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The Asia Foundation

Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum

"Strengthening Resilience and Response
COVID-19 in Cambodia and ASEAN"

October 26-27, 2022
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

សហការជាមួយ/In Collaboration with



NATIONAL POLICY FORUM

26-27 October 2022
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

NATIONAL POLICY FORUM

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COVID-19 in Cambodia and ASEAN"

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Introduction

It has been over two years since the Coronavirus pandemic began, putting immense pressure on global and regional public health systems and slowing socio-economic development. The ASEAN countries, including Cambodia, have put significant effort toward fighting COVID-19. For instance, in 2020, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF)¹ was developed to respond to the pandemic across the region. The Framework focuses on five broad strategies, including 1) enhancing health systems, 2) strengthening human security, 3) maximizing the potential of the intra-ASEAN market and broader economic integration, 4) accelerating inclusive digital transformation, and 5) advancing towards a more sustainable and resilient future. In Cambodia, the government's efforts to roll out its vaccination program and quick and effective response have kept the pandemic under control. Currently, Cambodia is one of the top countries in the world for vaccination rates² and the number of COVID-19 cases nationally has remained low.

In December 2021, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGOC) launched the Strategic Framework and Program for Cambodia's Economic Recovery (2021-2023)³ to restore the economy in the immediate- and medium-term, improve its potential and resilience, and ensure more sustainable and inclusive development in the long run. The RGOC also implemented a number of support programs to sustain the economy during the pandemic.

Timely data and analysis on COVID-19's effects are critical to inform sound public policies. They can enable policymakers, development partners, and relevant stakeholders to make better decisions and achieve better outcomes. Notably, 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. Shortly after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ponlok Chomnes program took immediate action by pivoting current programming⁴ to respond to the quickly evolving situation and to directly support Australia's Partnerships for Recovery Strategy.

¹ <https://asean.org/book/asean-comprehensive-recovery-framework-implementation-plan/>

² <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/kingdom-covid-indexs-no2>

³ <https://policypulse.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/strategic-framework-and-programs-for-economic-recovery-.pdf>

⁴ THE PONLOK CHOMNES PROGRAM'S COVID-19 PIVOT: EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY FOR EFFECTIVE HEALTH, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN CAMBODIA

Subsequently, the Ponlok Chomnes' Core Partners⁵ and Emerging and Collaborative Research Partners⁶, among other research institutions, have conducted various pieces of research that examine the impacts of COVID-19 and government efforts on multiple sectors in Cambodia, including education, tourism, urban issues, the garment sector, the economy, and others.

Drawing on insights from Cambodia's and ASEAN perspectives, the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum (NPF) was 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 other knowledge users, including policymakers and policy practitioners from state and non-state organizations. The forum examined the RGOC's response to the COVID-19 crisis and provides recommendations that can inform Cambodia's and ASEAN future resilience.

⁵ Ponlok Chomnes' Core Partners include Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI); Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP); Center for Khmer Studies (CKS); Centre for Policy Studies (CPS); and Future Forum (FF). For more information, please click this link.

⁶ Ponlok Chomnes' Emerging Research Partners include 1) The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability – Cambodia (ANSA); 2) Department of Tourism, Royal University of Phnom Penh (DoT-RUPP); 3) Khmer Association for Development of Countryside (KAFDOC); 4) Kampuchea Action to Promote Education (KAPE); 5) Komar Rikreay Association (KMR); 6) My Village Organization (MVi); 7) Analyzing Development Issues Centre (ADIC); 8) Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA); 9) Vicheasthan Bamreu Neak Samrabsamroul Karngae Akphiwat (VBNK); 10) Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC). Ponlok Chomnes' Collaborative Research Partners include 1) Center for Strategy and Innovation Policy (CSIP); 2) Center for Sustainable Water (CSW); 3) Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC-Cambodia); and 4) NUM Research Center National University of Management. For more information, please click this link.

Welcome Remarks

Ms. Meloney C. Lindberg
Country Representative
The Asia Foundation



I am so pleased to welcome you all to the second National Policy Forum, an annual policy dialogue hosted by The Asia Foundation, as part of The Asia Foundation’s ongoing “Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Policy Dialogue in Cambodia” program. The Foundation is grateful to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for its generous support for this program, which represents our shared purpose in supporting and strengthening the capacity of the knowledge sector and informing public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia.

This year, the National Policy Forum is focusing on “Strengthening Resilience and Responses to COVID-19 in Cambodia and ASEAN.” The forum convenes researchers, policymakers, and members of the academia. It provides these knowledge sector actors with a platform to present and discuss their work as subject matter experts, as it relates to COVID-19 resilience.

In the past one year since our last Forum, the Ponlok Chomnes program through its several partners, has produced nine research projects; held 10 dissemination events and policy talks; a Provincial Policy Forum in Battambang; and now, this second National Policy Forum. We have also conducted an interesting diagnostic study on the policy process and the use of data. For those of you who joined us at last year’s Forum, as you can see, we’ve come a long way.

In all our activities we are incredibly thankful for the ongoing support we receive from the focal points across 21 ministries. This connection has really helped us better understand how Ponlok Chomnes knowledge products can be useful to policy makers and analysts. We regularly refresh the Policy Pulse Initiative (PPI) website to share important policy updates in Cambodia through high-quality research and this includes a policy inventory which highlights reforms from each ministry. I’m delighted to share that since November 2021 until now, the website has over 18,000 new users and over 42,000 page views. This is a clear indication of growing interest in the policy space.

As COVID-19 cases reduce in Cambodia and around the world, we have observed a deepening of engagement and collaboration across knowledge sector partners. As the situation normalizes even more, we plan to focus on connecting with knowledge users in the policy space and linking them with knowledge producers – think tanks and research institutes, to learn more about how data driven research can be beneficial.

I'm also pleased to share that through this forum, we are able to provide an opportunity to young researchers who represent diverse institutions. They will bring the results of their studies and policy recommendations on a range of topics and present them.

The program also has a keen focus on women researchers. This evening, we would like to invite all of you to join our networking reception during which we will feature our SheThinks Network, made up of over 70 women researchers. This initiative is unique to the Ponlok Chomnes program, aiming to address the gender disparity within the research community in Cambodia by empowering and amplifying women's voices in research and making the research space more inclusive.

Finally, I wish to conclude by highlighting a remarkable achievement I read about a few days ago in the paper– that Cambodia has recently ranked fourth place out of 121 countries in the Nikkei COVID-19 Recovery Index – and is the highest ranked country in the ASEAN region. This is a tremendous accomplishment for Cambodia, particularly during its ASEAN Chair year, and highlights Cambodia's resilient nature. We hope it will not be tested again, but I am convinced that Cambodia would be well-prepared.

With this positive news in mind, I wish to welcome you all as critical members of Cambodia's knowledge sector community. I look forward to joining you and participating over the next two days. I am sure it will be a fruitful and rewarding experience.

Opening Remarks

H.E. Pablo Kang
Australian Ambassador to Cambodia



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

I can't quite believe it's been nearly a year since the inaugural forum here at Le Royal, and it's great to have heard about the first provincial policy forum which took place in Battambang in August this year.

The Australian Government is proud to have established the Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program, in support of the growth of independent think tanks and their ability to provide alternative policy advice to government in Cambodia.

Thank you, Meloney and the team at The Asia Foundation for putting together this National Policy Forum. The forum is one of the Ponlok Chomnes program's major flagship events, and this year, the focus is on "Strengthening Resilience and Responses to COVID-19 in Cambodia and ASEAN," a theme which is both timely and relevant.

As we have now endured life under the pandemic for more than two years, we have observed the challenges and stress endured by public health systems across the world, impacting the growth and development of so many of the world's economies. Those which are in the ASEAN region including Cambodia have been no exception. That said, this region has hit the ground running on battling the pandemic and countering its effects.

The ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) comes to mind from a regional perspective. This framework also aligns with Australia's "Partnerships for Recovery" COVID-19 Development Response and performance framework that outlines Australia's approach to tackling COVID-19 in our region, pivoting our development programs in 2020 to focus on combatting the virus, together with our partners.

Here in Cambodia, the government did a highly commendable job of vaccinating citizens and residents to control the spread of the virus and to reduce its intensity. The Australian Government was proud to have played our part in these efforts, by donating 2.83 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, 133 ultra cold freezers for their storage, plus training for health workers and awareness- raising materials for the public. The first batch of Australian-donated vaccines arrived here late last year just as the Omicron variant was threatening to take hold – and the Cambodian Government immediately deployed them as boosters, including to front-line health workers and vulnerable groups. Subsequently we provided some 482,000 paediatric Pfizer vaccines for use with children aged between 5 and 11.

As I prepare to conclude my diplomatic assignment early next year, COVID-19 and Australia's role in fighting it in Cambodia will always be one of my most enduring diplomatic memories.

Australia also continues to be a partner and friend to Cambodia as it plans to host the 40th and 41st ASEAN and related summits next month.

This will also of course include the ASEAN-Australia Summit– the first in-person annual summit between Australia and ASEAN, to be chaired by Samdech Prime Minister Hun Sen and with the participation of our Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Since becoming ASEAN's first dialogue partner nearly 50 years ago in 1974, the Australian Government has always supported ASEAN's vision of a rules-based, inclusive, and economically integrated regional community. We are pleased to be one of ASEAN's first comprehensive strategic partners, exactly one year ago tomorrow, and to begin implementing a new Australia for ASEAN futures initiative containing practical activities aligned with ASEAN's own core priorities in the political, economic, social and cultural sectors.

Within ASEAN, our commitment to Cambodia's growth and development remains strong. Last month we launched a new flagship program investing AUD \$87 million into post COVID-19 economic recovery – the Cambodia Australia Partnership for Resilient Economic Development (CAP-RED). This is a minimum five-year partnership which will build on over a decade of Australia's previous support to the Cambodian agriculture and infrastructure sectors through the CAVAC and Investing in Infrastructure (3i) programs. We also continue to support the Royal Government of Cambodia's Strategic Framework and Program for Cambodia's Economic Recovery (2021 – 2023) to restore the economy in the immediate- and medium-term, improve its

potential and resilience, and ensure more sustainable and inclusive development overall. As these efforts evolve, it is critical for knowledge producers in Cambodia to generate data and analysis to support policymakers, development partners, and key stakeholders in providing evidence on how to strengthen national resilience and responses to COVID-19 at home and in the ASEAN region. As a key stakeholder in the Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program, the Royal Government has demonstrated strong support for data-informed approaches to policy-making, and the program will continue to create and support an enabling environment for the knowledge sector, and to strengthen the linkages between researchers and policymakers. This includes the She Thinks network of women researchers I launched together with H.E. Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi earlier this year.

As I mentioned earlier this is the second Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum (NPF) and I hope this annual gathering continues to be a platform for knowledge producers including think tanks, academia, researchers, and other non-traditional research organisations. It is an opportunity for you all to showcase your findings, discuss, exchange knowledge, and network with knowledge users, including policymakers and policy practitioners from state and non-state organisations.

You can revisit the governments' efforts and provide recommendations that will inform Cambodia's and ASEAN future resilience to the pandemic and other crises.

I see from the agenda and concept note that this year, the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum has expanded to the region, bringing expert panelists from the region and across Cambodia to share knowledge, insights and lessons learned on the issues affecting Cambodia and its neighbourhood in areas including education, urbanisation, foreign policy and economic recovery.

This research is contributing to increased understandings of the actual impacts of the pandemic on all citizens, including vulnerable groups, and supporting policymakers to develop effective and appropriate responses.

We are delighted to see such a diverse group of participants, representing think tanks, community organisations, research institutes, government agencies, local NGOs, multilateral organizations, and international development partners. I encourage you to take this opportunity to network and

develop partnerships so that we can collaboratively address the challenges presented by future pandemics and other economic shocks, and provide support.

Once again, I would like to thank The Asia Foundation and Ponlok Chomnes partners for organising and putting together this national policy forum. I wish to conclude by wishing everyone a very productive two days of rich discussion and deliberation.

Keynote Address

H.E. Ung Rachana

Under Secretary of State

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation



Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to say how delighted I am to be here at this major forum and to represent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia.

I would like to express my deep thanks to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia for supporting this event. My high appreciation goes to The Asia Foundation for hosting today's forum "On Resilience and Response to COVID-19". I really commend the organizer for choosing this subject for our two-day deliberation.

COVID-19 has brought a major set-back for the global economy. It has triggered severe social and economic disruption across all sectors and aspects of life worldwide. Widespread supply shortages, including food shortages, were caused by supply chain disruption. COVID-19 has gravely affected already vulnerable people, widening the social gap.

COVID-19 is a test to our unity, solidarity, health system, and resilience. We have seen global efforts and responses to combat this deadly virus. Countries that are in a better position in terms of wealth and expertise assist the weaker ones. This is very encouraging to witness. Cambodia has received COVID-19 vaccines and related equipment bilaterally from friends and through COVAX. We are very thankful to our friends for the provision of these most-needed goods. "A friend in need is a friend indeed". At the same time, we also procure COVID-19 vaccines and related materials. Cambodia also share its COVID-19 vaccines and related equipment with our friends too (Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste).

Facing the epidemic, in December 2021 the Royal Government of Cambodia launched a Strategic Framework and Program for Cambodia's Economic Recovery (2021-2023) which has three pillars: 1) Economic recovery, 2) Reforms, and 3) Building Resilience.

Over the past year, Cambodia has implemented a comprehensive response to COVID-19 by addressing negative impacts caused by this pandemic with the intensive vaccine roll-out and the introduction of a fiscal stimulus package. Key policies of this package include socio-economic assistance measures with cash handouts to the most vulnerable households, and economic support measures for sectors that have been hit hard by COVID-19. I think later on our colleague from the Ministry of Economy and Finance might elaborate on this policy. Recognizing that the pandemic still poses severe impacts on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable families and on some economic sectors, the government has maintained this stimulus package.

Seeing that the spread of COVID-19 has subsided and with the understanding that we have to live with it whether we want to or not, the government gradually permitted local businesses to reopen and eased cross-border restrictions by reopening the country since November 1, 2021, provided health measures are strictly and fully implemented.

Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen early this month emphasized that, in addition to vaccine roll-out, the government will further invest in the healthcare sector aiming to develop a strong healthcare system that can protect the population from COVID-19, as well as other pandemics that may occur in the future; promote social safety nets for the poor and most vulnerable families, and develop small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen also mentioned about turning the crisis into an opportunity, by accelerating an in-depth reform to improve the business climate and by strengthening competitiveness.

In response to the outbreak of Coronavirus, ASEAN has established a few mechanisms which include: the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies (RRMS), the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), and the ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework (ATCAF). With financial support from the governments of Australia and Japan, ASEAN is in the process of establishing the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED). When established, it will serve as a center of excellence and a regional resource hub to strengthen ASEAN's regional capabilities to prepare for, prevent, detect and respond to public health emergencies and emerging diseases.

Strategic vaccine roll-out, comprehensive policy, strong leadership and, perhaps most importantly, popular participation could be the keys to success in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccination alone could not prevent the spread of the pandemic. Ongoing public health measures to prevent transmission is still needed alongside the vaccination. Samdech Hun Sen suggests the '3 don'ts and 3 do's': don't touch or shake hands, don't stay in crowded place, don't stay in a poorly ventilated room. Do wear a mask, wash hands, and maintain social distance.

WHO Regional Director Dr. Kasai commends Cambodia on its COVID-19 response, saying: "I am very impressed by the remarkable achievements of the Cambodian government in leading the fight against COVID-19, including the effective vaccine roll-out."

Cambodia contributed 2,000,000 masks; 200,000 N95 masks; 300 oxygen machines; 100 life detector machines; and USD 1,000,000 in cash to the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies (RRMS).

During our ASEAN Chairmanship 2022, Cambodia will host the 2nd ASEAN Global Dialogue under the theme "Post-COVID-19 Comprehensive Recovery", which is a major side event of the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits and related Summit from November 10-13. This Dialogue will provide a platform for ASEAN Leaders and ASEAN's partners to exchange views, share wisdom and policy in developing sustainable and inclusive strategies for post-pandemic recovery, and address current and future challenges. Today's forum will add more value to this Dialogue.

Different governments may have different approaches, policies, and priorities in fighting against COVID-19. Today's forum gathers important speakers who are eager to share their valuable lessons learned, success stories, policies and measures in enhancing resilience and responses to COVID-19 and future emerging pandemics and diseases. I am positive that we all will have rich takeaways from this meeting. I wish the forum great success.

Thank you!

Opening Plenary Discussion

Lessons from the Region: Cambodia and ASEAN's Response to COVID-19 and Path to Economic Recovery



Cambodia is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the country had reached lower middle-income status in 2015 and aspires to reach middle-income status by 2030. The majority of the economy is based on garment exports, construction, and tourism, among others.

With the start of the pandemic in 2020, these sectors, including construction which made up a large percentage of the Cambodia's economic growth, came to a standstill. According to the World Bank, the economy contracted by around 3.1 percent. However, the way Cambodia has dealt with this challenge, including vaccinating its population and taking quick action to curb the spread of COVID-19, has resulted in a positive forecasted growth of around 5.3% in 2022 and 6.5% in 2023, as per the Asian Development Bank (ADB). As of August 2022, approximately 95% of the population was fully vaccinated. Many Cambodians are now on their fifth dose of the vaccine. The cash transfer scheme, which provides \$45 per month to almost 3 million Cambodians living below the poverty line, supports the most vulnerable.

Further, government restrictions around mobility and travel (both domestic and international) have eased. This will undoubtedly help the resurgence of the Kingdom's tourism, construction, and manufacturing sectors. News reports indicate that over 70% of hotels and guesthouses have already opened. Service sectors which require in-person engagement are particularly crucial to the growth of the Cambodian economy and need revival.

As the economy grows, increased attention to reforms around the business and trade environment, supporting socio-economic growth and protection for all groups, and closing infrastructure gaps are also critical, as are improving rural opportunities for growth and development and reducing poverty. Given the demographic dividend, special attention to youth aspirations and skilling young Cambodians for the future with digital technology and education will also be important. In late 2021 the Cambodian government launched the Strategic Framework and Program for Cambodia's Economic Recovery to restore the economy and outline several support programs.

Going into 2023, which is around the corner, it will be interesting to watch how external factors that disrupt global economic growth, such as the conflict in Ukraine and rising energy and food prices, influence the Cambodian economy. Will the economy continue to be resilient to external shocks? It will also be interesting to see how improved regional trade and cooperation within ASEAN can support post-COVID-19 growth and recovery from a regional perspective. In 2020 the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ARCF) was developed – has it been effective two years later?

Further, as ASEAN Chair in 2022, Cambodia has pledged to work closely with the 15 Asia-Pacific countries, which include 10 ASEAN member states, to promote the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement. The RCEP focuses on trade liberalization and economic cooperation post-COVID-19 through reduced tariff and non-tariff barriers, improved flows of goods and services, promotion of regional competitiveness, and strong economic ties. An ADB study indicates that it is likely to increase member country incomes by 0.6% in 2030, add \$255 billion annually to regional incomes, and create 2.8 million regional jobs.

The future is hopeful. Regional cooperation and strong in-country growth for most of Southeast Asia will help strengthen the region's economic growth post-COVID-19, buoyed by high vaccination rates.

The opening plenary discussion on “Lessons from the Region: Cambodia and ASEAN's Response to COVID-19 and the Path to Economic Recovery” provided an opportunity for the ASEAN member government and the ASEAN Secretariat to share best practices and lessons in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and highlight the way forward. Specifically, the discussion focused on policies and measures undertaken by ASEAN member states towards post-COVID-19 economic recovery – not only from a country-level perspective but also from a regional lens – to assess the best way that the ASEAN region can leverage regional cooperation and agreements, and collaboration towards a more robust and resilient ASEAN region.

Summary of Discussion

ASEAN is an open region, so there are comparatively higher levels of intra-regional trade, and anything that affects the global economy will also affect us. Trade is the main contributor to economic recovery for ASEAN. Before COVID-19, trade activity in ASEAN was worth three trillion USD; however, COVID-19 slowed down the trade activity. In 2021, encouraging figures in terms of FDI improved in the region and increased by 42% to reach around \$174 billion USD.

In response to the pandemic, the ASEAN Response Fund, a pool of financial resources for ASEAN, plays an important role. For instance, the establishment of the ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergency and Emerging Disease is a regional hub to prevent, detect, and respond to public health emergencies and emerging diseases.

In addition to the ASEAN Response Fund, each member state has developed its own measures to respond to COVID-19. For instance, Cambodia has developed and implemented a Strategic Framework and Programs for Economic Recovery to ensure Cambodia's economic growth. The framework consists of three measures. The first is 'Recovery', which supports the potential sectors for recovery. For instance, the government has implemented tax and non-financial reliefs to relieve the pandemic's pressures on sectors such as footwear and tourism. The second is 'Reform', which helps facilitate the business environment. The last is 'Resilience'. The measure will help Cambodia achieve steady growth as it is expected that Cambodia's economy will grow five percent and more than six percent in 2023 and 2024, respectively.

Like Cambodia, Thailand also experienced economic decline. In response to the crisis, the Thai government has financially supported the vulnerable. For instance, the half-half co-payment scheme is an initiative that allowed consumers to pay half price for goods and services. Local travel is also encouraged by sponsoring part of the trip for hotels and restaurants. Such initiatives are expected to boost the local economy. Thailand has also instituted other measures to help in the recovery of its economy. For instance, the Bio-Circular Green Economy Model integrates the bio-economy, circular economy, and green economy with advanced technology to boost competitiveness and mitigate the impact on the environment and promote balanced growth in five key potential areas, namely food and agriculture; medical service, and wellness; bioenergy, biomaterial and biochemical; tourism; and creative economy. The second measure is digital transformation. Thailand also established the Eastern Economic Corridor – Digital (EECD), which

functions as a regional digital innovation hub to bring investors together where digital innovators can partner and support the growth of talented digital players, innovative ecosystems, and emergent programs. The third is promotion of tourism. Thailand will pursue a tourism campaign that was originally planned before COVID-19, and this year Thailand expects to receive 9.65 million international tourists.

In coping with this kind of situation, the pandemic, it is necessary to have a clear vision and in-depth understanding to mobilize financial and human resources effectively. From a regional perspective, trade is still essential in economic recovery.

Moderator and Panelists



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Plenary Discussions

Policies and Measures for Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery: The Role of Foreign Policy



The world has gradually returned to normalcy after nearly three years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like other countries, Cambodia has developed a recovery framework known as “Policies and Measures for Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery.” This framework focuses on 3Rs or three pillars: Pillar 1- Recovery, Pillar 2- Reform, and Pillar 3- Resilience. Pillar 1- Recovery- focuses on stimulating the growth of key sectors such as agriculture and agro-industry, tourism, garment, and non-garment sectors. Pillar 2- Reform- introduces key structural reform measures to improve the environment and trade facilitation for investments and businesses. The sectors that need to be further reformed include regional free trade agreements, enforcing the law on investment, electricity, ease of doing business, transportation, and logistics. Pillar 3- Resilience- is meant to strengthen readiness and response to ensure the sustainability and inclusiveness of socio-economic development and to cope with similar diseases or crises that may erupt in the future. The issues include the health sector, education development, SME development, climate change adaptation, social protection, skill development, the digital sector, and green development. This is a comprehensive and spot-on recovery framework from the Cambodian government.

This plenary discussion explored how various foreign policies can contribute to implementing this recovery framework, including in the areas of economic, security, and cultural foreign policy. The objective of this panel was to stimulate discussion with foreign policy experts to gather perspectives and solutions on how foreign policy can contribute to resilience by focusing on three important and trending elements: SME development, education and skill development, and digital and green development.

Summary of Discussion

SMEs are considered one of the key factors contributing to the country's economic growth. However, in Cambodia, many SMEs are unregistered; this is a reminder to the government to find ways to include them in the formal sector. The roles of SMEs are not limited to domestic production but also include international production as they supply many of the components for multinational cooperations. SMEs are expected to create many job opportunities for local people; however, the big issue is the shortage of relevant skills in the country.

Skill shortage is caused by the slow progress in producing human capital. Cambodia ranks one of the lowest in ASEAN regarding human capital development. Thus, this is a big task for the government to invest in education, including primary, secondary, vocational training, and higher education, and the government should also make sure that educational investments include people living in rural areas. Another solution to the skill shortage is finding ways to utilize the skills of returned migrant workers, such as workers returning from South Korea.

COVID-19 has interrupted the education system in the country as it involved adopting online learning and teaching. Embracing technology in education gave the country opportunities to improve young people's digital skills, which are beneficial for the country's future digital economy. Despite the fast adoption of digital technology, Cambodia still lacks digital regulations such as cyber security laws, laws on personal data protection, and laws developing safe cyberspaces, which requires capacity building and infrastructure.

Cambodia has mainstreamed digital technology in its priority sector to catch up with the global pace. For example, the government has recently released the Agri-tech Road Map, which helps address issues in the agriculture sector, such as low productivity, lack of technical skills, insufficient research and development, and climate change vulnerabilities, among other challenges. The roadmap also poises Cambodia to adopt science and technology, which can support Cambodia's national economic growth.

Foreign policy can play an essential role in helping the government to achieve its digital policy goals. In the case of agriculture, Cambodia can build its economic diplomacy with advanced and developed countries to

modernize agri-technology. Cambodia can learn from best practices to improve agricultural productivity, for example. Cambodia will seek to increase its rice exports globally, particularly in the post-pandemic world where food remains scarce and in areas where staple foods are becoming more expensive. One success story that can be built upon is the Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA), which places agriculture at the center of this bilateral trade agreement.

Cambodia has also been pursuing a free trade agreement (FTA) and is part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Having many FTAs can be challenging as multiple FTAs can pose a large bureaucratic burden. Additionally, some bigger countries do not liberalize trade on agricultural trading agreements with developing countries. Cambodia can play a role in harmonizing all different kinds of multilateral FTAs.

As foreign policy is important to Cambodia’s development, Cambodia has to ensure that its policies are autonomous, independent, and neutral. Cambodia should work collaboratively, engage with other countries, and move forward with skills, technology, education, agriculture, and trade.

Moderator, Scene Setter, and Panelists



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Agricultural Sector's Contribution to Economic Recovery in post-COVID-19



In the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the world's largest economic catastrophe in more than a century. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have also affected the agriculture sector, posing a severe threat to food security and livelihoods in many of the least-developed countries, where agricultural production systems are highly labor-intensive and there is less capacity to resist a serious economic crisis.⁷

Cambodia's agricultural sector, however, has not been affected too much by the pandemic crisis. Instead, it allowed the agricultural sector to expand its production to meet the rising demand for agricultural products in the markets. The pandemic also reduced imported agricultural products from neighboring states.⁸ In 2020, Cambodia's agricultural sector increased by 0.5% and was projected to increase by 1.3% in 2021 and 1.2% in 2022.⁹

In late 2021, The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) launched "The Strategic Framework and Programmes for Economic Recovery in the Context of Living with COVID-19 in a New Normal 2021-2023" to restore and boost the country's economic growth back to its potential level and strengthen resilience for sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic development in the medium- and long-term.¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/COVID-19-and-the-food-and-agriculture-sector-issues-and-policy-responses-a23f764b/>

⁸ <https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/cambodias-agriculture-sector-amid-COVID-19/#ref-149389-7>

⁹ <https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-development-outlook-2021>

¹⁰ <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/2021-2023-recovery-plan-launched>

Given that the agricultural sector was not severely affected by the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RGC recognises that there is an opportunity for the agriculture sector to recover while the industry and service sectors are suffering a downturn.¹¹ The agricultural sector is expected to contribute significantly to the country's economic growth post-COVID-19. In 2020, Cambodia exported over 13 million tonnes of agricultural products worth about US\$3.5 billion, increasing by 17% from 2019. The future annual rate of agriculture sector growth has been forecasted to grow at 3%, reaching a production value of US\$7.8 billion in 2030. Nevertheless, the sector contributed only 5.5% of total exports, which was dominantly comprised of garment and footwear exports.¹² The agricultural sector is still unsteady and unable to balance and make up for the job losses experienced in the tourism sector.



¹¹ <https://opendevdevelopmentcambodia.net/cambodias-agriculture-sector-amid-COVID-19/#ref-149389-7>

¹² CPS. 2021. Study of Emerging Areas and Potential Crops for Diversification in Cambodia. Centre for Policy Study. Phnom Penh.

Summary of Discussion

Agriculture is essential for making the food value chain sustainable. The government considers agriculture as a concrete foundation contributing to economic growth. In 2020 and 2021, the global food production and supply system was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the food value chain and supply sides were interrupted because of the country's lockdown. There were difficulties in the movement, import, and export of food supply, and the cost of transportation was extremely high.

Moreover, the country faces some challenges resulting from the war in Ukraine. It affects some parts of food production, mainly imported raw materials whose price increases lead to higher agricultural production costs. Meanwhile, the country also faces some challenges related to climate change and floods, which need urgent attention from the government to help farmers.

The aquaculture sector also faces challenges. COVID-19 has dramatically affected the sector. Farmers could produce fish but could not sell them, primarily impacting exports of fish abroad due to the border closure. This has caused fish farmers to lose income and caused inability to repay bank loans. The price of imported fish feed is also increasing, affecting production costs. Additionally, lack of skilled labor in aquaculture is another challenge for farmers.

In response to these challenges, the government should play a role in facilitating a lower loan interest rate from banks. The RGC should encourage more investors to invest in fish feed processing domestically so that farmers are not entirely dependent on imported fish feed. Tax exemptions should also be made for investors. Additionally, farmers rely on fish breeds imported from abroad. The government should consider establishing a fish breeding center to produce quality fish breeds for aquaculture.

To respond to the challenges in the agriculture sector, the government has granted tax exemptions to almost all agricultural imports from abroad and provided tax exemptions for pig farming for two years (2022 and 2023) to restore pig farming after the pandemic. The government continues implementing the National Policy for Agricultural Development 2022-2030. The government expects to increase agricultural productivity, diversification, and competitive trade through modernisation. This policy encourages the use of technology and innovation to reduce agriculture production costs and to benefit farmers while not affecting the product price for users.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) is strengthening farmers’ capacity through farming demonstrations where farmers can learn how to improve their agricultural productivity. The MAFF has included the Public-Private-Producer Partnership (PPPP) framework in the Agricultural Development Policy. This framework encourages the public, private sector, and producers (farmers) to work together to improve the agricultural value chain. The MAFF has also been developing the Contract Farming policy to deal with farmers’ challenges regarding markets.

Moderator and Panelists



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Strengthening COVID-19 Resilience of Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia



The pandemic has impacted all segments of the population. Although all stakeholders, including the government and non-government institutions, have been working tirelessly to address the pandemic’s challenges, some have affected certain groups more acutely.

Like most other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has effected Cambodia widely, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups such as the poor, children, older people, people with disabilities, women, and informal and migrant workers. Those living under the poverty line faced difficulties affording food, while children and women encountered increased rates of domestic violence during the lockdown.

This panel discussion drew insights from the studies supported by the Ponlok Chomnes program on the impacts of COVID-19 on specific vulnerable groups, such as “Exploring the social-wellbeing of migration and families on the Cambodian-Thai border in the period of COVID-19 Pandemic;” “Post-COVID-19 Recovery after Its Impact on Women Entrepreneurs;” “The Impacts of COVID-19 on Education of Persons with Disabilities;” and “COVID-19’s Impact on Vulnerable Youth in Cambodia.”

Summary of Discussion

A study was conducted by the Analyzing Development Issues Centre (ADIC) that explored the social-wellbeing of migrants and families on the Cambodian-Thai border during the period of COVID-19 in Pursat, Battambang, and Banteay Meanchey provinces. According to this research, migrant Cambodian workers in Thailand were forced to leave Thailand without receiving any support from the Thai government. The migrant workers paid for their travel arrangements and paid informal fees to enter Cambodia. Some also received limited support, such as healthcare access during quarantine.

The Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA) conducted a study with 625 women entrepreneurs in Sihanoukville province and Phnom Penh city and found that 85% of women entrepreneurs lost income, 71% of them reported having fewer customers, and 51% of women entrepreneurs closed their businesses. Indebtedness is a big challenge for these women, as 39% reported being indebted, including taking loans from microfinance institutes, relatives, and friends.

The National University of Management Research Center's research on the 'Education of Persons with Disabilities' in five special education schools in Battambang province, Seam Reap province, Kampong Cham province, and Phnom Penh capital showed that online learning is a big challenge for persons with disabilities due to lack of special support and their inability to adapt to the changing study environment.

A study conducted by the Youth Council of Cambodia that explored the 'COVID-19 Impact on Vulnerable Youth in Cambodia' indicated that 5% of young people lost their job, 50% of vulnerable youth were working in undesirable occupations, and 34% of vulnerable youth reported increased expenses. Additionally, 76% reported mental health issues because of the lockdown, 29% of vulnerable youth had to close their business, and 39% lacked capacity reportedly from a lack of education opportunities.

Some suggestions were made to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable groups in Cambodia. Enhancing the implementation of the legal framework on social protection and social well-being is needed. The government and relevant stakeholders should review, revise, and update the existing laws and legal framework in response to the vulnerable groups' current challenges, such as considering special assistance programs to support vulnerable groups. Civil society and the government should collaborate to provide vulnerable groups with capacity building opportunities post-COVID-19.

Moderator, Scene Setter, and Panelists



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Urban Transformation and Socio-economic Changes in Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery



Cambodia has advanced beyond its “least developed country” status and is currently showing one of the fastest urbanization rates in the Asian region. The current urban plan has been shaped by multiple factors ranging from colonial practices to the recent influence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI has created more interdependency and is vulnerable to system failures within the regional and global spheres.

In Sihanoukville, the city’s sudden transformation brought a new spatial dynamic between industrial, commercial, and residential zones, redefining the administrative boundaries between the Sangkat (urban commune) and the new urban centers. This transformation brings about questions on the long-term effects impacting inclusive and sustainable growth of the city. In Siem Reap, on the other hand, the tourism sector was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented event raises questions about the pandemic’s long-term impacts on the hospitality sector, such as hotels and guesthouses, and particularly on workers.

Drawing on the insights from Cambodian and international experts, this plenary discussion discussed urban transformation, specifically in Sihanoukville and Siem Reap, during COVID-19 and the human and social aspects of creating a resilient and sustainable city.

Summary of Discussion

In the early days and at the height of the pandemic there was a seismic shift in the daily lives of people living in Cambodia. The pandemic necessitated lockdowns and strict movement controls. This meant that people had to quickly adapt their work, social, and personal lives. This also reconfigured how we live in cities. Activity and mobility patterns have changed. For instance, landlords of commercial properties and companies already redesigned their office spaces to accommodate for the new lifestyle of city dwellers.

COVID-19 has not only transformed the city's physical look, but also how people live in cities such as people's livelihoods. For example, COVID-19 caused business suspensions and closures. Based on a study conducted by the Center for Khmer Studies (CKS) on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism workers in Siem Reap, more than 100 hotels and guesthouses in Siem Reap permanently ceased operations, while 230 others announced indefinite suspensions amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, almost 80% of the 113 hotel and guesthouse workers that were interviewed were indebted to banks, microfinance institutions, and/or private loans and they reported struggling to pay their loans during COVID-19.

Despite challenges, it has been observed that people are resilient to the pandemic. Based on another study by CKS on 'Urban Development and Socio-economic Transformation of Sihanoukville in COVID-19 Times', people in Sihanoukville encountered issues such as job loss and indebtedness. However, people also reported quick adaptations and responses to the situation. Many people who used to work in restaurants and construction sites started businesses in other sectors/areas to sustain their livelihoods. In Siem Reap, people searched for whatever jobs were available, such as food delivery job, making baskets to sell, etc. Some used their savings and/or sold their assets (land, motorbike, car, jewelry, etc.). Some who own land also started or expanded domestic agricultural activities, including growing/producing their own food, such as vegetables and fruit trees, and raising chickens, pigs, cows, etc., to lessen their food expenses.

Despite these adaptations, more efforts are needed to support the most vulnerable. Social protection systems, especially those supporting the poor during shocks, should be strengthened. Building human capital such as skill buildings can be another good solution. Trust between the government and local communities should be built. In rapid urban development, infrastructure development is one of main sources of people's employment.

Commitment to support workers’ wellbeing, such as affordable rental housing for workers, should be strengthened.

Cambodia can also learn from examples abroad in order to build human resilience in the city. In Jarkarta, a project was initiated to build urban people’s resilience titled ‘Entrepreneurial and E-Commerce Skills Programme’. The aim of the programme was to equip members of two neighbourhoods in Petamburan in Central Jakarta, particularly street peddlers who lost their jobs to the pandemic, with entrepreneurial skills for alternative livelihoods and also to boost the public health and resilience of the community in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moderator, Scene Setter, and Panelists



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Reopening, Recovery, and Resilience in Education in ASEAN



In ASEAN, the pandemic has caused an unprecedented and sudden disruption of education for approximately 152 million children and youth since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020. Children of marginalised groups have been adversely impacted by school closures and are at risk of further educational exclusion.

Learning loss —a term that refers to a general or specific loss of knowledge or skills due to an extended discontinuity in a student’s regular education program—has been reported by many studies around the world, especially in developing countries. In Cambodia, schools were closed for approximately 250 days during 2020 and 2021, the equivalent of almost two-thirds of the two school year school term. Based on the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports’ (MoEYS) national learning assessments of Grade-6 students conducted in 2016 compared to results from 2021, Cambodian students had fallen behind in their learning during the pandemic. The percentage of students who failed to demonstrate basic proficiency increased from 34% to 45% in the Khmer language assessment and from 49% to 74% in Mathematics (UNICEF, 2022). Boys seem to be more adversely affected by the pandemic in terms of learning loss.

Acknowledging this critical issue, the RGC has carried out numerous responses to tackle the educational problems created by COVID-19, and at the same time, developed plans for the national recovery from the pandemic and to strengthen its education system so that it will be more resilient against uncertainty in the future.

Summary of Discussion

At the regional level, schools across Asia faced lengthy closures due to COVID-19 pandemic. The learning loss is equivalent to half a year of learning according to estimations by the World Bank. For Cambodia, in particular, there was a decline in reading and mathematics during 2021. In contrast, there is an increase in the use of technology applications in learning and teaching. This shows the adaptability of teachers and students to use technology to replace the traditional learning approaches in order to minimize learning losses.

Interventions have been implemented by countries to mitigate learning losses and to prepare for school reopenings. In India and Pakistan, teaching at the adjusted learning level was implemented as one of the methodologies to mitigate and respond to learning losses. Instead of teaching the children strictly the content of their corresponding grade levels, this methodology is flexible and allows for teaching the students at their adjusted learning level. In Indonesia, the curriculum was redesigned into an emergency curriculum in order to reduce the work overload of teachers and give autonomy to the teacher and students to decide how they are going to use the curriculum. Meanwhile, in Thailand, an initiative called ‘Bring the Kids back to School’ was implemented. It aims to encourage children to return to school and to orient them to the learning environment. And in Lao PDR, the government has tried to reduce the curriculum to just 80% of the core curriculum in primary and secondary education. Teaching and learning materials had been adjusted to enable students to learn from home.

In Cambodia, two kinds of measures were implemented to mitigate learning losses. First, the immediate measures put in place were to adopt the use of e-learning to ensure that learning could continue despite the school closures. Thus, Cambodia developed digital platforms in response to the learning needs of students and teachers with support from development partners. Second, a long-term measure was initiated to focus on digital transformation to ensure inclusive and equitable education. Within this transformation, Cambodia recognized the importance of teacher training to ensure that the ‘new normal’ of education can be effectively and sustainably enforced. A digital education center was established and the ICT curriculum was introduced.

Collective efforts have also been put in place. The Asia-Pacific region has successfully concluded the Bangkok Statement 2022 “Towards an effective learning recovery for all and transforming education in Asia-Pacific which

reaffirmed all the countries commitments toward education.” The meeting concluded with two main overarching priorities. First, Safe School Reopening, Learning Recovery, and Continuity of Learning. This is meant to ensure the safe returns of all learners, especially girls and children in rural areas. Second, education transformation ensures equity and gender equality learning as drop-out rates continue to increase. This priority focuses on inclusive and quality education, as well as upgrading teachers’ skills and maintaining their well-being. Additionally, better governance and accountability should not be overlooked.

The government should focus on planning the education budget in cooperation with development partners such as public institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, and also with ASEAN members to share the experiences and budget plans with one another. To ensure the quality of education, the government should not only invest in the use of digital technologies, but also training for teachers. The government should focus more on the quality of the teaching force, including pre-service and in-service training, school infrastructure, and the use of technology, while more programs on soft and hard skills should be offered for students.

In Cambodia, the mental health of the students is one of the priorities of the MoEYS and one area identified as causing stress is lack of jobs or youth skills alignment to jobs. Industries should be involved in this discussion in order to determine the changing needs to better skill youth to fill these positions. Transferable skills are also important to seek employment and the MoEYS should work with other ministries, companies, and stakeholders to upskill youth.

Moderator and Panelists



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Strengthening Resilience in the Public Service Sector in Post-COVID-19: Key Lessons from Four Case Studies



COVID-19 caused negative socio-economic impacts. Many businesses were closed due to travel restrictions and disruptions in economic activities in the country. This crisis has put immense pressure on the public sector in Cambodia as the government has to deliver necessary services to meet people's growing and changing needs during the pandemic. However, the social protection scheme for affected people, such as the unemployed, was limited as the social protection system was at an early stage of development.

The government's attention to COVID-19 has, more or less, interrupted the public sector's normal operations and functions. For instance, the restriction on gathering disrupted the democratic decision-making process because sub-national authorities could not gather local citizens and key actors to participate. In addition, the implementation of some reforms such as the decentralization reform has also been interrupted due to the limited budget as the government's budget has been reallocated for COVID-19 related interventions. For instance, due to COVID-19, the expected increase to the budget allocated to sub-national administrations (SNAs) was postponed in 2021, and it interrupted some expected project implementation at this level.

Despite challenges, there are opportunities for improvement and reforms in the public services sector to prepare for the future crises. Therefore, several questions are emerging:

1. What are the challenges and gaps in implementing government mechanisms in public service sectors during COVID-19?
2. What has the public service sector in Cambodia learned during COVID-19?
3. What are practical solutions to build the resilience of the government's mechanisms?

Drawing on insights from four cases, namely “Youth Volunteerism, Digital Literacy, and Community Development”; “Implementation of Private Sector’s Pension Scheme in Cambodia: Readiness and Its Impact on Social Welfare”; “Local Government and Private Sector Partnership for Service Delivery: The Case of Clean Water Supply in Cambodia”; and “Community Support Service,” this panel discussion will contribute to strengthening public sector resilience.



Summary of Discussion

The Volunteer for My Community (VMC) program was established by the MoEYS to provide a chance for youth to contribute to community development projects. The program is linked to the MoEYS' Policy on Vocational Skills Training and Creative Skills for Youth, especially soft skills. This program has adopted digital technologies, which in turn promote youth's digital literacy. Youth encounter digital literacy issues including computer skills, social media skills, and internet skills. COVID-19 presented an opportunity for youth to improve those skills as they needed to adapt to new ways of working and learning. However, youth still lack knowledge related to cyber security skills. Youth know how to use social media for communication, for instance, but their awareness of using it safely remains challenging.

Digital literacy for youth can be improved. At the national level, including digital literacy in the national education system. At the subnational level, digital infrastructure such as an Information Communications Technology Center should be established in the community to provide learning and resources to young people. Capacity building of officials at subnational level should be improved. Private sector actors, such as internet service providers, should expand the internet coverage to more communities.

COVID-19 has posed challenges to Cambodia's economy. Employees faced challenges such as job loss and inability to pay the bills. Cambodia's employees are vulnerable to other unexpected and unforeseen crises in the future. In response to this vulnerability, the retirement pension scheme for the private sector, one of the social protection policies, has been developed to guarantee the income of the citizens in their retirement period. Despite the robust policy, strengthening the retirement pension scheme requires a strong governance system such as reliability, trust, credibility, and transparency. More importantly, there is a need to collaborate with employees and employers to improve their understanding of the benefits and processes of the system.

Additionally, women and vulnerable groups face water stress due to the high demand of water use during COVID-19. There are two types of vulnerabilities. First, people have to pay more for water consumption due to the high demand of water. Women are more vulnerable as they need more water for protective health measures (such as handwashing) and also for cooking. Second, insufficient water encourages people to use water from rivers and lakes, which in turn, makes them prone to health issues. The development of clean water supplies requires a huge amount of money, especially in rural

areas, floating areas, and forest areas. To tackle this issue, Cambodia needs support and coordination from the government, NGOs, and the private sector in providing good quality and accessible water to different groups of people.

Many communities faced a financial crisis due to the unexpected occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The commune budget is used to address urgent matters faced by the poor, the unemployed, and immigrants, among other vulnerable groups. To make a budget plan, the community needs to gather input from not less than 60% of residents to meet their current need. Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 period, gathering people was highly restricted amid lockdowns. Community services play crucial roles in aiding vulnerable groups. This support can be provided in the forms of knowledge-sharing, counselling, and financial support, among other services. These community support services can be managed by different actors from the government and non-government organizations and companies. Privatizing community support services is the most effective option because of its efficiency and transparency.

Moderator, Scene Setter, and Panelists



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Future-ready Recoveries: Toward a Bolder and Stronger Cambodia 2040



The pandemic caused many businesses to close down their production of goods and services which resulted in damage to the Cambodian economy. Tax relief and other policies issued by the government were integrated with-in various areas. In the digital economy, the government helped to promote the small SME sector by giving them an easier financing system.

Digital transformation is being celebrated for providing support to trade. Nowadays, people can easily shop online for products thanks to the advancement of technology. This has created a lot of opportunities in e-commerce like helping SMEs enter the overseas market.

COVID-19 also impacted how the world learns. Previously, there was reliance on paper-based learning and traditional communication methods between teachers and students. Platforms like Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams that had existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic helped to teachers and students at all levels to connect. Other learning opportunities wer also brought to the forefront, such as the ability to take online courses from well-known institutions through Coursera or EdX.

Despite challenges, COVID-19 also presented opportunities to Cambodia. When reflecting on what was learned during this period, other questions arose, such as what should be the priorities for Cambodia’s development in the next five to ten years? And what can we do to ensure that the future is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable?

Summary of Discussion

Three priorities are significant for Cambodia to consider for future development. First, Cambodia needs to strengthen its revenue system, including its

tax collection system. Digital tools and resources can help Cambodia's tax system to avoid leakage and to expand and possibly use 'smart tax' technology. Recently, the General Department of Taxation drafted a new tax law that responds to the international practice of Cambodia's regional and global economic integration. It makes it easier for taxpayers to pay their taxes through this tax system reform, and this in turn generates more national budget. It is also important for the government to be transparent about government expenditures.

The second is to improve border and trade facilitation to make imports and exports of goods and services more efficient. Cambodia has increased the use of technology in cross-border paperless trade as Cambodia is a member of World Trade Organization (WTO), which is using the trade information portal. However, there are several things Cambodia needs to improve, such as pre-arrival process procedures. There is also a lack of women's representation in the social enterprise area. Development of women's capacity in this field should be encouraged so that they can improve their advocacy work with the government.

Third, Cambodia can improve its economy through the promotion of sports. The increasing popularity of sports also increases the demand for sports-wear like running shoes, employment in the sporting sector, and foreign visitors. In turn, sports can contribute to the country's economy.

Cambodia's economy is on the rise and ensuring that future development is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable is critical. It has been observed that energy consumption is increasing, and Cambodia might face energy shortages in the future. Therefore, Cambodia should diversify its energy sources to both renewable and non-renewable sources. The role of the private sector in the energy sector is important. Promoting physical activity and alternative means of transport can also reduce the consumption of energy, such as riding bikes instead of driving.

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Policy Brief Presentation

Better Social Protection System, Better Response: Preparation for Future Pandemics

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Introduction

Cambodia is one of the fastest-growing post-pandemic economies in the region with an estimated growth rate of 6.3% (Kunmakara, 2022). However, businesses and workers in hard-hit sectors like manufacturing, tourism, and construction are still under pressure. Due to limited social welfare programs during the pandemic, distressed Cambodians resorted to microfinance institutions for loans as a survival coping mechanism. Many were forced to sell their assets to pay their debts, yet most will likely experience indebtedness still. Only around 0.3% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is spent on social welfare, compared to 1.4% of GDP spent on average for other lower-middle-income countries (Zambra, 2018). This low rate of social spending has shown bitter consequences.

In recent years, an estimated 17.8% of the population is living below the poverty threshold (ADB, 2022). However, Cambodia's IDPoor¹³ program has only targeted 560,000 households so far (UNICEF Cambodia, 2020). Therefore, Cambodia is yet to firmly establish its own flagship social protection programs that have the capabilities to expand and cover a larger proportion

¹³ The IDPoor Programme, established in 2006 within the Ministry of Planning, is part of the Royal Government of Cambodia's ongoing efforts to reduce poverty and support socioeconomic development throughout the country. Being the RGC's mandatory standard tool for targeting pro-poor measures in the country, the programme provides regularly updated information on poor households to a large number of Government and non-governmental agencies to help them target services and assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable households.

of the population, like China's Dibao or Philippines' Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. The slow progression of the ambitious but underfunded National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) has also left many Cambodians without a much-needed safety net (Zambra, 2018).

This policy brief outlines intra- and post-pandemic conditions of the most vulnerable Cambodians and analyzes the impact on the four main pillars of Cambodian society, namely education, labor, health, and finance. It also reiterates the importance of the NSPPF under the guidance of the National Social Protection Council (NSPC) and the direction of the Ministry of Economics and Finance (MoEF). Finally, the policy brief provides recommendations on how Cambodia's social protection system can be strengthened and made more shockproof.

Analysis

Education

More than three million young Cambodian learners were impacted by the transition to online learning during the pandemic (Kov, 2022). From 2020 to 2021, schools were closed for 250 days. Even when schools reopened, some (primarily universities) still opted for hybrid learning instead of full physical classes, citing student safety concerns. The move has angered impatient parents who paid the full tuition fee while their children stayed at home most of the school year. Some parents have even protested for a discounted rate due to online learning during the lockdown period (Savi, 2020). Moreover, the absence of schooling put an extra burden on working parents who had to find alternative childcare arrangements during working hours. Poor parents had no choice but to bring their children to the workplace (such as working on the streets and dump sites scavenging for plastic trash that can be sold for some money) (Redmond et al., 2020). Consequently, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), in collaboration with UNICEF and other Capacity Development Partnership Fund (CDPF) partners found that students across the country experienced "learning loss" and are falling behind previous generations (MoEYS, 2022).

The unpreparedness not only impacted the traditional way of absorbing knowledge but also delayed the national exam and university life for hundreds of thousands of high schoolers in Cambodia (MoEYS, 2022). Most university students were not satisfied with their academic performance during the pandemic, and the negative effects of online learning have not only dissuaded them from continuing to learn virtually but could also potentially impact their career prospects (Chet et al., 2022). Complications in the tran-

sition period might not be the fault of lack of funds and technological equipment alone. According to Chea et al., (n.d.), most teachers (public and private) had access to the tools needed to conduct online classes but lack the information and communications technology (ICT) readiness to use them.

Labor

Cambodia's female-dominated garment, textile, and footwear (GTF) sector remains one of the most impacted as it employs around three-quarters of a million people, most of which are women from the countryside (The Guardian, 2020). As infections rose, the government asked factories to pay 40% of their employees' salaries for up to six months, but garment workers still struggled to make ends meet and may never graduate above the national poverty line (The Guardian, 2020).

During the first year of the pandemic, which in Cambodia was arguably less severe in terms of COVID-19 cases, fatalities, and lockdowns or business closures than in 2021, around two hundred thousand jobs were lost in the GTF sector. By 2021, lockdowns further deteriorated the livelihood of GTF employees. Although the government offered wage subsidies on two occasions, reports have indicated that the cash retrieval process has not been smooth; 16% of the survey participants did not receive any benefits during the first round, and up to around 80% did not during the second round (Reach, 2022). Even for beneficiaries who were fully compensated (wage subsidies amount to only 37% of their wage), it barely covered their expenses on essential items including monthly accommodation, utility bills, and food expenditures which amount to around 80% of their US\$190 salary (Reach, 2022). Furthermore, most employees carry outstanding debts, and it is often their first priority to repay them monthly, leading to food insecurity (Reach, 2022). Countries like the Philippines and Thailand have offered more in terms of subsidies-to-wage ratio (Reach, 2022).

Health

Cambodia has been hailed as one of the best countries in terms of our public health response and vaccination rollouts (Kuntheary, 2022). Due to quick government decisions, highly crowded areas like schools and cinemas were closed throughout 2020 and 2021. As a result, Cambodia went through 2020 relatively unscathed. Despite the success, the economic impacts of the pandemic, just like the disease itself, has long-term negative effects. Many opportunities, jobs, and resources were lost during the process but most importantly, the loss of loved ones will be felt the most throughout the world.

However, the Delta variant of 2021 tested the limits of Cambodia's public

health system and its personnel. With thousands of daily infections, hospitals were full, convention centers were transformed into facilities for COVID-19 patients, and frontliners fought the virus tirelessly through day and night (Prak, 2021). The mass vaccination campaign spearheaded by the government was nothing short of a success story. From the vaccine supply to the area-based strategy, to the low levels of vaccine hesitancy and social cohesion, Cambodians across the nation were eager to line up and get jabbed (Strangio, 2021). But to say that the Cambodian government could not have done a better job would be a naive statement. Despite the fast development of a vaccination strategy and rollout of vaccinations, partial closures of non-essential businesses and strict lockdowns harmed the physical and mental well-being of millions. During the rollout, millions flocked to the vaccination sites and clogged up the newly conceived digital vaccination card system, causing long queues, queue jumping, unregistered vaccinations, long waiting times for vaccine cards, and other challenges (Associated Press, 2021; Badzmierowski, 2021). Moreover, hospital and primary care services in rural areas remain inaccessible and underfunded compared to urban areas, which has affected maternal and child health (Masaki et al., n.d.).

The IDPoor program gained momentum during the first quarter of 2020, and with the support of Prime Minister Hun Sen, UNICEF worked with the government to scale the program nationwide. In addition, the data collected were also used to strengthen the Health Equity Fund to provide health-care service fee exemptions for the identified poor at government health facilities and non-medical benefits such as reimbursement of transportation costs to and from the referral hospital, food allowances for caretakers of patients, and funeral support (Kaba et al., 2018).

Finance

Financially, as the economy contracted by 3.1%, the adverse effects rippled across all sectors and areas of the country (UNOCHA, 2022). Many were forced to find jobs in other sectors like agriculture and livestock. With income levels decreasing, household vulnerabilities like food shortages become a reality. To stay afloat, many sold off their assets or spent their life savings to pay their mortgages and loans or for survival (UNOCHA, 2022). The pandemic deprived both poor and non-poor households, especially those barely above the national poverty threshold, of their savings and personal assets. The lack of employment has forced many to borrow from microfinance institutions (Flynn & Phoung, 2021). Even before the pandemic, over-indebtedness has been a growing economic and political concern

(Bylander et al., 2019). During the pandemic, due to the insufficient amount of government cash transfers and the complications related to personal bankruptcy law (which makes debt forgiveness unlikely), vulnerable households had no choice but to seek help from microfinance institutions. Even so, loose regulations on both the institutions and loaning personnel might have led to risky lending for the borrowers. Moreover, the low rate of financial literacy among Cambodian borrowers has also contributed to this crisis (Bylander et al., 2019).

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic caught the entire world off guard. Healthcare systems and government responses in countries like Taiwan and South Korea were effective in curbing the spread of the virus and its fatal effects, while the U.S. struggled, despite being one of the top spenders on healthcare compared to other OECD countries (Maizland & Klobucista, 2020). The Royal Government of Cambodia responded swiftly and utilized its resources to curb the spread of the virus through lockdowns and rapid vaccinations of its citizens. So far, Cambodia ranks sixth in the world for the percentage of the population vaccinated against COVID-19 (Ritchie et al., 2020). As a result, borders reopened and businesses are booming again.

The need to address social protection issues and how to improve the current system is more important than ever. The analysis above revealed that the lack of funding is not the only challenge to establishing a better social protection system, but also poor planning and coordination have resulted in insufficient coverage, gaps in data collection, and delayed policy approaches and implementation. Many social protection programs still depend on the funding of development partners, and this dependency can only decrease if government funding increases (Zambra, 2018).

To secure the funding and ensure the sustainability of the social protection system and its future expansion, contributions from all employment groups should be equitable, incremental, and without a ceiling. So far, the percentage of the uncovered vulnerable population is extremely high—more than one-fourth of Cambodians are not covered by any social protection mechanisms at all. Thus, the need to increase coverage is critical. To do so, cost and coverage modeling and data collection such as the identification of uncovered vulnerable populations are much-needed (Kolesar et al., 2020). Positively, the IDPoor program has been set up to provide necessary data for the NSPC to understand more about the different levels of income in poor households and the needs of different vulnerable employment groups to implement effective policies and provide sufficient and responsive help.

The most destructive effects of the pandemic might be its lingering effects moving forward. With the fear of monkeypox lurking around in the past few months, it is safe to say that the COVID-19 pandemic is most likely not the last of its kind. Thus, the unpreparedness during this pandemic should be a wake-up call and a lesson to all parties involved. In sum, failure to match the regional level of spending on social safety nets will likely have negative consequences. For Cambodia to reach its status as a high-income country by 2050, the government must improve its social protection system with adequate funding for it to have the capability and flexibility to expand and adapt in the unforeseeable future.

Recommendations

1. The government should match its funding of the NSPPF (The National Social Protection Policy Framework) at least on par with the regional average (1.4% of GDP spent on safety nets).
2. A pandemic playbook should be drafted by the National Social Protection Council (NSPC), in collaboration with MoSVY (social protection), MoEYS (education), MoLVT (labor), MoH (health), and MoEF (finance), to ensure a coordinated and timely response for future pandemics.
3. The MoEF, which is in charge of the overall direction and funding of the NSPPF, should synergize inter-ministerial and non-governmental initiatives that work towards safeguarding mechanisms that include pro-human capital policies like accessible public education, adequate labor protection, affordable healthcare, and safe financial assistance programs.

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Cambodia Energy Sector's Post Covid-19 Recovery

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Background and objectives

Objectives

As with other developing countries, Cambodia has faced many challenges related to energy shortages, particularly in planning for the prospective increased demand in the post COVID-19 period. This policy brief aims to assess the current energy situation in Cambodia in the post COVID-19 era and to provide policy recommendations for improving and strengthening the energy sector in Cambodia.

Policy background

Cambodia's economy grew by around 7% annually before the COVID-19 pandemic (The World Bank, 2022). Electricity is one of the main precursors and contributors to economic growth. In 2020, commercial buildings and industrial factories consumed 61.62% of total energy generation in Cambodia (Electricity Authority of Cambodia, 2020). For the 10 years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, energy demands in Cambodia increased on average by about 19.2% annually (Electricity Authority of Cambodia, 2020). This massive increase in demand has put pressure on the government to keep up with expanding needs. Because of investments, the electricity power sources have increased from 584 megawatts (MW) in 2010 to 3,897 MW in 2020, while the energy generated from those sources increased from 2,515 gigawatt hours (GWh) to 12,499 GWh in 2020 (Electricity Authority of Cambodia, 2020).

In 2020, during the COVID-19 outbreak, Cambodia's economy contracted by approximately 3.1% due to a reduction in manufacturing production caused by restrictions on international travel, raw materials transport, and the export of finished products (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2021). However, energy consumption in Cambodia continued to increase by about 5.7% and 1.6% in 2020 and 2021, respectively (Electricity Authority of Cambodia, 2021). And the Asian Development Bank (ADB) predicts that industrial production will increase by approximately 7.0% in 2022 (ADB, 2021). This estimate shows a productivity rebound in garments, footwear, travel products, electronics, and bicycles (ADB, 2021).

Hydropower and coal thermal power plants are Cambodia's primary local power generation sources, accounting for 46.8% and 41.0%, respectively (Electricity Authority of Cambodia, 2020). But these have proven insufficient as illustrated when *Électricité du Cambodge* (EDC) decided to do load shedding in 2019 (East Asia Forum, 2019). With current global warming and climate change trends, hydropower plants may not be a reliable source of electricity. Furthermore, if economic activities suddenly rebound, the government will face an electricity supply shortage and consumption rebound problems. A similar situation happened in the past, including an economic crisis in 2008 and energy dropping in 2009, but it this jumped back up in 2010 (Wang & Wang, 2020). Other ideas around smaller, individual energy needs may not be enough in the longterm either. Individual energy sources, such as installation of power sources like solar panels without battery systems, does not prepare the country for sudden demand that can occur if the solar panels drop in electricity generation and traditional power sources are necessary (Uzum et al., 2020).

To cope with electricity shortages, the government of Cambodia should focus on the policy side.

Literature review

A considerable amount of research has been conducted to identify the effect of energy efficiency on energy consumption in different sectors worldwide. Governments use different requirements, standards, instruments, targets, and strategies to improve energy efficiency (Economidou et al., 2020). For instance, giving feedback to residential energy customers can reduce household energy consumption by 5 to 10% (Galvin, 2012; Kim & Sunitiyoso, 2019). Hasan et al. (2021) studied energy management in the industrial sector of Bangladesh. They found that energy management, including long-term energy management, monitoring, and efficiency strategies,

could improve energy efficiency by 8 to 10%. At the same time, the financial mechanism of building renovation should be considered to ensure energy efficiency policy implementation (Santi et al., 2015). In Australia, Alam et al. (2019) found three critical factors that lead to success in retrofitting government buildings, namely retrofitting policies, financial mechanisms, and energy service companies.

Significance of the policy brief

This policy brief may act as a policy reference for the Government of Cambodia to reduce pressure on the power generation side and increase the efficiency of general energy usage.

Analysis method

In this policy brief, the investigator extracted policy recommendations from the existing academic studies using ScienceDirect and Google Scholar. Keywords used for the literature search included “energy efficiency best practice” and “energy efficiency policy review.” Only primary reports and peer-reviewed research articles were included. The investigator targeted policies and lessons learned from low- and middle-income countries; however, where relevant, those from high-income countries deemed relevant to the Cambodian context were also included.

Findings and discussion

Energy efficiency in commercial buildings

Commercial buildings in Cambodia consumed 36.3% of the energy supplied in the country in 2019 (EAC, 2021). The government may consider several policies to improve energy efficiency in commercial buildings in the country. On the policy side, direction and command instruments, including energy efficiency standards, energy-saving targets, and energy auditing, are among the effective instruments currently used in low-, middle, and high-income countries (Hao et al., 2017; Lo, 2014; Sebi et al., 2019). For direction and command instruments, the government can set targets and mandatory tasks for commercial buildings to follow. For example, in Germany, commercial buildings need to reduce heating and cooling system consumption by 2% annually (Global Building Performance Network, 2009). In Mali and Morocco, the government requires industries to apply energy auditing (United Nations Environment Programme, 2017).

Direct command policies can improve energy efficiency in commercial buildings in Cambodia. The energy efficiency in commercial buildings can be improved by reducing consumption by main components, such as heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC), and lighting systems. HVAC consumes about 50% of the total energy consumption in commercial buildings, so the building owners can save up to 25% of the energy consumption by appropriately selecting and operating the HVAC system (Fasiuddin & Budaiwi, 2011; Saidur et al., 2011; Yu & Chan, 2012).

HVAC systems operate under two main parameters – supply air and chilled water temperature (Fong et al., 2006). Optimizing the air supply temperature and water set point could save about 7% of HVAC energy consumption (Fong et al., 2006). Zamora et al. (2014) found that using a water-cooled chiller instead of an air-cooled chiller can increase the cooling capacity by 38.7%. Bruno (2011) set up an experiment in Australia and found that using a dew point cooler instead of the conventional cooler system could save 52-56% of energy used. Other researchers suggested using natural ventilation for cooling systems, but it may not be a good idea because it will reduce the ability to control indoor conditions (Chang et al., 2004).

Typically, 15% of total energy consumption is consumed by lighting systems (Pérez-Lombard et al., 2008). There are two popular ways of applying energy efficiency to lighting systems – light emitting diodes (LEDs) and a lighting control system (Haq et al., 2014; Khan & Abas, 2011; Peng et al., 2014). Some factors should be considered, such as work performed, daylight entrance, behavior pattern of occupants, and geometry of the building to define a lighting control system (Haq et al., 2014). The lighting energy demand can be reduced from 75 to 90% when efficient lighting and appropriate lighting control systems are used (Hinnells, 2008).

Energy efficiency in industrial factories

The industrial sector typically consumes a significant proportion of national energy. Therefore, applying an energy efficiency policy to industrial factories may contribute to a considerable reduction in energy consumption. Similar to commercial buildings, energy auditing, energy efficiency standards, and energy savings targets can be used to reduce energy consumption. Mandatory energy auditing should be in place to encourage factories to implement energy efficiency measures. Standards or requirements for some high energy consumption products or systems in factories should also be considered, such as motor-driven systems, boiler, and condenser systems widely used in all factories. In Denmark, the industrial sector consumes approximately

60% of the total energy. By applying an energy management policy, those factories could reduce energy consumption from 24% to 62%, depending on their characteristics and the measures they use (Hasan et al., 2018).

Energy efficiency in residential houses and energy efficiency labeling

Residential buildings in the world consumed 36% of the total final energy consumption in 2017 (Global Alliance for Building Construction, 2022). Similarly, residential houses consumed 35.8% of total energy in Cambodia in 2021 (Electricity Authority of Cambodia, 2021). Like commercial buildings, energy efficiency in residential houses can be improved through building insulation, HVAC systems, and lighting systems (Mardookhy et al., 2014; Valentin et al., 2022). It is challenging to encourage individual house owners to implement energy efficiency measures. One option is to establish minimum energy efficiency standards for HVAC systems, lighting systems, and home appliances (Al-Homoud & Krarti, 2021). A standard for energy consumption per floor area should be implemented for new houses built by real estate or construction companies.

Nevertheless, barriers to retrofitting residential houses have been identified, such as lack of awareness of the household owner, necessity of technical support, and requirement of auditing activities (Hu & Qiu, 2019; Liu et al., 2020). Therefore, possible solutions to promote retrofitting in residential housing may include providing direct instructions on retrofitting or improving energy efficiency labeling for high energy consumption appliances, such as air-conditioners, refrigerators, and rice cookers. In general, applying an energy efficiency policy can reduce energy consumption from between 15.9% to 18.09% for residential houses (Adly & El-Khouly, 2022).

Potential roadmap

Figure 1 shows a possible roadmap for implementing energy efficiency in Cambodia. The potential roadmap for implementing energy efficiency in Cambodia should begin with commercial buildings and industrial factories. There were 6,771 big and medium factories and 13,445 big and medium commercial buildings in 2021; and they consumed 32.89% and 3.01%, respectively, of the total electricity in the country (Electricity Authority of Cambodia, 2021). The government can set a clear energy reduction target for industrial factories and commercial buildings (Annunziata et al., 2013; Tanaka, 2011). Energy auditing is another instrument the government can use to monitor the performance of industrial factories and commercial buildings (Tanaka, 2011). It requires technical and financial support to retro-

fit and audit the energy consumption in industrial factories and commercial buildings (Alam et al., 2019). The second step of implementing energy efficiency is applying standard energy consumption requirements per square meter for new buildings (Li & Shui, 2015). The standard energy consumption per square meter can be implemented simultaneously with energy efficiency standards and labeling (Li & Shui, 2015). Currently, EDC is implementing a billing system that informs household owners about their consumption history. This measure may improve the awareness of the household owners about their consumption. Lastly, energy service companies and financial mechanisms should be considered to tackle the technical and financial barriers.

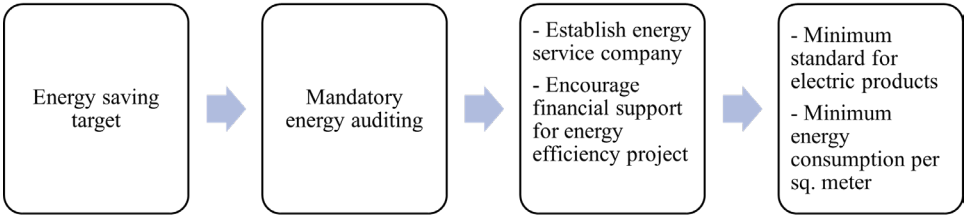


Figure 1. Road map for implementing energy efficiency

Conclusion and policy recommendations

This policy brief reviewed several policies and technical recommendations worldwide that could be used to reduce energy consumption in Cambodia. By applying an energy efficiency policy, Cambodia could strengthen national energy security by reducing energy imports and releasing pressure on the power generation side. However, achieving energy efficiency is a long journey for the government. The energy efficiency policy can only be achieved if/when it is appropriately implemented (GLA, 2015). In Cambodia, residential houses, commercial buildings, and factories consumed about 32.8%, 36.3%, and 30.82% of the total energy, respectively. Therefore, based on the literature in this policy brief, Cambodia could save up to 25.2% of the total energy consumption in the country in 2021, equivalent to 2,977.48 GWh, as shown in Table 1. This would be more than enough to cover the energy needs for 90% of the big and medium industrial factories (that connect directly to high voltage or medium voltage grid). To strengthen the energy sector in Cambodia, applying energy efficiency on the demand side alone is not sufficient. Strengthening power generation, transmission, and distribution should be considered for future research.

Table 1. Possible energy savings in Cambodia

Table 1. Possible energy savings in Cambodia

	Resident	Small business	Big-medium commercial	Big-medium industrial	Time of Use	Rural school, health center	Source
Energy consumption in 2021 (in GWh)	3,870.94	3,826.04	467.92	3,164.34	477.37	9.45	EAC, Cambodia
Energy consumption in 2021 (in %)	32.76%	32.38%	3.96%	26.78%	4.04%	0.08%	EAC, Cambodia
Possible energy saving (in %)	5.93%	11.88%		7.40%	-	-	- Residential building: (Adly & El-Khouly, 2022) - Industrial: (Hasan et al., 2018) - Commercial building: (Hinnells, 2008) and (Fasiuddin & Budaiwi, 2011; Saidur et al., 2011; Yu & Chan, 2012)
Possible energy saving (in GWh)	700.25	1403.22		874.01	-	-	

Note: EAC refers to the Electricity Authority of Cambodia

Limitations

Findings from this policy brief may be limited by the small number of research studies identified in the literature search and the inclusion of studies conducted in high-income countries. For example, the category of the industrial factories in developing countries discussed above might be different from that in Cambodia. This difference might lead to a different level of energy saving. Future research should focus on low- and middle-income countries with similar contexts to Cambodia and the literature search should be expanded to include databases other than ScienceDirect and Google Scholar.



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Middle and Small Power Post-Pandemic

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I. Background and Objective

Two years after the outbreak of the pandemic, humanity witnessed a severe disruption to global economic and human security. COVID-19 created a modern global crisis, affecting everything from socio-economic aspects to foreign relations, illustrating how states deal with modern human security issues. In the Asia Pacific region, several small and middle powers, such as Cambodia, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea, offer pandemic success stories as these countries are considered to have maintained stability despite the spread of the virus. While attention turns to how the pandemic has damaged socio-economic status, the changes affecting foreign relations should also be considered.

Recent research revealed that many small and middle powers responded effectively to the spread of the virus (Lowy Institute, 2021). Low death rates, early air travel restrictions, and several lockdowns with major distribution of health kits made Australia and Cambodia two of the top 100 countries in terms of pandemic response (Oliver, 2021). Their excellent response in the Asia Pacific pulled together a group of other small and middle power countries that performed relatively well in the crisis management field.

While several other papers and research focus on the model of middle powers in Coronavirus management or developing countries' responses, there is a need to understand the possible changes in partnership among middle powers in the post-pandemic world. Given their status during the COVID-19 response, studying the relationships between Cambodia, Australia, and oth-

er countries in the region would help to understand possible scenarios of future middle and small power connections. Although several researchers have given attention to middle powers in East Asia, the successes in South-east Asia (SEA) seem to have received minor attention. Understanding the connection between the SEA region and their middle power counterparts post-pandemic provides a unique angle to look at the new normal in foreign affairs world.

The aims of this policy brief are twofold. First, the paper will further explore how the global crisis could create a course of changes to foreign policy direction, specifically for small and middle powers, as these two groupings serve as examples of success when it comes to prevention of diseases. This policy brief will look closely at the case of Cambodia and Australia. Second, the paper also looks for future opportunities for cooperation between the two countries.

The significance of this policy brief is providing a new angle of looking at foreign policy and the more significant role that middle powers can play along with small countries. Contemporary international affairs often center around how the major countries shape the global socio-economic spectrum, though this may shift after the inability of most major powers to effectively manage the global health crisis among. The pandemic indeed caused damage and destruction that cannot be overlooked, yet this crisis can also point to the potential of new visions for the future.

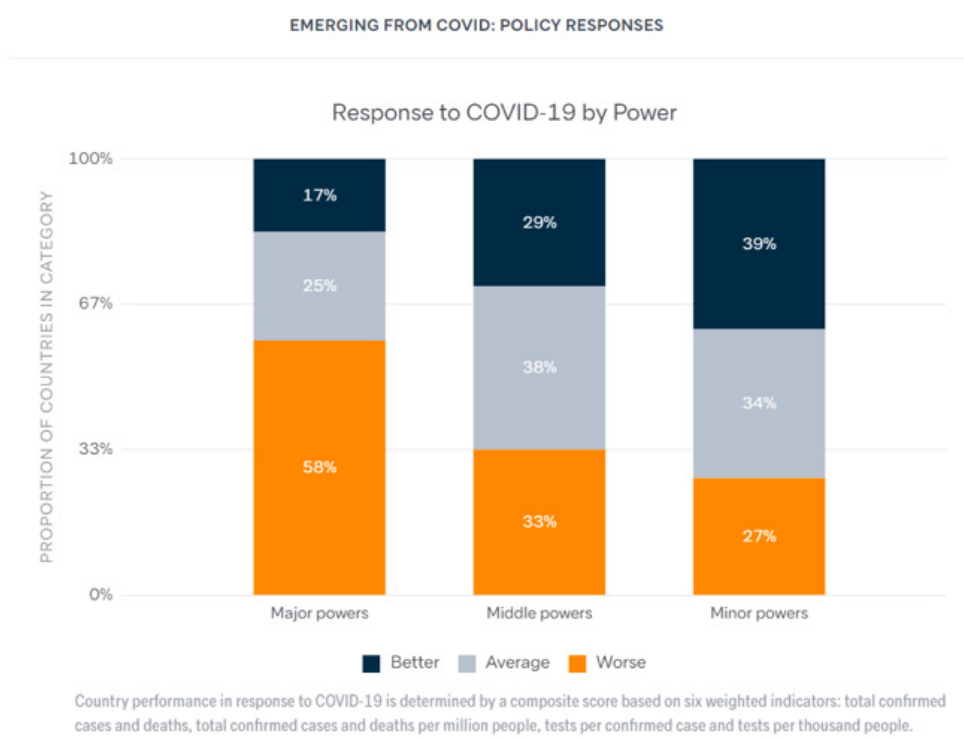
II. Analysis method

The COVID Performance Index, released by the Lowy Institute, studied global performance in tackling the virus by looking at more than one hundred countries with publicly available and comparable data (Lowy Institute, 2021). This data shows that the Asia Pacific region is on the more positive side of the scale. Factors such social and economic development, political system, or size do not entirely affect the result of these indexes. To date, there is no single political system identified as a success factor in virus prevention and the natures of differing systems only indicate how different governments can convince citizens to adhere to measures such as stay-at-home orders, lockdowns, and border closures (Lowy Institute, 2021). Comparing economic factors, the index illustrates many developing countries have coped well with the outbreak and are able to impose preventive measures without provoking political instability. Nationwide vaccination, like in Cambodia (The Diplomat, 2021), strict early lockdowns and air travel suspension, and

Australia’s support for WHO pandemic plan with medical supplies (Australia Ministry of Health and Aged Care, 2022) are examples of how these countries took matters into their own hands to deal with the crisis.

The Coronavirus brought attention to global leadership. Research on small and middle powers shows their upper hand in dealing with this crisis, in comparison to the major powers (see Figure 1) (Lemahieu & Leng, 2021). Standing at the top of the scale, countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Vietnam and others had what the research called “bold policy,” adopting measures in the very early stages of the outbreak such as early domestic lockdowns and air travel restrictions. In a sense, some comparative advantages, such as state capacity and trust, favor states with smaller populations, greater social cohesion, and high capabilities of their institutions (Lemahieu & Leng, 2021).

Figure 1: Country performance in Covid responsiveness. Lowy Institute 2021



Other research examined the middle power moment within global governance and the significance of countries such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.) and MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, and Australia). Karadeniz (2020) emphasizes the need of middle powers to act collectively and fill “the power vacuum” amid crises such as COVID-19. Given the competitive nature of the major powers – namely the United States and China – human security responses, health crises, and other key issues needed more projection from not the major but smaller side of competitive global politics. In the case of COVID-19, countries that became prime examples in combating the pandemic and providing health supplies and support to the WHO turned out to be those in Asia Pacific- South Korea, New Zealand and others in the neighborhood (Karadeniz, 2020). Australia, besides housing the manufacturer of AstraZeneca, distributed millions of doses of the vaccine and medical and protection supplies to approximately 23 countries, as well as health kits to its neighbors along with other financial support to the Pacific Islands (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). Meanwhile, the Royal Government of Cambodia at the early stages of the pandemic recognized COVID-19 as a public health threat and proceeded quickly with establishment of a Rapid Response Team, consisting of trained personnel ready to work closely with the public (Nit et al., 2021). Besides that, the country also worked enthusiastically with international health partners.

Other research (Pedi & Wivel, 2020) showed the ineffective global crisis response – mostly by the major power – created an opportunity for small and middle power states to take action or even influence global order. In a sense, it seems like their power or size played a smaller role than to be expected in carving out their influence on the pandemic response. The US “American First” initiative seemed to affect beyond their domestic borders as this national policy became a limitation to vaccination access or infrastructure needed for developing countries (Banco, 2021). Others like the EU region also experienced infection crises, like high case numbers the UK and France, and they responded by trying to close their borders and focus on domestic management (Pedi & Wivel, 2020). Besides trying to maintain the domestic crisis, many small and middle powers became partners of international agencies like WHO, UN that work on combating the pandemic (Pedi & Wivel, 2020). For example, these states sought scientific advice and information from WHO while some contributed to financial and supply support for the institution.

III. Findings and discussion

The post-pandemic ‘new normal’ will result in changes made to cooperation and foreign policy focus areas. The pandemic and the differing levels of crisis management between countries has influenced global governance and the existing political order. While there seems to be a failure of major powers in responding to and managing such an alarming issue, there are questions left for the roles of others and their interactions in the present and in the future. Small and middle powers that achieved successful pandemic responses can extend this influence into heightened leadership roles in the post-pandemic era. This paper uses the case studies of Australia and Cambodia to illustrate this point.

A middle power in crisis prevention: the case of Australia

Australia gained praise from the international community in terms of their Coronavirus prevention and ability to cooperate with agencies and distribute help to the neighborhood in Asia and the Pacific.

Strong border control measures, both nationally and internationally, a mandatory 14 day quarantine in accommodation facilities, a rapidly scaled up polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based mass testing program, and enhanced contact tracing resources within public health units, along with the responsiveness of communities, supported their early crisis management successes (Holley, et al, 2021).

However, following such success, there is still existing criticism around this country as later cases show spikes in infection rates after previously low numbers, contributing to a negative shift compared to their previous rank. Despite this, there should be focus on how Australia’s crisis management contributes to the betterment of their future role in foreign policy and cooperation with counterparts.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, middle powers were big supporters of areas of global concern such as climate change and sustainable development. During the pandemic, the governments of Australia and New Zealand participated in a cabinet meeting to discuss lockdown exit strategies and economic recovery (Pedi & Wivel, 2020). These two countries also worked on what they called the “Australia-Pacific Corridor”, a humanitarian corridor to ensure continuous medical supplies and logistics needed within the region. This is one of the examples of how these middle powers contribute to crises of global concern. Building off of their leadership during the pandemic, these middle power can continue to leverage their status through regional networking and cooperation.



Figure 1: Lowy Institute Covid-19 recovery index, economic development factor.

Small power influence: The case of Cambodia

Though at the early stages of the crisis many small powers faced obstacles in terms of resourcing equipment and treatment methods, many were able to overcome and implement successful prevention practices (Lowy Institute, 2021).

Considered a limited resources state when it comes to health care, the appearance of the Kingdom of Cambodia amidst the top rankings in the index was perhaps surprising, yet posed an influential message that smaller countries were capable of dealing with complex crises. Success factors for Cambodia included strong support and cooperation with international institutions and public compliance to given preventative regulations could be counted as their factor of success (Nit et al., 2021). Like their middle state counterpart, the country took swift action in recognizing the health crisis when Coronavirus started to appear followed by multiple approaches to maintain and prevent domestic infections. Similar to Australia, the country moved quickly with the establishment of a response team, working closely between the government and the affected public (Nit et al., 2021). Digital tools were also used to effectively collect data, including reporting symptoms and tracking cases, that were made accessible to the public. These efforts came with great praise from the international community and similarly, even with relatively small status, the country managed to send supplies and kits to its Southeast Asia neighbors.

Domestically, the country's vaccine roll out was also considered successful, not only in the mainstream city areas, but also in underprivileged parts. Partnerships between government ministries and development agencies, such as UNICE and other partners, allowed them to work together to address

gaps in service delivery and COVID vaccine access for the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities (Elisabeth, 2022). With the campaign that started in February 2021, the Kingdom reached its target of 10 million adults vaccinated by the end of 2021 with the highest percentages of COVID-19 vaccination among its adult population in the WHO Western Pacific Region and also among the top 17 countries in the world to first vaccinate teachers (UNCT Cambodia, 2021).

Status and their implications

Taking lessons learned from the pandemic, the gaps between small and middle power relations could be minimized to leverage possible future cooperation on health or human security. These kinds of cooperation or commitments can also boost actual actions and innovative plans, beyond diplomatic cooperation.

IV. Recommendations

Based on their successes, there are several opportunities for Cambodia and Australia to jointly focus on health security and technical cooperation. There are several policy recommendations as a result of this research paper as highlighted below.

The countries could create a network to exchange practices and lessons learned regarding the pandemic and health crisis management, for example, they could build upon the Smart COVID-19 Management Group initiated by Australia. This kind of network will allow small countries to have influence while accessing exchanges of information, lessons, and technical support mutually with their counterparts. For similar reasons, middle powers could also benefit from their role as initiator of such groups and this practice could extend to other sectors within the human security sphere.

Another possible initiative would be to invest in creating a network of think tanks and policy makers across small and middle power countries. To a certain degree, there are national/international think tanks which operate individually or cooperate occasionally, but there should be a concrete regional network. Such an establishment could create a network of academia across the region to better bridge diplomacy and practice and also become a possible platform for exchanges of young policy practitioners to provide them with international opportunities.

The cases of Cambodia and Australia have potential to show dynamic middle-small power relations in the Asia Pacific. Because of their successes in

dealing with COVID-19, post-pandemic international relations may be affected by the actions and leadership of these countries in dealing with this global threat.

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Regional Governance on Climate Change and Sustainable Food Security in ASEAN's Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Era

Mr. Lay Kimly, Junior Research Fellow, Future Forum



I. Background and Key Objectives

Climate change has consistently increased in the past two decades, leading to several subsequent global challenges. It is one of the most complex issues and the biggest challenges of this century (Asadnabizadeh, 2019). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organization that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation and is comprised of ten member countries. In ASEAN, climate change remains a significant concern as the region is one of the most at-risk in the world affected by the impacts of climate change (ASEAN, 2021). The Global Climate Risk Index 2021 has ranked several ASEAN member as the countries most affected by climate change, including Myanmar, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand (Beirne et al., 2021). Between 2000 and 2019, ASEAN suffered from the most significant economic damage due to climate change to the tune of \$12 billion USD (Purchasing Power Parity) and had over 8,000 fatalities attributed to climate change (Eckstein et al., 2021). In addition, climate change has caused a significant ecological impact in the region from floods, loss of biodiversity, and rising sea levels (ASEAN, 2021). The State of Southeast Asia: 2021 Survey Report showed that over 80% of the participants in the survey agreed that climate change threatens food supplies in the ASEAN countries (Seah et al., 2021).

In the last few years, as with the rest of the world, ASEAN member states have been confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic,

the initial policy interventions, such as lockdowns, social distancing measures, and travel restrictions, caused instability to the larger economy and to household incomes (Morgan et al., 2022). Since the virus has spread to all ASEAN members, the pandemic has had significant negative impacts on economic activities in the region. The impacts include loss of employment or reduced working hours, reduced household income generation activities, inability to travel to work, increased prices, lack of availability of food production, reduced access to schooling, and even food crises in some countries (Morgan et al., 2021). It has led to inflation and higher food prices among ASEAN members. The average inflation rate went from 3.1% in December 2021 to 4.7% in April 2022 (Nurul Suhaidi, 2022). As agriculture is one of the crucial sectors in many ASEAN members' economies, especially in Myanmar (making up 22% of the economy), Cambodia (17.3%), Lao PDR (13.9%), Vietnam (13.6%), and Indonesia (12.4%) (ASEAN, 2021), the pandemic had far reaching negative impacts beyond just health.

The climate change crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic are ongoing and may significantly impact food security in the ASEAN region. Therefore, this policy brief contributes insights to support ASEAN leaders, policymakers, and researchers in developing strategies to address climate change and sustainable food security issues in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

The paper has two objectives:

1. To explore how ASEAN policymakers perceive climate change in relation to food security in ASEAN countries.
2. To examine how ASEAN leaders may navigate possible solutions to cope with climate change and sustainable food security by providing policy implications.

II. Analysis method

Data used in this paper were obtained from a collaborative white paper authored by Croplife Asia (a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting plant science) and PSB Insights (a leading modern global market research consultancy firm). An online survey was conducted with 35 ASEAN policymakers in October 2021. Alongside this quantitative survey, four in-depth interviews were conducted with key policymakers across the region between October 2021 and January 2022. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes and covered the same topics. The study was designed to understand the impact of climate change on agriculture, food production, and smallholder farmers in the ASEAN region and how these key challenges can be addressed. In addition, desk reviews and secondary data collection

were conducted by reviewing and assessing various regional reports (ASEAN (2021), ASEAN (2020), ASEAN (2015), The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2021), Seah, S., Thaiha, H., Martinus, M., & Phuong Thao, T, P. (2021), ADBI (2021)).

III. Findings and discussion

Climate change as the main obstacle to the food system

Climate change is the most significant factor contributing to food insecurity. Two of the four respondents to the targeted ASEAN survey mentioned that countries in the region should prioritize managing climate change's impact and effects. One respondent said, "All agroecological systems are affected by climate change, which showed rising temperatures, droughts, floods, and irregular rainfall. Therefore, we must take strategies and collective action to cope with it." Another respondent said, "In 2050, food production will decline, especially rice, corn, and meat."

The online survey results show that there are other perceived obstacles for managing the impacts of climate change, including: managing water resources for agriculture (26% of respondents), growing populations/overpopulation (23% of respondents), robust agricultural trade environment (23% of respondents), farmer access to finance (20% of respondents), ensuring sufficient unstable farmland (17% of respondents), farmer access to technology (17% of respondents), and ensuring political stability (17% of respondents).

Education on agricultural technology and further innovation

The education sector remains one of the most significant areas of potential to combat climate change in regards to mitigating and improving the agricultural sector. It is unknown and deemed unlikely by the author that there is an effective accountability mechanism to ensure that the education sector adequately prepares students to respond to, adapt to, and reduce the effects of climate change in the ASEAN region. This is a critical area of potential for mitigating the impact of climate change in the region.

All four respondents to the survey mentioned that improving education by focusing on agricultural technology and innovation in the agriculture sector is a significant way to mitigate the impacts of climate change. In addition, they mentioned that the ASEAN governments need to support the quality of education on agriculture technology and science and provide education

on regional standards of crop management and development processes to the farmers.

Climate change and food security in ASEAN's post-COVID-19 pandemic era

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenge of climate change was temporarily displaced from the news, but the challenge has not gone away (Matthew. 2021). The ASEAN leaders struggled to find vaccines for fighting the pandemic. The pandemic has reiterated risks and vulnerability to systematic and interconnected people. Therefore, it is vital to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable against different types of risks (climatic, geophysical, economic, or health-related) (David, Vera, & Laura, 2021).

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, the response to climate change by governments can be challenging due to the economic impacts of the pandemic. The countries may prioritize their economic recovery, which will lead to increased industrial activity and transportation, which will, in turn, increase greenhouse gas (GHG), land use, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), carbon dioxide (CO₂), and air pollution.

The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has predicted that global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century, and temperatures are predicted to rise by 1.5-2 degrees Celsius during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades (IPCC, 2021). Thus, tackling climate change needs a more critical action plan and commitment from all the ASEAN governments.

The ASEAN region has been proactive in coping with climate change. ASEAN has adopted a new disaster management framework for 2021-2025 called the "ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER)" (ASEAN, 2020). Another document, "The ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together," outlines ASEAN's intent to cooperate with like-minded external partners to address international issues of common concern, such as climate and the environment, and to enhance sustainable development (ASEAN, 2015)

IV. Conclusion and policy recommendations

ASEAN member states have worked collectively to address climate change issues by making significant commitments. However, the Global Climate Risk Index 2021 ranked four out of 10 ASEAN members as the most affected by

climate change [REF]. This policy brief provides policy alternatives for leaders and policymakers to think more deeply about the future of climate change, to mitigate the impact of climate change, and to ensure sustainable food security in ASEAN. All the interventions must come from the ASEAN countries' commitment as regional actors.

Therefore, this paper proposes three policy recommendations:

1. Build trust and enforce ASEAN commitments

Tackling climate change requires humanity and commitment among ASEAN members. ASEAN is considered one of the most significant regions in action against climate change. Many countries have committed to eliminating gas emissions in the next 10 or 20 years. However, to be sustainable, the co-operation must be transparent and strategically explicit with considerable effort by all members. ASEAN should create a better mechanism to track countries' progress and to share this information with all members. The mechanism should be unbiased to ensure that all countries take bold action to mitigate climate change.

2. Promote regional cooperation with strategic partners

A strategic partner must be involved in combating climate change in the region. ASEAN has many strategic partners, including the United States, China, Russia, South Korea, Japan, Australia, India, and New Zealand. With the regional strategic partners, ASEAN should add an agenda item to every meeting to discuss climate change as a priority action and ensure that all strategic partners have made a significant effort to promote transparent and sustainable solutions. In addition, collective action should be put upfront.

Moreover, climate change is a global issue requiring all global action plans to be implemented. ASEAN should cooperate better with other international or regional organizations. The EU-ASEAN collaboration on "Green Deal Initiatives" was launched on November 18, 2021 to mitigate climate change. This is significant as leading international organizations should work together on climate change. ASEAN and the European Union should establish technical support to each other.

3. Promote regional cooperation of "modernization in agriculture" and the "ASEAN food bank"

The ASEAN population has increased to more than 661.8 million people and will be 723 million by 2030 (Athira N, 2020). Therefore, ASEAN countries

should work collectively on investing in advanced agricultural technology and science in food production and ensure that the qualities and quantities will be priorities of ASEAN members. In addition, promoting education in agriculture technology and food science is also one of the most critical policies in the ASEAN region. All ASEAN members should have a regional education standard related to food science and agriculture technology, especially in countries with significant agriculture sectors. This requires more collective action and implementation.

Moreover, ASEAN members should promote an initiative on the “ASEAN Food Bank.” This will help stock food products when the region faces external shocks like pandemics, environmental disasters, and wars. As mentioned above, the ASEAN region is still vulnerable to future food insecurity. The ASEAN leaders must be proactive in developing the “ASEAN Food Bank” with collective action plans from each member state. All ASEAN members must ensure that no one is left behind regarding food security among ASEAN states.

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Conclusion

The Asia Foundation’s “Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia” program, in collaboration with its core partners and emerging research partners, held the Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum on “Strengthening Resilience and Responses to COVID-19 in Cambodia and ASEAN” from October 26-27, 2022 in Phnom Penh. Drawing on insights from Cambodian and ASEAN perspectives, the Forum convened over 150 participants, including government representatives, researchers, civil society, policymakers, policy experts, and members of academia and the diplomatic corps from Cambodia and ASEAN, to present and discuss their research findings and case studies on various topics. These topics included agriculture, education, social services, urban development, food security, social protection, and others, which all contribute to strengthening the economy in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

The National Policy Forum is one of the flagship events of the Ponlok Chomnes program, which supports various local organizations in conducting action research to collect timely data that responds to issues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways with regard to policy-making in Post-COVID-19 Cambodia and the ASEAN region:

- 1** **ENABLE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION:** While Cambodia benefits greatly from an increasingly successful focus on regional and global partnerships, particularly given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is equally important that this engagement is strengthened by the meaningful participation of diverse provincial and local communities in policy-making at the national level.
- 2** **ENSURE INCLUSION:** Inclusive development is a commendable objective, whether this relates to gender, disability, age, background or other factors. However, policy-making will be truly effective and responsive to citizens needs when institutions and the enabling environment are themselves inclusive, ensuring policy becomes practice.
- 3** **PROMOTE PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT:** Smart cities are not only smart by virtue of adopting digital technology. They are truly smart when they adopt a people-centered policy-making approach that enables ease of access to basic needs and services, as well as opportunities which ensure a higher quality of life.

4 BE CLIMATE-SMART: Communities and institutions should consider climate-smart approaches to agricultural development, which relies less on the intensive use of agro-chemicals and more on effective climate adaptation strategies that enable improved management and harnessing of natural resources.

5 DEEPEN RESILIENCE: Strengthening the digital economy and building accountable government institutions will strengthen resilience to withstand future shocks, such as pandemics or other man-made and natural disasters. Strong local institutions will enable timely and effective responses that are suited to the local context.

6 ADAPTING TO NEW SKILLS AND WAYS OF WORKING: To strengthen long-term community and national resilience to mitigate the negative impact of events such as a global pandemic, government, the private sector, and civil society institutions should work in partnership to enable citizens to develop skills that can be adapted to shifts in the economic landscape and new ways of working in the future. Such adaptations would require a focus on problem-solving and creative thinking as fundamental learning components in primary, secondary, and higher education systems.



Agenda

Ponlok Chomnes National Policy Forum
Strengthening Resilience and Responses to COVID-19 in Cambodia and ASEAN

Date: 26-27 October 2022

Venue: Raffles Hotel Le Royal, Phnom Penh

26 October 2022

Time	Agenda	Note
7:35 am – 8:15 am	Registration	The Asia Foundation Team
8:15 am – 8:20 am	Forum Opening and National Anthem	MC
8:20 am – 8:25 am	Welcoming Remarks	Ms. Meloney C. Lindberg Country Representative The Asia Foundation
8:25 am – 8:35 am	Opening Remarks	H.E. Pablo Kang Australian Ambassador to Cambodia
8:35 am – 08:45 am	Keynote Address	H.E. Ung Rachana Under Secretary of State Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
08:45 am – 09:15 am	Group Photo + Coffee Break	Ponlok Chomnes Team
09:15 am – 10:30 am (75 minutes)	Opening Plenary Discussion: “Lessons from the Region: Cambodia and ASEAN’s Response to COVID-19 and Path to Economic Recovery” Q&A Session	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ms. Benjaporn Fattier, Counsellor, Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh- H.E. Dr. Huot Pum, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Economy and Finance- Dr. Ahmad Zafarullah Abdul Jalil, Director of ASEAN Integration Monitoring Directorate, ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) Unit, ASEAN Secretariat Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ms. Meloney Lindberg, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation, Cambodia

10:30 am – 11:45 am (75 minutes)	Opening Plenary Discussion: <p>“Policies and Measures for Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery: The Role of Foreign Policy”</p> Q&A Session	Scene Setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Amber Cernovs, First Secretary, Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Sam Seun, Policy Analyst, The Royal Academy of Cambodia - Dr. Jayant Menon, Visiting Senior Fellow, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute) - Mr. Bong Chansambath, Deputy Director of the Centre for Inclusive Digital Economy (CIDE), the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) - Mr. Po Sovinda, Senior Research Fellow, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Eng Netra, Executive Director, Cambodia Development Resource Institute
11:30 am – 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm – 2:15 pm (75 minutes)	Plenary Discussion: <p>“Agricultural Sector’s Contribution to Economic Recovery in post-COVID-19”</p> Q&A Session	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H.E. Srey Vuthy, Secretary General, Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries - Mr. Lao Poliveth, Deputy Director, Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy Department, General Department of Policy, Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) - Mr. Sok Raden, Chairman of the Board, Cambodia Aquaculturist Association (C.A.A) Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Asisah Man, Responsible Investment and Land Governance Coordinator, Oxfam Cambodia
2:15 pm – 3:45 pm (90 minutes)	Plenary Discussion: <p>“Strengthening COVID-19 Resilience of Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia”</p> Q&A Session	Scene Setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Mey Samith, Executive Director, Phnom Penh Center for Independent Living Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Cham Soeun, Head of Program, Analyzing Development Issues Centre - Mr. Him Yun, Executive Director, Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Kim Veara, Lecturer and Researcher, National University of Management's Research Center - Mr. Im Sothy, Executive Director, Youth Council of Cambodia Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Diya Nag, Governance and Legal Specialist, The Asia Foundation
3:45 pm – 4:00 pm	Coffee break	
4.00 pm – 5:15 pm (75 minutes)	Plenary Discussion: "Urban Transformation and Socio-economic Changes in Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery" Q&A Session	Scene Setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Long Dimanche, Deputy Governor, Sihanoukville Province Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Try Thuon, Coordinator of Department of Sustainable Urban Planning and Development (DSUPD), Royal University of Phnom Penh - Dr. Samuel Chng, Research Fellow and Head of the Urban Psychology Lab, Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at the Singapore University of Technology and Design - Dr. Im Soksamphoas, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Center for Khmer Studies Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Yen Yat, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Center for Khmer Studies
5:15 pm – 5:30 pm	Networking Reception: Featuring SheThinks Network	

27 October 2022

Time	Agenda	Note
8:30 am – 10:00 am (90 minutes)	Policy Brief Presentation 1. Regional Governance on Climate Change and Sustainable Food Security in ASEAN's Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Era 2. Middle and Small power post-pandemic 3. Cambodia Chairmanship of ASEAN Q&A Session	Scene Setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Lim Chhay, Program Manager, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Presenters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Lay Kimly, Junior Research Fellow, Future Forum - Ms. Nasa Dip, Project Manager & Reporter, Globe Media Asia - Ms. Horn Chanvoitey, Research Consultant Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. San Sophany, Director of Centre for Governance and Inclusive Society, Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

10:00 am – 10:15 am	Coffee Break	
10:15 am – 11:30 am (75 minutes)	<p>Plenary Discussion:</p> <p>“Reopening, Recovery and Resilience in Education in ASEAN”</p> <p>Q&A Session</p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H.E. Dr. Dy Khamboly, Deputy Director General, Directorate General of Policy and Planning, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) - Mr. Kadam Vongdeuane, Director of Center for Educational Research and Evaluation, Research Institute for Educational Sciences (RIES), Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR - Kim Veara, Lecturer and Researcher, National University of Management’s Research Center - Ms. Margarete Sachs-Israel, Chief of Section for Inclusive Quality Education, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Thailand <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Song Sopheak, Director of Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)
11:30 am – 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm – 2:35 pm (90 minutes)	<p>Policy Brief Presentation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cambodia Poverty Dynamics and COVID-19 2. Better Social Protection System, Better Response: Preparation for Future Pandemic 3. Cambodia Energy Sector’s Post Covid-19 Recovery <p>Q&A Session</p>	<p>Scene Setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Vorng Sreymom, Deputy director of Policy Analysis and Development Division, National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Chhom Theavy, Research Associate, Cambodia Development Resource Institute - Mr. Luy Ung Techhong, Student, Paragon International University - Mr. San Sereyvathna, Official, Ministry of Mine and Energy <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Saut Sopheakpanha, Foundation Year Program Coordinator, University of Puthisastra
2:30 pm – 4:00 pm (90 minutes)	<p>Plenary Discussion:</p> <p>“Strengthening Resilience in Public Services Sector in Post-COVID-19: Key Lessons from Four Case Studies”</p>	<p>Scene Setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Phean Sophoan, Country Director, Oxfam <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Seng Reasey, Executive Director, SILAKA Organization - Dr. Oum Sothea, Executive Director, Centre for Strategy and Innovation Policy

	Q&A Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Sao Davy, Executive Director, Centre for Sustainable Water - Mr. Yan Lay, Executive Director, Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC) Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Nop Navy, Program Manager, The Asia Foundation
4:00 pm – 4:15 pm	Coffee Break	
4:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. (75 minutes)	Plenary Discussion: “Future-ready Recoveries: Toward a Bolder and Stronger Cambodia 2040” Q&A Session	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Chean Sithykun, Associate, Vriens & Partners, Phnom Penh - Mr. Sok Kha, Trade Facilitation Advisor of ARISE Plus Cambodia / Technical Lead of SeT4SME Project - Mr. Vrak Thanit, Faculty Member at Institute for International Studies and Public Policy (IISPP), Royal University of Phnom Penh Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Sann Socheata, Program Director, The Asia Foundation
5:30 p.m. – 5:40 p.m.	Closing Remarks	H.E. Pablo Kang Australian Ambassador to Cambodia
5:40 p.m.	End of Program	MC







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 Australian 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.

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