Country in focus:
Cambodia

Cambodia has a population of 14 million with about half of the population under 21 years of age. The poverty-ridden countryside requires considerable investment to improve basic infrastructure. The country suffered traumatically from wars and the genocide conducted by the Khmer Rouge over decades; an estimated 1.7 million people perished in the years 1975–1979 alone. Although the country has experienced a long period of setbacks, the past decade has shown a marked shift towards increased grassroots mobilisation and advocacy to support democratic development.

Cambodia is part of Diakonia’s work in the south-east Asia sub-region, and our work here is influenced by both the country and sub-regional contexts. The major thematic areas of Diakonia’s and our partner organisations’ work are human rights and democracy, with an emphasis on community organisation and mobilisation, and integrated rural development. Diakonia’s focus in Cambodia is long-term commitment, core funding and results that are focused on increasing people’s participation in democratic processes. Diakonia supports democratic development at the grassroots level and protection of human rights through the most important human rights organisations in Cambodia. This two-way approach involves a range of approaches and dialogue between local partner organisations.

How we and our partners work

Diakonia works through a variety of national and local partners. Some are large and well-known national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) located in the capital Phnom Penh, while others are provincial NGOs located in rural areas. In Cambodia, Diakonia focuses on working together with medium-sized to big national NGOs with a broad donor portfolio.

Through national partners, Diakonia is involved in the policy formulation within Cambodian civil society. Provincial partners organise the community, which include self-help groups, women’s and men’s groups etc., to effect community development. Processes such as community and village planning are increasingly influenced by the grassroots through community-based organisations. As a result, local authorities improve their quality of decision-making. A special focus has been on gender, encompassing both work against gender-based violence and gender equity/equality.

Our attitude to capacity development is to look at what is working well already, and learn from that, rather than identifying what is not working. With this approach we avoid solutions that may not fit well into organisational structures and culture. In addition, Diakonia plays an important role as a bridge-builder between partners by organising opportunities for organisations to share and learn from each other. Through these processes, information is also fed into the advocacy work that Diakonia conducts at the international level.

Diakonia in Cambodia is led by a team with many years of experience working in international organisations. While partners are accountable for the funds they receive, the country office offers positive and constructive support to strengthen the focus on results, along with mentoring to improve financial and administrative systems.

Case study: Protecting human rights

The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (LICADHO) is one of Cambodia’s major human rights watchdogs and has been a long-standing Diakonia partner for over ten years. This long history enables Diakonia to work in a close and trustful partnership with LICADHO.

LICADHO is a vocal defender of human rights and lobbies both nationally and internationally to raise awareness about human rights violations in Cambodia. While this is the most well known role of LICADHO, most of its work takes place locally where it is very active in working with local authorities to help women and children in prisons, support child rights groups and human rights activists in the community. LICADHO also has humanitarian activities through their medical staff, helping people without access to medical care. In all this work they constantly cooperate and advocate with local authorities to assist beneficiaries.
Diakonia is a Christian development organisation working together with local partners for a sustainable change for the most vulnerable people in the world.

We support more than 400 partner organisations in over 30 countries – in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Diakonia believes in a ‘strategy for change’, which focuses on socially sustainable development. We believe that our partners can solve problems and identify opportunities by adopting a holistic, rights-based approach.