

SOCIAL HEALTH PROTECTION

BETTER HEALTH FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND OLDER PERSONS

Challenges

Over the past two decades, the Kingdom of Cambodia has made great strides in reforming the country's health system. Investments in health infrastructure and the establishment of health financing mechanisms have greatly expanded access to health services for Cambodia's 15 million inhabitants. However, more needs to be done to increase access to quality health services for the most vulnerable Cambodians. Persons with disabilities and older persons have more health needs than the general population, but face multiple barriers to accessing care. Moreover, they are often marginalised in a public health system which is primarily focused on acute illness and maternal and child health. In addition, health care workers show limited awareness of the rights and specific health needs of these vulnerable groups.

Cambodian society is ageing, with the proportion of people 60 and older projected to rise from 7.2 percent in 2015 to 17.8 percent in 2050. In addition to a substantial burden of communicable disease, the country faces an upsurge in non-communicable and chronic conditions related to this demographic transition. More than half of deaths each year can be attributed to cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes, cancer and other non-communicable diseases. There is also a high prevalence of disability: according to the 2014 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey, 10 percent of Cambodians over the age of five – and 44 percent of those over 60 – report living with one or more disabilities. The shift towards chronic conditions implies increased demands for preventive, curative and rehabilitative services which Cambodia's health system is not yet able to meet. Specialised services are mainly concentrated in urban areas, excluding large segments of the population from access, and the coverage of rehabilitation services is low.

Project name	Social Health Protection
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Cambodia
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Health
Overall term	2015 to 2018

Persons with disabilities and older persons in Cambodia face an overlapping set of barriers to accessing health services. Average out-of-pocket health costs are three times higher for older persons and five times higher for persons with disabilities, compared to the general population, putting both groups at risk of impoverishment due to catastrophic health expenditure. Many health facilities are not physically accessible and communication barriers can undermine the quality of care. In addition, there is little health information which specifically targets older persons and persons with disabilities, and their overall level of knowledge about health is low. Health workers generally have limited knowledge of disability-related health needs, and stigma, discrimination and negative attitudes are widespread.

In order to address these challenges, it is essential that persons with disabilities and older persons be actively engaged in local-level planning processes which are accompanying the gradual decentralisation of responsibility for health service delivery in the country. However, many members of these vulnerable groups lack basic information about the services available, their right to access health care, and the existence of health financing mechanisms to support this access. As a result of their marginalised position in society, their voices often go unheard during decision-making processes in their communities.



Photo left: Dancers with EpicArts, a Kampot-based NGO, raise awareness of the needs and rights of persons with disabilities
Photo right: A comprehensive screening tool allows for the early detection of impairments among newborns and children



Dr. Vanny Peng
vanny.peng@giz.de
Tel.: +855 77 60 66 07

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GIZ Cambodia please visit:
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Living with a disability in Cambodia

*New health centres are built with ramps
to facilitate access for persons with
disabilities and older persons*

Our Approach

The Cambodian-German Social Health Protection project, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), supports the Royal Government of Cambodia to provide poor and vulnerable Cambodians with equitable access to good quality, affordable health services. Since 2013 the project has mainstreamed a focus on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons across all its focus areas (health financing, health services delivery and health systems governance) as part of Germany's commitment to inclusive development cooperation measures. In addition, it supports specific interventions at a national and provincial level which aim to increase health-related knowledge and awareness of the right to health care among persons with disabilities and older persons.

At the national level, GIZ works closely with the Cambodian Disabled People's Organisation (CDPO), the umbrella body for Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in Cambodia, to bring a stronger focus on health into the organisation's monitoring and advocacy activities. It has supported the development of a National Health Advocacy Strategy (2016-2018) which will guide CDPO's efforts in the coming years to improve access to affordable and quality health services for persons with disabilities countrywide. The project is also cooperating with CDPO on the development of a training curriculum, informed by the findings from two baseline studies conducted in Kampong Thom, Kampot and Kep provinces, which will be used to build the capacity of DPOs to organise and advocate on health-related issues.

At a provincial level, GIZ works directly with DPOs and Older Persons Associations (OPAs) to build organisational capacity, to strengthen their ability to advocate for their members' needs and interests, and to become sustainable organisations with diversified sources of financing. The project has supported six DPOs – one in Kampong Thom, four in Kampot, and one in Kep province – with training in basic health issues, disability rights, and client and provider rights and duties. Other trainings have focused on organisational processes, such as how to organise effective meetings, conduct community forums and implement health awareness activities. The supported DPOs, in turn, work to raise awareness of health and the rights of persons with disabilities in the health system among members of local Self Help Groups (SHGs). Plans are underway to roll out a similar model with OPAs in target provinces.

In order to strengthen the voice of persons with disabilities and older persons in sub-national decision-making processes, GIZ works to ensure that representatives of DPOs and OPAs are engaged in the development of commune investment plans, which determine priorities for socio-economic development, infrastructure and social services at community level. DPO and OPA representatives also participate in the development of annual operational plans for health facilities and hospitals, sharing feedback from their members and advocating for changes which would improve their access to health services (e.g. building ramps, adding sign boards, renovating toilets).

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Social Health Protection Project (SHPP)
GIZ Project Office at NIPH
P.O. Box 1238, #2, Street 289, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
T +855 23 88 44 76
F +855 23 88 49 76
www.giz-cambodia.com

Author(s) Dr. Vanny Peng and Laura Sterner

Layout Jenny Nickisch

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Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany

Addresses of the
BMZ offices

BMZ Bonn
Dahlmannstraße 4
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 99 535 - 0
F +49 228 99 535 - 3500

BMZ Berlin
Stresemannstraße 94
10963 Berlin, Germany
T +49 30 18 535 - 0
F +49 30 18 535 - 2501

poststelle@bmz.bund.de
www.bmz.de