

'There is a learning crisis in Cambodia – education is the answer'

UN Eradication of Poverty Day is celebrated on 17 October every year. Poverty is complex and seldom has a single cause, but it is undoubtedly a violation of human rights. Evidence shows that quality education is a powerful tool in combating poverty, with the potential to empower people and transform lives and communities.

Following the Cambodian Civil War 40 years ago, the Khmer Rouge regime killed 90 per cent of the country's teachers. Those who survived were faced with years of hardship, as schools were all but nonexistent and illiteracy was rampant.

The impact of the Khmer Rouge regime is still evident in modern-day Cambodia. Schools are now abundant, but learning is not. Less than three per cent of Cambodian children reach minimum learning standards in numeracy and literacy. On average, a Cambodian child will spend 4.7 years in school.

Cambodian educational attainments are trailing far behind those of their neighbouring countries, including Thailand and Vietnam. The reasons are many: the continuing effects of a troubled history, quality of teacher training, resources, economics and a lack of parental learning support. The result is tragic on an individual and national level, as the life prospects of thousands of Cambodian children are diminished.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on Cambodia, a country that relies heavily on tourism. Schools have been closed for over 230 days and many children will never return to school. Remote or distance learning was an impossible challenge for children in rural areas as children do not have access to computers or wifi. It is fair to say

that there is a learning crisis in Cambodia today. This is a bleak analysis but there is hope and a genuine appetite to create real change for the future.

SeeBeyondBorders Ireland, a registered charity, is working on the ground in Cambodia to improve education for Cambodian children. We recognise the teacher as the most important resource in education. Through workshops and mentoring, we work with Cambodian teachers to deliver evidence-based programmes. With quality support, children's literacy and numeracy levels have been transformed.

We have also introduced an Educational Technology programme, which is bringing technology to rural schools providing much-needed resources to support learning. This year, our Educational Changemaker programme offers a two-year graduate programme to young Cambodian women.

The aim of SeeBeyondBorders is to create systemic change in the education system in Cambodia.

Many of us who are involved in SeeBeyondBorders are teachers and we are working in solidarity with our Cambodian colleagues. We work together in partnership, and we are all learning from each other.

We are a small organisation but we

have big dreams for the future.

We are very grateful to our donors for helping us to carry out our programmes, in particular the INTO, RTAI, Cornmarket and Comhar Linn, as well as all the individuals who have donated directly.



Do you want to support our work? Contact: maeve.corish@seebeyondborders.org, or visit www.seebeyondborders.ie. SeeBeyondBorders Ireland is part of the Cambodia Ireland Changemaker Network.

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