

Development of community based drug abuse counseling, treatment and rehabilitation services in Cambodia



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Cambodia

Duration: May 2005 to March 2010

Implementing UN Agencies: UNODC

Other Implementing Partners: Ministry of Health; National Authority for Combating Drugs; Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs; National AIDS Authority; JICA

Budget: \$1,176,001

Key Words: Youth; drug abuse; health; capacity building

BACKGROUND

Since the mid-1990s, Cambodia has become an increasingly important transit country for drug trafficking in South East Asia. The growing expansion of trafficking in the region has had significant consequences in Cambodia, including the rise of local production of illegal substances as well as an increase in substance abuse, both of which were historically non-existent in the country. The most vulnerable groups within Cambodia – migrant laborers, street children, sex workers and prisoners – have been at the greatest risk of substance abuse. In addition, an increasing segment of middle class and urban youth

has also become vulnerable to substance abuse. As a result, the increasing levels of drug dependency and the accompanying rise in the number of HIV/AIDS cases are subsequently placing a heavy toll on the ability of the Government and its health institutions to respond appropriately to the threats faced by the Cambodian people. Moreover, substance abuse and its related health consequences are exacerbating widespread poverty and are threatening to undermine the social and economic development gains made by Cambodia over the recent years.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In order to improve Cambodia's long term social and economic development, the project's overall goal was to reduce the rapidly increasing trend of substance abuse within five highly-affected provinces: Phnom Penh, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Sihanoukville and Battambang. To attain this goal, the project sought

to increase the capacity of healthcare professionals at the governmental and non-governmental levels, and to respond to the needs of illicit drug users and vulnerable groups through coordinated and community-based drug abuse counseling, treatment and rehabilitation programmes.

BENEFICIARIES

The target beneficiaries of the project included drug users and those vulnerable to substance abuse –

including street children, urban school children, youth, and unemployed people – as well as their families.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) To promote a people-centered and prevention-oriented approach, the project undertook a comprehensive vulnerability mapping of drug abuse and unsafe sexual practices in 24 provinces in Cambodia. The mapping process allowed the project team to identify the 12 most vulnerable and hardest-to-reach provinces, thereby ensuring an inclusive community-based strategy that both addressed the immediate threats as well as prevented the future uptake of substance abuse in other provinces in Cambodia.

(ii) To build local and national capacities, the project employed an empowerment-based approach for addressing substance abuse and expanding health care options in the most severely affected provinces. Through identifying and training local focal points – 15 national trainers, 24 provincial trainers, and 240

grassroots workers – the project reduced Cambodia's dependence on external expertise and established targeted and contextually-relevant approaches for reducing vulnerability to substance abuse and its related health challenges among the Cambodian population.

(iii) The integrated approach employed by the project – involving local authorities, village focal points, local health care centers, the police and community members – established crucial partnerships among relevant stakeholders and improved the sustainability of the achievements made under the project. Moreover, the diverse network of stakeholders provided the foundation for project initiatives to be scaled up and expanded to more than 350 additional communes in Cambodia.

LESSONS LEARNED

The project demonstrated valuable lessons with regard to building local ownership as well as the added value of innovative approaches for inducing policy change. First, the project highlighted that enhancing the mentoring capacity of local focal points was the cornerstone in fostering local ownership and creating an enabling environment for the delivery of project activities. Second, through its people-centered and

integrated approach, the project illustrated the benefits of non-punitive alternatives to incarceration for the treatment and prevention of substance abuse. Such an approach provided the Government of Cambodia with the opportunity to explore an entirely different set of policy options, resulting in crucial partnerships that helped extend the reach and the sustainability of the project.