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Country Snapshot*

- Population:** 13.5 million
- Independence:** 1953
- Life expectancy at birth:** 56 years
- Adult literacy rate:** 73.6%
- Infant mortality rate:** 73.2 per 1000 births (poorest 20%); 50 per 1000 births (overall)
- Maternal mortality rate:** 450 per 100,000 live births
- HIV prevalence:** 2.6%

* Source: Human Development Report 2005

Program overview

CARE worked in Cambodia between 1973 and 1975, distributing food, providing medical assistance and improving education. In 1990, CARE returned to Cambodia, working with the United Nations to help 370,000 Khmer refugees return to their homes from camps along the Thai border. Over the years, CARE has shifted its focus in Cambodia from short-term but vital relief operations to working with poor communities as they strive to make long-term improvements in their daily lives.

Preparing for disasters

Farming families face many challenges, including the effects of drought. CARE is working with communities to prepare for and reduce the effects of drought, focusing on agricultural land and water management, soil conservation and income diversification. Communities are developing expertise in low-cost and innovative drought mitigation and preparedness technologies, which will be disseminated to benefit other communities and countries. CARE is also reducing families' vulnerability to disasters by improving their access to resources and markets, and building the skills of people and organisations to alleviate the impact of disasters on livelihoods.

De-mining and development

One in 278 Cambodians is a mine survivor and more than five million mines still cause death and injury and seriously limit access to usable land. CARE is clearing mines and unexploded ordnance so that poor communities are able to use land safely and effectively and working to ensure cleared land is put to the best possible use by rural families. CARE is also resettling

people without homes or land and helping them to support themselves. Working closely with communities, natural resources are being managed to ensure food security through planning how land should be used. Opportunities are also being provided for people to save money for any future needs, such as food or medical expenses.

Food security

Cambodia is one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the Mekong Region. Some 90 per cent of people living below the poverty line live in rural areas. Food security is a huge issue in rural Cambodia, where the emotional and social legacies of war have had a significant impact on agriculture and employment. CARE is working in rural areas of north-western Cambodia to reduce poverty by helping vulnerable people to contribute more effectively to the development of their communities and to share equally in the benefits. Through support and training, local people are improving their farming techniques. CARE is also helping people overcome the impact of war by assisting them to develop financial skills and encouraging them to put what they have learned into practice.

Health

Cambodia has a high and only slowly decreasing maternal mortality rate; high and increasing infant and child mortality rates and the continuing burden of diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV. CARE is committed to improving the health of all Cambodians by strengthening health services through working with local and national partners. Communities are encouraged to adopt safe reproductive



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health and family planning practices and to improve people's access to quality health services. CARE is also focusing on improving the sexual and reproductive health of young people by encouraging them to attend adolescent-friendly reproductive health services and building links between health services and the community. Some innovative activities involve producing spirulina algae and distributing it to poor people who would benefit from its positive health effects. CARE is also investigating the relationship between solar disinfected drinking water and selected health indicators with the aim of ensuring safe water in emergency situations.

Education

After almost three decades of armed conflict and political instability the number of children entering school, and those actually completing primary school, is now increasing in Cambodia. Despite these achievements, enormous challenges remain. Many girls never enrol in school and if they do, they may not even complete primary school. Uneducated girls are often less healthy, and at risk of being exposed to HIV, crime, homelessness and drug abuse, and they are also vulnerable to trafficking, sexual exploitation and child labour. CARE is providing scholarships for disadvantaged girls, through which the students and their communities learn about community development, safe migration, gender awareness and health issues, including avian influenza. CARE is teaching marginalised and vulnerable adolescents, such as sex workers and young people from ethnic minority groups, to read and write and be better equipped to cope with unfamiliar or unsafe situations and participate in their community's development.

As most indigenous people do not speak Cambodia's national language of Khmer – the language of instruction in government schools – indigenous children's rates of enrolment, retention and literacy are among the lowest in the country. CARE is educating children and training teachers in Cambodia's remote north-eastern province of Ratanakiri. With the local communities, CARE has established community-run schools across the province, where students learn in both their own language and Khmer.

HIV prevention and care

Cambodia has the highest adult HIV prevalence in Southeast Asia. Almost half of new infections are among married women and one third of new infections occur from mothers to their new-born infants. Children who are HIV infected are not accepted at most orphanages and in many cases they need special care which extended families cannot or are unwilling to provide. CARE is supporting these children in homes that provide treatment, training and shelter before they are reintegrated into their communities. CARE supports orphans and vulnerable children with vocational training, planning for their futures when their parents are seriously ill, providing medical care, counselling, and legal support for children infected with and affected by HIV. CARE is also supporting and strengthening government systems and facilities that provide anti-retroviral therapy to people living with HIV. These HIV awareness campaigns are often delivered in innovative ways.

In another project, CARE is working to develop and promote a rights-based, empowerment focused HIV prevention program with 1000 sex workers in three Cambodian-Thai border sites: Poipet, Koh Kong and Samrong. Based on the early success of another project CARE maintains a sex worker-led HIV prevention and support program.

Avian influenza

Some of the world's poorest countries are experiencing outbreaks of avian influenza (AI) in poultry and humans. The conditions in which poor people live are likely to make them both more vulnerable to AI and less able to survive it. CARE approaches AI not only as a critical public health issue, but also as a crisis that could erase hard-won development gains and push millions of people into extreme poverty. In Cambodia, CARE is working with communities to reduce the vulnerability of people across the Mekong Region to the AI epidemic. Given its nature, it is recognised that it will be impossible to completely eradicate the virus from all countries in Asia in the near future and therefore there is a sustained need for activities which seek to strengthen community and government capacity to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks.

Another project helps people to see how taking basic precautions to prevent AI, such as not introducing new stock without a quarantine period, washing hands after handling poultry and good hygiene of poultry and animal containment areas, can have substantial benefits for poultry keeping. CARE uses past experience to enhance existing relationships with Village Development Committees and national NGOs to ensure widespread awareness with a focus on detection, reporting, prevention and containment of AI at its source.

Livelihoods

Increasing people's access to better livelihood opportunities can make a huge difference in places where opportunities are few. One such CARE project in Cambodia works to increase economic opportunities for vulnerable groups in the country's north-west. CARE is working to build the capacity of communities by enhancing both private and public sectors associated with the planning, design, construction, maintenance, and ongoing monitoring of project activities. Rural livelihoods are being advanced, establishing small-scale infrastructure at the village level, and savings and credit groups in the villages and communes.

Human Rights

The Charter of the United Nations is active in 'promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion'. CARE echoes this sentiment in its programming in Cambodia by working with people in vulnerable situations, such as those at risk of contracting HIV, and looking at gender issues within communities.

One of CARE's projects promotes human rights in the context of sexual behaviour and improves access to protective services and legal response for survivors of rape and other forms of gender based violence. CARE trains young people (with a focus on young men) and works with a Youth Information Centre, which aims to prevent incidents and promote sexual



Cambodia – ©2006 Karina Coates/CARE
Educational messages are placed on billboards about preventing the spread of avian influenza

responsibility. CARE also works to create links between police and social services for survivors of gender based violence through the increased training of police in prevention, gender issues, interviewing witnesses and survivors, improved practices for dealing with survivors of rape and domestic violence, and the legal rights of survivors. CARE has contributed to the creation of Kandal's first 24 hour Crisis Centre for survivors of gender based violence with links between police and social service referrals.

CARE also looks at gender equity and diversity within the organisation through a rights based approach (RBA). A RBA incorporates international human rights standards into development programming. In Cambodia, CARE is establishing a RBA working group, which will incorporate human rights into all aspects of the project cycle and into policy and practices related to employment, engagement with partners as well as communities. The RBA Working Group has identified the need for a teacher training program and a gender training manual for CARE Colleagues.

Major donors

Asia Development Bank (ADB), The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Brook Family Foundation, CARE Friends Okayama, Centre for Disease Control (CDC), Conservation International, CUSA Private Donor John Peterson, CUSA Private Donor Yim Family, Elton John Foundation, European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), European Union (EU), Global Fund, Ireland-Department of Foreign Affairs, Levis Strauss Foundation, Mike Matsushita Fund, McKnight Foundation, Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), USAID, US Embassy, West Region Pool, and various private and corporate donors.

CARE International members supporting current programs

CARE Australia, CARE Canada, CARE USA, CARE USA's Asia Regional Management Unit (ARMU).

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Last updated October 2007