

Programme Area Summary

Country: Cambodia

Programme Area: Health 2006-2010

What is the aim of the programme area?

To contribute to improved physical and mental health of women and children in Cambodia.

Why is VSO working in this particular programme area and region?

There has been considerable progress made in Cambodia over the last decade to improve the health of the nation. However, continuing challenges include high maternal, neonatal, infant and under-five mortality rates, which remain amongst the worst in South-East Asia. Statistics produced by the Cambodia Demographic Health Survey in 2000 indicate that the maternal mortality rate is 437 per 100,000 live births, the infant mortality rate is 95 per 1,000 live births and the abortion mortality rate is 130 per 100,000.

Many illnesses and deaths occur from conditions that are preventable and treatable. Continuation of unhealthy living practices stems largely from a lack of adequate water and sanitation, insufficient knowledge of home-care and public health services, traditional beliefs and chronic poverty. Improvements in the public health sector services are largely under utilised due to the difficulty of access, cost, limited opening hours, poor staff attitudes and public mistrust. The public health sector, especially in rural areas, has poorly equipped facilities, insufficient trained staff and a weak referral system. Public health staff receive very low wages and the quality of clinical practice is low.

Women and children are the most severely affected and those in rural communities are even more vulnerable due to poverty and difficulty accessing the public health service. The programme has therefore chosen to focus on reproductive and child health in two north-east and two north-west provinces of Cambodia. These are Stung Treng, Kratie, Banteay Meanchey and Oddar Meanchey.

Key beneficiaries and partners

National Level Partners:

- National Reproductive Health Programme
- National Nutrition Programme
- MoH Personnel Department
- Ponleu Sokapheap
- MEDiCAM
- Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO)
- Reproductive and Child Health Alliance (RACHA)

Provincial Level Partners:

- Stung Treng Provincial Health Department & Referral Hospital
- Kratie Provincial Health Department & Referral Hospital
- Stung Treng Regional Training Centre
- Mongkol Borei Referral Hospital
- Thmar Pouk Referral Hospital
- American Red Cross – Integrated Child Health Project
- Cambodian Health and Human Rights Alliance

Beneficiaries are poor communities in rural areas, particularly women, children and people with mental health problems.

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Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

The programme's specific objective is to increase the quality, range and uptake of reproductive, child health and nutrition services and the adoption of healthy living practices in the 4 provinces.

The expected results are:

- reproductive, child health and nutrition services are better planned, co-ordinated, managed, reviewed and resourced;
- service providers have improved skills and knowledge to provide patient-focused reproductive health, child health and nutrition services including knowledge of the needs of women with maternal depression;
- poor women and children have better access to reproductive, child health and nutrition services;
- rural communities are enabled to reduce their own barriers to good health
- the Ministry of Health's ability to plan for and provide good quality training to an appropriate number of student nurses and midwives is improved.

The programme is mainstreaming HIV and AIDS through VSO Cambodia's health, education and livelihoods programmes. The approach being taken is to increase the knowledge and awareness of VSO's partners and volunteers about HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment and care and available services in Cambodia and to encourage current partners to incorporate HIV and AIDS into their own programmes and activities.

Food security and poor nutrition, particularly in the poorer and more rural areas of Cambodia, are issues affecting general health, people's ability to sustain a livelihood and children's ability to participate fully in school. Nutrition has been chosen as a cross cutting theme and volunteers and partners in each programme area are including activities to improve nutrition in their work.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- Health Service Management
- Health Service Policy and Research
- Health Service Pre-Service and In-Service Training and Training Materials
- Public Sector and Civil Society Health Programming Co-ordination
- Maternal and Child Health – including nursing, midwifery and medical placements
- Nutrition
- HIV and AIDS
- Behaviour Change Communication and Health Education
- Civil Society Response and Community-based Health Initiatives

Workshops, training & conferences

- Coaching of health centre midwives in breastfeeding counselling
- Interpersonal communication training of health centre staff
- Community first aid training
- Coaching of MOH Personnel Department staff in planning and review
- Training of MEDiCAM NGO members in primary health care and community health promotion

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Research

- Research study will take place in 2007 to determine the link between antenatal depression and infant birth weight and to analyse risk factors of antenatal depression in Cambodia
- Small-scale research into the effectiveness of urine dipstick tests to detect women at risk of eclampsia and pre-eclampsia at antenatal care in health centres
- Small-scale research into the cost-effectiveness of incentivising delivery at the health centre to increase the number of deliveries by skill birth attendants

Partner exchange visits/study tours

- Study tour to India to observe existing antenatal depression screening and treatment services in February 2007
- Clinical practice at hospital for nursing and midwifery students
- Study tour to an Integrated Child Health Project in Siem Reap for public health staff from Stung Treng
- Review of information systems available at provincial health departments by MOH Personnel Department

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

Depression relating to childbirth affects up to 30% of pregnant women worldwide. In Cambodia there is no routine screening for depression. Few trained staff can detect cases and offer appropriate referral, support and treatment. VSO is supporting TPO and RACHA to carry out the first ever research in Cambodia to establish the link between antenatal depression and low infant birth weight. The results of this research will be used to push the development and implementation of policy and guidelines by the national reproductive health and mental health programmes. These will be aimed at supporting pregnant women suffering from the debilitating effects of depression.