

US Ambassador Visits World Education-supported School in Rural Cambodia

The U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia, Mr. Joseph A. Mussomeli, and a delegation from the US Agency for International Development visited the O’Krieng Primary School in Samobo District, Kratie Province on January 23, 2008.

Ambassador Mussomeli said that education in Cambodia has progressed remarkably over the last decade. However, many Cambodian children including those children with disabilities, children living in remote areas, children from ethnic minorities, and girls still face difficulty in accessing school.

The Ambassador said, "This is the best learning environment for children that I have seen in Cambodia. The school has a friendly atmosphere, and it is clear that the students and teachers enjoy being here. If I had had such a nice school when I was a kid, even I would have enjoyed going to school!"

USAID-supported Educational Support for Children of Underserved Populations (ESCUP) program is designed to increase access to and quality of basic education to underserved groups, including the poorest of the poor, disabled children, girls, and minority groups. ESCUP interventions promote access to and quality of education by improving teachers’ skills and school-community partnerships.

ESCUP follows the Child Friendly School initiative of the Royal Government of Cambodia’s Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, in which an integrated development approach to improving the quality of education has been a key feature. The Child Friendly School approach attempts to make schools attractive, friendly, open places where all children are happy to attend and receive an education best suited to them. In line with this initiative, the ESCUP project supports many innovative activities such as life skills education, school readiness programs, child-to-child help networks, village-based remediation classes for slow learners, recruitment and training of community teachers, bilingual classroom assistants, and scholarship support to children from poor families.

The director of the O’Krieng Primary School said that among the many activities in the school supported by USAID are a cultural center, student playground, life skills support, and integrated pest management [agriculture] activities. The school director expressed his appreciation of the visit by the delegation, NGOs, and especially the presence of the US Ambassador who met with villagers, school teachers, and students in the area.

ESCUP, implemented by World Education in a subcontract to the American Institutes for Research, is active in Kampong Cham, Kratie, and Mondulhiri Provinces. It serves 63,000 children in 150 primary schools and 16 lower secondary schools. By improving the learning environment in schools, dropouts and grade repetition have been reduced. In addition, 1,007 children with disabilities have been identified, referred for treatment and enrolled in schools; and 5,300 students have received scholarship support from the program. In order to deal with the acute shortage of teachers in Cambodia, ESCUP has helped to deploy 169 teachers, both state teachers and community teachers, to teach in remote areas where some classes have a high pupil teacher ratio (60 to 70 students per class) which is one of the factors contributing to student dropout.

World Education has been working in Cambodia since the early 1990s to improve education and health outcomes. To learn more visit www.worlded.org.