

8. The SDGs and the Commitment of the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia

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INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the global agenda continuing from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since late 2015, the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia has been committed to localizing the post-2015 agenda into the national context even before the list of global SDGs was finalized. At the same time, the Prime Minister has added one more goal for the context of Cambodia related to demining/removing explosive remnants of war and victim assistance.

The SDGs are similar and yet different compared to the MDGs. It is the same global agenda but with a different mandate (the mandate of the MDGs was from 2000 to 2015 and they mostly covered the social sector, but the SDGs are from 2016 to 2030 and cover social, economic, environment and also culture). No one is to be left behind in the era of the SDGs.

PROCESS OF SDG LOCALIZATION IN THE CAMBODIAN CONTEXT

In the case of Cambodia, we have applied the existing mechanism to localize the SDGs into our national context. The Ministry of Planning is the central government agency responsible for leading and facilitating this process. In a letter dated 2 February 2016, the Prime Minister delegated this work to the Ministry of Planning.

The process of localization included a kick-off meeting of line ministries and line agencies to review the list of global goals and targets, followed by an inter-ministerial meeting to select goals, targets and indicators for the national context. The process also identified the responsible agency, data source, cycle of data, definition and method for calculating target values for each indicator. In addition, baseline and targets were set for each indicator for every year, depending on the availability of data. Having a baseline and target for each indicator between 2016 and 2030 is very important for monitoring and evaluation of the progress towards achievement of the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) Framework.

In the context of Cambodia, a separate action plan will not be prepared; the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) will be the framework for implementing the CSDGs, which will be integrated into next NSDP (2019-2023) in early 2018. Because the mandate of the NSDP is for five years, the CSDGs Framework will cover three successive NSDPs (2019-2023, 2024-2028 and 2029-2033).

M&E PRACTICE AND COMMITMENT TO SET UP A STANDARD M&E SYSTEM IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia has prepared economic development plans since 1995, but only since 2006 have they included a chapter identifying the role and modality of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the implementation of the plans. However, M&E practices follow the modalities of the supporting projects and activities of individual donor agencies, so that different M&E modalities are used. The Government is endeavouring to manage M&E activity and is committed to set up a national standard for the M&E system in Cambodia. All partners will be encouraged to use the system including development partners, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs).

In 2012, the Ministry of Planning set up a National Working Group on M&E consisting of members of core line ministries. In 2015, with technical and financial support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Cambodia, the Ministry of Planning conducted an assessment of M&E practices in government agencies. Based on the result of the assessment, the Ministry has prepared guidelines for M&E as part of the implementation of the NSDP, including the CSDGs. The guidelines provided a road map for developing an M&E system consisting of four core components and activities: the M&E policy; M&E capacity-building; institutional arrangements for managing M&E activities; and an information system to support M&E work.

For the first component, M&E policy preparation, the Ministry of Planning drafted the policy in late 2016 and discussed it with the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Supreme National Economic Council and the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board. The Ministry of Economy and Finance requested that the process be delayed to allow finalization of the Budget System Reform Strategy 2017-2025, and that the title be changed from National M&E Policy to National M&E Strategy. Preparation of the strategy will start in December 2017 and it is expected to be finalized in the first quarter of 2018.

In terms of institutional arrangements, three levels are proposed to manage M&E work. The M&E Steering Committee will provide high-level management for M&E and comprise representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Supreme National Economic Council, Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Council and the Ministry of Planning. The committee has the role of supervising and providing guidelines to technical staff working in M&E, and also of approving the workplan and reporting on M&E activities. The second level is the National Technical Working Group on M&E, an extension of the National Working Group on M&E set up in 2012, and responsible for implementing daily M&E work and consisting of representatives of various ministries. The third level is the M&E Secretariat located in the Ministry of Planning. The secretariat services the Steering Committee and ongoing daily work in the field of M&E activities.

In order to strengthen M&E activities in Cambodia, the Government, through the Ministry of Planning and with support from UNICEF, conducted a course on M&E capacity-building from January to March 2016. The course, provided by the IDEA International Institute and Laval University, consisted of three modules (Module 1: Public Programme Implementation and Results Monitoring; Module 2: Management of Evaluations of Development Policies, Programmes and Projects; Module 3: Information Systems for Monitoring and Evaluation). Each module took three weeks (two weeks online and one week onsite). The course had 30 participants from the Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, Ministry of Civil Servant, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Ministry of Rural Development and UNICEF. The knowledge gained from the training is being applied in the establishment of the M&E system and to improve M&E activities.

Data and information are very important to support M&E activities. The National Institute of Statistics, under the Ministry of Planning, is responsible for setting up an information and data collection system to support this work. According to a rapid integration assessment conducted in 2016 with technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), only 36 percent of SDG indicators have existing data support, assuming that the current mechanism for collecting data will continue in the future. Cambodia is facing a lack of data support for the SDG indicators because of declining budget support from development partners and the national budget is limited.

In the SDG era, development and environment must be balanced. Six of the SDGs focus on the environment on the earth, in the fresh and sea water, underground, in the air. According to the draft CSDGs, more than 60 indicators related to the environment have been selected, created and included in the Cambodian context. The indicators will be included in the CSDG Framework and be integrated into the next NSDP.

The Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia has taken account of the role of gender in all levels of society. While all sectors of the Government have mainstreamed gender, it is most important to focus on the decision-making level. Gender needs to be considered in both the monitoring of activities and the evaluation of the results of implementation, including of efforts to achieve the SDGs.

CHALLENGES

Evaluation in Cambodia in the SDG era still faces many challenges. As mentioned above, the information system to support M&E is the responsibility of the National Institute of Statistics, under the Ministry of Planning. There are two sources for data: administrative data, which can be collected through administrative structures; and primary data, which can be compiled through censuses and surveys. Data collection is very costly, as the quality of data depends on the size of the survey sample. A larger sample will have a higher cost but the accuracy will be greater, and a smaller sample will have a lower cost but the quality of the data will also be lower.

In the past, the budget for primary data collection was supported by development partners but the trend of support seems to be declining and the Government does not have

adequate resources in the national budget to cover the cost. In addition, additional surveys and data will be needed for M&E of the CSDGs. The United Nations Statistical Division, Paris²¹ (Partnerships in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific have provided technical support to the Ministry of Planning for data compilation to support M&E of the CSDGs. We hope that this support will continue.

THE WAY FORWARD

As already mentioned, the National Strategy for M&E will be finalized, the three levels of institutional arrangements will be set up and the information system for M&E will continue to compile and store data to support M&E work.

The CSDG Framework will start to be integrated into the NSDP 2019-2023 during the preparatory process beginning in early 2018. The progress reports on the NSDP and CSDGs will be prepared jointly, with one report focusing on the national context of implementation of the NSDP and progress towards the CSDGs. A separate report on achievement of the CSDGs will be sent to the United Nations for global progress reporting on the SDGs.