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The Development of Victim Assistance in Cambodia

by Lao Veng, [**Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation**]
and Sisary Kheng [**Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics**] - [view pdf](#)

The Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation has played an active role in collaboration and support to mobilize resources for victims in Cambodia. A number of local and international organizations contributed to the development of better victim assistance services.



Vocational training programs help develop life skills and income generation for landmine survivors and persons with disabilities in Cambodia.
All photos courtesy of The Cambodia Trust.

Cambodia, like Laos, suffered considerable collateral damage including extensive defoliation from Agent Orange and contamination from cluster munitions and heavy bombing during the Vietnam War (1955–1975).¹ Following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam, the Pol Pot regime ruled Cambodia until Vietnam intervened in 1978, and the regime collapsed. Regime supporters retreated into the jungles bordering Thailand, where they continued to fight a guerrilla war against the new Cambodian government. The landmines, boobytraps and other explosive devices remaining from this guerilla warfare, coupled with the remnants of the international conflict, left the country with extensive unexploded ordnance contamination.

In 1989, following the United Nations' intervention, Cambodia returned to the international community.² After U.N.-sponsored elections, Cambodia regained democratic independence as a constitutional monarchy in 1993. During the transition, the international

community became aware of Cambodia's landmine problem. The national census in 2008 estimated that 1.4 percent of the population sustained physical disabilities, but at that point a clear definition and classification of disabilities was not established. Based on new definitions and classifications, the numbers may be higher.

Despite many challenges due to the lack of resources, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation has achieved success in victim assistance for landmine survivors and people with disabilities through close collaboration with the government and development partners such as nongovernmental organizations and civil-society

organizations. Since its beginning in 1979 under the Department of Social Affairs, Labour, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, MoSVY's accomplishments are as follows:

- Founded the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics
- Established 11 physical rehabilitation centers throughout Cambodia
- Established an orthopedic component factory
- Developed a spinal-cord-injury rehabilitation center
- Created nine vocational training centers
- Helped to develop national plan laws on protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities

Community-based Rehabilitation

Working toward Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals, MoSVY and partner organizations aim to integrate community-based rehabilitation into programs for health care, education, empowerment, livelihood, social integration and development.³ The community-based rehabilitation program is currently implemented in 20 of the 24 provinces. Referring to the importance of equal assistance, MoSVY created a victim assistance paradigm that identifies a comprehensive model of physical rehabilitation, vocational training, and an approach to equal community participation and opportunity. victim assistance resources are equally important to rehabilitate and fully integrate landmine survivors. Inclusive education and socioeconomic development, as well as societal changes in how disability is perceived, are the cornerstones for a successful approach of long-term, sustainable assistance to victims and PWDs. Additionally, MoSVY and development partners such as the Cambodian War Amputees Rehabilitation Society, Japan Cambodia Interactive Association, Jesuit Service Cambodia and the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, founded nine vocational training centers, including training and workplace vocational training. Vocational training programs help develop life skills and income generation for landmine survivors and PWDs in Cambodia.



Inclusive education and socioeconomic development, as well as how society views disability, are the cornerstones for a successful approach of long-term, sustainable assistance to victims and survivors.

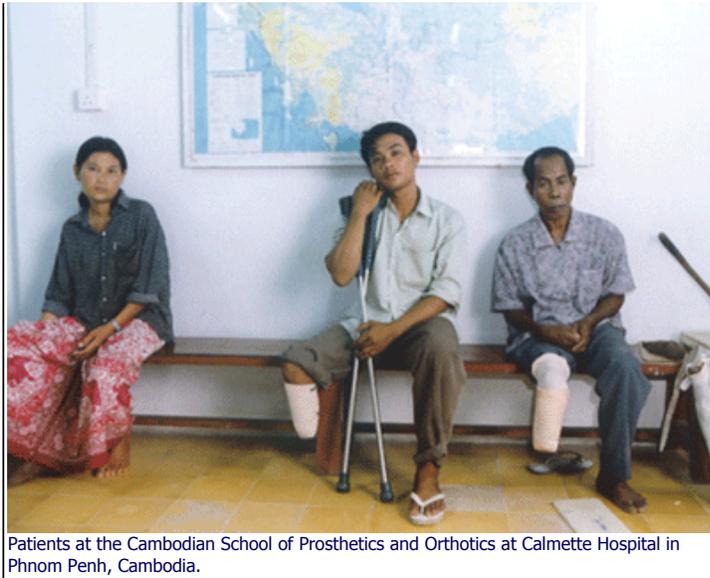
In 1993, MoSVY and The Cambodia Trust, a British NGO, established the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics at Calmette Hospital in Phnom Penh along with support from other stakeholders.⁴ In a three-year course of study, the school trains students in prosthetics and orthotics to provide mobility devices for persons with disabilities (not only mine victims) countrywide. In 1997, the International Society of Prosthetics and Orthotics and the World Health Organization formally accredited the school. In 1998, following inquiries from Laos, the school received its first international students. Since then, students from 18 countries have attended the school, most from post-conflict and/or mine affected countries. Since 2000, CSPO graduates have provided all prosthetic and orthotic services in the country, reducing the need of expatriate professionals such as prosthetists and orthotists. Expanding upon this success, CSPO contributed to the development of three new schools of prosthetics and orthotics in Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Official Victim Assistance Policies

The establishment of laws protecting and promoting disability rights and other legal requirements and policies related to PWDs were significant achievements for MoSVY and the nation. Though more services are needed to continue the integration, empowerment and inclusion of PWDs at the community level, past experience with NGO partners and Cambodia's government led to positive developments.

The key to success for national, regional and provincial victim assistance in Cambodia relies heavily on mutual understanding and compliance to national legal requirements between MoSVY and the victim-assistance organizations. These legal guidelines and national oversight bodies include the following laws and organizations:

- Memorandum of Understanding between MoSVY and organizations
- Disability Action Council
- The Law of the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- National Disability Coordination Committee
- National Plan of Action on Disabilities



Patients at the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics at Calmette Hospital in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

These coordination mechanisms give MoSVY and Cambodia a clear overview and plan in partnership with other victim assistance organizations.

The coordination and development of the Memorandum of Understanding between MoSVY and victim assistance organizations is one of the major cornerstones in the establishment and delivery of victim assistance. The Memorandum of Understanding gives operators and MoSVY an overview of all victim assistance projects, the implementation plan, and indicators for successes and expected collaboration. Each Memorandum of Understanding renewal (every one to five years) is an opportunity for victim assistance organizations and MoSVY to review achievements and challenges in order to design a better plan for more efficient coordination and dissemination.

The Disability Action Council was established in 1997 as the national coordination and advisory

mechanism on disability issues. The Disability Action Council promotes, coordinates and strengthens the capacity of its affiliated members to initiate and secure necessary PWD rights and services. Local and international institutions from the disability sector and from the non-disability sector with goals and visions sympathetic to PWD inclusion are eligible to apply for membership. For its members, the Disability Action Council represents the disability sector and provides a common voice for lobbying government ministries and relevant stakeholders to influence policy and monitor the implementation of existing legal frameworks. It also serves as a place where members and government ministries meet and share updated information, challenges and best practices to produce specific recommendations to relevant ministries, institutions and stakeholders.

His Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni of Cambodia signed the Law of the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 3 July 2009. The law ensures equal opportunities for PWDs in Cambodia. MoSVY and other interested partners enforce the law, aiming to reduce stigma and discrimination toward PWDs.

The National Disability Coordination Committee is another instrument to monitor, coordinate, evaluate and promote a national victim assistance plan of action in Cambodia. The National Disability Coordination Committee mobilizes victim assistance resources, ensuring effective and efficient distribution in Cambodia according to landmine and ERW survivor needs. The National Disability Coordination Committee also collaborates with and supports stakeholders, interested partners and government agencies in delivering timely, efficient and appropriate support to nongovernmental and governmental institutes for effective implementation of the laws on protection and promotion of PWD rights.

The National Plan of Action on Persons with Disabilities facilitates better victim assistance coordination in Cambodia. From 2009–2011 the National Plan of Action on PWD, developed by MoSVY and relevant stakeholders, included landmine and explosive remnants of war survivors. The goals of this National Plan of Action are as follows:

- Define the scale of the challenge to identify, monitor and evaluate responses to needs
- Reduce deaths by stabilizing medical conditions and minimize physical impairments in emergency settings
- Restore maximum physical functional ability for PWD, including the provision of appropriate assistive devices
- Promote disability rights, including landmine/ERW survivors and children, to resume their roles in the community by helping them adjust to psychosocial changes and thereby participate and contribute to their society
- Improve PWD living standards, including landmine/ERW survivors, through increased opportunities for employment and other income-generating activities
- Establish, implement and enforce laws and public policies that guarantee the rights of PWDs, including landmine survivors

The National Plan of Action is annually monitored with a complete review at the end of the term.

Conclusion

MoSVY's experiences with collaboration, support and resource mobilization in Cambodia can assist other states in coordinating victim assistance services. Victim assistance, coupled with and integrated into broader disability services as mandated by the *U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, has been successful in Cambodia. Physical rehabilitation is widely available for landmine survivors and other PWDs. Representatives of Cambodia's MoSVY and broader government are proud to have taken a proactive and positive leadership role in victim assistance, providing physical and psychological assistance to survivors. Good planning, international cooperation and strategic thinking, in cooperation with credible partners, allowed the lessons learned by MoSVY and other organizations working in Cambodia to be used throughout the region. 🌐

Biographies



Lao Veng has served as the director of the rehabilitation department (Department of Welfare for Persons with Disabilities) of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation since 2005. In addition to obtaining his bachelor's degree in law in 1998, he attended various trainings nationally and internationally related to disability and development. Furthermore, he served as director of the Disability Action Council Secretariat, assistant to vice-governor of the municipality of Phnom Penh and the secretary of administration of the Department of the National Election Committee. He is also a member of the Cambodian Veteran Association as well as the deputy-secretary general of the National Special Olympic Committee.



Sisary Kheng graduated from Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics in 2000. In addition to her professional qualifications in prosthetics and orthotics (diploma from CSPO and a degree from La Trobe University, Australia), she holds a Master of Science in rehabilitation studies from the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. Apart from involvement in prosthetist/orthotist education in Cambodia, she also chairs the International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics Category II subcommittee on education worldwide.

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Endnotes

1. The Vietnamese refer to this war as the American War. "Vietnam War: History." *BBC News* 2012. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/asia_pac/05/vietnam_war/html/introduction.stm. Accessed 8 October 2012.
2. Following the invasion, the Khmer Rouge represented Cambodia in the United Nations; the country was later allowed to represent itself again in 1989.
3. The U.N. set Cambodia's eight Millennium Development Goals, which aim to eradicate poverty by 2015.
4. Harte, Carson. "Replicating the Cambodian Trust Model." *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*, Issue 16.1 (Spring 2012). <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/16.1/Notes/Harte/harte.html>. Accessed 31 May 2012.
5. "Role and achievements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights." *United Nations General Assembly*. <http://www.un.org/documents/qa/docs/56/a56230.pdf>. Accessed 31 May 2012.

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