

# Global Health Support Programme Practice & Policy Briefing

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Issue 43·February 2019



Global Health Support Programme

GHSP, jointly launched by Chinese government and United Kingdom government, is a China-UK partnership contributing to improve global health policy and outcomes. The programme will help China improve its contribution to global health and achieve the potential of its collaboration. GHSP is scheduled to be implemented from 2012 to 2019 with a total budget of £12 million funded by UK DFID.

## Strengthening China-Cambodia Health Cooperation with the Focus on Infectious Disease Prevention and Control

Infectious disease prevention and control is an important issue in global health and related international cooperation is increasingly deepening. China is traditionally a friendly and cooperative partner of Cambodia, both sides own high political mutual trust and active practical cooperation in various fields. The in-depth cooperation between China and Cambodia in the infectious disease prevention and control could not only effectively promote the health of the Cambodian people, but also help maintain the health security in the region. China should take the need for the infectious disease prevention and control in Cambodia as the starting point, and help Cambodia improve the monitoring of infectious diseases based on information technology. The co-constructed medical laboratory could work as a carrier of technology and experience sharing, so as to enhance the exchange and technology sharing of health personnel between the two countries and provide the training assistance for Cambodian professionals in the field of the infectious disease prevention and control. In addition, China should pay more attention to disseminating the achievements of China-Cambodia health cooperation, further contributing to the connection of the hearts of people from two countries.

## Background

Cambodia is located in the hinterland of Central South Peninsula and situated in the central position of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is an important transport hub in Southeast Asia as

well as a significant country alongside the Trans-Asian Railway and the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). China and Cambodia have maintained a friendly relationship for a long time without any territorial disputes and

ethnic conflicts. With the deepening cooperation and exchanges between two countries especially in the field of politics, economics, military and culture, Cambodia always holds supportive attitude towards China's standpoint on maintaining national sovereignty, security and maritime rights.

The government and all sectors of society in Cambodia respond positively to the BRI, putting forth effect on connecting the "Rectangular Strategy" (national development strategy of Cambodia) and the BRI. Cambodia has long been a link between China and ASEAN, promoting China-ASEAN Cooperation and Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. As a model of bilateral cooperation, China-Cambodia cooperation shows friendly signals towards other ASEAN countries with the principle of "Consultation, Contribution and Shared Benefits", displaying the solid foundation of interest and

further deepening the political mutual trust between China and ASEAN countries.

In the 21st century, China has gradually become Cambodia's largest donor. The two sides have carried out extensive cooperation in the fields of economy, society and culture. The health cooperation and exchanges have always been focuses for both sides. The two countries have carried out a series of cooperation programs in aid for medical institution construction, medical equipment assistance, infectious disease prevention and control, which are also important components of Healthy Silk Road. On 19 July 2018, the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Cambodia provided an opportunity for comprehensively deepening health cooperation between the two countries.

## Achievements and Shortcomings of China-Cambodia Health Cooperation

In accordance with the Three-Year Plan for the Implementation of the "Belt and Road" Health Exchange and Cooperation (2015-2017), China and Cambodia have carried out a large number of regional health cooperation and exchange activities based on the "China-ASEAN" cooperation framework (such as "Nanning Declaration on China-ASEAN Health Cooperation and Development", "Training Programs for One Hundred Public Health Professionals", etc.). According to the actual needs of Cambodia, China has launched a series of health cooperation projects related to the vital interests of Cambodian people. For example, the project of free surgery for children with congenital heart diseases has been successfully implemented, the project of providing free glasses for myopia children has been launched twice, the "mobile clinic" vehicles that provide medical services for residents in remote areas have benefited thousands of families, the China-Cambodia Friendship Medical Building in Phnom Penh and the Hospital Aid project in Doun Kaev Municipality are progressing smoothly, several Chinese medical expert teams have been to Cambodia and provided free health services.

In the field of infectious disease prevention and control, China and Cambodia have carried out joint prevention

and control measures for key infectious diseases based on the China-ASEAN regional cooperation project including monitoring, infectious disease prevention and control in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (namely the Lancang-Mekong sub-region), joint prevention and control of cross-border infectious diseases in the Mekong sub-region, elimination and control of schistosomiasis in the Mekong River Basin, and so on. Although the existing regional cooperation programs have significantly improved Cambodia's ability to prevent and control key infectious diseases, it did not systemically improve Cambodia on building the national prevention and control system. Cambodia has not built an effective "blood-forming" mechanism on the infectious disease prevention and control.

### **Cooperation demand for the infectious disease prevention and control in Cambodia**

As one of the 47 least developed countries identified by the United Nations, Cambodia faces many challenges in the infectious disease prevention and control. The incidence of some typical infectious diseases in Cambodia remains quite high. For example, the incidence of tuberculosis in Cambodia is about five times that of China in 2016 (Cambodia: 345/100,000,

China: 64/100,000), the incidence of malaria in Cambodia is about 39 times that of China in 2016 (Cambodia: 89/100,000, China: 0.23/100,000). In addition, there are a large number of AIDS-associated tuberculosis patients in Cambodia. The rampant spread of many infectious diseases in Cambodia reflects not only a lack of prevention and control technology for certain infectious diseases, but also a lack of basic capabilities on infectious disease monitoring, reporting and testing.

#### **The poor monitoring system limits the improvement of Cambodia's overall capacity for infectious disease prevention and control**

Effective monitoring and timely reporting are the basis for preventing and controlling infectious diseases. Due to the backwardness of information technology, Cambodia is at a disadvantage in the construction of the infectious disease monitoring system. Firstly, Cambodia Early Warning and Response Network (CamEWARN) only covers 7 acute infectious diseases (diarrhea, fever and rash, acute flaccid paralysis, severe respiratory infections, suspected dengue fever, meningitis/encephalitis, acute jaundice) and influenza. Secondly, the extremely fragmented infectious disease monitoring system results in that four subsystems in CamEWARN (acute infectious diseases, influenza, public health emergencies, laboratory surveillance data) cannot be effectively connected, thus taking a long time to summarize relevant data. Thirdly, CamEWARN cannot summarize terminal data automatically, which not only increases a lot of labor input but also affects the timeliness and accuracy of monitoring.

#### **Weak laboratory testing capacity inhibits the prevention and control of key infectious diseases in Cambodia**

As the workload of prevention and control of infectious disease increases, the accuracy and timeliness of laboratory testing become an important prerequisite for public health departments to deal with infectious diseases effectively. Due to the weak testing capacity in Cambodia, the safety of blood products is difficult to be guaranteed, and it has become a hotbed for the spread of blood-borne diseases, such as AIDS and hepatitis B. In recent years, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, rifampicin resistant tuberculosis, and artemisinin-resistant falciparum malaria have been rampant in Cambodia, which put forward higher requirements for the testing ability of medical laboratory. However, the quality and quantity of existing medical laboratories in Cambodia are difficult to meet the standards: Firstly, it is difficult to establish a pathogen spectrum monitoring network due to the lack of CDC testing professionals, and the testing time of known pathogens and unknown ones is difficult to be guaranteed. Secondly, the accuracy of testing greatly reduced due to the lack of standardized training for laboratory personnel as well as the lack of unified standardized management and regular testing for instruments.

In conclusion, in the field of prevention and control of infectious disease, neither the demands of Cambodia nor the aid strategy of China should not keep at the level of material aid, but turn to improve capacity through experience exchange, technology sharing and personnel training. Therefore, China could teach Cambodia related technology directly, and Cambodia can achieve its own development.

## **Policy Recommendations**

- To assist Cambodia to improve the infectious diseases monitoring level:** China can offer assistance to Cambodia on improving the capacity of infectious disease reporting system, thus providing accurate and convincing evidence in response to infectious diseases. Firstly, China and Cambodia should strengthen the exchanges and sharing of experience in building a surveillance system for the prevention and control of infectious diseases. In 2004 and 2008, China established the world's largest direct

national disease reporting system and automatic early warning system for infectious diseases, thus accumulating rich experience in real-time epidemic surveillance and evidence-based decision-making. Therefore, China and Cambodia can focus on the exchange and sharing of experience in infectious disease surveillance and reporting. Secondly, Chinese technical personnel should be dispatched to assist Cambodia in enhancing the monitoring system to improve the timeliness and accuracy. Thirdly, China

can assist Cambodia to strengthen capacity building of infectious disease data analysis and response to infectious diseases based on big data.

**● To co-construct the medical laboratory to promote information and technology sharing:**

Co-constructing the medical laboratory is an ideal carrier to strengthen the China-Cambodia bilateral cooperation. As an important assistance project to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Cambodia, the China-Cambodia friendship medical building is located in the western part of Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. It will work as a comprehensive health center integrating medical care and teaching. China can use this building as a base for health professional communication, and co-construct the medical laboratory to achieve the goals: The first goal is **achieving technology sharing**. China has built the world's largest pathogens spectrum monitoring and research laboratory network, covering 12 core laboratories, 91 key provincial laboratories and more than 800 hospital laboratories. China can rely on the network and the co-constructed laboratory to share the testing technology of key infectious diseases and emerging infectious diseases. The second one is **conducting cooperative research**. Taking the antibiotic resistance as an example, it is a common challenge faced by both China and Cambodia, the two sides can carry out research on antibiotic resistance through joint laboratory cooperation.

**● To strengthen aid to Cambodia in technical personnel training for the infectious disease**

**prevention and control:** The technical personnel is the prerequisite, guarantee and core force for the infectious disease prevention and control. Cambodia needs a large amount of qualified technical personnel to build its own infectious disease prevention and control system, both in terms of emergency response capacity and system construction. China can undertake the responsibility of training specialized technical personnel (e.g., laboratory technicians) for Cambodia with the support of possible international funds, thus promoting technical exchanges between Chinese and Cambodian.

**● To make active use of China-Cambodia health cooperation to consolidate public support for bilateral relations:**

The historic visit of President Xi to Cambodia in October 2016 created a new era of China-Cambodia comprehensive strategic partnership. The upgrading of China-Cambodia relationship marks the all-round development of bilateral political, economic, security and cultural cooperation. To deepen the cooperation between the two countries in the field of the prevention and control of infectious disease, it is necessary to make a good use of the cooperation achievements, to improve the quality of cooperation and to ensure that the Cambodian people can benefit from the cooperation and get better health outcomes. It is believed that the cooperation can further connect the hearts of people of two countries and consolidate the public support for the enhancement of bilateral cooperation. In addition, special attention should be paid to improving the transparency of aid data, thus promoting China's national image in Cambodia and the international community.

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## Acknowledgement

This policy brief was supported by GHSP funded by UK DFID.  
Any quotation, duplication and distribution of this policy brief shall provide the acknowledgement as above.



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