

Improving Social Protection and Health

Background

Cambodia enjoyed remarkable economic development over the last two decades where per capita gross domestic product rose from USD 300 (1999) to USD 1,700 (2019). Despite this, almost 50% of Cambodia's 16 million inhabitants are still categorised as poor or near poor. They remain vulnerable to life-shocks which can come in various forms such as illness or disasters caused by extreme weather.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused not only ill-health; poverty rate is projected to rise from 10% (2019) to 17.8% (2021) due to the pandemic's socio-economic impact. A key learning is that the national social protection system must be more resilient to future shocks. More shocks are anticipated as climate change brings about regular extreme weather and deforestation pushes wildlife ever closer to human habitats. Social protection's importance to cushion such shocks is widely recognised, but the national social protection system is still nascent. As such, the country has embarked on an ambitious development plan as outlined in the National Social Protection Policy Framework 2016 - 2025.

As for the national health system, two areas of weakness have been identified as requiring improvement:

- The education system for the fields of medicine and laboratory needs to be reformed to be in line with international best practices.
- Laboratories require further strengthening especially in terms of quality management and capability.



Project name	Improving Social Protection and Health
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
Project region	Cambodia
Lead executing agency	National Social Protection Council
Duration	October 2021 – September 2024

Our approach

The project adheres to the strategic direction of the National Social Protection Council and provides technical support in two complementary areas of work.

In the field of social protection, policy advice is provided to strengthen the strategic framework. Areas of focus include Universal Health Coverage, digital transformation, shock- responsiveness, and inclusiveness. Work is underway to enhance the public communications system so that the general population can better understand their social protection rights, entitlements, and participation possibilities. This includes building the capacity of the village chiefs who often are the people's main source of social protection system related information. The Identification of Poor Household (IDPoor) system is a cornerstone of the social protection system. It is being evolved to become a social registry, allowing proactive support instead of reacting only after a household becomes poor. Technical support is provided to two new organisations to refine the design and start operations.



Photo (L): Family receiving free health services provided through the Health Equity Fund

Photo (R): Refinement of Laboratory standard operating Procedures



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Photo (L): An elderly beneficiary of the cash transfer programme

Photo (R): Assessment of eligibility

These are the National Social Assistance Fund which is envisioned to operate all social assistance programmes so to improve operational efficiency and the Social Security Regulator which will work towards improving oversight, especially in the areas of fiscal health and programme effectiveness.

In the field of health, efforts are undertaken to improve the pre-service education system for the medical doctor and laboratory technician professions. The project supports the Health Science Institute of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and the Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital to develop new competency-based curricula which are in line with national standards. Upon completion of the curricula development phase, support will be provided in their implementation. The project cooperates with the Ministry of Health's Bureau for Medical Laboratory Services and the National Public Health Laboratory to strengthen the quality management systems of twelve laboratories. Areas being strengthened are development strategies, policies, digital transformation, and guidelines. This includes addressing capacity issues with efforts such as training, peer-to-peer collaborative learning, and improvement of standard operating procedures leading to accreditation.

The benefits

With more shocks anticipated, it is imperative for Cambodia to quickly advance its national social protection system and pandemic preparedness, especially in aspects such as governance, policy making, effectiveness, efficiency, and capacity of national actors to carry out their responsibilities. Contributions from the ISPH project will help strengthen these aspects.

Having an inclusive national social protection system helps cushion life-shocks, enabling destitute households to better lift themselves out of poverty and having a chance of living a dignified life. It is an important tool for the government in not only poverty alleviation efforts but also in the reduction of inequities and improve overall human development. The national social protection system thereby contributes to Cambodia's resilience, social peace, and economic development. Strengthening the pre-service education and laboratories will help Cambodia better manage the next disease outbreak. In the long run, the revised medical education system will ensure better quality healthcare for Cambodians.

Success Factors

The project's focus on strengthening foundational aspects of the system instead of focusing on specific social protection programmes or population groups distinguishes it from other development projects. This is due to the belief that the key to long-term, sustained development is to strengthen the national social protection governance system, including the ability of actors such as the National Social Protection Council, related line ministries, and specialised government agencies to carry out their responsibilities. Through an eye-level cooperation relationship, the project facilitates the sharing of learnings and best practices, factors contributing to sustainability and effectiveness, and values adopted from more mature national systems such as those found in East Asia, Germany and Europe, and Australasia. The aim is to positively influence the development journey, learning from others' best practices and mistakes. It will also concentrate on facilitating cooperation and peer-learning at the ASEAN level to ensure sustained capacity development in the long-run.

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