



The 4th National Conference on Transforming Education to Promote Inclusion in the Education Sector in Phnom Penh (2024)

2024 CIVIL SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON SDG 4

I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

The 7th legislature of the Cambodia National Assembly launched the “Pentagonal Strategy-Phase I for Growth, Employment, Equity, Efficiency, and Sustainability” focusing on performance efficiency through good governance practices and the Dynamics of Stakeholder System. The core objectives remain; maintain peace, economic growth, and development while accelerating development through resilience in five priority sectors: public sector, economic sector, financial sector, human and social capital sector, and environmental sector and climate change response.¹

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) have been instrumental in driving progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) – Quality Education. In the 2023-2024, primary education net enrolment has reached an impressive 99.6%. The RGC has been prioritising girls' enrolment in scholarship programs to improve equitable access to education, student retention, and secondary school completion (60% girls).

The RGC implements a comprehensive Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025, in response to national development priorities, including restructuring of the management institutions.² Cambodia through the MOEYS has addressing gender disparities in education through establishing the Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan in the Education Sector. The MOEYS has mainstreamed gender issues into various educational policies, including the Child-Friendly Policy, ESP 2019-2023 and the Teacher Policy Action Plan. These efforts push each educational entity to implement specific measures that promote gender equality through planning, educational programs, service delivery, and management.³ This intervention include building infrastructure, providing scholarships, gender-sensitive curriculum and materials development and teacher training, and life skills training.

However, significant challenges persist. While girls outperform boys in learning academic performance, students in urban schools consistently outperform their rural counterparts as well as those from different socioeconomic background, as assessed by SEA-PLM.⁴ According to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, Cambodia faces disparities in educational attainment, with only 12% of students reaching proficiency in mathematics and 8% in reading, significantly lower than the OECD averages.

Cambodia's vulnerability to climate change is evident, with the country facing increasingly severe weather events such as storms, floods, and droughts. The education sector is directly impacted by these climate-related disasters, leading to disruptions in school operations and infrastructure. The recent heatwave from April to May 2024, with temperatures soaring as high as 42 degrees Celsius, underscores the urgent need for adaptive measures to safeguard student well-being (MoWRaM, 2024). In response to climate change challenges, the MoEYS has implemented measures to mitigate the impact on education.

II. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SDGS AND SDG 4

Cambodia recognises the importance of gender equality in education and has developed a comprehensive monitoring framework for SDG 4, Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDG) Goal 5, including 6 key gender targets and 12 indicators linked to responsible ministries, data sources, and data cycles. Cambodia has a strong commitment to gender equality principles and issued multiple regulatory frameworks at the national level to promote social inclusion and protect women and marginalised groups.

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES	
Population:	16,944,826 (2023)
GNI per Capita (PPP\$)	5,460 (2023)
Income Group	Lower-Middle Income
HDI: Value/Rank	0.600 / 148th out of 193 (2022)
Gini Index	38.3 (2023)
Education Expenditure (% GDP)	2.83% (2023)
Completion rate in primary education in the academic year 2022-2023	86.8% (89.4% girls and 85.3% boys)
Lower secondary Completion Rate Female / Male	55.7% (60.4% girls and 51% boys) in the academic year 2022-2023
Literacy Rate (15-64 Yrs.) Female / Male	84.7% (2022-2023 school year) not separate boy and girl
2024 SDG Score/Rank	64.90 / 104th out of 166
SDG 4 Trend	■ Major challenges remain ➔ Stagnating
SDG 4 Dashboard	
Climate-related disasters:	
Total No. of disasters*	398 (2023)
Regional Mean/Median	9.3 / 4
Risk Management Index:	
Climate-driven Hazard & Exposure	6.9 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.6
Lack of coping capacity	5.9 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.3
Vulnerability	4 (2022) Regional Mean: 3.4
*Drought, Extreme temperature, Flood, Landslide, Storm, Wildfire	

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has implemented the Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan. This policy focuses on gender mainstreaming and behavioural change across sectors, facilitated by research analysis, law, and policy design.⁵ Cambodia launched the initiative Education 2030 Roadmap in 2029 which aligns with the international agenda outlined in the Incheon Declaration and it is the journey towards gender equality: CSDGs, prioritise the principle of "No One Left Behind." Through Educational Strategic Planning, the MOEYS is continuously working towards ensuring all Cambodian children and youth have equal opportunities to access quality education which aligns with the RGC commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Cambodia have been proactive in addressing climate change. Since ratifying the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1995, the country has established key institutes like the National Climate Change Committee and integrated climate change into its national development plans. The Cambodia Climate Change Strategic Plan 2014-2023 outlines long-term resilience strategies.

More recently, Cambodia has ratified the Paris Agreement and Aligned its climate actions with the Sustainable Development Goals. These efforts demonstrate a strong commitment to building a climate-resilient future by aligning national and global climate agendas. Cambodia integrates climate change education (CCE) into curriculum through the MoEYS's Climate Change Strategic Plan for Education 2014–2023. This plan incorporates environmental education into primary and secondary textbooks and focusing on two main themes in higher education:

1. Improving the quality of education on climate change impacts, disaster risk, adaptation, and resilience, and
2. Encouraging active participation of teachers, students, and communities in CCE activities and promoting environmental protection.

While Cambodia has demonstrated commitment to climate change actions, specific budget allocations for implementing CCE policies remain unclear. The government has allocated approximately 1% of GDP to address climate change challenges, as evidenced by public spending reviews (The National Council for Sustainable Development, Climate Change Policies and Plans).⁶ Cambodia has sought financial support from various bilateral and multilateral partners, including the Green Climate Fund and other financial mechanisms under the Paris Agreement. However, the specific financial allocation for climate change education remains unclear and requires further investigation and increased investment.

Some actors are acting against climate change including civil society organisations. One such organisation is Mlup Baitong, they played a crucial role in raising public awareness about environmental issues through a comprehensive environmental radio program and providing consultancy services. The radio program featured scripted content and live talk shows, focusing on various environmental topics and the consultancy services included designing environmental education materials, conducting surveys, and offering training.⁷



5 GENDER & INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS, USAID CAMBODIA, 2020

6 RETRIEVED FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CLIMATE FINANCE | THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (MOE.GOV.KH)

7 MLUP BAITONG ANNUAL REPORT 2019. RETRIEVED FROM: MLUP-BAITONG.ORG

III. CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SDG 4 IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP, AND MONITORING

The CSDGs mechanisms for implementing and monitoring are implemented through a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, and CSOs. The MOEYS is a key player in integrating SDG 4 into national education plans, focus on providing equitable and inclusive education for all children, particularly those with disabilities. The MoEYS actively fosters partnerships to drive progress. For example, the Inclusive Primary Education Activity (IPEA), a USD 25 million program launched in collaboration with USAID, aims to enhance the reading and learning experiences of Cambodian primary school children. The program is implemented by the RTI International and a consortium of partners.

CSOs engagement in SDG 4 implementation faces challenges due to limited access to policy-making forums and lack of technical expertise. CSOs often struggle to influence educational policies and programs due to insufficient timeframe given to them. When the MoEYS conducts meetings with stakeholders, including CSOs, to review draft policies, the timeframes given to CSOs are frequently insufficient for them to contribute fully. Some CSOs lack the technical expertise and capacity needed to effectively monitor and evaluate education policies and programs. This gap hinders their ability to provide constructive feedback and evidence-based recommendations for policymakers.

The level of CSOs participation in the implementation of SDG 4 varies. The government has engaged them in consultative processes through National Education Congress, policy input gathering consultations, and ESWG/JTWG and stakeholder meetings. Collaborative projects between government and CSOs aimed at improving education outcomes also demonstrate a willingness to engage CSOs in practical implementation efforts.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE



The quality of education is a significant barrier for marginalised youths, hindering their right to education. Low learning outcomes and access to the right learning environment hinder their performance. A good learning environment enhances learning outcomes, and mental health by fostering secure class engagement activities. Classroom should foster healthy relationships, improve communication, and boost enthusiasm.

However, marginalised youths lack opportunities for positive experiential behaviour and social skills. To improve the education quality, the government should eliminate the cycle of difficulty and discouragement. MOEYS should invest in equipping rural and under-resourced schools, train teachers, and adapt classes to meet the needs of marginalised students. Good communication between teachers and students is crucial for improving learning outcome.

- Year 3 male, Social Work Major student, NEP Education Champion Youth





Marginalised youth and students with disabilities in remote areas face limited access to education due to lack of computer classes and financial struggles. Safety concerns, particularly for girls, the school distance and difficulty of roads discourage them from fully attending school and attainment. I would suggest providing the computer class and basic computer skills. MOEYS should raise awareness about long-term benefits of education through community outreach programs and financial support. Additionally, the government should improve infrastructures in remote areas to ensure safety for students, especially girls, for need to travel to and from school.

- Year 3 female, Agriculture Major student, NEP Education Champion Youth



Barriers that obstruct youth in education are often children who live in poor urban and rural areas. This includes poverty, lack of study materials and transportation, low quality of teaching, and exclusion. These numerous reasons can lead the students to fall behind in school and eventually drop out. Dalin said. Personally, as a youth I think all parents should and must motivate their children to study and the government should take care of teachers especially in rural areas, adding some more fun activities to do besides general knowledge courses. Sports activities and club studies should be added to improve their strength in communication, improve soft skills and more importantly improve their social networking. The government should provide a scholarship for children who are in need. In whatever situation and condition they are in, all children have the right to study. In short, all children must be in the same room for education.

- Year 1 female student, Majoring in Professional Design, Current NEP Education Champion



IV. GENDER GAPS IN EDUCATION

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 published by the World Economic Forum (WEF, June 2023), Cambodia ranks 92nd out of 146 countries below Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Thailand and ranks 96th for Education Attainment, behind Vietnam and Thailand and stands in front of Lao PDR. Significant disparities persist in access to education, quality of learning, and learning outcomes. While progress exists, a slight gender gap persists in secondary education; the lower secondary enrolment rate is 65.5% (girls- 69.9%), and upper secondary is 46.7% (girls- 52.8%). This highlights an area requiring continued focus.

Laws and Regulatory Frameworks⁹

Cambodia has accepted UN treaties and implemented regulatory frameworks to promote social inclusion and protect women and marginalised, but gaps exist in national implementation. This concentration of responsibility reduces capacity for technical assistance and capacity building at the sub-national level. Local authorities lack knowledge and awareness of gender and inclusive development concepts, and few gender-related projects are funded by the government. Gender empowerment is seldom included in local authorities' development plans, and responsibility is not transferred from the ministry to local leaders, leaving a gap partially filled by NGOs. Despite some communes having women and children committees, there is a lack of action and commitment, including no budget or human resources for large-scale implementation.

⁸ GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2020, WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, (WEF 2023)

⁹ 2022-2023 ANNUAL CONGRESS REPORT, MOEYS, APRIL 2024

Negative Gender Stereotypes in Education and Employment

In Cambodia, STEM students are increasing; 25.6% to 31.21% (girls 13.8%), but traditional gender roles discourage girls from studying these subjects.¹¹ The ADB reports a significant underrepresentation of females in STEM fields in Cambodia's workforce. Despite progress in gender equality, gaps persist in education completion, health outcomes, employment, and leadership. Discrimination and gender norms hinder women's full participation in society. Women can face discrimination in hiring and compensation, and face additional barriers entering into certain male-dominated sectors.¹² UNESCO data shows that women make up only 35% of tertiary science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) graduates globally and hold less than 25% of science, engineering, information, and communication technologies jobs. Infrastructure limitations, social norms, and limited access to dormitories further restrict educational opportunities for female students.

Inadequate preparation in STEM subjects, foreign languages, and technology can disadvantage students, especially in higher education. Cultural norms and beliefs significantly influence gender equality and inclusive development. Female enrolment rates have increased, but still short of targets in remote areas and higher education. Parents' awareness and limited perception of the benefits of girls' education are key factor. School protection and safety are still limited for female students, and in remote areas have schools far from home, making it difficult for girls to travel. Family and society also influence women's skills and jobs choices, resulting in a low number of women with the required skills in the job market.¹³

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

Cambodia's legal system is neutral for LGBT people, same-sex activities are not criminal offences. However, there are no protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Access to formal education is crucial for human development and quality of life. But 15.4% of lower secondary and 13.7% of upper secondary school students dropped out in the 2022-2023 school year, possibly due to economic hardship, name-calling, and bullying.¹⁴ For higher education levels, 20% of gay males and 17% of lesbian respondents reached university, while only 6% of transgender females reached higher education level. Inflexible uniform regulations led to bullying and teasing, limiting access to job opportunities and skills.¹⁵

Children with Disabilities

The RGC has committed to the rights of persons with disabilities through the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012, the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities law, and the National Disability Strategic Plan 2019–2023. However, challenges remain in implementing, including limited financial resources. Persons with disabilities are historically marginalised and vulnerable, facing unique barriers in accessing health, education, information, social services, and discrimination. Low-income families struggle to meet the cost of disability-related support or services leading to abandoning or placing them in institutional care.¹⁶ Women with disabilities have a stronger need for investment in community facilities and have experienced more discrimination than men with disabilities. They are not supported to full inclusion and effective participation in society and are unaware of social protection laws.¹⁷

¹⁰ GENDER & INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS, USAID CAMBODIA, 2020

¹¹ 2022-2023 ANNUAL CONGRESS REPORT, MOEYS, APRIL 2024

¹² ADB'S WORK IN GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

¹³ GENDER MAINSTREAMING STRATEGIC PLAN IN EDUCATION SECTOR 2021-2022

¹⁴ 2022-2023 ANNUAL CONGRESS REPORT, MOEYS, APRIL 2024

¹⁵ UNDP, USAID (2014). BEING LGBT IN ASIA: CAMBODIA COUNTRY REPORT

¹⁶ PRESS RELEASE, UNITED NATIONS URGES TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS AND BUILD INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES FOR, WITH AND BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CAMBODIA OPENED BY THE OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF IN CAMBODIA, 08 DECEMBER 2023

¹⁷ GENDER & INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS, USAID CAMBODIA, 2020



V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Laws and Regulatory Frameworks

- Independent monitoring bodies should be established or empower existing ones to oversee the progress and hold accountability. It would look over complaints and recommend improvements.
- Public awareness campaigns can further these efforts by educating the population through partnerships with media outlets for educational programming and by integrating gender and inclusion themes into school curriculums at all levels

Urban-Rural Divide, Geography, and Socio-Economic Status (SES)

- The MOEYS should conduct school needs assessment in rural areas to identify infrastructure, learning/teaching materials, and technology gaps. The MOEYS may allocate research grants to universities or NGOs specialising in education research to conduct comprehensive training needs assessments amongst in-service teachers across different geographic zones. The MOEYS can develop implementation interventions for disadvantaged zones or pilot programs.
- The monitoring and evaluation need to be conducted regularly to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and adjust them as needed based on data and feedback. The data collection on student achievement disaggregated by SES background to track progress needs to be conducted to find the achievement gap and identify areas requiring further intervention.

Teacher Training and Quality on Gender

- The Teacher Education Program in Cambodia needs to be reformed to ensure long-term success. This includes implementing 21st-century teaching methods, fostering passion among pre-service teachers, and updating content knowledge. Comprehensive Gender-Responsive and Inclusion Pedagogy should be included in the curriculum.
- The MOEYS should enhance teacher quality in rural schools by strengthening the existing teachers' training programs. A yearly training plan should be established and approved by Department of Education, followed by refresher training at TECs or RTTC during school holidays with necessary budget ensured.
- The MOEYS should promote the career pathway platform for teachers and principals to become good teachers and school principals. Existing resources, such as lesson plans and teaching materials that promote GRP principles should be widely accessible online for teachers, educators, NGOs and experts for convenience to find and utilise.

Gender disparities in learning by school type and age

- The RGC, MOEYS, should increase budget allocation to improve the public schools, bridging the public-private divide and enhancing infrastructures, resources, and teacher's capacity to narrow the achievement gap between Cambodia's private and state schools.
- MOEYS should enhance its strategy to reduce late enrolment and repetition students by raising community awareness about early childhood education and school enrolment age. At the school level, schools should identify and address factors causing late enrolment and collaborate with local authorities to help over-aged students to enrol and catch up.

Gender Stereotypes in Education and Employment

- MOEYS should introduce STEM subjects to girls at appropriate age through showcasing the relevance and potential career opportunities. The scholarship, financial support, and promote equal opportunities for girls and adult females in STEM education and career should be implemented.
- Launch campaigns to promote awareness of the importance of girls in STEM subjects by partnership with multi-media organisations to develop the educational material and resources development shall prioritise girls to become women as successful role models in STEM careers. Teachers and parents at the local level should receive the training to deal with unconscious gender bias and encourage their support for female students and their children in STEM.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)

- Schools should promote inclusive spaces and anti-bullying policies to address discrimination on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). School uniforms should be reviewed to ensure inclusivity for student's gender expression and training to promote understanding and acceptance should be provided to teachers, parents, and community leaders. Regular data collection on LGBTQ students' experiences is crucial to inform policymakers.

Persons with Disabilities

- The MoEYS should prioritise creating an inclusive education and lifelong learning system that meets the needs of learners with disabilities by providing access to learning material, assistive technology, and qualify teacher, adapting school infrastructure to ensure accessibility, implement teacher training program on inclusive education practice and collaborating with families and communities to support learners with disabilities. The budget allocation should be targeted to improve infrastructure accessibility, transportation, sanitation, and comprehensive community care services.

Education Financing

- The MOEYS absorbed a 3.38 percent share of GDP in 2020 before losing its traction at 2.62% in 2022-Caused by the intensified impact of Covid19 pandemic. According the budget plan of MOEYS in 2024, the projection budget is 2.67% of GDP. If the country is to achieve the SDG for Education, a benchmark public education expenditure of 4% of GDP should be the aim.¹⁸ So, the RGC should increase the education budget up to 20% of the public expenditure.

18 EDUCATION BUDGET BRIEF 2022, UNICEF

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The NGO Education Partnership (NEP) is a membership organisation that fosters a strong civil society network. NEP has more than 72 members and promotes active collaboration between NGOs working in education and work to represent their views and voices to government and development partners to achieve our vision of equal and timely access to the high quality of education for all Cambodian people. Its mandate is to provide coordination and capacity development on sub-national and local levels and representation for its members on national platforms. NEP is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).



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