Background

Health remains an important challenge as well as a development priority for Cambodia. On one hand, Cambodia is one of the few countries globally that achieved both of the MDG targets of maternal and child mortality. On the other hand, 32% (or approximately 0.5 million) of children under five are stunted even today. The maternal mortality ratio decreased from 472 in 2005 to 170 in 2014 (number per 100,000 live births), but still remains high. Similarly, the under-five mortality rate decreased from 83 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 35 per 1,000 in 2014. Despite these dramatic improvements in maternal and child health, inequities in health outcomes persist among different socioeconomic statuses, geographical area, and between urban and rural populations. The government recognizes the need to go beyond improved survival rates to maximizing the potential of the country’s human capital.

For over 15 years, the World Bank has supported the health sector with its own financing as well as that of other development partners pooling funds through the World Bank. This has led to joint ownership, shared success and strong coordination among development partners and with the government, which is a unique feature in Cambodia and was instrumental in the rapid improvement in coverage and quality of health care services. The emphasis of past projects has been to improve access to health services while improving the results-based focus of financing through innovative instruments such as Health Equity Fund and Service Delivery Grants, with the specific goal of improving the quality of health service delivery and utilization of services by the poor.

About the Project

The project development objective is to improve access to quality health services for the target population. It will be achieved by:

- Increasing the number of health centers that exceed a quality assessment score of 60 percent.
- Protecting households against falling into poverty due to the cost of health services by reducing the share of households that experienced high levels of health spending, and reducing out of pocket health expenditure as percentage of the total health expenditure.
- Providing service delivery grants to support the quantity and quality of service delivery by the health facilities and to strengthen the management of the provincial health departments and district operations.
- Ensuring sustainable and responsive Health Systems.

Each year, the HEF system supports free access to over 2 million outpatient visits and over 100,000 hospital admissions for the poorest people in Cambodia, nationwide and across all public health facilities in the country. Payments for these services provided to the poor, as well as additional fixed and performance-based grants to health facilities, are deposited electronically and in a timely manner into the bank accounts of the health facilities. This has changed the empowerment and accountability paradigm, as resource availability at the most peripheral level of the health system has allowed facility-level decision making and vital funding that supports maintenance and repair of equipment and infrastructure and emergency shortages of drugs and consumables.

The project uses a multipronged approach to strengthening health systems, especially to support improvements in quality of care, by focusing on enhancing provider knowledge through both pre-service and in-service training, improved availability of critical infrastructure and strengthening public financial management (PFM). Significantly, the project uses government systems for its implementation arrangements, and is predominantly financed through results-based instruments.

Beneficiaries and Location

The project beneficiaries are the population of Cambodia, particularly the poor and vulnerable, and health care providers working in the public health sector. The project covers the whole country.