

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Joint Statement on Human Development
Delivered by Mr. Douglas Gardner, United Nations Resident Coordinator
At the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF)
19 June 2007, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

We welcome this focus today on the welfare of the people of Cambodia and thank the Government for the spotlight on this important issue.

Human Development is about expanding people's choices and their ability to lead a long and fulfilling life with their families. Healthy, well educated citizens enjoying a full range of choices and liberties in their lives are essential ingredients for the sustainable growth of the economy as well as the long term stability of the nation. Investments in human capital allow citizens to enjoy the basic right to attend school, to find decent work and productive employment, to visit a proper health center and to drink water that doesn't make them sick.

Maternal and child mortality

Turning first to health, we welcome the report of the Ministry of Health to the CDCF. While this highlights the reductions in infant and child mortality, improved antenatal care and delivery services, and progress on women's access to family planning, we share the serious concern that maternal mortality remains high and neonatal mortality reduction is lagging. Several targets for CMDGs 4 and 5 - Reducing Child Mortality and Improving Maternal Health - are at risk.

We support the concentrated focus on maternal and child health in 2007 and beyond. To see positive results on the CMDGs, both Government and development partners need to support a range of cross-sectoral initiatives, including: family planning, emergency obstetric care, infrastructure development, nutrition, girls' education and women's empowerment.

Three issues of particular importance are emerging in the sector:

- i. Health sector funding. There is a clear need for more resources available to front-line health facilities, and efforts to ensure equity and better support under-resourced but key priority areas such as maternal and neonatal health.
- ii. Access to quality services. Well-trained and supported health staff are the backbone of the health system, and their skills should be available to all. Competency and adequate pay must be ensured to enable this to happen.
- iii. Performance-based management systems. These are important to help health workers deliver services which focus on priority issues.

Water and Sanitation: After a long period of relative invisibility, rural sanitation and water supply will be included in this next set of JMI's. Sanitation and hygiene stand out as critical areas where Cambodia is off track. Rural sanitation coverage is far from reaching the CMDG target of 30% and is one of the lowest in the world. For water supply, the picture is slightly more encouraging. Cambodia has recently achieved its target of 50% coverage in rural areas. However, there remains the issues of regional disparities and water quality, particularly in arsenic affected provinces.

It is critical that Government finds a home for this important sector under the GDCC framework, and that it is recognized in national development frameworks such as the NSDP. The leadership by the Government in forming the coordination and collaboration committee on sanitation and hygiene to address policy and strategy issues is welcome. The question of how it relates to the GDCC for reporting progress on the new JMI is still being worked on by government and its partners.

Nutrition and Food Security: One out of every five Cambodians, faces chronic undernourishment and the food security situation in Cambodia remains of concern, particularly its impact on the poorest of the poor. We are therefore committed to

development of a strategic approach to national food security and nutrition and welcome the 2007 indicator to monitor this progress.

Education: Turning now to education, we applaud enrolment rates in primary schools which have remained high and are close to target. We also commend the increasing number of schools at all levels, development of new curricula for all grades and the draft education law now at the National Assembly.

Despite these good signals, what we see is that those same children who enroll often drop out or repeat grades for various reasons and thus the percentage of children actually completing primary education in 6 years is less than 50%, well below the CMDG target. Among the various factors leading to this low completion rate are children often starting school after the desired age of 6, a shortage of trained teachers and textbooks, inadequate teacher salaries, other demands at home and general poverty factors. Thus, only one out of every two Cambodian children who enters primary school will complete it.

We strongly urge continued spotlight and focused investment to ensure that all Cambodian children complete six years of primary education - able to read, write and think well, with increased chances of promotion to lower secondary school, and able to adapt to the demands of a rapidly changing society. We welcome planned further steps to expand formal and non-formal pre school education with a focus on enrolment at the age of five, increased scholarships to the poor and intensify efforts to reach the as-yet-unreached children.

Gender: Gender equality is of concern to all of us. Mainstreaming of gender is a critical commitment of Government and the establishment of Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups in all line ministries, is central to these efforts. There are a number of key achievements needed around gender that if fulfilled will have a positive effect on Cambodia's Human Development status. We will leave the elaboration of these priorities to our colleague the German Ambassador, in his forthcoming statement on the gender issues important to governance and reform.

HIV/AIDS: On HIV/AIDS, adult prevalence has fallen further in Cambodia from 3% to 1.9% and latest CDHS and HIV Sero Prevalence data indicates that prevalence has further declined. However it still remains high when compared to other countries in the region and we share the Government's concern for the increasing proportion of new infections of HIV between husband-and-wife and mother-and-child. The latest trends in HIV transmission will require actions that empower women and girls to be less vulnerable to infection and more able to demand treatment and to receive care. Greater access to information on prevention methods for these women and girls can put the power in their hands to prevent HIV infection.

In line with Cambodia's commitment to Universal Access to 2010, we will continue to support the rapid national expansion of comprehensive prevention, treatment and impact mitigation services for all Cambodians. A major challenge will be to intensify the country's prevention efforts and in particular to address the low use of condoms in indirect sex work settings, in rural areas and in multiple concurrent partner and "sweetheart" relationships, with men who have sex with men as well as expanding access to needle and syringe programmes and opioid substitution therapy for injecting drug users.

Conclusion: As mentioned at the last meeting, progress on human development is not just an issue for those people and institutions working directly in these areas. Linkages across the whole development spectrum are profound. Governance reforms, particularly public financial management, anti-corruption and public administrative reform, will be essential to direct increased financial resources to these priorities ensuring that they are received in a timely fashion and to ensure a motivated public workforce, willing to serve in all parts of the country. D and D reforms will bring decision making closer to parents whose lives and those of their children are ultimately impacted by sub national administrative actions. Finally, development of roads, electricity, and other vital 21st century infrastructure are key for further progress in human development overall.

In conclusion, it is important that we pay attention to reducing differences in outcomes between socio-economic groups in Cambodia, between provinces and urban-rural populations, and between the poor and rich to ensure that the benefits are equally distributed.

As new revenues from extractive industries enter the national budget in the coming years, coupled with continued strong economic growth, we are hopeful that Cambodia will move into a new era of prosperity - with the blessings of these new extractive industry revenues realized, not the curse. Only with a healthy and educated population, living productively in a safe and supportive environment, will choices for Cambodia's women, children and men expand and a bright future become reality.

Thank you.