

Multi-lingual Education and Empowerment of Indigenous Communities in the Cambodian Highlands

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Cambodia still faces many challenges to achieving MDG and EFA goals, especially in the ethnic minority communities of the Cambodian Highland where education services and socio-economic development still lags far behind the rest of the country. However, communities participating in MLE find themselves better equipped to maintain their cultural identity and natural resources as they face rapid modernization. They are highly motivated to break the tradition of illiteracy as well as produce materials in their own languages. The strong community support and a bilingual approach have been keys to overcoming challenges to project implementation.

Community-based teachers begin instruction in the local language and then a bridge to the national language, Khmer. The curriculum addresses issues identified by the communities, including health, marketing, and natural resource management. This paper describes the creative and successful strategies employed to enable indigenous communities to access education, along with the challenges encountered.

Community members young and old are partnering to document indigenous knowledge for future generations in the vernacular as well as the national language. They consider the education gained through this bilingual approach as a foundation for the socio-economic development of their families and communities.