



<b>Name of the evaluation report</b>	Highland Children's Education Project An Evaluation – March 2006
<b>Date and Type of Evaluation</b>	March 2006, End of Project Evaluation
<b>Project/program evaluated (start and end dates)</b>	Highland Children's Education Project (2002-2005)
<b>CARE Country Office</b>	Cambodia
<b>Project/ program sectors</b>	Education

# Highland Children's Education Project – Evaluation Summary

## Project/ Program Description

North East Cambodia is home to approximately 115,000 Indigenous people. Few speak the national language, Khmer, and those that do have limited competence. This inability to speak Khmer, their geographic isolation as well as their contrasting religious beliefs and economic activities has resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous people from mainstream Cambodian society. Issues of land alienation and continued discriminatory practices against them, threaten these highland communities with increased poverty and further marginalisation.

Education indicators illustrate the large disparities and are of particular concern. In the remote areas, 65% of official primary school age children do not attend school, while less than 10% of the total population completes primary school and even fewer highland children move on to secondary education. Large disparities exist with children of ethnic Khmer families, 20% of the population, making up 87% of the students at Ratanakiri Province's high schools. There are many communities without schools, with baseline surveys indicating that 93% of the target communities were functionally illiterate. Even where there are buildings, classes are often not held because few government teachers will stay at such posts.

The project was developed by CARE Cambodia in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) and funded by AusAID The objectives were to:

- Address the needs of disadvantaged ethnic minority groups through the *establishment of community schools* targeting girls and boys who have never enrolled or who have dropped out of the formal system
- Provide the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sport with a model for the delivery of basic education in remote areas of Cambodia to highland minority peoples.

## Achievements and Impacts

1. The project succeeded in providing quality, relevant education to the children in the six target communities to a very high standard. This was ground breaking work. Having started with nothing, HCEP effectively built up all elements of an education system within the space of four years in a particularly complex environment.

2. HCEP achieved this success by developing the following (which are expanded upon in *Lessons Learnt*):

a) Bilingual Model – development of curriculum under a bilingual model allowed for effective teaching and bridging from the local vernacular to Khmer. The curriculum was also developed as an adaptation of the national primary school curriculum, so that equivalence with and transition to the state system was established.

*Education is a right for all people in the world. This education is good because it provides a bridge to Khmer... It's a good model. Children are learning but in the state schools (Indigenous) children don't understand... It's a good model because we are able to adapt things like the calendar to the needs of the people. State schools can't do that.* (Local Project Staff member)

b) Teacher training - recruitment of local people as the teachers, people who could speak the language of the children as well as some Khmer and who had basic literacy, was a cornerstone of the Project. In addition to covering the curriculum, the training focused considerably on teaching methodologies and in particular a 'student-centred' approach.

c) Community School Boards (CSBs)- Central to the success of the Project has been the role played by the Boards of each school. Vesting genuine ownership and control of the schools in these boards is identified by the evaluation as the single most important factor in the success of the HCEP model. Traditional decision making processes were employed to elect Community School Boards who are responsible for the governance and management of the school while acting as an important and effective link between the community and the Project.

*The Community School Board is very good – they are like a second parent encouraging the teachers and the children.....School is our treasure - we will continue with it.* (Parent of participating child)

3. While at one level HCEP is about providing programs of bilingual education to highland communities, through its design and exemplary implementation, it has also become a model of what can be achieved through bilingual education programs in remote areas. The Project's evaluation confirms that it has provided the Ministry with an effective community school model for the provision of basic education to remote ethnic communities such as those found in the north-eastern provinces of Cambodia.

However, the impact remains questionable as the government lacks capacity and resources to replicate the model. Senior MoEYS officials stated that while they believed that the model could be used in other areas with other language groups it would require financial support which at this time could only come from NGOs or external donors. They also commented on the sustainability of the existing project;

*What CARE is doing is very good...My concern is that when CARE drops out, what will happen then? The communities*

*will have trouble running these schools on their own. Perhaps the Provincial Office of Education can take responsibility, but it can't do the same quality of work as CARE has done because it doesn't have the resources.* (Government MoEYS Official)

Nevertheless, the Project shows where the system should be heading and the areas in which it needs to build up its strengths and capacity. As outlined above it has developed curricula, teaching materials, training courses, approaches and procedures that potentially have wide applicability to education across the remote highland provinces of Cambodia.

4. The evaluation, which engaged a wide range of community stakeholders to solicit their perspectives on HCEP, also highlighted a few of the Project's wider impacts. The Project was seen to have *"brought knowledge into the community"*. A clear distinction was made:

*It's not just education for the kids - the school has also helped with our village life... Now it has made people start to talk about the educational things – like ways to see all children go to school and how to encourage the community to protect our resources and our land... Parents feel more confident. We know that if the children can read and write this will help them to protect their rights.* (Parent of participating child)

Other development partners also noted that the fact that indigenous people were seen as achieving success in education through the Project was a valuable lesson to those within the government who had been very wary, especially of activities undertaken in sensitive border areas: *"the leadership of the Project has been very strategic and they have put much emphasis on educating officials in the government at both the national and provincial levels"* (Project Partner)

While the project's objectives may not have projected it, HCEP appears to have made a valuable contribution to improving the social position of these marginalised indigenous communities.

## Lessons Learnt

The project lessons relate to the various challenges surrounding indigenous education and, in particular, how to make it relevant and effective in the special circumstances of remote and disadvantaged communities. Key lessons include:

### Participation and Decision Making

Management of the community schools through Community School Boards was central to the success of the Project. The philosophy and practice of community ownership proved to be the foundation of the HCEP model of schooling. Many external stakeholders commented that the achievement of the Project went beyond the quality of the learning and also included *"the way the ownership of the Project is truly vested in the community"*(Project Donor). In order to achieve this:

- The Boards required a great deal of training and support for them to understand the functioning of the educational enterprise and to identify and develop their roles and responsibilities as very few Board members had any experience of formal education.
- The Project operated from the perspective that education occurs in a context and consequently involved itself in community activities beyond the scope of daily schooling.
- "Respect" of the project for the Community School Boards was a key to their success. They were taken very seriously by the project and their decisions, although sometimes challenged, were always respected.

### Curriculum and Resource Production

As described above, HCEP was successful in providing relevant, quality education to the remote communities Ratanakiri Province because the curriculum was designed to meet the educational and cultural needs of indigenous children. A bilingual approach was adopted and subsequently became one of the Project's greatest challenges and successes. In order to develop materials of such a high standard:

- Indigenous knowledge was brought into the program through the involvement of the community in designing and improving resource materials and well as through their involvement in classroom. This ensured that the curriculum was relevant and reflected local knowledge and culture. Furthermore, the inclusion of life skills and references to local practices proved to be an excellent means of engaging students and the community in the larger educational program.
- The process of curriculum development was slow and required considerable skills- linguistic and educational. It also required the Project team to develop good working and trusting relationships with the communities as they faced the challenges of communicating and facilitating changes the Ministry required of the curriculum to the community.
- The program's approach to bilingual education used the children's own language for initial instruction and at the same time reinforced the child's identity through its use. While only 20% of curriculum was delivered in Khmer in the initial year, this progressively increased and by the fourth year 100% of teaching was delivered Khmer.



### Teacher Training

One of the Project's greatest initial challenges was that there were no trained teachers who could speak the language of the children as well as some Khmer and who had basic literacy, it was therefore necessary to recruit and train people from the local communities. As the Project donors noted:

*The government can't expect that teachers from the towns will go and live in remote villages. The HCEP goes a long way towards solving this problem even though the community teachers may not meet the Ministry's standards for certification.*

The merits of these teachers, even with their low levels of academic achievement, were demonstrated by the results of the children. The training program:

- Recognised the students' low levels of prior academic exposure and initially focused on helping them to improve their own standards.
- The course also had to consider the particular needs of the students and was therefore delivered through short intensive workshops followed by tasks back in the community so that students do not have to leave their homes for long periods of time. The in-service approach to training ensured retention of teachers, which had previously been a problem for the province.

### Sustainability

While praising the work being done by the HCEP program, almost all internal and external stakeholders were concerned about the sustainability of the model because of the costs involved. Hand-over of the current schools to the Provincial Office of Education was generally regarded as problematic because, while the Community School Boards prove fit to continue managing the schools, the province lacks the resources to liaise with them and communicate wider government strategies and requirements.

On another level, the model's capacity for replication by the Ministry is also hindered by a lack of resources, and arguably by their attitude and willingness to undertake the task;

*Transport is very difficult and therefore the government staff won't want to go there. The attitude of government staff is not patient enough. At the moment the teachers get very strong support from us (the staff). But the government staff won't help local teachers but will get angry with them. Sometimes children stay away. The government staff will blame the teachers if things are not running perfectly. When the government visits villages they won't discuss things with the CSB or with the teachers. They just give orders and our teachers and community members won't have a chance to share their ideas with them. Maybe the government doesn't have enough money to support the schools. (Local Project Staff)*

All parties involved in the evaluation agreed that further training and closer collaboration with government bodies was necessary for the following phase of the Project. It would appear that HCEP, while incredibly successful in its own right, is yet to realise its full potential.

N.B: This project 's success and potential has enabled it to secure further funding and subsequently carry out further phases, based on these lessons learnt and the needs of the community.

### **Other key findings**

The full evaluation report includes 72 recommendations on current operations; strategic planning, sustainability; and expansion.