

# Cambodian Red Cross Youth volunteers champion road safety

## Background

While Cambodia's economy has witnessed growth in recent years, the country has also seen a significant increase in traffic volume and motorization. Motorcycle ownership has grown by more than 300 per cent since 2005. Over the same time period, road-crash deaths have also doubled, costing an estimated 310 million US dollars to the economy each year<sup>1</sup>.

Motorcyclists are Cambodia's most vulnerable road users, constituting 66 per cent of total road fatalities. And with two-thirds of the population under the age of 25<sup>2</sup>, young people are disproportionately affected.

## Cambodian Red Cross takes action

For the Cambodian Red Cross, road safety is an important part of the humanitarian mandate to assist the most vulnerable. In addition to serving as an auxiliary to the public authorities, the Cambodian Red Cross is a member of the National Road Safety Committee (NRSC), placing the National Society in a key role to tackle the road safety crisis.

In 2004, the Cambodian Red Cross Youth programme launched a road-safety project, which addresses the increasing risk that young adults face on motorcycles. The Red Cross believes that empowering youth to solve the road crash crisis is critical in order to reduce death and injury on the roads.

The project builds upon key strengths of the Cambodian Red Cross – a vibrant, youth-volunteer network in schools, and their experience with peer education. The aim is to increase helmet use for motorcyclists by combining these skills with positive, road safety behaviour-change interventions.



A Cambodian Red Cross youth volunteer explains the importance of using a helmet. Head and neck injuries are the main cause of death and disability among motorcyclists. Credit: Cambodian Red Cross

## Small beginnings

With the support of the Swedish Red Cross through the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a pilot project was initially run in three provinces – Phnom Penh, Kompong Speu and Battambang. Trained advisors and youth leaders initiated a variety of activities, including road safety youth clubs, helmet distributions, and school-based awareness campaigns targeting secondary school students. The advisors and youth leaders were also encouraged to serve as role models for road-safety behavior in their own communities. The project gradually expanded with the support of other Red Cross branches and collective momentum led to the adoption of the Cambodian Red Cross Road Safety Strategy (2009-2013) in 2008.

1. Handicap International Belgium and Institute of Mobility, Hasselt University of Belgium. Study on Road Crash Costing in Cambodia. 2011

2. United Nations in Cambodia. New study highlights status of youth civic participation in Cambodia. 2011



Cambodian Red Cross youth volunteers explain how to properly wear a motorcycle helmet to fellow community members. Credit: Cambodian Red Cross

## Activities

The strategy supports, builds and strengthens Red Cross youth volunteers' competencies in road safety peer education, and ensures sustainability of the project. Activities also align to the four pillars of the strategy as follows:

### Building a culture of helmet wearing

- › Red Cross youth serve as role models by wearing motorcycle helmets on a daily basis.
- › Ongoing establishment of "helmet libraries", with support from the Australian Red Cross, to increase access, particularly among low-income students.
- › Distribution of helmets since 2006.
- › Information dissemination on correct use of helmets and the value of helmet protection.

### School-based road safety campaigns

- › Road safety youth clubs manage campaigns in a number of schools. Examples of campaign activities include helmet-wearing demonstrations, song and drama performances, poster sessions and debates on road safety and helmet-wearing (e.g. surveying and publicly reporting helmet wearing rates in a school). The clubs also train Red Cross youth volunteers on road safety peer education, and they provide a place for youth to come together and discuss the issue.

### Community-based education

- › In partnership with the traffic police, the Cambodian Red Cross youth and volunteers disseminate information on road safety to drivers at enforcement checkpoints. The Red Cross also encourages local commune councils to include road safety in their respective workplans.

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*"I am proud to share road safety knowledge to distracted riders and drivers, so they can change their risky road behaviours and respect the road traffic law."*

- Khem Vuthy, a 10<sup>th</sup> Grade student  
in Siem Reap province

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The Cambodian Red Cross has integrated the road safety project with the Cambodia Initiative for Disability Inclusion, supported by the Australian Red Cross, making youth with disabilities active participants rather than beneficiaries of the project.

Credit: Cambodian Red Cross

### Building capacity, support and partnerships

- › The Cambodian Red Cross does not only rely on external funding for the project. The National Society mobilizes resources from private companies by conducting annual road safety fundraising workshops with the private sector. A workshop in 2010 resulted in close to 30,000 US dollars. At the workshops, the Red Cross also encourages private companies to improve road safety awareness for their employees.
- › The Cambodian Red Cross branches contribute their own resources to the project costs, encouraging ownership and sustainability from the onset.

The Cambodian Red Cross also seeks to build partnerships to deliver innovative road safety actions outside of the scope of the school-based helmet wearing peer-education activities, including:

#### › Inclusion of Peoples with Disability in Road Safety

With the support of the Australian Red Cross, Cambodian Red Cross has integrated disability into road safety programs. Young people with disabilities (often as the results of road crashes) are actively involved in designing and implementing project activities, rather than being “targets” of the project. This was initially supported through the Cambodia Initiative for Disability Inclusion, an ARC-managed, Australian government funded program.

#### › Road Safety Advocacy Project

In coordination with the Global Road Safety Partnership and funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Cambodian Red Cross leverages their auxiliary status to influence decision-makers to strengthen road safety laws. The Red Cross actively participates with road safety stakeholders, supports improvements in legislation, hosts seminars with government partners, and engages with the media to reach the public. The Red Cross views these actions as a component of their humanitarian diplomacy efforts to act at all times in the interest of vulnerable people.

## Key Results

- › Cambodian Red Cross youth are experienced in road safety peer education.
- › Distribution of more than 25,000 helmets in local communities.
- › Implementation of road safety campaigns in schools.
- › Establishment of “helmet libraries” in eight schools for low-income students, which increases access to motorcycle helmets. It also has led to a higher rate of helmet wearing among students.
- › Mobilization of financial and in-kind resources from private companies as well as contributions from branches to project costs.
- › Integration into other programmes such as the Cambodia Initiative for Disability Inclusion (CIDI) and the Global Road Safety Partnership’s Road Safety Advocacy Project.
- › Long-term vision and methods to ensure sustainability of the project included from the onset.
- › A new traffic law is being processed due to an increased focus on humanitarian diplomacy.



Cambodian Red Cross youth volunteers serve as role models in their own communities by wearing helmets while conducting “motorcycle caravans” to raise awareness.

Credit: Cambodian Red Cross



Cambodian Red Cross youth volunteers display materials they use for road safety activities in their school. The aim is to educate fellow classmates on the importance of wearing motorcycle helmets. Credit: Cambodian Red Cross

## Current challenges

- › Continuous funding is required in order to maintain the project and technical skills of the vast Red Cross youth network at branch level.
- › A high turnover of volunteers results in a loss of investment and a need to identify new resources to train new youth volunteers.
- › Ways to integrate the road safety project into existing programmes such as community-based health care, first aid, blood donation and disaster risk reduction, in order to share resources and build better sustainability for road safety activities.
- › Assessing whether project outcomes have reduced head injuries is difficult due to the lack of skills in monitoring and evaluation among project staff at the headquarter and branch level.

## Moving forward

The Cambodian Red Cross road safety project is one of the most successful examples of long-term road safety initiatives in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement today.

The project demonstrates that youth and volunteers can be empowered to play a role in positively influencing mindsets, attitudes, and behaviours around the use of helmets to reduce death and injury on the road.

The Cambodian Red Cross remains dedicated to prioritising road safety projects, in order to ensure that the future of Cambodia is in good hands.



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