

# POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS OF CIVIC SPACE IN CAMBODIA

Challenges and Opportunities for Active Citizenship



**OXFAM**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>I</b>
<b>ACRONYMS</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>III</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>1</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	1
OBJECTIVE.....	1
METHODS .....	1
<b>OVERVIEW OF CAMBODIA POLITICAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT</b> .....	<b>3</b>
CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONTEXT .....	3
ECONOMIC SITUATION.....	3
SOCIETAL CONTEXT .....	4
POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES AFFECTING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT .....	5
ELECTORAL REFORMS.....	6
LEGAL INSTRUMENTS .....	6
FORMAL MECHANISMS OF ENGAGEMENT .....	6
STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS.....	7
IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS .....	11
STAKEHOLDERS .....	15
PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT .....	18

## ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CDCF	Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum
CNRP	Cambodia National Rescue Party
CPP	Cambodia People's Party
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
D&D	Decentralisation and Deconcentration
ELC	Economic Land Concession
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
LNGO	Local Non Governmental Organisation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NEC	National Election Committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
OA	Oxfam America
OECD-DAC	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
SAF	Social Accountability Framework
TWG	Technical Working Group
USA/US	United States of America

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2014 Oxfam<sup>1</sup> commissioned a political economy analysis<sup>2</sup> of Cambodia's civil space which was undertaken by Dennis McMahon and Kem Ley. This report synthesises findings, updates key political and economic changes and incorporates further consultations with Oxfam America staff.

**Today Cambodia is at a significant turning point in its social, economic and political development.** In the past 15 years Cambodia has entered a period of sustained high annual economic growth, although this is overshadowed by the observation that the benefits of growth have not been equitably shared amongst all social groups.<sup>3</sup> Cambodia's largely rural population experiences food insecurity, non-diversification of household economies, high prevalence of shocks and lack of opportunities<sup>4</sup>. Access to quality public services, land alienation, vulnerability to market fluctuations, disasters and climate change<sup>5</sup> are also development challenges for Cambodia.

Cambodia's dependency upon foreign development assistance is long-standing although the Overseas Development Assistance landscape is changing. Western Development Partners since the early 1990s regularly linked aid to governance reforms and democratic processes, openly agreed by Government. Subsequent adherence to compliance standards and donor responses have varied. While today China provides increasing aid, loans and investment, incentives remain for Cambodia to maintain positive relationships with all donors, if only to retain market access.

The results of the 2013 National Assembly elections surprising many, demonstrated mass mobilisation of citizens, particularly youth, voting for change. It is expected that the coming years will be characterised by Government efforts to increase its popular support, improve Cambodia's investment climate and seek to maintain or reduce national or international dissent. Observations that there is a reform agenda are evidenced by Government call to reduce corruption, appointment of capable Ministers and staff and recently drafted Social Accountability Framework (SAF). At the same time, civil society has expressed concerns about draft Law on Associations and NGOs, Cyber Crimes Law, Trade Union Law and the Agricultural Land Management Law: without citizen and civil society organisation (CSO) consultations, Cambodia's civic space could be reduced.

The political economic analysis identified that while relationships at local government level hold the greatest promise for constructive and meaningful civic engagement, it is important national level CSO and Government relations are strengthened. Citizen demand for inclusion in decision-making cannot be reversed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Political economic analysis commissioned by Oxfam America

<sup>2</sup> Dennis McMahon and Kem Ley

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Poverty Assessment 2013: "Where Have All the Poor Gone?"

<sup>4</sup> [www.foodsecurityatlas.org/km/country/access/livelihoods](http://www.foodsecurityatlas.org/km/country/access/livelihoods)

<sup>5</sup> World Bank Governance Index: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>

The role of Oxfam and development actors is to identify and facilitate mechanisms that will provide citizens with meaningful opportunities to engage in their own development in a changing political landscape. Promoting political pluralism and the “middle way”, developing a learning agenda and facilitating open dialogue will create a more issues focus and nuanced understanding by citizens.

# INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

## INTRODUCTION

Cambodia is at a turning point in its social, economic and political development. Between 1996 and 2011, World Bank governance indicators showed little change: indicators like voice and accountability, control of corruption and regulatory control fell while political stability or absence of violence showed improvement.<sup>6</sup> Indicators for political stability and absence of violence have improved, but has come at the expense of freedoms and equitable distribution of wealth. At the same time, persistent problems and concerning trends make Cambodia vulnerable to some level of instability - rapid population growth and increasing urbanisation, emerging youth population and limited employment opportunities, overall public service delivery standards, increasing land alienation and consequent high levels of migration; as well as Cambodia's vulnerability to market fluctuations, disasters or climate change.

Oxfam and other development partners must capitalise on existing opportunities and identify mechanisms that will support Government and civil society to come together in constructive engagement, building trust and mutual learning. A broad and robust process of civic engagement will enable citizens to engage in the process of changes to define democracy, strengthen role of civil society as an institution, and support accountability and transparency.

## OBJECTIVE

The political economy analysis of civic space was commissioned to deepen the understanding of key trends, actors and their dynamics related to civic engagement; and identify viable entry points for Oxfam, their partners and development actors to enable citizens to engage fully and effectively.

## METHODS

McMahon and Ley, working in collaboration with Oxfam staff conducted 36 key informant interviews, facilitated 8 semi-structured focus group sessions and completed a rigorous literature review. Consultations were conducted with the Government ruling party, Opposition party, Social Media, Media, Development Partners, International and National Non-Government Organisations (INGO and LNGO), Analysts, Radio show callers, People's Movements and local Association members. Data collected through literature review, individual interviews and focus groups was compiled in stakeholder analysis and issue tables, to identify the most relevant trends and changes in context, key relationships related to civic space and viable opportunities for engagement.

---

<sup>6</sup> World Bank Governance Index: [http:// info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index/asp](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index/asp)

This report updates the political economic analysis with changes until mid-September 2014:

- Acquisition by Oil and gas company KrisEnergy of Chevron Overseas Petroleum (Cambodia)
- Invitation for increase in NGO participation on Extractive Industries informal working group, advising Ministries of Environment and Mines & Energy
- Resolution of political deadlock as elected Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) take up seats in National Assembly
- Reopening of Freedom Park in Phnom Penh after its closure for some months
- National Institute of Statistics released the Ministry of Planning's Agricultural Census
- Significant progress by ruling and opposition parties towards finalisation of draft election law

# OVERVIEW OF CAMBODIA POLITICAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

## CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONTEXT

The results of the 2013 National Assembly elections surprised many with several factors contributing to the outcome: the massive mobilisation of youth support, online campaigns for change, and citizen desire for change. The ruling party has recognised the need for reform: “Reform is a necessary and urgent task that has to be continued for both the present and future”.<sup>7</sup>

Citizens have limited access to meaningful development dialogue. Challenges to maintaining or expanding civic space include: lack of proposed electoral reforms, promise of wealth from extractive industries and industrial agriculture, increasing aid loans from China and limited forums for engagement between Government with civil society.

## ECONOMIC SITUATION

Cambodia’s economy has grown remarkably at more than 8% per annum between 2004 to 2008, slowed during the global economic downturn in 2008-2009 and then picked up again to reach a four-year high of 7.3% in 2012.<sup>8</sup> Economic growth in 2013 was 7.2% with growth projections of 7.0% in 2014 and 7.3% in 2015<sup>9</sup> driven by strong exports, private investment, agriculture, and underpinned by a solid macroeconomic position.<sup>10</sup> There was a diversification in destination markets for garments and sources of tourism supported growth.<sup>11</sup> Agriculture, the only sector to extend beyond major population centres of Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanouk ville benefited from increased global rice prices but was negatively impacted by 2013 flooding and crop failures.<sup>12</sup>

The World Bank estimated that Cambodia attained its Millennium Development Goal of “halving poverty” in 2009, however a substantial proportion of the population remains only marginally above the poverty line. The gap between rich and poor continues to increase, with many communities vulnerable to external shocks from climate change and increases in prices of rice, petrol or other basic commodities.<sup>13</sup> Cambodia’s Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 2012 increased from 2012 total of US \$2.9 billion to US \$4.9 billion in 2013 in garment, footwear and

---

<sup>7</sup> Prime Minister remarks at the Cambodia Outlook Forum, Phnom Penh 2014

<sup>8</sup> [www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview) Last updated 23 December 2013

<sup>9</sup> [www.adb.org/countries/cambodia/economy](http://www.adb.org/countries/cambodia/economy) citing Asian Development Outlook 2014: ADB estimates

<sup>10</sup> [www.worldbank.org/country/cambodia/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/country/cambodia/overview) Last updated 23 December 2013

<sup>11</sup> [www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/cambodia/Cambodia\\_EAP\\_Update-Oct2013\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/cambodia/Cambodia_EAP_Update-Oct2013_ENG.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [www.adb.org/countries/cambodia/economy](http://www.adb.org/countries/cambodia/economy)

<sup>13</sup> World Bank Cambodia Poverty Assessment 2013 “Where Have All The Poor Gone?”

new investment areas.<sup>14</sup> Investment increases are likely to continue from China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam, which while bringing economic benefits such as job creation in manufacturing and construction and much needed power generation, may not be accompanied with strong corporate social responsibility (CSR). The vast majority of CSR programs in Cambodia are run by United States of America (USA), European or Australian companies.<sup>15</sup> CSOs have requested investors to publish environmental and social impact assessments before receiving Government project approval.<sup>16</sup>

Most investments are large scale industrial agriculture, developed by granting economic land concessions (ELC). A pervasive impact of macroeconomic development, including ELC or large industrial or commercial construction projects, is the eviction of farmers or poor urban dwellers from land often resulting in loss of livelihoods, unemployment and migration to domestic urban centres or nearby countries. As of February 2012, the Government has leased at least 2,033,664 hectares of land to private companies under its current concession schemes with approximately 800,000 hectares in just 2011.<sup>17</sup> Northeastern Indigenous highland people occupying much of the forested land prized for rubber production or mineral exploration are being negatively affected by Cambodia's economic development. The 2014 ANZ Royal Business Confidence Index, cited private sector concerns about institutional frameworks, electricity prices and infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

Close to reaching a quadrupling of its per capita income in the two decades since 1993, Cambodia is on the verge of graduating to lower middle-income country status.<sup>19</sup> Through continued growth, foreign investments, substantial endowments of natural resources, investor fees and largely un-tapped taxation revenue, Cambodia must generate funds to sustain a functioning government structure, provide quality social services and equitably manage national resources. International Labour Organisation estimated a 10% Gross Domestic Product loss annually, to corruption.<sup>20</sup>

## **SOCIETAL CONTEXT**

Traditionally, Cambodian society with its deeply embedded cultural beliefs around absolutism, strong-man rule and divine Karma, has not been well-equipped to manage conflict peacefully,<sup>21</sup> or promote political pluralism and a constructive, dynamic civic and political life. Traditional beliefs are further supported by an observed tendency towards "black and white" thinking, an

---

<sup>14</sup> [www.thesoutheastasiaweekly.com/foreign-direct-investment-in-cambodia-increased-to-4-9-billion-prime-minister-Hun-Sen/](http://www.thesoutheastasiaweekly.com/foreign-direct-investment-in-cambodia-increased-to-4-9-billion-prime-minister-Hun-Sen/)

<sup>15</sup> US State Department Investing in Cambodia, 2014

<sup>16</sup> 2007 approval to construct Kampot's Kanchey Dam was given, without release of environmental or social impact assessments

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/169LICADHOBriefingDraftAgriculturalLaw-English.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/business/survey-says-firms-confident-despite-deadlock-58295> May 8 2014

<sup>19</sup> [www.cdri.org.kh/webdata/download/cdd/CDD.pdf](http://www.cdri.org.kh/webdata/download/cdd/CDD.pdf) 2013

<sup>20</sup> Cambodia-PressHun Sen blames private sector September 4 2014

<sup>21</sup> Springer, 2013 Cambodia's Neoliberal Order

impediment to open discourse and consideration of the complexity of issues.

However, society is changing. Cambodian young people have not experienced the trauma of earlier generations and are seeking education, travelling in the region, sharing information online, pursuing livelihoods and increasingly influencing their extended families. Women, participate in community networking activities on a regular basis, have become increasingly vocal about family food security, child health and education standards. Women have been observed in increasingly vocal roles, including leadership in mass organisations or people's movements, even though literacy and education standards are lower for men, and women are under-represented in key leadership roles in the community and political arenas. Youth voices are increasingly being heard.

The 2013 elections showed that citizens want to participate in decision-making but responses to a survey conducted on the 2013 political debates, found the majority of respondents were not able to articulate the function of parliamentarians as law makers and overseers of executive.<sup>22</sup>

The current social challenges of Cambodia's economic transition are considerable: limited economic development in many rural areas, urbanisation, youth unemployment, lack of quality improvements in health and education and high migration rates which undermine the fabric of communities,<sup>23</sup> with stark contrast between rural and urban communities. Urban centres such as Phnom Penh and Siem Reap are focal points of economic growth, with landless or land-poor Cambodians migrating for income opportunities. As centres of education, urban populations contain a high proportion of educated Cambodians, students and young people seeking work. Citizens have greater access to internet and other media sources in urban centres, increased awareness of current events and opportunities to engage in social and political activities.

## **POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES AFFECTING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT**

Civil society is referred to as the "sphere of society which organises itself autonomously, as opposed to the sphere that is established and/or directly controlled by the state".<sup>24</sup> An open civic space where citizens enjoy their freedoms of association, expression and assembly and can actively participate in decisions that affect them, is seen as a vital and integral part of democratic society and a core foundation for sustainable peace and stability. Effective mechanisms must be established and political will harnessed for civil society and Government to overcome sensitivities and contradictions, to create an enabling environment for mutual learning and engagement.

---

<sup>22</sup> National Democratic Institute, 2013, report on the 2013 National Assembly Candidate debates

<sup>23</sup> COMFREL, Annual Report 2012

<sup>24</sup> Lummis CC. (1996) Radical Democracy Ithaca, Cornell University Press

## **ELECTORAL REFORMS**

It is hoped that NEC reforms will support Cambodia's Constitutional commitment to democracy and rule of law, related International Covenants on Civic and Political Rights enshrined in the Constitution, as well as increase confidence in future elections by stakeholders in the electoral process.

Progress has been made. Negotiators for both Cambodia People's Party (CPP) and CNRP have agreed upon several details in a new law governing the NEC, with the draft document planned for completion late September 2014. Having long accused the NEC of giving CPP unfair advantage in elections, its overhaul is one of the key CNRP demands agreed to by CPP to end the year-long political deadlock following the ruling party's victory in last year's national election.<sup>25</sup>

## **LEGAL INSTRUMENTS**

Demands by civil society for proposed electoral reforms and draft laws restricting freedom of assembly, freedom of association, access to information, freedom of expression and media freedom, internet freedom, management and use of agricultural lands and trade union law are documented. Draft laws, existing mechanisms and intermittent bans should not reduce citizen engagement. Only with pressure from development partners and private sector, is CSO input likely to be invited. Many development partners, including Oxfam, have worked to enable citizens to have a voice in national policy dialogue and debate, enhancing good governance and increasing state responsiveness to citizen priorities. Public forums have been established at the district level but it is unclear what mechanisms exist for sub-national input to be included in drafting Cambodia's laws and policies.

## **FORMAL MECHANISMS OF ENGAGEMENT**

**National level:** Limited opportunities for civil society to engage directly with Government exist at the national level. Citizens must gain permission from National Assembly cabinet to talk to their elected representatives. CSO participation in 19 Technical Working Groups (TWG) established to coordinate donors and relevant ministries is often seen to be observer, not participant status, leaving CSOs to resort to press releases and public statements as a proxy for expression.

**Sub-national level:** The Ministry of Interior recently drafted the SAF which creates potential for citizen monitoring of commune councils, local education and health services with LNGO support. Citizens can engage constructively with local council meetings and District Forums, both legally open to the public, but are not well attended. CSO can attend District Integration Workshops to understand local priorities and identify opportunities for alignment. The SAF will broaden civic engagement at sub-national level but all stakeholders must identify and support mechanisms to broaden the voice of sub-national civic engagement to be incorporated at national level.

---

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.opendevdevelopmentcambodia.net/news/two-party-talks-on-new-nec-law-move-forward/>

**Economic Land Concessions:** Transferring arable land from mostly small-scale farmers to agricultural companies has become a rallying point for large-scale mass movements. In 2013 a joint statement was issued by four NGO's saying that more than 700,000 people have been negatively affected since 2000.<sup>26</sup> Programs by Oxfam and other development actors, are today working with large numbers of women demonstrating leadership in farmers' groups and rural communities.

**Human Rights Enforcement:** A positive move in 2006 was agreement by the Prime Minister to the establishment of an independent National Human Rights Institution with powers to investigate human rights abuses in Cambodia and act as independent bridge between Government and civil society. Government has a human rights committee but is not seen to function as an investigator.<sup>27</sup>

**Extractive Industries:** While citizen knowledge about extractive industries is limited, two new civil society networks have emerged: Cambodians for Resource Revenue Transparency and the more field-focused Extractive Industries Social and Environment Impact Network. Each network has raised awareness, built constituent support for responsible extractive industry management and worked to affect national policy and problem solving at the community. Oxfam and other agencies engaged in the extractive industries policy dialogue have an important role to play in strengthening accountability and transparency of extractive industry standards, CSR and revenue.

## **STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS**

### **National Government**

While Cambodian Government institutions and economic life is strongly influenced by the CPP, increasingly there is recognition of need for reform. Reform pilots include: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport working with the Anti-Corruption Unit to help curb corruption in Grade 12 final examinations and Ministry of Commerce focus on improving business registration processes and reducing official fees. Overt tension between CPP and CNRP is observed to have reduced since CNRP took up its seats in the National Assembly but the political landscape will require on-going monitoring for changes leading into the 2016 Commune Council and 2018 National Assembly elections. National Assembly member visits to constituencies they represent are formal and citizens have limited access to representatives. Newly established Ministries and agencies will diminish the power and influence of existing Ministries, agencies and leadership.

### **Sub-National Government**

Decentralisation and Deconcentration (D&D) programs have moved slowly but positive examples exist of commune councillors as elected officials, problem-solving on matters of public interest. Commune councils commonly prioritise and assume management for project infrastructure but not more complex social development activities related to health or other social services. District authorities often lack a clear sense of purpose although envisioned to be the focal point. D&D reforms requiring functions delegated from line ministries to local government, need strengthening.

---

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/cambodias-worst-year'-land-disputes> 24 January 2013

<sup>27</sup> Cambodia Daily 31 December 2013 "Groups Want Independent Human Rights Body"

## Private Sector

Cambodia's private sector has many dimensions: the 2011 census reports more than 500,000 businesses but only 3.4% of them are officially registered; 96.6% being identified as informal sector employing less than 10 people and often a small family business.<sup>28</sup> While reportedly there are some nascent small business associations at the provincial level, it is larger-scale companies that dominate the landscape. Links between private and public sector (Government) are not documented and there is little public information about domestic or regional companies. Overall Cambodian FDI grew dramatically with 73% increase in 2012 alone. Garment sector comprises at least 60% of Cambodia's large enterprises with more than 70% of those companies owned by Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Korea.<sup>29</sup> Korea, China and Japan are also in real estate and construction with a notable spike in foreign property investment in Cambodia after it hosted the 2012 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit.<sup>30</sup>

Increasingly, voices are being heard for stronger anti-corruption controls and good CSR practices: communities concerned about the impact of Vietnamese rubber companies on their rights,<sup>31</sup> western companies legally bound by home-country legal requirements, the Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Associations requesting improved governance and equitable access to local judiciary to encourage foreign investors,<sup>32</sup> and protests in Seoul following accusations of Korean Embassy exerting pressure on the Government.<sup>33</sup> With USA receiving 40% of Cambodia's exports, the Government is well aware of the need to diversify. Linking job creation with quality education was identified by the 2014 Cambodia Outlook Conference.

## Non-Government Organisations

Of around 3,000 registered LNGO and Associations in Cambodia only 1,350 are active, 40 are considered strong, around 80% of active LNGO focus on service delivery; and few are accredited through Cambodia's Good Practice Project established by the Cooperation Committee of Cambodia. Contributions by LNGO's in Cambodia include establishing and supporting community development efforts and building community cohesion but without a genuine membership base are not seen as representative of civil society. LNGO are good at mobilising international donor resources; and local umbrella organisations serve important roles building solidarity among organisations, sharing information and bringing a collective voice to the national stage. Around 500 registered INGO are operating in Cambodia having emerged with repatriation efforts, originally in service delivery roles, but today with Cambodia's changing economic status INGOs are increasingly looking to LNGOs as implementers. Many informants commented on the overall lack of coordination and cooperation among INGO and the need for a more unified and coordinated approach to broaden social transformation.

Respondents want NGOs representing issues and beneficiary concerns to continue to highlight concerns to the public and press all political parties to develop a clear platform. Also noted was

---

<sup>28</sup> Cambodia 2011 National Census

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/content/uploads/2011/09/Chapter\\_7.pdf](http://www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/content/uploads/2011/09/Chapter_7.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/real-estate/foeign-investment-cambodia%E2%80%99s-property-rises>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.globalwitness.org/rubberbarons/>

<sup>32</sup> Phnom Penh Post article: Businesses need help fighting corruption March 13 2014

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/rare-gov%E2%80%99t-insight-korea-docs>

that NGO engagement with local councils varied from prioritising council relations over community needs, to pushing communities to a more adversarial position than communities were comfortable with. A mutual learning exchange would enhance Cambodia's development journey: NGOs fully understand roles and responsibilities of government functions and Government recognise different roles NGO play in civil society and contributions made in Cambodia.

### **Community-based Organisations**

An estimated 25,000 CBOs exist in Cambodia, mostly through NGO development activities at the local level and mostly unregistered.<sup>34</sup> Among these are savings groups, village development committees, fishery and forestry and farmer associations. While CBOs focusing upon livelihoods and food security often demonstrate independent and substantial motivation for engaging with authorities they may be reliant on NGO for funding and support, may lack sustainability and the impact of including the village chief as a member is debated. Anecdotal evidence suggests some villages have up to 7 committees, often comprising many of the same members.

### **Associations and People's Movements**

The most visible and vocal people's movements are those who fall into the "reactive" category organised and responding to immediate threats to property and livelihood. Several informants expressed concerns about donors and NGOs flocking to support the stronger and more prominent movements, noting that support may threaten to erode sense of purpose and self-determination. While strong examples of organically formed and self-motivated people's movements such as fisheries communities, labour unions and groups like the young Monks movements exist, most people's organisations have their roots in NGO initiatives and many remain reliant on this support. Non-financial inputs cited as beneficial include community organising, active non-violence training and exposure to other groups organised around similar circumstances. Importantly, emerging examples of peoples groups reaching out and building alliances around cross-cutting issues exist: fisheries communities and land rights.



Picture 1: Indigenous villagers walked more than 500 Km from Ratanak Kiri province to Phnom Penh city to celebrate the 2014 International Human Rights Day focusing on "Where is Justice Where is Peaceful for People"

### **Traditional Media**

There 14 domestic and 16 foreign journalist associations that have a presence in Cambodia.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> CDRI Working Paper, "20 Year Strengthening Cambodian Civil Society: Time for Reflection. By Sivhouch OU and Sedara KIM (2012)

<sup>35</sup> <http://cjrengilish.wordpress.com/2007/10/17/journalists-associations/>

Some support the protection of journalists and draw attention to abuses<sup>36</sup> with an international monitoring site noting 11 journalists reportedly killed between 1992 and early 2014, 9 with motives identified and 2 with unidentified motives.<sup>37</sup> Hosts of popular call-in shows indicate a dramatic increase in callers during the past year. Two English language newspapers enjoy relative press freedom and have Khmer language versions available in metropolitan areas. CSOs report that media are not always willing to profile sensitive issues thus reducing information sharing - radio has 72% national listeners and television, 86%.<sup>38</sup> Some independent radio stations report being blocked during the past election and state-controlled stations demonstrated awareness that bland programming affects revenue. Internet usage estimates vary between 5-18% of population and is available mainly in urban areas. CSO respondents found general media unwilling, or unable, to report on sensitive issues.

### Citizens

People report that today there is greater discussion of political issues in markets and other public places, reflected in the increase in radio callers on some programs. Youth, who have benefitted from recent increases in affordable internet and Khmer language capabilities on popular sites are becoming increasingly active, with the majority being women.<sup>39</sup> Facebook with 740,000 Cambodia users in 2011, 50% of whom were identified as between 18-24



Picture 2: Active citizen participated in a campaign against corruption

years<sup>40</sup>, is the sole means of internet networking in Cambodia although there are a number of alternative independent blog sites. Facebook activist sites are small in number with roughly only 12 taking a strong stand<sup>41</sup>, and it is common for both online and radio callers to use pseudonyms and false addresses. Youth activists are increasingly seen to influence opinions and voting preferences of extended families in rural areas even with limited understanding of Government issues and functions.<sup>42</sup> Restrictions for some groups on assembly resulted in them turning to online mechanisms to organise and mobilise.

### Development Partners

Cambodia receives around 40% of expenditure from traditional Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) donors, but increases in China aid, loans and direct investment with its non-interference politicise and economic agenda, is reducing their influence. China provides \$260 million, USA and European Union together \$236 million and Japan \$175 million; with Korea emerging as a strong donor. OECD-DAC donors may prioritise geopolitical, economic and trade considerations over human rights and governance concerns. Japan prefers to work quietly but Korea is generally aligned

<sup>36</sup> <http://capj-cambodia.blogspot.com/>

<sup>37</sup> <http://cpj.org/killed/asia/cambodia/> 2014

<sup>38</sup> NDI report on candidate debates 2013

<sup>39</sup> Anecdotal estimate from discussions from focus groups

<sup>40</sup> Citation from WEARASOCIAL and Socialbakars within the COMFREL 2012 document

<sup>41</sup> Personal estimate of Facebook activists consulted in the Political Economic Analysis by Dennis McMahon and Kem Lay

<sup>42</sup> UNDP 2011 Youth Civic Engagement KAP Study

with OECD-DAC donors and is active in TWG meetings.<sup>43</sup> The primary donor and government aid mechanism, the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF), scheduled annually has not been held for the last 3 years. Civil society has attempted but not been successful in having input to CDCF, at TWG CSO have been noted often as observers and a lack of formal mechanisms exist for regular dialogue between CSO and Development Partners.<sup>44</sup>

### **Religious Community**

The Sangha or religious community, respected and trusted by Cambodians as custodians of moral and spiritual ideals, is regulated by the Ministry of Cults and Religion. Ignoring the 2007 decree banning monks from participating in demonstrations<sup>45</sup> resulted in allegations of violence in recent protest marches.<sup>46</sup> Youth networks exist, aligned to political parties: the emerging 'Young Monks Movement' with an estimated 5,000 monks<sup>47</sup> and the 'Pagoda Boys', a LNNGO comprising lay youth living at pagodas, estimated at 4,000.<sup>48</sup>

### **Monarchy**

The King holding a constitutional role as head of state, is required to approve many Government appointments, but is not seen as a strong actor. The concept of monarchy is revered but many expressed disappointment, citing lost opportunities to call for cooperation and conciliation between parties and the promotion of open dialogue to bring pluralism and dynamism to public life.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

### **The Meaning of Citizenship**

Oxfam invests in programs to help people assert their rights so that they can improve their lives, enabling active citizens to promote effective states. Among Oxfam partners, Active Citizenship is both a right and a responsibility of citizens to participate in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation, ensuring that they are well informed and that their voice is reflected in decision making that affects their livelihoods and rights.

Active citizens are seen as having a strong understanding of their rights and issues taking "pro-active" steps towards influencing development decisions and sensitising others about issues, and holding government accountable for its actions. There is an overall sense that this is done through education and developing the capacity of citizens to organise, to think critically about issues as well as through broader actions, to ensure that they have information, continue the space for engagement and find creative opportunities for engagement.

---

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odiorg.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinions-files/8186.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> It was noted that the Australian Embassy convenes quarterly meetings with selected Australian NGO's; others may also hold them

<sup>45</sup> <http://phnompenhpost.com/national/ban-monk-protests-called-un-buddhist>

<sup>46</sup> <http://unpo.org/article/16739>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/belief/cambodia-monks-politics-election>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/students-blast-cpp-backed-pagoda-boys-28776/>



Oxfam believes that development is ultimately about active citizens and effective governments reaching agreements on shared priorities to improve their countries and their communities. And then bringing their respective skills and resources to bear in order to achieve that vision, as well as keeping each other accountable for their contributions along the way.

Ending extreme poverty is not possible without investments by governments. Too often, people lack the power to find out how public resources are spent or to verify that the funds are serving the public interest. Oxfam helps citizens to take action to ensure their country's resources including revenues from oil, gas, and mining, foreign aid dollars, and tax revenue are spent in ways that alleviate poverty. To meet this challenge, citizens must be equipped to "follow the money", raise their voices, and demand responses and reforms from their government officials.

"Following the money" has become a growing concern for governments and citizens. They need to be able to track financial transactions at regional and subnational levels as well as nationally, because the movements of funds are increasingly decentralised. In doing so, they address issues of power imbalances, weakness of the state compared with corporate powers, corruption or political patronage, or poor-quality service delivery that can result in "leakages" throughout public finance chains that prevent public revenue from flowing to poor people. In Cambodia, Oxfam is enhancing the capacity of local CSO to monitor development, policies and

expenditures, and helping to create the political space these organisations need to carry out this monitoring. Our partners are pushing for increased access to national budget information and for Government disclosure of payments from extractive industries. Globally, Oxfam is joining forces with like-minded citizen networks, such as the Global Movement for Budget Transparency, Accountability and Participation and linking with the Open Government Partnership and Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency. Oxfam is urging the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the USA government, and international donors to support transparency and accountability agendas at the national level.

The USA Government is supporting Oxfam's work on active citizenship by furthering transparency and accountability for citizens: the FY15 US Senate appropriations bill included language on protecting the rights of Cambodian people to freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, furthering transparency and accountability; enactment and enforcement of laws promoting civil society and internet freedom, protecting the rights of Cambodian people to freedom of expression, association, and assembly; transparency and accountability through enactment and enforcement of laws promoting civil society and Internet freedom.

### **Key Stakeholder Groups as Agents of Change**

Oxfam and its partners are working with two important change agent groups in Cambodia today: women and youth, building leaders and facilitating opportunities for their voices to be heard. Enabling all citizens to have a voice is important in developing a strong and responsive society.

### **Key Stakeholder Groups as Agents of Change**

Oxfam and its partners are working with two important change agent groups in Cambodia today: women and youth, building leaders and facilitating opportunities for their voices to be heard. Enabling all citizens to have a voice is important in developing a strong and responsive society.

**Women:** The potential role of women cannot be understated. While traditionally considered to be of lower status than men in Cambodia's hierarchical social order and disproportionately poor and under-educated, women are increasingly emerging as strong and capable leaders. Government integration of gender equality in national policies and development goals, including



inclusion of women elected into political positions, is stated but targets will not be met: women claimed only 18% of seats during the 2012 commune elections, with similar results in 2013 National Assembly elections. Gender mainstreaming is documented in the Ministry of Women's Affairs Five Year Strategy Plans (Nearv Ratanak I-IV) building on the Beijing Platform for Action to empower women in decision-making, to be given fundamental power and achieve equality, development and peace.

Picture 3: Cheiv Pan, 42, is an indigenous woman farmer joins the march to call for respect of her rights in the light widespread granting of land and mining concessions affecting her community

**Returned Scholars:** Thousands of Cambodians have benefitted from foreign government sponsored scholarship programs offering quality higher education outside of the country. Upon their return to Cambodia, alumni events are usually limited to networking.

**Self-Motivated People's Movements:** Farmer's groups, associations and cooperatives represent an immense pool of potential as a driver for political and social change in Cambodia. Representing nearly 70% of the population the issues they face are largely the same issues facing the entire country and with strong female representation at the local level, these groups can promote women's leadership. A lack of facility with the Khmer language or another common language, can present difficulties for effective provincial, national and regional networking but there is linking across different focus areas. Development actors work across a range of people's movements.

#### **FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE!**

The political economic analysis identified challenges present in Cambodia today, but opportunities also exist to broaden civil society engagement with Government, Opposition Parties, Development Partners, People's Movements, Sangha, women, youth, media, social media, social media activists and Cambodian Diaspora. On-going monitoring of the political, economic and social landscape is required so that programs effectively and efficiently respond to emerging trends and events.

To scale-up the impact of the Active Citizenship program, Oxfam which came together in 2013 as a confederation of affiliates, will continue to work across all 24 Cambodian provinces, directly implementing or cooperating with local partners and government representatives, and

engage with national advocacy agencies and trade unions. Oxfam and its partners will work with development actors, building on existing youth and women platforms and strengthening opportunities for active citizenship. Entry points identified below are not exhaustive and are drawn from the final report.

#### Respondents cited these considerations for the Active Citizenship program:

- Prioritise *coordination*
- Ensure *community voices* are authentic
- Support a *lead agency model* to coordinate responses and strategies
- Host *multi-stakeholder forums* to enable mutual learning and trust building
- Promote the “*middle way*” and *hold all political parties to account*
- Enhance collective action, supporting *networks from community to global level*
- Seek to become a “*critical friend*” of the Government

## STAKEHOLDERS

### National Government

Development partners and INGO should play a stronger role as *convenors* to bring CSO and Government representatives together in preferably less formal settings where relationships and mutual understanding can be built and future collaboration promoted

- *All political parties should be held accountable* on key issues and articulate clear platforms - Government and Opposition parties
  - Decrease meeting formality and create opportunities for *more substantive discussion* that allows Government and civil society to work towards a common agenda
  - Non-Government stakeholders should develop a common platform to *lobby and engage Government in dialogue* about threats to civic space including draft laws
  - Promote the need for Government accountability and transparency about Cambodia’s *revenue and expenditure* from all sources, including extractive industries and Development Partners
  - Advocate for *policies, legislation and implementation* that promote active civic engagement
  - Advocate for *annual Government CSO forums* as declared by the Prime Minister
  - *Lobby national level Government* to provide district councils with operating resources and strengthen mechanisms for community interests to be taken from sub-national to national level
  - Track *Government pilots* to improve accountability and transparency including anti-corruption
- Establish and strengthen positive working *relationships with key Ministry’s* and CSO

### Sub-National Government

- Participate in the *SAF*, build public service provider and citizen capacity, develop discussion papers and disseminate sub-nationally and nationally to promote dialogue
- Support or coordinate recently instituted *public forums at district level*, assisting in agenda setting and disseminating information about the event to increase participation
- Encourage partners to *question the sustainability* of NGO established community-based

committees, prevailing per diem practices and imposed structures

- Identify mechanisms to increase **community engagement in community meetings** and engagement with issues being discussed!
- Promote LNGO and CSO partners to attend **commune investment planning** and decision-making meetings to identify links to commune development priorities
- Identify mechanisms that build **district council** capacity and awareness of their mandate
- Community consultations conducted by **capable facilitators**, provide communities with positive opportunities to identify their key priorities and messages, increasing authenticity of messages

### People's Movements and Mass Organisations

- Respond to, and **support the emergence** of people's movements
- Remember that donors and NGOs should apply a "light touch" when supporting people's movements and mass organisations, working together to agree on core principles or codes of conduct, and consider developing a shared understanding of good practices
- Identify opportunities for Buddhist Monks to be involved in citizenship dialogue to highlight the Buddhist principle of the "middle way", working to transcend polarised thinking!
- Identify and support linking people's movements and mass movements, across different focus issues and communities, enabling their voice to be heard nationally, regionally and globally
- Support innovations that increase networking across different language groups

### Citizens

- Provide all citizen, particularly change agents: social media activists, youth and women with **civics education** to improve knowledge of Government processes, roles and responsibilities
- Utilise the **arts**: music, dance, poetry, visual art and sporting events to bring people together and stimulate their thinking, motivation and creativity about social issues
- Engage with **Cambodian Diaspora** groups in USA, France and Australia to increase awareness of political pluralism, power sharing and encourage a more nuanced view
- Strengthen citizen's awareness and knowledge about **active non-violence, conflict sensitivity and "bearing witness"** as socio-political change could involve public mass demonstrations

### Development Partners

- Seek opportunities for CSOs to **engage** with Development Partners
- Encourage Development Partners to play a stronger role **facilitating** working relations between civil society and Government, and create spaces for dialogue
- Work to increase donor support for **funded consortium project planning**, to promote shared understanding and increase partnership development between collaborating organisations
- Advocate Development Partners to **improve coordination among themselves**
- Advocate for the Japan Government to have an on-going and expanded role assisting Cambodia with its election reforms
- Nurture and strengthen relationships with Embassy's including the Korean Embassy, to **leverage their influence** and promote a more reformist trajectory for the Government
- Lobby international **Embassies in Cambodia** to raise critical issues with Government

- INGOs advocate for **headquarters** to raise critical concerns at the international level

## Youth

- Support **youth activism and civic engagement** by expanding youth understanding of civics, democratic principles and experiences of political pluralism
- Encourage **youth dialogue and debate activities** to transcend polarised thinking
- Encourage youth to **take issues to all parties**, holding each platform equally to account
- Support **youth networks** that **link groups** across communities and from community to global
- Establish a **mentoring program** for promising youth leaders
- Expand opportunities for rural youth to **access independent media**
- Support initiatives that **build computer literacy**, reinforce responsible computer use and the power of social media to share and organise
- Require youth groups to be **represented equally** by female leaders and male leaders
- Disseminate **principles of Active Citizenship** to all **Oxfam's youth participants**

## Women

- Promote women's leadership and empowerment, **focusing support to women leaders**
- Establish a **mentoring program** for promising community-based women leaders
- Increase community knowledge of **national laws, policies and programs about gender** and identify opportunities for community-based women to participate!
- Sensitise women to the power of **social media** as a tool for sharing and organising
- Encourage **women and women leaders** to participate in meetings and decision-making
- Promote active **networking, linking** groups across communities and from community to global
- Encourage girls and women to understand the **concept of leadership** and their leadership role
- **Nurture women leaders** to take up leadership roles in farmers groups, savings groups, people's organisations, mass organisations, politics and business...across every strata in Cambodia
- **Document, profile and disseminate** case studies of women leaders in Oxfam's work

## Media

- **Build knowledge about active citizenship** and challenges and opportunities being experienced in Cambodia to increase their inclusion in traditional television and radio programming
- **Deepen knowledge of social media opportunities** across different communities
- Capitalise on **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)** opportunities to provide populist learning opportunities: civics education, information and analysis on **Cambodia's development, political and governance context for citizens**
- Foster **social media use** across all stakeholders to share and organise
- Engage directly with more progressive leadership of some state affiliated media operators to identify **"edutainment"** concepts tolerable to authorities that would build public knowledge
- Build on international links to highlight **key issues related to CSR** of private sector companies
- Foster media opportunities for **Cambodian Diaspora** in USA, France and Australia to discuss

their experience living greater political pluralism

- Identify mechanisms, including through media, to include Cambodia Diaspora living and working in Korea and regional countries in Cambodia's development debate.<sup>4950</sup>

#### Private Sector

- Engage with private sector, build and strengthen effective working **relationships and identify common goals**, especially in relation to extractive industries
- Promote increased awareness of **CSR concepts** amongst the private sector, particularly in the extractive industries and agriculture and reputational risks of ignoring best practices
- Identify extractive industry **best practice models** for advocacy and information

### PILLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

#### Advocacy

- Work with **Oxfam affiliates** to identify active citizenship activities, across Cambodia, seeking to promote common terminology to expand impact
- Build **leadership skills** of key stakeholders and facilitate participation of elected representatives to attend relevant regional forums to broaden networking and dissemination of key messages
- Expand **regional ASEAN advocacy** by CSO groups, through ASEAN People's Forum increasing opportunities for key issues and recommendations to be tabled
- Work with ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights established in 2009, to strengthen its role in **receiving and responding to complaints**
- Prepare **press releases and lobby** delegates attending regional forums including Southeast Asia Committee for Action and Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy and Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum
- Consider **participating, supporting the participation** of partners and change agents in forums including: Asia Democracy Network, a multi-stakeholder forum; and Asian Development Alliance, a human rights and development practitioner forum
- **Link Active Citizenship advocacy** to Oxfam affiliate and Oxfam partner advocacy initiatives

#### Capacity Development

- Engage change agents in **research** activities, providing capacity development, supporting them to understand the process and the outcomes and be involved in research dissemination
- Take the **LNGO lead** in Cambodia in relevant areas: Active Citizenship, Extractive Industries
- **Sensitise LNGO and partners** to the need to develop flexible, responsive approaches to support nascent people's movements, ensuring identify and self-determination
- Encourage and support LNGO and CSO to **gain certification** from the Good Practice Project
- Consider working with LNGO to develop **developing guiding principles** or code of conduct for supporting people's movements, which can be disseminated nationally

---

<sup>49</sup> Of the 280,000 foreign-born spouses living in Korea, an estimated 20,000 Khmer women are married to Korean men: Pung Chhiv Kek, president of the Cambodia-based League for the Protection of Human Rights (LICADHO) 2013

<sup>50</sup> Around 300,000 Khmer migrants are working, mainly in farms, factories and homes:

<http://www.voacambodia.com/content/cambodian-workers-in-south-korea/1631367.html>

- Identify ways to **expand Government acknowledgement** of CSO contributions to Cambodia’s development, consider harnessing returned scholars, many of whom are civil servants
- **Support development and rollout of “anti-corruption education”<sup>51</sup>** in schools, encouraging broad consultations with teachers, Government, NGO’s and the public during its development
- Seize **learning moments by** responding to emerging issues, encourage citizen learning and dialogue opportunities
- Educate citizens about **local revenue generation**, taxation collection and expenditure as a catalyst for encouraging downward accountability
- **Conduct research** using change agents, particularly youth, in research activities, building their capacity and supporting them to understand processes and outcomes

**Active citizenship opportunities in the agriculture and extractive industries sector include:**

Agriculture	Extractive Industries and Revenue Transparency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support, guide and facilitate key agricultural organisations to disseminate a coordinated response to <b>Agricultural Land Management Law</b></li> <li>▪ Educate farmers groups on <b>law enforcement strategies</b> for pro-poor and small farmers</li> <li>▪ Support local partners and other key NGO’s in the agriculture sector to foster a <b>cohesive approach</b> between different farmer’s associations, identifying advocacy platform for sub-national and national level</li> <li>▪ Ensure <b>women’s leadership is promoted</b> within Farmer’s Associations and networks and is representative of the overall membership of the group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage with the ASEAN Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative</li> <li>▪ Expand <b>public awareness about revenue generation and expenditure</b> and role of taxation in development of neighbouring countries</li> <li>▪ Work with Government as a <b>critical friend</b> to expand role of NGO in high-level dialogue related to extractive industries</li> <li>▪ Network with <b>Oxfam Affiliates and other NGO</b> to pressure home-countries about private sector CSR practices, highlighting reputational risks</li> <li>▪ Develop, rank and publish findings related to extractive industries companies and <b>CSR</b></li> <li>▪ Nurture <b>links between community networks</b> in extractive areas, overcoming language barriers</li> <li>▪ Identify <b>best practices</b> amongst extractive industries and disseminate findings</li> </ul>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/hun-sen-orders-anticorruption-education-for-students-48830/>

Photos curtesy:  
Front Cover photo by Savann Oeurn  
Back Cover photo by Simon Rawles  
Photo inside the report by Savann Oeurn



Oxfam in Cambodia

#94 Russian Blvd, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. P.O Box: 883

Tel: +855 23 885 424 Fax: +855 23 885 452 Website: [www.oxfam.org/Cambodia](http://www.oxfam.org/Cambodia)



**OXFAM**