



KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA
Nation Religion King

ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA

The national emblem of Cambodia, featuring a central crown with a sunburst at the top, flanked by two mythical animals (Gajasingha and Singha) holding a shield. Below the shield is a banner with Khmer text. The emblem is surrounded by a wreath of rice and cotton stalks.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT
SPRING 2023

PROGRESS AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY, COVID-19, AND CLIMATE CHANGE



Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia

FOREWORD

The Royal Government of Cambodia has adhered to the principle of national solidarity to rally all Cambodians, inside and outside the country, from all walks of lives and political tendencies, under the motto “Nation-Religion-King” with the objective to build and protect the nation and social achievements while ensuring the country's independence, integrity, sovereignty, peace, democracy, and progress. Besides, Cambodia is attaining “gainful returns from peace” through high rate of economic growth and poverty reduction that took place in the past decade and has significantly contributed to the regional and global economic integration. The political stability, which has not been prevailing for years, has enabled Cambodia to carry out its reform measures in all sectors in order to build institutional capacity, improve socio-economic infrastructure, and create favourable environment to attract both domestic and foreign investments, with the aim of ensuring high rate of economic growth and poverty reduction.

On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia, I would like to deeply thank our development partners for their technical and financial support that has greatly contributed to our progress. Indeed, we are now entering a new era in which the RGC and its institutions must take full ownership of our development processes and be accountable for our own destiny. As we move forward, the RGC will take full charge of the entire development process to ensure that all resources, government and external development partners', are clearly directed to priorities and sectors chosen. In this regard, the RGC will vigorously work towards achieving a greater “net real transfer” of development resources to the targeted beneficiaries, particularly those in our rural areas.

Phnom Penh, 23 May 2023

Hun Sen

NATIONAL EMBLEM AND FLAG OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA



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INTRODUCTION

As the world moves into a new post-pandemic era, refueled with optimism and joy for a brighter future, the Royal Government of Cambodia has re-evaluated and updated its vision for the future of the nation. Many principles remain the same – the adherence to the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals and commitment to developing the economic resources and human capital of Cambodia has not changed. What has changed, in certain respects, is the approach taken to achieve our goals. Collectively, our efforts can forge a society that is more advanced, better educated, more capable and longer lasting than this country has ever seen.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the development vision of the Kingdom of Cambodia for the near future. It is divided into several major sections, each of which covers a different, yet highly important, facet of development. It is our mission to communicate to the international community the truly valuable opportunity which exists in Cambodia for investment and development. We are a proud, prosperous, and productive nation looking for partners as we advance into our next era of greatness, expanding upon the work of our predecessors.

As stated above, the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals are integral to the success of future development within the country. They mirror those of the United Nations, although they have been adapted for Cambodia's national priorities. Additionally, there is the addition of a new goal specific to our nation: "Cambodia Mine/ERW Free" (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019). Due to the similarity between our goals and those of the United Nations, we already begin to see potential avenues of cooperation between Cambodia and the rest of the international community.



Figure 1, Cristofolletti, T. (2017, April 27). Cambodia's first all women demining team. Retrieved from <https://www.thomascristofolletti.com/stories#/cambodias-first-allfemale-demining-team/>

Another key element of our developmental future is the Rectangular Strategy (see Figure 1), in which we are currently in Phase IV (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019). Utilizing the Rectangular Strategy, we intend to do the following: develop our human capital, diversify the economy, develop the private sector/markets and work toward sustainable and inclusive development (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019). All these strategies, require diligence and cooperation down to the lowest levels of government and civil society. As a country, we can accomplish these goals and better ourselves along the way.

Thus begins the discussion of Cambodia's specific development needs. Chapter 1 outlines the government philosophy Cambodia possesses moving forwards. Chapters 2-4 address the very issues mentioned earlier in this section in further detail. Throughout this report, data from outside organizations has been compiled with our unique perspective about the development needs and potential of this country. The report ends with a brief conclusion, which summarizes the most important take-aways of this research while simultaneously proposing solutions to these problems moving forward.

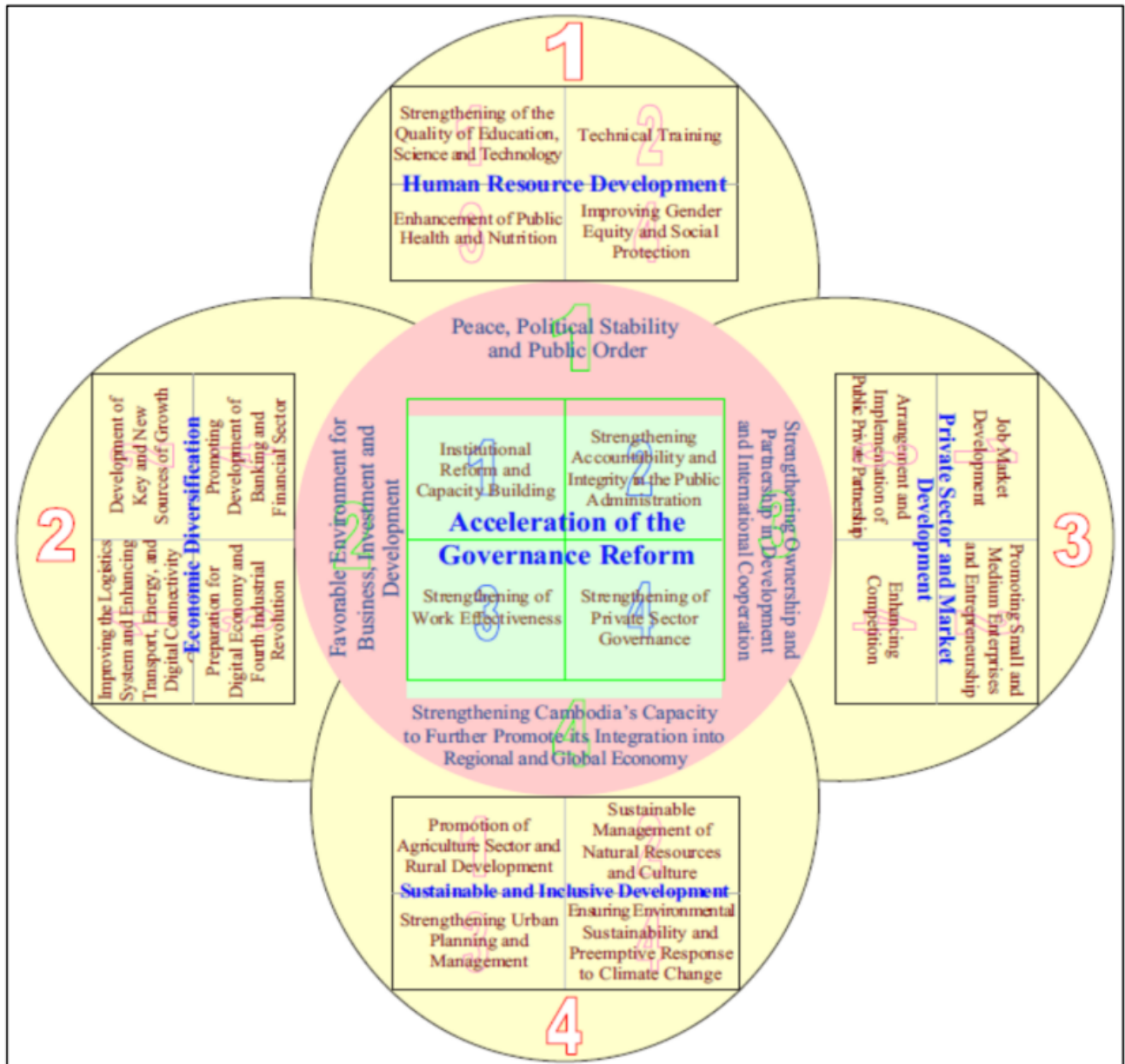


Figure 1, The Rectangular Strategy Phase IV, from National Development Plan 2019-2023, Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019, Published by Open Development Cambodia, https://data.opendatacambodia.net/laws_record/national-strategic-development-plan-nsdp-2019-2023/resource/bb62a621-8616-4728-842f-33ce7e199ef3

GOVERNANCE REFORM: THE CORE OF THE RECTANGULAR STRATEGY

The Royal Government of Cambodia knows that good governance is central to achieving the development goals laid out in this report. Therefore, the RGC has chosen to prioritize three policy areas for governance reform: (1) “institutional reform and capacity building”, (2) “strengthening accountability and integrity in the public administration”, and (3) “strengthening work

effectiveness of civil servants” (Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), 2021, pg. 11-22). In each of these areas, the RGC has reason to thank the Prime Minister, the Ministries of Interior, Civil Service, and National Defense, and the Anti-Corruption Unit for their tireless efforts to support the well-being of the Cambodian people.

1 INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND CAPACITY BUILDING

1.1 PUBLIC SERVICES AND SUB-NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

In this policy area, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) has made significant achievements in ensuring the quality of public services and sub-national administration, or administration at the municipal, district, and khan levels (RGC, 2021). The MOI has created legal instruments to guide public services and local administrations toward quality management and public service delivery. Additionally, the MOI has been focused on building the capacity of subnational administrators through training courses on “the provision of public services based on the principles of good governance (RGC, 2021).

Since 2019, the MOI has also initiated and run the “One Window Services Offices” (OWSO) program, with the assistance on international partners like USAID, to increase the government’s engagement with Cambodian citizens and provide citizens with more direct access to civil services (RGC, 2021). Since the program’s inception, OWSOs have been officially launched in 25 provinces (RGC, 2021).

The Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) has also introduced a new Performance Management System (PMS) for public service delivery based on guidelines from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (RGC, 2021). PMS, along with the Law on Public Service, will ensure that public servants are properly trained, properly compensated, and that service delivery is evaluated on a regular basis. (RGC, 2021)

1.2 PEACE, POLITICAL STABILITY, AND PUBLIC ORDER

The MOI has also made progress toward peace and security by securing Cambodia’s borders, preventing terrorism and lawlessness, and curbing “attempts to overthrow the legitimate Royal Government” (RGC, 2021, pg. 12). Strengthening border protections have been essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19 as well as protecting the sovereignty of the Cambodian people (RGC, 2021). We hope to continue to work with border states to ensure that the region is safe from threats of terrorism and to promote friendship along our borders (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2021).

Maintaining the power of the legitimately elected government is also essential to promoting peace and sustainability in Cambodia. Therefore, the MOI is committed to enforcing all laws against questioning the legitimacy of the Royal Government with demonstrations, strikes, insults against His Majesty the King, and rebel propaganda (RGC, 2021). The MOI is proud to report that progress has been made in this area through public education and the maintenance of decent living conditions for the Cambodian people (RGC, 2021).

1.3 DECENTRALIZATION AND DECONCENTRATION

The RGC also celebrates the 20+ year longevity of the decentralization and de-concentration policy, which encourages meaningful citizen participation in local government (RGC, 2021). This policy “continues to make service delivery more responsive and accountable

through strengthening local democratic institutions” (RGC, 2021, pg. 14). As power over local policy gradually shifts from the central government to sub-national

administrators, grassroots priorities are emphasized, citizens’ needs are met more fully, and resources are managed more effectively (RGC, 2021).

2 STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTEGRITY IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

For Cambodia, strengthening accountability and integrity in government is targeted at fighting corruption. The anti-corruption effort is guided by three “core measures, including (1) strengthening education to prevent corruption, (2) preventing and obstructing the opportunity of committing corruption, (3) cracking down on corrupt offend[ers]” (RGC, 2021, pg. 17).

2.1 STRENGTHENING EDUCATION

Education against corruption here in Cambodia, based on the wisdom of Prime Minister Samdech Techo, is integrated into education as early as primary school (RGC, 2021). The Ministry of Education, youth, and Sports integrated anti-corruption classes regularly into other subjects and coursework for students (RGC, 2021).

Additionally, at both the national and subnational level, there are efforts to educate administrators through presentations, speeches, and public awareness media campaigns (RGC, 2021). Efforts have also been made to ensure that the public has access to key information, like service fees, such that they can also hold government officials accountable (RGC, 2021).

2.2 CORRUPTION PREVENTION AND OBSTRUCTION

There are three main ways that the RGC is preventing and obstructs corruption: asset and liability declaration, careful examination of public servant recruitment processes, and observation from the Anti-Corruption Unit (RGC, 2021).

Even during the unprecedented COVID-19 event, all government entities have been “100% successful” in annually declaring assets and liabilities (RGC, 2021, pg. 17). This check on governmental debt accrual and asset management has been a significant tool in preventing and obstructing corruption (RGC, 2021). Further,

continual monitoring of the recruitment processes of ministries and subnational administrations have resulted in more transparent hiring practices and less criticism of government officials (RGC, 2021).

Additionally, the Anti-Corruption Unit is actively observing the processes, particularly related to “procurement projects” for compliance with national standards of finance (RGC, 2021, pg. 17).



Figure 2, Grab. (2018). Members of the Cambodian Anti-Corruption Unit holding up an accord signed into law. Retrieved from

<https://www.grab.com/kh/en/press/social-impact-safety/grab-signs-memorandum-of-understanding-with-cambodias-anti-corruption-unit-acu/>

2.3 LAW ENFORCEMENT FOR CORRUPTION SUPPRESSION

In the event that prevention and monitoring are ineffective, the Anti-Corruption Unit is becoming increasingly effective in enforcing anti-corruption laws (RGC, 2021). Between 2019 and 2021, 99% of complaints were either resolved or were in the process of being resolved after the first quarter of 2021 (RGC, 2021).

Moving forward, the Anti-Corruption Unit will work diligently on collaborating with ministries and local authorities to learn how to better enforce anti-corruption laws (RGC, 2021).

3 STRENGTHENING WORK EFFECTIVENESS OF CIVIL SERVANTS

The RGC has initiated several activities to increase the effectiveness of civil servants, including “capacity building trainings,” coordination efforts across ministries, inspections and monitoring, revision of salaries for government and government contracted employees, and a modernization of human resources information management (RGC, 2021, pg. 19). Further, the Decentralization and De-concentration reform movement has made strides in good sub-national governance and the Ministry of Justice has grown significantly in both transparency and capacity to administer justice.

3.1 GENERAL WORK EFFECTIVENESS

Some of the most impressive achievements have come from trainings and workshops have reached over 17,000 employees, a good share of whom have been women (RGC, 2021). Additionally, 39 monitoring and evaluation projects were completed between n 2019 and 2021 and laws have been drafted to improve public service delivery (RGC, 2021). Among the most notable of these laws are “public administration reforms, subnational democratic reforms” and public performance management systems at the one window service offices (RGC, 2021, pg. 20). The ministries and subnational administrators tasked with implementing these reforms have increased their coordination and “prepared a new joint action plan” to ensure that promises to the Cambodian people are fulfilled (RGC, 2021, pg. 20).

3.2 SUB-NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Through the important reform movement, Decentralization and De-concentration, the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) has achieved significant results in good local governance through information systems to track service delivery and management. Additionally, for financial de-concentration, the RGC is pleased to report that 100% of the national budget revenue is being allocated to municipal/district development funds, up from 50% in 2020, and 41 municipalities/districts are receiving funds (RGC, 2021).

However, it is important to note that despite achievements in capacity building activities, there are still some holes that need to be filled. For example, “the National School for Local Administration, an institution for capacity building, is not fully functioning” (RGC, 2021, pg. 21). Further, management and evaluation systems have not yet been fully developed at the local level and there is a general lack of “technical and financial support” when it comes to dealing with complaints at the local level (RGC, 2021, pg. 21). These small areas of improvement are areas that the NCDD is committed to working past in service of a fully decentralized, self-governing state under the wisdom of His Majesty the King.

3.3 MINISTRY OF JUSTICE REFORM

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has made significant progress in building out the Cambodian legal landscape, training judges, clerks, and prosecutors, funding indigent defense, and strengthening transparent, efficient systems of judicial checks and balances (RGC, 2021).

In efforts to create a more equitable system, over 200 explanations of key terms in the Crime and Crime Procedure Codes were explained and funding from the National Budget has been allocated to the Bar Association of the Kingdom of Cambodia to provide consultations and legal defense to indigent people (RGC, 2021). Furthermore, the training of judges and other legal personnel has led to a resolution of a years-long blockage of criminal cases, giving defendants a quicker and more efficient experience in the legal system (RGC, 2021).

To increase transparency and efficiency, the MOJ has taken a number of steps. First, it has held investigations and resolved complaints about judges and tribunals (RGC, 2021). Additionally, it has periodically inspected the operations of courts and has collected important information about law enforcement operations. Next, it has constructed a system of appeals courts at the regional level and has established more lower courts in key areas (RGC, 2021). Further, it has increased efforts to solve disputes with local mechanisms of conflict resolution, such as the Khan Justice Service Centers, which operate in 10 capital-provinces (RGC, 2021).



Figure 3, Cambodian Royal Palace, retrieved from <https://www.visitsoutheastasia.travel/top-sights/royal-palace/>



Figure 4, Heng, S. S. (2015). New building of the National Assembly building, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, retrieved from <https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/topics/parliament/>

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Even in an era of rapid, unprecedented technological advancement, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) places a heavy emphasis on its human “capital.” Looking forward, as Cambodia seeks to advance its development initiatives through the strategic utilization of new technology, it is also very important that Cambodia continues to invest in its people, the lifeblood

of Cambodian society and life. Sub-divided into several priorities – civil service training, education, public health, nutrition, gender equity, women’s empowerment and child protections – the RGC seeks to expand upon its current programs to ensure that progress continues for the future of Cambodian people and society.

4 CIVIL SERVICE TRAINING AND EDUCATION

As outlined in the 2019-2023 National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), education remains one of Cambodia’s key development priorities for the near future. Within this area of focus, the Kingdom of Cambodia seeks to specialize in several areas that benefit the people of Cambodia, including a specific focus on anti-corruption efforts (Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), 2018).

4.1 CIVIL SERVANT EDUCATION, ANTI-CORRUPTION AND BEYOND

Corruption has been one of the key challenges to the growth and prosperity of Cambodia throughout the nation’s history. For example, there have been instances of certain officials using funds from the national treasury for personal gain that would have otherwise been utilized to better every-day life in rural villages and promote access to basic human needs (Wiedemann, n.d.). By pushing for better training and educational practices surrounding the issue of corruption, Cambodia not only gains a brighter future in the face of this critical issue, but also will benefit from the added support of the population towards government officials, reinforcing a sense of trust between the people and the government. Development in anti-corruption education would also aid Cambodia in achieving greater success relating to the sixteenth SDG, ‘Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions’ (*Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), 2023).

Beyond anti-corruption efforts, it is critical for the future of civil service in Cambodia to improve the level and sophistication of education and training civil servants receive. Stated in the NSDP, another initiative of the RGC is to strengthen the Royal School of Administration (ERA) (RGC, 2018). This school is designed to build upon the technical proficiencies required in a modern civil service wing of the national government. Often overlooked, civil servants bridge the gap between the kingdom and the

civilian population of the country; ensuring that those who fill roles within this important branch of the government will yield major dividends as the country seeks to chart a better future, led by the Royal Government. Enhancing the human capital of Cambodia’s civil servants is a key priority for the country in the near term.

4.2 KEY METRICS OF EDUCATION

Additionally, Cambodia also seeks to improve upon conventional metrics associated with education. For example, in 2018, the RGC’s goal was to reach 88% literacy in 2023 in adults, which would mark a 5.5% increase over five years (RGC, 2018). In reality, only 83.9% of adults aged 15 or older are considered ‘literate,’ indicating that the country is 4.1% below where the government had intended for it to be by 2023 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023). Additional funding towards education could benefit Cambodia, allowing it to elevate itself closer to its target literacy rate, and would also drive internationally agreed upon goals, such as the United Nation’s fourth Sustainable Development Goal: “Quality Education” (SDGs, 2023).

Within the past two years, Cambodia has taken action to improve upon literacy rates and other key metrics of education with New Generation Schools (NGS), whose goal is to place a heavier emphasis on “21st century skills” that are vital for the Cambodian workforce’s advancement (Dara, 2022). As part of the larger Education Reform Program, NGS updates infrastructure and facilities while also “restoring learning infrastructure like knowledge and skills on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and information and communications technology (ICT) skills” (Khorry, 2020). By reforming education to better anticipate the needs of modern times, Cambodia is sure to be refitted with a

civilian population more ready to address uncertain times and the challenges they bring.

To counterbalance this approach and find an equilibrium between knowledge appreciated in modern times and that of traditional value, an important emphasis on Buddhism education must also continue. Managed in part by the Ministry of Religion and Cults, Buddhism education has been an important spiritual and cultural element of Cambodian life which must not be forgotten when making adjustments and reforms to the national education system (RGC, 2018). The NSDP has tracked and managed statistics surrounding enrollment and

graduation of monk students within the national educational system and must continue to do so in the years to come (RGC, 2018).

At the core of the current development strategy for Buddhism education, the RGC seeks to “promot[e] Buddhism linkages with society” so that they are not lost in this era of transformation (RGC, 2018, p. 18). As the national religion of Cambodia, with an estimated 97.1% of the population reported as Buddhist in 2023, the importance of protecting Buddhist teaching remains a vital interest of the people of Cambodia (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023).



Figure 5, Leverage Edu. (2021). Cambodian children learn in a Buddhist educational system. Retrieved from <https://leverageedu.com/blog/buddhist-education-system/>

5 PUBLIC HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Public health and nutrition have, and continues to be, an area of importance for the future of Cambodia. In light of recent events, most notably the COVID-19 Pandemic, public health initiatives have received greater interest and support from the international community. According to the World Health Organization, there have

been 46,895,957 COVID-19 vaccine doses administered within Cambodia (*Cambodia Situation*, 2023). The Royal Government is proud of its response to the pandemic, enforcing strict standards of vaccination and – as necessary – ordering lockdowns to slow the spread of the virus. That being said, Cambodia is still being

affected by the pandemic and a continued effort to remain diligent in the face of this unprecedented threat

must continue as the country aims to return to normal life.

Cambodia Situation

138,735

confirmed cases

3,056

deaths

Source: World Health Organization
Data may be incomplete for the current day or week.

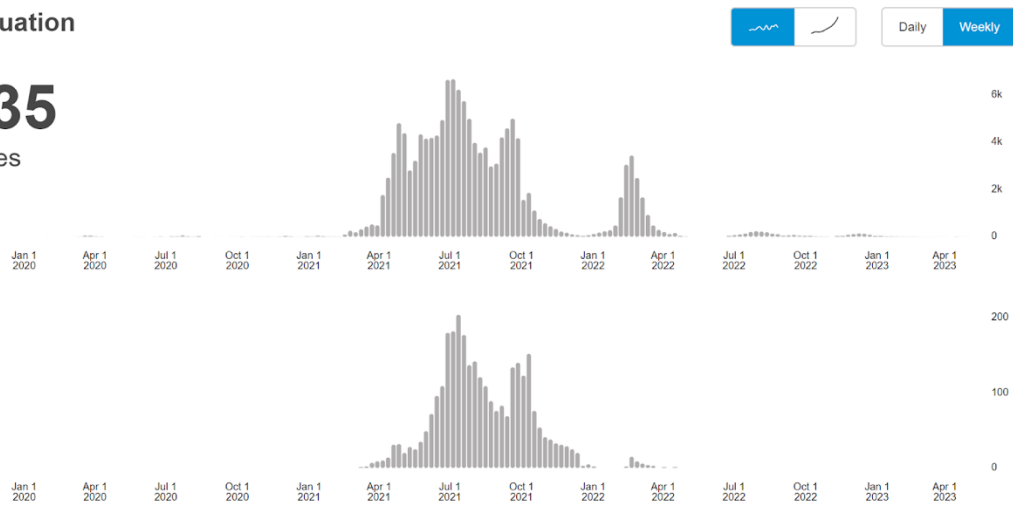


Figure 6, World Health Organization. (2023, April 1). COVID-19 Situation in Cambodia. Retrieved from <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/kh>

To address other health needs, partner organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders, have been assisting Cambodia for the past several years with projects targeted towards eliminating Hepatitis C, which remains another public health challenge (*How we're helping in Cambodia*, 2023). While grateful for their support, and the work of many others, the RGC is seeking to become more self-sufficient in addressing public health and nutrition challenges. As part of the NSDP, the Royal Government has made plans to create four new "special operation" health agencies under the Ministry of Health, located in Kampot, Prey Veng, Kratie and Kampong Thom (RGC, 2018, p. 9). This project falls under the greater initiative to improve certain administrative functions of the government to allow the people of Cambodia better access to basic services. Additionally, it better satisfies the need for self-sufficient health systems by following a system of "internal contracting" for the roll-out of health services to rural areas (Vong et al., 2018).

Working within the framework of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, Cambodia is pursuing an improved system of universal healthcare (UHC) to promote progress towards the third goal: "Good health and wellbeing" (SDGs, 2023). In a study published in 2022 by the Health Economics Review, it was concluded that the UHC system in Cambodia needs continued improvement, starting "by increasing utilization of cost-effective services" and "improving health service quality,

regulating private sector providers, focusing on discretionary health financing, and incentivizing a referral system" the efficiency of UHC can be maximized (Kolestar et al., 2022). The NSDP makes note of many of these issue when addressing some of the "challenges" seen when "promoting good governance and accountability" in the health sector (RGC, 2018, pp. 79-80). The Royal Government will make policy improvements, armed with the lessons learned through this research, and is seeking additional support in realizing the vital infrastructure and training requirements associated with this task.

Another area of concern for the RGC is the access to clean water and proper nutrition for the Cambodian people, particularly in rural and poor areas. An article published by Brigham Young University highlights how children tend to be the most-affected groups of people when it comes to malnutrition (Bernal, 2022). According to this research, children often fall victim to malnutrition due to a lack of educational understanding about proper nutrition and poor access to clean drinking water, which results in diarrhea (Bernal, 2022). In other words, efforts to promote proper nutrition and access to clean drinking water go hand in hand. Cambodia is very fortunate to have received the assistance of international organizations, such as UNICEF, during efforts to improve access to clean drinking water (*Water, Sanitation and Hydration*, 2023). This alone is not enough to fully improve the situation for our children, with "one in three

Cambodians [using] water from an unimproved drinking source,” (*Water, Sanitation and Hydration*, 2023). However, it serves as a positive first step and a demonstration of the RGC’s commitment to the well-

being of the Cambodian people. In future development projects we will continue to make progress until no child suffers from malnutrition or lack of access to clean drinking water.

6 GENDER EQUITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTIONS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

As Cambodia transitions into this next era of the country’s developmental future, a heavier emphasis will be placed on gender equity and social protections. Cambodia’s long-term commitment to empowering women and promoting gender equity dates back to the 2014-2018 National Strategic Development Plan and continues today. The 2019-2023 National Strategic Development Plan focuses on addressing the issue of gender inequity in six distinct categories. Among them, and most relevant to the discussion of development included within this report, are “Women’s Economic Empowerment” and “Women in Public Sector and Politics” – which includes women in the legislature, general government positions, public administration and management at the sub-national level of governance (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018).



Figure 6, *Khmer Times*. (2022, May 18). Increased representation of women in Cambodian politics. Retrieved from

<https://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/news/world-news/cambodian-women-leadership-rising>

6.1 ELIMINATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Particularly important for the RCG is addressing gender-based violence, which is listed as one of five “Critical Issues of Gender (In)Equality in Cambodia” by the United Nations (United Nations Country Team in Cambodia, 2022; RCG, 2018). Combating gender-based violence aligns the national interest of Cambodia with the goals of the international community, supporting both the third and fifth Sustainable Development Goals of the

United Nations: “Good health and well-being” and “Gender equality,” respectively (SDGs, 2023).

Eliminating gender-based violence remains a key task in achieving greater gender equity. Very unfortunately, it has been reported that “one in four women in Cambodia is a victim of physical, emotional or sexual violence” (Eisenbruch, 2018). According to this study, a couple key measures must be taken to both prevent violence against women: more comprehensive training of officials and enforcement of existing laws (Eisenbruch, 2018). Better training of officials involved in both the prevention of gender-based violence and its mitigation through enforcement should, in theory, yield dividends in progress towards less violence against women.

Another key document pertaining to the prevention of violence against women is the 2014-2018 National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women. Within this plan, the Royal Government pledges to take action, in the form of five strategies, to aid in resolving this issue: (1) “Primary Prevention,” (2) “Legal Protection and Multi-sectoral Services,” (3) “Formulating and Implementing Policies and Laws,” (4) “Capacity Building” and (5) “Review, Monitoring and Evaluation” (RGC, 2014, p. 3). By implementing these strategies, the Royal Government will prioritize curbing violence against women before, during and after it has occurred, providing a holistic approach for a safer society.

6.2 PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

A second issue of social protection that often goes side-by-side with gender equity is the protection of children. A report published by the organization End Violence Against Children states that approximately 50% of children in Cambodia are physically abused before age 18 and that approximately 25% of children suffer from emotional abuse (End Violence Against Children, 2019). To better stand up for children’s rights, the Cambodian National Council for Children has been actively engaged in seeking out positive outcomes for the introduction of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018, p. 82). As a signatory of this convention, in accordance with Article 19, the Royal Government pledges to uphold high

standards for taking “all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse...”

(A/RES/44/25, 1989). Actions such as these are small steps of improvement but show the dedication of the Royal Government to upholding international standards of children’s rights.



Figure 7, Girl sitting on a bench in Phnom Penh, R. Sison, 2019, retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/photos/hNqOigFZqcs>

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

The Cambodian economy has experienced a renaissance since 2000 thanks to investments in various key sectors such as human capital, infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, and more; “between 1998 and 2019, the Cambodian economy grew 7.7 percent annually making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world” (World Bank Group, 2023). Because of Cambodia’s economic success, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) achieved the goal of becoming a lower middle-income status in 2015, has plans to achieve middle-income status by 2030 and will achieve high-income status by 2050. Cambodians have experienced higher wages and better standards of living because of our widespread gains. Additionally, the poverty rate has declined rapidly, from “33.8 percent to 17.8 percent over the ten-year period [between 2009]/2020, with almost 2 million Cambodians escaping poverty” (World Bank Group (2), 2022).

However, the Coronavirus pandemic proved to be a major obstacle to our economic growth, with major hits to annual current income growth, which fell by 14.5% in 2020, export growth, which dropped from 14.0% in 2019 to -1.1% in 2020 (Figure 8), and GDP, which in 2020 dropped 3.1% (Figure 9). Even with COVID-19 greatly hindering our progress, the economy has already displayed massive resilience in an extremely short window of time.

The RGC is fully committed to meeting the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs), our economic success has already provided opportunities for major strides in reaching ‘no poverty,’ ‘reduced inequalities,’ ‘decent work and economic growth,’ and ‘industry, innovation, and infrastructure.’ From an economic standpoint, the RGC plans to focus on two key areas to make the CSDGs a reality: economic diversification and private sector and job development.

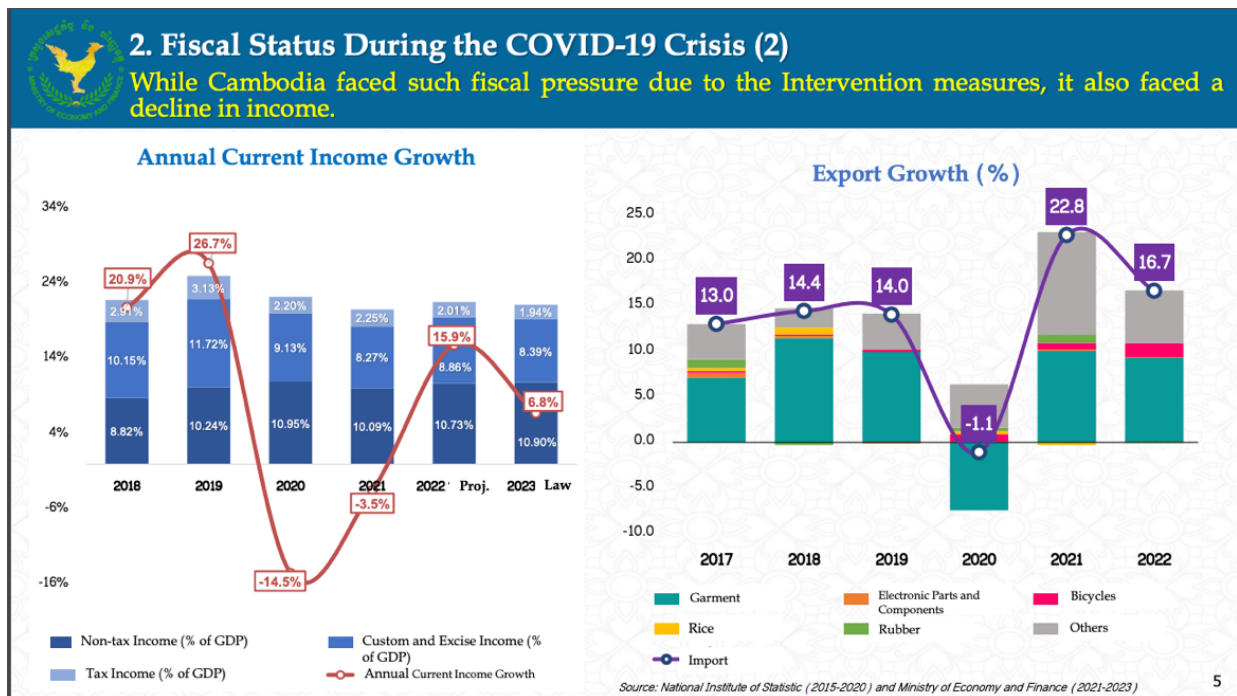


Figure 8, HUOT Pum, H.E. (2023, February 14). Cambodia’s Response and Recovery in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Build-back Better towards UHC. Ministry of Economy and Finance. Retrieved from file:///Users/st.johngutbezah/Downloads/session-2-2-mef-cambodia-14-feb-2023.

7 ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

The RGC has determined that the current economic, “growth pillars i.e. agriculture, tourism, garment and construction, cannot ensure high growth in the long term due to structural change of domestic economy and demography, rising competition and vulnerability to external shocks” (RGC, 2019, p. 175). Diversification is essential to ensuring economic stability and growth, which the RGC plans to achieve via investments in three different key areas: key and new sources of growth, digital economy, and the banking and financial sector. Furthermore, taking steps to strengthen the already existing pillars of the Cambodian economy will be critical in achieving the CSDG ‘industry, innovation, and infrastructure.’

7.1 KEY AND NEW SOURCES OF GROWTH

Manufacturing is rapidly becoming one of the most essential aspects of the Cambodian economy as, “the average annual growth rate spread over the past 15 years (1998-2013) was estimated at 12.4% compared to 4.7%

and 8.5% for the agriculture and the service sector, respectively” (RGC, 2015, p.3). Although the industrial sector is growing rapidly, it still lacks the necessary basis to support larger, more sophisticated manufacturing operations.

The RGC has set new goals to “transform and strengthen the industrial sector by increasing the GDP share of industrial sector to 30% in 2025 from 24.1% of GDP in 2013 with the manufacturing sector growing from 15.5% in 2013 to 20% in 2025” (see Figure 9) (RGC, 2015, p. 14). In addition, the RGC plans to further diversify our exports by expanding the non-garment and footwear industry to account for 15% of total exports by 2025 (see Figure 9). By increasing the role of the industrial sector in the economy, Cambodians living in urban areas will have more job opportunities with higher wages than typical agricultural or tourism related work. This will further our progress toward CSDGs ‘no poverty,’ ‘reduced inequalities,’ and ‘decent work and economic growth.’

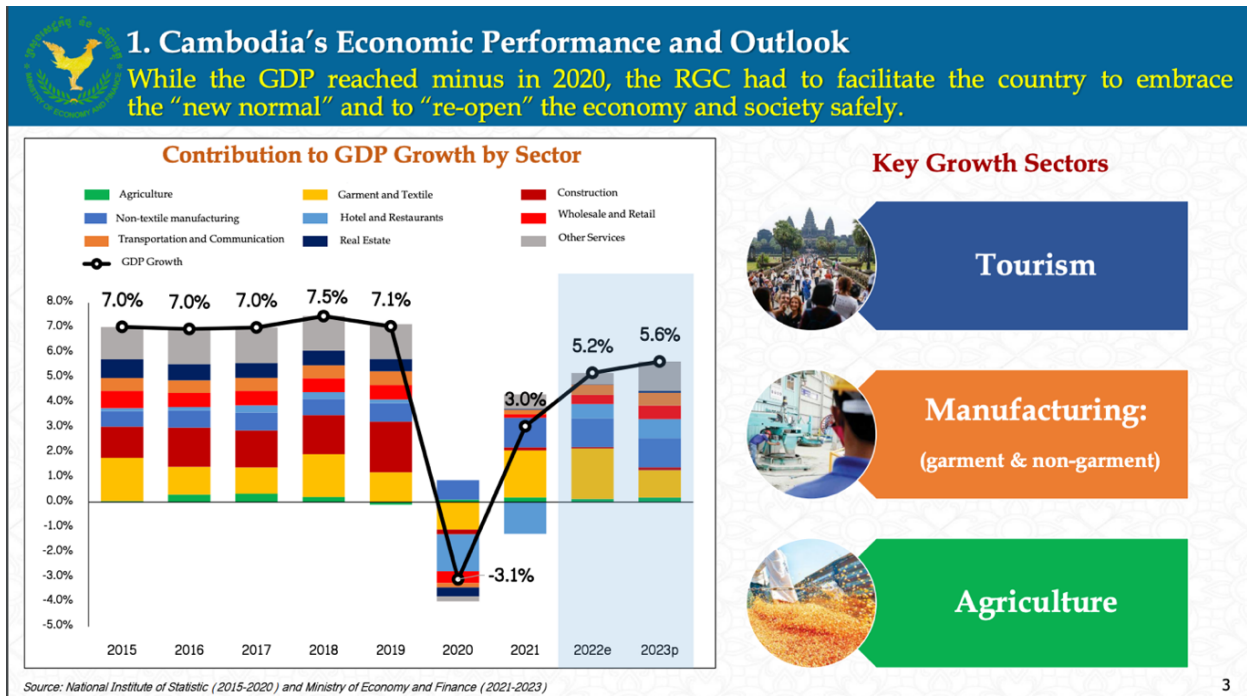


Figure 9, HUOT Pum, H.E. (2023, February 14). Cambodia's Response and Recovery in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Build-back Better towards UHC. Ministry of Economy and Finance. Retrieved from file:///Users/st.johngutbezahl/Downloads/session-2-2-mef-cambodia-14-feb-2023

7.2 MULTIPURPOSE SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES

One method to expand manufacturing and further our goal of economic diversification is the development of Multipurpose Special Economic Zones (MPSEZ) in regions with economic potential. MPSEZs have special legal frameworks and regulations to help promote business. The RGC supports the MPSEZs by providing administrative assistance for imports and exports (*Special Economic Zones*, 2015). To transform these regions into industrial powerhouses, it is crucial that major investments be made in infrastructure to support areas with industrial potential as well as to improve the education of the Cambodian workforce to build a competent, technical, workforce (RGC, 2015).

Several proposed MPSEZs are already in the process of development in strategic economic areas, in on the outskirts of our capital city, Phnom Penh, Poipet O'Neang, which is located on the Thailand-Cambodia border, and Manhattan, which is in the town of Bavet near the Vietnam-Cambodia border. Perhaps the most notable MPSEZ, however, is that in the Sihanoukville Province. This province already serves as one of the primary economic regions for Cambodia largely due to our country's largest seaport being in Sihanoukville, making it an ideal location.

Development within Sihanoukville has already begun with the expansion of its seaport, airport, and expressway, as well as 34 new roads to better connect the region domestically. MPSEZs will attract new investors due to the improved trading access and a streamlined business environment. Moreover, Cambodians will have opportunities to receive technical training, higher wages, and a higher quality of life.

COVID-19 hit the rural regions of Cambodia the hardest, but by increasing the capabilities of newly designated MPSEZs, the benefits could be shared across the country, helping to bring those most economically affected back to prosperity (Koty, 2021). Rural communities face also major challenges due to a lack of access to business, services, and transportation. By investing in MPSEZs, and the necessary infrastructure required for them to function, neighboring and rural communities will receive spillover benefits including opportunities for

entrepreneurship, transportation, and access to services in the urban sector.



Figure 10, HKTDC Research. (2017, April 12). Cambodia SEZs in Focus. [Research.hktdc.com](https://research.hktdc.com).

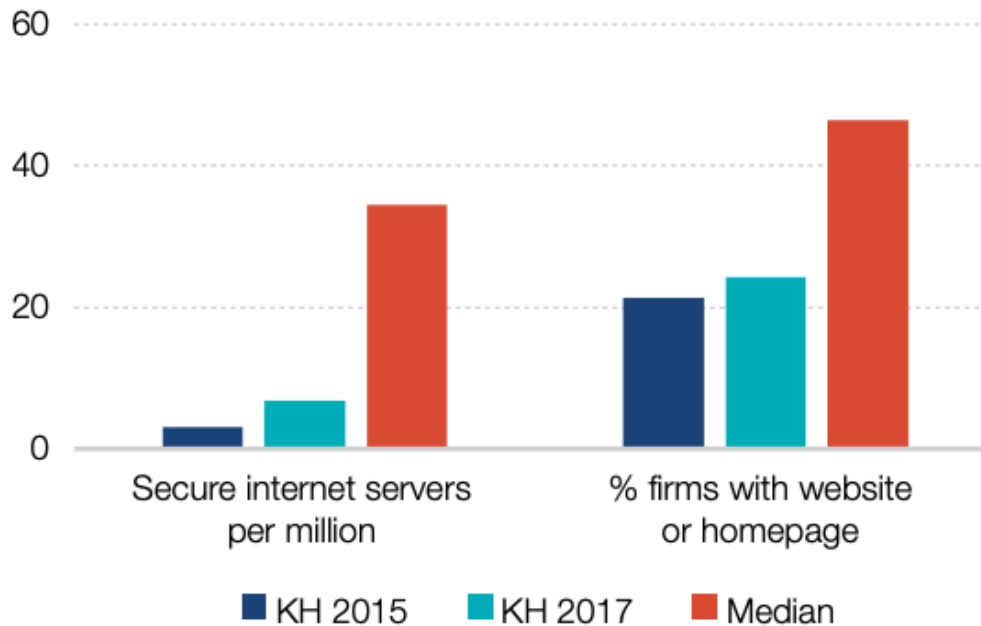
<https://research.hktdc.com/en/article/MzgzMDUwMDI0>

7.3 DIGITAL ECONOMY

The digital economy has largely remained an area of untapped potential that could greatly aid in Cambodia becoming a middle-income country. However, Cambodia is lacking the infrastructure to support high-speed internet and resolve other issues related to connectivity (Beschoner et. al., 2018).

Many businesses in Cambodia still operate without a website and Cambodia is deficient in secure internet servers for our citizens, making it difficult for Cambodians assimilate into the digital age (see Figure 4). Promoting the digital economy would allow the overall economy to become streamlined and more connected to foreign and domestic business. Entrepreneurs and small business owners will greatly benefit from a stronger digital market and connectivity. Additionally, citizens living in rural areas would be able to gain access to services via the internet, such as online education or virtual doctor's visits, which brings the RGC closer to achieving the CSDG, 'reducing inequality.'

Digital Adoption Index - firm subcomponents



Note: The global median refers to both 2015 and 2017.

Figure 11, Beschoner et. al., 2018, World Bank Benefitting from the Digital Economy: Cambodia Policy Note p. 1

7.4 BANKING AND FINANCIAL SECTOR

Improving the banking and financial sector is essential to fostering an environment for businesses to thrive. The RGC plans to invest in, “the development of payment system using financial technologies; coordinating policy and regulatory frameworks; strengthening institutional capacity and human resources” (RGC, 2019, p. 187). In providing credit, loans, and other financial services, businesses of every size will have more opportunities to expand and create more jobs for Cambodians. Additionally, those living in rural areas would greatly benefit from a stronger, more accessible, financial sector

which would greatly increase access to credit and financing.

The amount of financial leasing has steadily increased since 2016 from 485 billion riels to 1350.5 billion riels largely due to an increase in business expansion. Even after taking a downturn following the COVID-19 pandemic, the banking and financial sector has remained resilient, making it a valuable and reliable opportunity for foreign investors (*Banking and Financial Services*, 2020).

8 PRIVATE SECTOR AND JOB DEVELOPMENT

Developing the private sector in Cambodia is crucial for several reasons. First, a strong private sector fosters economic growth by attracting domestic and foreign investments, creating job opportunities, and generating tax revenue. It diversifies the economy beyond traditional sectors and reduces dependency on foreign aid. Secondly, a vibrant private sector promotes

innovation, entrepreneurship, and competition, which leads to improved productivity and efficiency. This, in turn, drives technological advancements and increases the country's overall competitiveness in the global market. Lastly, a robust private sector enables the government to focus on its core functions by transferring some responsibilities, such as service provision and job

creation, to private enterprises. Ultimately, the development of the private sector contributes to poverty reduction, sustainable development, and improved living standards for the people of Cambodia.

It is crucial that the RGC reduce hindrances to small and medium sized enterprises, such as complex registration/licensing and trade barriers, to provide a friendlier environment for entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the RGC aims to address various obstacles encountered by workers, including issues related to occupational safety and health, the eradication of child labor and forced labor, the enhancement of mechanisms for determining minimum wage and worker benefits, and the reinforcement of harmonization in industrial relations, to foster improved working conditions (RGC, 2019).

By improving workers' wellbeing, productivity can be increased, further strengthening the overall state of the economy, and moving our country closer to achieving the CSDGs 'decent work and economic growth' and 'reducing inequality.'

8.1 SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMEs)

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in the Cambodian economy for several reasons. First, they are a significant source of employment, providing job opportunities for a large portion of the population. SMEs contribute to reducing unemployment rates and supporting livelihoods, particularly in rural areas where they often operate. Second, SMEs foster entrepreneurship and innovation. They are often more agile and adaptable to market changes, driving competitiveness and introducing new ideas and products to the economy. Furthermore, SMEs contribute to economic diversification by operating in various sectors, reducing dependency on a few industries, and

promoting a more balanced and resilient economy. Lastly, SMEs contribute to poverty reduction by creating income-generating opportunities for individuals and communities, ultimately improving living standards and fostering inclusive economic growth.

The number of SMEs has been steadily increasing since 2010, however, many still face obstacles such as policies and regulations that prevent them from moving to the next stage of expansion (see Figure 12).

Currently there are several challenges that pose a threat to the future of Cambodian small businesses, including "a need for more comprehensive tax incentives, lack of entrepreneurship and [lack of] business management competencies" (RGC, 2019, p. 191). Additionally, small businesses are hindered by, "limited infrastructure support such as national laboratories, and inefficient trade facilitation with high cost compared to neighboring countries in the region (RGC, 2019, p. 191). To combat these challenges, the government aims to streamline administrative procedures and reduce red tape to make it easier for SMEs to start and operate their businesses.

Efforts have been made to simplify licensing processes and create a more business-friendly environment. Cambodia has also been collaborating with financial institutions and international organizations to improve access to financing for SMEs. This includes providing credit facilities, loans, and grants specifically targeted towards SMEs, as well as establishing specialized financing programs and venture capital funds (RGC, 2019, p. 191). Additionally, the government and various organizations offer support services such as training, mentoring, and capacity-building programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of SME owners and employees. These initiatives will help improve business management capabilities and promote sustainable growth.

Size/type of enterprises	Officially registered			Enterprises with balance sheets		
	2010	2020	2025	2010	2020	2025
Small enterprises	37	70	80	4	30	50
Medium enterprises	72	80	90	24	50	70
Large enterprises	93	100	100	66	100	100

Figure 12, Banking and financial services, Open Development Cambodia (ODC). (2020, December 8). <https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/topics/banking-and-financial-services/>

9 MOVING FORWARD

To enhance its competitiveness on the global market, Cambodia can focus on several key strategies. Firstly, investing in infrastructure development is crucial to improve logistics and connectivity, reducing transportation costs and facilitating trade. This includes upgrading transportation networks, expanding port facilities, and enhancing digital connectivity. Secondly, fostering an environment of innovation and entrepreneurship through targeted policies and incentives can promote the development of high-value industries and products. Encouraging research and development, supporting startups and innovation hubs,

and strengthening intellectual property rights protection can drive technological advancements and create unique competitive advantages. Additionally, investing in human capital by improving education and skills training programs can ensure a skilled workforce that meets the demands of emerging industries. Finally, actively engaging in regional and international trade agreements can open up new markets, attract foreign investment, and provide access to global supply chains. By implementing these strategies, Cambodia can position itself as a competitive player in the global market and attract more trade and investment opportunities.



Figure 13, T. Cristofolletti, (2018), Street Market in Phnom Penh, from *Mekong: a river in chains*, retrieved from <https://www.thomascristofolletti.com/stories#/mekong-a-river-in-chains2/>

INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Royal Government of Cambodia has four key policy priorities for Inclusive Sustainable Development: to promote agriculture and rural development, to engage in sustainable resource management and cultural preservation, and to improve urban planning and management. Within each of these key areas, the RGC is committed to preventing the degradation of the environment and managing climate change. For agriculture and rural development, our focus is on making sustainable increases in agricultural sector productivity and ensuring that agricultural workers and entrepreneurs take full advantage of domestic and international markets. In agriculture and rural development, the RGC is committed to the CSDGs ‘zero hunger,’ ‘no poverty,’ ‘climate action,’ ‘reduced inequalities,’ and ‘landmine/ERW elimination.’

For sustainable resource management and cultural preservation, the RGC is committed to maintaining the biodiversity and ecosystem services of our forests and waterways and is engaging in processes to preserve and restore our beautiful cultural heritage sites. Additionally, the RGC is working diligently with other nations along the Mekong River to ensure that the surrounding areas are developed sustainably and equitably. The relevant CSDGs here are ‘responsible consumption and production,’ ‘climate action,’ and ‘life on land.’ For urban planning and management, the Royal Government of Cambodia is prioritizing access to clean water, waste and sewage management, and affordable housing with the goal of achieving the CSDGs ‘sustainable cities and communities,’ ‘clean water and sanitation,’ and ‘affordable and clean energy.’

10 PROMOTE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The past decade has seen many achievements for the people of Cambodia in increasing agricultural productivity, facilitating stronger domestic markets, increasing food security, building and maintaining rural infrastructure, and engaging in landmine reduction (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2021). The sector has seen increases in total cultivated areas and in animal production. Further, the RGC has been successful in bringing together agriculture and food processing to create livelihoods and wealth for the Cambodian people. In 17 provinces, the “quality, quantity, and processing” of rice, vegetable, chicken, cassava, and silk are increasing through the “Accelerating Inclusive Markets for Smallholders (AIMS)” project (RGC, 2021, pg. 60). Additionally, the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture has seen great success in promoting Cambodian produced agricultural products for domestic use. This increase has allowed our agricultural sector to supply the needs of our people, reducing reliance on imports and increasing food security (RGC, 2021).

Further, Cambodian farmers have seen their share of the international market increase through strengthened campaigns to encourage people around the world to buy Cambodian products. One such project, One Village One Product (OVOP) project, which focuses on

production based on local priorities, resources, and culture for international and domestic markets, has been largely successful (Ministry of Cooperatives, 2014). In Cambodia, OVOP has empowered local producers of many agricultural products, including silk, wine, and vegetables, to reach international markets and showcase Cambodian agricultural and cultural heritage (Narayan, 2023).



Figure 14, Cambodian Farmer at harvest, from Culture of Cambodia – Main Values, Religion, Traditions, Retrieved May 23, 2023 from <https://12go.asia/en/cambodia/culture#/photo>

The RGC is also proud to announce that the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA), which has been tasked with clearing landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) and assisting victims since 1992, expects twelve provinces to be mine free by the end of the year, with the remaining landmines cleared by 2025 (Sunly, 2022). As a result of the CMAA's work we have seen the number of landmine victims decrease by 66% from 2019 (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2021). This is a great achievement for the Kingdom of Cambodia toward the CSDG 18, Demining and ERW (RGC, 2018).

10.1 CROP DIVERSIFICATION AND DOMESTIC MARKETS

Despite achievements in all these areas, Cambodia is still facing development challenges in agriculture and rural development. To begin, farmers need technical and educational assistance in diversifying their crops and competing in the international market. Doing so will bring Cambodia closer to CSDG, 'no poverty,' particularly in rural areas. Additionally, Cambodia is still feeling the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic when it comes to agriculture sector growth. Overall poverty has increased "from around 10 to 17.8 per cent," with rural Cambodians left increasingly vulnerable (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 2022, pg. 1).

Economic hardship has in turn led to budget decreases for infrastructure projects and agricultural research and development (RGC, 2021). Thus, farmers are encountering barriers to crop diversification and market expansion due to a lack of technology, credit, information, and financial services (IFAD, 2022). Meaningful development in the agricultural sector will not be possible without agricultural research, information dissemination, and technical assistance. In addition, investment in higher value products and value-adding processing will be necessary in reducing reliance on rice production and increasing the competitiveness of small farms (World Bank Group (2), 2019). Investing in these measures will help the RGC achieve the CSDGs "no poverty" and "reduced inequality," if small farming operations can employ more advanced processes and are able to compete in the agricultural market.

Further, disruptions in the global supply chain and efforts to contain COVID have led to food shortages as recently

as May 2021 (Roland-Holst & Westover, 2021). This means that small scale local farmers must be able to make an impact in their local food economies if Cambodia is to regain progress in food security and CSDG 'zero hunger.' Therefore, the RGC is committed to developing sophisticated and effective local food production for domestic use (Asia Development Bank, 2021). While the OVOP project has helped in this area, "lack of technical skills in processing, packaging, and product design" as well as insufficient access to credit remain significant barriers (Narayan, 2023). Assistance for farmers is needed for financing and machinery for large- and small-scale production of fruits, vegetables, and rice as well as the industrial production of cassava and cashew nuts (Asia Development Bank, 2021). The government of Cambodia has committed to providing \$50 million through the Rural Development and Agricultural Bank to assist farmers with low interest loans in order to grow the food system and production of high-quality products for domestic consumption (Asia Development Bank, 2021).

10.2 RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Additionally, there remains limited funds in the national budget to support rural infrastructure and respond to the effects of climate change in rural areas (RGC, 2021). As of last year, Rural and agricultural livelihoods are increasingly vulnerable "through disruptions to agricultural production, water, and transport" (World Bank Group (1), 2022). Thus, of the rural infrastructure challenges, irrigation systems and sustainable development of water resources remains a top priority of the RGC and its development partners (RGC, 2021; Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), 2023; World Bank Group (1), 2019).

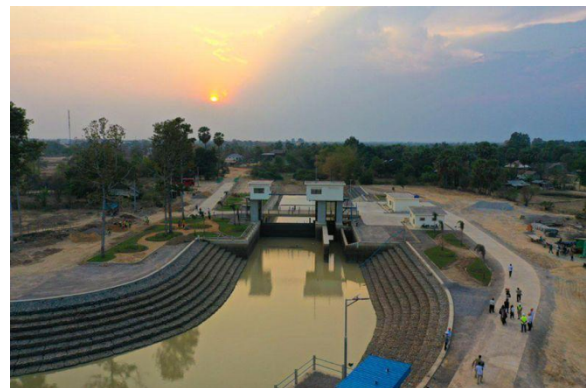


Figure 15, Phnom Penh Post, (2020), JICA's Wat Chre Irrigation and Drainage Improvement Project, Kandal

Province, from Jica invests in rejuvenation of National Road 5 Lifeline, <https://phnompenhpost.com/post-focus/jica-invests-rejuvenation-national-road-5-lifeline>

Because of the increasing volatility of climate change and increasing demands on agricultural production, reliance on rainwater for irrigation is no longer sustainable for Cambodian farmers. Thus, non-functional irrigation systems need repair and improvements, particularly in the region southwest of Phnom Penh (JICA, 2023).

Additionally, growth in the agricultural sector is dependent on the sustainable development of the Mekong River and Mekong River Basin (RGC, 2021). With pressure on the Mekong growing from a variety of regional actors, it is a top priority of the RCG to restore the land and water assets of the Mekong, support infrastructure for sustainable development there, and make the most of the natural wealth of the river (RGC, 2021; World Bank Group, 2019). Thus, it will be important to build capacity around sustainable development of the Mekong and facilitate regional agreements around that development (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2021).

11 SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Sustainable resource management and cultural preservation has also seen steady progress over the past decade. Key areas of resource management include mining, forestry, and fishing (RGC, 2021). Since 2019, the Ministry of Mines and Energy has “created four working groups to monitor and inspect mineral resources,” enabling it to enforce policies and collect taxes on mine operations (RGC, 2021, pg. 66). The MME has also developed a fund to promote sustainable development of the mine industry and assist communities that are directly or indirectly affected, ensuring that the benefits of mine operation are felt equitably (RGC, 2021).

Additionally, in 2017, the RGC adopted the National Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) Strategy as a comprehensive resource management plan with the goal of mitigating global climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions (RGC, 2017). The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries has seen progress in strengthening the legal framework of forestry and fishing, supporting communities in forestry and fishing areas, and enforcing fines for deforestation and illegal fishing activities through the National REDD+ Strategy and other important policies (RGC, 2021).

Further, the Ministry of Environment has been successful in creating protected areas, reaching 7 million hectares, or 41% of Cambodia’s land areas, as of 2021 (RGC, 2021). These areas, and the indigenous communities that reside in them, are under the protection of His Majesty the King and the Cambodian Government. They are now part of an ecologically strategic system to support “the

sustainability of [the] socio-economic environment,” preserve cultural values, and support Cambodia’s vital ecosystem services (RGC, 2021, pg. 68). These actions are consistent with Cambodia’s National REDD+ vision to “contribute to national and global climate change mitigation through improving the management of its natural resources and forest lands, and biodiversity conservation and sustainable development” (RGC, 2017, pg. 1). As far as cultural preservation, the RCG has been increasingly successful in restoring and conserving ancient constructions, designating World Heritage sites, and preserving important cultural artifacts (RGC, 2021).

11.1 SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Despite these magnificent achievements, the RGC faces challenges to resource management and cultural preservation. For resource management, the main challenges stem from budget reductions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting capacity issues (RGC, 2021). Capacity issues have led to difficulty in dealing with illegal activities in forest and fishery communities as well as on protected lands (RGC, 2021). For example, according to the REDD+ Framework, deforestation and degradation are continually driven by expansion of rural communities into forest land, illegal logging and unsustainable harvest practices, and an overall lack of government capacity to create and enforce forest governance and land use (RGC, 2017).

Although Cambodia’s forests are one of the largest carbon sinks in Southeast Asia, Cambodia is currently a

net emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, with “loss of forest cover and associated land use change” being the main causal factors (RGC, 2017, pg. 16). Thus, capacity building to address resource degradation is one of the guiding principles of the REDD+ strategy. Support toward addressing deforestation and land degradation may include capacity building assistance in “management of forest resources, land use planning, forest resource assessment, and forest monitoring” as well as training for new staff and law enforcement to implement natural resource protection (RGC, 2017).

11.2 CULTURAL PRESERVATION

The same issues of capacity and budgetary restraints persist when it comes to cultural preservation (RGC, 2021). The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MOFAC), which is tasked with preserving cultural heritage and increasing the attractiveness of Cambodia’s cultural heritage sites to increase tourism, does not have enough officials to complete these tasks professionally and effectively (RGC, 2021). Additionally, staff at the MOFAC do not have access to adequate transportation for artifacts such that they may be safely preserved (RCG, 2021). Thus, it will be essential to invest in staffing and transportation infrastructure for cultural preservation.



Figure 16, K. Chanvirak, (2020). Prasat Thom Of Koh Ker Temple Site, on UNESCO Tentative Heritage Site List, from “Koh Ker Temple in bid to be World Heritage Site,” <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50797073/koh-ker-temple-in-bid-to-be-world-heritage-site/>

12 URBAN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

The Cambodian SDG 11, ‘sustainable cities and communities,’ focuses entirely on reducing the environmental impact of cities by properly dealing with urban solid waste, reducing emissions, and reducing the use of plastic bags (Open Development Cambodia, 2019). Development goals in urban planning and management encompass CSDG 11 as well as CSDG 1 “no poverty” and CSDG 10 ‘reduced inequalities.’ Toward CSDG 1 and 10, the RGC is focused on formalizing land ownership and use policies as well as providing affordable housing.

The RGC takes pride in the achievements of the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning, and Construction (MLMUPC) over the past few years. In 2018, the Ministry of the Environment “acted to reduce the consumption of single use plastic bags by requiring supermarkets and general stores to charge customers 10 cents” for each bag they used (Open Development Cambodia, 2019). On the land use side, the MLMUPC has updated Cambodia’s system of land ownership, land use laws, and housing laws. Additionally, we have seen an increase in sustainable land use planning for coastal lands, rivers, and other waterways and have made progress on in-city roads (RGC, 2021). These advancements should move Cambodia closer to reducing the environmental impact of cities.

In light of these achievements, the RGC believes that we can do more to combat the challenges that come with increasing urbanization. Urban infrastructure, affordable housing, and sustainable growth are all areas of opportunity for the RGC and our partners. The MLMUPC has specifically reported enduring challenges in supplying clean water, managing waste, and meeting demand for affordable housing (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2021).

12.1 WATER AND WASTE

For water, access remains low in many urban areas due to a shortage of public water supply authorities (JICA, 2023). Private operators, which supply half the water in urban areas (World Bank Group (2), 2019), are not sufficient to achieve the Cambodian SDG, ‘clean water and sanitation,’ so the RGC must build capacity in its public sector water suppliers (JICA, 2023). For the RGC to

increase capacity to adequate levels, aid is needed to hire design and construction staff, acquire land, and procure materials for public works facilities and water pipelines (World Bank Group (1), 2023).

In terms of waste management, urbanization has widened the gap in access to critical waste management services, with some areas seeing only 15 percent of residents having access (World Bank Group (2), 2019). Nationwide, an estimated 42 percent of urban dwelling Cambodians do not have access to solid waste management services, resulting in health risks as well as risks to the environment (World Bank Group (2), 2019). Thus, solid waste management is an important indicator of CSDG 11, with the goal of increasing collection by a quarter of a million tons by 2029 (Open Development Cambodia, 2019).

Further, when waste is collected, the infrastructure and technology necessary to deal with that waste is lacking (Pheakdey et. al., 2022). Many waste collection vehicles are open trucks, meaning that lighter trash often flies off and liquid can leak out during transport, resulting in degradation of the urban environment (Pheakdey et. al., 2022). Then, when the trucks reach their destination, landfills, the waste is not immediately treated, separated for recycling, or prevented from leaking into water sources (Pheakdey et. al., 2022). Thus, it is important for the RGC to get support in building safe and sanitary landfills. Additionally, private waste management companies must be incentivized to invest in technology, like compactor trucks, to transport waste (Pheakdey et. al., 2022).

12.2 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The RGC has been working with the United Nations-Habitat (UNH) program since 1966 to “reduce inequality” and ensure access to affordable housing (UN-Habitat, n.d.). The UNH collaboration has led to new guidelines on constructing Low-Cost Resilient Housing (UN-Habitat, n.d.). Resilient housing is essential to the RGC’s efforts to protect the Cambodian people from the negative effects of climate change, as these structures can be restored quickly in the event of flooding and other climate change-related disasters.

The RGC has also adopted the National Housing Policy with the goal of providing lower income households and “vulnerable groups” with “access to decent housing” (Global Green Growth Institute, 2019, pg. 23). Vulnerable households include those who are at the most risk for hardship from climate change related natural disasters (Global Green Growth Institute, 2019). Ensuring that these groups have access to housing that is both low cost and resilient is an important part of the RGC’s preemptive response to climate change.

The main challenge with building and maintaining affordable housing projects is attracting private investors

(Global Green Growth Institute, 2019). This is exemplified by the capital city, Phnom Penh, where new housing developments are often catered to higher income households (Global Green Growth Institute, 2019). While sustainable and resilient affordable housing is in high demand, the projects do not yield the same return on investment and are more expensive to build than “shop houses,” the existing low-cost affordable housing model. Investment in sustainable affordable housing is essential in reducing emissions and easing environmental pressures as they are more energy efficient (Global Green Growth Institute, 2019).



Figure 17, Z. Yangpeng (2019). Capital City of Phnom Penh, from *Cambodian Property Proves Popular with Chinese buyers as mainland development drives economic growth*, https://www.scmp.com/property/international/article/3013103/cambodian-property-proves-popular-chinese-buyers-mainland?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3013103

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The future of Cambodia is strong, full of positive potential and opportunities for growth – all through the guiding values that make the Kingdom great. Once again, it is the hope of the Royal Government of Cambodia that outside organizations and actors take a serious look into the issues mentioned in this report and assess what role they can play in finding mutually advantageous arrangements, which we believe are plentiful.

The main lines of effort for the near-term future remain to focus on inclusive sustainable development, economic growth and the enrichment of human capital. All of the efforts drive progress and make the Kingdom stronger and better equipped to manage the challenges of this complicated era. As we transition forwards and begin to receive additional support from the international community, we wish to leave the reader with the following key points to aid in understanding the nuanced and complex development climate currently experienced in Cambodia:

Expanding training of civil society employees is integral to future organizational success: Investing in the people who run our government and bridge the gap between the government and civilian realms is vital to a smooth continuation of leadership and values for the years to come. Better training and higher standards will create the conditions for a better future of governance and administration.

The pandemic is officially over, but the effects are everlasting and must be properly addressed: The world must not be so naive as to believe that the effects of COVID-19 are gone for good; Cambodia is no exception. As with every initiative we pursue in the domain of public health, we must be diligent, proactive and follow the data. Health emergencies not only affect the health and spirit of the people, but also our economy, education system, military readiness and processes associated with development.

While not the sole focus of development, building up the economy remains very relevant: In the modern era, traditional measures of development that are heavily biased towards economics – such as GDP – are being replaced by more holistic measures of human progress – such as HDI and STG analyses. That being said, Cambodia must still consider that economic strength still drives global politics and therefore we must keep building up our traditional metrics while pursuing newer, and arguably better, measurements of development success.

The negative effects of climate change are widespread and impactful on the daily lives of the people of Cambodia: Climate change is a real and important phenomenon we witness in our daily lives. The Royal Government of Cambodia acknowledges the virulence and scale of these global challenges and is eager to work with international partners to reduce our impact on the ecological health of the planet.



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