

# Exploring Opportunities, Addressing Challenges: Policy Briefs by Young Cambodians on Key Development Areas 2023

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## *About Transparency International Cambodia*

Transparency International Cambodia is the fully-accredited National Chapter of Transparency International and was officially founded on 5 July 2010 by a group of anti-corruption activists and professionals committed to the creation of transparent and accountable Cambodia. It has since built a strong institution arduously fighting corruption and promoting integrity, transparency and accountability in the country. We work together with individuals and institutions at all levels including government, civil society, business, media and the wider public to achieve sustainable economic development, promote integrity and fight corruption.



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# *Acknowledgement*

In launching this collection of policy briefs, Transparency International Cambodia (TI Cambodia) extends our deepest recognition to the nine talented young researchers who contributed their dedication and insightful perspectives: Ms. Mao Sreykeo, Mr. Phan Daro, Ms. Phal Nyveara, Ms. Sokkhea Gechny, Mr. Seth Suonvisal, Ms. Lim Chhengheang, Mr. Chea Sameang, Mr. Chourn Visal, and Mr. Reth Vicheka. Their nine distinctive policy briefs serve as valuable tools, raising awareness and influencing policymakers on budget practices that directly impact citizens' lives.

Our sincere gratitude extends to the expert trainers of the "Young Budget Trackers" program who equipped our trainers with vital knowledge in fiscal policy, corruption, research methodology, and policy brief writing. We are also grateful to the coaching consultant who provided invaluable guidance on policy brief development and language editing. We thank the evaluation committee for their insightful feedback, which significantly enhanced the quality of the policy briefs. We deeply appreciate everyone for sharing their expertise, suggestions, and the opportunity to nurture the growth and learning of our team.

Finally, we express our profound gratitude to our donor, Oxfam Cambodia, for their unwavering support. While the findings and recommendations in each policy brief are solely those of the authors, we acknowledge the crucial role of Oxfam Cambodia in making this project a reality.

# Foreward

On behalf of Transparency International Cambodia (TI Cambodia), I am pleased to present this collection of nine insightful policy briefs authored by young Cambodian researchers. This publication is the culmination of the "Young Budget Trackers" program, a testament to our unwavering commitment to empowering youth and fostering active citizenship.

The budget process plays a critical role in shaping the lives of citizens. It dictates how resources are allocated across various sectors, impacting everything from education and healthcare to infrastructure and social protection. Recognizing this vital role, raising budget literacy amongst all citizens, including the youth, is crucial.

Youth are not merely beneficiaries of the budget; they are also future leaders and stakeholders. Their active participation in fiscal accountability is essential for ensuring transparency, efficiency, and equitable distribution of resources. One important avenue for such participation is evidence-based advocacy. This collection of policy briefs exemplifies the power of youth voices in shaping policy through rigorous research and well-reasoned recommendations.

It is in this context that TI Cambodia, with the generous support of Oxfam Cambodia, initiated the "Young Budget Trackers" program. This initiative aims to:

- Enhance budget literacy among citizens and youth.
- Equip young researchers with the necessary skills to conduct research and advocate for evidence-based policies.
- Empower youth to actively engage in national and sub-national budget processes.

The program provided extensive training to a group of young researchers in fiscal policy, corruption, research methodology, and policy brief writing. This training allowed them to delve into pertinent issues impacting Cambodia's development, resulting in this compelling collection of nine policy briefs.

These briefs explore critical topics ranging from gender-responsive budgeting to investing in digital infrastructure, strengthening good governance, and enhancing social protection. Each brief offers valuable insights and actionable recommendations informed by thorough research and analysis.

During the program, the young researchers presented their work to an evaluation committee who provided constructive feedback to further refine the policy briefs. This collaborative approach ensured the quality and effectiveness of the final publications. We are immensely proud of these young researchers for their dedication, intellectual curiosity, and commitment to making a positive impact on their nation. We also extend our sincere gratitude to the expert trainers, coaching consultant, and evaluation committee whose expertise and guidance proved invaluable. Finally, we acknowledge the crucial role played by Oxfam Cambodia in making this program a reality through their generous financial support.

This collection of policy briefs is not just a culmination of the "Young Budget Trackers" program; it is a powerful call to action. We invite policymakers, civil society organizations, and all stakeholders to engage with the findings and recommendations presented here. By fostering informed dialogue and collaborative action, we can empower Cambodian youth and work towards building a brighter and more equitable future for all.

Sincerely,

Pech Pisey

Transparency International Cambodia





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# ***Policy Brief One***

**COVID-19 Impact: Mitigating the Impact of  
COVID-19 on Women in Cambodia through  
Gender-Responsive Budgeting**

*By: Mao Srey Keo*

# *I. Executive summary*

- Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Cambodia's GDP has experienced a negative growth rate, dropping from 7.1 per cent in 2019 to -3.1 per cent in 2020 before rising to 5.5 per cent in 2022.

- COVID-19 has put many sectors at risk, including construction, manufacturing, hotels, restaurants, transport, as well as storage and communications which consequently has caused a disproportionate impact on women's jobs, income and well-being and an increase in women's burden related to unpaid care work. The disruption of global supply chain resulting from Covid-19 has exacerbated the gender gap in entrepreneurship and has disproportionately impacted female-owned enterprises.

- To address the impacts of COVID-19, the Royal Government of Cambodia has issued a comprehensive response program as well as fiscal stimulus packages including wage subsidy, tax relief and cash transfer for poor and vulnerable populations. However, the vast majority of the schemes provide coverage only to those who work in the garment and tourism industries. The schemes have not covered self-employed women and workers in the informal sector.

- Therefore, to address the crisis effectively, it is recommended that the government should adopt a gender-responsive budget where gender perspective is integrated into the government policy response and budget cycle.

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## ***II. Introduction***

After the first outbreak in December 2019, COVID-19 has spread to countries and regions around the globe. Like other humanitarian crises, it is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities, and disrupting labor markets globally. The impacts of such crises are never gender-neutral and the pandemic has been no exception. Women tend to lose their livelihoods faster than men as they have suffered disproportionate job and income losses. Many women continue to work on the front line, sustaining care systems, economies, and societies while often doing the majority of the unpaid care work (ILO, 2021a).

As a developing country Cambodia is characterized by low income, undeveloped healthcare systems, and high vulnerability to external shocks. The poverty rate has been estimated to rise from under 10 per cent to over 15 per cent (Kim, 2020). The unemployment rate has been estimated to increase at least in the medium-term of 2020. Moreover, there is also a large informal sector where workers do not have adequate social protection. The pandemic has resulted in job and income losses in Cambodia, especially among vulnerable groups, including women, informal, and own-account workers who have very limited access to social protection, many of whom live in poverty or run a severe risk of falling into poverty. To mitigate the massive loss of life, jobs, and income caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has issued several major containment policies to help the country recover. However, the pandemic remains a significant challenge and causes a devastating effect on vulnerable groups, especially women.

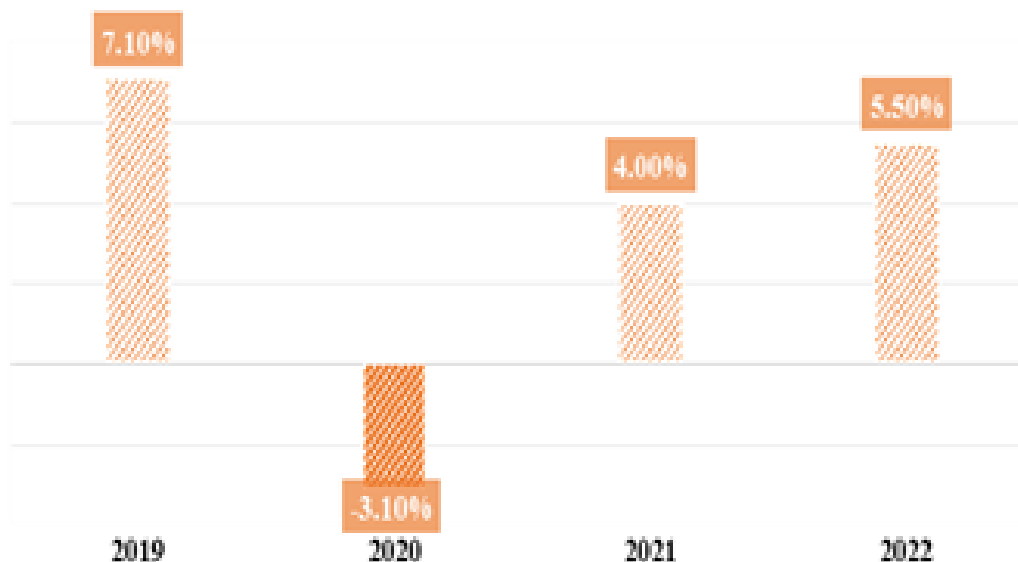


## III.COVID-19 Impacts on Socio-economies

### 3.1. GDP Growth Prospect

Similar to the other Southeast Asian countries, COVID-19 has produced an unprecedented impact on Cambodia's labor market, which remains characterized by extensive working poverty and informality. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), approximately 570,000 jobs have been lost, and around 100,000 Cambodian migrant workers returned home in 2020 (ADB, 2021a). In addition to job losses, the disruption of the global supply chain and labor market resulting from the pandemic also caused devastating effects on Cambodia's GDP growth. The revised ADB estimates for Cambodia's GDP show a negative growth rate—from 7.1 per cent in 2019 to -3.1 per cent in 2020 before rising to 5.5 per cent in 2022, as shown in Figure 1 (ADB, 2021b).

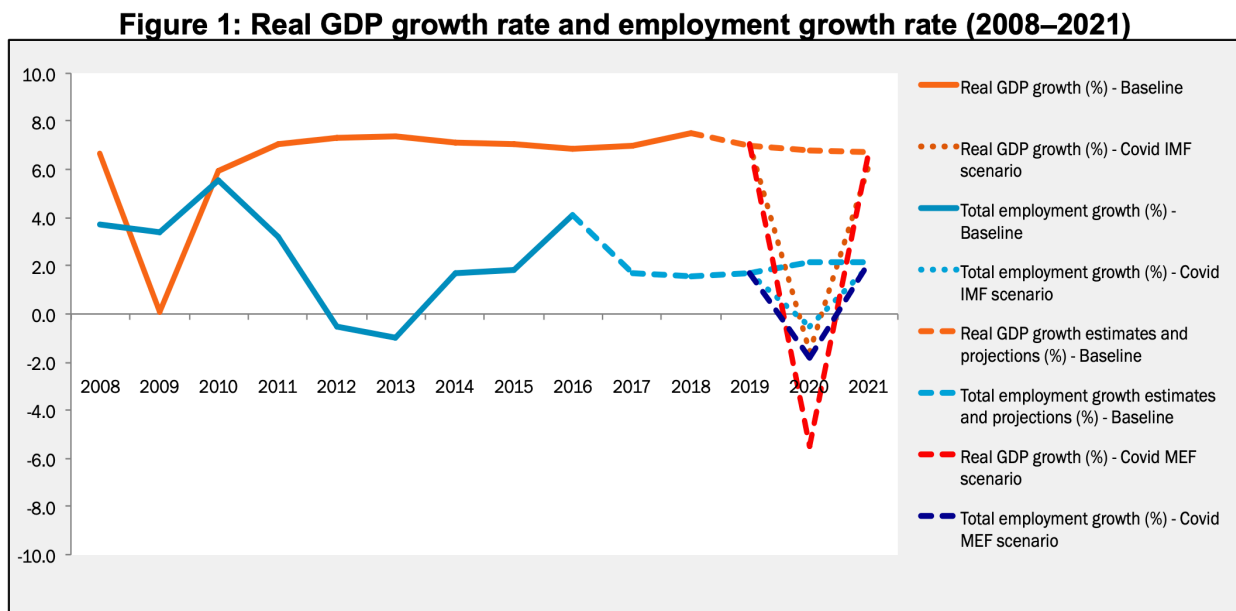
**Figure1: GDP Growth Forecast, 2021**



Source: ADB, *Cambodia's Economy to Recover in 2021, Accelerate in 2022*

The joint ADB-MEF modeling exercise has forecasted an even greater decline in real GDP, -5.5 per cent in 2020 (ADB, 2021a). Preliminary ADB estimates, using sectorial point employment elasticity of growth, show a sharp drop in employment from 0.5 per cent in 2019 to -1.8 per cent in 2020, based on the new IMF and ADB-MEF joint forecasts, respectively (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Real GDP grow rate and Employment grow rate (2018-2021)**



Source: ADB staff estimates for employment using IMF's WEO Data (April 2020) for GDP growth.

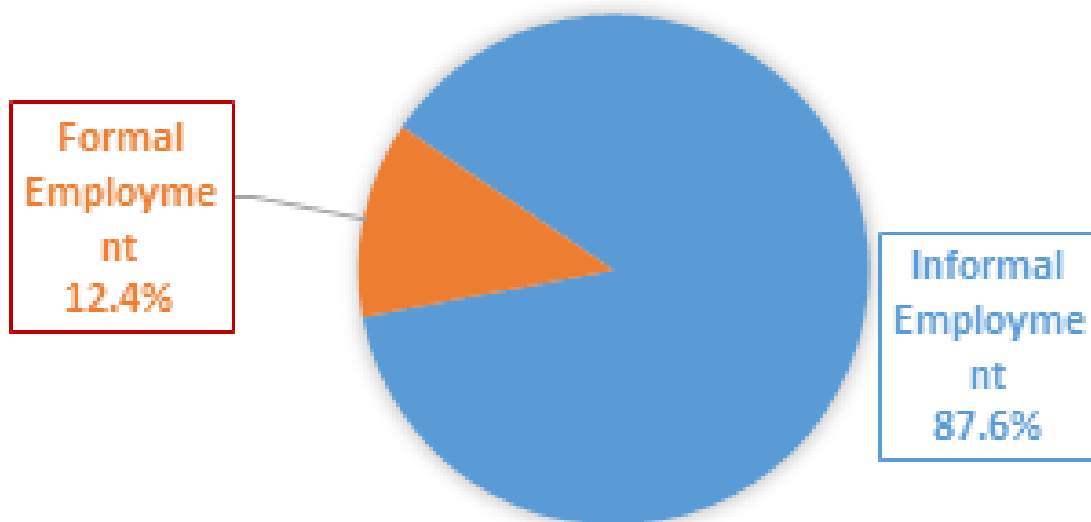
*Sources: ADB's Employment and Poverty Impact Assessment Cambodia, 2021*

### 3.2. Women's Work and Earning

While the labor participation rate keeps increasing every year, Cambodia's workforce remains predominantly in the informal sector where workers don't have an adequate social and employment protection. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Cambodia, 88.3 percent of total employed persons in 2019 were reportedly in informal employment. As shown in Figure 3, at 87.6 percent, women are overrepresented in the informal sector, while only 12.4 percent of them have a decent job (NIS, 2021).

Being employed in such informal and vulnerable forms of work, women have faced a greater risk of losing their jobs during the pandemic. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has estimated that informal workers are three times more likely than their formal counterparts to lose their jobs due to the crisis (ILO, 2021b).

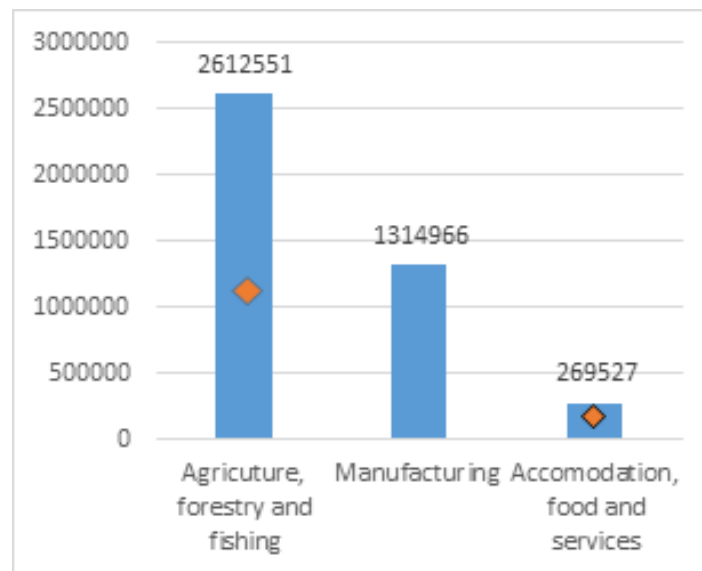
**Figure 3: Percentages of Women in formal and informal employment**



*Sources: National Institute Statistic Cambodia,*

COVID-19 has not only brought disruption to Cambodia's labor forces but has also put many sectors at risk including construction, manufacturing, hotels, restaurants, transportation, as well as storage and communications (ADB, 2021a). Among the high-risk sectors, hotel and restaurant are sectors where women account for the largest share of total employment—64 percent as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Female share in Employment (2019)**



= Female shares in Employment,

Sources: National Institute of Statistics of Cambodia

Working in these sectors, women are often vulnerable to external shocks as they typically work in unfavorable conditions with long working hours, low and unstable wages, and no protection benefits. Compared to its previous projection, ADB has estimated that employment in hotels and restaurants will continue to drop to 26,000-37,000 in 2020 (ADB, 2021a). As shown in Figure 4, women are also overrepresented in the manufacturing industry, one of the most affected sectors.

According to the ADB's estimate, the employment losses in manufacturing will be lower by about 63,000-69,000 in 2020. In addition to job and income losses, women are also likely to fall into poverty and financial debt. To assess the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, the UNDP accelerator lab in Cambodia surveyed 1400 informal workers, of which 48 percent are female. The tracking survey shows that, due to income losses, 30 percent of women who are already in debt continue to borrow more money either from their relatives or local banks (UNDP Accelerator Labs in Cambodia, n.d.).

### 3.3. Women in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Besides the heavy impact on the informal sectors, COVID-19 has also exacerbated the gender gap in entrepreneurship and has disproportionately impacted female-owned enterprises. Compared to men, women's ownership of business in Cambodia is highest in microenterprise (62 percent). The microenterprise is often identified as unorganized, unregistered and informal businesses with no access to social protection or government benefit. For instance, during COVID-19, RGC launched SME Finance Fund however, the fund did not cover microenterprises and only benefits small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that are registered with the government (UNESCAP, 2021). The impacts are likely to be significant when women predominantly operate their businesses in the most affected sectors such as retail trade and services, hotels and restaurants, as shown in Figure 5 (UNESCAP, 2021).

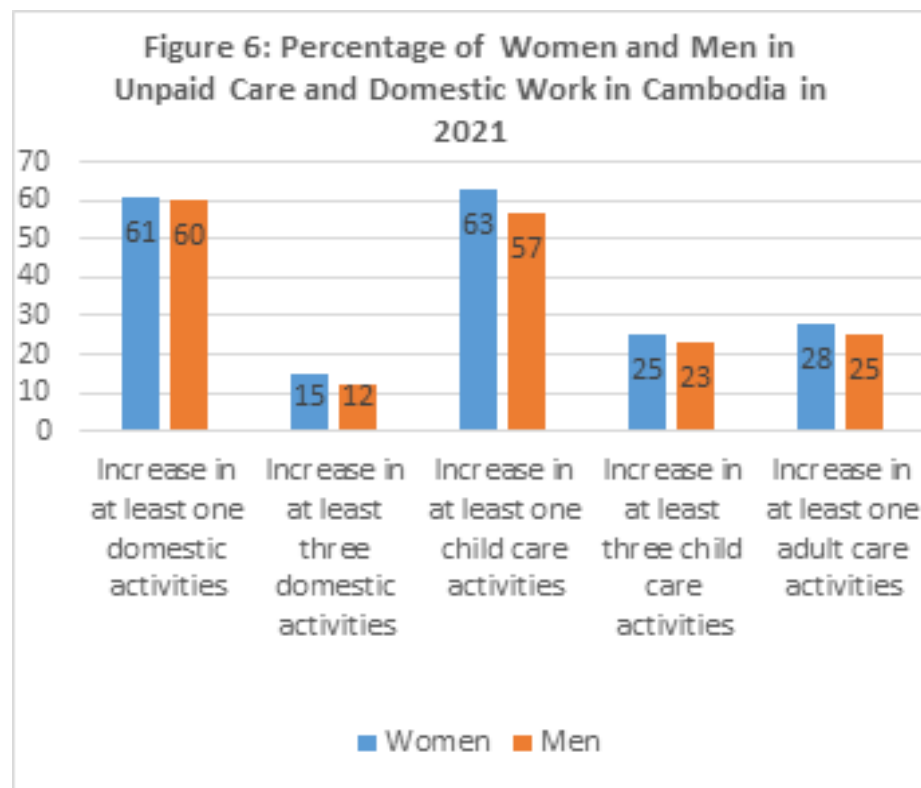
**Figure 5: WSMEs in Selected Sector**



Source: UNESCAP, 2021 Cambodia, 2021

## IV. Unpaid Care Work

Without any doubt, COVID-19 has also deepened gender inequalities in Cambodia. On account of gender and social norms, women often devote most of their time to unpaid care and domestic work. Prior to the pandemic, women reportedly spent three times more time than men on unpaid care work globally (United Nations, 2020). School closures and prolonged lockdown have further exacerbated the amount of unpaid care work shared between women and men. As shown in Figure 6, both women and men in Cambodia have spent more time on unpaid care and domestic work since the spread of the pandemic. However, women still take on significantly more responsibilities. An increasing burden in unpaid care work could further hinder their participation in the labor force, especially in full-time and formal employment. With limited time to learn new skills and knowledge, women are likely to continue working in the informal sector where they do not access social protection and the opportunity to have decent work (Anton, n.d.).



Source: UN Women Data: Rapid Gender Assessments on the Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19

## V. Policies Addressing Gender Impact of COVID-19

To address the health, social and economic impact of COVID-19, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has issued a comprehensive response program and fiscal stimulus packages, including wage subsidy, tax relief, and cash transfer for the poor and vulnerable population. As shown in Table 1, in 2020 RGC has spent \$761 million for COVID-19 response, and \$719 million will be further allocated to address the impact of COVID-19, including \$449 million for health and social sectors and \$270 million for economic sectors (ADB, 2021c).

**Table 1: Planned Expenditures and Responses for 2020 and 2021**

Planned expenditure for COVID-19 response and actual disbursement			
	2020		2021
Purpose	Planned (\$millions)	Disbursed (\$million)	Planned (\$million)
<b>I. Health and Social Sectors</b>	564	431	449
1. Health Master plan	100	29	
2. Outbreak Prevention and Treatment for the COVID-19 disease			30
3. Vocational training programs and support for suspended contract worker	64	64	59
4. Cash for work project	100	32	160
5. Cash Transfer for Poor Families and vulnerable people	300	306	200
<b>II. Economic Sector</b>	600	330	270
6. Special financing program-ARDB	50	50	
7. Co-financing and risk sharing-SME Bank	50	50	
8. Credit guarantee fund	200	200	
9. Financing	300	30	
10. Total (I+II)	1 164	761	719

**Note:** ARDB=Agricultural and Rural Development Bank

*Sources: ADB report on Cambodia's COVID-19 active response and expenditure support program for October-December and January-March 2021*



## 5.1. Social Protection Policy

Social protection is undoubtedly the most important instrument protecting the lives and livelihoods of people during COVID-19. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, developed countries, for instance, have already allocated 6 percent of their GDPs for social protection coverage. International organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suggested that national governments should further increase their budget allocation for social protection programs (ILO, 2020).

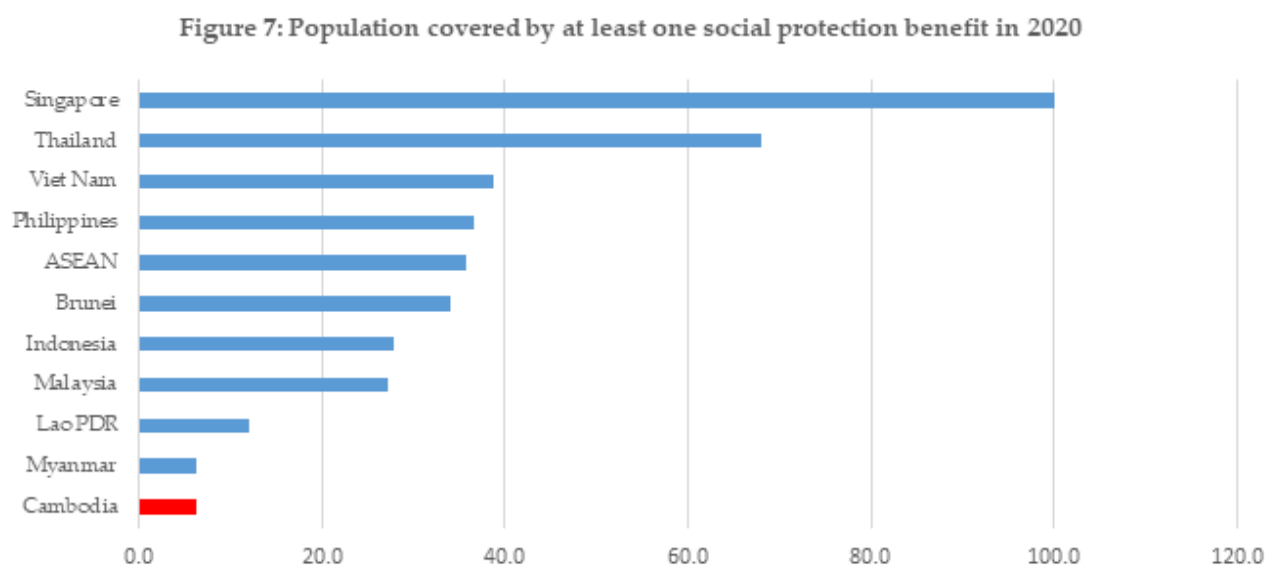
Since the spread of the pandemic, the Royal Government of Cambodia has implemented many containment policies, including strengthening and developing its social assistance programs. For instance, in June 2020, it announced a cash transfer for poor and vulnerable households registered in the IDPoor database. The World Bank revealed that the relief has produced a significant impact on Cambodia's population. Before the pandemic, only 0.5 percent of the population was covered by social assistance. As of March 2021, the program has extended its coverage to 710,000 households, equal to 2.8 million individuals (World Bank, 2021). With that being said, strong social assistance is important to sustain the livelihood and well-being of people living within the country. However, the social relief in Cambodia is temporary and limited in terms of its coverage, as it only covers those identified by the ID Poor program (World Bank, 2021).

In addition to the cash transfers, RGC also provided financial support to the hardest-hit sectors, such as the garment and the tourism industry (ADB, 2021d). In April 2020, the government announced a tax exemption for the tourism industry. As of November 4, 2020, 745 impacted firms in the garment, textile, footwear, and tourism industries received tax relief and National Social Security Fund (NSSF) contribution (ADB, 2021e). Besides tax relief, suspended workers in the above sectors have also received wage support from the government. In June 2021, the RGC announced that it would continue to roll out the program until the end of September (Medina, 2021).

## 5.2. Policies' Gap and Limitation

Even though the above stimulus packages gradually address the crisis, they are still limited in scope and coverage. The vast majority of the schemes provide benefits to only certain sectors such as the garment and tourism industries. The schemes did not cover self-employed women and workers in the informal sectors.

**Figure 7: Population covered by at least one social protection benefits in 2020**



Sources: ILOSTAT, updated 31/10/2021, Extracted: 04/11/2021

Furthermore, social protection in Cambodia is still not comprehensive and inclusive. As shown in Figure 7, only 6.2 per cent of the total population was covered by social protection benefits in 2020. Compared to its peer countries, Cambodia has the lowest rank in terms of social protection coverage.



## ***VI. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations***

Since its first outbreak, COVID-19 has deepened pre-existing social inequalities, exposed vulnerability, and undone decades of progress women have made in Cambodia. Like other humanitarian crises, the impacts of COVID-19 have not been gender-neutral. The pandemic has disproportionately impacted women's jobs, income, and well-being. In addition, the school closures and prolonged lockdowns have also further increased women's responsibility in unpaid care and domestic work. The Royal Government of Cambodia has imposed several major policies to address the crisis, such as wage subsidy, tax relief and cash transfer for poor and vulnerable populations. However, the procedures have not tackled the crisis in a gendered manner. Compared to the peer countries, Cambodia's social protection coverage remains low. The existing policies, such as tax relief and wage subsidies were only limited to certain sectors and did not cover self-employed women and informal workers.

## 6.1. Policy Recommendations

**1.** To address the impact of COVID-19 on women effectively and efficiently, the collection and allocation of public resources are really important for Cambodia. RGC should adopt gender-responsive budgeting where gender perspective is integrated into public finance management (budgeting cycle).

- Gender Impact Assessment (GIAs): As stated, COVID-19 has not been gender-neutral since it impacts women and men differently. Therefore, the government should use sex-aggregated data to assess the differentiated impact of the pandemic. Using sex-aggregated data, the government can identify who are the most affected so that they can reprioritize and reallocate the resources efficiently. Promising experiences have emerged from few countries that used GIAs. For instance, In Canada, the gender-budgeting framework has guided the government's decisions in response to COVID-19 and has produced successful outcomes.

- After assessing the gender impacts, relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Economy and Finance should conduct a Gender Budget Statement (GBS) by providing a short description of how they use the budget to support women during Covid-19 and achieve gender equalities. Some countries like the government of Albania have made their GBS public in which they explain their budget plan in simple terms Reflecting from Albania's experience, the GBS not only informs the public of how the government budget are allocated but also promotes the government's transparency and accountability.

- Lastly, the National Assembly plays an important role in budget oversight. They can use GIAs to assess government policy response. This includes engaging in debate and amending the law or the bill.

**2.** Given the importance of social protection for the well-being and livelihood of people, RGC should promote inclusive social protection by ensuring that everyone, including women and those who work in the informal sector, can access social benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, maternity leave and unemployment benefit through the government's existing framework, National Social Security Fund Scheme (NSSF).

**3.** NSSF was established by the government in 2008 to protect the well-being of workers and employees. However, it is still limited in terms of scope and coverage in that it covers only those who work in private sectors and institutions registered within the government framework. Therefore, it is important to expand NSSF's scope and coverage to ensure that everyone, including women, can access such social protection benefits

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# ***Policy Brief Two***

## **Digital Infrastructure in Cambodia: The Current Status and Budget Expenditures**

*By: Phan Daro*



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## *I. Executive Summary*

- Strong digital infrastructure with access to a fast and reliable broadband connection is key to business competitiveness and social inclusion, which provides the opportunity for equal access to a range of technologies that are linked to business, public services, health, and education.
- Surveys done by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2019 show that only 1 out of every 100 inhabitants in Cambodia has access to a fixed broadband subscription.
- Ensure key policy-makers have abundant digital knowledge to support the benefits of strong digital infrastructure during the national budget allocation process.
- Ensure the unique challenges faced by rural areas in the provinces are considered when preparing future national broadband policies.
- Take a partnership approach to broadband infrastructure deployment in rural areas in the provinces to ease the budget burden on the government.

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## ***II. The Importance of Digital Infrastructure***

The digital economy is a major driver of GDP growth in many countries in the world. It is predicted to contribute USD 23 trillion to the global GDP by 2025 (Inter-American Development Bank, 2018). In ASEAN, it is also expected to contribute up to USD 1 trillion to the region's GDP by 2030 (LOH, 2021).

These GDP contributions would be impossible without building strong digital infrastructure, including access to fast and reliable broadband connections. Digital infrastructure is also key to business competitiveness and social inclusion, which provides the opportunity for equal access to a range of technologies that are linked to business, public services, health, and education (Price et al., 2021, p. 1).

Nonetheless, Cambodia's readiness to embrace digital technologies has been held back due to limited access to fixed and reliable broadband connections (Supreme National Economic Council, 2021, p. xi), especially in rural areas. Surveys done by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2019 show that only 1 out of every 100 inhabitants in Cambodia has a fixed broadband subscription.

This policy brief explores the current status of digital infrastructure in Cambodia by reviewing key indicators in fixed broadband subscription. It also looks at the 139 policy measures set forth in the Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035 (hereinafter the Digital Economy Framework) and the current expenditures of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC), a key ministry responsible for building digital infrastructure.

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### ***III. Key definitions***

Digital infrastructure refers to the digital technologies that provide the foundation for information technology and operations. The ITU provides the following examples of digital infrastructure: internet backbone; mobile telecom and digital communication suites; data centers and networks; enterprise portals, platforms, systems, and software; cloud services and software; operational security, user identity and data encryption; and application programming interface (API) and integrations. Such digital infrastructure contributes to bridging the digital divide in a country.

Digital divide is a term which refers to the gap in usage and access to digital infrastructure and services between individuals, households, businesses or geographical areas (Ben et al., 2017, p. 1). Specifically, it affects certain population segments, for instance, low-income and rural communities due to the lack of critical digital infrastructure and issues around affordability.

Fixed-broadband subscriptions refer to fixed subscriptions to high-speed access to the public Internet, at downstream speeds equal to or greater than 256 Kbit/s. This includes cable modem, DSL, fiber-to-the-home/building, other fixed (wired) broadband subscriptions, satellite broadband, and terrestrial fixed wireless broadband (Herguera, 2019).

**Table 1: Categories of Internet Speed**

Average Download Bit Rate	Description of service
> 0.5 Mbps	Web browsing, email, streaming audio, mobile-quality video streaming, voice and Standard-Definition (SD) video calling
0.5 – 2.0 Mbps	SD video streaming (360p), High-Definition (HD) video calling
2.0 – 3.5 Mbps	Low bit rate HD streaming video (480p/720p)
3.5 – 5.0 Mbps	High bit rate HD streaming video (720p/1080p)
5.0 – 10.0 Mbps	Very high bit rate HD video streaming
10.0 – 20.0 Mbps	Ultra HD (UHD) video streaming
> 20.0 Mbps	High frame rate UHD video streaming, augmented reality, advanced telemedicine

*Source: (Porciuncula & Paltridge, 2018)*

## IV. The Magnitude of the Challenge

In Cambodia, more than nine million people live in rural areas. The population density in rural areas is only 55 inhabitants per square kilometer. One of the challenges which affects how these populations live and work is limited access to public services.

**Table 2: Population by urban and rural areas**

Urban/Rural	Total	Male	Female
Urban	6,135,194	2,993,339	3,141,855
Rural	9,417,017	4,578,498	4,838,519

*Source: National Report on Final Census Results published in 2020*

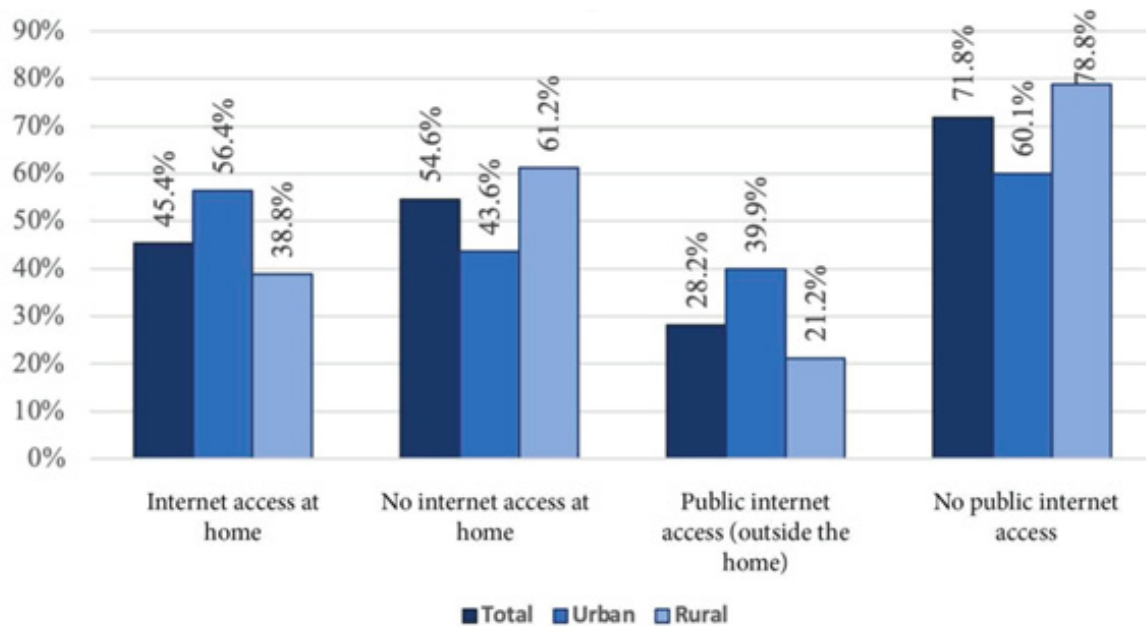
**Table 3: Population density**

Population density (inhabitants per square km)	
Urban	874
Rural	55

*Source: National Report on Final Census Results published in 2020*

Access to a fast and reliable broadband connection can help to address the challenges related to limited public services by providing rural residents with new ways of accessing these services, creating new opportunities for rural businesses, improving transport networks, and fostering stronger social and business networks (Price et al., 2021, p. 2). The national report, which published the final 2020 census results, confirms that people who live in rural areas lack access to reliable internet connections. The populations who do not have an internet connection at home stand at 43.6 percent in the city and 61.2 percent in rural areas. 71.8 percent of the population does not have access to public internet.

**Figure 1: Percentage distributions of households by types of internet access and areas**



(Source: National Report on Final Census Results published in 2020)

The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Development Index of ITU shows positive development in key ICT indicators in Cambodia. As of 2020, 93 percent of the population own mobile phones. Regarding mobile networks, 85 percent of Cambodians have at least 3G mobile network access and 80 percent of them have at least 4G mobile network access in 2019. In terms of Internet access, 74 percent of Cambodian households have installed an internet connection in their home as of 2020. Yet, the percentage of households who own a computer at home was as low as 8 percent in the same year. While active mobile broadband subscriptions stand at 96 people per 100 inhabitants in 2019, only 1 per 100 inhabitants has fixed broadband subscription.

**Table 4: ITU's ICT Infrastructure and Access**

Infrastructure and Access	
<b>Network coverage</b>	
Population covered by at least a 3G mobile network (2019)	85%
Population covered by at least a 4G mobile network (2019)	80%
<b>Mobile phone ownership</b>	
Individuals owning mobile phone (2020)	93%
<b>ICT access at home</b>	
Households with Internet access at home (2020)	74%
Households with a computer at home (2020)	8%
<b>Mobile and fixed broadband subscriptions</b>	
Active mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (2019)	96%
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (2019)	1%
Fixed broadband (% of total): >10 Mbit/s	90%
<b>ICT prices</b>	
Fixed broadband basket as a % of GNI p.c. (2020)	12.20%
Mobile cellular basket as a % of GNI p.c. (2020)	5%
Mobile broadband basket as a % of GNI p.c. (2020)	1.60%



The prices of ICT in Cambodia are still high, particularly for fixed broadband and mobile cellular, which are above the minimum 2 percent of gross national income (GNI) per capita. The fixed broadband prices stand out as the highest, at 12.2 percent. However, the mobile broadband price is as low as 1.6 percent. In 2020, there were 38 companies which provided fixed broadband services in Cambodia. However, there are only 252,216 subscribers with a market share of 1.64 percent compared to that of mobile broadband companies.

***Table 5: Supply and the usage of Internet service  
as of July 2020***

Operators	No. of Subscribers	Rate per 100	Market Share
Mobile Broadband (5 companies)	15,127,031	91.65	98.36%
Fixed Broadband (38 companies)	252,216	1.53	1.64%

*Source: Telecommunications Regulator of Cambodia (TRC) 2020*

## V. The Digital Economy Framework

The Digital Economy Framework proposes a total of 9 out of 139 policy measures to be implemented between 2021 and 2035 to improve the foundations and infrastructure for digital connectivity. The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC) is the key ministry to implement these policies along with other relevant ministries and institutions.

**Table 6: Policy Measures under Digital Connectivity**

Policy Direction: Digital Connectivity		
No.	Policy Measures	Responsible Agency
1	Accelerate the development of high-speed broadband networks and infrastructure	MPTC, MEF
2	Amend or revise laws related to digital infrastructure	
3	Promote the use of infrastructure sharing	MPTC, relevant ministries
4	Develop the national infrastructure database for the management, monitoring and evaluation	MPTC
5	Develop the national data and cloud technology infrastructure	MPTC, MEF
6	Promote and encourage the use of licensed software	MPTC, MEF, relevant ministries
7	Initiate the investment programs/projects on digital infrastructure	MPTC, MEF
8	Formulate the framework to monitor and evaluate the efficiency of the spending on digital infrastructure	MEF, MPTC
9	Promote the Public-Private Partnership mechanism for the investment of digital infrastructure	MEF, MPTC, relevant ministries

*Source: Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035*

These nine policies are the essential foundation of Cambodia's digital connectivity strategy and correspond to some of the ICT indicators surveyed by ITU. The policy measures attempt to achieve 95 percent coverage of the population in terms of the Internet backbone network. However, the policy measures have not determined the legal minimum broadband speed for Cambodia. While the policy framework also mentions the public-private partnership mechanism for investment into digital infrastructure, there remains some uncertainty about how this partnership mechanism is to be carried out amid the adoption of the law on public-private partnership in 2021. Additionally, it should be noted that the successful implementation of these measures will be a considerable challenge considering the national budget allocations in 2021 and 2022.

## VI. Budget Expenditure of MPTC

The Budget in Brief 2021 provided by the MEF shows that the MPTC is expected to spend only 77,655 million riels or approximately USD 19 million to implement its proposed policy measures and programs. The budget allocation for building and improving digital infrastructure is not in the RGC's priority list. Most of the budget has been allocated to national defense and upgrading nation-wide education programs. These competing policies mean that budget requests by MPTC for its policy measures are still pending or have been outright rejected. The expected budget expenditure in 2022 is increased by almost 50 percent compared to that of 2021.

**Table 7: MPTC's Current Budget Expenditure**

The current expenditure of Ministry of Post and Telecommunications				
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022
Million riels	73,963.9	79,594.6	77,655.0	116,331.0
USD million	18.49	19.90	19.41	29.08

*Source: Budget Law in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022*

There are three main programs that MPTC proposes for money expenditures in 2021. The program on institutional support takes approximately USD 17.14 million while the other two programs take only USD 1.39 million. However, there are no specific programs that involve upgrading digital infrastructure, or aiming to increase the Internet access speed for the population, especially in rural areas.

**Table 8: MPTC's 2021 Budget Expenditures divided into Programs**

Ministry of Post and Telecommunications	Million riels	USD million
<b>Total</b>	<b>77,655</b>	<b>19.41</b>
<b>Program 1: Support and development of postal service, telecommunications and radio frequency spectrum management</b>	<b>2,505.1</b>	<b>0.63</b>
Sub-program 1: Preparation and monitoring the implementation of telecommunication development policies and management	1,027.6	0.26
Sub-program 2: Preparation and monitoring the implementation of postal development policy	949.5	0.24
Sub-program 3: Radio frequency spectrum resource management	528.0	0.13
<b>Program 2: Management and development of information and communication technology</b>	<b>6,597.6</b>	<b>1.65</b>
Sub-program 1: Promote the development of e-government and security management, information and communication technology	747.5	0.19
Sub-program 2: Development of ICT	356.5	0.09
Sub-program 3: Management of National Information Infrastructure and Video Conference System of the Royal Government	4,496.1	1.12
Sub-program 4: Management of software development and information content	523.0	0.13
Sub-program 5: Administration and development of ICT policies	474.5	0.12
<b>Program 3: Institutional support</b>	<b>68,552.3</b>	<b>17.14</b>
Sub-program 1: Management, administration, finance and cross-sectorial affairs	6,925.8	1.73
Sub-program 2: Human Resource Management	38,847.1	9.71
Sub-program 3: Strengthen regulatory oversight and governance	992.1	0.25
Sub-program 4: Legal Affairs and International Relations	974.6	0.24
Sub-program 5: Education, training, research and innovation in the field of post and ICT	3,773.7	0.94
Sub-program 6: Management of Post and Telecommunications and ICT at the local level	17,039.0	4.26

Source: 2021 Budget in Brief of MEF

## ***VII. Conclusion and recommendations***

Despite the positive trends in many of the ITU's indicators, the RGC should allocate more of its budget for the implementation of policy measures and programs which aim to improve and upgrade the digital infrastructure to ensure that each of the indicators exceeds 95 percent. In particular, the MPTC should execute action plans that boost the number of households with fixed broadband subscriptions. The government should consider setting the minimum internet speed for the country and prioritize lowering the broadband prices with subsidies in its proposed budget planning in the future.

**Message 1: Ensure key policy makers have abundant digital knowledge to support the benefits of strong digital infrastructure when national budget allocation is proposed.**

Historically, Cambodian policy makers have not been highly engaged in the commitment to improve digital infrastructure. The reason for this is either the result of competing priorities or a lack of awareness of the benefits of digitalization for Cambodia. Inadequacy of commitment from key policy makers has rendered some provinces unable to take advantage of the opportunities offered by broadband connectivity. Therefore, there is a need to brief policy makers on the benefits of digitalization (Price et al., 2021, p. 2). Additionally, linking digital infrastructure investment to strategic development plans such as population increase, job creation, and GDP growth can emphasize this critical connection to the Cambodian economy.

**Message 2: Ensure the unique challenges faced by rural areas in provinces are considered when preparing future national broadband policies**

It is important that future broadband policies reflect the unique challenges of rural areas at the provincial level in Cambodia. It is true that low populations and other geographical factors could reduce the return on investment for digital infrastructure providers. However, many provinces could respond to this market failure by working with local communities and small infrastructure providers to address the gaps in coverage. Price et al. (2018, p. 3) also suggests that the local communities can install public Wi-Fi hotspots along with running workshops to help local businesses take advantage of broadband-enabled services.

**Message 3: Take a partnership approach to broadband infrastructure deployment in rural areas in provinces to ease the budget burden on the government**

With the increased use of digital technology, the complete economic and social benefits will only be achieved with the deployment of high-capacity networks across rural as well urban areas. However, laying fiber optic cable across provinces with small populations would be expensive; especially, when there would be little economic return for broadband providers without government subsidies. One way to overcome this is via an open-access network in which the physical infrastructure is supplied separately by local authorities and the delivery of the broadband services is made by internet service providers (Price et al., 2021, p. 4). The shared costs of this option would make it more viable for rural areas in the provinces.

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# ***Policy Brief Three***

**Achieving Good Governance through  
Effective Leadership Behaviors in the Public  
Sector in Local Government in Cambodia**

*By: PHAL Nyveara*



## *I. Summary*

- Good governance is an important part of promoting and supporting the process of managing public resources and developing the country.
- Many factors contribute to the success of good governance. However, this study is going to look at the organizational behaviors in the public sector with the belief that it is a good starting point to improve public service deliveries.
- Document reviews from other developing countries and a case study about an effective leader in a local government in Cambodia were conducted to investigate the key leadership behaviors that affect good governance.
- Results indicate that role models and relation-building leaders are necessary to enhance the execution of good governance.
- This study suggests local government leaders should employ effective leadership behaviors to improve the performance of their organizations and to support the enhancement of good governance in Cambodia.



## ***II. Introduction***

Good governance is an important reform technique for Cambodia to implement in order to effectively manage resources and for the sake of overall development. Many reforms have been created to support good governance. For instance, the One Window Service Mechanism (OWSM), which helps to bring the citizens closer to the government and receives positive outcomes through transparent fees and fast service deliveries (Neb, 2017).

Even though the implementation of good governance has been conducted for years with considerable positive results, it still has constraints (Som, 2020; Te, 2007). Many studies have investigated several challenges that hinder the practice of good governance in Cambodia, including the lack of materials and equipment to support operations, the lack of financial autonomy of the local government, and constraints related to human resource management (Korm & Bunthoeun, 2019; Seng, 2013).

However, the most common issue found in those studies is the problem of leadership in these governmental organization. Some leaders are able to lead well but they are unable to model what they want to see from their employees (Pratt & Yongvanit, 2015). When a public leader is unable to use proper leadership behaviors in the organization, the employees are rendered unable to deliver good services as well (Andersen et al., 2018). In Cambodia, the challenge of performing effective leadership is also addressed (Lay et al., 2018). The problem of such organizational behaviors delays the effective implementation of good governance in some developing countries. Therefore, it is critical to understand the key leadership behaviors the public sector could apply in order to improve the performance of these organizations.

Understanding this significance, this paper is going to examine the common leadership behaviors that contribute to the success of public administrative services. Investigating these behaviors can be a good practice for all public leaders in Cambodia to learn and adapt to become effective leaders who can lead their organizations to become successful in providing public services to their citizens.



### ***III. Methodology***

This study utilizes document reviews. There are three steps taken for the whole analysis process. The document review began with a search for journal articles in Google scholar using four key terms: leadership, good governance, public sector, and developing countries. The author used scanning techniques to see if the articles examined the relationship between leadership behaviors and good governance. Then the author selected the most-related fifteen journal articles to analyze the behaviors of the leaders.

Secondly, the author investigated the relationship between leadership and good governance from the selected articles. Mostly, this relationship is clearly shown in the abstract part of each journal article. After understanding its relationship, the author continued to scan and list all the behaviors of the leaders from the article. Then the author categorized those behaviors into a matrix. The matrix has seven groups of the leading behaviors, including initiating change, role modeling, initiating vision, building human relationships, planning, following rules, and making decisions. These behaviors were then grouped based on keywords. For example, the behavior of the leaders who have a clear vision and share that vision with their employees is classified into the initiating vision group. After classification, the author manually counted the number of occurrences in each group. The most frequent leadership behaviors will be selected and later adopted to be the main finding of this study.

Finally, a case study about an effective leader who generated highly committed employees in a local government of Cambodia is presented. The behaviors of this local leader in Cambodia and the behaviors found from the matrix will be the key recommendations for the Cambodian policymakers to implement in order to be effective leaders.



## ***IV. Leadership Behaviors and the Good Governance***

There are many factors affecting the practices of good governance in the public sector in developing countries. Infrastructure planning, stakeholder engagement, organizational compliance and commitment, local government competence, and leadership are all found to have a relationship with good governance. However, leadership is the most significant one.

Good governance is the process of organizing and managing problems and public resources effectively and responsively on behalf of the whole nation (Ministry of Interior, 2013). In order to achieve this process, it is important to have a good leader (Tungsawat, 2018b). Many studies have revealed that the behavior of leaders strongly influence the performance of their organizations (Orazi et al., 2013). Derue et al. (2011) argued that leaders' behaviors or styles are the most important predictor for leadership effectiveness. The study has revealed that the behaviors of the leader can be learned and developed to improve group performance and generate outcomes for the organization. Leaders play an important role in building the organization, inspiring followers to achieve the organization's goals, and influencing the elements of good governance (Omar Elmasry & Bakri, 2019).



## V. Results

Results from the document review show little doubt that leaders' behaviors affect the performance of the public organization which influences the practice of good governance (Mohamad et al., 2014)

**Figure 1. The relationship between effective leadership behaviors and good governance**



Source: (Agyeman, 2015; Nzimakwe, 2014; Prihanto & Gunawan, 2020)

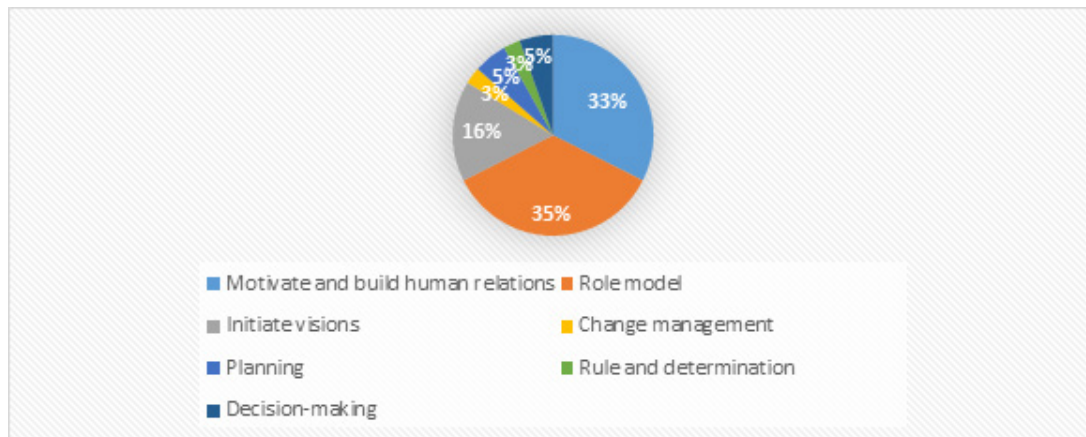
Figure 1 illustrates the seven leadership behaviors that are considered to be effective. Those behaviors are: to motivate and build human relations, to initiate vision, to plan, to be a role model, to rule and show determination, to manage change, and to make decisions. Leaders can apply one or more of these behaviors in accordance with the situation they in, in order to be effective. Leaders who like to build a relationship with employees are those who inspire, empower, motivate, support, respect, understand, encourage, and care about the employees' feelings, needs, and wants.

Whereas some leaders believe that leading effective organizations means following strict rules and disciplines and that everything must stick to their rules. Stick and carrot policies may be applicable for such leaders. Moreover, some effective leaders focus on initiating a vision for the organization and engaging all the stakeholders to achieve the goal together. Some leaders prioritize having good plans, implementing, and developing them to achieve the goals. A role model leader pays great attention to exhibiting strong strategic competencies, creativities, ethics and morals, and stimulating the employees to work beyond the tasks assigned. Additionally, some leaders act as change initiators who see problems and take action by changing the way the organization behaves. They also stimulate the employees to change as well. Additionally, some leaders are attentive in the process of making decisions by allowing full participation from the employees.

Furthermore, Figure 1 also clearly shows that effective leadership behaviors have a positive relationship with good governance (Omar Elmasry & Bakri, 2019). When a leader exercises one or more effective behaviors in his or her organization, it seems that the employees are inspired to work. This can enhance the productivity and performance, which hugely contribute to good governance. For instance, when leaders provide frequent operational pieces of training and understand how to build good relationships with their employees, the employees feel secure and confident in their work. They have the capacity to accomplish their assigned tasks and are willing to work with enthusiasm. Moreover, from the training, they should know the behaviors they should use to communicate with the citizens they serve and are able to deliver good public services to these citizens, which are the fundamental ingredients for good governance.

Therefore, a public sector leader should utilize proper leadership behaviors in order to make the employees work effectively to achieve the ultimate goal of the government, which is to serve the citizens accountably, transparently, and fairly.

**Figure 2. Percentage of the number of occurrences of effective leadership behaviors from the fifteen research papers**



Sources: (Agyeman, 2015; Aziz et al., 2015; Booranakit et al., 2017; Jatmiko & Lestiawan, 2016; Mohamad et al., 2014; Muhammad, 2014; Naidoo, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014; Olanike Sharon et al., 2016; Omar Elmasry & Bakri, 2019; Pillay, 2014; Prihanto & Gunawan, 2020; Tungsawat, 2018a; Vil-Nkomo, 2015; Yosinta, 2016)

Figure 2 explains that among the seven effective leadership behaviors, the behaviors of being a role model and motivating and building a human relationship with employees are the most frequently occurring in the studies. In terms of the frequency at which these leadership traits are mentioned, being a role model is mentioned 35 per cent of the time followed by motivating and building human relations with employees, at 33 per cent, while initiating the vision is represented only 16 per cent of the time. The behaviors of planning and decision-making are found in the percentage while the behaviors of change management and rule and determination also showed up at the same rates of 5 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. This clearly indicates that acting as a role model and building human relations are the two most-described behaviors that have the greatest contribution to good governance found in the public sectors in developing countries.

The most effective leaders usually know how to be role models in the organizations. There are three criteria for a role model leader. Firstly, these types of leaders work in a way that upholds sound ethics, honesty, and commitment to responsibilities (Othman & Rahman, 2014). These elements are critical for public leaders to be good models for the employees and can demonstrate that their offices are free of corruption

Secondly, the leaders should have sufficient competencies to solve problems, use strategies and technologies, and show creativity to establish clear strategies in dealing with different kinds of situations in the organizations (Tungsawat, 2018a). In developing nations, employees usually appreciate the leaders who have explicit talents and capacities as they can rely on them when the organizations face problems. People respect when their leaders have a high capacity to get the job done in a creative manner. Finally, a role model leader should exhibit the eagerness to learn as well as to engage with his or her subordinates to undertake continuous self-development. The leader should keep learning new skills and inspire others to learn as well. When a workplace has a role model leader, the employees feel proud and are willing to improve themselves, reflecting the qualities they can see from their leaders

Besides being role models, leaders, who motivate and build relationships with employees in their organizations are also effective in promoting good governance. In terms of motivation, there are two main ways that leaders can motivate their employees, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Wang et al., 2015). Leaders who motivate employees through exchanging rewards is an example of intrinsic motivation. This can be effective for the public sector (Rukmani et al., 2010). However, some leaders may motivate their employees by showing empathy and paying great attention to the employees, which is a form of extrinsic motivation. In terms of building relationships, good leaders focus on providing support and opportunities, having individualized consideration, recognizing and encouraging, using consultation, and using empowerment through delegation (Othman & Rahman, 2014; Silvia & McGuire, 2010; Yukl et al., 2002). Some leaders also show great care and are open to their employees to make them feel close. When the employees are motivated and have a healthy relationship with their leaders, they are able to achieve the goals and visions of the organization. Undoubtedly, better leaders and employees are more likely to deliver better public services to their citizens.



## ***VI. Leadership Behaviors of a Chief Officer in the One Window Service Unit (OWSU) in Cambodia***

From August to September of 2019, the author received permission from three provincial governors to conduct field studies to investigate the leadership behaviors of chief officers and the commitment of the employees in the OWSUs. The study comprised an interview with the chief officer, the employees, as well as field observation. After analysis there was one chief officer in particular who exhibited positive leadership behaviors, this officer was also found to have the most committed employees.

This chief officer led in two notable ways. First, he held meetings frequently to communicate his vision to all employees in the office. He acknowledged the vision of the office, made his employees aware of their assignments and what they had to accomplish. The meetings also allowed the chief to solve problems effectively. He made his employees recognize any problems, discuss these issues, and take action accordingly. He also acted as a role model for his employees. His work prioritized ethics and morality. He also showed a high capacity and creativity in accomplishing tasks, including using problem-solving, communication to get jobs done. He introduced a new system to the office and had all his employees use that system properly. He also showed his employees that he had an eagerness to learn which, in turn, inspired his employees to learn a lot from him as well. At the same time, he tried to develop the capacity of his employees through frequent training.

Secondly, the chief officer illustrated his strong commitment to motivating his employees. He built trust with his employees through being open, using encouraging words to communicate, showing trust in the ability of his employees, giving support and assistance, and promoting fairness in the office. He built a strong sense of team spirit of employees in the OWSU. All employees liked to work and help each other. He listened more but talked less. He took action and was responsive. He also provided proper seating arrangements and enough office facilities to support the work of his employees. The chief officer, likewise, usually created some fun activities for his employees to enjoy together as well. Those fun activities included birthday celebrations in the office and parties after work or on the weekends.

As a result, his employees showed the highest commitment compared to the other two provinces. Therefore, these leading behaviors should be considered as a model for other chief officers or local leaders to lead their own office

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## ***VII. Policy Implications***

Lessons from some developing countries and a case study in Cambodia suggest that leadership behaviors of those in charge are important to promote the practice of good governance among public organizations. Leaders should apply these behaviors in leading their offices. One behavior is to act as a role model in the organization. The leaders should show commitment in following the code of ethics for public servants. The leaders should also show creativity in the workplace and provide frequent trainings related to the jobs of their employees. Another behavior is to motivate the employees well. This motivation should be both monetary and non-monetary. In monetary terms, the leaders should give rewards when the employees succeed at assigned tasks. The reward should be fair and systematic. For the non-monetary rewards, leaders should demonstrate great attention to their employees by providing them good care, great support, assistance, and inspiration.

There are three ways to encourage local leaders to exhibit these leading behaviors. Firstly, Cambodian policymakers should include the criteria of these leadership behaviors into the training agenda of the Capacity Development Office under the Human Resource Development Department in each provincial hall. The training should be conducted monthly and should provide participants with case studies so they can understand these behaviors comprehensively.



Secondly, the capital and provincial governors should have an internal rule that requires all leaders in each department to hold weekly or monthly employee meetings. These meetings should provide the chance for employees to share their concerns and challenge their ideas. Leaders should also take these meetings as an opportunity to build closer relationships with their employees. They should approach and access the real needs of their employees and support them accordingly. Finally, in every job promotion, the selection criteria should include a leadership assessment in the report. The capital and provincial management team should prioritize those who already exercise or at least know some of these leadership behaviors. In order to assess this information, interviews with the candidates and the employees should be allocated before any job promotion.

In conclusion, the behaviors of public leaders are an important part of improving the practice of good governance in developing countries. Cambodia is no exception. Practicing correct leadership behaviors can drive these governmental organizations to reach their goals. The most-described leadership behaviors are the behavior of a role model and a relationship-builder. Leaders who can prove they have integrity, morality, and ethics; and open leaders who prioritize building a closer relationship with their employees. This type of leader could help to improve the performance of the organization. The vision of the government, which is to deliver transparent, easy, accountable, and efficient public services to the citizens, should be later realized.

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# ***Policy Brief Four***

**Lessons from Cambodia's Social Protection  
in Responding to COVID-19 Pandemic: The  
Cash Transfer Program**

*By: SOKKHEA Gechny*



## *I. Summary*

Since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Cambodia in early January 2020, the country has faced critical challenges to socio-economic development:

- Cambodia's economic growth, for first time in nearly three decades, experienced a contraction of 3.1 percent in 2020 according to an economic forecast from the Asian Development Bank. Sectors that count as major economic drivers, including tourism, garment and footwear manufacturing, and construction, were among the hardest hit in 2020.
- Efforts to lessen the economic and social impact of COVID-19, especially for poor and vulnerable households, have been taken through a whole of government approach and have included immediate and medium-term policy interventions up to 10th round as well as the use of social protection framework policy through a cash transfer program, which is at the time of writing, in its 7th round of disbursement.
- Through these immediate and medium-term interventions from the government, the impacts of COVID-19 are manageable; however, challenges have arisen during the implementation of the cash transfer program these will require more attention if they are to be resolved.





## ***II. Introduction***

The spread of the Novel Coronavirus, COVID-19, was announced as a global pandemic in March 2020 by WHO, a designation which required all countries to take immediate response (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). On 27 January 2020, Cambodia confirmed its first case of COVID-19. As of 23 November 2021, there have been 111,977 cases in the country (Open Development Cambodia, 2021).

Due to the pandemic's impacts, the Kingdom's economy has experienced the slowest growth rate since 1994, which in turn has triggered an increase in poverty as a consequence of job and income loss (World Bank Group, 2020). According to the economic forecast conducted by ADB, it estimated that the country's economy experienced a contraction by 3.1 percent in 2020 (Asian Development Bank, 2020). As the impact caused by virus interrupted the country's economic activities, citizens—especially vulnerable groups including women and girls, persons with disabilities, older people and migrant workers—felt the impacts. The government has put in effort to mitigate these impacts as well as promote recovery of the country's economy through implementing immediate and medium-term health and economic measures. The most urgent step has been to provide support to households to alleviate poverty. Therefore, up to the present there have been 7 rounds of cash transfers for poor and vulnerable households (World Bank, Nov 2020).

This cash transfer program, however, has faced some challenges related to the implementation process, which this paper will address by reviewing existing literature before providing recommendations and solutions.



### ***III. Impacts of COVID-19 on Social and Economy of Cambodia***

Cambodia has experienced economic growth of around 7.0 percent per year from 2010-2019; however, 2020 brought unprecedented shocks caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. The country confirmed its first community outbreaks in early May, 2020. Thus far, there have been four community outbreaks which have caused tremendous impacts on economic activities, people's livelihoods and well-being, and public health (UNICEF Cambodia, World Food Programme & But, 2021). Almost every sector has felt the impacts, but three critical sectors which drive the Cambodian economy, tourism, manufacturing and exports, and construction—which together contributed 70 percent of growth and 39.4 percent of total paid employment in 2019—were particularly hard hit. These three sectors alone employ around 2 million employees, over 20 percent of Cambodia's workforce (United Nations ESCAP, 2021).

As of December 2020, the tourism sector experienced an 80.2 percent reduction of international arrivals compared to the previous year. Consequently, the sector experienced a loss of around 630,000 jobs (World Bank Group, 2021). Manufacturing and exports sectors faced suspended operations or closed operations due to the cancelation or suspension of orders from major import countries and regions like the U.S. and the EU which are the biggest markets for garment, footwear and travel goods. The World Bank reported that there are around 130 garment and footwear factories that have suspended or closed operations partially or fully since the middle of April 2020 (World Bank Group, 2020b). As a result, the growth in manufacturing and exports accounted for 2.5 percent only in 2020 compared to 2019 when it was 17.7 percent (Ibid). In the construction sector, the foreign direct investment inflow and construction activities have been weakened. As a result, this sector experienced a contraction by 41.4 percent in the first nine months of 2020 (Ibid).

**Table 1: Selected Economic Indicators 2019-2020**

Year	GDP Growth	Tourism (International Arrival)	Garment Manufacturing and exports	Construction (Steel Imports)
2019	7.0 %	11.2 %	17.7 %	63.5 %
2020	-3.1 %	-80.2 %	2.5 %	41.4 %

*Source: World Bank Cambodia Economic Update June 2019 & June 2021*

With the economic fallout caused by COVID-19, the 4.5 million Cambodians who are at risk of falling into the poverty are inevitably made all the more vulnerable when the country faces such economic and external shocks (UNICEF, n.d.). Those vulnerable people are not able to access basic needs including food, water, medicine, health care as well as education (UNICEF Cambodia, 2020). The unemployment rate in 2020 increased noticeably to around 3.2 percent due to the loss of jobs in major economic sectors as well as in the informal sector, compared with 2019 when the rate was only 0.7 percent (Quinonez, 2020). This has resulted in a 14.7 percent increase of the overall poverty rate in 2020 (Ministry of Economy and Finance et al., 2021).

## ***IV. Social Protection Measures in Response to COVID-19 Impacts***

To mitigate the impacts caused by COVID-19 on poor and vulnerable households and to alleviate poverty, Cambodia's government has been putting tremendous efforts into implementing relief programs under the Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025. The focus since June 2020 has been on a Cash Transfer Program for poor and vulnerable households (United Nations ESCAP, 2021). This special social assistance program aims to lessen the financial burden felt by the households which are eligible for IDPoor Card 1 (very poor) and Card 2 (poor). The program is also open to those who have lost their jobs or their income and those who have been pushed into poverty due to the pandemic (The Phnom Penh Post, 2021). To be eligible for these cash transfers, recipients must be IDPoor Card holders and must have completed an interview process conducted by commune/sangkat authorities using the IDPoor questionnaire (Ministry of Planning, n.d.).

According to the Ministry of Planning, IDPoor card holders receive an average of around USD 45 per month in financial support from the government (United Nations ESCAP, 2021). From 25 June 2020 to 24 October 2021, 678,459 households (equivalent to 2.6 million people) received cash relief benefits through Wing accounts totalling over 1,883 billion riels (equivalent to 470 million USD) from the national budget. The program is widely recognized and supported by development partners in cooperation with the government as a way to collectively support poor and vulnerable households amidst of COVID-19 pandemic (Social Protection in Cambodia, 2021). Up to the time of writing, the Cash Transfer Program has implemented its 7th round which covered the period from October to December 2021. Please find Identification of IDPoor Procedure in the figure below:

Source: [www.idpoor.gov.kh/about/process](http://www.idpoor.gov.kh/about/process).



Source: [www.idpoor.gov.kh/about/process](http://www.idpoor.gov.kh/about/process).

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## ***V. Challenges of Implementing Cash Transfer Program***

Although there have been significant achievements of the Cash Transfer Program implemented by the government in terms of reducing impacts caused by COVID-19, there have also been challenges related to the program which need to be addressed. According to the Performance Assessment of Cash Transfer Program for Poor and Vulnerable Household done by Nuppun Research and Consulting Co., Ltd in 2021, there have been some bottlenecks during the implementation of the program.

First and foremost, the challenges have appeared at the implementation level. The knowledge of commune authorities, especially in remote and rural areas when it comes to using online systems “On Demand - IDPoor system” during the registration process has been limited. Moreover, issues related to the supporting infrastructure, such as mobile internet top-up fees, transportation and insufficient tablets in some areas have affected the registration process. The participation of targeted households also presented as a slight challenge during the interview process, particularly when a member of family was absent during the interview stage.

Secondly, there is the possibility that some poor and vulnerable households have been left out of the scheme due to design features of the poor household questionnaire. The questionnaire does not fully capture the reality of these populations and the questionnaire sheet does not include an “Other” option which would allow interviewees to be able to add their real situation into the answer sheet.

Therefore, in some occasions, the poor and vulnerable people evaluated by the commune authorities did not get a sufficient score during the interview because to their answers did not meet the eligibility criteria listed in the questionnaire. As a result, they cannot obtain IDPoor card which means they cannot get the monetary support from the government through Cash Transfer Program. In addition, the removal of IDPoor graduates from IDPoor list also brought a challenge, since it is difficult to remove IDPoor card holders from the system. This process takes at least two weeks to renew existing households that have not graduated which means the people who need this assistance most are the ones that are left behind.

Lastly, challenges exist at the cash-withdrawal point of the process, including frequent errors of the Wing System during the cash withdrawing dates due to the high levels of transactions, and the inadequate cash stores for beneficiaries due to high demand for cash withdrawal on these same dates. Research from Vinuya (2021), highlighted the challenge of this program regarding the inclusiveness of beneficiaries. The cash transfer program focuses on the rural areas while more than 80 percent of the total workforce in the informal sector are concentrated in urban areas. This means the vulnerable and poor households in the urban areas receive less support or do not get any support from cash transfer if they are not able to apply for IDPoor survey.





## ***VI. Conclusion***

The outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019 shocked every country, including Cambodia. The economic and social impacts include the deceleration of GDP growth, an increase in poverty, nation-wide closure of schools as well as shocks to the health system. With these impacts, the Royal Government of Cambodia developed both immediate and medium-term responses to lessen the burden on citizens and secure economic and social stability. One among those immediate measures has been the Cash Transfer Program, which has been playing a crucial role in helping to keep vulnerable people from falling further into poverty during the hit of COVID-19. Even though the overall implementation of Cash Transfer Program has performed well in terms of mitigating the impacts on poor and vulnerable households during the pandemic, policy makers and practitioners should pay closer attention to the gaps in the program which have been identified in order to ensure maximum inclusion among the target groups to minimize the numbers of people being left behind, and to ensure that funds reach recipients on time.



## ***VII. Recommendations***

As the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing and the funds from the government will continue to cover poor and vulnerable households until September 2022, capacity-building, especially at the commune level should be a priority for improvement. The questionnaire used to determine eligibility must fully capture the reality on the ground and must be flexible in nature in order to make sure all poor and vulnerable populations are included and able to receive financial support from the government. Therefore, some recommendations should be considered to improve the effectiveness of the cash transfer program:

### **1. Improve the efficiency of implementation at the commune level**

- Relevant authorities should provide more training rapidly and consistently to commune officials who are lacking in knowledge related to ITC and using the On Demand IDPoor system (Nuppun Research and Consulting Co., Ltd, 2021 & Boros, Under Secretary Of State Of MoSVY, 2021).
- The provision of financial allocations for transportation, mobile internet top-up for commune officers and the increasing tablets to the areas that have disperse geography system should be re-considered (Nuppun Research and Consulting Co., Ltd, 2021).

### **2. Reduce the possibility of excluding some disadvantaged populations during the interview stage:**

- The customization of the questionnaire to meet the real situation of poor and vulnerable households should be re-considered by creating more flexible options such as adding “Other” as an option for those who do not meet the existing criteria in the questionnaires sheet (Ibid).

- The procedure of removing poor and vulnerable households from ID Poor list must be reviewed to ensure the allocation of cash reaches those who need it most as well as to speed up the removal process (Ibid).
- The use of other ministry databases should be considered to ensure that all vulnerable populations especially those who are working in the informal sector are able to receive IDPoor card. In Nigeria, for instance, the government uses a database from Ministry of Labor in order to identified populations who are working in the informal sector and therefore would be highly affected by the shocks (Lowe et al., 2021).

### 3.Improve cash deliver mechanism at Wing agents:

- Diversification of cash payment agents should be considered (more agents should be identified) through mapping geography of recipients.
- Staggering the scheduled cash withdrawal dates in each commune should be considered to avoid flooding of cash withdrawal

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# ***Policy Brief Five***

**Promoting Youth in Political Participation and  
Democratic Process: Inclusive Approaches for  
Cambodia's Context**

*By: SETH Suonvisal*



## ***I. Key Messages***

- Objective: This paper aims to provide approaches that would help increase youth political participation, particularly in Cambodia's context.

- Methodology: This brief exclusively draws on secondary data from various research papers (from sources including NGOs, think-thanks, government, etc.) on the topic of youth and political participation. Good international practices are provided to support the cases of the policy options.

- Problem statement:

1. There is a mismatch between numbers of youth in Cambodia's population and their representation in government.

Youth accounted for 46 percent of all eligible voters in the 2018 election. This is compared with zero youth representation in the National Assembly if youth are defined as persons under the age of 30. If the definition is those under the age of 35, then only two MPs count as youth. If the definition is those under the age of 40, there are eight youth Members of Parliament (MPs), accounting for less than 7 per cent of the total seats available.

2. Youth participation in politics is of the utmost importance. Youth in politics matter as they are better equipped to address youth-oriented agenda issues, such as: education, youth wellbeing, career and opportunity barriers, and societal participation.



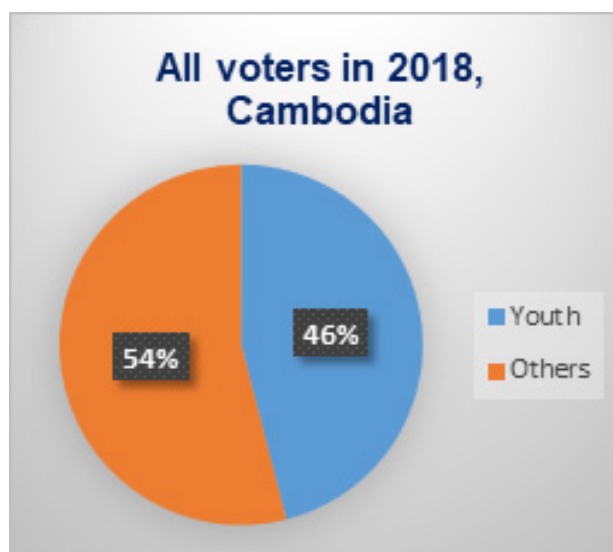
- Limitation of their participation caused by: age, financial barriers, the absence of a national system to leverage youth
- Suggested approaches: (1) Reducing the age limit for holding office, (2) Allocating funding for youth political candidates, and (3) Legislating a youth quota in representative bodies.

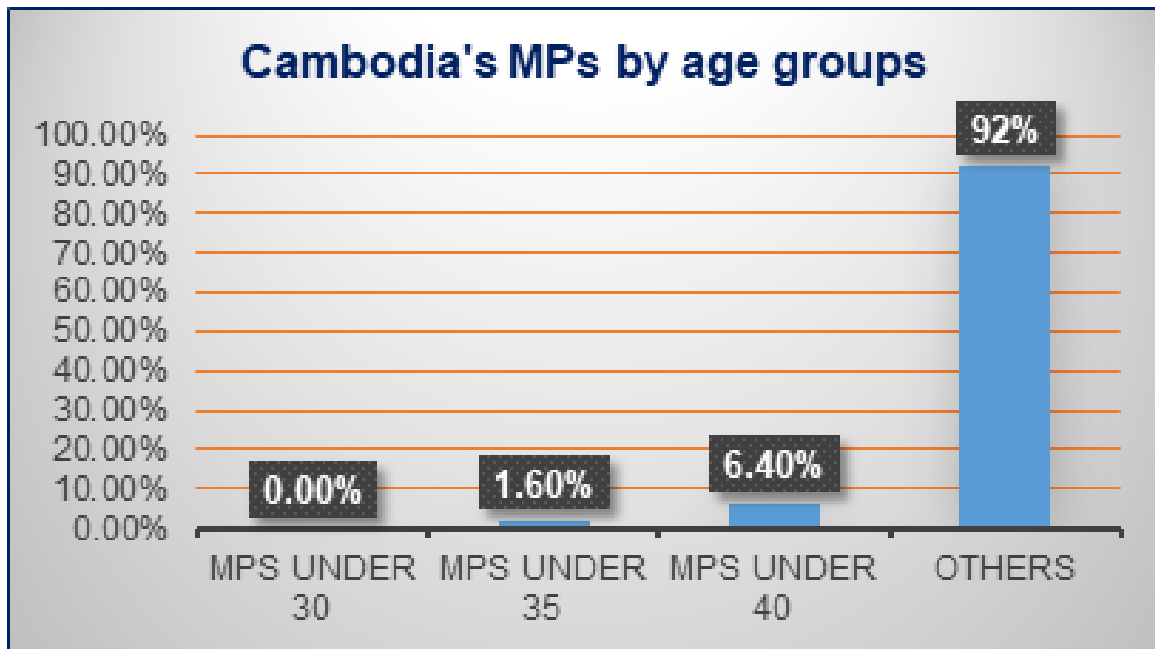
## II. Introduction

While youth in Cambodia (persons between the ages of 15 and 30) represented 46 per cent of the voters in the last election in 2018, their representation, particularly in Parliamentary Platform(s) is still limited and disproportionately low. For instance, parliamentarians under the age of 30 do not exist in the current Cambodian Lower House.

Even if the definition is changed to include members under 35 years of age, as in line with other ASEAN Member States (AMS), there would still be only two young Members of Parliament (hereafter MPs) in Cambodia's Legislature. If the criteria were raised further to 40 years of age, there would still be only 8 young MPs, accounting for 6.4 percent of all members of the Lower House, as backed up by official elected candidates of the 2018 National Election Committee (NEC). The charts below show data related to youth representation, where the pie chart numbers the youth population out of eligible voters & the bar chart displays parliamentarians by age group.

**Figure 1: Eligible voters in 2018**

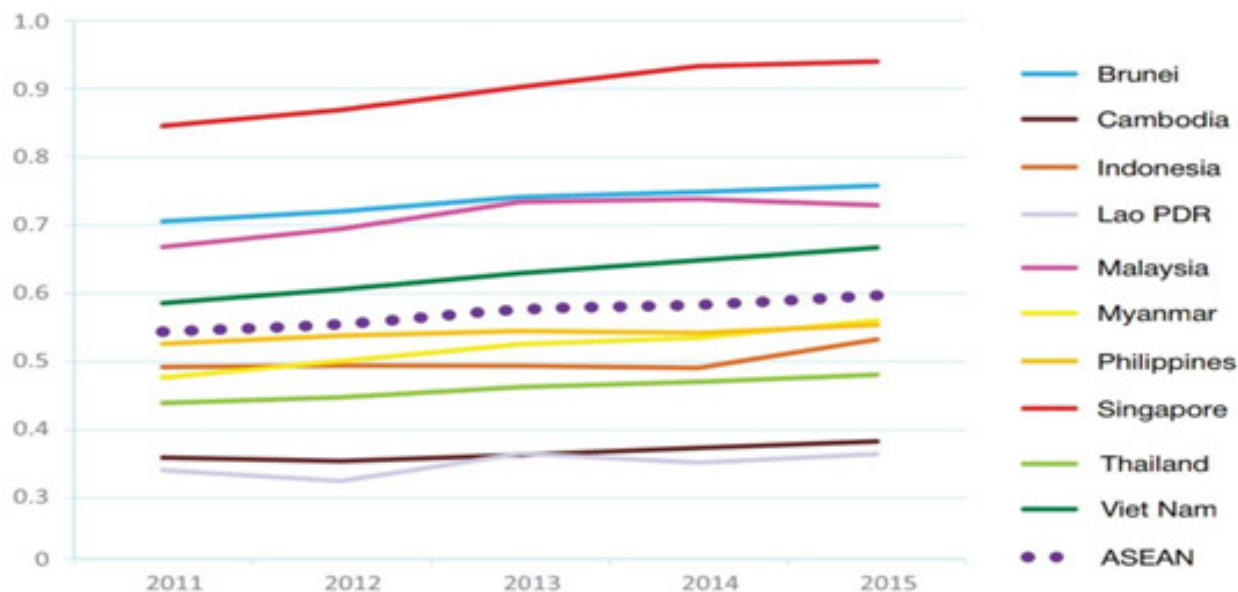


**Figure 2: MPs by age groups**

Apart from youth participation in politics in Cambodia, it is notable to have a comparative study of youth in general and in broader scale to ASEAN with a study conducted by ASEAN and UNFPA. The ASEAN-UNFPA report identified the Youth Development Index (YDI) where four main indicators were considered: education, health and wellbeing, employment, and participation and engagement. The findings listed Cambodia as having the second lowest score, slightly higher than Lao PDR while Singapore stayed on the top in the list. Remarkably, amongst the four categories studied, “Participation and engagement” received the lowest score in the ASEAN Average Domain Score. Similarly, the same category was at the bottom if compared for “all domains score for Cambodia.” This means that youth participation and engagement is particularly limited in Cambodia, and thereby requires further attention.

Figure 3: The overall trend YDI trends 2011-2015 (ASEAN) (source: ASEAN-UNFPA Report, First ASEAN Youth Development Index, 2017)

**Figure3 : The overall trend YDI trends 2011-2015 (ASEAN) (source: ASEAN-UNFPA Report, First ASEAN Youth Development Index, 2017)**



Source: ASEAN-UNFPA report. (2017). First ASEAN Youth Development Index. Retrieved from [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ASEAN-UNFPA\\_report\\_web-final-05sep.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ASEAN-UNFPA_report_web-final-05sep.pdf)

It is significant for readers to understand that this is the first phase of the YDI (2022). The second phase shifts to include indicators, such as: “awareness, values, and identity,” and therefore does not stipulate much relevancy to the context of this brief about “participation.”

### III. Why do youth in politics matter?

This section **Briefly** discusses the significance of the study, and covers the benefits of youth participation in politics. Some research findings reveal that participation by youth in politics could help youth in their personal development, particularly related to their self-esteem and open-mindedness while also building them up to be responsible citizens. Other findings highlight the effect of youth participation on interconnected policies, as their engagement and participation can address specific youth-oriented agenda items, such as: (1) education, (2) wellbeing, (3) career and opportunity, and (4) participation.

Still, there might be questions around how the topic of youth participation is connected with these issues (education, health, and decent job). Simply put, youth participation is a cross-cutting issue that will not solely be addressed or result from the issue of “participation” alone. Securing greater “participation” would lead to issues in the other three sectors “education, health, and, employment” being addressed as well. The diagram below displays the supporting framework of participation relative to other sectors relevant to youth.

**Figure 4: Framework of participation**



To save space, the policy paper does not discuss these regards of interconnection in detail but would refer readers to other briefs for this regard where a greater length of elaboration is provided separately. The next session thereby jumps straight to the category of “participation”.



## ***IV. Why low participation?***

This section explores the reasons behind low participation of youth in politics, allowing further understanding of the root cause so that solutions can be formulated to best match with the drawbacks.

To understand the barriers, it is worthwhile explaining what “youth participation” really is. There is no single definition for the term, but it is generally understood as: the involvement of youth as prospective leaders to participate in political action, to speak up, and to contribute to decisions that would result in major changes for their future; as well as for their rights and responsibilities.

Other definitions include the right for youth to access information, express their thoughts, take active roles in planning policies and programs that benefit their communities, and hold a public decision making. In general, youth participation is about the impacts youth can make through their participation to shift drawbacks into positive trends in their communities. Nevertheless, their full participation is hindered by various barriers.

#### **4.1. First barrier: Political agenda, unjust justice system, and Misused rule of law**

Youth in politics are still limited by many factors including but not limited to, “political agenda and justice system” as backed up by the 2011’s OECD report on “key issues affecting youth in Cambodia”, highlighting those incidents as demotivating factors that have prevented youth from participating in politics. One may argue that the statement is likely no longer valid in the present day due to the outdated year of this report’s publication. However, there has not been recent data that contradicts the report’s statement. Instead, recent incidents show that this issue is still relevant, for example in the case of the young activists who have been sentenced to 10 years in prison based on a charge of plotting against the government. The activists are members of the group Mother Nature whose mission is to protect and preserve the environment. These young activists were arrested for their series of videos on waste run-off into Phnom Penh’s Tonle Sap River.

Other cases include youngsters having been sent to jail with the allegation of insulting authorities, and a more-senior environmental campaigner, governmental critic, and also a refugee facing deportation at risk of being imprisoned in his home country (Cambodia).

The practice of limiting freedom of speech by labeling critical discourse as an insult to the powerful or to the authorities has created an inhospitable political environment that discourages participation. This causes uncertainty for youth who would otherwise want to engage due to fear of misinterpretation that could threaten their active participation.

## 4.2. Second barrier: Matter of age for formal participation

Youth make up almost half of all eligible voters, they therefore deserve greater recognition in the political sphere. Promoting them in the policy arena would allow them to weigh in on the national agenda and to engage their mindset and skills to close gaps within their own communities.

Youth represent a significant portion of the population and have the potential to be agents of change if they are given the ability to influence decisions and represent their demographic's lives and concerns. It is therefore significant to include youth and their leadership in all political processes, not just at the grassroots level but also at the national level.

Nevertheless, leadership positions at the national level have not typically been held by people under the age of 35, both in Cambodia and around the World. The scarcity is particularly evident in developing countries where political eligibility to run for parliamentary seats is constituted at 25 years or older and it is common practice to refer to politicians as 'young' if they are 35-40 years of age. Youth are also inadequately represented in other types of participation in formal political institutions such as political parties, elections, and public office. Thus, the matter of age restriction restricts youth participation, and the removal of this eligibility requirement should be considered.



### 4.3. Third barrier: Funding & Socio-economic factor

Political financing can also affect young people's representation within political parties and the electoral process. The escalating costs of running for office hinders youth, whose financial resources are scarce no matter how passionate they are about politics.

This is because in some countries there is a charge for one to be nominated as candidate. In Nigeria for instance, an estimated US\$3,000 is demanded for nomination to the Lower House while presidential candidacy may require an estimated US\$50,000. This burden of wealth backing would further add barriers to the establishment of political connections for youth.

Though this practice is nowhere to be found in research for Cambodia's political behavior towards charging candidates, it is hardly deniable that running for offices requires financial backing, and even more so if one is looking to be nominated in a favorable position on the ranked list of candidates on the ballot.

Without sufficient funding, youth may defer their interest in politics and participation and move in other directions as they are unsure of their future in politics on top of struggling to afford the livelihood:

***“Young people will first look for a source of livelihood, because they do not have a guaranteed future”, Moussa Timbiné, a former MP (Mali)***

## 4.4. Fourth barrier: Conventional & Unconventional approach in politics

Before moving further into the discussion, it is worth understanding “what conventional approach is about?” The term refers to the customary, formal route for one to become a politician—through an affiliation to a party system. Thus, the conventional approach is the most well-known path to enter politics, for instance, by becoming a political party member or joining political causes. In most developing countries like Cambodia, getting oneself into politics mostly happens through conventional approach—particularly through a party, this could be through a “party’s youth wing” or a “party’s political groups/committees.”

Though the conventional approach seems promising, for a growing number of youths, how long it will take to gain trust and climb the political ladder in order to influence their agenda remains ambiguous and may depend on numerous factors such as allies, internal competition, and financial support. While youth from elite families may not struggle in this regard, these factors do not typically work in the favor of ordinary youth. The need to build a solid network, gain the trust of senior political leaders, and finance their career, all slow down the progress of youth in politics.

There is also a study that the conventional approach of involvement in parties’ youth wings can lead to differing outcomes: (1) constructive political experience. (2) youth mobilization for violence or patronage, depending on the goals of political elites. The uncertainty, to some extent, may demotivate youth to get themselves involved, with a possible perception that engaging in politics, in Cambodia, may lead to hazardous consequences.

The unconventional approach instead refers to other ways to immerse oneself in the public, political sphere through actions that could be simply defined as a “caregiver for society”. In the modern social media landscape, individuals can benefit from these platforms to put forth their agenda. While it is possible for one to gain popularity, it would require substantial effort and perseverance to make oneself be known to and gain trust from the public with that title (caregiver for society).

To date, there have been rare cases where youth can rise by themselves, run for something, and be accepted by the public without having been backed by the support via parties’ channels. Even with the slight chance for youth to succeed in politics via this approach, this approach should not be underestimated. After all, the current political mechanisms to raise youth leaders to the level are not working, as we see with the current data (out of 125 Parliamentarians, only two are under the age of 35). A youth quota, as a leveraging formula, is also not yet available in Cambodia’s context.

Given the factors discussed, it is therefore valid to conclude that low participation of youth in politics is linked to (1) inconvenient political environment such as absence of rule of law that could threaten their active participation, (2) age restriction, (3) socio-economic factors & limited funding for youth to run for offices or fund other initiatives on their own, (4) conventional approach and unconventional approach, both of which are not supported by a youth quota for youth to stand for proportionate representation, and finally other relevant causes i.e. exclusion (of youth) from policy planning and other political processes.



## ***V. What are “good international practices” to address those matters/barriers?***

### **5.1. Addressing “Age Restriction”**

There are many approaches to work on the national youth action plan and strategies. Nevertheless, there is a different perception in the research findings carried by a consortium of international agencies working on democracy-related agenda, such as USAID, IRI, NDI, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, and CEPPS- Strengthening Democracy through Partnership. The findings suggest no evidence that national youth policy strategies contribute to the long-term youth civic and political engagement. The research instead points out that lowering the candidacy minimum age reflects better with more numbers of youth turning out to vote, participating further, and holding more offices.

This research is in line with reality in Cambodia's context where National Policy on Youth Development is available but the number of youths participating in senior leadership at the national level is still limited (as backed by data in previous section), since they also have to wait until being certain age to run and hold offices, while other countries allow candidates to run in their earlier ages. The table below illustrates the practice of lower minimum age limit to run for offices

**Figure 5: Age to run for parliamentary seats participation system,  
and Misused rule of law**

Country	Minimum Age	Source
Sweden	18	<a href="http://archive.ipu.org/parline/reports/2303.htm">http://archive.ipu.org/parline/reports/2303.htm</a>
Ireland	21	<a href="http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1997/en/act/pub/0002/sec0011.html">http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1997/en/act/pub/0002/sec0011.html</a>
Portugal	18	<a href="http://www.cne.pt/faq2/96/3">http://www.cne.pt/faq2/96/3</a>
Belgium	18	DE BELGISCHE GRONDWET (senate.be) (article 64 & 69)
Germany	18	<a href="https://www.uni-marburg.de/administration/recht/wahlrecht/landtagswahlgesetz">https://www.uni-marburg.de/administration/recht/wahlrecht/landtagswahlgesetz</a>
Finland	18	<a href="http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/finland/">http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/finland/</a> <a href="https://www.infofinland.fi/en/information-about-finland/finnish-society/elections-in-finland">https://www.infofinland.fi/en/information-about-finland/finnish-society/elections-in-finland</a> <a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/yes-why-we-should-vote-in-favour-of-lowering-the-age-of-candidates-eligible-to-become-president-1.2091000">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/yes-why-we-should-vote-in-favour-of-lowering-the-age-of-candidates-eligible-to-become-president-1.2091000</a>
The UK	18	<a href="https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/elections/standing/">https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/elections/standing/</a>

The above list is carefully selected with the criteria that those countries received favorable scores in the latest YDI (Youth Development Index) 2020, such as Sweden, Ireland, and Portugal staying on top ten countries of the index.

It is important to note that age to run for executive offices may be higher than to run for parliamentary seats. However, other developed nations such as France and Slovenia, have even lowered the age requirement to run for presidency—to the age of 18, while Finland, the Netherlands, and Denmark embraced a similar model by setting the minimum age for candidacy at 18 for all elections. The UK also amended its election law to drop the age requirement for parliamentary elections from 21 to 18.

In other parts of the world, particularly in the West, there have also been campaigns to advocate for lowering the age requirements for political candidacy. The National Youth Rights Association of the US defines the age of candidacy in an overall context that refers to the minimum age required for candidate to hold a political office in all regards, including Governor, Upper House, Lower House, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State and Treasurer. Due to different legal practices in different states, required age of candidacy for those offices range from 18 to 30. Given these criteria, it could be argued that “the age of candidacy laws unfairly bar from office young people with a strong background in politics and capable of gaining support of their constituents”. With recent laws, however, there are five US states that have implemented the 18-year age requirement for candidacy across all of the aforementioned offices. Those states include: Washington D.C., California, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Rhode Island.

To learn also from practice of another continent, Nigeria reduced the age requirement to run for parliamentary office to 25 in response to a campaign by youth groups and political supporters. The decision led to a positive change after one election cycle with a 9 per cent increase in youth representation in parliament. This can be inferred that though the 25-age amendment as the case of Nigeria may be believed as still high, the shown result is truly welcoming as long as there is change.

The story of Turkey is similar to what took place in Nigeria in terms of the age requirement. The requirement was reduced from 30 to 25 and then to 18 following a constitutional referendum in 2017. This amendment introduced the youngest MP in Turkey's history—an 18-year-old high-school student who ran for her constituency.

The implication of these practices is that full political participation could result from a lower minimum age of candidacy for political office, as the act of lowering candidate age will reflect greater youth participation in politics.

## 5.2. Addressing Funding

Acknowledging the financial concerns of youth when it comes to participating in politics, there is a growing trend among countries and states to subsidize or fund political activities to leverage pluralism. Youth are not the only group to have benefited from these schemes. Underrepresented groups, women, indigenous and ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities have also benefited.

Regulation of campaign expenditure is needed to be legally binding. Countries like Kenya and Ireland, for instance, have bound political party legislation up with the requirement that parties allocate a portion of their funding to promote youth representation.

Some of the above ideas are backed by parliamentarians who acknowledge, for instance, that financial issues have hampered youth who seek to go into politics:

***“People look for candidates with money. Politicians cannot just talk. You also need to spend” Dorji Khandu (young MP, Bhutan)***

***“It’s not cheap to run, and how big is a 25-year-old’s salary?” – Irene Putri (young MP, Indonesia)***

Allies, organizations, donors, and advocate groups with sufficient sponsorship can help too to fill in financial constraint for youth and other marginalized groups. As in the case of the United States, an organization called EMILY's List has been working on financial mobilization to empower women candidates in the Democratic Party.

Making electoral campaign funding available for young candidates is, therefore, an attractive tool. To address the funding issue, one option is a systematically legislated tool where the law requires political parties to spend a minimum percentage of their budgets on youth candidates. Second, electoral authorities could secure or subsidize minority candidates, such as youth, with lowered registration fees. Third, states or authorities could provide support for youth candidates through grants and loans. Finally NGOs, organizations and civil society should consider supporting youth via their mission and vision by following the example of EMILY's List.



### 5.3. Addressing obstructing approaches for youth in politics

Matters of youth political participation are relevant to the feasibility of systematic political platforms, such as parliament and government. As discussed in the previous section, Cambodia's political platforms are shaped by two avenues: conventional & unconventional; both of which have not been able to secure the full participation of youth. The low participation at the National Level is one of the concerns, as Cambodia's youth represent a large proportion of the population that have not seen full proportional representation.

The problem is not just in Cambodia, low levels of youth political participation persist around the globe. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) concerns the low margin of global young representation which, having studied various groups of age such as below 30 years old and below 40 years old parliamentarians, resulted in only 2.6% and 17.5% representation respectively, compared to the total number (of world parliamentarians).

Whether it is an issue related to the conventional or unconventional approach, low participation by youth in politics requires a systematic solution. One potential solution is a youth quota. The effectiveness of youth quotas is backed by research. Such quotas have been shown to increase the quantity of youth in elected bodies but researchers warn that it will require a well-rounded strategy to support the inclusive and meaningful engagement of youth within these institutions.

Countries embracing youth quotas in various forms include Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Uganda, amongst others, with the adoption of systems which include:

- (i) reserved seats (constitutional and/or legislative)*
- (ii) legal candidate quotas (constitutional and/or legislative)*
- (iii) voluntary political party quota*

### 5.3.1. Reserved seat system

The following table introduces some of the applications by selected countries.

**Figure 6: Reserved-seat systems by country**

Detailed view of reserved seat systems by country				
Country	Age group	Quota (percentage)	Gender	Appointment method
Rwanda	Under 35	1.8 (2 seats)	Embedded	Elected by National Youth Council
Morocco	Under 40	7.6 (30 seats)	Embedded	Elected from closed party lists
Kenya – Lower Chamber	Under 35	3.4 (12 seats for young people with disabilities and workers)	Embedded	Nominated by parties
Kenya – Upper Chamber	Under 35	2.9 (2 seats)	Embedded	Elected from party lists
Uganda	Under 30	1.2 (5 seats)	Embedded	Elected by national youth delegates conference

*(Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth Participation in National Parliaments, 2021)*

Kenya, for example, allocates 12 seats in the Lower House to represent special interest groups (youth, persons with disabilities, and workers) with inclusive treatment of both males and females; two seats reserved for youth at the Senate (one of whom is female).

Other countries like Rwanda and Uganda appreciate the decision made by “National Youth” Body; Rwanda, with two members elected by the National Youth Council, & Uganda, with five seats elected by the National Youth Delegates Conference.

Morocco reserves the highest percentage out of all compared countries, with its allocation of 30 seats, accounting for 7.6 per cent of the House’s total members. However, the age group seems to be not so relevant (the reserved seats can be eligible to those under 40).

To conclude, Uganda leads the list in term of age requirement (under 30) whilst Kenya also shares great advantages for youth in term of allotted percentage (3.4 per cent), for the reserved quota system.

### 5.3.2. Legislated candidate quotas

Whilst the above model of youth quota application used in Uganda where five “reserved seats”, representing 1.2 per cent, is allotted to youth under 30 years old, some countries adopt another model—the Legal Candidate Quota. At such, the Philippines practices this type of quote where 50 per cent of proportional lists must be from different segments of the population, including youth.

The below table provides more details of the Philippines and other countries that favor this option.

**Figure 7: Legal candidate systems by country**

Countries with legislated candidate quotas			
Country	Age group	Quota (percentage)	Gender
Philippines	–	50 (50 per cent of proportional lists must be from different segments of the population, including youth)	Mixed
Tunisia	Under 35	25 (in districts with four or more seats, one young candidate is to be placed in one of the top four positions on the roster)	Separate quotas
Gabon	Under 40	20	No quotas
Kyrgyzstan	Under 36	15	Separate quotas
Egypt	Under 35	Varied (at least 16 young candidates must be nominated across four electoral districts)	Separate quotas

*(Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth Participation in National Parliaments, 2021)*

“Legislated-candidate quotas” refer to a legally-binding requirement that parties nominate or set aside a certain portion of seats for youth candidates, under a certain age. For example, Tunisia’s party must nominate at least one young candidate out of every four seats available to be elected. This accounts for 25 per cent.

The obligations can be bound by constitutions or by laws providing quotas for young candidates, the impacts may however vary, depending on the listing order youth are placed in particularly in electable positions. Therefore, the effectiveness may not be borne solely from just nominating youth into the candidacy but demand greater attention to political party list arrangement that would not place youth too low to be elected with sufficient votes.

By embracing good practices in this section, the final section provides policy options to address the barriers, while ascertaining the options which best apply in Cambodia’s context.

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## ***VI. Policy Options to address those matters/barriers?***

From the several options of good practices above, this brief can conclude with the following recommendations:

### **6.1. Reducing age limit**

Having remarked on the issue of the shortage of youth political representation, Cambodia is in need to reformulate their election policy where eligible candidates shall be allowed to run office before they are 25 years old. Reducing the age limit, thus, opens a way forward for more young people to be more engaged in politics, particularly running for both executive offices and parliamentary seats.

### **6.2. Allocating (funding) for youth**

While the message of engaging youth has always been appealing, there is little chance youth can excel if financial burdens still prevent them from engaging, organizing and implementing their causes, initiatives, and projects. Therefore, allocating national-level funding for youth would be crucial to kick off youth interest and involvement regarding the various contributions they could make, such as business start-ups, community development and service, social projects and advocacy, and a greater extent of running for something they are passionate about. This fund could be a special package in whole or separate specifically to line ministries with specific aims for addressing the benefits of youth concerns. For instance, government shall issue a guideline for relevant ministries to designate an annual budget plan for designing programs or activities in relevance of youth.

### 6.3. Legislating youth quota

Legislating youth quota should also be considered. This policy option would involve more youth at the National Level; as a result, reflecting the youth perspective to create a youth-oriented agenda at a greater scale. To do this, Cambodia may consider youth quotas to be a preference in an upgrading scale of quota systems:

(1) Reserved seats for youth at the parliament.

This approach is legally binding and may be stipulated in any feasible legal frameworks, either election law or constitution (if deemed legitimate).

(2) Legislated candidate quotas of youth

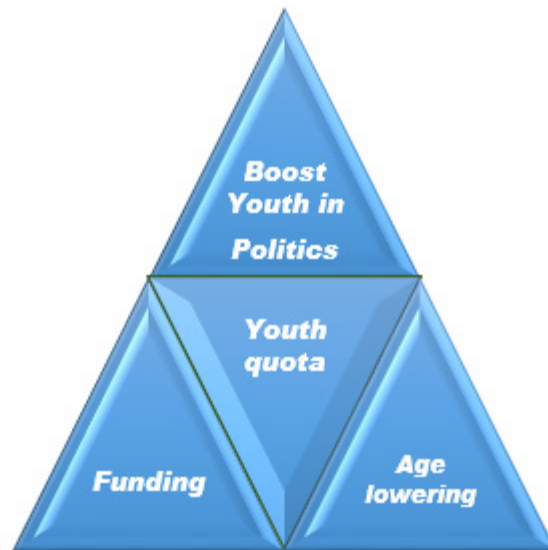
This approach is constitutional and/or legally binding as the type above with specific compulsory requirements for youth to be included to some extent in the voting lists. Best practices have shown that a specific percentage of youth are required for parties to field candidates, by law

(3) Political party quotas

This approach acknowledges the attempt to integrate youth in candidacy nomination lists on a voluntary basis and is not legal-binding, thereby having limited impact on the success of integrating youth participation.

In the third approach Cambodian political parties may prepare their lists of candidates with some proportions dedicated to youth, on a voluntary commitment without being pressurized under any legal-binding stipulations. Thus, moving to #2 and #1 would secure more youth participation through parliamentary accountability that would influence on youth agenda.

Altogether with the options combined (age lowering, funding and youth quota), the interconnection of the three dimensions can be drawn into a framework as below:

**Figure 8: Supporting framework of the policy options**

To illustrate, “age lowering” is like opening a gateway for youth to start earlier while they can also be sure that they will be supported by governments, political parties, NGOs and all relevant stakeholders in term of “political finance.” When “youth quota” is also considered, it becomes the core element that has been reinforced by the “sufficient funding and inclusive contribution at a younger age,” all of which combine together as a set of boosters for youth participation in policy planning and other political processes. These options fit in the Cambodia’s context with multiple dimensional impacts that leverage youth for better results of change, and the result of greater youth representation will translate to other benefits, such as “awareness, building partnerships, mobilizing political will and sensitize voters of all age groups.

## ***Disclaimer***

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# ***Policy Brief Six***

**Enforcement of Skill-based Education  
as a Means for Inclusive Growth: The  
Present and Way Forward**

*By: LIM Chhengheang*

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## ***I. Executive Summary***

- Education helps to promote inclusive growth, which is economic growth for all, but many Cambodians are unable to complete their general education.
- Maintaining socio-economic development, social inclusion and mobility, and promoting lifelong learning hinge on the provision of skilled-based education or vocational education and training as a vehicle to pursuing higher education, which is initially impossible for dropouts.
- Despite the current policies, mechanisms to promote TVET, and growing convergence between TVET and higher education, data show students continue to struggle to find employment and ways to switch from TVET to universities.
- The issue stems from a combination of factors related to top-level coordination problems, institutional and teaching quality, lack of the implementation of prior learning recognition mechanism, and funding.
- TVET still has ground to cover, but the creation of an intermediary body to assist in communication and cooperation between different stakeholders in course development, as well as in information dissemination could serve as a start.

## ***II. Introduction***

Education is one of the factors that promotes inclusive growth, which refers to economic growth that is distributed fairly across society and creates opportunities for all (OECD, n.d.). Yet, Cambodia's efforts to provide education for all have been met with resistance. In the academic year 2017-2018, there were a total of 303,969 students enrolled in upper secondary education. However, only 55.7 percent of these students were able to complete high school grade 12 while a staggering 38.6 percent dropped out of school (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, 2018). According to The World Bank (2021), only 13.688 percent of students enrolled in tertiary education.

The population structure in Cambodia is experiencing a dramatic shift as the people are either ready to enter the market or are already in it. However, the number of people who are unable to finish general education and become dropouts is concerning. To enter new labor markets to maintain its socio-economic development, therefore, Cambodia not only needs to upgrade the skills and competencies of its existing workforce, but the country also needs to increase access to technical training for those who are unable to finish their general education or drop out early (ADB, 2018). To accommodate an increasingly specialized and demanding labor market, skill-based education or vocational education and training is needed (The Council of Technical Education & Training, n.d.). In addition, UNESCO highlights the important role of TVET in providing options for lifelong learning that can take place at secondary and post-secondary levels and includes work-based learning and continuing training and professional development which may lead to qualifications. Providing opportunities for disadvantaged groups to pursue higher education also contributes to social inclusion and mobility through permeability—the ability to move easily through different types of education (Chea, Hun, & Song, 2021).

Henceforth, understanding Cambodia's application of TVET and its impacts on the lifelong learning pursuit of dropout students is paramount to the labor market and to further economic prosperity in both the near and distant future. According to Chhoeurm (2021), enrolling in universities is essential for Cambodian students as it maximizes students' potential economic prosperity, and potential to secure employment. As previously mentioned, TVET is meant to equip trainees with opportunities to pursue higher education through permeability. However, incoherent actions from key actors in TVET and general education continue to impede TVET's role in promoting growth for youth outside the formal higher education system.

Therefore, this policy brief aims to identify immediate actions that could be taken coherently by key players to better support TVET's role in contributing to building human resources for inclusive growth.

### ***III. Methodology***

This policy brief is based on a desk review of TVET policies, mechanisms and performance, along with reports from various ministries and international organizations and institutions, as well as published journal articles that could be evidence for responding to current challenges related to TVET implementation. Central to the analysis found in this brief is the connection between TVET institutions, trainers, budgeting, and policies that are the core inputs to produce trainees.

This policy brief addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the current status of TVET education?
2. What are the challenges of TVET implementation?



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## ***IV. Evidence on TVET Performance***

### **4.1. The Status Quo**

The backbone of TVET is the National Technical Vocational Education and Training Policy 2017–2025. As laid out in the framework, TVET is considered an indispensable asset for the country’s socioeconomic development as it assists learners in gaining knowledge, technical skills, and competency to become skilled workers and technicians. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has also endorsed the “Industrial Development Policy (IDP) 2015–2025, and National Employment Policy (NEP) 2015–2025”. Both policies are aimed at contributing to the development of the industrial sector, to the creation of decent work and to promoting a high quality and highly productive workforce that is better able to compete with regional countries. As can be seen, the development of a flexible TVET system is essential to responding to market needs, and prioritizing lifelong skills upgrade and development across all age groups (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, 2017).

To add to how crucial TVET can be, the Cambodia Qualifications Framework (2012) also recognizes the overlapping nature between general education and aspects of technical training. It is stated that students of both sectors are expected to develop capacity for thinking and problem-solving, personal qualities of responsibility, integrity and capacity for continued learning. Hence, students should be permitted to proceed to further studies in a flexible manner provided they can demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills required.

With these policies, the government has been pushing to increase students' enrollment rate in public TVET institutions. As the table shows, between 2016 and 2018, there was a 14.28 percent increase in the number of total students enrolled in the 39 public institutions. The graduation rate for all the institutions has also seen a significant increase of around 55.55 percent. Despite this significant increase, students struggled to find employment within six months after graduation. Upon finishing school in 2018, only 58.75 percent of the total graduates successfully landed in a job (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, 2019).

**Figure 1:**

<b>39 public institutes country-wide</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>
<b>Total number of students enrolled</b>	39,207	44,806
<b>Total number of graduates</b>	21,740	41,445
<b>Total number of graduates employed within 6 months after graduation</b>	NA	17,097

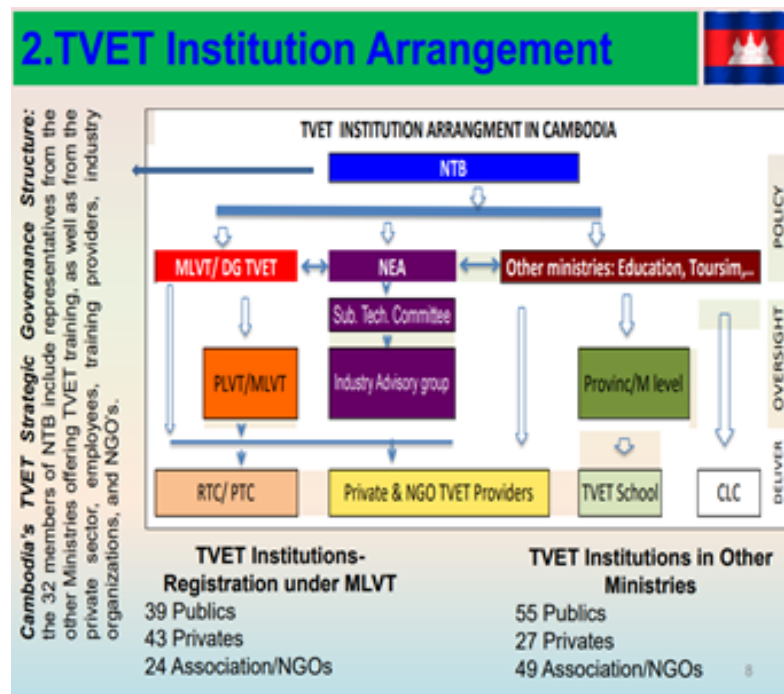
Source: (MLVT, 2018 & 2019)

## 4.2. Current Challenges

### 4.2.1. Coordination Problems

TVET has faced crippling coordination problems (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, 2017). The hierarchy of TVET Cambodia starts from the National Training Board (NTB) and includes various stakeholders ranging from the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MLVT) with the Directorate General of TVET (DGTNET) and National Employment Agency (NEA) under it, and different line ministries (see figure 2). These institutions formulate policy which will ultimately affect regional or provincial training centers (RTC/PTC), TVET schools, community learning centers (CLC), and even private and non-governmental organizations (NGO) TVET providers (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. TVET Institution Arrangement**



Source: Keo, 2017

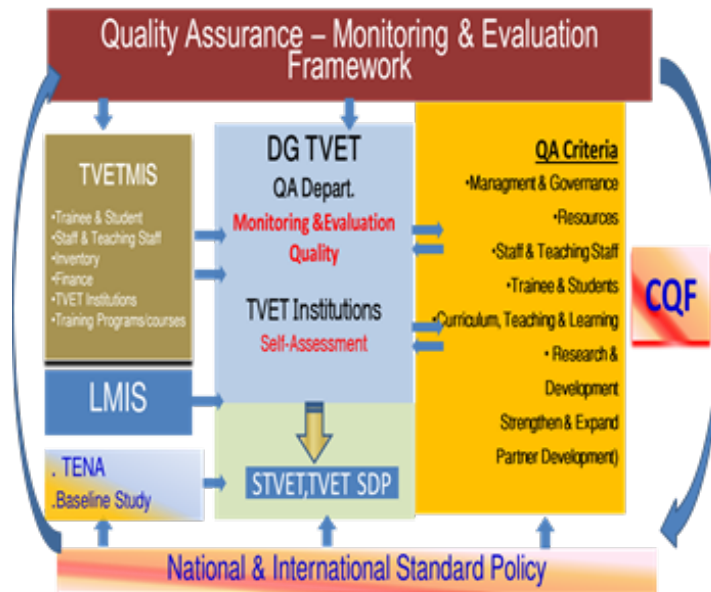
In reality, the provision of TVET and non-formal training remains largely uncoordinated and unregulated. Some of the larger providers remain unregistered with MLVT. Some programs operated by other ministries and private institutions are registered with a municipal department of MoEYS instead. Some specialized vocational training programs fall under the supervision of their sector ministries independent from MLVT. Members and observers suggest that the infrequent and ad hoc nature of the NTB meetings (biannually) negatively impacts effectiveness, and that MLVT (in charge of executing its directives) is not always clear about planning and coordination for the sub-sector. Industry does not appear to be actively involved in the planning and development of TVET at the national level, explained in part by its relatively low representation on the NTB. Another concern is the apparent poor dialogue and coordination between the NTB and DPs (World Bank, 2010).

#### *4.2.2. Institutional Quality*

Another vexing concern is the quality of instruction that TVET institutions provide. There are 39 public TVET schools across the country, however, only 23 institutes are ISO certified, which is the adopted mechanism to ensure the quality of their training and education. In terms of achieving National Competency Standards, only 21 occupations from Certificate 1, 2, 3 in construction, mechanics, and information and communications technology/business are up to this standard.

To ensure that quality is upheld, a Quality Assurance and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (Figure 3) with six performance criteria has been recently adopted by NTB. Based on the framework, self-assessments and quality audits will be undertaken (Yorn, 2015). All of the 39 TVET institutes go through field work internal audits. Nonetheless, the capacity of the quality assurance officers in terms of report writing is limited, along with report preparation, they have to go through on-the-job training and coaching (e-GEN Consultants Ltd. & Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector Development Program, 2017). In addition, TVET quality has yet to respond to the demand of the market since the quality assurance system is still lacking (ADB, 2018 & UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2020).

**Figure 3. QA Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**



Source: Yorn, 2015

### *4.2.3. Teaching Staff*

One of the backbones of TVET's quality input is the teaching staff, as their professionalization is considered a critical issue that affects the effectiveness of vocational education in generating skilled workers (Bukit, n.d.).

Based on MLVT (2019), in between academic year 2017–2018, there are a total of 2,094 teaching staff for the 39 total institutions. Yet, 1,098 among the total teaching staff (over 50 percent) have not received pedagogical training. Only 699 have received advanced pedagogical training and are qualified to teach bachelor level and below; meanwhile, a mere 297 are equipped with basic pedagogical training and are qualified to teach Diploma level and below

### *4.2.4. Accreditation of Qualifications and Credit Transfer*

There are two accrediting bodies for qualifications, one is the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia for the higher education sector and the other is the National Training Board (NTB) for the TVET sector. As of now, there are no quality standards or criteria related to the performance of the accrediting agency or related to the accreditation of qualifications. Currently there is no public register of national qualifications since there is no body or ministry which assumes responsibility as regulators for monitoring quality standards. Accreditation processes through the NTB are in the trailing stage through the ADB STVET project which has developed competency standards, curricula, learner workbooks and assessment materials for Level 2 to Level 4 qualifications for electrical plumbing, masonry and carpentry. There has been no development of curricula, workbooks or assessment packages for Diploma or above (Yorm & Marnane, 2015), except for one JICA project to support only electrical fields (JICA, 2016).

According to the World Bank, there is a lack of pathways that lead from TVET programs to higher levels of education. These pathways suffer due to the absence of consensus on the recognition of students' prior qualifications, as the ministries involved—particularly MoEYS and MLVT—adopt different guidelines to evaluate students' prior learnings and have limited interministerial coordination and communication (Yorm & Marnane, 2015; Chea, Hun, & Song, 2021).

#### *4.2.5. Budgeting and Resource Allocation Transfer*

TVET has three major funding sources - government recurrent expenditure, international donors such as ADB, and the private sector. Since the establishment of MLVT in 2005, its expenditure on TVET has been growing steadily. From 2005 to 2010, the expenditure increased by about 45 per cent per annum. In 2011 the government outlay was approximately US\$3.3 million, and it reached approximately US\$8.8 million in 2012. Within these outlays, RGC provides recurrent financing to both private and public providers, through a National Training Fund (NTF) which is made sustainable through Prime Minister Special Fund program (Hay, 2013 & Gonçalves, 2019). One source of MLVT outlays is the non-program budget (NPB), funded mainly through ADB loan programs. The Third Education Sector Development Program 2 (ESDP 2) provided US\$4.95 million over five years to 2011, and the Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training project 1 (STVET 1) provided US\$5.2 million in 2011 and \$4.5 million in 2012 (Gonçalves, 2019).

Based on the Ministry of Economy and Finance budget brief (2018), the RGC has further increased the total budget for MLVT, though TVET only holds about 25 per cent of the total vbudget. In 2017, the total expenditure for MLVT was \$47.4m but only \$12.82m was allocated for TVET, and in 2018, there was a notable 10.3291 per cent increase in budget for MLVT, but TVET only experienced a 4.36 per cent increase to \$13.38 m (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Budget Plan on MLVT in 2018**

Budget Plan for MLVT to TVET	2018
1. Develop and implement national policies and regulations on TVET	342,425
2. Mechanisms to promote the enrollment of students in the field of TVET	12,160,525
3. Strengthen TVET education management mechanisms	769,050
4. TVET Support Service to Capital and Provincial Specialized Department	114,900
<b>Total in USD:</b>	<b>\$ 13,386,900</b>

*(Source: Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2018).*

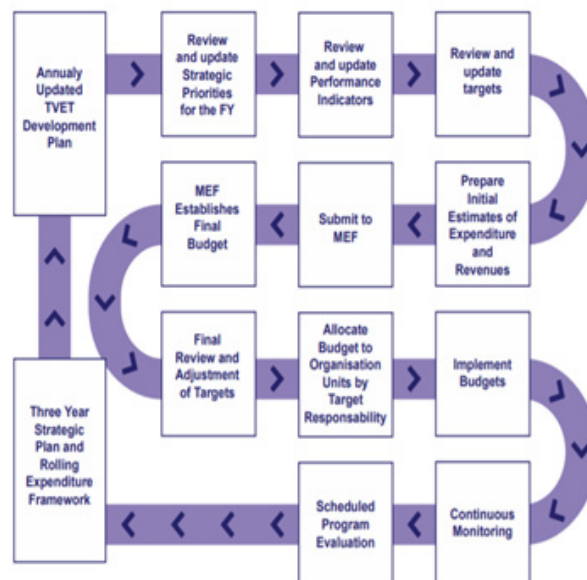


#### 4.2.5.1. MLVT Strategic Budget Plan (SBP)

MLVT prepares a strategic budget plan, which includes outlines of achievements, challenges, and solutions for next year's implementation, policy objectives, strategies towards the policy objectives, performance indicators and targets, expenditure requirements, and projected outcomes. The SBP is translated into Program Budget (PB) format and allocated to administrative units within DGTNET and DGTNET institutions, and then submitted to MEF.

In reality, the policy objectives and strategies from the SBP are poorly translated into the PB (Program Budget) structure. The PB structure does not provide an effective accountability mechanism. Little progress has been made in implementing the PB. Substantial areas of expenditure are included in PB. And the feedback loops (as the diagram shows) to update SBP and the National TVET Development Plan (NTDP) have not been updated since 2008. Moreover, monitoring and evaluation has not yet been carried out (See Figure 5).

**Figure 5. MLVT Strategic Budget Plan**



Source: ADB/ MLTV

#### *4.2.5.2. Resource Allocation to the Directorate General of TVET (DGTVET)*

Budget is allocated at the sub-program level and further divided into actions. However, the resource allocation (RA) process moves without a focus on the declared goals. The RA reports provide limited information on accountability. They detail how much money is spent, whether a program has been delivered, and relatively basic data on the gender and number of enrollees and graduates. Nevertheless, they do not include a cost-efficiency analysis, and the RA process does not cover all the funds available to the institutions (Gonçalves, 2019).

In addition, heads of TVET institutions are not responsible for planning their institutional budgets but rather this is being done for them, with some exceptions. Furthermore, it is argued that TVET institutions' boards are not actively involved in overseeing budget planning and budget execution. Based on UNESCO institutional visits, the lack of detailed costing is a key weakness of the current funding system (UNESCO, 2013).



## ***V. Policy Implication***

Both ADB (2018) and the National Technical Vocational Education and Training Policy (2017) highlights the significant role TVET can play in Cambodia's economic development, and the efforts to push for increase in enrollment in skilled-based education institutions. Despite the annual increase in trainees' enrolment in TVET, much needs to be done to further realize the potential of TVET, particularly for dropouts and those who do not go on to university after high school. Hence, this policy brief calls for:

The creation of an intermediary body to assist in and coordinate communications between MLVT and line ministries in TVET delivery. This body should encompass members from different ministries. This body should be kept 'in the loop' of delivery of TVET, whether formal or informal and report to MLVT.

More frequent professional development opportunities for TVET trainers, particularly with cooperation from development partners to increase trainers' exposure to current work practice and technological know-how during their employment as trainers.

Cooperation between TVET and higher education in the creation of a bridging course for credit transfer. This mechanism already exists in the Qualification Framework, but universities are not implementing it on the basis that TVET and higher education focuses on different things. Hence, a bridging course would serve as a means to get students ready to permeate into universities, even if they were initially not qualified for entry due to failing or dropping out of high school.

In addition, an information-sharing portal should also be adopted. As private or NGO providers may have different curricula compared to public TVET institutions, a centralized learning outcome should be made available. With the creation of this portal, stakeholders should be able to view what direction MLVT is setting for TVET and adjust their syllabi accordingly.

Finally, budgeting for TVET should be made more transparent, particularly on how much each of the 39 institutes receive. The boards of TVET institutions should also be well-informed on budget implementation and monitoring.

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# ***Policy Brief Seven***

**Youth Engagement in Cambodian Politics  
through Facebook**

*By: CHEA Sameang*





## ***I. Executive Summary***

- Facebook is one of the most essential social media platforms in Cambodia with over 6.8 million users including youth as of 2018. The platform permits the quick transmission of data and allows users to communicate their viewpoints openly.
- Despite the rise in Cambodian youths' engagement through Facebook, truly free expression, criticism, and the sharing of political discussions and analysis regarding political issues on Facebook remains limited and challenging.
- Cambodian youth have long been neglected and marginalized in politics due to barriers related to law enforcement and limitations in terms of political literacy and knowledge.
- Facebook can potentially become a medium for users to join different kinds of participatory activities, to leverage policy engagement and to demand transparency and accountability from the government.
- The over the vagueness of applying criminal code would only prevents youth from having a space to engage and participate in politics through Facebook, and the law would pose the risk of politically motivated persecution of legitimate exercises of freedom of expression.
- The self-censorship and limitation of knowledge regarding politic remains a crucial barrier for Cambodian youth to freely engage.
- By providing youth to have freely access and space to engage with political discussion, youth will be more responsible, and informed and their inject fresh perspectives and vital energy will impact into the policy-making processes.



## ***II. Introduction***

As of 2021, Cambodia has more than 17 million Internet users (Cambodia, 2021), and the engagement of youth through social media appears to be rising. Facebook is the online media platform of choice for Cambodian youth (Kimheng Hok, Mun Vong, 2017). Cambodian young people are using Facebook as a means of engaging with friends and family, a means of expressing their views, opinions, and ideas regarding social issues, and as an arena for voicing thoughts on initiatives the government should implement.

But even while there has been an increase in youth social media engagement through Facebook, when this engagement takes the form of criticism, political debate, political discussion, and analysis regarding political issues limits and challenges remain (DOYLE, 2021, p. 299).

The youth activists who dare to discuss politics have frequently facing the struggle of receiving warnings from authorities (Watch, 2020), and have faced accusations of causing chaos and instability in society (Panlatino, 2019). These threats and accusations push politically active youth to apply self-censorship or remain silent rather than talk publicly through their own Facebook profile.

In light of this, this policy brief will first discuss the barriers Cambodian youth face when it comes to engagement with political expression through Facebook. Second, the paper will show why youth engagement in politics is a matter of the utmost importance for the future of Cambodia's democracy. Third, this paper will propose recommendations that would address the factors holding political youth participation through Facebook back. This policy brief is based mainly on qualitative data which has been reviewed by the author. Diverse journal articles, national and local news media, national and international reports were also used for this analysis.



### ***III. The Current Status of Cambodian***

In general, there is no common definition for youth political participation across states as each state has its own value to define due to its social and economic condition. However, youth in Cambodia refers to people of both sexes between 15 and 30 years of age (MEYS, 2010). On the other hand, political participation has been defined similarly by both Jan W. Van Deth (Deth, 2016) and Huoyan SHYU as actions from private citizens seeking to influence or to support to government and politics directly or indirectly (SHYU, 2009). Thus, youth political participation mainly focuses on individual or collective activities taken by youths that seek to affect or impact the government's political agenda in both official and unofficial ways.

Cambodia's population is overwhelmingly young. More than 50 percent of the population is younger than 21, and 70 percent are under the age of 30 which is considered to be a new trend for the future of Cambodian political participation (UNDP, 2010). Studies have shown that youth can play a crucial role in the country's politics, and development can only progress when these young people can achieve full political participation (YANG Monyoudom, SO Hengvotey, LEANG Seakleng, 2020).

In addition, the rate at which youth are engaging through Facebook is also increasing. According to Geeks Cambodia, Facebook has become one of the most essential social media platforms in the country with over 6.8 million users including youth in 2018 (Geek, 2018). Facebook allows for the quick transmission of data and enables users to communicate their viewpoints uninhibitedly, to criticize government activities around social issues, and to request accountability from public authorities in order to try to shape their government for the better (Kimheng Hok, Mun Vong, 2017). Youth also tended to express their ideas and critiques through Facebook regarding political issues, governance issues, and environmental issues, yet the affordances of different platforms may shape the forms and styles of expression that young people use.

Cambodian youth have begun to learn and to share with each other by creating private groups as a way of having public discussions around political issues. Politikcoffee is an example of this type of private group. They share their views with each other via reliable sources and discuss what they think and what should be improved or reformed in Cambodian society. In the wake of the heated context around the 2013 Cambodia national election Facebook became particularly attractive to youth as a way to discuss and express their views of the political landscape (Kimheng Hok, Mun Vong, 2017).

However, the growing rates of youth participation in political expression have limits, and struggles and challenges remain particularly after the main opposite party Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) was closed. Those who dare to talk on this subject, write a song to criticize, and express through social media regarding their concern or critics on political agenda have been threatened with arrest and even imprisoned (Palatino, 2021).

## ***IV. Barriers to Youth Political Engagement through Facebook in Cambodia***

There are many barriers that block youth from having more space to engage in Cambodia politics through Facebook. However, this policy brief will only seek to understand two main barriers which limit youth engagement in Cambodian politics through Facebook. They are discussed below:

### ***4.1. Self-Censorship under Pressure from Cambodian Law***

The status of Cambodian youth engagement in social activities, especially civic engagement, has prompted the government to think of a better way to promote youth engagement in the national strategic plan (Ministry of education, 2011), as it is believed that youth engagement in political participation would bring peace through their positive contributions as young peace builders to society. However, Cambodian youth have long been neglected and marginalized in politics.

The Cambodian government voted to adopt a sub-decree on the Establishment of the National Internet Gateway (NIG), which centralizes internet traffic, enables the government to force internet service providers (ISPs) to block or restrict content, and increases the government's ability to monitor users' online activity. This law has raised critiques from legal analysts and from international human rights defenders (Center, 2021) that it would aim to regulate and monitor individual activities through social media in a way that could violate individuals' freedom of expression (Haffner, 2021). As a potential consequence, after the implementation of the NIG, individuals, especially youths, may be more fearful of accessing and sharing sensitive political issues. For example, the arrest of youth activists from Mother Nature Cambodia was also a result of leaked

conversations in which political issues were being discussed (Sovuthy, 2021). Thus, the vagueness of this provision will not only shrink the space youth have to engage with and actively participate in politics but it will also spread the risk of politically motivated persecution of legitimate exercises of freedom of expression (Center, 2021, p. 19).



A Licadho report in 2020 showed that 158 Cambodians have been arrested due to their online expression (Sorn Sarath, and Ngay Nai, 2021). In addition, a Cambodian Center for Human Rights report found that 108 restrictions to freedom of expression had been enacted by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC); 68 (or 63 percent) of these incidents also violated international human rights law (Human, 2020). Although, Facebook continues to be the online platform most frequently policed, with 46 restrictions of freedom of expression taking place on this social media platform in Year Five. According to the Freedom of Expression factsheet which was recently published by CCHR, between 1 January and 30 September 2021 online expression was regularly restricted: 79 per cent of restrictions and violations of freedom of expression occurred online, and Facebook was the most frequently policed platform (Right, 2021).

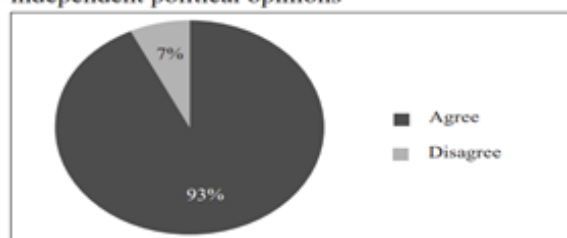
Social media users, especially youth, are afraid to post messages and either make attempts to self-censor (House, 2021) or prefer to keep silent altogether to avoid restrictions and potential arrest as a result of their political expression. Thus, with all these challenges it is obvious the space is limited for youth to freely express what they think is right for society. This also affects young people's freedom to think and express themselves, which is enshrined and supported in article 41 and article 35 of the Cambodian Constitution.

## 4.2. Limitations of Youth Political Knowledge and Literacy

Facebook offers a platform for youth to be able to interact with the wider society and offers an effective channel to deliver civic education in a more entertaining and informal way to inspire a diverse and dynamic youth population across Cambodia. However, youth critical thinking skills and knowledge-based understanding of political affairs, as well as political literacy are still not widely spread and recognized.

Even at school, youth have been banned from talking about or discussing politics (Dara, 2015). One survey study which was conducted by CDRI which polled 1,600 randomly selected respondents from Phnom Penh and five provinces (Battambang, Kampot, Stung Treng, Svay Rieng, and Kampong Cham) found that youth reported feeling limitations on their online and offline political freedom which could potentially hinder their acquisition of political knowledge, and only 65 percent and 20 percent of youth respectively provided correct answers to the two political knowledge questions on politicians and institutions (YANG Monyoudom, SO Hengvotey, LEANG Seakleng, 2020).

Figure 5: Youth views on importance of having independent political opinions



Note: Number of observations = 398

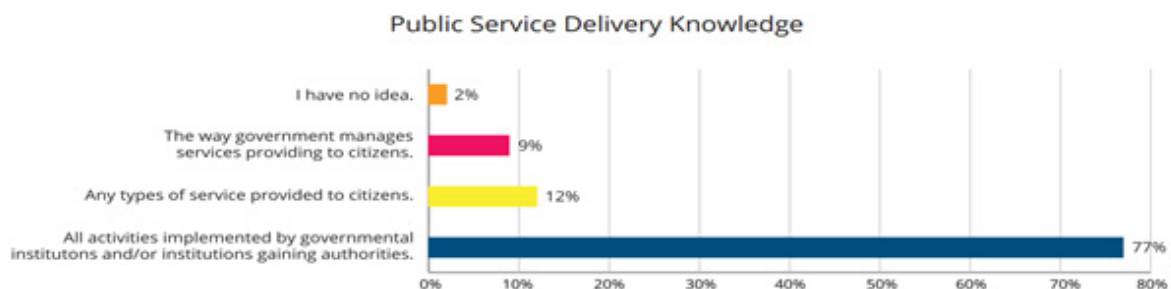
Figure 6: Youth perceived online and offline political freedom



Note: Number of observations = 398



Moreover, according to a report in a survey of 2,000 young respondents aged 15-24 many youths who heard about human rights, democracy, and civic engagement were not able to define these concepts (UNDP, BBC Media Action, 2014). One report showed that 83 per cent of respondents answered correctly while only 17 per cent answered wrong regarding the definition of governance (Makara Vorn, and You Y Ly, 2016, p. 124). In addition, the report also showed that while 92 per cent of youth had heard of commune councils, nearly a third of those youth who were aware of commune councils did not know what they do. The report also added that only one-fourth of the respondents were aware of the meaning of transparency, and 10 per cent were aware of the term political accountability (UNDP, BBC Media Action, 2014). According to one report from Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Cambodia (KAS), we surveyed 150 respondents, around 55 per cent of whom were 15 to 30-year-olds, only 77 per cent of respondents were able to define public service delivery correctly (Makara Vorn, and You Y Ly, 2016).



*Figure 3: Perceived definition of 'Public Service Delivery' by respondents*

This limited of knowledge regarding politics and political institutions, and the lack of understanding regarding themes of transparency, the concept of human rights, the ideas of democracy, and public service delivery could also be a source of challenges and barriers to these youth when it comes to having the confidence to use their freedom and expression regarding political participation through Facebook.



## ***V. Why does it Matter for Youth to Engage through Facebook?***

Facebook has the potential to become a medium for users to join different kinds of participatory activities, to leverage policy engagement and to demand transparency and accountability from their government. Moreover, Cambodian youth use Facebook to create visibility around issues related to governmental mismanagement, to share news, and to express opinions about injustice, or poor public service delivery to the wider public and to governmental officials. Two reasons underpin this belief:

First, youth will be more responsible and informed. When there is free space for youth to engage in politics by consuming or sharing ideas related to what the government should or and should not undertake, whether it's on Facebook pages or even on the accounts of officials or ministers, youth will become significantly more involved in shaping policies that will affect them today and well into the future.

When youth can freely express their points of view, then they will understand more clearly the role of government in relation to good governance. But at the moment there is a low number of those who are exercising these rights due to self-censorship or sensitive criticism. The KAS survey, for instance, found that the numbers of youth who dare to express their opinions regarding critiques of the government remain low due their fear of sensitive criticism (Makara Vorn, and You Y Ly, 2016, p. 124). And if youth are able to freely engage by expressing their active concerns through Facebook, then they will get even better at expressing their opinions, critiquing governance and demanding better governance.

Second, youth can inject fresh perspectives and vital energy into the policy-making processes – this is seen as a matter of efficacy to improve space for youth to be engaging in politics. As the KAS study showed, expressing opinions on public issues remains important for democratic society as it empowers political engagement (Makara Vorn, and You Y Ly, 2016). Thus, if youth are well-educated about politics, they will find a way to demand their rights and demand further accountability and transparency from the government. When there are complaints from citizens, the government might try to adjust. As the KAS study has shown, in example cases regarding issues around drugs and car accidents in which youth were raising concerns through government Facebook pages in the form of comments, the government made an effort to respond (Makara Vorn, and You Y Ly, 2016, p. 119).

Third, Political knowledge has a strong significant positive relationship with education and media consumption. When it comes to improving quality of life, it is essential to inspire literate people to search for alternative solutions to enhance and address issues in their society and to be proactively participating in community development. The over-enforcement of the law and the threats to youth which result in self-censorship will only make it more likely that youth are neglected and not invested in addressing the issues Cambodian society faces. And, the over-vagueness of law enforcement (criminal code article 495 and 496) will not allow youth to have space to engage and actively participate in politics through Facebook, but the law would increase the risk of politically-motivated persecution of legitimate freedom of expression.



## ***VI. Conclusion***

The potential for youth to engage through Facebook is growing, however, their engagement through sharing criticism, participating in political debate, sharing political discussion on Facebook remains limited and challenging. Barriers, such as over-application of laws such as the Cambodia's National Internet Getaway, as well as limited levels of understanding among youth regarding issues related to politics, including concepts such as transparency, human rights and democracy, and lack of understanding on the roles of political institutions cause Cambodian youth to practice self-censorship or to remain silent on Facebook.

### **6.1. Policy Implications**

To promote and support youth political participation on social media, especially on Facebook, which could help to stimulate policy-making through informal dialogue between youth and the government, some recommendations should be considered:

A. The authorities should not over-apply article 495 and 496 of the criminal code to prevent online peaceful critiques by citizens who make public demands to hold the government responsible, but rather authorities should support and encourage or educate them to use their rightful voice in the rightful way.

B. Relevant NGOs should coordinate with groups like the politikcoffee team to conduct more trainings on topics related to democracy and political literacy to allow basic knowledge around political literacy to be more widespread to all universities students and encourage youth to be more actively engaged in political activities.

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# ***Policy Brief Eight***

**Way Forward Adopting Circular  
Economy in Cambodia**

*By: CHOURN Visal*



## ***I. Introduction***

A circular economy is a production and consumption system that emphasizes product recycling, re-use, repair, remanufacturing, as well as sharing, and promotes changing consumer behavior, new business models, and processes (Vence & Pereira, 2018). In this policy brief, which was done as a result of a review of multiple reports and studies, provides insights into what Cambodia has done and what the country can do to move closer to having a circular economy

ASEAN policy makers committed to reviewing and reforming their respective economies in late 2021 through their adoption of the Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) on 21 October 2021. The long-term goals of this framework prioritize a resilient economy, resource efficiency, and sustainable and inclusive growth (ASEAN, 2021). This new framework allows ASEAN member states to revise their economic transition toward a circular economy based on five strategic priorities:

1. Standard harmonization and mutual recognition of circular products and services;
2. Trade openness and trade facilitation in circular goods and services;
3. Enhanced role of innovation, digitalization, and emerging/green technologies;
4. Competitive sustainable finance and innovative ESG Investments; and
5. Efficient use of energy and other resources.

This paper aims to provide an overview of Cambodia's preparedness to move to this circular economy and provides policy options for promoting this circular economy for sustainable development. This can be answered by searching for evidence to address the following questions:

1. How can a circular economy ensure sustainable economic growth in ASEAN?
2. Are there any policies or existing program initiatives for adopting this circular economy in Cambodia?
3. What are the strategic options for Cambodia to promote this circular economy?



## ***II. Awareness of the Benefit of the Circular Economy***

Governments and companies in ASEAN are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of adopting a circular economic model. Three main benefits for it stand out; 1) energy reduction, 2) financial returns and 3) environmental impact and reduced global warming. The Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) states that while circular initiatives have already existed in the AEC, most program initiatives in ASEAN tend to focus only on environmental perception, with limited focus on potential impacts on trade, technological innovations, and financial markets, thus ASEAN must prioritize energy reduction and financial returns as an incentive and a bridge towards adopting a circular economy.

Firstly, a circular economy provides opportunities for the financial sector to deliver on promises related to climate change as well as other corporate governance objectives that answer to environmental and social needs, while venturing out into better growth and long-term value generation.

In a 2018 research report by ERIA, the World Economic Forum estimated that only 20 percent of global materials, equal to US\$3.2 trillion, are recovered, while 80 percent are lost to the 'take-make-use-dispose' model used traditionally in the linear economy. This is a shocking statistic that should alarm all policymakers and truly shows what a pressing issue this is. (Anbumozhi, 2018).

Many institutions and international organizations are pushing forward with the circular economy concept which is gaining more attention as it will help decrease resource extraction and waste flows, minimize environmental impacts, and support countries to move towards more sustainable development. The level of sustainable consumption and awareness among ASEAN citizens is still extremely low, and actions must be taken now considering the recent reports about consumption trends in the region.

According to the Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), by 2030 consumption in ASEAN will double to nearly 4 trillion dollars. By transitioning to circular economy, ASEAN will increase its competitiveness, enhance innovation, and promote green jobs. Many businesses have already benefited from the circular approach in ASEAN, improving customer satisfaction, reducing energy use, reducing cost of waste, enhancing brand recognition, lengthening customer relationships and increasing sales



### ***III. Current Circular Economy in ASEAN***

The emphasis and shift should be in the technological realm and as well as in waste management systems. The research and development sector should be strengthened with suitable policies. In terms of ASEAN countries' preparedness for circular economy adoption, technological readiness, innovation and sophistication factors are necessary. A circular economy is restorative and aims to maintain the utility and value of products, components, and materials. It thus minimizes the need for new inputs of materials and energy while reducing environmental pressures linked to resource extraction, emissions, and waste. In the circular economy, natural resources are managed efficiently and sustainably throughout their life cycles.

In findings done by (Anbumozhi, 2018) Myanmar almost has no potential for Industry 4.0, while Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam have the least potential. Meanwhile, Singapore is highly competitive with other developed economies like Japan and Germany and has the most potential for Industry 4.0. Malaysia tends to have medium potential while Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand have low potential for Industry 4.0.

Singapore has a unique position within ASEAN and Cambodia should take note of several of its key policies, specifically its Zero Waste Masterplan which Singapore adopted in regards to Circular Economy. It is likely that such policies will be reproduced in other ASEAN countries with the Singapore Green Label or the Singapore Green Mark Scheme considered benchmarks for the region. Furthermore, Singapore has taken concrete steps and stepped up its efforts to ensure that the country has made a foray into the field of circularity more recently.

Of all the steps that Singapore has taken, ones that are noteworthy for Cambodia to look to follow are steps in integrated planning approach to current laws and policies as well as dynamic urban governance i.e. engaging with the public, industry, and other stakeholders. Moreover, Singapore's policy framework is aligned with its emphasis on resilience.

Two plans stand out; the Climate Change Action Plan and the recent Zero Waste Master Plan will lay the foundations for increasing circularity in Singapore. Specifically, the Zero Waste Master Plan sets targets, such as 30 percent reduction in waste to landfill by 2035, and a 70 percent overall recycling rate. In conjunction with these grand master strategic plans, the Resource Sustainability Act 2019 provides legislative support, mandating specific reduction and reporting requirements for e-waste, food waste, and packaging waste.

The biggest steps that Cambodia that take to follow in this path would be to introduce EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) for e-waste and packaging waste. This has proven to be a big steps in terms of reorganizing financing and organizing collection, sorting and recycling of waste.



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## ***IV. A Few Pilot Initiatives of Circular Economy in Cambodia***

In the context of development in Cambodia, the country is slowly moving towards a digital and green economy. The way forward for Cambodia is to fully realize the Green Growth policies and slowly introduce circular economy to policymakers and as well as to the business community.

Currently, Cambodia has developed the Cambodia National Policy on Green Growth (2013-2020) that aims to strike a balance between economic development and environmental preservation. Further talks on the circular economy are being brought up more frequently in national conferences in conjunction with UNDP and other development agencies as well as foreign embassies. The first major consultative workshop was held between National Council for Sustainable Development, local municipalities and UNDP to draft the “Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan.”

Pilot programs in waste management have started with the Scoping Study Report on Solid Waste Management in Kep province. Cambodia, being dependent on tourism as part of its economic growth, can start collecting more waste and recycling more effectively in order to fully take a step further towards circular economy. There is a daily variation in waste management of roughly 10 tons between peak and off-peak tourist seasons in Kep, with off-peak generation estimated at between 45 and 51 tons per day and generation during peak season estimated to be 55 tons per day.

A key challenge in Kep province waste management is linked to low rates of waste collection, as well as decentralization challenges that exist between the national and sub-national levels. Sub-decree No. 113 of Management of Garbage and Solid Waste of Municipalities officially dictates that solid waste management is left to authorities at the district and municipal levels. The root cause of this stems from the lack of contracts between provincial authorities with private companies. And at the national level, there seems to be a lack of data on the current situation of waste management contractual arrangements on both sub-national and national level, as well as un-coordinated M&E on sub-national authority waste management. Specifically, the challenges of non-compliance by district and municipal authorities regarding implementation and spending of Sub-National Authority Sanitation Service Funds coupled with a lack of contractual agreements with the waste collection service provider exacerbate the difficulties in waste collection.

Moving forwards, in order to tackle this issue head-on, Cambodia can consider an approach to reform these 5 key areas: governance focusing on M&E for management and operational improvement, decentralized technology and systems, a full waste collection service coverage and landfill improvement, role of informal sector, and education & awareness.



## ***V. Moving Forward to Circular Economy***

Under the ASEAN Vision 2040, environmental and sustainability issues are gaining more recognition. The circular economy through the 3R approach is gaining momentum in ASEAN with Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam planning to achieve better waste management and integrate better policies and plans. Cambodia and Laos are also aspiring to adopt proactive policies on waste management. Singapore is the only country that has been able to fully and successfully adopt 3Rs.

Some good practices for SE Asia moving forward toward realizing CE could be minimizing the use of resources, reusing products, prioritizing sustainable design, improving system efficiency and minimizing system externalities. As we look ahead to the future, the impact of the digital economy and industry 4.0 cannot be overlooked. Countries should look to utilize new technologies to improve our consumption and production habits but most importantly to improve the sustainability of our resources. And by partnering with other external partners and private institutions we can create better dialogues and partnerships and innovative investment platforms for future financing and business opportunities.

The European business communities are looking to ASEAN for more and more trade opportunities and the knowledge around circular economy practices there can be shared with partners in ASEAN, by opening doors to diverse opportunities in the Europe-ASEAN Corridor. The European business communities are looking to ASEAN for more and more trade opportunities and the knowledge around circular economy practices there can be shared with partners in ASEAN, by opening doors to diverse opportunities in the Europe-ASEAN Corridor. 'Borderless Business: Europe-ASEAN corridor', a business strategic point-of-view assigned by Standard Chartered and prepared by PwC outlines the main opportunity sectors as well as key factors for European companies to drive sustainable and

resilient growth. At the policy level, the EU not only financially supports the ASEAN Smart Green Cities Initiative, but also works with individual members on ecofriendly policies, such as Thailand's Bio-Circular Green Economic Model and Singapore's Green Plan 2030. In moving forward, the main strategic focus gained from this report can be summed as more investments in smart cities and prioritizing clean energy for ASEAN growing consumptions.



## ***VI. Policy Recommendations Economy in Cambodia Economy***

- Integration into ASEAN: AEC Blueprint 2025 attempts to address the need for resource-efficient technology, energy efficiency, and sustainability. In order to accelerate this, policymakers should design policies that are beneficial to innovation and dynamic growth
- Digital Economy as part of Green Growth and Circular Economy: ASEAN member countries will need to adopt regional cooperation on science and technology through grant funding or through other means.
- Mobilize more resources for a public-private partnership, including economic incentives to promote waste separation as part of the circular economy.

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# ***Policy Brief Nine***

**Strengthening Sub-national Service  
Delivery through Public Participation**

*By: RETH Vicheka*



## ***Abstract***

- This brief aims to point out the ways in which public participation can strengthen public service delivery in Cambodia and to examine the challenges of integrating public participation at the sub-national level.
- In addition, this brief will also point out the benefits of public participation in sub-national administration.
- This brief will also examine the ways Cambodia's legal framework might support public participation in sub-national administration and explore the initiatives sub-national administration has undertaken to encourage people to participate.
- This brief will also provide recommendations to improve public participation at the sub-national level.



## ***Introduction***

Public participation, or citizen participation, refers to the involvement of members of the public in societal governance, which provides individual citizens with an opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been considered as a component of the democratic decision-making process (Josie, 2012). Participation is the cornerstone of good governance. Citizen participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives (Addink, 2019). Emphasis on public participation in government is growing more common throughout the world. In many countries, local laws and regulations may even require public involvement and comment on government actions. The laws of some countries require even more extensive forms of public engagement and input.

Cambodia is currently in the 2nd stage of the process of decentralization reform, and at this moment citizen participation in public service delivery is particularly crucial (Kimchoeun, 2011). The primary duty of the sub-national administration is to perform any necessary public services and to take responsibility for those services and other local affairs to meet the needs of the people (Eng, 2014). In the first term of commune council, citizens have many dissatisfactions regarding their performance and activity. In the second term, the overall performance of commune councils towards citizens has seen some improvement, the decision making, planning processes and public service delivery of commune councils have been strengthening to promote democratic principles (Comfrel Report in 2013).



The sub-national administration performance and their concerns are more on local demand, indicating that reducing the gap between the government and the people needs further communications. Furthermore, even with their limited capacity, commune councils still largely committed to addressing local disputes while ensuring peace and safety in their jurisdictions. Through the use of government direct funding, the commune councils have so far improved physical infrastructure, most notably the roads in rural areas, however, their contribution to social services still lags far behind.

This brief will explore the concept of public participation and attempt to answer some fundamental questions by conducting a desk review. To do this, this brief uses a mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative methods will form the basis for the methodology of this research. The author will review and analyze secondary data, such as government strategies, policy frameworks, and published reports from partner organizations.

## ***II. Findings***

### **2.1. The Benefits of Public Participation in Sub-national Administration**

There are at least four key benefits of involving the public in governance. First, it can bring better governance by strengthening democratic legitimacy, increasing interest and engagement in politics, strengthening accountability, and stimulating active citizenship. Second, public participation (PP) can reduce social exclusion, limiting the multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, which involves the separation of groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and prevents them from full participation in their daily activities of the society. Indeed PP can help build relationships, community cohesion, justice and equity. Through shared decision-making, people can be more involved in decisions, and the risks or the benefits of alternative choices can be explained in detail (André et al., 2006; Berman, 2016). Public involvement in decision-making suggests an attitudinal shift in society towards greater individual autonomy and choice (Yang & Ott, 2016). Third, PP can encourage better and more efficient public services to meet the community's needs. The objective is to provide a basis for future growth and development. Fourth, PP decreases the probability of barriers originating from the interactions among various actors. They can occur at any stage in the decision-making process and derive from conflicting institutional, legal and financial interactions/requirements of actors (e.g., jurisdictional conflicts between national and local institutions) and be associated with achieving acceptance by stakeholders on possible courses of action (Macaulay et al., 2011).

## 2.2. Legal Framework Support of Public Participation in Sub-national Administration

The legal and regulatory framework is the backbone for sub-national administration as it provides the rules of operation regarding administrative, political, and financial mechanisms (Brooks et al., 2010). Between 2007 and 2011, more than 192 legal instruments were issued in order to implement the law on commune/sangkat administration, the law on province, municipality, district and khan and D&D policy (NCDD, 2012). In 2012, nine legal and policy documents were developed which include the Sub-Decree on General Processes of Transfer of Functions and Resources to the Sub-National Administrations (NCDD, 2019). Other important documents are the Sub-decree on the DM Fund and several guidelines on predominantly financial management issues which have been completed by NCDD-S in collaboration with respective ministries.

Based on the commune law, commune councils are elected to deliver administrative services, mediate local conflicts and maintain law and order within their jurisdiction (Cambodia Government, 2001). Moreover, commune councils are meant to assume primary responsibility for local economic activities as well as social development in their communities. To this extent, the commune law also gives commune councils the power to handle local affairs regarding meeting the basic needs and serving the common interests of the people. Furthermore, the law recognizes that in promoting local development, commune council can act either as representatives of a local political constituency to implement their own policies and programs with their own resources, or to implement policies and programs defined or funded by higher-level authorities. To prevent unfunded mandates, the law also stipulates that any government agency requesting commune council to carry out administrative or developmental functions on their behalf, should ensure that the commune council has the capacity and is able to obtain the necessary financial means to implement such functions.

## 2.3. Commune Activities to Encourage Citizen Participation

### 2.3.1. *Monthly meeting*

According to the Commune Administration Law, commune councils are required to hold regular monthly meetings with all councilors. The law intends for these meetings to be open to the public, although councilors have the right to hold additional closed meetings at their discretion. It seems, however, that meetings have been held on a less regular basis, particularly since the national elections. In some instances, meetings are being held only every other month. With regard to participation in the meeting in Sangkat Phar Kandal two, for instance, an invitation or a notification would be sent to the citizens by the village chief (Cambodia Government, 2001).

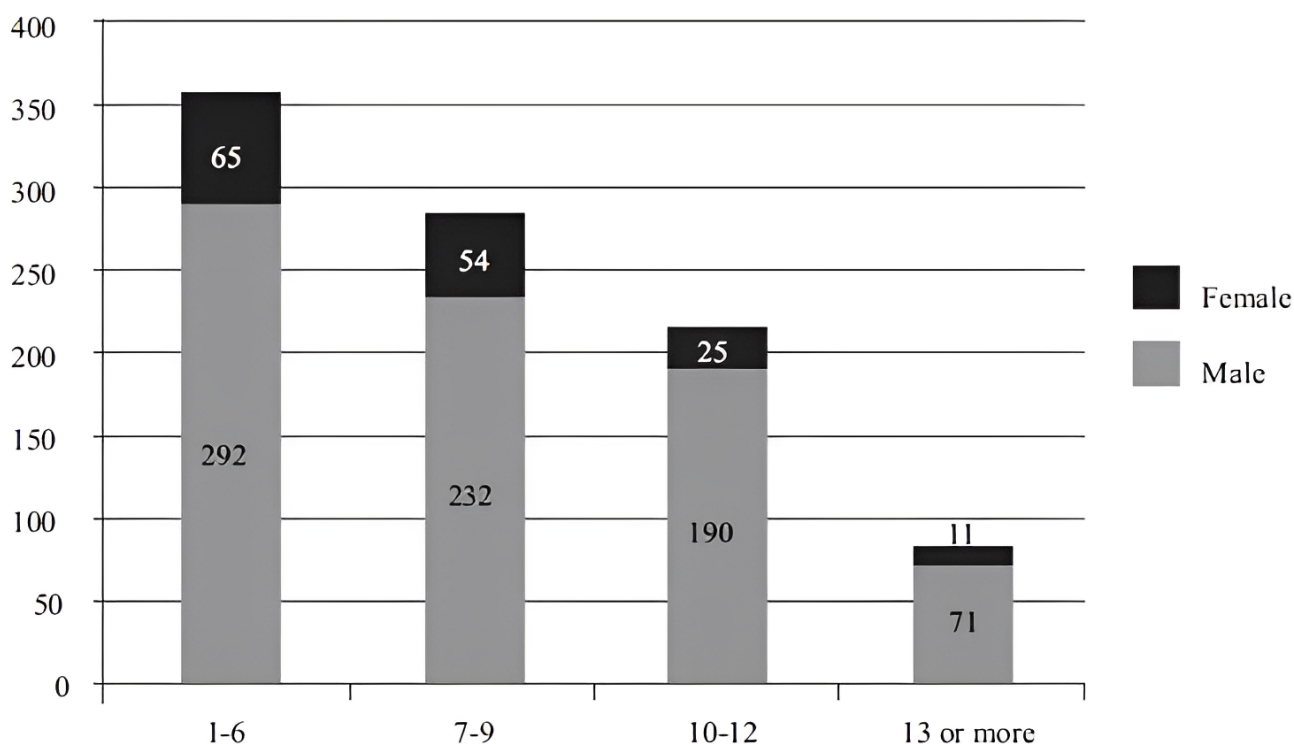
### 2.3.2. *Reporting and dissemination of information*

Commune councils usually indicate that village chiefs receive copies of council monthly meeting minutes and that the information in these is disseminated at village meetings. However, many villagers still do not receive or have not heard of reports from the council meetings (NCDD, 2011). Sangkat Phar Kandal has two information boards to post any information of interest to residents. Although the level of literacy is high, a surprisingly large number of people often do not stop and look at information boards even if they can read. This emphasizes the importance for information to be presented in a form that is available to villagers who are illiterate or neo-literates. The majority of councilors have yet to understand that posting information can be a way to build a connection with commune residents and raise the profile of the councilors.

## 2.4. The challenges that have hindered effective public participation in sub-national administration

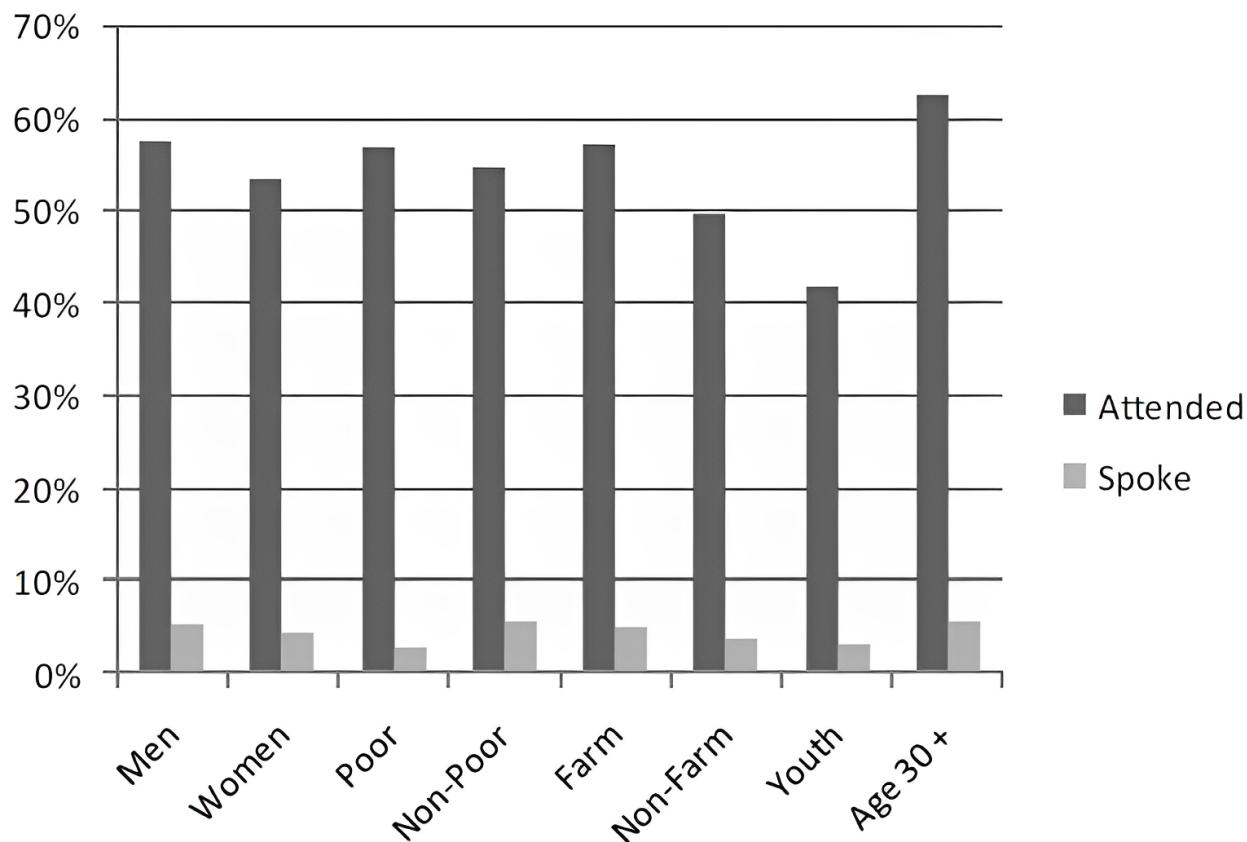
Historically, one of the main challenges identified by many organizations that hinders public participation has been staff capacity (Siddiqui, Strickler, & Vinde, P, 2004). Research would indicate that, to some extent, this is still true. A survey from 2017 by CDRI shows that many commune councilors have a low level of education. Over half of the 532 participants surveyed received between one to six years of education, 30 percent between seven to nine years, 13 percent between 10-12 years, and only 2 percent 13 years or more. Of course, a low education level may not necessarily translate into poor performance, however, a low educational background may affect capacity to develop public engagement activity action plans as well as financial plans.

**Figure 1: Commune councilor's education level**



The second primary issue is the councilors' lack of understanding about their obligation to inform citizens. From a citizen's point of view, councilors are only slightly more aware of the rights of citizens to attend council meetings and to examine documents at the commune office. In line with this, a survey regarding citizen satisfaction at the commune level shows that many citizens, as much as 80 percent of them, strongly disagreed with the councilor claim that they understand the citizen's right to be inform. In another section of that same questionnaire, councilors were asked to evaluate the statement that citizens should have an invitation before attending a commune council meeting with 65 percent of councilors saying they strongly agreed with this statement and only 15 percent strongly disagreeing. Moreover, over 90 percent of councilors strongly agreed with the citizens' rights to know the time, subject and outcomes of council meetings and with their right to know about the council's financial affairs (Vicheka, 2019).

A third challenge is the lack of effort from citizens when it comes to participating in sub-national administration activities. In the citizen satisfaction survey (2017), citizens of the target communes were more likely to attend planning meetings and more likely to speak in the meetings than citizens of the non-target communes. The difference was small but statistically significant. Members of households earning their livelihoods from agriculture or natural resources activities ("farm households") are somewhat more active participants than non-farmers. Young people are significantly less likely to participate in and speak in meetings than their elders (Figure 3). This latter difference is related to age not status in the household: only 49 percent of young household heads had attended a meeting as compared with 80 percent of household heads over the age of 30.



The fourth challenge to public participation is related to the complicated funding process. According to the Commune Administration Law, commune councils have the right to formulate their own budget and development plans, but they still need to follow strict rules and regulations provided by the government. In the budget law, there is a section about the subnational level in every year, but the Ministry of Interior is the only Ministry that distributes those budgets to every Sangkat, but not all Sangkat can have the same budget. The budgeted amount that one Sangkat can receive from the government largely depends on the size of Sangkat, the population of the Sangkat and the amount of tax revenue that each Sangkat can generate.

Furthermore, the system of transferring this budget amount from the central government to the Sangkat by the Ministry of Interior is largely dysfunctional. Budget resources are divided into two categories—obligatory and permissive. Obligatory functions are linked to conditional grants and permissive functions are linked to unconditional grants. These categories have added unnecessary complexity to the transfers system. Budget resources at subnational administration levels are scarce and delivered poorly; it is misleading to divide budget resources into these two levels—obligatory and permissive. Scarcity of resources in relation to needs would suggest that only very high-priority matters should make it to the approved budget stage at subnational administration levels (Heng et al., 2011; Seiha et al., 2011).



### ***III. Recommendation***

To address the challenges raised in this brief, the government should consider the following recommendations:

- Ongoing capacity-building for commune councilors should be provided as it critical for the implementation of their responsibilities, especially when it comes to planning and budgeting.
- Financial support for citizen participation should be a collaborative effort among all the key stakeholders, with public resources playing a major role. In this respect, the commune council should partner with the Khan and municipality to fund citizen participation. This should be done as a matter of obligation rather than as a means of insinuating a controlling hand into the domain of citizen participation. Furthermore, the central government must provide more resources to the communes and elaborate a framework which clearly indicates the service delivery roles communes can or should take on, and how such commune roles relate to those of other established, or emerging, service providers (like government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector).
- In order for accountability to be real, effective enforcement mechanisms must accompany the policy frameworks, statutory provisions, and by-laws that will be required to anchor it within the domains of binding rules, the infringement of which will attract deterrent actions by legitimate authorities on behalf of the people but not for tendentious political competition.

- Sub-national administration should create more activities to reach out to citizens and reduce the complexity of how citizen can participate.
- Sub-national administration should improve the means of spreading information to the citizen to increase citizen awareness and transparency.



## ***IV. Conclusion***

Overall, this brief shows that the challenges related to citizen participation and improving public service delivery are matters that are relevant to citizens and commune councilors alike. Sub-national administration is more active and performs a wider range of activities than is generally assumed. While the overall capacity of these councils remains limited, sub-national administrations are acquiring basic administrative skills and they are participating in general development and problem-solving activities to improve the welfare of the communities they represent. More importantly, they are developing a tangible sense of ownership and responsibility for their activities and a sense of control over what happens in their areas.

It is also evident that public participation is the key in improving the quality of sub-national administration and enhancing public service delivery. Public participation has played a key role in the financial systems and in the development plans of communes as they have the power to formulate and collect their own tax on top of the budget that they receive from the central government. Furthermore, in all development planning processes, citizens have played a role in terms of monitoring as well as providing suggestions in cases where those plans affect citizen livelihoods. It is also important for the commune councils to collaborate with the central government and other private sector entities to step up civic education on this crucial aspect of good governance.

In addition, it is important that the challenges identified above such as staff capacity, lack of councilor understanding regarding their obligations to inform citizens, lack of proper engagement activities, commune councilor perceptions about participation from citizens as a low priority, lack of effort from citizens to participate, impatience and expectation of instant results, corruption, as well as complicated funding processes are addressed by the relevant bodies at both the sub-national and central government levels.

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