



Cambodia

Newsletter

Vol. 07, No. 25
January-March 2010

Connecting Cambodia to a World of Development Experience

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

Striving to reduce gender disparity in Cambodia

Cambodia will not spare any efforts in working to enhance employment opportunities for women despite making progress in narrowing the socio-economic gap between them and their male counterparts.

This commitment was expressed at a consultative workshop Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training had with stakeholders and development partners in November last year. The meeting was held to assess the work in mainstreaming gender in labour and vocational training sectors, which are an important part of the national development strategy.

"There needs to be stronger support and encouragement for women's roles in economic and social fields, especially in formal sectors through which they can influence economic policy and laws," H.E. Vong Sauth, Minister of Labour and Vocational Training, said.

The government's main development framework, known as rectangular strategy, has proclaimed Cambodian women as "the backbone of national economy and society." Gender disparity is one of the main causes of poverty in Cambodia. While gender equality means ensuring there

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District data books to assist in local democratic development



UNDP PHOTO

Provincial workers load up district data books onto their trucks to distribute to provincial districts across Cambodia. The data books have been produced by the National Committee on Sub-national Democratic Development to assist policy-makers and development planners in carrying out democratic reform at the local level.

They could be called one-stop-shop books. In them, one can look up a variety of information such as road distance from a district office to its nearest commune, how many families in one district have access to toilets, the number of women who have suffered from domestic violence or the percentage of villagers using chemical pesticide on farms. The list goes on.

These new provincial district data books have been produced by the National Committee on Sub-national Democratic Development, or NCDD, to assist policy-makers and development planners in carrying out democratic reform at the local level in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

The books have been distributed to all 185 provincial districts after they were unveiled on 3 February. At the launching ceremony, H.E. Sar Kheng, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, described them as a significant tool for decision making and for more concrete development planning.

The data books hold a comprehensive set of information on demography,

natural resources, poverty, infrastructure, economy, education, development plans and projects, and existing services and organizations in the districts and provinces. They also contain local maps.

"It is the first time in Cambodia that such detailed data has been compiled for use as broadly as possible," H.E. Sar Kheng said.

The Cambodian government has, in recent years, taken a series of crucial steps in implementing democratic reform at the local level through decentralization and deconcentration. Those steps include the enactment of the Law on Commune/Sangkat Administration and Management, two Commune/Sangkat elections since 2002, the adoption of Organic Law which provides a framework for administrative management of capital, provinces, municipalities, districts and Khans. In May 2009, Cambodia held the first indirect election to choose provincial and district/khan councils.

As it pushes ahead with the reform, the government faces a growing need for

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are equal shares for men and women, participants of the workshop shared a consensus that a greater emphasis should be placed on women who, in broad human development terms, are disproportionately lacking in opportunities compared to men – from access to education to health to skill training and to employment. In addition to experiencing socio-economic disadvantages, many Cambodian women also suffer from physical and sexual abuses committed by men.

The meeting took stock of achievements in raising awareness about gender equality among employers and employees and in enrolling women in vocational training to help them get decent jobs. The ministry manages 37 vocational training centres to help provide both men and women with skills for jobs. In 2005, the centres had 851 teachers, out of which 119 were women. In 2009, the number of female trainers increased to 186, demonstrating some progress, albeit small, towards reducing the gender gap. The meeting also discussed the challenges of the training, including a lack of female dormitories, which hinders women's enrollment in skills training programmes located far from home.

The Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training is one of the 16 ministries and institutions in Cambodia which to date

have instituted a gender mainstreaming action plan with support from UNDP and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the government's main focal point to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

The current global economic downturn makes the message of the workshop even more important. The crisis is expected to worsen the hardship of the country's most vulnerable groups, which also include women. Many women have already lost their jobs in the garment industry, on which they

used to depend for income and to send remittances to their families in the countryside. The National Social Security Funds established in 2007 will generate significant benefit to both men and women to respond to the crisis and other risks at workplace.

"We must continue creating conditions for women to enhance their capacity in education and skills so that they can become equally capable as men in the society," Ms. Prak Chantha, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, said. She added that "we must not spare any strength or energy" in carrying on with the task in making gender equality a reality.



UNDP PHOTO

Cambodian women chat during a break at a women's vocational training center in Samlot district, Battambang province in northwestern Cambodia. The center provides training skills for women as part of the country's effort to expand business opportunity for them as well as to narrow socio-economic gap between them and their male counterparts.

District data books to assist....

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information – which to date is only available through scattered sources – about the country's 185 districts, 23 Provinces and Phnom Penh capital. Trying to address the challenge, in 2009 the **NCDD**, began compiling the data books with support from UNDP.

For some officials, who were among the first to have their hands on the books at the launching, it was a bit early for them to digest the information. But they said the significance of the books could not be simplified.

"They are certainly very useful. For example, if we do not know how many women or children are living under our jurisdiction, how can we do the proper planning to respond to their needs?

Having budget is only one part of the job," H.E. Kep Chutema, governor of Phnom Penh, explained.

The data books are compiled from the commune data base of all 1,621 communes, Ministries of Health, Education and Land Management, and several other projects funded by different development partners of Cambodia. They provide an important tool for setting baselines for planning, defining priorities and monitoring, and in drawing lessons from the sub-national level.

They have been printed in 9,250 copies in Khmer for Cambodian officials, accompanied by 7,400 copies in English to be used by research institutes, non-governmental organisations and development

partners working in Cambodia as well as the media.

Training of Trainers has been held for several local officials on how to use the data and more will be conducted in the future to help others to increase their understanding of the information and how to use them for development planning.

H.E. Sar Kheng urged local officials to make the best use of the data for defining strategies and planning for delivering development services in their communities "sustainably and quitably."

Aside from the hard copies the books *will also be available upon request from the NCDD and on its website www.ncdd.gov.kh.*

Deforestation in Pailin raises concern about land degradation



UNDP PHOTO

Cambodian farmers collect corn harvest in Pailin province in northwestern Cambodia. Corn, bean and cassava farms are the main lifeline for many of its residents. But these benefits have come at a cost to the environment. Concerns are growing about land degradation as forests are cut down to make way for plantations.

It was another corn harvesting season in Pailin, a northwestern province in Cambodia. Nuon Thol's face lit up with a big smile as he joined his family in the harvest.

"This plantation has regularly generated me the income that I need to support my family and the education of my four children," the 50-year-old man said, recalling how he managed to turn what used to be forest land into a five-hectare farm over the past eight years.

Pailin, which was a war zone during and after the Khmer Rouge era, is today a major agricultural frontier. Corn, bean and cassava farms are the main lifeline for many of its residents.

But these benefits have come at a cost to the environment. Concerns are growing about land degradation as forests are cut down to make way for plantations.

"The main cause of the loss of forest is the increase in the number of the population. We now have 70,000 residents, a seven-fold increase in a 10-year period," Pailin's deputy governor Ieng Vuth explained.

Until then, gem stone mining was their main economic activity. Now, people living in the area have shifted to agriculture by clearing and burning forest to grow cash crops.

"There are now approximately 40,000 hectares of plantation, meaning that forest cover of the same size has already been destroyed," Ieng Vuth said.

During the past decade Pailin has seen its forest fast disappearing across flat land and smaller hills. Now forest cover on big mountains is starting to recede. Pailin is an example of how pervasive the issue of deforestation is becoming in the country.

The extent of the problem was discussed in a recent meeting between provincial officials and visiting Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries staff who manage the UNDP-supported Sustainable Land Management Project. The visit was part of a wider effort to build a comprehensive look into causes of land degradation which is seen as a threat to Cambodia's agriculture and natural resources in the future.

Addressing land degradation is a major component in the National Action Plan that the government, with UNDP's assistance, is preparing as part of its obligation under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The plan will become a strategic tool to seek funding to tackle the problem and outline activities to educate farmers about farming techniques that will ensure sustainability of land use and productivity.

But it's not just deforestation that is contributing to land degradation in Pailin - farming practices are equally problematic. To save money, farmers prefer herbicide to hiring extra hands to remove weeds and grass to boost yield. Over time this degrades soil quality. Additionally, many fields stretch across

hilly terrain. Farmers usually plough them in up-and-down lines instead of across the slopes - a technique experts say makes it easy for top soil to wash down in rainy season into rivers such as the Sangker River, which then feed into the Tonle Sap lake, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. According to SLM project consultant Tan Boun Suy, this can cause silt build-up and significant long term effects especially for downstream provinces.

"Soil erosion from forest clearing here would make the lake become shallower. But the people in Pailin will be the first to be affected by the consequences [of deforestation] before other areas. Another impact from deforestation will be on biodiversity," he said.

Sao Chhong, a 47-year-old farmer, has in the past five years noticed a steady decline in his corn yield - from seven to three tonnes per hectare. It's an experience shared by other local farmers, who say the soil is becoming less fertile due partly to herbicide.

"It is time to start changing from business as usual, and we also need to have more agricultural extension from the government," he said.

Aside from farming extension, Ieng Vuth said another focus of his administration was in preventing more loss of the green on the mountain range in Pailin's western part otherwise the province would become "a virtual desert."

Engaging Parliamentarians to fight against HIV/AIDS

Cambodia has been hailed for its efforts in reducing the rate of HIV transmission during the last decade. Yet increased engagement – particularly from the country's Members of Parliament – will help prevent this progress from being eroded in the future.

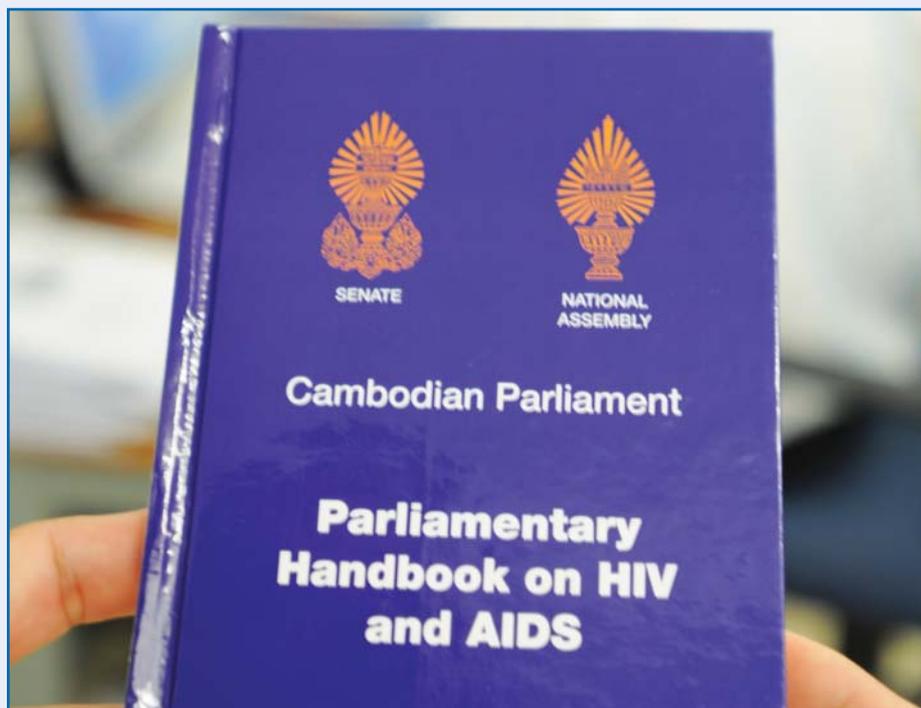
To encourage parliamentarians to play a greater role in ensuring accurate and up to date information on transmission, prevention and treatment of HIV reaches their constituents, in January all Members of the National Assembly and the Senate received a copy of a new Parliamentary Handbook on HIV and AIDS.

First Lady of Cambodia and President of the Cambodian Red Cross, Lok Chumteav Bun Rany Hun Sen launched the handbook at the National Assembly on 29 January. She spoke of past achievements in reducing transmission rates in Cambodia, while identifying the challenges that still lie ahead in the fight against the epidemic.

"We still have more work which requires us to overcome together. This handbook represents... the good initiative of the top leaders of Cambodia and development partners in combating HIV/AIDS," she said. The First lady is also the National Champion for the Asia Pacific leadership Forum on HIV/AIDS and Development (APLF).

The Parliamentary Handbook is a user-friendly resource. About half a centimetre thick and measuring 11 by 15 centimetres, it provides purse-size information about the epidemic, definition of the virus, its causes and how it can be transmitted, and available treatment. It also features the National response so far, as well as recommendations regarding how parliamentarians can do to enable a more effective response across policy, advocacy, leadership and legislative areas.

Cambodia's fight against HIV/AIDS has come a long way. The first cases were discovered in the country in 1991, reaching a prevalence rate of 2 percent among 15-49 year olds in 1998. However, by 2009, the rate had been reduced to 0.7 percent, thanks largely to a rigorous government-led awareness campaign, which was conducted with support from development partners. The country now has 234 blood testing and counseling centres, and nearly everyone who is HIV



UNDP PHOTO

The Parliamentary Handbook on HIV and AIDS has been distributed to Cambodian parliamentarians to encourage them to play a greater role in ensuring accurate and up to date information on transmission, prevention and treatment of HIV reaches their constituents.

positive is receiving the treatment they need.

But there is no room for complacency.

During the launch, officials urged greater vigilance to avoid a "second wave" of the epidemic. They said more focus was needed on most at risk groups, including entertainment workers and their male clients, men who have sex with men, and drug users. Representatives of the groups also conducted a dialogue with the parliamentarians about the biggest challenges to their communities and made recommendations to the Parliament regarding legislation, stigma and discrimination, and treatment.

"This will require more active engagement from members of parliament, national authorities and all stakeholders," said H.E. Mrs. Khloth Tongphka, Chairwoman of the Senate's Commission on Health, Social Affairs, Veteran, Rehabilitation, Vocational Training, Labour and Women's Affairs.

She said neither her specialized commission nor that of the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, can alone achieve in the task of keeping HIV/AIDS at bay. She said the handbook resembled a "living dictionary" which all parlia-

mentarians and their staff could use to further educate themselves about the virus and carry with them to spread the messages about prevention and care to their constituents.

UN Resident Coordinator Douglas Broderick noted that Cambodia is recognised as both a world and regional leader in its response to HIV. The country has also achieved the Millennium Development Goal on reducing HIV/AIDS prevalence and is working to ensure that it reaches its ambitious yet achievable Universal Access targets for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by the end of 2010.

With the valuable information contained in the handbook and greater engagement from parliamentarians, he said Cambodia could further enhance its success in the fight against the disease.

"You can take the lead in ensuring that Cambodia's success in beating back HIV and AIDS continues and is even stronger in the future," he said at the launch.

The handbook was produced by UNDP's Legislative Assistance Project (LEAP) and UNAIDS in collaboration with the Parliament and the National AIDS Authority with technical support provided by USAID's Prasiit Project.

Stories of hope inspire democratic participation among youth on International Human Rights Day

The annual celebration of International Human Rights Day is an occasion to reflect how far Cambodia has come in promoting respect and protection of human rights for its citizens. Last year's event, however, was a useful chance for some school students to meet face-to-face with lawmakers to talk about issues concerning young Cambodian people.

Some 180 students from six schools in the capital Phnom Penh and Kandal province participated in a forum organized by the National Assembly, the country's lower house of Parliament, on 9 December to celebrate the 61st anniversary of the Human Rights Day on 10 December.

Welcoming the young guests, H.E. Khoun Sudary, a member of the National Assembly and the Chair of Commission 1, explained why the legislative body chose to have a dialogue about youth on the Human Rights Day.

"We want to pay greater attention to roles and places of the young people in the society," she said in her opening remarks at the forum, themed Promoting Democracy through Youth Participation.

Cambodia is a very youthful nation. Two out of three Cambodians are under 25 years old and more than 30 percent of the country's population of 13.4 million are between 10 and 24 years of age. Young people constitute one third of the workforce and are the drivers of growth into the future. Yet their voices are rarely considered or incorporated into development planning.

Drug abuse, trafficking, HIV infection, lack of access to education and unemployment were cited by Khoun Sudary as some of the contemporary issues closely linked to the fundamental rights of young people.

"We can no longer ignore their needs. Young people are the real resource for sustainable development of the country," she said.

But the discussion did not just revolve around what policy makers must do to tackle challenges facing the young people. The participants also looked at the roles young people can play in developing self-worth and helping to chart the course of the country's future.



UNDP PHOTO

H.E. Khoun Sudary, left, a member of Cambodia's National Assembly, speaks to a group of school girls during an event marking the International Human Rights Day in December 2009.

One of the key messages for the young guests was: Try to create your own opportunities - do not wait for them to materialize.

The event was not just about serious talks about fundamental rights and duties of citizens. Three speakers – one lawmaker and two students – relayed their personal experiences of success to encourage and inspire hope among the young guests.

At 17, Ly Chhay is a young, skillful cameraman and reporter for the non-governmental group Support Children and Young People (SCY). When he was 15 he had to drop out of school to work as a truck porter and construction worker in Phnom Penh to earn money to support his poor family in his home province, Kandal. He continued like this, working every day, homeless, until he was approached by SCY, who put him back in school. He received computer training and learned how to handle a video camera to make documentaries about young people like himself. This was a critical turning point in his life.

"We young people are worthy and have the right to take part in all social activities like adults too. While we have the opportunity to study, we must hold on to it tight and not waste it," he said.

Ly Chhay's story moved Vat Bo, an 18-year-old student who attended the forum.

"He gives me courage and hope for a better future," Vat Bo said.

The event was part of the parliamentary school outreach activity supported by UNDP to make the legislative body more accessible to the public.

For Pho Somany, an 18-year-old student from Kandal province, taking part in the forum at the National Assembly was like a dream come true.

"I only used to see lawmakers on television but now I had the chance to meet with some of them to exchange our views. I would like to hope one day I will become a lawmaker here," she said.

Cambodian art exhibit about progress in tackling landmines displayed in Colombia

A Cambodian landmine art exhibit celebrating the country's significant progress in addressing its landmine and explosive remnants of war challenge was held in Cartagena. IMPACT : an art exhibit about landmines in Cambodia consists of works by ten Cambodian artists and four young landmine survivors.

"Cambodia is happy to present these works of art as a symbol of the positive impact of landmine clearance. I hope that the message they bring will further validate our commitment to a world free from the impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war, where communities can safely use their land and children can play without fear," remarked Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority Vice President H.E. Prak Sokhonn.

"While highlighting the destructive force of mines and explosive remnants of war and the challenges that remain, this thought-provoking exhibit is a reminder that our joint efforts have a marked impact on the lives of Cambodia's men, women, boys and girls," said UNDP Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery's Senior Deputy Director Miguel Bermeo on behalf of the United Nations Mine Action Team's Miguel Bermeo.

The exhibit debuted in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in September before traveling



UNDP PHOTO

Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority Vice President H.E. Prak Sokhonn, second left, speaks during an art exhibition about Cambodia's progress in addressing land mines and explosive remnants of war in Cartagena, Colombia, in December 2009.

with support from the Australian Government to Colombia for the Cartagena Summit for a Mine-Free World, which was held in December 2009.

"Australia has supported Cambodia's mine clearance, survivor assistance, mine risk education and integrated development efforts since 1996. It is important that people from around the world are aware of the progress and remaining challenges of mines in Cambodia," said Ms. Caroline Millar,

Australia's Ambassador for Disarmament and Permanent Representative to the United Nations at Geneva. "Cambodia is also now helping other countries to rid themselves of the scourge of landmines."

The Royal Government of Cambodia ratified the Mine Ban Treaty in 1999. Due to the high level of contamination in Cambodia, the Government has requested a 10-year extension, which will be considered during this week's Summit.

UNDP programme areas

UNDP Cambodia is the national presence of UNDP in Cambodia. It assists Cambodians to find their own solutions to the challenges of development. UNDP Cambodia focuses on three thematic areas: Poverty Reduction, Energy and Environment, and Democratic Governance.

Poverty Reduction

UNDP is working with government, outside donors and the civil sector to reduce poverty country-wide by supporting poverty reduction efforts. These efforts strengthen government leadership capacity, give better access to information for effective pro-poor policy making, bolster trade and private sector development to help the poor, and focus on effective aid coordination so that each dollar spent has a greater impact.

Energy and Environment

There is a great sense of urgency for actions to address Cambodia's environment and energy challenges. The poor are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and lack of access to clean affordable energy services. UNDP is helping to instill a long-term perspective in the management of Cambodia's natural resources in some of the country's most sensitive geographical regions.

Democratic Governance

Cambodia's challenge in building democratic governance is to develop institutions and processes that are more responsive to the need of ordinary citizens, including the poor, and that promote development. UNDP help strengthen electoral and legislative systems, improve access to justice and public administration, and develop a greater capacity to deliver basic services to those most in need.



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