

REACHING YOUTH WITH HIV/AIDS MESSAGES IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia has the highest rate of HIV infection in Asia. Approximately 2.7% of the population ages 15-49 are infected with HIV. A number of factors contribute to the spread of the epidemic, including low levels of education, high poverty rates, recent population migration, growth in the sex industry, and the lack of resources in public health agencies. To address this crisis, World Education has partnered with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to integrate HIV/AIDS education into the formal school curriculum and to develop community activities to reach out-of-school youth. The HIV/AIDS Education for Youth Project has been successfully implemented across remote districts in northwestern Cambodia.



In Cambodia, youth are learning about how to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS, and are passing the lessons on to their out-of-school peers, through the HIV/AIDS Education for youth Project.

Funded by UNICEF and World Education, the project teaches youth about many issues relating to HIV/AIDS. In addition to learning how HIV is transmitted and how the disease affects the body, young people learn how to share prevention messages with other community members.

One main objective of the project is to address misconceptions about HIV to prevent discrimination against people infected and affected by the disease. Children whose parents live with HIV/AIDS or who have been orphaned as a result of AIDS often experience discrimination. Because of the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and the strain on family resources, many of these children stop attending school. The project works with teachers, school administrators, and community members to lay the foundation for acceptance and support, and to harness community resources to help people living with HIV and AIDS, as well as those affected, such as children.

The project is conducted through a cascade training model. Project trainers train school administrators, who in turn train teachers on how to use the HIV/AIDS curriculum in the classroom using participatory-style teaching. Ultimately, HIV/AIDS messages flow from the teachers to the school children who then continue to build awareness of out-of-school youth.

Teachers not only learn how to teach about HIV/AIDS in the classroom, but they also strengthen their teaching skills. Learning how to focus on the needs of their students, they are trained to help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. They also use local resources as teaching tools, conducting community mapping surveys to better understand community problems and available resources. School administrators are trained to support the teachers so that the program can be sustained at the community level.



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Many young people in Cambodia do not attend school regularly. To reach these youth, the project engages community members and the students trained in the school programs to develop and implement HIV awareness activities. Teachers select young adults in the upper grades who are seen to be leaders. These youth are supported by adults in the community who help them conduct outreach activities for out-of-school peers. Activities range from one-on-one training sessions to group sessions to large-scale community events. Large-scale community events have drawn over 200 community members. Youth put on skits that include role plays on issues related to HIV/AIDS. This type of community outreach draws people of all ages because of its festival-like atmosphere. The music, the noise, and the positive tone projected from such events attract many villagers, which exposes a large number of people to HIV/AIDS education.

Local temples also support community outreach activities. Monks often help students organize skits and education sessions for some of the out-of-school youth to educate them about HIV/AIDS. Working with monks and local temple associations allows the project to draw on the significant role that religious leaders play in communities throughout Cambodia.

From classroom instruction to large-scale community events, World Education has witnessed the positive impact the HIV/AIDS Education for Youth Project has had on community members. Currently, discussions are underway with the (MoEYS) to expand the program into other areas of Cambodia. This expansion will broaden the ability to reach larger numbers of community members and will strengthen the fight against HIV/AIDS in Cambodia.

For more information about World Education projects that address the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Cambodia and elsewhere, please go to www.worlded.org or contact:

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