Community Learning Centres

An APPEAL-supported Regional Project
UNESCO Bangkok
Community Learning Centres (CLC)

Overview

Of all APPEAL-supported regional projects none has generated greater enthusiasm among Member States than the CLC project. Initiated in the late 1990s it has attracted over 20 countries in the region to try out community-based models for learning at the local level. A number of countries that have piloted the development of CLCs with the support of APPEAL have now developed models that are being replicated with the support of communities, governments and other partners.

What is a CLC?

A community learning centre (CLC) is a local place of learning outside the formal education system. Located in both village and urban areas, it is usually set up and managed by local people for local people. In this way, CLCs are home-grown institutions that are well positioned to provide education programmes that address the specific needs and desires of the populations they serve. The CLC focus on life long learning often makes them a central component of community development. Centres may offer diverse learning opportunities, but all share a common goal helping people to improve their quality of life through education and skills development.

The aim of a CLC is to help individuals empower themselves and promote community development through life long education for all people in the community, including adults, youth and children of all ages. The main beneficiaries of a CLC should be people with fewer opportunities for education, for example, out-of-school children, illiterate youth and adults including women and the elderly. A CLC does not necessarily require new infrastructure, but can operate from an existing health centre, temple, mosque, primary school or other suitable venue.
CLCs should be established with the full involvement and ownership of the community they serve. Starting with awareness promotion, they need to set up a management committee, identify the needs of the community and mobilize people and money. The activities at a CLC should be flexible and participatory, allowing for leadership to emerge from the community, while support mechanisms should also be available through strengthened coordination, networking and partnerships. Features of a successful CLC project may include context-based programmes, strong community participation, the CLC as a tangible symbol in the community, local networks, and the availability of external support for the community.

APPEAL CLC project

Community based education programmes are not new to many countries. In recent years, however, CLCs have gained in popularity in the Asia-Pacific region. There have been many innovative activities undertaken by governments and NGOs in the region over the years. Unfortunately, such initiatives are too often time and budget bound projects without systematic or long term strategies, disconnected from national education policies and planning.

APPEAL’s Community Learning Centre project began in 1998 with financial assistance from Japan and Norway. Its main focus has been to develop effective community-based learning through non-formal approaches and delivery mechanisms to institutionalize CLCs as an effective means of delivering literacy and continuing education within the framework of the national education policy and, well integrated into EFA plans.

CLC experiences in the region

CLC policy and legislations

CLCs have been recognized as being very effective not only for learning to read and write but also for acquiring various life skills such as: self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking and critical thinking to improve people’s quality of life. The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) launched in 2000, includes “community participation” as a key area of action, and encourages the establishment of CLCs.

Several countries in the region have included CLCs in their education policy and legislation. In Viet Nam, CLCs were recognized for implementing Decision 112/200/QD-TTg on the Proposal of Developing a Learning Society in the period 2000-2010 dated 18 May 2005 and approved by the Prime Minister. The Education Law 2000 has stipulated that CLCs are an official non-formal/continuing education institution of the national educational system. As of June 2006, the country has established 7,787 CLCs, reaching 67.2 per cent of the total 10,983 communes, wards and towns in Viet Nam. Thirteen provinces already have 100 per cent coverage. Other countries in the region including Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal and Thailand have also included CLCs in their national policy and EFA action plans.

Networking of CLCs

Many countries have reported that the activities in CLCs are often limited to education. In fact, CLC activities should also include those related to health, agriculture and community development. Thus NFE/CLC personnel need to improve their skills to establish contacts and networking with all agencies including the private sector, for the purpose of community development and quality of life improvement.

APPEAL supported six countries to undertake research to identify different models of CLC networking. According to the study in China, there are different types of CLCs; village-centred, town-centred and school-centred that can benefit from networking. The rationale for networks and linkages is to ensure greater use of resources by all the partners. Parallel to national policy on poverty alleviation particularly for farmers (the main target group) CLCs play a significant role in increasing farm incomes and productivity through linkages with related agencies such as the animal husbandry and health and sanitary departments.

ICT use through CLCs

APPEAL initiated the project on ICT-NFE for Community Empowerment to use the potential of ICT to deliver education and skill training for quality of life improvement, poverty alleviation and community development. Initiated in CLCs of nine participating countries, the project has supported ICT use for community development through computers, radios, television, telephone, fax, CD-ROMs and loudspeakers/megaphones. ICT is used for income

© UNESCO / D.Riewpituk
generating programmes in many countries such as web-based marketings and sales promotion, accounting, and demonstrating production methods like mushroom growing and raising chickens. In the CLCs of the Philippines, ICT is used as a tool for strengthening literacy programmes to meet their cultural and educational needs. Research has shown that with mother tongue-based instruction, indigenous people gain confidence and retain much of what they learn. It is important for ethnic and linguistic minorities to access basic education through improvements to the quality of literacy programmes, contextual skills (livelihood, basic health care, environmental education), generic skills (resolving conflicts, creative thinking, critical thinking, dealing/ managing/coping with emotions, dealing/managing/coping with stress, and production/entrepreneurship skills). Training sessions under the project were held in CLCs after strengthening the existing curriculum and teaching learning process of the Philippines Alternative Learning System Accreditation & Equivalency Programme. In Uzbekistan, the National Commission for UNESCO, in cooperation with the Business Women's Association of Uzbekistan, focuses on income generation for women using ICT for embroidery training. The project in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam in 2004 to mainstream gender in CLC activities and to build the capacity of CLC personnel in this regard. As a first step, a set of needs assessment tools were developed and piloted to identify ways in which CLC programmes and staff could be more gender-responsive. This was followed by gender training of CLC management and staff. Master trainers were identified and further trained in project countries to build a pool of local expertise in this area. Support is also being provided to reach and empower out-of-school girls and boys to raise awareness among their parents and community members on the value of sending both girls and boys to school.

The project in the Philippines aims to develop, enhance and reinforce mother tongue literacy programmes to meet their cultural and educational needs. Research has shown that with mother tongue-based instruction, indigenous people gain confidence and retain much of what they learn. It is important for ethnic and linguistic minorities to access basic education through improvements to the quality of literacy programmes, contextual skills (livelihood, basic health care, environmental education), generic skills (resolving conflicts, creative thinking, critical thinking, dealing/ managing/coping with emotions, dealing/managing/coping with stress, and production/entrepreneurship skills). Training sessions under the project were held in CLCs after strengthening the existing curriculum and teaching learning process of the Philippines Alternative Learning System Accreditation & Equivalency Programme. Life skills Life skill programmes enhance human potential for positive and adaptive behaviour in dealing with needs, challenges and situations of everyday life for quality of life improvement. Participating countries in APPEAL’s regional project on life skills agreed that three main components should be integrated into NFE programmes namely, adaptive behaviour in dealing with needs, challenges and situations of everyday life for quality of life improvement. These components are: literacy skills (reading, writing and numeracy), effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, decision-making and critical thinking, dealing/ managing/coping with emotions, managing stress, and production/entrepreneurship skills. Training sessions under the project were held in CLCs after strengthening the existing curriculum and teaching learning process of the Philippines Alternative Learning System Accreditation & Equivalency Programme. Azerbaijan offers a good example of this approach. In 2005, the Office of NFE Commission and Linguists in Azerbaijan launched a national literacy project for ethnic and linguistic minorities. The project in Thailand aims to improve the quality of life of ethnic minorities by using their mother tongue for literacy, learning, and training at the CLC in health, environmental issues, agriculture and cultural mathematics. Karen is the mother tongue of the main minority communities in the North of Thailand. Karen is a family of languages and learning materials were jointly developed by Karen facilitators who graduated from Thai universities, Karen community leaders and children, and the Office of NFE Commission and Linguists. A five year teaching plan was formulated starting with mother tongue/bilingual education at the initial stage, gradually bridging to the national language.

Life skills

Life skills programmes enhance human potential for positive and adaptive behaviour in dealing with needs, challenges and situations of everyday life for quality of life improvement. Participating countries in APPEAL’s regional project on life skills agreed that three main components should be integrated into NFE programmes namely, adaptive behaviour in dealing with needs, challenges and situations of everyday life for quality of life improvement. These components are: literacy skills (reading, writing and numeracy), effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, decision-making and critical thinking, dealing/ managing/coping with emotions, dealing/managing/coping with stress, and production/entrepreneurship skills. Training sessions under the project were held in CLCs after strengthening the existing curriculum and teaching learning process of the Philippines Alternative Learning System Accreditation & Equivalency Programme. Azerbaijan offers a good example of this approach. In 2005, the Office of NFE Commission and Linguists in Azerbaijan launched a national literacy project for ethnic and linguistic minorities. The project in Thailand aims to improve the quality of life of ethnic minorities by using their mother tongue for literacy, learning, and training at the CLC in health, environmental issues, agriculture and cultural mathematics. Karen is the mother tongue of the main minority communities in the North of Thailand. Karen is a family of languages and learning materials were jointly developed by Karen facilitators who graduated from Thai universities, Karen community leaders and children, and the Office of NFE Commission and Linguists. A five year teaching plan was formulated starting with mother tongue/bilingual education at the initial stage, gradually bridging to the national language.

APPEAL has supported 11 countries to implement mother tongue literacy projects for ethnic and linguistic minorities. The project in Thailand aims to improve the quality of life of ethnic minorities by using their mother tongue literacy projects. It serves as an entry point for ethnic and cultural mathematics. Karen is the mother tongue of the main minority communities in the North of Thailand. Karen is a family of languages and learning materials were jointly developed by Karen facilitators who graduated from Thai universities, Karen community leaders and children, and the Office of NFE Commission and Linguists. A five year teaching plan was formulated starting with mother tongue/bilingual education at the initial stage, gradually bridging to the national language.

Language

The project in Thailand aims to improve the quality of life of ethnic minorities by using their mother tongue literacy projects. It serves as an entry point for ethnic and cultural mathematics. Karen is the mother tongue of the main minority communities in the North of Thailand. Karen is a family of languages and learning materials were jointly developed by Karen facilitators who graduated from Thai universities, Karen community leaders and children, and the Office of NFE Commission and Linguists. A five year teaching plan was formulated starting with mother tongue/bilingual education at the initial stage, gradually bridging to the national language.

Mother tongue literacy

In the Asia-Pacific region, many languages are spoken by ethnic minorities, both indigenous inhabitants and migrants. The Dakar Framework for Action guarantees education of good quality for all. It is important for ethnic and linguistic minorities to access basic education through improvements to the quality of literacy programmes, contextual skills (livelihood, basic health care, environmental education), generic skills (resolving conflicts, creative thinking, critical thinking, dealing/ managing/coping with emotions, dealing/managing/coping with stress, and production/entrepreneurship skills). Training sessions under the project were held in CLCs after strengthening the existing curriculum and teaching learning process of the Philippines Alternative Learning System Accreditation & Equivalency Programme. In Uzbekistan, the National Commission for UNESCO, in cooperation with the Business Women's Association of Uzbekistan, focuses on income generation for women using ICT for embroidery training. The project in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam in 2004 to mainstream gender in CLC activities and to build the capacity of CLC personnel in this regard. As a first step, a set of needs assessment tools were developed and piloted to identify ways in which CLC programmes and staff could be more gender-responsive. This was followed by gender training of CLC management and staff. Master trainers were identified and further trained in project countries to build a pool of local expertise in this area. Support is also being provided to reach and empower out-of-school girls and boys to raise awareness among their parents and community members on the value of sending both girls and boys to school.

Gender equality

The Gender in Education Programme in APPEAL initiated a project in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam in 2004 to mainstream gender in CLC activities and to build the capacity of CLC personnel in this regard. As a first step, a set of needs assessment tools were developed and piloted to identify ways in which CLC programmes and staff could be more gender-responsive. This was followed by gender training of CLC management and staff. Master trainers were identified and further trained in project countries to build a pool of local expertise in this area. Support is also being provided to reach and empower out-of-school girls and boys to raise awareness among their parents and community members on the value of sending both girls and boys to school.

Gender equality

CLCs have demonstrated that they provide new opportunities for girls and women to attend literacy programmes and participate in income generating activities leading to better living conditions and status. However, studies undertaken in 2001 by UNESCO in 16 countries under the project “Basic Education for Lifelong Learning and Gender Equality in CLC” showed that most CLCs still face numerous challenges with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment. Overall, CLC projects and programmes have responded to women’s practical needs but not to their strategic needs such as knowledge, skills that are needed to improve women's status in society, their relationship with their male counterparts etc. There has been very little systematic gender analysis in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes. There is also a need to involve more women in the decision making process of the CLCs.

The Gender in Education Programme in APPEAL initiated a project in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam in 2004 to mainstream gender in CLC activities and to build the capacity of CLC personnel in this regard. As a first step, a set of needs assessment tools were developed and piloted to identify ways in which CLC programmes and staff could be more gender-responsive. This was followed by gender training of CLC management and staff. Master trainers were identified and further trained in project countries to build a pool of local expertise in this area. Support is also being provided to reach and empower out-of-school girls and boys to raise awareness among their parents and community members on the value of sending both girls and boys to school.

Gender equality

The Gender in Education Programme in APPEAL initiated a project in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam in 2004 to mainstream gender in CLC activities and to build the capacity of CLC personnel in this regard. As a first step, a set of needs assessment tools were developed and piloted to identify ways in which CLC programmes and staff could be more gender-responsive. This was followed by gender training of CLC management and staff. Master trainers were identified and further trained in project countries to build a pool of local expertise in this area. Support is also being provided to reach and empower out-of-school girls and boys to raise awareness among their parents and community members on the value of sending both girls and boys to school.
Regional Cooperation

The CLC project has been executed differently in each participating country based on the local situation and needs of the community. To support the efforts of participating countries, regional cooperation has developed project frameworks, innovative approaches, practical tools and resources as well as building the capacity of personnel.

Regional forums

Joint planning: To initiate the project, APPEAL organized joint planning meetings in 1998 – 1999 for participating countries to review community based education programmes, to examine the concept of CLCs and to formulate goals and action plans to initiate pilot projects. A generic framework of CLCs was developed as a guide for participating countries to implement national level activities.

Sharing experience: APPEAL organized regional forums to share the experience of CLCs among participating countries. Held in 2000, 2001, 2004 and 2005, the forums reviewed delivery mechanisms for literacy, continuing education and various community development programmes, linking with national policies and strategies of education and development.

Training: A series of training workshops on CLC management, material development, in roll of facilitators and networking were organized to strengthen the capacity of key CLC personnel. The training programmes also covered development issues including ICT use, life skills, gender, income generation, mother tongue literacy, HIV/AIDS and equivalency programmes.

Resource materials

APPEAL, in cooperation with experts in the region, developed resource materials to strengthen CLC operations and implementation of literacy and continuing education programmes. Key resource materials are a series of handbooks on: CLC management; NFE facilitators; facilitator literacy material development and implementation of continuing education.

These materials have been distributed to the countries of the region for adaptation and for development of local resource materials. Country-specific resource materials are available from government offices in charge of NFE or APPEAL’s network agencies in the region such as ARTC (APPEAL Resource and Training Consortium) members and also LRCs (Literacy Resource Centres for Women and Girls) coordinated by ACCU (Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO).

Research studies

APPEAL has coordinated a number of research studies on CLCs concerning the establishment of networks and linkages as well as effective implementation and impact of CLC activities. These research studies provide EFA stakeholders with evidence for strengthening and institutionalizing CLCs within the framework of the EFA plan.

Several evaluation studies on CLCs have been undertaken as part of a pilot project including evaluation reports of Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mongolia and Nepal.

Inter-regional cooperation

In view of growing interest from regions outside Asia to learn from the Asia-Pacific CLC experience, APPEAL has engaged with the Arab region and African regions for study visits to selected Asian countries, participation in regional workshops and adaptation of APPEAL resource materials.
Lessons learned and future directions

Advocacy for CLCs at all levels is crucial through more critical and strategic analysis. Descriptions on CLCs so far undertaken are necessary but not sufficient to provide policy makers with enough evidence for institutionalizing and integrating them into the national system. A database should be developed, covering a variety of experiences and also arguments in favour of CLCs.

The balance between community ownership and government involvement is a delicate but important issue which requires further study and information. Different types of CLCs were reported including: CLCs initiated by government or with the help of development partners from outside the community; CLCs with a stronger emphasis on community participation; and CLCs initiated by the government then handed over to the community.

To meet the expanded notions and changing demands in the community, CLCs need to establish strong linkages among themselves to share experience and resources.

Further efforts need to be made to target disadvantaged groups including ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, women and girls. The notion of literacy and learning through CLCs has been expanded from the Rs (reading, writing and numeracy) or academic subjects, to acquisition of essential life skills leading to improvements in the quality of life. CLCs need to provide opportunities for all for life long learning by expanding access in non-formal education policy. CLCs should be autonomous bodies. At the same time they need support from external agencies, governments and NGOs.

Interventions of external agencies should help identify problems and develop practical solutions jointly with the CLC and the community. While many organizations emphasize the importance of community participation, there are instances where greater levels of external support and involvement have proved to be necessary and useful in programme design as well as in implementation.

Regional networks of APPEAL such as the Resource Training Consortium (ARTC) and Literacy Resource Centre for Women and Girls (LRC) should be more closely linked with the implementation of CLCs at the national level and also document the lessons learned in the development of CLCs in the region.

CLCs aim to provide learning opportunities for all throughout their lives, in rural as well as urban areas. As a regional programme, APPEAL will continue to facilitate the sharing of experience in developing CLCs through regional and sub-regional review meetings. APPEAL will also maintain its support to develop CLC personnel’s capacity for management and training and for establishing linkages with partners for enhancing sustainability. In addition, APPEAL will continue its work in the production of reports and other publications that document innovative actions, and good and effective practice. It will also document the lessons learned in the development of CLCs in particular countries of time-bound policy. CLCs will contribute to the strengthening of CLCs in the region as it is desirable to establish a regional CLC network such as a CLC Federation along the lines of the Kominkan network in Japan or Indonesia’s newly established CLC forum.

Examples should be further documented and shared in the region to contribute to the strengthening of CLCs. In view of the interest in and expansion of CLCs in the region it is desirable to establish a regional CLC network such as a CLC Federation along the lines of the Kominkan network in Japan or Indonesia’s newly established CLC forum.

APPEAL’s Continuing Support to Countries to Develop CLCs

APPEAL does not promote a rigid and definitive model. CLCs have set in motion a flexible and open way of providing learning to people of all ages, especially to those hitherto underserved or un reach ed. While the priority group remains the most disadvantaged and excluded, CLCs can provide learning opportunities for all throughout people’s lives, in rural as well as urban areas. As a regional programme, APPEAL will continue to facilitate the sharing of experience in developing CLCs through regional and sub-regional review meetings. APPEAL will also maintain its support to develop CLC personnel’s capacity for management and training and for establishing linkages with partners for enhancing sustainability. In addition, APPEAL will continue its work in the production of reports and other publications that document innovative actions, and good and effective practice. It will also document the lessons learned in the development of CLCs in particular countries of time-bound policy. CLCs will contribute to the strengthening of CLCs in the region as it is desirable to establish a regional CLC network such as a CLC Federation along the lines of the Kominkan network in Japan or Indonesia’s newly established CLC forum.
For more information please contact:
UNESCO Bangkok
APPEAL Unit
Mom Luang Pin Malakul Centenary Building
920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong,
Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Tel: +66 2 3910577
Fax: +66 2 3910866
Email: appeal@unescobkk.org
www.unescobkk.org

www.unescobkk.org/appeal/clc