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Newsletter

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UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in more than 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

Equal rights and opportunities for people with disability

A joint UN programme aimed at ensuring equal rights and opportunities for people with disability was launched in Cambodia on Friday, 4 July. Funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Disability Rights Initiative-Cambodia (DRIC) Programme will be implemented jointly by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and World Health Organization (WHO).

People with disability make up about 5 percent of the country's population, according to Cambodia Socio Economic Survey in 2012. They face many barriers in daily life and lack access to appropriate, quality and affordable healthcare, rehabilitation, education and disability services that prevent them from full and effective participation in the society.

In 2012, the Royal Government of Cambodia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), in addition to a number of disability laws and strategic plans that show its commitment to address issues facing people with disability.

The joint programme has four components that will support:

- the government to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to effectively coordinate implementation of the National Disability Strategic Plan (NDSP);

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From a water scarce to a water supplier – a tale of one Cambodian village



Photo: UNDP Cambodia

Nuon Chhuon, a farmer, showers the pigs he raises in his backyard using water from a community reservoir in Kraing Serey village, Kampong Speu province. Construction of the reservoir and a connected pipeline was funded by Sweden as part of a broader initiative to improve resilience of rural communities to cope with effects of climate change.

Kampong Speu – The late morning heat was building up and Nuon Chhuon realized it's time to give his pigs a shower.

"They need to be hosed at least three times a day to cool off," the 69-year-old farmer said, referring to the 10 piglets that were busy competing for their mother's milk in the pen. "My son plans on getting married and this is where he will get his wedding money from."

Not long ago, raising pigs in his backyard never crossed his mind since his village of 335 people did not even have enough water for cooking and washing.

The construction of a water reservoir has finally put an end to their plight and brought significant changes to the lives of the people of Kraing Serey, in Kampong Speu province. And now they are discussing a bigger plan: to sell excess water to neighboring villages.

"There is more than enough water for us to go around these days. We can keep the excess water to entertain our eyes but that won't bring any income to our community," said Long Thim, 36, the community leader.

In the past, he said, the villagers spent on average four hours daily just on collecting water. Women, who make up more than half

of the village's population, bore the brunt of the work. Children often skipped classes to help with the task. Some people had their sleep shortened at night to rush to the wells before others could drain them of water. Others had to buy it from outside, paying US\$2 for every 400 litres of water just to last a few days. That's a heavy sum in a country where many people still scrape by on less than US\$1 a day.

"Only after we found some water to bring home could we set our minds on other things for the rest of the day," said Chea Sarom, 41 and a mother of five children. "My children used to look very unhappy whenever I made them go fetch water after they returned from school," she added. They no longer have to shoulder the burden since their home is now hooked to a pipe system that brings water up to their front yard.

Kraing Serey village is among rural communities without access to a sufficient water source – whether for farming or consumption. But its proximity to a foothill, the villagers said, makes it impossible to dig any wells deep enough to provide one of human's most essential needs. This is especially difficult during dry season.

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From a water scarce to a water supplier...

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The situation began to reverse in 2012. A reservoir – four meters deep and 5,400 square meters in size – was built, with funding from Sweden, to catch rainwater flushing down the surrounding hills. A pipeline was later laid to connect to all 67 houses in the village. They are now equipped with water-supplied toilets, which the villagers said have contributed to the decline in water-borne disease such as diarrhea among children. People are growing vegetables for sale and food. Others are raising pigs to diversify their source of income – and to collect manure to make cooking gas.



PHOTO: UNDP Cambodia

Son Kimhuon, 30, stores water in the jar at her house in Kraing Serey village. The committee in the village is now working on a plan to sell excess water to neighboring villages hoping to raise fund to the sustain the utility far into the future.

Now it's time to reach out to help their neighbors.

Long Thim said that, in May this year, the pipeline was extended to sell water to 20 houses in a neighboring village at 2,000 riel

(50 US cents) per cubic metre. He said the fee is only a third of the price charged by private water truck drivers. Currently, he and the villagers are studying a request to supply the water to another 400 homes in three adjacent villages.

"We knew fully well what it was like to live with water shortage and that is why we want to help others," he said.

He acknowledged that his planned enterprise will face challenges, but he believed it is doable. The reservoir has the capacity to meet the needs of both current and new users all year round. New customers will be charged 50 US cents per cubic metre, effectively saving them US\$1 for the same amount of water they buy from outside. He said money to be earned will be used for future development in his village and, most importantly, for ensuring the long life of the utility itself.

The reservoir project was carried out by the Small Grants Programme (SGP), with support from (UNDP), as part of a broader initiative to improve resilience of 450 rural communities in Cambodia to cope with effects of climate change.

Climate change strategic plan disseminated

Cambodia's climate change strategic plan (CCCSP) is gradually making inroad in the provinces for sub-national authorities to integrate into their development planning to improve its readiness in addressing climate change threats.

Ministry of Environment held a dissemination workshop in Phnom Penh on 25 June which was attended by representatives from government ministries, development partners and civil society organizations. It has previously conducted similar events in several provinces in a campaign to get the messages across to sub-national government bodies that fighting climate change is everyone's business.

"The Strategic Plan being disseminated is a significant step taken by the government in shaping its path towards becoming a resilient and low-carbon development nation," UNDP Country Director Setsuko Yamazaki said in her remarks at the workshop.

"This is particularly relevant to planners and practitioners at the sub-national level who are directly involved in supporting



PHOTO: UNDP Cambodia

Cambodian women give their inputs about climate change concerns in the commune investment plan at Chong Ampil commune office, Prey Veng province.

vulnerable communities to cope with the effects of climate change," she added.

The country's first-ever climate strategic blueprint, CCCSP was launched in November last year. It outlines the government's vision for promoting climate-resilient development for the next 10 years with focus on adaptation activities aimed at strengthening community resilience.

The dissemination of CCCSP also takes place against the backdrop of new evidence to back up previous findings on Cambodia's

vulnerability to effects of climate change. A study by the United States' credit ratings agency, Standard & Poor's, early this month placed Cambodia on the top of its list of 116 countries most vulnerable to climate change due to its heavy reliance on agricultural productivity, and weak capacity to cope with the changing climate patterns and extreme weather events such as drought and flood.

Ms. Yamazaki, UNDP Country Director, said these consistent results from international reports have only amplified concern over the country's ability to respond and call for immediate actions by all stakeholders.

While at the national level coordinated efforts have been made to integrate climate change into development plans, she said the spotlight is now gradually shifting to the needs to put in place local plans, capacities and investments to minimize climate change impacts on rural communities.

"[CCCSP] clearly is an ambitious plan that requires strong commitment and coordination from all stakeholders at both national and sub-national levels to align their work in contribution to this vision," the country director said.

Eco-tourism gives women a new lease on life

Siem Reap – When it was her turn, Tooch Yi maneuvered her wooden boat to the dock to pick up two tourists and began paddling away. Other women paddlers followed suit in an orderly fashion to give visitors a tour of the flooded forest in Kampong Phluk commune in northern Cambodia.

In this flooded community located on the edge of Tonle Sap Lake, women are getting a new lease on life through an eco-tourism scheme.

The project is part of a larger initiative to protect the flooded forest and fish habitat, and aims to provide the villagers with an additional means for a better life. Women, especially widows who are the sole breadwinners of their families, are the main target. They are among the most vulnerable group and in need of opportunities to earn income to prevent them from falling deeper in poverty.

Although they have adapted to their way of life already, the villagers face rather grim conditions in daily life here. Clean water is scarce. In case of medical emergency, they have to travel by boat, motorcycle and car to reach the nearest hospital in Siem Reap city, some 40 kilometres away. Since this is a flooded community, there is virtually no land space for rice farming and fishing is their way of life that dates back many generations already.

For Tooch Yi, 46, her options are quite limited though. Because of motion sickness, she is afraid of going out to the lake to catch fish like others do and so most of the time she confines herself to raising pigs and growing vegetables at home.

“Taking tourists on a boat ride is the only other job that I have to make some money,” said Tooch Yi, who has an 82-year-old father and an aunt under her care.



PHOTO: UNDP Cambodia

Cambodian women take visitors on boat tour of the flooded forest in Kampong Phluk on the northern edge of Tonle Sap Lake.

On Cambodia's tourist map, the famed Angkor temples are normally the most sought-after, making Kampong Phluk community an unlikely tourist attraction. But one draw there is the villages are made up of wooden stilt houses that line the canal, the main route for passenger and fishing boats traveling to and from the lake. Another lure is the sight of the lush green canopy of the Barringtonia trees that, when submerged during the rainy season, provide a perfect spawning ground for fish, the main source of protein for Cambodians.

One way to preserve the flooded forest, an area of about 5.5 hectares, is by turning it into a tourist destination, said 37-year-old Mut Siek, a member of the eco-tourism committee.

“This is the sanctuary for many kinds of birds and fish. Since we don't have land to plant rice, fishing is the only occupation we have. That is why, in the common interest, the villagers join together in preserving it,” she said.

Under the scheme, 25 women identified as the poorest of the poor were picked to receive a boat each at a price tag of US\$294 in credit. Under a mutual agreement, each woman makes

a monthly payment of US\$5 within five years after which they can own the boat outright.

On average, the site receives daily 200 visitors, who, after touring the famed Angkor temples, want to catch a glimpse of life in the flooded villages. Once they arrive at the wooden pier, which was built with UNDP's support, the camera-toting tourists, two at a time, hop onto a small wooden boat to be given sightseeing in the flooded forest.

Sok Plang, a local council member, said that, in the spirit of equality, the eco-tourism committee has set up a system where the villagers take turns to get a shot at the opportunity to earn money through the scheme. For every one-hour ride, a woman paddler can earn US\$4, including tips. It may not be a whole lot but could go a long way for those who do not have much to rely on, he said.

“At least they can now earn additional income that they can use to buy medicine or in an emergency,” he said. “That is why the conservation of this forest is so important to us here.”

The conservation and eco-tourism activities have received support from the Community Development and Knowledge Management for the Satoyama Initiative (COMDEKS), funded by the Japan Biodiversity Fund, implemented by UNDP and delivered by the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP).

National Policy on Gender Equality

Work on Cambodia's National Policy on Gender Equality is in its final stage and, if all goes as planned, expected to be released by September 2014. The policy sets out the country's long-term gender-related goals. Central to it is the need to gradually shift the focus from direct outreach activities towards strengthening institutional capacity across the government to promote and support gender equality and women's empowerment in a coherent and sustainable manner. It outlines strategies toward achieving gender equality within different thematic programmes ranging from women's economic empowerment and legal protection to social services and social protection.

Ministry of Women's Affairs is taking the lead in preparing the policy with support from UNDP through the Partnership for Gender Equity project (phase 3). Additionally, the ministry is also drawing up a five-year strategic plan (2014-2018) which will provide a detailed breakdown of activities, timing and resources to implement the policy.

Equal rights and opportunities...

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- the disabled people's organizations to raise the voice and protect the rights of people with disability through policy research and advocacy;
- the government's measures to strengthen rehabilitation systems and services; and
- inclusive governance with focus on capacity development for decision-makers at subnational levels to implement disability inclusive development.

The five-year (2014-2018) programme has a projected budget of AUD\$13.1 million.

Its implementing partners include Ministry of Social Affairs Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, Cambodian Disabled's People's Organization, Disability Action Council, Persons with Disabilities Foundation, and Civil Society Organizations.

Guided by the National Disability Strategic Plan, the joint initiative will work towards increasing opportunities for people with disability to realize their potentials in social, economic, cultural and political activity that will in turn contribute to improving their quality of life in the Cambodian society.

Women deminers take on a man's job

They're young, female and fearless. Meet the deminers who boldly take risks by clearing landmines in the most contaminated areas in Cambodia.

Ruot Sreylla is 24 and mother to a three-year old boy. Five years ago, she lived in Pursat Province, tilling farmland for a daily wage of KHR 12,000 (\$3). When she learned about a job opportunity as a deminer in neighboring Battambang province, she signed up for the training.

Meanwhile, Song Sreymao, 25 years old with a four-year old son, was also a low-wage earner before becoming a trained deminer. Both women did not have the opportunity to finish school but both longed to provide a better income for their families.

Sreylla and Sreymao underwent a six-week training course provided by the Cambodia Mine Action Center (CMAC) in Kompong Chhnang province. Here, they learned how to use mine detectors, follow standard operating procedures and practice safety, among others.

Five years later, they are among the growing number of female deminers working at CMAC in Battambang province, one of the most heavily mined areas in western Cambodia.

"It was my decision to become a deminer," says Sreylla. "I am an uneducated girl trapped in the city. If I weren't a deminer, I would still be a laborer earning much less," she shares. As deminers, each of the women are paid \$203 per month, gets life and medical insurance and receives three months paid maternity leave.

Through the Clearing for Results project, the United Nations Development Programme has been mainstreaming gender in the mine action sector by advancing the vital role of women in public participation and planning. The Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA) which implements the project, has instituted the Gender in Mine Action Plan (GAP). As the lead government agency that regulates, monitors and coordinates the mine action sector, CMAA through the GAP ensures that it promotes equal access to women and men in clearance work, including in planning and prioritization.

"Mine risk educators have made efforts to encourage women's participation in activities and have promoted equality of access to employment," says Peang Sovannary, CMAA's gender focal person.



PHOTO: UNDP Cambodia/RICHARD FRASER

A female demining worker cuts weeds and grass in an area suspected to contain land mine in a minefield in Banteay Meanchey province.

"However, there are some areas where gender inequality persists, such as the number of women attending planning meetings. Greater focus on participation at the local level to promote gender equality would assist in increasing women's involvement in planning and prioritization," she states.

In addition, traditional gender roles often prevent women from participating in public life and therefore have limited influence in the planning process, thus potentially impeding on the legitimacy and success of the process. Where fatalities occur, mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, because of gender biases in work and of the prominent place of women in the household, often take on an expanded family role to assume the economic, social and psychological responsibilities previously held by their fathers, husbands or brothers. In many cases, a landmine accident will push an economically vulnerable household into extreme poverty.

The GAP ensures that apart from promoting equal employment opportunity, it also monitors the equal access by women, men, boys and girls to mine risk information, access to gender-sensitive services by landmine survivors, and equal participation and representation in advocacy activities.

"I would encourage other women to be a deminer so they can earn more income," says Sreylla who has by far detected around 20 landmines. "I am not afraid because we had

a good training. You just have to be careful and follow the SOP," she says.

The Clearing for Results project is a five-year project administered by the United Nations Development Programme and implemented by the Cambodian Mine Action and Victims Assistance Authority (CMAA). Now on its second phase, the \$25 million project intends to build CMAA's capacity in fulfilling its mandate and managing the mine action sector in Cambodia. The project, supported by the governments of Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Austria and the United Kingdom, has helped the Cambodian government clear 83 km² of land since 2006 and has contributed to the steady decline of landmine accidents in the most heavily mined northwestern provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Pailin.



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N° 53, Pasteur Street
Boeung Keng Kang I
P.O. Box 877
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Tel: +855 (0) 23 216167

Fax: +855 (0) 23 216 257

E-mail: registry.kh@undp.org

www.kh.undp.org

www.facebook.com/UNDPCambodia

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