



Key Notes for the Department of Social Welfare for Persons with Disabilities

#5. Community-based care for children with disabilities

Facilitating children to live in communities and with families stimulates the development of capacities needed to participate fully in community life and wider society. The government of Cambodia should invest in community-based care to ensure child-centred services and the appropriate support needed to bring about full inclusion of children with disabilities.

It is estimated that nearly 1 out of every 100 children in Cambodia is living in residential care such as orphanages, recovery centres and child protection centres. They are divided over approximately 1,658 residential care settings. The primary reason for entering residential care is to escape from poverty or to obtain educational opportunitiesⁱ. However, the cost for residential care is significantly higher than community-based careⁱⁱ.

There is increasing international recognition on the importance of deinstitutionalisation: the transition from institutional to community-based care. Community-based care is “an approach designed to enable children to remain with their own family or to be placed with a foster family, if possible within their community”ⁱⁱⁱ. Community-based care enables children with disabilities to develop cognitive, emotional and physical capacities, whereas those living in residential care settings can face the risk of violence, emotional abuse and neglect. Being taken care of in the community is important for the health and wellbeing of children with disabilities and should thus be promoted by the Government of Cambodia.

Why should the government invest in community-based care for children with disabilities?

1. Living in a community setting stimulates a healthy development of children with disabilities, because

it^{iv} v:

- Lessens the risk of violence, emotional abuse and neglect;
- Fosters the creation of friendships and sense of belonging;
- Provides the opportunity to learn and interact with non-disabled peers;
- Helps children to explore and understand life in the community;
- Creates better opportunities to lead an independent life.

2. Being taken care of by the community facilitates tailored services and appropriate support^{vi}:

- Potentially reduces reliance on health and social care workers over time;
- Increases the ability to obtain the most appropriate and personalised type of services;
- Fosters personalised responses to individual needs – this may reduce need for more costly residential services.

3. Community-based care preserves and stimulates traditional care structures of Cambodia^{vii}:

- It strengthens the Cambodian tradition of caring for vulnerable persons through community and extended families, thus strengthening the cultural response.

4. It facilitates an inclusive society, as living in a community^{viii}:

- Facilitates interaction between community members;
- Increases options for participation in social and cultural activities;
- Contributes to greater acceptance by the environment.

5. In the long term, community-based care creates socio-economic opportunities:

- The capacities derived from participating in the community, provide a foundation for increased social engagement and economic productivity later in life.
- The cost for residential care is significantly higher than community-based careⁱⁱ.

National and International Legislative and Frameworks / Provisions

2006 Cambodian Policy on Alternative Care for Children

This policy (followed by the 2008 Minimum Standards on Alternative Care) notes that family and community-based care are the best option for children, with institutional care being a last resort and a temporary solution.

Law on the Protection and the Promotion of the Right for Persons with Disabilities

Article 12 demands to “have an annual budget in order to integrate persons with disabilities into communities”. The state is also responsible to promote inclusive education for persons with disabilities, as written in Article 28.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 19 recognizes that persons with disabilities have the right to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and that states have to take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate this right.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The Convention recognizes that the family is “the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children”, including children with disabilities. In Article 23, States Parties recognize that children with disabilities should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions that promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Community-based care is fundamental to achieve universal health and wellbeing, implicit in Goal 3. Opportunities for life-long learning through, among others, inclusive education are mentioned in Goal 4 and stress the importance of community-based care.



With support from:



ⁱ Stark L, Rubenstein B., L, Pak K. *National estimation of children in residential care institutions in Cambodia: a modelling study*. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-013888

ⁱⁱ Prouty, R. and Larkin, K.C. (1999). *Residential services for persons with developmental disabilities: status and trends through 1998*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis, Research and Training Centre on Community Living, Institute on Community Integration.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jordanwood, M., (2016). *Protecting Cambodia's Children? Phnom Penh: World Vision Cambodia*.

^{iv} W Clark, H., et al (2020). *A future for the world's children?* A WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission. The Lancet, 395(10224), 605–658.

^v UNICEF (2013) Factsheet: *Residential care in Cambodia*.

^{vi} Hurstfield, J., Parashar, U., & Schofield, K. (2007). *The costs and benefits of independent living*. Office for Disability Issues.

^{vii} Hamilton, C., Aplan, K., Dunaiski, M., Yarrow, K. (2017). *Alternative care community practices for children in Cambodia*.

^{viii} Jolly, D. (2009). *Research paper on community living and the support of independent living: Costs and benefits*. European Network of Independent Living.