“Improving the Quality of Life of Children and Youth in the Asia and Pacific Region”

As part of the project of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the Empowerment of Minority Children through Education and the Preservation of their Intangible Cultural Heritage, a teacher training workshop-cum-study visit was organized for the administrators and teachers from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam from 23 March to 1 April 2011 in Bangkok, Sa Kaeo and Chachoengsao provinces in Thailand.

Launched in 2006, this project is a joint effort between the Office of H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn’s Projects (OPSP), UNESCO and the UNESCO National Commissions of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. The project is aimed at empowering minority children and youth in the Greater Mekong Sub-region through the best practices that the Princess has been pioneering in Thailand. These include health and nutrition, school agriculture, education as well as cultural and environmental conservation activities.

62 participants including administrators and teachers from 21 participating schools, as well as UNESCO-funded representatives who were government officials from the ministerial and provincial levels and the UNESCO National Commissions of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam participated in this training workshop-cum-study visit. This teacher training workshop included the cultural dimensions of school farming, nutrition, health and educational activities.

The workshop participants from the three countries as well as representatives from Thai schools who offered the study visits met with the Princess at Chitralada Palace in Bangkok on 28 March 2011, to report on the achievements and challenges of the project implementation in addition to future plans. Besides technical and financial supports, the Princess provided the participating schools with vegetable seeds, agricultural tools, kitchen utensils and other materials necessary for the implementation of school activities.

‘I want to give seeds and agricultural tools to the pupils and encourage them to participate in agricultural work: an indirect and difficult way. Meals are prepared from their agricultural products. This is an alternative way to get food. The by-products are knowledge and skills in agriculture and nutrition which can be used to generate income in the future’

H.R.H. talks about her own initiative

On 29 March 2011, after the participants visited the National Science Centre for Education in Bangkok, a tea party was organized for them at UNESCO Bangkok premises. The participants were warmly welcomed by Mr Gwang-Jo Kim, Director and were briefed by Mr Dieter Schlenker, Chief of IKM, on the overall work of UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.

This year marks three decades of the Princess’s outstanding commitments to education and to the welfare of children in remote areas. The participants attended the 30th Anniversary of
Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn’s Work for Children and Youth in Remote Areas with the theme “Gate to a Greater Opportunity”, at Chulalongkorn University. It was a good opportunity for participants to share experiences not only with each other but also with Thai schools from all over the country.