Multilingual education teachers promoted

In February 2017, the Royal Government of Cambodia promoted 20 community teachers (five women) to state school teaching positions, which provides them with a greater level of job security and elevates their social standing in schools, their communities, and with the government. According to the Deputy Director of Education in Ratanak Kiri Province, Mr. Pa Satha, this is a milestone for the provincial Departments of Education in the northeast of Cambodia and their long-standing commitment to improving education in the area. The promotion of these teachers is proof that the government is extending their support for and ownership of multilingual education in Cambodia.

Barriers to education: Historically, education outcomes in the northeast of Cambodia have been significantly lower than the national average; a result of the barriers faced by ethnic minority communities in this area such as remoteness, cultural discrimination, and most notably, language. Children from these communities often struggle in school because classes are taught in the national language, Khmer—a foreign language for many of these children who have grown up speaking a different language in their home. This situation makes it difficult for children to understand their teacher and, as a result, often fall behind or drop out of school.

Children learn in their own language: One of the ways CARE Cambodia is addressing this issue is through multilingual education, which makes it possible for ethnic minority children to access an education—a universal right for children everywhere. Multilingual education classes are taught using the children’s mother tongue as the medium of instruction—a method which research has shown is the most effective way for a child to succeed in school—while gradually introducing them to the Khmer language. According to Mr. Pa Satha, multilingual education also helps to preserve the culture and language of indigenous people—important aspects of their identity.

The handover of multilingual education: After many years developing this program with the government and UNICEF, CARE Cambodia is the final stages of handing it over to be administered by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. Part of this process involves training government officials to be multilingual teacher trainers—a vital role to ensure the continuation and success of this program. Another example of the government’s intentions to institutionalise multilingual education is the recognition of CARE Cambodia-trained, community teachers as state school teachers if they meet requirements specified in the government’s Multilingual Education National Action Plan.

A positive role model: Ms. Nangmak is one of the 20 MLE community teachers who signed a state school teaching contract in early 2017. In 2004, she received multilingual teacher training with CARE Cambodia and has taught ethnic minority children in the northeast of Cambodia for the past 11 years. Currently, Ms. Nangmak teaches grade one at Krala Primary School in Ratanak Kiri Province. She expressed her delight to receive this contract because it gives her a greater level of job security, enabling her to provide a high quality of life for her family and two children. She also spoke about her status as a role model in the community; how she hopes to set a positive example for her students and show them that like her, they too can have a meaningful career through education and hard work.

Ethnic minority children in Cambodia continue to face barriers to development; however, multilingual education gives them an opportunity to access their right to an education—a pathway to more fulfilling jobs and a better life for themselves and their family. As evident in Ms. Nangmak’s story, the value of well-trained multilingual teachers extends beyond the classroom, with positive impacts for families and the community. With the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport extending their ownership of multilingual education through institutional and financial support, more ethnic minority communities will benefit from this model of education that is both relevant and accessible to them.

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