



FLOWING FORWARD

Expanding Community Access to Piped Water in Cambodia

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Research Summary

Access to clean water is a fundamental human right and essential for health, economic development, and overall well-being.

This policy brief provides strategic and actionable recommendations to achieve:



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL #6

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Despite progress in Cambodia's water and sanitation sector, rural areas, where most of the population resides, still face significant challenges in accessing clean water: only 1 in 5 people from these areas use safely managed drinking water services in 2023.

World Vision International (WVI-C) has been actively engaged in supporting the establishment and functioning of community small-scale piped water distribution systems in Cambodia since 2015. This initiative aims to ensure equitable and sustainable access to clean water for rural communities, particularly the most vulnerable households. In 2024, an independent evaluation of these systems highlighted their effectiveness, sustainability, and areas for improvement. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, including focus group discussions, key informant interviews, household interactions, site visits, and sector consultations.

The findings underscore the critical need for increased investment to expand piped-water connections, especially to reach the most vulnerable communities.

Key Findings

The significant impact of the community small-scale piped water distribution systems supported by WVI-C, as well as challenges raised, highlight the importance of continued support and targeted interventions to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability.

The independent evaluation conducted in nine provinces where WVI-C supported community piped water distribution systems revealed the following four main findings:



1 COMMUNITY SMALL-SCALE PIPED WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS ARE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE

- 97% of the 125 community small-scale piped water distribution systems supported by WVI-C are functioning effectively¹. Seven systems with 450 to 500 connections are financially sustainable.
- This high functionality rate is significantly better than the national failure rate for rural community small-scale piped water distribution systems, which ranges from 17% to 25%. This indicates the robustness and reliability of the systems supported by WVI-C.



2 THEY OFFER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- Access to piped water has significantly improved health outcomes, reduced waterborne diseases, and enhanced sanitation and hygiene practices. It has also lessened the burden on women and children, allowing for better education and income opportunities.
- Households reported that since connecting to piped water, children no longer suffer from diarrhea. Schools and health centers with piped water connections have functioning latrines and handwashing stations, contributing to better health and hygiene, and improved academic attendance rates for girls and boys.



3 THEY PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY AND EQUITY

- Efforts to ensure equitable access to clean water have benefited low-income and vulnerable households, including those with Most Vulnerable Children (MVC). Gender equity is promoted through active participation of women in Water Management Committees (WMCs).
- 31% of the total connections serve poor and marginalized vulnerable households. Initial piped water connections were provided at a reduced cost for these households, with some charged only 50% of the connection fee or connected free of charge.



4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVERY STEP OF THE WAY BUILDS LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

- Community involvement in the planning, implementation, and management of piped water systems has fostered a sense of ownership and accountability. Transparent tariff-setting and community-driven financing enhance sustainability.
- All WMCs operate under established bylaws with a clear organizational structure. Community members actively participate in decision-making processes, such as voting for WMC members and agreeing on bylaws and water tariffs.

¹Water station functioning is assessed on the sustainability of water sources, WMCs participation, households-to-connection rate, water users payment, profitability of the station, user complaints on water quality, and WMCs knowledge and skills on station maintenance.

SIGNIFICANT REMAINING CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- **Financial Constraints:** licensing of private operators create barriers for some villages in accessing piped water connections (cost). Insufficient capital investment to scale up the business model and inadequate financing for WMCs also hinder equitable access.
- **Accountability and Planning:** limited social accountability and local public investment contributions affect communities' trust in WMCs. The lack of long-term business, water safety and climate resilience planning negatively impacts the sustainability of the approach.

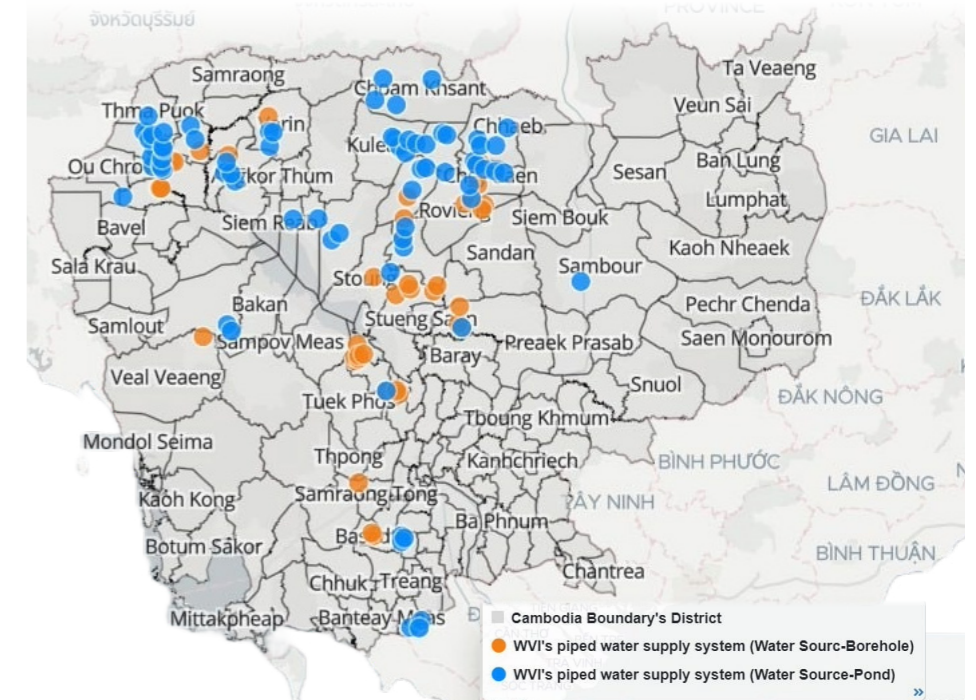
Connecting Marginalised Communities to Piped Water in Cambodia

World Vision's contribution since 2015

329 villages connected in nine provinces

125 water distribution systems constructed

137k new people accessing piped water from 27,503 households



Policy Priorities

Increased investment and strengthened public-private linkages are needed to achieve Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goals, and the National Strategic Plan for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene 2011-2025.

Building on the key findings and lessons learnt from the evaluation, we encourage key partners for Cambodia's sustainable development to consider the following actions:

>>> TO POLICY MAKERS & LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES



1 LEAD REGULATORY REVIEW

- Conduct a comprehensive review of licensing regulations to address geographical overlaps with private operators;
- Issue licenses on village-based geography or household mapping approach.

2 BOOST FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Develop policies that incentivize community-driven investments in water infrastructure;
- Provide subsidies for low-income households to cover connection fees.

3 ENHANCE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

- Implement transparent accountability frameworks that encourage local public investment contributions and foster community trust in water management.



The Need to Accelerate Community Piped Water Investment in Cambodia

from 1% to 10% per year

While the percentage of Cambodian households from rural areas accessing piped water increased annually by 1% from 2014 to 2022 (CDHS), Cambodia needs a ten-fold increase in efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goal by 2030.



>>> TO DONORS, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND NGOS

1 FUND TARGETED PROGRAMMES

- Allocate additional funding to expand piped-water infrastructure in rural areas through community engagement programmes;
- Support capacity-building programmes for WMCs on technical skills and financial and business management that foster collaboration with local authorities and stakeholders.

2 PROMOTE INCLUSIVE ACCESS

- Design systems accessible to all, including marginalised groups;
- Offer flexible payment plans to make connections affordable.

>>> TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR

1 INCREASE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

- Explore partnerships with local communities and governments to develop innovative financing models that expand access to water services and improve infrastructure.

2 INVEST IN SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

- Encourage private operators to invest in sustainable water practices that include climate resilience measures and water safety protocols.

>>> TO THE WATER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

1 DEVELOP LONG-TERM BUSINESS PLANS

- Create comprehensive long-term business plans that outline strategic goals for infrastructure development, financing, and community engagement.

2 IMPLEMENT WATER-SAFETY PLANS

- Establish and regularly update water safety and climate resilience plans to ensure a sustainable water supply that addresses environmental challenges.

Further Information

For more details, refer to the full evaluation report by World Vision International-Cambodia (WVI-C) and other relevant documents:

- World Vision International in Cambodia (WVI-C) Evaluation Report
- National Action Plan for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene (NAP)
- Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) 2021-22
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs)

This policy brief underscores the urgent need for increased resources to expand piped-water connections in Cambodia's rural areas, ensuring that the most vulnerable communities have access to clean and safe drinking water. Implementing these recommendations will significantly improve health, economic stability, and overall well-being for all community members.