



# Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia

## Learning Brief

21 May 2025, Phnom Penh



# Outline

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- Introduction
- Summary of presentation on Emerging Insights and Experiences from the Ponlok Chomnes Baseline study
- Cases from Ignite Talks
- Reflections on Inclusive Practices: Key Takeaways
- Feedback from Participants
- Questions asked about the Ponlok Chomnes program and answers



## Introduction

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RIVERSIDE HOTEL

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21, 2025 from

# Ponlok Chomnes Learning Event

- Held on 21 May 2025 in Phnom Penh
- Supported by the Australian Government
- Implemented by The Asia Foundation
- 127 participants (7 people with disabilities and 51 women) from the government, research institutes, universities, NGOs, civil society, and the Australian Embassy.
- Participants engaged in:
  - ✓ Ignite Talks featuring youth-led participatory action, research approaches, inclusive dialogues, and youth in urban policy.
  - ✓ An interactive Exhibition Fair showcasing research, communication, and social inclusion initiatives
  - ✓ Real-time reflections with participants through an interactive survey session to collect feedback and inputs
  - ✓ Deep-dive discussions with partners on program activities





# From Baseline to Practice: Emerging Insights and Experiences

Australian Aid   The Asia Foundation

## Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia

Engaging Cambodia's knowledge sector actors to increase evidence-based and inclusive policymaking.

**Phase 1** 2019-2023

Enhancing the capacity of the knowledge sector institutions

**Phase 2** 2023-2027

Supporting policy processes are based on diverse evidence and informed by inclusive dialogue

Integrating gender equality, disability and social inclusion, and climate change considerations

-  Credible and diverse evidence
-  Effective and accessible communications
-  Inclusive dialogues
-  Substantial engagement of women and marginalised groups



# Where we started: Baseline study results from 2023

## Some highlights from the baseline study:

- From the 25 reports, articles and briefs (published between 2022-2023), less than 20% of publications have women as first authors
- From these 25 publications, only 19 % met accessibility benchmarks based on an accessible publication checklist
- Heavy reliance on text-based formats, with limited effort toward multimedia or inclusive communication (none of these research publications turned into multimedia)
- Inclusive dialogue practices are limited (of the 15 dialogues assessed with 78 speakers, 19 were women speakers)

## The need for inclusive research, communication and dialogues:

- Need for more systematic efforts to improve gender balance in authorship
- Need to systematically engage underrepresented groups in policy dialogues.
- Need to ensure researchers adopt inclusive practices

# Where Ponlok Chomnes II is now

Increased focus on inclusive research through 12 policy issues



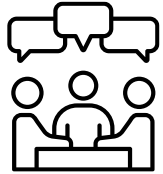
**Inclusive research outputs improved:**

38 publications produced in 2024; 34% had women as first authors



**GEDSI integration strengthened:**

GEDSI integration training, checklists, guidelines and tools developed and tested



**Inclusive dialogue participation expanded:**

31 policy dialogues in 2024 engaged 1,990 participants  
39% women and 3% from other underrepresented groups



## Ponlok Chomnes supported projects by sector:

### Climate Change

Migration, livelihoods, climate-resilient agriculture, social protection

### Inclusive development

Inclusive education, rural development, governance, community engagement



### Open governance and data

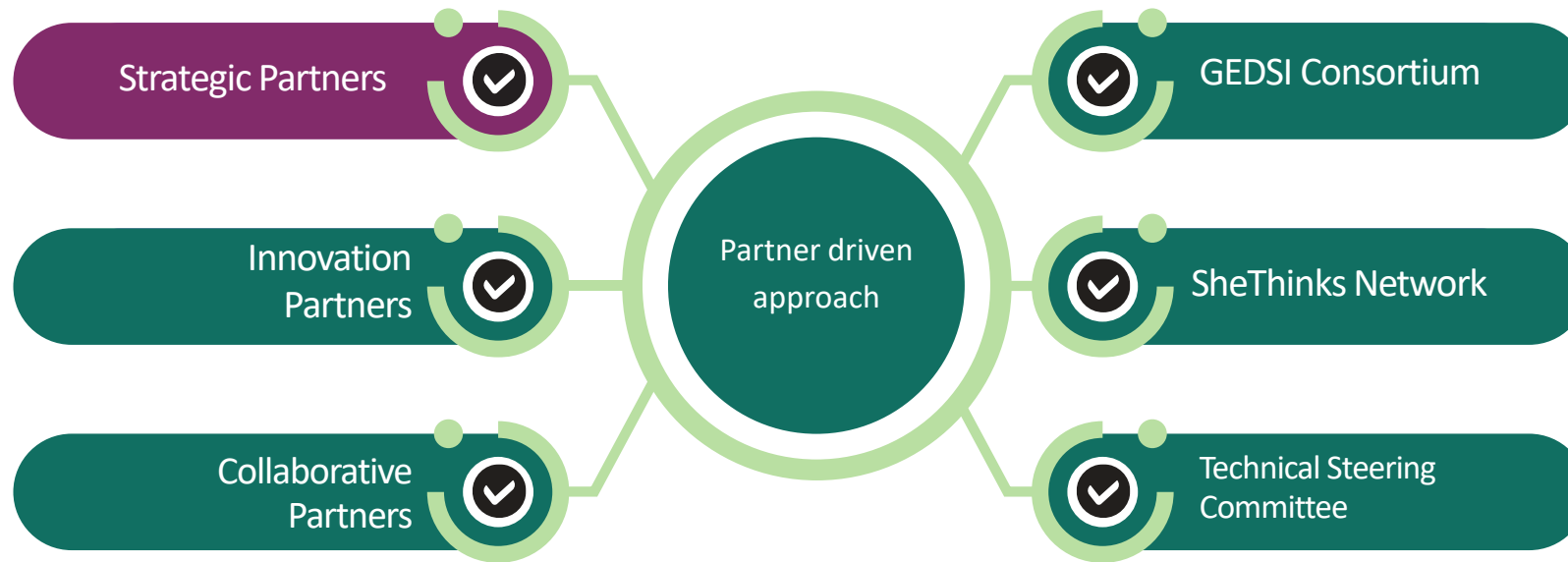
Open data, subnational budgeting and planning, statistical development

### Youth and women empowerment

Young and inclusive research fellowships, youth participation



# Partners at the heart of the Ponlok Chomnes Program



Evidence of government institutions proactively consulting data produced by **Strategic Partners**



**Trialling different communication formats** communicating findings in a more **strategic** way



Promoting **collaboration between government and research think tanks** through Policy Engagement Fund and other small funds



Partners **trialling different models** of inclusive policy dialogues





# Cases from Ignite Talks



# Empowering Youth in Research and Local Development

Presented by Il Oeur, Analyzing Development Issue Center (ADIC)

[Learn more](#) about ADIC work under Ponlok Chomnes



# Empowering Youth in Research and Local Development



- ADIC equipped young people with action research and data collection skills, enabling them to develop evidence-based messages that reflect real community needs.
- Training youth in research methods deepens their ability to engage with local stakeholders, not just as observers but as contributors in the data and analysis process.
- Through mock activities with commune councils, students gained hands-on experience with local planning processes, particularly the commune investment plan.
- Even while in school, youth can participate in community development by engaging through existing mechanisms like commune meetings, demonstrating that age and student status need not be barriers.



An aerial photograph of a coastal village. In the foreground, there are several houses with bright blue and red roofs. A dirt road winds through the village. In the background, a large body of water stretches to the horizon, with a few small boats visible. The sky is overcast.

# Stakeholders and Approaches to Participation

Presented by Sam Chanthy, National Institute of Social Affairs (NISA)

[Learn more](#) about NISA work under Ponlok Chomnes



# Stakeholders and Approaches to Participation: *Case Study on Cash Transfer Programs and Adaptation to Climate Change in Coastal Cambodia*



- Effective research for policy should begin by identifying key stakeholders, selecting appropriate methodologies, and mapping relevant activities — ensuring the process is structured and intentional.
- Involving stakeholders throughout the research process— especially early on—helps ensure they are informed, invested, and more likely to use the findings in policymaking.
- Policymaking benefits from engagement that is not one-off. Maintaining communication with respondents and stakeholders throughout enables iterative input, strengthens ownership, and enhances relevance.
- Research should be communicated in formats appropriate to different target groups—community members, policymakers, or civil society—to improve understanding and reach.
- When stakeholders are well-informed, they can contribute based on their expertise and roles, enhancing the likelihood that policy will reflect both evidence and context.





# Inclusive Dialogue Guideline Development Process

Presented by Mean Vibolratanak, Cambodian Disabled People Organisation (CDPO)  
and Chhun Chakriya, Women Peace Maker (WPM)

Learn more about [CDPO](#) and [WPM work](#) under Ponlok Chomnes







## Inclusive Dialogue Guideline Development Process

- Ensuring open and meaningful participation by marginalized groups is essential so they have equal opportunities to express their concerns, needs, and perspectives in the policymaking process.
- Effective dialogue guidelines are “a living document” that evolves with new learnings and can be tailored to local contexts and shifting dynamics.
- Developing inclusive guidelines requires working with a diverse range of actors such as research institutions, civil society organizations, and peer reviewers from frontline implementers to leadership levels.
- Validating guidelines through consultation with communities ensures they are grounded in real-world needs and increases buy-in from those most affected.
- Piloting the guidelines in real dialogue settings, using tools like checklists and structured observation, provides practical feedback for refining the approach.





# Youth's Engagement in Urban Policy & Design

Presented by Ses Aronskda, Future Forum

[Learn more](#) about Future Forum work under Ponlok Chomnes





## Youth's Engagement in Urban Policy & Design

- Decisions made today will shape the world youth inherit—engaging them early ensures long-term relevance.
- Activities like policy walks, community observation, and co-design roundtables allow youth to engage in practical, solution-oriented ways.
- Using communication tools strategically helps youth voices reach broader audiences and influence public discourse.
- Future Forum blends bottom-up community initiatives with top-down policy engagement to create lasting change.
- The research on urban walkability contributed to the development of Phnom Penh Walk Street—demonstrating how youth-led, human-centered design can inform real policy outcomes.





# Reflections on Inclusive Practice: Key Takeaways





# Inclusive and Diverse Evidence

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- There is a need to shift from backward-facing research toward more forward-looking approaches. Research that focuses too heavily on past issues can lead to policy responses that feel outdated.
- It is important to produce actionable, not just descriptive research.
- Budget and time constraints often prevent the full integration of GEDSI principles.
  - There is a need for dedicated inclusion fundings or supplementary budgets to support broader participation and more inclusive research practices.
  - Inclusion in research is time-consuming; therefore, stakeholders should be identified and the research scope clearly defined before commissioning the research.
- Avoid personalizing research findings to prevent identity sensitivity.





# Inclusive Policy Dialogue

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- Go to the community and meet with them; consult them if you want their voices to be heard.
- Two aspects of inclusion to consider are: representation of diverse views—especially from those who are not regularly included—and accessibility.
- There is not only one way to conduct dialogues. For example, a policy walk—going to the place to observe, see real issues, discuss with people there, reflect, and co-design—can be effective.





# Accessible and Effective Research Communication

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- Short articles are more effective than long texts, as audiences prefer content with more visuals, videos, and audios rather than lengthy reading.
- Partnering with media outlets helps broaden reach, as people regularly consume news through those channels.
- To increase impact, participants suggested experimenting with alternative communication formats such as stage performances, videos, songs, and podcasts.
- Standard communication methods often overlook the needs of persons with disabilities. To ensure true accessibility, it was recommended to involve people with disabilities in the design of publications and websites, and to test materials with users before public release. Following the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) was also advised.
- There is a need for more research products available in the Khmer language to improve accessibility and local relevance.



# Partnership for Policy Engagement

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- Collaboration should start with small, actionable ideas and informal approaches.
- Engaging high-level government officials is most effective when supported by clear ideas and actionable proposals. This helps ensure discussions are constructive and aligned with policy priorities.
- Forming a civil society organisation working group with diverse members and expertise—independent of any political party—is recommended.





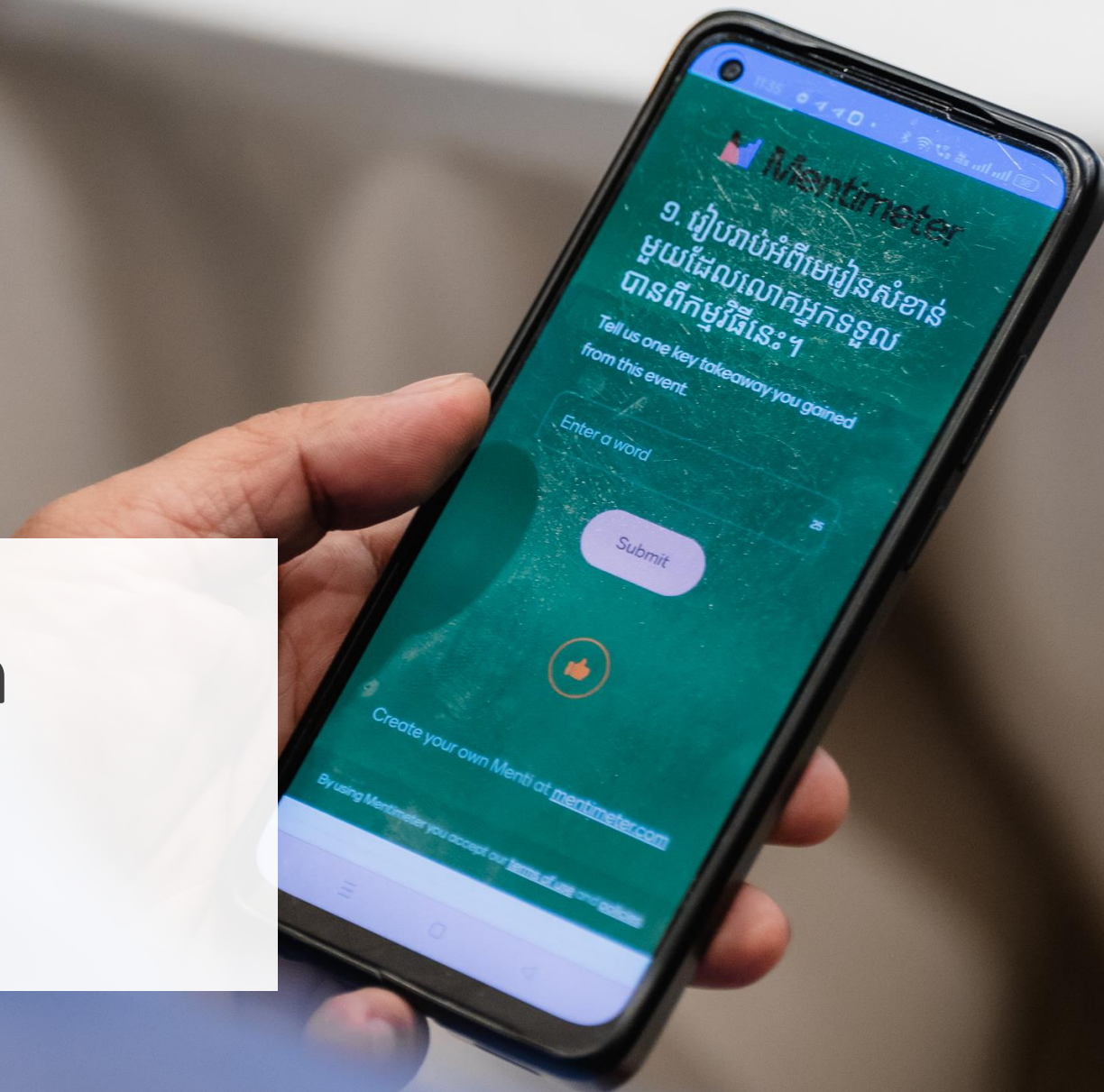
# Influencing the Policy Process

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- To increase acceptance, we need to identify the key stakeholders and engage policymakers through a participatory approach by engaging them throughout the process, reporting back, and don't wait until the final stage to involve them.
- We need to use existing government platforms.
- Engaging the right media is another way to influence policy.
- Empowering communities to own the research ensures relevance and sustainability.



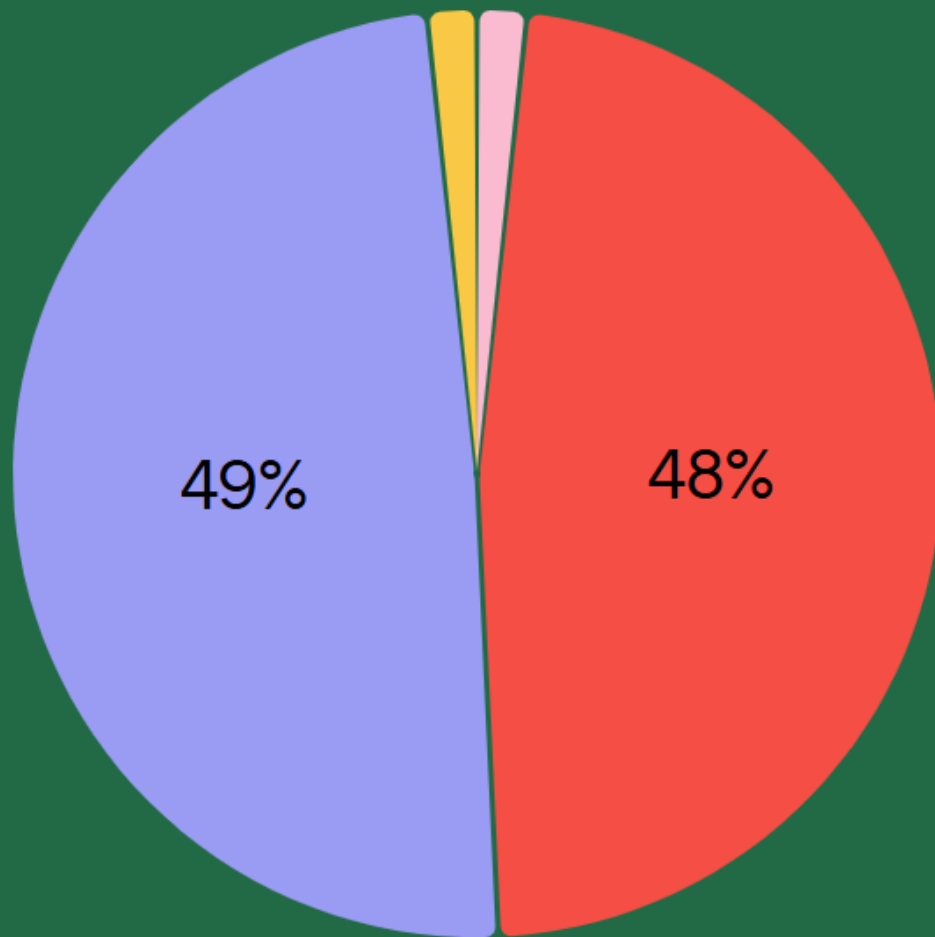
## Feedback from Participants







Tell us one key takeaway you gained from this event.



- 1% មិនមានអ្វីថ្មីនោះទេ/Nothing new
- 48% បានរៀនថ្មីមួយចំនួន ប៉ុន្តែភាគច្រើនខ្ញុំបានដឹងរួចហើយ/I learned a few new things, but most of it I already knew
- 49% ភាគច្រើនគឺថ្មីសម្រាប់ខ្ញុំ/Most of it was new
- 1% វាគឺថ្មីទាំងអស់សម្រាប់ខ្ញុំ/It was all new to me

How much of the information you heard today was new to you?



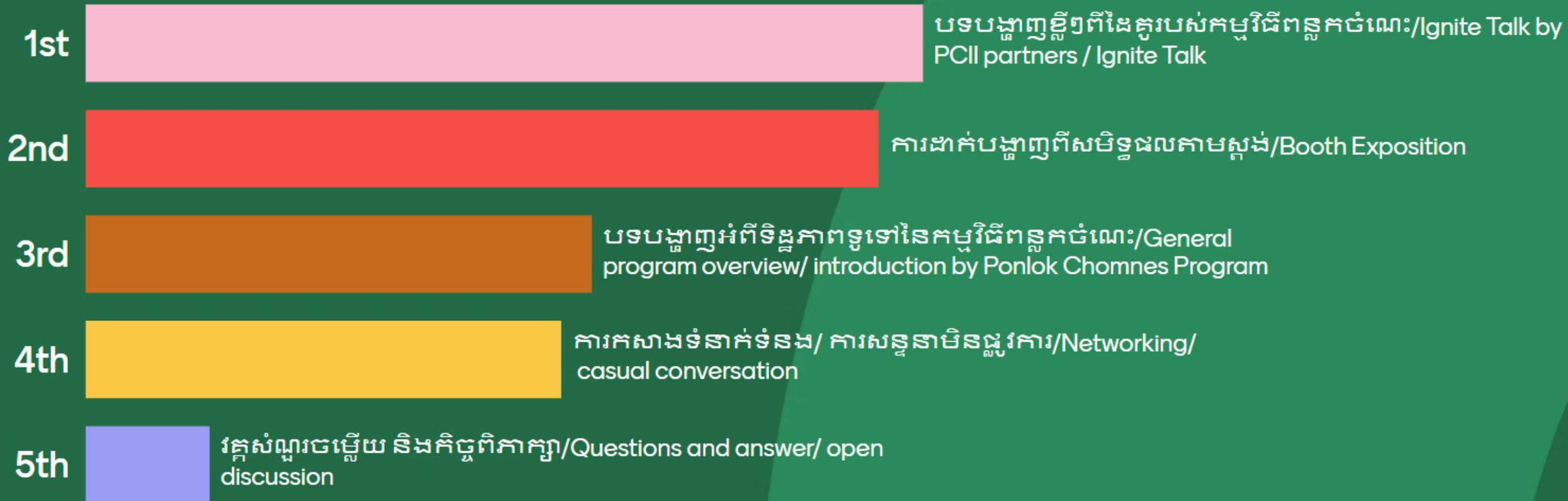


In which program area(s) have we made the most progress, in your opinion?



In which program area do you think the program activities are most relevant/ needed in Cambodia's current context?





Which sessions did you find most useful and interesting?



Questions received and answers by  
the Ponlok Chomnes team







# 1. Participants' suggestions for PCII

- Extend the time for Ignite Talks and booth sessions, adding more topics and booths, and creating space for follow-up questions and interactive discussions with speakers.
- Improving accessibility: more accessible venue (stage), open to public, engaging private sector, access to materials – slide presentations
- Participants expressed interest in future activities for PCII to consider, including:
  - *Hosting workshops at universities or higher education institutions,*
  - *Focusing on policymaking and disability-related topics,*
  - *Creating more opportunities for engagement with speakers and for university students to share their work, and*
  - *Increasing youth involvement by expanding fellowship opportunities.*

## 2. Participants Questions and PCII's Responses

1. **What are the next priorities of PCII?** *Answer: Policy engagement, accessible and effective communication of research, and promote inclusive research and dialogue practices in Cambodia.*
2. **How to apply research ethics in group discussions or Ignite Talks?** *Answer: Always seek consent before sharing personal stories or sensitive data. Respect confidentiality and avoid disclosing identities without permission. Please kindly read more on [Data Ethics Guideline](#) and [Data Ethics Toolkit](#) for the detailed guidance.*
3. **What are three GEDSI considerations in policy decisions?** *Answer: Identify who may be excluded, include diverse voices, and ensure accessibility for all. For more understandings, please refer to [inclusion strategy](#) and [inclusion, equity and diversity strategy](#) by the Australian Government. Please also contact Ponlok Chomnes team for inclusive policy dialogue guideline.*
4. **Is there support for those interested in research? Can individuals become Ponlok Chomnes partners?** *Answer: Support to individuals is available, primarily through institutions. While PCII does not directly fund individuals, it strengthens research capacity through partners. Individuals including those from marginalized groups may receive additional support to lead or engage in research and dialogue. Opportunities also exist through PCII-funded fellowships with CKS, Future Forum, and activities led by the SheThinks Network.*
5. **How can we engage with Ponlok Chomnes?** *Answer: Through research grants, fellowships, and participation in policy dialogue events. Stay connected through our communication channels for upcoming opportunities.*
6. **Any examples of policy influence?** *Answer: CPS research contributed to rural development policy (please click this [link for evidence](#)); Future Forum fellows contributed to urban policy design (please click this [link for details](#)).*

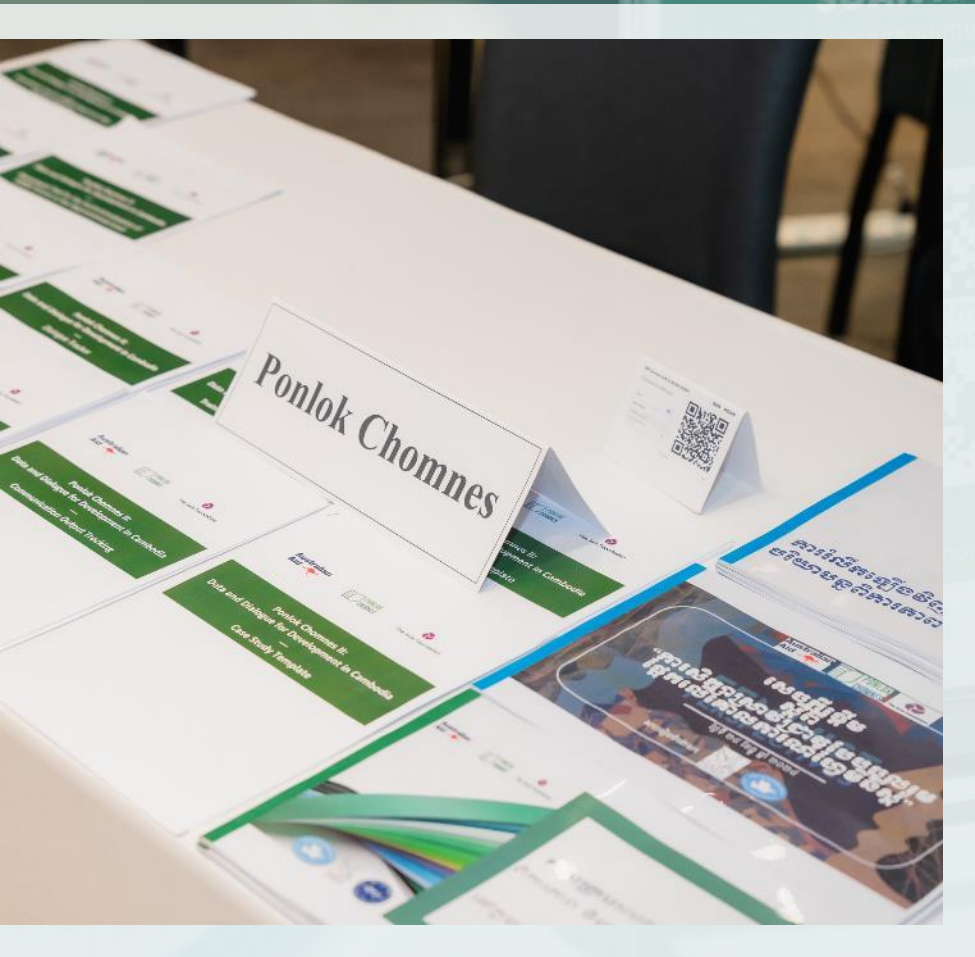




## 2. Participants Questions and PCII's Responses

7. Is there a research travel grant for students to conduct field research? *Answer: Not currently, but it's under consideration.*
8. How do you balance innovation with cultural and institutional contexts to ensure relevance and sustainability? *Answer: We follow locally led principles, allowing partners to use their expertise in ways aligned with national priorities and needs. We not only value new ideas but also care about local context.*
9. What happens to research results? *Answer: They're shared with stakeholders, including government and public to inform decisions and understandings. You can access our [knowledge products](#) and [our partners' work](#).*
10. Does PCII fund government ministries? *Answer: No direct funding to ministries. The support is provided indirectly via NGOs.*
11. Is illiteracy in rural areas relevant to PCII? *Answer: Yes. For example, [CPS works](#) on rural development-related research.*
12. What kind of content is shared on Ponlok Chomnes Telegram? *Answer: Research products, updates, communications materials, and partner highlights.*
13. Will guidelines under PCII be made public? *Answer: Yes, they will be uploaded to our website (please click [here](#)) once finalized.*





### 3. Event Resources

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- Please kindly access this [link to all materials](#)
- Please kindly access this [link to all photos](#)



# Contact and social media



Website: Policy Pulse



LinkedIn: @PonlokChomnes



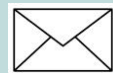
Twitter (X): @PonlokChomnes



Facebook: Ponlok Chomnes



Facebook: Australian Embassy, Cambodia



Email: ponlok.chomnes@asiafoundation.org

## Thank you!

And please follow our channels 😊

SCAN QR Code to visit the Policy Pulse Website:



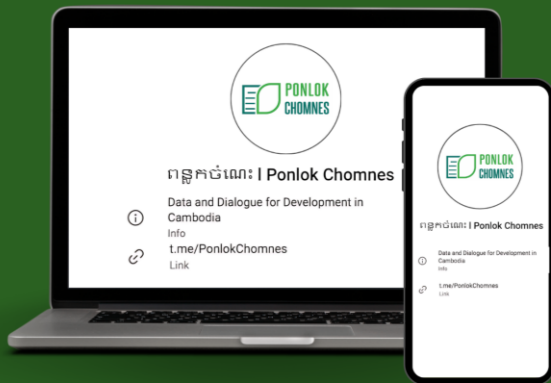
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Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia

## Phase II: 2023-2027

By 2027, select public policy decisions use  
**credible evidence** and involve **inclusive dialogue**

to achieve this outcome we are focused on:

Credible and  
diverse evidence

Effective and  
accessible  
communication

Inclusive  
policy dialogues

Meaningful  
engagement  
of women and  
marginalised groups

Integrating gender, disability, social inclusion  
and climate change throughout



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Thank you for all your  
participation

