



# From Community Plan to Community Preschool

Colmeal case from the CLEAR Project Cambodia (2023 - 2024)

Community Ownership \* Collaboration \* Inclusion \* Data-Driven \* Adaptability \* Sustainability

## CASE SNAPSHOT

The sign on the wall of Ou Soam’s new preschool lists three funders alongside the community. But in the story of how this preschool came to be, the community’s name comes first:

*“Planned and initiated by the Community Management Committee and the Community.”*

In June 2023, Ou Soam—a rural community in Santuk District, Cambodia—had no preschool and no clear path to one. Eighteen months later, children from Ou Soam and three neighbouring communities were sitting in class: in a building the community built, with a teacher the community selected, supported in part by an organization the community approached themselves.

This case documents the change pathway and how small, unstructured funding started a chain of lasting positive change.

March 2026



Cambodia



Education



Early Childhood Development



## CONTEXT

In the rural community of Ou Soam in Santuk District, Cambodia, parents had long experienced a troubling pattern: without access to preschool education, their children were entering primary school already at a disadvantage. While families shared a strong desire to give their children a better start, there wasn't any clear or viable solution.

**What made the CLEAR project unusual from the outset was its innovative funding design.** Support was provided to a single community, with no thematic focus, no predetermined priorities, and no directive to address any particular sector. There was no expectation that the community would work on education, health, or anything else. What they chose to focus on would be entirely their decision. This approach was new for the community—and for the project team.



The only goal was to support Ou Soam in identifying its own priorities, using the Colmeal approach introduced by ADRA Cambodia in June 2023. From there, the process placed decision-making firmly in the community's hands: to determine what mattered most, understand why, and decide what to do about it.

## APPROACH

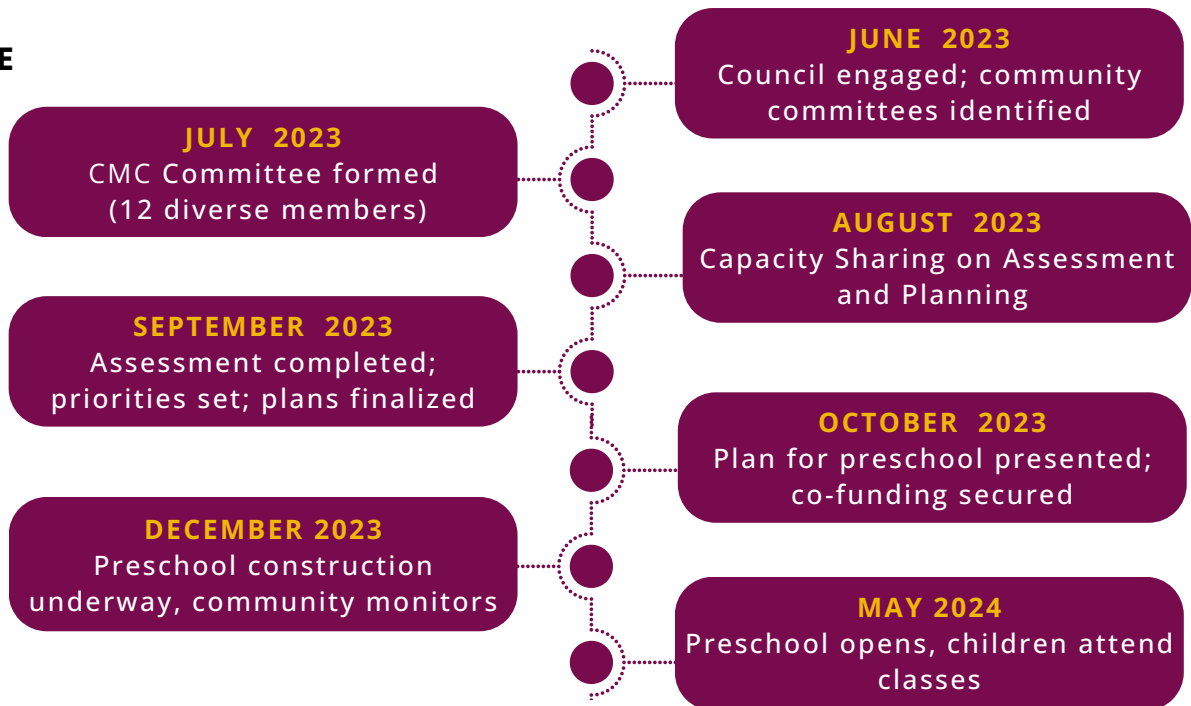
The process began with a simple but important question: whose voices are missing? From there, community members formed a group of 28 people reflecting the wide diversity of Ou Soam—men and women, male and female youth, older persons, people with disabilities, people representing minority groups, and children. All facilitation was led by members of the community itself, coached by the project team. No external facilitator proposed or shaped the priorities that emerged.



Through structured discussions in August and September 2023, residents mapped the challenges affecting their daily lives and worked together to prioritize them. Three issues rose to the top through their own analysis: the lack of early childhood education; violence within families, linked to alcohol use, drug use, and gambling; and unemployment and poverty.

The breadth of these priorities is worth pausing on. Domestic violence surfaced despite there being no project mandate, budget, or expectation to address it. When Colmeal helped community members create a safe space to speak openly, they chose to name it—and it became part of a shared, whole-of-community conversation.

## TIMELINE



## RESULTS

By September 2023, the community — represented by a group of 17 women and 4 men — developed a clear and actionable plan: a simplified Theory of Change, a Community Action Plan, and a monitoring plan.

In October 2023, community representatives approached Kindercare Learning Centres and presented their plan. Kindercare reviewed the community's Colmeal documents and committed co-funding based on what they saw. The community's own process documents became the funding proposal.

From that point, the 12-person Community Management Committee took charge. They selected the location, chose the teacher, mobilized community resources to keep the classroom running, and led monitoring and sharing with the broader community. Two community members were trained as early childhood educators.

In May 2024 — just ten months after the committee was formed — children from Ou Soam and three neighbouring communities were sitting in class. The committees continue to operate today, formally recognized by the commune council and serving as a bridge between community initiatives and local governance. [Page 3 of 4](#)



- LEARNING**
- **Unstructured funding unlocks genuine ownership:** When communities are not steered toward predetermined priorities, the solutions they identify seem to be more relevant, more deeply owned, and more likely to endure.
  - **Community-generated evidence attracts resources:** Locally produced plans and data can open doors that formal proposals often cannot—Kindercare committed co-funding based on the community's own documents.
  - **Safe spaces surface hidden priorities:** Domestic violence was not part of any project agenda. The Colmeal process created the conditions for it to be named and addressed collectively.
  - **Community-led action extends beyond a single project cycle:** ADRA Cambodia noted that seven to nine months is insufficient for full Colmeal implementation, and applied this learning directly to future programme design.



**UNLEARNING**

- **Funders do not need to set the agenda:** Providing funding without predetermined priorities is not a risk — it is a condition for genuine community ownership.
- **External expertise is not the starting point:** Community members, supported rather than directed, identified their own priorities and led the facilitation process.
- **A community plan is not a stepping stone to a “real” proposal:** The community’s Colmeal documents were the proposal—and they were enough.

Sources: Colmeal Evidence Register (claims C-073 - C-081), Project Final Report, Monitoring Stories. Evidence Strength: Strong - 3 sources. 2026 - CLEAR Project, ADRA Cambodia / ADRA Czech / Salanga

