and security. At the same time, education recovery and livelihood support will help rebuild community cohesion and provide children and families with hope for the future.

Immediate Humanitarian Response

- Provide **secure shelters** to replace fragile tents, ensuring protection from rain, storms, and heat.
- Distribute **essential supplies** (food, clean water, blankets, mosquito nets, school materials) to meet urgent needs.
- Offer **psychosocial support** for children and families coping with trauma, stress, and fear.

Protection & Security

- Advocate for **safe resettlement guarantees**, ensuring families can return to homes and farmland without intimidation from helicopters or armed soldiers.
- Strengthen **community protection mechanisms**, including monitoring and reporting of threats.
- Engage with authorities and international actors to reduce **militarization and surveillance** in civilian areas.

Reconstruction & Recovery

- Launch programs to **rebuild schools, homes, temples, and health centers** destroyed by the conflict.
- Repair **roads and farmland** to restore livelihoods and access to markets.
- Provide **livelihood support** (tools, seeds, vocational training) to help families regain economic stability.

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)

- Ensure **women’s voices and leadership** are included in decision-making on resettlement and recovery.
- Provide **targeted support for women and girls**, including safety, dignity kits, and education opportunities.
- Promote **economic empowerment for women**, enabling them to contribute to peacebuilding and family resilience.

Long-Term Solutions

- Advocate for **transparent resettlement plans** with clear timelines and community participation.
- Strengthen **education recovery programs** to ensure children can return to school safely.
- Build **community cohesion and peacebuilding initiatives**, reducing fear and fostering trust across affected areas.

ACT recommends that the **government and relevant sectors** take urgent, coordinated action to address both immediate relief and long-term recovery to ensure safe resettlement guarantees and reduce military intimidation so families can return to their homes and farmland without fear. Humanitarian agencies and local partners must prioritize secure shelters, food, and psychosocial support to help communities cope with trauma.

At the same time, reconstruction of schools, homes, temples, and health centers should be accelerated to restore dignity and stability, while repairing roads and farmland will revive livelihoods. It is essential that women’s voices are included in decision-making processes to strengthen peace and security, and that education recovery programs are supported to prevent long-term disruption for children. Together, government institutions, humanitarian organizations, and community leaders must collaborate to rebuild cohesion, restore trust, and provide displaced families with hope for a safer future.

ACT is deeply concerned on the dispute along Khmer-Thai border, continue since July-December 2025 that cause many people died, injures, displace, lost their property, time and education...etc. ACT would call to all leaders to stop violence and bring safe, security and peace to all.



For Humanitarian

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