

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PH-Japan Foundation (PHJ) implemented the Maternal and Child Health Improvement Project (MCHIP) in Baray-Santuk Operational Health District in Kampong Thom Province from 2008 to 2010. This project targeted four health centers which provide health services to approximately 47,000 people in a total of 55 rural villages.

Project Design

The purpose of the project was three-fold: first, to support and assist the targeted health centers so that they are able to provide proper Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services; second, to raise public awareness of health issues, especially Maternal and Child Health, in the target communities; and third, to encourage the pursuit of good health in the target areas. The Project's approach focused on human resource development for those working on health issues at the grassroots level. The main activities undertaken over the course of the project included: training for health center midwives, workshops for Village Health Support Group members and Traditional Birth Attendants in communities, and technical assistance and support aimed at improving health center management practices. PHJ also provided much needed medical supplies, equipment, and facilities. As a result of the activities and support of MCHIP, the targeted health centers now have both a greater capacity and improved facilities with which to provide quality health care services to their communities.

In addition to the main approaches and activities described above, PHJ also undertook several additional activities that supported and enhanced the MCHIP's main objectives. Particularly, PHJ organized monitoring & evaluation activities every six months to review the progress and share the results with project partners such as staff of Operational Health District (OD) and Health Centers (HCs). In addition, PHJ conducted community surveys before and after the project to examine the changes of behavior and awareness of villagers on health issues. This information was then used as an important source of data for the project evaluation process.

Project Implementation & Outcomes

In order to guide the daily operation of the Project, MCHIP was designed to include outcomes, activities, indicators and measurement tools. There were four outcomes for MCHIP, namely: to improve midwife skills and knowledge, to improve health center management, to strengthen networking between health centers and communities, and to improve the health knowledge of villagers. Accordingly, activities and indicators were set in order to make the progress toward and achievement of these outcomes measurable as well as to make project management transparent and accountable.

Project Evaluation

At the conclusion of MCHIP, PHJ undertook a comprehensive evaluation of the project. A PHJ internal evaluator looked through the data collected for MCHIP and utilized a five-point evaluation criteria to rate the achievement of the Project.

Relevancy: High

The improvement of maternal and child health is a national priority in Cambodia, as the country has been plagued by a high maternal mortality rate and extremely limited access for many of the country's women to quality health care services that would ensure safer pregnancies and deliveries. This is especially true in Kampong Thom which ranks as one of the lowest performing provinces on indicators of MCH and has lacked an adequate number of capable health care service providers to meet the province's needs. Thus, the project and its approach were consistent with national policy as well as local needs.

Effectiveness: High

The project evidenced high levels of effectiveness in three areas. First, midwives who participated in project-sponsored training gained sufficient knowledge and skills in midwifery to provide high-quality health care services at the target health centers. Second, health centers saw significant improvement in hygiene practices and facilities management. Third, the project helped to build networks among health centers and villagers, so that Village Health Support Groups (VHSGs) and Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) could share health information with health center staff in monthly meeting and promote health center services in their communities. As a result, increasing numbers of villagers began accessing health center services.

Efficiency: High

By inviting staff from the Baray-Santuk Operational Health District as well as local hospitals to train health center midwives, the project reduced costs while strengthening the local network of health care service providers. Likewise, transportation costs were reduced by selecting training venues for VHSGs and TBAs which were close to the participants' villages. The project provided effective educational programming at a low cost.

Sustainability: Some concern, but no major problems.

Considering both the tremendous need to improve MCH and the priority it has been given at the national level, PHJ anticipates that the public health sector will continue to allocate funds for programming in this area in the years to come. Although advances in health center management are likely self-sustaining, local communities will require support from international organizations or NGOs if they are to continue to hold monthly meeting with VHSGs and TBAs. Also, refresher courses for VHSGs and TBAs as well as those provided by health center staff for villagers will be necessary in order for villagers to remain up-to-date and reinforce their knowledge of health issues.

Impact: Positive Impact

As a result of the project, increasing numbers of women are seeking ANC, child birthing services, vaccinations (for themselves and their children) and other services from the targeted local health centers. It is expected that villagers will continue to utilize health center services at an increasing rate. Moreover, there were positive changes in the attitudes of VHSG members and TBAs well beyond what was initially expected. VHSG members became active promoters of health center services and important advocates and role models for improved home hygiene practices in their communities. As well, TBAs actively advised pregnant women in the villages to seek health center services and referred delivery cases to health center in cooperation with health center midwives.

Conclusions & Recommendations

PHJ achieved the project purposes set out for MCHIP and made important progress toward the Project's overall goal that "community people can have access to health center to have proper health services." Health Center staff in the targeted communities recognized that the growing numbers of clients was a direct result of service improvements made through the Project and now understand the importance of providing high quality care and proper service to each and every client. Furthermore, VHSGs and TBAs have committed themselves to safeguarding the health of villagers and are eager to continue their educational efforts within their communities. It is the common understanding of health center staff, VHSGs and TBAs that the behavior changes witnessed in villagers has just begun and that continuing education efforts with villagers is essential to ensure that these changes become permanent.