

TRANSCRIPT

Remarks by USAID/Cambodia Mission Director Erin Soto, July 4, 2007 TV Special

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Question 1: Please give our viewers some background information on USAID's programs in Cambodia.

ERIN SOTO: The United States Agency for International Development is one part of the United States government. In the past 15 years, USAID has provided almost \$600 million to Cambodia.

In the past we've worked in things like infrastructure and providing seed money for micro-finance institutions. But today, we provide assistance in health, and in education, and in good governance. This year alone we are going to be providing almost \$55 million to Cambodia.

Question 2: Let's start with USAID's health program. What health problems are you focused on and how successful have you been?

ERIN SOTO: USAID supports the Government of Cambodia's efforts in improving health for all Cambodians.

Did you know that over 60,000 children and babies die every year in Cambodia? And most of them die from diseases that we know how to prevent. USAID, working with the Government of Cambodia and other partners, are focusing efforts on immunizing children. Last year alone USAID provided assistance in immunizing children under 5 against measles. Over 80% of these children were vaccinated last year. And we also have provided assistance in supplementing Vitamin A to over half the children under 5. That was just last year alone.

In HIV/AIDS, the US government is the largest donor. We provide assistance in the care and treatment of people living with AIDS. Since 1998, the HIV prevalence rate has dropped from 3% to today less than 1%. That is an amazing statistic, and not many countries in the world can claim such success. The Cambodians have a lot to be proud of, and USAID and the US government is a proud supporter of that effort.

Many of your viewers might be familiar with Super Moan, Super Chicken. This is a USAID-supported intervention which is attempting to educate all Cambodians about how to prevent the threat of avian influenza.

So in health we provide a lot of support. It's our largest sector that we provide assistance in.

Question 3: Education is so important for the future of Cambodia. What support has USAID provided to educate the children of Cambodia?

ERIN SOTO: In the education sector, 92% of Cambodian children enroll in grade 1. That's a wonderful statistic. But by the 6th grade, half of them stop going to school. With support from USAID and other donors, the government has approved a new curriculum that includes something called "Life Skills," which is designed to focus on quality and on keeping parents and children interested in school. In some places you'll see where schools have a class on cultural heritage, and other schools they are looking at agricultural production techniques, and yet at other schools they are looking at HIV/AIDS prevention. Within the next couple of years we hope to have all 76,000 teachers trained in this new curriculum. That is USAID's support in education.

Question 4: I'm sure many of our viewers know that promoting democracy and human rights is an important foreign policy for the U.S. government. How has USAID supported this policy in Cambodia?

ERIN SOTO: The good governance is a very complex and broad field. It is extremely important and underpins everything we do in health and education. We provide a large amount of support in elections, strengthening rule of law, human rights, anti-corruption, and anti-trafficking in persons.

In elections, for example, many of the adults of the country went to the polls this year, and they probably saw people standing around with pencils and pieces of paper. These were observers and monitors, and USAID, for example, trained over 5,000 domestic observers to observe the electoral process, not only on Election Day but the many months preceding Election Day.

In the area of rule of law, USAID has trained almost all the lawyers in the country at one time or another. And we're currently in the process of training all the judges and all the prosecutors on ethics, and soon will be training all the prosecutors and all the judges on the land law.

As well for example anti-corruption, a very sensitive topic. USAID has supported 30 NGOs to work to educate people as to what is corruption and how do they know when it occurs and what can they do about it. There are over 300,000 Cambodian citizens who have signed a petition to encourage the government to pass a good anti-corruption law. So these are just some examples of the many, many things that USAID does to support democracy and governance in Cambodia.

Question 5: Finally, Cambodia's economy has experienced good growth over the past few years, and the predictions are that this growth will continue. What role has the US and USAID played in economic development in Cambodia?

ERIN SOTO: Economic growth is one sector that is critically important to development.

Another thing that we are doing for example is we are working to increase the productivity of the garment sector. The garment sector is critically important in Cambodia, and USAID support is working in the factories with the managers to try to enhance productivity. So far, in a very new program, those factories that we have worked with have shown a 15%

increase in productivity. Which, for those that we are working with, translates into about \$600,000 worth of value.

Another thing that we do in the countryside, in the rural areas, is a program that focuses on rural entrepreneurs.

We're working with over 1000 rural entrepreneurs, and what we've been able to do, for example, just as one example, is the 500 pig farmers that we've been working with, trying to teach them how to raise their pigs so that they become healthier faster, fatter faster, that fewer of them die, that they get their immunizations, and so on and so forth. About 500 of the farmers that we've been working with have shown an increase in just one year of \$150 per year. And while that might not sound like very much, \$150 dollars in a year in a rural area can mean a lot to a rural family.

So those are just a few of the examples in economic growth, and democracy and governance, health and education, where USAID and the US government intervene to help Cambodia.