

## Voices from the Field

# Engaging Adolescent Evaluators to Review UNICEF Cambodia Activities

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Two adolescent evaluators hold a focus group discussion with some local children.

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UNICEF Cambodia just finished the office's first review using Adolescent-Led Evaluation as an approach. This internal review looked at two different UNICEF-sponsored activities. One, called Magic Classroom, screens short, interactive and educational videos on different health, nutrition and WASH issues for villagers in the provinces of Kratie and Ratanakiri, as well as in Phnom Penh. These videos cover topics

such as handwashing with soap and proper use of latrines. The review also looked at the Community Preschool Playgrounds that UNICEF has helped build in the same northeastern provinces. The playgrounds provide local children with a safe place to play and develop. This review was conducted internally in order to assess whether these two activities were meeting their goals and objectives as well as to pilot the adolescent-led evaluation approach.

In this review, the team at UNICEF Cambodia identified groups of four adolescents, aged 15-19, in each of the three locations where the activities were implemented (Kratie, Ratanakiri and Phnom Penh). The cohorts were all gender balanced and composed of students who were both traditionally good students and those who excelled in other ways. We also made sure to engage adolescent evaluators from ethnic minority communities, which allowed for some data collection

to occur in villagers' mother tongue of Tampoun, removing the boundaries seen with external evaluators who use Khmer only.

Following identification of cohorts, the Enabling Adult Team, composed of the Evaluation Intern and a Youth Evaluator and Translator with the support of the Evaluation Specialist and M&E Officer, traveled to the field to begin the review. The team had already prepared materials, such as tools and rubrics, beforehand. Once there, the Enabling Adult Team trained the adolescent evaluators on main concepts of evaluation and on how to conduct interviews and focus group discussions. Then, the adolescent evaluators, with support from the team, went out into nearby villages to perform the data collection on the two different activities. Finally, the adolescent evaluators analysed the results and provided recommendations. The Enabling Adult Team then used these results and recommendations to formulate overarching recommendations for all three locations, synthesized into a comprehensive assessment report.

Through the work of the adolescent evaluators, we now have more information on how to improve health, nutrition, WASH and playground programmes so that they benefit more people in a more effective manner. The respondents in this review were already quite pleased with the activities and appreciated having access to these different resources. One parent said “[the playground] makes the kids healthy and be brave.” A student that was interviewed said that she liked the lessons because “it makes me healthier” and because “if you are hygienic, there are a lot of friends who will like you.”



Cohort of adolescent evaluators in Phnom Penh with the Enabling Adult Team. © UNICEF/2018/Fisher

However, of course, these activities have some small gaps and areas for improvement, such as playgrounds that lack fencing to keep out animals, or individuals who live too far from where Magic Classroom sessions are held. As these activities move forward, the recommendations from this report will be used to fill in these gaps.

By engaging adolescents in this review, or in other programme design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation activities, UNICEF will be able to create programmes and plans that are more inclusive. While children, adolescents and young people are at the core of all the work done at UNICEF, they are rarely key players in these aspects of the organization's work. When

we seek their inputs and perspectives, we will be able to better respond to the needs and realities of life in Cambodia, and anywhere else UNICEF works. As Erica Mattellone, Evaluation Specialist at UNICEF Cambodia, said, “when we engage children, adolescents and young people, we create better programmes to achieve greater results in Cambodia and around the world.”

Additionally, by facilitating more youth involvement, those young people are simultaneously gaining important, and often marketable, soft and hard skills. For example, in this review, the adolescent evaluators reported feeling more confident speaking to groups or to adults and now know how to perform interviews and focus group discussions, which could also lead to career opportunities after finishing school. One participant said that they “gained good experience for my life, and I now know how to communicate with partners or other people.” Thus, by promoting adolescent and youth participation, we are simultaneously improving our programmes and helping prepare adolescents for life outside of school and helping them gain new skills.

While this review provided useful and tangible feedback on the two activities that were analysed, it also showed us that adolescent participation is highly useful and empowering to all those involved. For more information, check out the video, [available here](#).