

Bridging authorities and civil society



In a Brao village along the Sesan River, evening literacy classes are held teaching Brao children their indigenous language. Even though the facilities may be primitive, the teaching methods are not. Teachers are using creative ways to teach, like decorating the classroom with posters, slogans and Khmer and Brao proverbs to teach lessons about morality and virtue. The teachers are also teaching the students about child rights, such as the right to education, right to development and the right to protection. This literacy class is conducted in addition to and in connection with the government primary school in the village.

In another Brao village, also along the Sesan River, the authorities and community are likewise working together to ensure their children have proper education in both Brao and Khmer languages. The government primary school in the village teaches Khmer and other subjects during the day, and in the evening the same school is used for literacy classes teaching students in their mother tongue. The outcome of this collaboration between the government school and literacy class is that students are finishing Brao Primer 6 and are able to continue with the Khmer Primer 2 in the literacy class.

The parents enjoy seeing how their children can read and write in their mother tongue and Khmer, after both learning in the literacy class and the government school. The parents consistently participate by monitoring their children's learning. They are happy when they hear Brao songs set to modern Khmer melodies, or when they listen to recorded talks about education, that their children have downloaded onto their mobile phones. They seem to listen as much for their own enjoyment as well as encouraging their children to study too.

Volunteer literacy class teachers in this Brao community and in other indigenous communities in Mondulakiri and Ratanakiri provinces have been trained by ICC iBCDE project (identity Based Community Development and Education) to provide bilingual non-formal education to local villagers. This is done in both their indigenous language and in the national Khmer language by using a three-step formula that allows students to start literacy learning mainly in their mother tongue, but gradually change over to use Khmer language more and more. When the students pass the Khmer Primer 2 exam, they are accepted to enter grade 4 in the government primary school, which counts for all literacy classes in Ratanakiri province. This enables the indigenous students to participate in the national education system, and opens up opportunities for further education. Also, the teaching resources used in literacy classes have been developed by the iBCDE team in close collaboration with the indigenous communities. Hence, the study materials fit their needs and circumstances.

Authorities and civil society are also collaborating on provincial and national levels, and here the iBCDE team often represents the indigenous people in meetings with provincial departments of Education and with the Ministry of Education. This is a role and responsibility to which the iBCDE team gives high priority and considers of utmost importance, because the project seeks to fulfill people's right to education.

In The Universal Declaration of Human Rights it says, that all people have a right to education, *and education should help people become the best they can*. The Cambodian government has committed to apply The Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all Cambodians. Hence, ICC is committed to collaborate with the authorities to see that this comes true also, for the indigenous people in Mondulakiri and Ratanakiri provinces in Cambodia.