

CAMBODIA

POPULATION IN 2016

15.762.370

SIZE

181,035 KM²

HDI RANKING 2016

143/188

INEQUALITY ADJUSTED HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT INDEX 2016

0,563

GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX 2016

0,479

CIVIC SPACE (CIVICUS MONITOR 2017)

REPRESSED

HDI - Human Development Index and its components, ranks countries by HDI value and details the values of the three HDI components: longevity, education and income.

IHDI - Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index - IHDI looks beyond the average achievements of a country in longevity, education and income to show how these achievements are distributed among its residents. An IHDI value can be interpreted as the level of human development when inequality is accounted for.

GDI - Gender Development Index, measures disparities on the HDI by gender. The table contains HDI values estimated separately for women and men; the ratio of which is the GDI value. The closer the ratio is to 1, the smaller the gap between women and men.

Civic space - The CIVICUS monitor assigns each country a rating on civic space based on constant analysis of multiple streams of data on civic space. The rating is open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed or closed. <https://monitor.civicus.org/Ratings>

Introduction

The Kingdom of Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia. Around 75% of population lives in rural areas (National Institute of Statistics, 2013).

Although Cambodia has experienced strong economic growth in the last two decades, people living in rural areas still face extreme poverty resulting in education and health challenges. Cambodia has signed and ratified many international conventions and covenants that promote economic, political, social and cultural rights. There is a framework of laws and policies to promote human rights inclusion for most individuals in Cambodia. However, implementation from the national to sub-national level is weak. Oxfam manages Voice in Cambodia focusing on all target groups in all regions with a strong focus on intersectionality.

State of affairs

Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953 and this was followed by decades of civil war. The fall of the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979) led to the establishment of the Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989), which was then renamed the State of Cambodia (1989-1993). The Paris Peace Accord was signed in 1991 and was followed by national elections in 1993.

In 2015, Cambodia attained lower-middle income status with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of US \$1070 (World Bank, 2016).

Although economic growth is strong and poverty is declining, the wealth gap between those living in rural and urban areas is growing. Education and health also remain key challenges in Cambodia. National laws and policies have created a framework for social, economic, spatial and political inclusion for most individuals in Cambodia.

Although 5,073 civil society organisations are formally registered, many are inactive. Historically, CSOs have been able to operate relatively freely to provide a diversity of social services to Cambodian citizens. However, recently, with the passing of the Law on Association and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO, 2013), tension has risen between some CSOs and the government of Cambodia, particularly those that focus on human rights and issues of transparency and accountability.

People living with disabilities

Although the Royal Government of Cambodia has instituted policies to provide equal services and access for people living with disabilities, there is a clear gap in the implementation of these policies. Additionally, there is a lack of consistency in the data on the number of people living with disabilities, which is challenging for planning by government institutions.

Commonly, people living with disabilities – both adults and children – are kept at home and are socially isolated. Name-calling and making fun of a person's impairment are commonly reported. Children with disabilities also face exclusion from school. People living with disabilities face challenges of stigma, discrimination, access to services and education, and physical accessibility. They also have a much higher unemployment rate than people in the general population – 10.32% for people with disabilities compared to 3.22% unemployed in the general population. A large majority of disabled persons work in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and informal sectors. Fewer disabled people work in formal sectors like industry and service compared to the general population (National Institute of Statistics, 2013).

A recent study on violence against women with disabilities compared to their able-bodied peers showed that women and girls with disabilities face more discrimination and negative attitudes, fewer opportunities to health care and education, and increased vulnerability to physical, emotional and sexual violence (Bailey & Nguon, 2014).

Persons with disabilities also commonly face barriers to political participation. While there is no official data on their participation in government (elected or civil servants), their lower educational attainment, low literacy and low socio-economic status contribute to their lack of political participation.

Sexual Minorities – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI)

There is no formal statistical information on the population of the LGBTI community in Cambodia. However, limited studies highlight their status in society and geography. While the Constitution of Cambodia guarantees equal rights for all, LGBTI people in Cambodia do not receive the same protection as others under the law. LGBTI people face significant stigma and discrimination in Cambodian society, especially if they 'come out' and live openly by expressing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This stigma and discrimination manifests through family rejection, forced marriages to the opposite sex, attempted 'cures' or 'correctiveness' for being LGBTI, controlling and restrictive behaviour and violence.

The police and local duty bearers openly discriminate and use the law to oppress, for example, the Safe Village-Commune/Sangkat Policy (2010), to detain LGBTI persons. The most at risk are those who identify as transgender. In some cases, there is literally no place for them to seek protection as the very people that should protect them are committing the crimes against them.

LGBTI people face economic hardship and unemployment because they cannot be open about their sexual orientation in the workplace and have limited job opportunities due to discrimination and exclusion from different employment sectors (Cambodia Center for Human Rights, 2010).

In addition to discrimination in employment, young LGBTI people are also more likely to drop out of school, mostly due to bullying, economic hardship and family rejection, further limiting their economic options (CCHR, 2012).

Women facing exploitation, abuse, and/or violence

Recent data shows that about one in five women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (MoWA, 2015). Cambodia has a policy framework that addresses discrimination, exploitation and abuse against women. Despite this, women and girls continue to be subjected to physical, emotional, sexual and economic violence that cuts across all divisions of income, culture and class in their daily public and private spheres. These high rates of violence are often from their intimate partners.

While the Cambodian National Police has made significant progress in establishing a structure to prevent and improve the police response to violence, concerns have been raised about the negative attitudes of authorities which bars women's access to the legal system (Brickell, Prak, & Poch, 2014) (MoWA, 2014). This was validated in the 2013 CEDAW report of Cambodia, which highlighted that these negative attitudes discourage women from taking legal action against perpetrators even when such recourse is warranted.

Over 84% of women aged 15 and over engage in the informal economy because of limited education and rudimentary work skills. Women's labour market participation is also constrained by time consuming domestic and care responsibilities. These constraints begin during childhood and continue throughout the life cycle (Asian Development Bank, 2013).

Furthermore, women in Cambodia remain under-represented in decision-making positions in politics, the public sector and the judiciary. Discrimination impacts the ability of women to be promoted and they tend to remain concentrated in sectors traditionally associated with women and at lower levels of government. Men continue to hold the vast majority of decision-making positions at all levels (MoWA, 2014).

Traditional social norms that disadvantage women are deeply rooted in Cambodian culture. Historically, these norms are prescribed in the 'Chbab Srey' or traditional 'Code of Women'. The Chbab Srey is the moral guideline which prescribes, through normative poems, proper behaviour for 'respectable' girls and women in Cambodian society. These norms, taught from childhood, perpetuate inequitable gender norms and attitudes of women and girls and men and boys in the family and in society. Boys are also taught the 'Chbab Proh' – the equivalent version for men – from an early age (Bricknell, 2007).

Age-discriminated vulnerable groups

The elderly: In 2008, persons aged 60 years old and over made up 6.34% or 848,911 persons. This is projected to increase to around 11% by the year 2030 (National Institute of Statistics, 2012), thus making older people the fastest growing population in Cambodian society (Zimmer & Khim, 2013).

Due to migration, many older people have become the heads of households in 'skip homes' where they are left to care for children and are unable to participate in primary generating activities. While there is a limited policy framework specifically addressing the needs and rights of older people, there are still gaps. For example, there is no pension or social security provided to civil servants in Cambodia, so there is no safety net for older Cambodians.

There is no stigma associated with ageing in Cambodia. Older people and elders are deeply respected in Cambodian culture; typically children are expected to care for and support their parents as they age (South Eastern Region Migrant Centre, 2011). However, Cambodian culture is changing rapidly and some of the cultural norms are shifting towards older people. Older people report discrimination as they age, particularly in relation to finding jobs, participation in household decision-making and in accessing health care. These participants also report feeling a sense of isolation from younger generations, especially if their children migrate for work or if they are too unhealthy to leave their homes.

Older people do have a voice in the current political climate of Cambodia, albeit small. The needs and concerns of older people seem to be better addressed at the local level than in national level processes. Most elderly are self-employed or are employed in the home, participating with other family members to generate income. Many also participate in secondary income generation activities like crop and livestock farming (National Institute of Statistics, 2012). The same type of economic opportunity available for younger people simply does not exist for older people.

In addition, older people report difficulties of accessing credit, loans and land ownership due to their age. Loans and credit have high interest rates, making them expensive and inaccessible. Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the Voice target groups revealed that many older people feel isolated from their communities due to health issues, poverty or heavy workloads at home. Participants expressed this in terms of illness and health care. Illness keeps many older people confined to the house and inadequate health care or no access to proper treatment due to economic status or distance to hospitals compounds this.

Young people make up the largest portion of the Cambodian population. Two out of every three people are below 25 years with more than 30% being between 10 and 24 years old making Cambodia one of the largest 'young' populations in Asia (UNICEF, 2009). Eight out of 10 (83%) young people reside in rural areas, with the densest concentrations being in the Plains and Tonle Sap regions (UNICEF, 2009). Over the past decades, migration, particularly of young adults to work in urban areas or to neighbouring countries, has grown resulting in a 'slow greying' of the rural population (MoWA, 2014).

During the consultations for the Voice context analysis, participants reported that, while both boys and girls can attend school, often the long distances and transportation requirements are a barrier to the participation of females in activities like clubs.

Child labour continues to be a challenge. Young people are taken out of school to do work which may be very dangerous. Young women in rural areas are more likely to be working than women of the same age in Phnom Penh. Children (especially girls) experience spatial exclusion – not being able to travel to school or meetings – because of distance and the perception that it is not safe for a girl to travel for fear of rape or robbery.

Indigenous groups and ethnic minorities

The 2008 census identified 1.34% (about 179,000) of the population (24 groups) as indigenous/ethnic minorities spread over 15 provinces (National Institute of Statistics, 2008).

Access to services such as health and education is a challenge for many in the indigenous communities, especially for those living in remote areas. Within the education sector, particularly in these areas, there is a higher dropout rate, greater gender disparity in school attendance, a lack of textbooks and a lack of teachers willing to teach. Often, classes are not taught in indigenous languages confining access to those who are fluent in Khmer (NGO-CEDAW, 2014).

Cambodian indigenous and/or ethnic minority people have different cultural practices, migration histories, patterns, means of living and sense of identity (Kirchner, 2015). Stigma and discrimination are common. Many of the indigenous people's customs and practices are different from Khmer society and are sometimes seen as less civilised, uneducated and simplistic. Indigenous people see themselves as different from Khmer society and, as such, the government has also considered these groups as separate (Chhim, 2005).

Political participation is a challenge for indigenous people and their fear of local authorities is common (Beban & Pou, 2014). They feel unrecognised and unsupported. Their conflict with the government and private sector is often over land issues, which is a highly politically charged issue.

The highest rates of poverty in Cambodia are in the northeast provinces where the vast majority of indigenous people reside (UNDAF, 2016). Job opportunities are low and dependent on land, making this population even more vulnerable to economic exclusion especially as they lose access to and control over their land.

Typically, the lack of trust in local authorities also transfers to the courts. Indigenous people do not utilise formal justice mechanisms favouring traditional means of conflict resolution. However, increasingly, communities are trying to use the court systems for land disputes, even though knowledge of these formal systems is still low (Chhim, 2005; Beban & Pou, 2014).

Intersections and linkages between groups

Gender inequality is a cross cutting issue among all the target groups, with increased vulnerability in each group for women and girls. Women in all the groups are more vulnerable, face higher rates of poverty, fewer economic opportunities, higher rates of violence, poorer health conditions and other vulnerabilities compared to their male counterparts. Older women face more economic hardships and health problems than older men, girls have less access to education than boys, indigenous women are less likely to hold leadership positions or have decision making powers compared to indigenous men. Likewise, transgender and lesbians face more violence than gay men and women living with disabilities are more likely to experience non-spousal abuse than their male counterparts.

Poverty and lack of economic opportunity

Although income poverty levels have fallen drastically in Cambodia, vulnerability to poverty, especially in urban settings, is increasing (Asian Development Bank, 2014). The literature and interviews reveal an intersecting vulnerability to poverty

experienced by all groups who commonly experience lack of access to job opportunities and income generation activities leading to economic exclusion.

State recognition and prioritisation

Older and younger people and people living with disabilities are prioritised through government policies and protections. This prioritisation and recognition from the state makes building alliances with these target groups and local duty bearers easier. However, state recognition does not always result in effective implementation of the laws and policies. Many of the policies created for these groups have not been implemented nationally or locally due to a low or lack of budget, support, resources, and/or trained or available human resources. This lack of implementation has resulted in the intersection of different types of exclusion for each group.

LGBTI persons and indigenous people/ethnic minorities are not fully recognised by the state or given autonomy to live freely. This manifests differently for each group and creates different types of exclusions. Both experience tension, mistrust, and sometimes violence from local duty bearers. LGBTI people often experience a sense of 'not belonging' and, in fact, being ostracised by family and community but, at the same time, also have a strong desire to be accepted and be part of Khmer society. Likewise, indigenous people/ethnic minorities see themselves and are seen by others outside their group as separate from Khmer society. They have a deep desire to freely practice their own customs and traditions.

Migration

Young adults are migrating in record numbers most commonly in their pursuit for work. Children are being left behind in the care of older people or are being taken out of school to work with their parents or to generate income themselves. Jobs and opportunities are drawing people to urban areas or to nearby countries. Conversely, people of indigenous communities feel the impact of migration as people migrate to their traditional lands in search of resources or to work in plantation farming as the forests are destroyed.

Members of all the Voice target groups commonly experience **stigma and discrimination**. This has a significant impact on people, ranging from social isolation and lack of access to economic opportunities to significant violence and abuse. Transgender people experience significant physical violence and abuse by the state authorities. Older people and people with disabilities experience social isolation, lack of economic opportunities and higher rates of abuse in the family. Young people experience stigma and discrimination if they are poor or a sexual minority. Indigenous people/ethnic minorities are seen as different from the larger Khmer society. Generally, all the groups face stigma and discrimination based on their status as part of the group.

Media

The influence of media on these target groups is varied. Media can be both a positive influencer by targeting change and increasing awareness of laws and policies or it can have a negative impact by promoting negative images or social norms and traditional stereotypes.

Negative impacts are particularly strong for LGBTI people and women facing exploitation, violence and/or abuse. The media has portrayed both groups negatively. Recently, The Asia Foundation engaged with the television industry to try to introduce programming with more positive content through the development of standards strengthening the policy environment.

There have also been positive uses of mass media, primarily for awareness-raising. These campaigns are important for the implementation of policies, as they raise awareness about a particular issue, such as the rights of victims and survivors, and can demonstrate pathways for responses and solutions by changing behaviours and policies.

Raising the issue publicly helps policy makers to understand that an issue is important. Most commonly, this method has been used in response to violence against women.

NGOs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Women Affairs, have carried out various campaigns such as 'The Good Men Campaign' addressing social norms with men who do not tolerate violence against women, 'Safe Migration Campaigns' addressing legal migration to prevent trafficking, 'Love 9' a multi-media messaging approach on sexual and reproductive health knowledge targeting men and 'Why Stop' addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. These are just a few examples of mass media campaigns that have used radio, television, and social media in a positive way. A recent study showed 48% of Cambodians accessed the internet from their smartphones, thus making the use of social media and internet based media campaigns useful for reaching groups and/or addressing negative stereotypes or gender norms (Phong, Srou, & Solá, 2016).

Academic Institutions

Currently there are 105 higher education institutions in Cambodia, of which 39 are public institutions. However, due to budget constraints, most universities do not conduct their own research as donors or NGOs commission most of it (The Asia Foundation, 2015). Academic institutions also engage through targeting change programmes at students. This has been a common mechanism, particularly on ending violence against women, where students are engaged in prevention activities and learning sessions. This shows that there is some influence from the academic community on these target groups that potentially could increase with more partnership and collaboration.

Civil society organising

While there may be 5,073 civil society organisations registered in Cambodia, many are not active. In 2015, the Law on Association and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) was passed after some opposition from the NGO community. This law limits the influence and regulates the functioning of civil society. It gives the government the jurisdiction to shut down or prosecute organisations for criticising the state (Sokheng & Holman, 2015). In short, as long as the work being done is not at odds with the government, CSOs can and do operate freely.

Building relationships and networks with the government at the national and subnational levels has achieved successful practices and advocacy gains. Members of the CSOs see themselves as a strong force for human rights and advocacy but also realise that they must work in certain political confinements to be effective. Local human rights organisations desire to form a network, however, their fear of repercussions as a result of the LANGO law, has meant this has been put on hold.