Integration of nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene: a foundation for human capital in Cambodia







Key national data

- **32%** of children under 5 years of age affected by stunting.
- **10%** of children under 5 years of age affected by wasting. ¹
- **61%** of the population has access to 'at least basic' water.
- **73%** of the population has access to 'at least basic' sanitation.
- **24%** of the population defecates in the open. ²

- 66% of the population has access to a 'basic' hygiene facility with soap and water.
- **39%** of schools have access to a 'basic' sanitation service.³
- 91% of healthcare facilities have access to basic water supply.
- **39%** of healthcare facilities have access to basic sanitation. ⁴







Key message

The Royal Government of Cambodia and development partners should capitalise on the strong momentum for WASH–nutrition coordination and seek to deepen and sustain integrated action. Key priorities are to agree a precise, action-focused joint strategic plan owned by the sub-working group (SWG) and line ministries – backed up with joint core indicators, nationwide malnutrition hotspot data, and investment – and to make capacity-building of sub-national decision-makers an urgent priority.

Introduction

Despite steady economic growth and poverty reduction, malnutrition remains a public health threat in Cambodia. One in four children under five are underweight, one in ten are wasted and one in three are stunted, irreversibly damaging their long-term cognitive and physical development, and contributing to low wages and lost productivity in adulthood. Improving children's health and nutrition is not only a moral imperative, but failure to do so undermines all other efforts to stimulate economic progress and nurture the human capital necessary to secure a prosperous future for Cambodia. Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is a fundamental determinant of

health and nutrition. Cambodia has made good progress in improving access to WASH services, with over half of the population now able to access basic sanitation. However, a quarter of the population are still practising open defecation, and water, sanitation and handwashing facilities are still inadequate in many healthcare facilities and schools.

The Royal Government of Cambodia have recognised that a well-coordinated multisectoral approach is necessary to improve nutrition, and that a key element of combatting chronic malnutrition among young children is reducing the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases, intestinal worms and other illnesses

linked to poor WASH. Led by Cambodia's Council of Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (2014–2018)⁵ reflects clear prioritisation of WASH as part of a comprehensive approach combining nutrition-specific with nutrition-sensitive interventions at all levels. Efforts to drive progress in this area have been led by a dedicated sub-working group, led by CARD, focused on WASH–nutrition integration (hereafter referred to as 'the SWG').

Meanwhile, at the global level there is recognition of the need to better understand and support WASH-nutrition integration. An initiative in

this area is the partnership between Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. This partnership seeks to document and share experiences from around the world on the integration of WASH and nutrition in policies and practice. To assess the successes, challenges, opportunities and recommendations for greater collaboration between WASH and nutrition. WaterAid conducted a qualitative analysis involving key stakeholders working in these fields in Cambodia. WaterAid interviewed stakeholders from national and subnational government, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, and NGOs. The list of interviewees is in Annex 1.



The specific objectives of our Cambodia study were:

- To understand the extent to which the recommendations from the 2016 Cambodia WASH-nutrition study by the Burnet Institute and partners ⁶, are being implemented by the SWG.
- To document lessons from current WASHnutrition programmes on how integration of approaches can be scaled up through government systems.
- To understand the role donors have in supporting WASH-nutrition integration.
- To support WaterAid's national and international advocacy objectives through developing contextspecific policy recommendations.
- To support the objectives of the SUN–SWA partnership by documenting and sharing experiences from which other governments and donors can learn.

Areas of progress



A number of our informants highlighted the high profile of WASH as a critical component of nutrition within the political narrative at the highest levels in Cambodia. The National Nutrition Day held in November 2018 was a good example of this, with almost all keynote speakers, including the Deputy Prime Minister, mentioning WASH as a key priority in addressing malnutrition. This is an important achievement; in WaterAid's experience in other countries, it is rare for WASH to have significant profile and recognition within national political and policy narratives on nutrition.

There was consensus that CARD is playing a vital role at the national level in mobilising and convening the multiple ministries that must take coordinated multisectoral action to tackle malnutrition, and ensuring that development partner efforts align with the overarching national Government approach. The SWG on WASH and Nutrition is recognised as an active, collaborative group that has dynamic discussions, examines the evidence, and helps to keep the agenda moving forwards.

Representatives from the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD lead ministry for WASH), Ministry of Health (MOH) and from development partners recognise the need for greater integration and cross-referencing between relevant nutrition and WASH national strategies and policies, and between the National Strategic Plan (NSP) for Food Security and Nutrition and the National Action Plan (NAP) for Rural WASH. These are ongoing processes at the time of writing. We encourage MRD, MOH and partners to ensure that the final NAP and NSP do reflect the necessary integration of WASH and nutrition investments and actions.

It is worth highlighting some of the key enabling factors that have allowed progress on WASH-nutrition integration in Cambodia, so that these can be built on and strengthened. Many informants recognised the leadership of Dr. Chea Samnang, Director of Deputy Prime Minister's Cabinet Office of CARD, WSSCC National Coordinator in Cambodia and Chief of SWG on WASH and Nutrition, in driving this agenda forwards. Dr Samnang's individual expertise and relationships in both the WASH and

There are several ongoing examples of greater programmatic integration of WASH and nutrition in Cambodia, results from which should provide insights into how integrated interventions can have most impact on reducing stunting. These include:

- The NOURISH project funded by USAID and implemented by Save the Children and partners in Battambang, Pursat, and Siem Reap provinces. NOURISH focuses on several of the key causal factors of chronic malnutrition specific to Cambodia – poverty, lack of access to quality food and nutrition services, unsanitary environments, and social norms and practices that work against optimal growth and development ⁷.
- The Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security in Cambodia (MUSEFO) project, funded by GIZ and implemented with Action Against Hunger (ACF) in Kampong Thom and Kampot. MUSEFO's conceptual model focuses on achieving diversified food production and consumption. The project incorporates training for health workers and farmers alongside community-based nutrition-relevant hygiene behaviour change delivered through community care groups⁸.
- The school health programme led by the Ministry of Education in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP). This has adapted and expanded from a narrow 'school feeding' approach to incorporate a more holistic approach to 'school health', which includes improving WASH facilities in schools and integrating hygiene education within the curriculum.

nutrition fields is an important and relatively rare combination that has enabled him to bring together all relevant actors towards a common goal. It is worth considering what would happen if Dr Samnang were no longer in this position, and whether WASH-nutrition integration would be sufficiently embedded and institutionalised within CARD, line ministries and development partners to continue.

The Royal Government of Cambodia's political priority on addressing malnutrition in order to nurture human capital and achieve economic prosperity for the country

has helped to give attention, time and energy to this agenda. This has been complemented by SUN's increasing presence in Cambodia and the emphasis that SUN places on a multisectoral approach to nutrition. It is also clear that the focus of some specific donor agencies operating in Cambodia on WASH-nutrition integration has helped to drive efforts. Again, it is worth reflecting on whether the programmes currently underway will become sufficiently embedded and government-led to be able to outlast donor project funding and become sustainable for the long term.

The challenges: translating policies to action, subnational capacity and government ownership



Compared with many other countries where WaterAid works, it is clear that the national dialogue and coordination on WASH and nutrition in Cambodia is more mature, with deeper understanding of the barriers for integrated working. Nonetheless, our informants identified significant challenges at both national and sub-national levels.

At national level

Our informants recognised the importance of CARD's role in convening and driving WASHnutrition integration at the national level. However, several argued that CARD needs to do more to hold line ministries to account for working effectively together. There is some concern that line ministries are 'paying lip service' to the integration agenda - saying the right things, but in reality maintaining siloed practices and not engaging actively enough in the SWG, CARD's lack of sub-national presence also means there is a gap in convening and coordination at the provincial level, where line ministry representatives (provincial departments) tend to work more separately and in siloes.

The study by the Burnet Institute in 20169 recommended that, as a high priority, 'focal points' for WASHnutrition integration should be identified by relevant line ministries. This has not yet happened, and is seen by many as a barrier – without these key individuals, and with high staff turnover in ministries, it is difficult to build strong relationships across ministries and to deepen knowledge of how to integrate. Beyond the need for focal points, some informants noted that there is relatively limited practical experience and understanding of WASH-nutrition integration within the MRD and MOH, and that this lack of technical expertise prevents a deepening of joint planning,

implementation, monitoring and budgeting.

An important potential driver for WASH-nutrition integration is the establishment of common shared measurements and monitoring between relevant actors. In Cambodia, work has been started but not finished on a set of 'core joint indicators', with the intention that all actors - line ministries, development partners and NGOs - would use these consistently, enabling CARD and all other stakeholders to have a consistent picture of progress and to be able to monitor the impact of integrated interventions. In the absence of these agreed core joint indicators, different ministries and different projects are using their own indicators, which are not consistent and aligned.

Many informants pointed out a lack of budget allocation both by ministries and by donor agencies for integrated WASH-nutrition programmes. On the Government side, there is no cross-ministry budget allocation mechanism, and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) does not currently play a strong enough role in steering ministries to allocate budget for their portion of WASH-nutrition integration work. On the donor side, too few donor agencies are creating funding streams or opportunities for integrated approaches - donor financing is often still sector-siloed

and rigidly defined in a way that precludes integrated approaches.

One clear entry point for enhancing integration is to converge or co-locate WASH and nutrition interventions to 'hotspot' areas with high rates of malnutrition and low WASH access. However, the lack of localised data on stunting and wasting in Cambodia was noted by our informants as a major gap that prevents joint planning or colocation of WASH interventions for high priority locations. UNICEF has previously produced localised data for two provinces, but there is hesitation about investing in this further if it will not drive action and investments.

Some informants also raised concerns about the lack of upto-date, regularly produced and robust data to enable targeting. For example, the current National Strategy on Food Security and Nutrition (2014-18) relied for its baseline on Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) data from 2014. This data had not been updated by the time of the mid-term review of the strategy, so it was not possible to know what impact the strategy was having on malnutrition levels. The new national strategy is now being developed in the absence of new data (since the next CDHS will not be completed until 2019 or 2020).

At sub-national level

In general, stakeholders in Cambodia agreed that the momentum on WASH-nutrition coordination and integration at the national level must be translated into action at the provincial, district and commune levels for it to have a real impact on malnutrition levels. However, there was also consensus that this is not yet happening sufficiently, with several factors identified.

While there has been a deepening of understanding about WASH–nutrition integration at the national level thanks to CARD and the SWG, there remains limited knowledge about the interlinkages and about practical ways to integrate WASH and nutrition among key decision-makers at provincial, district and commune levels. Authorities at these levels are extremely busy and continue to work to sectorsiloed priorities, with limited time to engage in cross-sectoral work.

Ultimately, individual citizens and families lack understanding of the importance of WASH for nutrition (such as good hygiene practices), so awareness-raising, advocacy and behaviour change activity must remain priorities.

While coordination between national line ministries on WASH and nutrition has strengthened considerably, at provincial level the departments representing MRD. MOH and other ministries continue to work quite separately and to have limited awareness of or coordination with each other's activities (insufficient 'horizontal' coordination). In the provinces of Battambang and Pursat, which are two of the three target provinces of the NOURISH project, the Provincial Department for Rural Development (PDRD) and Provincial Health Department (PHD) were aware that their interventions formed part of an overarching NOURISH strategy that incorporates both WASH and nutrition. However, this awareness did not necessarily change their ways of working or strengthen joint planning, implementation or monitoring by the PDRD and PHD.

It is also notable that the PDRD. PHD and PDAFF (Provincial Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) representatives we interviewed emphasised their roles in relation to donor-funded projects - rather than articulating crossdepartmental coordination as part of their own long-term aims and ways of working. Both NOURISH and MUSEFO projects have included funding for coordination roles at the provincial level to bring departments and other stakeholders together (called 'provincial development advisors' or 'provincial coordinators').



However, these roles are funded by donors on a project basis and will end soon. A key question, therefore, is whether coordination between WASH and nutrition actors at the provincial level will last beyond these donor-funded projects and become sufficiently institutionalised and sustainably government-led to ensure long-term change.

'Vertical' coordination is also relatively limited. There is little communication between provincial departments and their national line ministries specifically about WASH-nutrition integration, with little quidance **from** national ministries

to their provincial departments on this issue, and little reporting **from** provincial departments **to** their national ministries.

Finally, at the district and commune levels, some of our informants were concerned that local service-delivery platforms and functions severely lack capacity and so cannot respond to the need for integrated action on WASH and nutrition. Individuals and authorities tasked with service delivery on health, nutrition and WASH remain often separated and unfamiliar with each other's approaches.

Opportunities

More than many other countries where WaterAid works, Cambodia has the potential to achieve rapid reductions in malnutrition levels through integrated action on nutrition and WASH. As a lower-middle-income country with an ambitious economic development agenda, the Royal Government of Cambodia should be able to allocate significant resources to high-impact integrated interventions targeted at the communities most affected by malnutrition.

The existing CARD-driven national dialogue on WASH-nutrition integration, combined with the emerging evidence that can be drawn from ongoing integrated projects in the country and strong engagement of development partners, could rapidly accelerate efforts in this area. If this combination were to be backed up by nationwide, localised data on stunting and wasting, that is robust and updated regularly, then highly targeted integrated WASH and nutrition interventions could have a high impact on malnutrition levels.





Case study recommendations and Call to Action

A set of recommendations was developed based on the findings from this case study. These recommendations were used to prepare a 'call to action', presented and discussed at the second National Conference on WASH and Nutrition that took place in December 2018 under the auspices of CARD and the Deputy Prime Minister. The conference represented a key opportunity to broaden and deepen engagement with the integration agenda. Crucially, it aimed to strengthen shared ownership of this work by all

relevant line ministries, and to begin to build the capacity of Provincial Governors and other sub-national decision-makers to implement the vision set out at the national level.

The call to action outlines next steps to be taken as a priority by national ministries, sub-national authorities and development partners to implement WASH-nutrition integration. This call to action represents an important consensus and commitment that must now be translated swiftly into action.

Call to Action presented at the national conference

National level:

Government:

- 1. The Sub-Working Group on WASH and Nutrition Integration led by CARD should develop a concise, specific and achievable **strategic action plan** to drive progress on implementing integrated WASHnutrition programmes and projects. The strategic action plan should be in line with the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (2019-2023) and the NAP on Rural WASH (2019-2023). It should be timelimited, action-focused and include:
 - A clearly-articulated overarching goal for aligning the actions of all partners
 - Cross-reference to the relevant sectoral policies and plans highlighting how WASH-Nutrition has been incorporated within these

- Specific roles and responsibilities for all relevant line ministries, development partners and NGOs
- A minimum package for integration with <u>3-5 priority interventions</u> that all partners should invest in, including:
- geographical convergence (co-location) deliver WASH and nutrition interventions in the same locations drawing on 'hotspot' data
- integrated Behaviour Change Campaigns (BCC) incorporating key nutrition-relevant behaviours
- leveraging and building the capacity of local service delivery platforms
- Awareness raising and advocacy for the impact of WASH and Nutrition
- 2. The Sub-Working Group on WASH and Nutrition led by CARD should complete the development of a concise set of joint core indicators. CARD should mandate that all line ministries, DPs and NGOs use these core indicators to monitor the progress and report on WASH-Nutrition programming, enabling CARD to regularly aggregate and analyse data and prepare national reports.
- 3. CARD and the SUN Donor and CSO Networks should **regularly map existing and planned investments in WASH and Nutrition** to show geographical coverage and funding mechanisms.
- 4. Relevant line ministries (MOH, MRD, MAFF, MEF, MEYS) should identify two senior staff as Focal Persons on WASH-Nutrition who will act as a liaison to CARD, develop deep technical knowledge of integration and report on relevant activities regularly.
- 5. Ministry of Economy and Finance should participate in the development of the joint strategic plan on WASH-Nutrition integration, and agree with line ministries relevant budget items to enable delivery of agreed priority interventions, prioritising 'hot spot' locations in the short term.
- 6. Ministry of Economy and Finance should provide support to line ministries and DPs to allocate funding to complete mapping of undernutrition 'hot spots' to determine in which districts and provinces the situation is most severe, drawing on planned national surveys including the CDHS, in order to enable all partners to converge efforts on 'hotspots' of malnutrition.

- 7. CARD should coordinate line ministries and DPs investments in a highly integrated approach delivered in a small number of 'hotspot' areas with high rates of malnutrition, monitoring the results over a 3-5 year period in order to provide evidence of what works and a proof of concept for national scale-up.
- 8. SWG members should work and coordinate with National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) to incorporate **WASH-Nutrition as a priority within local planning guidance** issued to Provincial and District Governors and Commune Chiefs.

Development Partners:

- DPs should, through the SUN Donor Network, align programming to the CARD-led joint strategic plan for WASH-Nutrition as well as National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (2019-2023), ensuring that interventions reflect the priority approaches agreed by the SWG and that monitoring and reporting incorporates the joint core indicators.
- 10. In coordination with MEF, DPs should **pool funding to produce nationwide mapping of under-nutrition 'hotspots'**.
- 11. Development Partners should invest in capacity-building of Provincial and District authorities and Commune Councils in understanding of WASH-Nutrition integration and how to effectively coordinate and jointly plan, deliver and monitor the progress of integrated projects.

NGOs and CSOs:

- 12.NGOs should, through the SUN Civil Society Alliance, align programming to the CARD-led joint strategic plan for WASH-Nutrition, ensuring that interventions reflect the priority approaches agreed by the SWG, that interventions target 'hotspot' areas, and that monitoring and reporting incorporates the joint core indicators.
- 13.NGOs and CSOs should invest in documenting their experiences of WASH-Nutrition integrated interventions, sharing the learning on progress and challenges with the SWG along with specific recommendations for actions.
- 14.NGOs and CSOs should **prioritise capacity-building of Provincial and District authorities and Commune Councils** in understanding of WASH-Nutrition integration and how to effectively coordinate and jointly plan, deliver and monitor the progress of integrated projects.

Private sector:

15. Private sector actors specialising in WASH and/or nutrition-relevant areas should align programming to the CARD-led joint strategic plan for WASH-Nutrition and National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (2019 -2023).

Sub-national level:

Provincial and District Authorities

16. Governors should **strengthen coordination** of WASH and nutrition actors at provincial and district level, by using **existing forums or coordination platforms for convening regular meetings** to facilitate joint planning, implementation and monitoring by adding WASH and nutrition integration as a standing agenda item.

<u>Provincial departments and District Offices (including MOH, MRD, MEYS and MAFF)</u>

- 17. Provincial departments and district offices of MOH, MRD, MEYS and MAFF should **strengthen coordination with each other and with their respective national ministries** in order to communicate progress and challenges for action by national government.
- 18. Provincial departments and district offices of MOH, MRD, MEYS and MAFF should **coordinate closely with the offices of Provincial Governors and District Governors, and support their capacity** to plan, invest in and deliver effective WASH-Nutrition interventions.

Commune Councils:

19. Commune Councils should invest in integrated WASH-Nutrition interventions within their localities, in order to improve the long-term health and prosperity of their communities.

Annex 1 – full list of interviewees for this case study

Research fieldwork took place in November 2018. Interviews at national level were conducted in Phnom Penh by Dan Jones, WaterAid UK. Interviews with sub-national stakeholders were conducted in Kampong Thom, Kampot and Pursat by Sodany Saing, consultant for WaterAid Cambodia.

Name	Position	Organisation
Dr. Chea Samnang	Director of Deputy Prime Minister's Cabinet Office of CARD, WSSCC National Coordinator in Cambodia and Chief of SWG on WASH and Nutrition	CARD
Dr. Mary Chea	Director of Nutrition	МОН
Mr. Chreay Pom	Director-General for Technical Affairs	MRD
Dr. Yim Phivatho	Deputy Director	PHD, Kampong Thom
Mrs. Seng Nary	Chief of Maternal and Child Health	PHD, Kampot
Mrs. Muy Virath	Vice Chief Administration	Kampot Provincial Hall
Mrs. Sem Sothea	Deputy Director	PDAFF, Pursat
Mrs. Sorn Suvanny		PDAFF, Pursat
Mr. Duong Phanny		District Office of Agriculture, Pursat
Mr. Kong Rattanak	Officer of Planning Office	PDRD, Pursat
Mrs. Chheng Phannary	Midwife	PHD, Pursat
Mr. Phim Sopheap	Provincial Coordinator	NOURISH Project, Pursat
Ms. Inna Sacci	Chief of Party	NOURISH / Save the Children US

Mr. Patrick Renaud	Project Manager – MUSEFO	ACF Cambodia
Ms. Paloma Martin	Country Director	ACF Cambodia
Mr. Iean Russell	Senior Policy Advisor (FIRST Programme)	FAO Cambodia
Ms. Iris Richter	Consultant	GIZ
Mr. Hou Kroun	Deputy Country Director / SUN-CSA Focal Point	HKI Cambodia
Mr. Laillou Arnaud	Nutrition Specialist	UNICEF Cambodia
Mr. James Wicken	Country Director	WaterAid Cambodia
Ms. Indira Bose	Nutrition Division	WFP
Virak Chan	Water and Sanitation Specialist	World Bank Cambodia
Dr. Shakuntala Thilsted	Program Leader, Value Chains and Nutrition	World Fish

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- Hygiene and school sanitation figures from WASHWatch Cambodia profile - washwatch. org/en/countries/cambodia/summary/ statistics/
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To assess the successes, challenges, opportunities and recommendations for greater collaboration between WASH and nutrition, WaterAid conducted a qualitative analysis involving key stakeholders working in these fields in Cambodia.

Our study concludes that the Royal Government of Cambodia and development partners should capitalise on the strong momentum for WASH–nutrition coordination and seek to deepen and sustain integrated action.

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