

The Cambodian National Volleyball League (Disabled) uses volleyball to integrate people with disabilities back into their communities.

# Sport League Drives Reintegration of Disability Community in Cambodia

Cambodian National Volleyball League (Disabled) Organisation



## PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

The disability community, including landmine survivors and people affected by muscular degenerative diseases such as polio. Athletes between the ages of 18 to 54 are particularly targeted.

## LOCATION

Throughout Cambodia with a focus on provincial development

## LEAD ORGANIZATION

Cambodian National Volleyball League (Disabled) Organization

## PROGRAM NAME

Cambodian National Volleyball League (Disabled)

## OBJECTIVES

- To assist in the socio-economic reintegration of landmine/unexploded ordinance survivors and other people with disabilities through sports training and competition.
- To use sport as a tool for the continuation of national reconciliation.
- To leverage media coverage of the league and its participants to raise awareness of disability and landmine issues.
- To build accessible, multi-use sports facilities throughout Cambodia.

## PROGRAM CONTEXT

Cambodia was affected by regional instability resulting from the Vietnam conflict in the 1960s and 70s. Years of civil war followed. One of the most long-lasting legacies of years of conflict is the landmines which lay buried throughout the countryside and the devastation they continue to reap. While census data is difficult to obtain, it is generally accepted that Cambodia has approximately 40 000 landmine survivors who have suffered amputations. This figure, combined with a significant population of polio survivors, means that Cambodia has one of the highest per capita rates of people with physical disabilities in the world.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

The Cambodian National Volleyball League (Disabled), or CNVLD, uses sport to reintegrate people with disabilities, including former combatants, back into their communities. Reintegration through sport happens on a number of different levels: physically, athletes gain or regain a degree of mobility through regular exercise; on a personal level, participants' confidence and sense of self-worth increase dramatically; and economically, all players receive a stipend which allows them to support themselves financially.

The CNVLD's core sport is standing volleyball, chosen because volleyball is the national team sport of Cambodia and is extremely popular throughout the country. Wheelchair racing has also recently been added in order to reach a wider population of people with disabilities (e.g., double amputees and severe cases of polio). All sports are played in teams to allow participants to benefit from companionship and camaraderie.

CNVLD organizes and trains the teams and is involved in constructing simple but multi-purpose sports facilities around the country, consisting of a wheelchair accessible concrete slab, which can be used for basketball, volleyball or badminton. Every village has at least one kilometre of road suitable for wheelchair racing.

Players commit to their teams for a period of 8 months, sign a contract and agree to attend practice four times per week. In return, they receive a stipend (US \$450), meals and transportation. Expectations on the athletes are high and discipline is strict: if players are not punctual and healthy, they can be thrown off the team. CNVLD provides uniforms and all necessary equipment, including wheelchairs which are designed and manufactured locally, in cooperation with Don Bosco Vocational Training College.

CNVLD is run at the national level by two full-time expatriate staff members and four Cambodian staff (an overall project manager, a media spokesperson, a sports coordinator and a volleyball coordinator). Local project managers are being trained by the overall project manager. All four of the Cambodian national staff members and 90% of the local project managers are women and CNVLD encourages women to be involved at all levels.

CNVLD currently has 16 teams of 12 people. Over 40 new teams have been identified and are ready to begin playing in the league, but there is a shortage of resources.

## DELIVERY AND IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

- Ministry of Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (locates and organizes groups of people with disabilities for CNVLD to incorporate into the program)
- International Committee of the Red Cross (builds joint sport facilities with CNVLD, runs rehabilitation centres and provides prostheses to many participants)
- National Olympic Committee of Germany (provides technical advisors to conduct training courses)
- Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) (provides technical advisors)
- Swiss Academy for Development (promotes and supports CNVLD's activities internationally)

## RESOURCES

Each team costs US\$7000 annually to support, including the coach's salary, stipends for the players, transportation, meals and uniforms. Resources are provided by:

- AusAID
- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

CNVLD is gradually phasing out donor funding in favour of corporate sponsorship. CNVLD is currently supported by: DHL, Siemens, Sunway Corporation, Air Catering Cambodia, Kingmaker Shoes, ANZ Royal, Hagar, Confirel Cambodia, and Medico International.

## IMPACT

- The majority of CNVLD's athletes are demobilized soldiers who were unemployed before joining the program. With improved self-confidence and other life skills, over 60% of CNVLD's athletes are now employed outside the program.
- Former soldiers from both sides of Cambodia's conflict are able to play together with genuine respect.

- Kingmaker Shoes, a Cambodian firm that manufactures Timberland and Clark shoes, has hired some CNVLD athletes in its factory, attributing the discipline they learn playing sports to making them excellent employees. CNVLD supports this idea but is committed to carefully vetting workplaces and employers to avoid exploitation of workers with a disability. CNVLD endorsed Kingmaker Shoes as a quality employer and in the next three years, Kingmaker has pledged to bring 1000 women in wheelchairs into a custom-built factory currently under construction.
- CNVLD teams receive an enormous amount of media coverage in Cambodia and internationally. This has allowed the organization to begin securing corporate sponsorship for teams (rather than relying on donor funds) and to raise national and international awareness about the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.
- Athletes on the CNVLD teams gain an enormous amount of confidence from participating in the program. People with disabilities who had never worn shorts are now showing off their prostheses.
- The stable presence of CNVLD enables participants to make long-term plans, often for the first time in their lives.
- CNVLD won the United Nations Best Practice Award in 2006.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Hope is the most important attribute participants gain from the program. Most CNLVD athletes acknowledge that losing a limb made them contemplate suicide, but by becoming part of a team their hope was renewed.

- Programs like CNLVD should avoid making beneficiaries dependent: though athletes receive a stipend from the project, it is not a living wage. Participants are encouraged to seek job training and ultimately, outside employment. Practice times are flexible, allowing people to combine work and sport.
- Sport has the power to contribute to the process of national reconciliation, integrating people of all social and economic classes, political affiliations and physical abilities.
- Many female amputees are not comfortable playing stand up sports and prefer to participate in wheelchair sports.
- Many international development and aid programs still do not recognize the unique capacity of sport to foster positive social change.
- Corruption should not be tolerated. CNVLD has gained a reputation for being “tough” on corruption, both local and foreign.

## LOOKING AHEAD

CNVLD will continue to grow, as resources allow, opening new volleyball and wheelchair racing teams, and adding a third sport, power lifting (for which materials can be manufactured locally). CNLVD also hopes to expand its programs for children with disabilities. Currently, coaches and participants in selected regions work with children’s groups to train them in wheelchair sports and standing volleyball; in the future, each community will have a children’s coordinator working alongside the local coach.

Program staff also plan to lobby international groups to recognize standing volleyball. Although the International Paralympic Committee recognizes sitting volleyball as a paralympic sport, standing volleyball does not have this designation. As a result, many countries find it difficult to obtain support to develop programs.



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Meoun competes in wheelchair races.

## FEATURED SUCCESS STORY

Moeun, 40, contracted polio when she was a girl and cannot walk; to move from one place to another, she must drag herself along the ground with her arms. For the past twenty years she worked in the rice fields planting crops for three months each year. Normally, a rice farmer stands knee deep in water while planting crops, but because Moeun cannot stand, her body was almost completely submerged. She endured this for years, suffering serious health consequences.

Moeun no longer works in the rice fields and is now a healthy athlete with the Cambodian National Volleyball League, competing in wheelchair races. She has received a great deal of positive media attention in Cambodia and was recently profiled in a program aired by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Christopher Minko, founder of CNVLD, describes her as “extremely dignified.”

### MORE INFORMATION

For more information, visit <http://www.standupcambodia.org>