



# THE REDUCTION IN MATERNAL MORTALITY PROJECT [RMMP]

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## WHO WE ARE

RMMP is funded by the UK Department for International Development – DFID, under the Health Sector Support Project. RMMP is led by a consortium of partners, managed by Options Consultancy Services Ltd. Options Consultancy Services Ltd, a leading provider of technical expertise and management services within the health and social sectors.

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## THE REDUCTION IN MATERNAL MORTALITY PROJECT

Cambodia has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the region, with approximately 472 women dying per 100,000 live births in Cambodia in 2005 (CDHS 2005). The vast majority of these deaths are avoidable where women have access to quality reproductive and maternal health services.

The limited availability and use of modern contraception methods inevitably leads to a large number of unwanted pregnancies, with the use of unsafe abortion commonplace. Widespread use of informal clinics with untrained providers contributes significantly to the high maternal mortality ratio in the country.

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To prevent death from unsafe abortion, services must be designed both safe and responsive to the voiced needs of women'.

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Despite the legalisation of Abortion in Cambodia in 1997, the majority of Cambodian women still do not have access to appropriate services. Many risk their lives attempting to end their pregnancy themselves, or with the help of traditional midwives or pharmacists.

## WHY DO WOMEN CONTINUE TO PRACTICE UNSAFE ABORTION?

- The limited use of modern methods of family planning leads to many unwanted pregnancies
- Very few government clinics offer safe abortion services, with very few staff trained in modern methods
- A lack of awareness of the Abortion Law by health care professionals leads to limited availability of services
- Qualified providers are prohibitively expensive, and most equity fund implements do to not support the service.

The average (median) age of the cambodian population is 21 years

Women get married relatively late, at median age of 20



“To prevent deaths from unsafe abortion, services must be designed to be both safe and responsive to the voiced needs of women ”



The Reduction in Maternal Mortality Project (RMMP), a component of the Health Sector Support Programme (HSSP), is a DFID-funded project which aims to tackle the high maternal mortality rates, through producing affordable and sustainable, high quality maternal health services for poor women in Cambodia.

### RMMP WORKS TO:

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#### 1 DEVELOP AND STRENGTHEN GOVERNMENT FACILITIES TO PROVIDE LONG-TERM FAMILY PLANNING AND SAFE ABORTION SERVICES.

The project plans to facilitate 16 Comprehensive Safe Abortion Centres and 60 Basic Safe Abortion Centres.

Currently, there is a very limited availability of long-term family planning methods, and even qualified providers often use outdated methods for terminating pregnancy. RMMP has developed evidence based training curricula, and national training centres. The project now provides high-quality training for Long-Term Family Planning and safe abortion care, including the use of medical abortion. ■

#### 2 INCREASE ACCESS TO, AND AWARENESS OF LONG-TERM FAMILY PLANNING.

RMMP works with partners to develop training curricula and training centres to support providers in delivering high-quality long-term family planning services. Through communications we aim to increase knowledge and awareness of the availability of services in the community. ■

#### 3 IDENTIFY AND REDUCE BARRIERS WOMEN FACE IN ACCESSING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Many health facilities believe that they are not authorised by the Ministry of Health to provide abortions.

In the community, women face a number of barriers when trying to access safe abortion and long-term contraceptive services.

Using (PEER) participatory research RMMP has gained significant insights into health seeking behaviour through the voices of women themselves.

Through training of health providers in the 1997 Cambodian Abortion Law and the development of effective communications strategy, these barriers will begin to be addressed. ■

4

#### RAISE UNDERSTANDING OF AND SUPPORT FOR THE PROVISION OF SAFE ABORTION SERVICES AMONG BOTH PROVIDERS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

RMMP aims to establish a process in which women are informed appropriately of the services available to themselves and are offered counselling when seeking abortion.

RMMP advocates at all levels to increase understanding of a woman's right to choose an abortion within the law, and where to have it.

RMMP works closely with the Ministry of Health and health professionals to raise awareness of the legality of abortion and ensure that individuals working within the system understand their obligations with respect to their legal rights. ■

5

#### DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL ROADMAP FOR THE REDUCTION OF MATERNAL MORTALITY

RMMP is producing a "National Roadmap" which outlines the necessary steps to reduce maternal mortality by the provision of long-term family planning and safe abortion services nationwide. ■

Current provision of contraception is inadequate, with only 27 per cent of women using a modern method. Older women, seeking to end fertility, or the youth population who may be sexually active have little provision.

Whilst many women can name one or more contraceptive method, understanding of these methods, and indeed of basic reproductive biology is low; for example many women do not know when they are most fertile.

There are widespread misunderstandings of how modern contraceptives work. Whilst around half of Cambodian women have tried a modern method, many discontinue when they experience side effects that they were not prepared for, or don't understand. Women are not effectively counselled to choose a method that is right for them, presenting a major barrier to consistent use.

The high unmet need for contraception has led to significant levels of unplanned pregnancy and abortion.



## WHAT DOES RMMP DO ?

- Train health practitioners in long-term family planning and safe abortion procedures.
- Renovation of health facilities to provide Safe Abortion services.
- Establish national level training sites, curricula and trainers.
- A “National Roadmap” of safe abortion practices.
- Ensure high quality services are scalable and sustainable.

## ABORTION IN CAMBODIA:

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**Abortion up to 12 weeks** (and over 12 weeks in certain circumstances) has been legal in Cambodia since 1997.

However, affordable, accessible and quality services are not available to the majority of Cambodian women. This results in the common use of unsafe abortion, often from untrained informal providers.

Whilst the scale of the problem is hard to quantify, the lives of many women are put at risk, contributing significantly to Cambodia’s high maternal mortality ratio.

Women delay abortion care seeking. When they seek care, women prefer not to use Government providers for safe abortion care, where they often feel intimidated by unsympathetic staff and fear a lack of confidentiality.

**Medical abortion is widely available** and in common use. However it is not clear how often, (and in what doses) woman are provided with the recommended combination for drugs.

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“When they seek care, women prefer not to use Government Providers for safe abortion care, where they often feel intimidated by unsympathetic staff and fear a lack of confidentiality”  
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**To prevent deaths from unsafe abortion**, services must be designed to be both safe, and responsive to the voiced needs of women. The formal sector is currently failing women, who, in addition to technical safety, require kind and confidential services to encourage them away from unsafe providers.

**Young, unmarried women** are put at particularly high risk, both family

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One in three Cambodian pregnancies is either unwanted or mistimed (NIS, 2000). The likelihood of having an unwanted or mistimed pregnancy increases dramatically as women have more children.

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planning and safe abortion services should be specifically tailored to their needs.

**The cost of safe abortion services are prohibitive** in all sectors, and a very significant proportion of women are unable to afford anything but an unsafe abortion. The majority of health equity fund implementers are unwilling to support access to safe abortion services in accordance with the national policy, due to the US “Mexico City” gag rule. This denial of basic reproductive health rights is putting many Cambodian women at significant increased risk of death or disability.

**After women receive an abortion**, they are often poorly counselled on the importance of future family planning, and commodities may not be available at the same site. ■

**RMMP aims to support the government to maximise the potential of the entire health sector, including private providers. The project works to reduce unsafe abortion both through family planning and safe abortion service delivery. Advocates for greater attention to equity of access, particularly through demand side financing.**





## **RMMP:**

to increase the utilisation of sustainable, quality and affordable reproductive and maternal health services by poor women.



**RMMP:**

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**តើ RMMF ជានរណា?**

RMMF គឺជាគម្រោងដែលទទួលបានមុនគ្នាពីអង្គការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍សហប្រតិបត្តិការអន្តរជាតិ UK-DFID ហើយស្ថិតនៅក្រោមការគ្រប់គ្រងរបស់អង្គការជំនួយស្ថាប័ន។  
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