

Cambodia charts new reform pathway for climate-resilient and gender-responsive social protection at the Sub-national Level

Phnom Penh, 27 May 2026 — Cambodia has taken a major step towards strengthening social protection systems at sub-national level after a collaborative reform process brought together key government institutions spanning social protection, decentralisation, climate action, disaster risk management, and gender inclusion.

The initiative was implemented under the banner “Lead the Change for Social Protection and Climate Action in Cambodia”. This collaborative leadership and reform programme provides a platform for supporting state institutions in working across traditional mandates and translating high-level dialogue into concrete action. Currently underway in other countries including Pakistan, Tanzania, and Malawi, the programme operates on the principle that complex reforms require coordinated leadership across all sectors and levels of government.

The programme brought together eight key government entities: the General Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council, the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development Secretariat, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the National Committee for Disaster Management, and the National Social Assistance Fund. Together, these institutions mapped out clearer institutional roles, streamlined coordination, and identified practical steps to make social protection more effective and equitable at sub-national level.

The process recognised that climate change increasingly threatens vulnerable households across Cambodia. Because sub-national administrations are the first to respond to local crises and support affected communities in building long-term resilience, therefore, strengthening their role and coordination capacities are essential to ensure that social protection systems can respond effectively, equitably and in a climate-resilient and gender-responsive manner.

Through this process, a joint comprehensive concept note has been proposed, marking an important step in shaping a direction for strengthening the role of sub-national authorities in social protection delivery. As next steps, this document will now move through official government channels for formal review and endorsement. “This collaborative process has helped establish a clear reform pathway for strengthening social protection delivery at the sub-national level in equitable manner,” said **H.E. Dr Chan Narith**, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Economy and Finance and Secretary General of the National Social Protection Council. “It reflects a shared commitment across institutions to improve how support reaches vulnerable households and build their long-term resilience, including in times of crisis and climate-related shocks in line with government’s priorities as set out in key policies such as National Social Protection Policy Framework 2024-2030 and the Guideline on Shock Responsive Social Protection Framework”.

Environmental and climate officials also welcomed the shared direction. **H.E. Pak Sokharavuth**, Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Environment, highlighted the initiative’s relevance to Cambodia’s climate agenda: “Cambodia’s NDC 3.0 marks an important milestone in advancing climate-related social protection. The achievement we celebrate today reflects the power of partnership and collective action.

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Through continued collaboration, we can strengthen social protection systems, enhance community resilience and ensure that no one is left behind on Cambodia's path towards a green, climate-resilient and sustainable future."

Representatives from the decentralisation sector echoed this perspective, emphasising how institutional cooperation turns policy priorities into real improvements on the ground. **H.E. Chheng Vatanak**, Deputy Head of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development Secretariat, added: "The success of this reform will ultimately depend on whether sub-national administrations are equipped with clear mandates, adequate resources, operational guidance, and practical capacities to deliver climate-resilient and gender-responsive social protection effectively and equitably to their communities".

While the conclusion of this first phase marks a significant step towards building a more climate-resilience and gender-responsive social protection at the sub-national level, participating institutions and partners stressed that securing these reforms will require further political alignment, implementation decisions, and sustained supports from international partners.

About *Lead the Change*:

The "Lead the Change" initiative is managed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and carried out in collaboration with the World Bank and other partners.