



## SUCCESS STORY

# Digital Libraries Improve Access to Information in Rural Areas



Aide et Action Cambodia (AEA) works to improve quality and accessibility of educational materials for all Cambodians, especially minority populations and those in the rural areas. Photo: Development Innovations

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Children from marginalized populations often fall behind in their education when their specific needs are not understood and met. In Cambodia, children from the Kingdom’s ethnic minority groups face an added level of complexity: their language and culture do not align with what they are taught in school. Many are not proficient in the national language, Khmer, which is unfamiliar or unknown to them, yet is the only language in which learning materials are created at schools. Before children can become good learners in a second language, they need to learn their mother tongue first.

Recognizing this, NGO Aide et Action Cambodia (AEA) has been working to help improve access to educational materials in indigenous languages for ethnic minority students and teachers in Mondolkiri and Rattankiri provinces. Since 2017, Development Innovations has supported AEA to develop multimedia materials in libraries at seven target primary schools as part of the Khmer LEARN project. With a smart TV, tablets, visual audio-lingual and printed materials that are continually updated with newly produced and locally written materials, this digital library has been serving as a learning place where young students can access information in their own languages, and materials built for them. Since the digital library has been in place, hundreds of students have used the materials.

Teachers, administrators and students have given the library good marks. The director of Krouch Primary School Srei Vireak, a school made up of a majority of students from the Tompoun ethnic group, said, “This library is very helpful for teachers and students, as well as the community. Before, many young kids, especially those at the early grade level did not want to come to school and their parents had to keep pushing them every day. However, most of the things have changed since we have the digital library in school; it attracts students for schooling more regularly and makes their learning joyful. Many teachers said that their students learn faster with access to these new materials. For parents, they acknowledged positive behavior change on their kids toward learning and they are also more active in participating in school activities.”

AEA has developed an innovative implementation plan for this project to boost the potential for sustainability. Many teachers need access to supplementary training materials to help improve their teaching. Digital content, videos and infographic materials can help them add value to the existing curriculum. The AEA project subsidized 50% of the tablet cost for teachers at the target schools. All the tablets were installed with useful applications that can support their teaching, and help them do more learning. “There are a lot of important applications in the tablets that contain resourceful materials for teaching and learning. If I had to buy it from market, I would have to pay full cost and not sure if I could get these useful applications installed,” said Horn Sokheng, a grade 5 teacher at Royar Leur Primary School, Mondolkiri.

AEA has had marked success developing tools and systems to support teachers with Khmer language materials on the popular Khmer Learn applications, and now, through the funding from Development Innovations, has expanded to serve minority populations, including over 40 teachers and almost 2,000 students in Mondolkiri and Ratanakiri. In its next steps, AEA hopes to foster a community in Mondolkiri and Ratanakiri that uses and maintains the platform as a common good. Their vision is that all educational content developers can use a common platform that promotes collaboration and reduces redundancy.