NATIONAL POLICY FORUM

CAMBODIA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY PATHWAYS

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Australian Aid

PONLOK CHOMNES

The Asia Foundation

NATIONAL POLICY FORUM

Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways

November 23-24, 2021
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments 6
Credits 7
Introduction 10
Welcoming Remarks 11
Opening Remarks 12
Keynote Address 14
Opening Plenary Discussion 16
Plenary Discussions on Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways 19
- Adoption of Technology in Higher Education 20
- The Role of Agricultural Labour in Economic Recovery Post COVID-19 24
- Urban Development, Socio-economic Changes in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic and Policy Development 27
- Cambodia Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Aspects and Perspectives 30
- Enhancing Cambodia's Post Covid-19 Recovery: How Foreign Policy Can Play a Role 34
- Social Inclusion in the Context of COVID-19 in Cambodia: Experiences from Emerging Knowledge Sector Actors 37

Women Researchers Platform: Impact of COVID-19 and Risk Mitigation on Vulnerable Groups: Empirical Results from Four Case Studies 48
- Policy Brief: Types and Implementation of Social Assistance under the Context of COVID-19: A Case of Garment and Textile Manufacturing in Cambodia 49
- Policy Brief: The Effectiveness of COVID-19 Social Protection in Cambodia: Perspective and Experience from Female Garment Workers on the Wage Subsidy 61
- Policy Brief: Personal Bankruptcy Law as an Entry Point for Credit Consumer Protection Dialogue 70
- Policy Brief: Tackling school-related gender-based violence through teacher professional development 81

The Role of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Principles in Informing Policy Decision 95
Conclusion 98
Annex 100
- Agenda 100
- Speakers and Moderators 105

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About Ponlok Chomnes

Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia is a four-year initiative (2019-2023) to strengthen the capacity of the knowledge sector and inform public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia. In partnership with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Asia Foundation is strengthening organizational and technical capacity among Cambodian research institutions and creating an enabling environment for policy dialogue.

About The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our work across the region is focused on good governance, women's empowerment and gender equality, inclusive economic growth, environment and climate action, and regional and international relations.

Credits

The Asia Foundation Team

Chap Sreyphea
Chea Sophearith
Chea Yorn
Chhay Darapheakdey
Diya Nag
Him Samnang
Himel Jazmyn
Hout Salinit
Lim Vichda
Ly Sopheary
Meloney Lindberg
Men Pechet
Min Samneang
Mouk Maelen
Nhoek Sreypichlita
Nop Navy
Pan Leaksmey
Prak Rathyrea
Sann Socheata
Sareth Srey Sroh
Sary Phirum
Sok Vannaroith
Sry Bopharath
Tes Sreyphin

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Center for Khmer Studies
Centre for Policy Studies
Future Forum

Emerging Research Partners

Affiliated Network for Social Accountability – Cambodia
Kampuchea Action to Promote Education
Khmer Association for Development of Countryside
Komar Rikreay Association
My Village Organization

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Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum
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Introduction

In Cambodia, various studies have been produced by local research institutes, think tanks, non-government organizations, and government institutions to inform decisions and policies that respond to the country's needs, particularly in the context of COVID-19. This crisis has made the task of developing highly effective public policies and government programs even more critical than ever. Timely data and analysis are vital in this situation to enable policymakers and development partners to make better decisions and to achieve better outcomes on health, security, social stability and inclusion, and economic resilience. The government has demonstrated an openness to data-informed approaches during the pandemic, a trend that the Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program aims to support.

Subsequently, Ponlok Chomnes' Core Partners and Emerging Research Partners have conducted various pieces of research that examine the impacts of COVID-19 on various sectors in Cambodia, including education, tourism, urban issues, the garment industry, economic issues, and others. The research provides on-the-ground and sophisticated data and contributes towards an increased and deeper understanding of the actual impacts of the pandemic on citizens as well as vulnerable groups.

The Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum is a platform for knowledge producers such as think tanks, academia, researchers, and other non-traditional research organizations to showcase their findings, discuss, exchange knowledge, and network with knowledge users, including policy makers and policy practitioners from state and non-state organizations who need knowledge to inform their policymaking for post-Covid-19 recovery.

The objectives of the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum (NPF) are to communicate research and data that responds to policy needs to better inform Cambodia's COVID-19 response, promote the knowledge exchange and policy discussion between policy makers and stakeholders that contribute to COVID-19 recovery plan, and create an enabling environment where knowledge sector actors meet to discuss and broaden their network to build a strong knowledge sector community in Cambodia.

The Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum: Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways booklet contains nine chapters, including Introduction; Welcome Remarks; Opening Remarks; Keynote Address; Opening Plenary Discussion on Cambodia's Knowledge Sector: Policymaking Process in Cambodia and Role of Think Tanks; Plenary Discussions on Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways; Women Researchers Platform: Impact of COVID-19 and Risk Mitigation on Vulnerable Groups: Empirical Results from Four Case Studies; The Role of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Principles in Informing Policy Decisions; and Conclusion.

Welcoming Remarks

Ms. Meloney C. Lindberg
Country Representative
The Asia Foundation

I am pleased to welcome you all for the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum 2021, a policy dialogue hosted by The Asia Foundation. This year, the National Policy Forum is focusing on Cambodia's COVID-19 recovery pathways, from the perspective of several diverse, but critical, broad sectors including socio-economic; education; gender and social inclusion; and foreign policy. This event is presented as part of the Foundation's "Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Policy Dialogue in Cambodia" program, with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Before we begin today's opening plenary session, I would like to take this opportunity to share some background about the Ponlok Chomnes Program. This is a four-year initiative which began in 2019 and will run through 2023. The Asia Foundation is very grateful to DFAT for their support and partnership towards building this program collaboratively. The Ponlok Chomnes program represents our shared purpose in supporting and strengthening the capacity of the knowledge sector and informing public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia. Our core partners and emerging research partners have conducted various pieces of research that explore the impact of COVID-19 on various sectors in Cambodia, such as education, tourism, urban development, garment, agriculture, entrepreneurial, cross border migration, and others.

This forum convenes researchers, policymakers, and members of academia and gives them an opportunity to present and discuss their work on various topics, such as the policymaking process in Cambodia and the role of think tanks and research institutes in contributing to this process; the adoption of technology in higher education; and how policies ranging from foreign policy to agricultural policy can play a critical role in Cambodia's post-pandemic recovery. In addition, the forum will feature panels on the role of gender equality and social inclusion principles in policymaking, as well as on urban development and socio-economic changes.

I'm also pleased to share that through this forum, we are able to provide an opportunity for young researchers to participate through a call for policy briefs. Qualified policy briefs have gone through our publication process, such as going through external reviewing, presenting in this forum, and publishing final briefs on our program's Policy Pulse website. This year, all of the panelists for the young researchers' session are women. They will bring the results of their studies and policy recommendations on topics ranging from the government's social assistance approaches during COVID-19, to personal bankruptcy laws, and also gender-based violence at the school level.

Once again, I hope you will find that this forum provides a valuable opportunity for researchers, policymakers, and academia to share research results and experiences. I am grateful to many experts who have come to share their knowledge and experience during these two days. I also welcome many representatives of governments, universities, research think tanks, and national and international NGOs who have joined us. You are all members of this knowledge sector community.

I am sure you will have fruitful and rewarding exchanges over the next two days. I wish you every success with this important forum and look forward to learning about the outcomes.

Opening Remarks

H.E. Pablo Kang
Australian Ambassador to Cambodia

I am delighted to join you all for the opening of the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum, hosted by The Asia Foundation in collaboration with Ponlok Chomnes core partners and emerging research partners.

The Government of Australian is very pleased, with The Asia Foundation, to support the growth of Cambodia's knowledge sector, and the development of high-quality Cambodian public policy, through Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program.

This inaugural National Policy Forum is the flagship Ponlok Chomnes event, bringing together Cambodian academia, government policymakers, non-traditional research producers and others to showcase their findings and discuss the present and future of Cambodian policymaking. This year, the focus is on "Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways," which is both timely and relevant as Cambodia moves to kickstart its economy and re-open to the world after a tumultuous past two years.

To this extent, I would like to congratulate Ponlok Chomnes Team, including The Asia Foundation, the Technical Advisory Council, and Ponlok Chomnes' Partners for effectively implementing this program despite the global pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis has made the task of developing highly effective public policies and government programs even more important than ever. Timely data, evidence, and analysis are critical in this situation. They enable policy makers and development partners to make more informed decisions and achieve better outcomes — on health security, social stability and inclusion, and economic resilience.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has demonstrated an openness to considering evidence-informed approaches during the pandemic, to boost Cambodia's post-COVID recovery from the perspective of multiple sectors. I also know many of the Cambodian knowledge institutions present today pivoted their own research activities and focuses to examine the impact of COVID-19 across Cambodia's economy, society, and vulnerable populations, thereby providing a valuable source of knowledge to inform the directions taken by policymakers.

Shortly after the pandemic, the Australian Government released the Partnerships for Recovery Strategy. This strategy was developed in light of the pandemic's profound impacts on Australia's neighbourhood — the Indo-Pacific region — in particular Pacific Island Countries, Timor-Leste, and Southeast Asia. How these neighbouring countries emerge from the crisis will potentially influence Australia's economic and strategic context for decades to come.

In this context, Australia is committed to working closely and collaboratively with Cambodia to tackle the crisis together. Australia has already moved quickly to support Cambodia, including by pivoting existing development programs to respond to the health security, stability and inclusion, and economic impacts of COVID-19, supporting Cambodia to achieve its development goal of becoming an upper-middle- income country by 2030 and a higher-income country by 2050.

To this end, I'm also proud that earlier this year, Australia committed to both expanding and extending the Ponlok Chomnes program. The program will now run until 2023 with a total value of 5.8 million Australian dollars. It also incorporates a new focus on Cambodia's foreign policy as it assumes the chair of ASEAN, and on expanding the connections between Cambodia's knowledge sector institutions, and other research organisations across the ASEAN region and Australia.

This is a testament of Australia's commitment to supporting Cambodia to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to develop the sustainable, whole-of-society policy ecosystem needed to drive Cambodia's economic and social growth in the face of enduring global challenges. It's also a mark of Australia's commitment to supporting a stronger, more integrated and self-sufficient greater Mekong region, which is the rationale behind our 232 million Australian dollar Mekong-Australia Partnership.

Soon, we will hear from expert panelists sharing their valuable knowledge and insights about issues affecting Cambodia ranging from education, urbanization, foreign policy, and economic recovery, contributing towards an increased and deeper understanding of the actual impacts of the pandemic on all citizens, including vulnerable groups. We are very pleased to see such a diverse group of participants, representing think tanks, research institutes, government agencies, local NGOs, multilateral organizations, and international development partners.

I hope that all the participants will enjoy the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum and find it beneficial. We encourage everyone to ask critical questions to our expert panelists and hope that the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum will generate some critical and constructive discussion; hence, contributing to policy inputs and solutions on Cambodia's COVID-19 recovery pathways.

I also hope that the discussions and ideas-sharing that we'll hear throughout the National Policy Forum don't end tomorrow. One of the primary objectives of the Ponlok Chomnes program is to foster greater collaboration and exchange between Cambodia's knowledge producers and its policymakers. If you hear a proposal or research finding over the next few days that interests, confuses, or excites you, I encourage you to reach out to the speaker or organization behind it – it's through these individual connections that we build a stronger base for Cambodia's future public policy.

Once again, I would like to thank The Asia Foundation and Ponlok Chomnes' partners for organizing and putting together this forum. Special thanks to participants here and online. I hope you have a productive two days of rich discussion and deliberation, and I look forward to the outcomes.

Thank you for being here today, and please stay safe.

Keynote Address

The Role of Subnational Administration in Addressing COVID-19 Challenges in the "New Normal" Context
H.E. Ngan Chamroeun, Secretary of State, Ministry of Interior

Today I am pleased to attend the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum under the theme "Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways through Multi-Sectoral Approaches" to share the experiences and measures that the Royal Government of Cambodia has undertaken at the subnational administration level to address the impact of COVID-19, as well as the government's preparation towards recovery in a post-pandemic context.

First, I would like to express my appreciation to The Asia Foundation and its partners, who have invited me to join this event, and my thanks to the Australian government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for supporting this event. At the same time, I greatly value the crucial role of The Asia Foundation in contributing to the promotion of Cambodia's knowledge sector through the Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program.

As you have seen, in Cambodia, various studies have been produced by local research institutes, think tanks, non-government organizations, and government institutions to inform decisions and policies that respond to the country's needs, particularly in the context of COVID-19. Therefore, today's event is crucial for think tanks, academia, researchers, and other non-traditional research organizations to showcase their findings, discuss, exchange knowledge and network with policy makers and policy practitioners from state and non-state organizations who need knowledge to inform their policymaking.

It has been around two years since we first encountered the coronavirus, which has since put immense pressure on the country's public health system and socio-economic development. However, the government's efforts to roll out its vaccination program and capacity to respond quickly and effectively has kept the pandemic under control. As of now, Cambodia is one of the top countries in the world for vaccination rates. We can see the number of COVID-19 cases have been declining steadily compared to earlier in the year. This result has been achieved with timely leadership and policies provided by the Royal Government of Cambodia.
The national leadership and policies have provided the right guidance and direction to subnational administration to effectively limit the spread of the pandemic and deliver necessary services to people at risk. This includes timely COVID-19 testing, tracing positive cases, and enforcing quarantine measures, and other preventative measures such as "3 Do's and 3 Don'ts". Collectively, these efforts have contributed towards limiting the transmission of COVID-19 at the community level, and keeping Cambodians protected as much as possible.

As mentioned earlier, Cambodia has an impressive vaccination rate. It should be recognized that the subnational administration played a major role in supporting the national government to roll out the vaccination program, including identifying at-risk and hard to reach groups and mobilizing people to get fully vaccinated.

The pandemic has impacted the livelihoods of local people, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, who suffered from personal loss, economic hardship, and health problems. Access to basic needs, such as food and essential health services and facilities, has also been facilitated by the local authorities in a timely manner to ensure that all citizens, including the vulnerable and marginalized, have been looked after. This also includes supporting the government to identify people who are eligible for ID Poor and the government's cash transfer program.

Until now, despite impressive progress in addressing the challenges of COVID-19, no one can guarantee when the pandemic will end. However, we are seeing a light at the end of the tunnel with reduced cases and transmission. There is also a need to adapt to this 'new normal' and return our focus to economic growth and development of our country, and to benefit our people. That is why the Royal Government of Cambodia announced the reopening of the country. This decision brings hope to Cambodia's social and economic recovery.

However, though we have reopened, this does not mean we can return to life as we knew it before COVID-19. The subnational administration continues to remain cautious and follow the government's reopening guidelines, such as supporting the government's efforts to provide full vaccination to citizens, including providing booster shots. The local government is ready to assist the national government to respond to a future pandemic and prevent the spread of the virus, such as delivering health services and facilities to those who are infected. Local authorities are aware of COVID-19 and know how to prevent its transmission, and they will also continue educating and raising awareness to citizens to implement preventative measures and keep themselves safe from the pandemic.

Though we cannot return to pre-pandemic life, it is imperative that we adapt to a new way of living and strive towards success in the context of this 'new normal' across various sectors. Such adaptation requires robust policies and effective decision-making processes, which are indeed supported by reliable knowledge, data, and evidence.

Therefore, today's event is unique – it provides a platform for the knowledge sector to come together, and encourages discussion and knowledge exchange among researchers, academia, policy makers, and other decision makers from state and non-state organizations working in different sectors, such as economy, education, governance, international relations, agriculture, and urban development, among other social sectors that contribute to COVID-19 recovery pathways.

Finally, my sincere thanks to The Asia Foundation and its partners for hosting this platform which provides a place for collaboration between state and non-state actors to support evidence-based policymaking for COVID-19 recovery.

I hope that all the participants will enjoy the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum and find the discussion beneficial.

Thank you, and please stay safe.

Opening Plenary Discussion

Cambodia's Knowledge Sector: Policymaking Process in Cambodia and Role of Think Tanks*

One of the key elements of the Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program is to improve understanding of the landscape of the knowledge sector in the country. This supports the establishment of strategic programmatic entry points for the program and informs the design and implementation of the program's activities moving forward. To deliver on this need, The Asia Foundation has supported a research study, which is a diagnostic assessment of knowledge users and mega-trends in public policy in Cambodia.

It explores the systematic analysis of Cambodian policymaking cycles and processes; maps the formal and informal institutions that shape policies; the norms and values that inform those; the regulatory frameworks that guide them; and an analysis of those that would be of benefit. Along with this, the study on mega-trends in public policy serves as a benchmark for how the program can help deepen analysis and discussion of near- and long-term policy issues. This analysis is driven by the need to understand policymaking processes in Cambodia and the region at large.

*Panelists: Ms. Sem Sophea, Dr. Eng Netra, H.E. Chea Chanthum, Ms. Meloney Lindberg, Dr. Pak Kimchoeun (virtual)

The opening plenary discussion on **"Cambodia's Knowledge Sector: Policymaking Process in Cambodia and the Role of Think Tanks"** aimed to set the context for the National Policy Forum and included a high-level presentation by The Foundation's consultant, Dr. Pak Kimchoeun, on the key preliminary findings from the "Diagnostic Assessment of Policy Process and Knowledge Use in Cambodia."

Summary of moderation questions and answers

What are the key emerging policy trends in Cambodia?

There are several major global mega trends, including digitalization, the changing economic architecture, climate change (green agendas), and changing demographics. The Royal Government of Cambodia is addressing all of these issues under various policies and is using data- and evidence-driven information to inform decision-making and this is critical for development. Using knowledge also helps to ensure that policies are targeted and achievable.

Additionally, migration and changes in the way people use communication tools, brought on by the technology and digital transformation, impacts individual Cambodians as they are embracing these new technologies. This also affects the way government responds to citizens as citizen demands are becoming more vocalized and there are higher expectations for government to respond to these demands. Finding ways to coordinate and work together is key to addressing these challenges moving forward. Evidence is required to track what is happening at the local level, as what is needed in communities has changed over the past 20 years. It is no longer about simple asks- such as roads or bridges- but more about long-term planning, such as for how to mitigate the effects of climate change.

From the government side, how is data and evidence used in policy?

There are both opportunities and challenges. In terms of opportunities, there is a need to strengthen the role of national statistics institutions to coordinate how to collect and manage data at all levels. There is a need for capacity development and also for these institutions to gain so that citizens feel as if the data is reliable.

There are three main challenges: budget, quality of data, and lack of a system to streamline how data is stored and used. Budget is needed to prioritize data and evidence collection and use. Quality of data is affected by a lack of capacity so researchers need to be supported. And the systems need to be built. There are talks to create larger databases so that all of the individual units 'talk' to one another in terms of sharing information. The question is how do we make use of existing data and make sure that there is sound communication between different actors to encourage sharing, use, and analysis of this data.

Policy monitoring and evaluation is an area that needs improvement. Many policymakers use data for making policies and implementing them, but where they fall short is in monitoring and evaluating these policies- and this also requires specific data collection.

With large scale national programs, like IDPoor, how do you use these large sets of data?

Several actors work together to come up with the data- from the local implementors, to the Ministry of Health, to international actors such as UNICEF and GIZ. Support from external partners helps to make sure that data is analyzed, but all of the actors working together have to be strong in order to ensure that the data is of high quality.

What are the most important areas of data?

Investing in collecting and analyzing data is valuable when it is used effectively. Agencies and organizations need to be willing and open to share and disseminate data that they collect so that other agencies can also use that information. Another critical aspect of data sharing is building trust. This means presenting findings so that policymakers understand and find them useful to make decisions. This also means that researchers need to demonstrate why the data is valuable, and technology is an excellent way to do this. This can be real-time data collection or tracking because it builds trust among those involved.

Involvement of young people in data is also critical, as is involvement from the private sector. Engagement with these groups will help to contribute to policymaking by involving other engaged actors. This is also true for regional or even global actors to learn what is working.

Plenary Discussions on Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways

The Plenary Discussions on Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways consisted of six panel discussions, including Adoption of Technology in Higher Education; The Role of Agricultural Labour in Economic Recovery Post-COVID-19; Urban Development, Socio-economic Changes in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic and Policy Development; Cambodia Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Aspects and Perspectives; Enhancing Cambodia's Post Covid-19 Recovery: How Foreign Policy Can Play a Role; and Social Inclusion in the Context of COVID-19 in Cambodia: Experiences from Emerging Knowledge Sector Actors.

Adoption of Technology in Higher Education*

The global COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the global education system on a scale that has never been experienced before in human history. According to UNESCO statistics, at the peak of the pandemic, over 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries were out of school, and more than a million teachers and school personnel were affected by school closures. It is estimated that in 2020 the pandemic affected around 220 million tertiary-level students around the globe. The primary concern of school closure was the immediate learning loss at both "intensive" (how much students learn during school closure) and "extensive" (how many students continue to learn during school closure) margins and the long-term impact on students' learning outcomes.

For Cambodia, schools were closed in March 2020 after the announcement by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) and reopened shortly in January 2021. However, it was closed again after an outbreak in February (known as the February 20th incident). Educational institutions were compelled to move their traditional face-to-face classrooms to an online learning and teaching environment. This provided universities with a rare opportunity to experiment with these technologies. While school ICT infrastructure is one critical factor for e-learning adoption, technology readiness among teachers and students is another crucial factor. Different schools have adopted different strategies to adapt to new tech-enhanced online learning and teaching given the differences in ICT infrastructures and technology readiness among teachers and students.

*Panelists: Dr. Chea Phal, Mr Eng Titya, Ms Khely Meas, Dr Ky Ravikun, Dr Song Sopheak, Mr Lay Heng (virtual)

The plenary discussion on "Adoption of Technology in Higher Education" discussed the future role of EdTech in education, drawing from Cambodia Development Resource Institute's preliminary research findings as well as insights from policy makers, and representatives from public and private higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector.

This panel addressed the following questions:

1. What is the status of EdTech adoption in Cambodia higher education?
2. To what extent are university teachers and students ready to shift to online teaching and learning?
3. What are the lessons learnt from the online learning experience during the school closure?
4. Considering the school reopening this November 2021, what would be the future role of EdTech in higher education teaching and learning?

The panel sought to contribute to the understanding of the teaching and learning experience in higher education during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond, and to improve the quality of education offered by higher education institutions.

What is CDRI studying and what are the key findings?

In July 2020, CDRI started collecting data from students and teachers to explore how these groups were adopting technology during the pandemic. CDRI has interviewed approximately 1,300 students and 370 teachers. The findings show that it is extremely varied across schools and users. Some schools were able to quickly adapt and shift online, while others used Telegram group to send documents to students but did not provide lessons online. It has also been found that teachers were not prepared to shift online because only about 10% had ever taught online before the pandemic; but the study also found that teachers were better prepared than students, probably because of their higher education levels, experience with technology, and better grasp of the English language, among other factors. Teachers at the tertiary level have been found to be better prepared than teachers at the secondary level also. In 2021, students were also not satisfied with online learning and 90% wanted to return to the classroom for face-to-face instruction.

How have universities overcome the challenges caused by COVID-19 and what lessons or best practices can be shared?

Our university regularly holds capacity building sessions with lecturers to keep them up to date with teaching best practices, even before COVID-19. Teaching methodologies is at the center of lecture series so that professors have knowledge of useful tools, such as applications. When the pandemic started, we were able to adapt quickly. We created a task force to connect all students with lecturers and staff, and we used Google Meet in connection with other Google platforms (G-Suite) to create virtual classrooms where teachers would broadcast live with students. We also held group trainings to coach and mentor both students and teachers to use these new online applications. For those lecturers that were hesitant to shift online, a special team was created to assist them. We also sent out a survey to better understand the needs of students so that we could provide more targeted help. Leadership was key throughout this process to build the systems and to listen to professors and students to understand how they were coping. professors and students to understand how they were coping.

Another institute also shared their learnings:

Our institute has been supporting e-learning for about ten years through various programs. The main issue we faced during school closures was the adaptation of the lecturers and students. The institute has experience with e-learning, but only a small percentage of teachers and students actually do. But we moved quickly, within a week, to use Microsoft applications to organize online classrooms. We have chosen to do asynchronous learning to free up time for lecturers to focus on their research as well.

Question posed to a university student: Having been in university for a year during COVID-19, what difficulties have you faced? What challenges have you overcome?

An advantage to studying online is that you can go back to the lectures to better grasp the information. Time management is also easier because I do not have any travel time so I can just focus on my studies from home. I can also find a comfortable learning place at home, which is more familiar than at school.

The biggest difficulties are unstable internet connection, as internet is required for watching lectures, interacting with professors and students, and submitting assignments. Additionally, it is easy to get distracted at home and to not focus on studying.

Question posed to a university in the province: What have you done to support both students and professors?

In the province, the issue of internet connection is much greater, especially since we have students from diverse backgrounds and living conditions. Some students also lack knowledge about technology. There were three main challenges: deciding on and learning a new technology to shift online; second, equipment, as many students did not have computers so the school had to facilitate this; and third, helping students and teachers to adapt. We chose to use a Telegram group to keep students and teachers up to date and to create videos and tutorials to help them learn this new technology. We used assessments to monitor and evaluate how students were adapting to these changes and to guide adaptations.

The Role of Agricultural Labour in Economic Recovery Post COVID-19*

Agriculture has been resilient throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and is regarded as a potential sector for employment creation for workers of other sectors affected by the pandemic. The Cambodian government budget plan in 2021 prioritizes allocations to boost the sector by focusing on enhancing productivity, diversification, processing, and commercialization. This is part of the government's prioritized public expenditures for post COVID-19 interventions that also focus on skill development for suspended workers and cash-for-work initiatives to absorb the labor laid-off by the affected industries, provide diversified employment in agriculture, and develop physical infrastructure in rural areas to create jobs.

A study by the Centre for Policy Studies on the impact of COVID-19 on workers conducted in late 2020 found that agriculture could potentially offer alternative employment for affected workers, particularly in vegetables and cash crops farming and in relatively new areas. Further, the study revealed that affected workers and returned migrants have low interest to work in agriculture due to the nature of hard work in the sector. Besides, job opportunities in agriculture may not be large enough to absorb all laid-off workers due to an increasing level of mechanization in farms. However, potential job opportunities could be available with large-scale agricultural plantations such as economic land concessions and farming partnerships with agricultural companies through inclusive agricultural investment models. Thus, more empirical evidence is required to understand the real prospects of jobs in agriculture for affected workers and migrants and what support should be provided to attract them to do farming as an alternative livelihood pursuit, particularly for young people, in post COVID-19 recovery.

*Panelists: Dr. Ngin Chanrith, H.E. Somean Kuoch, Mr. Chan Sophal, Ms. Narin Kruy (virtual)

The panel discussion on **"The Role of Agricultural Labour in Economic Recovery Post COVID-19"** presented key findings of a study by the Centre for Policy Studies on the labour demand in the agriculture sector that was conducted in August and September 2021. Its aim was to elicit reactions from policymakers and practitioners to the results, to discuss relevant policy implications, and to provide a better understanding of the agricultural labour demand and the prospect of the sector for providing jobs to workers impacted by COVID-19.

This panel addressed the following questions:

1. In which subsectors of agriculture are the prospects for creating more jobs greatest, particularly for workers and migrants laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the existing skills of laid-off workers and returned migrants and what support do they need to join agricultural work for a post COVID-19 recovery?
3. What are the required skill development and technical support needed to increase employment opportunities in agriculture for laid-off workers and returned migrants? How can the government and agricultural companies provide this?

What are the key findings of the Centre for Policy Studies' study on labour demands in the agricultural sector?

The study focused on agricultural companies and private farms (and did not include small family farms), surveyed labour workers and returning migrant, and conducted key informant interviews with other relevant stakeholders. The key findings showed large differences between commercial and private farms, as expected. This includes average farm size- for commercial farms it is over 2000 hectares, but only 53 hectares for private farms. The corporate farms employed about 700 workers, and the private farms only employed 16 workers for full time. Only 6% of private farm have processing facilities, but 50% of commercial farms have processing facilities. In terms of if these farms were firing laid off workers, 17% of corporate farm said 'yes' and 4% of private farms said that they had hired laid off workers and migrant returnees. The study also asked about employee benefits and these varied but generally included free accommodation, free utilities, and free food. Corporate farms also provided social support including health and education services to workers and their families. In terms of skills training, 90% of corporate farms said that they had provided skills training compared to 58% of private farms.

In response to whether more workers are needed, 30% of corporate farms and 9% of private farms said that they do need additional labor, though their harvest periods differ. Corporate farms noted April-June compared to February and April for private farms. The study also asked if they faced difficulties or challenges in recruitment. More than half of the corporate farms said yes and 40% of private farms said yes. Additionally, 33% of corporate farms recruit workers through village and commune authority. The study overall found that the labour shortage is most prevalent in the rubber and cashew plantations in the northeast region, especially in Modulkiri and Rattanakiri. And it found that harvesting, maintenance, and planting are the most needed skills.

The government sees its role as facilitating employment- the national employment agency extended services through employment centers in various provinces and municipalities. It has strengthened communication with local authorities so that the authorities can register the names of those looking for a job and connect them with companies who are hiring. Longer term, a job portal is also in development that can streamline the process to connect job seekers to employers.

There are also several areas that are prohibiting laborers, including those from the service industry, to take agricultural jobs. These are wage competitiveness, lack of stability in these jobs (seasonal or part time work), and unequal demand among provinces. Some areas have an abundance of labor while other provinces are in need of more workers. Taking these challenges into consideration, the government is encouraging skills development, retraining, and upgrading of skills. Corporate and private firms can send proposals to funding committees for support.

Additional support is being provided to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), such as agro-processing manufacturing. Support is being given through the tax incentive as well as through wage subsidies in particular for those potential or prioritized sectors. Budget has been allocated for wage subsidies and skills training for the third year in a row.

Urban Development, Socio-economic Changes in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic and Policy Development*

Cambodia has advanced from the 'Least Developed Country' status and is currently showing one of the fastest urbanization rates in the Asian region. By 2008, the government had designated 27 urban centers and towns in the country (outside of Phnom Penh), and some of them have been classified as secondary and growth poles of the country. By 2050, the country expects that 36.2% of the population will be living in urban areas (World Bank[1] , 2017). Key policies to address urban growth include the Industrial Development Policy 2025, Sustainable Development Goal (Goal 11) 2030, and the long-term vision of urban development by 2050. These national policies were established to support the need for building specialized human capacity during the transition from an agrarian economy to a manufacturing and service economy, as a response to the lack of technical and specialized skills in urban planning profession in dealing with sustainable and inclusive urban growth. But urbanization can also bring challenges, such as lack of housing, lack of water and sewage, parks, and public facilities, lack of jobs in cities, damage caused by disasters such as floods and earthquakes, environmental pollution in cities, and the loss of historical and cultural areas in cities.

Urbanization in Cambodia is also shaped by its past, including colonial practices and the recent influence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Participatory urban planning and knowledge co-production among the local community, civil society, and non-state actors seems to be missing throughout the process.

*Panelists: Dr. Try Thuon, Dr. Yen Yat, Mr. Vuth Lyno, Ms. Samedy Suong

[1] World Bank, (2017) "Urban Development in Phnom Penh."

The panel discussion on **"Urban Development, Socio-economic Changes in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic and Policy Development"** sought to address recent urban development and socio-economic changes within one of the most contentious coastal cities in Cambodia- Sihanoukville. It also touched on the promotion of urbanism, drawing experiences from participatory urban planning and co-curriculum development approaches based on urban life in Phnom Penh.

This panel addressed four key issues related to current urban transformation, participatory planning, and policy development. The specific topics addressed included:

1. The evolution of urban planning and its impacts on socio-economic development and urban transformation
2. Human capital development and inclusion
3. Inclusive urban development and promoting sustainable pathway urban growth
4. Bottom-up urbanism through art, education, and community organization

Village Cinema, the White Building, 2012-2017

Summary of Presentation on the Evolution of Urban Planning, Human Capital, Inclusion and Promoting Sustainable Urban Growth

Sihanoukville is an interesting example of urban planning. Currently, its urban planning has strong focus on road construction and modernization through infrastructure upgrading. Also, urban planning has moved father from the past. Urban planning before and during colonization era focused on three main things – economy, environment, and infrastructure. But this paid less attention to people participation, but with more focus on urban gentrification and beautification. Now, we need a focus on sustainability and to include communities in these plans. Human capital development is a critical factor because it allows cities to grow or recover if it experiences shocks. Strong human capital allows workers to shift to other industries when necessary.

Sihanoukville experienced extreme change between 2018 and 2020, with a large increase of foreign investment and foreign nationals. From our surveys we see that housing improved (studied by looking at types of roofs) and vehicle ownership increased, though they started to leave Sihanoukville in 2020. The number of workers had also grown over this time period, but then these workers left in 2020 as well.

COVID-19 greatly impacted Sihanoukville, a city that thrived on tourism, trade, and previously casinos and online gaming until these were shut down. The vast majority reported being impacted by the pandemic, but they also reported that they would like to.

Summary of Presentation on Bottom-up Urbanism through Art, Education, and Community Organising

Phnom Penh has also changed since the times of the Khmer Rouge. It has opened up to embrace art and communities participating in architecture, design, and other aspects of urban art.

What is different between current urban planning in Cambodia and the past urban planning?

If we looked at the post-independence era, the city was focused on just three main factors – economy, environment, and physical infrastructure. There was no concentration on people, or social and environmental impacts. In Sihanoukville, in the past, we focused more on survival after the colonization. What we called 'Khmer never dies.' Now if we think about the current concept, it is about 'Khmer can do.' Local communities should be part of the planning process because they know how to get things done.

What can we learn about how art initiatives have played a role in urban planning and development?

Art can help to integrate citizens into planning processes, such as how they participate, how do they customize their needs, how do they look at spaces? This helps us to see that communities want to play a role in determining the infrastructure that suits their needs, such as housing, markets, entertainment spaces.

Cambodia Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Aspects and Perspectives*

The COVID-19 pandemic, a public health crisis that has become an economic shock, has negatively affected economies around the world, triggering a significant decline in earnings and outputs and potentially putting millions of people into extreme poverty.

Tourism was one of the largest, fastest, and most consistent growth sectors in the world economy before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has undeniably disrupted most businesses across all types of industries, with a significant hit to the tourism and travel sector due to an unprecedented fall in demand and widespread travel restrictions. In 2020, international arrivals lost 1 billion tourists compared to 2019, and USD $1.3 trillion, more than 11 times the loss recorded during the 2009 global economic crisis. The economic shock from COVID-19 has negatively affected economies around the world, triggering a significant decline in earnings and outputs and potentially putting hundred million people out of labor market, according to reports from ILO. The crisis has put between 100 and 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk, many of them in small and medium-sized enterprises. UNWTO's extended scenarios for 2021-2024 indicate that for international tourism to return to its 2019 levels could take years and not occur until after 2023 (UNWTO, 2021)[2].

Cambodia's economy registered negative growth for the first time in 2020 after more than two decades of growth, with a loss of 3.1 percent compared to growth of 6.2 percent in 2019, and a decline of 6.3 percent in the service sector.

*Panelists: Dr. Bradley J. Murg, Dr. Teng Delux, H.E. Dr. Huot Pum, Dr. Iván González de Alba, Dr. Laura Beckwith

[2] UNWTO World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex, January 2021.

The tourism sector was the worst affected sector as international arrivals took a sharp decline. The industry sector shrank by 1.4 percent, the growing over-supply of real estate and the absence of foreign buyers are also a big challenge. Only agricultural output increased by 0.4 percent due to an ecologically questionable expansion of cultivated areas and the absence of major natural disasters (Berger C. & Hanselmann S. 2020)[3].

In the 20 years covered by available data for Cambodia, several things can be noted about the economy. These include: 1) Service has always remained the most important economic sector and its share at current prices has slightly increased; 2) Agriculture had been the dominant sector until the end of the previous century, but it is now less important with its production share being less than a quart of the total; 3) Industry historically had been the least important sector, but starting in 2009 has been consistently improving, surpassing agriculture in 2015 and approaching services.

Key reforms are needed for Cambodia to sustain pro-poor growth and foster competitiveness through efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation and wealth redistribution by improving the quality of public services. Further diversification of the economy will require greater connectivity and investments in rural and urban infrastructure, fostering entrepreneurship, expanding the use of technology, and building new skills to address emerging labour market needs. Accountable and responsive public institutions are critical to meeting the evolving needs of citizens and the private sector. And quality of human capital will be of utmost importance to achieve Cambodia's ambitious goal of reaching middle-income status by 2030.

The panel discussion on "Cambodia Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Aspects and Perspectives" addressed the following questions:

1. What should be the economic priorities of Cambodia on Post COVID-19 economic recovery?
2. What are the existing issues and opportunities for Cambodia economic development?
3. How can Cambodia achieve its ambitious goal of reaching middle-in come status by 2030?

[3] Berger C. & Hanselmann S., (2020), "Reflections On Cambodia's Post-COVID Economic Recovery."

What are the priorities for Cambodia's economic recovery?

Before the pandemic, Cambodia's economy was growing at an average rate of 7.2%, with the industry and agricultural sectors being the top priorities. But over time Cambodia's rise from a low-income country to a lower-middle income country has seen a shift away from a primarily agricultural economy to one where the service and industry sectors are growing rapidly. The creation of jobs in the service and industry sectors have pushed the economic growth of Cambodia, as well as to increase the standard of living and competitiveness in the region. But the COVID-19 pandemic has hit these sectors very hard because of a lack of travel, tourism, and reduced trade and investment.

Thus, priorities should focus on human capital by building quality education systems because human development is at the core of building national economic foundations. In the short term, the government should continue with support programs, such as IDPoor.

Trade between Vietnam and Cambodia will also play a role to strengthen Cambodia's standing in the region. There is large potential for cross-border trade. But Cambodia should also diversify its partners so as not to over-rely on any state or region too much. Internally, Cambodia should also focus on gradually reducing size of the informal economic sector. Those who are employed in the informal sector essentially are not able to contribute to the supply chain and the long term stable economic growth of the country, and a gradual process of formalization is something that can contribute to more economic stability.

There is also a need to work toward transparency and stronger rule of law so that Cambodia can have much stronger level of foreign direct investment from a wide variety of sources to ensure sustainable growth, as well as pro-poor growth.

What reflections can we make on the direction Cambodia is going in terms of how it is prioritizing economic growth while also keeping a focus on poverty reduction, social inclusion, environmental protection, and climate change mitigation and adaption?

Key to this is supporting economic recovery because many people's livelihoods were impacted by loss of tourism, closing of garment factories, and shutting down of hotels. These sectors employ many people, so we need to support their recovery through finance and planning. In tourism specifically, the government should look at modernizing infrastructure to attract quality tourists that spend more money. Prioritizing quality tourists over quantity will mean attracting tourists who travel to Cambodia to spend larger amounts of money.

Reforms in education and health are also essential. The pandemic greatly impacted education, with many students dropping out of school. This needs to be rectified to build strong human capital. Skills training is also necessary to ensure that people have technical skills that align with the type of economy that Cambodia is striving for.

Cambodia also needs to strengthen its relationships with regional partners, such as Thailand and Vietnam. Cambodia has an opportunity to increase its exports to these countries and this should be evaluated.

Another issue is related to the agricultural sector. We know that the evolution of technology requires modernization, so we need skilled farmers. Modernizing agricultural practices will increase output and help Cambodia to build stronger ties to regional partners. This can include factory processing.

Enhancing Cambodia's Post Covid-19 Recovery: How Foreign Policy Can Play a Role*

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused destruction for all countries around the world, and Cambodia is no exception. Compared to other countries, Cambodia has fared relatively well and has launched an aggressive and successful vaccination campaign. In Cambodia, restrictions on most businesses and travel have already been lifted and the quarantine policy has also been reformed to welcome international travelers. But more measures are needed to help Cambodia in its recovery. Many discussions and dialogues have focused on health and economic policy. In this sense, foreign policy is often a neglected concept when it comes to economic recovery. However, it actually plays a critical role in helping Cambodia to gain more support from major powers (e.g., China, the United States, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and others).

The panel discussion on **"Enhancing Cambodia's Post Covid-19 Recovery: How Foreign Policy Can Play a Role"** gathered foreign policy experts from Cambodia to figure out ways in which Cambodia could leverage its foreign policy to achieve maximum support from those major powers. In this panel, experts talked about three topics:

1. How should Cambodia engage key major and regional powers?
2. How should Cambodia as an upcoming chair of ASEAN adopt an agenda that would yield more fruitful outcomes?
3. How can Cambodia leverage its membership in minilateral institutions to gain more support?

*Panelists: Dr. Seun Sam, Mr. James Lawler Dr. Chheang Vannarith (virtual), Mr. Sovinda Po (virtual)

How can Cambodia chair ASEAN to design a common COVID-19 recovery plan?

COVID-19 has exacerbated many existing issues including the geopolitical rivalry and competition in the region. It has also caused rising protectionism, unilateralism, and nationalism in different parts of the world. But the only solution to this kind of large-scale need due to the pandemic is international cooperation.

But chairing ASEAN will not be easy for Cambodia because there are several emerging regional issues, including the political crisis in Myanmar. These affect the image, productivity, and unity of ASEAN at a time when all of the members need to be focusing on recovery from COVID-19. The ASEAN member states must work together to support regional recovery and to help each other reopen their economies safely and robustly. Additionally, the member states must work together to support infrastructure development and connectivity, especially in terms of digital connectivity. Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are the least developed countries in the region and must be supported to inclusively undergo a 'digital transformation.' And lastly, women entrepreneurs will be a key highlight of Cambodia's term as ASEAN Chair. Women entrepreneurs will be a foundational element for sustainable, inclusive economic recovery so they should be highlighted throughout ASEAN.

How can Cambodia leverage its membership in multilateral institutes to achieve maximum support?

Cambodia should be understood in the context of the rising Mekong region as a whole. Cambodia is a member of several multilateral institutions, including AYEA Watdi Chao Praya Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (in short known as ACMECS), Lang Chang Mekong Cooperation, Mekong Kangang cooperation, US Mekong Partnership, Mekong Japan Cooperation, Mekong Korea Cooperation, and Mekong Australia Cooperation. These are multilateral institutions that try to promote the development in the Mekong region. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the five Mekong countries enjoyed strong economic growth at around 8% annually make it the fastest growing economy, not just in the region but also in the world.

One way for Cambodia to leverage its membership is that Cambodia should work with all ACMECS members to enhance its role and autonomy. As a chair of ASEAN next year, Cambodia should set up an agenda for ASEAN members to discuss the role of ACMECS in contributing to peace and development in Southeast Asia as a whole. For several decades, ASEAN as a collective regional organisation has not paid much attention to the Mekong issue. There is an opportunity with Cambodia as Chair to bring attention to ACMECS. Cambodia should also encourage ACMECS to invite relevant stakeholders to their meetings, including China, Japan, the US, North Korea, India, Australia, and the EU.

The chair of ACMECS should have a clear development agenda that benefits all ACMECS members and should have a clear vision of how major power should contribute to the development of the Mekong region. By focusing on ACMECS, Cambodia can lobby for funding while also enhancing their own autonomy. But ACMECS also needs to balance the power dynamics in the region, such as China versus the US, and playing a complementary role to ASEAN instead of competing against it.

What will change in Cambodia in foreign policy and what will stay the same as the result of COVID-19?

Economic recovery will be Cambodia's top priority this year and this economic diplomacy will serve as platform and mechanism to promote trade investment, tourism, infrastructure development, and so on. Another emphasis will be on human capacity building and scenario planning which was not previously emphasized. Cambodia needs to prepare for future crises now.

How will Cambodia's foreign policies change or stay the same due to COVID-19?

Cambodia may stretch its presence outside of the Indo-Pacific region to broader Asia. Cambodia does not really have strong diplomatic networks in central Asia or the 'Stan' countries. That region contains so much potential for Cambodia's economic diplomacy.

Additionally, Cambodia should engage in global dialogue involving the United Nations, World Bank, IMF, ASEAN Development Bank, and other international organizations that can contribute to the post pandemic recovery.

Social Inclusion in the Context of COVID-19 in Cambodia: Experiences from Emerging Knowledge Sector Actors*

In Cambodia, certain groups face barriers that limit their participation in political, economic, and social life. These groups commonly have unique social identities, including disability, race, age, gender, ethnicity, or economic status, for example. These social identities frequently render them as 'different' or with unique challenges and barriers, and often results in their exclusion from the decision and policy making processes. In the long run, continued social exclusion results in productivity and income loss not only for the individual or group, but also has serious implications for the country's economic growth and development prospects. For instance, those who are excluded in education will face job insecurity in the future, which, in return, cause national economic loss.

Therefore, working towards ensuring social inclusion is a key factor in the development narrative of any country, including Cambodia designing policies so that all members and segments of a society enjoy equal rights and benefits in the political, economic, and social spheres. Cambodia's government has made significant efforts to promote social inclusion, which can be seen in a number of policies and programs, such as the National Strategic Development Plan, the National Social Protection Policy, the Inclusive Education Policy, and the Commune Investment Program Guidelines. All of these emphasize support to marginalized and vulnerable groups to have access to equal rights.
Despite the government's best efforts, the COVID-19 pandemic affected many

*Panelists: Mr. Stanislas Kowalski, Mr. San Chey, Ms. Prom Kimcheng, Mr. Uk Yuth, Mr. Prak Rathyrea, Ms. Yon Soknim (vitual)

marginalized groups, and also limited their access to necessary resources and basic needs. For instance, vulnerable children are prone to health problems, lack of nutrition, and limited access to education. The pandemic also affected local citizens' participation in their local planning due to restrictions on gatherings, while also effecting the livelihoods of indigenous peoples.

COVID-19 cases are reducing, and vaccination efforts have proven successful, particularly in Cambodia, and the pandemic is slowly evolving into a situation where COVID-19 is endemic. However, it has left behind some very important lessons on how critical it is to ensure social inclusion. Robust recommendations can ensure that partners work together to support recovery from this pandemic.

The plenary discussion on **"Social Inclusion in the Time of COVID-19 in Cambodia"** drew insights from The Foundation's Emerging Research Partners working in various sectors such as local governance, education, child protection and indigenous group's right protection, as well as their research findings.

This discussion addressed the themes below:

1. Impact of COVID-19 on Marginalized and Vulnerable Groups: What are the impacts of COVID-19 on marginalized and vulnerable people? Have they received equal access to resources they need or participate during COVID-19?
2. Effort to Promote Social inclusion during COVID-19 and Challenges: Based on your research findings and experience, what has the government done to promote inclusion during COVID-19? And what has your organizations done to promote the inclusion? has the effort to promote social inclusion worked? Why? And why not?
3. Recommendations: What are the suggested areas for consideration to promote social inclusion? To put it simply, what are the recommendation to support marginalized and vulnerable people to have access to neces sary resources and basic needs and fully participate in the development.

COVID-19 has had immense impacts on people's health, both physical and mental, in Cambodia and across the globe. Therefore, Komar Rikreay Association has conducted a study to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on child protection and wellbeing as well as their needs during the COVID-19 outbreak. The study began in March 2021. However, due to the travel restrictions, the data collection was delayed until October 2021. The team conducted a survey with 300 respondents, among which 150 respondents (70 male) were children aged between 11-17 years old and 150 respondents (67 male) were parents or caretakers from ten villages, two communes, two districts, in Battambang Province. Based on the research findings, some children and parents have experienced increased stress levels that have contributed to depression and mental issue. Some parents reported that their stress resulted in verbal and physical violence on their children. Some respondents said that the decrease in family income has also contributed to their negative treatment of their children. According to the study, more than 50% of the respondents have lost their income. The study has also found that women have experienced an increase in negative feelings more than men because they have more responsibilities in the family than men. Unfortunately, most adult respondents said that they have not received any needed support, including general healthcare, psychological support, consultations, and support in preventing domestic violence. Additionally, both parents and children have limited knowledge of their children's online learning and online safety.

During the data collection, only 13 respondents among 150 adult respondents had migrated to other places for employment. During the lockdown, they could not return home. Those who have returned home had to stay in quarantine centers before they could reunite with their family. Though the study did not report an increase in child labor, it found that children were more involved in housework and looking after their younger siblings, particularly girls. In conclusion, the study found that COVID-19 has had several negative effects, particularly increased depression and mental issues, on children and their parents that contributed to domestic violence. Adult respondents have faced challenges in loss of income. However, village and commune chiefs and their neighbors have provided some support to them.

Khmer Association for Development of Countryside (KAFDOC)- Encouraging families to send their children back to school

KAFDOC has worked successfully for many years in the field of Primary education and providing training for school staff. It has successfully encouraged families to allow their children to study, despite extreme poverty and has educated families on the importance of education. KAFDOC was unable to hold meetings or training sessions because of Covid restrictions. Most families became even more poor and needed income from their children. Most families have no access to WIFI and many do not have a television so students were unable to study electronically. Those that could found it difficult and discouraging to have little teacher input. Schools were closed for a long time, and families developed new routines, where children were money earners, or supported the family at home. Especially during the second round of school closures, teachers and students became discouraged and apathetic about education. Parents need encouragement to allow their children to study again. Parents need reassurance that their children are safe from Covid at school. Directors and teachers must be patient with students and supportive as they begin learning again after such a long break. KAFDOC can begin holding trainings/meetings again to support schools and families. We must apply lessons learned from this time, and research better ways for students to learn if schools are closed again and we have to continue to educate families on the importance of education and of the benefits to all of the family.

I wish I could share a success story about distance learning. After all, the New Generation Pedagogical Research Center has been able to carry on its activities during the Covid crisis. It took us one day to shift to an online setting. We even designed a remote practicum when it was time to do so, with pre-recorded lessons and role-plays to replace real classroom observations and conferences between mentors and teachers. But it wouldn't be honest during a policy talk. We worked under exceptionally favorable circumstances. All of our students are experienced teachers. All of them are proficient with ICT. All of them can speak English. And most importantly, they are all volunteers. It is pretty much like a lab experiment. In research, we know that we should never use lab conditions to make decisions about the real world. Such favorable circumstances don't exist for normal classes, especially in K-12 education.

We have talked extensively about the need to collect accurate data to inspire public policies. We don't have all the information that we would like. For instance, it is too soon to show the dropout rates among Cambodian students, until the situation is stabilized. However, we can already make some estimates, based on the available sources and on logic. After all, in order to make a decision, an order of magnitude is often sufficient.

The trick is to correctly Interpret the figures that we have. A survey in August 2020 indicated that 69% of the students had access to a smartphone. This is an amazing achievement for a poor country, if we consider that smartphones are a very recent technology. However, we must understand what it means for teachers who want to conduct e-learning activities. A smartphone is a necessary condition for e-learning. If you don't have it, you are automatically excluded. It means that 30% of the students are excluded from the beginning! But it isn't the only condition. 69% is a cap, the upper limit of what we can expect. Then

you need a stable Internet connection, a reliable supply of electricity, and so on. Each new condition comes with a significant loss of efficiency. Even more, "having access to" doesn't mean that all those 69% of students own their smartphones. It just means that someone in the household possesses one. They have to share it with siblings. The more siblings you have, the less time you can spend learning on the smartphone. Therefore, we can probably expect only a half or a third of that figure. The students who can actually partake in synchronous distance learning are a minority just because of material constraints.

I'm not talking about the other requirements such as ICT skills, commitment, school management, and so on. I let you imagine how easy it is for a student to shut down their camera and do something else after connecting to the lesson. He just has to pretend that the connectivity is bad.

If I'm looking at the alternatives to synchronous online learning, the situation isn't better. According to the same survey, worksheets were used by around 45% of the students. But it meant a lot of delays. Only 58% of the teachers were in touch with their students 2 times a week or more. 75% of the teachers reported that the students don't complete their worksheet. And who should be surprised? Any experienced teacher knows that collecting homework is a painful and unreliable process, even in normal times. When a large proportion of your students live far away from the school, going to the villages to collect material or provide support is clearly unpractical. Even worse, only 19% of the teachers gave the worksheets back after correction.

All in all, in August 2020, only 16% of the students declared working more than 5 hours a week. It's an astonishing low threshold if we think about it. Not even one-fourth or one-fifth of a normal school week. It means that the learning loss during school closure is more than 90%, just by considering the amount of time.

Let's say that the schools reopen partially, and that they organize double or triple shifts in order to keep social distancing in a classroom. Then, you are facing a loss of 50% or 66%, by design. In fact, complementary activities are not really possible. Even though the students are learning only part-time, the teachers, on the other hand, are working full-time.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the distance learning strategies have improved somewhat. But in any case, the outcome cannot be higher than what the smallest choke point allows. An optimistic estimate would place the learning loss between 50% and 90%. That's assuming that Cambodian teachers do their job and actively try to find solutions.

There will be a lot of work to do to fix the damage on the school system. Some damages are just unfixable. Of course, we need to think of dropout teenagers, girls who get married sooner than planned, or even boys who decided to get a paying job instead of wasting their time waiting for an uncertain reopening. Many of them didn't even have a choice with the economic disruption that

struck their family. We don't have the dropout data yet because we need the situation to stabilize before. I've had anecdotal reports from teachers saying that 15%, 30% of their students didn't attend the remote classes, or even much more. Of them, a large proportion will come back when it's possible. But how many won't?

We have talked a lot about the inclusion of disadvantaged students. We can pinpoint the situation of the girls who are much more likely to do the chores instead of learning. But don't miss the big picture. In the current circumstances most of the children, boys and girls, are at risk of being excluded from school, one way or another. As an educator, I must also remind you about a very important fact. There is a time to learn certain things. If language is not acquired at a younger age, the missing lessons will never be recuperated entirely. Those who missed the right time to learn how to read might never be able to learn it as well as they should have. Bad beginnings lead to discouragement, and other troubles. There will be long-lasting effects.

For all those reasons, I salute the decision of the Royal Government of Cambodia to reopen the schools. We simply cannot go on like this for an undetermined period of time. For many years to come, there will be a lot of work to help the students catch up with the curriculum. The priority is to conduct diagnostic assessments, exactly like we diagnose a patient to identify his illness and evaluate his general health. But it is not enough. Evaluating is useless if the evaluation doesn't serve to make decisions. Since the situations are extremely diverse, it's at the school level that most of the decisions must be made. Teachers and school directors will have to be much more flexible than they use to be in order to offer a treatment to the real students that they have in front of them. Prioritizing some parts of the curriculum is unavoidable in order to ensure solid foundations. It's pointless to teach a lesson that the students cannot understand, under the pretext that we have a textbook to follow. Teachers will have to take initiatives. It is critical that all the institutions acknowledge their duty and their right to do so. I pray that we won't have to close the schools again.

This study had two focuses. The first one is to know the effects of COVID-19 on the economy and social habits of indigenous people. Second is to know what strategies indigenous people are using and what support is being offered from authorities and relevant stakeholders.

In our study, we focused on three main points which are related to the daily lives of indigenous communities. First, we studied income. Because of COVID-19, indigenous people lost their jobs and income that they earned from being hired. Apart from subsistence farming, they tried to earn extra income by selling their labor (ស៊ីឈ្នួល) within or outside their community. Selling their labor outside their community, based on the research, included working for banana plantation companies or rubber plantation companies because in Stoeng Treng, where the research took place, there are many banana or rubber companies. There are also many people who migrated to work for those companies. But due to the pandemic and restrictions, some people decided to leave these jobs and return home. Loss of income also affected their ability to subsistence farm because they did not have the money to pay for inputs, such as buying gas, fertilizer, or herbicide. This also led to higher levels of debt.

Another finding that impacted indigenous communities is the decreased price of fish. We studied five communities who lived along Mekong, Seesaan, and Sre Pok rivers. But during COVID-19, the price of fish went down because not many businesspeople went to buy the fish. Also because of lockdowns, import and export of fish reduced or stopped altogether. This resulted in loss of income. A similar situation happened for those who depend on forest products for their

livelihood, including selling resin, honey, and mushrooms. The demand for these products dropped dramatically resulting in lower prices and loss of income.

Additionally, education was greatly impacted in these communities. Indigenous children struggled to adapt to online schooling because about 40% to 50% of the indigenous community were not able to access lessons due to not having access to or being able to afford smart phones or TV. The study also focused on other vulnerable groups who faced the same challenges. These included people living in poverty, widowers, and people with disabilities. Because parents did not have caregivers to watch their children, many took them to their farms during the day which also prohibited them from studying from provided workbooks.

Restrictions also impacted health as many were not able to travel to health centers outside of their villages. Also, many people could not afford masks or alcohol to protect themselves against COVID-19.

Violence was also reported in the communities. Some attributed their negative behavior to stress, loss of income, and alcohol.

Though facing challenges, they were able to be flexible or find their own solutions as well. For example, when they lost income from working outside the community, many tried to get a job in their community or turn to fishing both for food and income. They also looked for forest products to use for food or sometimes sell them when there were businesspeople coming to buy. During the pandemic, they also sold their animals, such as ducks or chickens. The community was happy with the government who provided financial support to poor families. Poor students received scholarship in the form of rice. The agricultural department also had a measure to provide seeds and to teach planting techniques to grow vegetables for subsistence farming.

My research is a little bit different from others. We looked at the commune investment program or local development plans for 2025. It is a process toward a new consideration with a context which has migration movement and the use of social media. The commune investment program, which is a part of commune development planning in 2025, should move in what direction because we know that the current of evolvement of society changes from one year to another. Now there is a new turn of migration, for example, people in Takeo move to Rattanakiri; people in Udor Meanchey, Banteay Meanchey or Siem Reap migrate to Thailand. The question is whether they still have their local needs met.

We conducted a study in Takeo and Rattanakiri. The sample included 335 people and more than 60% of the sample were women. Social inclusion has been factored into the process of this research. We believe the commune investment program is important and required to have social inclusion. Social inclusion here means that no vulnerable people are excluded or ignored and add ideas, requests, or comments to the investment plan. The decentralization and deconcentralisation policies require participation from citizens in the process of commune development. It is called an Annual Commune Sangkat Development Plan.

What we discovered was that the rate of citizen participation in this process in Takeo was small. The percentage was 25% lower than in Rattanakiri, and 60% lower than in Siem Reap. This showed that citizen participation in these three provinces is different. The reasons include: migration and the way citizens are invited to participate. Citizens also wanted to know the meeting agenda. When they are only informed about the meeting, it lacked enough information to de-

cide if they should join the meeting. So, the meeting agenda and the invitation approach are important for citizens. The commune hall has a subordinate that is the village chief. Yet, citizens wanted an official written letter so that they do not forget. The meeting should be organised at a time that people do not migrate. For example, they have a short-term migration for three months to work at rubber plantation. During this time most indigenous people would migrate. Thus, the level of citizen participation decreased. Citizens rated very high the value of their participation because they want to let commune chiefs know their needs to have quick local development.

We can envision how local authorities can engage citizens to participant in the commune investment process in 2025 while some migrate to other places. Will we be able to get inputs from them? Some citizens or youths have social media, so they can send their needs or priorities through social media if communes have Facebook accounts. This is an idea that came from the research.

Women Researchers Platform:

Impact of COVID-19 and Risk Mitigation on Vulnerable Groups: Empirical Results from Four Case Studies*

The plenary session on **"Impacts of COVID-19 and Risk Mitigation on Vulnerable Groups: Empirical Results from Four Case Studies"** brings together five women researchers, representing a research institute, a university, and an international organisation. The panelists discuss the impact of COVID-19 on different sectors.

There are four policy briefs which will be discussed:

1. "Types and Implementation of Social Assistance under the Context of COVID-19: A Case of Garment and Textile Manufacturing in Cambodia," by Ms. Benghong Siela Bossba, Research Assistant, and Ms. Pen Socheata, Research Assistant, Cambodia Development Resource Institute
2. "The Effectiveness of COVID-19 Social Protection in Cambodia: Perspective and Experience from Female Garment Workers on the Wage Subsidy," by Ms. Reach Mony, Research Assistant, Cambodia Development Resource Institute
3. "Personal Bankruptcy Law as an Entry Point for Credit Consumer Protection Dialogue," by Ms. Phasy Res, PHD candidate, Institut D'études Du Développement De La Sorbonne (Iedes), Sorbonne Paris 1 University, France
4. "Tackling school-related gender-based violence through teacher professional development," by Ms. Lotte Van Praet, Strategic Education Advisor, Education for Development Cambodia (VVOB)

*Panlists: Ms.Lotte Van Praet, Ms. Reach Mony, Ms. Pen Socheata, Ms. Benghong Siela Bossba, Ms. Phasy Res, Ms. Bopharath Sry

Policy Brief: Types and Implementation of Social Assistance under the Context of COVID-19: A Case of Garment and Textile Manufacturing in Cambodia*

Ms. Benghong Siela Bossba, Research Assistant, and Ms. Pen Socheata, Research Assistant, Cambodia Development Resource Institute

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted most aspects of socioeconomic development, with the garment, manufacturing and textile industry being no exception. Decreased demand for orders has led to factory closures, and workers being suspended or laid off. The empirical evidence in this policy brief captures the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of 2000 surveyed garment workers. The survey revealed that a majority of workers (80 percent) have faced income reductions, as well as reductions in food and non-food consumption. Respondents who experienced a lack of food (40 percent) borrowed food from others (20 percent). Notably, women have been disproportionally affected by this. Figures on access to government in-kind support (27 percent) are still low, and more than one-third of workers have not received any cash support from the government. The lack of skills training, and evidence of economic inactivity and job dynamics were also reported. Based on these findings, three policy recommendations were formed to ensure better implementation of social assistance programs targeted at garment workers, and contributing to an inclusive and resilient social assistance system in Cambodia: (1) the continuation of emergency assistance and the provision of welfare; (2) improved identification mechanisms, assistance implementation and delivery; and (3) increased awareness and provision of upskilling and reskilling training for garment workers.

Ms. Benghong Siela Bossba has recently graduated from two universities. Upon her graduation in 2020, she has joined CDRI as an intern at CDET. She holds a BA in International Relation from Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL) and a LL.B. in English Language Based Bachelor of Law from Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE). Currently, she is a Research Assistant at CDET.

Ms. Pen Socheata obtained a Bachelor's Degree from the Department of International Studies, Institute of Foreign Languages with an International Relations major in 2020. In October, she joined Cambodia Development Resource Institute as a research intern in the Centre for Development Economics and Trade. Currently, she is a Research Assistant. Socheata has grown interested in data science and macroeconomic and foreign policies in ASEAN countries.

*This policy brief mainly uses findings from the Garment Worker Survey (2021), which is part of the regional project examining the impacts of COVID-19 on inclusive development and governance in CLMV countries. The project is funded by the International Development Research Centre of Canada. Views expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of either the Cambodia Development Resource Institute or the funder. The authors take full responsibility for unintentional errors.

I. Background and Objectives

The pandemic has impacted many sectors of the Cambodian economy, and particularly the garment industry, as 40 percent of the overall workforce are those in the garment and textile industry (Connell 2021). For them, the pandemic has resulted in reduced income, difficulty affording basic needs, inability to send remittances, and reliance on debt for survival (Connell 2021). United Nations Cambodia (2021b) traced similar impacts. The government and other stakeholders were quick to respond by providing certain forms of social assistance through the IDPoor Program and wage subsidies to mitigate the shock. Based on a survey conducted by the Center for Policy Studies, government support is considered helpful but not sufficient (Connell 2021).

The conceptualization of social protection is diverse in terms of the focus area. Issues are vulnerability, risk, deprivation, poverty, and economic and social distress. Norton et al. (2001) raised insurance-based policies and programs, social assistance and other instruments as means to deal with deprivation and vulnerabilities faced by both the poor and non-poor during shocks. Specifically, social assistance refers to non-contributory interventions aimed at helping individuals or households to mitigate poverty, vulnerability, and destitution (Barrientos 2010 as cited in Carter et al. 2019). The Cambodian social protection system shares commonality with this concept, as it entails social assistance and social security as a means to address the economic risks and vulnerabilities derived from changes in living and working conditions (The Royal Government of Cambodia 2017). As mentioned in the core official document, the National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) 2016-2025, Cambodia's social protection system is divided into two pillars: (1) Social assistance, and (2) Social security. The former aims to support the poor and vulnerable through four main programs: emergency response, human capital development, vocational training, and social welfare of vulnerable people. Emergency response is initiated to support the poor and vulnerable during emergencies. COVID-19 is a health emergency, and has had similar impacts on income and consumption for workers in the garment industry. Vocational training is part of efforts to bridge skills gaps and contribute to a more skilled labor force. Social welfare is targeted at vulnerable groups and is implemented using the IDPoor system.

By acknowledging the significance of the government's social assistance program in supporting the vulnerable during times of crisis, this policy brief aims to give an overview of COVID-19's impact on garment workers, their needs, and the implementation of a social assistance program in this sector. Backed by empirical evidence, policy recommendations will explore possible improvements in social assistance for this target group, and beyond, in Cambodia.

II. Analysis Method

This policy brief is based on a descriptive analysis of primary data collected from a phone survey of 2000 workers in the garment and textile manufacturing industry. The survey was conducted in June-July 2021 and covered 10 provinces across Cambodia. Existing findings and literature are incorporated to enrich the discussion. By using the social assistance framework specified in the NSPPF, the paper describes the implementation of social assistance programs, particularly for garment workers and their households. Various social and economic indicators, such as income, consumption, food security, re-skilling and up-skilling, as well as support measures, are examined to indicate the impacts of COVID-19 and the extent to which social assistance programs have contributed to mitigating those impacts. Due to limited availability and scope of data collected, the paper does not cover human capacity development programs and analyses of specific groups, namely, the elderly and people with disabilities.

III. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Sample Characteristics

The samples were selected based on probability proportional to size. The geographical distribution of respondents was concentrated in three provinces: Phnom Penh (37 percent), Kandal (17 percent) and Kampong Speu (14 percent). Table 1 summarizes the geographical distribution of respondents; 80 percent of respondents were female and 20 percent were male. Respondents' ages varied from 18 years to 65 years, with a mean of 32 years for women and 31 years for men. In terms of marital status, 72 percent were married, 20 percent were single, and 9 percent were either divorced or widowed.

Table 1: Sample Geographical Distribution

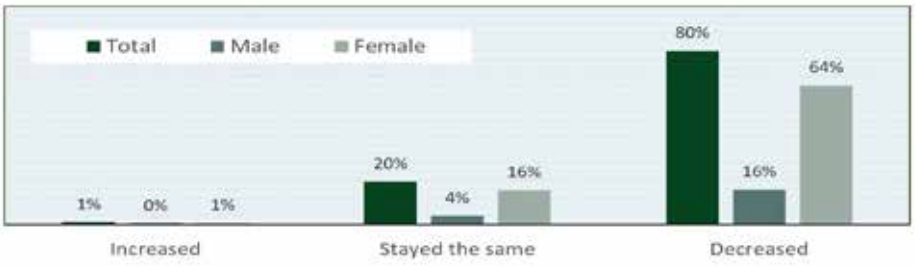
Geographical Location	Total		Male Obs.	Female Obs.
	Obs.	%		
Banteay Meanchey	22	1.1	4	18
Kampong Cham	185	9.0	34	151
Kampong Chhnang	124	6.2	13	111
Kampong Speu	289	14.5	64	225
Kandal	330	16.5	68	262
Phnom Penh	731	36.6	159	572
Prey Veng	19	1.0	1	18
Preah Sihanouk	30	1.5	5	25
Svay Rieng	139	7.0	31	108
Takeo	131	6.6	25	106
Total	2000	100	404	1596

Source: Garment Worker Survey (2021)

3.2. Emergency Response and Welfare Provision

As seen in Figure 1, 80 percent of surveyed respondents reported reduced income during the time of COVID-19. Of these, more than one fifth had their income reduced by half. Due to the female-dominated nature of this industry, the share of female respondents (64 percent) reporting income reductions was significantly higher than male respondents (16 percent). In addition to reduced income, 35 percent of respondents had reduced food consumption and 24 percent had reduced non-food consumption. Notably, male respondents (40 percent) reported reduced household food consumption more than females (33 percent), whereas females (27 percent) reported reduced household non-food consumption more than males (13 percent).

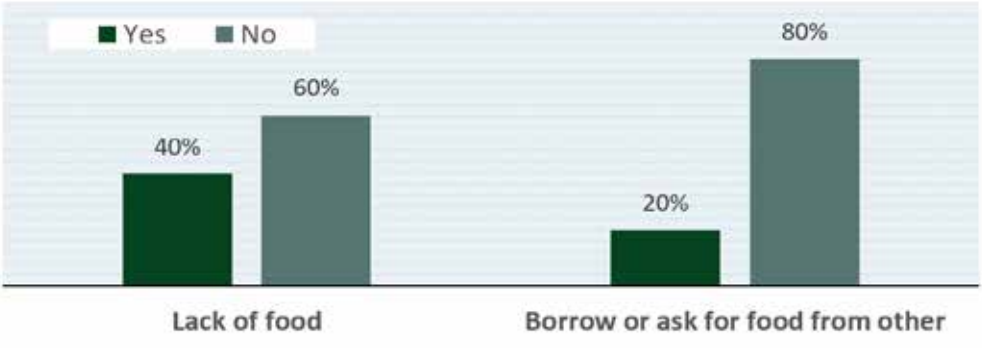
Figure 1: Income Status Before and During COVID-19



Source: Garment Worker Survey (2021)

Food insecurity is another important finding from the study: 40 percent of respondents reported a lack of food and 20 percent borrowed or asked for food from others during the pandemic (Figure 2). The consequences of reduced food consumption affect women more than men. When faced with a lack of food, female respondents said that they and their mothers volunteered to eat less (58 percent), while this was 35 percent for men and their fathers. More women borrowed food (68 percent) than men (44 percent). These findings indicate the severity of the COVID-19 situation in Cambodia, and for garment workers in particular. Thus, government assistance, both in-kind and cash support, is needed more than ever during this emergency.

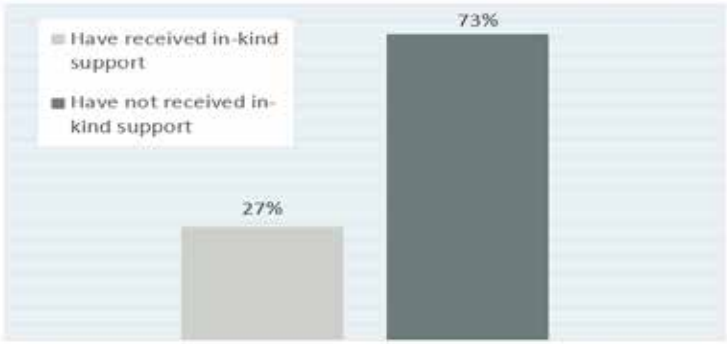
Figure 2: Food Insecurity



Source: Garment Worker Survey (2021)

Such assistance was evidenced in the findings, with 27 percent of respondents reporting receiving in-kind assistance from the government since March 2020 (Figure 3). Daily survival necessities including rice, instant food and cooking condiments were delivered as part of emergency food assistance (United Nations Cambodia 2021a).

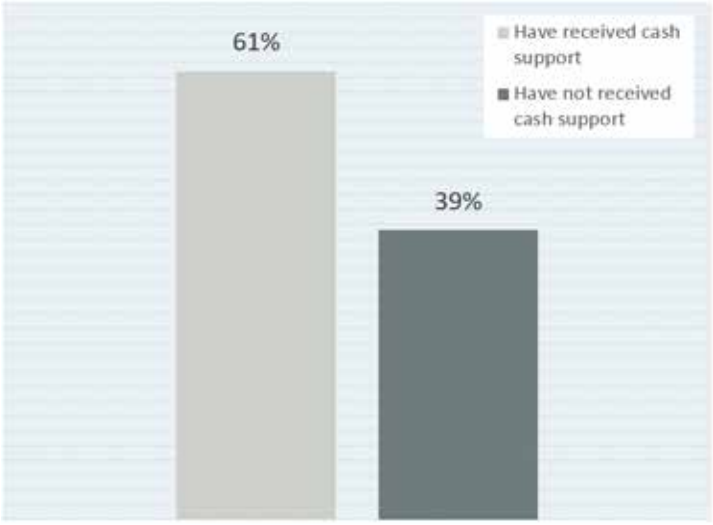
Figure 3: Receipt of In-kind Assistance from the Government



Source: Garment Worker Survey (2021)

Another form of assistance targeted at poor and vulnerable people is Cash Transfers for the Poor and Vulnerable during COVID-19. IDPoor and on-demand mechanisms are the primary targeting procedures to identify poor and vulnerable people for support. As a particular response to COVID-19, the government has been implementing another cash transfer program to subsidize garment workers' wages, whose factories file for suspension; 61 percent of surveyed respondents reported receiving cash support from the government programs (Figure 4). This includes support from either the IDPoor Program or the wage subsidy. Meanwhile, 39 percent have not received any cash support since March 2020.

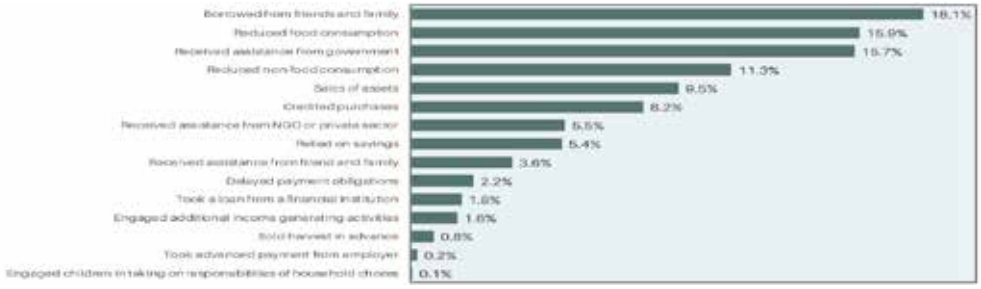
Figure 4: Receipt of Cash Support from the Government



Source: Garment Worker Survey (2021)

The government support programs seem to help in mitigating the impacts for those affected. In Figure 5, receiving assistance from government (15.7 percent) is shown as the third most common coping strategy among respondents, although borrowing from friends and family and reduced consumption are also in the top four.

Figure 5: Coping Strategies

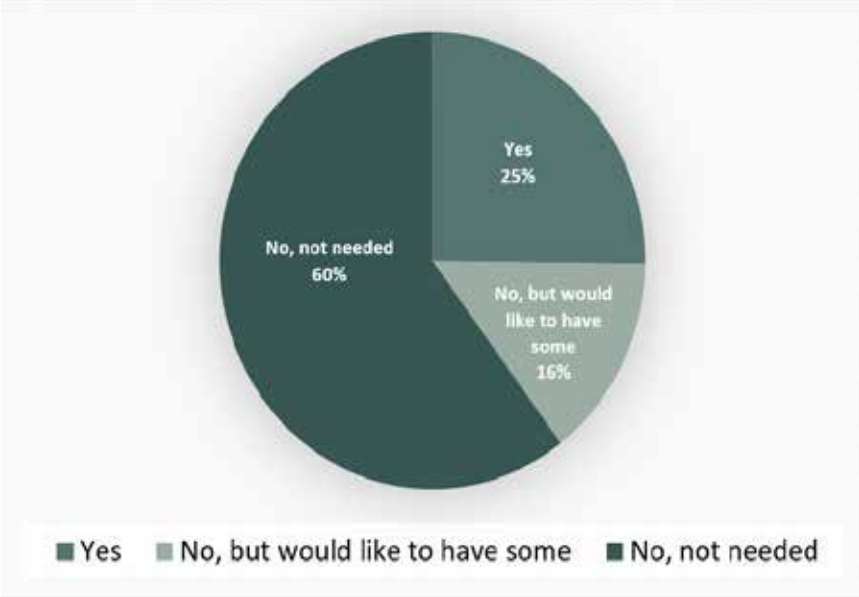


Source: Garment Worker Survey (2021)

3.3. Vocational Training Program

The garment and textile sector contributed roughly 11 percent to GDP in 2019 and 9.9 percent in 2020 (United Nations Cambodia 2021b). This sector of the economy remains one of the most impacted by the pandemic. During the COVID-19 shock, skills training for garment workers should be more available, so that workers can adapt to the context. As shown in Figure 6, only one quarter of workers received skills training during the COVID-19 crisis and 15 percent would like to receive training, while another 60 percent responded not needed.

Figure 6: Necessary Skills Training Provision During COVID-19 Crisis



Source: Garment Worker Survey (2021)

Most training programs focused on COVID-19 preventive and protection measures (68 percent) and occupation-specific technical skills (14 percent). Other areas of training, which were not as prolific, were using advanced equipment (3 percent) and digital skills in training (0 percent). It is worth mentioning that these figures can be based on certain positions that the garment workers are in. This reflects the current low skill status of garment workers in Cambodia in the context of COVID-19, which requires more upskilling and training for garment workers.

The findings for skill-set preferences also align with skills training: 15 percent of garment workers want to have similar skills sets; 41 percent chose occupation-specific technical skills, while 31 percent chose a training course on COVID-19 preventive and protection measures. However, 11 percent preferred team leading, supervisory, or management skills. This reiterates the demand for upskilling and training, as well as increased awareness of its importance.

Equally significant in this context, 49 percent of workers did nothing when they were suspended or terminated, followed by 20 percent, 9 percent, and 5 percent who moved to the agriculture sector, engaged in buying and selling activities, and worked in construction, respectively. The high level of economic inactivity and evidence of job dynamics across sectors emphasizes the importance of re-skilling and equipping workers with sufficient skills to secure new jobs during times of crisis.

IV. Discussion

CARE Cambodia (2020) reported that female garment workers experienced an average income reduction of 42 percent, based on a survey conducted in mid-2020. This was also the case for Southeast Asian countries, where a majority of surveyed households in Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam saw incomes reduce by 26 percent to 50 percent (Morgan and Trinh 2021). In addition to reduced income, the lockdown implemented in Cambodia in April 2021 further exacerbated food insecurity in places where garment factories are concentrated. More than 17,000 garment workers were quarantined and workers from around 200 factories tested positive across Cambodia (David 2021). The impact was even more devastating in the red zones [4], where around 80 percent of the population experienced a lack of food (Danovaro, Laot, and Federico 2021). Despite signs of food insecurity, receipt of in-kind assistance was still low, and the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on women must be carefully considered.

Another finding relates to the receipt of cash support. For those who have not received cash support yet, ineligibility could be a reason. For IDPoor, the household must be assessed and registered in the government system. For the wage subsidy program, workers must register with their factories, be suspended for

[4] Refers to geographical zones that have the highest levels of COVID-19 transmission.

at least 10 days, and be able to withdraw the cash support within 10 days of it being administered. Failure to meet these requirements results in no entitlement to cash support, even if they are vulnerable. Due to the lack of a systematic database on these targeted groups, issues such as delays in identification and registration processes were also acknowledged in the early stages of implementation. These are still considered a priority for further improvement by the government (Asian Development Bank 2021). Another explanation is operational bottlenecks. Technical issues caused by over-use of services at cash withdrawal agents is considered a significant challenge that reduces access to cash support (Nuppun Research and Consulting 2021). In other countries, similar cash support programs for garment workers are also implemented, but the amount of cash support is relatively higher based on the minimum wage standard of the respective country. Garment workers in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Vietnam received cash support amounting to more than 50 percent of the minimum wage, whereas the Cambodian wage subsidy corresponds to only 37 percent of the minimum wage (James, Jason, and Christian 2020). Some cash support also covers those whose working hours have been reduced. This could be a good practice to adopt in Cambodia, considering that many garment workers at the time of the survey were no longer suspended, but had to reduce their working hours due to limited orders from suppliers.

To deal with the COVID-19 impacts, workers adopt various coping strategies, but receiving government assistance is the only positive coping mechanism among the top four. The other three are negative strategies that could affect human capital development and the ability to deal with future crises. Based on a recent report, a positive effect of cash support evidenced among households in Cambodia is that people who have received cash support are less likely to resort to selling goods or assets (UNICEF and World Food Programme 2021).

Linking to vocational training as part of social assistance programs in the NSPPF 2016-2025, the garment and textile sector is not explicitly considered as the prioritized sector for the vocational training provision. As evidenced in the findings, it is important that currently suspended and terminated garment workers should receive both upskilling and reskilling training. The training would help them remain relevant in the labor market, and be able to practice their skill sets to perform tasks during the pandemic and beyond. The training would further help them secure their jobs and maintain a sustainable income. Workers would also be more resilient to future emergencies with the skills gained from the training, as they could find solutions and survive in times of crisis.

V. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Garment workers are among those most affected by COVID-19, with impacts ranging from loss of income to food and job insecurity and limited access to social assistance. These impacts significantly affect garment workers and their families' livelihoods. Reduced income has forced workers to reduce both food and non-food consumption. Women bear a disproportionate impact of food insecurity. While emergency responses and social welfare contribute partially to

mitigating these impacts, they have not yet been implemented to realize their full potential. Some of the challenges identified include issues embedded in eligibility criteria, delayed administrative processes, and operational bottlenecks. For skills training programs, further improvement is needed, as evidenced in the findings on the lack of training provision and awareness of its importance. Improving the implementation of social assistance programs and developing a more resilient social protection system will help address these challenges in the short and long term. To achieve this, we have three specific recommendations:

(1) Continue emergency assistance and welfare provision for garment workers and other vulnerable households who have been heavily affected by the pandemic, using a more gender-sensitive approach. Assistance must be provided promptly to ensure that impacts on consumption are mitigated.

(2) Establish and maintain a database system that can help identify affected groups and their specific needs, and improve social assistance implementation and delivery mechanisms to increase the accessibility, effectiveness, and resilience of the social protection system for future crises.

- First, there should be an updated database of workers and a standard, consisting of gender-sensitive, socio-economic indicators applicable across sectors, to identify affected groups and their needs.
- Second, expand coverage of the cash support program to include more than only those who have been suspended, and consider increasing the amount of cash support to at least 50 percent of the minimum wage for this sector.
- Third, continue to seek assistance from the industry and development partners to ease and facilitate the registration process. Cooperate with the private sector to diversify the cash withdrawal platform and prolong its validity to increase accessibility. Further engage sub-national actors, the private sector, development partners, and civil society in designing and implementing social assistance programs to better understand the context and challenges.

(3) Raise awareness of the importance of up-skilling and re-skilling and their contribution to job security. Increase the provision of and participation in mandatory training courses for garment workers, using an incentive system. Considering their higher level of vulnerability, low-skilled workers should be prioritized. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, non-governmental organizations including industry associations and the private sector should work cooperatively to design and implement these training programs. Public-private partnerships are also needed to sustain financial resources, to provide incentives for employees and contribute to program implementation.

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Policy Brief: The Effectiveness of COVID-19 Social Protection in Cambodia: Perspective and Experience from Female Garment Workers on the Wage Subsidy

Ms. Reach Mony, Research Assistant, Cambodia Development Resource Institute

Summary

COVID-19 has heavily affected Cambodian female garment worker's economic security and personal well-being. The impacts are on employment, household income and expenditures, mental and physical health, remittances, investment, and savings. Recognizing this as a threat, the Royal Government of Cambodia has rolled out a new measure of temporary wage subsidy as part of a social assistance program for suspended garment workers, to the total US$70 monthly to mitigate the impacts and support their livelihood. Hence, this study delved into the perspective and experiences of female garment workers in regards to this support and also examined its effectiveness. Consequently, three main findings have emerged. First, it is considered as an opportunity to support their survival in the short-term. Second, there are several challenges revolving around money retrieval and distribution faced by workers. Third, it is viewed as not effective due to insufficiency in sustaining their livelihoods. Thus, several policy interventions are necessary to ensure efficiency in providing support towards female garment workers as following:

(1) Review the current wage subsidy program;
(2) Strengthen monitoring mechanism of the distribution of wages to the workers;
(3) Assess challenges of unmet beneficiaries;
(4) Promote well information distribution among workers; and
(5) Consider expanding the eligibility and coverage of support to reduced hours and informal workers.

Reach Mony is a Research Assistant at Centre for Governance an Inclusive Society, CDRI. She holds a BA in International Relations from the Royal University of Phnom Penh. She is currently part of the ReFashion Project and Care Economy and Unpaid Care Work of Women in Cambodia. She mainly supports the team in conducting research and administrative, logistical tasks and the organization of virtual CDRI's Monthly Research Seminar.

I. Background and Key Objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe disruptions throughout the global garment and footwear supply chain resulting in widespread lay-offs and furloughs. In Cambodia, approximately 900,000 people were directly employed in the garment and footwear sector, where around 80 percent of these workers were women (UN Cambodia 2021). In 2020 alone, job losses in this sector amount to around 200,000 (ILO 2020b; Sorn 2020). Between April and May 2021, approximately US$117 million of lost wages were incurred while more than 700,000 workers were owed US$393 million in outstanding wages and severance pay (Turton 2021). This caused a serious threat to the economic security of female garment workers whose minimum wage was only US$190 in 2019, which was not a living wage (Mao and Flynn 2021). Moreover, 88 percent of workers' jobs are estimated to face the risk with the arrival of automation (OECD 2017). Therefore, female workforces in this sector are considered to be a group that need social protection from the government.

Social protection would play a critical role in coping with these challenges. It refers to certain types of assistance to prevent people from falling into poverty and vulnerability by different economic and social shocks (Chheang 2016; Kem and Khiev 2010; ILO 2013). Cambodia is implementing existing social programs outlined in the National Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025 and also rolled out other measures (Royal Government of Cambodia 2017). One of which is a temporary wage subsidy as part of a social assistance program to suspended workers of a total of US$70 per month, of which US$40 will be provided by the government and US$30 will be provided by the employer (EuroCham 2020; ILO 2020a). This assistance will be available for only formally suspended workers. The payment would be made through Wing (Cambodia) Limited Specialized Bank and workers will be notified by text message within 10 days for collection. For unclaimed payment, it will be returned to the government.

In light of this, the policy brief's objectives are twofold. First, it aims to explore how female garment workers perceive this provision of support and further examines its effectiveness to assist and support workers and their family's livelihood during the time of job suspension. Second, it calls for policy intervention by the government to review and adopt solutions to ensure efficiency in delivering help to those people at risk.

II. Analysis Method

This paper uses data from the Refashion Project which is a mixed method longitudinal study of female garment workers to track and amplify their experiences during the pandemic[5] . There were two rounds of data collection through face-

[5] The Refashion Project is led by a team of United Kingdom and Cambodian researchers from Royal Holloway, University of London, the University of Nottingham, and the Cambodia Development Resource Institute. More information about the project, visit https://www.refashionstudy.org

to-face and phone surveys with a sample of 203 garment workers across 40 factories in Phnom Penh, Kandal, and Kampong Speu provinces. Quantitative data was collected between November and December 2020 of 203 garment workers, and between March and April 2021 of 155 workers. Qualitative data was gathered between January and February 2020 of 60 workers, and between May and June 2021 with 49 workers. This qualitative data was in the form of key informant interviews to deepen the understanding of their various stories and hardships. Additional inputs were generated from desk reviews and secondary data from the reports and articles detailing the most recent information and updates about the stimulus package.

The quantitative data was analyzed with descriptive statistics using Excel. The qualitative data was transcribed and imported to NVivo software for organization, management, and analysis of the garment workers ' perspectives. It was done by carefully reading all the transcripts from two rounds of interviews and identifying key themes and sub-themes based on commonalities. The data was then coded around these nodes/themes. The main themes and sub-themes that emerged related to government support, access to wage subsidy, challenges, and effectiveness of support.

III. Findings

This section will explore the perspectives and experiences of female garment workers by showing the opportunities and challenges given by the financial support. Then it further analyzes the effectiveness of the support by examining its ability to support workers' livelihoods.

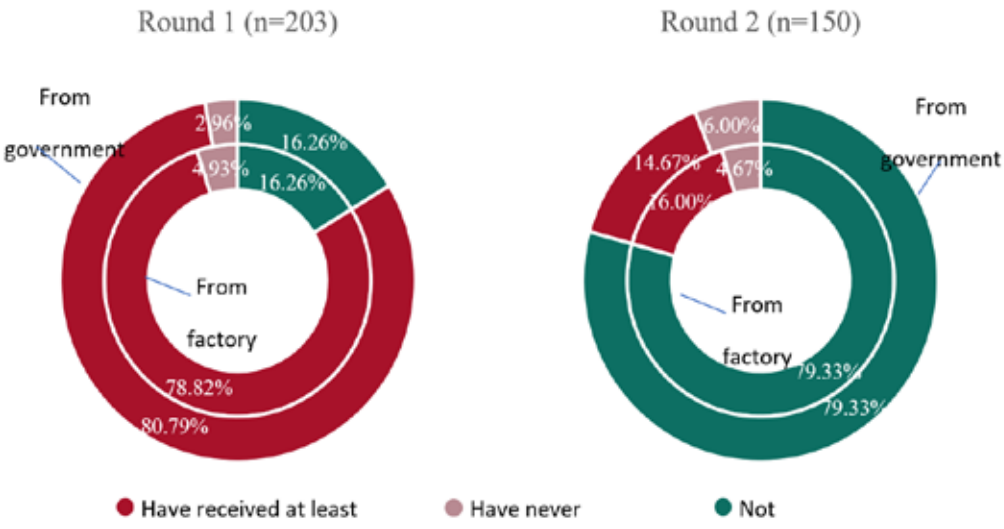
1. Perspective and Experience

As of April 2021, the government industry has already provided wage subsidies to 520,916 workers whose contracts have been suspended in the garment, textiles, and footwear sector (425,292 were female beneficiaries) (ADB 2021). As COVID-19 is still a threat, the program has been extended continuously to the 10th round of support to female garment workers. Therefore, this section will elucidate the experience and perspective of workers based on the opportunities and challenges they found from this support.

Opportunities

From the two rounds of surveys, the data shows that most of the suspended respondents were aware and have received the money at least once. Precisely, 78.82% to 80.79% and 14.67% to 16.4% of respondents have received full payment from both government and employer between round one and round two, respectively (Figure 1). The large number of workers who did not receive the support in round two reported that some of them are being called to resume their work as normal and others have not been registered as suspended workers with the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training in a timely manner by the employers.

Figure 1: Percentage of Suspended Workers that Received the Wage Subsidy



Source: Data from two round of quantitative survey of the Refashion Project conducted in November/December 2020(n=203), and March/April 2021 (n=155)

The experience from the first round of qualitative interviews showed that this support has played a role in assisting them to solve some problems, mainly on daily spending such as rent, bills, and food consumption. A respondent stated, "When I got the money with its amount of around KHR160,000 from the government, I used it to buy rice and paid the electricity bills."[6]

In February 2021, implementation of lockdowns were ordered in Phnom Penh, Takhmao, and Sihanouk Ville at different times. All the operation of business, factories, production had to be halted, hence affecting a significant number of workers' incomes. Therefore, the government disbursed more than US$11 million to be distributed to garment workers who were caught in lockdowns whereby it is reported that almost 275,747 workers in 513 factories would receive this social protection allowance. Therefore, this gratitude is even amplified in the second round of interviews, as workers perceived it as an opportunity to alleviate their suffering during this time.

Challenges

Although the government has continuously extended the subsidies, there are still a number of workers who reported not receiving either partial payment or full payment. Data from the two rounds of surveys and interviews shows the challenges most often notes had to do with the money distribution and retrieval. This can be explained by the employers that did not follow the regulations to

[6] Interviewed a garment worker in Phnom Penh

pay for the work and also caused late registration of suspended workers to the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training. This may be explained by their misunderstanding of their role, their unwillingness to do so, their inability to be contacted (such as losing their phones), etc. The result from the first round of interviews revealed that some workers are less likely to reach out to their employers again once they failed to access or claim the money. (See Box 1)

Box 1: Workers' challenges

"For that US$70, the date of payment was always delayed. For example, the date of payment was set on the 5th, but it was delayed until 2 weeks later to get it." -**Garment worker, Phnom Penh**

"Some workers did not get it on time. [...] The Ministry releases the incentives for 2 days only, so some people could not get it on time. They announced on their Facebook page that workers could withdraw money within 1 week. But only after 2 days the workers could not get it. I know there were a lot of workers who did not get it [...]." -**Garment worker, Phnom Penh**

Moreover, workers also reported their experience with irregularity of wage subsidies when they could only receive it for two or three months and then it was no longer available to them. Similar cases were also voiced out by interviewees in the second round that they felt the operation was not smooth enough and only a short span of time was allowed for withdrawal. This made it harder for those residing farther from the withdrawal location to access this money while the city lockdown was in effect.

2. Effectiveness

Although this measure was initiated to protect and mitigate economic impacts, the amount given was enormously below the minimum wage, not to mention it is a not living wage (Nuon 2021). Regardless of the stipend support, suspended workers are still heavily suffering from the crisis and many of them are living under the national poverty line (CARE 2020). The results can outline that this is not effective in the way that it is far too little for them to access basic necessities, not to mention other expenditures to support their livelihood.

This can be explained by several aspects. First, the average expenditure of garment workers. Based on Refashion data, the garment workers' average monthly household food expenditure during COVID-19 was US$107.03 while the average monthly accommodation and facilities fees are US$27.64 and US$13.63, respectively (Ngo et al. 2021). It was estimated that the average individual food expenditure was US$69, indicating that the provision can barely meet these costs. In some cases, even during lockdown, the rented room and utilities fees remained the same so this stipend did not cover their living costs.

Second, there is an issue of food price inflation whereas meat, fish and even vegetables were more expensive due to rises in demand. These caused massive concerns among interviewees from the second round on the small subsidy which could not address their basic needs after lockdown. (See Box 2)

Box 2: Workers face with inflation

A respondent mentioned that "[...] the ginger price was rising about US$12.5 per kg which is impossible. I can't afford it. [...] Last time I bought water [brand] Convolvulus which usually cost about 1000 riels a bunch but is now 3000 riels per bunch"-Garment worker, Phnom Penh

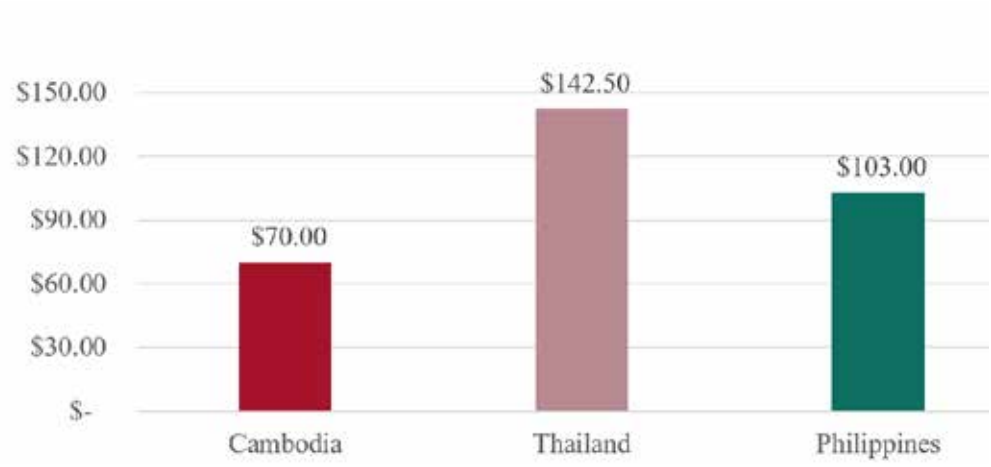
"[...]in 2021, the food price has increased sharply. For example, 10 eggs cost 18,000 Riels. [...] Since the factory started to suspend jobs, we have earned so little compared to before. Before, we could spend 7,000 Riels or 8,000 Riels on food and we could have 2 or 3 meals available for two people. Now, we spend 10,000 Riels and that is barely enough to serve only 1 meal for two people." **-Garment worker, Phnom Penh**

Third, many workers carried debt from prior to the pandemic. Based on a two-round survey, 63 percent of workers possess outstanding loans. Concerns of loan repayments are intensified in tandem with meeting living costs and medicine as the main financial worries. This data is also reinforced by the interviews in the second round, that they are likely to allocate loan repayments first and this leaves less for food consumption. Hence in some cases workers have resorted to other informal work to meet their daily living costs.

3. Discussion

It is noteworthy to examine practices from several countries, notably from the Philippines and Thailand. The COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP) by the Philippines was a program to assist suspended and reduced hours of workers via financial support of a one-time payment of US$103, which corresponds to 68 percent of minimum wage of US$151 monthly in central Luzon (ILO 2020b). Similarly, the Thai government also paid affected workers under the Social Security System 50 percent of their previous salary if the employer temporarily halts employment (KPMG 2020). However, the provision of the wage subsidy in Cambodia is only 37 percent of minimum wage in 2021, which is 46 percent and 26 percent lower than the Philippines' and Thailand's ratio, respectively.

Figure 2: Amount of Monthly Cash Assistance by Several Countries



Source: KPMG 2020; ILO 2020b

This suggests that the Cambodian government could have offered a higher amount of cash support given by its assistance from development partners through loans, grants that were given to support health care systems, and social protection measures such as temporary wage subsidies. Cambodia received US$571 million from Team Europe's financial mobilization for cash assistance and social protection in the export-oriented industries (Xinhua 2020). Cambodia has also received funding from the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as income protection for workers in the ready-made garment sector which included 1.95 million Euro for Cash Transfer for the garment sector (ILO 2020c).

The incremental amount of the cash assistance with an appropriate estimate of the government budget will effectively help alleviate the hardship and burden rather than just provide food. The other burden could be stemmed from reduction of work, job loss, decline in income of family members/spouses. There are cases showing that most of these workers are employed in the informal sectors and are not entitled to any social protection for the loss of work. In this sense, female garment workers tend to bear the responsibility for earning the household income alone. This caused the serious issues when one could only receive US$70 within the time of suspension and that this has been allocated for the whole household expenditure. Therefore, it is essential to help in the way to prevent them from resorting to traditional coping mechanisms such as selling their assets, which can plunge them into chronic and continuing poverty, and also a way to keep them away from encountering further long-term problems such as food insecurity, both mental and physical health crisis, debt crisis.

IV. Conclusion and Policy Implications

Three important findings resulted from the study: (1) The wage subsidies were perceived as an opportunity to support female garment workers in the short-

run; (2) several challenges arose within money retrieval and distribution; (3) the subsidy is not effective in supporting the livelihoods of workers during job suspension.

Within the analysis of the findings above, the paper calls for policy interventions from the government to:

- **Review the current wage subsidy program** through an evidence-based study to determine a new amount that could adequately and inclusively meet recipients' basic needs and ease their household burdens.

- **Strengthen, expand rigorous tracking/monitoring mechanism of the distribution of wages to the workers** while strengthening arrangements for program reporting with accountability and transparency between responsible ministry, government agency, employers, payment agents and relevant actors by establishing focal points to ensure timely reporting on program outcomes.

- **Assess challenges of unmet beneficiaries** in order to pinpoint obstacles hindering them from benefiting from the program; and to provide clear information for the implementer to overcome the gap to ensure the well preparation for the next round.

- **Promote distribution of information** about the wage subsidy programs and strengthen the communication with related actors to raise awareness to workers by considering workers have limited access to information, higher levels of illiteracy, and lack of access to devices.

- **Consider broadening the eligibility to reduced hours and applicability to informal workers;** especially not only for those in subcontracting factories but also other workers that are not entitled to any form of social protection.

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Policy Brief: Personal Bankruptcy Law as an Entry Point for Credit Consumer Protection Dialogue*

Ms. Phasy Res, PHD candidate, Institut D'études Du Développement De La Sorbonne (Iedes), Sorbonne Paris 1 University, France

Summary

COVID-19 has caused income loss among vulnerable households, mainly those who engaged in tourism and cross-border migration. With the loss of income, it was observed that the majority of households, and especially those who had outstanding loans with the amount of 5000 USD and above, tended to engage in coping strategies that could heighten their vulnerabilities. At the time of this study, debt forgiveness which was in a form of write-off policy was practiced but not systematically. Since debt forgiveness is not practiced systematically, the concern is that due to the prolonged nature of COVID-19, it is expected that more low-income households would have to engage in extreme negative coping strategies which could push them and their children further into poverty. Thus, there is a need for a systematic debt forgiveness. The systematic debt forgiveness could be implemented as part of a personal bankruptcy law, and it should be implemented with thorough assessment tools.

Ms. Phasy RES is a third-year PhD candidate in anthropology at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Currently she is also a research fellow at the Center for Khmer Studies. Her PhD research looks at the relationship between microfinance expansion and land security by examining how access to microfinance shapes land management, access, and control. She has conducted research on a wide range of topics, including agricultural mechanization and intensification, anti-malaria drug resistance, labor migration in the Sub-Mekong region, and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 crisis on households in various sectors including tourism. Her work has been published in Espace Politique, Malaria Journal, Development Policy Review, Development and Change, Mekong Migration Network and The Center for Khmer Studies.

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I. Introduction

The COVID-19 induced crisis has revealed numbers of structural issues, which require the expansion of social protections in various sectors, mainly the informal ones. In line with the social protections expansion, credit consumer protection should be considered. A decade prior to COVID-19, the concern over household over-indebtedness in Cambodia had been raised, studied, and discussed (see Gonzalez 2010; Gonzalez & Javoy 2011; Krauss et al 2012; Liv 2013; CMA 2014; Bylander 2016; MFC and Good Return 2017; Bylander et al 2019). The central concern, which was raised by researchers and microfinance stakeholders, is that loan sizes have grown rapidly, while average incomes have not grown at a similar pace. In 2017, such concerns prompted the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) with the support of its international partners, mainly Good Return, to launch a financial literacy campaign called 'Let's talk money.' It was aired and broadcast by the national radio and television channels. The campaign was also included in the national educational curriculum.

Simultaneously, financial literacy training programs have been implemented by major Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) and non-governmental organizations (mainly local) (see more in Bylander and Res 2020; Res forthcoming). Firstly, such programmes are indeed effective when the problem is individual-driven. However, as highlighted in Res (2021), prior to COVID-19 the failure to generate incomes are sometimes structurally-driven, for instance immigration policy at the destination countries (see also Bylander 2020), flood, drought, and everything but arms (EBA) trade preferential withdrawal. These factors shape the stability of income earning activities, and they are beyond the control of the individuals. Secondly, when households are already in a debt distress situation, financial literacy is seen to be less effective (see more in Res forthcoming). My point is that, both solutions are needed but it should be implemented based on different circumstances. During times of crisis, a structural-driven response, like a personal bankruptcy law with the provision of debt forgiveness, is needed. How financial literacy could be included in the personal bankruptcy law will be discussed in the conclusion and policy recommendation.

Apart from this individual-driven solution, in the past five years, financial and governmental actors have taken a number of steps to mainstream best practices in consumer protection across the financial sector. For instance, since 2016 the Cambodian Microfinance Association (CMA) has worked to build stronger consumer protection practices, via its lending guidelines, and in 2015 the Association of Banks in Cambodia (ABC) also initiated Code of Banking Practices and Cambodian Sustainable Finance Principles Implementation Guidelines. The two mechanisms are used by both groups to guide member institutions. In addition, NBC has also noted the importance of consumer protection in its most recent financial sector development strategic plan 2016-2025. In this strategic plan, NBC appears committed to bringing consumer protection into its regulations. The most recent policy which directly responds to the COVID-19 crisis is the circular No. T7.020. 001 issued on 27 March 2020; this policy allows debt distressed households to get some sort of support in terms of loan restructuring

and debt repayment suspension (see more details in Res 2021).

Although NBC and CMA have been actively engaged to bring the principles of credit consumer protection into practice, it is still in its infancy stage. According to Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 'Microscope' report, Cambodia ranks nearly at the bottom for consumer protection. Cambodian ranks 53 with a score of 14, while Indonesia ranks 13 with a score of 77 on consumer protection (Economist Intelligence Unit 2019). Based on the EIU's findings, and drawing on my research findings, this study argues that the NBC and relevant government agencies or ministries should consider establishing a personal bankruptcy law. Such law can be a legal framework to build a culture of credit consumer protection.

The overall objectives of the research were to, first, understand households' responses to income loss, and second, to understand the dynamics of debt repayment among microfinance debt distressed households, as well as the possible consequences of this distress. The research also aims to highlight issues that are recurrent and exacerbated during COVID-19 times. Finally, there are many possible responses, but in this policy brief I chose to propose one possible recommendation for policy makers, which is the establishment of a personal bankruptcy law. This will be discussed in more details in the conclusion and policy recommendation section.

II. Analysis method

The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 119 current microfinance borrowers and 34 financial institution (FI) representatives. The study was carried out between July and October 2020 in Phnom Penh, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Siem Reap, and Kandal (FI representatives only). All interviews were transcribed, translated, and analysed for themes and sub-themes. The analysis and table figures highlight the common experiences of the interviewees.

Adopting a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) framework, we selected indebted households with high levels of economic insecurity or vulnerabilities prior to COVID-19 (export-oriented agriculture and cross-border migration), and the households who engaged in sectors that were perceived as severely impacted by COVID-19 (garment and tourism). Within the sector, households were selected with a great diversity: e.g, seasonal and regular migrant workers (cross-border migration); souvenir sellers, tuk tuk drivers, tour guides, hotel and restaurant staff (tourism); land-owning farmers, and tenant farmers (agriculture); and textile, shoes, clothes, and bag workers (garment manufacturing).

The study areas were selected based on multiple reasons. Firstly, it was based on their high concentrations of the sectors of interest. For example, most garment factories are in Phnom Penh, with some in Kampong Chhnang. Siem Reap heavily depends on international tourism. Battambang is one of the main origin regions for cross-border migrant workers and is also well-known for its cash

crop cultivation, such as rice, corn, and cassava. Secondly, the researcher's prior research experience (Kampong Chhnang) and the research team's connection to these communities also contributed to their selection. These prior connections were important in allowing the fieldwork to run smoothly during a time where anxieties about outsiders were high.

Additionally, FI representatives in Kandal province were interviewed instead of in Phnom Penh because the majority of loans in this province were given to either garment manufacturing workers or those who do business directly or indirectly with the workers. The institutions were selected based on two main criteria: 1) being SMART-certified members; and 2) being one of the top ten banks/MFIs. Being certified by SMART, FIs are expected to integrate seven consumer protection principles[7] into their lending and debt collecting practices. Being a SMART-certified member is one of the important components for this study as we engage in consumer protection dialogue. Top ten banks/MFIs[8] which were comprised of 90 percent (self-calculation; LICADHO 2019) of formal loan were invited to participate in the study but the team only received three acceptances[9]. In addition, the research team also used our own connections to interview several MFI employees. In total, 34 FI representatives from five of the top ten banks/MIFs were interviewed.

III. Findings and discussion

Socio-demographic characteristic of borrowers and FI representatives

The majority of interviewed borrowers were female. For those who engaged in agriculture, garment manufacturing, and cross-border migration, almost all of them at least have a primary level of formal education. As for borrowers engaged in the tourism sector, almost half of the participants had a university degree or are studying at university. The majority of borrowers were married couples except for those in the tourism sector. In the tourism sector, the majority of participants were single and young. The majority of interviewed borrowers were around 30-35 years old. The average loan size among our participants was 6784 USD ranging from the minimum amount of 750 USD to a maximum amount of 30,000 USD. Most studied households have an outstanding loan with the amount of 4000 USD (median = 4000 USD).

Unlike borrowers, all FI representatives were male except one. All of them have

[7] Seven Consumer protection principles: 1) appropriate product design and delivery; 2) prevention of over-indebtedness; 3) transparency; 4) responsible pricing; 5) fair and respectful treatment of clients; 6) privacy of client data; 7) mechanism for complaint resolution.
[8] List of the top ten bank/MFI included: ACLEDA, Sathapana, PhilipBank-former name Kredit, Prasac, Amret, AMK, Hattha Kaksekar, LOLC Cambodia- former name 'the village bank', WB Finance-former name Vision Fund, and Chamroeun.
[9] With the help of Cambodian Microfinance Association and Mr. Yannick Milev- a CEO of Chamroeun microfinance institution at the time of this study.

at least a university degree or are attending a university. At the time of this study, the majority of credit officers were attending a university. Moreover, more than half of branch managers have a master's degree or are planning to get a master's degree. And almost all of the branch managers were married, while more than half of credit officers were single. All branch managers were more than 30 years of age, while the credit officers were as young as 19 years old.

Repayment strategies of debt distress households

In this research study, I categorize repayment strategies of debt distressed households into three levels: primary, secondary, and last resort strategies (see table 1 for details). Debt distressed households refers to those who are struggling to meet the debt repayment obligation due to any reason. Such situations coerce households to adopt different coping strategies (described in table 1) in order to meet a debt repayment obligation. Thus, in this sense, neither the size of the debt, repayment rates, nor PAR 30 or 30+[9] rates are sufficient tools to measure the debt distress level (see also MFC and Good Return 2017). Instead, this study argues that the act of adopting different coping strategies described in Table 1 allows us to determine the distress of indebted households. At the time of this study, the majority of interviewed households engaged in primary resorting strategies. Only a few who had rotated credit from either informal or formal lenders or thought of selling its productive assets, for instance a piece of land (farmers), or a tuk tuk (tuk tuk driver). Again, due to the prolonged nature of COVID-19, it is expected that more households will engage in either secondary or last resort strategies (see details in table 1).

Table 1: Repayment Strategies of Debt Distressed Households

Ranking	Strategies
Primary resorting strategies	▪ reduction of household food consumption ▪ depletion of savings/sale of personal assets and livestock ▪ rotate credit among kinship circles- no interest
Secondary resorting strategies	▪ rotate credit from informal/formal lenders – incurs interest
Last resort strategies	▪ negotiate with financial institutions ▪ sale of productive assets, such as land ▪ withdraw children from school/ children dropped out of school ▪ distress migration ▪ child labour

Source: Drawn on interviews with 119 borrowers and Bylander 2014; Ovesen and Trankell 2014; Bylander 2015; Green and Estes 2018; LICADHO 2019; Green 2019; Bylander 2020; LICADHO 2020; Bylander and Green 2021

[9] PAR 30 or 30+ refers to the portfolio at risk 30 days or more than 30 days- meaning debtors repay late for 30 days or more.

In the table above, these strategies are described in more detail and ranked in the way that borrowers most typically described their desirability. While these coping strategies may support borrowers being able to make ends meet in the short-term, they can all have negative consequences in the medium- to long-term. Depleting savings and selling livestock, for instance, may exacerbate future vulnerability, as households have limited resources in moments of future crisis. Similarly, forced reduction of food consumption due to decreasing revenue can cause immediate malnutrition, especially in the case of low-income households who barely meet minimum nutritional standards intake per person per day in normal times and can severely impact the well-being of household members (Seng 2018). Borrowing money from friends and family can strain household relations and deplete the savings of middle-class and near-poor households, heightening their vulnerability. Less desirable coping strategies also have negative consequences. Taking out additional loans ultimately exacerbates debt stress, and selling assets, distress migrating, and taking children out of school can lead to long-term negative consequences (Bylander 2014; Ovesen and Trankell 2014; Bylander 2015; Green and Estes 2018; LICADHO 2019; Green 2019; Bylander 2020; LICADHO 2020; Bylander and Green 2021).

Household vulnerabilities and debt repayment strategies

The findings of debt repayment strategies among debt distressed households tell us two things: 1) the level of household vulnerabilities, and 2) a lack of systematic debt forgiveness practices. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss a lack of systemic debt forgiveness practices and a need to implement systematic debt forgiveness.

Drawing on Table 1 (above) and Table 2 (below), we see that debt forgiveness is not practiced systematically, even during the COVID-19 crisis. Through discussions with 34 FI representatives, debt forgiveness is uncommonly carried out under a write-off policy (see also Table 2). Officers only wrote off the loan when they could no longer contact borrowers, loan guarantors, and their immediate relatives. Although even after these instances of loans being written off, officers still tried to collect the repayment. I was told that the reason that the officers still continued to collect the repayment was because they did not want to create a situation that encouraged borrowers to default on purpose. I must say, such concern is well understood. However, instead of seeing systematic debt forgiveness as an encouragement for borrowers to default on purpose, I argue that if implemented thoroughly, systematic debt forgiveness can benefit society in two obvious ways. Firstly, the immediate benefit of this policy is that it relieves the debt burden from vulnerable households and this will give many households a second chance to improve their economic situation. A sustainable and resilient national economy is built upon a healthy economy of household units. Thus, debt forgiveness and debt relief will allow households to economically recover faster and this could shield low-income households from different forms of negative impacts, namely social, emotional, and psychological.

Table 2: Mechanisms for Debt Distressed Households

Implementation Regularity	Pre-COVID-19	COVID-19	Projected Mechanisms Post COVID-19
Common	- internal refinance/reloan	- internal refinance/reloan - grace period - emergency/relief loan	internal refinance/reloan
Uncommon	- write-off - emergency/relief loan*	- holiday payment - period extension - write-off	- grace period - emergency/relief loan - write-off - holiday payment - period extension

Source: Drawn on interviews with 34 financial representatives and reviewed of internal policies of top ten MFI/bank

*Emergency loan is normally for personal accidents, sickness, and natural disasters

Secondly, in the long-run such legal frameworks contribute to building a safe space for doing businesses, meaning that it can encourage people to take more risk. As one knows, the volume of business activities contributes to the growth of the economy. Many scholars, including a governor of the Central Bank of the Philippines, strongly argue that a well-designed personal bankruptcy or voluntary bankruptcy law contributes to building a safety net to support people to take more risks in doing business, and such attitudes permit more business activities to be carried out. More business activities can contribute to the economic growth (see Jullamon 2008; Tetangco 2015; Retnaningsih and Ikhwansyah 2017). For example, the governor of the Central Bank of the Philippines stated,

"A 2008 study that compared self-employment in 15 countries in Europe and North America between 1990 and 2005 found that more forgiving personal bankruptcy laws combined with ready access to limited liability protections, enhance entrepreneurial activity" (Tetangco 2015).

IV. Conclusion and policy recommendation

In order to curb vulnerabilities of debt distressed households, this research study argues that the National Bank of Cambodia and relevant ministries should consider establishing a personal bankruptcy law. This personal bankruptcy law can build on the 2007 bankruptcy law, known in Khmer as the law of Khsay Thun number NS/RKM/1207/031. Currently, this bankruptcy law does not clearly distinguish between individuals and corporations. Plus, it is poorly accessible to the public due to its "complex, insufficient, and uncertain" procedures (Ly 2020). As a result, since 2007 there have been less than dozen bankruptcy cases filed

in competent courts (Ibid).

Thus, below are some policy recommendations that should be considered.

- Distinguish between personal bankruptcy law for individuals or natural persons as opposed to a bankruptcy law for corporations or juristic persons. Hence here I define personal bankruptcy law as a law that allows natural persons or individual debtors to file a petition or to declare bankruptcy. Some scholars refer to this process as voluntary bankruptcy (see Jullamon 2008).
- Such law should include the provision of debt forgiveness and debt relief. Without the provision of debt forgiveness and debt relief, the law will instead function as an institutional debt-coerced to materialize debtors' properties, for instance in the case of Indonesia (Retnaningsih and Ikhwansyah 2017).
- The procedure of filing petitions or declaring bankruptcy should be simplified and more widely publicized, especially to the most vulnerable households. For example, Australia and Malaysia have launched websites and hot lines which are widely accessible by the public (Australian Financial Security Authority 2016; Malaysian Department of Insolvency 2021). The websites include clear instructions and procedures on how to file a petition to declare bankruptcy and the consequences of bankruptcy (Australian Financial Security Authority 2016; Malaysian Department of Insolvency 2021). The widely published personal bankruptcy law could disincentivise risky lending practices, while widely publicized consequences of bankruptcy could disincentivise risky credit consumption.
- Provide opportunities for financial rehabilitation.
- Attending financial literacy training could be made mandatory when debtors declare bankruptcy. This training should focus on technical skills such as assessment of different forms of risk (e.g, financial, economic, political environmental, and personal) in doing business. It should also train individuals to select suitable products and financial institutions with well-equipped support mechanisms during times of crisis. Moreover, effective financial literacy training should avoid the discourse of debt-discipline and debt repayment at any cost (see Bylander and Res 2020; Res forthcoming).
- The issue of borrowers defaulting on purpose and nepotism need to be tackled thoroughly and sufficiently, otherwise the policy might not benefit debt distressed households.
- In order to implement this law in the Cambodian context, this brief calls for a more in-depth study adopting an interdisciplinary approach (e.g, social sciences, economic, finance, and law) to gather more scientific evidence on best practices and challenges face by neighboring countries and countries in the Southeast Asian region in general.
- Moreover, such studies should also concretely gather evidence in terms of how a personal bankruptcy law contributes to economic growth and financial stability; and how exactly it disincentivises risky lending and credit consuming practices.

I hope that this policy brief provokes more thoughts, dialogues, and debates on the establishment of personal bankruptcy law which includes the provision of debt forgiveness and debt relief. I am convinced that there is a way for policy makers to design a personal bankruptcy law that can benefit both creditors and debtors so that a fair playing ground in doing business is established. I also hope that the design of the personal bankruptcy law can provide more support for debt distressed households. Thus, again I take a firm stand that the provision of debt forgiveness, debt relief, and opportunities for financial rehabilitation should be included in the personal bankruptcy law.

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Policy Brief: Tackling school-related gender-based violence through teacher professional development*

VVOB – education for development, represented by Lotte Van Praet

Summary

In many countries, including Cambodia, various forms of negative discipline are not considered abusive. To tackle school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), an innovative project- Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness (TIGER)- was implemented in Cambodia in Battambang province.

The study used pre-intervention and post-intervention data. Findings indicate that teachers from primary schools seem to benefit the most from the Teacher Professional Development in terms of reporting the biggest decline in perpetrating SRGBV. Results indicate small significant transfer effects in primary schools owing to the TIGER project on decreased emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual harassment. The impact of the TIGER project on students from lower secondary schools was limited to reducing sexual harassment. The findings of this study show that the elimination of SRGBV requires broad professional development interventions among teachers.

VVOB – education for development (VVOB) is a non-profit organization that provides technical assistance to national governments, through their Ministries of Education, to develop the capacity of teachers and educational leaders. VVOB has longstanding operations in nine partner countries, including Cambodia and Vietnam in Southeast Asia.

Lotte Van Praet is a Strategic Education Advisor at VVOB in Cambodia. Lotte has a background and practical engagement in (adult) teaching and coaching. She is passionate about life-long learning, teaching pedagogy, and gender-responsive education.

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I. Introduction

Cambodia suffers from high rates of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), with two-thirds of students in grades 4 to 9 reporting that they have experienced emotional abuse, and 50% of students reporting that they have experienced physical violence in a teacher-student relationships (Cabus et al., 2019). Additionally, 45% of teachers believe that boys and girls should be disciplined differently for the same misbehaviour (Cabus et al., 2019). SRGBV is a major obstacle to achieving gender equality.

The education system does provide opportunities for innovative, effective, and sustainable interventions to prevent violence against and between students, and to change the attitudes and beliefs towards equitable gender roles. Teachers and school leaders are fundamental in transforming practices, attitudes, and values, and instilling in learners a better understanding of gender equality and non-violent behaviour.

To tackle SRGBV, an innovative project- Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness (TIGER)- was implemented in Cambodia, in Battambang province. TIGER worked with students and teachers in grades 4 to 6 of primary education and grades 7 to 9 of lower secondary education in Battambang province. Those grades were purposely selected to reach the students during an important stage in their development. This age range also noted that while nearly every girl attends primary school for at least a couple of years, a significantly lower number of girls enter secondary education – despite higher levels of achievement in primary. By targeting younger students, the project sought to reach girls while they were still in school.

The TIGER project included teacher professional development (TPD) for in-service teachers and school leaders in primary and lower secondary schools in Battambang province. The teachers and school leaders from the participating TIGER schools received two trainings using the Action Guide that promotes gender-responsive education. In between the first training and the refresher training, the TIGER project facilitated two additional activities. The first activity offered individual coaching sessions to address the challenges and difficulties that teachers and school leaders might experience. The second activity organized peer support discussions. These interventions offered teaching staff a platform to share experiences and further strengthen their competences in creating a school environment free from SRGBV.

Emotional abuse or physical violence within a caregiver-child relationship at school is used by teachers in teaching practices as a form of discipline. In many countries, these negative forms of discipline are not considered abusive (Devries et al., 2015; Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Parkes et al., 2016). Violence against boys and girls is often accepted and tolerated; as observed in Cambodia (Hillis et al., 2018). However, it may seriously endanger children's mental or physical health, and, as such, its occurrence cannot be ignored (UNGEI, 2018). Previous litera-

ture classifies emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual harassment under the umbrella of SRGBV. The research team adopts the umbrella of SRGBV throughout this policy brief by examining teachers' beliefs and practices around emotional abuse and physical violence, and students' reports of experiencing emotional abuse, physical violence, or sexual harassment at or on the way to school.

The baseline study, conducted by Cabus et. al. (2019), shows that that overall incidence rates of different forms of violence against and between children in the Cambodian school context are high for both sexes. School principals and teachers are not well equipped to respond to SRGBV. This is the result of a lack of internal regulations in this area within schools. Consequently, teachers continue to use corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure (Cabus et al., 2019). The baseline study indicates that a substantial share of students in primary and lower secondary schools experience emotional abuse, physical violence, and/or sexual harassment (Cabus et al., 2019). Isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, and intimidation are examples of emotional abuse, while hitting, beating, kicking, or pulling hair are examples of physical violence. Sexual harassment is defined as touching and non-touching behaviours that the child did not like/approve (see FAWE, 2018, p.99) Examples are unsolicited sexual attention, display of pornographic material, and physical conduct of a sexual nature.

This policy brief looks at teachers' beliefs and practices of emotional abuse and physical violence, and students' reporting of experiencing emotional abuse, physical violence or sexual harassment at or on the way to school. This policy brief summarizes evidence from two working papers[10] dealing with the effectiveness of the TIGER project: one working paper addresses the impact at the teacher-level (Cabus et al., 2021a), and one paper that assesses the impact at the student-level (Cabus et al., 2021b).

II. AN IMPACT STUDY ON TIGER

Methodology

The team sought to estimate the effects of the TIGER project on teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices towards gender equity and SRGBV. The team conducted pre-intervention (2018) and post-intervention (2020) studies that involved a treatment group and a comparison group. The baseline study took place in October and November of 2018, while the post-intervention study was conducted in October 2020. Teachers and their students in primary education (grades 4 to 6) and lower secondary education (grades 7 to 9) participated in this study. The treatment group are teachers and their students in Battambang province, and the control group consists of teachers and their students in Svay Rieng province (see Table 1). The research team selected a cross section of teachers and students in the relevant grades. All schools in Battambang who did the treatment were included in the study (no selection). Control group were selected based on comparability of schools and children.

[10] The full working papers are available on VVOB's website: https://www.vvob.org/en/publications.

Table 1: Treatment and Control Group of the Pre- and Post-intervention Study.

	Teachers (N=300)		**Students (N=2,333)**	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Control group: Svay Rieng province	89	70	595	590
Treatment group: Battambang province	58	73	575	573
Total sample size	151	149	1,170	1,163

The results on the TIGER project's impact are presented separately for teachers and students. In line with the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009, p.185), the team considered several levels on which the TIGER project could have had an impact. The first level is defined as "increased teachers' knowledge and skills [and corresponding] changes in attitudes and beliefs." In the questionnaire, the team translated this first level into questions with corresponding scales that reflect teachers' beliefs regarding acceptable forms of discipline. Respondents could answer the questions dealing with emotional and physical abuse on a 5-point Likert scale that rates these forms of discipline as 'very bad'; 'bad'; 'neutral'; 'good'; or 'very good.'

The team also asked questions to the teachers dealing with their changes in performing emotional abuse and physical violence. The team asked: How often do you use the following forms of discipline yourself? Respondents could again answer on a 5-point Likert scale with the options of 'never'; 'seldom'; 'sometimes; 'often'; or 'very often.'

The second level in the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009, p.185) on which the TIGER project assessed its progress was students reporting "change in instruction." The team included questions in the questionnaires targeted at students experiencing emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual harassment. These questions correspond to the same questions asked to the teachers, but answered from the perspective of the student. Furthermore, the questionnaire included one additional question that asked about students' frequency of experiencing sexual harassment. Respondents could answer on a 5-point Likert offered the options of 'never'; 'seldom'; 'sometimes; 'often'; or 'very often.'

Below the socio-demographic characteristics of teachers and students are presented. By using the questionnaire, the team was able to collect information on the demographic characteristics of the teacher respondents and student

respondents. A summary of the teacher respondents is presented in Table 2. Owing to the Kernel matching, there are no longer significant differences on the demographic characteristics between the Battambang (treatment) group and Svay Rieng (control) group. The team observed that two teachers from the treatment group cannot be matched to the control group. These 2 teachers were therefore excluded from the analysis, leaving 298 (N=298) teachers in the final sample.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Teacher Sample with Application of Propensity Score Matching (N=298)

	Battambang			Svay Rieng					
	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Dif.	p-value	Sig.
Pre-intervention									
Female	58	0.500	0.504	93	0.463	0.501	0.037	0.680	
Age	58	33.2	8.5	93	32.6	8.3	0.577	0.694	
Seniority	58	10.9	8.3	93	11.6	8.3	-0.699	0.624	
Household wealth	58	3.2	0.5	93	3.2	0.4	0.053	0.497	
Primary vs. lower secondary school	58	0.5	0.5	93	0.6	0.5	-0.016	0.854	
Post-intervention									
Female	71	0.521	0.503	76	0.561	0.500	-0.040	0.656	
Age	71	33.0	8.0	76	34.1	8.1	-1.078	0.447	
Seniority	71	11.2	7.9	76	10.7	7.5	0.439	0.733	
Household wealth	71	3.1	0.4	76	3.2	0.4	-0.069	0.332	
Primary vs. lower secondary school	71	0.6	0.5	76	0.6	0.5	0.025	0.768	

*Averages calculated using the weights from the propensity score matching. Significance at 1%-level (***); 5%-level (**); and 10%-level (*).

In Table 3 the descriptive statistics of the student sample are presented. The team applied matching techniques to overcome the significant differences between the two provinces.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Student Sample (N=2,333)

	Battambang		Svay Rieng				
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Diff.	p-value	
Primary schools (NB=760; NSR=601))							
Female	0.513	0.500	0.501	0.500	0.012	0.652	
Age	11.6	1.4	11.3	1.3	0.359	0.000	***
Grade	5	1	5	1	-0.116	0.008	***
Mother can read	0.705	0.456	0.745	0.436	-0.040	0.100	
Father can read	0.805	0.396	0.835	0.371	-0.030	0.154	
Household wealth	2.9	0.7	3.1	0.6	-0.186	0.000	***
Secondary schools (NB=439; NSVR=601)							
Female	0.487	0.500	0.499	0.500	-0.012	0.710	
Age	14.7	1.4	14.0	1.3	0.739	0.000	***
Grade	8	1	8	1	-0.020	0.697	
Mother can read	0.656	0.476	0.739	0.440	-0.083	0.004	***
Father can read	0.827	0.379	0.887	0.317	-0.060	0.006	***
Household wealth	3.0	0.5	3.2	0.5	-0.221	0.000	***

*NB denotes the number of students that participated in the questionnaire in Battambang; while NSVR the number of students in Svay Rieng. We give the relevant sample size of the students for Battambang and Svay Rieng provinces by primary and lower secondary schools separately in this table.

In the tables below, the impact of the TIGER project on each of the aforementioned scales dealing with emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual harassment at the level of the teachers and students are summarized. Effect sizes are used to express the net programme effects. The team applied a difference-in-differences methodology, using a pre- and post-intervention study, and a treatment and control group. To improve the comparability of the schools selected in the sample, the team also conducted a propensity score matching analysis. Propensity score matching is a technique that matches children and teachers from the control group to children and teachers from the treatment group based on a set of observed demographic characteristics. In the work-

ing paper the team shows that the control group resembles to great extent the treatment group. This allow the team to say that the estimated effects on SRGBV can be attributed to the TIGER-project, and not to differences between the treatment and control groups. This also shows whether the changes in the outcome variables are small, medium, or large.

III. THE EFFECTS OF TIGER ON TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

The general findings indicate that there is a substantial change in teachers' beliefs regarding acceptable forms of discipline in both primary and lower secondary schools. The team also observed changes in teachers use of negative forms of discipline, with largest estimated effects of the TIGER project on teachers from primary schools. The team observed that the TIGER project contributed to fewer changes among teachers from lower secondary schools regarding performing emotional abuse, and no changes in performing physical violence. It is then not surprising that the transfer effects of the TIGER project on students' ratings of experiencing emotional abuse or physical violence in lower secondary schools are small and not significant. On the contrary, the decrease in the students' reporting of emotional abuse, physical violence or sexual harassment in primary schools is small, but significant, for all three outcomes. Finally, there is also a small significant impact on sexual harassment in lower secondary schools.

Table 4: The Evidence Base at the Teacher-Level

What worked?	Impact in Effect Sizes for Primary versus Secondary Schools	What didn't work?	Impact in Effect Sizes
Decreased ratings on two scales of acceptable forms of discipline dealing with emotional abuse and physical violence.	Large impact on emotional abuse (-0.852 SD) and physical violence (-0.761 SD) in primary schools. Large impact on emotional abuse (-0.636 SD) and physical violence (-0.764 SD) in secondary schools.		

Decreased ratings on two scales of performing emotional abuse and physical violence in primary schools.	Moderate impact on emotional abuse (-0.497 SD) and on physical violence (-0.604 SD) in primary schools.	No decreased ratings on two scales of performing emotional abuse and physical violence in secondary schools.	No significant impact of the TIGER project on teachers performing less emotional abuse (-.133 SD) and physical violence (-0.030 SD) in secondary schools.

Table 5: The Evidence Base at the Student-Level

What worked?	Impact in Effect Sizes for Primary versus Secondary Schools	What didn't work?	Impact in Effect Sizes
Decreased ratings on experiencing emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual harassment, however, for primary schools only.	Small impact on emotional abuse (-0.14); physical violence (-0.20); and harassment (-0.35) in primary schools.	We do not estimate significant effects of the TIGER project on students' ratings of experiencing emotional abuse or physical violence in secondary schools.	The effect size is close to zero and nonsignificant.
In secondary schools, we observe that student' ratings with regard to experiencing sexual harassment decreased.	A small impact (-0.15) on sexual harassment is observed in secondary schools.		

While there is ample evidence on the effectiveness of TPD in terms of improved teacher quality (or pedagogy) and/or increased student performance (Garet et al., 2001; Wayne et al., 2008; Avalos, 2011; Postholm, 2012; Van Veen et al., 2012; Kang et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), there is much less evidence base on the effectiveness of TPD or policy in the field of SRGBV (Aldridge &

McChesney, 2018; Bhana et al., 2011; Halimi et al., 2016; Parkes et al., 2016). Very few studies have looked at the impact of innovative TPD on students in low- and middle-income countries (Devries et al., 2015; Parkes et al., 2016; Cabus et al., 2019, 2021). In line with Parkes et al. (2016), the team concluded that previous literature indicates that directly working with teachers can be an effective approach to tackle SRGBV, which is also confirmed by this study. Furthermore, this study indicates the spill over of effects from teacher-level to student-level.

IV. DISCUSSION

The general findings indicate that there is a substantial change in teachers' beliefs regarding acceptable forms of discipline in both primary and lower secondary schools thanks to the TIGER capacity development interventions. Teachers are fundamental in transforming gender practices and taboos, attitudes, and values that exist within society. They can help learners understand and practice gender equality and non-violent behaviour. Why teachers? First and foremost, they are close to the child and can form a caregiver-child relationship. Further, teachers and school leaders translate school policy and regulations on gender-responsiveness, if any, into school practice. Teacher professional development should focus on becoming aware of, and addressing, their own gender biases and belief systems. Afterwards, teachers can tap into their potential and become real agents of change who successfully challenge gender practices and taboos.

Effective TPD requires engagement of teachers and ownership over their learning, and a lack of these elements may hamper an effective change in behaviour. School leadership plays a crucial role in creating a violence-free school environment. Hence, the school management needs to be aware of their own stereotypes and beliefs as well. Only when school leaders acknowledge the existence of stereotypes in schools, homes, and communities, and understand their detrimental impact can they start to challenge these. In pursuit of this, they should be trained on strategies and concrete tools to challenge gender stereotypes and tackle violence in their school environments.

There are very few studies look at the impact of innovative TPD on students in low- and middle-income countries (Baker-Henningham et al., 2009, 2012; Devries et al., 2015; Parkes et al., 2015; Schwandt & Underwood, 2016; Cabus et al., 2019, 2021). Devries et al. (2015) estimated the impact of The Good School Toolkit, an intervention designed by the Ugandan not-for-profit organisation Raising Voices, on students' reporting physical violence experienced in the week preceding the questionnaire. A difference-in-differences analysis found a reduction of 15.8 percentage points (or an odds ratio of 0.40) in the reporting of physical violence owing to the toolkit. Baker-Henningham et al. (2009, 2012) analysed the Incredible Years intervention implemented in Jamaica in early childhood education. There was a large significant reduction on negative teachers' behaviour attributed the Incredible Years project. Teachers also rated the behavioural changes of the children, and compared to the baseline, they moderately improved the ratings of child conduct disorders and social skills. These studies are in line with

our findings of moderate to large impacts on teachers and significant effects on students.

To explain the observed differences in the effectiveness of the TIGER project between primary and lower secondary schools, the team took a closer look at possible implementation issues. Registration data was used to observe the participation of teachers and school leaders in the TIGER activities as were several interviews with key informants. Using the participation registration data for two trainings for teachers and school leaders; individual coaching sessions; and learning cycles, the team observed remarkable differences between primary and lower secondary schools. The team clustered schools with relatively high (≥95%), moderate (75 to 94%) and low (<75%) participation rates together in Table 6 below. It was observed four primary schools have moderate participation rates and all the other nine primary schools have high participation rates. On the contrary, there are two lower secondary schools with relatively low participation rates, three schools with moderate participation rates, and two schools with high participation rates. From these data, it can be surmised that teachers from lower secondary schools were less actively participating in the TIGER project than those from primary schools. Autonomy of school leaders and teachers to experiment with new strategies learned to tackle SRGBV may be more limited in lower secondary schools. This could explain why there are only incremental – but fundamental – changes in instruction that led to the observed significant impact on students in primary schools. While the study observed changes in attitudes and beliefs among trained teachers in both primary and lower secondary schools and incremental changes in instruction, the effects on students differ between primary and lower secondary schools (Cabus et al., 2021a; 2021b). The qualitative and registration data show that teachers from lower secondary schools were less engaged in following all TPD initiatives than teachers from the primary schools. Teacher engagement is a prerequisite of effective TPD (Merchie et al., 2018).

Table 6: Participation Rates in the TIGER Project in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools in Battambang Province

School	Primary (1) vs. Secondary (0)	Participation Rates (%)	Classification
1	1	100.0%	High
2	1	95.1%	High
3	1	96.8%	High
4	1	82.5%	Moderate
5	1	93.6%	Moderate
6	1	100.0%	High
7	1	100.0%	High
8	1	100.0%	High
9	1	100.0%	High

10	1	100.0%	High
11	1	93.3%	Moderate
12	1	100.0%	High
13	1	91.7%	Moderate
14	0	41.7%	Low
15	0	87.5%	Moderate
16	0	96.6%	High
17	0	100.0%	High
18	0	92.9%	Moderate
19	0	57.1%	Low
20	0	92.3%	Moderate

*The categories used denote high (≥95%), moderate (75 to 94%), and low (<75%) participation rates
Source: Registration data from VVOB.

V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude, the study applies the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009) to gauge the effectiveness of the TIGER project. Figure 1 visualizes the evidence base in a flow chart (or cascade). In line with the theoretical framework, the study team can conclude that large knowledge gains among teachers, as observed in this study, due to effective teacher professional development, can yield small gains for students, in the event that knowledge gains among teachers spill over (or transfer) to students through changes in attitudes and/or instruction. While changes in attitudes and beliefs among trained teachers in both primary and lower secondary schools were observed in Cabus et al. (2021a), and while incremental changes in instruction were observed, or the implementation of lessons learned on tackling SRGBV in daily teaching practices, the effects on students differ between primary and lower secondary schools. From qualitative research and registration data it seems that teachers from lower secondary schools were less engaged in (or attracted to) following all the TPD initiatives than the teachers from the primary schools. Teacher engagement is considered a prerequisite of effective TPD (Merchie et al., 2018). Previous literature indicates that autonomy is positively associated with teacher engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p.76). While Cambodian schools often fall back on regulations and laws from the government (Cabus et al., 2019), autonomy of school leaders and teachers to experiment with new strategies learned to tackle SRGBV may be (more) limited in lower secondary schools. This could explain why there are only incremental – but fundamental – changes in instruction that led to the observed significant impact on students in primary schools.

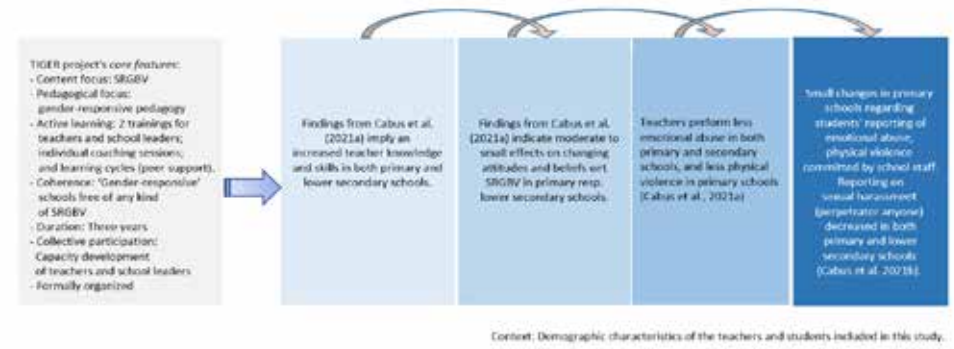
The findings of this study show that the elimination of SRGBV requires broad professional development trajectories of teachers. This study on TIGER's approach has identified 3 recommendations.

1) Raising awareness on gender practices and taboos is critical to instructional changes in the classrooms.

2) Teacher professional development (TPD) should include training, mentoring and peer nto their teaching practice.

3) Participation and active engagements of teachers in the TPD is a condition to yield transfer effects from teachers to students. To this end, a gender-responsive, supportive climate should be established by training the school management in parallel to the TPD.

Figure 1: An Application of the Theoretical Framework on Effective TPD to the TIGER Project



Note: Own handling of the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009)

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The Role of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Principles in Informing Policy Decisions*

Cambodia has made significant progress in considering the needs of women, girls, and vulnerable groups in its development journey – reaching lower middle-income status by 2015; and aspiring to become an upper middle-income status country by 2030. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, with Cambodia assuming ASEAN chairmanship in 2022, there is significant hope pinned on the growth and development of this great kingdom.

However, growth and development should be for all Cambodians, including women and girls; persons with disabilities; and other vulnerable and marginalized groups. The Cambodian government leadership has stressed that as social protection systems are expanded during the pandemic, all programs much be available to everyone, particularly women and girls. Mainstreaming gender into policies to boost business development is also an achievement for Cambodia, as is the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women for 2019-2023. Cambodian women were indispensable as frontline workers during the pandemic, and the government is keen for women to play a greater role in public, corporate, and political affairs.

*Panelists: Mr. Ou Virak, Ms. Anne Rouve-Khiev, Ms. Phean Sophoan, Dr. Bo Chankoulika, Ms. Diya Nag

Therefore, as Cambodia progresses towards a more equal and prosperous society, it is critical for all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and development partners to convene and understand how and when gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) principles can be formally considered and also informally applied to the policy decision making processes, research and thought pieces, and program design. Engaging on this issue as early as possible will ensure that any future policy decisions are not GESI agnostic, and GESI is well integrated into the country's policies in a way which carefully considers Cambodia's unique context and culture.

This discussion on "The Role of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Principles in Informing Policy Decisions" is designed to engage with key stakeholders through a structured and moderated discussion, to understand how and when GESI principles can be integrated into policy-making processes. Inviting insights from government, bilateral development partners, and civil society organisations, the session seeks to map out what a GESI-friendly policymaking approach would look like for Cambodia, what are some interventions which have worked, and what kind of approaches should be considered.

Through curated questions for each panelist, and a moderated discussion, the session aims to address the following broad themes:

1. How can GESI be mainstreamed into the government's national and subnational policies across various sectors such as social protection, education, economic growth?
2. What would be the key elements of a uniquely Cambodian GESI framwork for policy decisions? Who should benefit from this framework?
3. What are some best practices that Cambodia can consider as it seeks to integrateGESI into policy-making processes? How can countries such as Australia which have integrated GESI into its development approaches support us?
4. From a civil society perspective, what are the main challenges that marginalized groups face when it comes to policy decisions?

What are some socially inclusive practices that the government has implemented?

Socially inclusive policies and practices developed by the Department of Policy are based in evidence to better understand the complicated factors that are behind inclusion and exclusion. A good example of this is the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019-2023, which has stated many interdisciplinary issues which also include gender, indigenous people, and vulnerable children. We mentioned about strategies to support them to receive education with equity and quality. In our Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan also mentioned gender and gender related issues in education at all levels from policy level to implementation level. We have a strategy to promote the education of indigenous children, which stated clearly about the plan and actions to promote indigenous children who are Troeng, Tompun, Phnorng, Jaray, and Tman. We have prepared a curriculum for them to allow them to learn Khmer language but also to keep their native language. Recently we have made a policy called Inclusive Education Policy 2018 which is prepared by the Department of Policy. These policies show the strong willingness of MoEYS and the government to bring children back into the system

In the context of COVID-19, how have civil society organizations and larger organizations managed to continue to work to ensure gender quality and social inclusion? What is the role of civil society in engaging with the government in terms of policy and strategizing?

As a large, international organization, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked closely with NGO partners to collect evidence on the effects of COVID-19 and to pay attention to women and those who work in service sectors. When service sector stopped working, it affected their social and economic status. Then we worked to complement government efforts instead of duplicating them. We also worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote inclusive policies to ensure women's voices and women's protection is considered, and to enable women to raise their needs especially related to their rights. We created a committee so that they can participate. We do this not only at the national level but also at the ASEAN level through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to create a committee about women. This Women's Committee prepared a regional forum to raise issues around social protection.

What is the role of Think Tanks in Cambodia on influencing decision makers to consider more GESI oriented approaches during the policy making process?

The biggest issue is setting the agenda, asking what we should prioritize, who determines that, who needs to say what is important. Also, the question of agency. Agency matters. Who own the policy process; who get to be part of the policy process?

Evidence-based research alone is not enough. Think Tanks can play that role to help people to understand not only research and evidence but also policy and how policies can be used to make a difference. But these processes need to be inclusive so that the right people have agency in being part of the process.

Conclusion

The Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum: Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways engaged with multiple stakeholders including government, civil society, youth, women, think tanks, research institutes, development partners, and many experts. The two-day Forum, held from November 23-24, 2021 in Phnom Penh, convened over 100 participants to present and discuss research findings and case studies on various topics ranging from the adoption of technology, urban and economic development, social inclusion, to foreign policy – all of which contribute to Cambodia's COVID-19 recovery plan.

Some of the key takeaways from each panel of the forum included:

Cambodia's Knowledge Sector: Policymaking and the Role of Think Tanks

- While data is significant in inclusive policymaking, improving data and evidence in public policy requires collaboration between both the government and non-state actors, including research institutions, civil society, and the private sector.

- Investing in collecting and analyzing data is valuable when it is used effectively. Agencies and organizations need to be willing and open to share and disseminate data that they collect so that other agencies can also use that information.

Adoption of Technology in Higher Education

- Schools that took an adaptive approach to introducting technology reported success, specifically including surveying teachers and students to understand their needs, offering tailored support to both groups to work through technological issues, providing ongoing training to teach users how to use these platforms.

- Some lessons that can be learned are to try to prepare students and faculty early, before an emergency situation like COVID-19, so that they are more familiar with online resources. Moving forward, supporting learners to use these platforms can help them in case of another period of online school.

The Role of Agriculture Labour in Economic Recovery Post COVID-19

- Agriculture has been resilient even during the pandemic, but there are several areas that are prohibiting workers from taking jobs in this sector, namely wage competitiveness, lack of stability in these jobs (seasonal or part time work), and unequal demand among provinces.

- The government is encouraging skills development, retraining, and upgrading of skills. The government is also seeking funding proposals from corporate and private firms to increase the skillsets of agricultural workers.

Urban Development, Socioeconomic Changes in the time of COVID-19, and Policy Development

- Local communities should be integrated into urban planning processes to ensure that urban spaces benefit them.

- Urban planning has evolved and will continue to evolve with differing needs of the community.

Cambodia's Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Aspects and Perspectives

- Building human capital, such as through improving the education and health systems, should be at the core of building strong economic foundations.

- In the short term, the government should continue with support programs such as IDPoor.

- The government should also explore strengthening existing and opening new trade channels, especially within the region and with ASEAN partners.

Enhancing Cambodia's Post COVID-19 Recovery: How Foreign Policy Can Play a Role

- As incoming chair of ASEAN, Cambodia is in a good position to enhance and improve its foreign relations with other countries in the region and in the world.

- Cambodia should also focus on strengthening local networks, such as unified Mekong groups, to leverage their collective power in building partnerships.

The Role of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Principles in Informing Policy Decisions

- It is critical to build the capacity of women entrepreneurs, promote digital connectivity and e-commerce within the Mekong region and beyond, and to strengthen networks to promote multilateralism.

- Ensuring inclusion in development priorities, mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) principles in policy design and decisions, and promoting beneficiary-led and consultative process are critical.

- It is imperative to always consider who is being asked to provide input and how that input is used. This is key to mainstreaming GESI principles throughout research and policy design and implementation.

Annex

Agenda

Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum
Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Pathways

Date: 23-24 November 2021

Venue: Raffles Hotel Le Royal, Phnom Penh

23 November 2021

Time	Agenda	Note
8:00 am – 8:30 am	Registration	The Asia Foundation Team
8:30 am – 8:35 am	Forum Opening and National Anthem	MC
8:35 am – 8:45 am	Welcoming Remarks	Ms. Meloney C. Lindberg Country Representative The Asia Foundation
8:45 am – 9:00 am	Opening Remarks	H.E. Pablo Kang Australian Ambassador to Cambodia
9:00 am – 09:15 am	Keynote Address	H.E. Ngan Chamroeun Secretary of State Ministry of Interior (virtual)
09:15 am – 09:30 am	Group Photo	Ponlok Chomnes Team
09:30 am – 10:00 am	Coffee Break	
10:00 am – 11:30 am	Opening Plenary Discussion: Cambodia's Knowledge Sector: Policy-making Process in Cambodia and Role of Think Tanks Q&A Session	Panelists: - H.E. Chea Chantum,Secretary General, General Secretariat of Population and Development, Ministry of Planning - Ms. Sem Sophea, Acting Director, Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Department, General Department of Policy, Ministry of Economy and Finance - Dr. Eng Netra, Executive Director, Cambodia Development Resource Institute - Dr. Pak Kimchoeun, Senior Policy Researcher and Analyst (virtual) Moderator - Ms. Meloney Lindberg, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation

11:30 am – 1:30 pm	Lunch	
1:30 pm– 2:45 pm	Plenary Discussion: Adoption of Technology in Higher Education Q&A Sessionw	Panelists: - Dr. Ky Ravikun, Vice Rector for International Relations and Research, Phnom Penh International University - Mr. Lay Heng, Head of Information and Communication Engineering Department, Institute for Technology of Cambodia (virtual) - Mr. Eng Titya, Vice Dean, National University of Battambang - Dr. Chea Phal, Research Fellow, Cambodia Development Resource Institute - Ms. Meas Khely, Student, Cambodia Academy of Digital Technology Moderator: Dr. Song Sopheak, Director, Center for Educational Research and Innovation, Cambodia Development Resource Institute
2:45 pm – 3:00 pm	Coffee break	
3:00 pm – 4:15 pm	Ponlok Chomnes Women Researchers Platform: Policy Brief Presentations Impact of COVID-19 and Risk Mitigation on Vulnerable Groups: Empirical Results from Four Case Studies Q&A Session	Presenter: - Ms. Lotte Van Praet, Strategic Education Advisor, Education for Development Cambodia (VVOB) - Ms. Phasy Res, PHD candidate, Institut D'études Du Développement De La Sorbonne (Iedes), Sorbonne Paris 1 University, France - Ms. Benghong Siela Bossba, Research Assistant, CDRI and Ms. Pen Socheata, Research Assistant, CDRI - Ms. Reach Mony, Research Assistant, CDRI Moderator: - Ms. Sry Bopharath, Program Officer, The Asia Foundation

4.15 pm – 5:30 pm	Plenary Discussion: Enhancing Cambodia's Post Covid-19 Recovery: How Foreign Policy Can Play a Role Q&A Session	Panelists: - Dr. Seun Sam, Policy Analyst, Royal Academy of Cambodia - Dr. Chheang Vannarith, President, Asian Vision Institute (virtual) - Mr. Sovinda Po, Project Coordinator and Research Fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (virtual) Moderator: - Mr. James Lawler, Third Secretary, Australian Embassy
5:30 pm	Closing of Day 1	

24 November 2021

Time	Agenda	Note
8.30 am – 10.00 am	Plenary Discussion: The Role of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Principles in Informing Policy Decisions Q&A Session	Panelists: - Dr. Bo Chankoulika, Director of Department of Policy, Directorate General for Policy and Planning, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport - Ms. Phean Sophoan, Country Director, Oxfam - Ms. Anne ROUVE-KHIEV, ACCESS Team Leader, Australian Embassy - Mr. Ou Virak, Executive Director, Future Forum Moderator - Ms. Diya Nag, Governance and Legal Specialist, The Asia Foundation

10.00 am – 10:15 am	Coffee Break	
10:15 am – 11:30 am	Plenary Discussion: The Role of Agricultural Labour in Economic Recovery Post-COVID-19 Q&A Session	Panelists: - H.E. Kuoch Somean, Secretary General, General Secretariat of National Council for Minimum Wage, Ministry of Labour and Vocation Training - Ms. Kruy Narin, Deputy Director General, General Department of Policy, Ministry of Economy and Finance - Dr. Ngin Chanrith, Research Director, Centre for Policy Studies Moderator: - Mr. Chan Sophal, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Studies
11:30 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm – 2:15 pm	Plenary Discussion: Social Inclusion in the Context of COVID-19 in Cambodia: Experiences from Emerging Knowledge Sector Actors Q&A Session	Panelist: - Ms. Prom Kimcheng, Executive Director, Komar Rikreay Association (KMR) - Mr. San Chey, Executive Director, The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA) - Mr. Stanislas Kowalski, Technical Advisor, New Generation Pedagogical Research Center (NGPRC) of Kampuchea Action to Promote Education (KAPE) - Mr. Uk Yuth, Executive Director, Khmer Association for Development for Countryside (KADOC) - Ms. Yon Soknim, Field Facilitator, My Village Organization (MVi) (Virtual) Moderator: Mr. Prak Rathyrea, Senior Program Officer, The Asia Foundation

2:15 pm – 3:30 pm	Plenary Discussion: Urban Development, Socio-economic Changes in Time of COVID-19 Pandemic and Policy Development Q&A Session	Panelists: - Mr. Vuth Lyno, Co-Founder and Director, Sa Art Project - Dr. Try Thuon, Senior Researcher, Center for Khmer Studies - Dr. Yen Yat, Senior Researcher, Center for Khmer Studies Moderator: Ms. Suong Samedy, Head of Program, Center for Khmer Studies
3:30 pm – 3:45 pm	Coffee Break	
3.45 pm – 5.00 pm	Plenary Discussion: Cambodia Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Aspects and Perspectives Q&A Session	Panelists: - H.E. Dr. Huot Pum, Undersecretary of State, Deputy Secretary General, National Committee for Economic and Finance Policy, Ministry of Economy and Finance - Mr. Ivan Gonzalez de Alba, Country Economist, UNDP - Dr. Bradley Murg, Senior Academic Advisor, Future Forum - Dr. Teng Delux, Research Fellow, Cambodia Development Resource Institute Moderator: Dr. Laura Beckwith, Research Fellow, Northumbria University
5:00 pm – 5:15 pm	Wrap-up and Ways Forward	Ms. Meloney C. Lindberg Country Representative The Asia Foundation
5:15 pm – 5:30 pm	Closing Remarks	H.E. Pablo Kang Australian Ambassador to Cambodia
5:30 pm	End of Program	

Speakers and Moderators

Ms. Anne Rouve-Khiev
ACCESS Team Leader, Australian Embassy

With an educational background in political science and international development project management, Anne is a seasoned program manager with 25 years' experience overseeing the implementation of large-scale, complex social development programs across Asia, including over ten years in Cambodia. Currently, Anne is the Team Leader of the Australia Cambodia Cooperation for Equitable Sustainable Services Program (ACCESS), a five-year AUD 25 million DFAT funded program aiming at improving access to sustainable, equitable and inclusive services for persons with disabilities and women affected by violence in Cambodia.

Dr. Bo Chankoulika
Director of Department of Policy, Directorate General for Policy and Planning, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

Dr. Bo Chankoulika is Director of Policy Department, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). She earned her PhD in Education from Flinders University, Australia in 2017 and Master's in Social Law from the University of Lumière Lyon II, France in 2004. As director, she has led and managed educational research projects and has used research results to inform policy and decision making. She has led the formulation and monitoring of education policies toward achieving inclusive quality education in Cambodia.

Dr. Bradley J. Murg
Senior Academic Advisor at Future Forum

Dr. Murg holds positions as Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor of Political Science at Paragon International University; Distinguished Senior Research Fellow and Senior Advisor at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace; and lead editor of the Journal of Greater Mekong Studies. His work, supported by grants from the Social Science Research Council and the International Research and Exchanges Board, focuses on contemporary international relations in Southeast Asia; the politics of foreign aid; and the political economy of the

Greater Mekong Subregion as a whole. Dr. Murg graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Emory University with a B.A./M.A. in philosophy, received a M.Sc. in economic history from the London School of Economics, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from the University of Washington. Most recently he co-edited the three volume Cambodia 2040 book series - a foresighting analysis of Cambodia's socio-economic development and foreign relations. He regularly writes about Southeast Asian affairs in The Diplomat, Asia Times, Nikkei, and South China Morning Post.

Mr. Chan Sophal
Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS)

Mr. Chan Sophal is currently the Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), a Cambodian think tank providing research and consulting services in the areas of economic development, mainly in agriculture, land, and labour issues. For a progressive career over the past 28 years, he has been a researcher and manager in various institutions including the World Bank, Leopard Capital, USAID-funded HARVEST project, World Food Programme, Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Mr. Chan received an MSc in Agricultural Economics from the University of London, Imperial College at Wye, UK, after he completed a Bachelor's Degree in Agribusiness from the University Queensland, Gatton College, Australia and a Diploma in Hydrology from the National Institute of Agriculture, Prek Leap.

H.E. Chea Chantum
Secretary General, General Secretariat of Population and Development,
Ministry of Planning.

H.E. Chea Chanthum has served in the public sector as a civil servant for more than 32 years, since 1988. He has been working in the areas of planning and policy development for more than 20 years, especially in the area of population and development. Key achievements to which he has directly contributed are through leading and facilitating the formulation of the National Population Policy, 2016-2030; National Ageing Policy, 2017-2030; National Strategic Development Plans; and various plan and policy papers. He was a founder of the IDPoor program and was a program coordinator of the IDPoor program from 2005 to 2008. H.E. Chea Chantum graduated with a Masters of Science in Regional and Rural Development Planning from

the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand in 2003, and with a Master's in Public Management from the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore in 2010. He is currently doing a Ph.D. at the Graduate School of International Development, Nagoya University under the Transnational Doctoral Programs for Leading Professionals in Asian Countries.

Dr. Chea Phal
Research Fellow, Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

Prior to joining CDRI in 2020 as Research Fellow, Dr. Chea worked as consultant for the World Bank, as a research fellow at Kobe University, and as adjunct researcher at the Research Institute for Economics and Business Administration (RIEB), Japan. He earned his Master's and Ph.D. degrees in Economics of Education from Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University, Japan. He also actively involved in joint projects between UNESCO Bangkok and Kobe University, conducting several educational research projects in Cambodia. His research interest includes economics of education, education finance, higher education, learning assessment, and field experiment. He has authored and co-authored many scientific papers including those indexed in SCOPUS journal database.

Dr. Chheang Vannarith
Public Policy analyst and Government Relations Strategist

Dr. Chheang Vannarith is a public policy analyst and government relations strategist. He has over a decade of experience as a geopolitical and geoeconomic analyst, with a focus on Southeast Asia. He was honored as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2013. He previously served as Visiting Fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2017-2018), China Institute of International Studies (2016), Institute of Developing Economies in Japan (2012), and East-West Center in the United States (2010); Southeast Asia Consultant at The Nippon Foundation in Japan (2016-2018); Adjunct Lecturer at Nanyang Technological University's School of Social Sciences (2017 – Present); Lecturer of Asia Pacific Studies at the University of Leeds (2013-2016), Executive Director of Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (2009-2013); Technical Advisor to the Cambodian National Assembly (2011); and Assistant to Cambodia's Defense Minister (2011-2012). He received his

BA in International Relations from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam in 2002, MA in International Relations from the International University of Japan in 2006, and PhD in Asia Pacific Studies from the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in 2009.

Ms. Diya Nag
Governance and Legal Specialist at The Asia Foundation's Cambodia office

In her current role at The Asia Foundation, Diya leads the governance and law portfolios for the Cambodia office. She formerly served as associate director of programs at the Foundation's office in India. Her areas of specialization include governance, law and justice, gender equality, and regional and international cooperation. Diya also has prior experience working with the UNDP, and with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative on promoting rule of law and improved access to justice. Before relocating to Asia to work on international development, she practiced law in New York, where she is admitted to the bar. Diya attended Barnard College, Columbia University and earned a Bachelor of Arts in sociology and human rights; and has a juris doctor degree from Syracuse University.

Dr. Eng Netra
Executive Director, Cambodia Development Resource Institute.

Dr Eng Netra has a long and distinguished career in development policy research specializing in governance and inclusive society, along with research management and policy influencing. Her appointment as Executive Director of CDRI caps a history of managerial and leadership positions over a 15-year research career at CDRI. She began her journey with the Institute in 2003 as a Research Associate in the Policy Oriented Decentralisation Research Program. From 2006-2010 and from 2015-18, Netra was a research fellow and the head of the governance unit (now the Center for Governance and Inclusive Society). She oversaw many research studies that have produced original, high quality, and locally owned research on Cambodia's political and institutional transformation.

Mr. ENG Titya
Vice Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology at National University of Battambang

ENG Titya comes from Battambang province and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in IT from the National University of Battambang in 2016. He obtained Master's Degree in Computer Applied Technology from the Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China in 2019. He teaches at the National University of Battambang in the field of Information Technology. In 2021, he was promoted to be Vice Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology at National University of Battambang.

H.E. Dr. Huot Pum
Undersecretary of State, Deputy Secretary General, National Committee for Economic and Finance Policy, Ministry of Economy and Finance

H.E. Dr. Huot Pum has worked for ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office, AMRO Asia for 7 years as an economist, and previously as a Coordination and Technical Assistance Officer. He was a lecturer in Economics at Royal University of Law and Economics for 9 years. He earned his PhD in Economics from Universite Lumiere Lyon 2 in 2008, and a Bachelor of Business Administration with BBA First Class Hors in 1998.

Dr. Iván González de Alba
Country Economist at UNDP's Country Office in Cambodia

Before, he served as Regional Policy Advisor at UNDP's Regional Hub for Latin America and the Caribbean in Panama and also served in different positions in the Mexican government in the Ministries of Social Development, Tourism, and Urban Development. He is experienced in a number of topics such as sustainable development, poverty, financing for development and social protection. He holds a Masters in Economic and a PhD. in Development Studies from University of Oxford, United Kingdom.

Mr. James Lawler
Third Secretary, Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh

Mr. James Lawler is the Third Secretary of the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. He has previously worked on East and Southeast Asian issues with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra, and has also worked with the United Nations Population Fund's Cambodia office.

Ms. Narin Kruy
Senior Economist & Deputy Director General of the General Department of Policy, Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF)

With more than 10 years of experience in economics, she leads the Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Department, including Economic Surveillance; Economic, Fiscal and Sectoral Policy Formulation; Economic and Fiscal Analysis and Forecasting; Economic Impact Assessment; Economic Monitoring; Medium-Term Fiscal Framework; Policy Dialogues; Policy Notes; Revenue Mobilization Strategy; and other Tax Policies. She is the former Special Appointee in the Asia and Pacific Department (APD) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), where she was directly involved in practical economic surveillance work with the Philippines team, conducted pragmatic research and drafted Selected Issue Papers to be part of the IMF Article IV report. She got her Master's Degree from International University of Japan (IUJ) in International Development. She also completed her Humphrey Fellowship Program in Economics from Michigan State University (MSU) and professional Affiliation at the IMF on macroeconomic forecasting model for Cambodia.

H.E. Somean KUOCH
Secretary General of the National Council for Minimum Wage

H.E. Somean KUOCH is currently the Secretary General of the National Council for Minimum Wage. Before holding this position, he served as Deputy Director General at the National Employment Agency (NEA) for almost 10 years. During his work at NEA, he had contributed enormously to the development of NEA such as setting additional job centers, designing SOP of Public Employment Services (PES) Delivery, expanding the accessibility of PES via job portal and mobile job search

application, and developing three years rolling business plan. He also conducted various labour market studies and analysis on skill shortages, skill gaps, youth employability and skill development. Mr. Somean holds a Master's Degree in International Management from the Audencia School of Management in France in 2012, and double Master's Degree in Applied Labour Economics for Development from SciencePo University in France and Turin School of Development in Italy in 2017. He graduated from Royal University of Law and Economics and Lumiere Lyon II with Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Management in 2010.

Dr. Ky Ravikun
Vice Rector for International Relations and Research

Dr Ky Ravikun earned her Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degrees from People's Friendship University (formerly Patris Lumumba Friendship University). In higher education management, she started as an Academic Coordinator, and moved on to be Vice President for Students' Affairs, Academic Affairs and International Relations, and Vice Rector for International Relations and Research, a position she was appointed to in 2020. She also lectures to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Dr Ky has been much involved with quality assurance (QA) since 2005, when she was selected as one of the external assessors by the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), which was established by the Royal Government of Cambodia and whose mandate is to administer accreditation to all higher education institutions (HEIs). This is to ensure and promote the quality of higher education in Cambodia. Since then, she has been involved in assessment of the foundation year programs (from 2005 to 2010) and institutional assessments in 2015 to 2019, which required her to assess more than 60 HEIs in Cambodia in her assigned capacity by ACC as a team member and subsequently as team leader. She has also attended many seminars/workshops/forums on higher education management and QA at national and international levels. In addition, she has played an active role in the framework of SHARE programs (the internationalization of HEIs, and community of practice), SHARE-Taenia, and the DIES (NMT) program.

Dr. Laura Beckwith
Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Northumbria University

Dr. Laura Beckwith holds a PhD from the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa. Her fieldwork looked at how urban farmers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia responded to the combined effects of environmental change and urbanization. She previously completed her MSc in Environment and Sustainable Development from University College London and a BA in International Relations from the University of British Columbia. She is currently employed at Northumbria University as a Post-doctoral Research Fellow on the Living Deltas Research Hub, where she is studying how young people living in the Mekong Delta are responding to environmental change.

Mr. LAY Heng
Vice-Dean of Faculty of Electronic and Energy of ITC

LAY Heng graduated with a degree in Information System Engineering from the University of La Rochelle in 2009. Since then, he has been teaching at the Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC) in the field of Information and Communication Engineering. In 2014, he was promoted to be head of the department. Currently, he is working as Vice-Dean of Faculty of Electronic and Energy, in charge of the Department of Information and Communication Engineering, e-Learning Center, and Incubation Space of ITC. LAY Heng, in his academic career at ITC, has participated in different research and development activities, including Natural Language Processing (Khmer), e-learning in Higher Education in Cambodia, Innovation Challenges and Incubation Program, and Professional Development Program.

Ms. Khely Meas
Student, Cambodia Academy of Digital Technology

Born in Phnom Penh, Khely Meas graduated from The Westline School in 2020. She is currently a freshman at Cambodia Academy of Digital Technology, majoring in E-commerce. She also studies at National Management University majoring in Management. She took UX/UI design course at TUX Global Institute as a complementary for her E-commerce major. She is also a member of AIESEC Wat Phnom as a PR Executive for Business Development.

Ms. Meloney Lindberg
Country Representative, The Asia Foundation

Ms. Meloney Lindberg oversees a diverse portfolio of projects including improving the capacity of knowledge sector institutions to undertake quality research to inform public policy analysis and dialogue; and to engage with private waste collection firms and local stakeholders to test interventions to increase accountability and responsiveness in municipal solid waste collection and management. Her women's empowerment portfolio includes projects that advance women's economic opportunities through skill development programs for tech entrepreneurs and high school students; improve women's safety and security by building government capacity to delivery legal services to survivors of gender-based violence and conducting public safety audits to highlight women's urban safety at the subnational level. From 2009 to 2017, Lindberg served as country representative in Mongolia. She previously served as the Foundation's deputy country representative in Sri Lanka, where she managed rule of law programming. She was also the Foundation's deputy country representative in Afghanistan from 2004-2008, where she was responsible for a diverse set of programs related to the advancement of women and girls through education initiatives. In 2002-2004, she was the deputy country representative in the Philippines where she worked on anti-corruption and access to justice programs.

Dr Ngin Chanrith
Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Policy Studies

Dr. Chanrith has worked as Senior Research Fellow and Professional Teaching Fellow at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, Designated Professor at Nagoya University Cambodia Satellite Campus, and Dean of the Faculty of Development Studies at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

His research interests cover processes and transformations of rural and community development involving natural resource governance and climate change. Currently, he is working on the roles of agricultural labour and farmer organizations in post-COVID-19 recovery.

Mr. Ou Virak
Executive Director, Future Forum

OU Virak is the founder and president of Future Forum and he is one of Cambodia's most prominent and principled political analysts and human rights activists, with proven expertise in strengthening grassroots movements, conducting political economy analyses, spearheading organizational development, and directing risk assessments. Prior to founding Future Forum in late 2015, Virak led the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, one of Cambodia's premier human rights organizations. He has led successful campaigns to free human rights activists and tackled some of the most controversial issues in Cambodia: rule of law, freedom of expression, racism, LGBT rights, forced evictions and more.

Dr. Pak Kimchoeun
Senior Policy Researcher and Analyst

He has a Master's Degree in Public Finance from Syracuse University, New York under a Fulbright Scholarship, and a PhD in Public Policy and Governance from the Australian National University (ANU) under the Australian Leadership Awards (ALA). Since 2003, he has conducted many research and consultancy projects on governance and public sector reforms, especially in the areas of decentralization and public financial management. More recently, he has expanded his research interest to the issues of social protection, the labor sector, youth, data analysis, and M&E. Through his work, he has developed a good understanding of policy formulation and implementation in Cambodia and has built professional networks with various government and non-government agencies at both national and sub-national level.

Ms. Phean Sophoan
Country Director, Oxfam

Sophoan (PHEAN) is the National Director of Oxfam in Cambodia. Sophoan specialises in policy analysis, policy and strategy development, social research, and program management. She works extensively in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos PDR on agriculture and climate change, natural resources management and governance, and social protection. She is an advocate for gender equality, social inclusion, and women's leadership and participation in development. She has strong gender background and concrete experiences in gender mainstreaming, and women empowerment, and policy analysis and policy development.

Mr. Rathyrea Prak
Senior Program Officer for The Asia Foundation in Cambodia

In this capacity, he supports the Foundation's Governance and Legal Unit in implementing the Australian-funded Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program that aims to strengthen the capacity of Cambodian knowledge sector institutions to undertake quality research and inform public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia. In addition, he supports governance-related research studies and organizes policy dialogues with relevant stakeholders. Prior to joining the Foundation, Rathyrea worked for a research firm, conducting various research studies, including child rights governance, public service delivery, protection of marginalized urban women, and others, which aimed to inform public policies and practices in tackling governance-related issues in Cambodia. Rathyrea Prak holds a master's degree in Public Policy (specializing in good governance) from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Ms. Prom Kimcheng,
Executive Director, Komar Rikreay Association

Ms. Prom Kimchheng is the Executive Director of Komar Rikreay Association (KMR) in Battambang Province. She has been responsible for organizational management and development since 2003. Currently KMR is implementing many projects that focus on trafficked, street, and at-risk children in Battambang province. Before working at KMR, Ms. Prom Kimchheng was a finance officer, an administrator, and a supervisor at Ptea Teuk Dong Street Family Centre at Battambang province between 1996 and 2003. She was also a teacher at UNCESCO, Battambang between 1994 and 1996, and also a teacher at Net Yang secondary school between 1984 and 1996.

Mr. San Chey
Executive Director, Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA)

Mr. SAN Chey earned a Master's Degree in Law and Political Science. He has experience working in advocacy since 2006 in the field of local and national governance, community empowerment, digital rights, entrepreneurship mindset, influencing skills, research, youth engagement, and policy debates. He is also an international trainer on good governance, leadership, public speaking, media use, innovation, and social accountability, and leads various social accountability development and training curriculum.

Ms. Sem Sophea
Acting Director, Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Department, General Department of Policy, Ministry of Economy and Finance

Ms. Sophea is the current Acting Director of Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Department of the General Department of Policy, MEF after serving as Deputy Director. Starting her career in MEF as a young economist in 2015, she has been involved with various macroeconomic and financial research and national development strategies. Currently, she leads the Department to prepare Cambodia's economic outlook, conduct fiscal forecasting, and provide macroeconomic and fiscal policy recommendations to the management. She also oversees the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the RMS, leads the preparation of the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF), and participates in various national policies and strategies development. Ms. Sophea holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy from KDI School of Public Policy and Management in South Korea.

Dr. Seun Sam
Policy Analyst, he Royal Academy of Cambodia

Dr. Seun Sam is a Fellow of the American Political Science Association (APSA) and a member of the Meridian International Center's international committee, both of which are based in Washington, DC, USA. Dr. Sam was nominated to participate in the US Government's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) during the 50th Anniversary of the US Peace Corps in 2011, and he has spent seven years engaging with volunteerism. He is also a part-time lecturer on geopolitics and geo-economics at the Royal Academy of Cambodia and Khemarak University in Phnom Penh, in addition to his work at the Royal Academy of Cambodia. He has also frequently contributes articles to the Khmer Times, Cambodianess, South China Morning Post, and other local media. Dr. Sam is a Cambodian native who earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from Khemarak University in Phnom Penh.

Dr Song Sopheak
Director of CDRI's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

Dr Song Sopheak joined CDRI as a research fellow in October 2016 after undertaking post-doctoral research at the Global Career Design Centre of Hiroshima University. He is currently leading a long-term research project on technical and vocational education and training with a focus on workforcedevelopment and employer engagement. He also manages several research projects on higher education in Cambodia. His research has focuses on teaching and learning, workforce development, vocational and professional education, and the links between universities and industry. Dr Song holds a PhD in Education and Human Science from Hiroshima University, Japan.

Mr. Sovinda Po
Senior Research Fellow, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

Mr. Sovinda Po is a PhD candidate in International Relations at Griffith University and a Senior Research Fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace. His research agenda focuses on the evolution of the relationship between China and mainland Southeast Asia and the strategic use of minilateral institutions by both major powers and small states. His journal articles have appeared in the Australian Journal of International Affairs, Asian Studies Review, Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, European Journal of East Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Affairs, Journal of Greater Mekong Studies, Explorations: A Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, and UC Occasional Paper Series. His op-eds have appeared in the Diplomat, East Asia Forum, New Mandala, the Interpreter, ASEANFocus, IPP Review and Australian Outlook. He is often quoted in the Phnom Penh Post, and the South China Morning Post, and has also been interviewed by the Wire (Australia), the Voice of America, and Radio Free Asia.

Bopharath Sry
Program Officer, The Asia Foundation

Bopharath Sry is a program officer for The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program. She coordinates and works with research partners and relevant stakeholders in the knowledge sector in Cambodia. Her works include supporting partners' research proposals and papers, facilitating the selection process of research grants, and mobilizing resources and networks to strengthen research think tanks' technical and organizational capacities. She coordinates the SheThinks Network, where female researchers meet to discuss and share their research experience and access information and mentorship.

Mr. Stanislas Kowalski
Technical Advisor, NGPRC, KAPE

Mr. Stanislas Kowalski is the mentor of the New Generation Pedagogical Research Center in Phnom-Penh. He's in charge of the curriculum design for the Master of Education in Mentoring. He has worked as an educator in several countries and at various levels. In France, he was a literature teacher in secondary schools. He taught French language at the Central South University in Changsha (People's Republic of China). He was the director of the alphabetization center of Ali-Sabieh (Djibouti) for two years.

Ms. Samedy Suong
Head of Programs, Center for Khmer Studies

Ms. Samedy Suong joined CKS since November 2017 as Head of Programs of CKS. She oversees all CKS programs and is in-charge of initiating new ideas and programs. She also supports quality communication and partnerships. She holds a Master's Degree in Rural Development from Belgium. Before joining CKS, she worked at UNDP for over 2.5 years as the Project Coordinator for Clearing for Results, a Mine Action project. Additionally,, she worked as a Research Fellow at KHANA for over 1.5years. Her expertise ranges from mine action, gender, HIV/AIDs, and research.

Dr. Teng Delux
Research Fellow, Cambodia Development Resource Institute

Dr. Teng Delux received a Diploma of International Investment in 2009 from Belgorod State University, Russia. In 2011, he earned a Ph.D. in World Economy from Southern Federal University and Diploma in State and Municipal Management from Institute of State and Municipal Management, Belgorod State National Research University, Russia. Dr. Teng Delux is currently a research fellow at the Center of Development Economic and Trade, CDRI. His publications include Essence and Phases of International Economic Integration, Comparative Analysis of University Publication Activity by Google Scholar (On Example of Leading Czech and Germany), Method for the Quantitative Evaluation of Universities' Publishing Activity by Countries Based on the Taiwanese Ranking, Cambodia Labour Market Forecasting 2017-2027.

Dr. Try Thuon
Research Team Leader, Center for Khmer Studies

Dr. Try Thuon holds a PhD in Social Sciences in Urban Studies. He is currently working as the research team leader on the project "Urban development and socio-economic changes in Sihanoukville's urban development in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic". His research interests include urban vulnerability and resilience in practice, urbanism from the bottom, water security, gender inequality and ethnic relations, and the role of social sciences in social engagement for co-learning processes and planning practices.

Mr. Vuth Lyno
Co-founder , Sa Art Projects

Mr. Vuth Lyno has initiated and coordinated research projects in vulnerable urban communities in Phnom Penh. He also is a visual artist, curator, and educator interested in space, cultural history, and knowledge production. His artwork often engage with micro and overlooked histories, notions of community, place-making, and production of social relations. Lyno is also a member of Stiev Selapak collective which founded and co-runs Sa Art Projects, a long-term initiative committed to the development of contemporary visual arts landscape in Cambodia. He teaches, initiates, and innovates art programs facilitating a growing and critically conscious community.

Dr. Yen Yat
Research Fellow, Center for Khmer Studies

Dr. Yen Yat holds a PhD in Land Resource Management. In 2018, he joined College of Urban and Environmental Sciences, Peking University, as a Postdoc Research Fellow. Currently, he is a CKS research fellow who is working with other researchers on urban research projects in Cambodia. His research interests focus on sustainable urban planning, mainly on land use planning, urban green space management, and walkability. His research work has been published in SCI/SSCI journals.

Ms. Yon Soknim,
Research Assistant, My Village Organization (MVi)

Mrs. Yon Soknim is a research assistant at My Village Organization (MVi). Before working for MVi, she got her first job as a community facilitator in an International Organization called Wildlife Alliance based in Koh Kong province in order to help the community to build up their sustainable income without doing illegal logging and hunting. In 2014, she worked for another local NGO in Siem Reap province as a nutrition officer. Mrs. Yon Soknim graduated with a Bachelor's Degree of Archaeology in 2012 from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh.

Ponlok Chomnes is a four-year initiative (2019-2023) to strengthen the capacity of the knowledge sector and inform public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia. In partnership with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Asia Foundation is strengthening organizational and technical capacity among Cambodian research institutions and creating an enabling environment for policy dialogue.

CONTACT US

THE ASIA FOUNDATION | CAMBODIA OFFICE

#59, Oknha Peich (Street 242) Phnom Penh, Cambodia

ponlokchomnes@asiafoundation.org

+855 (0)23 210 431

https://policypulse.org/

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