



**JOINT SUBMISSION
TO HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

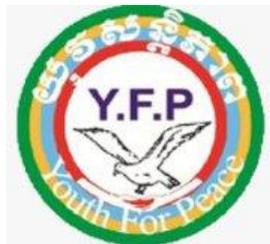
SUBMITTED BY:

**Youth Committee for Unity And Development (YCUUD) and Youth Organizations
working toward youth empowerment and enhanced youth participation in social
development in Cambodia.**

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Joint Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Cambodia on Issues Affecting Youth Development in Cambodia JUNE 2013

Cambodia's youth between the ages of 15 to 30 make up 4,384,407 or 32.73 percent of the total population¹. Cambodia has taken ownership to protect the rights of the Cambodia poor and vulnerable populations, especially high-risk situations faced by Cambodia youth². Approximately 25 % or close to 1 million Cambodian Youth live and work in high-risk situations such as entertainment workers, men who have sex with men, drug users, domestic workers, factory workers, street youth, unemployment youth, construction workers, migrant workers, gangsters etc.

Hence, in this year 2013, Young people and youth-led organizations and networks have been mobilizing, and discussing to find the ways for joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review on Issues Affecting Youth Development in Cambodia. Below are the key issue affecting by Cambodian youth and recommendation from youth organizations:

Quality of Education

Cambodia Education has significant and substantial growth in many educational development indicators in recent years. The National Primary Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) has risen from 83.8 percent in 2000 to 94.4 percent in 2008 and to 96% in 2012, close to the CMDG target of 100 percent in 2015.

The national Youth Literacy Rate (15-24 yrs old) has increased from 76.3 percent in 1998 to 84.7 percent in 2007. This increase reflects the expansion of access to primary education nationwide in the last ten years. While there are substantial achievements in education, there is still a great deal which must be done to achieve the CMDG and EFA targets, particularly at the lower secondary level. The key challenges include:

- **Low completion rates** (90% in Primary School, 42% in lower secondary school and 28% in upper secondary school) are also due in part to the low quality of education.
- **Low Net Enrollment rate** in lower secondary school (35%) and upper Secondary School (20%) leading to difficult milestones toward CMDG2-2015.
- **High Drop-Out Rate** especially in lower secondary school (Grade7:22, Grade8:20 and Grade9: 23%)
- **Academic qualification of teachers is still very low** (only 17% of teacher are graduated and 82% of them are secondary school.. Teachers' salaries are also very low (50\$ to 150\$ per month), making it difficult to attract and keep qualified teachers.
- **Weak functions of Community Participation:** Cambodia has recently adopted a Child Friendly School approach, striving to foster greater community involvement in school level planning and decision-making through School Support Committees (SSC). Parents and communities need information on school finances and other aspects of school performance, including teacher performance, and have the ability to use this information to voice their expectations or concerns. Parental and community participation is another excellent entry point for improved governance at the local level¹
- **Relevance:** The issue of the direction of education in Cambodia -- whether it leads to employment in the civil service, the modern urban sector or provides rural children with the capabilities needed to participate meaningfully in the development of their communities, still needs to be fully resolved. Given increased risky behaviors by youths,

¹ CCA 2009, UNDP

a comprehensive life skills education, including sexual, reproductive health/HIV, gender equality, gender based violence and drug related education, is of critical importance to improved health, gender equality and other societal outcomes.²

- **Early Childhood Education (ECE):** ECE is an important element in education as it develops cognitive abilities that will later contribute to students' progress in school and reduce drop out and repetition rates. The ECE enrolment rate increased from 10.8 percent in the 2004-2005 school years to 15.6 percent in the 2007-2008 school years³.

Recommendation:

- Bolstering Public Administrative Enterprise of All Schools with effective Exemption System for poor and poorest. This option is to increase quality of education, reduce dropout rate and motivate teachers and staff through public administrative enterprise.
- Investing and enhancing the functions of the 5 main oversight committee such as Commune Committee for Women and Children-CCWC, Parental Association, School Management Committee, Commune Councils and Commune Committee for Education for All
- Reforming Cambodia Education System to match and link with Job Market through regularly updated job market and employment law and policy development.

Youth Employment

In Cambodia, the working aged population is defined as 15–64 years⁴ of age and employment is all persons who worked at least one hour during the reference period, the past seven days, or had a job/economic activity from which they were temporarily absent.. Unpaid family workers are considered employed. Definition in CSES 2009, MoP also indicated that status in employment refers to the status of an economically active person with respect to his or her employment. The percentage of Cambodian youth of both sexes who were currently employed in the past 12 months is high (**68.7%**) but more than **64% of them** are as self-employed agricultural workers or currently not working. It also shows that only 2.6% are working in services and nearly 17% are working in industries as skilled manual laborers. Additionally, only 22.5% of Cambodia Youth aged 15-30 are not employed in the past three months⁵ and 42.1% of educated Cambodia Youth are not employed in the past 12 months.

The low job growth and high number entrants into the workforce has serious implications for youth unemployment and increased poverty. According to a recent survey by the Cambodia Federation of Employers and Business Associations (CAMFEBA), the low absorption rate is due to a skills mismatch from a lack of data and information on the labour market.

Recommendation:

- RGC should develop Employment Law, Employment Policy and National Strategic Plan for Employment Enhancement and education and job market matching Strategy
- RGC should reform Education System to match job market and conduct project for employment in all sectors (Private Sector, Public Sector and Civil Society Sector)
- Enforcing the implementation of ASEAN Declaration on Promotion and Protection of Migrants and their families

² These issues are elaborated further in the Youth Situation Analysis [UNCT 2009].

³ CCA 2009, UNDP

⁴ Cambodia Socio Economic Survey 2009

⁵ CDHS 2010, MoH/MoP, CDHS raw data analysis, Macro.

- Develop and Enforcement Minimum Wage Policy in systematic and non-systematic economic sectors

Gender Equality

Turning best practices and lessons of MDG-Goal3, 2000-2015 is central point for sustainable development of equal and qualified functions of women and men in 2030. Global status of Gender Gaps is over 100.

The changing of Cambodia Women in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, social protection and political empowerment has been significantly contributed to the Cambodia Development. Gender disparities in economic participation and opportunity still remain, primarily because of social norms and low levels of social protections. Due to low levels of literacy and education of women and girl child currently in the work force, there are limited livelihood alternatives for most women workers and low representation of women in higher level occupations and decision-making positions.

- Rural women included young girls account for 80 percent of food production, and more than 65 percent of all women are farmers. Half of the women farmers are illiterate or have less than a primary education. For the most part, women in agriculture are unpaid family workers.
- Training opportunities for women especially rural and remote women are limited and inappropriate.
- Women entrepreneurs face gender-based barriers to starting and growing their businesses, including discriminatory property, matrimonial and inheritance laws and/or cultural practices; limited mobility voice and representation; and an unequal share of family and household responsibilities.
- The lack of adequate productive job creation and decent work in rural areas is contributing to **increased migration** into urban areas and neighbouring countries.

A MoWA survey in 2009 revealed that up to 46 percent of people still find the lowest forms of physical violence against women (e.g throwing something at the other, pushing or shoving, slapping, kicking, shaking, punching) acceptable, always or under certain circumstances. The MoWA 2009 report acknowledges that while levels of violent physical abuse (throwing acid, choking, burning, threatening with gun or knife) have dropped by more than 50 per cent since 2005, it is disturbed to note that about 10 percent of the population still finds these extreme forms of violence acceptable under certain circumstances.

Most female victims of violence still do not seek help and, if they do, most often seek help from relatives, friends or commune or village authorities, not from the police, courts or professionals. A report from UNAIDS in 2011 quoted data to reveal that 35-45% of local authorities felt a husband was justified in engaging in extreme types of violence if wives argued with husbands, did not obey him, or did not show respect (UNAIDS 2011).

Recommendation:

- Provide better political enabling environment for young women to have free and safe in participation in politic
- Young women perspective in CEDAW report and national policy debate ---
- Provide cash transfer and livelihood options whose female headed households when their husband who are arrested and sentenced to prison due to domestic violence and other committed crimes.
- Enforce National and local democratic spaces and mechanisms through eliminating the fear of participation and building capacity of rights holders.

Sustainable Environment

Cambodia has huge endowments of natural resources such as deforestation, natural disasters (drought & flood) unfertile land, land degradation, land grabbing, uncontrolled mineral, gas exploitation, water pollution, climatic conditions which represents potential comparative advantages for agriculture. 81% of the population living in the rural areas, and over 60% of the population directly or indirectly depends on income generated in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and agriculture.

In-depth Analysis, based on CMDG 2011 indicated that Cambodia forest cover is 57.59% but 3,936,481 hectares (2,036,170 ha of Economic land concessions, 1,900,311 ha, mining concessions) have been granted as mining & economic land concessions, covering 22 % of Cambodia's surface area, which totals 17,650, 931 ha, (*CIA World Fact Book 2011*) Anyway, there is no nationwide study in last five year (2006-2012).

Recommendation:

- The need to address current vulnerabilities and short-term shocks and crises (based on health, social safety nets and Disaster Risk Reduction)
- National movement on Bio-digesters for Cambodia Population through providing concession and full package of loan to reduce firewood and charcoal consumption as well as improve sanitation.
- Enhancing people participation in forest protection and community fishing lots through strengthening and expanding the roles of forest community and fisheries community and include all those main activities and program in commune development plan and commune investment.
- National Survey on awareness of climate change and climate adaptation among general public and nationwide forest cover assessment.

Youth participation

One of the six overarching goals of the RGC's National Policy for Youth Development is to: 'Enable youth to share their perspectives, opinions, and decisions in their community and in the broader national development context'

In addition to the goal of the National Youth Development Policy, several national frameworks have established the rights and critical role of youth in Cambodia's development process. Article 34 of the Constitution gives Cambodian citizens over 18 of either sex the right to vote, and to stand as candidates for election if they are at least 25. The National Strategic Development Plan of 2009-2013 also acknowledges that youth are a critically important group to include in plans for advancing the country's development (NSDP 2009).

The political stability that began in Cambodia only in the early 1990s gave youth the opportunity to participate in the social, political and economic spheres of national development. But the traditional values and hierarchical nature of Cambodian society, which demands respect for elders and authorities and limits possibilities for young people to articulate their views, has contributed to what has manifested, until June 2011 at least, as a general lack of recognition of youth needs and perspectives in the Government's policies and programmes (Yong 2005).

The UN Situation Analysis of Youth in Cambodia (2009) stated that youth voices in rural Cambodia are not well incorporated into local development planning. While young people

take part in economic activities that benefit their households and communities, the extent to which their voices are heard and incorporated in decision-making and development processes is very limited. Because local leaders do not consult youth on development issues – since their views are not appreciated – youth concerns are not adequately represented and reflected in village, district or provincial development priorities and budgets (UN2009).

In surveys conducted for the UN 2009 report, youths expressed confidence in their ability to contribute positively to development processes. However, they face major hurdles related to the idea that participation and leadership should come with age, knowledge and experience. The traditional values of social deference to elders leads to the creation of a ‘knowledge hierarchy’ where youths are expected to listen to their elders, who ‘know better’, thus encouraging passivity from youths. The tendency to listen to youth and address their needs tends to be (1) limited to specific issues (such as violence and drug use) and only when they emerge as local concerns to elders. Or they tend to be (2) one-time interventions that respond to an immediate visible problem (UN2009).

Youth in Cambodia, like youth everywhere, want to play an active role in shaping their society. According to the World Youth Report 2007, providing young people a chance to take part in decision-making helps shape their own development, preparing them for a role in enhancing and strengthening their societies, and subsequently creating a better environment for youth participation. A peaceful, prosperous and equitable future for Cambodia depends on stimulating and harnessing the creative energy of the young by providing and supporting diverse opportunities for civic engagement.

Civic engagement refers to activities that engage youth in affecting policy and taking action on issues in their community. It can be an individual or collective and includes efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy (PACT 2008).

Civic engagement does not occur naturally, it must be fostered. Cambodia’s public institutions however are still too weak and therefore unable to promote civic engagement effectively. Cambodian schools are not able to adequately prepare students academically – and even less so civically. While civic material has been introduced into the public curricula, major changes in pedagogical approach are needed for schools to engage students in practical civic activities, and to involve parents and the entire community in their efforts (PACT 2008).

Youth could benefit from such activities if there was strong support from the community, and engagement in community-level service may serve as a base for encouraging youth participation in decision-making and policy about community-level issues. The PACT ‘Youth Force for Change’ report argues that there is a widespread lack of community services for youth, and that parents and village leaders often view opportunities for team sports and other activities as a waste of time and scarce resources. The lack of support and encouragement from parents and communities for youth civic engagement also partly explains the absence of youth needs and perspectives in government policies and programmes (PACT 2008).

While all young people in Cambodia should be introduced to the concepts surrounding civic engagement, their ability to participate will be limited by the demands made upon them by their family. Many older relatives are concerned about youths participating in civic activities out of fear that they are too ‘political’ and therefore dangerous (KYA 2008). The attitudes and beliefs of elders and community leaders need to change to incorporate an understanding of the value of greater youth participation in social and civic affairs. Advancing the youth civic engagement agenda implies giving credence to the voice of youth. It means treating youth with consideration and respect as responsible individuals, while at the same time

protecting them from the vulnerabilities that affect all young people in the 21st Century. But given the weakness of the educational system, gaps in inter-generational communication, and increased exposure to the media, the need for youth civic engagement programs appears to be increasing in urgency.

Cambodia's youth have a right to participate in the political life of their country. But after decades of civil war and political violence, Cambodia is still struggling to build effective democratic institutions. Financial interests have yet to be decoupled from political affiliation, and because the stakes are so high, the Cambodian political landscape is fraught with tension. In such a context, political activism is perceived as threatening to those in office and they in turn inspire fear in potential activists. Additionally, the Government does not allow political discussions and meetings in schools, because they are seen as neutral areas in which politics has no place. This poses a constraint on young people gaining a critical political orientation or developing informed opinions (Yong 2005).

The tense nature of Cambodian politics, the existing governance structures and the overbearing formality of the administrative culture combine to act as a disincentive for youth civic and political engagement. The election monitoring organization COMFREL has stated that youth political participation remains very low and that Cambodian students with university-level education do not pay much attention to voting (COMFREL 2008). Recent youth surveys have revealed that the perception of the absence of the rule of law and the complete dominance by one political party has led to youth apathy towards electoral processes. 53 percent of youth aged 21 years or above did not vote in the 2007 elections for representatives to the Commune Councils, despite this being the lowest level of local government and therefore much closer to the day-to-day issues which affect the lives of most of the population (UNDP / BBC World Service Trust 2010).

There are emerging possibilities that could open new opportunities for youth to participate meaningfully in social and political development processes. The Royal Government's current decentralization and de-concentration effort, could present youth with a better chance to become involved in local development processes.

The RGC has stated that the decentralization and de-concentration programme has two strategic goals: firstly to strengthen and expand local democracy and secondly to promote local development and to reduce poverty. The reform process will be based on the principles of:

- Democratic representation: the reforms will strengthen the roles of councils at provincial/municipal, district/khan and commune/sangkat administrations by expanding their powers, duties, responsibilities and resources.
- Participation of the people: the reforms will introduce systems and procedures as ensure that people, especially women, vulnerable groups and indigenous minorities can participate in decision-making at provincial/municipal, district/khan and commune/sangkat levels.
- Public sector accountability: reforms will strengthen accountability at all levels of administration and facilitate citizens' oversight of the administrative and financial affairs of those administrations.
- Focusing on poverty reduction: the reforms will strengthen local capacity in using resources to support poverty reduction activities, especially vulnerable groups, indigenous minorities and women and children in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of Cambodia.

The National Committee for Subnational Democratic Development has stated that the

decentralization and de-concentration reform programme is the most ambitious and important change in Cambodia governance since the 1993 Constitution was enacted (NCDD 2005).

Youth understandings of principle of democracy, governance, human rights and civic engagement

In order to take advantage of these emerging opportunities, youth will need to know about political institutions and processes, and to have a rudimentary understanding of the concepts of democracy, governance, human rights and civic engagement.

A survey of two thousand youth across five regions (UNDP / BBC World Service Trust 2010) revealed that awareness and knowledge of democratic concepts was mixed. Many youth had heard of 'human rights', 'democracy' and 'civic engagement' but did not know how to define them, or had varied interpretations. While nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents said they had heard of 'democracy', they could not say what democracy means to them. Among those who did say what it means to them, neither elections nor voting were mentioned. Nearly all supported the statement 'All villagers should vote for the village chief' and two-thirds agreed that 'District government should be elected by all citizens' However, the response to the idea that 'The government should include representatives from all major regions and ethnic groups in the country' was more mixed with only half agreeing. Three-quarters supported the statement 'All political parties should appear equally on TV and radio' and even more agreed that 'People should have the rights to know about the names of political candidates'. One third agreed that 'Voters should select individuals, not parties on the ballot', and another third disagreed.

When those who had heard of 'human rights' were asked what the term meant, one fourth of them did not know. 'Civic engagement' was less known. The two-thirds of young people who had heard the term gave a range of definitions about some type of response to problems. A third of those who had heard of it could not define it.

Awareness of the institutions of democracy was also mixed. Young people who had heard of the institutions knew more about courts and commune councils than about parliament. The term 'Courts' was universally known and the vast majority knew that courts 'provide judgment for people' and 'provide justice'. 'Commune councils' were widely familiar but what they do was less clear to respondents: 92% of youth had heard of 'commune councils'. However, nearly a third of those who were aware of commune councils did not know what they do. Of the three institutions, parliament was the least familiar to youth, with just three quarters having heard of 'Parliament', and two-thirds of these people not knowing what parliament does.

The influence of corruption on youth

After decades of civil war and political violence, it is a sad truth that corruption has pervaded almost every sector of Cambodian public life, with a system of patronage well entrenched in society. In 2011, Cambodia ranked 164th out of 182 nations (i.e in bottom 10%) in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. The World Bank's 'Worldwide Governance Indicators' confirm this picture of widespread and endemic corruption, with Cambodia performing extremely poorly on indicators of voice and accountability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality and control of corruption.

Inefficient government structures, unregulated bureaucracy, red tape and an opaque regulatory environment offer many opportunities of bribery and extortion. According to the Transparency International's 2007 Global Corruption Barometer, 72 percent of the respondents reported paying a bribe to obtain services. Citizens routinely have to make

informal payments to access public services such as medical care, school grades, court verdicts, alleged traffic violations and birth and marriage certificates. Civil servants are underpaid, with salaries typically less than 20 percent of the living wage, thus making corruption a vital survival strategy. Law enforcement agencies are perceived as the most corrupt and inefficient sectors, lacking the independence, resources and capacity to effectively investigate and prosecute corruption cases. Weak systems of checks and balance, ineffective accountability mechanisms and scarce opportunities for public participation further contribute to the deteriorating situation (Transparency International 2007).

The nature of corruption has been so pervasive for so long that young people can be forgiven for thinking that this behavior is a normal way of life in Cambodia. Such beliefs will undermine the ability of youth to fulfill their potential as the future of Cambodia. If the current levels of corruption persist then the future for Cambodia can only be bleak. Youth have an opportunity to be a force for a better, more equitable and more sustainable future for Cambodia. The challenges are immense but the choices are clear. Young people can maintain the status quo and be passengers on the journey into Cambodia's future or, with leadership and encouragement, they can pioneer actions to change the mindsets and behaviours of the next generation, and put a stop to the parasitic culture of corruption which continues to fester and spread.

The first step towards a better future for the governance of Cambodia is a higher level of youth awareness and knowledge about the principles of good governance. In the UNDP / BBC World Service Trust survey (2010) only one-fourth of the youth respondents were aware of the term 'transparency' and 10% were aware of the term 'accountability'. Though there is a lack of vocabulary to discuss transparency, there is an understanding of transparency in action. The majority of respondents agree that there must be transparency with respect to public expenditure and that appointment to government jobs must be merit-based. Despite the low level of awareness and understanding of the term 'Accountability' there is a considerably high level of understanding of principles and mechanisms related to it. More than two-thirds of youth believe that citizens can raise ideas, speak without fear and can debate with their leaders. An even higher percentage believes that the commune council should respond to people in the commune. This is a strong foundation from which the goals of the RCG's decentralization and de-colonisation programme can be successfully built.

The emerging role of social media among may provide an opportunity for youth to mobilize action towards better participation and higher standards of democratic governance. Media offers a platform for young people to interact with the wider society. It can be an effective channel through which to deliver civic education in a more entertaining and informal way, and to model all kinds of participation to inspire a diverse and dynamic youth population across Cambodia.

Recommendation:

- Create an enabling environment for full participation by young people within local communities;
- Promote formal mechanisms for effective participation by youth with civil society;
- Promote youth representatives at national, sub-national, and regional committees or councils, and ensure youth integration in the decentralization and de-concentration process;
- Promote participation, expression, and decision making by young people in the education sector; and
- Mobilize support for youth voices in policy and legislation development processes that affect youth.