

## Cambodia Country Advocacy Brief Injecting Drug Use and HIV

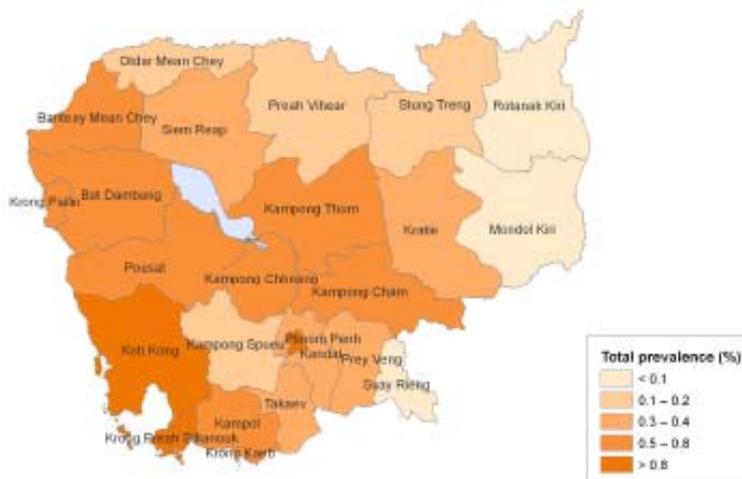
### Key actions to be supported

- Immediate expansion of the needle and syringe programme, combined with the establishment of, and access to, evidence-based drug dependence detoxification and treatment (in particular the treatment of methamphetamine and the availability of Methadone Maintenance Therapy for opioid dependent people), would save many lives by preventing new HIV infections among, and from people, who use drugs
- Review and revision of laws and policies – with possible development of sub-decree(s) and prakas (“proclamations”) etc. -- which may hamper implementation of harm reduction is critical to an effective national HIV response and its scale-up to achieve targets set for Universal Access by the end of 2010
- Organization of workshop(s) and necessary training to inform relevant institutions and partners about the laws, policies, sub-decree(s), prakas and other policy documents.
- Resource mobilization for, swift implementation and monitoring, of the strategic plan and operational plan for drug-related HIV and AIDS in Cambodia
- An improved national size estimation of people who use drugs, including those who inject drugs, and an HIV surveillance system which includes these populations as a surveillance group, will help to guide programme planning, implementation and monitoring of service coverage in addition to existing ad-hoc surveys
- Coordination of donor inputs (GFATM Round 7, HAARP, USAID, ADB and Sida supported projects) to the national program development; NACD capacity to be further developed to assume a leadership role in the coordination.

### *Situation of drug use and HIV*

- In response to high level political leadership and an impressive scale-up of a national HIV prevention, treatment and care response, Cambodia is one of few countries in the world known for having controlled and reversed a generalised HIV epidemic in the 1990s.

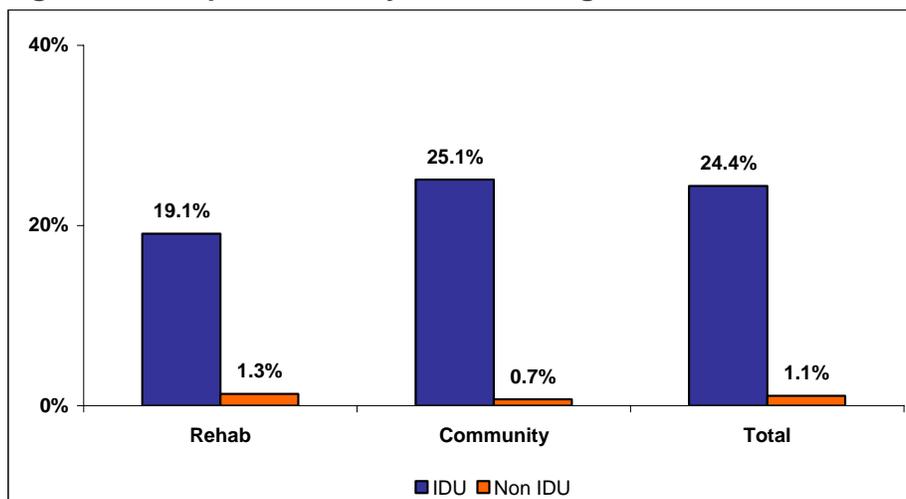
**Figure 1. Adult (15-49 years) prevalence, population-based survey (2005)<sup>1</sup>**



- The national HIV prevalence reached its peak at 3.0 % in 1997<sup>1</sup> and has since declined to 0.9.<sup>1</sup> The country has also demonstrated an impressive scale of coverage of ART, with 67% of people with advanced HIV infection in need of ART receiving it.<sup>1</sup>

- If the interventions are sustained at current levels, it is projected that the prevalence could further decline and stabilise at 0.6% by 2011.<sup>2</sup>
- However, there are concerns that the generalised HIV epidemic could resurge because of an emerging trend in drug use, including injecting drug use, which could have a significant impact in changing the course of the HIV epidemic, as has been the case in other countries of the region and beyond.
- The Royal Government of Cambodia reports that 5,797 drug users were in contact with local authorities in 2007, a figure somewhat lower than that of 6,500 in 2006.<sup>3</sup> It is recognized that the actual number of drug users is much higher.
- In 2004, an expert consensus group estimated there to be 20,000 Amphetamine-Type-Stimulant (ATS) users and 2,500 heroin users, of whom about 1,750 inject.<sup>4</sup> This translates to 0.02% prevalence of injecting drug use in the population in the age range of 15-64 years.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2007, an expert consensus group, led by UNAIDS, estimated that there were 46,300 illicit drug users, of whom 23,150 (50%) were using ATS and some 2,900 (6.3%) using heroin, including 2,025 (range: 1,250-7,500) who inject.<sup>6</sup>
- ATS use in the country includes methamphetamine (referred to locally as “yaba”), crystal methamphetamine (known locally as “ice”), ecstasy and ketamine. It has been reported that users of “yaba” and “ice” often switch to injecting heroin because heroin is sometimes cheaper and produces a more prolonged effect.<sup>7</sup>
- The majority of drug users are young people aged 18-25 and of all drug users women account for 6.5%.<sup>8</sup> Among 2,089 street children interviewed by an NGO in Phnom Penh, 1,041 (49.8%) reported recent use of one or more drugs.<sup>9</sup> In 2007, 1.7% (n=9) children, of a sample of 1,041 street children, reported injecting of “Yaba”.<sup>10</sup> The number of heroin-using street children has remained similar over time, 145 in 2006 and 140 in 2007, respectively.<sup>11</sup>
- A cross-sectional survey of drug users in rehabilitation centres and in the community in the capital, Phnom Penh, conducted in 2007, found 24.4 % (range: 16.4-33.2%) of people who inject drugs infected with HIV and the prevalence of HIV amongst non-injecting drug users at 1.1%.<sup>12</sup> Among prisoners, 3.1% have tested HIV positive.<sup>13</sup> Prevalence of hepatitis C virus in this population is not known but informal estimates suggest the prevalence is extremely high.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 2. HIV prevalence by mode of drug use<sup>15</sup>**

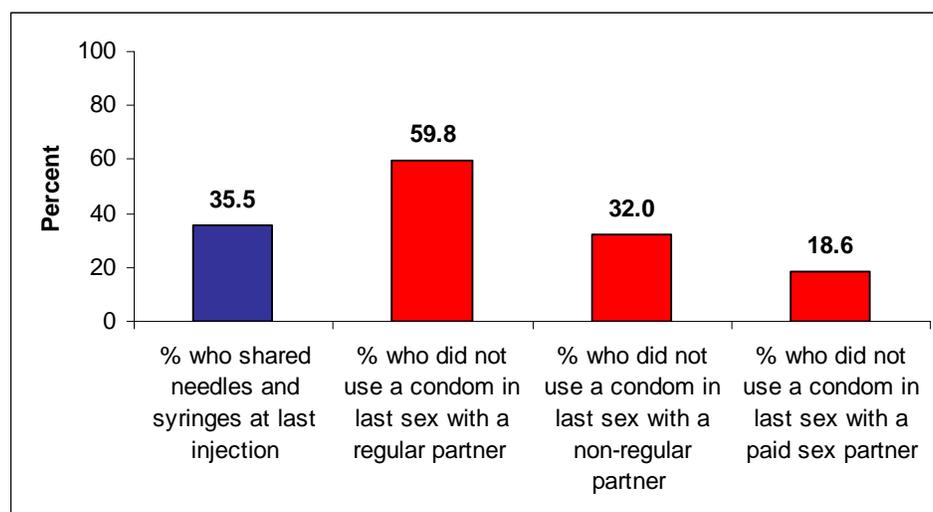


- The overlap between drug use, sex between men and commercial sex work is of concern, as well as the possible selling of blood products by injecting and non-injecting drug users. Reports of drug use are higher among men who have sex with men (MSM) than in any other high-risk population, with between 9-19% of MSM reporting use of yaba and between 5-7% reporting use of heroin. Of a recent

study of 400 karaoke women, 333 (83.3%) reported having used drugs at least once, and 30 (9.0%) reported Yama use.<sup>16</sup>

- Recent behavioural data indicates that HIV risk behaviours are prevalent. Of a sample of people who inject drugs, one third (35.5%) had shared needles / syringes at last injection. Over half (60%) had not used a condom at last sex with a regular partner, one-in-three (32%) had not used a condom at last sex with a non-regular partner and one in five (19%) did not use it in last sex with a paid sex partner.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 3. HIV risk behaviors<sup>18</sup>**



### ***Legal and policy context and national HIV response***

- The Cambodian Law on Drug Control (1997 as amended in 2005) renders consumption and use, except with medical prescription, unlawful. Charges may be dropped if the quantity for personal consumption is very small and such an offender maybe released with a warning.<sup>19</sup> The law is currently under review and revision.
- Treatment for drug dependence, under the Cambodian Law on Drug Control and directed by the Court or the Prosecution, is restricted to detoxification aimed at eliminating physical dependence on drugs. Drug users who volunteer for drug treatment are immune from prosecution but drug users maybe held in treatment facilities on orders of the Civil Court, acting on a complaint by a family member, relative or Prosecution.<sup>20</sup> There are 16 operational drug treatment centres, including 12 centres operated by the government and 4 privately or NGO run centres, in the country<sup>21</sup> and more are under development.<sup>22</sup> However, the approach used in all such centres is not commensurate with evidence-based international good practices for detoxification, treatment or rehabilitation and – whilst follow-up of those released from such centres is not undertaken – the relapse rate is believed to be extremely high.
- The country has achieved impressive coverage of people with advanced HIV infection in need of ART receiving it (67%). The number of HIV-positive drug users in need of ART benefiting from treatment is not known but believed to be almost negligible.
- The HIV/AIDS National Strategic Plan provides explicit support for harm reduction and the Drug Control Master Plan for Cambodia recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS.<sup>23</sup> The Royal Government of Cambodia, with support from the UN system, has also developed a costed National Strategic Plan for Drug Use, related HIV and AIDS.
- Of the national HIV expenditure that was allocated for prevention (19.9 million USD), 2.2% is allocated for prevention among people who inject drugs.

### ***Intervention coverage***

- The Royal Government of Cambodia has demonstrated its concrete support for evidence-based HIV interventions by announcing its plan to introduce a methadone maintenance pilot in Phnom Penh as well as to establish demonstration VCT sites for drug users; the MMT programme is expected to begin service delivery in December 2009 at one national hospital in the capital, Phnom Penh.
- Government support is already present for the needle / syringe programme, implemented by two non-governmental NGOs, Mith Samlanh and Korsang, among a range of services for drug users in the capital, Phnom Penh. The total number of needles / syringes distributed in 2007 was 67,721, falling short of the likely required number of needles / syringes assuming 1,750 people who may inject drugs twice a day. In 2007, Mith Samlanh reported that each month some 3,641 needles and syringes were distributed to 980 people who inject drugs<sup>24</sup>, averaging 3.7 needles and syringes per drug user per month.
- There has also been a reported steady increase in the percentage of harm reduction service contacts in use of heroin last time drug was used in 2007.<sup>25</sup> Should the heroin users, or ATS users, increasingly switch to injecting, the possibility of an explosive HIV epidemic, as reported by a number of neighboring countries, in the injecting drug using population cannot be ruled out. Such an HIV epidemic among people who inject drugs could lead to a significant increase in HIV prevalence among the sexual partners of men who inject drugs, including women in sex work and others, and thus threaten the major success of the country in reversing the HIV epidemic.
- The core interventions, which will have maximum impact on reducing HIV transmission among and from people who inject drugs are opioid substitution treatment (OST), needle / syringe programmes (NSP), voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) and anti-retroviral therapy (ART). Introduction or expansion of these services can turn around the HIV epidemic in this population. The Cambodian Government appears to have recognised this fact and is building a continuum of care for drug users that encompass all of these key components in partnership with the UN, donors and civil society organisations.

## ANNEX

### Socio demographics and disease prevalence

		Date	Source
Total population (thousands) in 2007	14,444	2007	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, March 2008
Adult (15-49) HIV prevalence (%)	0.8	2007	UNAIDS, 2008 <sup>26</sup>
Estimated number of people living with HIV	75,000	2007	Ibid.
Estimated population of people who inject drugs	1,750	2006	Mathers et al., 2008 <sup>27</sup>
Prevalence of injecting drug use among 15-64 year olds (%)	0.02	2004	Ibid.
% female among people who inject drugs (%)	0.7		BSS, 2007
Median age (range) of people who inject drugs			
Reported HIV cases			
% of cumulative reported HIV infections among people who inject drugs			
% of AIDS cases associated with injecting drug use			
AIDS deaths associated with IDU			
% people who inject drugs who are HIV positive	24.4	2007	Surveillance Unit National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD <sup>28</sup>
% of prisoners who are HIV positive	3.1		IHRA, 2008 <sup>29</sup>
% of methamphetamine users who are HIV positive	1.1	2007	Surveillance Unit National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD <sup>30</sup>
Adult HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs			
TB & HIV co-infection among people who inject drugs			
Active Syphilis among people who inject drugs			

### HIV risk and vulnerability

	2007	Source
% people who inject drugs who have received an HIV test in the last 12 months and who know their HIV test result (UNGASS core indicator)	Not available	UNGASS Country Report 2008
% people who inject drugs who both correctly identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and who reject major misconceptions about HIV (UNGASS core indicator)	Not available	UNGASS Country Report 2008
% people who inject drugs reporting the use of a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse with a regular partner	40.2	Surveillance Unit National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD
% people who inject drugs reporting the use of a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse with a non-regular partner	68.0	Surveillance Unit National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD
% of people who inject drugs reporting the use of sterile injecting equipment the last time they injected (UNGASS core indicator)	Not available	UNGASS Country Report 2008
% of people who inject drugs reporting sharing needles and syringes the last time they injected	35.5	Surveillance Unit National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD
% of direct female sex workers who report Yama use	18.6	UNODC, USAID, Prasit,
% of karaoke girls reporting life time use of drugs	83.3	KHANA, 2008 <sup>31</sup> PSI, 2007 <sup>32</sup>
% of women who inject drugs who report having sold sex		
% of men who inject drugs who report having bought sex		

## Intervention coverage

		Date	Source
Number of substitution treatment sites	0	2009	
Number of people who inject drugs accessing MMT	0	2009	
Number of prisoners accessing MMT	0	2009	
% in need of opioid substitution treatment (OST) accessing services (assuming 30% of IDU in need of OST)	0	2009	
Number of substitution treatment sites per 1,000 IDU	0	2009	
Number of needle and syringe programme sites (Phnom Penh)	2	2006	Centre for Harm reduction, 2007 <sup>33</sup>
Number of people who inject drugs accessing NSP	980	2007	Mith Samlanh, Annual Report 2007
Number of NSP sites per 1,000 IDU	1.1	2008	
% of people who inject drugs in need of NSP accessing NSP	56.0 <sup>34</sup>	2007	
Number of people who inject drugs received peer education / outreach	App 300		Centre for Harm reduction, 2007
% of people who inject drugs received peer education / outreach	17.1		
Number of drop-in centres in the country	45 (37 NGO and 8 Govt health services)		Centre for Harm reduction, 2007
Number of people who inject drugs accessed drop-in centres			
% of people who inject drugs accessed drop-in centres			
Number of VCT sites for people who inject drugs	0		
Number of people who inject drugs who have received HIV testing and counselling	App 100		Centre for Harm reduction, 2007
% of people who inject drugs who have received HIV testing and counselling	5.7		
Reported number of people living with HIV receiving ART	31,999	Dec 2008	WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, 2009 <sup>35</sup>
Number of people who inject drugs in need of ARV			
Number of people who inject drugs on ARV			
% of people injecting drugs in need of ARV receiving ARV			
People who inject drugs on ARVs as a proportion of all PLHIV receiving ARVs			
Coverage of people who inject drugs in need of prevention services reached by prevention programmes (%)	Not available	2007	National AIDS Authority, 2008 <sup>36</sup>
Estimated prison population	11,207	Mid 2008	Conference Report of the 28 <sup>th</sup> APCCA, 2008 <sup>37</sup>
Number of drug treatment centres	16	2009	Drug Information Centre, NACD Secretariat-General & WHO <sup>38</sup>
Number of drug users (or IDU) in drug treatment centres			
Prisoners accessing services:			
VCT	Referral available in 6 prisons		
NSP	0		
OST	0		
Condoms	Not available		
Peer education	In limited number of prisons		
Primary health care	In 6 prisons		
Post release follow up	0		Centre for Harm reduction, 2007

**The Cambodia Country Advocacy Brief is a joint product by the UN RTF and HAARP**

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