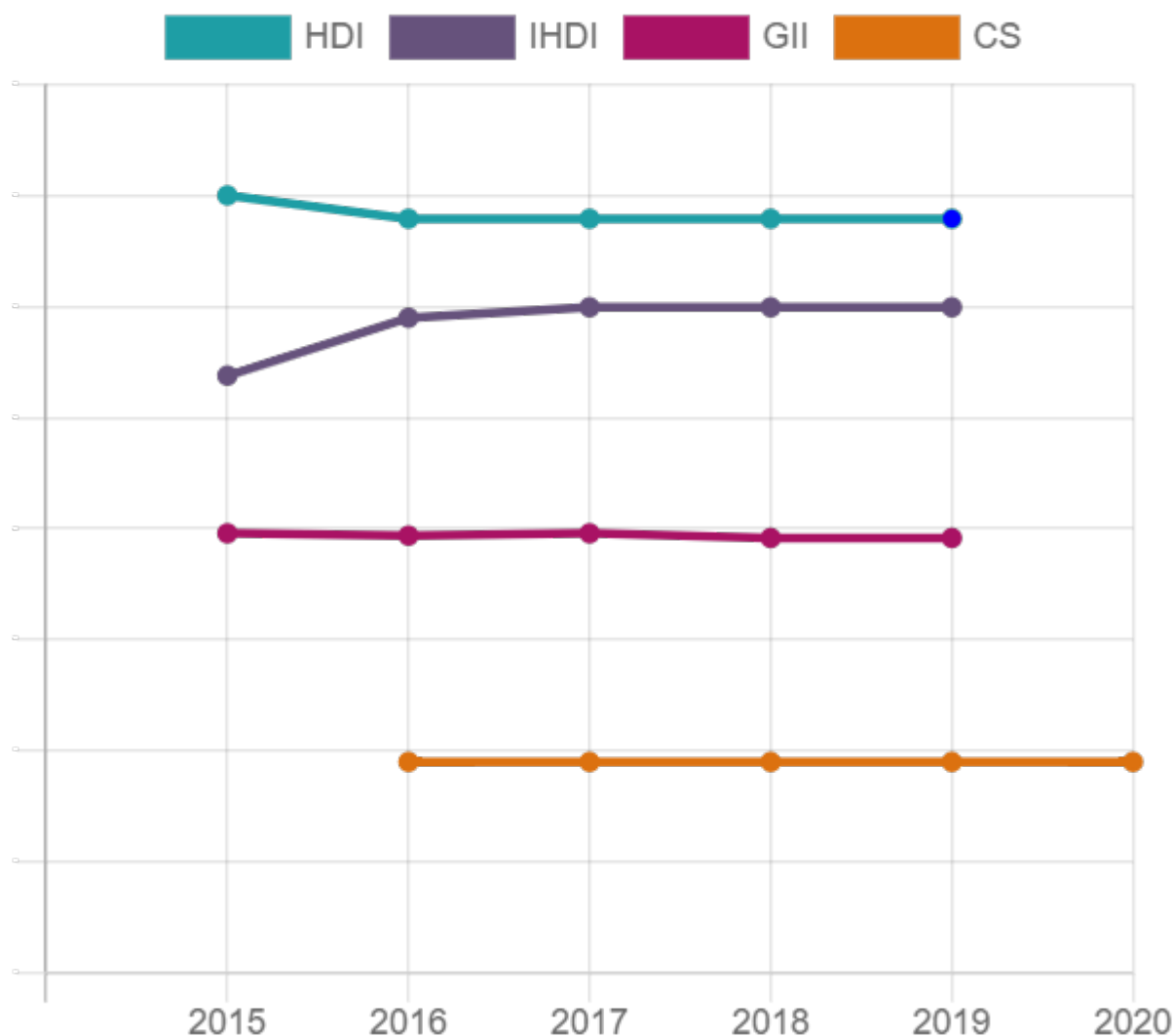


CAMBODIA

The Kingdom of Cambodia, commonly known as Cambodia, is one of the four Southeast Asian countries where Voice is active. Oxfam is coordinating Voice in the country. We live in a rapidly changing world - some changes may be for the better - others not so much. In order to continue to ground Voice in local lived realities, a country context analysis is organised every other year, engaging many stakeholders, grantees and rightsholders. The analysis is used to frame Calls for Proposals, to support the applications of grant-seekers and to advance the overall learnings. Below follows a summary of the exercise conducted in 2020, capturing the many views and perspectives of Cambodians. The summary is structured by presenting the big picture and slowly but surely to zoom in on the voices and aspirations of the rightsholders and to zoom out again by sharing the way forward for Voice. This page can also be downloaded at the bottom of the page. A full report and previous versions can be availed to you upon request.

Zooming out

The big picture



Human Development Index (HDI)

The Human Development Index is an index that combines data on life expectancy, education, and per capita

income to rank countries. While the overall HDI has been improving slowly over the last few years, Cambodia's ranking has remained the same between 2016 - 2019.

Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IDHI)

The IHDI measures the human development cost of inequality, or the overall loss to human development due to inequality. The closer to 1 the more equal a society is. The IHDI can inform policies towards inequality reduction. Inequality has been decreasing in Cambodia, albeit slowly. For some rightsholders group, such as the elderly this has not led to improved standards of living (yet).

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The GII is an inequality index, measuring the human development costs of gender inequality economically, health- and education-wise. The closer to 0, the better. Gender equality has only marginally improved over the last few years in Cambodia.

Civic Space (CS)

According to the independent Civicus Monitor which started in 2016, civic space continues to be Repressed in Cambodia. This is also because of restrictive NGO laws (LANGO), the State of Emergency Law and the draft Public Order Law. Opportunities for change continue to exist especially at local level as Voice grantees have shown.

Behind the numbers

Cambodia is at a turning point in 2020. The partial suspension by the European Union of the Everything But Arms (EBA) trade scheme is expected to further limit economic opportunities available to Voice rightsholder groups. At the same time, it is seen as one of the few levers for influencing the Cambodian government's adherence to human rights and civic space. There are however, opportunities to take advantage of some emerging changes. In particular, the government continues to move forward with the National Aging Policy and the National Social Protection Policy Framework, both of which provide further state support for elderly, women, and people with disabilities. How can rightsholder groups creatively make their own voices heard in this context?

Political shifts

The change of political landscape continues to hamper the space for influencing and amplify the voice of right holders with vulnerabilities. The invited space has seen as another important space at this crossroad – the CSOs leading by CSOs networks have used this invited space to advocate for the amendments of fundamental laws including LANGO, Trade Union Laws, Access to Information Laws, Tax Compliance Law etc. At the same time CSOs network and HR organisations have continued to claim for more space. Close monitoring of the changing spaces, enhancing strategic influencing by Voice grantees as well as engaging the broader CSOs network and alliance are importantly needed.

Economic shifts

Since 2018, Cambodia has been growing at an annual rate of 7%. The economy however is seen to contract by approximately 4.4% in 2020 as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the EBA withdrawal, mentioned above. Natural resources continue to be depleted at an alarming rate. Forest coverage has declined from 57% in 2010 to 47% in 2018, adversely affecting indigenous people who depend on it for their survival and subsistence.

Social shifts

Improvements have been reported in health, education, and other dimensions of human development, but there are still many people who are disproportionately affected by poverty, as well as gender-related disparities. Stigma and discrimination still remains high among all rightsholder groups in term of accessing employment, health care, education and civic participation. Regional and local migration of younger family members for work continues as a trend. This leaves older family members to care for their grandchildren and the work left behind, which are mostly smallholder farming and fishing.

(Visible) Power shifts

Working with rightsholder groups appears to bear low risk if they are involved on issues such as health awareness, education or vocational training. The risk increases if the work is critical of government policies or does not follow government regulations and guidelines. Attempting to resolve the conceptual and legal aspect of statelessness is a challenge, since it may not be considered in-line with existing Cambodian laws. There is also a prevailing bias against ethnic Vietnamese stateless people competing for jobs and livelihoods with ethnic Cambodian citizens. Women are directly and indirectly involved in changing policies which directly affect them. However, only the higher educated women are participating in public and national forums to express themselves. While the elderly can advocate for their benefits at the village or commune levels, it is difficult for them to connect with governments at the district, provincial, and national levels. More indigenous communities are aware of their rights and participate in activities to express their interests and claims to different levels of the government structure.

COVID-19

The adoption of the State of Emergency Law as a response to the pandemic provides the government with powers to impose restrictions on citizen movement, assembly and gatherings. It also applies to emergencies such as war, armed conflicts, and any threats to national security. People have been arrested for expressing their concerns about the pandemic and have been accused of spreading “fake news”. The economic losses from the pandemic have also increased concerns regarding financial debt from microfinance institutions. The average individual debt is already 3,320 USD or approximately twice the GDP per capita. Many rightsholders, especially in the informal sector, are unable to pay their loans because of movement restrictions, affecting the economic empowerment of all rightsholder groups. At the same time, the proposed 2021 government budget is half of what was planned for 2020 due to lower economic growth. Unemployment is expected to increase in 2020 to 4.8% without social protection measures in place. Young Cambodian migrant workers from neighbouring countries such as Thailand have returned due to massive layoffs. Local garment factories were suspended because of both COVID-19 and the EBA withdrawal, resulting in more than 150,000 young workers losing their sources of income. Still comparatively low compared to Cambodia’s neighbours, as much as 51% of jobs are considered vulnerable, meaning informal or not salaried. The pandemic and its implications make rightsholder groups even more vulnerable, by increasing stigma and discrimination against them, especially against the elderly and people with disabilities, who may be perceived as burdens to families during the crisis.

Zooming in

Voices behind the picture

There is limited outreach services to the homes and villages where **the elderly** are. The situation is made more challenging because of the lack of medicine supplies and dedicated counselors. Mostly it is the retired government employees who are members of Older People’s Associations (OPAs). This gives them more

opportunities to join social events and receive support from the government. **The youth's** role is somewhat limited within decision-making structures, where seniority or popularity prevails. The work towards building a youth movement for advocacy and policy change can be politicised, increasing the risks associated with it. The risks of working with **Indigenous People (IP)** is high, due to the contentious issues they face brought about by Economic Land Concessions (ELCs), as well as encroachment into IP areas by large-scale government projects. People advocating for their rights or demonstrating against the operations of the government or companies can easily be perceived as state antagonists. There is also increasing migration of non-IP into indigenous areas, who tend to sell the land for cash to buy modern equipment. Organisations of **LGBTI people** and other NGOs often focus their activities in the area of health and HIV/Aids prevention. They promote their own visibility for community acceptance, highlighting individual needs, and awareness raising on gender/sexual orientation. Their capacity for advocating on potential policy changes is not yet strong. There has been acceptance from local authorities as well as national recognition of LGBTI people's issues. The absence of a specific law for LGBTI groups however, makes local authorities reluctant to issue formal papers such as ID cards and other legal documents due to different understanding about sexual orientation/gender identity. Local authorities in some areas though follow suggestions from the LGBTI community. Despite various legal protection policies that were adopted, their implementation and access for **People with disabilities** remain limited due to the challenging political environment and limited resources. Government institutions are aware of the National Disability Strategic Plan (2019-2023) and the action plan to pursue implementation of the strategic plan is being finalised. Women with disabilities face additional difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which mental and physical violence have increased due to movement restrictions. The participation of women is most seen at the sub-national level, but limited at the national (policy) including decision making level. **Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence** (in particular sexual assault and/or domestic violence) are less likely to be protected by local authorities, unless the case is severe or continuous. Incidences of women experiencing violence among indigenous people appear to increase when drug use is involved. Women experiencing sexual violence is higher among the young. Women working in entertainment services face significant challenges related to accessing free public health services.

Their aspirations

Cambodia is moving in a positive direction with the adoption of policy frameworks on areas such as social protection, health, education, and other social services. All rightsholders desire a more inclusive implementation of these policies at all levels of Cambodian government, from the village to the national level. For example, persons with disabilities and indigenous youth want technical and vocational programmes at schools in order to increase their access to employment opportunities. Similarly, members of the LGBTI community want to include discussions about their community in secondary school textbooks. This sense of inclusion is broadened by rightsholders' wanting Cambodian society to recognise different groups within their community. For example, respect for the dignity of women also includes acknowledging the work being done by women in the entertainment services, women domestic workers, and women with disabilities in the informal sector. Even within civil society organisations, there is a need to show how their advocacies and campaigns bring in rightsholders and the voices that will ultimately be impacted by changes in policies. The elderly and the indigenous people's limited access to national dialogues can be alleviated with collaborations from larger organisations. The LGBTI community is looking for strategies to better link with each other and establish a common agenda.

Zooming out

Fostering change

This exercise has brought forward a number of issues of particular importance to Voice grantees and the

rightsholder groups they are part of or work with, particularly in terms of still weak organisation at the grassroots and lack of consolidated national organisations with links to the government and international organisations or networks. Furthermore, among the organisations and representatives studied, there is a lack of “champions” that are regarded as recognised leaders of any of the five rightsholder groups. Therefore, Voice will put a particular focus on the following strategies in the coming years:

- As the COVID-19 pandemic has highly impacted the socio-economic standing of rightsholder groups, Voice will announce at least one Call for Proposals (CfP) that focuses on access to resources and employment, particularly for women and girl from all rightsholder groups.
- As informally employed rightsholders are not included in the government’s National Social Protection Policy Framework (2016-2025), Voice will target an Influencing CfP on successful approaches to advocate for Social Protection schemes of the elderly people, especially older women in Cambodia.
- Due to limits in organising capacities at the grassroots level, Voice will target an Innovate and Learn CfP to look into strengthening the voices of grantees and rightsholders with more creative ways, for example by using social media platforms, art and digitalise technology to informally connect different groups on national and/or regional advocacy. We will look for synergies or complementing programme on social protection to be more inclusive for other Voice rightsholder group from the informal economy, especially women and girls.
- Additionally, Voice will target more strategic connections at national and/or regional levels via Linking and Learning exchanges on specific cross-cutting themes. Moreover, Voice will target Linking and Learning exchanges with other Voice countries where the elderly face similar challenges, such as in Laos.
- In order to better connect and work with “hard-to-reach” rightsholder groups, Voice will make use of creative outreach strategies, for example approaches tailored towards people with disabilities with high stigma or other hidden barriers to inclusion.
- Furthermore, Voice will strengthen the promotion of intersectional approaches in theory and practice through the documentation of projects’ impacts as well as the Linking and Learning platform. This will be based on the identification of overlapping identities as well as intersecting themes among grantees.