

# Climate change, children and youth in Cambodia: Successes, challenges and policy implications

POLICY BRIEF<sup>1</sup>  
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## Climate change is a development and humanitarian challenge

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Cambodia is vulnerable to the effects of climate change including rising sea levels, greater uncertainty in weather patterns and increased likelihood of extreme events. Exposure and sensitivity to the effects of extreme climatic events, coupled with insufficient adaptive capacity<sup>2</sup> – due to lack of adequate social systems to enable people to cope with and to adapt to extreme conditions and thus reduce vulnerability to climate change – pose serious challenges. Rapid population growth, resource scarcity and inadequate environmental management could further undermine the goal of ensuring adequate well-being for the population.

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# Climate change, children and youth in Cambodia: Successes, challenges and policy implications (continued)

According to the 2009 Study on 'Climate Change Vulnerability Mapping for South East Asia'<sup>3</sup>, although Cambodia will be less affected than other countries in the region, its status as the country with the lowest adaptive capacity of any in the region, combined with the effects of climate change regionally, makes it one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change.

Climate change already affects a large proportion of the population and as the magnitude of impact increases many more people are likely to be affected in the years to come (See Table 1).

- Natural disasters affected 16.5 million people over the last two decades<sup>4</sup>.
- Cambodia ranks 5th out of 162 countries in terms of population exposed to flooding<sup>5</sup>.
- Cambodia loses an estimated USD\$0.9 billion in GDP annually due to floods alone<sup>6</sup>.

Impacts of climate change on livelihoods can be sudden, such as droughts and floods, or slower but resulting in cumulative decline in food security, assets and incomes, affecting overall well-being. Unpredictable or unseasonal flooding, drought and high temperature impact agricultural production, livelihoods, health, transportation, access to education, and safety and security.

Particularly vulnerable are populations that experience chronic vulnerability and poverty, including food insecurity, poor access to public services and lack of social protection support. Typhoon Ketsana, with its disastrous effects on livelihoods and public systems of service provision<sup>7</sup> was a wake-up call which points to the need to improve disaster management in Cambodia. It is likely that the national and local emergency response systems will need to improve to cope with the increasing incidence of hydro-meteorological disasters.

In the absence of adequate adaptation strategies and responses, households,

**TABLE 1. Human exposure to climate hazards in Cambodia**

Hazard type	Population exposed	Country ranking
Cyclone	11	85th out of 89
Drought	5,266	153rd out of 184
Flood	1,765,674	5th out of 162
Landslide	530	81st out of 162
Earthquake	-	- out of 153
Tsunami	1,101	60th out of 265

Source: <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/countries/statistics/risk.php?cid=29>

women and children may suffer considerable and irreparable damage to their well-being and development. Therefore, climate change is no longer just an environmental concern. It is increasingly a development and humanitarian concern, requiring that livelihoods, public services, enterprises, infrastructure and planning adapt to the inevitable and changing situation. Climate change is:

- An inter-generational challenge affecting both present and future generations, raising issues of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities, with both having to pay a high price in terms of investment into adaptation and mitigation and adaptive costs of livelihoods.
- A risk accelerator, in particular in areas already facing high levels of human insecurity and vulnerability, to which children are particularly vulnerable.
- A trigger of change in human vulnerabilities, deepening risks facing the poor and vulnerable, and compounding the effects on health, education, protection, sanitation, etc.
- A destabilizer of critical social networks and livelihoods systems, increasing the likelihood of gender inequality and worsening the well-being of the most vulnerable, including families, children, women, minority groups and people living with chronic illness.

- A new driver of social change, bringing about higher levels of migration and urbanization, and therefore compounding the challenges of achieving equitable provision of services to the population<sup>8</sup>.

Climate change presents challenges to the achievement of the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs), in particular the key areas of child well-being, including poverty, social protection, education, health and gender equality. Significant progress has been made in many of the CMDGs, and therefore efforts need to be made to sustain these gains. It is important to address the equity concerns in achieving the goals, as significant inequities and disparities still remain. With climate change having the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities and disparities, achieving the CMDGs with equity may become a more distant vision than previously envisioned.

Climate change effects are particularly worrisome in view of the already high levels of poverty and vulnerability affecting the population. If adaptive capacity remains weak, climate change is likely to compound existing levels of poverty and deprivation. As the situation stands today:

- Headcount poverty stands at 30 per cent in 2007 (CSES 2007)<sup>9</sup>, undergoing a roughly 1 per cent reduction per year; the recent series

## DISPARITIES IN CMDGS

- Child health. Under-five mortality in the poorest quintile is almost three times higher than in the richest (127/1,000 live births compared to 43/1,000 live births, CDHS 2005). The percentage of under-five children receiving more than six child survival interventions in the lowest quintile is under 10 per cent, but over 60 per cent for the highest quintile (CDHS 2005).
- Child nutrition. Under-five under-nutrition in the poorest quintile is almost twice as high as in the richest quintile, 35 per cent compared to 19 per cent (CAS 2008).
- Maternal health. Women from the richest quintile are 10 times more likely to give birth at a facility than those in the poorest quintile, 67.4 per cent compared to 6.5 per cent (CDHS 2005).
- Basic education. Transition rates to lower secondary education are at 94.5 per cent in urban areas and 77.4 per cent in rural areas; and for higher secondary education at 92.9 per cent and 65.7 per cent; dropout rates for lower secondary are at 11.5 per cent for urban and almost twice as high for rural areas at 20.8 per cent; completion rates for lower secondary education are at 71.21 per cent in urban areas compared to only 44.97 per cent in rural areas; and in upper secondary education 2.5 times as high for urban areas at 58.23 per cent compared to rural areas at only 18.08 per cent (EMIS 2009/10).
- Water and sanitation. Only 23.4% of the population in rural areas have access to improved sanitation, compared to 81.5% in urban areas (Census, 2008)
- Social protection. Social protection/assistance coverage is roughly 44 per cent of all eligible poor (ADB 2008). Children, pregnant women, and in particular the elderly remain largely untargeted by social protection interventions, while being the most vulnerable to shocks, including climatic shocks and economic crises, which affect their ability to secure food and basic necessities.

Sources: Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS), 2005, Royal Government of Cambodia, Education Monitoring and Information System (EMIS), 2009/01, Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Anthropometric Survey (CAS), 2008.

of crises possibly slowed down the rate of decrease in poverty for certain groups, at the disaggregated level.

- Inequality increased as measured by the gini index from 0.35 in 1994 to 0.43 in 2007 (CSES 2007)<sup>10,11</sup>; disparities in outcomes remain wide between the richest and poorest quintiles (especially in reference to malnutrition, education, maternal mortality, access to water, sanitation, etc.).
- The country's human development index (HDI) was at 0.593 in 2007; the pace of increase in HDI lags behind the pace of increase in GDP per capita, compared to countries of similar levels of development (HDR, 2009)<sup>12</sup>.
- Twenty-seven per cent of the population are migrants (Census 2008)<sup>13</sup>.
- Almost 200,000 people are disabled (Census 2008)<sup>14</sup>.
- The country experiences changing patterns of dengue fever and malaria, with more frequent outbreaks during the year; as well as increasing incidence of waterborne diseases such as cholera (e.g. the recent outbreaks in 2009 and 2010); Cambodia faces the highest fatality rate from malaria in Asia (WHO, cited in IDS/Plan 2010)<sup>15</sup>.

# Importance of understanding the effects: Impact of climate change on children

Climate change presents a number of challenges in ensuring adequate levels of well-being for children. A key concern for practitioners and policymakers is reducing the current and future economic, social, human and environmental costs of climate change, while ensuring that opportunities are fully capitalized on for the benefit of current and future generations. Given the evolving demographics and current levels of poverty and vulnerability affecting children in Cambodia, looking at these critical intervention areas through a child lens is key.

Understanding current and possible future effects of climate change on children has not played a big part in public debates on climate change so far. Research, advocacy and programmatic work in relation to climate change and its impact on children is less advanced, and would require focused and sustained support in the future. Despite this, it is widely recognized that children are central to the climate change dialogue and policies.

The population of Cambodia is young. Forty-one per cent of the total population are children under 18 (Census 2008)<sup>16</sup>. Over 10 per cent are children under four (Census 2008)<sup>17</sup> who face high levels of malnutrition, poor developmental outcomes and exposure to diseases. Although child poverty has declined over the last decade (See Table 2), levels of child poverty and vulnerability remain high and raise serious concerns, as they could be exacerbated as a result of climate change:

- Some 1.7 million children under 18 experience income poverty (UNICEF 2009, based on CSES, 2004)<sup>18</sup>; more could have fallen into poverty during the 2008-2009 deep economic crisis.
- Sixty-four per cent of children experience two or more forms of deprivation (from food, nutrition, health, water and sanitation, shelter, education, and information) (UNICEF 2009, based on DHS 2005)<sup>19</sup>.
- The most frequent combination of deprivation is shelter and sanitation, at 55 per cent of the total child

**TABLE 2. Trends in child income/consumption poverty since 1993/94, 1999 & 2004**

Cambodia	1993/94	1999	2004
National poverty line (riels per day)	1,230.63	1978.30	1,862.66
Poverty headcount among all households – by national poverty line <sup>a</sup>	39.00%	35.9%	34.68%
Number of children in poverty (in thousands) – by national poverty line	2,019.03	1,939.54	1,743.52
Number of households with children (in thousands)	2,157	1665	1814
Total number of households (in thousands)	1,963	2375	2,530
Total number of children (in thousands)	5177	5402	5128d
Average household size	5.6	5.2	5.1

Sources: various, including, Royal Government of Cambodia, A Poverty Profile of Cambodia 2006; Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2004, National Institute of Statistics of Cambodia; Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey, 2004; Royal Government of Cambodia, A Poverty Profile of Cambodia 1999; Population Census 1998; Statistical Yearbook 2006

population under 18 (UNICEF 2009, based on DHS 2005)<sup>20</sup>.

- Twenty-nine per cent of children under five suffer from malnutrition, with acute malnutrition on the rise in urban areas (CAS 2008)<sup>21</sup>; malnutrition is twice as high in the lowest income quintile compared to the highest income quintile (CAS, 2008)<sup>22</sup>.
- Twenty-seven per cent of people living with disabilities are children under 19 (Census 2008)<sup>23</sup>.
- About 20 per cent of children aged 6 to 14 and 48 per cent of children aged 15-19 are not in school (Census 2008)<sup>24</sup>; many of them are working, including child labour's most hazardous forms.

Therefore, children's unique vulnerabilities and their limited adaptive capacity need to be factored into climate change responses and policy decisions. Compared to adults, children are more susceptible to adverse environmental conditions such as contaminated water, extreme heat and floods, disease outbreaks, etc., and they also have fewer resources and means to be able to independently respond to these conditions and care for themselves.

There is increasing evidence that many of the main causes of death for

children, such as diarrhoea, malnutrition and mosquito-borne diseases, are exacerbated by climate change. Climate change is likely to also affect education by making it more difficult for children to attend school. Gender inequality may increase, as more parents may be inclined to keep the girls at home rather than send them to school if their safety is perceived to be at risk in times of climate hazards. In the face of reduced food security and incomes, parents can also withdraw their children from school. This can result in more inequalities and the perpetuation of inter-generational poverty. Child protection is also under threat due to loss of livelihoods and socio-economic security, decreased social support networks, distress migration, etc.

Climate change has serious implications for the availability, accessibility, equity and quality of public service provision. Currently, many basic social services in Cambodia lag behind national targets, norms and standards. Already wide gaps are noted in the key CMDG rights, most of which concern basic social services. Climate change could further widen the gaps in provision and worsen the situation of many children, pushing them further into the vicious cycle of poverty and deprivation. Inequalities and disparities persist in basic social service provision and outcomes.

# Effects of climate change on children in Cambodia and children's own views: **The Evidence**

According to the findings from the IDS/Plan Cambodia research on child rights and climate change adaptation (2010)<sup>25</sup>, children in Cambodia see a clear link between changing climate conditions, in particular worsening drought and erratic rainfall, and violation of their rights.

## CHILDREN'S VOICES

*"Our school is far from the village and the floods cause many difficulties for the community, especially for children. The roads get cut off and the bridges collapse and the majority of children cannot get to school."*

*"My parents really need me to help, even during my school hours, since our family has insufficient income. We need to work in the cassava plantation to earn income. Sometimes we get sick since we work under very hot temperatures and we cannot go to school."*



Children in Plan target areas produced two videos on flood and drought risk reduction to make their voices heard. **Photo:** Ms. Tamara Plush, Participatory Video Consultant, July 2009

Priority concerns voiced by the children include:

- Lack of access to water and irrigation infrastructure, threatening livelihoods and affecting food and income sources.

- Insecure livelihoods, constraining access to education and exacerbating food deprivation.
- Floods, which create physical barriers to access schools and pose safety and protection challenges for children when travelling to school.
- Risk of abuse due to families migrating for work and income because of increasingly scarce food.
- Insufficient participation in resource management decisions.

Climate change affects the realization of children's rights in Cambodia with damaging consequences, in particular for education, protection and participation<sup>26</sup>:

- Right to education: children spend more time in farming and non-farming activities (pumping water for the rice fields, etc.) and do not attend school.
- Right to protection: drought-induced child labour, poor health and exploitation from some coping strategies, child labour in cultivation and processing of cassava, fear for their safety.
- Right to participation: children's voices regarding resource management not heard.

This evidence and children's views point to an urgent need for child-sensitive approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation in Cambodia. Child-sensitive approaches need to inform both national poverty reduction and sectoral policies and strategies, as well as to help improve local development planning processes, including local disaster risk reduction plans and household livelihoods strategies.

## LISTENING TO CHILDREN

- Cambodian children have told us that disasters and climate change are negatively impacting their right to survival and development, non-discrimination, participation, education, health and food security, as established under the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- The primary responsibility for disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation (CCA) planning, and the protection of the rights of the child, lies with national governments, which should ensure that children are able to adapt to changing levels of risk now and into their futures.
- Climate change and disaster risk must therefore be integrated into national child poverty reduction and welfare agendas, in order for child rights to be protected, fulfilled and respected, and children should be enabled to use their valuable potential to contribute to DRR and CCA activities.

# Child sensitive climate change adaptation and mitigation: Principles and Evidence

Child-sensitive approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation need to include a number of basic principles that would ensure maximum consideration of children's rights. These principles derive from the international normative framework, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, A World Fit for Children (WFFC) and the MDGs.

These also inform the national policy framework and strategies in the National Rectangular Strategy, the National Strategic Development Plan, the National Social Protection Strategy, and the Action Plan on Vulnerable and Orphaned Children, among others, where children's concerns and rights are prioritized.

The legal and policy framework aims to protect and preserve the right of every child to a safe and healthy environment in which to develop and grow. Protecting the environment and providing for the health, education and development of children are mutually inclusive goals and should guide the response to addressing the impact of climate change on children.

A number of basic principles can inform a child-sensitive approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation. These principles underlie and inform most policymaking and programming approaches to addressing children's rights. In reference to climate change mitigation and adaptation more specifically, these can include the following<sup>27</sup>:

- Avoid adverse impacts on children, and reduce or mitigate economic and social risks arising from the effects of climate change that directly affect children's lives.
- Intervene as early as possible where children are at risk from the actual or potential future effects of climate change, in order to prevent irreversible impairment or harm, which could lock the child in a vicious cycle of poverty.
- Consider the age- and gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities of children throughout the life cycle when considering adaptation and mitigation approaches to climate change.

- Include the voices and opinions of children, their caregivers and youth in the understanding and design of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, systems and programmes.
- Mitigate the effects of shocks, exclusion and poverty arising from climate change on families, recognizing that families raising children need support to ensure equal opportunity for redress, compensation and assistance after extreme climatic events, such as droughts, floods, rises in sea level, rises in temperature, etc.
- Make special provisions to reach children who are particularly vulnerable and excluded, including children without parental care, and those who are marginalized within their families or communities due to their gender, disability, ethnicity, HIV/AIDS status or other factors. These groups are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change in view of their limited capacity to adapt.
- Consider the mechanisms and intra-household dynamics that may affect how children are reached with climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, in particular the balance of power between men and women and boys and girls within the household and broader community, to ensure a balanced response to the needs and rights of boys and girls.

In some instances, these principles have been effectively applied in Cambodia. At the policy level, Cambodia's National Action Plan for Adaptation (NAPA) 2005 includes a number of small projects that are directly relevant to children, such as an initiative to reduce disaster risk in schools (medium priority) and malaria control programmes<sup>28</sup>. The priority projects on water resources management and agriculture production are also highly relevant to realizing children's rights<sup>29</sup>. The Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2008-2013 mentions a number of priorities for action that are directly and indirectly relevant to children, such as incorporation of disaster risk management and risk reduction

into school curricula and elevated schools in flood areas, which facilitate the realization of children's rights to participate and protect in emergencies.

There are also examples of sub-national level pilots and projects that have tested child-sensitive climate change approaches to disaster risk reduction (DRR), with positive results for the children, youth and the communities where they reside. DRR work is particularly important as a first logical step in climate change adaptation. Understanding the social losses caused by disasters, and the fact that climate change increases these losses, means that well-implemented DRR activities will become even better value for money in the future and could help prevent greater economic, social and human loss. One such initiative, focusing on Commune Committee for Disaster Management Committees (CCDM), the lowest level of government authority with a disaster management mandate, is supported by Plan Cambodia<sup>30</sup>. Because DRR is about poverty dynamics and preparedness, it therefore needs to be integrated into planning processes at every scale. Cambodia has a structure in place for Disaster Management Planning from local to national levels; however, CCDMs operate with few resources and remain largely focused on disaster response and relief efforts. CCDMs recognize differentiated vulnerability across their communes and look at aspects related to wealth, gender and geographic location, but often they do not explicitly consider age as a key factor.



Children in Plan target areas participated in local planning meeting with CCDM. **Photo:** Mr. Chham Sokha, Disaster Risk Reduction Project Coordinator of Plan Cambodia, October 2009

Plan Cambodia has raised awareness among CCDMs, commune councils and community members about addressing children's rights. In particular, Plan Cambodia is focusing on issues related to basic education, health, water and sanitation, household economic security, and child participation and protection, and is working on a child rights-based governance and risk-reduction framework. As a result, some CCDM members now see children as having a legitimate voice in decision-making and are generally receptive to child representation and contributions. As a result of Plan Cambodia's initiative and support, dialogue between children and local authorities on addressing children's rights in DRR has been increasing. In addition, the importance of child participation in DRR has been recognized by the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) and other NGOs who are working on DRR through the DRR Forum in Cambodia.

ActionAid notes that children's voices are not given serious consideration while developing risk-reduction and mitigation plans. The priorities of children and CCDM often do not match. While climate change primarily looks at future scenarios, it is important that their views and concerns be recognized and considered.

Child-centred Disaster Risk Reduction approaches are providing considerable lessons for tackling climate change. Through such initiatives, the awareness of risks and risk-reduction options of children and their communities is raised and spaces are provided for their voices to be heard and to influence behaviour and policies that will reduce exposure of children to climate risks. Little is still understood about how child-centred initiatives can lead to transformative change. By engaging children, some of the drivers of vulnerabilities of children are adequately addressed in the long-term, for example addressing logging that contributes to landslides and flooding<sup>31</sup>.



Children in Plan target areas raised awareness about tree planting. **Photo:** Mr. Chham Sokha, Disaster Risk Reduction Project Coordinator of Plan Cambodia. November 2009

Emergency monitoring, especially for the slow onset of emergencies like food crises, health crises, and droughts and floods, is important because it could help prevent considerable damage to livelihoods, families and children.

Sector-specific programmatic approaches to child-sensitive climate change adaptation are also evolving. UNICEF Cambodia, among other agencies, addresses climate change-related vulnerabilities in many of its sectoral programme components. UNICEF's most successful initiatives – some of which are long-running – are implemented in the water and sanitation, health, and education sectors:

#### Water and sanitation

- Promoting water safety plans to mitigate the effects of climate change, including household water treatment and hygiene promotion.
- Promoting the use of rainwater, in particular in areas affected by arsenic, to help communities reduce water extraction techniques that exacerbate arsenic levels in ground water, and help communities adapt to climate change effects.

- Promoting proper use of water and sanitation and hygiene practices in schools.
- Promoting the use of latrines by households and communities, which, in addition to improving hygiene and health, also contributes to environmental protection (e.g. protection against contamination of water sources), although this is not a direct goal.
- Grants – earmarked funds – given to communes to promote sanitation and hygiene activities.
- Promoting participatory approaches (e.g. social service mapping and household mapping) for mapping vulnerabilities in access to and utilization of water and sanitation services.
- Educating the community in understanding the sources of water contamination and increasing knowledge about alternative sources of clean water. Promoting community-based water use (e.g. water user groups) with equal participation of women. Using a community-based education approach to raising awareness about arsenic.

#### Maternal and child health

- Promoting community health education on haemorrhagic dengue fever and also on flood-related health risks and response. Support is provided to mobile teams to ensure availability of supplies for the flood response.
- Supporting the supply of chlorofluorocarbon-free refrigerators to all health centres.
- Supporting the supply of solar chill refrigerators to remote health centres, a process that is currently in the testing phase, as part of the cold-chain immunization programme. Solar chill refrigerators are cheaper than solar refrigerators (which run on batteries) and more suitable for use in remote locations.

- Collaboration with health partners on nutrition response in food insecure, drought-affected areas, including as part of the UN Joint Programme on Nutrition, to address food insecurity and malnutrition in mothers and children.

### Basic education

- Disaster-risk reduction and planning is an inherent component of the child-friendly school approach, in particular the school environment and the child-protection dimensions of child-friendly schools. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is considering developing guidelines for integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness into the national curriculum (based on the results of the work of the ministry with NGOs).

UNICEF has provided leadership in formulating a child-sensitive approach within the National Social Protection Strategy and the key social protection packages required to address child poverty and vulnerability. UNICEF takes a life-cycle/continuum-of-care approach and advocates for bridging social protection provision at critical junctures in the life of a child, where social protection provision is currently lacking and impedes transition and achievement of outcomes along the development cycle. Special emphasis is placed on bridging transfers and services, cross-referral services, and coordination of service provision for a continuous stream of services – including in situations of emergency, crises and extreme climatic events – aimed at comprehensively addressing child poverty, deprivation and vulnerability. UNICEF has also technically supported the discussions on adaptive social protection<sup>32</sup>.

Some of the longest-running and most successful programmatic interventions supported by UNICEF include:

- Supporting people living with HIV/AIDS and orphans through the Buddhist Leadership Initiative, which includes counselling, in-kind assistance and also cash transfers (through the HIV/AIDS programme component).
- Supporting the implementation and expansion of government Health Equity Funds, which are aimed at helping the poor access health services. UNICEF is also initiating innovations in cash transfers for addressing maternal and child malnutrition, for which public-private partnership arrangements are pursued (through the Child Survival programme component).
- Supporting school feeding, in partnership with the World Food Programme, with the aim of increasing enrolment and retention (through the Education programme component).
- Supporting the development of effective commune referral systems and ensuring access to a continuous stream of basic social services for poor and vulnerable children (through the Local Governance for Child Rights and Child Protection programme components).
- Supporting social-service mapping – a commune poverty and vulnerability mapping tool – as a complement to IDPoor, the Government's mainstream identification and targeting mechanism. UNICEF is contributing funding this year to IDPoor, which is the primary method for poverty identification and targeting (through the Local Governance for Child Rights programme component).

- Providing social protection at the commune level through the use of discretionary commune funds, e.g. emergency cash to transport women in labour to health facilities; bicycles and other in-kind and cash support to poor families with school-going children; food assistance to poor families with children (through the Local Governance for Child Rights programme component).
- In collaboration with NGOs, supporting various initiatives for children with disabilities and victims of landmines, which also includes cash transfers to families of victims (through the Child Protection programme component).



# Climate change related policy and programming in Cambodia: **Entry Points**

Effectively implementing a child-sensitive approach to climate change in Cambodia requires identifying the most potent entry points, including but not limited to assessments, policies, strategies, programmes, partnerships and resource-allocation decision fora. These need to be informed by the lessons learned from the good work of the Government, UN agencies, NGOs, and in particular experimental and innovative approaches at the sub-national level.

There are a number of activities that provide opportunities for greater focus on child vulnerability in climate change adaptation and mitigation responses, and, overall, present opportunities for strengthening the children's agenda on climate change policy and programming. These include:

- Vulnerability assessment and adaptation (VA&A) report for the 2nd Communication to UNFCCC (draft, discussed at the National Workshop on Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation (VA&A), 2010), including sector-specific vulnerability analyses (e.g. for health with a focus on malaria response). The sectoral assessments present space for focus on children's issues and could help inform adjustments to sectoral policies, plans and budgets.
- The Cambodia Climate Change Alliance (CCCA)<sup>33</sup>, a new, innovative and collaborative approach to climate-change partnerships, which addresses technical support and capacity building in climate change awareness and response; joint funding aimed at harmonized engagement of donors and the Government; and strengthening of communities of practice enabling access to up-to-date information, learning tools, resources and knowledge-sharing services on climate change. This presents an opportunity to address the specific vulnerabilities faced by children and families.
- Emerging EC/EU guidelines on sector-specific climate-change adaptation activities (for all social sectors, including health and education). This opens up space for mainstreaming child-sensitive indicators and criteria into the guidelines.
- The Government's National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable (NSPS draft April 2010), which prioritizes the need for adaptive approaches to social protection; a number of conceptual approaches to implementing adaptive social protection instruments, such as public works schemes<sup>34</sup>; and strengthening disaster risk reduction through social-protection interventions. The major beneficiaries of programmes under the NSPS will be children and families.
- The innovative work of NGOs in implementing child-focused disaster risk reduction programmes, adaptation programmes, etc., in collaboration with Disaster Management Committees at the provincial, district and commune levels. For instance, Commune Disaster Management Committees have experimented working with children in making DRR child-sensitive (an initiative successfully supported by Plan Cambodia in two provinces). In addition, school teachers have worked with children through the disaster risk reduction programme to create awareness and skills on various hazards and vulnerabilities, and have become agents of change within the communities and schools (an initiative successfully supported by Action Aid and ADPC).
- The work of UN agencies, such as the International Labour Organization's efforts to reduce child labour, present opportunities to expand work on climate change issues. UNICEF, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and other initiatives on child-friendly schools, including safety clubs and environmental clubs, also present opportunities for addressing climate change issues at the school level.

# Key policy recommendations

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**Ensuring a child-sensitive approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation, including disaster risk reduction and planning, requires raising awareness among policymakers and practitioners about what entails a child-sensitive framework. It also implies ensuring the availability of mechanisms and tools for judging the adequacy of assessments, policies, strategies, programmes and approaches from the point of view of children's rights.**

To start with, a checklist could help to bring attention to the children's agenda. Meanwhile, more focused and sustained efforts at promoting child-focused analyses, policies, programmes and investments are required. It is important to build on the good work carried out collaboratively by NGOs and local government authorities, which is especially relevant in the context of the decentralized provision of services in Cambodia.

It is equally important to ensure that public service provision, in particular basic social services, which are to a large extent about realizing children's rights (in particular, those related to education, health and social protection), are adapted to the effects of climate change. This will ensure the availability of a continuous stream and continuous improvement of services, in particular in response to floods, droughts or other extreme climatic events. Examples of successful climate change adaptive capacity in education include:

- Disaster-proofing the education system, both hardware (safe schools) and software (school DRR), at the individual and whole system level and in a way which involves children.
- Developing the curriculum to give appropriate education to children on disasters, climate change and environmental management/Natural Resource Management.
- Seeing adaptation as an educational challenge: how to encourage the next generation to be entrepreneurial in

the face of rapid climate change and a range of new threats/opportunities (especially in view of the agricultural/livelihoods challenges expected and required technology transfer and innovation at a local level).

In ensuring climate sensitive public provision of services, special attention needs to be paid to equity issues and universal coverage of basic social services. Chronically poor, vulnerable, marginalized and excluded populations are the most likely to be the first and deeply affected by extreme weather events. They are often the first to remain with limited access to basic social services, by virtue of their location, available means, attitudes, practices of the community, etc. Therefore, equity concerns and strategies aimed at equitable adaptation to climate change are especially relevant.

In Cambodia, such equity-focused strategies are important in addressing the situation of special vulnerable groups: small children, widows, elderly, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and people with HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases, among others. Equally important is addressing the situation of specific segments within the dominant population. For instance, during the food price crisis of 2008-09, food insecurity and acute malnutrition increased sharply in urban areas, while affecting the largest number of children in rural areas<sup>35</sup>. This points to the need for a balanced and differentiated approach.

There are a number of opportunities and entry points for strengthening the agenda for children's rights and child-sensitive approaches to climate change response in Cambodia. Children's rights need to be raised high on the agenda of national climate change response processes. The participation of children also needs to be strengthened. Their innovative adaptation solutions may add value to local development planning for climate change response and disaster risk reduction processes.

Furthermore, children and youth are often the most potent channel for addressing change in behaviour and social practices, as proven, for instance, by the way children have influenced their peers' and parents' practices related to sanitation. Ensuring their active participation, however, requires an adequate framework of research, support and partnerships that explicitly recognizes the need for, and comprises the expertise for facilitating, a focus on children.

Initiatives such as the Ministry of Environment's work with UNDP and Oxfam America on surveying knowledge, attitudes and practices, which would allow for disaggregation of data and therefore look at how youth understand the issues regarding climate change, is one such example. Plan Cambodia's works with IDS and CENTDOR supporting children to make participatory videos on flood and drought risk reductions is another. The videos have been used as an advocacy tool to influence the local authorities, donors, NGOs and other community members to reduce flood and drought risks in the community by requesting canal renovation, tree planting, rice banks, safe schools and emergency response.

Further use of participatory approaches to engage children and youth in climate change-related work is essential in order to raise a generation of conscious, well-informed and active citizens. Engagement of children and youth with CCDMs is, in this sense, an example worth replicating and sustaining, as it both encourages participation in local decision-making and raises awareness about children's rights more broadly.

The experience of child-centred DRR also suggests that children can contribute to DRR as:<sup>36</sup>

- Analyzers of risk and risk reduction activities.
- Designers and implementers of DRR interventions at community level.

- Communicators of risks and risk-management options.
- Mobilizers of resources and action for community-based resilience.
- Constructors of social networks and capital.

Recent research also found that children benefit from participating in local groups by:

- Contributing more explicitly to their community and supporting their parents.
- Supporting other children.
- Tackling many different issues in their community according to their own interests and priorities (if well facilitated).
- Increasing their confidence and building respect between children and adults.
- Learning and increasing their opportunities to access higher levels of education.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This policy brief was prepared by Mariana Stirbu (UNICEF), Emily Polack (IDS) and Bun Peuvchenda (Plan Cambodia). Valuable inputs were received from Kumi Careme, Coordinator, National Human Development Report, UNDP, Andrew Pearlman, Consultant, Strategic Planning and DRR, Nick Finney, Regional Emergency Manager, Save the Children, Bangkok. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or the official position of their respective organizations. This briefing was prepared as background to the Cambodia Human Development Report on climate change and rural livelihoods in Cambodia. Collaboration between agencies was facilitated by the Children in a Changing Climate programme – a coalition of child-centred agencies working to establish effective protection and meaningful participation of children and young people in a changing climate. The programme hosts a research programme that provides the evidence base to enable practitioners, policymakers and children themselves to take action to prevent and adapt to climate change, see [www.childreninachangingclimate.org](http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org). This brief was designed by Sarah Rothwell.

<sup>2</sup> Adaptive capacity refers to the ability of the economy, industries, services etc. and also of the people themselves to adapt to climate change and mitigate its effects through changing livelihood strategies and consumption patterns.

<sup>3</sup> Anshory and Francisco, 2009, [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/7865\\_12324196651MapppingReport1.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/7865_12324196651MapppingReport1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Cambodia, Risk Profile, <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/countries/statistics/risk.php?cid=29>

<sup>5</sup> Cambodia, Risk Profile, <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/countries/statistics/risk.php?cid=29>

<sup>6</sup> Cambodia, Risk Profile, <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/countries/statistics/risk.php?cid=29>

<sup>7</sup> RGC, Comprehensive post-disaster needs assessment. Ketsana recovery and reconstruction in Cambodia, March 2010

<sup>8</sup> Ken Maskall, Climate Change in the Framework of the Medium Term Strategic Plan, working draft, September 2009; Jill Lawler et al., Children and Climate Change in the Asia-Pacific Region, working paper, June 2009

<sup>9</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Social and Economic Survey, 2007

<sup>10</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Social and Economic Survey, 2007

<sup>11</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Social and Economic Survey, 2007

<sup>12</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report, 2009

<sup>13</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Population Census, 2008

<sup>14</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Population Census, 2008

<sup>15</sup> Emily Polack, Child rights and climate change adaptation: voices from Kenya and Cambodia, February 2010

<sup>16</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Population Census, 2008

<sup>17</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Population Census, 2008

<sup>18</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Social and Economic Survey, 2004

<sup>19</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey, 2005

<sup>20</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey, 2005

<sup>21</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Anthropometric Survey, 2008

<sup>22</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Anthropometric Survey, 2008

<sup>23</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Population Census, 2008

<sup>24</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Population Census, 2008

<sup>25</sup> Emily Polack, Child rights and climate change adaptation: voices from Kenya and Cambodia, February 2010

<sup>26</sup> Emily Polack, Child rights and climate change adaptation: voices from Kenya and Cambodia, February 2010

<sup>27</sup> The child-sensitive principles formulated in the Joint Statement on Child-Sensitive Social Protection (2009) were used as basis here and adapted to reflect the particular concerns and strategies arising in connection with climate change.

<sup>28</sup> Emily Polack, Child rights and climate change adaptation: voices from Kenya and Cambodia, February 2010

<sup>29</sup> Emily Polack, Child rights and climate change adaptation: voices from Kenya and Cambodia, February 2010

<sup>30</sup> Example draws on Emily Polack, Child rights and climate change adaptation: voices from Kenya and Cambodia, February 2010

<sup>31</sup> Back et al., Children and Disaster Risk Reduction: Taking Stock and moving forwards. November 2009. Children in Changing Climate Research Report from UNICEF and IDS.

<sup>32</sup> Mariana Stirbu, Technical Note "Social Protection and Climate Change: Linkages and Synergies for Cambodia", draft June 2010

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.un.org.kh/undp/Climate-Change/Launch-of-Cambodia-Climate-Change-Alliance.html>

<sup>34</sup> Mariana Stirbu, Technical Note " Social Protection and Climate Change: Linkages and Synergies for Cambodia", draft June 2010

<sup>35</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodia Anthropometric Survey, 2008

<sup>36</sup> Tanner, T. Garcia, M. Lazcano, J. Molina, F. Molina, G. Rodriguez, G. Tribunalo, B. and Seballos F (2009) Children's participation in community-based disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change. Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) 60: Community based adaptation to climate change [http://www.planotes.org/pla\\_backissues/60.html](http://www.planotes.org/pla_backissues/60.html)

