

Assessment of Cham and Migrant Children's Educational Needs in Cambodia

By Kurt Bredenburg

This study was undertaken by Save the Children/Sweden and the Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) to assess the degree to which vulnerable and migrant children in the country's Kampong Cham Province can access educational services in the state school system. The report focuses mainly on the largest minority, the Cham ethnic group. The study recounts sensitivities surrounding minority rights and bilingual education, as well as specific problems in the formal education sector as they relate to the stated target groups.

The state school system does not collect data disaggregated by minority or migratory status so researchers found it necessary to explore information provided by projects of limited scope and attitudinal surveys. Findings include: districts with large populations of Cham people demonstrated the lowest levels of educational efficiency; Cham parents have clear educational expectations relating to their native language and Islam, which are unmet by state schools; the emergence of a parallel, Islamic school system; the attitudes of the Cham people towards mainstream Cambodian society are complex, with the Cham people keen to blend in rather than been seen as an ethnic minority, though often choosing not to live in Khmer villages and not speaking Khmer as their first language. Therefore, the challenge for any programme is to address distinct cultural and language needs while maintaining a myth that they are not culturally different from the majority ethnic group.

KAPE is now in the second year of implementation of a small project called Minority Outreach in Education, which is a pilot programme that aims to increase educational relevance to populations with a high Cham minority population and work towards universal primary education.