Government, partners pledge to halve child deaths

Cambodia’s infant, under-five, and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in Asia, but plans are under way to improve them.

At a three-day workshop held early this month the Royal Government of Cambodia, The Global Child Survival Partnership and other development partners have pledged to cut infant deaths from the current 95 per 1,000 live births to 50, and the under-five mortality rate from 124 per 1,000 live births to 65 by the year 2015.

Some 63,000 children of Cambodian under the age of five die of preventable causes each year. The main causes are pneumonia (24 percent), diarrhea (24 percent) and neonatal-related causes (34 percent).

Monks discuss religion’s role in environmental conservation

Last month the lofty open air hall of Vipasana (Meditation) retreat center outside Phnom Penh hosted a three-day conference for more than 120 monks from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Burma to meet with NGOs to discuss environmental protection in their countries, and the special roles that monks play in linking conservation with the Buddhist religion.

The conference was the culmination of a 12-day study and training tour held in two Cambodian provinces that provided an opportunity for monks to visit existing environmental programs in pagodas and villages as well as community forests and eco-tourism schemes.

All the participating monks stayed in pagodas with the local monks.

“It was the conversations which often lasted long into the nights that gave them a chance to talk at length about their ideas, experiences, strengths and difficulties in carrying out environmental programs,” said Venerable Vatthana, a Laotian participant in the tour. “It was during this first week that the monks realized that they needed a collective and formal voice to influence en-

Gov’t, World Bank announce new initiative to reduce fiduciary risk in Bank-funded projects

The Ministry of Economy and Finance and the World Bank announced on June 4 a plan to investigate and tighten procedures for the use of money on public projects. The review, Reduction of Fiduciary Risk in Cambodia, to be undertaken by the World Bank, will focus closely on the World Bank-funded projects first, with a view to ensuring that the money is used only for the purpose intended.

The initiative is a central component of the Bank’s new Country Assistance Strategy with Cambodia, which has identified improving governance and fighting corruption as necessary first steps for improving the pace and quality of development.

“We have taken quite a few steps over the past few years to close loopholes and to increase the development impact of our lending in Cambodia,” said Ian Porter, Country Director for Cambodia. “But it has not been enough, and we have seen continued problems in a number of areas. We want to fix them, and hopefully see the improved processes spread to other areas of government and public spending. Our aim, as we have laid out in the Country Assistance Strategy, is not to simply lend money to Cambodia, but to make sure that what we do lend is used effectively and we are helping Cambodians. In this case, we will actually be lending less, and having a greater impact.”

Senior Minister Keat Chhon, Minister of Economy and Finance said: “We would

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Government, Partners pledge to halve child mortality

Malnutrition an underlying cause of 54 percent of all childhood deaths.

The Asian Development Bank, the European Commission and the Japanese development agency (JICA) and others joined the Global Child Survival Partnership - a new alliance that includes UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the British Department for International Development (DFID) and other developing country, multilateral and bilateral partners, non-government organizations and the Gates Foundation.

“We are at a crossroads and have a major opportunity to improve the health of Cambodian children and their families,” said Mr Kul Gautam, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. “We have the tools needed to prevent child deaths - they are simply not being implemented on a sufficient scale. If we refocus on the simple, low-tech and doable interventions, we can stop the top killers of children in Cambodia.”

Dr Jacques Baudouy, Director of Health, Population and Nutrition at the World Bank, told the workshop child survival had to be seen in the context of maternal health.

“The child survival program represents a unique opportunity to achieve quick and significant public health results,” he said. “But if maternal health is not addressed, our child survival goals will not be reached. It is impossible to separate the health of the child from the mother.”

According to Dr Jose Martines, WHO’s Associate Director for Child and Adolescent Health and Development, the goal of reducing infant and child deaths is within our reach. “We need to focus on interventions proven to be effective like antibiotics for pneumonia, breastfeeding, complimentary feeding and oral rehydration for diarrhea. With all stakeholders working together, with the Government in the lead, we can improve the lives of children throughout Cambodia.”

Some 85 per cent of Cambodia’s population live in rural areas and many are mired in poverty. Access to safe water is reported to be just 29 percent, with only nine percent having access to sanitation. Some 30 per cent of the population are reported to face chronic food shortages. Rates of malnutrition in children, as well as anemia in both children and women of reproductive age, are high.

National immunization coverage has increased in recent years, but fewer than 50 percent of children complete the full immunization series. Half of children under the age of five are reported to be malnourished, which affects their growth and learning capacity.

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Girls enjoy clean water from the hand-pump in their school grounds

like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to all our development partners and donors for their contribution to our country development and poverty reduction. To attract more assistance we have to make sure that aid money is spent effectively and efficiently through a transparent process. In this sense, the Royal Government has to be accountable not only to our own people, but also to the taxpayers of the donor countries.” He underlined that “Within the World Bank portfolio, our Executing Agencies have to apply the Bank’s procedures and principles with the surveillance from the Bank staff regularly during implementation. Our disbursement rate is satisfactorily high. However, to ensure full transparency and to improve the culture of accountability, we have jointly agreed with the World Bank to launch this initiative. In this process, we would like to make sure that the works will not end up with just finding the problems, but remedy will also be taken. We strongly hope that this exercise will also be beneficial to our Public Finance Management (PFM) reform program.”

The initiative will complement work already underway through the Integrated Fiduciary Assessment and Public Expenditure Review (IFAPER) and the Country Procurement Assessment Report (CPAR), both of which identify action plans through which the efficiency of public expenditure can be improved and procurement strengthened.

For more information contact: Ms. Jennifer Thomson Financial Management Specialist Email: jthomson@worldbank.org and Sok Sokunthea Procurement Assistant Email: ssok@worldbank.org

For more information contact: Mr. Beng Simeth, Human Development officer Email: sbeng@worldbank.org

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vironmental-related policy and programs from government to village level.”

The goals of the event, hosted by the Alliance for Religion and Conservation and Mlup Baitong (a local NGO in Cambodia), were to empower the monks through national and cross-border contact, and to strengthen partnership links with NGOs, development agencies and government bodies. Financing was provided by the World Bank President’s Contingency Fund contribution to the “Forests and Faith initiative”.


“The challenges of poverty and environment are large and the World Bank cannot tackle these challenges alone,” said Nisha Agrawal, World Bank Country Manager. “We are now reaching out to all partners – including religious organizations – since all religions teach us about compassion for the poor and about respect for the

environment”

The Patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism’s Mohanikay sect, the Venerable Tep Vong of Wat Ounalom, attended the conference.

Ms Teresa Serra, Sector Manager for Environment and Social Development from the World Bank, attended some of the event as part of a broader program in Cambodia looking at environmental protection projects and meeting with civil society activists in social development, conservation, and building awareness of these issues at the grassroots level. “I am very struck by the significant social capital that the participants represent and which we tend not to engage. I think there is great scope here for future partnerships”.

In the post-war years the Sangha (community of Buddhist monks and nuns) has been recovering, with their focus on re-establishing the Buddha’s teachings, known as Dhamma.

The conference not only highlighted a new confidence within the Cambodian Sangha but also illustrated to everyone present the level of capacity that exists among monks, and the drive and commitment that they have shown in relation to environmental issues. It turned into a regional event with the monks from each country reflecting different experiences in relation to campaigning and action on environmental and development issues.

This was further discussed in the conference the following week, which allowed for more sharing and for practical training.

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Education Project: dropout rate lower, promotion rate higher

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) data collected by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) make it possible to examine promotion and dropout rates during the Education Quality Improvement project (EQIP) period (1999-2002). The results from EMIS show dramatic increases in student promotion rates and decreasing rates of student dropout in all provinces between 1999 and 2002. The results in this analysis show that EQIP has had a positive effect over and above this general trend. Considering the sample average for dropout is roughly 10 percent for all grades 1 to 6, the EQIP impact translates into roughly 30 to 40 students per year (per cluster) who remain in EQIP schools that would otherwise leave.

The positive changes in promotion rates are on an order of between 1 and 2.5 percent per year.

Beside the dropout rate and promotion rate, the EQIP participation also predicts higher scores on Literacy and Numeracy exams.

Using data on test scores collected during four years it is possible to compare EQIP school achievement results at various stages of program participation. The results show that EQIP participation is significantly associated with higher test scores, even when controlling for a range of community, school and teacher characteristics.

For more information contact:

Mr. Beng Simeth,
Human Development Officer
Email: sbeng @worldbank.org
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in managing funds, transparency/accountability, fund-raising etc.

It was found that many monks already have well-established links with the Departments of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, and a few of the monks have training or funding relationships with NGOs and are active in rural development and forestry. Other monks have autonomously initiated their own successful environmental programs in forested areas, and eight of the monks from different regions had already established conservation and development NGOs, and already take a leading role in the function of these NGOs.

For example, in Oddor Meanchay province, by applying the traditional rules of forest dwelling in two forests (of 10,000 and 8,000 hectares), monks have been able to confront uncontrolled settlement into “virgin” forest still populated by tiger, leopard, gaur, and deer, and the source of valuable water. Community Forest International is currently in discussion to support the Venerable Bun Salot, who spearheads this forest protection program.

Training is a key factor in empowering the monks and creating capacity and confidence in pagodas and villages. This is something that the various Sanghas involved, as well as ARC, Mlup Baitong, Spirit in Education and other NGOs wish to develop as part of a more coordinated and active Sangha Network.

Other outcomes (to date) of the conference include:
- discussions between Conservation International and the monks living in the region of the Cardamon Mountains to protect the freshwater and seawater turtles;
- Save Cambodia’s Wildlife (a local NGO) meeting with ARC and Mlup Baitong to develop partnerships with monks on their education and community outreach programs;
- several monks were considering establishing their own pagoda based NGOs;
- WCS Cambodia discussing with Mlup Baitong a proposal to conduct a wildlife survey in the Sangha protected forests of Oddor Meanchay; and
- Village Focus International offering partnership training and support for monks on land legislation in selected communities that are at risk.

Towards the end of the conference it was proposed that a South-East Asian Monks Federation for the Environment be established, to be coordinated by the Sangha, with ARC making plans to facilitate meetings of core groups of monks to formulate this organization. A model for the legal statutes is being drawn up by David Mead, retired director of Conservation International-Cambodia, who has volunteered his help with the legal process.

“I think that this workshop is trying to find the way to protect the environment which is under threat and hope that this method can extend the life of environment in Cambodia and help to preserve it” said Heng Monichenda director of Buddhist Development.

For more information please contact
Ms. Nil Vanna
Social Development Specialist
Email: vnil@worldbank.org
and
Chamroeun Mudita
Rural Development Officer
cmudita@worldbank.org

We Welcome Your Opinions and Comments

We welcome your opinions, comments and questions. Please send them to: Bou Saroeun, Communications Specialist, at 113 Norodom Blvd., Phnom Penh, email: sbou@worldbank.org. We very much appreciate your valuable assistance.