



CAMBODIA

Population 16 million (UN, 2012) **Area** 181,035 sq km (69,898 sq miles)
Major language Khmer **Major religion** Buddhism
Life expectancy 66 years (men), 71 years (women) (UN) **Currency** Riel



▲ Leou with her father after cataract surgery, 2009
 ▲ Patient after surgery

Before Mekong Eye Doctors became active in Cambodia, eye care in the country consisted of a single ophthalmologist in Phnom Penh and one eye doctor in Battambang Provincial Hospital. Eye care infrastructure has meanwhile been significantly developed through eye health facilities, equipment and commodities, providing specialty and complementary services at national hospitals, provincial hospitals, and health centres as well as promoting community awareness.⁵¹

During the first few years of its presence in Cambodia, Mekong Eye Doctors worked in cooperation with Doctors Without Borders. Cambodia had just been through a devastating civil war from 1967 until 1975. A large number of its literate and educated citizens had been murdered by Pol Pot's regime or had died in the countryside from starvation or exhaustion. The infrastructure, roads, hospitals and schools, had largely been destroyed. In 1994 and the following years, the roads were still in bad shape and dangerous in those remote areas where the Khmer Rouge remained active. Travelling to the provinces of Kratie and Pursat was only possible by boat and under military protection. MED organised a number of eye camps in Kratie and Pursat, both of which attracted hundreds of people. Their goal was to establish an affordable, accessible and sustainable eye care service for marginalized people, and it was with this target in mind that MED initiated support to the Referral Hospitals of Kratie, Steung Treng, Svay Rieng, Ratanakiri and Mondulokiri and subsequently expanded to Kampong Cham province from 1999 to 2008.⁵²

51 Boonny, T. Atlas of Cambodia, maps on socio-economic development and environment. Phnom Penh: Save Cambodia's Wildlife, 2014: pp. 59-68, 81-88, 111-116.
 52 Broers, M. ECF Year report 2008. Amsterdam: Eye Care Foundation, 2008.

Patients waiting for an eye screening



DR. SAMORN PANG STUDIED AT THE AMC IN THE NETHERLANDS

Cambodian ophthalmologist Dr. Samorn Pang finished his subspecialty training at the AMC⁵³ in the Netherlands and went back to Cambodia in April 2016. “During the seven months of the training I learned all I could learn in the field of orbital surgery. But in Cambodia I had come across cases that I did not see during my time at the AMC: eye injuries that had volatile causes like acid, burning or motor accidents. In Cambodia I had already dealt with a lot of such cases, so compared with the eye doctors in the Netherlands I already had a lot of experience.” “Another thing I learned in the Netherlands and that I will take back to Cambodia is the importance of cooperation between different disciplines within the hospital. I now also have a lot more insight into the doctor-patient relationship. Finally, I learned a lot about running a hospital in terms of logistics but also general management. And of course I appreciated the working relationships with my colleagues; everyone was very open and friendly”.

It was during that period that the National Programme for Eye Health (NPEH)⁵⁴ was formed by the government and, together with other eye health NGO’s active in the country at the time, programmes were set up to train professionals and build an ophthalmic infrastructure. In 2001 MED built an eye clinic on the grounds of the hospital in Kratie. Dr. Sokhan (who received his training in Vietnam) set to work with his team and they still form a strong and efficient team today. Stung Treng followed and later, when the roads were increasingly better and safer, MED also started operations in the region of Mondulkiri and subsequently Svay Rieng, Tbung Kmum and Ratanakiri. The latest eye clinic in Ratanakiri was opened in 2017.⁵⁵

53 The Dutch Academic Medical Center (Academisch Medisch Centrum, AMC) is merged with the VU Medical Center (VU medisch centrum, VUmc) into Amsterdam UMC. Retrieved June 14, 2019 from AMC: <https://www.amc.nl/web/home.htm>

54 Meng, Ngy. National Programme for Eye Health Cambodia (NPEH). Retrieved June 14, 2019 from NPEH: <http://npehcambodia.com>

55 Praag, van, A. Annual report 2017, A good cause in sight. Amsterdam: Eye Care Foundation, 2017.

The eye clinics supported by ECF organise multiple outreach expeditions to regions situated far away from the clinics. ECF has also given long-term support training to the nurses who work in the numerous health centres; they are capable of treating simple eye disorders and know when to refer patients to an eye clinic. Recently ECF has also started school screenings to ensure early identification and intervention of children with vision problems.

Since 2007,⁵⁶ ECF has supported the retraining of doctors to ophthalmologists at the University of Health Sciences in Phnom Penh. Every year, two specialists travel from the Netherlands to Phnom Penh to give lectures and hands-on training for a week.⁵⁷

Now that ophthalmic care has been put on the map by the various NGO's, in collaboration with the NPEH, the next step is to integrate eye care into the national health policy and ensure the provision of adequate budget. The first steps have been taken in creating a health insurance system. Unfortunately, many people still have little or no access to health care, either due to poverty or their place of residence, and currently aid remains critical to their wellbeing.

The office in Phnom Penh opened in November 2007 and started with one Programme Manager: Thong Chun Leng.⁵⁸ He was later joined by Pech Chan Muny, Ouk Somuny, Sao Chhorn and Pol Sambath.⁵⁹ Somuny who is Finance and Adminis-

tration Officer and Sambath who is the Country Manager still work in the Cambodia office and Piseth Horm recently joined the team as Senior Program Coordinator, along with Marguerite Goulding who is the Programme Development Mentor from the Australian Volunteer for International Development program.



▲ Part of the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh 2012

⁵⁶ Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Fred Hollows Foundation (FHF): <https://www.hollows.org/au/home>
⁵⁷ AD Rotterdam, 2013. Oogarts gaat naar Cambodja (Dutch Eye Doctor goes to Cambodia to give lectures).
⁵⁸ Broers, M. ECF Year report 2008. Amsterdam: Eye Care Foundation, 2008.
⁵⁹ Praag, van, A. Annual report 2017, A good cause in sight. Amsterdam: Eye Care Foundation, 2017.



▲ Opening eye clinic in Svay Rieng, 2015 ▲ Patient and ECF team during a screening ▲ Patients in Svay Rieng, 2015

ECF FAMILY IN CAMBODIA

ECF works together with the following doctors in Cambodia: Professor Ngy Meng, Chairman of the National Program for Eye Health and Professor Do Seiha, Vice Chairman of the National Program for Eye Health. Dr. Heng Sokhan, Basic Eye Doctor at Kratie Provincial Hospital and Dr. Chheang Sovutha, Director of Kratie Provincial Health Department. Dr. Moch Kimhong, Eye Doctor at Ratanakiri Provincial Hospital and Dr. Ung Ratana, Director of Ratanakiri Provincial Health Department. Dr. Poch Thaly, Basic Eye Doctor at Tbong Khmum Provincial Hospital and Dr. Keo Vannak, Director of Tbong Khmum Provincial Health Department. Dr. Pang Samorn, Ophthalmologist of Svay Rieng Provincial Hospital and Dr. Ke Rotha, Director of Svay Rieng Provincial Health Department. Dr. Sreng Hourng, Eye Doctor at Mondulkiri Provincial Hospital and Dr. Bun Sour, Director of Mondulkiri Provincial Health Department. Please see the inside cover of this publication for a full ECF Family List.

