



Policy Brief

CAMBODIAN YOUTH AND THE KNOWLEDGE SECTOR

Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations

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Introduction

This research is part of a series of diagnostic studies supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program. The program aims to strengthen the capacity of the Cambodian knowledge sector institutions to undertake quality research that informs public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia.

In this report, three questions are addressed:

1. What are the opportunities and challenges of Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector?
2. How supportive is the current environment for Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector?
3. How can we promote Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector?

Methodology

The report is based on a study that employed in-depth interviews and an online survey to collect data from the research participants. There were 16 participants (6 females) who participated in one-on-one interviews. These participants were university students, lecturers, university leaders, government officials, and staff/leaders of non-government organizations (NGOs) and think tanks. There were 456 youth or young Cambodians, aged 18-35, who responded to the online survey. Among them, 52.2% were females, about 70% were university students, and three-quarters were studying for/had received a bachelor's degree. The report also benefited from a consultation workshop conducted to gather additional inputs from concerned stakeholders, such as government officials, researchers, staff/leaders of universities, think tanks, NGOs, and youth networks. The findings are as follows:

Findings from the interviews

Challenges to Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector

Data from the interviews showed three main categories of challenges affecting Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector. These are: 1) limited knowledge about research, publication, and English language skills; 2) a less supportive environment for research; and 3) other personal and professional challenges. These challenges are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Challenges to Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector

1. Limited knowledge about research, publication, and English language skills <i>(e.g., lack of prior research training/background, limited research knowledge, limited focus on research, etc.)</i>
2. Lack of a supportive environment for research <i>(e.g., limited research capacity building opportunities, discouraging environment for research, limited access to both primary and secondary data, etc.)</i>
3. Other personal and professional challenges <i>(e.g., time constraints, financial constraints, attitudinal constraints/negative mindset toward research, etc.)</i>

Opportunities for Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector

The interviews also highlighted a number of opportunities for Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector. These opportunities can be classified into four categories: 1) new programs/initiatives that support research; 2) new platforms for research and publication; 3) greater focus on research and publication; and 4) other opportunities. They are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Opportunities for Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector

1. New programs/initiatives that support research <i>(e.g., young researcher programs, research training/mentoring opportunities, research internship programs, etc.)</i>
2. New platforms for research and publication <i>(e.g., National Research Forum, Cambodian Journal of Educational Research, Cambodian Journal of STEM and Education Research, SheThinks Network, etc.)</i>
3. Greater focus on research and publication <i>(e.g., introduction of institutional vision to promote research, introduction of research requirements for students, etc.)</i>
4. Other opportunities <i>(e.g., more lecturers and teacher trainers with better qualifications from overseas, support for research from development partners and donor agencies, etc.)</i>

Recommendations for promoting Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector

The participants were asked to provide recommendations to promote Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector. They made several suggestions that could be grouped into four categories: 1) providing research support; 2) providing research and publication opportunities; 3) creating a supportive environment for research; and 4) having a greater focus on research and publication. These recommendations are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Recommendations for promoting Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector

1. Provide research support <i>(e.g., resource/funding allocation, incentives for research and publication, research capacity building programs, support/mentorship for research and publication, etc.)</i>
2. Provide research and publication opportunities <i>(e.g., internship/fellowship programs, research seminars/workshops/conferences/presentations, research and publication activities, etc.)</i>
3. Create a supportive environment for research <i>(e.g., research support networks, platforms for research publication, stakeholder/institutional collaboration, promotion of academic freedom, etc.)</i>
4. Have a greater focus on research and publication <i>(e.g., establishment of institutional research policies, research requirements in school, curriculum and assessment reform, improvement in higher education enrollment and management, improvement in policy implementation, etc.)</i>

Findings from the survey

Cambodian youth’s research experience

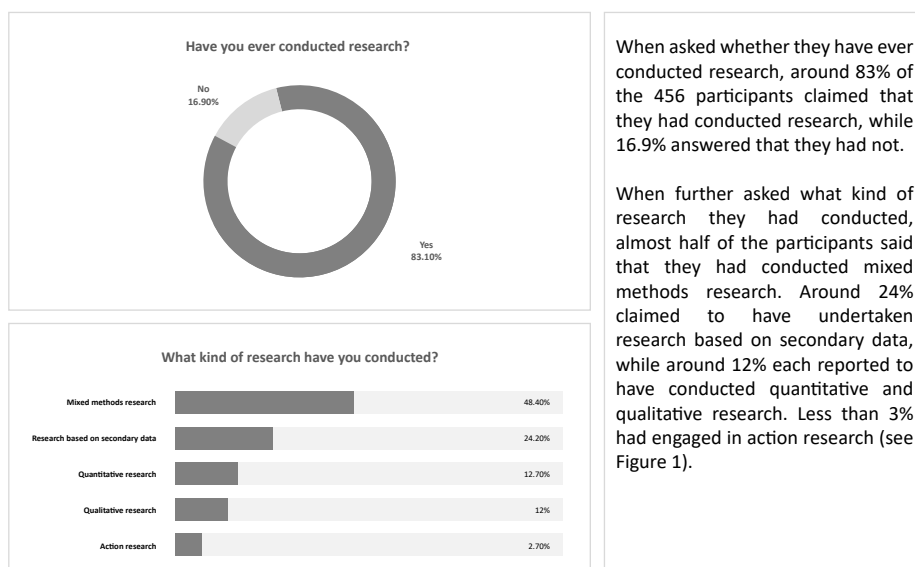


Figure 1. Cambodian youth’s research experience

Most important challenges to Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector

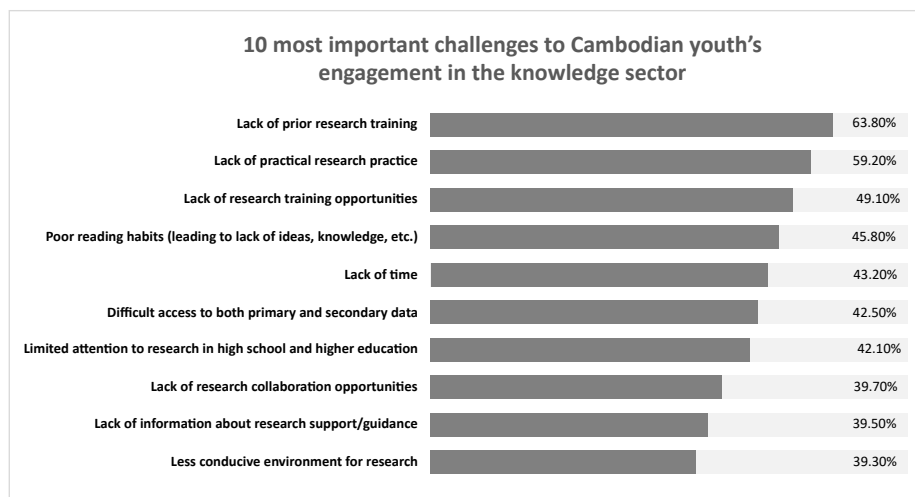
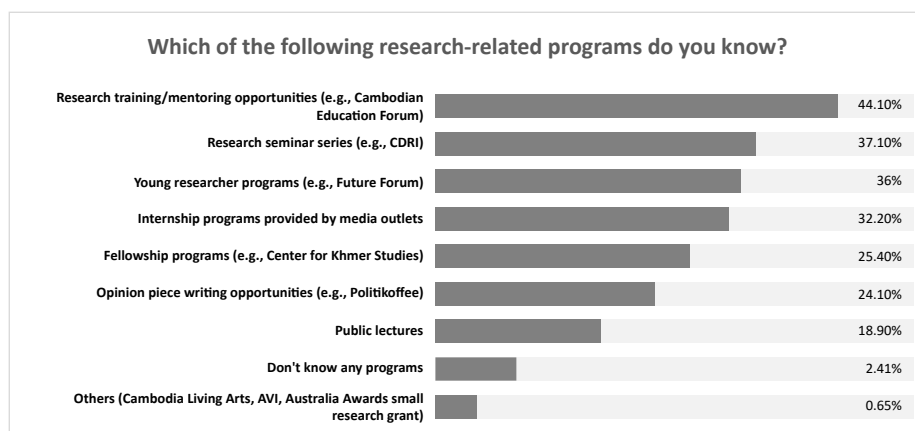


Figure 2. Ten most important challenges to Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector

The participants were given a list of 24 potential challenges to Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector and were asked to select their perceived 10 most important challenges. The results are shown in Figure 2 above. Among these challenges, three challenges were most frequently selected, including 1) lack of prior research training, 2) lack of practical research practice, and 3) lack of research training opportunities.

Opportunities for Cambodian youth's engagement in the knowledge sector



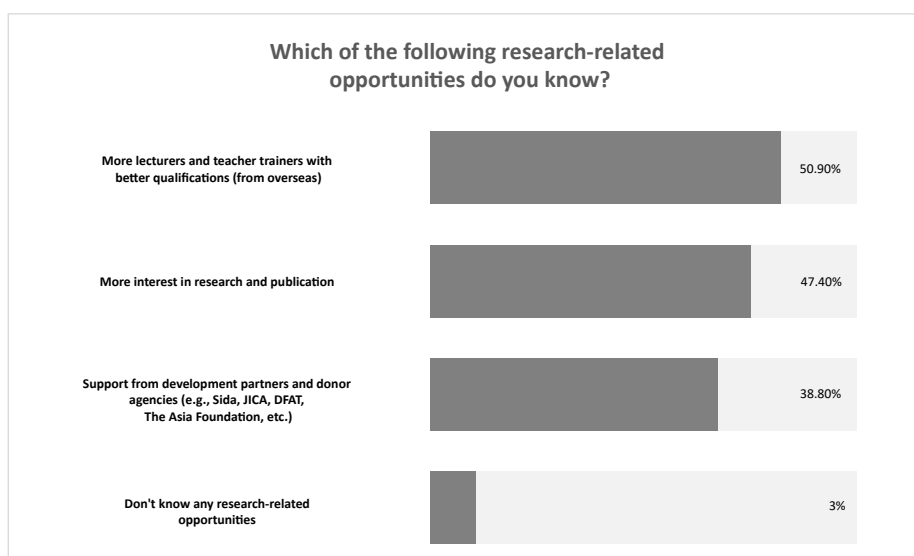
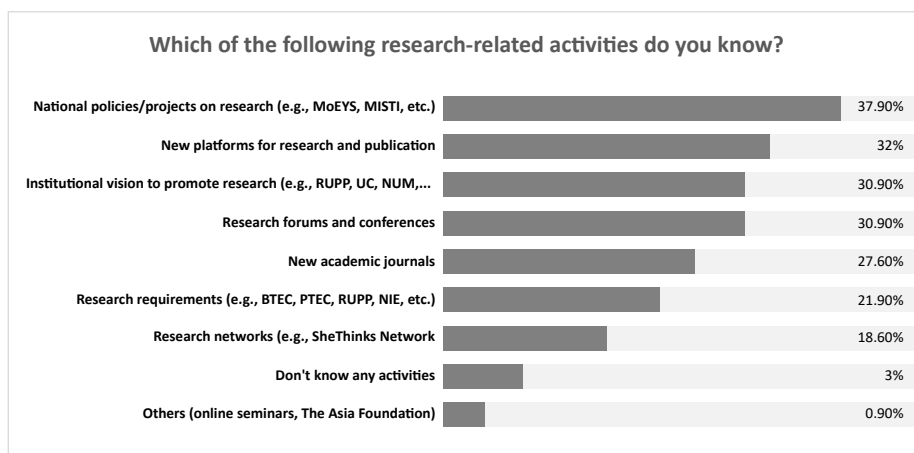


Figure 3. Participants’ awareness of opportunities for Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector

The participants were asked to select various research-related programs, activities, and opportunities of which they were aware. The results are shown in Figure 3. Overall, less than half of the participants were aware of the various research-related programs, activities, and opportunities presented. About 44% of the participants knew about research training and mentoring opportunities, around 37% knew about research seminar series and national policies/projects on research, and around 50% were aware of the fact that there were more lecturers and teacher trainers with overseas qualifications as well as more interest in research and publication. These results indicated that Cambodian youth’s awareness of the various available research-related opportunities was limited.

Recommendations for promoting Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector

Table 4. Recommendations that received the highest combined percentage of “Agree” and “Strongly agree”

Recommendations	Level of Agreement (%)		
	SD/D	N	A/SA
1. Resource/funding allocation to support research	14.69	10.09	75.22
2. Incentives for research and publication	14.04	6.58	79.39
3. Research capacity building programs/continuous professional development (for teaching staff)	14.25	6.80	78.95
4. Support/mentorship for research and publication activities	14.47	8.55	76.97
5. Providing research and publication opportunities	14.69	7.24	78.07
6. Research internship/fellowship programs	14.25	8.33	77.41
7. Research seminars/workshops/conferences/presentations	14.04	9.43	76.54
8. Research projects/initiatives	13.38	10.53	76.10
9. More research activities/opportunities for youth to engage in research	13.38	8.55	78.07
10. More research and publication activities to promote research interest	13.82	9.21	76.97
11. Research support networks in and outside of university settings	15.35	7.89	76.75
12. Promotion of student-teacher relations	12.94	11.18	75.88
13. Youth’s proactiveness	12.72	11.18	76.10

Note. SD/D = Strongly disagree/Disagree, N = Neutral, and A/SA = Agree/Strongly agree

The participants were given a list of 34 potential recommendations for promoting Cambodian youth’s engagement in the knowledge sector. They were asked to rate these recommendations on a 5-point Likert scale, consisting of 1) Strongly disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral, 4) Agree, and 5) Strongly agree. The results showed that 13 recommendations received the highest combined percentage (75% or higher) of “Agree” and “Strongly agree”. These recommendations are shown in Table 4.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study highlighted several challenges/barriers, as well as some new opportunities for Cambodian youth to engage in the knowledge sector as knowledge users, knowledge producers, and knowledge intermediaries.

This study argues that the current environment is not supportive for Cambodian youth to actively engage in the knowledge sector. Therefore, these challenges need to be addressed in order to allow more Cambodian youth to actively engage in research and knowledge production activities to contribute to advancing the knowledge sector in Cambodia. At the same time, more efforts by concerned stakeholders, particularly the government and educational institutions, are needed to ensure the sustainability of existing and new research opportunities so that more Cambodian youth can have ample opportunities to meaningfully engage in the knowledge sector actively.

The study also identified a set of recommendations that should be considered to nurture a conducive environment for Cambodian youth's greater engagement in the knowledge sector. The various recommendations include providing research support, making research and publication opportunities more available and accessible, creating a favorable environment for research, and emphasizing research and publication activities. The study offers four additional recommendations as follows:

Provide research capacity building opportunities

It is important to ensure Cambodian youth, especially university students, have the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in research activities. This can be done at multiple levels, including the national, community, and institutional levels. More research capacity building opportunities should, therefore, be made available and accessible to youth to allow them to develop their research knowledge and skills so that they can increase their research engagement activities.

Provide opportunities for practical research experience

More research internship programs should be offered by relevant stakeholders, particularly educational institutions, research institutes, think tanks, and NGOs. In such research-focused programs, youth should be given opportunities to conduct research and be able to receive personalized support in the form of mentorship. This is to enable them to have first-hand experience in conducting research and to have the opportunity to develop their research knowledge and skills through individualized support and mentorship.

Provide publication support

It is important to provide youth with first-hand experience in conducting research and writing for publication. To achieve this goal, training or mentorship programs that aim to develop youth's writing and publication skills are much needed to help them build their confidence and strengthen their interest in writing and publication. This type of support can begin by focusing on writing short or commentary articles and can progress to engaging in more advanced forms of writing, such as research reports and journal articles.

Create a support network for youth and young researchers

It is important to create a support network for youth and young researchers. Such a support network is essential as it helps to create a platform for youth and young researchers to meet and discuss issues relevant to their research interests and career goals. The support network, if well supported and well-managed, will provide a supportive environment for youth to develop their skills and fulfil their aspirations to contribute to Cambodia's knowledge sector. Therefore, it is essential that concerned stakeholders should work closely together to find innovative ways to establish a platform where Cambodian youth and young researchers can seek different forms of support when needed. The availability of effective support networks will contribute to nurturing an environment in which youth are empowered to enhance their roles as knowledge users, producers, and intermediaries in the knowledge sector in Cambodia.



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 the 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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