



Joint Press Release

National action plan launched to promote multilingual education in Cambodia

Expanding access to quality learning for children from ethnic minority communities

KRATIE, Cambodia, 1 March 2016 - The Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP) was launched today in Kratie Province at an event presided over by His Excellency Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) in the presence of stakeholders and partners, including national and sub-national government representatives, community members, UNICEF, CARE and other development partners.

The National Action Plan provides a roadmap to expand multilingual education to reach more children from ethnic minority communities in Cambodia by enabling them to learn in their mother tongue to strengthen the quality and relevance of their learning. The Plan includes planning for more schools, training teachers and developing teaching materials for the multilingual education programme in the north-eastern provinces of Ratanak Kiri, Mondul Kiri, Stung Treng, Kratie and Preah Vihear.

"The Multilingual Education programme is essential to reach the Sustainable Development Goals for inclusive and equitable quality education in Cambodia", the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport said. "It serves as a bridge for Cambodian children who do not speak Khmer at home and allows indigenous children to learn in school effectively and understand what their teachers say in the classroom", he continued.

The National Action Plan covers until the end of 2018 and aims to increase the number of multilingual education pre-schools by 88 percent (64 pre-schools) and multilingual education primary schools by 100 percent (108 primary schools).

"This plan underpins the political will and commitment of the Government of Cambodia to ensure children's equitable access to learning by providing education that is tailored to the needs of children from ethnic minorities," said Debora Comini, UNICEF Representative to Cambodia. "The next important step will be to ensure that the Government allocates sufficient budget to expand the multilingual education programme in a sustainable manner. While the coverage of this programme does not yet match the scale of the needs for multilingual education due to its resource intensive nature, this is an extremely crucial step forward towards hopefully further scaling up in the future."

With support from UNICEF and CARE, the multilingual education programme is currently implemented in five provinces for pre-school children and in four provinces for primary school children. To date, more than 5,500 children learn in pre- and primary schools implementing the multilingual education programme using five ethnic minority languages, namely Brov, Tampuen, Kreung, Kavet and Phnong. A total of 150 teachers have so far been fully trained in multilingual education.

Joanne Fairley, CARE Country Director in Cambodia, congratulated MoEYS on being the first



country in the region to launch a plan like MENAP. "The launch of this National Action Plan is an excellent example of the benefits of long-term partnership. Many years of collaboration between those involved, under the leadership of the Ministry and with the support of CARE and UNICEF, have resulted in a clear plan which will have far-reaching impacts for children from ethnic minorities. As multilingual education enters its next phase we hope to continue this fruitful partnership and look to future opportunities for increasing the impact of multilingual education further."

It is estimated that 64 per cent and 58 per cent of the population in Rattanak Kiri and Mondul Kiri, respectively, belong to an ethnic minority group. According to the 2008 census, 41 per cent of the non-Khmer mother tongue speaking children had never attended school at that time.

Studies have shown that it is easier for children to learn a second language if they begin to learn it in their mother tongue. A child learning at school in a language not used at home is more likely to experience poor performance and marginalization from education. The expansion of multilingual education will allow more children from ethnic minority communities to start their pre-school and primary education in their mother tongue, while being gradually introduced to the national Khmer language until they are confident to learn fully in Khmer as they advance to higher grades.

The National Action Plan also outlines a number of strategies to ensure quality and sustainability of the multilingual education programme, such as:

- Providing additional training to ethnic minority teacher trainees on how to teach in two languages;
- Providing recognition to multilingual education community teachers who meet minimum standards so they can receive state school teacher status;
- Publishing teaching and learning materials in indigenous languages and ensuring all students have sufficient access to them; and
- Transforming community multilingual education schools to become state schools which are managed by the MoEYS.

"MoEYS will continue its strategic partnership with UNICEF and CARE to strengthen multilingual education for children from ethnic minority communities in Cambodia. In 2016, the Government aims to change the status of all community teachers who teach multilingual education to Government paid staff to ensure retention and sustainability", added Excellency Dr. Hang Chuon Naron.

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For more information about this initiative, refer to the attached Multilingual Education Programme fact sheet.

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