

The Inclusion, Mobility and Multilingual Education Conference

Exploring the role of languages for education and development

134C

From Literacy to University in 20 Years: Case Study of the Kavet MTB-MLE Non-formal Education Initiative in the NE Cambodian Highlands

By Anne E. Thomas and Thit Phing

The indigenous peoples of the NE Cambodian Highlands have long been geographically and politically isolated, with limited access to government services. Two decades ago, very few indigenous community members of the NE Cambodian Highlands could read, write, speak the national language, or use numbers. Their languages did not yet have writing systems. Instructional materials and Non-formal Education (NFE) initiatives starting in the mother tongue and bridging to Khmer were developed together with the local communities, and volunteers were trained as instructors. The NFE classes became a stepping stone to accessing formal education as well as further capacity building through the NFE programme.

This case study traces the development and implementation of the Mother tongue based (MTB) approach with the Kavet people using a non-formal education (NFE) approach. It covers two decades of progress and impact, including challenges, obstacles, lessons learned, best practices, and impact on national education policy. Kavet villagers who participated in NFE initiatives now hold a variety of local leadership positions as well as technical posts including health, education and national park staff. Community members are active participants of village-based committees for development, education, health and natural resource management. The MTB-MLE approach has been shared through study visits and exchanges with other countries. The Kavet co-author began his education as a literacy student twenty years ago and is now responsible for materials development, dictionary compilation, and teacher training. The co-author and other Kavet non-formal education graduates are the first cohort of Kavet University students.