



POLICY BRIEF: 14

SUB-NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS NEED ASSESSMENT IN SOCIAL PROTECTION

1. INTRODUCTION

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has implemented and is expanding the scope of the social protection (SP) system to provide supports to citizens through an approach called **“Strengthening the System to Expand Coverage”**. Overall, the SP system in Cambodia is being significantly expanded, which requires ongoing cooperation and collective efforts from all relevant ministries and institutions at both national and sub-national levels. In the implementation of work within the social protection system, Sub-National Administrations (SNA) play a leading role in executing tasks and have direct contact with citizens at the community level. Recognizing the fundamental roles of SNA in the social protection system, the General Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council (GS-NSPC), with the support from German Development Cooperation through GIZ, collaborated with relevant ministries and institutions to conduct studies to assess the needs and challenges that SNA have faced and are currently facing. Objective was to provide evidence and a basis for preparing the qualifications of SNA to respond to the expansive scope of social assistance programs and social security schemes through enhancing awareness and addressing current challenges, promoting cooperation among SNA at all levels, and ensuring the legal authority of each SNA to perform their duties in SP system effectively and efficiently.

2. Objectives and Methodology

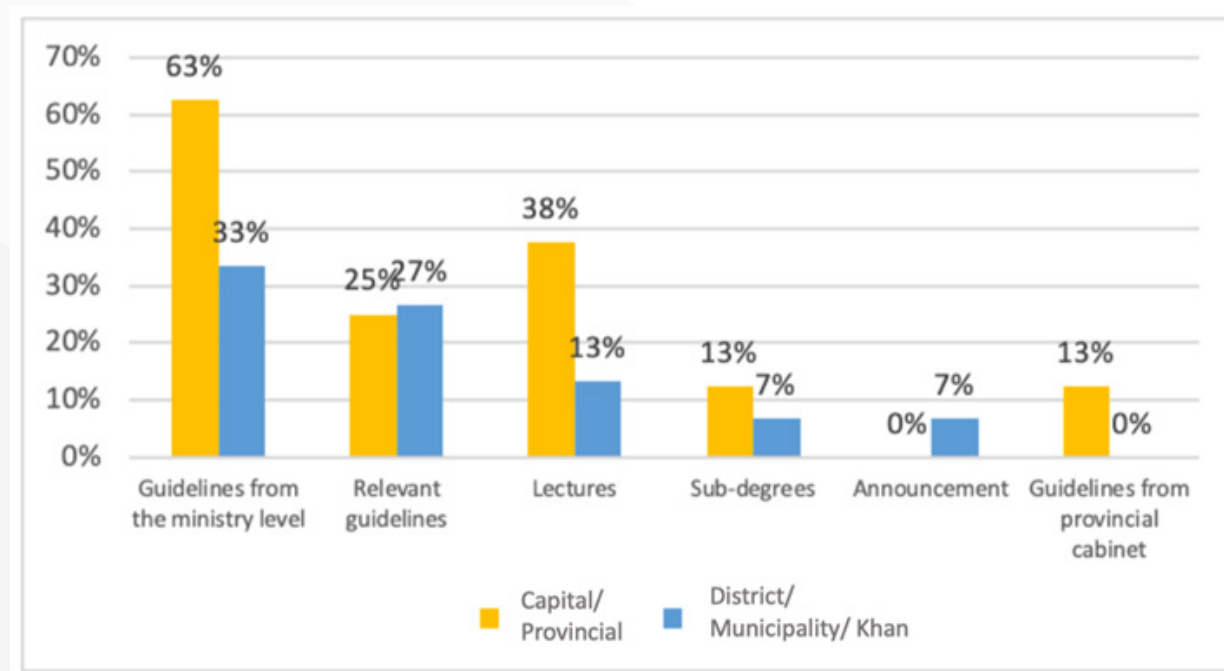
The assessment was conducted from mid-2023 until January 2024, seeking to: pinpoint knowledge gaps, assess the involvement of SNA in social protection, examine support from higher-tier SNA to lower-tier SNA, identify essential resources, and scrutinize the legal framework. The assessment utilized qualitative approach involving the reviews of relevant documents as well as the gathering of information and data from 8 different provinces/capital cities, and conducting on 535 participants (229 females).

3. Findings

3.1. Legal Frameworks

The assessment shows that the existing legal frameworks are adequate but the understanding of program implementors seems to be limited. Meanwhile, the lack of official organizational structure in the implementation of the SP system at the sub-national levels does not allow for the formal assignment of duties in the SP system to the SNA, which leads the sub-national administrations to perceive that social protection is an additional workload and ad-hoc work.

FIGURE 1: Perception of SNA on the available guiding documents for SP implementation at SNA level



The available handbook on the implementation of social assistance programs and social security schemes, sectoral technical guides, as well as instructions related to the allocation of budget for implementation are not sufficient for ease of use and accessibility yet. For instance, the existing regulations and guidelines consist of highly technical terminology, lack practical or step-by-step guidance and are not easily accessible online. The assessment indicated that 63% of the assessment participants at Capital/Provincial (CP) level and 33% of those at District/Municipality/Khan (DMK) level received the guidelines on SP implementation from the ministry level while only about 10% and below of both levels relied on the Sub-decrees and the announcements, as illustrated in Figure 1. In addition, instructions related to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework and guidelines for SNA levels are not yet developed.

Dissemination of information on the SP system and procedures for the implementation of social assistance programs and social security schemes is not yet widely available. In addition, the dissemination of knowledge lags behind due to the limited number of training courses, with inadequate concise teaching materials and methods and the lack of communication materials.

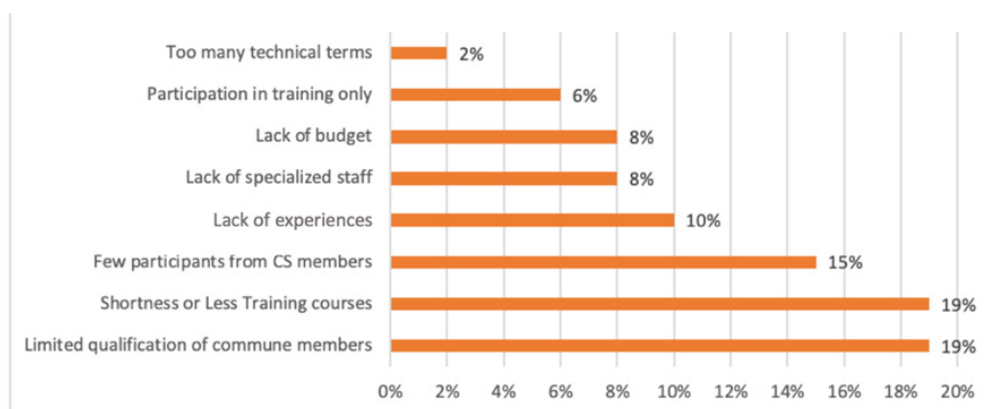
3.2. Human and Financial Resources

The lack of human and financial resources presents a challenge for the implementation of social assistance programs and social security schemes. The delegation and functional transfer based on the new administrative and financial arrangements of SNA, especially at the DMK level, necessitate a certain time. The time for adaptation during the transition period is substantial and should be used to support the SP works at the Commune-Sangkat (CS) level. In addition, the budget allocation for implementing these functional transfers in which SP system included is also not yet clear.

In regard to human resources, the assessment revealed varying levels of understanding of social protection among stakeholders. Social protection is perceived more as charitable actions than a part of the routine activities at the SNAs level and is also considered as additional burden for which systematic and clear structure are not in place. Overwork, limited time availability, and challenges from an aging workforce contribute to the challenges.

Moreover, the absence of specialized staff, inadequate incentives, poor internet services, lack of transportation means, and outdated gadgets for SP activities were also highlighted and considered a hurdle to human resources. Remarkably, the Figure 2 illustrates that the reasons behind challenges in understanding SP implementation among CS level who is the ground implementor are limited qualification of commune members and shortness or less training courses equally at 19%, followed by a few participants from CS members (15%) and lack of experiences on SP work (10%).

FIGURE 2: Challenges in understanding Social Protection System of Commune-Sangkat

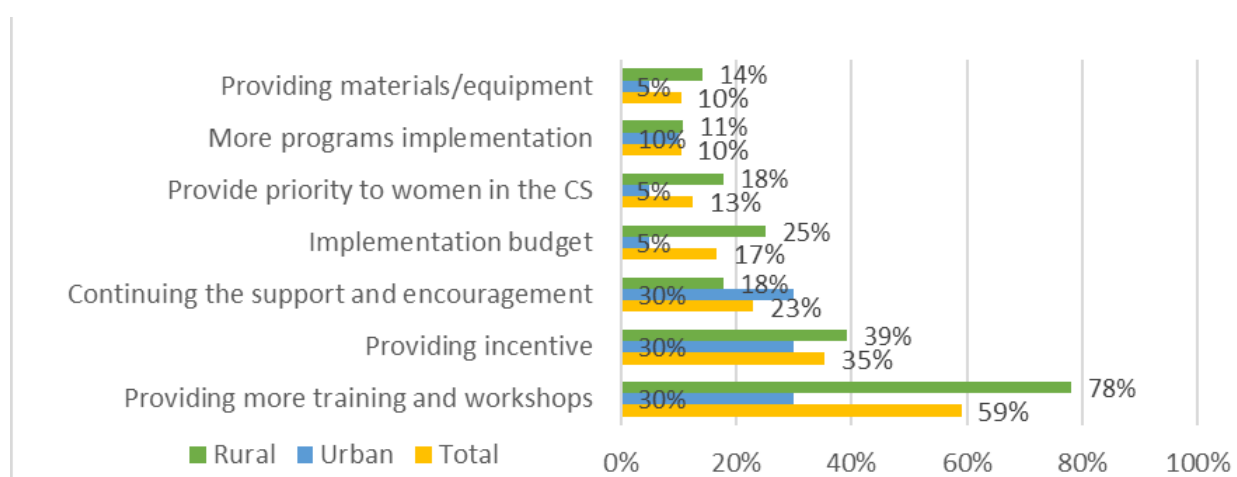


Regarding financial resources, the challenges that SNAs are facing include delayed budget releases as well as limited and unclear budget allocation. All levels of SNA require additional guidance about budget allocation for implementation of social assistance programs and social security schemes as the current budget allocation mainly depends on the general guidance by the national level, which is less specific for allocation at SNA levels.

3.3. Availability of Supports among SNAs

Despite positive perceptions by the SNAs, the provided support was deemed inadequate to meet their needs. The CP level was found predominantly active in capacity building in terms of trainings and workshops, coordination and facilitation, and awareness raising. However, the DMK level highlights the need of additional supports, budgetary allocation, and dissemination materials. Meanwhile, CS level, as the implementor at the community level, also presents a high demand of capacity building in term of frequent trainings. Figure 3 illustrates that CS level needs most support from higher-level SNAs on organizing more trainings and workshops (59%); followed by providing incentive bonuses (35%).

FIGURE 3: Types of requests for support of CS from CP/DMK



Aside from that, currently, the management of the beneficiary database remains centralized under the national level, thus, SNA has been facing challenges in managing beneficiaries information at SNA levels, which poses issues in confirming whether a recipient has benefited from specific social assistance programs and social security schemes in SP system, and in solving problems for the beneficiaries in a timely manner.

3.4. Constraints in Implementing Social Protection Programs

In short, the main constraints for CP, DMK and CS administrations include lack of budgetary support, lack of adequate human resources, limited technical knowledge, lack of adequate technical materials and office stationery, and insufficient coordination and partnership. Partnership and coordination in the implementation of social protection system in DMK and CS levels have become a constraint since the structure and responsibilities of SP implementation for sub-national levels are not clear. Moreover, shortcomings of equipment and dissemination materials of SP-related policies, social assistance programs and social security schemes in SP system are also the main challenges for all tiers of SNA in disseminating, information sharing, and trainings from higher-tier SNA to lower-tier SNA, which has hindered the effectiveness of implementation.

In addition, other external factors are also constraints, such as low community participation, limited awareness among local community, and frequent community mobility.

4. Key recommendations

Based on the findings above, to bridge the gaps in current circumstances, and to foster a more resilient and inclusive system that could respond to the diverse needs and perspectives of stakeholders involved, this assessment has raised several key recommendations as follows:

1. Improving Legal Frameworks

- **Legal Frameworks Guiding on Organizational Structure at SNA and Adaptive Budget Allocation in Social Protection:** to formulate declaration (Prakas) or guideline on working structure delineating roles in SP of each sub-national level for clear division of social protection functions. Moreover, legal framework or guideline should also be developed to introduce and allow adaptive budget allocation for the implementation of SP system at the sub-national levels. This will enable judicious use of budgetary resources, tailored to the unique contexts of different SNA tiers and socio-economic conditions.
- **Guidebook:** to develop a comprehensive guidebook by consolidating the various guidelines for the execution of social assistance programs and social security schemes at sub-national levels, which emphasizes user-friendly contents, ensuring simplicity for ease of understanding by sub-national levels particularly CS level. This guidebook should also be easily accessible online.
- **Sector-specific Technical Guidelines and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Guideline:** to formulate sector-specific technical guidelines for effectiveness and efficiency operation of each specific sector of SP system. Moreover, M&E guideline should be developed for the systematic evaluation of work within SP system to enhance efficiency in monitoring and support activities at the sub-national levels. This M&E guideline should be aligned with National Social Protection Policy Framework by focusing on M&E roles at the DMK and CS levels. These guidelines should be simple and easy to understand, especially for CS level, to ensure comprehensive tracking and responsive problem solving in social assistance programs and social security schemes. These documents shall be stored in a centralized and also for SNA easily accessible repository.

- **Active Participations in Addressing Suggestions and Feedback from Ministries/Institutions and NGOs:** to encourage active participation from relevant ministries and institutions and NGOs to address their feedback and suggestions concerning the existing legal framework, and to foster collaborative improvements
- **Strengthen Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** to enhance collaboration with CSOs to leverage their expertise, resources, and community networks for more effective program implementation and governance.

2. Enhancing Support on Human and Financial Resources:

- **Capacity Building Initiatives:** to prioritize comprehensive capacity-building initiatives at the CS level to improve their understanding on SP concept and enhance skills required for efficient social assistance programs and social security schemes implementation. The initiatives or approaches shall also be reviewed from time to time for reinforcement purpose.
- **Incentive Programs:** to establish incentive programs to mitigate challenges related to overwork, limited time availability, and an aging workforce to foster increased engagement and commitment among SP implementors.
- **Specialized Staff Recruitment:** to implement targeted recruitment initiatives and providing incentives to attract qualified professionals into the SP system. For instance, job description development (clear roles and responsibilities) shall be taken into account for greater accountability and robust evaluation of staff performance at the DMK level, and to encourage productivity in sectoral offices.
- **Continuous Promotion of Social Protection System:** to regularly and continuously conduct awareness campaigns on SP system, guidelines, processes, and benefits of social assistance programs and social security schemes for beneficiaries and sub-national levels by utilizing practical approaches, distributing existing legal frameworks and guidelines in SP system, by utilizing new techniques and promote awareness raising on those legal frameworks and guidelines as necessary.

3. Enhancing Supports in Social Protection Implementation

- **Unified Data System:**to create a synchronized data system serving as a unified platform for SP system implementation at the sub-national levels, which could facilitate target-group identification, registration, verification, provision, and monitoring of progress (beneficiary registry and case management system).
- **Equipment and Materials Re-assessment:**to recheck the status of materials and equipment required for implementation of the work within SP system and provide appropriate technical or materials support to address issues with aging gadgets.
- **Public Debates and Forums:**to promote public debates and forums related to SP system at sub-national levels to enhance the effectiveness of implementation and beneficiaries' benefits.