

Launch of ILO-EU Social Protection Studies in Cambodia, 28 May 2013

Opening Address by H.E. Sann Vathana, CARD

Your Excellency Ambassador, colleagues of ILO and UN, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a significant moment today in Siem Reap when policy makers, practitioners, academicians, development partners and civil society have gathered here to witness the launch of the ILO-EU studies, including those on the National Employment Policy, the Social Protection Expenditure Review and the costing of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS).

May I take this opportunity to thank the European Union for their essential support to the ILO.

Many countries have doubted that they could afford social protection, even if they recognised its undeniable development value. Furthermore, for low-income countries like Cambodia, it is necessary to provide evidence to demonstrate that there is the possibility of moving towards greater provision of at least basic social protection for the poor and vulnerable.

This evidence has to be present in the role of social protection in building human capacities, offering an escape from poverty, reducing income inequality, advancing economic growth and achieving social cohesion through inclusion.

I must re-emphasise to all of you, especially those who are visiting Cambodia for the first time, that the legacy of chronic conflicts and atrocities still haunt us. While national unity, reconciliation and development are the three things we need and aim for. This is the reason why I point out that social protection is necessary not only to achieve economic and social development, but also to ensure that each and every one of us will benefit from and contribute to national development at the same time and also to confirm that each and every one of us is part of our own society.

The three studies that have been developed at just the right time provide evidence of the necessity of social protection and employment opportunities in Cambodia.

- The study on Social Protection Expenditure Review is the business plan for estimating the financing capacity for social protection.
- The costing exercise on the NSPS is the budget plan for selecting the tools and most important programs. It will also help determine the appropriate size and coverage of the programs and whether the programs should be targeted or universal.
- The National Employment Policy is the background to understanding the capacity of the working age population to contribute to social and economic development.

The results of these studies will contribute to the development of a Policy Note on Social Protection Investment as a complementary document to the current NSPS. The results of other studies such as the one on rate of return on social protection investment, together with the three above-mentioned studies, clearly present to the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) that social protection is not a cost nor an expenditure, but an investment for inclusive growth.

As mentioned by Your Excellency Ambassador, with the help of these studies we can see that social protection is not just a promise anymore, but is affordable through the evidence-based selection of social protection programs.

Development partners and the RGC will take this momentum further and lead to the development of a new Rectangular Strategy and a National Strategic Development Plan, to present the integral part played by social protection in achieving growth, employment, equity and efficiency.

We must not forget that policy without an implementation strategy is just a paper, whereas a strategy without implementation is a useless paper.

- With our readiness in terms of policy development, it is just the beginning of a long way to go for implementing social protection by SNA.
- The role of SNA in providing financing and coordination on social protection implementation is not a myth and not imagination, but a must in light of Decentralisation and De-concentration in Cambodia.

May I take this opportunity to call for further collaboration among stakeholders involved to move this agenda onward. Last but not the least, may I welcome you all to Siem Reap, the charming cultural city of Cambodia. Please feel like home during your stay here.