



Securing Political Support for Sustainable Domestic Financing for the HIV Response in Cambodia: A Policy Process

HP+ POLICY *Brief*

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Background

Cambodia is successfully controlling and managing its HIV epidemic through active case-finding strategies, increasing coverage of antiretroviral therapy, and achieving a high rate of viral load suppression. It is globally recognized as one of the few countries to reach UNAIDS' "90-90-90" targets, achieved through strong commitment and implementation by the Royal Government of Cambodia, development partners, and civil society organizations. However, in 2017, only 24% of the response was funded by the government, with the remainder supported by donors, particularly the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.¹ As a lower-middle-income country, Cambodia is expected to sustainably increase its share of funding for the HIV response by tapping into domestic resources.

One of the key objectives of the National AIDS Authority (NAA) is to lead and coordinate efforts to drive increased domestic resource mobilization for the HIV response. The Health Policy Plus (HP+) project—funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development—provides technical assistance to NAA to support its mission to drive policy change for a more sustainable and domestically financed HIV response through evidence generation, capacity building, policy advocacy, and technical dialogue. In February 2019, this work culminated with the Council of Ministers ratifying a policy circular ([SorChorNor 213](#) or [SCN 213](#)) with the Prime Minister's approval, which—among other things—increases allocation of resources for HIV. The six policy measures contained within SCN 213 are summarized in Box 1.

Policy Engagement Process

HP+ engaged with NAA on several activities that led to the signing of SCN 213. One activity included working with NAA's Policy Advisory Board, which is headed by the chair of NAA, a senior minister in the government of Cambodia. The board meets bi-annually and serves as a multisectoral forum to discuss critical HIV priorities, present new evidence,

¹ Preliminary findings from the Cambodia National AIDS Spending Assessment, 2016-2017.

Box 1. SCN 213 Policy Measures

- 1. Integration into commune council plans:** The National AIDS Authority will collaborate with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Economy and Finance to allocate a specific budget package for integration of HIV activities into *commune/sangkat* five-year development plans and three-year rolling investment plans.
- 2. IDPoor/Health Equity Fund for all people living with HIV:** The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Planning recognize that all people living with HIV are a vulnerable group eligible for the Equity Card, ensuring access to health care and social protection schemes.
- 3. Health facility funds for HIV:** The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Economy and Finance will jointly develop rules and procedures for health centers and referral hospitals to use their own funding for the HIV response.
- 4. Public financing of civil society organizations working in HIV:** The Council of Ministers, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of Health, and National AIDS Authority acknowledge the important role of civil society organizations in responding to HIV and will continue to support their participation, funded by the Government of Cambodia, as available within the national budget.
- 5. Fiscal space for the HIV response:** The Supreme National Economic Council should study the fiscal space needed to ensure achievement of the government's commitments to eliminate HIV by 2025.
- 6. Integration of HIV into health systems:** The Ministry of Health will continue to strengthen human resources, the procurement system, supply chain management, and the health information system to ensure a more effective and sustainable HIV response.

and achieve consensus on key policy measures and resolutions related to the role of different line ministries in sustaining the HIV response. Members of the Policy Advisory Board include representatives from key ministries, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Planning, and Ministry of Interior. HP+ helped to structure the board's priorities and developed a coherent advocacy plan, which was put into action during the board's 2018 meetings in May and December.

Another important activity included working with NAA to generate evidence on the need to identify domestic sources for funding the HIV response due to declining external funding. Critical analyses were conducted, including analysis on the cost of increasing the number of people living with HIV covered by the Health Equity Fund and analysis demonstrating that people living with HIV are a vulnerable population that should be prioritized for enrollment in social health insurance. In addition, HP+ supported NAA with assessing the role of civil society organizations in the HIV response and the additional resources needed for the government to fund their services. Overall, HP+ provided sustained capacity building to NAA leadership to support policy advocacy and drafted board resolutions and proposals for the Prime Minister's office.

Policy Measures for HIV Financing

SCN 213 provides policy guidance for ministries to increase the allocation of resources to HIV through available funding channels. SCN 213 also supports the incorporation of a well-established and accomplished, but still largely vertically managed HIV program, into the Ministry of Health. The timing of SCN 213 coincides with several government strategic planning processes, including the development of NAA's fifth National Strategic Plan for 2019-2023, the Health Sector Strategic Plan for the next 10 years, and the joint program review of

HIV. SCN 213 serves as the guiding document to develop, monitor, and implement NAA's strategies through its National Strategic Plan.

Supporting Policy Implementation

Moving forward, NAA is leading the planning for implementation and monitoring of SCN 213, in close collaboration with relevant line ministries. NAA organized an inter-ministerial meeting on SCN 213 in March 2019, and further follow-up activities are underway to ensure effective implementation, with technical support from HP+ and other development partners. HP+ supported NAA to develop an implementation roadmap for its commitments, including identifying NAA "policy champions." These policy champions will lead engagement with relevant ministries to develop action plans and follow-up activities. HP+ is continuing to provide capacity development and evidence generation to NAA so it can lead and monitor implementation of SCN 213, encouraging self-reliance in delivering a highly effective HIV response.

Lessons Learned

- Engagement across ministries, not just with health and HIV stakeholders, is necessary to ensure effective implementation of policy measures focusing on sustainable financing of HIV.
- Identification of government policy champions promotes the advancement of sustainable reforms and ownership of the transition to domestic funding.
- Evidence generation and building local capacity is critical to support advocacy efforts conducted by technical counterparts targeted to senior officials within the government.
- Major government policy changes that impact funding require sustained technical support over the medium term to build momentum and deliver lasting change.

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