



SOCIAL HEALTH PROTECTION PROGRAMME

Delivery of quality health services: still a challenge in Cambodia

A legacy of civil war continues to impact the health situation in Cambodia, which has one of the lowest life expectancies in the Asia-Pacific region. Today, Cambodia's challenges include high maternal and infant mortality rates and a growing burden of non-communicable diseases. Recent research found a disability rate of 10.1% of children between 2 and 9 years alone in addition to high rates of chronic conditions in the general population.

The public health system suffers from a lack of qualified personnel, substandard equipment and facilities and low staff salaries and allowances. The monthly salary of nurses and doctors is about USD 100 and 190 respectively. This salary is not commensurate with the cost of living. Many health professionals supplement their income with private practices, often resulting in a shortage of staff in public hospitals and clinics. Thus, many Cambodians prefer private health care. However, due to lack of regulations, patients bear most of the cost of private treatment themselves. Catastrophic health expenditure and debt frequently affect all households in Cambodia, except for the most affluent families. In 2009, Cambodians spent an annual average of USD 28 per person on health care; this means that 4.3% of households spent more than 40% of their disposable income on health and 3.8% struggled to repay health-care-related debts.

Gender norms and inequalities have also a negative impact on Cambodians' health. While one third of women faces problems in accessing health services due to lack of permission from their husbands or partners, men are less likely to seek health assistance and avoid exposure to certain risky and unsafe situations.

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| Project name | Social Health Protection Programme (SHPP) |
| Commissioned by | German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) |
| Project region | Cambodia |
| Lead executing agency | Ministry of Health |

The Cambodian Ministry of Health has launched a comprehensive health sector reform to improve the health of all Cambodians, aid poverty alleviation and to enhance socio-economic development. The current Health Strategic Plan 2008-2015 focuses on five areas: health service delivery, health care financing, human resources for health, health information systems and health system governance.

Setting standards in health care services

Since 1995, the German Technical Cooperation has supported Cambodia's health sector in the areas of reproductive health, quality management and capacity development. In 2005, GIZ added social health insurance to the development efforts. The Cambodian-German Social Health Protection Programme, launched in mid-2009, continues and expands the Technical Cooperation's support to these areas and reinforces collaboration with the German Financial Cooperation (KfW Entwicklungsbank). The second phase, which began in July 2011, focuses on three components of the Ministry's Strategic Plan: health care financing, health service delivery and health system governance. GIZ provides strategic advice to the Ministry, helps to implement social health protection schemes and strengthens local health systems in Kampot and Kampong Thom Provinces. GIZ supports



Photo left: Nurse providing health information to a patient

Photo right: Promotion of charter on clients' rights and providers' rights and duties



Training of midwives

Collection of funds for transport and food allowances to facilitate access to health services for the poor

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the Ministry in drafting clinical guidelines and quality standards for health services and in the introduction and expansion of social health protection systems. GIZ supports training centres, hospitals and health centres in rural areas. The new governance component boosts accountability and efficiency through client feedback mechanisms, informing patients of their rights and responsibilities through information sessions.

The project encourages the sharing of information and experience between the various entities. In this way, the usefulness of national guidelines drawn up at policy level can be tested in local health centres and hospitals. The lessons learned are reported back to improve standards for countrywide implementation. The programme is planned with sustainability in mind to ensure long-term support to the Cambodian health system at the local and national level.

Results for women and children

GIZ and its partners have made significant contributions towards achieving the goals of the health sector reform in Cambodia, especially in improving the lives and health of women and children. Trainings and continuing education for midwives and nurses have increased their capacity to provide safe deliveries. For example, 82% of midwives in the provinces supported by the project meet national quality standards.

Additionally, KfW's contribution to the joint programme focuses on vouchers to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services and reduce maternal mortality. Meanwhile, GIZ helps to improve maternal and child health through training and supervision of nurses and midwives in target areas. Additionally,

the newly launched Rights-based Family Planning and Maternal Health Project provides emergency maternal and newborn health care and family planning supporting the government's fast track initiative.

Putting patients first: Prioritising the poor and vulnerable

Local health insurance schemes supported by the project cover more than 18,000 members in Kampot and almost 130,000 members in Kampong Thom. More than half of the members are women. As part of the innovative approach to poverty alleviation, over 90,000 people living in poverty receive free access to the same health services as paying members, as well as transport and food allowances when seeking health care.

Being enrolled in a health insurance scheme protects members from falling into a debt spiral and poverty when facing ill health. Since project inception, use of public health services among health insurance members has significantly increased to well above the national average. GIZ assessments have shown that 85% of public health facilities supported by the project sustain quality improvement of their services.

The Cambodian-German Social Health Protection Programme is improving access to effective and affordable health care for impoverished and vulnerable populations in Cambodia, so that they increasingly use health services and enjoy healthier and longer lives. The Programme places specific emphasis on addressing the above-average health needs of older people with chronic diseases and people with or at risk of disabilities.

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