

Participatory Bilingual Education: The Highland Community Program in Cambodia

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Cambodia is a kingdom in South-East Asia with a population of approximately 15 million. Ethnic Khmer, predominantly Buddhist, constitute close to 90% of the population. Their language is Khmer, making Cambodia one of the linguistically least diverse nations in the region. About 25 other languages are spoken in the country. City-dwelling Chinese, Cham and Vietnamese living along the waterways make up the largest minority groups, while several ethnic minority groups, often labeled “indigenous peoples” or “highlanders,” are predominately located in the northeastern provinces of Cambodia. Highland Community Program in Cambodia is a participatory community school model of bilingual education that targets Indigenous Highland Children and was established by Government, NGO’s and Civil Society in response for sustainable development and opportunities available to children of remote indigenous ethnic minority communities. Students are taught primarily in their native languages at first, and the Khmer language is progressively introduced. The program is based on community participation: communities establish their own school boards based on traditional decision-making processes; these boards are robustly involved in the development of the books and materials used in the schools; they manage the schools; and they select people from within their communities to be trained as teachers. The teachers and schools need to use bilingual education for indigenous minority group communities to achieve education for sustainable development and CMDG’s. What are the good practices in bilingual education for sustainable development programs could be documented, analyzed, and shared. Bilingual education for sustainable development is defined as all learning activities undertaken throughout time with the aims of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and /or employment-related perspective for indigenous minority group in Cambodia.