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*Applying Science to Strengthen  
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## USAID ASSIST Project

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# Cambodia Country Report FY15

**Cooperative Agreement Number:**

AID-OAA-A-12-00101

**Performance Period:**

October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2015

**DECEMBER 2015**

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This annual country report was prepared by University Research Co., LLC for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project is made possible by the generous support of the American people through USAID.



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#### DISCLAIMER

This report was authored by University Research Co., LLC (URC). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

## **Acknowledgements**

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For more information on the work of the USAID ASSIST Project, please visit [www.usaidassist.org](http://www.usaidassist.org) or write [assist-info@urc-chs.com](mailto:assist-info@urc-chs.com).

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## Abbreviations

ASSIST	USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems Project
CCN	Cambodian Council of Nurses
CMC	Cambodian Midwives Council
CNR	National Nursing Representatives
DCC	Dental Council of Cambodia
FY	Fiscal Year
HRDD	
ICM	International Confederation of Midwives
ICN	International Council of Nurses
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MCC	Medical Council of Cambodia
MOH	Ministry of Health
PCC	Pharmacy Council of Cambodia
URC	University Research Co., LLC
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

# 1 Introduction

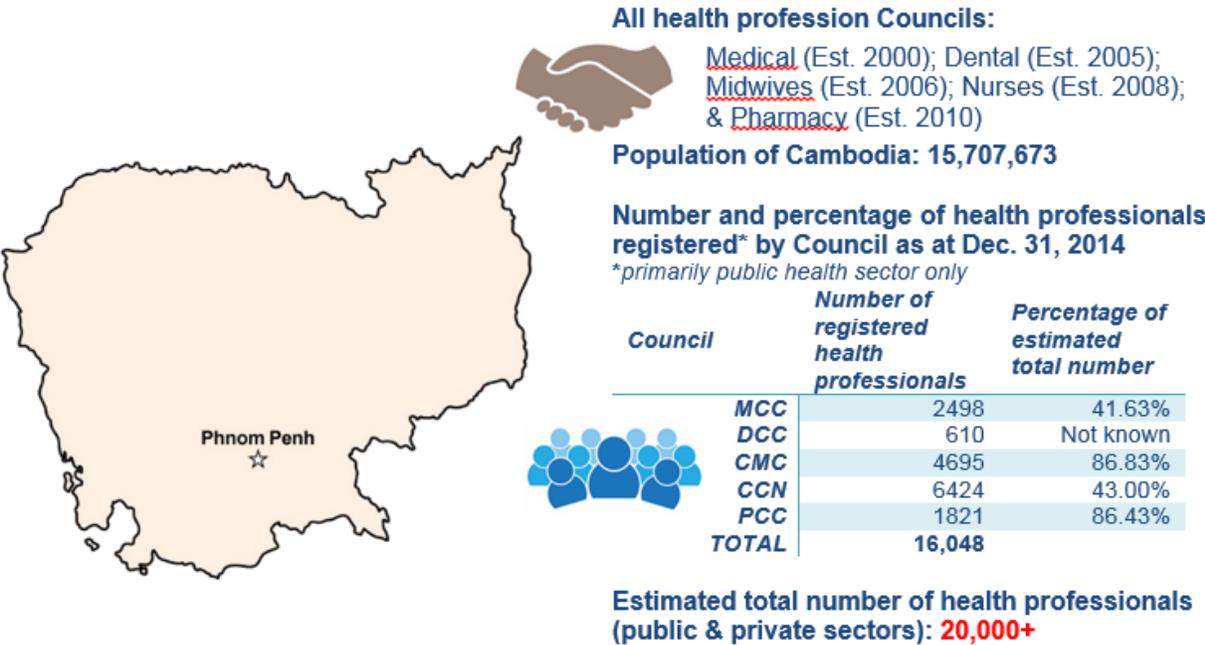
In the health system of Cambodia, five health professions are regulated by independent councils, which were established by Royal Decree between 2000 and 2010. This legislation and other related legislative instruments, sub-decrees, and *prakas* currently provide the framework for the establishment of health professional regulation in Cambodia. The five councils are: the Medical Council of Cambodia (MCC); Dental Council of Cambodia (DCC); Cambodian Midwives Council (CMC); Cambodia Council of Nurses (CCN); and the Pharmacy Council of Cambodia (PCC). Together with the Ministry of Health (MOH) Human Resource Development Department (HRDD), they seek to ensure that health professionals meet minimum standards for qualification and demonstrate fitness to practice (health and professional conduct) and competence to provide safe, ethical, and effective care.

In February 2014, the USAID Mission in Cambodia asked the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project to provide technical assistance to strengthen the regulation of the medical profession in the country. The scope of the requested activity was subsequently broadened in consultation with the USAID Mission and key stakeholders in Cambodia to holistically strengthen the system of regulation for all five health professions. Broadening the scope of this activity allows ASSIST to contribute to building the capacity of Cambodia’s health care system to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, client-centeredness, safety, accessibility, and equity of the health care services provided.

The principles underpinning this ASSIST activity include co-design; enabling improvements rather than implementing them; and encouraging systems and processes to better utilize and/or mobilize available resources within the system. It is anticipated that these principles will:

- Strengthen stakeholder ownership and capacity to develop, test, lead, and implement sustainable solutions
- Harness Cambodian expertise and draw from lessons learned
- Connect stakeholders with the best international technical expertise
- Support the development of relationships and collaboration with regulatory peers regionally and globally

## Scale of USAID ASSIST’s Work in Cambodia



## 2 Program Overview

What are we trying to accomplish?	At what scale?
<b>1. Create a national five-year strategic plan to strengthen health profession regulation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen the system of health profession regulation for all five health profession councils through a shared 2015-2020 strategic plan</li> </ul>	Focus on all health professions at national, regional, and provincial levels (25 provinces in Cambodia)
<b>2. Establish and implement a plan of action for the councils' three priority strategic objectives</b>	
Establish and implement a plan of action to meet three of the councils' strategic goals*: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Goal #1: Organizational Redesign</li> <li>Strategic Goal #2: Legislative Review and Reform</li> <li>Strategic Goal #3: Registration</li> </ul>	Focus on all five health profession councils at national, regional and provincial levels

\* Health Profession Councils' National Strategic Plan 2015-2020 (June 8, 2015)

## 3 Key Activities, Accomplishments, and Results

### **Activity 1. Create national five-year strategic plan for health profession regulation**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The creation of a shared five-year national Strategic Plan 2015-2020 for all five health profession councils, in partnership with the MOH, is intended to guide the implementation and evaluation of priority improvements for health profession regulation in Cambodia. The Strategic Plan lays out the strategic objectives and associated strategies and timeframes to improve the five councils' regulatory performance in assuring safety and quality and addresses the following areas:

1. Legislation (advocacy and responsiveness)
2. Organizational (and internal governance)
3. Public accountability (and external governance)
4. Responsibilities and functions

The Strategic Plan provides for a shared understanding among the councils, the Ministry of Health HRDD, and key stakeholders of the key priorities required to strengthen health profession regulation in Cambodia and informs the ASSIST activity design for fiscal year (FY) 2015 and beyond. The Strategic Plan also enables health development partners to understand the approach and contribute to strengthening the system of health profession regulation that meets the needs of Cambodia.

#### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS & RESULTS**

- **ASSIST organized with the Ministry of Health and the five councils a two-day, interactive National Consultation Workshop** on October 13-14, 2014 with approximately 165 participants from Phnom Penh and the provinces. ASSIST presented the findings of the rapid baseline assessment along with international experiences. Cambodian stakeholders presented their perspectives on the assessment findings and the regulatory situation in Cambodia. The discussions at the workshop informed the content of the five-year strategic plan.



**National Consultation Workshop opening ceremony, Phnom Penh (Oct 2014).**  
*Photograph by Tana Wuliji, URC.*



**A Cambodian welcome** for (L-R) Mr. Sean Callahan, Acting Mission Director, USAID Cambodia; His Excellency Mam Bun Heng, Minister for Health, Royal Government of Cambodia; and (behind R), His Excellency, Professor Thir Kruey, President of the Medical Council of Cambodia and Secretary of State, Ministry of Health. *Photograph by URC.*



**National Consultation Workshop participants:** His Excellency Mam Bun Heng, Minister for Health; Presidents and leaders of the five health profession councils; Ministry of Health Human Resource Development Department; and USAID ASSIST Project team at completion of National Consultation Workshop. *Photograph by URC.*

- **A meeting hosted by the Office of the World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Cambodia and the councils with health development partners** on October 21, 2014 provided the opportunity to share the outcomes of the National Consultation Workshop; the Councils' progress to date in developing a shared national strategic plan; and health development partners' current roles and activities. The meeting also allowed the councils to discuss with health development partners suggested next steps for strengthening health profession regulation in Cambodia.



**Working meeting:** Presidents and leaders of the five health profession councils reviewing the stakeholder feedback and prioritizing the proposed strategic objectives and strategies. *Photograph by Tana Wuliji, URC.*

- **Unanimous agreement by the five health profession councils** in December 2014 to commit to a partnership with a strong, single voice to promote and collaboratively strengthen the system of health profession regulation in Cambodia.
- **Official launch of the *Health Profession Councils' National Strategic Plan 2015-2020*** (June 8, 2015) by the Minister for Health, His Excellency Mam Bun Heng. This was attended by 165 participants from Phnom Penh and the provinces, with distribution of the *Councils' National Strategic Plan 2015-2020* in both Khmer and English.



**Official Launch:** His Excellency Mam Bun Heng, Minister for Health, Royal Government of Cambodia; Presidents and leaders of the health profession councils of Cambodia; Acting Mission Director and Director, Office of Public Health and Education, USAID Cambodia; Technical Officer, Human Resources for Health, Office of the Representative of WHO, Cambodia; USAID ASSIST Director and Senior Advisor, Health Professions Regulation, USAID ASSIST Project, URC. *Photograph by URC.*

## **Activity 2: Establish and implement a plan of action for the councils' three priority strategic objectives**

### **BACKGROUND**

Based on the *Strategic Plan 2015-2020*, three priority strategic objectives were identified for action: 1) organizational redesign; 2) legislative review and reform; and 3) registration. ASSIST supported the development and implementation of a detailed action plan for each of the councils' three priority strategic objectives for FY15. The councils were able to share these action plans with the Royal Government of Cambodia, all health development partners, and stakeholders to obtain the required support and assistance to achieve the desired outcomes.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS & RESULTS

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**Strategic goal #1: Organizational redesign. Review and redesign the health profession councils' governance arrangements and organizational structure with sound financial modelling to deliver the five councils' regulatory systems and processes.**

ASSIST is providing technical advice and guidance to the health profession councils, in partnership with the MOH, to develop a comprehensive business plan. The business plan will provide clear financial requirements and identify potential sources for funds to establish a shared office and employ sufficient number and quality of staff to deliver efficient and effective business and regulatory systems and processes for the five health profession councils during the next three years. The ultimate aim is for the councils to be self-funding within five years.

- **ASSIST partner, EnCompass LLC, was contracted in May 2015 to develop a business plan that includes the financial arrangements required to support a shared secretariat for all five councils.** In July 2015, EnCompass LLC consultant Anne Rooney travelled to Phnom Penh to meet with representatives from all five councils, the MOH, and other key stakeholders to gather baseline information to inform the development of the business plan and the business case. A structured questionnaire was used to interview representatives of the five councils to inform the organizational re-design and financial arrangements. Representatives from the MOH and other key stakeholders including the USAID Mission Cambodia, Office of the WHO Representative in Cambodia, the United Nations Population Fund, and the University of Health Sciences, were also interviewed.
- **ASSIST convened a one-day retreat with representatives from all five health profession councils where Anne Rooney presented the preliminary findings of her interviews and obtained consensus on the strengths and issues that need to be addressed in the proposed business plan** (Aug 5, 2015). The preliminary findings showed that the councils were supportive of a shared secretariat for the administrative and business functions, and, where appropriate, regulatory functions. They supported the need to maintain the independence of each council in relation to profession-specific regulation matters. In addition, a sound financial system with accountability and regular reporting was identified as an important foundation for the councils' future viability. It was recognized that without a robust financial accounting system for all councils, the opportunity to receive external funds from the Royal Government of Cambodia and other sources to establish the councils' new secretariat function will be limited.

**Strategic goal #2: Legislative review and reform. Review of existing laws and preparation of amendments or development of a new law for all health profession councils.**

- **In April 2015, ASSIST developed an options paper for the councils, the MOH, and select stakeholders to consider and determine the extent of legislative reform that is required to effectively regulate the five health professions and meet the needs of Cambodia.** The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in partnership with the MOH Human Resource Development Department, secured the Minister for Health's support to immediately draft new legislation to address the absence of health practitioner licensure and the necessary enforcements. Support for the development of this new law on *Regulation of Health Practitioners* arose from the five-year JICA/HRDD project, which originally focus on the nursing and midwifery professions and was subsequently expanded to include all five health profession councils.
- **His Excellency Professor Thir Kruey, Secretary of State, informed ASSIST that the MOH had decided to develop a new law on health professionals to ensure the quality of health professionals in public and private sectors.** On completion of the five-year JICA/HRDD project in June 2015, the Ministry of Health considered its options with regard to completing the drafting of the new law on *Regulation of Health Practitioners*. The Ministry of Health subsequently requested the Office of the WHO Representative in Cambodia to support the completion of the new law.
- **ASSIST provided the services of a local legal expert in health profession regulatory law.** ASSIST arranged for provision of technical advice to the councils and feedback to the legal team on the various drafts of the proposed law by Sithisak Law Office in Cambodia. ASSIST also participated in six all-day consultation forums conducted by the MOH/HRDD, JICA, and WHO.
- **The drafting of the new law on *Regulation of Health Practitioners* was completed by the Ministry of Health in consultation with health profession councils, the office of the WHO**

**Representative in Cambodia, and USAID ASSIST on July 31, 2015.** The draft law addresses regulatory gaps relating to the initial and renewal of license to practice, penalties for practicing without having registration and/or license to practice, and disciplinary sanctions for professional misconduct.

- **The content of the proposed law was finalized** following two additional all-day consultation forums in August/September 2015 with representatives from the Council of Jurists. Following a consultation meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, it is anticipated the draft law will be presented in late 2015 or early 2016 to the Council of Ministers for consideration and subsequent passage through the National Assembly to become law.

**Strategic goal #3: Registration. Achievement of full compliance with registration requirements and full awareness among stakeholders and health professionals of registration requirements and obligations.** ASSIST is providing technical assistance to support the five councils in the development and trial of a harmonized system and process for registration of all health professionals that is robust, cost-effective, and timely, with the target of registering between 90% and 100% of health professionals by September 30, 2016. ASSIST support is focusing on policy and procedures, standardized forms, communications plan, and monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes.

- **Representatives were identified from each council to work with ASSIST to map the registration process for each health profession** (April - Aug 2015).
- **The ASSIST team has mapped the registration process for all health profession councils to understand each council's process, the barriers, and opportunities for improvement.** Overall, the registration activities are behind schedule. This may now be accelerated should additional resources be obtained for staff to be employed by councils to do the essential work of registration. This an important pre-cursor to the new law with the introduction of a mandatory, renewable license to practice that requires the health professional to be registered with the respective council prior to obtaining a license to practice.

## 4 Sustainability and Institutionalization

The agreement by all five health profession councils and their ongoing commitment for the shared National Strategic Plan 2015-2020 in strengthening the system of health profession regulation provides an important mechanism by which the transformational change for health profession regulation can occur in Cambodia. The involvement of the MOH is key for the sustainability and institutionalization of health professions' regulation, and discussions with the Deputy Director of Planning and Health Information at the MOH provided insight into processes for strategic, operational, and budgetary planning for health system strengthening within the MOH that may positively impact the sustainability of a shared regulatory secretariat in the future.

The proposed new law on *Regulation of Health Practitioners* is an important step forward. It addresses some of the identified gaps and omissions in the existing regulatory law, particularly relating to health professional registration, licensure, and associated penalties; professional standards and scopes of practice; and investigation of complaints relating to health issues and health professionals' performance and professional conduct, with the power for councils to take protective action (health matters) or apply sanctions (performance and conduct matters) on the health professional.

It will give the legal authority and power to the councils to:

- Set the requirements for and ensure 100% registration of all health professionals in Cambodia;
- Regulate issuing and renewing the license to practice required of all registered health professionals who wish to practice their profession;
- Determine a scope of practice for each health profession; and
- Be able to apply penalties to those health professionals who do not register with their council and who practice without a current license to practice.

The councils' ability to enforce these requirements in accordance with the law will overcome the institutional problem of health professionals initially obtaining registration and then not continuing to demonstrate their competence and fitness to practice through continuing professional development, recent practice, a check of criminal history, and demonstrating there is no physical or mental impairment that may adversely affect their ability to practice.

The goal of 90-100% registration of eligible applicants combined with a regular renewal process for a license to practice by all registered health professionals will provide sustainable revenue by which the councils can employ staff to deliver the regulatory functions and rent office premises. This will diminish the reliance on volunteer council members to execute the business, administrative and regulatory functions and over time, build a sustainable shared office and staff.

## 5 Challenges and Remedies

By far the greatest challenge to strengthening the system of health profession regulation is in ensuring that these new initiatives are adequately resourced and fully implemented with robust systems and processes in place to enable the required capacity, capability, and sustainability of the Councils to execute their legislative role and regulatory functions. It will require the continued commitment and support from the five health profession councils at both national and sub-national levels, and the Ministry of Health; access to sufficient financial and human resources to establish the necessary business and regulatory systems and processes until the Councils can become financially independent; and a focus on ensuring the agreed decisions and action plans are fully implemented.

### LEGISLATION

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- The proposed new law on *Regulation of Health Practitioners* does not comprehensively address all challenges identified in ASSIST's review of the current legal instruments for regulating health professions in Cambodia. The existing instruments are missing many rules and controls that would be expected in a modern system for regulating health professions. For example, they do not provide the councils with a mandate to implement standards or assess the standards of pre-service education or provide sustainable governance arrangements for each council that meet the needs of Cambodia. This new law will not address all the gaps in the existing laws and may inadvertently create new, unintentional outcomes or problems. Further work in these areas will be needed in the future.
- Consequential amendments to each council's sub-decree and *prakas* and development of implementation guidelines for the new law will assist in identifying gaps, unintentional outcomes or problems, and potential remedies.
- The new law does not deliver the comprehensive reform required to meet contemporary regulation of the health professions and the needs of Cambodia. Further legislative review and reform will be required in the future.

### ORGANIZATIONAL REDESIGN

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- Significant barriers to the councils' ability to execute their roles and functions as health profession regulators include:
  - Lack of adequate funds for the five councils' essential infrastructure and lack of employed staff to undertake the regulatory work of registration, including: complaints management; investigation into a health practitioner's health, performance, or professional conduct; and dissemination of professional codes and standards of practice
  - Reliance on volunteer council members to do the councils' work
  - Absence of a sound financial system and processes with accountability and regular reporting
- Development and agreement by all councils of a shared business plan and an implementation plan to address the above challenges is a critical strategy to ensure the capacity, capability, and sustainability of all the councils.

### REGISTRATION

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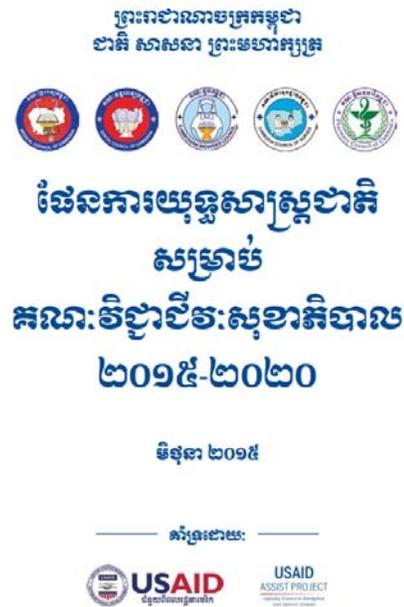
- The absence of penalties for persons not holding registration with their respective council and the absence of initial and renewal of license to practice and associated penalties in the existing law has limited the opportunity to increase registration numbers of all health professionals to 100%. This was compounded by the limited capacity of the ASSIST team and the councils' voluntary members to address both the drafting the new law to meet the Minister for Health's request for completion in a three-month period and the important work on the business plan.
- The pending new law will include mandatory registration; the requirement to be registered with a council prior to being issued a license to practice; renewal of licensure; and penalties for not holding a license to practice. This combined with the progress on implementing an agreed business plan and

shared council resources along with additional resources on the ASSIST team will help achieve important progress toward the goal of registration of 100% of all eligible health professionals by the end of FY16.

## 6 Knowledge Management Products and Activities

### Products:

- Strengthening Health Professions Regulation in Cambodia: National Consultative Workshop Fact Sheet (October 2014). Available at: <https://www.usaidassist.org/resources/baseline-assessment-cambodia-health-professions-regulatory-system>
- Options Paper titled *Reforming Cambodia's Health Professions Regulatory System* (May 2015) – not disseminated due to change in MOH direction with regards legal reform.
- *Health Profession Councils' National Strategic Plan 2015-2020* (June 2015). Available in English and Khmer at: <https://www.usaidassist.org/resources/health-profession-councils-national-strategic-plan-2015%E2%80%932020>
- Presentation “Beyond Safety to Improvement - The role of health workforce regulation: - The Cambodian Perspective” presented at the 4th APAC Forum – Auckland, New Zealand (September 23-25, 2015). Available at: <https://www.usaidassist.org/content/4th-apac-forum>
- Prepared manuscript for peer-reviewed publication in *Human Resources for Health*, “Strengthening health professions regulation in Cambodia: a rapid assessment.” Clarke D, Duke J, Wuliji T, Smith A, Phuong K, San U.



Health Profession Councils' National Strategic Plan 2015-2020 (Khmer)

### Activities:

- National Consultation Workshop Phnom Penh, Cambodia (October 13-14, 2014)
- Official launch of the Health Profession Councils' *National Strategic Plan 2015-2020*, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (June 8, 2015)
- International Council of Nurses (ICN) Conference *Global Citizen, Global Nursing* and Council of National Nursing Representatives (CNR) Forum – Seoul, Korea (June 16-23, 2015): Sponsored attendance by two representatives of the Cambodian Council of Nurses (CCN) and the USAID ASSIST Senior Advisor, Health Professions Regulation, to:
  - Observe the Council of National Nursing Association Representatives Forum (ICN's global governing body)
  - Participate in the World Health Organization (WHO) workshop on the *Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health 2030* and the *Strategic Directions for Strengthening Nursing & Midwifery*
  - Attend conference presentations on nursing regulation, nursing education, and quality improvement of nursing care, services, and systems
  - Network with international regulatory authorities and/or national nursing associations to source opportunities for new information, guidance, support, and assistance with contemporary nursing regulation.
- Sourced funds from Marie Stopes International–Cambodia to contribute to the sponsorship of a Cambodian Midwives Council representative to attend the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) Asia Pacific Regional Conference, *Midwifery care for every mother and their newborn*, held in Yokohama, Japan (July, 20-22, 2015). The sponsored CMC member:

- Participated in the conference and attended the sessions specifically related to midwifery regulation including education
- Liaised with international midwifery regulatory authorities to identify and establish potential partnership relationships to support and guide the CMC in midwifery regulation

## 7 Directions for FY16

The focus for FY16 remains on pursuing the three priority strategic objectives of the *National Strategic Plan 2015-2020*: Organizational redesign, legislative review and reform, and registration. Building on the success and decisions in FY15, in FY16, ASSIST will:

- Locate resources to establish the joint secretariat for the five councils and implement new business and administrative systems and processes to support the business and regulatory functions.
- Provide support and guidance to the passage of the new law through to the National Assembly for approval; prepare the consequential amendments to the sub-decrees and *prakas* for all councils; and develop the implementation guidelines to enact the law when it is passed.
- Design and implement: 1) a harmonized system and process for registration of all health professionals that is robust, cost-effective, and timely with the target of 100% of health professionals being registered by the end of 2016; and 2) a registration database for all health professions that is accessible to the public and other stakeholders.





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