

HIV/AIDS Prevention Education for Youth: Working with In-School and Out-of-School Populations in Two Provinces of Cambodia

World Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

Background

World Education's Cambodia Field Office has been operational since 1992. The past thirteen years have allowed us to develop skills and experience in a number of areas for which we now provide leadership in the education sector. Our *IPM in Schools Program* provides an innovative means of improving pedagogy and learning outcomes through experience-based learning in agriculture which can be transferred all along the formal curriculum, and provides a highly culturally relevant medium for nonformal education. The *OPTIONS Program* and its predecessor, *EPSSEG* (Education as a Preventative Strategy against Sexual Exploitation of Girls), uses education as a preventative means against human trafficking and sexual exploitation, as well as HIV infection and blind migration. Both programs stress life skills education, and both are firmly grounded in existing government mechanisms through which they are implemented. World Education provides technical assistance in areas of curriculum development, training and program management. Our UNICEF-funded *HIV/AIDS Education for Youth Project*, which ended in December 2004, supported the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in developing and implementing a school-based HIV/AIDS education program with a strong community outreach component. World Education worked with Ministry staff to train teachers through an in-service teacher training program, and young teacher trainees through a pre-service training program at teacher training colleges. In addition, the *Cambodian Living Arts Project* has combined traditional performing arts with a modern theme of HIV prevention in developing and producing shadow puppet performances for urban populations in Cambodia. The performances promote safer sexual behavior and educate audiences about HIV/AIDS.

World Education has built on this broad base of expertise in designing new interventions targeting in-school and out of school youth in Takeo and Pursat provinces for HIV/AIDS prevention education, which combine an emphasis on life skills, nonformal education curriculum development and training. Funded by HealthNet International, a Netherlands-based NGO which has received a grant from the European Union to help develop and oversee new HIV prevention strategies in these two provinces, World Education's interventions range in duration from five months to one year and are considered pilot projects to demonstrate innovative techniques for combating HIV/AIDS infection among youth for possible scale-up in the future.

Project Goal

The **goal** of World Education's HIV/AIDS Prevention Education for Youth activities in Takeo and Pursat is to change behaviors and attitudes of youth in and out of school (ages 15 to 24) related to HIV/AIDS, thereby making them less vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. **Objectives** include: to improve the quality of learning regarding life skills and HIV/AIDS awareness for youth; to increase and enhance school and community support for HIV prevention activities; and to increase the capacity of district and community level stakeholders to support HIV prevention activities.

Project Approaches

World Education's strategy for working with youth in Takeo and Pursat is subdivided into three components.

IEC and Life Skills for Out-of-School Youth works with adolescent boys and young men, adolescent girls and young women, and married couples. World Education employs a two-pronged strategy for behavior change among out of school youth living in 100 villages in two districts of Takeo Province. Individualized life skills classes for each of the three groups will combine issues of HIV awareness and human sexuality with a range of additional topics highly relevant to the individual sub-populations, such as responsible fatherhood for males; sexual exploitation and migration for females; and child development and household management for married couples. Peer education will also be carried out among all three youth sub-populations, to provide opportunities for counseling and information dissemination to take place in informal settings. Local communities will be heavily involved in project implementation. Commune council members and stakeholders from local schools, health

centers and other groups will be involved as mentors for peer educators, life skills facilitators and in project planning.

In-School IEC and Life Skills Training for HIV/AIDS is implemented in nine separate lower secondary and secondary schools in Pursat and Takeo provinces. The pilot program is subject to extension should results prove positive. The project combines a life skills approach with peer education for in-school youth. In addition, targeted youth will be involved in setting behavior change goals and in developing specific information, education and communication materials to facilitate behavior change among their peers. Teachers and community members will be involved in life skills training, mentoring peer educators and IEC development and dissemination.

A third strategy for working with in-school youth is entitled, **Promoting Healthy Youth**, and entails creating Health Clubs in four secondary schools in Pursat Province. World Education and the schools will employ health clubs as a means of getting students interested in the topic of HIV/AIDS through membership and participation in the Clubs. Membership in the Health Clubs will be by application only, and subject to approval by School Working Groups. The School Working Groups, formed from teachers, parents and concerned community members, will also serve as advisors to the Clubs. Club members will engage in HIV education and outreach activities, community mobilization and IEC development and dissemination.

Target Areas and Beneficiaries

World Education is working in 13 schools in Takeo and Pursat, reaching more than 9,500 students. In addition, teachers, school directors, the provincial and district nonformal education departments, and other community stakeholders—such as parents—will be involved.

