

CIESF Leaders Academy, Grade 5 (Cambodia)

What Are the SDGs?

Fifth-grade students at CIESF Leaders Academy (CLA), located in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, took on the theme “Do you know about the SDGs?” for their class project. While continuing their studies in both Cambodian and Japanese, the students researched and presented global and local issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in their own words and from their own perspectives.

The Beginning of Learning: What Are the SDGs?

A classroom survey revealed that about 80% of the fifth graders had never heard of the SDGs. Many students said they had seen the term before but did not understand what it meant. With guidance from their teacher, they began learning about the Sustainable Development Goals, a set of global targets adopted by world leaders in 2015 with Cambodia among the participating countries.

They paid special attention to Goal 4: Quality Education and explored how the lack of access to education can create a chain of problems for individuals and societies alike.

Team-Based Research and Presentations

The students split into two groups: a Research Team and an Information Team.

- The **Research Team** conducted a school-wide survey at CLA to measure awareness of the SDGs. While sixth graders showed high awareness (largely owing to learning from Japanese supporters), 90% of students in grades 1–4 did not know about the SDGs.
- The **Information Team** chose SDG goals they were interested in and researched them online.

For example:

- Goal 2: Zero Hunger led them to explore the health impacts of sugar-heavy diets.
- Goal 5: Gender Equality introduced the students to real stories of girls who were not allowed to attend school, just because of their gender – something they found deeply unfair.

- Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation highlighted the issue of rural communities in Cambodia still relying on unsanitary water sources, such as rivers and ponds, which cause both health and environmental problems.

Cambodia's Unique "18th Goal"

At the end of their presentation, the students introduced Cambodia's own 18th SDG through a quiz:

"What do you think Cambodia's 18th goal is?"

The answer: the removal of landmines and unexploded ordnance from past conflicts. The students explained that over 28,000 landmines remain across an area equivalent to 68 Tokyo Domes, emphasizing that this remains a real and dangerous issue in Cambodia today.

Looking to the Future

Through this project, the students realized that many of the SDG-related challenges exist not only globally, but also right around them in Cambodia. They expressed a strong desire to work together to help solve these problems by 2030, and closed their presentation with the message:

"We will think about what we can do – and then **try doing it.**"