

Youth Volunteerism, Digital Literacy and Community Development:

A Case Study of the ‘Volunteer for My Community’ Program and ‘Adolescent and Youth Reference Group’ in Cambodia

Disclaimer

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Introduction

Volunteer for My Community Program (VMC) is the Cambodia's national and largest volunteer program under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and has been implemented since 2019. Adolescent and Youth Reference Group (ARYG), on the other hand, was established with the support of UNICEF and composed of adolescents and youths aged 15-25, nominated by various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). VMC and ARYG are volunteering hubs that aim to build youths' capacity building and community development through community-based projects proposed by the youth volunteers. Thousands of youth volunteers have participated in the program and initiated hundreds of projects to solve community issues.

Due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the VMC digitalized itself into an entirely online-based program in 2021. The VMC system has been set up to ensure sustainability and achieve its goals. With this principle, VMC created a strategic and management framework guideline, implementation guideline, standardized youth project proposal template, VMC website, etc. ARYG also has the implementation guideline through the strategic plan from 2021-2023. It has a logical framework which the goal is to lead ARYG to become a strong leading network to advocate for the betterment of adolescent's and youths' well-being.

With the support from Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes program, Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC) conducted a study 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 (ARYG)." The study proposes critical findings focusing on how youth volunteerism contributes to

- A). youths' capacity development;
- B). community development;
- C). institutional capacity development;
- D). digital integration in the programs.

Research objective & key questions

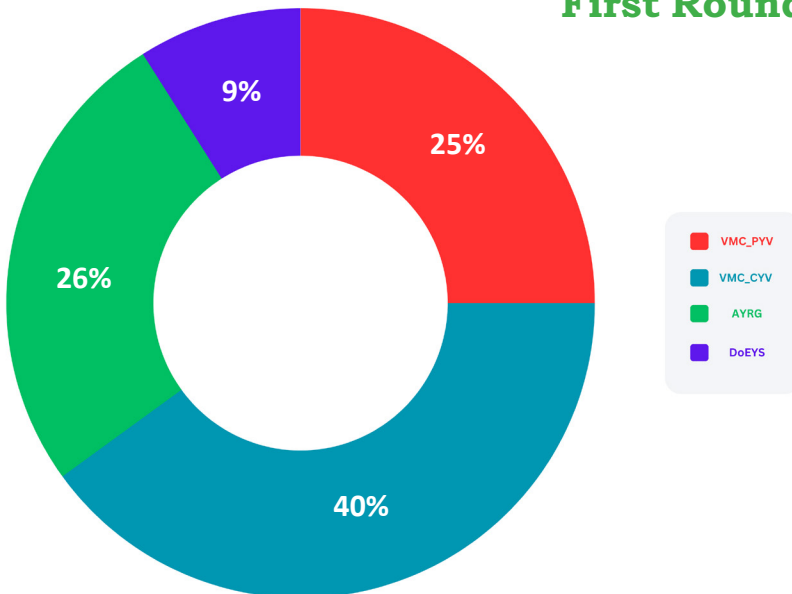
This research seeks to understand the skills that were developed by youth volunteers through volunteerism. It identifies the soft and digital skills they gained and improved upon throughout their work in the program. Also, it showed how youth volunteers contributed to community development. It also aims to understand how the program improved the institutional management and support of youth volunteers in their locations. The results should be used to provide concrete recommendations to improve the program. VMC and ARYG were utilized for this research.

This research is designed to answer specific questions, as follows:

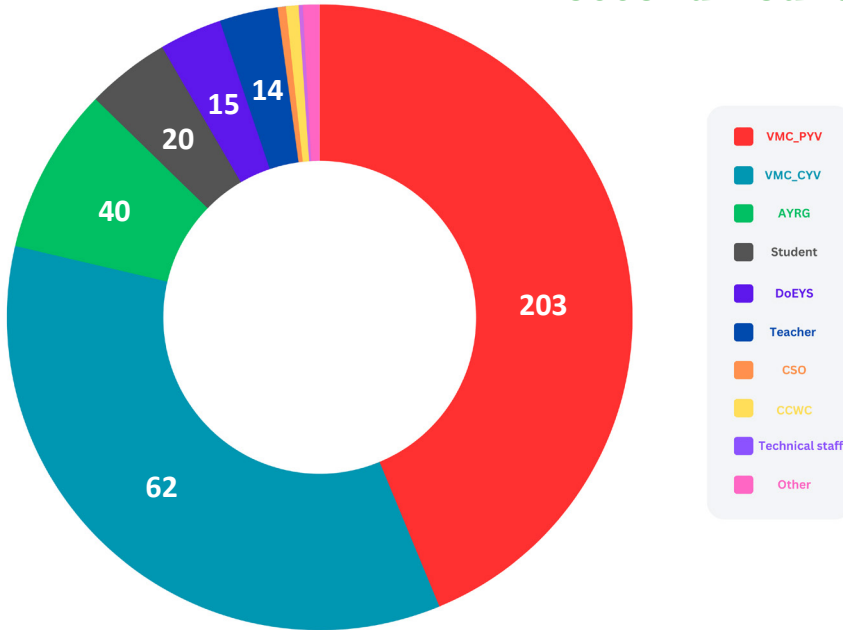
- ? How**
have the VMC and AYRG operated to build youths' skills and community development, including climate change? How has digital technology been used in that process?
- ? How**
much has digital literacy been promoted among youth volunteers nationwide? What gaps are there to further improve?
- ? How**
have VMC and AYRG youth volunteer-led projects contributed to community development, especially in areas of green development and climate change?
- ? What**
additional activities and improvements should the VMC and AYRG consider to improve their impacts on youths, the community, and the capacity of the General Department of Youth of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and other partners?

Respondents

First Round



Second Round



Provincial Youth Volunteer (PYC); Capital Youth Volunteers (CYV); Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sport (DoEYS); Local Stakeholders (LS)

Key Research findings

Youths' capacity development

Finding 1

13 key activities have been identified in the program implementation process that benefit youth skills and capacity development.

Training soft skills

Training hard skills

Providing opportunities for youths to gain new knowledge

Providing new knowledge in terms of science and technology

Creating participation opportunities for youths

Establishing workshops

Empowering youths to make decisions, participate, and express themselves

Providing new experiences

Creating opportunities for youths to develop themselves

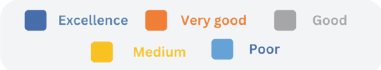
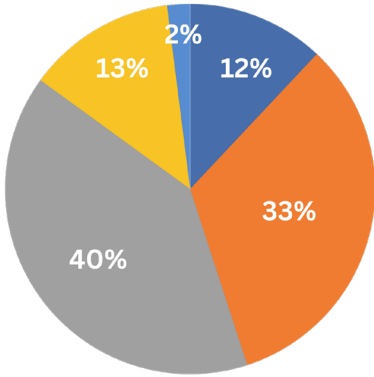
Providing opportunities for youths to face and solve problems

Providing opportunities for youths to express themselves

Providing opportunities to participate in national and international programs

Providing opportunities for youths to participate in community development

Overall rating from females on 13 key activities



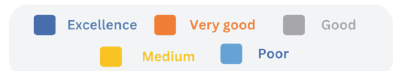
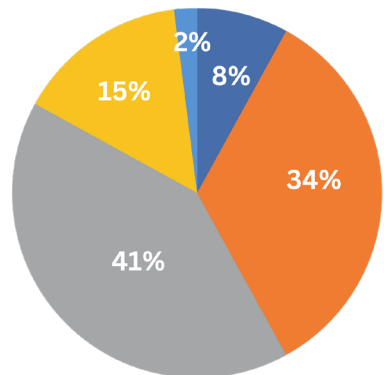
The top three "excellent" activities for females

- 1 Providing opportunities for youth to participate in community development
- 2 Creating opportunities for youth to develop themselves
- 3 Providing new experiences

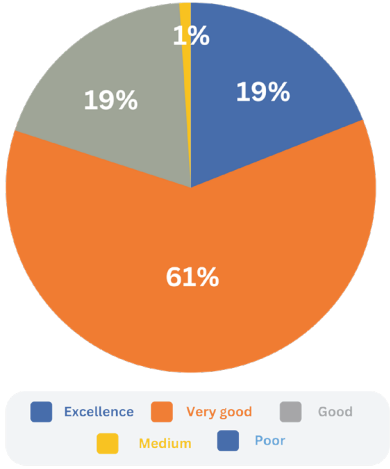
The three "poor" activities for VG

- 1 Training hard skills
- 2 Providing new knowledge in terms of science and technology
- 3 Creating participation Opportunities for youths

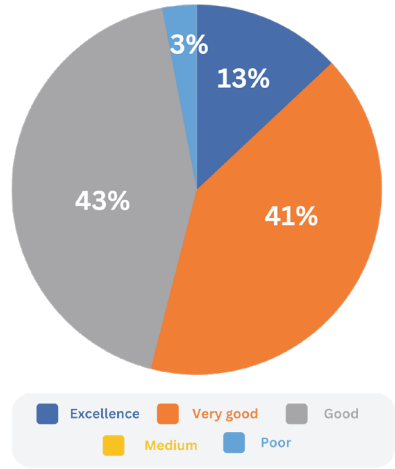
Overall rating from Vulnerable Group 13 key activities



Youths' capacity has been developed and improved through VMC on 13 key activities



Youths' capacity has been developed and improved through VMC (Endline)

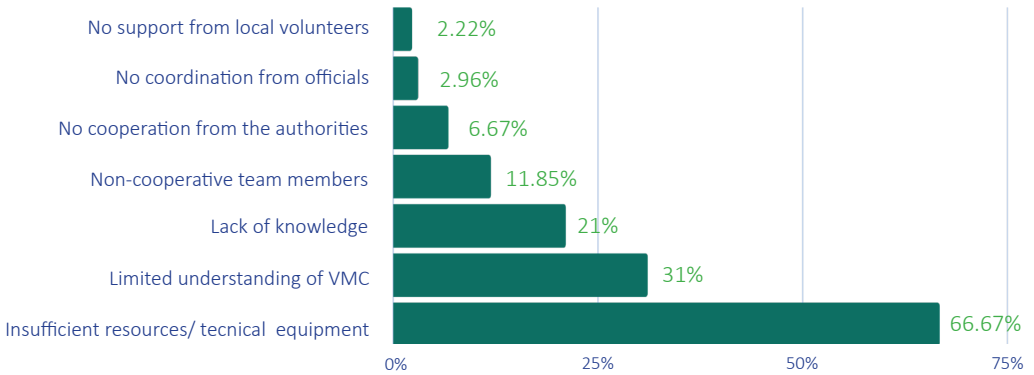


Finding 2 *20 skills have been identified that the youth volunteers obtained from the program.*

Communication skills	Critical thinking skills	Teamwork skills
Microsoft word	Management skills	Microsoft PowerPoint
Problem-solving skills	Microsoft Excel	Leadership skills
Social media skills	Photography skills	Video recording skills
Facebook page management	Google form	Zoom
Google meet	Google my map	Resource mobilization skills
Computer skills		Administrative skills

VMC and AYRG designed core courses to offer trainings for youth volunteers/networks before commencing their project proposal and implementation. The skills identified by the respondents mostly matched courses offered by the programs, baseline, and endline surveys of the VMC. It showed that pre-placement training courses would be well-performed to equip youth volunteers with some basic skills to be able to use during their placement.

What challenges did you face while working with the VMC?



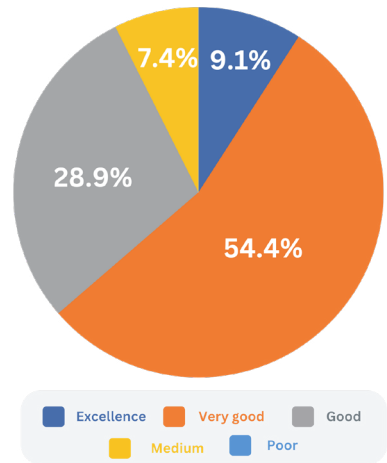
Finding 3

8 basic digital skills have been identified that the youth volunteers obtained from the program.

8 basic digital skills

- 1 Conducting online meetings
- 2 Communicating online
- 3 Typing documents and project proposal
- 4 Recording videos for a project presentation
- 5 Being able to use Google for research
- 6 Using Google Maps to show the project location
- 7 Promoting projects on social media
- 8 Preparing slide presentations

What do you think have the VMC and AYRG achieved in terms of digital literacy for youths?

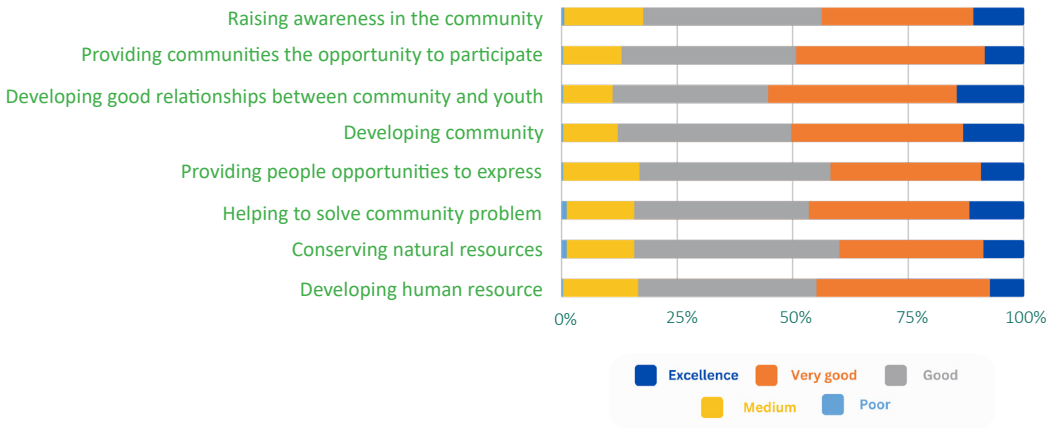


Youth Capacity Development

Finding 4

8 key activities have been identified that were perceived to benefit community development.

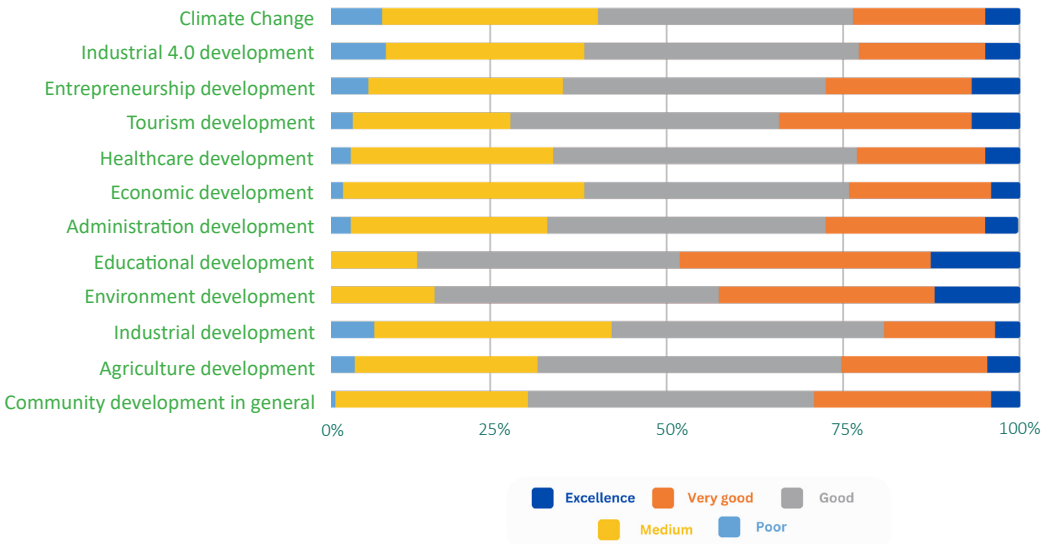
In your opinion, to what extent has the VMC or AYRG contributed to the following activities for the community?



Finding 5

10 areas are identified that have developed through the youth volunteers of the program.

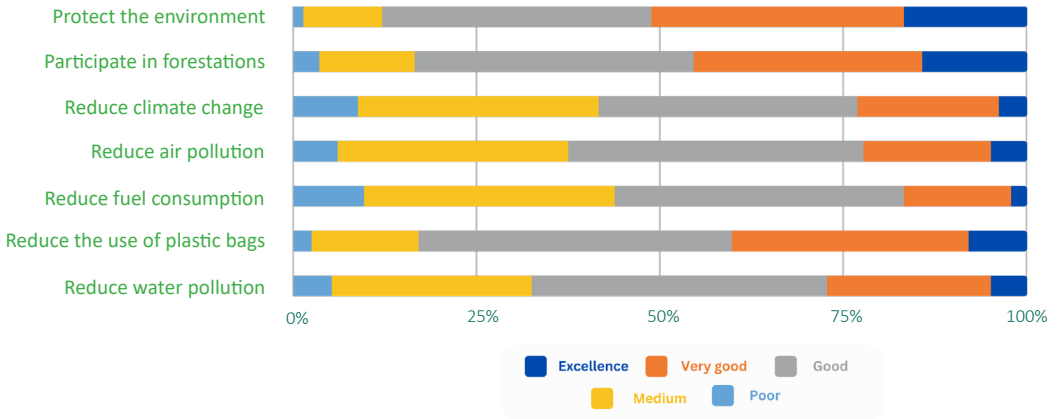
In your opinion, to what extent has the community received the following developments from the VMC or the AYRG?



Finding 6

7 key activities were identified that have contributed to mitigating climate change in the community.

To what extent have the VMC or the AYRG contributed to the following activities in community development on climate change?

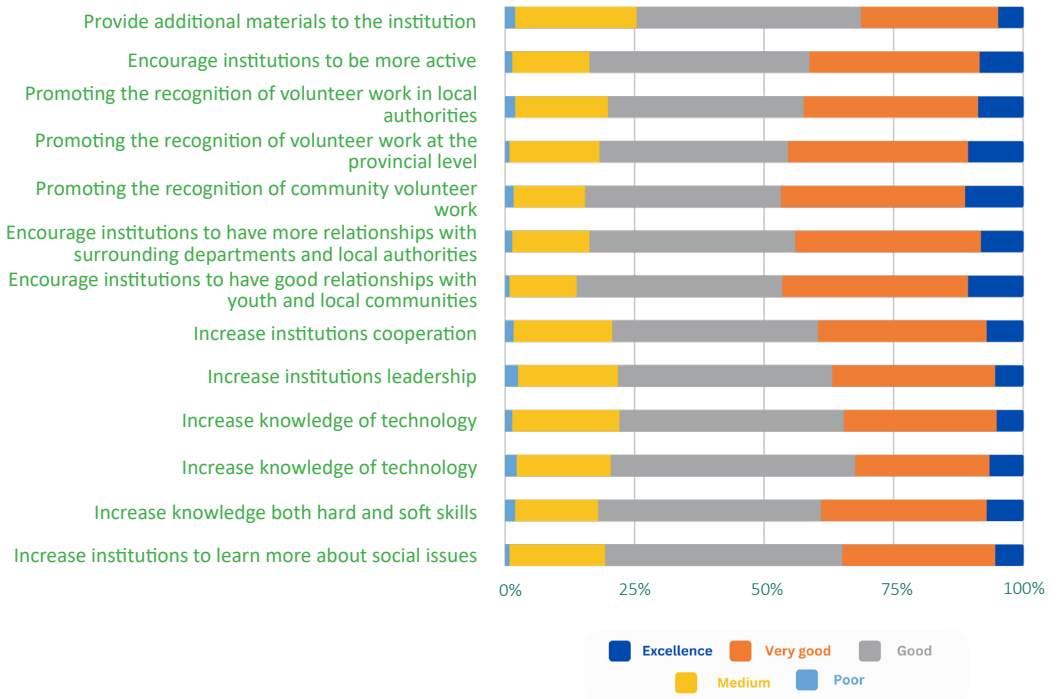


Institutional Capacity Development

Finding 7

14 key activities have been identified in the implementation process of the program that benefit institutional capacity development.

In your opinion, what level of activities have the VMC or AYRG created for the institutions?

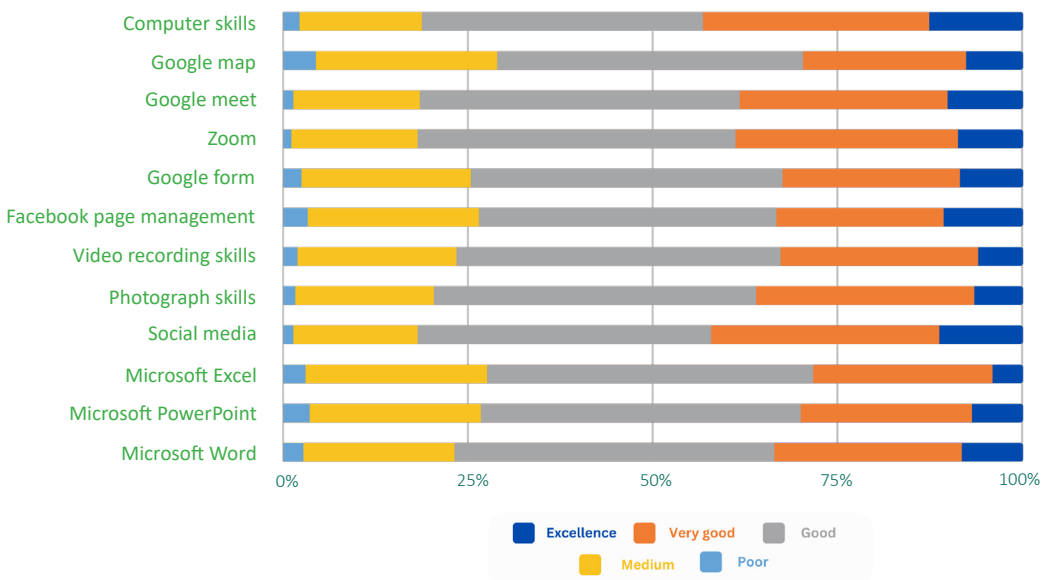


Finding 8

12 digital skills were identified to contribute to institutional capacity development.

- The top three “excellence” skills included: 1). computer skills, 2). social media, and 3). Facebookpage management.
- Presently, VMC uses a Facebook page, website, Google Maps, YouTube, and Telegram to communicate and promote the program.
- However, there were still many challenges in introducing new technology to the institutions, both at the national and sub-national levels. The three main challenges were: 1). technology mindset, 2). human resources to manage and maintain, and 3). financial resources.

In your opinion, to what extent did the institution acquire the following skills from the Volunteer for My Community (VMC) Program or the AYRG?



Digital integration in VMC and AYRG

Digital integration in the VMC has been introduced gradually since the program’s inception, with some basic computer skills. By 2019, provincial youth volunteers had developed their project proposals using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint for project presentations. Social activities were disrupted during the pandemic, and the VMC was implemented entirely online. By 2022, it had implemented a hybrid system where some key activities were conducted online.

Digital knowledge is an essential factor in promoting youth participation throughout the country and promoting changes and impacts in the community. However, there were still many challenges to introducing new technology to the institutions at both national and sub-national levels. The three main challenges identified were: 1) a technology mindset, 2) human resources to manage and maintain, and 3) financing

Based on the Digital Score for VMC, 43% of program implementation has been done online and 57% in-person, compared to 53% online for AYRG and 47% in person.

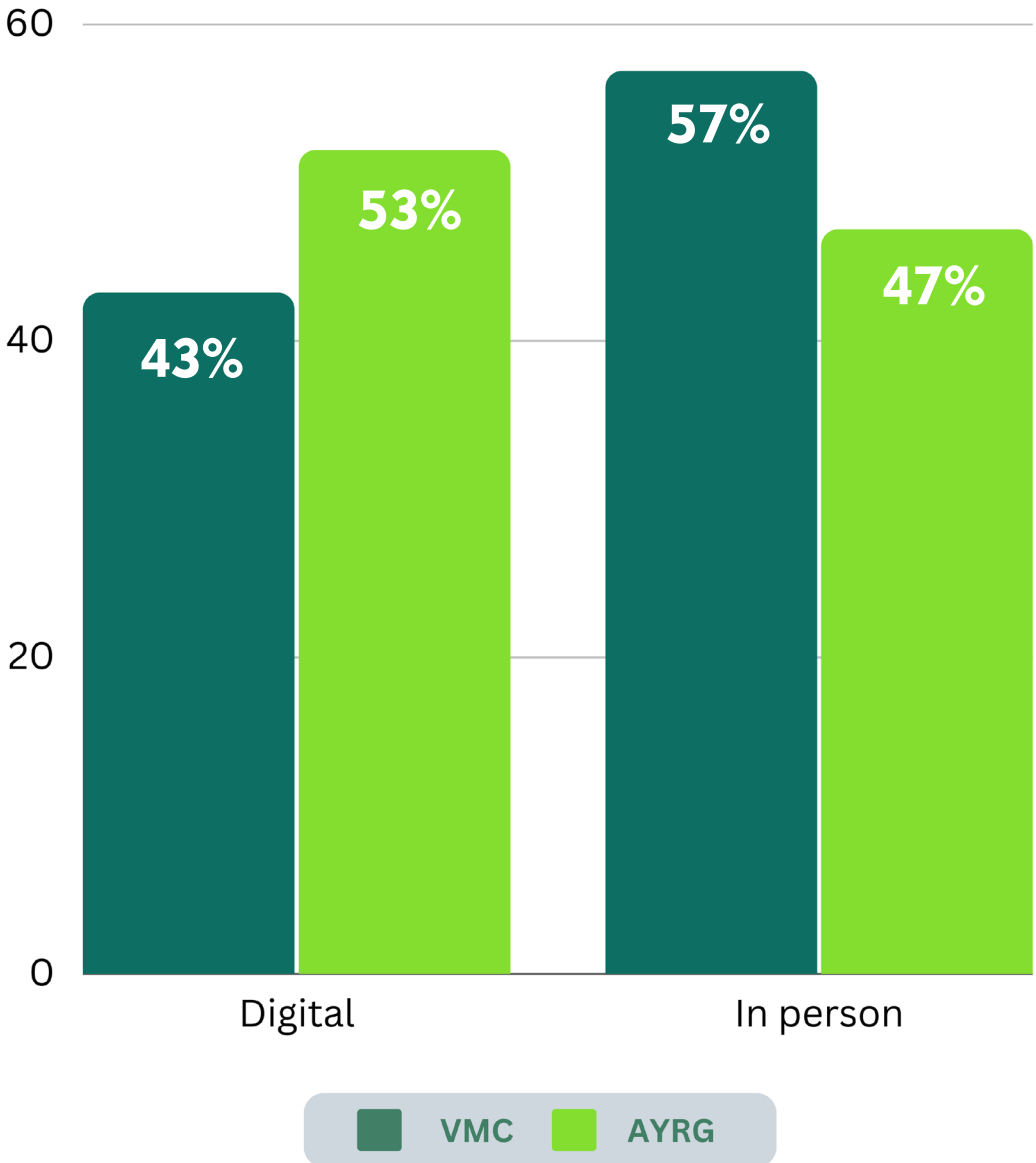
VMC

1	Recruitment of Capital Focal Volunteers
2	Training official and Capital Focal Volunteers
3	Provincial Authority Recognition
4	Recruitment provincial youth volunteers
5	VMC National Training for Capital Focal Volunteers and Provincial Youth Volunteers
6	Project Proposal preparation by the provincial youth volunteers
7	Regional training and revision of projects documents
8	Projects implementation, reporting and support form the ministry
9	Evaluation and selection of the best project at the best project at the provincial level
10	Evaluation and Selction of the country's annual best projects
11	Certificates and Recognition
12	M&E and reflection

ARYG

1	Membersip expansion
2	Annual meeting of AYRG and selection of AYRG steering committee
3	Support NGO parent organizations to strengthen the function of ARYG
4	Build the capacity of AYRG members and their cluster group members
5	Support ARYG members to attend relevant meetings, workshops, dialogue, discussion, and forum
6	Annual meeting of ARYG to develop an adolescent statement, share lesson learned, and promote peer-to-peer sharing
7	Dialogue between AYRG and the movement to submit the adolescent statement
8	Meeting facilitation between AYRG and Minister/Chair of National Assembly/Senior Government offices to present the adolescent statement
9	Support AYRG to conduct awareness-raising activities as part of the Cambodia PROTECT campaign
10	Support adolescents to develop messages on MHPSS, GBV, VAC, and TVET to be disseminated through social media as part of the 16-day campaign
11	Peer-to-peer education activities in 6 target provinces to raise awareness on preventing and responding to VAC, child online protection issues, and child marriage
12	Youth prank during community event on VAC, parenting/child marriage, climate/environment
13	Provide small grants to AYRG and VMC programs to support innovative youth-led projects
14	U Report (youth engagement with UNICEF)
15	Quarterly/Annual report to update the progress of the project implementation

Digital integration in VMC and AYRG



DoEYS seemed to recognize the significance of technology, but the intention to learn and improve was still in question. Moreover, human resources to support the online system are challenging in the MoEYS and DoEYS. Lastly, finances are needed to run and support the online activities.

Recommendation

The digital environment is becoming increasingly important across most aspects of children's and youth's lives, including during times of crisis, as societal functions, including communication, education, government services, and commerce, progressively come to rely upon digital technologies. VMC and AYRG members are also using online platforms and need training on how to use social media privacy settings to keep their pictures and personal information safe, how to set a stronger password to protect users' accounts, and how to understand and avoid the practices of online predators. This includes training on how to report risky or abusive content to social media platforms so that appropriate actions can be taken.

The five categories below were recommended by VMC and AYRG members. The recommendations call for both technical and resource (human and financing) support and key interventions from key ministries, local authorities, schools, teachers, youth themselves, parents, civic societies, individual expert, donors, development partners, and UN agencies.

Training

- Conduct more training/workshops for youth volunteers to have sufficient skills to work and develop the communities more effectively.
- Strengthen training on new knowledge in terms of science and digital technology.
- Strengthen training on Microsoft Office, critical thinking, administration work, and Google Maps.
- Develop a standard training curriculum and convert those courses into an online platform.

Explore Opportunities and Resource Support

- Provide opportunities for youth volunteers to participate in national and international events/programs.
- Support adequate financial support for youth volunteers to run their projects.
- Support technical and digital equipment for volunteers to access online trainings and run projects.

- Consider having more focus on climate change, green development, and skills for volunteers and volunteer-led projects.
- Continue to review and update the VMC manual and tools following the evidence from the implementation and global standard for volunteer for development.
- Play a role in facilitating all development partners (DPs) and organizations working on volunteerism to work together to bring change in the communities through volunteering work.
- Consider partnerships with DPs and own income generation to ensure the sustainability of the program.
- Integrate and introduce technology to young people and rural youth is vital and, the program should consider providing computers and other device to support them.

Strengthening and Networking

- Strengthen the quality of pre-placement training courses and the induction system to ensure that youth volunteers have enough knowledge about the program to be able to work with the local communities and authorities, especially soft skills.
- Strengthen the provincial volunteer recruitment process to promote “inclusiveness” by encouraging youths from various groups to take part, including person with disability, LGBTIQ, indigenous, and vulnerable groups, etc.
- Strengthen online support mechanisms for volunteers and the community.
- Conduct an annual reflection meeting to document the achievements and lessons learned from all provinces and youth volunteers.

Evidence and advocacy

- Influence the development of the standard volunteering framework in Cambodia to ensure the impact and development of the volunteering work. Moreover, it ensures that the duty of care is fully provided to the volunteers and communities.
- Generate and using the evidence from VMC and AYRG program implementation and core principles/guidance from the global standard for volunteering for development to localize or develop national volunteering standards to promote and guide quality volunteering practice and volunteering recognition in Cambodia.
- Advocate with MoEYS and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) to allocate more budget to support the VMC program.

Development of the related databases and guidelines

- Develop a recruitment process for NGOs' parents.
- Develop the VMC strategic and management guidelines.
- Develop an annual report template to showcase the program's achievements.
- Develop and standardize duties of care for volunteers as guided by the Global Volunteering Standard.
- Develop an online certificate that all volunteers can download from the system at any time.
- Develop an AYRG implementation guideline.

The Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC-Cambodia) is a non-governmental organization that has a mission to “realize the rights of children through upholding the accountability of duty-bearers to implement policy commitments and increase investments to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of children.” CRC-Cambodia works to promote and protect children’s rights, including advocating and ensuring support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) through awareness-raising, monitoring its implementation, cooperating with member organizations, and networking with relevant agencies.

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