

2-Education for the blind in Cambodia

2-1-History of Blind Education in Cambodia

No government in Cambodian history have looked into the education for disabled people, which have been forced to live in isolation from society. Only few slightly disabled people such as cripples go to normal schools but there are no special schools for these kinds of disabilities.

This is because of the limited ability in education for normal children, let alone disabled ones. The needs and rights of people with disabilities were recognized by Krousar Thmey which created a first school for blind children in 1994.

Krousar Thmey is an apolitical and non-religious Cambodian NGO. It was created in 1991 in the site II refugee camp on the Thai Border and started in Cambodia in 1992. Krousar Thmey has three domains of intervention. Child welfare, educational support, cultural and artistic development.

2-2-Why it is important for blind to go to school

Every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.

Schooling and education helps all children to learn about the world around them and to become useful members of the community. It is important to send blind children to school as basic knowledge is essential for them to become autonomous adult. As the Cambodian proverbs say **“Knowledge is food and wisdom is a weapon”** **“Knowledge is an excellent wealth”** ...etc. Without knowledge they will live in the world of hopelessness and isolation. As Cambodia is a poor country, so blind children are likely to become beggars or street children which are one of the heavy burdens for the government. To help Cambodia move out of poverty we must give all children the same opportunity to access a proper education. Without giving education to blind children Cambodia cannot move from the poverty trap and achieve the universal primary education in 2015. As we know education enables people to earn money and helps people avoiding being cheated and exploited.

2-3-Education program for blind children

The Education for the blind children follows by the national curriculum plus additional subjects like: English, traditional music, computer and weaving. Krousar Thmey created Khmer Braille and continues to translate national school books and other books into Khmer Braille. Krousar Thmey also creates specific tools and adapted materials to facilitate for blind teaching. Among the national curriculum some courses are very hard

for the blind to study such as: Geometry and experimental courses such as: physics, biology and chemistry.

3-Inclusive Education Practice of Blind

3-1-What is inclusive education?

Inclusive education is an approach that seeks to meet the learning and schooling need of everyone and does not segregate some because they might have different needs or abilities. It is based on the idea that segregated education is almost always unequal education and that schools must change in order to accommodate student diversity foster and enriched learning environment for all students. With respect to disability, inclusive education was perhaps the earliest issue recognised internationally as critical within the framework of development cooperation.

3-2-Objective of the inclusion

- To provide the same opportunities and educational experiences for blind children as those provided for sighted children.
- To assist them to reach basic education grade 9.
- To help them how to get along with others, how to behave, and how to work with others.
- To develop the abilities children have.
- To help children to accept the rules and take responsibility.
- To help children to form friendships and give them the feeling of belonging to the group.
- To help children to become independent adults.
- To increase supporting and involving of the government to the education of the blind.
- To increase awareness of human rights which lead to a reduction of discrimination.
- To be a part of integral to achieve Education for All strategy.

3-3-Activities of Krousar Thmey toward inclusive

3-3-1-Integrate in Public Primary School

From grade 3 we integrate our blind children to the local public school which are nearest to the Korusar Thmey special schools. In primary school they study half of the day in regular school and other half of the day they come back to study at Krousar Thmey schools with their special teachers. At public school blind children sit closer to front and

average learners who help them during the lessons. Little by little they learn how to help the blind appropriately. Blind children need to bring their Khmer Braille translation books to school everyday; with these they can follow the lesson easily at school. Public teachers who teach our blind children need to attend the complementary training at Krousar Thmey School. KrousarThmey teachers and public teacher always meet each other to share and solve any problem they may meet.

3-3-2-Integration in the public secondary school

In secondary school blind student also attend public school for a half a day. They do not attend all classes. Some are not possible for them to follow like sewing classes or library time there is no book translated into Braille in the library. Instead, blind children come back to Krousar Thmey to study additional courses and revise their lesson with their specialized teachers. Secondary schools teachers also receive training on “Teaching Mathematic to Children with visual impairment”. One staff of Krousar Thmey passed on this knowledge to those teachers after the training in Bangkok, funded by ON-NET. They learnt Braille code for Mathematics. For monthly and semester examinations the teachers always do oral test, if they do written tests, blind student exchange their copies between each other for correction, or Krousar Thmey teacher help public teachers to correct. During national examination to finish grade 9 and grade 12, in an agreement with Ministry of Education and Krousar Thmey, Krousar Thmey teachers need to translate the exam copies into Braille and then hand them to the blind student with the close monitoring from official of the ministry, or examination inspectors can read the copies to blind listen and record after finish the writing, they start to do the exam. During examination process the blind student sit in separate room from the normal students.

4-Our Achievement

- The number of blind children attending the inclusive school has increased every year.
- The ability of the blind student is comparable to the sighted.
- We practice teaching inclusive for blind in the city and 3 big provinces in Cambodia.
- Our program is well-known among the public.
- Changing attitude of the public toward blindness. They are recognizing the ability of the blind.
- The government of Cambodia, especially ministry of education has become more involved in education for blind by drafting the national policy for special education.
- Our program contributes to raising awareness on the issue of exclusion of disabled persons from access to education because of lack of structure, skills and

political willingness of the government to address the problem, despite the rhetoric of Education for All.

- The program offers unprecedented opportunity to blind children to access to public schooling system at primary and secondary school.
- Our blind children can study at the public school from grade 3-12 with less repeated and dropped out rate.

5-Our Difficulty in inclusive Education for blind students

- Some schools principals are not willing to accept blind children in their school.
- The public teachers teach the blind like others normal students; sometimes they could not understand the lesson well.
- Krousar Thmey teacher need to spend time to review each lesson with the blind children after they come back from the public schools to make sure they understood the lessons.
- Some courses designed by the ministry of education for sighted children, are difficult to learn for blind children, such as: geometry, chemistry, physic, biology...etc
- Blind students are very sensitive to sound but sometimes they are disturbed by their classmates or their next door classes. When they faced with the noisy environment they could not listen well to the teacher explanation.
- Relationship between blind students with the normal children. Some sighted students still discriminate the blind.
- Our children are not completing autonomous because they still need help from special teachers.
- Government has no special fund for inclusive education for blind.
- Regular class teachers do not have skills needed to teach blind children.
- Most of the parents' blind children are not involve in their children's education, who depend solely on Krousar Thmey.
- Public teachers lack of technical aids and equipment to teach blind children.
- Inaccessible facilities such as toilet for disabled people in the school especially for the blind children make them hard because the number of pubic students is higher than number of student at special school. So, it makes the blind difficult in going to toilet during the break time.
- Number of students in classes of public school is over, so it is hard for teachers to pay more attention on blind students.

- Our blind student lack of specialized tools such as , books, and specialized equipment and technology to assure equal access to the core and specialized curricula, and to enable them compete effectively with their peers in school and ultimately in society.
- Level of commitment for blind student is limited because they are not confident that what they will do next after they finish high school because in Cambodia no public or private university accepts blind student yet.
- Most of the students' study materials were produced by Krousar Thmey not the government.
- Policy makers do not pay a lot attention on inclusive education for blind.

6-Our solutions

- If the school directors of the public school are not willing to take our blind children to study at their school we will try to insist until they agree. If we can not reach an agreement we will seek intervention from the Provincial Office of Education or for the Ministry.
- To help the public teachers to know about how to teach blind children we will conduct a regular training every week and they will attend the full course of two month complementary training in summer holiday.
- Public teachers and teacher of special schools always meet each other to solve the problem they meet and share any information related to the study situation of the blind and also check attendance.
- To understand the lesson well we ask our blind students to bring their translated Braille books to school everyday. Sometimes they need to study the lessons first with their special teacher. As a result when public teachers explained the lesson again they can understand better.
- To encourage and motivate the school directors and public teachers who teach our children Krousar Thmey pays a complement to their monthly salary paid by the government.

7-Our Limitations

- The inclusive classes for the blind are limited because of Krousar Thmey's abilities.
- Braille code understanding of public teacher is limited, so teachers try to learn new things from their students.
- There is no national policy for inclusive education.

8-Our Future Plan

- Continue to work and lobby the government to create a national policy for special education which will benefit education for blind children.
- Continue to solve barriers and problems we meet in practicing inclusive education.
- Continue to train public teachers in methodology to help them teach blind student.
- Conduct more awareness campaign to promote education for blind children and to change the mental attitude of the community toward blind children.
- Improve capacity building of Krousar Thmey staff in teaching blind children.
- Our long term goal is to make all Krousar Thmey special schools training centers for education for blind children throughout the country.

9-Recommendation

- Develop step-by-step the framework of action for implementing inclusive education for blind.
- Find the way to change the negative attitudes in the schools and communities.
- Disable teachers were essential for inclusive education to be successful, but there were number of challenge to achieve this, such as cultural prejudices or legislation that prevents people with disabilities from attending government teacher training colleges.
- Suggest to the government to add more building and toilets to make it easy for blind children to go to study and use.
- Motivate teachers in government schools to adopt the “joyful learning” and “disabled children center” approach associated with the revised, competency-based school curriculum.
- Recommend the ministry to cut out some subjects which are too difficult for the blind student.
- Constantly train key public teacher about the new concept of inclusive.
- Create materials adapted to the real needs of education of blind.
- The government should create a national policy for special education.
- Increase public awareness through campaigns.
- Give the opportunity for blind students to enroll in university.
- The government should create a vocational training for the blind after they graduated high school to help them earn the living in the future.

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