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### USAID Market Simulations Teach Children the Basics of Business and Commerce

Kampong Cham Province  
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Market simulation activities in Krek Primary School, Kampong Cham Province.

On most days, the courtyard of Krek Primary School is serene: children chat and play between classes as the teachers gather in the shade to discuss the day's events. But on a recent weekday in early June, the energy level was closer to that of a busy indoor market in Phnom Penh.

Hundreds of students dashed between stalls that sold breakfast noodles, baguettes and candy, as part of a USAID-funded market simulation, an event designed to teach students the basics of commerce and business. Vendors touted their wares, buyers bargained and money changed hands, and although the currency was fake, the lessons learned were very real. The event at Krek was one of 24 market simulations USAID organized this month in Kompong Cham, Kratie and Monduliri provinces.

"We really enjoyed the event, and we learned a lot of valuable lessons," said Chiep Serey Net, a 12-year-old student at Krek.

Chiep and four of her classmates sold sandwiches and made a 15 percent profit on the day. "We were so successful that we will take this product back to our village and sell it for real," she said.

Market simulations teach children the basic skills they need to start a business. In the weeks leading up to the events, students collected fake currency for good attendance and doing chores like cleaning the schoolyard. They then used this money to devise business plans, procure supplies, and, if all went well, make a profit.

The events are part of USAID's \$4.45 million Educational Support to Children in Underserved Populations (ESCUP) program, which is implemented by the American Institutes for Research and World Education. The program is designed to improve the quality and access of education for marginalized groups – such poor people, ethnic minorities and the disabled – by offering life-skill courses, student scholarships and teacher training. The idea is behind the program is that, by making school more relevant to life in rural areas, fewer students will drop out. Indeed, the results speak for themselves: two out of three ESCUP-targeted schools reported reduced dropout rates since they started working with the program, and 71% reported a reduction in students repeating grades.