

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Title of Project	Comprehensive Prison Program
Project location	Cambodia
Implementing Partner/s:	Caritas Cambodia Siem Reap office,
Program Duration	1/07/2017 to 30/06/2021
Total Program Budget	\$385,000
Evaluator	Internal done by Tim Morris
Date of Evaluation	December 2019
Total local downstream partners and name	In collaboration with General Department of Prison in 6 provinces

PROJECT/PROGRAM/ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

The *Comprehensive Prison Program* is implemented by Caritas Australia partner organisation Caritas Cambodia. Caritas Australia began funding support for Caritas Cambodia's Prison Project in 2011, in Kratie and Mondulkiri prisons. Since then the project has expanded to six prisons in Cambodia – with the addition of Steung Treng and Rattanakiri prisons in 2014, Pursat CC4 prison in 2017, and Pailin prison in 2018.

The project works closely with prison directors, guards, government health staff and vocational training staff to provide quality health and vocational training services to inmates inside the prisons and improve dignity of inmates, who often lack skills and education and have faced loss of dignity and discrimination since being incarcerated. The project supports vocational skill trainings such as Khmer literacy, computer, sewing skills, traditional music, handicrafts, home gardening and other skills which are keys to improve the livelihoods of inmates after they leave prison.

The project aims to promote health and well-being and increase knowledge and skills of prisoners and guards in 6 prisons in Cambodia. It has four specific objectives:

- Objective 1: Improve health, knowledge and confidence of 4,548 inmates and 368 prison staff in 6 prisons.
- Objective 2: Promote solidarity, peaceful relationships and learning among 4,548 inmates and 368 prison staff.
- Objective 3: Enhance access to vocational skills trainings including soft skills to sustain life of inmates after release.
- Objective 4: Enhance cooperation between Caritas Cambodia, Prison directors, the National and Provincial Departments of Health, Education and Labour, General Department of Prisons, NGOs

and International Organisations for program sustainability, independence from external funding and job placement for inmates after release.

PURPOSE and METHODOLOGY OF EVALUATION

The Comprehensive Prison Program had not been formally evaluated since its inception in 2011. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand the long-term changes that have occurred as a result of the project and the likely sustainability of these, with the intent that findings will help improve the effectiveness of future iterations of the project.

Specifically, the evaluation aimed to:

- To assess the extent of impact and changes brought about in the lives of those that the project sought to benefit and the sustainability of these.
- To identify what worked well and not so well in the project context, the facilitating factors, and how these impacted the project's achievements.
- To highlight lessons learned and provide recommendations that will assist Caritas Australia and Caritas Cambodia in further improvement of project activities and inform future direction of the project.

The evaluation was led by the Caritas Australia Asia Design, Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning Coordinator, Tim Morris. The evaluation team conducted semi-structured interviews with key project stakeholders and a combination of interviews and focus group discussions with project participants at all six prisons. Respondents were also asked a short number of quantitative questions ranking the level of change perceived against key project outcomes. A group interview with project staff was also conducted upon conclusion of field work.

Notes were consolidated under each of the Key Evaluation Questions, grouped by project objective, and coded by respondent. Average scores were calculated for the quantitative questions. Data were analysed to identify the frequency of responses by different stakeholder groups and different project sites, and assess the strength of evidence in support of findings.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall the project has achieved quite remarkable success, particularly considering the difficult context in which it operates. The evaluation focused on the qualitative outcomes of the project rather than seeking to quantitatively assess the degree to which the project achieved its targets.

Under Objective 1, there have been significant improvements in the quality of healthcare available to inmates in prisons and a reduction in the incidence of illness and the number of inmates requiring referral to hospital. Ease of referral to the local Health Centre or District Hospital has improved, as has the quality of treatment received. The vast majority of inmates have also increased their understanding on health issues and have improved behaviours, including good hygiene practices, ways to prevent the spread of illnesses, and following treatment correctly. However, the comprehensiveness of healthcare provided by prison Health Posts could be improved in some areas, including prescribing correct medicines for the health issue, and ensuring ongoing availability of medicines.

Under Objective 2, there has been a reported reduction in the number of issues occurring amongst inmates and between inmates and staff. In general, inmates "treat each other like family", helping each

other out when in need. Some inmates also report that their relationship with staff is “more like family” than before, that communication between staff and inmates has improved, and that they work together better than before. Improvements to mental health sits under this objective of the project, and is an area that the evaluation found requires further work on. While physical health of inmates has significantly improved, many stakeholders – including inmates and prison staff – responded that more needs to be done to support the mental health of both inmates and staff.

Under Objective 3, prisons have established a department dedicated to skills development and training of inmates. Prisons have also now established relationships with Provincial Training Centres and all prisons offer (a limited number of) vocational training courses for inmates. Inmates who have participated in vocational training courses for the most part report that they have improved their technical skills. For many, their participation has also changed their attitude and outlook, with trained inmates feeling more hopeful, that when they leave prison they’ll be able to use what they’ve learnt, and that having a skill will help prevent them from reoffending. However, in all prisons except for Kratie, the number of training places available is not enough to meet demand. Having many inmates who cannot participate in trainings has caused some feelings of jealousy, frustration, and hopelessness amongst those who have missed out. Further, the training courses offered are not enough to build the capacity of inmates to the level required for working in that sector, which is the ultimate goal of the initiative. Additionally, the project has not been able to demonstrate whether the initiative has had any impact on ex-inmates’ ability to use the skills they learnt or gain employment once outside of prison to improve their livelihoods. This is due to the fact, that when the evaluation took place, the number of ex-inmates released were limited at the time of the evaluation and thus the project was unable to demonstrate nor the evaluation to capture any outcomes. The next phase of the project will focus on this objective along with the evaluation.

Under Objective 4, cooperation between prisons and relevant stakeholders has improved significantly. Prison directors and staff report that they have increased capacity, skills, and confidence to undertake their roles and to manage their prison programs, and there has been a considerable change in prison management’s initiative to network and collaborate to mobilise resources to improve their prison. However, progress has been uneven and there are some prisons and some areas under this objective that have seen less improvement. This is due to the fact, that when the evaluation took place, the number of ex-inmates released were limited at the time of the evaluation and thus the project was unable to demonstrate nor the evaluation to capture any outcomes. The next phase of the project will focus on this objective along with the evaluation.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An important factor that influenced the achievements of the project was good cooperation between Caritas Cambodia and prisons. Prison directors are a key ‘gatekeeper’, and without their support for the project’s initiatives and commitment to improve their prison, the project would not be able to achieve much. The project team have done a remarkable job at developing strong relationships with prison directors and achieving their “buy in” and support for the project. Doing so required many years of dedicated work forging and maintaining relationships, starting off with a small idea and showing positive results to gain more support and grow over time, and earning the respect and trust of stakeholders. Much of this would not have been possible without “Bong Srey (sister)” Bernadette, Caritas Cambodia Prisons Program Director, who, with her strong but warm and caring character, has been an invaluable asset to the project.

Good cooperation between the key stakeholders whose collaboration and support is critical for prisons to be able to run strong and effective programs is also important. This includes between prisons and

government ministries and departments such as the Department of Health, Operational District, and Health Centre for health; and the Department of Labour and Vocational Training, Department of Youth, Education & Sport, National Employment Agency, and Provincial Training Centres for skills training. However, it's also important that there is good cooperation between government ministries including the General Department of Prisons, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Health, to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and allow for greater collaboration. The evaluation found that many prison staff and stakeholders reported significant improvements in their relationships and cooperation with each other, frequently citing Caritas Cambodia's facilitation as being a key factor for enabling these improvements.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the following recommendations are provided for the project to improve its effectiveness, impact, and sustainability in the next phase:

Objective 1, Health:

- Further action to strengthen cooperation between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Interior and relevant provincial-level departments would benefit prisons' health programs in the future.

Objective 2, Relationships:

- Activities to help improve mental health services for both inmates and staff should be included in the next phase of the project.

Objective 3, Skills:

- Further action to strengthen cooperation between Ministry/Provincial Department of Youth, Education & Sport, Ministry/Provincial Department of Women & Social Affairs, prisons, and Provincial Training Centres would benefit prisons' skills development programs in the future.
- Vocational skills training courses should be improved (more contact hours, greater inclusion of practical work, more advanced curriculum) so that participants are trained to a level required for employment/work in that field.
- Opportunities for inmates to get out of their cells and engage in productive activities should be expanded.
- The next phase of the project should have a greater focus on reintegration of ex-inmates after release.

Objective 4, Independence:

- The project should promote more cross-learning amongst prisons so as to foster more innovation and improve the capacity of prisons to manage their existing income generation initiatives.
- The project should increase advocacy to encourage prisons and stakeholders to mobilise their own resources to support identified issues – including in the areas of waste management and WASH.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Forthcoming