

Story of Significant Change:

Moving towards a more disability inclusive social protection system

“I am really thankful to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Australia-Cambodia Cooperation for Equitable Sustainable Services (ACCESS) for having delivered a variety of trainings and program [activities] to support us. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) strives to develop policies and we need different actors to work with us. We have found that ACCESS’ support to Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), such as delivering training, has made OPDs stronger and able to advocate at the grassroots level and with policy makers.”
H.E Samheng Boros, Minister Attached to Prime Minister and Secretary of State¹.

“Now that we know about the identification process and social protection schemes, we can engage effectively with local authorities for the benefit of our members”. Mr. Som Sam Eng, Leader of Samroung Tong District OPD.

Why is disability inclusive social protection important in Cambodia?

Many persons with disabilities in Cambodia are struggling to earn a sufficient income, and they find it challenging to achieve a decent standard of living. On average, the incomes of persons with disabilities – and their households – are well below those of persons without disabilities. They also experience significant additional costs, due to their impairment, which further impact their standards of living and wellbeing.² Persons with disabilities are over-represented among the poorest members of Cambodia’s population. Based on the Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (CSES), 26 percent of persons with disabilities are in the poorest quintile of the population, while only 13 percent are in the richest quintile. Furthermore, the national poverty rate among persons without disabilities is 17.5%, but among persons with disabilities it is 21.1%.³

¹ Interview on November 4th 2022

² World Bank Cambodia Country Overview, updated March 2022.

³ Stephen Kidd, Diloa Athias, Sarina Kidd, Silvia Nastasi and Bjorn Gelders, A Situational Analysis of persons with disability in Cambodia, June 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation. It is estimated to have increased poverty in Cambodia from 18 percent based on 2019/20 data to 20.8% in 2020, a rise of 2.8 percentage points. Delivering social assistance through the social protection system is a key avenue for the RGC to provide support to people affected by the pandemic. Therefore, a more disability inclusive social protection system was expected to directly benefit persons with disabilities.

This article presents ACCESS' significant contributions to making the social protection system more disability inclusive. This story also provides evidence of ACCESS' progress towards achieving intermediate outcomes (IO) 5 (related to social protection implementation), (IO) 6 (related to evidence for policy making) and (IO) 8 (related to policy dialogues and engagements).

What was the situation in 2020 before ACCESS started working on social protection?

The economic disruptions resulting from the onset of COVID-19 led the RGC and development partners to increase focus on social protection. Prior to the outbreak there was no specific focus on disability inclusiveness within the social protection system or awareness of the barriers that persons with disabilities faced when accessing social protection. There was also a lack of evidence as to the extent of disability inclusion in the social protection system and limited engagement between RGC and OPDs in relation to the disability inclusiveness of the social protection system. The RGC was however aware of some of these shortcomings and had plans to roll out a Disability Management Information System (DMIS) with a new disability identification process to better target persons with disabilities.

What changes in relation to disability inclusiveness in the social protection system were made since 2020?

Changes in the availability of evidence

“This discussion on disability was overdue, and I am very happy that it has taken place. It can help shifting from a “feeling” based discussion to an evidence-based one. This analysis gives evidence which adds strength to the reform design and gives options of ways to take it forward technically”. HE Dr. Narith Chan, Under-Secretary of State of Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) and General Secretary of National Social Protection Council (NSPC)⁴

There has been an increase in the availability of evidence about how social protection could be made more disability inclusive. A 2021 study by Development Pathways analysed existing data to present evidence as to the socio-economic situation of persons with disabilities to build a case for developing a more disability inclusive social protection framework. The report highlighted the additional costs of disability and suggests some ways to respond to this in the design of social protection schemes.⁵

Persons with disabilities have higher living costs due to needing to purchase items and services specific to their disabilities, and persons with disabilities often incur additional costs when purchasing goods and

⁴ Meeting notes -Technical discussion on additional cost of disability, Wednesday 13 October 2021

⁵ Data collection was undertaken in May-June 2021.

services such as education, transport and personal assistance. For example, Cambodians with disabilities spend on average 39% more on healthcare (treatment and transport) than persons without disabilities.⁶ Moreover, persons with disabilities are less likely to be employed, with data from the 2014 Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey showing that less than 5% of persons aged 15-49 reporting a form of disability were currently employed. Persons with disabilities raised during their interviews, that they felt as though they were being a burden on their families, and were less able to contribute income to the family, while also incurring additional costs. They also raised that it was quite common for persons with disabilities to miss out on benefiting from social protection transfers provided to households.⁷ The work by Development Pathways also included the development of a simulation tool which allowed the calculation of the financial implications and corresponding benefits of various benefit values and levels of social protection coverage.⁸ Furthermore, a package of policy papers have been developed comprising 1) the voices of persons with disabilities about their experiences with social protection, 2) some examples of the additional costs of disability in Cambodia and 3) the engagement of OPDs in disability assessment⁹. The policy papers are intended to provide clear summaries of the evidence from the research to be used by CSOs and other actors in the social protection sector to support their advocacy for greater disability inclusion to RGC.

Feedback from RGC was that the messages about the additional costs for persons with disabilities were welcome and inspired a greater focus on disability inclusive social protection.¹⁰ An interviewee noted that the simulation tool provided useful information for considering different policy options and increasing capacity in the team to undertake budget planning, although it did not provide all the information required for budget planning negotiations between the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth (MoSVY) and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Policy recommendations included increasing the benefit value for people with disabilities to ensure they can access opportunities and standards of living which are equal to those being experienced by persons without disabilities.¹¹ Preliminary recommendations and options in response were presented to a technical reference group. A development partner reported that they are still using the evidence and recommendations from this study for costing models as advocacy points.¹² Commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO)¹³, Development Pathway also conducted a recent mid-term review of the national social protection policy framework on behalf of the National Social Protection Council and its General Secretariat with references to some of the data and analysis commissioned by ACCESS.

⁶ Stephen Kidd, Diloa Athias, Sarina Kidd, Silvia Nastasi and Bjorn Gelders, A Situational Analysis of persons with disability in Cambodia, June 2022

⁷ Stephen Kidd, Diloa Athias, Sarina Kidd, Silvia Nastasi and Bjorn Gelders, A Situational Analysis of persons with disability in Cambodia, June 2022

⁸ The technical reference group provided advice and guidance to the project to ensure its relevance and quality. The reference group was made up of Royal Government of Cambodia representatives from Ministries and departments engaged in social protection, international development partners with interests in social protection policy and programming and representatives from OPDs.

⁹ The three papers are: 'Social Protection - Situation Analysis of Persons with Disabilities in Cambodia', 'Good practices and Lessons for a Meaningful Engagement of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities in Disability Assessment Process', and 'Their words: Empowering Cambodians with disabilities through social protection'

¹⁰ Interview with Senior Advisor at NSPC-GS, 3 June 2022

¹¹ The additional costs of disability in Cambodia: implications for the design of social protection schemes, Policy brief, 2021

¹² Interview with Development Partner Representative

¹³ ILO country office for Thailand, Cambodia and Lao

Increases in the visibility of persons with disabilities in social protection

People with disabilities are better represented and are more visible in social protection policy forums which has made the disability inclusiveness of social protection a greater focus for RGC. There have been four dialogues between OPDs and RGC about social protection and these are continuing to occur.¹⁴ An RGC Stakeholder commented that they found these dialogues very helpful. While they already knew about many of the concerns raised, it was more impactful to hear the issues explained directly by OPDs themselves.¹⁵ A disability stakeholder noted that there was a greater willingness by RGC to listen to the challenges persons with disabilities face around social protection and to engage directly with OPDs.¹⁶ ACCESS staff noted the greater involvement of OPDs means that they are likely to monitor the implementation of changes, increasing the likelihood of their sustainability.¹⁷

“To ensure that social protection is effective, first of all, there needs to be a representative of persons with disability in the government systems at the commune, district and provincial levels to raise the voice of persons with disability. Second, DPO leaders could be integrated into the Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC) as Committee members to collect information and ensure that issues relevant for persons with disability are included in Commune Investment Plans (CIP) or report issues to the Cambodian Disabled People’s Organisation (CDPO) with references and evidence. Thirdly, Persons with disabilities need an awareness of their rights, for instance issues related to water and sanitation during floods, food supply and safe shelter.” Mr. Soy Sokhorn, Leader of Kampong Cham OPD.

Changes in awareness of social protection entitlements amongst persons with disabilities

People with disabilities also have a greater awareness of their social protection entitlements. OPDs in Provinces and Districts have become more aware of the various social protection benefits their members are entitled to and how they can access them, allowing them to better engage with commune councils for the benefit of their members. For example, representatives of OPDs were able to attend information sessions from the Ministry of Planning (MoP) and MoSVY at the national level on disability and the IDPoor identification process and disseminate this information when visiting self-help group members in their community. This included 50 OPD representatives joining a training session on the disability identification tool. In addition, CDPO developed a simple booklet summarising various social protection schemes currently available. So far there have not been changes in relation to the value of social protection payments in line with the research recommendations, or to the targeting system. However, some stakeholders interviewed were optimistic about the possibility of changes in the future.¹⁸

“We are representatives of persons with disabilities, and we have studied the benefits available to persons with disabilities from social protection schemes. This allows us to promote these schemes to persons with disabilities in the community. We raise their needs, issues and concerns with the local authorities. We advocate to the communes, provincial and municipal level governments to provide services to persons with disabilities in the social protection sector”. Ms. Kay Srey Orn, Leader of Siem Reap OPD.

¹⁴ The first dialogue was on 8th August 2020, the second on 28th Sept 2021, the third on 28 January 2022 and the fourth on 9 May 2022.

¹⁵ Interview with NSPC-GS Representative

¹⁶ Interview with CDPO Executive Director

¹⁷ Interview with ACCESS staff

¹⁸ Interview with Development Partner Representative

More persons with disabilities are being registered in the Disability Management Information System and are therefore eligible for benefits. At the end of 2022, national level authorities had collected data from 245,063 persons with disabilities (115,521 females), and 200,000 of them were to be provided with disability cards to support them to better access social protection schemes and other support services. Persons with disabilities with an IDPoor card registered in the DMIS can receive the cash transfer while other disability specific benefits are still to be defined.

Overall, these changes have been significant, as they demonstrate an increase in the disability inclusiveness of the social protection system, although there is more work to be done to address the issues highlighted in the Development Pathways analysis.

How did ACCESS contribute to the change?

ACCESS funded and supported four major contributions to the social protection system.

- 1. ACCESS started by supporting the readiness of key stakeholders to engage in discussions around disability inclusive social protection.** This included arranging and funding a training delivered by Development Pathways to OPDs about social protection and their entitlements, supporting them to advocate for more disability inclusive social protection and facilitating ongoing dialogues between OPDs and RGC. Training on the social protection system outlined how the Cambodian system worked and explained best practices on disability and social protection internationally. Furthermore, the ACCESS Disability Lead presented concepts related to disability inclusion to the National Social Protection Council- General Secretariat, which helped to raise their interest in the topic and identify how ACCESS could contribute given the number of actors already working in the space. ACCESS supported the participation of four RGC officials and two CDPO staff to an in-depth training series on disability inclusive social protection.
- 2. ACCESS funded and helped to arrange dialogues between OPDs and RGC stakeholders providing an important forum to discuss how Cambodia's social protection system could become more disability inclusive.** ACCESS funded training supported the participation of OPDs in the first national dialogue on Disability Inclusive Social Protection on 8 August 2020. ACCESS then assisted with organising three other dialogues. During these dialogues, OPDs leaders could access updated information on targeting process and benefits from social assistance schemes from RGC senior officials and disseminate this information to their members at the community level. This assisted OPDs to understand their entitlements so that they could advocate to authorities where these weren't being achieved. At the same time, RGC policy makers could learn from OPDs about challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing social protection benefits. ACCESS also funded the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization to develop a communications package about existing social protection schemes and to support OPDs engagement with commune councils.



4th dialogue between policy makers and organisations of persons with disabilities on disability inclusive social protection on May 9th 2022 at Sunway Hotel

3. **ACCESS funded research by Development Pathways as to how to improve the disability inclusiveness of the social protection system and supported the dissemination of information from the research.** Following on from providing capacity support to OPDs in 2020, Development Pathways was asked to propose a roadmap to ACCESS on activities to improve the disability inclusiveness of Cambodia’s social protection system. Development Pathways were then engaged to conduct research and deliver policy options to respond to the issues identified. In addition to engaging the research team and funding their work, ACCESS also managed a reference group comprised of key social protection stakeholders which met three times to help guide the study and review the approach and recommendations.
4. **ACCESS supported the establishment and use of the DMIS.** ACCESS provided two printing machines and accessories for the printing of disability cards, and assisted the Department for Welfare of Persons with Disabilities to run a Helpline to facilitate the identification of persons with disabilities. ACCESS also facilitated OPDs to receive training on disability identification and support the access of persons with disabilities to disability registrations and is planning to provide refresher training to target commune authorities on disability identification.¹⁹

Stakeholders interviewed noted that the ACCESS Team’s existing relationships with MoSVY and broader knowledge of the disability sector allowed them to identify potential opportunities for policy coherence within the disability sector.²⁰ For example, ACCESS’ involvement in establishing the database for

¹⁹ Note that ACCESS has a limited role in designing and rolling out the disability identification process. This is being led by MoSVY and supported by United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

²⁰ Interview with Development Partner Representative

employing persons with disabilities allowed for synergies with the DMIS, including providing equipment, a server and information sharing. The ACCESS team also believed that their approach of facilitating dialogue between a range of stakeholders to work through different perspectives contributed towards some of the successes.

Challenges and next steps

Some of the recommendations in the Development Pathways research were controversial. Interviews with persons with disabilities identified some gaps in coverage of the IDPoor card for persons with disabilities. As many persons with disabilities are poor, their lack of IDPoor cards suggested the IDPoor system before 2020 was not working effectively as a targeting system for social protection. However, since then the system has improved, with an on-demand IDPoor identification process now in place at commune offices and accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities²¹.

RGC raised concerns that the Development Pathways research was mostly influenced by international practice which reflected different social and economic conditions and wasn't sufficiently grounded in the Cambodian context²². The research team acknowledged these concerns, but maintained it was important to bring international practice to the attention of Cambodian decision makers.

Funding is needed to support OPDs to have ongoing inputs and continue to engage meaningfully with RGC. This is important in both national level policy forums as well as with Commune Councils.

It will also be important to continue to advocate for the importance of some of the recommendations from the Development Pathways work in the new and constantly evolving social protection sector, in the hope that some of the other recommendations may be adopted later.

Significance of the change

The change is considered to be **significant**, with evidence suggesting that persons with disabilities have a much better understanding of their social protection entitlements, that RGC is more engaged in ensuring the social protection scheme is disability inclusive and that there is an improved disability management information system to promote persons with disabilities (PWD) receiving the social protection benefits that they are entitled to.

Level of ACCESS contribution

The level of ACCESS contribution to the change is assessed as **significant**. Interviewees believe that ACCESS' work made some significant contributions to the change. The engagement of OPDs in the process has increased the likely sustainability of the changes made, although the lack of ongoing funding to support their ongoing engagement in policy forums remains a risk.

²¹ Interview with NCSP-GS Representative, 13 June 2022

²² Interview with the senior advisor to NCSP-GS

The strength of evidence supporting these conclusions is **adequate**. It is based on the review of a large number of documents, which included the results of primary research undertaken in relation to social protection as well as interviews with independent knowledgeable stakeholders. Interviews with additional independent stakeholders could have strengthened this rating.

Data Sources

Interviews

Interview with CDPO Executive Director, 13 June 2022

Interview with NCSP-GS Representative, 13 June 2022

Interview with the senior advisor to NCSP-GS, 3 June 2022

Interview with Development Partner Representative, 15 June 2022

Documents

Stephen Kidd, Diloa Athias, Sarina Kidd, Silvia Nastasi and Bjorn Gelders, A Situational Analysis of persons with disability in Cambodia, June 2022

The additional costs of disability in Cambodia: implications for the design of social protection schemes, Draft Policy brief, September 2022

Briefing Note: Dialogue between Policy Makers and Organization of Persons with disabilities (OPDs), Topic: "The roles of OPDs in Inclusion Social Protection & Disaster Response", 28th September 2021

Minutes from 3rd meeting of the Disability Inclusive Social Protection Reference Group, November 25th 2021.

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