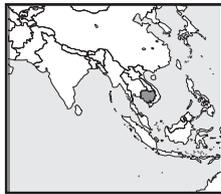


■ CAMBODIA

Accountability needed



The Government disregards crucial rights, such as education or access to land. The economy still depends heavily on agriculture, but land reforms and investment incentives are provoking a mass exodus from rural areas to the cities and to other countries. Although progress has been made in the protection of women's rights, some indicators are alarmingly worse. Civil society has to play a decisive role in demanding and achieving equity in the distribution of wealth.

SILAKA
Committee to Promote Women in Politics
NGO Committee on CEDAW
NGO Forum on Cambodia
Thida Khus

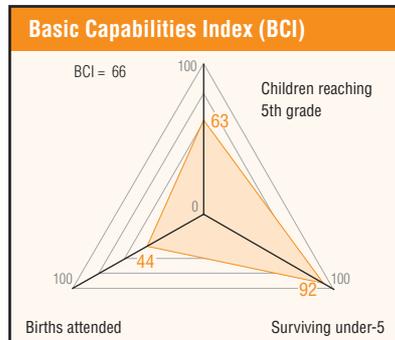
Fourteen years after the UN-sponsored national elections, Cambodia has been slowly emerging from over two decades of civil war. The country, now a constitutional monarchy, has seen three national elections since 1993 and in 2002, in a move toward decentralization, a local election to select the 1,624 communes and Sangkat councils. The Cambodian National Assembly recently passed legislation that further decentralizes government administration to the sub-national level of 24 provinces and municipalities.

Along with the Peace Agreement, Cambodia signed all human rights treaties in 1992, and after 1993, accepted the presence of the UN special representative for human rights. But, although the ratification of those treaties obliges the Government to periodically submit reports on the status of human rights, the country has so far submitted just one report on the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2006. The next report is due in 2009.

Cambodia joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1999, committed to eliminate all import duties for other ASEAN countries by 2015 and moved steadily to integrate its economy with that of 10 neighbouring countries. While joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2004, it still needs to pass considerable legislations in order to meet WTO requirements.

The pace of reforms

During the last 14 years, Cambodia has relied on international aid for more than half of the national budget. In 2008, total revenue increased over 21.5%, public investment increased 25%, including domestic financing of 23.7% and 26.1% of foreign financing. Foreign donors and the multilateral institutions have been working with Cambodia for several important reforms, one of which is the public financial management, as it is expected to start generating considerable gas and oil revenues, starting in 2011. The country has received debt cancellation from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and is working



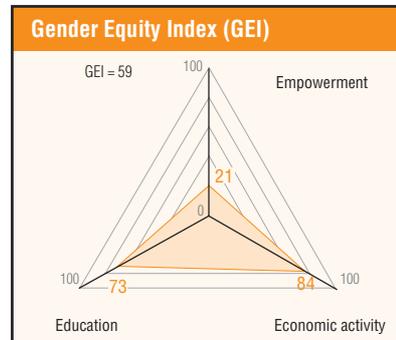
with Russia for the same deal. Negotiations have been underway for some time with the United States, to secure special consideration as a Least Developed Country and to receive an extension of special treatment for garment exports.

ASEAN obligated Cambodia to lift all import taxes by 2011. However, the benefit to the local economy and industries has not yet materialized. Cambodia's trade imbalance with ASEAN countries rose: exports to these countries rose from USD 80 million to USD 100 million a year between 2000 and 2005, while imports from the same countries climbed from USD 500 million to USD 800 million, in the same period.

Since 1993, the country has experienced sustained economic growth, mainly in three areas: garment industry, tourism and construction. The garment industry has grown steadily in the past decade, although the sector has been shaky for the past two years due to competition from Vietnam and China. This industry employs 284,000 people, 80% of them young women, mostly from the rural areas.

Nevertheless, 90% of the rural community, or 80% of the total population, is employed in agriculture, which saw a meagre growth from -2.8% of GDP in 2002 to 1.3% of GDP in 2005. It must be pointed out that most of the country's agricultural products are exported to Vietnam and Thailand, and mostly go unreported. Garments, shoes and textiles have been the main exports, amounting to 91% of GDP in 2005.

Between 1994 and 2008, 2 million youth, according to the Cambodian Economic Institute, sought employment, of which the local economy can only absorb 20%. The majority migrate to other urban areas, and overseas to find employment.



A mass exodus

With the deregulation of investments and imports, aimed at encouraging foreign investment, Cambodia has moved fast into land concessions and speculation. While the elite has benefited, the sustainability of the country's ethnic indigenous minority cultures, particularly in the northeast, is at risk. Rural land is being sold or appropriated to large businesses by powerful public officials, urban areas are rapidly growing and available land is exhausted, triggering large disparities between rich and poor.

Human rights and legal organizations have been monitoring the abuse and eviction of families from their land and homes to make way for urban construction by big companies and large land concessions for planting crops. Although the Government has set up a national committee to resolve land disputes, this has failed to resolve the problems because of the unregulated land titles and the judiciary bias in favour of the rich and powerful.

Unprotected migrant workers

Cambodians rely mostly on families as an economic unit, and most family members have to contribute to production; this is the reason why Table 1 shows such low unemployment. However, the rate does not reflect the liveable employment of the majority of the population, since the percentage of men seeking employment in other urban areas and/or other countries is estimated at 35%. There are 140,000 persons working abroad, and remittances to families and the national economy are significant.

The mass labour migration has made people vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking into slave labour or sex work. While this trend is increasing, the Government has adopted a policy of facilitating migration for employment in Thailand, Malaysia

and Republic of Korea. The protection of migrant workers, many of whom are women, has been championed by women's civil society organizations, which have used CEDAW to demand Government to provide greater protection. The Ministry of Women Affairs responded to CEDAW recommendations by initiating a database to monitor the migration flow. The Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training was created in 2004 to regulate the labour market and provide skilled workers. This ministry has adopted a strategic plan to facilitate legal migration overseas, but protection measures for migrant workers have yet to take shape.

The protection of women's rights

Some progress has been made on the protection of women rights through the use of international instruments such as the CEDAW, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Beijing Platform for Action. The reduction of domestic violence has been included in Goal 3 of the national Cambodian MDGs and incorporated into the National Strategic Plan for 2006-2010. A law for the Protection against Domestic Violence was passed in 2006, but the implementation of the law has not begun, owing to the slow pace of the national legal reform.

According to the Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2005, the maternal mortality rate has been increasing, rising to 472 per 100,000 live births in 2005, from 437 per 100,000 live births in 2000, primarily due to lack of access to pre-natal care, inadequate nutrition and education access for girls and women.

Cambodia has aligned with the other ASEAN countries on improving the rights of women and children. There have been few results to date, owing to the resistance to the use of affirmative action to address decades of inequality. Efforts to promote women's leadership in the public sector, led by the Committee to Promote Women in Politics, increased women's representation in commune councils from 8% to 15% in the April 2007 election.

However, girls are still disadvantaged in education beyond elementary school. They are still expected to do household chores and support family economic needs more than boys. Although the Ministry of Women Affairs has defined this sector as a priority, it received a 14% decrease in the 2008 budget, while other sectors average a 22% increase.¹

¹ Priority Sectors in the 2008 Draft Budget law, Analysis by the NGO Forum, 27 November 2007.

CHART 1. Labour force (%)

Status	Cambodia	Phnom Penh	Rural
Labour force			
Both sexes	74.6	60.8	77.0
Male	78.9	65.1	81.4
Female	70.7	56.7	66.0
Employment rate			
Both sexes	99.2	96.7	99.5
Male	99.2	97.3	99.4
Female	99.1	96.2	99.5

Source: Summary Subject Matters Report, Cambodia Social-Economic Survey 2004, by the National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, September 2005. Table 2.1, p. 8.

Minorities and indigenous peoples

The Constitution states that all citizens must be treated equally, without discrimination. The Muslim, Chinese and Vietnamese account for approximately 6% of the total population. Minorities and indigenous groups are left on their own to practice their language and religious beliefs. The Chinese and Vietnamese are fairing well in business, but Cham Muslims and other indigenous ethnic groups are in a disadvantaged position. Their only source of livelihood from the forest and land is being invaded by large land and forestry concessions and now the large mining concessions. The Government does not have a plan to help these ethnic minorities' communities in the transition economy for their survival.

Children, old people and the disabled still depend on their families as a safety net, while state institutions play a decreased role due to the drive to cut expenditures and increase tax collection.

The role of civil society

In order to ensure greater equality in the distribution of wealth, citizens have been proactive in demanding government accountability. The World Bank is currently undertaking a project to increase social accountability by building capacity among public institutions and civil society organizations, and engaging them in pilot projects. Civil society institutions have started to monitor specific rights, such as civil and political rights and access to land. A group of NGOs have campaigned to urge the Government to pass a corruption law to meet international standards. ■

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