Adopting Rights-Based Strategies in Conflict-Prevention and Resolution

The UNESCO-initiated Education for Peace and Development Project in Kampot Province, Cambodia

Photo © Olof Sandkull
2. Adopting Rights-Based Strategies in Conflict-Prevention and Resolution: The UNSECO-initiated Education for Peace and Development Project in Kampot Province, Cambodia

Author: Upala Devi Banerjee

1 Upala Devi Banerjee structured, edited and undertook an analysis of the rights-based aspects of the case study and is currently Asia-Pacific Coordinator of the UN Inter-agency Lessons Learned Project, based at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Bangkok.

The author wishes to thank K.C Krishna and Tey Sambo of UNESCO Cambodia and Olof Sandkull of UNESCO Regional Office, Bangkok, for extending all necessary assistance and cooperation that made it possible to document this case study.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED:

ADHOC: Cambodian Association for Human Rights and Development
ALRC: Asian Legal Resource Center
CAT: Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment
CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CERD: Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CLCs: Community Learning Centers
CLEC: Community Legal Education Center
CLO: Cambodian Labor Organization
CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSD: Center for Social Development
CSOs: Civil Society Organizations
ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education
HRBAP: Human Rights-based Approach to Programming
ICC: International Criminal Court
ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICMW: International Convention on Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
IFIs: International Financial Institutions
INGOs: International Non-governmental Organizations
KID: Khmer Institute for Democracy
LAC: Legal Aid of Cambodia
LICADHO: Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
MDGs: Millennium Development Goals
NFE: Non-formal Education
NGOs: Non-governmental Organizations
OPDC: Organization for Peace and Development
UN: United Nations
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNTAC: United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
1. Background and Rationale:

**Country and Programme Context:** Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in South East Asia, plagued by its very recent history of war and genocide. Nearly 80% of the population resides in the rural areas, subsisting on under US$2 a day. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has placed Cambodia in the list of 32 top priority countries where urgent action must be taken in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) deadline of 2015. In the past two decades, the country has received immense financial aid and technical assistance from various international financial institutions (IFI's), Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Cambodian Government has also taken steps towards adopting the MDGs by laying out poverty reduction plans to donors, but development Projects remain centralized and the main impetus for action derives from external pressure from major donors, the IFIs and international NGOs (INGOs).

Thus, Cambodia’s progress towards meeting the MDGs is mixed. Access to primary education has improved over the last decade (but progress is less than satisfactory and there is a fear that the country will be home to a large illiterate population) and HIV prevalence rates fell from 3.3 percent to 2.6 percent between 1997-2002. But, child mortality has risen over the past 10 years and progress on maternal mortality has been limited. The Cambodia MDGs Report states that for those particular goals to be met, decisive action needs to be taken to reduce the high rate of malnutrition, increase the number of trained health workers, improve access to health care, provide adequate funding to the health sector, and strengthen public financial management.²

**Policy and Legal Framework:** Cambodia’s recent history has been dominated by the atrocities and violence perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge – that sought to create a utopian agrarian society and to rid the country of all foreign influences³ - between the years 1975-1979. The Vietnamese invasion in January 1979 over border conflict with the Khmer Rouge inflicted another 10 years of warfare and bloodshed before the United Nations (UN) intervened in 1989 and established the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to oversee transition of power to a democratically elected Government.⁴ It was only in 1993 that the first democratic elections (sponsored by the UN) were held in the country; two more elections have been held since and at present, the country is classified as having a multi-party liberal democracy under a Constitutional Monarch, King Norodom Sihamoni. Rebuilding efforts in all spheres has been undertaken slowly since 1993 but progress has been slow and staggered.

Cambodia adopted a new Constitution and accepted rule of law principles as the basis for organization of a new society in 1993 after the UN-sponsored elections. It is party to six of the seven major international human rights instruments, i.e. the International

---
⁴ “Cambodia Short Guide” by Thnam Kanha Net. Source: [http://www.oneworld.net/guides/cambodia/development](http://www.oneworld.net/guides/cambodia/development)
Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Optional Protocol; the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CAT); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and its two Optional Protocols on i) the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography; and, ii) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. It has not yet signed the International Convention on Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICMW). Cambodia ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 11 April 2002, although it has yet to accede to any individual complaints mechanisms.5 The Cambodian Constitution has also incorporated all these international human rights covenants and conventions, including the ICCPR.6

However, the human rights record of the country remains poor and its willingness to meet its obligations under international treaties that it has signed in doubt as a result of its weak implementation of legal safeguards against torture; its failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice (as is demonstrated in the country’s inadequacies in bringing the former Khmer Rouge leaders to trial); and, its policies towards asylum-seekers.7

Human Rights and the Role of Civil Society: The Khmer Rouge bought to a halt any form of civil society presence in the country during their regime and controlled all activities. An estimated 1.7 million Khmer lives was lost due to arbitrary killings, torture and starvation; those who survived suffered long-term psychological and physical effects. There was an exodus of tens of thousands of refugees to neighboring countries, where some were permitted to resettle. All infrastructures in the country were destroyed. It was only in the early 1990s, under the UNTAC, that INGOs started working in the country, mostly in service delivery roles.

Currently, there exist a large number of national NGOs and several dozen Cambodian NGOs are active throughout the country, investigating violations, monitoring prison conditions, observing trials, and conducting human rights education.8 In addition, some NGOs are specializing in election monitoring roles, observing voter registration and the commune election processes. Overall, though it has been observed that the atmosphere for NGOs to function is now less threatening than ever before,

8 Some of the active human rights NGOs include the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), the Cambodian Association for Human Rights and Development (ADHOC), the Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID), the Legal Aid of Cambodia (LAC), Center for Social Development (CSD), Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) and the Cambodian Labor Organization (CLO), among others.
Cambodian civil society is still weak and it will take a while before it emerges as a cohesive force engaged in the nation's developmental process.

The UN system is well-represented in the country and has played (and is still playing) a vital role in the country's development – from helping build the human assets of the poor - including in the areas of education and health - to helping raise agricultural incomes by promoting diversification into other rural activities, combined with efforts to support the mobilization and organization of the poor and promoting their livelihoods by ensuring access to productive assets, employment, income generating opportunities and credit. It also works to improve the nutritional status of the population and to empower Cambodians to fully develop their capabilities through greater and affordable access to quality basic social services and to reduce regional disparities in the area of HIV/AIDS, health, water and sanitation, reproductive health, education.9

Cambodia has no independent national human rights institution for the protection and promotion of human rights but there are a number of State institutions with some human rights responsibilities: two parliamentary committees have been created under the internal regulations of the Senate and National Assembly respectively; and a separate Cambodian Human Rights Committee - a Government committee staffed by civil servants that was created by royal decree in 2001 - has the principal responsibility for preparing initial and periodic reports under the human rights treaties to which Cambodia is party.

However, as mentioned at the outset, the country faces severe challenges in upholding the human rights of its citizens. Cambodians in the rural areas have no access to information and communication technologies. The media is largely Government-controlled and the people have limited rights to free speech. Few rural provinces can receive radio transmissions and newspapers.10 The situation is further exacerbated by challenges posed by poor infrastructure, low human resource capacity, poor governance issues, poor policy implementation and widespread corruption among the elite - these continue to hamper developmental progress and impede realization of basic rights.

Against such enormous challenges, this case study documents the strategies used by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Cambodia in helping former Khmer Rouge communities to begin realizing their right to education by inculcating a culture of peace. Because this Project is still operational (it started operations since January 2004 and will conclude in end-December 2005), the final outcomes are not yet ascertained and what is presented is an analysis of the human rights-based approach to programming (HRBAP) strategies used and the interim outcomes visible as a result of the use of such strategies.

10 Ibid. Refer to footnote No 4.
2. The Study of the UNSECO-initiated Education for Peace and Development Project in Kampot Province using Rights-Based Strategies

Case Study/Project Context: The collapse of what was South East Asia’s most progressive education system, together with the killing of the country’s educated class during the Khmer Rouge regime, has created a risk of building a large illiterate population in Cambodia, especially as 43% of the population is under 15 years of age. The challenge is formidable given that 35% of children aged 6-14 years were out of school in 1999, and between 38% and 48% of female children were out of primary and secondary schools in 2001. Literacy rates and quality of education varies between large cities and rural towns, with many rural provinces experiencing high student-teacher ratios. In 2001, only 33% of students finished grade 1-9. While the Government is working with donors to achieve the MDGs - including in the education-related goals - by measures like improving access to schools, reforming the nationwide curriculum in primary and secondary schools and so on, progress is slow as is demonstrated by the low salaries of teachers or by the limited attention paid to the large number of students seeking higher education and employment. Some parents turn to private schools to satisfy their educational needs but few can afford the high costs involved. Access to education by the poorest and most disadvantaged groups, particularly in rural and remote areas, continues to be limited. A more significant increase has not been achieved due to low public investment in the education sector.11 The future of high school graduates is therefore bleak and may retard plans for economic growth.12

The right to education has a special significance in Cambodia as it is addressed in five of the six main international treaties that it has acceded to and these were also incorporated into the 1993 Constitution. Chapter 6 of the Constitution dwells on “the people’s right to quality education at all levels” and the role of the State in the establishment of “a comprehensive and universal educational system throughout the country”. Educational freedom is guaranteed, as is educational quality “so that all citizens have equal opportunity to earn a living”. Primary and secondary schooling are to be provided free of charge and nine years of education are compulsory. Private schooling is allowed and Buddhist education promoted, subject to State control.13

In principle, the country is thus under an obligation to progressively provide all of the above so that citizens can realize the right to education by 2015 (as have been expressed by the Government). However, as mentioned elsewhere in this paper, progress has been very slow due to the attendant challenges. Against this backdrop, the UN system has played an important role in the rehabilitation of the Cambodian educational system. Most of the support has been targeted at developing the capacities of individuals, institutions and systems so that the interventions made can be self-sustaining in the longer time frame. Support has also been provided for strategic planning with wider stakeholder participation.14

---

11 Ibid. Refer to footnote No. 9.
12 Ibid. Refer to footnote above.
14 Ibid. Refer to footnote No 9.
The UNESCO-initiated Project “Conflict Prevention and Resolution through Education – Education for Peace and Development” in 18 villages in two communes (Trapeng Phleng and Taken) in the Koh Sla region in Kampot Province is one such initiative that uses strategies that have rights-based elements intertwined within (see Box 1 below) and have demonstrated how, through the use of education as an entry point into the communities, conflicts in a society (that have been hitherto dominated by conflict) can be mitigated.

**Box 1: The Human-Rights Based Approach to Educational Programming**

The Human-Rights Based Approach to educational programming involves an analytical and methodological framework that combines human rights norms and principles with good programming practices in the education sector as follows:

* Builds on agreed norms and standards in international treaties, conventions, and declarations related to education;

* Is a tool for identifying, planning, designing, implementing, and monitoring education development activities from a human rights perspective;

* Integrates human rights norms, standards, and principles in all phases of the programming process;

* Ensures that all programming activities further the realisation of the right to education;

* Encompasses the importance of quality and relevance of education, as defined in the Dakar Framework for Action and which includes:
  1. the well-being of learners
  2. relevance of content and outcomes
  3. quality of teaching and learning processes
  4. suitability of learning environments

* Ensures that programme activities contribute to the development of capacities of ‘duty-bearers’ and ‘rights-holders’;

* Insists that a rights-based approach to education programming involves four key actors:
  
  the Government and its institutions, as duty-bearers
  
  the child, as rights-holder/claimer
  
  parents, as representatives of the child
  
  teachers, as both rights-holders and duty-bearers

* Insists that no right can exist without a corresponding Governmental obligation – the obligation “to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to education”;

* Builds on the 4-A scheme\(^{15}\) presented in the Manual on Rights-Based Education developed by UNESCO Bangkok and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education.

This initiative assumes more significance as it has been undertaken in participation with the public sector – relevant Government departments – and an NGO in an area

\(^{15}\) The 4-A Scheme involves government obligations to make education available, accessible, affordable and adaptable so that children worldwide can realise their right to education.
where groups of former Khmer Rouge people still reside. Koh Sla region is widely known as one of the last and biggest former Khmer Rouge stronghold in Cambodia and faces severe challenges due to its physical location, illiteracy, overarching poverty levels and lack of access to healthcare, schools, roads, food and safe drinking water. Women and girls in these communities are particularly disadvantaged in all aspects.

**Stakeholders Involved:** The Project is supported by the Belgium Government and UNESCO Cambodia is implementing Project activities in partnership with relevant public sector stakeholders – the Non-formal Education Department of Kampot Province, the Cambodian Ministry of Education, the District Education Office, the Engineering Institute of Cambodia - an NGO, Organization for Peace and Development (OPDC); and, he communities living in Trapeng Phleng and Taken communes in Koh Sla region in Kampot Province.

**Objectives of the Project:** Through the Project activities that are centered on the Right to Education and designed and implemented with participation of all stakeholders, the Project aims to achieve a long-term goal of building a culture of peace in the communities by preventing conflict in both the domestic and community spheres.

This long-term goal would be achieved through short-term goals that include:

i) Enabling children to access non-formal education;

ii) Helping communities realize the value of a culture of peace as a prerequisite to implement and sustain any developmental outcomes;

iii) Enabling people in the communities to be economically empowered by training them in vocational skills;

iv) Empowering people in the communities to be active partners in the developmental process rather than mere recipients of aid; and,

v) Helping support equitable processes that would lead to gender empowerment.

3. Process:

The Project activities in both the communes to help achieve the above consists of:

* A Project launch to initiate the Project in January 2004;
* Holding of non-formal education (NFE) literacy-level 1 classes;
* Undertaking early childhood care and education (ECCE) activities;
* Opening mobile libraries;
* Conducting baseline surveys;
* Undertaking Vocational training for income generation;
* Undertaking capacity development activities via training of the communities and officials of the related public sector departments;
* Setting up Community Learning Centers (CLCs);
* Introducing a Culture of Peace initiative in the communities via OPDC;
* Documenting case studies to document lessons learned in the process of implementation of Project activities;
* Using radio as a means of development communication; and,
Networking amongst various stakeholders.

**Rights-Based Programming Strategies Used:** The capacities of all in-country stakeholders – the communities, the civil society organizations (CSOs) and the relevant public sector departments – are weak and severely constrained in undertaking any form of cohesive activity (due to the factors as elaborated throughout Section 1 of this case study). Hence, UNESCO Cambodia realized that to undertake activities that can help achieve the long-term Project goal, it had to play the role of a catalyst by helping develop capacities of its partners – the relevant public sector departments, the communities and the partner NGO – through the use of the various strategies that can be called rights-based as they i) involve stakeholder participation; ii) taps into the agency of the communities to have a stake in decisions that impact their lives; iii) looks at enhancing empowerment levels; and, iv) focuses on processes as well as outcomes (through one of the Project activities that involves documentation of case studies). This is in addition to the agency performing a service-delivery role, which is equally important in this particular country context.

- **Trainings as a capacity development strategy to build stakeholder capacities:** As capacity development is the key to engage and co-opt stakeholders and for any initiative to become sustainable and viable, UNSECO Cambodia focused on developing capacities of all key stakeholders as a key strategy from which would follow the envisaged Project outcomes. Most of such capacity development was mainly in the form of intensive trainings that have focused on how to effectively initiate activities as envisaged under the programme in a sustainable manner by involving the participation of all stakeholders (please see the following Section on one such capacity development initiative). These trainings also included capacity development in monitoring and evaluation tools. Of particular interest is the strategy of developing capacities of formerly illiterate individuals (hailing from the former Khmer Rouge) and training them as NFE and ECCE facilitators. The outcomes of such capacity development are documented in Section 4.

- **Enlisting stakeholder participation via conducting of the baseline surveys:** Data on various indicators related to population, gender, literacy, health, water, livelihoods and so on that adequately reflects the status and needs of the local communities is imperative and an essential element to undertake effective grassroots programming. Thus, as one of the first steps in the process that involved developing capacities to undertake Project activities, UNSECO Cambodia helped develop the capacities of the local communities in the villages in the two communes to undertake baseline surveys. Realizing that these people did not possess the capacity to undertake such surveys, UNSECO prepared the questionnaire, taking care to ascertain that the survey reflects those issues that are representative of the communities. Thereafter, capacity development in the form of survey training was conducted for literacy facilitators, village supervisors and commune supervisors, who prepared plans for primary data collection. These people were also trained to write up the results of the village surveys. To an extent, UNSECO staff monitored the survey process as this was really the very first time that these communities were undertaking such an effort.
Box 2: Summary of survey conducted by the local community in the 18 villages

Total number of population: 13,142, of which 6,237 are females.
Total number of households: 2,690

Total number of children under 6: 2,364, of which 972 are girls.

Total number of children aged 6-12 years are: 3,273, of which 1,585 are girls. Among these 3,273 children, 1,205 (of which 757 are girls) have never been to school for different reasons but mainly due to the long distances that they have to walk to reach school everyday.

Total number of illiterate people aged 13-45 years is 3,911, of which 2,403 are women.

Only about 13% of the population have access to pump water or open well water. Others obtain drinking water either from ponds, rivers or from rainwater collection.

More than a person per family have been suffering from malaria and almost a similar number of people have diarrhea problems. About half of the population go to traditional healers when they fall sick or buy medicines from local stores by themselves without getting checked by a doctor. There is no hospital in the area and only one health care center for 18 villages. However, there are 167 traditional healers that people have access to.

Using a local civil society agency to help build inroads: As a local CSO is more familiar with the ground contexts and also often have more acceptability amongst the local population, UNSECO Cambodia started partnering with an NGO – OPDC - on one important Project activity – the Culture of Peace initiative. Realizing that for any outcomes to be effective, the local communities have to be well-rooted in a culture that promotes peace as a human rights standard and principle, OPDC have developed local context-specific training materials and begun educating the village chiefs, the commune authorities, the NFE facilitators, the school teachers and the parents on how peace is a prerequisite to live in a society and thrive. Such training has also been introduced in the NFE schools through the NFE facilitators. A population that have never been to school or who have been previously excluded from the formal education system are now slowly learning how peace building characters and their values (such as problem solving and conflict resolution) is an essential requirement to live harmoniously in a society.

Using radio as a means of development communication: Realizing the positive role that community radio can play as a rights-based tool in undertaking advocacy, UNESCO Cambodia used Radio Kampot as an advocacy tool to publicize the activities and related outcomes under this Project. Hearing their own achievements broadcasted via the radio serves to only encourage the local communities and the public officials in the two communes to participate even more pro-actively in the

---

programme activities. It has also made public officials at the central level aware of the Project activities and outcomes and of the linkages of how accessing the Right to Education and training in culture of peace (and other associated activities) can help previously rights-unaware communities proactively participate in developmental processes.

- **Using the Community Learning Centers as a forum for participation:** The CLCs have been used by UNESCO Cambodia as a forum for the communities to participate in various roles. Firstly, the CLCs are built with community inputs in terms of labour, money, construction materials and land for the centers. Such inputs, in themselves, build in the communities’ stake in ensuring that the CLCs function as per the role that was envisaged for it. Secondly, the CLCs are managed by the communities (CLC management committees are formed with community members and they are trained by UNCESO to perform their functions). Some of the important functions these committees play pertain to selection of contractors to build the centers; ensure that the centers are built based on the communities needs and choices; and finally, in managing the centers in terms of upkeep and facilities. Having a democratically elected committee manage the CLCs ensure accountability and transparency at all levels – from ensuring that the contractor is accountable in building a center that is reflective of the communities needs to making certain that the committee performs its functions as was envisaged for it.

- **Documenting process outcomes:** From the onset, UNESCO Cambodia identified the need of documentation of the Project activities and the impact these have had on the people in the communities. Such documentation, UNSECO realized, would be vital in the advocacy and lobbying process of enabling such communities realize their rights. For the communities, such documentation would also provide an opportunity to undertake evidence-based advocacy with the public officials and for UNESCO, this process would provide a framework wherein it could further its dialogue with diverse stakeholders. In this Project, such documentation is in the form of case studies written by the NFE and ECCE facilitators and supervisors themselves of their own experiences or experiences narrated to them by the individuals living in the communities, or even articles written by children with help from their teachers.

**Capacity/Role of Duty-bearers in Addressing Demands:** At the macro level, public sector officials – in this case, officials from related Government agencies who are Project stakeholders – have been trained to undertake monitoring and evaluation, write reports and in becoming active partners in the Project implementation process (for instance, in helping build the CLCs). At the micro level, duty-bearers like the village chiefs and commune authorities have also been capacitated via trainings to work collaboratively with the communities in meeting obligations (like participating in building the CLCs; in ensuring that the CLCs reflect the needs and choices of the local communities; in overseeing that the CLCs function as common community properties; and, at times, by functioning as community dispute mitigation authorities).

**Monitoring to Ascertain Rights-Based Outcomes from the Rights-Based Strategies:** In this Project, training of all stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation of ongoing Project activities (immediate outcomes as well as overall outcomes - this will be
undertaken at a later stage) forms an essential part of the capacity development process. For instance, training on monitoring and evaluation (on school learning, school attendance, etc.) for NFE facilitators in both the communes have been undertaken by UNESCO Cambodia; such training has also been undertaken for village supervisors (and facilitated by commune and district supervisors) to monitor the literacy classes on an ongoing basis.

Though UNSECO Cambodia finds that the capacities of the stakeholders to monitor and evaluate their activities and resultant outcomes are still at a rudimentary level\(^\text{17}\), it is a step in the right direction in the process of building stakeholder ownership and accountability in the process of determining the Project outcomes.

4. Outcome (Results):

As mentioned at the outset, this Project is still operational and hence, the outcomes documented below can only be viewed as interim outcomes. They however deserve documentation as they are culled from experiences of rights-unaware communities via the use of strategies that are rights-based in a country that has suffered from two decades of genocide, violence and political turmoil.

- **Public sector being capacitated:** A very important strategy and resultant outcome - particularly in the Cambodian context – has been the building of capacities of public sector stakeholders (the related Government departments at both the central and provincial levels). Building of such capacities by UNESCO Cambodia has not only enabled them to start collaborating with the stakeholders - communities and with UNSECO Cambodia - in discharging their obligations as duty-bearers but has also enabled them to be well-equipped technically on programmatic issues relating to health-service delivery; CLC construction and management; facilitating literacy and ECCE; undertaking monitoring and evaluation; and so on. Stakeholder participation and collective action of any kind is a new concept in the country since the idea of the public sector collaborating with the communities/civil society was non-existent during the Khmer Rouge and is only now emerging and finding a new space in developmental interventions. Such capacity development also provides an opportunity for the related public sector departments to gradually use these skills while implementing interventions or programmes of the same nature in other parts of the country.

- **People becoming empowered to participate and gradually realize rights:** Along with helping develop capacities of the public sector, another important outcome that has been witnessed since this Project was initiated has been the visibly growing empowerment levels of community members (including of women) in the two communes. Realizing the value of education and the imperative need to live in a culture of peace (through the UNESCO Cambodia capacity development initiatives), villagers are not only collaborating in helping build the CLCs (by contributing land, labor, materials and so on) but have contributed labor and materials in helping build the NFE schools; in some schools, villagers have even helped build the desks and benches. In one instance, they have collaborated with local public sector officials in

\(^{17}\) Ibid. Refer to footnote above.
helping repair six bridges; in another case, they helped build a road that would lead to the local NFE school; in yet another case, local women from one village (Monosok village) lobbied and received support from the Nepalese Women’s Association in Cambodia to set up a water point in their village – around 62 families in this village are now able to collect water through this water point.\(^\text{18}\)

The transition from a community of people that were previously only reliant on sporadic and erratic public sector service-delivery to those who are now collaborating and participating in community-focused activities with the public sector is also a step forward in making them more empowered and self-reliant and will hopefully lead to a scenario where they will start dialoguing with the public sector duty-bearers on claiming their rights. At a micro-level, such dialoguing has already occurred between community members and commune leaders (the local-level duty-bearers), an instance being the construction of the CLCs based on the communities’ needs and choices.

- **Conflicts mitigated to an extent:** The communes where the Project activities have been initiated were previously dominated by violence – be it domestic violence and abuse, conflicts between community members and so on. This was due to the fact that these communities belonged to the former Khmer Rouge and hence lived a life dominated by conflict and violence. This Project (and its activities) have helped in mitigating conflicts to a large extent – commune and village chiefs have stated that incidences of violence in the communities have gone down and that community members have started resolving contentious issues through dialogue and discussions, often using the CLCs as a platform. Even incidences of abuse (or situations that leads to abuses) within families – like drinking, gambling, wife and child beating – have been reported at far lesser intervals than when the Project activities were originally initiated.

- **Children realizing their right to an education:** Children in these 18 villages have started availing of NFE – the changes are already visible in communities that have had no opportunity to avail of any form of education for the last two decades. The learning rate is high and 1036 children are attending classes; the quality of teaching is also of a good standard (UNESCO Cambodia – in keeping with the rights-based principles of educational programming that states that education should not only be available, accessible, affordable and adaptable but should also be of good quality – have ensured that teachers, through capacity development initiatives, are adequately trained to impart a good quality of teaching to the children. The outcome is that some of these NFE schools will receive formal school status as early as in the next two years. This is an accomplishment in itself as it implies that the public sector is coming forward to work together with the communities; it also has larger implications in terms of the public sector replicating such partnership models elsewhere in the country.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.
5. The Value Added of Using Rights-Based Strategies:

**Positive Lessons Learned:** At a very limited and basic level, against the enormous task of nation-building on hand and the challenges this entails, what the Koh Sla experience – via the interim outcomes – reveals is that with adequate capacity development initiatives (that is a combination of both service-delivery and a focus on developing the capabilities of both the public sector and the communities), a receptive public sector, donor support and the use of acceptable strategies as entry-points (in this case, using education as an entry-point) even countries in transition and communities dominated (and affected) by conflict can come together under a participatory framework to realize basic rights and start realizing the value of living harmoniously.

**Challenges in Implementing Rights-Based Programming Strategies: Lessons Learned**

- **Low capacity in using those rights-based strategies that have political overtones:** Cambodia is a country that is only just emerging from decades of political turmoil and violence. It is now heavily involved in nation-building and reconstruction efforts and as a fledgling democracy, is dealing with many attendant challenges, including a very lowly-capacitated public sector, a weak judiciary and a populace that is dominantly illiterate and poor. Corruption is also another factor that has eroded and hampered the effective functioning of the public sector. In such a scenario, the public sector, most NGOs and the donors focus on an aid delivery strategy that is more service-delivery reliant than on developing capacities. The general population, being poor and illiterate, is also more reliant on such service delivery and in meeting their basic needs. Thus, any agency that works on developing capacities under a rights-based framework will have to work under the assumption that only some strategies (like developing capacities to work under a participatory stakeholder framework) to realize rights will work; other rights-based strategies that are more politically oriented (like challenging the status quo; attacking corrupt public as well as local village/commune officials and leaders; using the platform of public hearings to bring such issues into public domain; and, undertaking political advocacy and lobbying) will not work or will require more enabling and sophisticated conditions to operate in (and which are not prevalent right now in the country).

- **Working with groups that belong to the former Khmer Rouge a challenge:** The UNSECO Cambodia-initiated Project partners with groups of people who belong to the former Khmer Rouge; these are groups who are still to be tried under both Cambodian and international law for war crimes. This situation restricts the abilities of these particular groups to demand and claim their rights. Moreover, the Project activities entails that the public sector work with these communities; however, the current Cambodian public sector officials do not have a shared history with the former Khmer Rouge that is based on the principles of trust and cooperation. Co-opting these officials to enable them to start partnering with those people who are to be tried for committing war crimes against their own people is a very big challenge that the agency faces in this Project.
At another level, the Project involves working with commune members who belong to the former Khmer Rouge; these local-level village heads are still very much entrenched in mindsets of power and domination; working with them in a manner so as to avoid elite capture (domination of power by only a select powerful few in the villages and communes), especially in this context, is a challenge that UNSECO Cambodia faces to quite a large extent while implementing this Project.
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY:


Net, Thnam Kanha., “Cambodia Short Guide” Source: http://www.oneworld.net/guides/cambodia/development

