

Strengthening Medical Education of Cambodia's Doctors and Laboratory Technicians

Background

In the last two decades, Cambodia's health sector has enjoyed vast improvements. Life expectancy has risen, while infant, child and mother mortality rates have dropped. In addition, the last 40 years have seen the sector's workforce strengthen, from a mere 45 physicians nationwide to more than 4 thousand working in the public health sector today. These achievements have been spearheaded by the Ministry of Health's (MoH) commitment to enhance access and improve the quality of health services for Cambodians through various interventions. These range from infrastructure and financial mechanisms to supporting vulnerable groups and developing national strategies and guidelines.

However, despite these successes, challenges remain in the delivery of health services, most notably the shortage of well-trained health providers. The current ratio of doctors, nurses, and midwives to the population remains low, sitting at two per 1,000 people. This makes Cambodia the lowest-ranking in ASEAN, with the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) aiming to reach 2.4 per 1,000 by 2030. Additional hurdles sit in the population's perception of healthcare providers. A lot of mistrust remains concerning competency, resulting in many Cambodians seeking medical care abroad despite the hefty costs involved.

The MoH's strategic plan for Pre-Service Education (PSE) has set a goal to increase the qualifications of health professionals to meet international standards in the region within 10 years. To achieve this long-term goal, the MoH has implemented "Strengthening Pre-Service Education System for Health Professionals". This is a six-year project at the national level that aims to transform PSE in



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six professions (Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Nursing, Midwifery and Medical Laboratory Technology) towards a Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework.

To achieve the implementation of CBE, it is key that government institutions, public universities and hospitals as clinical practice sites actively collaborate. At the institutional level, GIZ-Cambodia, with the support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is working on the technical cooperation project, "Improving Social Protection and Health" (ISPH). The focus is supporting the Health Science Institute of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (HSI RCAF) and the Khmer Soviet Friendship Hospital (KSFH) to transition from a traditional learning approach to CBE aligned with the national standards set by MoH. The GIZ ISPH Project is taking an organizational development approach to build human resource capacity, integrate the systems and initiate ideas that are sustainable and replicable into the future.



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Left Photo: Signing MoU Ceremony between ISPH project and Health Science Institute of the Royal Cambodian Armed Force

Right Photo: Computer room, Health Science Institute of Royal Cambodia Armed Force



Left Photo: Classroom, Health Science Institute of Royal Cambodia Armed Force

Right Photo: Khmer Soviet Friendship Hospital

Our Approach

The project provides technical support to both HSI RCAF (health training institution) and KSFH (clinical practice institution) to implement the national competency framework. This includes upgrading existing PSE programmes and ensuring the curricula, CBE methods and national Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) align. The project also provides support in organizational development, implementing a quality improvement system and collaborative integrated courses between both institutions.

The management teams of both institutions are building their knowledge in CBE to apply an Internal Quality Improvement Cycle using Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a methodology of self-determined change that builds on an organization's strengths and resources. The ultimate goal is to achieve an overarching organizational vision that results in action plans for improvement, with a high level of ownership with internal stakeholders. By applying AI, the core team can identify their strengths, resources and opportunities for improvement at their institution. It also flags up further synergies through collaboration. By adopting this approach, the two institutions are encouraged to jointly define their values, vision and goals, and identify key interventions to ensure success. By improving coordination between the two institutions, an integrated approach to theoretical and practical teaching and learning is achieved, increasing quality and standards sector-wide.

For example, HSI RCAF and KSFH have developed a roadmap and identified dedicated resources to adopt digital technology by implementing a Learning Management System (LMS) to support its CBE journey. The LMS will provide students with more opportunities for self-learning while encouraging active participation and providing feedback tools. IT experts, supported by GIZ ISPH, will be on hand to provide technical guidance. The technical implementation of LMS will also be supported by comprehensive peer-to-peer training. This will start with the core team, who will share their newly acquired knowledge within their teams and then scaling-up across both institutions.

Along with these technical aids, the project supports the procurement of necessary medical doctor and laboratory training materials, such as microscopes, to deliver hands-on learning experiences.

Expected Outcome

Through capacity building, encouraging collaboration and supporting system improvements, the GIZ ISPH project has the following expected results:

At the institutional level:

- HSI RCAF and KSFH have improved their collaboration by jointly developing theoretical and clinical practice curricula to support students' learning. This has helped bridge the gap between theoretical and practical studies
- Both institutions have implemented a mature LMS as a backbone for lecturers and students
- Increase in professional competencies of doctors and laboratory technicians through improved curricula and practical integrated study methods, in alignment with MoH's SOPs
- Improve the capacity and knowledge of both institutions' management teams, enabling them to continue the transformation of their institutions towards a CBE national centre of excellence
- Both institutions have adopted a culture of continuous organizational growth using AI and self-leadership practices, informed by one cycle of quality improvement processes at both institutions.
- The two institutions will serve as role-models and present their improved model of CBE to MoH to be replicated elsewhere

At the individual level of students' learning:

- Students will appreciate the improved facilities, systems and teaching models to support their learning at HSI RCAF; This is expected to boost student enrollment
- Students will actively participate and engage more with faculty staff (HSI RCAF) and clinical instructors (KSFH) by providing feedback through the new mechanisms
- A high percentage of students will pass the annual and national examinations to graduate as professional, competent health professionals

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