



**LOCAL GOVERNANCE FOR CHILD RIGHTS**

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## SITUATION

More than 30 years after the brutal Khmer Rouge regime shattered Cambodia, the government is taking meaningful steps toward democratic development in an effort to be more responsive to citizens' needs, the majority of whom live in rural areas, struggling to satisfy basic needs for their families.

Through an ambitious decentralization and deconcentration reform process, the national government is now placing increased authority and accountability at the provincial, district and commune levels to address challenges at the local level with the recognition that local officials are the best custodians of their communities.

As a result, needs for services that most impact children, including education, health and nutrition, child protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene, are now being assessed and prioritized by local government leaders, providing new opportunities for rural communities to play a role in the decisions affecting them.

However, investments in women's and children's issues remain a low priority for local governments, which have mostly focused on constructing physical infrastructure rather than the specific development needs of women and children. Yet the chronic challenges women and children confront at the local level stifle overall national progress.

Although public expenditure on social services has been traditionally low, the Government has indicated commitment to improving social sector spending as a percentage of the budget by increasing the number of schools, health centres and health posts in communes and villages, improving the delivery of operating funds at the district level and ensuring quality staff is available to provide services at the local level.

Cambodia has ratified important human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. The challenge now is to make sure these are translated into action and implemented at the local level.

The decentralization and deconcentration reform process provides an opportunity to address and mainstream major issues related to children and women into political and administrative processes. However, more must be done to prioritize human development through local initiatives that improve basic living conditions for women and children in order for national development to gain traction and have real impact.

UNICEF is working with the Government to ensure that the voices of children and women are heard in this process and that the key roles and functions of sub-national authorities in delivery of basic public services are identified and translated into legal instruments that will help to strengthen their capacities to effectively plan, manage and deliver services for children and women.

### LOCAL GOVERNANCE FOR CHILD RIGHTS – UNICEF'S PRINCIPAL SUPPORT

- Build the capacity of authorities at the provincial, district and commune levels, as well as Women and Children Focal Points and village leaders to identify issues related to the rights of women and children, and to take simple, measurable actions to improve the management and delivery of social services.
- Facilitate collaboration and dialogue between ministries, local governments, social service providers and communities, and support systematic monitoring and follow-up action to ensure that children's and women's rights are acknowledged and served.



### KEY PARTNERSHIPS IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE FOR CHILD RIGHTS

UNICEF works closely with the government under the overall coordination of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development. Our main government partners in this area are:

- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Women's Affairs
- Ministry of Planning

At the sub-national level, our partners include Provincial and District Boards of Governors, Provincial, District and Commune Councils, Provincial and District Women and Children Consultative Committees, and Commune Committees for Women and Children.

UNICEF contributes to national coordination efforts through its participation in the Technical Working Group on Decentralization and Deconcentration, led by the Ministry of Interior, and co-facilitated by the World Bank and UNCDF.

UNICEF also collaborates with a number of other UN agencies, research institutes, and national and international development partners.





## ENSURING CHILD & GENDER SENSITIVE PLANNING AT THE LOCAL LEVELS

Each Commune Council has an annual budget of approximately US\$24,000 through the government treasury system, but many communes receive two to three times that amount through donor and NGO support. However, communes tend to spend the majority of their budget on physical infrastructure, with limited funds directed to social services for children and women. Similarly, existing monitoring systems only track expenditures related to physical infrastructure, with no recording of spending on social services.

UNICEF is working with the government at the provincial, district and commune levels to strengthen capacities to map, collect and analyse data related to the situation of women and children, with the aim of increasingly responding to the needs of vulnerable families.

### WHAT WE DO

- Develop the capacity of authorities at provincial, district and commune levels, as well as Women and Children Focal Points and village leaders to:
  - Collect relevant and sex-disaggregated data related to children and women;
  - Analyse emerging issues and identify priorities related to children's and women's rights, child protection, maternal and newborn health, water, sanitation and hygiene, and early childhood education;
  - Plan and budget for these priorities;
  - Take simple, measurable and feasible actions to address the issues and priorities identified;
  - Follow up and monitor interventions.
- Support the organization of provincial and district fora to encourage collaboration among service providers and decision makers at provincial, district and commune levels.
- Work with Councils and Boards of Governors at provincial, district and commune levels to ensure that women and children are associated with, and participate in, local reform and the new democratic development process.
- Continue to strengthen the capacities of the local government to effectively engage in decentralized planning and budgeting, and management and delivery of public services with equitable access for the most vulnerable families.
- Generate and document experiences to influence policy development at national level on the delivery of quality services to the most vulnerable families to support the achievement of Cambodia's Millennium Development Goal targets.



## STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Children living in poor families are highly vulnerable in Cambodia, facing daily threats to their health, education, safety and overall development.

Many vulnerable children are pulled out of school to help with household chores or labour, and an estimated 52 per cent of children aged 7 to 14 years have been found to be economically active, much higher than other countries with similar income levels.

The lack of adequate social safety nets and welfare services often leads parents to resort to negative coping strategies, such as unsafe migration, child exploitation and labour, abandonment and placement of children in institutional care.

Child protection services are generally weak, underfunded and understaffed. With only one to three government social affairs workers per district, servicing approximately 25,000 people, it is difficult to ensure quality welfare services and support to all families in need.



## SUPPORTING LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY PRESCHOOLS

International research shows that access to preschool improves a child's developmental readiness for school. Yet, less than 20 per cent of Cambodian children aged three to five benefit from early childhood development programmes. The government's Education for All target aims to see 50 per cent of children in this age group having access to preschool programmes by 2015.

Preliminary results from a study carried out by Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and UNICEF (2007-2010) show that exposure to early learning has positive effects on a child's education, particularly in terms of right age entry to primary schooling.

UNICEF works with the government at the local level to develop and improve capacity to implement, monitor and coordinate interventions related to community preschools, whilst working at the national level to ensure vital technical support. UNICEF encourages an increasing role and contribution by Commune Councils and communities in financing and managing community preschools, working towards the objective that the preschools would eventually become fully sustained by the communes.

## WHAT WE DO

- Strengthen referral systems for vulnerable children, youth and families. Identify and train community support workers, organize child protection interventions, contract community support workers and monitor the concerned activities.
- Work with authorities at provincial, district and commune levels, Women and Children Focal Points and village leaders to increase services and financial support for vulnerable children, including children affected by HIV, to improve their living conditions and keep them, as much as possible, in their communities, rather than in institutions.
- Ensure access for vulnerable children to commune emergency funds in cases of acute distress (floods, storms, fire); financial and/or material support (school books, uniforms, bicycles to go to school, other school materials); and transportation costs in case of medical emergencies and health check-ups.
- Use social services mapping to collect and analyse data on key child protection indicators, and ensure that a monitoring system and progress reports are created to advocate for increased support for child protection in development plans and investment programmes.
- Document experiences and lessons learnt to influence policy development at the national level.

## WHAT WE DO

- Continue to support Commune Councils, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women's Affairs to establish and manage community preschools in order to expose more children aged three to five to activities that stimulate their learning and better prepare them for primary education.
- Support Commune Councils to identify and contract local volunteers to be preschool teachers, organize preschool classes, and monitor these activities.
- Support the Ministry of Education to develop training and teaching curricula, lead technical training for volunteer educators, provide initial teaching and learning materials and monitor classes.
- Support the Ministry of Women's Affairs to raise awareness of the importance of preschools among parents and community leaders and monitor implementation.
- Advocate for provincial and district Councils and Boards of Governors to support Commune Councils to plan and budget for community preschools in villages.
- Document experiences and lessons learnt to influence policy development at the national level.





## BOOSTING THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO MANAGE MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

Maternal mortality remains among the highest in the region, at 206 deaths per 100,000 live births. This means that an estimated 1,700 women die during pregnancy, delivery and the postpartum period every year. Cambodia also has some of the highest child mortality rates in the region. Although under-five mortality has steadily declined, from 124 to 54 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000 and 2010 respectively, neonatal mortality – deaths within the first month of life – has declined at a slower rate, from 36 per cent to 27 per cent between 2000 and 2010. As a result, around 10,000 babies die in the first month of life every year, mostly due to preventable conditions.

Malnutrition remains a significant problem, with 40 per cent of children under five stunted and 28 per cent underweight, according to Cambodia's 2010 Demographic Health Survey. Poor nutrition in young children is largely driven by inadequate complementary feeding practices, poor hygiene and high prevalence of diseases, including diarrhoea.

Micronutrient deficiencies remain widespread in Cambodia. Anaemia is common among children under five, with a prevalence of more than 80 per cent among children under two. Meanwhile, Vitamin A supplementation of children aged 6 to 59 months has significantly increased, from 11 per cent in 2000 to 60 per cent in 2010. Nevertheless, deficiencies in iron, zinc and calcium remain among the top concerns for children across Cambodia.

## WHAT WE DO

- Support the 24-hour functioning of health centres; equip health centres with solar powered batteries; support costs for electricity and gas; improve water and sanitation in health facilities; ensure a 24-hour guard presence; and support communication systems at health centres.
- In close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, work with Commune Committees for Women and Children and Commune Councils to identify and contract village health volunteers and coordinate and monitor their out-reach activities, such as health promotion and food demonstration sessions.
- Work with the Commune Committees for Women and Children and village health volunteers to stimulate demand for health services and improve family and community care practices by facilitating access to health services through organization of transportation systems for health emergencies; identification of transport providers for remote areas; negotiation of transportation fees; support of dissemination of information among villagers on transportation arrangements; arrangement of housing for pregnant women to stay before delivery; and liaison with religious leaders to address misconceptions.
- Document experiences and lessons learnt to influence policy development at the national level.

### COMMUNE COMMITTEES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN CAMBODIA

Commune Committees for Women and Children are an important bridge between communities, service providers and local authorities in promoting increased access to and delivery of essential services for women and children.

They act as an advisory body to the Commune Council on issues related to women and children. And they help to increase the priority given by the Commune Council to the delivery of essential social services for women and children, such as health centre outreach and school services.

The Committee meets monthly to report on key child development indicators and take follow up actions to improve health, education and protection outcomes in the commune. These meetings act as a platform for members to work collaboratively to directly benefit children in the commune.

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Access to safe drinking water and environmental sanitation is essential to reduce the number of child deaths due to disease, especially diarrhoea. Interventions to improve sanitation and hygiene and access to improved sources of drinking water have a direct impact on the health status of women and children. Studies have shown that using toilets for defecation can reduce the incidence of diarrhoea by 30 per cent.

According to the Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2010, only 25 per cent of Cambodia's rural population have access to sanitation, while only 53 per cent have access to improved sources of drinking water. Furthermore, the Education Management Information System 2009/2010 shows that 66 per cent of primary schools have access to improved sources of drinking water and 79 per cent to improved sanitation facilities.

Commune Councils play an important role in improving the sanitation and hygiene situation and improving water quality in Cambodia. UNICEF works with government at provincial and district levels to ensure that the necessary skills are in place to monitor water quality, sanitation and hygiene in their respective areas, and to ensure that provincial, district and commune representatives are able to use data related to the number of existing drinking water facilities, functioning wells and latrines to address needs related to water, sanitation and hygiene.

## WHAT WE DO

- Support community-led approaches to improving sanitation and hygiene through stronger engagement of Commune Councils in planning, facilitation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Strengthen the roles and responsibilities of the commune's Water and Sanitation User Groups to maintain existing drinking water facilities, promote household water treatment, safe water storage and water quality monitoring.
- Facilitate collaboration with NGOs, health centres, schools and local providers to encourage access to safe water and improve sanitation and hygiene practices.
- Ensure that monitoring systems are in place at provincial, district and commune levels to promote sustainable and improved water, sanitation and hygiene.
- Encourage the District Office and Provincial Department of Rural Development to provide technical support to communes on water and sanitation issues.
- Document experiences and lessons learnt to influence policy development at the national level.







## IMPACT

Programme evaluations and studies show that Commune Councils and Commune Committees for Women and Children supported by UNICEF have successfully modelled potential decentralized functions related to improving access, performance and oversight of primary health care, early childhood development, primary education, protection, and water and sanitation services. As a result, the Government rolled out Commune Committees for Women and Children nationwide and established statutory Women and Children Consultative Committees at other levels of local government.

The government has earmarked additional funds to support the communes in providing social services that address the needs of women and children. Implementation guidelines on social development by communes have also been developed, and orientation for communes is currently being rolled out.

Results from various surveys show that the Commune Committees for Women and Children are having a positive impact, with higher priority given to women and children's issues relating to health and education in communes where the Committees have been established. As a result, children and women's issues are now on the agenda of Commune Council meetings and are integrated into the commune development planning process. The Commune Committees for Women and Children are fulfilling a vital role in helping to expand the Commune Councils' mandate to improve access to social services for women and children.

UNICEF-supported communes have also demonstrated capacity in data analysis and use, planning and reporting, and leveraging resources for social provision through the decentralized planning and budgeting system. Documentation of this experience has influenced formulation of the National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development, and, in recognition, the Government has asked UNICEF to co-facilitate the dialogue on devolution of functions to commune, district and provincial councils.



**UNICEF CAMBODIA**

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