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## Research Priorities & Methodology

Considerable research has been completed on youth in Cambodia, but few documents consolidate that research to provide a rich picture of the situation for youth. This study was commissioned by Pact Inc. to consolidate all country-level research and match it with global knowledge addressing youth issues. Three areas of focus were identified as topics for consideration in this research. Their selection was based on priorities of over 50 thought leaders, triangulated with a youth development framework, and data on essential youth issues within Cambodia and globally.

The first area of focus is **Employment and Skills Development**, that is, improving the supply of skilled workers and enhancing communication between potential employers and job seekers. A second area is **Civic Engagement**, which includes activities such as promoting youth leadership and responsibility, integrating the voice of youth into programs and policies, and encouraging youth to become actively involved in social, political and environmental issues. Finally, **Protecting Our Youth** addresses concerns about violence, drug use and other social problems that threaten the well-being of Cambodian youth.

This research initiative began with a desk review of current global literature on youth issues, giving special attention to developing countries. In Cambodia, the authors reviewed available publications related to youth and interviewed more than 30 organizations currently implementing youth initiatives. Informants included U.N. agencies, university departments, vocational training institutions, companies, NGOs, and donor agencies, as well as dozens of young people who were generous enough to share their hopes and fears. Research also included electronic correspondence with various sources, such as a dissertation student writing about vocational training in Cambodia, the ILO Bangkok Regional Office, UNICEF Cambodia and a national youth policy watchdog in Sri Lanka. At the conclusion of the field work a debriefing session was held for organizations working on youth issues.

This publication aims to present the main themes related to youth development in order to provide policymakers and other development actors with a framework for reflection on youth programs. However, youth literature tends to focus on very specific areas, such as ‘generating youth employment in the field of information technology.’ Few documents aim to synthesize information across sectors because of the large amount of data involved. To present a broad picture of the issues in a reader-friendly way, it has been necessary to reduce the presentation to common themes. A complete bibliography has been included for those interested in further reading.

The organizational profiles do not intend to represent an inventory of youth activities. The dedicated organizations working with youth in Cambodia that do not appear in the report should not consider their work overlooked – it was simply not possible to review all programs, particularly in the absence of a clearing house for youth programs and statistics.

## Executive Summary

More than half the population of Cambodia is less than 20 years old, and youth comprise almost 20% of the total population. Unlike some countries in Southeast Asia where this percentage is expected to decline by 2030, the proportion of youth in the population is expected to peak in 2035 with average annual growth of 0.1% in 2005-2015 and 1.0% in 2025-2035.

The last two decades have brought peace and economic growth to Cambodia, leaving room to reflect on matters beyond individual survival. In 2007 Pact Inc. asked 50 thought leaders what was uppermost on their mind regarding the development of Cambodia. The overwhelming primary concern was the future of Cambodia's youth. In response to that concern, this publication reviews the main themes related to youth development in order to provide a backdrop for reflection on youth programs.

### Youth in the World Today

According to the 2007 United Nations World Youth Report, youth make up 17.6% of the world's population. Of these, about 85% live in developing countries, with 70% living in Asia. While today's generation is 'the best-educated generation of youth ever,' youth in developing countries continue to encounter obstacles and enrolment in secondary school is apt to drop by more than 50% compared to enrolment in primary school. Over the past decade, the employment-to-population ratio has decreased more significantly for youth than adults and while some of that decrease can be attributed to higher educational enrolment, the UN speculates that in some regions "increasing discouragement of young people to participate in labor markets also contributes to the decrease." In 2008, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling on member states to ensure the full participation of young people and youth-led organizations in the development of policies designed to meet national youth goals.

### National Youth Policy

Around the world, states are recognizing the benefits of investing resources to develop national youth policies and create an enabling environment to allow youth to develop to their full potential and protect them from exploitation. In Cambodia youth-focused organizations have been advocating for a national youth policy since 1996 under the designation National Youth Policy Network. The Department of Youth within the Ministry of Education has reportedly been assigned lead responsibility for drafting the policy. Although progress has been slow due to lack of technical expertise, resources, and internal government support, it is hoped that current technical assistance from UNESCAP will facilitate the process. UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO and the World Bank have commissioned a rights-based analysis on the situation of youth aged 10–24 years. The situation analysis will identify human, financial, and organizational barriers to the fulfilment of young people's rights and will help inform the policy formulation process.

**Civil society organizations can contribute to the formulation of a national youth policy by sharing information with researchers, contributing to an inventory of youth activities, facilitating active youth participation in the policy process and organizing community advocacy for and feedback on a draft policy.**

## Employment

Youth around the world are finding it increasingly more difficult to secure employment and Cambodia is no exception. For the next few decades, 1 million young Cambodians will be entering the workforce every 4-5 years and Cambodia will face an increasingly serious employment problem. Primary strategies for increasing youth employment include promoting sectoral growth, implementing youth employment schemes, and fostering youth entrepreneurship.

Since globally most employment in the last decade has been created in small enterprises or as self-employment, and since the majority of Cambodians live in rural areas and work in the informal sector, these areas should remain priorities for employment creation – with investments in agriculture and off-farm employment in the forefront. While entrepreneurship is not a panacea for employment generation, and not everyone can become a successful entrepreneur, it is clear that promotion of entrepreneurship – and helping youth access credit and mentoring support in particular – must be a significant component of any employment generation strategy. Other potential sources of new jobs include the planned Special Economic Zones, information technology sector, tourism, and labor-intensive sectors such as construction.

**Civil society organizations can contribute to generating employment by improving the youth employment environment, increasing access to markets, improving registration procedures for small enterprises and supporting youth entrepreneurship.**

## Education

Cambodian youth are being cheated out of a proper education as gains from investments in primary education have yet to reach secondary and tertiary levels, particularly for girls. Additionally, universities need to become more responsive to industry needs and young Cambodians need to acquire analytical and technical skills that make them valuable to employers.

**Civil society organizations can best contribute to skills development of youth by making sure kids stay in school, advocating for the certification of university programs and ensuring that vocational training programs are properly evaluated. Finally, they can use their networking skills to create better links between the private sector and institutes of higher education and to create opportunities for young job seekers to connect with potential employers.**

## Civic Engagement

Civic engagement – engaging youth in affecting policy and taking action on issues – does not occur naturally, it must be fostered. Perhaps due to the ravages of war, the traditional institutions that transmit moral values – family, school and religion – are failing in their role. Morality aside, since civic engagement is considered a prerequisite to economic development. Cambodian leaders have a responsibility to examine what behavior they are modeling for the next generation and to promote concern for society.

**Civil society organizations can best promote civic engagement of Cambodia's youth by integrating the voice of youth into their organizations, promoting the creation of mentoring programs, including in the private sector, and encouraging a responsible media.**

## Protecting Youth

In the absence of a strong culture of transmitting social norms, Cambodia's youth is particularly vulnerable to commercial interests that expose youth to violence, extreme pornography, and addictive substances. Cambodian leaders need to be alert to the very real changes that are occurring among youth, and recognize that these influences are more intense and pervasive than those experienced by their parents.

**Civil society organizations can best protect Cambodia's youth by fighting against gender-based violence, educating youth on ways to avoid addictive substances, and generating public discussion of prevailing attitudes towards gender, violence, status, and work ethics and how these affect youth.**

## Conclusion

Young people are the agents of change, the economic engines, and the source of most innovation and creativity in any society. Policy makers and development actors need to realize that until they bring youth on board, listen to their concerns, show them respect, and create an enabling environment for them, the potential of young Cambodians – which is inextricably linked to that of the nation – cannot be unleashed. Left unattended, unemployed and frustrated youth will become an impetus of instability as they see their hopes and dreams turn to dust and foresee an endless cycle of poverty for themselves and their families, in contrast to the flaunted opulence of a small group of Cambodian elite.

In reviewing the various programs to promote employment, foster civic engagement, and protect youth, one observation stands out. The greatest challenge to the youth agenda will be the attitude of Cambodian adults and the behavior they emulate for their children. Adults need to act as role models, relinquishing their fixation with status and materialism, and promoting a broad-ranging work ethic. They need to show respect for youth and become comfortable conversing with them, even when their opinions do not coincide. Above all, they need to transmit a vision of Cambodia in which youth are seen as capable of achieving their dreams. If not, how can young Cambodians begin to believe in themselves?

## Acronyms

ADRA.....	Adventist Development and Relief Agency	LAAR .....	Local Administration and Reform
AFSC.....	American Friends Service Committee	LMI.....	Labor Market Information
ARH .....	Adolescent Reproductive Health	MDG .....	Millennium Development Goal
BYST .....	Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust – Business & Youth Starting Together	MPDF.....	Mekong Private Sector Development Facility
CCFC.....	French Cambodian Chamber of Commerce	NGO.....	Non-Government Organization
CD.....	Compact Disk	NYP.....	National Youth Policy
CEDAC.....	Cambodian Center for Study & Development in Agriculture	PDP-C.....	People Development and Peace Center
CEFP.....	Chantiers-Ecoles de Formation Professionnelle	RACHA .....	Reproductive Health and Child Health Alliance
CLC.....	Community Learning Center	RHAC .....	Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia
CSES.....	Cambodian Socio Economic Survey	RUPP.....	Royal University of Phnom Penh
CSO .....	Civil Society Organization	SEZ .....	Special Economic Zone
CV.....	Curriculum Vitae	SKLC.....	Send Ai Korean Labor Company
CVCD.....	Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development	SME.....	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
CVD .....	Cambodia-Vietnam Dialogues	SRP .....	Sam Rainsy Party
DDD .....	Digital Divide Data	TOT .....	Training of Trainers
DSW .....	German Foundation for Population	TVET .....	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
EFA .....	Education for All	UN.....	United Nations
EPZ.....	Economic Processing Zone	UNDP.....	UN Development Programme
ESP.....	Education Strategy Plan	UNESCAP.....	UN Economic & Social Commission for Asia & Pacific
FCTC.....	Framework Convention on Tobacco Control	UNFPA.....	United Nations Population Fund
FMECD.....	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)	UNODC .....	UN Office of Drugs and Crime
GAD.....	Gender and Development	UOC .....	University of Cambodia
GDP .....	Gross Domestic Product	UPE.....	Universal Primary Education
GEM .....	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor	USAID.....	United States Agency for International Development
GIPC .....	Garment Improved Productivity Center	USDE.....	United States Department of Education
HIV/AIDS .....	Human-Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	WDR.....	World Development Report
IADB .....	Inter-American Development Bank	WEGE.....	Women’s Entrepreneurship and Gender Equality
ICFC.....	International Center for Conciliation	WHO.....	World Health Organization
ICNYP.....	International Council on National Youth Policy	WPAY.....	World Program of Action for Youth
ICT .....	Information and Communications Technology	WTTC.....	World Travel and Tourism Council
IFC.....	International Finance Corporation	WVC.....	World Vision Cambodia
ILO .....	International Labor Organization	WYR .....	World Youth Report, produced by UN
IMF.....	International Monetary Fund	YAP.....	Youth Advisory Panel
lofC.....	Initiatives of Change	YCC .....	Youth Council of Cambodia
IRI.....	International Republic Institute	YCHD.....	Youth and Child Hope and Development
IT.....	Information Technology	YEN.....	Youth Employment Network
KILM.....	Key Indicators of the Labor Market	YFP .....	Youth for Peace
KIND .....	Khmer Institute for National Development	YLC .....	Youth Leadership Challenge
KYA .....	Khmer Youth Association	YOPEC.....	Youth Peace Council (Network)
KYD .....	Khmer Youth for Development	YPD .....	Youth Partners in Development
KYSD .....	Khmer Youth and Social Development	YPO.....	Youth Placement Office
		YRDP .....	Youth Resource Development Program

# Glossary of Terms<sup>1</sup>

Civic Engagement	Activities that engage youth in affecting policy and taking action on issues in their community. Can be an individual or collective effort.
Current active population	The currently active population (or the labor force) comprises all persons above a specified minimum age (e.g. 15 years) who, during a specified brief period of one week or one day, fulfill the requirements for inclusion among the employed or the unemployed.
Inadequate employment situations	Situations in the workplace, which reduce the capacities and well-being of workers as compared to an alternative employment situation. <i>Skill-inadequate employment</i> is characterized by an inadequate utilization and mismatch of occupational skills. <i>Income-related inadequate employment</i> results from low levels of organization of work, low productivity, insufficient tools, equipment or training, or a deficient infrastructure.
Labor Force Framework	The population is classified into three mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories: employed persons, unemployed persons, and persons not in the labor force (or persons not currently active). The labor force framework is best suited to situations where the dominant type of employment is regular full-time paid employment.
One-hour criterion	If a person has been engaged in an economic activity for as little as one hour, the ILO will classify them as <i>employed</i> on the basis of the labor force framework.
Paid employment	Employees including apprentices or trainees and members of the armed forces.
Self-employment	Employers, own-account workers including producers of goods for own final use, members of producers' cooperatives, and contributing family workers.
Service Learning	Community service by students for which they receive school credit. Includes more formal reflection on the experience than youth services.
Underemployment	Reflects an underutilization of productive capacity of the employed population. <i>Time-related underemployment</i> comprises all persons in employment who were willing to work additional hours and were available to work additional hours but who were not working full-time (to be determined according to national circumstances).
Unemployment	All persons not currently employed who have been actively looking for a job and would have accepted a suitable job if the opportunity arose.
Usually active population	All persons above a specified age (e.g. 15 years) whose main activity status as determined in terms of number of weeks or days during a long specified period (such as the preceding 12 months or the preceding calendar year) was employed or unemployed.
Youth Activism	More vigorous and direct action targeting policy change.
Youth Participation	Process of involving young people in decisions that affect their lives.
Youth Service	Umbrella term used to designate a wide range of programs and organizations that seek to involve young people in providing services to schools or communities. While youth service raises consciousness, its primary purpose is to address the symptoms, not the systems that allow the problem to occur.
Youth Voice	Ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiative of people considered to be “young.”

1. Many of the employment-related terms are from Ralf Hussmanns (2007), *Measurement of employment, unemployment and underemployment: Current international standards and issues in their application*. ILO Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/download/articles/2007-1.pdf>

# Table of Contents

PART ONE: THE FRAMEWORK.....	1
I. INTRODUCTION: YOUTH IN THE WORLD .....	1
II. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: THE GLOBAL AGENDA.....	2
III. NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES: A TOOL TO ADVANCE GLOBAL AGENDAS .....	3
1. Developing a National Youth Policy.....	3
2. Characteristics of Successful Policies.....	3
3. Cambodia’s National Youth Policy .....	4
4. Opportunities for Supporting the Formulation of Cambodia’s National Youth Policy .....	5
PART TWO: KEY ISSUES.....	7
I. EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT .....	7
1. Creating Youth Employment .....	7
2. Skills Development .....	15
3. Matching Labor Supply and Demand .....	21
II. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.....	25
1. General Civic Engagement Issues.....	25
2. Youth Civic Engagement Initiatives .....	27
3. Youth Civic Education Issues in Cambodia.....	28
4. Youth Civic Engagement Initiatives in Cambodia.....	30
5. Opportunities for Increasing Youth Civic Engagement .....	33
III. PROTECTING YOUTH.....	34
1. Issues Surrounding Protecting Youth in Cambodia.....	34
2. Current NGO Programs for Protecting Youth in Cambodia .....	36
3. Opportunities for Protecting Youth .....	39
PART THREE: CONCLUSION.....	41

## ELECTRONIC VERSION ONLY

APPENDIX I: Profiles of Youth Initiatives in Cambodia.....	47
1. National Youth Policies.....	47
2. Employment.....	47
3. Civic Engagement .....	55
4. Protecting Youth.....	61
APPENDIX II: Bibliography .....	66

Appendix I and Appendix II are available in the online edition of this document only. You can find the electronic version here: <http://www.pactcambodia.org/publications.htm>.





# PART I: THE FRAMEWORK

## I. INTRODUCTION: YOUTH IN THE WORLD

### The world youth population will continue to grow for some decades...

According to the 2007 United Nations (UN) World Youth Report, youth – defined by the UN as those between the age of 15 and 24 – make up 17.6% of the world’s population, or close to 1.2 billion people. This compares to a rate of 12.9% for developed countries, 18.7% for developing countries, 18% for Asia and 23.7% for Cambodia (or the equivalent of 3.5 million people).

“Although the youth population is the largest it has ever been in most developing countries, the size of the youth population relative to the working-age population is lower in most countries than it was 20 years ago.”<sup>1</sup> While the youth population doubled between 1950 and 1985, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that the world is close to reaching its historical peak and that the population will decline for 35 years after 2010. About 85% of the world’s youth live in developing countries, with 70% of these living in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

### Education of youth is still an obstacle...

The literature agrees that overall access to education has improved and that today’s generation is “the best-educated generation of youth ever.”<sup>3</sup> While there is no world literacy estimate due to insufficient data for some countries, the UN calculates that in Africa approximately 75% of youth are literate. In Asia literacy is assessed at 86.5%, while in Cambodia it is 83%. However, access to education is far from universal, and the gamut of obstacles ranges from lack of material resources to families who need their children’s income (preventing children from attending school), to educational systems where “the lack of relevant, up-to-date curricula prevent many students from acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to function effectively in society.”<sup>4</sup> Even when primary school enrollment is high in developing countries, enrollment in secondary school is apt to drop by more than 50 percentage points compared to enrollment in primary school.

### Youth are finding it increasingly hard to secure employment...

The UN estimates that 3 billion people aged 15 and older (not just youth) were employed in 2007; another 190 million were unemployed. Forty-five million new jobs were created last year, mostly in South Asia. Revised International Monetary Fund economic projections suggest that the global economy will slow down slightly in 2008 and only 40 million jobs will be created, with unemployment increasing by 5 million.

Between 1997 and 2007, the employment-to-population ratio – the proportion of working age people who were employed – decreased by almost one percentage point to 61.7%. Although across the globe, youth have a higher unemployment rate than adults, the decrease in the employment-to-population ratio for youth was more significant than for adults, declining from 50.6% to 47.8%. The reason for this decrease can be explained in part because more young people are pursuing studies and not looking for work, but the UN estimates that in some regions “increasing discouragement of young people to participate in labor markets also contributes to the decrease.” Some young people find it so hard to find a job that they eventually stop looking.

### Young women are at a disadvantage...

Although progress is being made, in many countries young women continue to have lower school enrollment rates than young men, particularly at the tertiary level. The gender gap restricts women’s ability to enter the workforce. This translates into more hours worked per day, higher unemployment rates and a higher participation in the (less-secure and lower paid) informal sector for young women.

### Youth are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS...

In 2005, youth represented more than half the estimated 5 million people who contracted HIV worldwide. Young women (15-24 years old) in particular are at risk<sup>5</sup> and are 1.6 times more likely to contract HIV than young men.

1. Lam, David (2006). *Youth Demographics in Developing Countries*.

2. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2005, Adolescent Fact Sheet accessed at [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_adolescents.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_adolescents.htm)

3. United Nations (2007). *World Youth Report 2007*.

4. Ibid.

5. World Bank (2007). *World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation*.

## II. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: THE GLOBAL AGENDA

Youth began to register on the global agenda with the adoption of the UN *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding* between Peoples in 1965.<sup>6</sup> However, 30 years later the UN passed the UN World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY) that firmly anchored youth as an issue on the global agenda. WPAY is based on the principle that every state should provide its young people with opportunities to obtain an education, guarantee full enjoyment of human rights, eliminate all forms of discrimination and foster mutual respect and tolerance.

Since 1978, the UN International Labor Organization (ILO) has passed five resolutions and produced many publications concerning youth employment. In 2000, ILO facilitated the establishment of the Youth Employment Network (YEN), a global partnership between the UN and the World Bank to support the participation of employers' and workers' organizations, civil society and youth groups in the design and implementation of government policies and programs on youth employment. Youth continues to appear prominently on the global agenda. In December 2007 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on Policies and Programmes Involving Youth: Youth in the Global Economy – Promoting Youth Participation in Social and Economic Development calling on member states to:

- Integrate and protect youth in the global economy;
- Improve the ability of young people to make a better transition into the world of work;
- Reinforce links between policies on education, training, social integration and mobility;

- Encourage young people's entrepreneurship by promoting formal and non-formal education, increasing access to micro-financing and facilitating their participation in cooperatives;
- Develop national strategies to overcome the digital divide and ensure that young people are equipped with knowledge and skills to use information and communications technology appropriately.

The resolution also calls upon member states to ensure the full participation of young people and youth-led organizations in the development of policies designed to meet national youth goals.

The UN defines youth development as activities and investments that “enable youth to complete consistently and effectively the transition into adulthood and to take advantage of opportunities to develop and use their human capital in the process.”<sup>7</sup> Viewed from the perspective of youth

themselves, youth development can be defined as: “...the ongoing growth process in which all youth are engaged in attempting to (1) meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and (2) to build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.”<sup>8</sup>

The work of Building Partnerships for Youth has resulted in a framework

that identifies 21 essential elements of youth development<sup>9</sup> which can be grouped into four broad categories:

- Basic skills such as academic development and workforce preparation.
- Social skills to allow youth to connect with family, peers and members of society. This includes leadership, respect for diversity and social standards and a sense of responsibility for community.

“Young people are finding it increasingly difficult to break into the labor market. One out of every three youth in the world is either seeking but unable to find work, has given up the job search entirely, or is working but still living on less than US\$ 2 a day.”

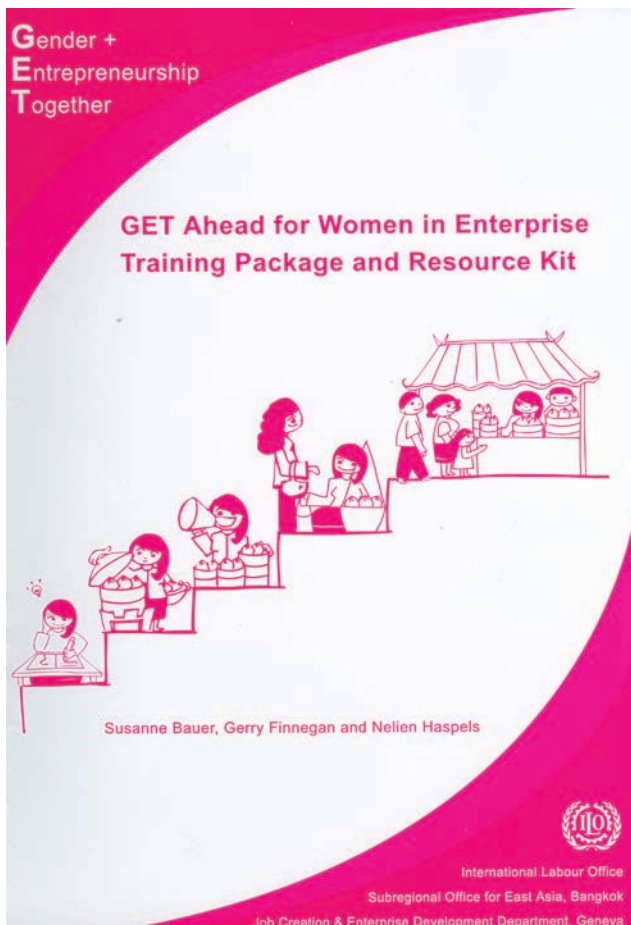
UN World Youth Report 2007

6. In 2008 terms, youth refers to those born between 1984 and 1993.

7. UN (2007). World Youth Report.

8. Reference to Karen Pittman's definition of youth development posted on the website of the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Academy for Educational Development. <http://cyd.aed.org/whatis.html>

9. *Building Partnerships for Youth* is a collaboration between the National 4-H Council and the University of Arizona, USA.



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- Judgment and autonomy allow youth to make informed choices, broadening their opportunities and allowing them to fulfill their obligations, cope with challenges and avoid undue risks.
- Emotional development and wellbeing including physical development, recreation and creativity, a sense of identity and purpose, as well as a vision for the future.

These categories are not intended to be definitive and in a country with scarce resources not all areas can receive the same attention. In many cases, priority will be necessarily given to employment-related skills that allow youth to secure their livelihood.

### III. NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES: A TOOL TO ADVANCE GLOBAL AGENDAS

#### I. Developing a National Youth Policy

For the past 30 years there has been increased global acknowledgment of the contributions that youth make to society. This has been accompanied by growing recognition of the benefits of developing national youth policies and action plans.<sup>10</sup> Youth are advocates for change but have special needs and are vulnerable to exploitation. A national youth policy creates an enabling environment to help protect youth and allow them to develop to their full potential.<sup>11</sup> A national youth policy explicitly recognizes the contributions of youth to society and raises their profile on the national agenda. It serves to articulate their needs, while communicating a vision of youth development, setting program priorities and calling upon young people, the public and all sectors of society (public, private, and civil) to mobilize in support of youth. It also serves to ensure that youth receive an equitable allocation of public resources. Finally, a policy allows for mainstreaming of youth in all government line ministries and makes provisions for planning, monitoring and evaluating youth policies and programs.

#### 2. Characteristics of Successful Policies

The World Development Report 2007 emphasizes that national youth policies often fail for three main reasons: lack of coordinated approach, insufficient youth input and inadequate evaluation. With this in mind, the World Bank makes the following observations regarding national youth policies:<sup>12</sup>

##### Strategic and Coordinated Approach that Emphasizes Accountability

Successful policies set specific desired outcomes, provide for the coordination of implementation, and establish clear lines of accountability for youth outcomes to avoid the disconnect that arises when, “sector ministries are responsible

10. Sweden's first youth policy was drafted 50 years ago and Thailand's dates from 1965. The *World Bank World Development Report 2007* reports that in 2001 82% of all countries had a youth policy and 89% had a designated national youth coordination mechanism.

11. UNESCAP (1999). *Youth Policy Formulation Manual*.

12. World Bank (2007). *World Development Report*.

for the bulk of policies that affect youth, while ministries or departments of youth are responsible for youth outcomes.” Coordination is necessary because achievement of objectives is dependent on more than one sector. Youth issues should be integrated into national planning and budgeting processes and in national poverty reduction strategies. It is imperative that the ministry charged with overseeing a youth policy have adequate capacity and resources to fulfill its role as a ‘champion of youth’ and maintain its focus on policy development, coordination and follow-up (including regular feedback surveys) rather than implementation.

#### **Participation of Youth in Policy Formulation**

One of the challenges for policymakers is securing *meaningful* participation of youth in the policy formulation process. This is particularly difficult with regards to youth because they represent generational change and are at an age when they seek to establish their autonomy. Their perceptions do not necessarily coincide with those of adults – and it may be difficult for adults raised in a different era to agree with what youth have to say. Youth usually also have more energy than government officials and may be frustrated by the pace of the process. They need to be given a certain amount of control over the process. “Even the institutions meant to reflect the voice of young people, such as national youth councils, often fail to do so.”<sup>13</sup> Policy makers must also be prepared to take note of the priority needs expressed by youth even if these may not coincide with their own views, and remember to incorporate equal opportunities for young women and young men to participate in all phases of its development, in decision-making and in the life of society.”<sup>14</sup>

### **3. Cambodia’s National Youth Policy**

In 1996 youth-focused organizations initiated a dialogue on the need for a Cambodian national youth policy. A decade later, interested organizations began to organize their efforts and prepare a draft policy. The following organizations have been participating in the initiative under the designation National Youth Policy Network (NYP-Net): Khmer Youth Association (KYA), Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP), Youth for Peace (YFP), Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC), Khmer Youth and Social Development (KYSD), Khmer Institute for National Development (KIND), Khmer Youth for Development (KYD), CYHD, SCEPE, People Development and Peace Center (PDP-C).

Within the Ministry of Education, the Department of Youth has been assigned the lead responsibility for drafting the national youth policy. However, progress has been slow due to lack of technical expertise and resources, as well as lack of internal government support. Youth non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are hoping that the Government of Cambodia will adopt a youth policy by the end of 2008.

Although much research and programming is being done to address the situation of young people in Cambodia, in the absence of a national youth strategy these lack a coordinated approach. UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), ILO and the World Bank have commissioned a rights-based analysis on the situation of youth aged 10–24 years. The situation analysis will identify human, financial and organizational barriers to the fulfilment of young people’s rights and will help inform the policy formulation process. It will also provide an opportunity to address the issues of most concern to youth – employment and safety.

13. World Bank (2007) *World Development Report 2007*.

14. Angel, William D, Ed. (2005). *Comparative Analysis of National Youth Policies*.

## 4. Opportunities for Supporting the Formulation of Cambodia's National Youth Policy

As the process of formulating a national youth policy in Cambodia gains momentum, there are many ways that civil society can contribute, namely NGOs can:

- Share information with researchers during the youth situational assessment and contribute to an inventory of NGO youth activities;
- Assist the government office charged with developing the policy to design a plan for active youth participation in the formulation process;
- Disseminate information on the purpose, objectives and process of formulating a youth policy and distribute widely through civil society networks;
- Participate in organizing youth (and adult) feedback activities, at national, provincial or local level and find creative ways for to provide their input (call-in radio shows, websites, art competitions, mobile teams).

## Conclusion

The importance of youth as agents for change is increasingly recognized and given credence. Still, young people around the world continue to face many challenges. National youth policies are a helpful tool for promoting the youth agenda, but only if formulated through a truly participatory process. The greatest challenge to advancing the youth agenda will be to alter people's attitudes towards youth, particularly in societies where youth have historically played a backseat role to adults.

### India – Revised National Youth Policy

In 1988, the Government of India drafted its first National Youth Policy, assigning 'nodal' responsibility to the Ministry of Youth and Sports and establishing a Committee for National Youth Programs. However, the document appears to perceive youth as a passive target or beneficiary, rather than agents of their own destiny.

The 2003 revised policy document reflects the global change in attitude that has taken place since the late 1980s. Youth are no longer perceived as passive recipients: the stated purpose of the NYP is to "galvanize youth to rise up to the new challenges, keeping in view the global scenario, and aims at motivating them to be active and committed participants in the exciting task of National Development."

The new policy recognizes youth rights and specifies youth responsibilities as well. All ministries are to have allocations for youth activities but their plans must reflect the multi-faceted dimension of youth issues. Other new themes include youth empowerment, youth leadership, need for youth access to information, promotion of youth volunteerism and recognition that violence against women is a violation of rights. The non-formal education sector is recognized with the addition of 'training' to references to 'education.' programs.



## PART II: KEY ISSUES

In considering youth development, three main issues rise to the surface. Young people need adequate employment to assure their livelihood, start families of their own and maintain a sense of self-worth. Thus the first key issue is ‘Employment and Skills Development.’

Second, society as a whole needs young people to develop a sense of social responsibility so that they can maintain (and improve on) existing social norms and institutions. This issue is examined under the rubric ‘Civic Engagement.’ Finally, young people today – and in Cambodia in particular – are growing up in a world that is very different from that of their parents. No one is completely isolated from global influences, and while these have many positive effects, they also place youth in a vulnerable position. The third key issue examined below seeks to raise awareness of the vulnerability encountered by youth in a rapidly changing social context and highlight the need for ‘Protecting Youth’.

### I. EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

This section looks at three aspects of the youth employment equation: (1) creating employment opportunities, (2) providing youth with skills to fill those jobs and (3) ensuring proper communication between supply and demand of labor. In order to understand what initiatives can most benefit youth, it is helpful to review some basic points related to employment and youth employment in developing countries today.

#### 1. Creating Youth Employment

##### a. Global Employment & Youth Employment Issues

We have seen above that youth around the world are finding it increasingly difficult to secure employment. The labor market for youth parallels the labor market for adults. In order to provide more job opportunities for young people there must be more opportunities for all workers.<sup>15</sup> Youth employment is influenced by factors such as total demand for labor, demographic trends, labor market regulations, education and training outcomes, work experience, entrepreneurship

options, and even the voice and aspirations of young people themselves. Many of these factors relate to the business and investment environment and can only be addressed through the intervention of governments and financial institutions at the national level. However, while employment creation is acknowledged to be an important factor in reducing poverty, government poverty reduction strategies rarely focus directly on increasing employment (let alone youth employment).<sup>16</sup>

Youth unemployment is usually significantly higher than that of adults and tends to be higher in developing countries – 2 to 4 times the adult rate.<sup>17</sup> In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, youth are five times more likely than older workers to be unemployed. Decreases in youth unemployment are associated with high economic growth. In Southeast Asia terms, reducing unemployment by 50% can result in an increase in GDP of 4.5% to 7.5 %.<sup>18</sup>

The ILO defines underemployment as working less than a set number of hours per week (which can vary by country) and wanting more work. Youth are also more likely to have inadequate employment, in other words insufficient income. Similarly, women tend to be disproportionately represented in the under-employed segment of society.<sup>19</sup>

Youth are over-represented in the informal sector. The informal sector – comprised of all unregistered enterprises – “represents an important part of the labor market, especially in developing economies, and plays a major role in employment creation, production and income generation.”<sup>20</sup> The problem with the informal sector is that it does not ensure decent employment, including sufficient income and adequate working conditions. Workers in the informal economy usually have no recourse when their rights are violated. The informal sector tends to absorb the large majority of labor market entrants in many developing countries, particularly in urban areas. Currently “the majority of the world’s youth work in the informal economy, where wages are an estimated 44% below

15. ILO (2004). *Improving Prospects for Young Women and Men in the World of Work*.

16. ILO (2004) *Starting Right: Decent Work for Young People*.

17. O’Higgins, Niall (2003). *Trends in the Youth Labor Market in Developing and Transition Countries*.

18. ILO (2004) *Decent Work for Young People*.

19. O’Higgins.

20. ILO (2007). *Key Indicators of the Labour Market Programme* (5th edition).



## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

*Generating youth employment through information and communication technologies: best practice examples and strategies* (Richard Curtain, 2002) argues that there are ICT employment opportunities even in rural areas with no electricity, with low literacy levels and little or no English language capability. Curtain outlines five principles for promoting employment opportunities for youth in the field of ICT include:

- **Promote Youth Entrepreneurship** e.g. local mobile phone services, basic business services, and assisting populations in accessing the internet.
- **Promote Public-Private Partnerships** between governments, businesses and NGOs.
- **Target Vulnerable Groups of Young People.** ICT increases opportunities for employment, such as selling local products and services (e.g. eco-tourism) internationally via the web. With the advent of telemedicine, there will also be increased need for youth located in rural areas with the necessary skills to link health care providers and the community.
- **Bridge the Gap between the Digital Economy and the Informal Sector** and help informal sector workers reach domestic and international markets. “Grassroots” software in the “language of daily use” can help thousands of women can gain computer skills, sell local products, and participate in distance learning programs on topics such as health and community development.
- **Put Youth In Charge.** Youth in many countries receive support in their ventures either through “e-mentoring” or direct assistance of international NGOs that identify promising youth in rural areas and provide them with the necessary training to set up their own businesses.

those in the formal economy, and where legal rights and regulations are often not respected, and the work in general is much more precarious.”<sup>21</sup>

Youth unemployment affects groups differently. In some developing countries youth unemployment is higher among less educated than among more educated youth. In others, including Thailand, unemployment is higher for the more educated.<sup>22</sup> When unskilled youth face difficulty finding employment, they are also more likely to take less attractive jobs because they have no alternative. When unemployed youth from wealthier backgrounds get discouraged, they can afford to stop looking for a job (or wait for a suitable position) and rely on their families to act as a safety net.

### b. Strategies for Increasing Youth Employment

As mentioned earlier, to increase youth employment necessitates increasing employment for workers from all age groups. Employment can be generated through various strategies, including promoting growth of sectors that provide employment, implementing schemes to encourage youth employment and promoting entrepreneurship.

#### Promoting Sectoral Growth

Employment promotion through the establishment/growth of large firms occurs at the national level through

21. ILO (2004) *Improving Prospects*.

22. ILO (2004). *Starting Right: Decent Work for Young People*. Background Paper, Tripartite Meeting on Youth Employment: The Way Forward, Geneva, 13-15 October, ILO.

government policies that increase investment in a sector. For example, Ireland’s remarkable success in the Information Technology (IT) sector came about through deliberate government policies to attract foreign investment accompanied by heavy investments in education. Efforts at job creation are more successful in labor-intensive sectors that require less capital investment or that have export potential. In developing countries these include small-scale agriculture, services (e.g. tourism), labor-intensive manufacturing (e.g. garment production and textiles) and infrastructure projects that use labor-intensive techniques (roads, construction).

As the ILO points out, certain sectors are particularly relevant to youth employment, particularly when new skills are required. For this reason, youth account for a large share of workers in IT.<sup>23</sup> Young people are also better suited for sectors that require English language skills, such as tourism and IT customer service. International labor migration is also an important source of employment for young people.

#### Schemes to Encourage Youth Employment

Youth employment can be promoted through a range of interventions such as incentive programs that reward employers for hiring young people, apprenticeship programs, labor-intensive infrastructure projects that offer temporary employment to young people and volunteer programs that mobilize youth to work in remote areas. Although there is no proof that incentive programs ultimately increase youth employ-

23. ILO (2004) *Decent Work*.

ment (and these can be very expensive), interventions such as bilateral agreements that facilitate safe labor migration and reduce processing fees are estimated to be more effective.<sup>24</sup>

### Promoting Entrepreneurship

Most new employment in the last decade has been created in small enterprises or as self-employment.<sup>25</sup> Entrepreneurship, which ranges from self-employment to high-growth new ventures, is an important economic activity in developing countries. This is not to say that all entrepreneurship is desirable. Self-employment in the informal sector offers little job security or social protection and often results in less optimal working conditions.<sup>26</sup> Workers in the informal sector usually have no recourse to a higher authority when they encounter a serious problem and may even avoid the authorities due to their relative powerlessness and lack of legal status.

Entrepreneurship requires special skills, including self-management, and not every person has the qualities requisite in the success entrepreneur. “Entrepreneurship is an option that is viable for only a minority of a country’s population. However, what is unknown for most countries is the potential size of the population that could pursue entrepreneurial activity if the conditions were more favorable.”<sup>27</sup>

In addition to social attitudes that do not support entrepreneurship, barriers include lack of training, mentors and credit. Richard Curtain summarizes the UN recommendations for supporting entrepreneurship:

- Create a new culture of entrepreneurship, highlighting the value of entrepreneurs to society and as a worthwhile option for young people through partnerships with the media, schools and universities, and business plan competitions and mini-ventures.
- Review existing regulations to make it easier to start and run enterprises. Often, the number of procedures for a business start-up and the delay in getting authorization will need to be reduced. Government can facilitate business start-ups through one-stop sources of information

and guidance to help young people learn how regulations work and what they need to do to comply.

- Incorporate entrepreneurial and business skills as part of existing education and training core curricula developed preferably in collaboration with business development professionals, corporations, and educational institutions.
- Increase access to credit. Young people find it especially hard to access credit because they lack assets for collateral and require long-term loans to float their business more than a year.
- Provide appropriate forms of business support. Businesspeople should be encouraged to support young entrepreneurs during the critical first years of their new business by transferring their knowledge, experience and contacts. Support can include mentoring and promoting cooperation and cost-sharing among small enterprises (ex; market research, marketing, export promotion, accounting, taxes, etc., and sharing of expenses; research) through networks among enterprises and institutions such as universities and specialized sectoral organizations.<sup>28</sup>

In a supportive environment, youth can be dynamic and innovative entrepreneurs. Larry Page and Sergey Brin, founders of Google, the highly successful internet search engine, were aged 24 and 23 respectively when they began their collaboration in 1995. Today, Google has more than 10,000 employees.

Of the three strategies for promoting youth employment described above, promoting sectoral growth offers promise but is the most complex and often can only be done through national policy-level intervention.

In developing countries with a primarily rural population, agriculture remains an important source of employment. Schemes for promoting youth employment offer partial (and often temporary) solutions, but do not address the long-term issues. Given its importance in creating recent employment, initiatives that promote youth entrepreneurship merit serious consideration from policymakers.

### c. Youth Employment in Cambodia

Cambodia is classified as one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2007 its total population was estimated at 13.4 million people. Of these, approximately 35% live below the poverty line. A 2007 World Food Programme report described Cambodia as “a least developed, low-income food-deficit country and a hot spot of hunger and under-nutrition

24. FMECD (2006) and Ministry of Japan report on China (2005) *Country Report About China's Youth Employment*.

25. ILO (2004). *Improving Prospects*.

26. UN (2007) *World Youth Report*.

27. Ibid.

28. ILO (2004). *Improving Prospects*.

in South-East Asia.”<sup>29</sup>

More than half the population is less than 20 years old, and youth comprise almost 20% of the total population. Unlike some countries in Southeast Asia, where this percentage is expected to decline by 2030, the proportion of youth in the population is expected to peak in 2035 with average annual growth of 0.1% in 2005-2015 and 1.0% in 2025-2035.<sup>30</sup> Depending on which figure is used, every 4-5 years 1 million young Cambodians will be entering the workforce. All labor sectors at most will only be able to absorb 40% of the labor force increase. In other words, Cambodia is facing an increasingly serious employment problem.

According to the 2006 USAID Cambodia Gender Analysis & Assessment, “The population ‘bulge’ resulting from the baby boom of the 1980s is now entering the workforce at a rate of about 150,000 each year, with an expected increase to 200,000 per year by 2010. The economy is not keeping pace with the demand for jobs, which could lead to frustration and social instability in the future.” The Swedish International Development Agency indicates that the 2004 socio-economic survey sets the average number of people entering the workforce between 1998 and 2004 at 221,000 per year. The figure is expected to increase to 230,000-240,000 (or a rate of 3%), for a total of 1.4 million new entrants between 2004 and 2010, increasing pressure for employment creation.<sup>31</sup>

Using 2004 statistics, average unemployment – defined as working less than an hour a week while looking for work – is relatively low in Cambodia (1%). The rate is much higher for teenagers aged 15-19 (6.2%) and young adults aged 20-24 (7.8%). In 2004, youth accounted for 74% of unemployed in Phnom Penh. If one widens the definition of unemployed to include those who are available for work (but not actively seeking employment), the numbers are alarming: 27.8% for teenagers and 16.6% for young adults.<sup>32</sup> This means that there are many young people who would like to work but have either become discouraged or do not know how to go about finding a job. These 2003-2004 employment statistics are likely higher today.

Additionally, ILO points out that “many Cambodians already work long hours but would like additional work. This suggests a problem of low earnings and low productivity.”<sup>33</sup> Lack of economic opportunities is associated with increased human trafficking, prostitution and child labor.

## Agriculture & Rural Development

The 2004 Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey indicates that while industry and services continue to grow in importance, employing 12.3% and 25.5% respectively, the large majority of Cambodians – 60.3% – continue to be employed in agriculture. Due to the high proportion of people working in agriculture doing unpaid family labor or being self-employed and the large informal sector in the cities, the majority of Cambodian workers (80% of men and 89% of women) fall under the category of self-employed.

High priority must be given to an intensification of agriculture in order to permit this sector to resume the role as a main contributor to employment and income generation and reverse the trend of widening income inequality. Since the majority of youth are located in rural areas, developing more productive employment in agriculture is a requisite for increasing youth employment. The rapid expansion of employment generation in the manufacturing sector cannot make up for the absence of employment generation in agriculture.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, projections for future growth in agriculture given current investments are low. The main challenge for agriculture is irrigation, which has become particularly important given unpredictable weather patterns of recent years and which has not received sufficient attention.

To promote agriculture and rural development it is equally important to ensure adequate road infrastructure, access to markets and moderate fuel prices. These factors combined with increased agricultural productivity will inject funds into the local economy by increasing consumer demand.

“It is not surprising that the occupation of three out of five workers is farmer or fisherman.”

Elizabeth Morris (2007)  
*Promoting Employment in Cambodia: Analysis and Options, ILO.*

29. World Food Programme (2007). *Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Pilot in Cambodia.*

30. Lam, David (2006). *Youth Demographics in Developing Countries.*

31. SIDA (2006) *Employment and Growth in Cambodia: An Integrated Economic Analysis.*

32. ILO (2007). *Policy Brief on Youth Employment in Cambodia.*

33. Morris, Elizabeth (2007). *Promoting Employment in Cambodia: Analysis and Options, ILO.*

34. Ibid.

## Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry

At the national level, the Government of Cambodia has pursued a range of strategies to increase employment. Since 1996, the Government of Cambodia has been working to develop Special Economic Zones or SEZs (otherwise known as Economic Processing Zones). A list posted on the Cambodian SEZ Board website at the CDC suggests that 14 SEZs are in the planning.<sup>35</sup> In 2006, the Minister of Finance indicated that the SEZs are expected to generate 500,000 new jobs by 2010-12 and 1 million by 2020, with another 1.5-2 million indirect jobs. Elsewhere SEZs have indeed generated employment and boosted exports although their ability to invigorate the surrounding economy is limited by their enclave/remote design. SEZs present challenges to trade unions and labor activists, who often have difficulty accessing workers in the zones. To meet projected employment demand in the next few decades the SEZs will have to generate jobs according to the most optimistic scenario.

The remarkable development of a garment manufacturing industry over the last decade has created an estimated 320,000 jobs – a significant feat. Concerns that investors in the garment industry would move to countries with more attractive profit margins after the removal of textile and garment quotas in early 2005 have not yet been realized. According to ILO statistics, almost all (85-90%) garment factory workers are youth i.e. women aged 18 to 25 years old. The garment sector employs approximately 20% of women aged 18 to 25. However, despite some optimistic projections, there is little reason to believe that employment in the garment industry will grow at the same pace as the last decade.<sup>36</sup>

The garment industry offers potential employment in managerial and technical positions. Pertinent to the creation of youth employment is the fact that many of the estimated 7,000 supervisory, technical and managerial positions in the garment industry are not yet filled by Cambodians because employers cannot find skilled workers to take over these jobs.

## Tourism

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) figures estimate that employment related to tourism peaked in 2007 and will be slightly lower in 2008, making up 15.4% of

employment in Cambodia, or 1.1 million jobs.<sup>37</sup> This includes all activities directly and indirectly attributed to tourism, however, without a breakdown it is not possible to assess to what degree the silk and handicraft industries are included in this estimate. WTTC projects that employment related to tourism will remain stable through 2018. However, because of the expected population growth of the next decade, this means that tourism's share of employment will drop to 12.7%. Thus, while tourism represents an interesting prospect for employment for young people, industry experts do not anticipate any significant employment growth in this sector.

## Migrant Labor

The number of legal overseas Cambodian workers is estimated at close to 200,000. Using the Cambodian Socio-economic Survey figure of 7,557,576 people in the active labor force, the labor migrant population already represents 2.65% of Cambodia's economically active population. The figure could be as high as 5% if estimates regarding the unregistered migrant population in Thailand are correct. Migrant jobs tend to be very low-skilled, particularly those in Thailand and Malaysia. Although they provide important livelihoods for Cambodians, they are not expected to improve the labor pool. Employment in Korea, however, appears more promising with higher skills being required and monthly salaries of \$1,000-\$2,000 per month. Government agreements with Japan, Brunei, China, Singapore, and Hong Kong suggest that demand for migrant labor will continue to increase.

## Other Areas of Potential Youth Employment

A number of other areas hold promise for added youth employment but specific projections were not available for this report. Agribusiness, including organic foods and food processing, is a promising sector in the face of mounting global concern for food safety and increasing demand for organic foods. Already there has been interest and investment in this industry, for example in the export of shrimps and prawns. However, Cambodia lacks a cold chain infrastructure (i.e., capacity to refrigerate food throughout the transportation process), which requires investment at the national level, as well as technical food processing skills. The Royal University of Phnom Penh is developing a food technology program

35. [www.cambodiasez.gov.kh](http://www.cambodiasez.gov.kh)

36. SIDA (2006) *Employment and Growth in Cambodia: An Integrated Economic Analysis*.

37. World Travel and Tourism Council (2008). *The 2008 Travel & Tourism Research: Cambodia*.

within its Chemistry Department and initial courses will be offered in September 2008.

Science and technology are important skills for young Cambodians to acquire. While it is not expected that Cambodia will become a technological innovator in the foreseeable future, science and technology skills are necessary to adapt existing technology to the local context. Employment in Information Technology (IT) can be expected to grow as computers become an integral part of doing business in Cambodia and as small and medium enterprises break into the field of e-business (conducting business via the internet).<sup>38</sup> The growing importance of these two fields is highlighted by the Science and Technology expo and IT expo held in early 2008. Demand for local services – plumbers, electricians, repair services, restaurant workers, basically any services that consumers need – are likely to be important sources of employment. However, actual information and estimates on growth of these types of services is unknown.

The prospective oil and gas industry (and potentially mining) may create additional employment. A retired oil geologist explained the potential opportunities:

Throughout the life of an oil company, there will be the need for low-skilled and high-skilled labor. The first phase (exploration) will require geologists, topographers, computer experts, etc. A skilled workforce (drillers, tool pushers) assisted by semi-skilled labor will be employed on the drilling rigs where mechanical and electrical engineers, communication technicians etc. will also be needed. The transportation of men and equipment to and from the drilling sites will create many jobs. There will also be a need for marine support in the case of offshore activities. Catering and other service activities will provide jobs for skilled and unskilled labor. During the production phase most of the jobs described above will still be in force and other skills required in the laying of pipelines, oil extraction and production techniques, and storage of reserves—all of these activities will be computer-assisted. Others will need study in schools or universities for the higher-skilled jobs related to engineering, management of oil fields, and finance. Semi-skilled activities are usually taught on the job.

38. UNESCAP and the Cambodian national ICT Development Authority organized a meeting in August 2007 to discuss the main issues of an ICT policy.

Whatever the sector, economists will emphasize the importance of increasing the value of a product in each transaction as it travels down the production line from raw material to final sale. Transactions that involve reselling a product at a higher cost but without adding any value to it may generate employment in the short term but are not likely to contribute to long-term growth.

#### **d. Programs to Increase Youth Employment in Cambodia**

The above sectors are expected to hold the most potential for growth of youth employment.<sup>39</sup> With regard to the labor demand side of the equation, the objective of creating jobs for Cambodian youth is best served through the following approaches:<sup>40</sup>

- Promote national policies that attract investment and create jobs, as in the case of the garment industry and SEZs. An important aspect is the development of infrastructure to support economic growth – including both physical infrastructure such as roads and power, and IT infrastructure.
- Increase access to markets. This entails increasing access to market information and learning about promising/innovative products and services. NGOs can promote youth employment through the establishment of social enterprises that combine business principles with social objectives.
- Improve registration procedures for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to facilitate the transitions of enterprises from the informal to the formal sector. A 2003 private sector assessment estimated that 80% of Cambodians were employed in the informal sector and that the industrial sector alone was comprised of 27,000 unregistered firms. Registering a firm entails official and unofficial costs, complex procedures and a lot of time. The introduction of simplified procedures, such as the one-stop shop piloted by the Ministry of Interior and GTZ, can facilitate the formalization of small enterprises. The transition from informal to formal enterprise is associated with improved protection of workers and greater employment growth. NGOs can contribute to the effort

39. Beyond the scope of this review is a general perception that Cambodia is at a disadvantage in regional trade and that employment will increase with improved terms of trade with Thailand and Vietnam.

40. Note: this discussion is limited to employment creation, not skills development, which is addressed in the following section.

by sharing information on enterprise registration with SMEs and by providing technical assistance to SMEs in basic management, accounting and marketing.

- **Support youth entrepreneurship.** If existing firms are not going to be able to provide enough jobs for young Cambodians, it will become all the more important to foster entrepreneurship among youth. Youth need a supportive environment, one in which innovation is respected, as well as access to training, mentoring and financial services specifically aimed at young entrepreneurs (who may not have collateral and may need more than a year to pay back their loan).

Of the above approaches, promoting youth entrepreneurship is the most relevant for agencies contemplating strategies to generate youth employment in Cambodia (on the labor demand side). Nevertheless, although some agencies are doing work with SMEs and the private sector – notably MPDF and GTZ – very few initiatives provide young fledgling entrepreneurs with the mentoring support, financial services and nurturing environment they need in order to become successful.

In urban areas, Mith Samlanh’s support for vocational training graduates who start their own businesses presents a successful model. Additionally, with the majority of young Cambodians living in rural areas and coming from farming backgrounds, promoting entrepreneurship is particularly important in areas where youth are unlikely to have access to higher education. CEDAC’s Young Agri-Entrepreneurs program provides an excellent model program for rural settings (see text boxes and profiles in the appendices).

One of the greatest hindrances is difficulty in securing credit for enterprise start-up. NGO and private financial institutions do not cater to young entrepreneurs, who lack assets to secure loans and require longer timeframes for repayment than the average adult borrower. For example, most institutions limit loans to one year, which is not sufficient time for a young entrepreneur to get a business off the ground.

In addition to start-up loans, young entrepreneurs require sufficient means to cover their living expenses during the start-up period. To this effect, only the Mith Samlanh program was found to support such expenses, and for a limited time period of three months. Young entrepreneurs also need mentoring support, interaction with a more experienced businessperson who can give them much-needed advice and help them anticipate problems and avoid pitfalls. No such formal programs could be found, though it is possible that the various business associations provide mentoring to young entrepreneurs.

Finally, young Cambodians are most likely to encounter the greatest obstacle at home when family members look down upon entrepreneurship and push their children to find employment in careers that are considered ‘good enough.’ The researchers could find no programs that aim to change this dominant attitude.

An alternative approach is the promotion of social entrepreneurship – operating a commercial business with social objectives in mind, such as generating employment. The handicraft industry is a common example, although the exact scope of employment generation in that sector is not known. Digital Divide Data presents another important model as it generates employment for as many as 180 young people

(see profile in appendix). However, such examples often require sophisticated start-up skills and networks that may not be readily available locally.

### **e. Opportunities for Youth Employment Initiatives in Cambodia**

An examination of current employment creation efforts in Cambodia reveals the following opportunities for NGOs:

**Improve the youth employment environment.** Share information with local authorities on employment problems confronting youth in Cambodia today and bring government, private sector and communities together to discuss youth employment issues at provincial or local levels.

#### **CEDAC’s Young**

**Agri-Entrepreneurs** program targets youth who want to work in farming and agribusiness. All high school graduates in the project areas are invited to enroll but must demonstrate capacity to complete a series of assignments to remain in the program. Starting from assignments related to the family, they progressively move out in wider circles to learn to reflect upon their community and the environment. They learn to conduct market studies and prepare a basic business development plan. Once they reach the implementation phase of their plan, those who have fulfilled all requirements receive technical ongoing technical and financial support from CEDAC.

Students at **Mith Samlanh's** vocational training center in Phnom Penh are among the few to benefit from entrepreneurial support. Mith Samlanh furnishes vocational training for graduates who opt to go into business for themselves, including equipment, supplies and *living expenses for three months*. They also encourage young entrepreneurs to interview business owners about what it is like to manage a business. In 2007, Mith Samlanh trained more than 100 students. Of these, 34 opened their own business – mostly in Phnom Penh, but also in the provinces. Enterprises started included motorcycle repair, television repair, hair dressing and bridal services.

Increase access to markets. NGOs can collaborate with private sector actors to build capacity of SMEs to access information and market their products. This does not need to be a high-level activity. Whenever NGOs support livelihood activities there will be room to improve market access for communities. More sophisticated NGOs can tap into international networks, professional associations and fair trade associations to increase market access.

Improve registration procedures for SMEs. NGOs can research information on business registration and disseminate it to their clients and to young entrepreneurs. They can also advocate with government for improved procedures.

Support youth entrepreneurship. The labor demand side of the employment equation offers the most opportunities for NGOs to increase youth employment. Suggested activities include:

- Raise the profile of youth as a dynamic and innovative segment of society using a media strategy for this purpose.
- Conduct research on opportunities and ideas for young entrepreneurs and disseminate findings widely, in particular opportunities in rural areas.
- Make entrepreneurship training and training resources accessible, such as the ILO WEGE manual, as well as basic accounting, marketing and management materials.

- These should be made accessible to all interested teachers/trainers, for example life skills instructors in public schools. Similarly, establish permanent capacity building resources for young entrepreneurs that are not dependent on cyclical or short-term project funding. In this virtual age, this does not necessarily entail setting up a physical center with high overhead – other more efficient models may be possible. Consider establishing a youth entrepreneurship incubation centers in the provinces.
- In collaboration with private sector actors, organize youth entrepreneurship competitions for the best business plans and ideas and award significant prizes such as seed capital or start-up loan.
- Facilitate the establishment of a network of youth entrepreneurs who can support each other and eventually become mentors to future generations of youth entrepreneurs. Examine the relevancy of integrating entrepreneurship training into savings groups to promote the growth of existing micro-enterprises.
- Advocate with lending institutions to make special loans for available youth who put together a solid business plan. Assist youth with the development of business plans, in collaboration with a private sector mentor.
- Celebrate Global Entrepreneurship Week on 17-23 November 2008.

## 2. Skills Development

### a. Global Issues around Skills Development

Skills Development – also referred to as improving labor supply or promoting employability – entails providing youth with basic education and training as well as the skills necessary to help them to function in society. It means more than just helping youth get their first job – they need to be able to cope with change, secure another job if they are laid off and enter the labor market at different periods of the life cycle.<sup>41</sup>

This section highlights current themes in skills development in developing countries and highlights how civil society organizations can promote youth employability.

In order to produce a balance between unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers, investments are necessary in three types of education: basic education (primary and secondary), technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education (tertiary). There is also growing concern over learning gaps across and within countries. Policy makers become increasingly worried that while great strides have been made, basic education in developing countries is not adequately preparing youth. Increasingly, ‘soft’ or ‘life’ or ‘flexible’ skills are being touted as the solution to the problem of youth employability. Countries wanting to compete in the global economy need higher skills and productivity among their workers.

#### Basic Education

The importance of basic education as an engine of growth and development is firmly established in the international community today. While countries remain committed

to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) goal of universal primary education, quality of education remains low. “Policies and programs need to be geared not only towards ensuring universal primary education and strengthening literacy, but also towards improving instructional quality, educational facilities, and student proficiency levels. In the context of rapid globalization, it is especially important to ensure that secondary education becomes the new minimum level of attainment.”<sup>42</sup>

Most basic education in developing countries has a weak link to actual employment, particularly for dropouts and high

school graduates who are not in a position to pursue their studies. This challenge has spurred the growth of ‘life skills’ programs. “Schools and other educational institutions should also provide youth with social, personal and other life skills that will benefit them and the wider community.”<sup>43</sup> Yet, “Disparities in access to education prevent many young people, especially those from minority groups and migrant backgrounds, from participating fully in society.

<sup>44</sup> These disparities need to be addressed in national policies. Urban dwellers and the relatively rich tend to be favored, while women, the poor, the disabled and members of ethnic minorities receive less equitable access to education. Participation of girls in secondary schools continues to be low and “evidence indicates that the educational gains among females around the world have not necessarily improved their position in the labor market.”<sup>45</sup>

The comparative strengths of NGOs in basic education include:

- Promoting basic education for girls’ and other disadvantaged groups. NGOs can be credited with leading

#### Skills for Youth

The term ‘skills’ is used in many different contexts. ILO identifies the following basic skills needed for youth to function in today’s world:

- literacy
- numeracy
- problem solving
- teamwork
- information and communications technology
- language skills
- learning-to-learn skills (being able to profit from instruction)
- competencies to protect against occupational hazards and diseases

The World Youth Report adds the following soft skills (WYR 07)

- active citizenship
- intercultural learning
- social solidarity
- ensuring equitable development
- social justice
- peace and social cohesion

*Life Skills* is a general term that refers to topics not historically taught as part of the formal school curriculum. These can range from hygiene and home economics to livelihood skills such as home gardening.

41. ILO (2004) *Improving Prospects*.

42. UN (2007). *World Youth Report*.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*



the push to increase the enrollment of girls and other disadvantaged groups.

- Providing non-formal and formal education in remote areas or to disadvantaged groups. “Household surveys show that non-formal education is the main route to learning for many disadvantaged youth and adults in some of the world’s poorest countries...[yet] non-formal education remains neglected in terms of public funding.”<sup>46</sup> NGOs are also in a better position to provide formal education in non-formal ways as a strategy for reintegrating children who are falling by the wayside of the public education system. The main challenge to this activity is linking formal programs to existing institutions in order to ensure their sustainability
- Continue to pilot/implement after-school and life skills programs. Defined as any program not found in the traditional school curriculum, life skills can encompass subjects as varied as ‘Dealing with Pressures’ and ‘Getting Along with Parents’ to livelihood skills such as home gardening and fish raising. However, these programs need to be linked to public system and involve capacity building of teachers to ensure sustainability.

NGOs can support youth employability in the following ways:

- At the policy level, (a) advocate for increased investments in basic education (and policies to increased access for disadvantaged groups), (b) participate in development, implementation and monitoring of education policies (b) empower citizens to advocate for Education for All (EFA).
- Provide input and engage private sector to provide input into public schools to improve employability. Government cannot meet the skill needs of the private sector if they do not know what these are. This type of activity is likely to be more responsive when it is done at the local level. NGOs can help organize round tables with all partners.
- Continue to support basic education of girls and vulnerable/minority groups, particularly at the secondary school level.
- Advocate for second chance programs to retrain youth who have lost their jobs and high school equivalency programs for dropouts who want to complete their basic

education. As the 2007 World Development Report puts it, “give young people the hope and the incentive to catch up from bad luck—or bad choices.” However, second chance programs need to ensure that they are coordinated with the mainstream.

### Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training present a mixed case of pros and cons in the skills development arena. On the negative side, TVET targets only about 5% of the secondary school population in least developed countries.<sup>47</sup> TVET centers are expensive to run and slow to respond to changes in the market demand for labor. At the same time, quality TVET can provide youth with skills that make them immediately employable.

TVET needs to be closely linked to market demand for labor. As with all skills development programs in developing countries (including basic and tertiary education), “while training plays a major role in assuring employability, it is often not considered a high priority, nor is it connected to labor market needs.”<sup>48</sup> TVET programs need to consider the particular constraints experienced by women in developing countries and avoid gender stereotyping. “Stereotyping is frequently found in vocational guidance and counseling services, which encourage young women away from training that would have led them to higher long-term earnings and status. Young women are encouraged to train in household-related work while young men are encouraged to go for high-skill training and employment. As a result, many young women end up in relatively low-skilled and low paid occupations with little prospect of career development.”<sup>49</sup> Constraints encountered by women include motherhood, household duties, difficulty with travel and being away from home, and discrimination.

TVET Programs need to be more responsive to skill requirements for people in the informal sector. It is by increasing the skills of those working in the informal sector that programs are most likely to increase the employability of the poor. Most people working in the informal sector cannot access TVET programs, although “they do manage to acquire most of the basic skills and competencies that are necessary to carry out their activities.”<sup>50</sup>

46. UNESCO (2008) *Education for All Global Monitoring Report Summary: Education for All by 2015, Will We Make it?*

47. King and Palmer (2006). *Skills Development and Poverty Reduction: The State of the Art*.

48. ILO (2004). *Improving Prospects*.

49. Ibid.

50. Liimatainen (2001). *Training and Skills Acquisition in the Informal Sector*. ILO.

TVET programs are notoriously poor at evaluation and consequently it is difficult to measure their effectiveness in promoting employability. However, empirical evidence from Cambodia (discussed below) suggests that *quality* programs are *very effective* at promoting employability.

The comparative strengths of NGOs with relation to TVET include:

- Providing vocational training to the disadvantaged youth. NGOs are better able to target skills programs to sub-groups of society, such as the disabled, women and populations in remote areas. They also tend to be effective in identifying “employment-and-income-generating opportunities at the local level, designing and delivering the appropriate training programs, and providing post-training support services, including credit, technical assistance and market information.<sup>51</sup> NGOs are able to provide high-quality training, but usually on a small or short-term scale.
- Collaborating with experts from the private sector to produce high quality skills training. NGOs are more adept at designing dynamic curricula, making linkages with companies for internships, securing funding and generally being creative in the management of a TVET program. In this sense they can be good partners for a public TVET program.
- NGOs can use their own expertise in TVET to contribute to the establishment of skills standards for certification programs. Part of moving from the informal to the formal sector is establishing standards for occupations, such as electricians, plumbers, etc. With their greater expertise, NGOs can contribute positively to the process of government standardization.

NGOs can support employability with regard to TVET in the following ways:

- NGOs should ensure that their skills training programs are evaluated (through tracer studies). They can also help develop government centers develop evaluation capacity. Many TVET centers, including those managed by NGOs, do not conduct formal follow-up activities of their graduates as means of assessing current market conditions.
- Assisting TVET centers to collect, understand and display labor market information (LMI) for students. NGOs with the capacity to access and understand LMI (acquired from the ILO, Ministry of Labor or a provincial office)

can in turn help their local TVET centers to access and display the information. NGOs can also assist centers to develop career guidance capacity and to establish a local mentoring network, which are almost always absent from the centers.

- NGOs can advocate for policies for increased investment in skill building in the growing informal sector. Programs need to be flexible and start from the specific needs of the target group but can include numeracy, literacy, problem-solving marketing, communication, marketing and negotiation skills to increase the productivity of micro-enterprises.<sup>52</sup>
- NGOs implementing micro-enterprise and savings programs can identify technical skills needed by their clients and design programs to fit their needs. Most micro-enterprise programs provide limited training in numeracy and literacy. The lack of technical skills such as marketing and new product design and service delivery limits the potential growth of the enterprise, including the possibility of creating more jobs.
- NGOs are encouraged to advocate for TVET training opportunities in better paying occupations for women.

### Higher Education

With the increased focus on basic education starting in the 1980s, higher education has taken a back seat on the agenda of most developing countries. In Southeast Asia, only Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore exceed 20% tertiary enrollment. There is a tension surrounding investments in higher education. On the one hand it is argued that higher education benefits a few elite, increases income inequality and provides low returns to society as whole. Proponents of higher education, on the other hand, argue that a country needs higher education skills to compete in the global economy.

Some of the issues relating to higher education in developing countries today include:

Many institutes of higher education in developing countries are chronically under-funded and burdened by antiquated administration and political interference. Under these conditions, it is very difficult to hire qualified staff and introduce modern teaching methodologies. Increase in demand for higher education has resulted in the growth of private sector institutions. Some use the absence of institutional history to

51. ILO (2004). *Improving Prospects*.

52. Liimatainen (2001). *Training and Skills Acquisition in the Informal Sector*.

PROJOVEN provides training and work experience for low-income high school graduates. Training agencies participate in a public tender system to implement courses designed to respond to the needs of the private sector through a combination of technical education and practical training. Seventy percent of participants have been successful in becoming integrated into the labor market and in increasing their real income by 120%. By 2001, the per capita cost has been reduced to US\$520 and the aggregated number of youths trained is approximately 25,000, 55% of which are women. (ILO, Improving Prospects). For comparative purposes, an evaluation of World Education's My Better Future non-formal education project in Cambodia estimates average cost per trainee at \$235. Given the intensity of the program over an 18-20 month period, and the significant outcomes observed in terms of employment status, ability to find work in their home villages, satisfaction levels, confidence and a range of other human and social indicators, this investment is considered to be highly cost effective. See [www.projovent.gov.pe](http://www.projovent.gov.pe).

build dynamic and innovative institutions, while others simply replicate the curriculum of the public universities. Yet others known as 'garage universities' disappear as quickly as they appear, leaving their students with significant investments of time or money but nothing to show for it. Universities are also challenged by the fact that most students who enroll are not properly prepared for higher education.

University programs do not always respond to market needs for skills and getting an education does not guarantee finding a job. In some developing countries educated youth experience higher rates of unemployment than the less educated. To promote employability, programs must be responsive to the needs of the private sector. Industry experts suggest that universities need to produce a smaller cohort of students with specialized skills alongside a larger cohort with general knowledge and the ability to be flexible and innovative. In today's world, students also need to know how to keep their knowledge up to date.<sup>53</sup>

NGOs do not have a strong tradition of working with institutes of higher education (with the exception of education NGOs). However, there are a number of ways in which NGOs can support employability of university students and graduates:

- Advocate for improved university programs that are tailored to the needs of potential employers and use experience working in communities to inform education administrators of the problems that youth encounter.
- Work with industry to advocate for the development of particular skills/curricula in universities and use networking skills to help universities forge links with the private sector, in order to create internship and mentoring opportunities, engage technical professionals in the develop-

ment of human resources in their field (for example by guest lecturing), and develop scholarship programs.

- Institutionalize student internships within the NGO and advocate for youth internships within the private and public sectors.
- Support development of a university certification system.

## b. Skills Development in Cambodia

### Basic Education

Cambodia has one of the lowest school enrollment rates in the Asia-Pacific region. Investments in education have been successful in raising net primary school enrollment rates to over 95% for both boys and girls., enrollment in secondary schools drops to 30% and 22% respectively. However, the near gender parity is encouraging for women. The expansion of primary school education has strained resources and the quality of education is low.

In line with global trends in developing countries, a secondary school bulge is expected and additional resources will be needed to handle the increased demand. The problem at present is that schools do not have adequate provisions for those who drop out or who graduate but cannot pursue tertiary studies. To deal with this issue, the Government, with assistance from donors, has developed a primary school life skills curriculum for grades 1 through 9 intended to assist students to participate in community life. The curriculum is made up of 20 modules with subjects ranging from school gardens to road safety and mending a tire puncture. By regulation, schools are now required to provide 2-5 hours of life skills to students every week.

One of the challenges in basic education in Cambodia

53. World Bank (2000) *Higher Education in Developing Countries*.

is the absence of a general education certification system to allow older dropouts to complete their high school degree. While it is theoretically possible to return to one's original high school and pay to take the exam, without the possibility of taking night or weekend classes (at low cost), the number of people who have sufficient discipline and capacity for self-learning to go through the process on their own is very limited. With the better TVET programs requiring a secondary school education, opportunities for advancement for dropouts are very limited.

### **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**

The Ministry of Labor maintains 38 technical and vocational centers, 26 of which are located in the provinces. Additionally, many NGOs and private sector firms provide vocational training. According to the Ministry's 2007 Summary report, during the 2006-2007 academic year, NGOs and the private sector provided training to 18,505 students and the government provided training to 69,862 students. The breakdown of men and women is 78% men and 22% women for the NGO/private sector and 54% men and 46% for the public sector. Historically the vocational training sector in Cambodia has been prone to stereotyping women. Men are recruited for occupations that offer higher returns such as welding and electrical work, whereas women have been limited to occupations traditionally perceived as falling within the realm of women's work, such as hair cutting and sewing. This has been the case for both public and NGO centers. In 2007 the TVET Department within the Ministry of Labor began a mainstreaming process that is expected to continue in 2008.

Empirical evidence suggests that NGOs and private firms can be extremely competent at providing high quality instruction for their students. As a result, students are quick to find employment. NGO and private centers not only provide skills, they also impart a set of work ethics to their students (such as being able to work without supervision) that is valued by employers.

From the interviews with the NGO/private TVET centers it appears that most graduates find jobs as staff rather than enter into self-employment. Students from rural areas who study in Phnom Penh tend to be unsuccessful at finding employment in rural areas and return to the city to find a job. Graduates appear to start their own businesses only when they receive support services, as in the case of Mith Samlanh.

In the case of Artisans d'Angkor, the establishment of rural workshops allows students to remain in rural areas.

### **Higher Education**

Although tertiary enrollment remains low at 3% and 1% respectively for men and women, higher education has witnessed an explosion in Cambodia over the past decade. Most visible has been the proliferation of private schools in the capital and provincial towns. Cambodians are hungry for education and anybody who has the means is attending school during the day, in the evenings and on weekends. Young people (and older adults) are making a major personal investment in education. What is not clear is if they are getting their money's worth or if they will find a job. On the contrary, unemployment among university graduates appears to be on the rise as the job market becomes tighter. Already it is not uncommon for educated youth to spend a year looking for a job.

Quality of instruction is low. Public and private sector employees note the lack of analytical skills and initiative as one of the largest obstacles to hiring strong candidates. Cambodian universities have yet to provide a solid liberal arts education, which is considered the backbone to any system of higher education. Cambodia also has yet to institute a system for certifying schools and their programs.

Additionally, many schools offer the same courses of study, notably in accounting, marketing and management although the job market is small for these areas of study. Their programs tend to be very superficial and do not present students with opportunities to learn hard core skills and gain experience. The absence of areas of specialization and the disconnect with industry needs mean that graduates are not adequately prepared for employment. Students are also lacking soft skills, such as problem solving and keeping their knowledge current.

Lack of information prevents students from making informed decisions about which university to attend. There is currently no system for rating schools, indeed no comparative information readily available to prospective students. This prevents consumer demand to apply pressure on schools to reform. There also appears to be a herd effect, in which youth decide on their course of study by emulating each other. As a result, the market for those skills becomes saturated.

On the positive side, the more serious universities are feeling the pressure to change and showing signs of becoming responsive to industry needs. Examples to this effect are the

**Artisans d'Angkor** provides training in wood and stone carving, lacquer/gilding, silk painting and silk farming for youth aged 18-25. Most young women choose silk farming, silk painting, and lacquer/gilding while men young men opt to study wood and stone carving. Upon enrollment, students are presented with the opportunity to join the Artisans d'Angkor network, which buys products and provides continuous education to artisans. The enterprise agrees to buy all products crafted by graduates as long they meet established specifications. Artisans d'Angkor currently provides employment for 1,000 artisans and non-craftsmen working in 12 village workshops.



establishment of a food technology department at the Royal University Phnom Penh (RUPP) and the introduction of courses on the garment industry at NUM, as profiled in the following section. However, there are many other promising technical areas that universities could examine as they consider ways to become more responsive to the development needs of the country.

### c. Programs to Improve Skills Development in Cambodia

In addition to the public vocational training centers, Cambodia boasts a number of private and NGO skills training programs. Often these programs have greater resources at their disposal and are able to offer students better quality instruction and other options such as experienced guest lecturers, internships, placement opportunities and even employment.

Skills training programs fall into two broad categories: basic trades and skills related to the tourism industry. Programs teaching basic trades are the most widespread. Occupations range from less technical – such as sewing, mat weaving and hair dressing – to those that require greater technical instruction and practical experience. These include occupations such as automotive repair, electricity, mechanics and construction-related occupations.

In the absence of a comprehensive assessment of the sector and of individual schools, it is difficult to draw general conclusions regarding vocational training centers in Cambodia. It appears, however, that established centers with high standards of education – such as Don Bosco, which has been providing training in Cambodia since 1981 – have no trouble attracting students (10 applications for each spot) and helping find employment. High quality centers have trouble keeping their students until graduation because they are in such demand. Most of these centers do not provide business

start-up support and graduates find employment with existing businesses rather starting their own. Graduates who do try to return to their native province and start a business are often unsuccessful and return to Phnom Penh to get a job.

Centers that focus on skills related to tourism, such as Artisans of Angkor (carving, silk weaving, lacquer painting) and the Paul Dubrule Hotel and Tourism School – both based in Siem Reap – find they are also in demand, even if they have a (subsidized) tuition requirement. Dubrule, for example, charges \$600 for a program that it values as \$3,000 and still has no trouble finding applicants. An important aspect of these programs is the networks that the schools establish with companies in order to link their graduates to potential employment opportunities.

The high profile schools require considerable funding to maintain. This is often done through grassroots fundraising (e.g. contributions from church communities), wealthy beneficiaries, grants from international donors and contributions of labor by professionals. There is some question as to whether schools that do not benefit from such resources provide adequate training. Additionally, in the past numerous NGO programs have provided training of low quality or on skills that do not match market demand.

The youth-oriented organization CVCD has instituted a policy requiring each of its programs to provide work experience for about 4-5 youth every year. Institutionalizing an internship policy within an NGO is a first step in promoting the concept to other NGOs and the private sector. In some countries, youth internships are common in the public sector as well.

#### **d. Opportunities to Support Skills Development in Cambodia**

NGOs are best equipped to support youth employment on the labor supply side of employment equation in the following ways:

##### **Basic Education**

- Advocate for second chance and equivalency policies and programs.
- Implement after school life skills programs and build capacity of teachers to teach them.
- Implement programs to get dropouts back into school or acquire livelihood skills.
- Implement non-formal education programs for disadvantaged youth and youth in remote areas.

##### **TVET**

- Help inform government and TVET centers on industry needs.
- Evaluate current programs; help government centers develop follow-up systems to track graduates.
- Provide entrepreneurship support to TVET graduates who want to start their own businesses – particularly those who want to return to rural areas. Support can include a combination of mentoring, participation in alumni/professional networks, short-term funding, access to credit or linkages to credit institutions.
- Provide technical skills to clients in micro-enterprise programs.
- Advocate for TVET training opportunities in better paying occupations for women.

##### **Higher Education**

- Conduct research on technical skills most needed by industry and share findings with educational institutions.
- Institutionalize youth internship programs within NGOs and advocate for youth internships within the private sector and the public sector.
- Help universities make links with industry to develop programs that reduce mismatch of skills.
- Develop a certification system for schools in order to protect students, as well as a rating system to help inform

prospective students and increase competition

- Make sure that NGO employees that receive educational benefits make informed choices on their course of study.
- Advocate for community colleges that allow adults to return to school on a part-time low-cost basis.

### **3. Matching Labor Supply and Demand**

#### **a. General Issues in Matching Labor Supply and Demand**

An important aspect of employment promotion is the existence of a system to assure adequate information flow between potential workers and prospective employers to ensure that workers are acquiring the appropriate skills and are located in the right place.

An important step in the matching of labor supply and demand is the existence of a sound labor market information system to inform policy makers, make educational institutions more responsive and help guide job seekers. ILO has taken a lead in this area with the development of 20 core Key Indicators of the Labor Market (KILM), which aims to make labor market information and analysis easily accessible and facilitates the comparison of key elements of national labor markets. A comprehensive labor market information system should provide information on labor trends and employment opportunities as well as information on the qualitative aspects of employment such as remuneration, mobility and career advancement.<sup>54</sup>

Monitoring barriers to entry into the job market should be included in order to identify challenges to youth employment. The key will be to present the information so that it may be taken into consideration by job seekers, academic institutions, and TVETs in preparing themselves or their students for potential employment.

Career guidance (based on updated labor market information) is another important element in reducing the mismatch of skills and can include a wide range of activities, including providing students with opportunities to:

- Learn about different occupations from practitioners
- Contact alumni or other networks

54. Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006). *Cornerstones of Youth Employment Promotion in Development Cooperation*.

- Locate information on how to explore occupations they find interesting

The impact of career guidance activities should be measured. Whenever possible, career guidance should be integrated into the public education system and not left solely to the university level. Career guidance is particularly important for youth in rural areas who have limited access to information, as demonstrated by the success of Uganda’s Youth Trucks supported by DSW, the German Foundation for Population (see textbox).

Job fairs play an important role in bringing employers and job seekers together, particularly in developing countries where employers have difficulty locating students after they graduate. In developed countries educational institutions hold job fairs as a matter of course. Employers are interested in participating as exhibitors because they want to recruit the best and the brightest students before graduation. Job seekers are eager to learn more about companies and to make initial contacts.

### **b. Matching Labor Supply and Demand in Cambodia**

The literature on Cambodia makes repeated references to a mismatch of skills between labor supply and demand. Industry cannot find skilled laborers and businesses have difficulty recruiting experienced managers. Part of the problem lies with the quality of basic and advanced education, as discussed in the section above. However, another important aspect is the system of signals between supply and demand in the labor market.

Young people in Cambodia have virtually no access to information that will inform their choice of study. Prospective university students usually choose a career by observing current demand for skills, without taking into consideration the possibility that in the 4-5 year lag between the time they select a program and the time they obtain their degree the market for that skill may be saturated. Secondary students who cannot afford to pursue their studies, youth in rural areas and high school dropouts are left to fend for themselves.

The absence of a labor market information system affects policy makers and private sector firms too. It is difficult to imagine how policy makers can make informed programming decisions without accurate up-to-date information on changes

in the labor market. Similarly, prospective employers have no means of identifying and communicating with graduating students and new graduates.

Thus there is significant and urgent need for information on many fronts:

- Educational institutions need to understand changes in labor demand to design curricula that enhance employability;
- Students need information on school programs as well as on anticipated labor demand so that their skills are relevant when they graduate;
- Policy makers need information to guide skills development priorities; and
- Firms need future job seekers to understand their needs, and they need to know where and how to find job seekers in order to recruit them.

**Employment Websites**  
[www.bongthom.com](http://www.bongthom.com)  
[www.bestcareerfinder.com](http://www.bestcareerfinder.com)  
[www.cambodiahosting.com](http://www.cambodiahosting.com)  
[www.cambodiaworks.com](http://www.cambodiaworks.com)  
[www.careerforumcambodia.com](http://www.careerforumcambodia.com)  
[www.cfcambodge.org](http://www.cfcambodge.org)  
[www.khmer.ws/jobs](http://www.khmer.ws/jobs)  
[www.khmercareers.com](http://www.khmercareers.com)  
[www.khmervisions.com.kh](http://www.khmervisions.com.kh)  
[www.kyop.org](http://www.kyop.org)

The above actors are acutely aware of these needs and some initiatives have already been started. Leading the way is the ILO/CAMFEBA Youth Skills and Employment Survey to be completed in 2008. Survey organizers aim to collect information from 500 firms in Phnom Penh and the provinces on employment needs for the next five years and identify what skills employers are having the most difficulty finding.

Since 2005, the French Cambodian Chamber of Commerce (CCFC) has been organizing an annual Career Forum to facilitate contact between companies and graduating students. In 2007, 41 exhibitors and 9,000 visitors attended the two-day event, which included free seminars on curriculum vitae (CV) and cover letter preparation, mock interviews and personality tests. Results of an evaluation showed that exhibiting companies were very satisfied because they were able to collect CVs and explain their human resource needs and requirements to prospective employees. Similarly, students expressed satisfaction because they were able to meet prospective employers, increase their understanding of the job market, and better prepare themselves for the job search.

A more recent development in the area of market information is the launch of G-21, Cambodia’s first education magazine. The bimonthly publication targets young professionals and students and can be found in most large stores

in Phnom Penh. The articles provide much-needed information on a wide variety of topics. Each edition features an article on how to apply for a scholarship to a particular country. The magazine costs Riel 6,000 (US\$1.5), not an insignificant amount to the average Cambodia. Nevertheless, circulation has reached 5,000 after only three editions and continues to grow, highlighting how desperate young Cambodians are for relevant and accurate information.

To celebrate the launching of G-21, Mag Alliance organized Cambodia's first Education Expo in September 2007. This annual event allows educational institutions to showcase their programs for perspective students and gives students a chance to shop around, hopefully promoting healthy competition in the higher education sector. Sixteen organizations participated in the first two-day event which was visited by 5,000 young Cambodians.

In 2007, the GIPC organized a seminar for 20 educational institutions to present the findings of the study and discuss skills needed by the garment industry. The response from participating institutions was very enthusiastic. They welcomed lecturers and agreed to organize seminars. However, most did not consider the garment industry a priority for their curriculum. They also doubted whether a program would attract enough students because of the prevailing perception of low salaries and poor working conditions in the garment factories.

Recently, the National University of Management agreed to introduce a survey course offered by GIPC. Presented as a reading seminar, it was the first university-level course on the garment industry. Full enrollment in the course and growing student interest in potential employment has since spurred four institutions (Norton, RUPP and UOC and



Career Forum 2007

the Cambodian Institute of Technology) to introduce similar courses. GIPC training of lecturers began in April 2008 and the courses will be offered in the fall semester.

Cambodian educational institutions will need technical assistance to develop more responsive programs. Until recently they focused on developing academic curricula, in particular for business management and marketing, without considering the needs of the private sector, in particular the all-important apparel industry.

Hopefully, the prospect of 7,000 middle and higher management positions that could be filled by young Cambodians and the apparent interest of students in the garment industry will act as a catalyst to motivate schools to develop responsive programs with guidance from industry experts and policy makers.

Although it is difficult to evaluate, currently the internet appears to be the most useful tool for young job seekers. Despite popular belief and frequent claims that employers in Cambodia only hire people who have connections, the author met a number of young people who got their jobs through the internet. They claim they learned about a position – be it waiting tables or working as an accountant – from one of the employment websites and were hired without knowing anyone in the firm personally. The most popular website by far appears to be Bong Thom.

### c. Opportunities for Matching Labor Demand and Supply

NGOs can contribute to matching labor demand and supply in the following ways:

- Integrate a discussion of career options and employment opportunities and instruction on conducting a job search into all programs at the grassroots level. This includes helping youth practice the interview pro-



G-21



In 2003, the Employers Federation of Sri Lanka and Motivation Charitable Trust held a Job Fair for People with Disabilities. Organizers offered job interview training to 79 job seekers and provided 24 participating companies guidance on hiring workers with disabilities for. Three weeks after the fair, 24 job seekers had found employment. Even those who were not hired expressed appreciation for the event: "I would not have had the confidence to approach these prestigious organizations on my own."

[www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

cess so that they can become comfortable with it.

- Research and disseminate information on local skill needs to communities. This need not be a very sophisticated activity. NGOs already know how to conduct baseline surveys and community assessments and these same skills can be used to survey businesses on their labor needs. NGOs might also assist a group of young people to conduct a survey themselves.
- Organize provincial (and even district) youth job fairs and job fairs for disadvantaged youth. Remember that small businesses do not know how to find job seekers.
- Maintain regular contact with companies that might employ graduates of an NGO program. This contact should not only occur when youth need placement, but be part of a larger strategy to engage business in social and community activities.

## Conclusion

Increasing youth employment is critical to Cambodia's future as more and more young Cambodians begin to look for jobs and move away from their home villages to do so. When young people cannot gain employable skills and find jobs, they are more apt to marry early and have larger families, thus perpetuating (and widening) the cycle of poverty. The agents for change become agents for instability as their frustration and hopelessness grows. Conversely, when young people feel they are a vital part of the economy and their skills are called upon to develop the country, there is no telling how far they can go.

To contribute positively to youth employment, policy-makers and other development actors need to adopt a different attitude towards youth – acting as advocates for quality education, providing them with opportunities to practice their skills and especially supporting those who show particular promise. Policymakers need to understand that they set the tone for the nation and act as role models. Above all, they need to believe that anything is possible – any invention or innovation – and transmit that vision to young Cambodians.

Although of central importance, however, employment presents only one facet of young people's lives. Crucial to the wellbeing of society as a whole is the ability and desire of young people to become involved in social issues, take a leadership stance and endeavor to change and improve the world. These issues are examined in the following chapter under the general category of 'civic engagement.'

## II. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### I. General Civic Engagement Issues

One of the challenges in understanding the field of youth development is the multiple interpretations of terms. For this reason it is helpful to start with definitions.

#### a. Definition of Civic Engagement

The term ‘civic engagement’ has multiple meanings. Civic engagement can be viewed as a way to promote individual youth development; political scientists see, “civic engagement as an avenue to increase political participation and a more robust democracy, and economists are interested in civic engagement to the degree that it promotes social capital and trust;” This report emphasizes civic engagement that has a policy focus and is directed at change. Youth Service of America offers the following definitions for terms often used in the discussion of civic engagement:<sup>55</sup>

*Civic Engagement* refers to activities that engage youth in affecting policy and taking action on issues in their community. Civic engagement can be an individual or collective effort. “It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy.”<sup>56</sup>

*Youth Service*, on the other hand, is an umbrella term used to designate a wide range of programs and organizations that seek to involve young people in providing services to schools or communities.<sup>57</sup> While youth service raises consciousness, its primary purpose is to address the *symptoms*, not the *systems* that allow the problem to occur.

*Service Learning* differs from youth service in that students receive school credit for their community work and there is a more formal reflection on the experience.

*Youth Participation* refers to the process of involving young people in decisions that affect their lives.

*Youth Voice* refers to the ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiative of people considered to be “young” Their voices often go unheard and/or their involvement is marginalized. Places where youth voice can take place include organizations, schools, government, and businesses.

Both civic engagement and youth service as defined above aim to serve the public interest. While there is a certain amount of overlap between the two, they are not interchangeable. A young person can provide services in the community without being civically engaged, for example if it is part of a school assignment. On the other hand, a business can be civically engaged if the owner or manager is trying to improve the community. “The key to civic engagement is not activity but intent.”<sup>58</sup>

#### b. Trends in Civic Engagement

Literature on youth civic engagement has focused for the most part on western countries and as a result it is difficult to comment on global trends. In the 20th Century, student movements have been the catalyst for political change. Notable examples include protests against the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement in the United States, student pressure on universities and businesses to divest from the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the 1989 demonstration in Tiananmen Square.

Recent youth surveys suggest that youth interest in political activity is decreasing. Only 15% of youth in Russia and 40% in Japan express any interest in political issues. Most youth in the Philippines claim to be concerned about issues, but are doing little about it. Voter turnout among youth in the United States has been steadily decreasing.<sup>59</sup> (Although there has been a slight reversal of this trend since 2006 as politicians increasingly focus on capturing the youth vote.)<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, the research is not conclusive on the

55. Youth Service of America, Youth Voice Definitions, <http://tools.ysa.org>

56. *The Pew Charitable Trust.*

57. Not to be confused with ‘youth services’ which refer to programs where youth are the clients/beneficiaries such as special health services tailored to youth.

58. Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Utah. [www.westminstercollege.edu/civicengagement](http://www.westminstercollege.edu/civicengagement)

59. Youniss, James, et al. (2002). ‘Youth Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century’, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, Vol 12, No 1, 121-48.

60. The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (2006). Fact Sheet Youth Voter Turnout Increases in 2006. Retrieved from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS07\\_2006MidtermCPS.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS07_2006MidtermCPS.pdf).

state of youth civic engagement. Some of the research suggests that youth are interested in issues but choose informal political processes as their preferred means of action. In the United States, youth political activism may be low, but 50-65% of Americans report having performed youth service in the past year. “The general picture that emerges is one of apathy toward traditional politics, but interest in a range of non-mainstream forms of civil involvement that can become mobilized.”<sup>61</sup> There is some evidence that the “concepts of ‘citizen’ of researchers may be irrelevant to young people.”<sup>62</sup>

Additionally, the issues that capture the interest of youth may not necessarily be those that their parents considered important in their time. For example, youth may be more interested in freedom on the internet, the effects of globalization, and environmental protection, than in laws governing labor unions.<sup>63</sup>

### c. Understanding the Context

A number of influences contribute to the creation of an environment that promotes youth civic engagement. In order to understand a specific context it is necessary to be able to answer some of the following questions:

- Historical era: What historical and global influences affect the current generation of youth and of their parents? Is society comfortable with change or is it static? How influential is the media? What are the religious/moral influences in society and how important is their role? Is the older generation more or less civically inclined than the youth of today?
- Political situation: How polarized/tense is the political context? Is the system based on rule of law or dominated by impunity? Are the stakes for political power very high? How far is a regime willing to go to stay in power? Is there fear involved? How strong is the state’s security apparatus? Is participation in political processes such as election campaigns valued as a civic engagement or is all political activity highly charged? Is diversity of political views valued or censored? Do public institutions have provisions for youth civic engagement?
- Economic situation: Does the economic situation in the country allow youth to be economically independent? Is there significant unemployment or underemployment

that will contribute to civic unrest? Are adequate policies in place to promote decent work for youth?

- Youth perceptions of government and society: Do youth trust the government and think that government wants to hear what they have to say? Do they think that government is relevant to their lives? Do they believe that interacting with government through formal processes is effective or do they prefer informal processes? Is youth community participation increasing? Do youth perceive becoming a community leader as important?
- Social attitudes towards youth: Is there a culture of youth rights in society? Are youth expected to defer to their elders? Does society believe in the autonomy of youth? Does it allow young people to make decisions?
- Parent/Child Interaction: How is the interaction between parents and their children characterized? Do parents communicate openly with their children? Do they discuss political issues and seek to mold their political mind? Are children more or less educated than their parents?
- The Media: Are conventional media programs aimed at youth primarily superficial entertainment? Do the media raise youth awareness of issues and present balanced arguments? What image of youth do the media portray to the general public? Are youth portrayed as materialistic and superficial, thus reinforcing negative stereotypes of young people? Or do the media also portray the contributions and leadership potential of youth?

Of the above-mentioned factors, two can be singled out as being of particular importance:

Family is one of the primary influences in youth civic engagement. Nevertheless, researchers have not been able to measure the degree of influence that family plays in molding young people’s interest in political participation. What is certain is that youth with politically active parents are more likely to be civically engaged themselves. It is not only parental activism that influences youth: “parents’ ability to communicate their values and ideals clearly, the specific attitudes and values that are openly discussed in the home, how parental messages are understood, and adolescents’ receptivity to parental messages can all contribute to the civic patterns of youth.”<sup>64</sup> Youth who become civically engaged are much more likely to remain politically active throughout their adult life. (Conversely, politically active youth tend to heighten the political

61. Youniss, James, et al. (2002). ‘Youth Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century’, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, Vol 12, No 1, 121-48.

62. Celestine.

63. Youniss.

64. Celestine, Jamila (2005). *African-American Youth and Civic Engagement: A Brief Review of the Literature*. Youth and Civic Engagement Memo, University of Chicago.

awareness of their elders.)

Schools play an important role in preparing young people to be civically engaged, both because of the large number of students that can be accessed through schools and because of the importance of school in molding youth knowledge and attitudes. However, studies from around the world show that civic education generally has a low status in schools and that teachers often treat students as passive recipients of information. As early as the 1920s, this problem was recognized in the U.S. and there was a proposal to supplement classroom instruction on democracy with experiential democratic activities.<sup>65</sup> Educational attainment is directly associated with student interest in public policy, which explains why university students are more closely associated with civic engagement and activism.

Another important factor in youth civic engagement is the degree to which institutions establish channels for formal youth civic involvement. Youth apathy may not be due to lack of concern for the issues but rather to feeling alienated from the public system and not knowing how to ‘overcome this alienation.’<sup>66</sup> As policy makers increasingly understand the importance of youth, greater efforts are being made to include youth in community governance.<sup>67</sup> Globalization can adversely impact youth civic engagement when youth feel that their future is controlled by decisions made in faraway countries or by multinational institutions over which they have no control.

“When the structure of government and the form of economy are in flux, citizenship can no longer be taken for granted as a plain matter of the older generation passing tradition on to the younger generation.”

James Youniss  
*Youth Civic Engagement  
in the 21st Century*

to improve their critical thinking skills by researching and presenting arguments around an issue. Debates and similar activities also serve to acculturate youth to a diversity of views, practice tolerance and negotiate consensus. In addition to critical thinking skills, civic competence involves familiarity with a range of potential civic interventions, from letter-writing to organizing large events.

### a. Youth Voice

Youth Voice refers to the ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiative of people considered to be ‘young.’ With regards to civic engagement, youth voice refers to including a youth perspective when making policy decisions that affect youth. All too often these views are simply not considered – whether developing a national youth policy or a youth employment policy.

### b. Youth Participation

In the literature it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Youth Voice from Youth Participation. For the purpose of this report, Youth Voice is understood to be the expression of youth views, whereas all activities in which youth are formally engaged in making decisions are grouped as Youth Participation. Here the discussion is limited to institutionalized youth participation and structures such as Youth Advisory Committees, Youth Councils and Youth Parliaments.

### c. Youth Service & Volunteerism

Youth Service is an umbrella term used to designate a wide range of programs and organizations that involve young people in providing services to schools or communities.<sup>68</sup> Its primary purpose is to address the symptoms, not the systems that allow the problem to occur. Youth service can be national or small-scale, mandatory or voluntary, military or civilian. Youth service can require university or high school preparation or can recruit youths that have not completed school. As with service learning, the youth service experience

## 2. Youth Civic Engagement Initiatives

Successful youth civic engagement begins with developing an understanding among youth of the political system. Termed *civic knowledge*, this entails understanding the basics of democracy, government structure, and basic laws, as well as familiarity with key issues that affect society.

Youth also need a chance to develop *civic competence* by engaging in democratic practices. Student debates allow youth

65. Youniss.

66. Celestine, Jamila (2005). African-American Youth and Civic Engagement: A Brief Review of the Literature. Youth and Civic Engagement Memo, University of Chicago.

67. Celestine.

68. Not to be confused with ‘youth services’ which refer to programs where youth are the clients/beneficiaries such as special health services tailored to youth.

### Why Are Youth Apathetic?

There are many possible explanations. Youth may lack general knowledge of government and public policy systems. They may not be aware of the policy implications of local problems and have not been taught to analyze the larger picture. Lack of interest can stem from not understanding how an individual problem affects the whole community. Youth may simply lack the skills needed to become engaged, skills that can only be acquired through familiarity and practice. Finally, low participation of youth in civic engagement may be due to lack of formal channels for them to express their views and organize their efforts.

People in general (not just youth) refrain from becoming civically active when they are:

- too busy earning a living;
- not in the habit of reflecting on issues;
- live in fear of repression for not conforming with the dominant political views ;
- consent to a given political situation because it meets priority needs (consciously or unconsciously);
- feel vulnerable to losing material possessions.

is maximized when opportunity for reflection is built into the program.<sup>69</sup>

Experience suggests that youth service helps build social trust while providing youth with important work and life experience. Programs have been shown to improve the likelihood of youth finding employment and reduce juvenile delinquency. Young people who complete youth service are more likely to continue their education and remain civically engaged. “Service and participation in youth organizations during adolescence is found to predict adult political behavior, including voting and membership in voluntary associations, even 25 years later.”<sup>70</sup>

#### d. Youth Activism

Youth Activism can be interpreted as more vigorous and direct action targeting policy change. Examples range from moderate student governments to more volatile student movements.

A student government is a formal structure within a school or university.<sup>71</sup> Given the importance of students to an educational institution, student government structures have been successful in fighting for their rights, for example student representation in the university governance structure and gender equality on campus. Students that share common interests can gather together under student associations. These may have a loose structure, although usually they are required to register with the university administration and

elect officers. Associations can be organized around a wide variety of subjects: debate teams, language clubs, musical groups, recreational activities, geographic or ethnic interest, or political parties. Since they are solely managed by young people, student associations provide youth with opportunities to practice democratic and governance processes without interference from older adults. Together students must learn to set an agenda, negotiate consensus, organize events, and attract new members.

### 3. Youth Civic Education Issues in Cambodia

A number of characteristics suggest an urgent need for promoting civic responsibility among youth in Cambodia today. The development witnessed over the last two decades has been impressive, but much more is needed. Moreover, a number of changes are occurring in the Cambodian landscape that are not in anyone’s control and for which the consequences cannot be foreseen – for example the effect of the mass media. Policymakers should not underestimate the magnitude of the influence of these changes on young Cambodians. The discussion in this section is limited to civic engagement; other social issues are discussed in the following chapter.

Public institutions are still weak and unable to promote civic engagement. Cambodian schools are not able to adequately prepare students academically – and even less so civically. While civic material has been introduced into the public curricula, major changes in pedagogical approach are needed for schools to engage students in practical civic activities, and to involve parents and the entire community in their efforts.

69. Stroud, Susan (2000). *Presentation: National Youth Service in Sixteen Countries: Program Characteristics.*

70. Youniss, James, et al. (2002). ‘Youth Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century.’

71. This section draws on the U.S. experience and correspondence with faculty at universities in Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, and Vermont.

Poverty limits people's ability to become civically engaged. While all young people in Cambodia should be introduced to concepts surrounding civic engagement, their ability to participate will be limited by the demands made upon them by their family. This does not imply that resources are a prerequisite – on the contrary, civic engagement can start with an act as simple as helping a struggling young neighbor to practice reading.

The political context discourages activism. Financial interests have yet to be decoupled from political affiliation, and as a result the Cambodian political landscape is fraught with tension because the stakes are so high. In such a context, political activism is perceived as threatening to those in office and they in turn inspire fear in potential activists.

Governance structures are not prepared or equipped to engage youth through formal political processes. A formal administrative culture and the tense nature of Cambodian politics combine to act as a disincentive for youth civic engagement. Decentralization and the local planning process are contributing to breaking down those barriers, but the leap to engaging youth has yet to be made.

Absence of rule of law and dominance by one political party are increasing youth apathy. Young Cambodians are asking themselves, 'What is the point?'

Social emphasis on age, status and wealth place youth at a disadvantage and act as a barrier to youth civic engagement. Since young people do not usually possess any of these assets, they have not been considered actors in the social or political agenda. Parents, educators and local officials will need to

fundamentally alter their perception of youth before they will embrace concepts of youth rights and youth participation.

Religion as a factor in shaping civic values appears to be decreasing.<sup>72</sup> In a 2005 survey, nearly all students interviewed responded that religion was important to them. However, in frank focus group discussions they admitted that religion was not an important factor in their life.

The media must play a larger role in shaping youth civic values. In analyzing responses in the 2005 Mysliwiec survey, the author suggests that "there is reason to believe (borne out by other media surveys) that the media play a much more influential role on Cambodian youth today than in the past, particularly in promoting consumerism and violence." Given weak school, parental and religious influences, and the rapid spread of conventional media, the conclusion that media are important in shaping youth civic values is reasonable.

The above negative factors are offset somewhat by some positive considerations:

Cambodian youth are hungry for information. Although not a reading society since the civil war – and despite popular belief – young Cambodians feel the absence of information and guidance. Newspapers, magazines and books are eagerly read and very much appreciated. The success of G-21, Cambodia's first (bilingual) career and education magazine, is an indicator that the information provided is filling a gap for young people.

Young Cambodians dream of a better place. With their energy and dynamism, young Cambodians are eager to improve their lot while assisting their community. The Mys-

In early 2008, the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office conducted a survey of civic engagement activities in 16 countries in the region and made the following recommendations:

- Improving knowledge and perceptions regarding youth civic engagement:
- Support and disseminate research on the impact of youth civic engagement.
- Conduct country-level mapping exercises.
- Develop case studies of different types of youth civic engagement.

Developing civic competence:

- Incorporate mechanisms for youth civic engagement in government programs.
- Build capacity of youth and adults to engage in effective dialogue.
- Promote service-learning in schools.
- Support peer education.
- Strengthen youth civic engagement programming among institutions of higher education.
- Support a small grants program for youth initiatives.
- Consider supporting a regional volunteer scheme.

72. Mysliwiec, Eva (2005). Youth, Volunteering and Social Capital in Cambodia.

liwec survey suggested that young people are interested in volunteering and indeed many do so already.

## 4. Youth Civic Engagement Initiatives in Cambodia

A survey of youth organizations and policies conducted by Forum Syd estimated that 50-60 youth-focused organizations were operating in Cambodia in 2002. Of these, the majority were founded by university students and focused on rights and environmental issues as well as general youth development activities such as scouting.<sup>73</sup> Few of these organizations have a significant membership base.

The categories of youth voice, youth participation, youth service, and youth activism are used below to review youth civic engagement initiatives in Cambodia, with the understanding that a number of activities fall into more than one category.

### a. Youth Voice

Under the rubric of youth voice, we include general youth development activities as well as initiatives that provide youth with opportunities to develop their sense of identity and to express themselves. Since 1992, the Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP) has been offering courses to improve critical thinking and analytical skills of university students in the Phnom Penh area. Hundreds of students have completed the program a 42-hour personal development course and practiced what they learned doing field work for NGOs, school and communities.

The Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC) conducts a series of democracy and advocacy seminars for young people in rural areas. Outstanding par-

“ It is important to stress that youth are not a problem, even if many problems face young Cambodians.”

Lena Wallquist  
Youth in Cambodia  
Forum Syd, 2002

ticipants are recruited to become YCC volunteers and encouraged to participate in community project.

YCC's Youth Leadership Challenge is a popular television series broadcast on CTN in which 16 young people undertake socially responsible activities as part of a competition.<sup>74</sup> Modeled on the popular 'Survivor' series,

participants vote each other off as they vie to win a roundtrip ticket to the U.S. In each episode, contestants complete a social challenge such as fundraising for a good cause, collecting signatures and thumbprints for a petition or competing in a debate. The contest builds courage and confidence and compels participants to use

their creative powers. The program has become quite popular and the number of applicants has increased for each new series.

Initiatives of Change International's Cambodia-Vietnam Dialogue has been bringing together young Cambodians and Vietnamese to exchange life stories and build cross-cultural friendship. Through a very intensive process, both groups have learned the importance of recognizing and respecting the needs and concerns of all ethnic groups and peoples living inside a country and a region.

### b. Youth Participation

It is early in Cambodia's modern era to find substantial examples of youth participation, interpreted here to mean institutionalized participation of youth in formal structures. The concept is only just being introduced into the development sector and has yet to reach the other sectors of society. At a very basic level, YCC is promoting youth participation by encouraging young volunteers to attend commune council meetings. Exposing councilors to concerned and thoughtful youth is a first step in raising the profile of youth as civic actors. Making short-term



Launch of UN Youth Advisory Panel  
December 18, 2007

73. Wallquist, Lena (2002). *Youth in Cambodia: Organizations, Activities and Policies*. Forum Syd, Cambodia.

74. Funded by USAID/IRI, Mobitel, and formerly ANZ.

youth internships a requirement for all of its program components, as CVCD has done, is a good example of institutionalizing youth participation.

The UN Country Team in Cambodia is exemplifying its commitment to youth empowerment and youth rights through establishing a UN Youth Advisory Panel. The objectives of the panel are to increase dialogue, information exchange and knowledge sharing between the UN system and Cambodia youth and to increase young people's understanding of the role of the UN. Contributions from the panel will help guide the UN Country Team's priority setting.

### c. Youth Service & Volunteerism

In early 2008, Youth Star Cambodia and United Nations Volunteers Cambodia commissioned a study of volunteers and their contribution to national development. The study found that NGOs working at the grassroots level depend to a great extent on volunteers and that volunteers are contributing significantly to Cambodia's development.<sup>75</sup> The research, combined with the findings of Mysliwiec's earlier study on volunteerism, suggests that young spirit of volunteerism is alive and well among young Cambodians.

Since 2005, Youth Star has been placing university graduates age 20-27 in rural communities. Volunteers start with a one-month residential orientation in which they learn about teacher-training and a wide range of topics. Volunteers are placed in villages at the request of a local partner – school, commune council, farmer's association, or local tourism association – that agrees to supervise and meet regularly with them. Once in the field, volunteers are urged to spend a month getting to know the community. Only after they create a community map do they draft action plans with their sponsor. Volunteers work in four areas: education and youth development, sus-

“We hope to expand their hearts, instill a sense of empathy, and engender a passion for developing the community on a local level. These are important leadership qualities.”

*Youth Star*

tainable livelihoods, health and well-being and social entrepreneurship. They often mobilize teenagers with nothing to do and organize clubs for them. In turn these clubs have begun to organize activities for the younger children.

Volunteers also organize special celebrations on International Volunteer Day (December 5th) that are intended to raise awareness on specific events –

while at the same time promoting a sense of fun and fostering creativity within the community. This year many celebrations included Rubbish Fashion Shows, organized to raise awareness of the impact of garbage and the need to recycle. Originated by renowned local artist Leang Seckon, the event consists in scouring the local garbage dump for materials that can be used to make outfits for the fashion models. As a result, villagers expressed a new attitude toward rubbish and a renewed commitment to protecting their environment. Ten volunteers have tried the idea in communities with successful reactions. Other added their own twist, like holding a rubbish kite competition and sculpture exhibition. Participants are reminded, “After all, this is not just about solving serious problems, but about youth and youth should be about rejoicing!”

Each year young people from Sweden and Cambodia spend six months together – three months in each country – as part of the Youth Partners in Development (YPD), a program implemented by the Khmer Youth Association (KYA) in partnership with the Swedish Center for International Youth Exchange (CIU). Volunteers live with a host family in the assigned community. The pairs of volunteers are expected to write and submit a proposal for an activity for funding by KYA. One team, for example, wrote a proposal for 28 water jars for poor families. In 2008, the theme for proposals will be reproductive health in support of the Millennium Development Goals.

The house building project implemented by Tabitha demonstrates how secondary school



KYA YPD

75. Youth Star Cambodia and United Nations Volunteers Cambodia (2008). UNTILEED DRAFT REPORT. Executive Summary.



students can be involved in civic activities. Each year, volunteers organize themselves into groups of 12-20 people and raise \$1500 as a contribution to Tabitha's community development activities – about the cost of materials for two houses. Most volunteers are students from international schools around the world who pay their own expenses to travel to Cambodia.

Buddhist Pagodas have historically played an important role in caring for young Cambodians. Families often enter their sons into the monkhood so that they can learn Buddhist principles and also be assured of enough food to eat during times of scarcity. Orphans regularly find refuge in Cambodia's thousands of temples. Before the advent of the state, Pagoda committees were responsible for managing schools, which were located on the Wat compound. Even today it is not unusual to learn that a bright and upcoming citizen was an orphan who got his start in a Pagoda.

Often Pagodas develop special youth programs. While some are suspected of promoting partisan interests (and even inciting violence), most are non-political and play an important role as one of the few – if not the only – local institutions transmitting basic values to Cambodia's youth. For example in 1995 Buddhism for Development initiated a four-week summer retreat for young boys and girls to learn about Buddhist principles, practice meditation and do community service. More than 1400 youth have completed this rigorous program, where young people are roused at 4 a.m. and study well into the evening. Parents overcame their initially reluctance to allow their daughters to enter the temple for a month and more than a third of the graduates are girls.

#### d. Youth Activism

Due to Cambodia's unique political situation, there are very few examples of youth activism in Cambodia. Cambodia's main political parties have youth wings and "the main aim for these organizations is to recruit new young members, to get them involved in politics and to educate them in the parties' respective ideology."<sup>76</sup> IRI's Party Youth Wings



TABITHA

project aims to promote youth participation and encourage the main political parties to organize internal youth elections and develop political leadership among the youth cadre up to age 30. As part of its strategy to engage young people, IRI tries to convince young people to leverage the attention of party leaders to get them to focus on issues of concern to youth.

#### e. Programs on the Environment

Because of the cross-border (and increasingly urgent) character of environmental issues this section briefly highlights two youth programs that focus on the environment:

KYSD's environmental education program for youth recruits recent university graduates to live in rural homes for a period of six months to one year to raise awareness and foster a sense of responsibility for protecting the environment. Volunteers in turn assist communities by teaching English and Khmer language classes, as well as skills like vegetable gardening and accessing markets for the sale of their local products. Volunteers additionally organize youth clubs whose goal is to unite their communities' youth under the banner of protecting their natural resources and strengthening the social fabric of their communities.

As it has for years, CVCD continues to organize clean-up days with students in their training center, volunteers and children in the squatter communities where it provides non-formal education for 500 children. Some youth are happy to participate in the clean-up event, while others complain that it should be the responsibility of the garbage companies. One of the effects of education around rubbish disposal is that children have begun to ask their parents to buy a trash bin and use it for rubbish disposal in the home.

76. Ibid.

## 5. Opportunities for Increasing Youth Civic Engagement

The opportunities for generating a sense of civic responsibility among Cambodia's youth are endless. Given the weakness of the educational system, gaps in inter-generational communication, and increased exposure to the media, the need for youth civic engagement programs appears to be increasing in urgency.

Civil society organizations can best promote youth civic engagement in Cambodia when they:

- Develop and implement internal policies that integrate youth participation into the workings of the entire organization and help local government, public institutions, schools and universities to do the same;
- Promote the formation of youth wings in professional and business associations as well as trade unions;
- Assist schools to improve their civic education programs and develop activities for youth to practice what they learn within the context of the community;
- Integrate civic education (and practical exercises) into all existing youth programs;
- Encourage the media to portray youth honestly and in a balanced way; and encourage them to treat youth as thinkers and responsible citizens;
- Consider ways in which youth structures can ensure their own institutional sustainability.

## Conclusion

Civic engagement must be consciously developed and does not occur in a vacuum. While some may argue that it is difficult to promote altruism in a context of poverty, civic engagement cannot wait until the time and context are favorable. The seeds must be planted early on, so that when people are able and have the time, they will reach out to help others. Policymakers should also be aware that civic engagement has an important economic effect and that civic engagement figures prominently in all economically developed countries.<sup>77</sup> Civic engagement precedes economic development and not the reverse. Advancing the youth civic engagement agenda implies giving credence to the voice of youth, admitting publicly that youth play an important role in the development of the country and therefore deserve consideration and respect. It means treating youth as responsible individuals while at the same time protecting them from the vulnerabilities that affect all young people in the 21st Century.

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77. To be distinguished from countries with a wealth of natural resources that may not be necessarily developed.

### III. PROTECTING YOUTH

Cambodia has witnessed dramatic changes since the country began to open up in the early 1990s. Whereas their parents grew up in relative isolation, Cambodian youth are children of the electronic age and have never known a time without cellular phones and text messages. Youth are leaving their native villages in search of employment opportunities, many of them traveling abroad where they are exposed to greater vulnerability. Young women, once confined to the home, are heading alone to the city in search of employment in the garment industry. Family bonds, until recently the mainstay of Cambodian society, have begun to loosen, creating a void that the commercial media are ready fill.

There is a distinct uneasiness that young Cambodians are becoming more vulnerable to the ills that accompany dramatic changes in a society. The damage to society caused by the years of war, the shock that accompanies a transition to a free-market economy, weak governance structures and the flooding of external influences combine to make Cambodia different from its neighbors.

Empirical research has not had time to fully document emerging patterns, but the first indications are there. For example, in the first 168 proposals that commune councils submitted to the Pact Local Administration and Reform project for social development activities, 13 requests (8%) are to address problems with youth, youth violence and substance abuse. There is no observable geographic or other pattern associated with the requests, which originate in different areas. In a society where youth have not historically taken center stage, the number of requests for youth-related projects and their widespread distribution can only signify a national trend that is not limited to urban areas. It is hoped that the findings of the UN Country Team Youth Situation Analysis will establish a clearer picture of what is taking place.



Adolescent Reproductive Health

### I. Issues Surrounding Protecting Youth in Cambodia

A number of reports have begun to give voice to the increased vulnerability of youth. The literature suggests that youth are at greater risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and of being involved in substance abuse, gangs, violence and gender-based violence. These issues are briefly discussed below.

#### a. Adolescent Reproductive Health

Reproductive health information and services help protect people against sexually transmitted diseases and prevent unintended pregnancies. Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH) services are regular health services delivered using an approach that is more appealing to young people. ARH uses peer educators for awareness raising and education because young people feel more comfortable getting information from someone their own age than from an adult. ARH also includes provision of services in a setting that takes into account youth needs for additional privacy and confidentiality. “Many Cambodian policymakers deny the existence of sexual activity among young people” and think ARH is inappropriate.<sup>78</sup>

#### b. Violence and Gender-Based Violence

Violence – and gender-based violence in particular – continues to pose a threat to young Cambodians – and women in particular. While there are no published statistics on average age of rape victims, the literature suggests that the majority are young, under 25 or even 20 years of age. There are two main patterns to rapes: commercial sex workers are raped by men who do not think that it is a crime and unsuspecting young women who are raped, often by someone they know. Particularly disturbing is an increase in reports of gang rapes.

78. Fordham, Graham, Ph.D (2005). *Adolescent Reproductive Health in Cambodia*.

In *Playing Safe Project*, Care International and Gender and Development (GAD) suggest that 61% of motodop drivers sampled from all the provinces were familiar with incidents of gang rape while a similar percentage of male university students reported knowing people involved in the practice.<sup>79</sup> Gender-based violence has a devastating effect on young women. The number of cases can be expected to rise as young women become more mobile, traveling further from home in search of employment, and as social practices among young Cambodians evolve. Young women need additional protection which can be achieved by enforcing existing legislation, educating law enforcement officials, teaching young women about their rights and showing them how protect themselves and where to go for help – as well as by educating youth men. None of these interventions can significantly change the situation, however, until the social norms that place the blame for gender-based violence on the victim are altered.

Numerous respondents during the course of this research referred to increase in gang violence and attacks by youth. Informants speaking to the authors of this report referred to increased attacks in rural areas, for example on unarmed commune police, and to cases of homicide among gang members. There were also various reports of university-level instructors being afraid to discipline their students for fear of physical reprisal. This anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in non-sexual youth violence that should raise concern among policy makers both at national and local level. NGOs and particularly human rights organizations should consider integrating reporting on youth-violence into their monitoring systems and collating it at the national level to identify trends and pattern of violence.

### **c. Substance Abuse**

Invariably discussion of violence is accompanied by references to increased substance abuse by youth, including use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Substance abuse is linked to economic and social problems. The UN points out: “Limited employment opportunities at the start of a working career trap many youths in poverty and low-productivity activities, from which they cannot escape. As a result, they are more affected by poverty, social exclusion, and personal frustration, as well as by crime, drug abuse, violence and HIV/AIDS.”<sup>80</sup>

79. Soprach, Tong (2004). *Playing Safe Project*.

80. I.L.O (2004). *Improving Prospects*.

### **Problem Drug Use**

Although Cambodia’s drug activity is low compared to other countries in the region, a 2002 study concludes that the drug trade in the country is growing rapidly.<sup>81</sup> UNODC characterizes the increase in availability of illicit drugs, in particular methamphetamine (yaba) and increasingly heroin, as alarming and calls for urgent prevention measures among youth.

### **Alcohol**

Communities around the country are experiencing an increase in violence that is associated with increased alcohol consumption. World Vision Cambodia’s 2006 survey of 13 to 17 year old girls and boys in two rural and one urban site found that 24% of youth drink alcohol, including 34% of boys and 14.9% of girls.<sup>82</sup> The overwhelming majority of respondents (83%) claimed that their parents were unaware of their drinking. Even in the absence of comparative statistics to ascertain trends, these figures are sufficient to raise concern. A traffic police report states that the number of accidents caused by people under 30 years old had risen to an all-time high. An estimated 18% of accidents in 2007 are attributed to the use of alcohol. The problem is aggravated because Cambodian society has few sanctions on drinking and drunkenness.

### **Tobacco**

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Cambodia has been working on tobacco issues since the late 1990s. According to ADRA, more than half of men over 20 are smokers (but only 6% of women). While a lesser social problem, tobacco consumption represents a serious health risk for youth. There are insufficient statistics to estimate trends in tobacco use, but a high rate of adult smokers and an unregulated advertising environment give rise to concerns that more people will start smoking at an early age. Morbidity due to smoking is difficult to estimate, but a 1997 WHO/Ministry of Health study estimates that 6,000 Cambodians die annually from smoking.

### **d. Youth Emotional Development and the Inter-Generational Gap**

Many informants over the course of the research made reference to lack of attention to emotional development in Cambodia and a growing generational gap between parents

81. UNODC (2002). Summary Report of the Illicit Drug Situation in Cambodia 2002.

82. Fordham, Graham, Ph.D (2005). *Adolescent Reproductive Health in Cambodia*.

and their children. A number of reasons are given for this existing situation. Parents are traumatized by their own history in the civil war. Cultural norms place a premium on age and prevent parents from having frank discussions with their children. As a result, communication tends to be one-sided and children are expected to heed their parents and keep their views and emotions to themselves.

One noticeable gap is the absence of inter-generational discussion on sexual relations and healthy sexuality that are essential for combating the culture of silence that surrounds sexual practices in Cambodia and enables sexual violence against women. Healthy sexuality implies consensual sexual relations in which no individual has undue power over another and both parties are knowledgeable about and protected from diseases and unwanted pregnancy.

### **e. Globalization, the Media and Pornography**

The World Youth Report 2007 recognizes that one of the effects of globalization in Asia has been the opening up of economics to foreign goods, services and information that are having significant impact on the values of young Asians.<sup>83</sup> One of the invasive changes is the media. While the media can offer youth many opportunities – to access information and connect with others – it also presents some very serious risks. During the course of this research, many informants made reference to increased exposure of youth to violent images on television and in films and the negative effects they thought the media were having on youth. While the prevalence of violent images in the media may be due in part to characteristics inherent in Cambodian society, as demonstrated by graphic violence portrayed in local newspapers on a routine basis, globalization plays a role because technology has made it easy and cheap to copy and distribute such images at the local level.

While there is no known general research on youth and the media in Cambodia, one area that is being carefully documented is the relationship between youth and exposure to pornography – with very disturbing findings. In 2006, WVI conducted a combined quantitative and qualitative study of 450 young people between the ages of 13 and 17 to ascertain their exposure to pornography.<sup>84</sup> The study found that a significant portion of respondents had been exposed to pornography – 47% of boys and 30% of girls. Most disturbing was that the material they were exposed to represented pornogra-

phy of the most extreme kind. This definition includes acts like bestiality, rape, and even subsequent killing of rape victim. Many of the children thought that watching such movies was normal. Examples of indirect effects of pornography are when boys increasingly physically grab girls or verbally harass them and make references to acts they have seen. Exposure to pornography gives youth a distorted view of the world and ‘shapes expectations in directions that ultimately lead to dissatisfaction.’

## **2. Current NGO Programs for Protecting Youth in Cambodia**

A number of NGOs are already implementing special programs to improve the social welfare of Cambodia’s youth. Highlighted below are a range of programs that specifically target youth. However, it was not possible to cover all programs within the scope of this study. Noticeably absent are programs that deal with violence and gender-based violence. More information is available from women’s organizations and human rights organizations working on those issues. Also absent is a review of any programs that advocate for improved media policies and programs.

### **a. Adolescent Reproductive Health**

With support from agencies like UNFPA and USAID, a number of ARH programs are being implemented in Cambodia. Youth-specific approaches include the use of peer educators, youth-friendly clinical services, and social pastimes that allow young people to discuss ARH in a relaxed and non-threatening environment. NGOs also use creative methods such as highly popular “radio phone-in” formats, question and answer columns in popular magazines and daily newspapers, and print-based reproductive health materials distributed in AIDS prevention programs that are also available for sale in local book stalls.<sup>85</sup> Following are highlights of a few youth-friendly ARH programs:

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Cambodia and the Reproductive Health and Child Health Alliance (RACHA) jointly implement an ARH program that targets 171,000 rural youth aged 10-24 years old. Provincial and district authorities from relevant departments provide training and coaching to the health centers, referral hospitals

83. UN (2007). *World Youth Report*.

84. Fordham, Graham (2006). *As if They Were Watching My Body*.

85. Fordham (2005).

and schools in youth-friendly services and youth information centers for both in-school and out-school youth. Training provided to teachers focuses on youth sexual reproductive health concepts, youth characteristics, youth rights, life skills and counseling skills. To reach youths who are out of school, ADRA contacts local authorities, identifies youth who are active in the community and trains them as peer educators. Topics and materials for out-of-school youths are adapted to reflect a different level of understanding. These in turn conduct outreach in the communities, sharing information with other young people.

The program is in the process of establishing youth-friendly health services at each health center, referral hospital and school youth corner. *Youth-friendly services* recognize that young people have special needs for information and services that differ from those of adults – for example a greater need for privacy and a need not to be judged by adults.

KYA is also providing ARH health education sessions in the provinces for secondary school students, street children, unemployed youths, child and young laborers but also parents, teachers and social workers. KYA uses peer educators, campaigns, drama, workshops, dialogue, sports activities and question and answer sessions as part of their approach. Activities can take place at school or in the community. Young people are eager to access information on reproductive health and referrals and they feel more prepared to solve problems after attending sessions.

When the program started, parents and local authorities had a strong negative reaction. They did not want their daughters talking about reproductive health because it is related to sex. KYA staff convinced parents and local authorities by inviting parents and teachers to meetings and by visiting parents in their homes. When the parents saw the brochures and listened to the explanation by KYA staff, they usually changed their mind and allowed their children to attend.

Within the context of the full scope of its clinical services, the Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC) maintains a youth health library that offers karaoke in the afternoon from 1:30 to 5:00 p.m. followed by a short

session on reproductive health. Instructors teach crafts as a way of allowing young visitors to discuss reproductive health in a relaxed atmosphere. RHAC also has a youth counseling center for face-to-face counseling as well as phone counseling. Most visitors to the centers are high school and university students or garment workers. In all, RHAC operates seven clinics in Phnom Penh in addition to clinics in six provinces. Finally, RHAC trains peer educators - one young woman and one young man from each class and from each community - to discuss health and protection methods with their peers.

## **b. Violence**

Youth for Peace's leadership program was established in 1999 by four students in the face of increasing violence and apparent decreasing morality among Cambodian youth. YFP

targets secondary school pupils (although high school drop-outs and university students are occasionally admitted) and aims to improve interpersonal skills, build confidence, and teach violence-reduction techniques. YFP activities include a self-improvement discussion series, facilitation, a leadership program that provides facilitation and team-building skills, and a justice and reconciliation program in which young people

learn about the Khmer Rouge tribunal and practice techniques to address fallout from Cambodia's conflict years.

Participants in the leadership program are required to organize a half-day or full-day workshop for their peers or for orphans at a center. Graduates are encouraged to work in groups and submit requests for other peace activities in the community. Currently YFP has more than 30 youth groups in three provinces.

## **c. Substance Abuse**

### **Problem Drug Use**

KYA's drug prevention program has a 12-member mobile team and targets youth age 13-25, with a focus on students in lower and upper secondary school. As a secondary group, KYA targets policy makers and politicians, youth leaders, par-



ADRA

ents and other adults. Activities include half-day educational sessions in schools and at youth organizations to raise awareness of the dangers of drugs. Youths practice negotiation to resist drugs and rehearse explaining to friends the dangers of drugs. Local authorities and key members of the community are also provided instruction. KYA organizes public campaigns with banners and loud speakers.

KYA also uses peer educators to distribute leaflets and talk to students, street children and youths who dropped out of school, explaining and showing the disadvantages, risks and dangers of drug abuse. A mobile team travels in the provinces, reaching out to residents through participatory theater. KYA educates teachers on how to teach students about drug prevention.

### Alcohol

*Improve People's Health in Cambodia* is a project implemented by People Development and Peace Center (PDP-Center) that advocates for an alcohol policy in Cambodia and works to reduce the harm caused by excessive alcohol use. PDP targets adults aged 18 and above at the community level as well as decision-makers in Phnom Penh, Svay Rieng, Battambang, Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey. As part of this project, PDP organizes community discussions for residents to discuss problems. Members of the community receive instruction on writing proposals related to alcohol abuse to apply for grants up to \$400 to implement public education projects. PDP also produces a radio call-in talk show which invites victims of alcohol abuse to share their experiences. The NGO also facilitates round-table discussions for young people and invites guest speakers from NGOs, government officials and Handicap International (which maintains a road traffic accident victim information system). At the policy level, PDP has organized stakeholder meetings around the issue of alcohol consumption.

### Tobacco

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)



YFP

Cambodia has been working on Tobacco Control in Cambodia since 1998. At the national level, ADRA Cambodia has advocated and supported the ratification of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which Cambodia government has signed to become a member of the Conference of Parties (COP) since 2005. ADRA is advocating for effective implementation of the WHO FCTC and is urging

the government to pass the draft National Law on tobacco control law as soon as possible. ADRA is also working to raise public awareness on the issue. In addition to these anti-tobacco activities, ADRA's Tobacco-Free Youth campaign in 2008 follows the theme of the WHO sponsored World No-Tobacco Day targeting youth in grades 8-9 in seven schools in particular to raise awareness of the harmful effects of smoking and convince them not to start.

### d. Youth Emotional Development

Programs that address the emotional needs of youth are a rarity in Cambodia. Noticeably absent are programs that provide education, support and counseling to parents who are concerned about their children and want to care for them better. The example highlights an innovative program to promote emotional development.

Originated by Maryknoll, Karol and Setha offers workshops for youth, peer educators and couples/parents to develop critical thinking on human sexuality. The name Karol & Setha is a combination of two acronyms: *Karol* means 'knowledge and reflection on life'

while *Setha* means 'sexuality through a holistic approach'.

Karol and Setha aims to assist youth to learn about themselves and understand their needs and those of their partner in order to improve long-term relationships and increase the chances of making each other happy. Workshops are geared to people 18 and older, with special workshops for couples preparing for marriage. There is a fee for registering which is

"The leadership program changes young people. They begin to make plans for themselves – for now and for the future."  
Long Khet, YFP Director

calculated on a sliding-scale. The organization has also produced a series of educational video programs on adolescent relationships.

#### **e. Media**

Due to the breath of this research, it was not possible to conduct an extensive study of current media advocacy activities in Cambodia. While there may be some excellent initiatives, none were readily identified. There are some known attempts to bring quality television programming to Cambodian children, notably World Education's production of a Khmer-language version of the popular children's educational television series *Sesame Street* in 2005.

### **3. Opportunities for Protecting Youth**

Among the many ways to protect Cambodia's youth, NGOs can:

#### **a. Adult Reproductive Health**

- Increase the scale and replicate current ARH programs, introducing youth-friendly services whenever possible.
- Improve capacity of teachers to educate students on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.
- Conduct research to document youth sexual practices and unmet need for services.
- Advocate for increased support for ARH from policy makers and for a multi-sectoral approach to ARH.
- Promote discussion of healthy sexuality with parents and communities at the local level.

#### **b. Violence and Gender-Based Violence**

- Promote public discussion of gender-based violence, the negative impact of current conceptions of masculinity and femininity into programs, and the need to report offenders.
- Integrate education on risks and methods of protection against violence (including legal services) into programs that target young women.
- Advocate for increased government enforcement of laws and prosecution of offenders.
- Take into account the role of substance abuse and pornography in inciting gender-based violence.

#### **c. Substance Abuse**

- Participate in anti-drug, alcohol and tobacco awareness campaigns.
- Educate youth on the dangers of substance abuse and techniques to avoid peer pressure.
- Involve all sectors of society, including community members, government and the private sector in campaigns.
- Advocate for the development and enforcement of policies that prohibit sale of drug, alcohol and tobacco to youth.
- Develop substance abuse counseling and treatment centers.

#### **d. Youth Emotional Development**

- Implement programs that develop youth self-esteem, autonomy, ability to make judgments, and negotiate peer pressure.
- Implement programs that improve communication between parents and their children, including on healthy sexuality.

#### **e. Media**

- Urge media outlets to produce quality programming for youth and air it at a reasonable time.
- Advocate with Government for a system of rating programs, policies limiting when and where adult content material can be aired and sanctions against airing, selling or generally making adult material available to youth under a certain age in any setting.
- Encourage parents to become more vigilant of their children's viewing habits.
- Explore the concept of a national campaign to protect youth through the promotion of responsible media.



## **f. General**

- Raise and examine social attitudes – towards youth, sexuality, gender, alcohol use, and wealth – in community programs whenever possible.
- Conduct awareness campaigns and educate parents on social problems affecting youth and alert them to the importance of remaining vigilant when it comes to their children.
- Help youth to identify positive role models.
- Integrate programs into existing structures whenever possible.

## **Conclusion**

Lack of experience and resources, a desire for excitement or escape that is natural to their age – combined with the frustration of not being in complete control of their life – place young people all over the world at increased risk of destructive influences, particularly those motivated by the commercial interests of uncaring adults. Inexpensive and ubiquitous mass media showing material that is inappropriate for youth or that they cannot put into proper context compound the risk. Policymakers, and all adults in Cambodia, need to be aware of the risks and take responsibility for protecting youth – whether it be through mentoring, role modeling or passing policy to protect the interests of youth.

## **PART III: CONCLUSION**

Young people are the agents of change, the engine of the economy and the source of most innovation and creativity in a country. Policy makers and development actors need to realize that until they bring youth on board, listen to their concerns, show them respect and create an enabling environment for them, the potential of young Cambodians – which is inextricably linked to that of the nation – cannot be unleashed.

Left unattended, unemployed and frustrated youth will become the source of instability as they see their hopes and dreams turn to dust and foresee an endless cycle of poverty for themselves and their families, in contrast to the flaunted opulence of a small group of Cambodian elite.

Best efforts at increasing the number of jobs are likely to fall far short of demand. Since most employment in the last decade has been created in small enterprises or as self-employment, and since the majority of Cambodians live in rural areas and work in the informal sector, these areas should remain priorities for employment creation. Entrepreneurship is not a panacea for employment generation, and not everyone can become a successful entrepreneur, but it is clear that promotion of entrepreneurship – and helping youth access credit and mentoring support in particular – should be an important component of any employment generation strategy. Whereas NGOs are not well placed to promote sectoral growth or implement youth employment schemes, they can help youth to become thriving entrepreneurs.

Currently, most youth initiatives are small in scale and focus on civic engagement. The second most common type of program is vocational training. Given the considerable expense of vocational training, it is important for skills training programs to prove their success and analyze their costs. Finally, protecting youth programs tend to be implemented by value-based (i.e. religious) organizations.

Among donor-supported programs, emphasis on youth entrepreneurship is negligible enough to be considered non-existent. With increased donor attention to the youth agenda, it is hoped that more entrepreneurship programs will be implemented and that these will take a long-term institutional approach so that they do not disappear on specific projects.

Donors and NGOs alike need to be vocal advocates for quality education at all levels, aiming to replicate the success in primary education at the secondary and higher levels. Low quality education is an obstacle that cannot be circumvented. If youth do not receive quality education, throughout their life they will be unable to make up for it in other ways.

In reviewing the various programs to promote employment, foster civic engagement and protect youth, one observation stands out. The greatest challenge to the youth agenda will be the attitude of Cambodian adults and the values they pass down to their children. Adults need to act as role models, relinquishing their fixation with status and materialism, and promoting a work ethic that respects all kinds of work. They need to show respect for youth and become comfortable conversing with them as equals, even when their opinions do not coincide. Above all, they need to transmit a vision of Cambodia in which youth can do anything. If not, how will young Cambodians begin to believe in themselves?





