

# SITUATION ANALYSIS OF YOUTH IN CAMBODIA

*"Youth are not the creators of problems within society; rather,  
it is society that brings about the problems being faced by youth"<sup>1</sup>*



ព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា  
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<sup>1</sup> A youth at a focus group discussion in Phnom Penh



# FOREWORD



**T**he Kingdom of Cambodia is an overwhelmingly youthful nation. Two out of every three people are aged below 25 and more than 30 percent are aged between 10-24 years; giving Cambodia one of the biggest youth populations in Southeast Asia. Such an abundance of young people brings with it both enormous possibilities as well as complex development challenges.

Cambodian young people are a dynamic and promising economic, social and cultural force. Young people offer new perspectives, new ideas and a willingness to build a brighter future

But their daily struggles to survive, to complete basic education, to maintain good health, to find a decent job, to support their families, to live free from physical and mental harm and to participate fully in society are real and urgent.

Today's young people are facing a unique array of hurdles. Cambodia is undergoing rapid economic growth and with it, tremendous social change. The country is also recovering from three decades of civil war and isolation which has left an indelible mark on the fabric of Cambodian society. The generational divide between young and old is vast and young people are often feared or misunderstood.

Yet the challenges which young people face are daunting. 300,000 job seekers leave school each year, and there are simply not enough jobs for them. Migration for economic and educational opportunities is transforming the composition of village life and sending more and more young people into urban centres, exposing them to new risks and vulnerabilities. High-risk behaviour, most especially among marginalized and vulnerable youth, is exposing young people to sexual reproductive health risks, HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence and drug abuse.

Following traditional values, the voices of youth are rarely considered or incorporated into development planning, even though young people constitute a third of the workforce and will continue to be the drivers of growth now and into the future. Active steps should be taken now to encourage young people's participation in decision-making at all levels.

This Situation Analysis of Youth is the first time that all available data on youth has been compiled and evaluated. It is regarded as a first step to assist policy makers, non-governmental organizations and youth themselves to develop a wide-ranging and inclusive National Youth Policy which will address the specific needs of young people in the areas of health, education, participation, employment and well-being and can guide further investment and interventions.

Positive trends in primary enrolment and an overall improvement in health and education indicators demonstrate that with investment and a pro-youth approach, the situation for Cambodia's young people can be improved. Young people are Cambodia's greatest resource for the future. They require our assistance and our support to nourish and guide them successfully into adulthood.

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<sup>1</sup> UN defines children, adolescents, youths and young people as children 0-18 years, adolescents 10-19 years, youth 15-24 years and young people 10-24 years of age.





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**Disclaimer:** This report constitutes a compilation of existing data and new research and does not reflect the official position or policies of the United Nations system.

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# ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS



<b>ACLEDA</b>	Association of Cambodian Local Economic Development Agency
<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>BPfA</b>	Beijing Platform for Action
<b>CARE</b>	CARE Cambodia
<b>CBOs</b>	Community-based Organisations
<b>CCs</b>	Commune Councils
<b>CDC</b>	Council for the Development of Cambodia
<b>CDHS</b>	Cambodia Demographic Health Survey
<b>CDRI</b>	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CESSP</b>	Cambodia Education Sector Support Project
<b>CGA</b>	Cambodia Gender Assessment
<b>CLS</b>	Child Labour Survey
<b>CMDG</b>	Cambodia Millennium Development Goals
<b>CNCW</b>	Cambodian National Council for Women
<b>CoM</b>	Council of Ministers
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSES</b>	Cambodia Social Economic Survey
<b>D&amp;D</b>	Decentralisation and Deconcentration
<b>DFID</b>	Department For International Development
<b>EBEP</b>	Expanded Basic Education Programme
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>EED</b>	Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst/ Evangelical Development Agency
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>EIC</b>	Economic Institute of Cambodia
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>ESP</b>	Education Strategic Plan
<b>ESSP</b>	Education Sector Support Project
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion

<b>FRESH</b>	Focusing Resources on Effective School Health
<b>FSW</b>	Female Sex Workers
<b>GDPs</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GMAGs</b>	Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups
<b>GMAPs</b>	Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans
<b>HCP</b>	Health Coverage Plan
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>HSS</b>	HIV Sentinel Surveillance Survey
<b>ICHA</b>	Ministry's Interdepartmental Committee on HIV/ AIDS
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>IDU</b>	Intravenous Drug Use
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IOs</b>	International Organisations
<b>IPEC</b>	International Programme on the Elimination of Child labour
<b>JFPR</b>	Japanese Fund for Poverty Reduction
<b>JICA</b>	Japan International Cooperation Agency
<b>KHANA</b>	Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance
<b>KIIs</b>	Key Informant Interviews
<b>LMI</b>	Labour Market Information
<b>LNGOs</b>	Local Non-governmental Organisations
<b>LPPs</b>	Local Planning Processes
<b>LSS</b>	Lower Secondary School
<b>MAFF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MIME</b>	Ministry of Industry, Mine and Energy
<b>MoEYS</b>	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MoI</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MoLVT</b>	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
<b>MOPS</b>	Moving Out of Poverty Study
<b>MoSVY</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
<b>MoWA</b>	Ministry of Women's Affairs
<b>MoWRAM</b>	Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology
<b>MSM</b>	Men who have Sex with Men
<b>MSME</b>	Medium and Small Micro-Enterprises
<b>NACD</b>	National Authority for Combating Drugs
<b>NCHADS</b>	National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STDs
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organisations

<b>NIS</b>	National Institute of Statistics
<b>NOVCTF</b>	National Orphans and Vulnerable Children Multi-sectoral Task Force
<b>NPDC</b>	National Plan on Drugs Control
<b>NSDP</b>	National Strategic Development Plan
<b>NSSF</b>	National Social Security Fund
<b>NYP</b>	National Youth Policy
<b>ODA</b>	Overseas Development Assistance
<b>ODs</b>	Operational Districts
<b>OJT</b>	On-the-Job Training
<b>OVC</b>	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
<b>PAP</b>	Priority Action Programme
<b>RGC</b>	Royal Government of Cambodia
<b>RHAC</b>	Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia
<b>RHIYA</b>	Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia
<b>SEILA</b>	Seila Programme
<b>SESDP</b>	Secondary Education Sector Development Project
<b>SIDA</b>	Swedish International Development Authority
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>STD</b>	Sexually Transmitted Disease
<b>STIs</b>	Sexually Transmitted Infections
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education Training
<b>TWG-G</b>	Technical Working Group on Gender
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nation Development Programme
<b>UNESCAP</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNGASS</b>	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
<b>UNCDF</b>	United Nations Capital Development Plan
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nation Children's Fund
<b>UNV</b>	United Nations Volunteer
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VDPs</b>	Village Development Plans
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>YRBS</b>	Youth Risk Behaviour Survey
<b>YSA</b>	Youth Situation Analysis





# GLOSSARY OF KHMER TERMS

Angkar	អង្គការ	Organisation
Cham	ចាម	One of minority groups in Cambodia
Mekong	មេគង្គ	Name of Cambodian river
Mith Samlanh	មិត្តសំណាញ់	Name of an organisation in Cambodia working with street children
Neary Rattanak	នារីរតនៈ	A comprehensive strategic policy focusing on gender and women
Riel	រៀល	Cambodian currency unit
Tonle Sap	ទន្លេសាប	Name of Cambodian river

## CAMBODIAN PLACE NAMES

Boeung Kok	បឹងកក់	A lake in Phnom Penh
Cheung Kor	ជើងគោ	Village in Sihanouk villis town
Laak	ល្អក់	Village in Ratanakiri province
Neak Loeung	អ្នកល្វើង	Village in Prey Veng province
Poi Pet	ប៉ោយប៉ែត	International border gate located in Banteay Meanchey province
Sangker	សង្កែ	Village in Svay Rieng province

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



With young people in the age group 10-24 comprising 36 percent of the population, Cambodia has one of the youngest populations in Southeast Asia. Although the number of young people leaving school and looking for work exceeds 250,000 annually, unlike many countries in the region, Cambodia has yet to reap a demographic dividend that often comes with a large young work force. Despite recent rapid economic growth, there simply are not enough jobs for youth, resulting in continued pressure on public services and resources in areas of education and health.

The health, education and employment issues confronting Cambodian youth today are highly inter-related. For example, youth employment is inextricably linked with access to education and skills training, and access to health services and information is directly correlated with income. The children of poor and very poor households are more vulnerable to problems associated with poverty and social exclusion. Without policies aimed at disrupting the intergenerational disadvantages of poverty, such patterns are self-perpetuating.

There is a need for a comprehensive multi-sectoral national youth policy to address these inequalities and to help guide public and private sector investment in the areas of education, vocational training, health services and information. The present analysis identifies the human, financial, and organizational barriers to the fulfilment of young people's rights nationally, with special attention given to the most vulnerable of young people.

The study profiles Cambodian youth nationally based on data from the Cambodia Socio-economic Survey (CSES) 2003/04. An inventory of previous and current youth surveys and studies helps identify main gaps in data and analysis, while a national mapping exercise identifies geographical and sectoral coverage and gaps in youth programmes. Researchers also conducted focus group discussions with youth and parents and interviewed key informants in a small sample of six specifically selected villages to add qualitative texture to the statistical analysis and desk exercises.

## A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF YOUTH

Cambodia's youth (aged 15-24 years) comprised 26 per cent of the total population in 2004, while 51 per cent were male. Eight-in-10 (83 per cent) reside in rural areas, with the densest concentrations in the Plains and Tonle Sap regions, at 43 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively. Ethnically, 96.2 per cent of youth are Khmer, 2.2 per cent are Cham; and the remainder are indigenous groups, as well as Chinese, Vietnamese, and Lao. Most (74.2 per cent) belong to households with at least five members; and 35 per cent live below the poverty line (CSES 2004, MoP 2006). Interestingly, a higher proportion (82.1 per cent) of the 15-17 age group are in large households compared to the 18-24 cohort (70.3 per cent). More of the young women than men aged 15-17 and 18-24 are either married, living together with a partner, divorced or have been widowed.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics cited and tables presented in this section are derived from the youth profile in Appendix A.

With regarding to education, 15-17 year olds are more likely than their older counterparts to have received primary level schooling. By gender, more young women than young men have reached primary levels of schooling, but young men are more likely to have had a secondary education. More than 8-in-10 (83.4 per cent) of 15-24 year olds are literate. Literacy rates are 87.9 per cent and 78.9 per cent for males and females, respectively. Younger adolescents are more likely to be literate than their older counterparts.

Cambodia's 15-24 year-olds comprise about 32.4 per cent of the country's labour force, equally divided between the younger (15-19) and older (20-24) age groups, reflecting the high birth rates of the 1980s and 90s. In 2004, more than two-thirds (69.8 per cent) of youth were in agriculture; a decline from 83.5 per cent in 1999. For male and female youth (15-19 years old) labour force participation rates are comparable, but this changes with apparently fewer females economically active as they reach the ages of 20-24 years.

Due in part to their low level of educational attainment, unemployment is high among Cambodia's youth. Unemployment is highest in the capital, Phnom Penh, at 20.1 per cent for those aged 15-24, This could be due to youth migration because of a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas and poor returns from agricultural production.

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The challenges and opportunities that young men and women currently face in Cambodia must be understood in terms of rapid economic growth characterised by modest reductions in poverty and increasing inequality.

Economic growth was rapid between 1997 and 2007, averaging 8.2 per cent annually. This growth has been largely fuelled by garment manufacturing and tourism, both of which employ large numbers of youths. Garment manufacturing grew at an average annual rate of 44 per cent, while tourism grew at 34 per cent yearly during the 1994 and 2004.

The majority of Cambodians (60 per cent) continue to work in agriculture, where growth has averaged 3.3 per cent per year – far below tourism and manufacturing; and today it represents less than 33 per cent (a decline from 46 per cent in 1994) as a share of the economy. Additionally, investment in agriculture has been low considering its importance to rural livelihoods, with public investment equalling only 0.55 per cent of GDP. Land tenure is generally insecure and landlessness is increasing.

With economic gains has come a decline in poverty from 45 per cent 1993/4 to 35 per cent a decade later. Rural poverty has remained high; falling from 43 to 34 percent while in Phnom Penh poverty fell from 11 to 5 percent. As poverty rates have fallen, inequality has increased over this time period; the Gini co-efficient for national consumption increased from .034 to 0.40. Inequality rose sharply in rural areas but remained constant, albeit higher, in urban areas. Inequality rose from 0.26 to 0.36 in rural areas while remaining at 0.43 in urban areas.

Rural-to-urban migration is having a profound impact on the social fabric of Cambodian society and its youth. While migration represents new job opportunities, it also removes young people from the safe haven of family and community, and exposes them to possible high-risk behaviour associated with dislocation in urban areas. For those who remain in rural communities, opportunities are limited. Some worry about the paucity of female marriage partners; others experience dwindling land resources, insecure land tenure and idiosyncratic economic shocks which result in the sale of assets including land.



## EMPLOYMENT

The single most important issue confronting youth in Cambodia today is employment. The labour force is increasing by as many as 300,000 per year, and will increase to as many as 400,000 per year in the near future. The garment, tourism, and construction industries are not growing sufficiently quickly to absorb so many new labour market entrants. As a result, the Government's Rectangular Strategy, as outlined in the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2006 – 2010, details steps to develop the agricultural sector as a “third engine” of growth. On-farm employment is, however, constrained by insecure land tenure, lack of affordable credit, fragmented inputs and services, a lack of infrastructure, and poorly functioning markets. Off-farm employment seems to have great potential but more effort is needed to stimulate Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) development and agri-business investments. There is a need to attract foreign investment in agri-business and to strengthen the business-enabling environment.

Moreover, as the economic structures of the region change, there is need for Cambodia to not only absorb the growing labour force, but to prepare young people for the next generation of jobs. For example, as Cambodia's agricultural sector intensifies and diversifies, there will be a greater reliance on machinery and transport that will require skilled mechanics for maintenance and repair. There is also a need to match these opportunities with affordable credit to support SME start-ups. Even in the face of immediate needs, such medium and long range planning is critical.

## EDUCATION

Education promotes economic growth through increased productivity, the acquisition of new skills and attitudes, and through the accumulation of knowledge itself. The role of education in reducing poverty and income inequality is also well established. In this sense, illiteracy is one of the strongest predictors of poverty, while unequal access to educational opportunity is one correlate of income inequality (World Bank, 2006a). Complementing the findings from a previous Cambodian Development Research Institute (CDRI) poverty study, this research found that investments in girls' education could yield some of the highest returns of any development investment, such as fostering more young female participation in the development process and welfare, and reducing some of the most pernicious effects of poverty. In focus group discussions (FGDs) with young women aged 20-24, a majority consistently said that, with even a few years of formal education, they could better plan their families and have fewer children, have better knowledge of how to provide children with better nutrition, ensure they are immunized, and procure appropriate medical care for their children. Education therefore can also be an important vehicle for improving health and promoting preventive health practices.

The Education Strategic Plan (2006-2010) outlines the Government's efforts for promoting the National Plan for Education for All 2003-2015. to achieve the Cambodia Millennium Development Goal (CMDG) of ensuring access to nine years of basic education for all young people. In support of this goal, significant progress has been made in increasing the number of primary and lower secondary schools, and improving enrolment levels in lower secondary education, and adult literacy (among those aged 15-24). A key indicator of progress in this regard is that national expenditure on education has steadily increased since 2000. Budgets have been primarily allocated for primary and lower secondary education for schools and materials, and teacher training. Policies have also been adopted to encourage greater participation by girls and disadvantaged youth (e.g., those with disabilities, ethnic minorities) in education.

The ratio of primary-to-secondary schools climbed to 7.6 in 2005. By 2004, only 14 districts were still without a lower secondary school, while 45 districts lacked an upper secondary school. This is important, as one of the key indicators concerning access to education is distance to school, which varies considerably according to sector and income quintile (e.g., 7.66 km for the lowest quintile and 3.09 km for the top quintile). This implies costs in terms of time and transportation for the poorest families. Infrastructure has also improved in many schools. For example, parental perceptions about school have improved recently, due to factors including improvements in access to school, free registration and a pro-poor education policy.

Despite these achievements, there is wide variability in terms of educational quality, efficiency and coverage. Access to education at all levels continues to be unevenly distributed in rural and remote areas, where many of Cambodia's poor and very poor reside. Costs, including informal fees, are still a barrier and vulnerable groups tend to be over-aged or late school entrants. High rates of illiteracy are still evident in the 15-24 age group, especially among girls. Young men and women from the poorest two quintiles face considerable challenges with regard to secondary education. Although increases in secondary enrolment are evident across gender, location and socio-economic groups, gaps have increased between urban and rural areas and between the poorest and richest quintiles. High dropout rates and poor retention remain serious concerns. As a result, overall educational attainment remains low and it will be difficult to achieve universal basic education by 2015.

Not only is there a need for more classrooms, but there is also a need for more relevant curricula – teaching that is tied to the employment opportunities of the future. This suggests a need to improve the quality of education by focusing on the quality of the teacher in the classroom, curricula, instructional materials, school and system accountability and education administration. The curriculum needs a review and re-formulation to include more science and mathematics, which promote problem solving skills that can help workers to make decisions and to work together in teams, as well as more practical courses that build and strengthen agricultural and vocational skills (e.g., carpentry and basic machinery).

Measures to address these challenges to increasing the participation of the poor and girls include focusing resources on school facilities in poor rural communities; targeting subsidies for school attendance for very poor and girls; community participation in school decisions; subsidies and incentives for secondary and tertiary education; adapting curricula to local needs; media/public information campaigns on the inclusion of girls, the disabled and other vulnerable young people.

## HEALTH

The broad and sweeping social and cultural transformations accompanying Cambodia's rapid economic development have shaped young people's exposure to and capacity to deal with risk situations. The rural-to-urban migration of young people for employment and education contributes to their exposure to sexual reproductive health risks, including increased risk-taking behaviour associated with HIV infection, and other health development risks, including drug abuse and gender-based violence. Additionally, access to information and communication technology is influencing changes in attitudes and introducing new lifestyle possibilities throughout the country.

Behaviour of concern includes tobacco use (by 13.6 per cent of 15-24 year-old males and 0.8 per cent of females) and alcohol consumption (20.9 per cent of males and 7.4 per cent of females). Many youth say they first consumed alcohol as early as 12 years of age. Young people report that they start to drink early due in part to peer pressure and/or emerging new lifestyle behaviours modelled by adults.

The production, sale and use of drugs are becoming increasingly complex and appear to be spreading throughout the country. While data are difficult to come by, more than 80 per cent of known drug users are below 26. Most drug users are unemployed, sex workers and workers in labour-intensive industries, including construction, garment manufacturing, and truck/taxi driving, as well as street children.

Cambodia has achieved important success in HIV prevention in recent years. Estimates in 2006 suggested that HIV prevalence among female sex workers attending antenatal centres was at 12.6 per cent, down from 21.4 per cent in 2003. Among young pregnant women aged 15-24, the figure was 0.41 per cent in 2006. Nearly half of new infections are now occurring in married women, most of whom are infected by their husbands.

Knowledge of at least one modern contraception method is almost universal; about 99 per cent of people between the ages of 15 and 49 (compared to knowledge of a traditional method which is 47.5 per cent). However, modern contraceptive method use among young females is very low (about 2.5 per cent). Attitudes about exposing young women to discussions of sexuality are changing and appears to be increasingly accepted by parents and others in the communities.

Health knowledge and key health indicators show strong improvement. These promising trends, however, do not appear to apply to marginalized groups, street youth or other disadvantaged youth. The Government and NGOs need to continue to develop advocacy and awareness for health education programmes at the individual, household and community levels. Local authorities, Community Based Organisation (CBOs), pagodas, schools and social service providers plus medical practitioners all have important roles to play in this regard. Meanwhile, knowledge and awareness of prohibited drugs is quite high.

## VULNERABILITY

A broad definition of vulnerability can be derived from the Government's policy statement on Alternative Care for Children (MoSVY 2006): Children exposed to one or more vulnerability situations have been categorised into children in need of special protection and children at risk. Children in special need of protection and at risk include orphans, abandoned children, children infected with or affected by HIV or AIDS, abused children (sexually, physically, emotionally), street children, children in conflict with the law, child victims of exploitation (whether sexual or any form of harmful labour), children with disabilities, children addicted to drugs, and children whose basic physical needs are not being met.

Vulnerability can be a function of poverty and social exclusion, physical and mental ill health, and violence and abuse. Vulnerability can also be assessed as a function of migration, where children of poor households are increasingly exposed to problems associated with homelessness, violence and abuse.

*Vulnerability as a function of poverty and social exclusion:* Young people living in poor households constitute 26 per cent of the country's population, of which about 35 per cent live below the poverty line. Because their livelihoods are mostly dependent on rain-fed agriculture, these youth often experience food insecurity. They tend to receive less education and have little or no access to vocational training. They live in households that are routinely in debt and have high dependency ratios. These households have dwindling land resources and poor employment prospects. Issues associated with social exclusion, including disability, ethnicity, and the remoteness of communities exacerbate tendencies toward vulnerability and poverty.



***Vulnerability as a function of physical and mental ill health:*** The number of street children (estimated at 10,000 to 20,000) is increasing at a rate of 20 per cent per year. They are among the most vulnerable groups in Cambodia, due to their exposure to a wide range of physical and mental health problems, lack of access to basic needs (clothing, food), and a multitude of dangers (sexual exploitation, violence and substance abuse).

Children of chronically ill parents, including parents with HIV or AIDS, are especially vulnerable to becoming single or double orphans which has consequent impacts on household income and access to education. According to 2005 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) data, 9 per cent of children under 18 (or about 55,000 young people) have lost one or both parents. It has been estimated that in 2005, 20.7 per cent of orphans in Cambodia had lost parents due to AIDS-related illnesses.

***Vulnerability as a function of violence and abuse:*** Young people may be experiencing more violence and abuse than any other group in Cambodia. Poverty, mental illness, alcoholism and gambling are all associated with domestic violence, which has either a direct or indirect effect on young people. Domestic violence is a contributing factor to downward household mobility due to property damage and the costs associated with injury and productivity losses.

***Vulnerability as a function of migration:*** Young men and women leaving rural communities for urban employment are exposed to a wide range of issues and problems, including alcohol and drug abuse, gang violence, crime, rape and gang membership. Some tend to adopt risk behaviours that expose them to problems associated with HIV and other STIs. Young people who migrate across borders are even more vulnerable to being cheated and losing their rights, becoming subject to arrest, or working in jobs that entail health risks with no consequent health care (i.e., spraying insecticide in Thailand). Some are exposed to drug use to induce long working hours, while some women are subject to sexual exploitation and forced prostitution.

## PARTICIPATION AND RIGHTS

The voice of youth is not incorporated into planning processes and young people are rarely called upon to participate in village meetings, they can therefore often feel ignored. Youths are however, called upon to participate as labourers once decisions have been made. There is consequently a need to mainstream youth participation in the development planning process at the local level. This should be incorporated as a key feature of a National Youth Policy (NYP).

Youth opportunities for volunteerism are key components in the formation of social capital and the strengthening of reciprocity. However, many youths tend to equate volunteerism with work without salary. There are indications that volunteerism can work when there is appropriate support from organizations such as NGOs and community institutions (pagodas and schools). When opportunities to volunteer are coupled with vocational or skills development, youth will have better prospects for decent employment and increased civic engagement.

There is also a widespread lack of community services for youth. Parents and village leaders often view opportunities for team sports and other activities as a waste of time and scarce resources. Youth could benefit from such activities if there is strong support from the community. 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.

Youth voices in rural Cambodia are not yet well incorporated into local development planning.

# INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

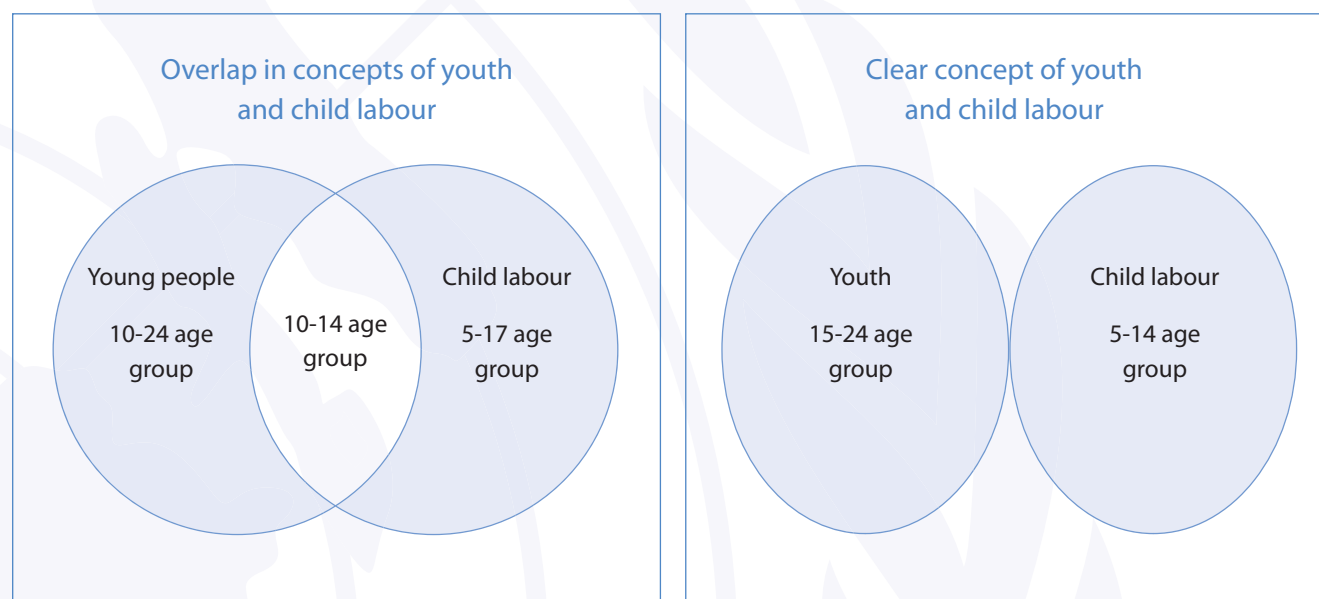
Cambodia is undergoing rapid demographic change. As of 2004, 60 per cent of the population was below 25 years of age. This situation has had major implications for Cambodia's socio-economic and political development, including labour market opportunities, access to public and family resources for youth, and the political future of a country in which the majority of the population have no experience (or even knowledge) of the Khmer Rouge regime or the country's recent conflicts. At the current pace of job creation, Cambodia will not have the capacity to compensate for the increasing numbers of young people entering the workforce annually (currently 300,000 per year, projected to increase to 400,000 per year by 2040). With the real risk of significant unemployment and underemployment, Cambodia faces the challenge of preventing increasing numbers of young people from entering both the informal and illegal economies. Additionally, as neighbouring economies grow, so too will transnational migration. A recent study by CDRI (2007) showed that cross-border demand for unskilled labour has increased, particularly in Thailand, and more recently in Malaysia. The recent trend of migrating to Malaysia has been spearheaded by the Khmer-Muslim community, and is likely to increase significantly in the future; however, migration to Malaysia is primarily conducted illicitly through Thailand.

With only half of young people completing primary school, and only a quarter proceeding to lower secondary school, there are few options for non school-going youth. Medium and Small Micro-Enterprises (MSMEs) are widely considered as the engine of growth for Cambodia's future. However, there remain real questions as to whether the current education system and business environment are structured to support these initiatives. Further complicating the picture, Cambodia's young population is also challenged by such risks as HIV, sexual exploitation, violence and abuse.

## 1.2 DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH

The UN General Assembly defines 'youth' as individuals aged between 15 and 24 years, and young people between 10 and 24 years (UN General Assembly, 1995). Cambodia's Youth Department at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) defines youth somewhat more expansively as those between the ages of 14 and 30, although the concept is said to be a relatively new cultural import to the country (Bearup 2003). This study, however, adopts the UN General Assembly definition.

FIGURE 1-1. STATISTICAL CONCEPT OF YOUTH AND CHILD LABOUR



### 1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Youth Situation Analysis broadly aims to identify the human, financial and organisational barriers to the fulfilment of young people's rights, with special focus on those most vulnerable and excluded from society. The findings are expected to guide the priorities of the development community, while empowering young people to advocate for their rights. In effect, the study shall offer a basis for developing a multi-sectoral Coordinated Response Strategy for youth.

The study specifically seeks to:

- Establish a Cambodian youth profile, including key indicators such as: number, gender, geographic distribution (including rural/ urban), ethnic background, religious affiliation, employment, educational attainment and vocational training, language(s) spoken, details of family structure, number of children and/or pregnancies, marital and HIV status.
- Analyse the current situation of young people and identify critical needs, major challenges and barriers to the fulfilment of their rights.
- Map current youth programmes (both donor-supported and governmental), including support and funding, in order to identify the main gaps and overlaps.
- Analyse links between key elements, such as population growth, employment patterns and economic and social development, between gender, sexuality and ethnicity.
- Compile an inventory of past, existing and ongoing studies, surveys, data and research on young people in Cambodia, and identify main gaps in data and analysis.
- Analyse the main areas requiring concerted efforts and greater investment for young people, and propose priority actions.



## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

The present youth situation analysis is based on both primary and secondary data sources including: a literature review; a mapping of current programs; existing studies; a 2003 national youth profile; and meetings with key informants and youth focus groups. Table 1-1 identifies the distribution of youth across Cambodia.

TABLE 1-1. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF YOUTH POPULATION

Geographic location	AGE GROUP						Ref
	10-14		15-17		18-24		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Region							2
Phnom Penh	67,989	67,267	47,473	53,904	115,426	119,309	
Plain	400,933	384,143	236,929	215,609	441,189	447,564	
Tonle Sap Lake	287,427	278,506	164,349	148,001	299,092	294,386	
Coastal	68,918	66,714	36,025	35,523	75,444	73,010	
Plateau and Mountainous	99,619	96,348	58,572	51,601	118,576	116,592	
Residence							2
Urban	134,346	132,017	85,382	90,184	187,157	174,670	
Rural	790,539	760,962	457,966	414,454	862,569	876,191	

FIGURE 1-2. DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK

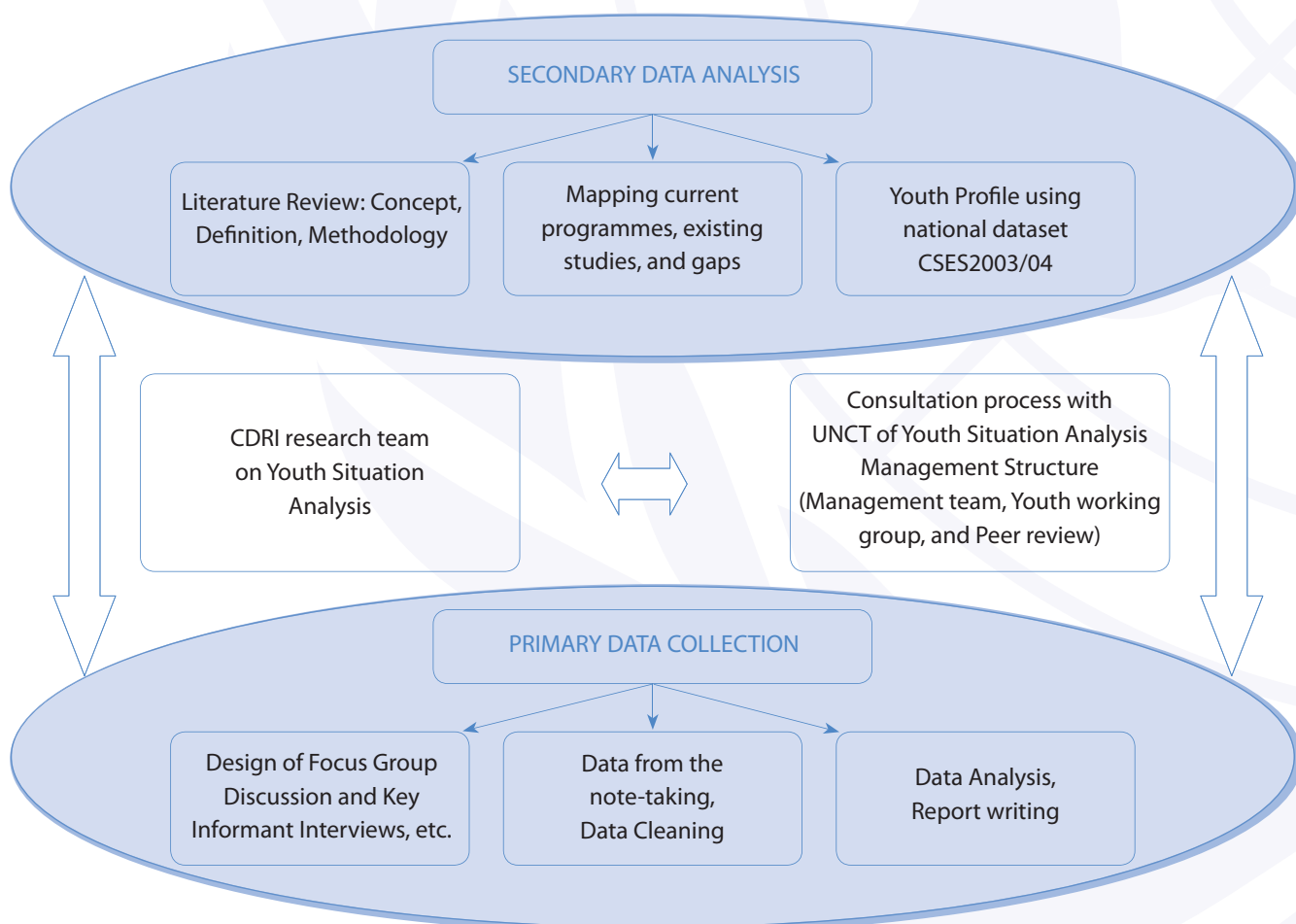
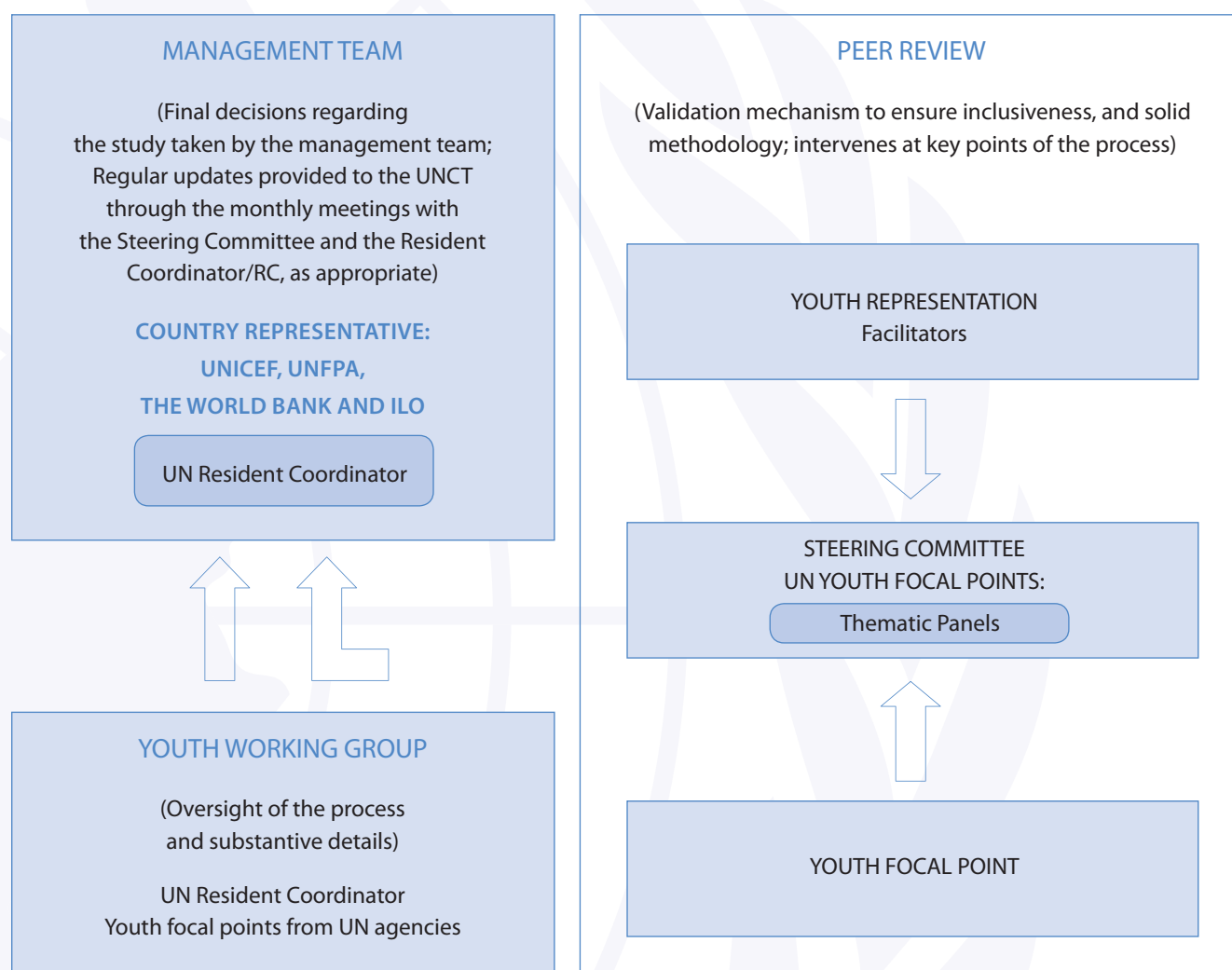


FIGURE 1-3. YOUTH SITUATION ANALYSIS MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



**Secondary data:** Included all available survey and administrative data. This analysis reviewed the current UNV study on youth and their role in society and national development, as well as surveys conducted by employers' associations and trade unions on gaps in skills, qualifications and future demand. The study drew upon the latest national dataset of the Cambodia Socioeconomic Survey 2003/04 to obtain a national profile of youth.

For the purpose of mapping current donor-supported and Government youth initiatives, the CDRI study team reviewed programme and project materials describing initiatives by the Royal Government (RG), International Organizations (IOs), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), and Local Non-Governmental Organizations (LNGOs).

**Primary data collection:** The overall objective of the primary data collection was to understand how the situation of Cambodian youth – and especially the most vulnerable – is changing in today's society. It also sought to tap youth perceptions of social change and their current and anticipated living situations, and it strives to give voice to youth observations and concerns about employment, health, education, participation in community development, and the challenges they face, as well as their potential involvement in development.

**Focus Group Discussions:** The key themes that guided the focus group discussions (FGDs) included employment, education, health, human security, rights and participation, changing values and attitudes, and expectations for the future. Gender was an overarching, crosscutting theme, as the FGDs explored differences in gender perspectives, especially around social change (see Appendix A/Annex 1-2 for themes and questions).

The FGDs were held in five zones (Phnom Penh, Mountain/Plateau, Tonle Sap, Plain, and Coastal) using trained facilitators. The sessions averaged three hours. Demographic information was collected from all FDG participants. Classrooms and school grounds were the most frequent settings for the FGDs.

**Key Informant Interviews (KIs):** These were held with village chiefs, parents, NGOs and other civil society organizations including:

- Action Aid International Cambodia
- Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
- Aide et Action- Asie du Sud-Est (AEA ASE)
- Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking (ARCPPT)
- Association Angkor-Belgique (AAB)
- Association of School Aid in Cambodia (ASAC)
- Australia Cambodia Foundation
- CARE International Cambodia
- Caritas Cambodia
- Centro Italiano Aiuti all Infanzia (CIAI)
- Christian and Missionary Alliance (CAMA Service)
- Concern Worldwide
- Diakonia
- Don Bosco Foundation of Cambodia
- East West Management Institute (EWMI)
- Enfants & Development (E&D)
- Enfants d'Ángkor (EDA)
- Enfants du Mekong (EdM)
- Enfants Refugies du Monde (ERM)
- EveryChild Cambodia
- Family Health International (FHI)
- Food For the Hungry International Cambodia (FHI)
- Foundation for International Development/ Relief (FIDR)
- Friends International
- German AgroAction (DWHH/ GAA)

- International Organisation for Migration (IOM).
- Intervida World Alliance (INWA)
- Japan International Volunteer Center (JVC)
- Japan Team of Young Human Power (JHP)
- Jesuit Service Cambodia (JS/JRS)
- Kokyo naki kodomotachi Children Without Borders (KnK)
- Maryknoll Cambodia
- Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
- New Humanity (NH)
- NGO Forum of Cambodia
- Oxfam Quebec
- PACT Cambodia
- Partners for Development (PFD)
- Plan International Cambodia
- Population Services International/ Cambodia (PSI Cambodia)
- Pour un Sourire d'Enfant (PSE)
- Save the Children Australia (SCA)
- Save the Children Norway, Cambodia Office (SCN-CO)
- SHARE Village Focus International
- Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)
- World Education
- World Vision Cambodia (WVC)
- Youth with a Mission (YWAM)

**Site selection and sampling:** YSA fieldwork took place in six provinces/municipalities. In each province, one village/community was selected. CDRI coordinated with an NGO (or NGOs) working with youth in a particular province to help coordinate site selection and organize the logistics associated with fieldwork. The three provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Ratanakiri, and Svay Rieng were covered during the first phase of fieldwork.

Additionally, targeted FGDs were conducted in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and Sihanoukville in order to address special issues pertaining to vulnerable and marginalized children. For example, in Phnom Penh an FGD was convened with young Cham males, female garment workers, street youth and/or youth involved with substance abuse. In Siem Reap, FGDs were convened in a fishing village with young Vietnamese men and women. In Sihanoukville, an FGD was convened with young people involved with informal labour markets. These three areas were covered in the second phase of the fieldwork.

There were three types of interaction at the community level during this study: FGDs; key informant interviews; and semi-structured individual interviews. Table 1.2 summarizes the interactions held for this study.



Table 1-2 Activity/sample summary

Interaction	Number per village	Villages in Sample	Total per Village	Specifically Targeted a/	Total Sample
FGD	6	6	36	6	42
KII	4	6	24	3-5	27-29
Individual Interviews	2-3	6	12-18	4-5	16-23

*Phnom Penh = 3; Siem Reap = 2; Sihanoukville = 1, depending on available resources*

Six FGDs took place at the village level, to give a total of 36 village FGDs. As gender was a critical crosscutting theme, FGDs were arranged according to the sex of the participants for two age groups, for young people and their parents. The specific groupings were as follows:

- Young males, aged 15-18 (open to any male member of the community of this age).
- Young females, aged 15-18 (open to any female member of the community of this age).
- Males, 19-24 (open to any male member of the community in this age group).
- Females, aged 19-24 (open to any female member of the community in this age group).
- Fathers with children 15-24 years of age.
- Mothers with children 15-24 years of age.

Data Entry and Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using STATA software computer package. Qualitative information on perceptions and opportunities of the youths were encoded in Microsoft Word and grouped thematically according to the FGDs by region.

Human Subject Considerations: Guiding principles for data collection with youth included: informed consent; the right of youth to withdraw or refuse to answer any question at any time; confidentiality and anonymity in reporting of all data (nothing would ever be attributed to an individual); and parental consent for youth under 17 years of age.

## 1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations characterize this study:

- As noted earlier, the focus of this study was on youth aged 15-24. While conforming to UN definitions, it excludes those aged 25-30 who, within the Cambodian context, are also considered 'youth'.
- Data from the Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (CSES) 2007 were not yet available at the time of this study, so we relied upon 2003-4 data. Additionally, it proved difficult to obtain data on sensitive issues such as drug use and abortion.
- The lack of youth-specific data proved to be a challenge, so the study used population data, extracting youth-specific information where possible (e.g. CSES 2004, the Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2004, the 2005 CDHS, and the 2001 Child Labour Survey). The lack of such national data often precluded analysis by gender, age or geography. Additionally, data limitations did not allow for exploration of youth-specific issues such as early marriage, drug use, abortion and violence.

- The FGD methodology proved difficult for younger participants – aged 15-19 – due to their hesitancy to respond to questions and relatively greater difficulty articulating issues of concern.
- There are very limited data on young people aged 10-14.
- Time and resource constraints limited the mapping exercise, as it was able only to assess the number of interventions at the provincial level.
- Secondary sources were limited, in that it was often difficult to determine which initiatives were still operative. Moreover, the assessment refers only to the number of interventions, rather than to their scope, scale or impact.





# YOUTH DATA AND TRENDS AT A GLANCE



## 2.1 A PROFILE OF CAMBODIA'S YOUTH

Cambodia has one of the youngest populations in Southeast Asia, with young people aged 10-24 making up 36 per cent of the total population. Cambodia's youth – defined in this study to be those in the 15-24 age group – comprised 26 per cent of the total population in 2004 (Ministry of Planning 2006). There were slightly more males (51 per cent) than females (49 per cent). More than 8-in-10 (83 per cent) live in rural areas with the largest concentration being in the Plains and Tonle Sap regions at 43 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively. Ethnically, 96.2 per cent of them are Khmer, about 2.2 per cent are Chams and the remainder make up the indigenous groups, Chinese, Vietnamese and Lao. The majority (74.2 per cent) belong to households with at least five members, which may partly account for the fact that some 35 per cent of the youth population lives below the poverty line (CSES 2004, MoP 2006).

Table 2-1 Cambodia youth population in 2005 and trends over 1998 and 2015

Age Group	Females 1,000s			Males 1,000s			Ref.
	2005	Change over 1998	Projected change over 2015	2005	Change over 1998	Projected change over 2015	
		(%)	(%)		(%)	(%)	
10-14	921	11	-12	953	9	-12	1
15-19	839	20	-4	879	29	-6	
20-24	755	88	19	755	108	22	
25-29	484	2	69	443	1	90	
Total	7,108	13	22	6,699	14	24	

Table 2-2. Total youth population by age group

Sex	Age group				Ref.
	10-14	15-17	18-24	Total Youth age 15-24	
Male	924,885	543,348	1,049,726	2,517,959	2
Female	892,978	504,638	1,050,861	2,448,477	2

Nearly 10 per cent of 15-19 year old females and over half (54.3 per cent) of those aged 20-24 are married, compared with 1.6 per cent and 36.2 per cent, respectively, of males in the comparable age groups. This reflects the relatively early age of female marriage, especially in the rural areas where marriages are still often



arranged. Youth interviewees for this study, particularly in Phnom Penh, Poipet and Sihanoukville, indicated that they generally do not favour early marriage. Cohabitation is also an extremely rare behaviour, occurring in less than 1 per cent of either age group or gender.

Older youth are more likely than their younger counterparts to be employed. In terms of income status, older youth seem somewhat better off than their younger peers. Moreover, females appear to be doing marginally better than males, although the differences are not significant. Thirty-two per cent of youth live below the poverty line.

Income and education are closely correlated, and we also see an increase in access to primary education among younger youth compared with those aged 20-24. Moreover, younger youth are more likely to be literate (84 per cent) than older youth (76.3 per cent). By gender, more young women have reached primary levels of schooling, but young men are more likely to have had a secondary education. One factor contributing to this gender disparity is the lack of secondary schools in rural areas and the reluctance of many families to send their daughters to urban centres for education.

Figure 2-1. Youth education by age group and gender

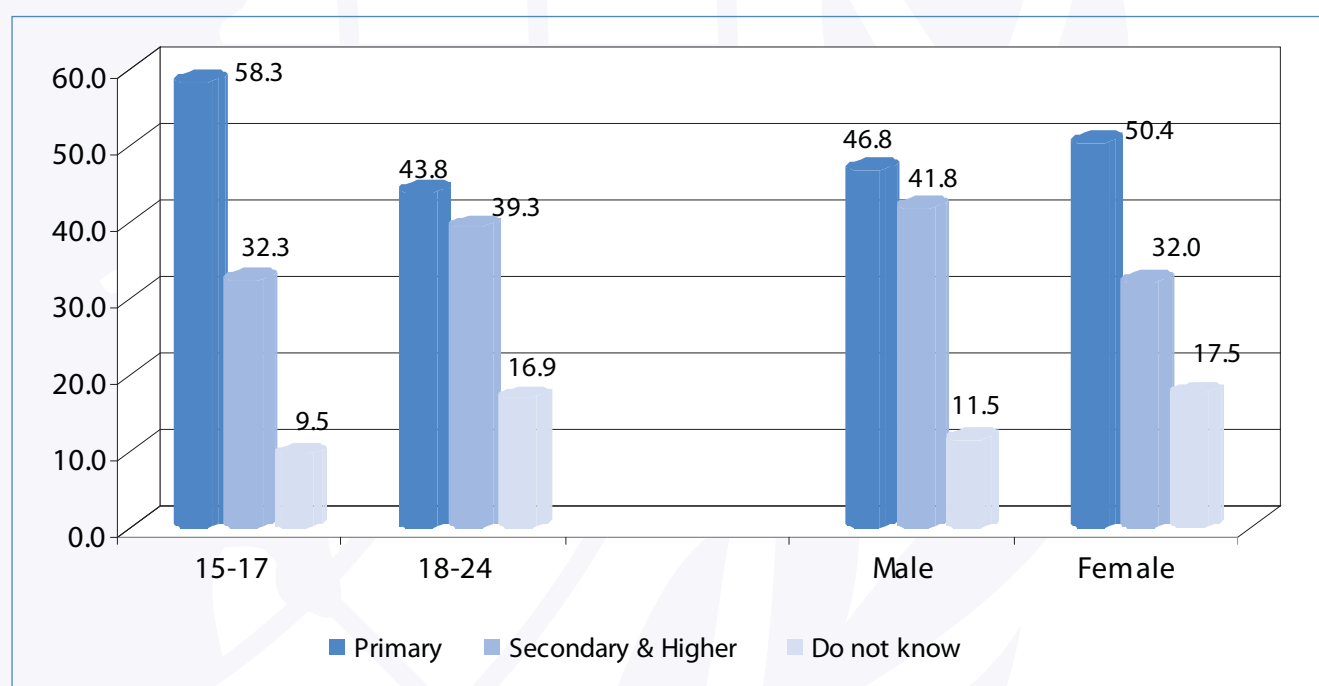


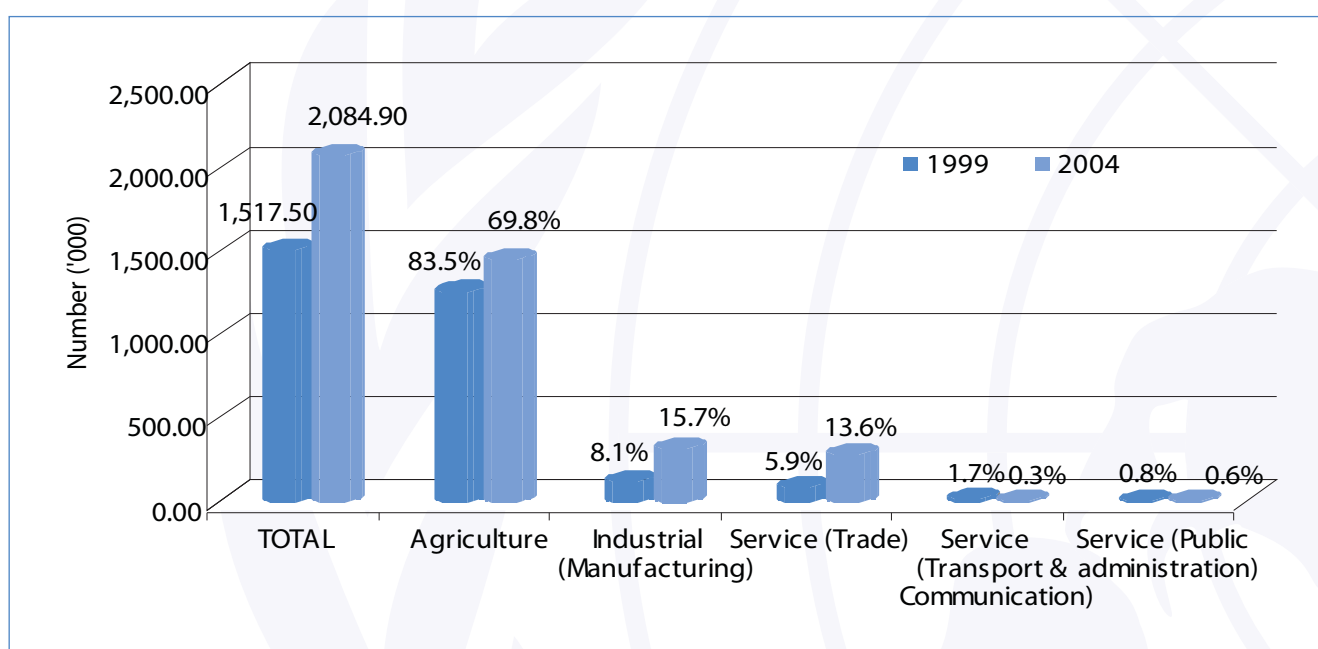
Table 2-3. Literacy by age group, sex and sector (%)

	Male			Female			Both Sexes		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
15-19	92.1	84.5	85.8	90.1	80.4	82.1	91.1	82.6	84.0
20-24	91.4	80.1	82.1	86.0	67.6	70.6	88.8	73.7	76.3
15-24	92.8	87.0	87.9	88.0	76.8	78.9	90.8	81.9	83.4
15 & over	91.7	83.3	84.7	76.9	61.6	64.1	83.8	71.6	73.6
7 & over	88.9	80.8	82.1	78.6	65.3	67.4	83.5	72.7	74.4



Cambodia's male and female 15-24 year-olds comprise a third of the country's labour force, with the 15-19 age group making up 16.4 per cent. In 2004, more than two-thirds (69.8 per cent) of both age groups were employed in agriculture (a decline of nearly 15 per cent compared to 1999), and there were comparable increases in employment in manufacturing and trade (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2. Total number of employed youth population, by sector and age group



Male and female youth labour participation rates are comparable for those aged 15-19. However, for older female youths are less likely to be employed, perhaps due to marriage and child raising practices. Not surprisingly, those who enter the labour force at youngest ages are also the most educationally disadvantaged. Moreover, the relatively low educational attainment of youth predisposes them to unemployment (Table 2-4).

Unemployment is highest in Phnom Penh, at 20.1 per cent for all those aged 15-24 years, and could be due to their migration in this capital city because of lack of employment opportunities in rural areas and poor returns from agricultural production.

Table 2-4. Youth labour force by level of education (%)

Age group	None	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Total
15-19	13.4	42.2	34.5	10.0	100.0
20-24	18.9	36.2	25.4	19.3	100.0
25-29	23.7	37.0	22.4	17.0	100.0
15 & over	91.7	83.3	84.7	76.9	61.6
7 & over	88.9	80.8	82.1	78.6	65.3

able 2-5. Youth unemployment by sex and region (%)

Criteria	Total	Male	Female	Phnom Penh	Other Urban	Rural
Unemployment using "strict" definition						
15 - 19	1.4	1.3	1.4	6.2	2.7	0.9
20 - 24	1.6	1.9	1.2	7.8	1.4	0.8
15 - 24	1.5	1.6	1.3	7.2	2.1	0.9
Unemployment using "relaxed" definition						
15 - 19	7.9	7.3	8.5	24.8	10.1	6.2
20 - 24	6.5	5.4	7.6	16.6	7.1	5.1
15 - 24	7.2	6.4	8	20.1	8.6	5.7

Note: "Strict" definition counts only those actively seeking employment; "Relaxed" definition measures those not working but available for work

## 2.2 TRENDS IN KEY AREAS AFFECTING YOUTH

### a. Education

*Poor and marginal youth still face extremely limited access to secondary education.* Newly constructed schools for young people and poor children have made access to primary schooling relatively equal, but considerable differences remain for lower and upper secondary schools (less than 5 per cent of villages have an upper secondary school). Most families are now able to send their children to primary school, given that the mean distance to the nearest primary school is 2.25 kilometres for those in the poorest quintile, which is not significantly different from other quintiles. However, the average distance to the nearest lower secondary school for the poorest household is 7.66 kilometres, which is more than twice that for the wealthiest children (World Bank, 2006). CSES 2004 also reveals that the mean distance to the nearest upper secondary school is 16.9 kilometres for the poorest quintile villages, compared to 7.34 kilometres for the richest.

*Those who are poor, rural and (especially) female are more likely to be illiterate:* CSES 2004 indicates that Cambodia has high illiteracy rates among young people aged 15-24 compared to the rest of the region. Additionally, vulnerable youth are much more likely to be over-aged or late school entrants. Late school entry may be related to structural factors such as child labour or malnutrition (e.g. in Ratanakiri and Poipet). While there have been substantial strides in reducing the gender and urban-rural gaps in education, the country's poorest have not benefited as much. In FGDs with female youth aged 20-24, the majority consistently said that, with even a few years of formal education, they could better plan their families and have fewer children, have better knowledge of how to provide children with better nutrition, ensure they are immunized and procure appropriate medical care, thereby reducing child mortality. Barriers appear to be both financial and social. For example, parents in Svay Rieng, Siem Reap, Poipet and Sihanoukville reported that, while they would like to send both their male and female children to school, they were more inclined to support their male children's education since their daughters were more likely to be needed for housework.

*Few youth go on to university education.* According to Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2006, only 1.4 per cent of youth aged 19-22 are enrolled in tertiary education.

## **b. Employment**

*Cambodia's labour force youth participation rates are among the highest in the region.* In general, those aged 15-19 and 20-24 are more likely to be working in rural than urban areas, reflecting lower secondary school matriculation and higher farm labour rates.

*Cambodia's young labour force generally suffers from low and poor levels of education* when viewed against the requirements of an increasingly developed economy and external competitiveness (Lundström and Ronnås 2006).

*Wage employment is less likely for women* than for men, suggesting that females are more likely to be employed in the informal economy, even taking the growing garment industry into consideration.

The unemployment rate in Phnom Penh for those aged 15-19 was 6.2 per cent, with little gender difference (CSES 2004). At 0.8 per cent, unemployment rates in rural areas are much lower:

There is a mismatch between education and labour needs, even among those who have benefitted from education and training, (ILO 2007).

## **c. Health**

*The incidence of unplanned pregnancy in the 15-19 age group has become a concern.* Approximately 8 per cent of Cambodian women aged 15-19 have become mothers or are currently pregnant with their first child (CDHS 2005). About 23 per cent of young married women had given birth by age 19, with early childbearing more common in rural (8.3 per cent) than urban (6 per cent) areas. Early child bearing is most pronounced in Mondulakiri/Ratanakiri (21.8 per cent) and Odar Meanchey (15.4 per cent), while the provinces of Preah Vihear/Stueng Treng (13.4 per cent) and Kratie (12.9 per cent) have the lowest incidence (CDHS, 2005).

*Abortions among women aged 15-49 years appear to be increasing.* The percentage of abortions among women aged 15-49 increased from 5 per cent in 2000 to 8 per cent in 2005 (CDHS 2000, 2005). Among women aged 15-34, the most common place to get an abortion was at private clinics (35.3 per cent), followed by other homes (33.7 per cent), private homes (11.5 per cent) and public health facilities (10.8 per cent). The proportion of women who received help for abortion from a trained professional was 87.3 per cent among urban women and 76.1 per cent among rural women (CDHS 2005).

*Basic contraceptive awareness is widespread.* About 97.3 per cent of those aged 15-19 indicated knowing at least one modern method of contraception (CDHS 2005). Among older youth the rate approaches 100 per cent. However, in practice, contraception use is low among currently married females. For example, among those aged 15-19, 20.8 per cent reported currently using any method and 13.7 per cent reported currently using any modern method; among those aged 20-24 the rates were 34.6 per cent and 23.3 per cent, respectively.

Both young males and young females have a good understanding of sexual and reproductive health and related infections. Youth interviewees learned about these issues from sex education and awareness campaigns in schools, and from NGOs in their villages. They also received training not only about sexual and reproductive health but also on HIV. The youths' other sources of information on sexual and reproductive health are television, village information boards, village peer educators (where there are such programmes) and community libraries.

*Tobacco use.* Overall, 7.3 per cent of Cambodian youths aged 15-24 were current smokers (13.6 per cent males and 0.8 per cent females). Moreover, rural youths smoke more than those who live in cities. The proportion of youths consuming tobacco was found to be highest in Ratanakiri, at 34 per cent.

*Smoking increases with age.* The prevalence of smoking among the 20-24 year olds was 12.5 per cent (males 24.0 per cent; females 1.1 per cent).

*In the area of alcohol use,* out-of school youth were more likely to drink than in-school peers (15.9 per cent and 12.1 per cent, respectively) (MoEYS 2004). Young people who consume alcohol started on average at age 12. The 2004 Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) also found that 45 per cent of young people in Ratanakiri and 40.9 per cent in Mondulakiri use alcohol. Young people indicate that the factors that influence alcohol use include: new lifestyles and exposure to new environments within society; peer pressure or the influence of their seniors; lack of family encouragement or poor environment within the home (e.g., domestic violence, family members seen as alcohol or drug users); and access to money among those who are economically better-off (Mith Samlanh-Friends 2002).

*The prevalence of drug use* among Cambodian adolescents aged 11-18 was 0.9 per cent (1.6 per cent and 0.3 per cent for males and females) (MoEYS 2004). Likewise, 2.2 per cent of urban youth and 0.5 per cent of the rural youth report using drugs. As with tobacco, drug use starts on average at age 12; and 95 per cent of those reporting ever having used drugs, say that they did so in the previous 12 months.

*Injury as a serious health issue* is underscored by the fact that among 15-to-17 year-olds it has surpassed communicable and other non-communicable cause of death, to become the major killer of young people (NIS/ NIPH 2008). Specifically, among 15-17 year-olds, suicide appears to be the leading cause of death, while vehicle-related injury and death predominate among older youth.

#### d. Vulnerability

*Large family size contributes to poverty* (an issue more pronounced in rural than urban areas). Cambodia has a high dependency ratio (89.6 per cent in rural areas, compared with 69.1 per cent in urban areas), which has a depressing effect on per capita income. The number of elderly or disabled people who are unable to work also raise the dependency ratio, which limits financial capital for activities like education.

*The mental health needs of youth* often go undetected. As noted previously, the NIS/NIPH survey (2008) observed suicide to be a leading cause of death among 15-17 year-olds. FGD findings suggest that mental health issues stem from violence in the home, a perceived lack of caring from the family,



feelings of isolation that result from migration for work, and the increased vulnerability of migrants who may enter into abusive relationships in exchange for friendship or food and shelter.

*Parents living with HIV and AIDS* also contribute to young people's vulnerability. The death of parents can place the onus of responsibility on adolescents and/or young adults. Approximately 55,000 children, or 10.9 per cent of all orphans, were orphaned by AIDS-related illnesses in 2001, increasing to an estimated 20.7 per cent by 2005 (World Bank 2006). Risk perception of HIV is low among youth in Cambodia, increasing their risk of infection.

*Sexual abuse appears to be increasing.* The proportion of homicides associated with rape has increased from 2003 to 2004 (ADHOC 2005). The victims include sex workers, garment workers and working in beer halls and karaoke establishments, the latter two occupations mainly employing young women (MoWA 2008). Perpetrators have included young urban men, male university students, some members of the police and gang members, who engage in *bauk* or gang rape. Failure to report such events is common due to the shame and stigma associated with it, distrust of the judicial system, costs of prosecution, unofficial 'compensation' settlements between perpetrators and victims, and fear of retaliation from the perpetrator (LICADHO 2006).

*Arrest increases vulnerability.* Children and youths who have been arrested are often detained with adults, despite legal provision on separation of untried and convicted youth offenders from adults (CDC 2003). The Youth Rehabilitation Centre is the only alternative for incarcerating juveniles. Those who land in prison are often abused and, without any form of legal or social protection, may languish in jail, and receive beatings or worse at the hands of the police or adult inmates (Egger 2005).

*Rural-to-urban migration is common among youth.* Those aged 15-25 made up a disproportionately large number of migrants in the five years before the 2004 Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (Maltoni 2007). Rural-to-urban mobility in this age group is shaped by push and pull of factors such as loss of land or loss of access to other livelihood resources, a desire to seek a better life, and the presence of family members in places where work may be found. Females in the 15-19 age group are more likely to migrate than their male counterparts, though gender differences decline after age 20.

*Young migrant workers fall prey to serious difficulties when working near cross-country borders.* Fitzgerald and So (2007) found that many young migrants reported being cheated out of wages, or entering another country illegally and running into difficulties when they returned to Cambodia. FGD participants also validated these issues.

#### e. Participation and rights

The needs and perspectives of youth are yet to be reflected in government policies and programmes. Such a lack of recognition appears to stem from an age or knowledge hierarchy (Brown 2008) in which community leaders feel that young people have little to contribute (Yong 2005). Additionally, Cambodian parents are wary and discouraging of civic engagement by their children, since this implies political involvement, which historically has been associated with risks (KYA 2008)

<sup>6</sup> In a 2006 study, ILO found the average age of beer promotion girls to be 22.7 years.

as well as the failure of the education system to impart the values necessary for the development of skills among young people to help build and participate in modern democratic societies and ensuring good governance.

The lack of youth voices is accentuated at the village level because young people are only called upon to carry out the decisions of their elders. Youth feel confident about their ability to contribute to development, but their social environment and the conservative beliefs of the local authorities and community elders prevent them from doing so.

Youth perceptions of volunteering vary depending on locale, with those in rural areas tending to have a more positive view. In Svay Rieng province, many school-going youth report having acquired support from a local NGO, Open Forum of Cambodia, to volunteer as journalists for a community newsletter, and as assistants in community development work such as road construction and rehabilitation. Other youths reported volunteering to assist with village traditional ceremonies, weddings, merit making and other religious events. In Ratanakiri, youth who belong to ethnic groups are also positive about volunteering. This is because they believe that their participation enhances their awareness and helps their community. In Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, on the other hand, youth tend to speak disparagingly of volunteering.

Youth-focused NGOs teach skills to young people as they contribute as volunteers to their communities. EveryChild-Cambodia (2006), for instance, identified 84 children and youth-led clubs and organizations across the 24 provinces and municipalities of the country (although some are local offices or divisions of NGOs that facilitate programmes for children and youths). The activities of these associations include leadership training, home-based care (for people living with HIV and AIDS), primary health care and child rights promotion, monitoring child abuse, capacity building for club members and holding literacy classes.

There is evidence that youth are not totally excluded from the political process. Yong (2005) found young people's political expressions evident in media campaigns, lobbying political leaders, organizing and taking part in the demonstrations and public forums organized by youth-focused NGOs.

Additionally, there are opportunities for youth to participate in sports, which they enjoy. However, many parents regard this activity as a waste of time, since they believe that it does not contribute to family income and it takes away time from assisting with household chores. The low value adults accord to sports is reflected in the paucity of sports and recreational facilities at the village level.

From the current situation analysis it appears that youth voices are often excluded, their interest in contributing to their communities is frequently discounted, their opportunities for educational advancement beyond the primary school are limited, and their participation in recreational activities is viewed by their elders as a waste of time. In the following chapters we will look more closely into these issues and their consequences for Cambodia.



# MAPPING DONOR-SUPPORTED AND GOVERNMENTAL YOUTH PROGRAMMES



## 3.1 INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS AND CONVENTIONS ON YOUTH AND YOUNG CHILDREN

The United Nations formally recognized the vital role of young people in the development of society through the *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between People* in General Assembly resolution A/RES/2037 (XX) of 7 December 1965 (United Nations 2007). Three decades later, the General Assembly, in resolution 50/81 of 14 December 1995, in paragraph 8(a) of the World Programme of Action for Youth, said: “every State shall provide its young people with opportunities for obtaining education, for acquiring skills, and for participating fully in all aspects of society.”

*The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 1989, is another covenant that supports young people. The Convention requires states to adopt all appropriate measures – legislative, administrative, social, economic, budgetary, educational or other – and to allocate the resources necessary to ensure its effective implementation. The Convention recognises the obligations of other parties (i.e., parents and families, civil society and the international community) for the provision of care, food and warmth, or for loving stimulus, basic education and health care (ILO 2002).

In its commitment to standardize labour, and to also protect young workers, the Cambodian Government ratified a number of fundamental ILO conventions: *Forced Labour Convention* (No. 29); *Abolition of Forced Labour Convention* (No. 105); *Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention* (No. 87); *Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention* (No. 98); *Equal Remuneration Convention* (No. 100); *Discrimination Convention* (No. 111); and *Minimum Age Convention* (No. 138). In November 2007, the country ratified the *Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour* (Convention No. 182) (ILO 2007). Cambodia is also a signatory to the 1990 *UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*, although it has yet to ratify it (Lee, n.d.).

Bilateral treaties and memorandums of agreement also underpin particular issues that affect youth. To promote safe migration for work, Cambodia has mutual labour cooperation agreements with Malaysia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand. Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on *Cooperation in the Employment of Workers* signed in May 2003, the Thai Government has accepted and legalized the status of Cambodians who are working in Thailand illegally (Lee, n.d.). Both countries also set up an Inter-Ministries Working Group for Cooperation to issue identification cards to Khmer migrant workers in Thailand, which allows them to apply for a work permit. Cambodia's official mutual agreement with Malaysia, *Recruitment Procedures for Cambodian Nationals for Employment in Malaysia* (1997/1999), has allowed the country, since 1998, to officially send its workers to Malaysia, the majority of whom are women, who work as domestic workers, factory workers and shop assistants. Another related agreement is the *Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT)*, an MoU, signed in 2004 by Cambodia and five countries