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Foreword

VSO is the world’s leading international development charity that fights poverty through the lasting power of volunteers. Our vision is a world without poverty, but we can only achieve this by working together: providing food, infrastructure and machinery is important, but we believe that people are the best agents of change. By sharing knowledge, experience and skills, our volunteers are able to work with local partners to develop health, education and livelihoods services – especially as they relate to fisheries and agriculture. They also aim to give poor people a voice, empowering them to drive lasting change.

Drawn from many countries and all walks of life, our volunteers give their expertise, their passion and their time, sharing their skills with carefully selected partner organisations ranging from grassroots groups to government ministries.

Together we work to improve poor people’s access to quality essential services, information and ideas that link them to the wider world. We help poor and marginalised people understand their rights and enable them to participate as equal, fully-valued members of their society. Together we influence policy to respond to the needs of everyone.

VSO in Cambodia

VSO has been working in Cambodia since 1991 and remains firmly committed to the development of Cambodia’s people. So far, 675 international volunteers have supported 152 partners, focusing on poor communities in 15 provinces to strengthen capacity in education, health, secure livelihoods and, more recently, governance. In this time, we have built a reputation as a leading organization in our chosen programme areas. For instance, through working with government partners, we have transformed education for two-thirds of primary students, and our research (through civil society organisations) on valuing teachers has led to national policy changes. Recent research on valuing workers in the health sector is expected to be similarly influential, complementing the influence we have had on raising standards of healthcare in many areas. The success of our Livelihoods Programme is evident in, for example, the fisheries sector, where our recommendations have led to a change in the fisheries policy and the introduction of a commune fisheries management plan, enabling the poor to access markets and have a steady income.

This new strategy will build on these and many other successes.

Country facts 2012

Population: 14.5 million
Official language: Khmer
Human Development Indicators (HDI): 138 out of 187 countries
Gross National Income per capita: $880\(^1\)
Percentage of people below the poverty line: 20%
Life expectancy: 63


It is the result of extensive participation and consultation with community members, government bodies, partner organisations, donors, volunteers, VSO staff and other key stakeholders. This document provides an overview of our objectives, who we work with and where - the way we work and our anticipated impact. Our detailed operational plans underpin this strategy and our progress is reviewed quarterly by the VSO Cambodia management team.

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Our strategic focus
We are proud to be part of VSO International, working towards an ambitious vision: a world without poverty. Our country vision is a Cambodia where people, especially poor communities, have an improved quality of life and are leading their own development.

Our mission is to bring people together to build the capacity of government and civil society and to enable poor communities to influence pro-poor policies and access quality basic services.

Our objectives
Specifically, we aim to:
• Strengthen the capacity of sub-national government and civil society to improve access to high quality and coordinated services in health, education and livelihoods
• Build the capacity of sub-national government and civil society to improve food and income security and increase ability to adapt to economic and environmental change
• Support sub-national government and other civil society to be more coordinated, accountable to communities and responsive to their demands
• Support community and civil society groups to inform and empower people, especially those who are socially excluded, to lead their own development
• Support government and their civil society partners to continue the development of pro-poor policies and their effective implementation at local level.

How we work towards our objectives
Our strength is our ability to bring people together to build mutually beneficial relationships. In a society tainted by discrimination and distrust, our stakeholders have acknowledged our capacity-building support as the most effective way of changing attitudes and bringing about sustainable change, rebuilding Cambodia’s depleted human resource base and countering aid dependency. In a crowded NGO sector, we continue to be unique through focusing on capacity building rather than service delivery.

Our international volunteers, placed for periods of up to two years, transfer knowledge and skills, not available locally, which act as a catalyst for improving working practices. Our volunteers work strategically in ‘teams’ with their national counterparts, which builds accountability for outcomes, increases our impact and provides value for money.

Through our local volunteer activities we bring together communities and local authorities to maximise the sustainability and impact of our development programmes.

Our multi-level approach
We work at many levels, for example, community, district, province and national. This allows us to influence both demand and supply sides, exerting a positive impact on the provision of basic services. As a result, our interventions have improved the quality of life for poor people. Our efforts in empowering women, men and young people to lead their own development are also making a difference and are essential for long-term sustainable change.

We work in an integrated manner, recognising that community mobilisation, policy, inclusion, gender and climate change adaptation are best approached within our core work focused on education, health, secure livelihoods and governance. We take a holistic approach and place a team of volunteers in our selected regions who have a mix of expertise.

They focus on their specific sector objectives while working together on common objectives, maximising our impact.

Who we work with
Through our work with more than 40 partners over the five years of our strategy, we aim to work directly with more than 14,000 local people who are critical to Cambodia’s development. They include service providers (for instance, doctors, teachers, village health workers), national and sub-national governmental offices (Provincial Health Departments, Fisheries Administration - both national and provincial) and networks and associations (for example, the NGO Education Partnership (NEP)). We provide capacity building support so that they can deliver quality services.

Through our partners, we will also work with an increasing number of local volunteers over the duration of this strategic plan, particularly targeting both young people and women.

Our institutional strengthening work with government bodies, such as the Ministry of Education and Fisheries Administration, on pro-poor policy, good governance and advocacy work will reach many more Cambodian people.
Our programmes

Focus on education
We have been working with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) for more than 20 years to implement highly successful programmes and we are regarded as a leading organisation in the Cambodian education sector. We will build on this strong partnership to support MoEYS to implement the Child Friendly School initiatives and the decentralised school quality improvement plan through a school cluster system and District Training and Monitoring Teams (‘school cluster development’).

Building on these successes, in the new strategy our main focus in the education sector is to ensure that primary and lower age children in our target areas can access quality education that is relevant to their individual needs and abilities, regardless of their gender, disability or ethnicity. In addition to the fulfillment of their rights, this provides children with the minimum skills and knowledge required to articulate their needs. It allows them to pursue opportunities that increase their ability to become productive members of society and improve the quality of their lives.

Key activities
Our volunteers support the Provincial Offices of Education in two ways: first, to build their own management and organisational capabilities; and second, to build the capacities of target schools. We also build organisational capacities at provincial teacher training colleges. Our activities at national level focus on supporting the development and implementation of the new English language curriculum, science education training handbook, building capacity in relevant education departments and working with civil society networks.

Our experienced volunteers work with school and community groups to increase the participation of children, families and communities in the running of their local school.

Funders
Our education programme donors have included the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through Cuso International, Capacity Building Partnership Fund from UNICEF, EU and SIDA, the ASML Foundation, USAid, the Equitable Trust, National Union of Teachers UK, UNESCO Asia Pacific and the Hornby Trust.

Focus on health
The overall aim of our health programme is to strengthen the capacity of sub-national government and civil society to improve access to high quality and coordinated services. Cambodia has, for instance, high neonatal mortality rates, a low proportion of births assisted by a trained health professional and limited access to healthcare: indeed, many Cambodians express fear of health services, preferring to seek traditional treatments. We support the government to build the organisational capability of district offices, health centres and health posts. The goal of our interventions and partnerships is to increase access to high quality services, to improve service delivery, especially for ethnic minorities, and to build community engagement so families demonstrate home-based solutions to disease prevention and good health. We support partners to strengthen the link between community-based structures - such as village health support groups, mother support groups, and health centre management committees - and the health system.

Ultimately, we aim to contribute to a decrease in mortality and morbidity among newborns, children under five and women during pregnancy and childbirth.

Key activities
Our doctors, midwives and other clinicians support hospitals and health centres to improve clinical and management skills and promote patient-centred care. Our community health advisers, based at provincial and district health departments, build the clinical and communication skills of staff and voluntary health workers to enable them to respond to community needs and deliver public health messages. Health management volunteers build the capacity of district government in interpreting their responsibilities, planning, managing resources, supporting staff development and promoting community involvement in health care. These volunteers also work with other VSO health volunteers to improve dialogue between poor communities, health service providers and government bodies, through strengthening the links between operational districts, commune councils, health centres and other community centres, and sometimes schools. Our national level research around Valuing Health Workers directs our work and aims to contribute towards national-level improvements in human resources for health.

Funders
Our health programme donors have included DFID, CIDA through Cuso International, Reproductive and Child Health Alliance, University Research Co LLC, the World Health Organisation, AusAID, and Guernsey Overseas Aid Commission.
**Focus on secure livelihoods**

Our secure livelihoods programme aims to build the capacity of sub-national government and civil society to improve food and income security and increase the ability of poor Cambodians to adapt to economic and environmental change. Fisheries are at the heart of Cambodia’s development. More than 60 per cent of the population depend - directly or indirectly - on income generated from fisheries and more than 80 per cent of people’s protein intake comes from fish. Communities are facing serious food shortages due to the decline in fish caused by illegal- and over-fishing, growing population pressure, and a lack of appropriate management, regulation and enforcement within the sector. Therefore, livestock production needs to grow in order to meet the local needs to improve nutrition and serve the tourism industry. However, livestock production in Cambodia has been adversely affected by pandemics and natural disasters. Against this backdrop, we work with our partner organisations to increase community income through livelihoods diversification and skills development. We support the implementation of the fisheries and livestock strategic planning frameworks while at the same time ensuring the sustainability of natural resources.

**Key activities**

Our volunteers – experts in their field – build the capacity of partners and communities through conducting organisational needs assessments, market assessment and climate change adaptation research and by supporting their pro-poor development approaches. We provide opportunities for poor people to engage in the local economy and participate in the management of their local natural resources through skills training and the formation of Community Fisheries Associations. We also support smallholders’ and community-based organisations (CBOs) to connect with other communities to develop and implement best practices.

**Funders**

Our secure livelihoods programme donors have included CIDA through Cuso International, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Accenture, the Faroe Islands, Oxfam GB, the McKnight Foundation, NZ Aid and the Bishops’ Appeal.

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**Focus on governance**

In our new governance programme our aim is to support elected bodies in fulfilling their political role, support communities to use these new political systems and develop the role of other key players in improving governance by, for instance, building a strong civil society and responsible media. Our programme will contribute to the successful implementation of the National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development 2010–2019 and Social Accountability Strategy. Commune Councils were first elected in 2002 and District Councils were successfully established in 2010. But neither type of council currently has the appropriate skills, competency and resources to deliver public services or to respond to community needs.

**Key activities**

Our management and governance advisers work with up to 12 district councils, four provincial association councils and four NGOs, building their capability to better plan, discharge their responsibilities and govern their communities or provinces. A variety of methods is employed including baseline assessments, coaching, study tours, training courses and regular networking events. We share our learning at national level for potential replication and to influence policy or practice at a wider level.

**Our holistic approach**

Across our four programmes we integrate community mobilisation, enabling people to lead their own development and to promote policies that are pro-poor. Our sector-specific volunteers work together in provincial teams towards their specific objectives but also offer a range of joined-up solutions to meet community needs. For example, health and education volunteers are working together in one province to support the community to reduce the barriers preventing children from attending school.
Partnerships are key

Our strength and uniqueness lie in our ability to collaborate with, and support, partners at many levels - national, provincial, district and community - enabling them to achieve their own objectives and maximising their impact. Supportive partnership is central to our approach to development.

Our multi-tiered approach to development means that we are able to deliver results at the community level while also bringing the voices of communities to government and strengthening the capacity of government to respond effectively.

Our volunteers work strategically in teams with their national counterparts, which facilitates ownership and builds sustainability. Donors and partners have acknowledged VSO’s capacity-building support as the most effective way of changing attitudes and bringing about sustainable change. As the Head of Primary Office, Banteay Meanchey Provincial Office of Education, commented: “I really appreciate and value the way VSO works by transferring knowledge, skills and expertise through its volunteers who stay and work closely with us, supporting and coaching us to be able to implement our tasks effectively.”

In our experience, volunteer placements are most effective when well supported and integrated as part of a larger team in a province. We adopt this strategy, supporting volunteers to work both within their own sectors and holistically.

Implementation through volunteers

We recognise that partner organisations are becoming more diverse and complex in their drive to eradicate poverty. Additionally, partners working in service delivery have a different combination of needs to those working in the governance arena. Consequently, we provide a range of initiatives to support partners, starting structured discussions early in the partnership development process. Our main approaches include:

- **International volunteer professionals:** Our highly experienced international volunteers have already established themselves within their profession and take time out of their careers to share skills and knowledge. Across our programmes we recruit doctors, nurses, midwives, nutritional advisers, teachers, education managers, community mobilisation advisers and governance experts. For our livelihoods programme, in particular, we recruit business management and economic development specialists with specific skills in marketing, financial management, business management, natural resource management and agro-economics. At any one time, around 60 international volunteers are working in Cambodia, sharing skills and knowledge, and building relationships and links with their Cambodian counterparts. We strike a balance between long-term (two years plus) and short-term placements to meet partner needs.

- **National volunteers:** We also provide opportunities for young Cambodians to be involved in their country’s development and to build their own skills. They are able to inspire and work effectively with target communities and, as such, are an increasingly important element of our team.

- **Youth volunteers:** Generally recruited from the UK, our youth volunteers and can effectively join with young Cambodians to make a positive impact on community mobilization, the national volunteering programme and gender activities.

- **Parliamentarian and ‘eminent’ volunteers:** For specific high-profile occasions and events, we recruit short-term parliamentarian or ‘eminent’ volunteers. They help to, for example, support our advocacy work and to publicise our research findings. These volunteers are Members of Parliament in the UK and elsewhere, and senior professionals from other professions or sectors, who are willing to undertake short-term placements in Cambodia.

- **Knowledge management:** Through workshops, conferences, and national and international exchange visits, we provide opportunities for volunteers, partners and stakeholders to share information, ideas and best practice.

- **Advocacy:** We share knowledge with those responsible for deciding and implementing policy. This provides opportunities to raise the voice of communities to influence those individuals and organisations that set and implement policies that affect their lives.
The priority for our country strategy from 2012 to 2017 is to improve the quality of life for Cambodia’s most disadvantaged people, including rural and ethnic populations, women, girls and youths, and enable them to lead their own development.

Our education programme, combined with our activities in good governance and community mobilisation, will contribute to an increase in the enrolment and retention of children in primary and lower secondary education. Students, including girls and those from ethnic minorities, will enjoy learning, will participate in education and appreciate its relevance to their future.

Parents and the wider community will value education and will be more involved in the development and monitoring of the educational services.

In the health sector, we will support partners in developing their plans based on community needs, recognise patient rights and treat all patients and their families with respect and sensitivity to gender and ethnicity. Communities will have access to high quality primary health services that are delivered by motivated and competent staff in a hygienic and welcoming environment. Communities will demonstrate home-based solutions to disease prevention and good health, including good nutrition, morbidity for newborns, children under five and women during pregnancy and childbirth.

We will support the development of vibrant communities that will have the relevant skills and knowledge to ensure their livelihoods are sustainable and able to withstand economic and environmental shocks. The communities will understand the marketplace and make their own decisions about how to engage in the value chain. A community-based disaster risk reduction and adaptation strategy will exist, be fit for purpose and be understood by government and civil society.

Our good governance and community mobilisation work will bring the voice of communities to government and civil society so that they are influencing debates on issues that affect the quality of their lives. We will support communities to lead their own development. Gender, youth and climate change adaptation will be integrated into our operations and programmes.

Our strategy is ambitious but focused. It calls on us and our partners to build on experiences and strengths while remaining willing to innovate and experiment. We will continue to strengthen our partners’ capacity and deepen the impact of our interventions through specialist teams in selected provinces providing technical support, capacity building and knowledge sharing.

Monitoring, evaluation and research helps us to understand which programmes and approaches are most effective. The results, learning and implications will be shared with the wider development community.

We fully intend that our actions will move us closer to our vision – a Cambodia where people, especially poor communities, have an improved quality of life and are leading their own development.