

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND DIALOGUE

Enhancing Public Services for Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia

27 April 2023

Siem Reap, Cambodia



Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Acknowledgments	i
Credits	ii
Introduction	1
Opening Remarks.....	4
Keynote Address.....	7
Opening Plenary Discussion	10
Enhancing Public Service Delivery in Supporting Vulnerable Groups at Sub-national Level	10
Plenary Discussion: Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia	14
Resilience and Recovery among Workers in Cambodia’s Hotel Sector	14
Exploring the social-wellbeing, social networks, and child labor of migrants and families on the Cambodian-Thai border in the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic	16
The Impacts of COVID-19 on Education of Persons with Disabilities in Cambodia	20
Plenary Discussion: Public Service Sector in Cambodia.....	23
The Introduction of the Private Sector’s Pension Scheme in Cambodia: Readiness and Its Impact on Social Welfare	23
Local Government and Private Sector Partnership for Service Delivery: The Case of Clean Water Supply in Cambodia.....	26
Youth Volunteerism, Digital Literacy, and Community Development: The Case of the Volunteering for My Community (VMC) Program in Cambodia and Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (AYRG) Road Map	30
Conclusion	33
Annex 1	36
Annex 2	40

Acknowledgments

The Asia Foundation (The Foundation) gratefully acknowledges the contributions of many individuals, organizations, and funders that have made the Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue possible.

The Foundation would like to thank its partners for their inputs and collaboration in designing the panel discussions; the guest speakers and moderators for their insights during the discussions; and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its funding support.

About Ponlok Chomnes

Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program 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.

About The Asia Foundation

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

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Funding

Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia Program is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and implemented by The Asia Foundation.

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Ponlok Chomnes Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue: Enhancing Public Service Sector for Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development Program. The views expressed in this booklet are the speakers' alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

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The Royal Government of Cambodia aims to improve public service delivery to ensure that people, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, have equal access to public services.¹ Several achievements have been noted to date. For example, more than 97% of children were enrolled in primary school in 2017,² 86.4% of the Cambodian population had access to electricity in 2020,³ and 80% of people in rural areas had access to clean water and sanitation in 2022.⁴

However, efforts to improve public service delivery were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The country was briefly closed to international visitors, and travel restrictions were put into place both internationally and nationally. As a result, Cambodian populations, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, were adversely impacted.

For instance, some vulnerable groups, especially persons with disabilities, encountered challenges in accessing and adapting to the changes in how public services were provided. The preliminary findings by the National University of Management's Research Center showed that students with disabilities faced challenges in studying due to the changing study environment and lack of special support.⁵

COVID-19 also put stress on natural resources. The pandemic increased people's demand for water, especially women, who needed water for cooking and cleaning (including handwashing).

In addition, children also encountered emotional stress and anxiety. A study by the Komar Rikreay Association found that 60% and 40% of children interviewed felt unhappier and hopeless, respectively, compared to their feeling before COVID-19.⁶

¹ <https://www.khmersme.gov.kh/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Rectangular-Strategy-Phase-IV.pdf>

² <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/education#:~:text=Cambodia%20has%20made%20terrific%20progress,in%20school%20year%202017%2F18.>

³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS?locations=KH>

⁴ <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501123910/over-80-pct-of-cambodias-rural-population-have-access-to-clean-water-sanitation/>

⁵ <https://policypulse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/NPF-booklet-20Jan23.pdf>

⁶ https://policypulse.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/KMR_the-impact-of-covid-19-on-child-protection-and-wellbeing.pdf

COVID-19 also made it hard for vulnerable groups to sustain their livelihoods due to their limited ability to adapt to the new circumstances. A study by My Village Organization on the impact of COVID-19 on indigenous people found that COVID-19 impacted the livelihoods of the indigenous people in Stung Treng province because they lost access to markets to sell their products.⁷ The income loss also made it harder for those living under the poverty line, as their daily earnings were inadequate to afford food.⁸

To address the immediate impacts of COVID-19 and ensure that the poorest people were not left behind, the government used its existing mechanism, the Identification for Poor Household (ID Poor), to support the most impoverished people to access necessary services such as healthcare, cash transfers, and other social services. The ID Poor program covered not only the poorest households but also different types of vulnerable workers, such as workers in the tourism sector⁹ and returning migrant workers, to receive cash and in-kind support.¹⁰ By 2022, more than 700,000 people in Cambodia received ID Poor cards to access the services.¹¹ In dealing with people's economic stress during COVID-19, the government also implemented several policies, such as the Strategic Framework and Programmes for Economic Recovery, and the Private Sector's Pension Scheme, to strengthen the country's resilience to future crises.

To enhance resilience to future crises and achieve better outcomes, the government needs reliable data and inclusive discussions to make decisions. Accordingly, the Ponlok Chomnes' partners and other research institutions have conducted various pieces of research on the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups to explore issues and challenges and to provide recommendations to improve services to them.

Drawing on insights from recent studies by the Ponlok Chomnes' partners and knowledge of key policy actors, the Ponlok Chomnes Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue serves as a platform for knowledge producers to show

⁷ <https://policypulse.org/publications/articles/investigation-of-the-impacts-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-local-and-indigenous-communities-socio-economic-status/>

⁸ <https://cambojanews.com/2-8-million-cambodians-were-living-under-the-poverty-line-in-2020/>

⁹ <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/final-cash-support-siem-reap-tourism-workers>

¹⁰ <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-post-depth/economic-woes-back-home-migrants>

¹¹ https://nspc.gov.kh/Images/%E1%9E%9F%E1%9E%BB%E1%9E%93%E1%9F%92%E1%9E%91%E1%9E%9A%E1%9E%80%E1%9E%90%E1%9E%B6_DPM_SP_WEEK_2023_2023_02_17_07_21_40.pdf

case their findings, host discussions, exchange knowledge, and network with knowledge users by assessing the governments' efforts and providing recommendations to enhance public services for vulnerable groups in Cambodia.



Opening Remarks



Mr. Andreas Zurbrugg

Australian Deputy Ambassador to Cambodia

It is my honor to represent the Australian Embassy in welcoming you to the 2023 Ponlok Chomnes Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue, hosted by The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes program in collaboration with the program's research partners and relevant policy actors.

Today's Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue is presented as part of The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program, a four-year initiative from 2019-2023 supported by the Australian Government that aims to strengthen the capacity of knowledge sector institutions to undertake quality research that informs public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia.

I am delighted that this year's Ponlok Chomnes subnational policy forum is focused on enhancing the public services sector to ensure better support and services for vulnerable groups in Cambodia, an issue which also aligns closely with Australia's own commitment to supporting and strengthening public service delivery for all Cambodians.

The Australian government has been actively supporting Cambodia to achieve its development goal of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. Our bilateral support also enables Cambodia to be a more resilient nation to shocks and crises, including the current COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, Australia moved quickly to support Cambodia, by pivoting existing development programs to respond to the health security, stability and inclusion, and economic impacts of COVID-19.

The Australian government has also provided support to many partners on various initiatives to ensure inclusive public service delivery in Cambodia. For instance, the Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) program we support aims to improve the performance of public service providers through enhanced transparency, strengthened citizen engagement and responsive action through the World Bank's Multi-donor Trust Fund, and is implemented by the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development Secretariat (NCDDS) and World Vision International in 865 communes/sangkats, 3,850 primary schools, 696 health centers, and 20 district/municipality administrations, which also include 7 districts, 62 communes, 324 primary schools, and 55 health centres in Siem Reap province. Australia assists Cambodia to improve health service delivery for the poor through the implementation of Health Equity and Quality Improvement Project (H-EQIP) by improving the quality of health services at around 1,300 public health centers and hospitals nationwide. In Siem Reap, H-EQIP covers 5 hospitals, 93 health centers, and 1 health post. Through the Australia-Cambodia Cooperation on Equitable Sustainable Services (ACCESS) program, Australia also improves access to quality and sustainability services for people with disabilities and victims of gender-based violence by working with Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY); Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) and the Disability Action Council (DAC) to support the implementation of Cambodia's National Disability Strategic Plan (NDSP) in 15 provinces with specific focus in three target provinces including Siem Reap. Our partnership with the private sector through the Investing in Infrastructure (3i) program allows Australia to help Cambodian households access clean piped water and electricity, and Australia also supports access to social protection schemes and public services for poor and marginalized Cambodians through our support to Cambodia's national poverty registration (IDPoor).

Moving forward, to enhance resilience to future crises and achieve better outcomes, we are committed to supporting the Government of Cambodia to access and utilize reliable data for policymaking, and to facilitating inclusive policy dialogues to inform the development of policies that are responsive to the needs and interests of all Cambodians. Our work strengthening the knowledge sector and diverse civil society actors in Cambodia through The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes program will make a major contribution in this area.

To date, the Ponlok Chomnes program's partners and grantees, including the Analyzing Development Issues Centre Cambodia (ADIC), Center for Khmer Studies (CKS), Center for Strategy and Innovation Policy (CSIP), Center for Sustainable Water (CSW), Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC), and National University of Management's Research Center have conducted research that explored the impacts of COVID-19 on public services for vulnerable groups such as migrants and people with disabilities. Going forward, we hope and expect that more research and dialogue on public services for vulnerable groups, and other related policy issues, will continue to be explored and discussed through the Ponlok Chomnes program.

Through Australia's support of The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes program, we hope to deepen our engagement with prominent think tanks, research institutes, and policy actors in Cambodia, working collaboratively to make data and evidence available to key policy actors, ensuring that there are regular and inclusive dialogues and conversations, and strengthening networks among think tanks, research institutes, and policy actors in the country and region. The Ponlok Chomnes Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue is one of those significant efforts supported by the Australian government, particularly at the subnational level, which will contribute to further development in Cambodia.

Today's Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue focusing on Enhancing Public Services Sector for Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia will be a platform for knowledge sector actors including researchers, policymakers, and academics to share and discuss their findings, exchange ideas, network with one another, and provide recommendations for future policy and programming in this area. I hope you will find this dialogue a valuable opportunity for knowledge exchange, networking, and collaboration. I am grateful to many experts from the government, research institutes, universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations who have come to share their knowledge and research findings in today's event.

Thank you again to The Asia Foundation and Ponlok Chomnes' partners for organizing this important event, and all the participants who are contributing their time and insights to this event. I look forward to a fruitful and rewarding knowledge exchange in today's dialogue, and I am sure we will all take away many new insights and learnings.

Keynote Address

Mr. Chek Kemchun

Deputy Director, Provincial Administration of
Siem Reap Province



Today, I am very delighted to deliver a keynote address at the Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue on “Enhancing Public Service Sector for Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia” with you. Taking this opportunity, I would like to welcome the presence of Mr. Andreas Zurbrugg, a Representative of the Australian Embassy in Cambodia, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Heads of Departments and relevant organizations who have spent a busy time participating in this important dialogue at this instant. Simultaneously, I would like to express my deep gratitude to The Asia Foundation for initiating and co-organizing this dialogue with the objectives 1) to communicate research and data that responds to policy needs to better inform Cambodia’s public services responding to the needs of vulnerable groups; 2) to promote the knowledge exchange and discussion among stakeholders at the national and provincial levels; and (3) to create an environment where knowledge sector actors meet to discuss and broaden their network to build a strong knowledge sector community at the provincial level.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen!

As you already know, under the leadership of Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, despite the obstacles over the past three years posed by the spread of COVID-19 in communities across the country, our Royal Government of Cambodia has been fighting to prevent the spread of this deadly virus and has succeeded in normalizing the situation of the people. In addition, the Royal Government is paying more attention to overcoming challenges and introducing policies to protect the well-being and livelihoods of the poor and vulnerable groups, such as basic vaccine and booster doses to encourage people to be vaccinated; policy support for persons with disabilities in the community; cash support for pregnant women and children under 2 years old; cash support to poor people affected by COVID-19; cash support to vulnerable fam-

ilies severely affected by floods and inflationary pressures, etc. All support to the above target groups is through the management and coordination of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, which has the National Social Assistance Fund as its direct staff in implementing those programs, and who have been trained through various meetings or workshops. The schools play a crucial role to share technical knowledge and experience to provincial and sub-national level officials on a regular basis.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen!

Today's dialogue will reflect on the progress, positives and negatives, lessons learned and energetic progress on public services delivery for vulnerable groups in Cambodia as a whole and separately in the performance of their duties; implementation of cash support programs for pregnant women and children under two years of age, cash assistance programs for poor and vulnerable families during the COVID-19 pandemic, disability identification and immunization monitoring of beneficiaries in the past year. This dialogue will provide an opportunity for you to review and reflect on the implementation of national policies, programs, and strategic plans of the Royal Government to improve the living standards and protect the well-being of the people. Therefore, I would like to urge your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the members of the whole forum to pay attention to monitor and give suggestions to be a good input for the implementation of their duties to get better results.

Once again, I would like to make a high evaluation and express my appreciation to all the team who have worked hard to fulfill their duties in coordinating, monitoring, examining, promoting, and cooperating to solve all the challenges related to program implementation to meet the needs of people, especially pregnant women, children, and persons with disability in poor families. I would like to further encourage you to continue to cooperate better and complement each other, because social work is a profession based on practice and discipline that promotes change and social development, social cohesion, and empowerment. Helping people in accordance with the principles of justice, rights and collective responsibility are at the core of social work.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation toward DFAT, The Asia Foundation, and all of Ponlok Chomnes' research partners for organizing this meaningful event and selecting Siem Reap province as a tourist province, a famous cultural and historical tourism center of Cambodia and the world, for this important dialogue with researchers, policymakers, practitioners, service recipients, civil society organizations and key stakeholders of social services that will provide inputs in line with our desired goals and a public services that we can improve for vulnerable groups.

At last, I would like to thank your excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen, for participating in the Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue on "Enhancing Public Service Sector for Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia" today, and I also would like to extend my best wishes to everyone to be healthy, prosperous, and successful perpetually.



Opening Plenary Discussion

Enhancing Public Service Delivery in Supporting Vulnerable Groups at Sub-national Level



The Royal Government of Cambodia aims to improve public service delivery to ensure that people, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, have equal access to public services.¹² However, this effort was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cambodian populations, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, were adversely impacted by the pandemic, its associated mitigation measures, and changes to accessibility of services.

The pandemic has impacted the livelihoods of local people, including marginalized and vulnerable groups who suffered from personal loss, economic hardship, and health problems. Sub-national administrations (SNAs), such as the Siem Reap Provincial Administration, have played critical roles in supporting the national government to implement key programs like cash transfers and vaccination campaigns for at-risk and hard-to-reach groups.

¹² <https://www.khmersme.gov.kh/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Rectangular-Strategy-Phase-IV.pdf>

The SNAs have also supported access to basic needs such as food and facilitated essential health services and facilities to ensure that all citizens, including the vulnerable and marginalized groups, are able to access and utilize essential services.

The opening plenary discussion on “Enhancing Public Service Delivery in Supporting Vulnerable Groups at Sub-national Administration” as part of the Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue discusses and explores the roles of SNAs in enhancing public service delivery in supporting vulnerable groups for future crises and uncertainties.

Discussion Summary

Public service delivery is the mechanism through which public services are delivered to the public by local and municipal authorities or governments. Vulnerable groups are those that face disadvantages that can hinder them from meeting their basic needs. This includes women head of households, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and those who have been marginalized by society. Therefore, it is essential for vulnerable groups to be able to access public services.

The SNAs, such as the Siem Reap Provincial Administration, have played critical roles during the pandemic to implement key national and local programs, such as vaccination efforts for at-risk and hard-to-reach groups and cash transfers. The SNAs also facilitated access to basic needs such as food and essential health. Additionally, the Siem Reap Provincial Administration used their provincial budget to support funding of local hospitals since their funding levels were found to be inadequate during the pandemic. The administration also produced 20,000 IDPoor Cards during this time.

In order to ensure vulnerable groups, including poor people, persons with disabilities, the elderly, have equal access to necessary services, the subnational administration, including the Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, provided IDPoor Cards to poor families. The elderly and children under the age of two received additional benefits. Subnational officers (called Krom Rohas) interviewed vulnerable groups to understand how the benefits that department provided were being used.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and development partners also play crucial roles in providing these services. Generally, CSOs play a role as supporter and examiner while SNAs are working as respondents. CSOs can identify additional needs and gaps, as well as to provide skills and knowledge to citizens. Moreover, CSOs provide capacity building to SNAs to support them in making services more effective and to develop quality standards. Furthermore, CSOs work to enhance social accountability, a very vital framework that helps to strengthen public service delivery to citizens. Most public service delivery, especially for vulnerable groups, focuses on health, nutrition, clean water, education, child protection, economic livelihoods, and climate change programs by adhering to the Implementation for Social Accountability Framework (ISAF). Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, activities such as trainings were postponed or canceled. All educational activities were halted because schools were shut down.

CSOs and NGOs played a critical role during this time to support household needs. Some supported health centers with materials such as alcohol, hand sanitizer, gloves, mask, and other items for them to work properly. Others addressed the increase in gender-based violence (GBV). Additionally, SNAs provided space for children to study at their administration center. Ultimately, CSOs, NGOs, and SNAs partnered together to deliver public services. In addition, SNAs have been tracking information to ensure that the policies and public service delivery mechanisms are reaching vulnerable groups. All chiefs in village, commune, districts, and provinces were connected through online platforms amid the COVID-19 pandemic to be able to track and have updated information. Likewise, SNAs collect information from communes and districts via report and direct telephone contact with citizens. For example, the Siem Reap Provincial Administration prioritized 90,000 poor people to ensure that they received services during the pandemic. To accomplish this, the administration has been working with GIZ, ACCESS, and the World Bank to continuously meet and develop an action plan for how to deliver public services specifically to these 90,000 poor people.

Some suggestions were made to enhance public service delivery to support vulnerable groups at the sub-national level. Strategic development plans should be participatory to allow citizens to be involved throughout the whole process and to ensure inclusiveness and gender responsiveness. There should be inclusive and confidential feedback mechanisms to ensure

citizens' needs are responsively addressed. Additionally, there should be data to support policy formulation and implementation. It is also important to ensure higher resource allocation to address social issues for vulnerable populations.

Moderator and Panelists

Moderator



MS. ENG CHANDY

Executive Director,
Gender and Development for
Cambodia (GADC)

Panelists



MR. CHEK KEMCHUN

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Provincial Coordinator,
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Plenary Discussions: Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia

Resilience and Recovery among Workers in Cambodia's Hotel Sector



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Siem Reap was one of the worst economically affected provinces in Cambodia, with nearly 90% of hospitality service businesses in the province suspended for an indefinite time or closing operations entirely. According to the Siem Reap Provincial Department of Tourism June 2022 brief report, of those formally registered with the Ministry, 230 hotels employ 12,592 employees, and 261 guesthouses employ 2,057 employees. The report showed that because of COVID-19, at least 18 hotels and 129 guesthouses shut down permanently, while 168 hotels and 56 guesthouses suspended operations, and 44 hotels and 76 guesthouses were partially operational. The shutdown and suspension of hospitality businesses affected an estimated 8,000 workers. This unprecedented event also called into question the pandemic's long-term impacts on the hospitality industry, particularly on workers.

A plenary discussion on “Resilience and Recovery Among Siem Reap’s Hospitality Workers During and Post-COVID-19” was held in order to identify the issues affecting hospitality businesses and workers during COVID-19, interventions, and the tourism recovery plan.

Discussion Summary

The hospitality industry in Siem Reap was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This affected an estimated 11,514 workers' in Siem Reap's tourism industry. Due to jobs and income loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, some employees left Siem Reap to look for income-generation opportunities in other cities and provinces. Some workers turned to subsistence agriculture, but many struggled if they did not have previous farming skills. As a result, today the hospitality industry still struggles as many of the workers who left the industry during the pandemic have not returned. On the other hand, there are growing number of small restaurants and beer gardens opening.

Despite the challenges, many affected workers have shown resilient behavior. Many reported taking charge and not waiting for government support but rather attempting to support themselves. Some even compared their situation during COVID-19 to the Khmer Rouge conflict – reminding themselves that people can survive during harsh circumstances. This is reflected by the number of affected tourism workers, including front-of-house staff taking daily-wage physical labor jobs, such as construction work, food delivery, domestic work, etc. Some workers also took focused on their mental health through purposeful activities such as physical exercise, meditation, cycling, camping, or singing karaoke.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a good learning lesson for everyone involved in the tourism industry, including the government, the tourism businesses, and the workers. It is important for all these stakeholders to have a spare budget for emergency crises. For tourism business owners, in addition to spare funds, they should have a backup business plan or diversify their businesses. Whereas tourism workers should also have savings and acquire backup skills beyond the tourism sector to help them manage their livelihoods in the face of crisis.

Moderator and Panelists

Moderator



DR. THUON TRY

Senior Research Fellow,
Center for Khmer Studies



MR. NGOUV SENGKAK

Director,
Siem Reap Provincial Department
of Tourism

Panelists



MR. DUCH SERETH

Vice President,
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DR. IM SOKSAMPHOAS

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Exploring the Social-Wellbeing, Social Networks, and Child Labor of Migrants and Families on the Cambodian-Thai Border in the Period of the COVID-19 Pandemic



Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand, driven by the motivation to seek new job opportunities across the border due to high levels of poverty and lack of access to jobs at home, are estimated to make up 92% of the 1.2 million Khmer people who work overseas.¹³ This large and vulnerable population have faced poor working conditions and exploitation along migration channels for decades including the risk of human trafficking. Conditions for migrant workers, both in Thailand and at home in Cambodia, have been degrading consistently since the onset of the pandemic. As a result of the closure of businesses in Thailand as part of the government response to COVID-19, during the study period the rate of returned migrants to Cambodia has been increasing, with a high risk of contracting COVID-19 on the journey and lack of social protection support. According to the Administrative Office of Battambang province, of the 4670 (2058 women) returning migrants, 510 (261 women) contracted COVID-19 between April and June 2021.

¹³ <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501032136/more-than-one-million-cambodians-work-abroad-and-sent-about-3-billion-every-year-to-their-families/>

The prolonged nature of the COVID-19 crisis in Southeast Asia and ongoing challenging conditions in rural Cambodia is now forcing many people to attempt the perilous journey back to Thailand, despite the risk of infection and less opportunities for decent work. Informal recruiters or brokers are becoming more active and are taking advantage of this pattern of precarious migration in both directions creating an increased risk of human trafficking. There is some anecdotal evidence emerging around an increase in numbers of children migrating and entering the workforce.

A plenary discussion on “Exploring the social wellbeing of migration and families on the Cambodian-Thai border in the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic” was held to contribute to the understanding of the social-wellbeing of migrants on the Cambodian-Thai border and their families at home during the COVID-19 Pandemic and beyond. The discussion also explored potential strategies that can enhance social assistance support for returned migrants as well as their families.



Discussion Summary

The research led by the Analyzing Development Issues Centre (ADIC) in Cambodia indicated that the key issues for migrant workers across all four target study areas included the lack of opportunities for decent work in their local areas, increased indebtedness to local banks and private money lenders, low income from rice farming due to poor yield rice, and inefficient income from petty trade. Migrants also reported that they relied on information from friends and family to inform their decisions to migrate.

Migrant workers used several different means to transfer money to their families back homes in Cambodia. They reported physically carrying money (between \$150 – \$250) and giving it to family when they returned home, transferring through Thai banks, transferring money through Wing to Wing services, or using brokers.

Frequently, migrant workers communicated with their family by phone calls and Facebook Messenger. Some respondents, however, stated that they do not know how to use Facebook, so they only occasionally speak to their

families on the phone. During the pandemic, some reported feeling isolated and worrying about their children.

There is general acceptance that COVID-19 has impacted migrant workers' employment in Thailand. The loss of jobs directly impacted their income for the workers and their families. While workers need daily food expenses without work, some reported receiving support from other migrants, informal Khmer Associations in Thailand, charitable organizations, and Thai businesses who gave migrant workers food, uncooked rice, noodles, soy sources, eggs, and canned fish while they were locked down in their rental room. The pandemic has also negatively affected their ability to repay outstanding loans at home as well as expenses incurred from their working documents in Thailand.

Generally speaking, migrant workers with legal documents tend to travel home twice a year for ceremonies celebrating Pchum Ben and the Khmer New Year. Migrants with valid documentation can enter the country legally and travel home without using labor brokers; however, they need to spend between USD \$80 to \$100 on transportation, meals, etc. on their journey home. Some respondents reported that if they needed to return home during the COVID-19 lockdown, they would need to spend between USD \$200 to \$250 to use labor broker channels.

The pandemic also strained migrant workers' ability to pay for healthcare abroad. In Thailand, documented migrant workers must purchase health insurance, which costs about USD\$15 per month; additionally, they paid around \$35 for the first dosage of the COVID-19 vaccine. In Cambodia, returning migrants who lacked an ID Poor card or were infected with COVID-19 had to pay between USD\$0.5 and \$0.75 for health service fees and an additional \$20 for a treatment facility that does not include medical care and medication. At the point of entry, returning migrants were given a mask, tested for COVID-19, and taken to a quarantine facility. They were provided with three meals a day, sleeping materials, a hygiene kit, daily health checks, and free transportation from the quarantine center to their hometown after 14 days. In case of they tested positive for COVID-19, they were given free treatment.

To enhance the social-assistance support for returned migrants as well as their families, it is recommended that:

- The Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training should support existing in formal networks in Thailand so that they are fully capable of assisting vulnerable migrant workers in a timely and comprehensive manner.
- The Sub-national authority should inform returning migrant workers about on-demand ID Poor information.
- Social Assistance Programs under the umbrella of the Social Protection Framework should be systematic and social assistance program for migrant workers and their families should be offered.
- The Ministry of the Interior should cooperate with the Thai governor and border authorities in facilitating legal documents to ensure the legality of Cambodian migrant workers to work in Thailand after COVID-19 relief.

Moderator and Panelists

Moderator



MR. OEUR IL

Executive Director,
Analyzing Development
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Deputy Governor,
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MR. ORN SOPHALLA

Deputy District Governor,
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Panelists



MRS. LOV SAMNAN

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MR. NIL DAMNANG

Research Fellow,
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The Impacts of COVID-19 on Education of Persons with Disabilities in Cambodia



In Cambodia, there are 689,532 persons with disabilities in which 74.3% are partial disabilities, 19.4% are serious disabilities,¹⁴ and 6.3% are absolute disabilities. Persons with disabilities are protected by international conventions and local laws aiming to ensure that they can fully enjoy freedoms and rights, including but not limited to the right to non-discrimination, right to participation and inclusion in society, equality in opportunities, right to accessibilities and equal treatment, and that their dignities are respected as human beings.¹⁵

The rights of persons with disabilities to education have been protected and materialized through other legal instruments including the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Constitution of Cambodia, and Cambodia's Law on the Protection and the Promotion of the

¹⁴ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Census of the population in the Kingdom of Cambodia 2019, National Report on Final Results, October 2020, page 125.

¹⁵ See ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention (No. 159), 1983; UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, adopted on 03 July 2009; and Cambodia's Law on the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities dated 03 July 2009.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Other local policies also focus specifically on persons with disabilities, including the National Strategy on Persons with Disabilities 2019-2023. Related to the promotion of the education of persons with disabilities in Cambodia, special education has been the focus of the government of Cambodia through the adoption of Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities in 2008 which was revised as the Policy on Inclusive Education by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in 2018.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted persons with disabilities as their employment was suspended or terminated due to temporary or permanent closure of businesses, social distancing measures, travel restrictions, gathering restrictions, lockdowns, school closures, and other COVID-19 pandemic preventive measures. COVID-19 has also impacted education on many fronts and challenged Cambodia's ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4. Within the education sector, students with disabilities were found to be severely impacted by the pandemic.

The plenary discussion explored the impacts COVID-19 on students with disabilities, and responses from the government of Cambodia to help students with disabilities during COVID-19.

Discussion Summary

People with disabilities were uniquely and harshly impacted by the pandemic. According to the study, students with disabilities felt more severely impacted than students with no disabilities. Emotional wellbeing, quality of education, and parents' selective behavior were identified as major impacts of COVID-19 on hearing and visually impaired students. Students with disabilities also noted that being isolated from their peers and an absence of disability services severely impacted their wellbeing. Moreover, because the pandemic took the world by surprise, schools were not prepared to offer quality inclusive services quickly and school closures and online learning impacted the students' learning as there is a lack of assistive technology, inclusive teaching methodologies, and poor internet connections. Selective approaches were also reportedly used by students' parents, and they gave priority to children with no disabilities if there were limited resources such as smart devices.

The COVID-19 pandemic was unexpected, and nobody was ready. Once schools received instruction from the government, they were worried how teachers would be able to teach the students. However, for immediate response, schools requested their teachers to use Telegram to send docu-

ments to students. Zoom was also used for teaching; however, not many students, parents, or even teachers had knowledge about this platform.

Students in the city center/urban areas could adopt the use of new technology very quickly; however, the students living in rural areas had a difficult time using technology, including unstable internet connection and limited knowledge of using these new technologies. There were a few organizations that provided support during the period, which included providing smart devices, creating materials and others. However, students with hearing and visual impairments struggled with online learning as the materials need additional adaptation for their needs. A case about a female teacher with visual impairments was raised. She had problems with mobility during the restrictions. She also felt emotionally down as she is blind and needed to be in the house all the time. She also experienced some difficulties with her teaching. She mentioned that the Google Platform for teaching was not friendly for blind people. The cost of living also became another problem for her and students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities also face judgement and discrimination by both other students and teachers. The need for better training on inclusive education to help create a safe and welcoming school environment. Several policy recommendations emerged from the discussion. The use of assistive technology is imperative to ensure students with special needs can learn both in the classroom and online. Teacher training is needed to ensure that both in person and online classrooms are inclusive, and students with special needs should be kept aware of any changing situations so that they can be emotionally supported.

Moderator and Panelists

Moderator



MR. KIM VEARA

Director,
ASEAN Economic Research
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DR. NOP KANHARITH

Professor and Researcher,
National University of Management

Panelists



MR. TUN BUNTORNNG

Deputy Director,
Siem Reap Special Education
High School



MS. SEAM NAVY

Teacher,
Siem Reap Special Education
High School

Plenary Discussions: Public Service Sector in Cambodia

The Introduction of the Private Sector's Pension Scheme in Cambodia: Readiness and Its Impact on Social Welfare



In Cambodia, the social protection system is at an early stage of development and social protection related activities and policies emerged after a National Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025 was adopted by the Royal Government of Cambodia. Following the policy, several institutions have been set up to support this endeavor, such as the National Social Protection Council (NSPC), the Executive Committee (EXCO) and General Secretariat of National Social Protection (GS-NSPC). NSPC was established in 2017 as a policy making body. In 2018, the EXCO was established as a coordination mechanism between the policy level and the technical level to support all functions and the duties of the NSPC while the GS-NSPC was set up to support the work of the NSPC and the EXCO.

With the establishment of supervisory authority, the social security regulator (SSR), which will oversee the improvement of the transparency and accountability of the social security operator and efforts put forth by the government to formalize the process in the next stage, the number of registered companies and employees/workers would gradually increase. This

would translate into a rise in the collection of contributions to the private sector pension scheme. The funds would then be placed as bank deposits, which would accelerate the availability of money by the banks into the economy, investment in stock and debt markets, investment in key physical infrastructures of the countries and/or in real estate sector, etc. These would facilitate sustainable growth of the economy and in the long run increase the social welfare of citizens through pension disbursement after retirement. The implementation of the private pension scheme came into effect in October 2022, with a contribution rate of 4% of basic wages, in which 2% will be borne by the employer and another 2% by the employee.

A plenary discussion on “Implementation of Private Sector’s Pension Scheme in Cambodia: Readiness and Its Impact on Social Welfare” was conducted to explore public awareness to, perception of, and reactions to the introduction of the private pension scheme in Cambodia. The discussion also touched on employers’ and employees’ readiness for the implementation of the scheme, challenges and potential benefits of the scheme, and policy options for the government to consider.

Discussion Summary

The results from the survey suggest that the majority of the surveyed employees and employers are aware of and prepared for the implementation of the pension scheme. Both recognize the important role of the pension scheme. However, there is a concern for the potential increase in operational costs as a result of employer’s co-contribution to the scheme. Nonetheless, it is quite promising that most of the surveyed employers are satisfied with their current co-contribution rate and are willing and able to pay their contribution for the next 5 years.

The total contribution to the pension scheme is estimated to be on average USD 211.7 million from 2022-2026, USD 571.3 million from 2027-2031, and about 1,178.7 million from 2032-2035. The computable general equilibrium (CGE) model suggests that the implementation of the private pension scheme would positively contribute to employment, GDP, and poverty reduction.

Despite the positive findings, there are some concerns regarding the implementation of the social security scheme as some of the surveyed employees who are registered with National Social Security Fund (NSSF) are covered by only one protection measure (such as health insurance and work injury

coverage), while some are covered by multiple. These findings are different from what is stated in the law. Although the majority of the surveyed employees are aware of the pension scheme, only 21% reported NSSF as the main source of information, suggesting that NSSF could further disseminate the information to a wider audience. There are some concerns about the management of the funds, especially during economic downturn. To respond in part to this concern, the government established the SSR. One of the many responsibilities of SSR is to provide guidance regarding the investment of the funds and to oversee the investment decisions carried out by NSSF. The investment will be diversified to ensure sustainability and resiliency.

Moving forward, the government may consider the following. First, NSSF and SSR should continue to expand the coverage of the employees that are subject to the pension scheme, at the same time, maintaining trust and efficiency of the management of the scheme. Second, NSSF improve existing quality services (information, social security services) and management capacity to sustainably manage the increasing size of the pension in the future. Third, SSR should coordinate with other relevant ministries and work closely with employers to mitigate the potential burdens from their co-contribution to the scheme by providing regulatory incentives and support to improve productivity and the business environment. Finally, SSR provide a regulatory framework for investment opportunities for the pension to effectively channel resources into productive investment, as well as conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the scheme.

Moderator and Panelists

Moderator



DR. OUM SOTHEA

Executive Director,
Center for Strategy and
Innovation Policy

Panelists



MR. CHHEAV NARATH

Board Member, Chairman,
Human Resources Committee
EuroCham Cambodia



MR. LENG SOKLONG

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Local Government and Private Sector Partnership for Service Delivery: The Case of Clean Water Supply in Cambodia



For more than a decade, the Royal Government of Cambodia has initiated decentralization and deconcentration (D&D) processes, with the aim of increasing responsiveness of service delivery, improving efficiencies, and enhancing accountabilities. Under D&D reforms, responsibilities for providing government services are being shifted to Sub-National Administrations (SNAs), including the commune/Sangkat, district, municipal, or Khan, and capital and provincial levels of government. Strengthening the ability of the SNAs to deliver public services is a key to the success of this reform agenda. In 2021, the government also adopted the National Program for Subnational Democratic Development (NP-SNDD) Phase 2, which emphasizes the role of effective SNA planning and strong Public Financial Management (PFM) systems for fiscal decentralization.

Clean water supply, including piped water, is one of the essential services to be improved through the D&D reforms. In providing the services, the Government, both national and sub-national, can either 1) directly deliver services or 2) act as regulator and coordinator for private operators. In Cambodia, much attention has been given to the first role but less on the second. The shrinking of the already limited fiscal space of the Government,

due mainly to the COVID-19 crisis, suggests that the second role should be given more attention in the years to come. Available data indicate that there has been more financing support from non-state actors and even more private investment in delivering services and investments, especially for public water supply, both in rural and urban areas.

However, the current partnership between SNAs in Cambodia and Private Water Operators (PWOs) has not been well developed. According to the existing policy, the district, municipal or Khan (DMK) level is the intended main tier for service delivery, including on clean water. However, in reality, after more than a decade of D&D, the DMK level receives the least resources compared to the capital/provincial and commune/Sangkat levels. In addition, while the Government's policy recognizes the importance of working with the private sector to improve local services, the roles of DMK administrations in this regard have not been well defined, nor concrete mechanisms have been put in place. This limitation has not only undermined the roles of the DMK administrations but also the targeting and accountability around piped-water investment and service delivery.

A plenary discussion on “Local Government and Private Sector Partnership for Service Delivery: The Case of Clean Water Supply in Cambodia” was conducted to discuss the current situation and possible future arrangements where local governments, especially the district/municipal (DM) administrations, can work closely with PWOs with the support from national level ministries to improve pipe-water services in both urban and rural areas.

Discussion Summary

Through the D&D reform process, the functions on clean water supply are placed under the Office of Economy and Community Development. This office is where the relevant functions under the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) and the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI) were transferred. For the MRD, the function transferred was ‘construction, repair, maintenance of rural water supply system,’ whereas, for MISTI, it is ‘management of pipe-water system management (after being licensed by MISTI)’.

It was believed that the transfer of management of piped clean water supply businesses to the district/municipal (DM) administrations would promote the efficiency of administrative management, public service delivery, and local development at the DM administrations. However, the actual performance of the local governments in improving access to clean and safe piped water is very limited because: 1) the power transferred to the local governments regarding piped clean water is too restrictive for them to perform the task effectively, 2) the local governments are not equipped with necessary means to implement the functions, and 3) they still lack of resources to implement the new function successfully.

PWOs, on the other hand, have been making a significant contribution to the clean water supply sector. However, most of them have typically undertaken full financing, design, construction, and operations of water supply systems, and faced many challenges including destruction of piped water supply systems with no compensation, insufficient investment funds, unclear roles and responsibilities of local governments, unsustainable water sources, unfavorable geographic and demographic conditions, low household density, and low willingness of households to use clean piped water.

The research employed a survey to seek out voices of water users. The results of the survey conducted with 206 households indicated that about 17% did not have a piped clean water supply connected to their households and the vast majority of them used water from wells. For households with access to the piped clean water supply, almost 50% had made some kinds of complaints to the PWOs regarding instability of water supply quality and quantity, high water fees, responsiveness of customer services, and difficulty in contacting them. They reported that they often did not receive a satisfactory reply or sometimes no response at all.

To ensure an effective partnership between local governments and PWOs, the following recommendations for different levels of administration should be taken into consideration:

- District and Commune:
 - Increase the budget and prioritize key activities
 - Strengthen the relationship between PWOs and authorities through monthly meetings
 - Organize public forums and conduct regular monitoring
 - Have a roster of local water and sanitation experts and build the capacity of the local staff

- Integrate PWOs into district/commune development planning
- Promote the use of clean water in communities and the protection of water sources
- Private Water Operators:
 - Respond to problems/issues/concerns that are raised by water users
 - Improve staff capacity in operations and management to comply with regulations
 - Provide data to commune/district authorities including pipeline maps
 - Cooperate with commune authorities and local road construction companies in order to minimize the destruction of pipe network
- Provincial Authorities:
 - Encourage water supply investment
 - Mobilize resources to invest in water supply
 - Facilitate investors in implementing their projects
- Ministries:
 - Continuously reviewing and improve licensing procedures
 - Speed up the development and issuance of detailed legal instructions, technical guidelines and operational manuals on the relevant issues
 - Broadly disseminate information and resources to the local governments and relevant agencies
- All Relevant Agencies:
 - Work closely together in an integrated manner in order to eliminate overlapping areas of operation, as well as to define roles and tasks
 - Establish an effective communication platform where relevant agencies and PWOs can better communicate, coordinate, and share information.

Moderator and Panelists

Moderator



MR. MOK SOKHA
Program Manager,
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Panelists



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Policy Analysis and Development
Division, National Committee for
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MR. LIM MINH
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Cambodian Water Supply
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DR. SAO DAVY
Executive Director,
Center for Sustainable Water
(CSW)



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(CAPRED)

Youth Volunteerism, Digital Literacy, and Community Development: The Case of the Volunteering for My Community (VMC) Program in Cambodia and Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (AYRG) Road Map



On March 16, 2020, the Cambodian government closed all education institutions, including public and private schools, as a preventative measure against the spread of COVID-19. These school closures have resulted in disruptions to learning in all of Cambodia's 13,482 state schools, from preschool through upper secondary, including 3,064 community pre-schools, non-formal education (NFE) centers and programs, and teacher education institutions (TEIs). As a result, an estimated 3.2 million students have been affected. In response, MoEYS, together with development partners and stakeholders, have made significant efforts to provide continuous distance learning for all students in Cambodia.¹⁶

In recent years, and especially during the COVID-19 outbreak in Cambodia, use of the internet and online platforms by children and youth increased significantly. Despite good intentions, a large number of youth and children, in the absence of appropriate awareness, support, knowledge, and protection mechanisms, are now becoming victims of online child abuse, and at the same time, their access to inappropriate sites is also increasing their vulnerability and risks. But local volunteer programs are helping youth to gain better online skills and to disseminate these skills to communities through service projects.

¹⁶ Cambodia COVID-19 Joint Education Needs Assessment, MoEYS, March 2021.

A plenary discussion on “Youth Volunteerism, Digital Literacy, and Community Development” was conducted to discuss and seek to understand how youth volunteerism and digital literacy can help build youth soft skills and allow them to contribute to community development on various issues, including climate change awareness raising and adaptation. It does so in the case of the government’s national youth volunteerism program, called the Volunteer for My Community (VMC) program.

Discussion Summary

The VMC and Adolescent Youth Reference Group (AYRG) programs were operated in order to provide opportunities for adolescents and youth to engage, learn, and initiate activities for improving their skills and community development. The VMC program was established in 2019 with support from the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) program to operate the activities in 12 provinces across Cambodia, and AYRG was founded in 2015, stabilized, and handed over to CRC-Cambodia in 2017 to operate in 10 provinces.

The programs provide training on a variety of topics such as proposal writing, communication, report writing, budget management, digital skills, and climate change activities. Additionally, the program also provided some small grants to the volunteers focusing on eight sectors to address community issues, namely: education, environment, agriculture, tourism, health, public administration, entrepreneurship, and industrial 4.0. Both AYRG and VMC also played important roles in addressing the climate change issue through mobilizing students and the community to plant trees for a green environment, waste management, and reducing plastic bags. In addition, AYRG also conducted consultations with their members at the sub-national level to collect inputs and recommendations on climate change impact for developing a joint statement and submitting it to key relevant ministries for response and support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, activities were forced to move online. This was challenging because VMC and AYRG volunteers and staff had limited skills regarding digital technology. Thus, to address this challenge, the VMC focal person has collaborated with other CSOs and UN agencies to provide capacity building to the VMC on digital technology related topics such as how to use Excel, Microsoft Word, Zoom, Google Meets, Microsoft Teams, etc. As a result, they have used those digital skills to continue the project’s implementation through meetings, communication, and awareness-raising online.

With the impact of social media, digital literacy now include a wide range of skills, from uploading content on YouTube to sharing things on Facebook. VMC brings technology to students and encourages them to use digital skills such as preparing documents (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), Google Meets, and Zoom. However, there are some things that need to be improved, such as providing more training sessions on social media campaigns, video editing, Google Earth, filming, doing research, and tech solutions.

The following recommendations for VMC and AYRG are suggested to build youth soft skills and allow them to contribute to community development:

- Develop a standard training curriculum and converting those courses into an online platform.
- Conduct more training/workshops for youth volunteers to have sufficient skills to work and develop the communities more effectively.
- Support technical support and digital equipment for volunteers to access online training and run projects.
- Integrate and introducing technology to young people and rural youth is vital, but the program should consider providing computers and another device to support them.
- Strengthen the provincial volunteer recruitment process to promote inclusiveness by encouraging youths from various groups to take part, including those with disabilities, LGBTQI, indigenous, and vulnerable groups, etc.
- Develop and standardize duties of care for volunteers as guided by the Global Volunteering Standard.

Moderator and Panelists

Moderator



MS. HOUR BOPHA
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Coalition Cambodia



MR. UY KEA
Deputy Director,
Center Management Department,
Ministry of Education,
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MR. YAN LAY
Executive Director,
Child Rights
Coalition Cambodia

Panelists



MS. KAO MENGHORNG
Youth Volunteer,
Volunteer for My Community
Program



MR. PUN KIRIKRAINET
Youth Volunteer,
Volunteer for My Community
Program

The Asia Foundation’s “Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia” program, in collaboration with its research partners, held the Ponlok Chomnes Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue on “Enhancing Public Service Sector for Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia” on April 27, 2023, in Siem Reap. Drawing on insights from recent studies by the Ponlok Chomnes partners and knowledge of key policy actors, the event convened over 120 participants, including government representatives, researchers, civil society, policymakers, policy experts, and members of academia and the diplomatic corps, to present and discuss their research findings and case studies on various topics. These topics included tourism, migration, education of persons with disabilities, the private sector pension scheme, clean water supply, digital literacy, community development and others, which all contribute to enhancing the public service sector for vulnerable groups in Cambodia.

The Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue 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 improve public service sector for vulnerable groups in Cambodia.

The following are the key takeaways drawn up from each plenary discussion:

- 1.** Opening Plenary Discussion on “Enhancing Public Service Delivery in Supporting Vulnerable Groups at Sub-national Level” – Strategic development plan should be participatory by prioritizing ways to actively and meaningfully involve citizens throughout the whole process to ensure inclusiveness and gender responsiveness. There should be inclusive and confidential feedback mechanisms to ensure citizens’ needs are responsively addressed. Additionally, data should be collected, disseminated, and used to support policy formulation and implementation. It is also important to ensure higher allocation of dedicated resources to address service delivery for vulnerable populations.

2. Panel Discussion on “Resilience and Recovery among Workers in Cambodia’s Hotel Sector” – COVID-19 heavily impacted Cambodia’s tourism sector through travel restrictions, shuttering of guesthouses and hotels, and employment losses. Future strategies should focus on supporting businesses to diversify their revenue as a cushion against unexpected shocks. Emphasis should also be placed on expanding the skillsets of tourism workers and ensuring that they have access to public services.

3. Panel Discussion on “Exploring the social-wellbeing of migration and families on the Cambodian-Thai border in the period of COVID-19 Pandemic” – migrant workers were impacted by the pandemic in multiple ways. To support migrant workers who are employed in Thailand, the social protection system for migrants should be expanded systematically. The government should also consider supporting both formal and informal networks in times of crises. Children of migrant workers should be provided with formal and informal education.

4. Panel Discussion on “The Impacts of COVID-19 on Education of Persons with Disabilities in Cambodia” – To achieve inclusive education in the classroom, teaching methods and curriculum should be designed to address the differing needs of students with disabilities along with the provision of special education training. Moreover, awareness raising among citizens on Persons with Disabilities is important to ensure respect, understanding, and participation of students with disabilities in society.

5. Panel Discussion on “The Introduction of the Private Sector’s Pension Scheme in Cambodia: Readiness and Its Impact on Social Welfare” – While the employers and employees are aware of and prepared for the implementation of the private sector pension scheme, it is vital to continue to expand the coverage of the employees that qualify and to maintain trust and efficiency of the management of the scheme. At the same time, it is important to improve the existing quality and management capacity of the National Social Security Fund to sustainably manage the increasing size of the pension in the future. The gov-

ernment should also work closely with employers to mitigate the potential burdens from their co-contribution to the scheme by providing regulatory incentives and strengthening the business environment.

6. Panel Discussion on “Local Government and Private Sector Partnership for Service Delivery: The Case of Clean Water Supply in Cambodia” – private water operators play a critical role in expanding coverage to clean water throughout the country. The local authorities have identified several challenges including effective planning, budgeting, management, and the capacity of subnational administration to engage private sector. The private sector has also identified other key challenges and these include destruction of piped water supply system, insufficient investment funds, unfavorable geographic and demographic conditions, and low willingness of local people to use clean piped water. To ensure the effective partnership between local government and private water operators, relevant agencies need to work closely together in an integrated manner in order to clearly define roles and responsibilities and to promote active communication and coordination.

7. Panel Discussion on “Youth Volunteerism, Digital Literacy, and Community Development: The Case of the Volunteering for My Community (VMC) Program in Cambodia and Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (AYRG) Road Map” – Youth volunteerism is significant in contributing to the development of the community and skills development of individual volunteers. Therefore, it is recommended that the provincial volunteer recruitment process should be strengthened to promote inclusiveness by encouraging youths from various groups to take part, including those with disabilities, LGBTIQ, indigenous, and vulnerable groups. Training courses should also be strengthened to support volunteers to hone their soft skills and digital literacy skills in particular.

Event Evaluation Note

The Royal Government of Cambodia aims to improve public service delivery to ensure that people, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, have equal access to public services¹⁷.¹ Some achievements have been proven. For instance, more than 97% of children enrolled in primary school in 2017¹⁸,² 86.4% of the Cambodian population had access to electricity in 2020¹⁹,³ and 80% of people in rural areas have access to clean water and sanitation in 2022²⁰.⁴ However, this effort was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The country was briefly closed, and travel restrictions were put into place both internationally and in-country. As a result, Cambodian populations, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, were adversely impacted.

Drawings on insights from recent studies by the Ponlok Chomnes partners and knowledge of key policy actors, the Ponlok Chomnes Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue will be a platform for knowledge producers to showcase their findings, discuss, exchange knowledge, and network with knowledge users by revisiting the governments' efforts and providing recommendations to enhance public services sector for vulnerable groups in Cambodia.

The objectives of the Ponlok Chomnes Knowledge Exchange and Dialogue are to:

- Communicate research and data that responds to policy needs to better inform Cambodia's public services responding to the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Promote the knowledge exchange and discussion among stakeholders at the national and provincial levels; and
- Create an environment where knowledge sector actors meet to discuss and broaden their network to build a strong knowledge sector community at the provincial level.

¹⁷ <https://www.khmersme.gov.kh/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Rectangular-Strategy-Phase-IV.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/education#:~:text=Cambodia%20has%20made%20terrific%20progress,in%20school%20year%202017%2F18.>

¹⁹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS?locations=KH>

²⁰ <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501123910/over-80-pct-of-cambodias-rural-population-have-access-to-clean-water-sanitation/>

To improve the next event management and collect proposed relevant topics for the next event the post-event survey was conducted. As a result, over 80% of participants rated that they were ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’ with overall event management and facilities including event organization, language interpretation, audio quality, room set up, and adequate time for discussion (Figure 1: Evaluation of Event Management and Facilities); however, there were a few highlights for improvement one of the room is small that is not able to accommodate all the interested participants and it would be better to have adequate time for interaction between panelists and participants.

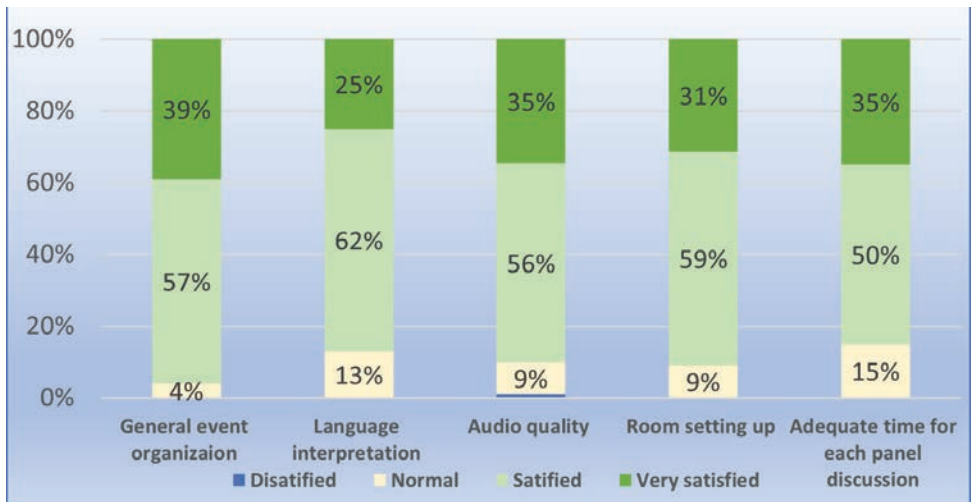


Figure 1: Evaluation of Event Management and Facilities

Regarding the overall event content, the participants were happy with the event- 93% rated ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’, and noted that the topics were very relevant to the current context and the panelists are very experienced and knowledgeable about the topics, especially the government officials are very responsive and engaged in the discussion (Figure 2: Evaluation of Event Content). However, a few pieces of feedback on the 3-room setup where that some participants missed the interesting topic, there was also the suggestion proposed to have 2 rooms that will be easier to manage participation in the panel discussions.

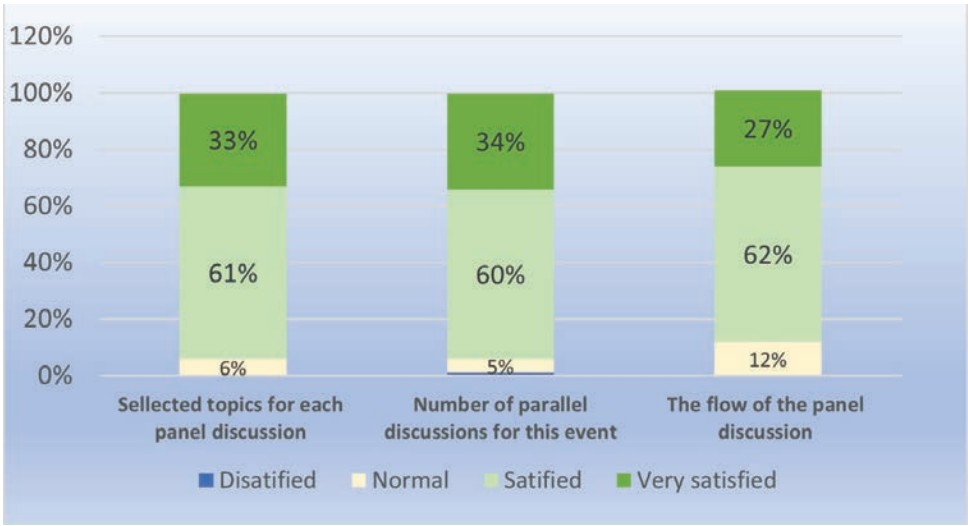


Figure 2: Evaluation of Event Content

When asked about length of the event, about 60% preferred a 2-day event and about 35% still would like a 1-day event (Figure 3: Proposed Duration for the next event).

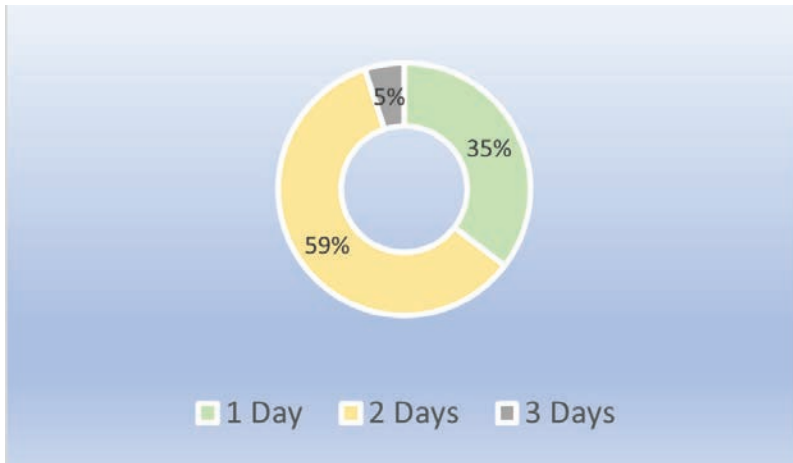


Figure 3: Proposed Duration for the next event

Participants have suggested and proposed their topics for the next dialogues:

- Natural Resource Management: Deforestation and Land Use Change
- Climate Resilience: Gender and Climate Change
- Energy efficiency: Privatization
- GEDSI: Gender, girl education, PWD social service provision and skill development, Women in the WASH sector
- Pandemic and Vulnerability Assessment
- Youth Engagement and Social Work and Industrial 4.0
- Safe Migration
- Sustainability of Pension Fund
- Stem Education
- Agriculture and Value Chain
- Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF)



Agenda

Enhancing Public Service Sector for Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia

Date: 27 April 2023

Venue: Angkor Paradise Hotel, Siem Reap Province

Time	Agenda	Note	Room
8:00 am – 8:30 am	Registration	The Asia Foundation Team	Bayon Ballroom
8:30 am – 8:45 am	Opening and National Anthem	MC	Bayon Ballroom
8:45 am – 9:00 am	Opening Remarks	Mr. Andreas Zurbrugg Australian Deputy Ambassador to Cambodia	Bayon Ballroom
9:00 am – 09:15 am	Keynote Address	Mr. Chek Kemchun, Deputy Director, Administration of Siem Reap Provincial Hall	Bayon Ballroom
09:15 am – 09:30 am	Group Photo	Ponlok Chomnes Team	
09.30 am – 10.00 am	Coffee Break		
10:00 am – 11:30 a.m.	<p>Opening Plenary Discussion</p> <p>Topic: Enhancing Public Service Delivery in Supporting Vulnerable Groups at Sub-national Level</p> <p><i>Q&A Session</i></p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Chek Kemchun, Deputy Director, Administration of Siem Reap Provincial Hall - Mr. Boeng Pech, Rehabilitation Center Officer, Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Siem Reap Province - Ms. Chan Sophea, Senior Manager for Community Engagement, World Vision International Cambodia - Mrs. Ly Pharom, Provincial Coordinator, Banteay Srei Organization <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Eng Chandy, Executive Director, Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) 	Bayon Ballroom

11:30 am – 1:00 pm	Lunch		
1:00 pm – 2:30 p.m.	Parallel Panel Discussion I: Vulnerable Groups in Cambodia		
	<p>Panel Discussion A: Resilience and Recovery among Workers in Cam- bodia’s Hotel Sector</p> <p><i>Q&A Session</i></p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Ngouv Sengkak, Director, Siem Reap Provincial Department of Tourism - Mr. Duch Sareth, Vice President, Cambodia Tourism Association - Dr. Im Soksamphoas, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Center for Khmer Studies <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Thuon Try, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Khmer Studies 	Bayon Ballroom
	<p>Panel Discussion B: Exploring the so- cial-wellbeing, social networks, and child labor of migrants and families on the Cambodia-Thailand border in period of COVID-19 Pandemic.</p> <p><i>Q&A Session</i></p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H.E. Pok Nady, Deputy Governor, Pursat Provincial Administration - Mr. Orn Sophalla, Deputy District Governor, Kandieng District, Pursat Province - Mrs. Lov Samnan, Executive Director, Akphivath Neary Khmer Organization (ANKO) - Mr. Nil Damnang, Research Fel- low, Analyzing Development Issues Centre (ADIC) <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Oeur Il, Executive Director, Analyzing Development Issues Centre (ADIC) 	Room: Kulen
<p>Panel Discussion C: The Impacts of COVID-19 on Education of Persons with Disabili- ties in Cambodia</p> <p><i>Q&A Session</i></p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Nop Kanharith, Professor and Researcher, National University of Management - Mr. Tun Buntornng, Deputy Direc- tor, Siem Reap Special Education High School - Ms. Seam Navy, Teacher, Siem Reap Special Education High School <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Kim Veara, Director, ASEAN Economic Research Institute, NUM 		

2:30 pm – 3:00 pm	Coffee break		
	Parallel Panel Discussion II: Public Service Sector in Cambodia		
	<p>Panel Discussion D: The Introduction of the Private Sector’s Pension Scheme in Cambodia: Readiness and Its Impact on Social Welfare</p> <p><i>Q&A Session</i></p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Chheav Narath, Board Member and Chairman, Human Resources Committee, EuroCham Cambodia - Mr. Leng Soklong, Advisor, Social Security Regulator of Cambodia (SSR), National Council for Social Protection - Ms. Bora Sunjolinet, Research Associate, Center for Strategy and Innovation Policy <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Oum Sothea, Executive Director, Center for Strategy and Innovation Policy 	Bayon Ballroom
3:00 pm – 4:30 pm	<p>Panel Discussion E: Local Government and Private Sector Partnership for Service Delivery: The Case of Clean Water Supply in Cambodia</p> <p><i>Q&A Session</i></p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mrs. Kong Bunna, Deputy Director, Policy Development and Analysis Division, Secretariat of National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD-S) - Mr. Lim Minh, Executive Director, Cambodian Water Supply Association (CWA) - Dr. Sao Davy, Executive Director, Center for Sustainable Water (CSW) - Ms. Tin Mola, Infrastructure Lead, Cambodia Australia Partnership for Resilient Economic Development (CAPRED) <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Mok Sokha, Program Manager, WaterAid Cambodia 	Room: Kulen

	<p>Panel Discussion F: Youth Volunteerism, Digital Literacy, and Community Develop- ment: The Case of the Volunteering for My Community (VMC) Pro- gram in Cambodia and Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (AYRG) Road Map</p> <p><i>Q&A Session</i></p>	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Uy Kea, Deputy Director, Center Management Department, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport - Mr. Yan Lay, Executive Director, Child Rights Coalition Cambodia - Ms. Kao Menghorng, Youth Vol- unteer, Volunteer for My Commu- nity Program - Mr. Pun Kirikrainet, Youth Volun- teer, Volunteer for My Community Program <p>Moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Hour Bopha, Project Officer, Child Rights Coalition Cambodia 	Room: Cozy
4:45 pm – 5:00 pm	Closing Remarks	Ms. Meloney C. Lindberg Country Representative The Asia Foundation	Bayon Ballroom
5:00 pm	End of Program		





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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