



INTRODUCTION

This *Integrated Report* is one of the products of the Asian Development Bank's Technical Assistance Contract No. 5794-REG, entitled "Health and Education Needs of Ethnic Minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion" (GMS). This study focuses on an analysis of the health and education status, needs, constraints, and opportunities of highland ethnic minorities in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam, and reviews relevant policies and programs intended to address these factors in the four countries. As a part of this project, individual country reports were prepared for those countries (see Appendix A for summaries).

The report introduces many of the common themes that were found in the country studies. It also seeks to synthesize individual country research reports and the discussions held during in-country workshops, in order to highlight crosscutting themes and to offer regional recommendations.

These four countries are distinct from one another in many ways. They differ in terms of history, political and governmental structures, economic base, and level of production and development; however, these areas are nonetheless linked in numerous ways beyond their shared borders. Common characteristics of these countries include recent economic growth and crisis, large ethnic minority populations, and upland and mountainous terrain.

The past decade has seen enormous economic growth, often with significant reduction of poverty, in most of the countries in the region. Although the Asian economic crisis of 1997 and 1998 tempered this growth, the gains are

still substantial and impressive. Maintaining and distributing these gains fairly is a major challenge for all countries in the region.

One common characteristic is the ethnic minority peoples (see Section 1.2 below for definitions) among their populations. Among the nearly 240 million people living in the GMS, roughly 21 million are of ethnic minority heritage. Many of these groups span the political borders of the region. In addition, many are socially marginalized, leading to poorer health, lower educational attainment, fragile means of livelihood, and, therefore, a compromised ability to attain a decent standard of living or to contribute to the economic development of the region.

Another shared characteristic in the GMS is a large proportion of upland and mountainous terrain that lacks the level of infrastructure available in the rest of the country, and in which many of the ethnic minority peoples live and work. Upland, mountainous areas are regarded by planners and developers as an opportunity for relieving population and land pressure in the lowlands, whereas environmentalists want to preserve the forest and other fragile ecosystems. Thus, the very livelihood of the people resident in these areas is besieged from both directions.

1.1 Study Goal and Objectives

In 1992, the Third Ministerial Conference under ADB's Greater Mekong Subregion Initiative identified the poor human development of ethnic minorities as one of seven priority issues. Health and education are basic elements of this development. This study



Overlook en route to Phongsaly Province, Lao PDR. The topography of the highland regions in the GMS countries poses many challenges to service delivery. Low population densities, few roads, and limited communications make it difficult to deliver health and education services. Many remote areas are accessible only by foot during the rainy season. (Photo by Inthasone Phetsiriseng)

grew out of the GMS working group on human resource development as an area requiring further attention and understanding.

The goal of the present ADB study is to foster the well-being of ethnic minorities living in the mountainous and border areas of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam, and to increase their opportunities for good health and education. This study also seeks to understand the capacity of providers to design and deliver services responsive to ethnic minorities' needs and to inform decision making at all levels.

The specific objectives of the research project are to

- Identify constraints that impede access by ethnic minorities to responsive health and education services.
- Identify local, national, and regional opportunities that exist and can be fostered to address needs and to remove or reduce constraints.

- Identify and document good practices of responsive health and education services.
- Identify strategies, approaches, tools, and interventions that respect minorities' chosen ways of living.
- Organize and support efforts to disseminate and exchange research findings, case studies, and other experiences with ethnic minority organizations and the general public, as well as key personnel in health, education, and related sectors.

The Asian Development Bank has increasingly oriented its lending toward activities that directly benefit vulnerable populations; moreover, as noted above, indigenous peoples were identified as a key vulnerable population in the region. The Asian Development Bank's *Policy on Indigenous Peoples* of April 1998, which provides a foundation for this study, says that

indigenous peoples may be regarded as one of the largest vulnerable groups in society. While differing significantly in terms of culture, identity, economic systems, and

social institutions, indigenous peoples as a whole most often reflect specific disadvantages in terms of social indicators, economic status, and quality of life. Indigenous peoples often are not able to participate equally in the development processes or share in the benefits of development, and often are not adequately represented in national social, economic, and political processes that direct development. (ADB, 1998, Introduction)

In 1999, the Asian Development Bank adopted a new poverty reduction strategy, placing the objective of reducing poverty at the center of ADB's mission, as its overarching goal (ADB, 1999b). In the GMS, highland ethnic minorities are among the poorest populations and need to be at the center of poverty-reduction strategies in the region. It is clear that ethnic minority highland populations tend to be poorer and more vulnerable than the general population. These population groups have significant health and education needs.

1.2 Study Methodology and Key Definitions

To address its objective, this project has applied several different methods:

- A review of the existing relevant research, policy, and program documents and statistics;
- Informational interviews with officials and technical personnel in key ministries, government institutions, other government offices, development agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including field studies in the areas where ethnic minorities reside and work;
- Brief structured field surveys; and
- Multiple evaluation methods to review project and program interventions and highlight noteworthy programs serving areas with significant ethnic minority populations in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

The work has been led by local research staff, working with representatives of key policy and implementing agencies in each of the four countries. Representative provinces in each country were selected for field work, which involved the completion of key informant interviews and observations at the provincial, district, commune, and village level.¹

The policy analysis and qualitative field work have focused on the access that ethnic minorities have to social services and the constraints that impede their effective access. Social services are one of the most important, although they are by no means the only factor that contributes to the health and education status of ethnic minorities. Better access improves the opportunities that ethnic minorities have to raise their health and education status. By using supply and demand of social services in health and education sectors as lenses to focus on minority groups, the study results identify related issues raised with respect to social exclusion, poverty, environment, and infrastructure, among others.

A number of key terms require clarification to establish operational boundaries for this study.

“Ethnic minority.” The diversity of peoples residing in the countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion is vast, and the factors affecting service provision in urban, rural lowland, and rural upland and highland settings are similarly diverse. The study team adopted ADB's working definition of “indigenous peoples” (“those with a social or cultural identity distinct from the dominant or mainstream society, which makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the processes of development” [ADB, 1998, para. 12]), and amended that definition to specify those living in highland and upland

¹ In Cambodia, field activities covered the provinces of Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri; in Lao PDR, field work was completed in Phongsali, Sayaburi, and Khammouan provinces; and in Thailand, field interviews were completed in Lampang and Chiang Mai provinces. In Viet Nam, field work was completed in the provinces of Dak Lak (Central Highlands) and Son La (Northern Highlands).

settings. Special attention is given to the particular circumstances of groups fitting this description who live near international borders.² The study explicitly excludes minority ethnic groups that live primarily in lowland areas, urban areas, and along the coast. For example, the Hoa in Viet Nam and Cham in Cambodia are explicitly excluded from this study.

This study is grounded in the approach that it is important to focus on highland and upland ethnic minority populations as such, rather than to simply speak of rural highland dwellers or underserved, poor populations. The highland and upland ethnic minority groups of this study generally are poor, underserved populations, but they are also the subject of specific policies and programs in most of the countries under study and they present particular linguistic, sociocultural, and, at times, political considerations that do not generally apply to other poor or underserved populations.

“Greater Mekong Subregion.” The term “Greater Mekong Subregion” encompasses the five countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam, plus China’s Yunnan Province. Thus, the geographical range of this study extends beyond those provinces or areas that physically touch the Mekong River or its tributaries. As previously mentioned, this study focuses on ethnic minorities in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

² Note that the ADB definition does not speak of numeric “majorities” and “minorities,” but rather focuses on the dominant and nondominant groups at the national level. Actual numerical “minority” status is not the salient feature. Indeed, at subnational levels, the term “minority” is technically incorrect. In numerous provinces, districts, and communities across the countries of the GMS, “ethnic minority” groups represent the clear majority of the population of the area in question.

“Effective access.” Not all factors contributing to the health and education status of ethnic minorities in the GMS can be addressed in the present study. We have singled out factors related to *effective access to services*, whether public or private. We use the term “effective access” to connote a state in which the populations of interest not only *have physical access* to services, but also *are using them*, and in which the services are perceived by recipients as effectively addressing their needs.

1.3 Report Content

This *Integrated Report* presents a synthesis of the health and education needs of the ethnic minority populations in the highland provinces of the four focus countries. It is based on the results of the country studies that were conducted in each of the four countries by local teams. The regional summary and analysis emphasize constraints to service access and effectiveness.

The *Integrated Report* begins by describing the status of ethnic minorities in the target countries. This portion draws heavily on the information presented in the four country reports. This introduction is followed by a discussion of *crosscutting themes*—i.e., issues affecting those in more than one study country—that pertain to ethnic minorities and the social sector. They should be considered as the basis for policy by governments, stakeholders, and donors, such as the Asian Development Bank.

The report concludes with the presentation of a series of points as the recommendations coming from the study’s research. The appendices provide additional information, including the summaries of the four Country Reports (Appendix A) and a proposed set of research and technical assistance projects that follow from the study’s recommendations (Appendix B).