



Op-Ed Series

The Need to Promote Research in Contemporary Cambodia

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July 09, 2020

Introduction

It is now an appropriate time for Cambodia to take research work more seriously, as the country is at the crossroad in the difficult journey towards sustainable development for a cohesive and prosperous society fully integrated in the region of Southeast Asia and beyond.

Cambodia has emerged well and passed through different stages of its nascent development. As such, research is becoming increasingly important to help the country seize new opportunities and navigates the unknown challenges more effectively during the crucial period of rebuilding the nation.

Research is a well-known discipline that can be used as an effective tool for building knowledge, facilitate learning, understand and increase public awareness on various important issues, and most importantly assist policy makers to make an informed decision on matters most important to national development. Research can provide strategic options for the country to steer clear of dangers that might be imposed unnecessarily.

Although the debate on the use of research results for policy decision-making and implementation processes is not new and its features have changed over time, the issue has gained greater distinction in Cambodia in recent years, following the major processes of world change that have increasingly called for concrete evidence to support or challenge the statecraft that is implemented in a variety of contexts, including the system of government and its foreign policy.

The need to promote research in Cambodia

In a modern era of the rapidly changing regional and global environment where fierce competition and limited opportunities exist, what Cambodia needs preeminently is to realize the right institutional reforms, backed up by credible research and development studies on various important

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and relevant subjects critical to the national development process. Therefore, it is absolutely relevant to promote and encourage local policy research that would motivate and facilitate the transition toward becoming a progressive nation where the government is the prime actor which spearhead all aspects of national development in consistent with the aspiration of all citizens of Cambodia.

Going forward into the future, it is anticipated that Cambodia, like the region of Southeast Asia, will face a myriad of challenges that result from economic, social and demographic growth, ecological shortfalls, and harsher political security environment. As such, strong, credible and evident-based research is especially needed to safeguard a good future and maintain peace and prosperity for all citizens to enjoy. One might consider the urgency of a strong research community in the context of increased globalization and competition, environmental degradation, and the rise of traditional and non-traditional security threats that could result in the unavoidable tradeoffs of public policy on an everyday basis.

In the next 10 years, Cambodia clearly needs a healthy and vibrant research community that are supported by the state and international community and work in tandem with all state apparatus. The characteristics of such a community are based on high academic capacities, proactive project development, enabling contexts for dissemination practices, legitimate and independent platforms for information and knowledge exchanges, and active epistemic communities or professional societies.

There are plenty of evidence worldwide suggesting that well-conducted research is vital and can contribute notably to the process of nation-building. Not only does research form the foundation of program development and policies all over the world, but it can also be translated into effective tools to help policymakers to take informed views and relevant decisions on matters critical to the national interest.



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Research draws its power from the fact that it is based on empirical evidence rather than merely theorizing about what might be effective or what could work.

Researchers go out to the fields and design studies that give policymakers hard data on which they can base their decision. Furthermore, good research produces results that are examinable by peers, methodologies that can be replicated, and knowledge that can be applied to real world situations.

In short, research enables the transformation of different perspectives into various shapes and forms of viewpoints from which a comprehensive approach can be created to enhance our knowledge of how best to address national, regional and international problems.

Benefits of research

The benefits of credible research works are many. The following are a few that are relevant in the Cambodian context where daunting challenges remain stern.

Carrying out research helps explain why things happen, which allows for progress with workable solutions. Research helps advance Cambodian society for the better. For instance, research can produce creative solutions for reforms, methods for improving livelihood, and ways to increase productivity.

Conducting research is matching a problem which needs to be solved with the required knowledge which may be used to solve that problem. Without the right match, the problem remains unsolved for a long time or cannot be solved altogether. Having said this, the state, universities and think tank institutions need to encourage a proper proportion of young scholars with qualified knowledge and skills to become interested in doing research works that are helpful to the country's further development. In the case of Cambodia, efforts to promote research should be directed to finding solutions of urgent national problems – inequality, weak governance, sustainable and inclusive growth, and external influence, just to name a few – and they should be ample support for the conduct of such research studies.

Research output provides a voice that is independent, transparent, evident-based as well as proactive in creating opportunities to improve a particular field of study. For example, a research result of a specific subject related to trade and industry usually entails the benefits of employment and enhanced economic activities for the population as well.

Research can provide viable options and alternative views for policymakers seeking to tackle endemic challenges or implementing reforms that are "Cambodia-specific" and avoiding "one size fits all" policies that are not necessarily relevant for Cambodia.

Key conditions for a striving research culture

For research culture to thrive in Cambodia, key conditions must be fulfilled to influence and motivate scholars who seek to invest their time and effort in research.

First, there must be well defined strategic goals for research ethos to prosper among stakeholders, be it the government, university or academic institutions, which aspire to promote research and development works in Cambodia.

Second, these stakeholders must continuously assist Cambodian researchers to fulfill their mission and overcome challenges such as lack of exposure to the right knowledge and methodological aspects of research; lack of access to supervisory support to ensure that the research project is manageable; unseen barriers, particularly if the research topic is controversial or sensitive; lack of access to resources, be it qualitative or quantitative literatures and lack of ability to find research grants and funding. They can also provide support when it comes to choosing a right and doable research topic.

Third, it is important to promote greater awareness to enhance local social, economic and political knowledge that ultimately transforms research into innovations to be used to shape policies required to implement development solutions that the country needs.

Finally, If Cambodia wants to gain more prominence and become a more progressive nation, like Singapore or South Korea, the government should take a lead in promoting the use of credible and independent research results for policy decision-making and implementation processes of major national development projects, including the making of sound foreign policy choices. Furthermore, to cultivate a vibrant research culture that grounds on informed actions and knowledge-based studies, the government, universities, and think tank institutions alike must create and nurture conducive environment for research and development to reverberate and direct their support toward scientific and technical research through grant-providing schemes or other appropriate incentives.

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About the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)

CICP is an independent, neutral, and non-partisan research institute based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. We aspire to become a leading institution in Cambodia and we are dedicated to the study of social, political and economic trends in both Cambodia and the region of Southeast Asia as a whole. Our mission is to cultivate broader interests concerning the development of Cambodia and promote wider attention among a community of scholars to engage in research within the fields of political science, international relations, history, peace building, and socio-economics studies in order to better understand the current and future prospects of the country and the region.

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