

Communicating Life-saving Health Information to Ethno-linguistic Minority Communities.

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Ethno-linguistic minorities in Southeast Asia face many challenges to achieving MDG health goals. Health education materials using the national language are often ineffective with rural ethno-linguistic minorities who are illiterate and do not know the national language. Creative and innovative approaches are needed to communicate life-saving health messages to ethnic minority populations who are illiterate, and have limited or no knowledge of the national language. Often they are not familiar with black and white illustrations or cartoon drawings used in the health education posters and materials distributed nationally.

Community theatre, songs and radio drama using local languages have been effective in bridging the communication gap in various projects in Cambodia and Laos. Picture stories designed specific to the locality have been used by local community members in order to educate other community members in a “villager to villager” approach in their own communities. Community members of all ages can understand and remember the health information presented in the local languages in the form of dramas, songs, picture stories and illustrated booklets. Illiterate community volunteers can also be trained to use some of the methods and materials.

Effective health materials designed and used by various NGOs in Ratanakiri, Cambodia are presented, including materials development and field use, and challenges and impact. Health materials address prevention and treatment of communicable diseases including HIV/AIDs, cholera, TB, and malaria. Examples include the successful HIV/AIDS radio dramas in ethnic minority languages in Cambodia and Laos developed in partnership with UNESCO.