



INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION CAMBODIA



Independent
Evaluation
Office

United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION CAMBODIA

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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: Cambodia

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IEO TEAM

Directorate: Oscar A. Garcia (Director) and Alan Fox (Deputy Director)

Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) section chief: Fumika Ouchi

Lead Evaluator: Harvey John Garcia

Evaluation consultants: Ernesto Bautista, Sokhem Pech, Francis Perez, Nimol Vamoeurn

Research associate: Claudia Villanueva

External reviewer: Dorothy Lucks and Shiva Kumar

Publishing and outreach: Flora Jimenez

Administrative support: Flora Jimenez, Chanthly Leang

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UNDP Cambodia staff: Alissar Chaker (Resident Representative), Sonali Dayatne (Deputy Resident Representative), Ratana Norng (Head of Result Based Management and ICPE focal point), and all the UNDP Cambodia staff who engaged in the ICPE process.

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the second Independent Country Programme Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Cambodia. This evaluation was carried out by the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP and covers the 2019–2023 programming period.

As the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) pursues its goal to reach a high middle-income status by 2030, it is faced with unique development challenges, such as meeting the opportunities presented by Industry 4.0, meeting goals set in its National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023, and fulfilling its commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

This evaluation underscores UNDP’s agility, flexibility, and comparative advantage as a trusted partner of the RGC, as evidenced by the \$21 million government cost-sharing that the agency was able to mobilize for a successful COVID-19 response. UNDP was also able to advocate for renewable energy and low-emission technologies, and to develop models of linking private sectors to underserved communities. Through UNDP support, the RGC is one of the 12 countries – and the first South-East Asian country – that submitted its *Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality by 2050*, an indication of its commitment to tackling climate change.

UNDP contributed to the strengthening of the government’s social protection programme and, importantly, improving disability rights. Results were underpinned by operationalizing a whole-of-government and human rights-based approach, creating synergies with subnational implementation and national-level policy work, and assisting in digitalizing the IDPoor.

The evaluation acknowledged the political and human rights concerns in Cambodia, including the shrinking of democratic space, which is expected to play an important role in shaping the country’s overall development path. The evaluation found that UNDP has contributed to creating and widening democratic spaces, though it was absent in politically sensitive issues such as land rights.

In developing the next country programme, UNDP will continue to build on its results in the areas of economic empowerment and environmental sustainability, and will ensure that governance work is integrated across its programme. UNDP will also capitalize on and mainstream its experience in using the whole-of-government approach in its disability programme. Moving forward, we will work to diversify partnerships to further mainstream gender equality and women empowerment, consolidate resources through an area-based approach, tackle politically sensitive issues within our mandate, and continue widening the platforms for civic engagement.

I would like to thank the Royal Government of Cambodia, national stakeholders, and colleagues from the UNDP Cambodia country office and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific for their support throughout this evaluation. I am confident that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations contained herein will strengthen the formulation of the next country programme strategy, with the aim of achieving a more inclusive and sustainable development pathway that responds to the aspirations of all the people of Cambodia.



Oscar A. Garcia
Director
Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| AIDS | Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| BESD | Building an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Development |
| CCCCA | Cambodia Climate Change Alliance |
| CDPO | Cambodia Disability People’s Organization |
| CGCC | Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia |
| CO | Country office |
| CP | Country programme |
| CPD | Country programme document |
| CSDGs | Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals |
| CSOs | Civil society organizations |
| CTIS | Cambodia Trade Integration Strategy |
| D&D | Decentralization and De-concentration |
| ELCs | Economic land concessions |
| ERW | Explosive remnants of war |
| FGDs | Focus group discussions |
| GCF | Green Climate Fund |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| GEF | Global Environment Fund |
| GEWE | Gender equality and women empowerment |
| GIS | Geographical Information System |
| HIV | Human immunodeficiency virus |
| ICPE | Independent Country Programme Evaluation |
| IEO | Independent Evaluation Office |
| IFIs | International financial institutions |
| LDC | Least Developed Country |
| LGBTQI | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex |

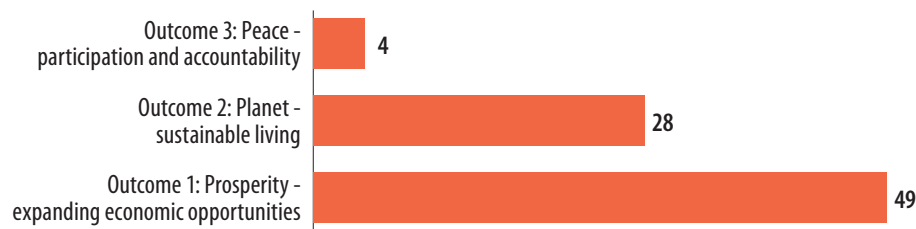
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| LTS4CN | Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality |
| MEF | Ministry of Economy and Finance |
| MoE | Ministry of Environment |
| MME | Ministry of Mines and Energy |
| MoSAVY | Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation |
| MoWA | Ministry of Women’s Affairs |
| M&E | Monitoring and evaluation |
| MSME | Micro, small, and medium enterprise |
| NCSD | National Council for Sustainable Development |
| NDC | Nationally Determined Contribution |
| NDSP | National Disability Strategic Plan |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| NRM | Natural resources management |
| NSDP | National Strategic Development Plan |
| ODA | Official development assistance |
| OPD | Organizations of People with Disability |
| PES | Payment for Environment Services |
| PDAC | Provincial Disability Action Council |
| REDD+ | Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation |
| RGC | Royal Government of Cambodia |
| ROAR | Results-Oriented Analysis Report |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SME | Small and medium enterprise |
| SPG | Small Grant Programme |
| SWM | Solid waste management |
| UNCT | United Nations Country Team |
| UNDAF | United Nations Development Assistance Framework |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |

As per the United Nations categorization, Cambodia is classified as a Least Developed Country, though it met its graduation criteria in 2021. While the country's economy is transitioning from an agricultural base to an industrial base, the largest sector contributing to Cambodia's GDP is the Service Sector, of which the major contributors are trade, transport/communications, and taxes.

One of the greatest forest covers in South-East Asia is found in Cambodia. Land distribution is highly unequal, and it has caused rampant conflicts among large-scale investors, small landholders, and local communities. During the last decade notable progress was achieved in reforming the country's public administration and public financial management, and in setting in place the policy and implementation framework for decentralization and deconcentration reforms.

Total UNDP expenditure within the scope of this evaluation was \$98.5 million. UNDP's Country Programme Document (CPD) 2019–2023 has focused on three main areas of intervention: Prosperity: expanding economic opportunities (Outcome 1); Planet: sustainable living (Outcome 2); and Peace: participation and accountability (Outcome 3).

Programme expenditure by outcome, 2019-2023 (US\$ million)



Findings and conclusions

UNDP achieved its output-level goals that contributed to Outcome 1 (Prosperity: expanding economic opportunities). The agency strengthened social protection in the country by developing strategic research to inform policies and by advocating for the inclusion of marginalized groups, consistent with the agency's *leave no one behind* principle. UNDP also supported the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) COVID-19 response by conducting socio-economic analysis, providing technical advice to economic policies and communications strategies, mobilizing and repurposing resources to complement social protection schemes, and supporting the implementation of policy changes and innovations. In terms of mine action, UNDP delivered on its mine-clearing targets, though the link to economic empowerment could have been improved. Regarding entrepreneurship and youth, UNDP assisted in the development of platforms and research on entrepreneurship; and it promoted the diversification of job opportunities, meeting the needs of the private sector for micro-, small-, and medium-enterprise growth.

Through its Outcome 2 portfolio (Planet: sustainable living), UNDP contributed to laying the groundwork for the adoption of electric vehicles. The agency was also able to leverage funds from donors and to stimulate private sector investments through de-risking energy investments and facilitating private sector/government cooperation for the delivery of social services. It further assisted the RGC in submitting its *Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality by 2050*, the first in South-East Asia. However, some policies and declarations it supported have stalled, mainly due to the lack of strong political support.

In its Outcome 3 (Peace: participation and accountability), UNDP contributed to advancing the rights of those with disabilities and the key principle of *leave no one behind*. Progress was made by operationalizing a whole-of-government and human rights-based approach, working at the subnational level linked to national-level dialogue to influence policies, strengthening institutional arrangements, capitalizing on partnerships, and building coherence across the country programme outcomes, outputs, and projects.

One area that needs strengthening is gender mainstreaming. UNDP consolidated gender programming with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, but had only limited engagement in working on gender empowerment with several ministries at the subnational level.

During the current CPD cycle, the country office was also able to build external coherence with a broad set of development partners in Cambodia through dovetailing on the results of these partners (and vice versa), joint programming, and knowledge sharing. In terms of resource mobilization, UNDP was very successful in mobilizing cost-sharing funds from the government to address the COVID-19 pandemic, about \$ 21.4 million, the largest among its ASEAN neighbours.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. UNDP should continue working on the areas of economic empowerment and environmental sustainability, building on the results it has delivered to date. It should underpin its future country programme by: (1) strengthening internal coherence across its programme, (2) planning for broader adoption at the project onset, (3) expanding and strengthening external coherence and partnerships to deliver concerted development results, and (4) advocating for politically-sensitive issues within its mandate and duty as a United Nations entity.

Recommendation 2. UNDP needs to rethink its current approach to its governance programming, not necessarily having a standalone outcome, but having a country programme with a systems approach of embedding governance across all thematic areas – one that integrates a rights-based approach and political economy analyses.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should build on the results of its disability inclusion initiatives with stronger and more explicit linkage with programming aimed at expanding social protection, poverty reduction, and strengthening access to social, economic, and legal aid services for persons with disabilities. To deliver this, UNDP should continue to expand its project portfolio, form strategic partnerships, and continue working to pilot new ideas and test policies at the subnational level, while informing national policies and decision-making processes with lessons learned from the field implementation.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should reinvigorate its strategy and programme in supporting gender equality and women empowerment by exploring and broadening its partnership and collaborations to leverage and support initiatives from other development partners that have an established track record in advancing gender equality. By using its comparative advantage of being a trusted facilitator, UNDP could help expand the alliances of its partners working on gender (e.g., UN Women, Ministry of Women's Affairs, SHE-investments, etc.). In addition to fully mainstreaming gender across its whole portfolio, if possible, UNDP should have gender as one of its country programme outcomes.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should consolidate its resources by implementing its programme through an area-based approach, which it has recently adopted, concentrating in provinces or regions with a clear rationale for UNDP interventions and where it can create additionality. It should also underpin its programming with a whole-of-government approach, especially at the subnational level, where it can also create civic spaces that support more inclusive governance.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



This chapter presents the purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation as well as the methodology applied. It lays out the development context of Cambodia before introducing the UNDP country programme.

1.1 Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results. ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.¹

This is the second independent country-level evaluation conducted by UNDP in Cambodia, after the Assessment of Development Results carried out by the IEO in 2010. This ICPE covers all programme activities from 2019 up to August 2022, under the UNDP Cambodia country programme 2019–2023.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process. Following the development of the terms of reference, the IEO recruited two international and two national consultants to support the assessment. During the initial phase a stakeholder analysis was conducted to identify all relevant stakeholders, including those that may not have worked with UNDP but had played a key role in the outcomes to which UNDP has contributed.

The effectiveness of the UNDP country programme was analysed through an assessment of progress made towards the achievement of expected outputs, and the extent to which these outputs contributed to the intended country programme document (CPD) outcomes. To better understand UNDP's performance and the sustainability of results in the country, the ICPE examined the specific factors that have influenced – both positively or negatively – the country programme. UNDP's capacity to adapt to the changing context and respond to national development needs and priorities was considered.

The evaluation methodology adhered to United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.² In line with UNDP's gender mainstreaming strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming across the country programme and operations. Gender-disaggregated data were collected, where available, and assessed against programme outcomes.

> BOX 1. Evaluation questions

1. What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
2. To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives?
3. To what extent has UNDP been able to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and support country's preparedness, response, and recovery process?
4. What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP performance and the sustainability of results?

¹ See <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml>.

² See website of the United Nations Evaluation Group, <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

The evaluation relied on information collected from different sources and then triangulated:

- A review of UNDP strategic and programme documents, project documents and monitoring reports, evaluations,³ research papers, and other available country-related publications, as well as the IEO datamart. The main documents consulted by the evaluation team are listed in Annex 4, available online.
- An analysis of the programme portfolio and outcome and output indicator matrix in Annex 3 and 5 (online).
- In-person and phone interviews with 139 stakeholders, including UNDP personnel, government representatives, UN country team representatives, development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, and beneficiaries. The interviews were used to collect data and assess stakeholders' perceptions of the scope and effectiveness of programme interventions, determine factors affecting performance, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the UNDP programme.
- Field visits to the provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, and Siem Reap were undertaken to assess the results of selected initiatives and to conduct semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries. The criteria used in choosing the field visits were the diversity and maturity of projects, and the distance and availability of stakeholders.
- Geographical Information System (GIS) analysis was employed to complement the data collection. The analyses included all projects with subnational implementation, which were overlaid against the Cambodian provinces, demographic data, themes, and specific common elements across the portfolio (e.g., climate change vulnerability; poverty data from IDPoor, Cambodia's official poverty targeting and identification mechanism; projects with gender activities; etc.). The 'priority' of the themes based on a project's estimated or actual expenditure on a province was calculated.

The evaluation used the IEO country programme performance rating system.⁴ The draft ICPE report was quality-assured by IEO's internal peer review mechanism and two external reviewers, then submitted to the country office and Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific for flagging of factual errors and comments, and finally shared with the government and other national partners.

Evaluation limitations

The evaluation had a limited number of days available for field visits due to the need to secure high-level interviews in the capital, Phnom Penh. The significant travel distance between the project locations also limited the number of projects the evaluation team could visit. In addition, the evaluation's main data collection phase was preceded by the local elections, affecting the availability of some stakeholders for face-to-face or virtual interviews. Another limitation was the availability of data, with some projects lacking documentation and others in the early phase of implementation. Hence, results were not yet visible.

The evaluation mitigated these limitations by prioritizing field activities in close coordination with the country office, ensuring that the team select locations (provinces) that cover multiple outcome areas and diverse stakeholders. To be able to cover as many projects as possible in each outcome, the team focused on central and western Cambodia, where its field visits were concentrated. For projects and field sites that were not visited, the team conducted – to the extent possible – virtual interviews of stakeholders, implementers, and beneficiaries. In cases where face-to-face or virtual interviews were not possible,

³ Sixteen decentralized evaluations were conducted in the period under consideration.

⁴ See <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/ratingsystem.shtml>.

the team was encouraged to send the interviewees questions via email. To mitigate data gaps, the evaluation expanded the scope of secondary data collection, including the use of GIS, databases from the government (e.g., IDPoor database), and reports available from development partners, and it conducted some bench-marking. For projects that are still in their initial stage, the team conducted additional interviews with their stakeholders, other development partners with similar programming as comparators, and elements related to preparations for implementation.

1.3 Country context

Demographics, poverty, economic sector, and youth

As of 2021, Cambodia has an estimate population of 16.9 million (24.5 per cent in urban areas and 75.5 per cent in rural areas), with 51 per cent female and 49 per cent male. It has a youthful population, with 69 per cent under the age of 34. Between 2001 and 2021, Cambodia's Human Development Index rose from 0.441 to 0.593 (146 out of 190 countries), placing it in the medium human development category.⁵ It placed 9th among the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁶ Estimates in 2019–2020 showed that 18 per cent of the population is considered poor and below the poverty line of \$2.70 per day.⁷

Cambodia is classified by the World Bank as a lower middle-income⁸ country (since 2015) and plans to reach high middle-income status by 2030. As per the United Nations, Cambodia is still classified as a Least Developed Country, though it has met its graduation criteria in 2021.⁹ Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has doubled from \$785 in 2010 to \$1,543 in 2020.¹⁰ As a measure of inequality, the GINI coefficient of Cambodia has decreased from 0.67 in 2010 to as low as 0.58 in 2020.¹¹ The economy of Cambodia is transitioning from an agricultural base to an industrial base as seen in the pattern of its GDP. The agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sectors contributed 33.6 per cent to the GDP in 2012 and decreased to 20.7 per cent in 2019. The subsector of crops, livestock, fisheries, and forestry increased in annual production, but has been outpaced by production in the industry sector. The industry sector has consistently increased from contributing 22.9 per cent of GDP in 2012 to 34.2 per cent in 2019, with the biggest subsector growth in manufacturing, textile, wearing apparel, and footwear. The largest sector contributing to Cambodia's GDP is the service sector, which accounts for an average of 38.1 per cent from 2012 to 2019, of which the largest contributors are trade, transport and communications, and taxes.¹²

⁵ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2020*, Briefing Note.

⁶ See <https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>.

⁷ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview>.

⁸ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview>; <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/378834-how-does-the-world-bank-classify-countries>.

⁹ "Next step: The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) will assess Cambodia again in 2024. If it meets the criteria again, Cambodia could be recommended for graduation and could graduate as early as 2027," <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category-cambodia.html>.

¹⁰ World Development Indicators Databank.

¹¹ GINI coefficient of 0 is perfect equality, while 1 is perfect inequality; World Inequality Database, <https://wid.world/country/cambodia/>.

¹² Values reported here are directly lifted from the *Statistical Yearbook of Cambodia 2021*, Ministry of Planning (December 2021), p.164, and the total per sector does not add to 100 per cent of GDP; <https://www.nis.gov.kh/nis/yearbooks/StatisticalYearbookofCambodia2021.pdf>.

The 2019 Global Competitiveness Index ranked Cambodia at 106 out of 141 countries, while its neighbours Thailand ranked 40 and Viet Nam at 67.¹³ A large proportion of the population is involved in the informal sector, and most are engaged in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which make up 73 per cent of employment in non-agricultural establishments in Cambodia.¹⁴ In 2019, MSMEs were reliant on microfinance institutions credit for capital, which reached a national total of \$10 billion that year. About 49 per cent of MSMEs (61 per cent women-owned) were dependent on microfinance institutions. In the same year, the median loan debt was at \$3,370 per household, the highest average for small loans globally. Economic observers considered this a full-blown debt crisis, prompting the RGC to impose an 18 per cent cap on interest rates.¹⁵ Also in 2019, the RGC established the Khmer Enterprise, an implementing unit of the Entrepreneurship Development Fund under the Ministry of Economy and Finance, to mobilize resources to build vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem by providing financial and non-financial support to start-ups, MSMEs, and enterprise supporting organizations.¹⁶ The following year the RGC incorporated the Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia, which aims to improve financial inclusion and promote the growth of SMEs by providing guarantees to lenders and sharing the risk burden.

According to Labour Force Survey 2012, 2.39 million Cambodians were employed in agriculture, 0.5 million in formal employment, and 4.3 million in informal employment. About 9 out of 10 positions in non-agricultural employment are informal. Based on the Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey, in 2019–2020 the Cambodia labour force was estimated at 8.8 million people aged 15–64. Cambodia has one of the highest *labour participation rates*¹⁷ in the world, estimated at 87.4 per cent for men and 84 per cent for women. Every year some 130,000 young people join the country’s labour market. *Labour participation rates* among the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups¹⁸ are relatively lower compared to the 25–34 and 35–44 age groups.¹⁹ The labour participation for the 15–19 age group is alarming, considering that this is the age for secondary and college education. A large proportion of the workers are in low-paying and low-value-added segments of the economy, and are employed in the informal sector and in MSMEs, which means they are exposed not only to the shocks such as the one brought on by the pandemic but also to the microfinance debt crisis besetting the sector as well as other volatilities in the market.²⁰

Climate change, energy, and forestry

In 2013, Cambodia launched its first *Climate Change Strategic Plan 2014–2023*, which sets its strategic objectives and targets for climate-smart development. In 2016 the government submitted its first *Nationally Determined Contribution*²¹ and updated it in 2020. In the following year, the RGC submitted its *National Strategy for Carbon Neutrality 2050* to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Cambodia is one of only two Least Developed Countries globally, and the only country among ASEAN, that submitted the strategy with a clear target for carbon neutrality by 2050. A series of national and

¹³ The Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 2019 Rankings, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf.

¹⁴ See <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/176283/cambodia-addressing-skills-gap.pdf>.

¹⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/kh/2022-08-26/SR-Cambodia-End-of-Mission-Statement.pdf>; PYMNTS, “What Cambodia’s Debt Crisis Means for Microlending” (13 August 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/14/world-bank-investigate-cambodias-micro-loans>; https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/228Report_Collateral_Damage_LICADHO_STT_Eng_07082019.pdf.

¹⁶ Khmer Enterprise, Program (khmerenterprise.info).

¹⁷ International Labour Organization, “Labour force participation rate is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active: all people who supply labour for the production of goods and services during a specified period,” ILOSTAT database.

¹⁸ 61 per cent male and 56 per cent female, 90.2 male and 87.5 female, respectively.

¹⁹ 98 per cent male and 92.1 per cent female, 98.8 male and 92.4 female, respectively.

²⁰ UNDP Cambodia, Report of Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2019–2020, “Counting the Cost of COVID-19 to Cambodia’s Informal Workers” (July 2021), <https://www.undp.org/cambodia/blog/counting-cost-covid-19-cambodia%E2%80%99s-informal-workers>.

²¹ See <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>.

sectoral strategies and action plans related to climate change have been adopted, such as the *Cambodia National Adaptation Programme 2006*, *Strategic National Action Plan for disaster risk reduction 2010–2020*, and 15 sector-level Climate Change Strategic Plans.²² The 2021 World Risk Index ranked Cambodia 15 out of 181 countries and as one of the countries in Asia with the highest risk from natural disasters and climate change. It measured ‘very high’ in the metrics of exposure and lacking coping capacities and ‘high’ in the metrics of vulnerability, susceptibility, and lack of adaptive capacities.²³

Cambodia has more expensive electricity and a lower electrification rate than its ASEAN neighbours (with a range of 10–18 USD cents per kWh, while Thailand, Malaysia, and Viet Nam range around 6–14 USD cents per kWh). Its energy sources rely heavily on diesel, coal, and hydropower. Cambodia’s electrification rate (84.1 per cent of households) remains the second lowest in South-East Asia, after Myanmar (51.6 per cent).²⁴ *The Cambodia Basic Energy Plan 2019*²⁵ underlined its aspiration to move away from fossil fuels, with a goal of 61 per cent hydropower and 28 per cent coal by 2030. Solar and wind would make up for about 5 per cent, and biomass about 6 per cent. Renewable energy sources, especially solar, are considered by many development partners as the key to a sustainable and clean energy source for Cambodia. The country has a high average radiation, 8100 MW of technical potential, and eight hours of sunlight per day.²⁶ In 2016 there was not a single solar plant in Cambodia, but by 2021 seven solar power plants were connected to the national grid; and by 2022 it had installed 436.8 MW of solar power, equalling 12.61 per cent of installed capacity of national power generation.²⁷

One of the largest forest covers in South-East Asia is found in Cambodia. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates the forest cover – including evergreen, deciduous rubber, and oil palm plantation – at 18.1 million hectares.²⁸ According to the Cambodian Government’s Second Forest Reference Level Modified Submission (Feb. 2022) the forest cover was estimated at 8.2 million hectares in 2018. The Global Forest Watch estimates that from 2000 to 2020, Cambodia had 6.20 million hectares considered as stable forest, and that it has lost 32 per cent of its humid primary forest from 2002 to 2021 – around 1.34 million hectares. This is one of the highest lost rates in the region.²⁹ About 15 per cent or 2.7 million hectares of Cambodia’s territory has been declared as protected areas. In addition, it has made progress in the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets it has adopted.³⁰ Cambodia is a signatory to about 286 environmental conventions and amendments. While the country had achieved most of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, it did not meet its target to maintain the forest cover

²² Ministry of Education (updated NDC 2020). Relevant NDC measures: Its coverage has increased to include climate change mitigation targets in the agricultural and waste sectors, and also with more detailed actions in key subsectors, such as energy efficiency, and a stronger set of adaptation actions; it sets an ambitious target in the Forestry and Land Use sector by halving the deforestation rate by 2030 in line with REDD+ strategy; it pays particular attention to gender and vulnerable groups to ensure its adaptation and mitigation actions contribute to a more inclusive society; it develops a framework for measurement, reporting, and verification.

²³ World Bank and Asian Development Bank, *Climate risk country profile* (2021), https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/15849-WB_Cambodia%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf; World Risk Report (2021), <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-world-risk-report.pdf>.

²⁴ See https://eac.gov.kh/uploads/salient_feature/english/salient_feature_2022_en.pdf; The 7th ASEAN energy Outlook 2020–2050, pp. 40–41; <https://www.phnompenhrealstate.net/a-guide-to-solar-energy-in-cambodia-for-2022/>.

²⁵ Developed jointly by the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia.

²⁶ See <https://investincambodia-eu.org/energy-2>.

²⁷ See <https://www.phnompenhrealstate.net/a-guide-to-solar-energy-in-cambodia-for-2022/>. Meanwhile, the country’s Rural Electrification Fund, supported by the World Bank, provided solar home systems to more than 60,000 rural households between 2013 and 2017.

²⁸ 2016 estimates at <https://www.fao.org/3/ca9986en/ca9986en.pdf>.

²⁹ See <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/>.

³⁰ As per its 6th national report to the Convention on Biodiversity in 2019, https://asean.chm-cbd.net/sites/acb/files/2020-04/6NR_KHM.pdf.

at 60 per cent of the total land area.³¹ Land distribution is highly unequal in Cambodia, and it has caused rampant conflicts between large-scale investors on the one hand and smallholders and local communities on the other.³²

A substantial part of Cambodia's growth has been fuelled by economic land concessions (ELCs), a long-term lease offered by the government for private investors to use up to 10,000 hectares over a maximum of 99 years for agriculture and agro-industrial production.³³ While ELCs are also limited by law to be granted only over degraded forests, there have been cases in which concession holders were able either to secure ELC over a forested area, next to one, or even within protected areas, and have managed to clear them or cut timber there for commercial purposes. Some ELCs resulted in displacing indigenous peoples away from their traditional or ancestral lands.³⁴ As of 2017 the government had granted 1.8 million hectares to agro-industrial concessions and 0.8 million hectares to mining concessions to both domestic and foreign investors. According to the Second Land Allocation for Social and Economic Development Project (World Bank 2019), more than 10 per cent of Cambodian rural households are landless, and a large share cultivates less than 0.5 hectares, which provides for less than half of the basic nutritional needs for a typical rural family.³⁵

Governance, gender, and disability

The country's favourable economic performance and progress in human development are complemented by significant accomplishments in key governance reforms, especially those aimed at improving the performance of the *machinery of government*. During the last decade notable progress was made in reforming the country's public administration and public financial management, and in putting in place the policy and implementation framework for the decentralization and de-concentration (D&D) reforms.³⁶ D&D reforms have successfully established a legal framework for a system of subnational administration. Decentralization at the lowest levels, i.e., Commune and Sangkat, has been significant. While political decentralization³⁷ at the district and provincial levels has been limited, Commune and Sangkat now operates at a subnational administrative level with independent governance arrangements involving competitive multiparty elections. Similarly, the D&D reforms successfully assigned some key functions to subnational administrations. These include managing local infrastructure and addressing gaps in central government service delivery, including managing human, financial, and physical resources. At the district and municipal levels, many administrative services have been transferred through One-Window Service Offices.³⁸ The RGC's Public Financial Management Reform Programme has enabled the government to build a robust public financial management system at the central level and to make significant progress in reforming public expenditure policy and public finance.³⁹

³¹ RGC, "The Cambodian Government's Achievements and Future Direction in Sustainable Development: National Report for Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012).

³² NGO Forum on Cambodia, "A Study on Land Disputes in Four Provinces of Cambodia: Mapping, Impacts, and Possible Solutions, Land Security Project (2015), <http://ngoforum.org.kh/files/5308155d9421e8c8436b13d783eef490-Report--Study-on-Land-Disputes-in-Four-Provinces-of-Cambodia-Eng.pdf>. Chanrith Ngin and Andreas Neef, "Contested Land Restitution Processes in Cambodia," Development Studies, School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland (2021).

³³ NGO Forum on Cambodia, "Statistical Analysis of Economic Land Concession in Cambodia," June 2016.

³⁴ Subedi, S. P., "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia." Addendum: "A human rights analysis of economic and other land concessions in Cambodia," Human rights Council, UN General Assembly (10 October 2012).

³⁵ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2019/10/22/cambodia---providing-land-and-opportunity-for-landless-and-land-poor-families#:~:text=More%20than%2010%20percent%20are,seasonal%20food%20shortages%20each%20year>.

³⁶ For a comprehensive discussion, see World Bank, "Public Financial Management, Decentralization and Public Administration Reforms: Achievements, Coordination, Challenges and Next Steps" (Washington, D.C., 2018).

³⁷ Transfer of power to lower levels of government where citizens are able to elect their representatives (through election). In Cambodia, it is at the Commune and Sangkat level where there is substantial political decentralization.

³⁸ World Bank, "Cambodia's Cross-cutting Reforms: Public Financial Management, Decentralization and Public Administration Reforms: Achievement, Coordination, Challenges and Next Steps," p. 10 (2018).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Cambodia is a state party to eight out of nine core human rights treaties, including the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*.⁴⁰ Despite considerable efforts over the past 25 years to advance the situation of women in Cambodia, gender inequality issues remain a major and continuing challenge, creating barriers to women's equal participation in the cultural, economic, and political life of the country and hindering inclusive and sustainable development in Cambodia. Social norms and beliefs that restrict women's participation, and give less value and power than men, are still pervasive. Women's participation in the political and economic decision-making process at the national and household levels remains unequal and limited. Women comprise a disproportionately small number in decision-making roles in the country's legislative institution, public administration, and at the subnational level. As of 2021, women occupy 21.6 per cent of seats in the national parliament, while comprising 51.8 per cent of the labour force.⁴¹ In the RGC's civil service, it is estimated that women comprise approximately 42 per cent of the total public servants, while comprising only 26 per cent of those in leadership positions.⁴² In Cambodia's public administration, it is estimated that women in leadership positions (from the Director General level) in 2010 stood at just 10 per cent⁴³ and was roughly the same in 2021,⁴⁴ indicating the limited progress in advancing women in leadership positions.⁴⁵ In addition, in some industries, such as garment, a significant part of the workforce consists of women. Women are disadvantaged in terms of formal schooling, paid employment, and access to technology and services, among others. Restrictive gender norms are reflected in the vastly unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work, with women doing, on average, 90 per cent of household drudgery.⁴⁶ The RGC is in the process of reviewing a draft National Policy for Gender Equality.⁴⁷

There are groups, such as indigenous communities, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) persons who have not benefited equally from the rapid economic growth and improvement in human development.⁴⁸ In 2019 it was estimated that there were about 524,000 persons with disabilities in Cambodia, equivalent to 4.1 per cent of the population,⁴⁹ but some experts mention that this number is higher if the less-visible disabilities such as those of hearing, speech, mental, and other forms of disability are properly accounted. The unemployment rate is 29 per cent for persons with disabilities compared to 16 per cent among those without disabilities. It is higher among women with disabilities at 32 per cent and 23 per cent for men with disabilities.⁵⁰ The RGC has committed to advancing disability rights, as evidenced by the country's ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)*. It has developed an extensive policy framework and institutional mechanisms that have the potential to advance the rights of persons with disabilities. A draft Law on Disability has been developed that reflects the rights-based approach of the

⁴⁰ Cambodia is not yet a party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=29&Lang=EN. For an in-depth discussion of gender issues in Cambodia, see United Nations Cambodia, "Gender Equality Deep Dive for Cambodia: Common Country Analysis" (2021).

⁴¹ See UNDP data mart columns M and AH1.

⁴² Data on civil servants furnished by UNDP Cambodia on Cambodian Civil Service. 'Women in leadership positions' is defined as those occupying deputy head of office to general directorate (Interview 25).

⁴³ UNDP, "Gender Equality in Public Administration in Cambodia," p. 11 (July 2017), <https://www.undp.org/publications/country-case-studies-gender-equality-public-administration-gepa>.

⁴⁴ Based on data on Cambodian civil servants provided by UNDP Cambodia. The per cent refer to the Director General level only.

⁴⁵ See https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/KHM/UNDP_KH_The%20Gender%20Wage%20Gap%20in%20Cambodia.pdf.

⁴⁶ United Nations Cambodia, "Gender Equality Deep Dive for Cambodia," p. 5.

⁴⁷ Second draft, 2020 (unofficial translation).

⁴⁸ For an in-depth discussion of the gender issues and how the COVID19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate the existing gender inequality in the country, see United Nations in Cambodia, "Gender Equality Deep Dive for Cambodia"; and "Being LGBT in Asia: Cambodia Country Report," https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/asia_pacific_rbap/rbap-hhd-2014-blia-cambodia-country-report_0.pdf.

⁴⁹ National Disability Strategic Plan 2019–2023.

⁵⁰ The Disability Data Portal, Unemployment rate, by sex, age, and persons with disabilities (aged 15–24) 2022, <https://www.disabilitydataportal.com/explore-by-country/cambodia/8/8-5-2-a/>.

UNCRPD, and is expected to be adopted by the RGC in 2022.⁵¹ While progress has been made, significant challenges remain in effectively mainstreaming disability into broader policies and plans. It is estimated that since the end of the war with Viet Nam, up to 64,000 people have died and 40,000 have lost a limb due to landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW).

Anti-personnel land mines and ERW are found mostly in the border provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Oddar Meanchey, Pursat, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Koh Kong, and Pailin.⁵² People who have lost limbs due to landmine explosions are among those who face difficulty in securing livelihoods and gainful employment and are at risk of being left behind. Significant portions of land in these areas suitable for farming are still inaccessible. Its impact on safety and livelihoods are proving to be a barrier to rural development, so much so that the RGC added ridding the country of landmines and ERWs as one of its sustainable development goals (SDGs) – Cambodia SDG 18. Leading these efforts is the Cambodia Mine Action and Victims Assistance Authority with support from UNDP and bilateral donors such as Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Korea International Cooperation Agency, and New Zealand Agency for International Development.

LGBTQI and same-sex relationships are not criminalized in Cambodia, though there is still a great deal of stigma faced by the LGBTQI community. Same-sex marriage is not recognized in Cambodia Law, nor is discrimination against an LGBTQI person.⁵³ As of 2019, there were an estimated 277,000 indigenous peoples in Cambodia, with 45.5 per cent from the Bunong and Kouy communities. Among the many challenges they face, land grabbing, dislocation from their ancestral lands, and the lack of tenure over their communal lands are the most serious.⁵⁴ Earlier estimates point out that immigration in Cambodia is mostly internal, with as much as 35 per cent of the population having migrated. As of 2021, more than 1.3 million Cambodian migrant workers are working abroad, remitting more than \$3 billion. Thailand is the biggest host country with 1.22 million Cambodian migrant workers, followed by Korea with about 46,000 and Malaysia with 23,000.⁵⁵

Amid the continuing implementation of governance reforms, the significant deterioration of the country's political and human rights situation has been reported to have contributed to the narrowing of democratic space, especially in the last few years.⁵⁶ In the lead-up to the 2018 national elections and continuing to the present, the Cambodian Government implemented several legal and administrative orders that from external observers' view silenced the opposition and human rights advocates, including dissolving the main opposition party; intimidating and/or arresting members of the media and human rights advocates; and imposing administrative requirements on civil society organizations to hold meetings or forums, among others. Echoing this concern, the UN Cambodia 2021 Common Country Analysis observed that *"Civic and political space is shrinking, and the government uses restrictive administrative and legal measures to impose limitations and restrictions on lawful activities of civil society organizations and human rights defenders,*

⁵¹ There are still two provisions of the draft law on disability that according to OHCHR are not yet fully compliant with UNCRPD but are generally acceptable. These gaps include: (1) the need for inclusive education for persons with disabilities, rather than a separate educational system; and (2) provision on access to justice. These gaps result from internal differences and current understanding by RGC authorities as they struggle to view disability in a human rights lens (Interview 32).

⁵² Open Development Cambodia, "Landmines UXO and demining," <https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/topics/landmines-uxo-and-demining/>.

⁵³ See <https://cambodia.ohchr.org/en/issues/lgbt-rights-0>.

⁵⁴ Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization, "Statistics of Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia: Facts & Stats – Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization" (cipocambodia.org); CIPO and Friborg, K. G., "Indigenous peoples in Cambodia"; International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, "Indigenous World 2020: Cambodia" (11 May 2020).

⁵⁵ Crassard, S., "IOM Country Profile: Cambodia" (2009).

⁵⁶ A key issue that directly relates to the shrinking democratic space in Cambodia is the controversial Law on Associations and Non-governmental Organizations (LANGO). LANGO has been criticized by a broad spectrum of stakeholders as it contains various provisions that are viewed as infringing on the freedom of association and related rights. For an analysis of LANGO, see <https://cambodia.ohchr.org/> Microsoft Word - Final Draft OHCHR analysis of 5th LANGO - CLEAN VERSION 4.08.2015.doc.

*attempting to justify this as legitimate and/or necessary.” Reflecting this observation, the same report noted that “The UN Secretary-General, in his 2020 annual report on the roles and achievements of the Office of the United Nations Office of High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Cambodia, highlighted intimidation against civil society and human rights organizations, which impedes their capacity to monitor and report. Civic and political space is shrinking, and the government uses restrictive administrative and legal measures to impose limitations and restrictions on lawful activities of civil society organizations and human rights defenders, attempting to justify this as legitimate and/or necessary.”*⁵⁷

COVID-19

From January 2020 until March 2023 the World Health Organization reported 138,719 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Cambodia, with a death toll of 3,056. During the height of the pandemic in 2020, Cambodia’s economy contracted by more than 3 per cent, but it managed to bounce back in 2021 with 3.3 per cent growth (lowered to 1.9 per cent)⁵⁸ and was predicted to reach 5.3 per cent in 2022 against targets of 6.5 per cent for 2020 and 7.0 per cent for 2021 in the National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023.⁵⁹ Complementary studies⁶⁰ indicate that the country’s tourism and manufacturing sectors, especially the garment industry, were heavily affected by the implementation of various measures aimed at stemming the spread of COVID-19. Since women comprise a large proportion of the garment industry’s workforce, women have borne the brunt of the negative impact of the virus. In addition to the direct impact on income and employment, COVID-19 has long-term impacts on the learning outcomes and cognitive development of children and on nutrition and mental health that are still yet to be fully understood by medical experts. While the outlook for the country remains positive, economic growth may not reach the 7.1 per cent average the country managed to achieve in the last few years due to many factors, not least of which is the war in Europe and its ripple effects, which caused oil and food prices to rise, for which Cambodia is dependent on imports. In terms of governance, the UN Cambodia 2021 Common Country Analysis mentions that *“The Cambodian Government has arrested and used force against peaceful protesters, including those who have raised concerns regarding the government’s response to COVID-19.”*

⁵⁷ UN Cambodia, “Common Country Assessment,” p. 39 (2021).

⁵⁸ Xinhua Net. “ADB lowers Cambodia’s economic growth forecast to 1.9 pct for 2021 due to prolonged pandemic,” The Cambodia Daily (Sept. 2021), <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/business/adb-lowers-cambodias-economic-growth-forecast-to-1-9-pct-for-2021-due-to-prolonged-pandemic-174968/>.

⁵⁹ See [https://www.adb.org/news/adb-maintains-cambodia-growth-forecast-2022-revises-down-projection-2023#:~:text=PHNOM%20PENH%2C%20CAMBODIA%20\(21%20September,due%20to%20weaker%20global%20growth](https://www.adb.org/news/adb-maintains-cambodia-growth-forecast-2022-revises-down-projection-2023#:~:text=PHNOM%20PENH%2C%20CAMBODIA%20(21%20September,due%20to%20weaker%20global%20growth).

⁶⁰ UNICEF, et al., “COVID 19 Socio-economic assessment” (July 2021).

> BOX 2. Official development assistance (ODA) overview of Cambodia

The big ODA sources for Cambodia are Japan, China, Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, and South Korea, which along with other non-EU donors have disbursed a total of \$1.85 billion in 2020, and \$3.34 billion planned for 2021–2023. The United Nations and the United States disbursed \$57.5 million and \$96.4 million, respectively, in 2020, and have allocated \$187.7 million and \$180 million, respectively, for 2021–2023. As of 2020, Cambodia received the highest ODA for Transportation, at \$1.78 billion; followed by Agriculture with \$929 million; Budget and Balance of Payments support, \$638 million; Energy, Power, and Electricity, \$627 million; Water and Sanitation, \$603 million; Health, \$573 million; and Education, \$459 million. In addition to Transportation, most notable are the increases in allocation for Rural Development, Agriculture, and Social Protection in 2021–2023, reflecting the Multi-annual Investment Plan picture of the country. It is worth noting that the ODA picture shows that the priorities of Cambodia’s development partners remain in investment areas for their industries. China, for instance, had the biggest allocation of their ODA for Cambodia in Agriculture; in Energy, Power, and Electricity; and in Transportation. The EU ODA map is slightly different in that it prioritized Water and Sanitation, Agriculture, and Rural Development in 2020. The EU was also the biggest ODA contributor to Social Protection, with almost 80 per cent of the total. The ADB and Japan prioritized Budget and Balance of Payments support. The UN priorities were on Agriculture, \$75.7 million; Education, \$52.8 million; Community Development, \$24.6 million; Health, \$20.8 million; Rural Development, \$19.1 million; Governance, \$13.9 million; Climate Change, \$13.9 million; and Environment, \$10.95 million.

Source: EU Multi-annual Investment Plan 2021–2027.

1.4 UNDP country programme

UNDP has more than 50 years of cooperation in Cambodia. It started its programme from 1958 to 1975 and resumed collaboration in 1980. The UNDP office in Phnom Penh was established in 1994 and had a Standard Basic Assistance Agreement with the government. Its current Country Programme Document 2019–2023 was endorsed by the Council for Development of Cambodia on behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

The current UNDP country programme is derived from the following strategies:

- Cambodia’s Rectangular Strategy for growth, employment, equity, and efficiency: Building the foundation towards realizing the Cambodia Vision 2050 – Phase IV (2018–2023). This reiteration of the strategy will focus on the ‘People’ rectangular strategy, while continuing to support the three rectangular strategies in the last three versions, i.e., Road, Water, and Electricity.
- National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2019–2023. The NSDP is the operationalization of the rectangular Strategy IV, which identifies the mechanism for implementation and its results framework.
- UNDP Strategic Plan 2018–2021. Anchored in the 2030 Agenda, this strategy sets the goals and pathways in which UNDP will adapt to the needs of country members.

- United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)⁶¹ 2019–2023. This is a targeted framework agreed upon by the Government of Cambodia and UN agencies, facilitated by the UN Country Team, which elaborates how the UN system as a whole will assist the development goals of Cambodia. UNDP’s country programme outcomes are fully derived from this document.

The country programme is composed of three outcomes. **Outcome 1 (prosperity: expanding economic opportunities)** deals largely with economic empowerment, advancing entrepreneurship and MSMEs, and social protection. It also houses the UNDP’s COVID-19 response and its demining activities. The indicative target budget in 2019 was \$26 million. UNDP overshoot its target with \$57 million in mobilized funds and \$49 million in expenditures (see figure 1). **Outcome 2 (planet: sustainable living)** focuses on climate change initiatives, energy, forestry, natural resources management, tenurial rights, and waste management. Its indicative target budget was \$47 million, while its current mobilized budget is \$36 million, and the expenditure is at \$28. The focus of **Outcome 3 (peace: participation and accountability)** is mainly on governance, gender, and disability. Its target budget at the start of the CPD was \$11 million. The programme was able to mobilize only \$5 million, and the current expenditure is at \$4.3 million. The delivery rate fell in 2020 due to restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, but since then it has been gradually climbing.

FIGURE 1. Programme budget and expenditures (US\$ million)

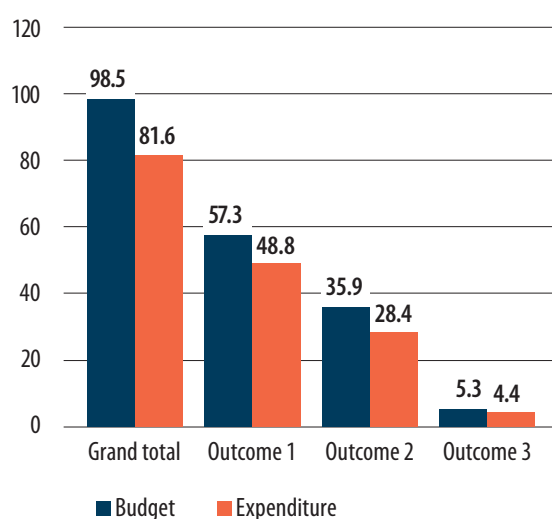
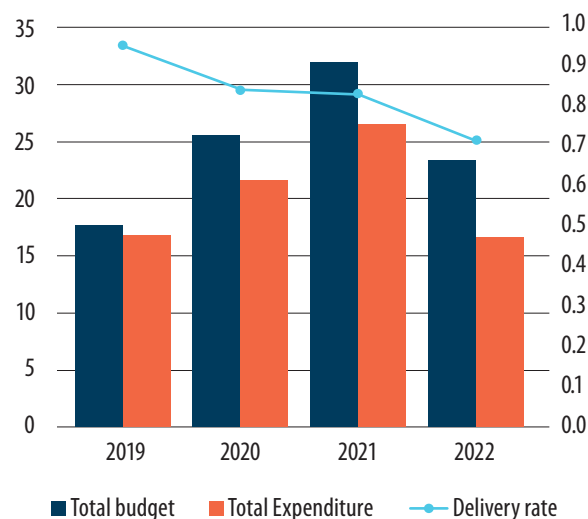


FIGURE 2. Evolution of programme budget and expenditure, 2019-2022 (US\$ million)



Source: Atlas (as of 28 January 2023).

⁶¹ The United Nations Development Assistance Framework has been renamed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in future reiterations.

CHAPTER 2

FINDINGS



This chapter presents the results of the outcome analysis and an assessment of cross-cutting issues. The main factors that influenced UNDP performance and contributions to results are also described in this section. The assessment was based on an analysis of the correlation between project results and their contribution to the expected outputs and to the overall outcome objectives.

2.1 Prosperity: Expanding economic opportunities

CPD OUTCOME 1: By 2023 women and men in Cambodia, in particular those marginalized and vulnerable, benefit from expanded opportunities for decent work and technological innovations; and they participate in a growing, more productive and competitive economy that is also fairer and environmentally sustainable.

Related outputs

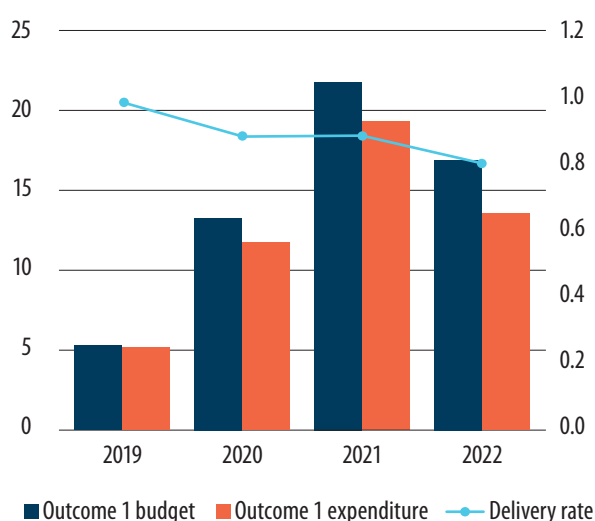
Output 1.1: Extremely poor and disadvantaged populations, including people living with HIV and persons with disabilities, have access to improved RGC social protection.

Output 1.2: Government fosters productivity alongside inclusive and sustainable growth.

Output 1.3: Left-behind and mine-affected communities have access to safe land for better livelihoods.

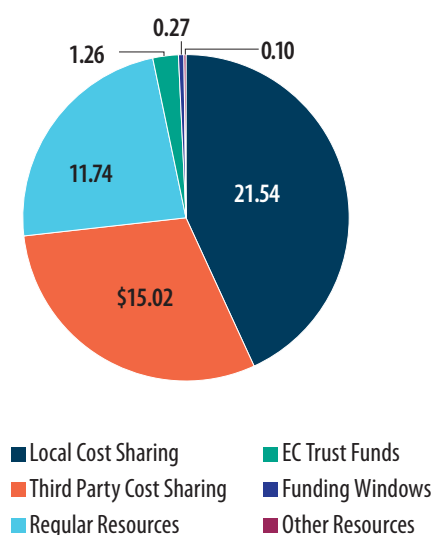
Output 1.4: Young women and men have opportunities to progress through access to information, skills development, and improved employment policies.

FIGURE 3. Evolution of budget and expenditure of Outcome 1 (US\$ million)



Source: Atlas (as of 28 January 2023).

FIGURE 4. Expenditure by fund category of Outcome 1, 2019–2022 (US\$ million)



Outcome 1 receives the largest share of funds in UNDP Cambodia. Its total budget is \$57 million, with an expenditure of \$49 million. Its delivery rate has constantly increased, even during the pandemic, with its largest source of funds coming from government cost-sharing (see figure 4). It is implemented through 15 projects within three thematic areas. In the first group are projects related to social protection, including the response to COVID-19 (Output 1.1. and 1.2.). This budget is \$39.3 million, with an expenditure of \$34.4 million. The second group includes the removal of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war (Output 1.3),⁶² which is a flagship intervention of UNDP and its longest-running project in Cambodia.⁶³ It includes support to persons with disabilities through capacity-development (with links to Outcome 3). Its budget within the current country programme is \$16 million, with an expenditure of \$12 million. The third group provides financial and technical support to creating employment and nurturing entrepreneurship (Output 1.4) through the Ministry of Commerce, Khmer Enterprise, and the National Employment Agency.⁶⁴ This budget is \$2.7 million, with a contribution from Khmer Enterprise of \$192,000 (7.11 per cent), and has an expenditure of \$2.7 million.

Finding 1. Social protection: UNDP contributed to reshaping the discourse and strengthening social protection in Cambodia by providing technical support to strategic thinking and analytics, such as fiscal space analysis; macroeconomic studies; refining the criteria, digitalizing, and identification of the Poor Households Programme (IDPoor); and in advocating for the inclusion of marginalized groups consistent with the *leave no one behind* principles. By dovetailing on government-led and funded systems, the likelihood of sustaining the results of UNDP intervention in social protection is high.

The *Cambodia Rectangular Strategy Phase IV* and the *National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023* aim to ensure that its GDP growth translates into sustainable and inclusive development. UNDP supports this vision and has aligned its country programme to ensure equitable growth, underpinning the principle of *leave no one behind*. The evaluation mapped all projects with subnational implementation of social protection activities across all three country programme (CP) outcomes (see maps 1 and 2). Most UNDP interventions covered provinces with the highest instances of poverty, but not necessarily areas where high poverty and high population intersect, such as the south-eastern provinces of Cambodia.⁶⁵

UNDP contributed to CP Outcome 1 by supporting economic studies, such as the *Adaption and Adoption of Industry 4.0*⁶⁶ in Cambodia, which expounds on the readiness, uptake, and use of technologies, and on measures to build and expand the digital economy.⁶⁷ For the last two decades, UNDP has consistently created synergies with the multi-donor-funded programme the *Enhanced Integrated Framework Partnership for Least Developed Countries* (EIF) to develop frameworks to bolster Cambodia in trade and technology transfer.⁶⁸ In 2001 the EIF, World Bank, and UNDP produced the first *Diagnostic Trade Integration Study* (DTIS), which contributed to Cambodia's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2003. In 2007 and 2014, UNDP continued to support the updated DTIS, which became the *Cambodia Trade Integration Strategy* (CTIS),

⁶² It includes the Clearing for Results (CfR) III and IV.

⁶³ In line with the Cambodia SDG 18, "End the negative impact of mines/ERW and promote victim assistance." The CP covers both the Clearing for Results project phase 4 (2020–2025) and phase 3 (2016–2020). The Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) via the Khmer Enterprise also contributed financial and non-financial support to two projects, namely Promote decent youth employment (Bluetribe) and Go4eCam (Track II: skills and entrepreneurship).

⁶⁴ Through the Promoting Decent Youth Employment (109996) and Policy and Innovation on Go4eCam (125268) projects.

⁶⁵ Projects include Policy and Innovation (112488); Graduation-based social protection pilot (115245); Medical Waste Management-CoVID19 (125406); Policy and Innovation (125819); Clearing for Results III and IV (96338 and 96246); Building an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Development (93203); Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities (104469); and Programme to Promote Disability Inclusion and Quality (96280).

⁶⁶ "Industry 4.0 represents the economic point of view, focusing on industry, manufacturing, and the fact that major technological advancements are revolutionizing industrial production. Industry 4.0 will affect all sectors and disciplines, and will have a huge impact on developing countries," <https://www.unsdglearn.org/courses/industry-4-0-an-introduction/>.

⁶⁷ See <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/kh/Industry-4.0-Report-Final.pdf>.

⁶⁸ See https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/teccop_e/if_e.htm.

which focused on export diversification and introduced trade pillars and road maps. In 2014, CTIS helped prepare Cambodia to participate in the ASEAN Economic Community, and the 2019 CTIS contributed to the National Council for Sustainable Development.⁶⁹ In addition, UNDP facilitated policy dialogues on China's Belt and Road Initiative on economic diversification, which engaged diverse stakeholders.

The strategic direction identified by CTIS, and information shared and networks created through the ASEAN Economic Community and the Belt and Road Initiative, contributed to enabling the RGC to identify and facilitate the adoption of digital and wireless technologies, which allowed commerce to continue amid the pandemic. This in turn helped enterprises and consumers with trade and payments, assisted the RGC and other aid agencies in digital cash transfers to those severely affected by COVID-19, enabled the collection of real-time data on poverty and vulnerability, and helped upgrade the IDPoor system.⁷⁰ An example is the facilitation of South-South cooperation with China to implement good practices in COVID-19 medical waste management.⁷¹

UNDP contributed to the strategic thinking behind, and helped bolster elements that help promote, social protection measures by the RGC in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as helping to identify the immediate basic needs of the most affected populations, and helping medium, small, and micro enterprises (MSMEs) withstand the impacts of the pandemic on commerce and the economy by providing technical support to the National Employment Agency⁷² and the creation of the Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia (CGCC). The CGCC underwrites part of the micro-loans through special products for women-owned MSMEs, agriculture and food production MSMEs, etc. UNDP also collaborated with Khmer Enterprise and the Ministry of Commerce for MSME training and start-up support. Pursuant to the principle of *leave no one behind*, UNDP helped upgrade RGC's IDPoor to the On-demand IDPoor system, allowing the candidates to request interviews faster and using real-time information (i.e., photographs using tablets) to identify poor households and those at risk of falling into further vulnerable categories (see box 1),⁷³ making the IDPoor more efficient. Since the IDPoor system is able to identify households of different vulnerability classifications, the government used it to implement social protection interventions such as programmes on cash transfer for poor and vulnerable households, persons with disabilities, the elderly, people living with HIV/AIDS, pregnant women, and children below two years of age; disability allowance, the equity card; and scholarships for children in poor IDPoor households. Stakeholders agree that policy shifts in social protection triggered by the response to the pandemic will have long-term effects and meaningful contributions to the SDGs (1 – no poverty; 2 – zero hunger; 3 – good health and well-being; 8 – decent work and economic growth; and 10 – reduced inequalities) and the *NSDP 2019–2023*.⁷⁴

UNDP is supporting the government in piloting a graduation-based social protection scheme with randomized control trials to gather ground-truthed data and to develop evidence-based recommendations that would help in decision-making to mainstream similar schemes to the *National Social Protection Policy Framework*.⁷⁵ These schemes transfer assets or cash to poor households in multiple phases in hopes of increasing household incomes and helping them to lift themselves out of poverty. Activities have been stalled by the pandemic and have recently restarted. Based on interviews, UNDP and its partners are optimistic that this will also be adopted by the RGC through the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans,

⁶⁹ See https://enhancedif.org/en/system/files/uploads/ctis_2019-2023.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=5640.

⁷⁰ Policy and Innovation project (112488) and Investing in SP project (125819).

⁷¹ COVID-19 Medical Waste Management Project (125406).

⁷² Under the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training.

⁷³ Policy and Innovation Hub for sustainable development (Project ID: 112488).

⁷⁴ Additionally, government partners mentioned the document "understanding better the paths to formalization in Cambodia and integrated visions," but the ICPE has not been able to be evaluated it.

⁷⁵ Policy and Innovation Hub for sustainable development (Project ID: 112488).

and Youth Rehabilitation, which was involved in the development and monitoring of this pilot project. At the time of this writing, the scheme is still under implementation, with capacity-development activities delivered to both treatment and control groups and cash and assets to treatment groups. There is uncertainty regarding the delivery of follow-up assets to the treatment groups, which are yet to be funded, and this puts into question the design scheme and how much the RGC is willing to invest in the scheme.

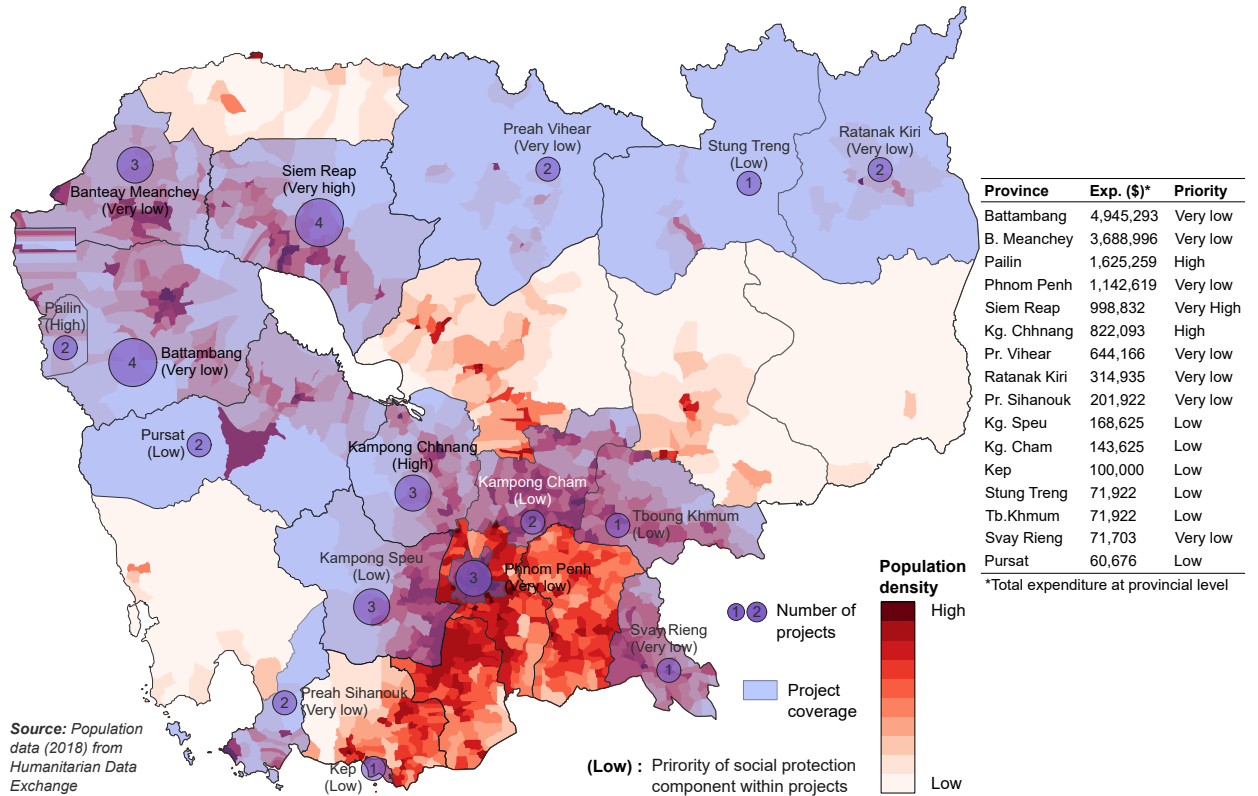
> BOX 3. From IDPoor to On Demand-IDPoor

Established in 2006, the IDPoor system is designed to identify, provide data on, and locate poor households, which gives access to RGC social protection programmes, such as cash transfers, free hospitalization, and discounted medicine through the equity fund (HEF). Before its 2020 update, the IDPoor system identified poor households in a rolling cycle of eight to nine provinces (out of the 24) per year. It takes around three years to fully update the national IDPoor database. The pen-and-paper IDPoor survey is done at the village level, and a committee is formed to assess the household based on standard criteria. Some beneficiaries reported that it took 6–12 months before they received their HEF card. This means that, at most, if poor households missed the rolling survey, it might take 1–4 years for them to be surveyed and included in the list. Based on our field interviews, beneficiaries reported some level of negative bias and lack of transparency by selection committees, where some members of the local governments used the IDPoor as a bargaining chip for poor households. Others complain that the criteria did not truly capture elements that make households poor and vulnerable.

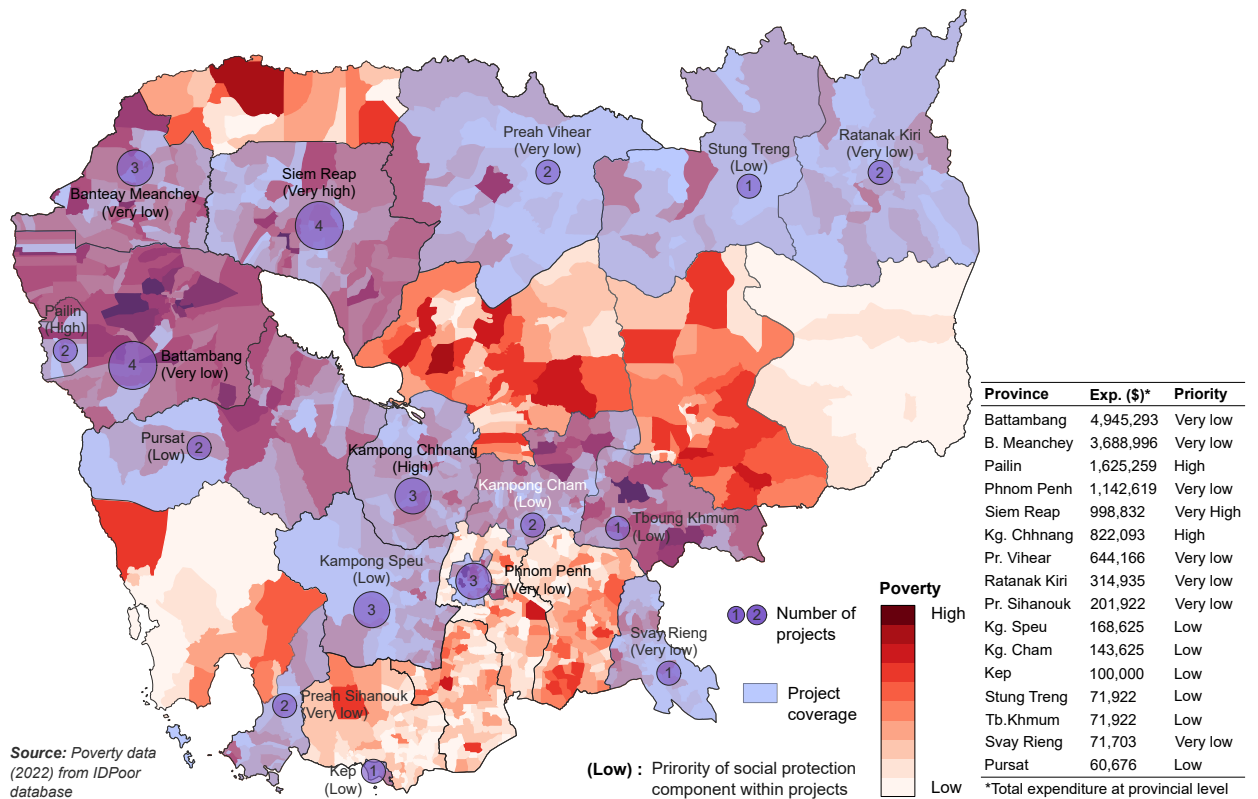
In 2020, in response to the COVID pandemic, the IDPoor system was updated to the On-demand IDPoor. UNDP provided support to the modification of the IDPoor questionnaire and the purchase of tablets to digitalize the data collection. The IDPoor questionnaire was nuanced to reflect a more realistic description of the features and characteristics of poor households, as well as include those on the borderline and at high risk of falling into poverty. The use of tablets sped up the process and reduced the survey-approval-release of the HEF equity card to three months (at the time of the evaluation). The village IDPoor selection panel was augmented with cloud computing, which was perceived by stakeholders (beneficiaries, surveyors, selection panel members) as more objective and transparent. With tablets, IDPoor surveyors were able to take real-time photos of households, which served as additional evidence and increased the rigor of the process. The modified system increased the involvement of subnational governments, which enabled local government leaders to provide real-time responses to the needs of people living in poverty, and allowed faster processing of data to be used for decision-making and planning.

Source: EU Multi-annual Investment Plan 2021–2027.

MAP 1. UNDP Cambodia projects with social protection component overlaid with population density



MAP 2. UNDP Cambodia projects with social protection component overlaid with poverty instances



Finding 2. COVID-19: UNDP demonstrated adaptability, agility, and flexibility with its support to the RGC COVID-19 response. It developed needed socio-economic analysis and modelling, provided technical advice to economic policies and communications strategies, mobilized and repurposed resources to complement social protection schemes, and supported implementing policy changes and innovations on the ground.

About \$30 million was mobilized by UNDP in 2020 for its pandemic response, ranging from emergency procurement of medical supplies and equipment for the Ministry of Health, to medical waste management, to policy reforms and funding for social protection for the most affected population through the strengthening of the ID Poor programme. Development partners lauded UNDP's efforts as important contributions to the country's response to the pandemic.⁷⁶ Other COVID-related results include:

- UNDP conducted an analysis of the cash transfer programme of the National Social Protection Council, which is intended to inform future RGC social protection policy and investment.⁷⁷
- Diversification of goods and services delivered through e-commerce platforms to cater to the immediate and changing consumer needs brought by the pandemic, and farmers and other producers supported with logistics and credit to enable them to access the markets online. This allowed the continuity of business and facilitated the supply of much-needed products and services amid the pandemic. It also helped provide jobs to workers who would otherwise have no work due to the disruptions in supply chains.⁷⁸
- Provided technical support to RGC policy development with analysis and modelling of COVID-19 challenges and response options. UNDP also helped in the formulation of the communication strategy to provide clear messages and information to the public regarding the pandemic and what measures the RGC and the public should take or are taking to mitigate its impacts.⁷⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic provided important insights into Cambodia's vulnerabilities and needs, and forced everything to slow down, including the country's push towards an upper middle-income status by 2030. This paved the way for opportunities to introduce different perspectives into the predominant development thinking, and to expedite some reforms, such as strengthening equitable growth through social protection. Ensuring economic continuity and providing a social safety net for the poor was a key element that was underscored as a right and a need during the pandemic. UNDP was both agile in responding to government requests and strategic in ensuring that its norms and principles (i.e., *no one left behind*) would get mainstreamed in the COVID-19 response. One senior government official mentions that *"the strength of the Cambodian society are the small players who work hard every day. If we support them, the economy and the country will survive. They will lift people out of poverty. So my job is not just about social protection. It is about poverty eradication."* This view is reflected in the perspectives of various government agencies, such as the Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Economy and Finance. There is a renewed appreciation of the role of the MSMEs, the role of women and youth in the economy and the challenges they face, as well as the support that they need as citizens and as an economic force to build-back-better from the pandemic.

⁷⁶ WHO, *Cambodia's effective rapid response to early COVID-19 cases due to early investments in health security systems* (who.int) (28 May 2020).

⁷⁷ The programme assisted about 700,000 households, has contributed to Cambodia's GDP growth (0.55% in 2020 and 0.45% in 2021), reduced unemployment (0.57% in 2020 and 0.62% in 2021), and reduced poverty rate (2.7% in 2020 and 3.4% in 2021). See also Ministry of Economy and Finance and UNDP Cambodia, "Socioeconomic Impacts of the COVID-19 Cash Transfer Programme for the Poor and Vulnerable Households in Cambodia: Micro and Macro-level Evaluations," Policy Brief vol. 5 (July 2022).

⁷⁸ COVID response – e-commerce Project (121245).

⁷⁹ COVID response – other TRAC 2 Project (121246).

Although the spread of COVID-19 negatively affected project implementation, it has also had unforeseen consequences in creating an environment for innovation, which led to UNDP exploring and using online platforms for communication (e.g., an accessible mobile app for the National Disability Strategic Plan 2019–2023, named *Cambodia Disability News*) and for its digital monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and leveraging opportunities across programme areas. The UN Country Team provided a unified response to support the RGC in ameliorating the impacts of COVID-19. UNDP utilized its expertise and system to help the RGC procure equipment and medical supplies, and to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Economy and Finance to assist in developing the RGC’s COVID-19 economic recovery plan. As a result of the assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities, UNDP was able to advocate for an improvement of the IDPoor system to better capture the disabilities status of household members. It also helped to document disability; and sensitivity to the disability data increased awareness of the issue for both IDPoor assessors and beneficiaries. At the time of the evaluation, it is estimated that approximately 60,000 persons with disabilities had received their IDPoor card and benefitted from the social protection package.

UNDP demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in its environmental portfolio. During the height of the pandemic, UNDP was quick to inject income to COVID-19-impacted communities through cash-for-work tree-planting activities from the repurposing of funds.⁸⁰ About 170 hectares of degraded land in national park forests were restored, and 40,000 native species were replanted in Cambodia’s flooded and community forest to support biodiversity. However, limitations in the flexibility of the COVID-19-related tree planting funds affected the sustainability of results. For example, since the funds were from an emergency window of donors, there was a need to quickly disburse the funds for cash-for-work for reforestation in the Kulen National Park within six months. This rush did not allow for proper planning and resulted in having no budget for maintenance and taking care of planted tree seedlings against the rapid overgrowth of the vegetation, which drastically decreased the effectiveness and sustainability of the activity. Measures such as fund allocations held in escrow for continuous care and maintenance of reforested areas for a certain period beyond the end of project life were not considered.

Finding 3. Mine-action: UNDP delivered on its mine-clearing targets and was greatly appreciated by the government and beneficiaries for its Clearing for Results project, now in its fourth phase. While the design of mine-action projects had limited development and economic activities due to its humanitarian nature, the link towards economic empowerment could have been achieved by stronger internal coherence with other UNDP outcome areas and projects. This has been recognized by the CO, and it is taking steps to strengthen internal coherence by designing its portfolio with area-based development thinking. Also, it is advocating for the government and donors to fund development activities together with mine clearance.

UNDP assisted in the development of the *National Mine Action Strategy (NMAS) 2018–2025*. The core objective of NMAS is to deliver Cambodia’s commitment to the *Maputo +15 Declaration* in line with the *NSDP 2019–2023*, and achieve goal 18 of the *Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs)* – “ending the negative impact of land mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) by 2025 and promote assistance to victims.” It also aims to minimize and manage the residual risk of landmine contamination beyond 2025. NMAS seeks to contribute to the goals of the *Cambodia Rectangular Strategy Phase IV* on good governance, human resources development, economic diversification, and ultimately to inclusive and sustainable development through mine-action and other related activities.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Through the projects Building an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Development (BESD) and the Cambodia Climate Change Alliance (CCCA); Annual project progress report – Reporting Period: 1/1–12/30 2020, the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) and UNDP Cambodia, “Results Oriented Annual Report 2022.”

⁸¹ UNDP, “Clearing for Results Phase IV (CfRIV): Mine Action for Human Development” (2018).

Since 2006, UNDP has supported the Cambodia Mine Action and Victims Assistance Authority through its *Clearing for Results (CfR)* projects, now in its fourth phase.⁸² The objectives of the projects are: (1) prioritize mine-impacted villages in the provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, and Pailin such that they are declared mine-free; (2) provide humanitarian mine-action and development activities aligned to national and subnational sectorial policies and planning strategies; and (3) strengthen mine-action sector management and national capacities that address residual threats. Significant progress has been made in the clearing of land mines, reaching targets for this CP period of 56 km² of land cleared of mines. (Total land released in 2021 was 26.33 km² and equal to 254 per cent of the annual target of 10.35 km².) Based on reports and technical data analysis of information from 68 minefields (256 hectares, 7 villages in Kouk Romlet Commune, Thma Puok District in Banteay Meanchey), the value of land increased by 260 per cent, from \$392,000 pre-clearance to nearly \$1.02 million post-clearance, and generated a total income of \$202,000 from agriculture production.

Reports mention a total of some 1.14 million people benefitting from mine clearing.⁸³ Between 2019 and 2020 a total of 103,858 individuals were reported to have benefited from UNDP-assisted demining, about half women.⁸⁴ However, it is unclear to the evaluation exactly how women benefitted from the project differently from the men. From our interviews with implementing partners and community members (beneficiaries), it seems that there was an assumption that women exercised similar levels of control and decision-making as the male members over the lands cleared of mines and turned over to the communities, as well as equally participate in local leadership and governance as a result of project interventions, which is not the case. At the implementation level, the engagement of female deminers contributed to raising awareness of gender issues, and underscored the importance of women in planning and prioritizing clearance operations.⁸⁵

In partnership with the Battambang Physical Rehabilitation Centre and the Trauma Care Foundation, UNDP provided funding and non-funding support to emergency response and medical treatment, improved physical rehabilitation services and mirror therapy, socio-economic inclusion, and mine-risk education to over 3,700 persons with disabilities. Representation of persons with disabilities in local governance and a whole-of-government approach to the provision of their rights and services are evident, but they could be more effective if strongly and deliberately linked with other projects. Service provision to persons with disabilities has linked well with the Provincial Disability Action Council (and Plans), but livelihood support could have been strengthened to include access to finance instead of limited to skills training. UNDP investment in persons with disabilities' treatment and rehabilitation could have also been optimized for promotion and scaling-up, rather than just direct service provision that, while beneficial on a limited scale, could be effective at the outcome level if scaled-up for maximum coverage with UNDP and government support (e.g., training for [mirror] therapists).

⁸² Phase III (096246) of CfR was implemented from 2016 to 2020 and Phase IV (096338) will be implemented over six years starting in 2020 and will continue beyond the current CP until 2025.

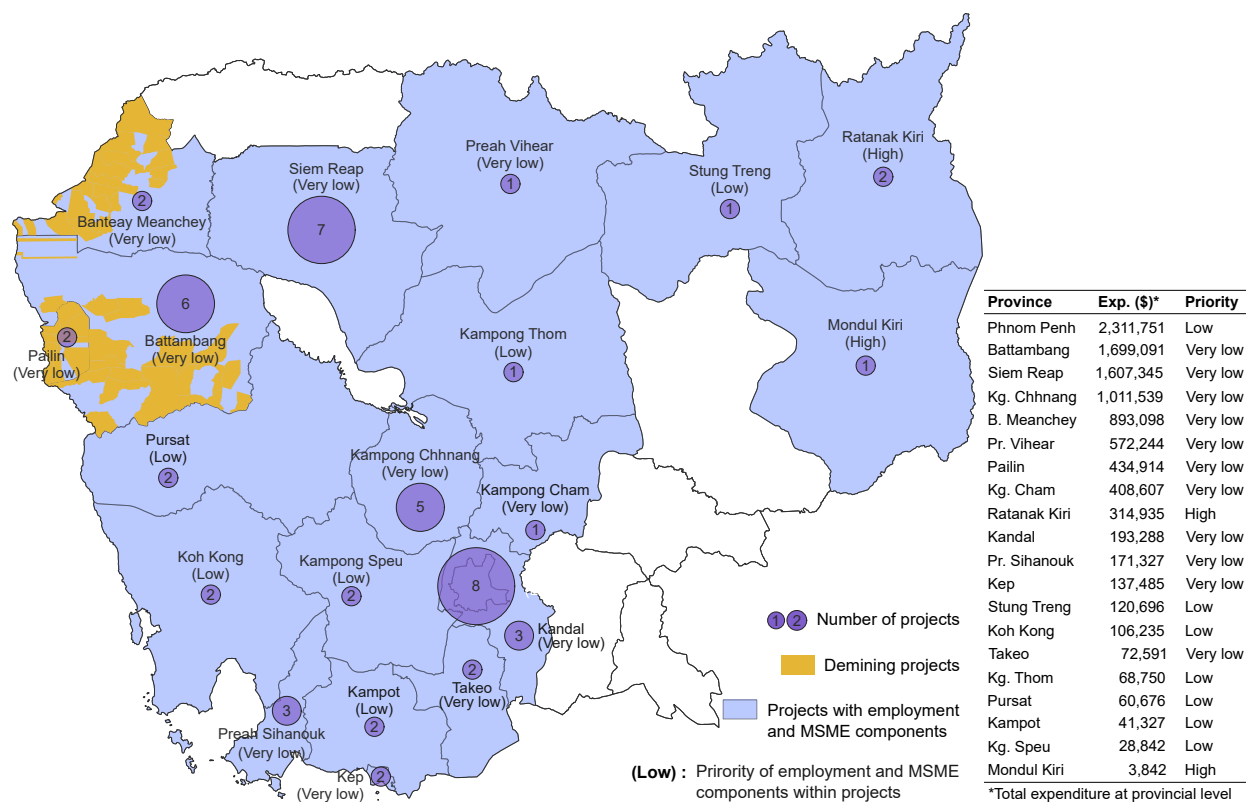
⁸³ CfR I, II, III, and IV results.

⁸⁴ This is in addition to a baseline of 986,448 individuals in 2019.

⁸⁵ As reported in the CfR IV 2021 report and validated in focus group discussions (FGDs).

The villages visited for this evaluation exhibited concerns about livelihood improvements, illustrated in Boeung Sakhrom and Khom Thmey, two demined villages in Banteay Meanchey province. Boeung Sakhrom is a village of former combatants, while Khom Thmey is a village of original settlers who came back after the war. Both are having difficulties with agricultural livelihoods. Map 3 shows the demining activities in Banteay Meanchey, Palin, and Battambang (green). The evaluation looked at the coherence between demining activities and UNDP projects with employment and MSME components, and it showed that there are four projects⁸⁶ that overlap with the provinces with demining activities. Further analysis showed that there is low priority for economic activities in these provinces in terms of UNDP expenditures, which was corroborated by UNDP personnel and implementing partners. Considering the proximity of the demined areas to the Thailand border and the lack of economic opportunities on the Cambodia side (deminced areas), most family members of people living in the demined areas opt to migrate to Thailand for work, in some cases illegally, through the use of middlemen. UNDP mentioned that it was challenging to encourage donors to fund development activities in parallel with mine-action projects that come from a donor’s humanitarian funding window. At the time of writing, the CO has started thinking about area-based development to leverage and complement mine-action-funded projects with mobilized funds.

MAP 3. UNDP Cambodia demining projects overlaid with projects with employment and MSME components



⁸⁶ Policy and Innovation (00112488); Graduation-based social protection pilot (00115245); Promoting Decent Youth Employment in Cambodia (00109996); Building an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Develop (00093203).

Finding 4. Entrepreneurship and youth: UNDP assisted in developing platforms and research on entrepreneurship to support the upstream enabling environment, with an emphasis on youth. The agency piloted potential platforms for youth’s engagement in e-commerce, but did not sufficiently build the momentum to scale results. However, it did produce promising studies with the potential to influence policy discourses. The collaboration with the Kampuchea Institute of Certified Public Accountants and Auditors to improve the accounting technician qualification had the unintended positive result of increasing the oversight of professionals, thus contributing to increasing transparency in Cambodia, in addition to its goals of diversifying job opportunities and meeting an identified need for private sector/MSME growth.

The evaluation mapped all projects across all three CP outcomes with subnational implementation related to the promotion of Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and entrepreneurship (see maps 4 and 5). The majority of UNDP interventions covered provinces with the highest instances of poverty, but not necessarily areas where high poverty and high population intersect.⁸⁷ The analysis showed that TVET and entrepreneurship activities had ‘low priority’ in terms of expenditure for subnational implementation, which the CO confirms, as several activities are aimed at policy influence at the national level.

According to multiple focus group discussions and interviews with the government, CSOs, and the private sector, the youth population in Cambodia has high Internet penetration, which has considerable potential for growth in the digital economy. The groups also mentioned that the ones leading this transition in Cambodia are the MSMEs (mostly start-ups) that are owned by and employ young people, especially women. UNDP partnered with the Ministry of Commerce and Khmer Enterprise to strengthen and increase the use of digital platforms for enterprises by building the capacity of mostly young entrepreneurs and providing innovative and promising projects start-up capital to encourage more participation and innovations.⁸⁸ Platforms such as Startup Mentorship,⁸⁹ Bluetribe Incubation Programme,⁹⁰ and Junior Entrepreneurs Programme⁹¹ were created for youth to engage in the business sector and to increase their capacity for entrepreneurship. The pilots showed the potential of such programmes to engage youth. All platforms were appreciated by implementing partners and beneficiaries, who saw them as opportunities to gain more knowledge, but their effectiveness in terms of contributing to additional business opportunities and the sustainability of such intervention was weak, evidenced by the lack of broader adoption (mainstreaming, replication, scaling up/out, sustaining, influencing market change) by partners. In the Junior Entrepreneurs Programme the majority of participants interviewed did not have the resources to start a business, which contrasts with the objective of the programme of launching entrepreneurs. UNDP also missed incorporating UN norms and values, such as gender, a human-rights-based approach, and *leave no one behind* in the Junior Entrepreneurs Programme curriculum. Interviews with stakeholders mentioned that the results of these platforms could potentially have significant policy influence, and that they would have a greater chance for scaling up if linked with other UNDP activities, such as those that supported the Ministry of Economy and Finance in establishing the Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia.⁹² UNDP supported the Kampuchea Institute of Certified Public Accountants and Auditors by improving training material, training of trainers, and putting in place a qualification system.

⁸⁷ Policy and Innovation (112488); Graduation-based social protection pilot (115245); Medical Waste Management–CoVID19 (125406); Policy and Innovation (121245); Policy and Innovation (125819); Promoting Decent Youth Employment in Cambodia (109996); Policy and Innovation (125268); Achieving 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in AP (regional) (124811); Building an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Develop (93203).

⁸⁸ Go4eCam project (125268).

⁸⁹ In partnership by Techno Center, <https://undpcambodia.exposure.co/undp-tsc-mentorship-callout>.

⁹⁰ In partnership with Khmer Enterprise, <https://www.undp.org/cambodia/press-releases/undp%E2%80%99s-bluetribe-raises-bar-young-entrepreneurs-cambodia>.

⁹¹ In partnership with Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia, <http://bit.ly/3byt39X>.

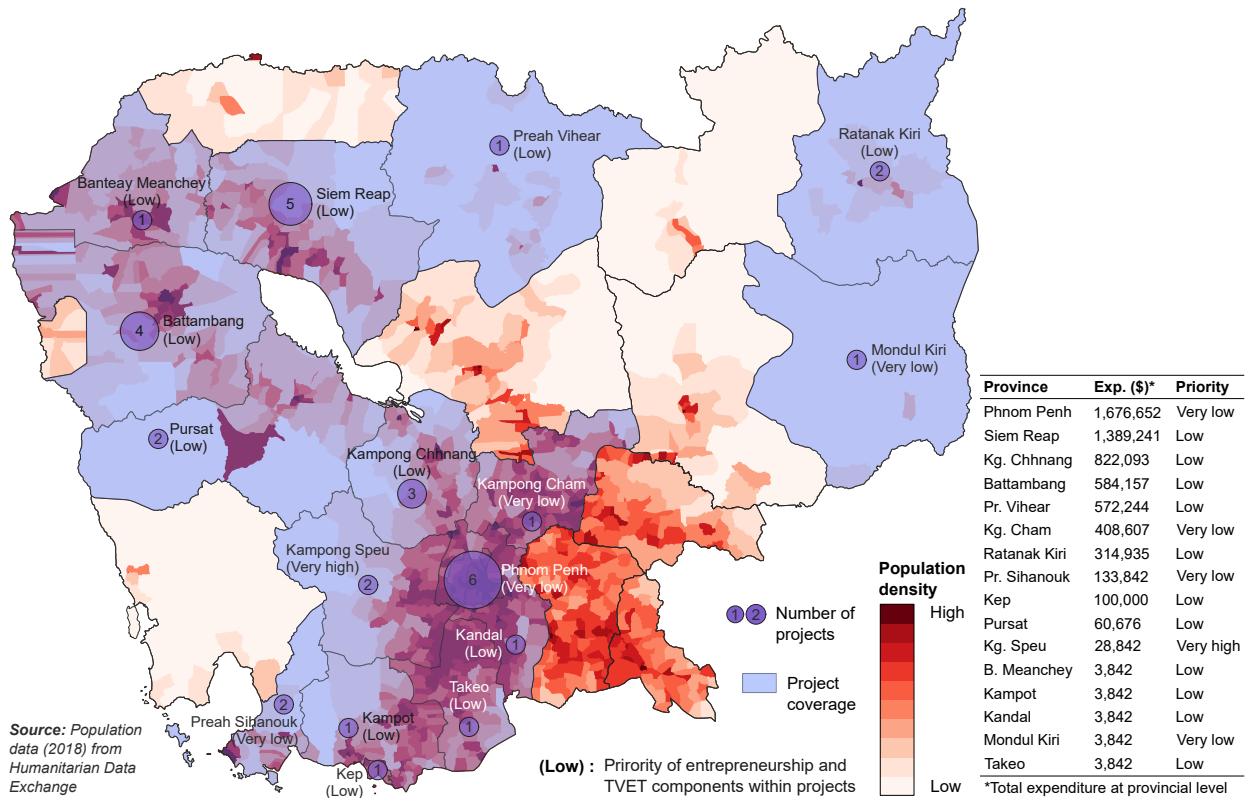
⁹² The newly established Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia (CGCC) offers credit guarantees mostly for MSMEs to stimulate investments and promote better lending models and practices in the country. CGCC has developed products that particularly target women entrepreneurs.

According to interviews, UNDP also supported research studies that influenced government strategies, including the following:

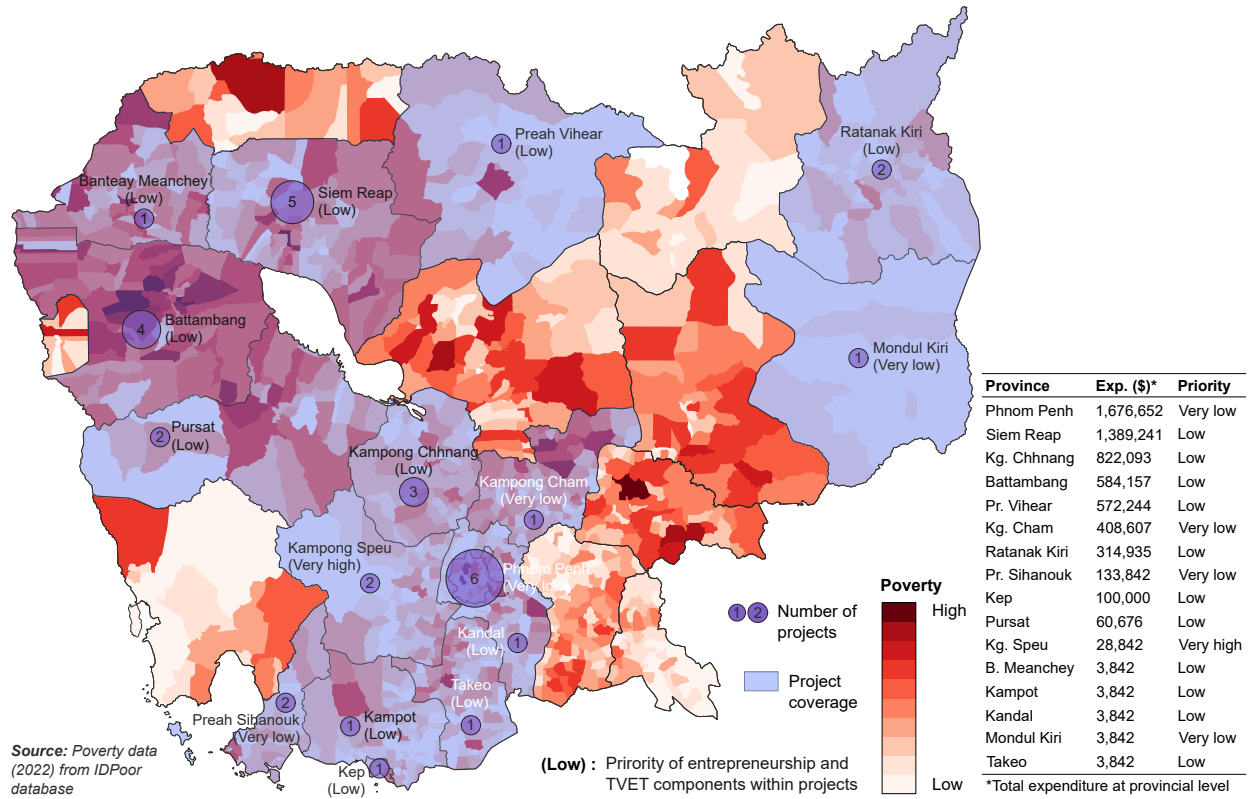
- The *Demand for and Supply of Digital Skills (2021)*, developed in partnership with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication and the Cambodia Academy of Digital Technology and aimed at influencing the policy dialogues and implementation of the *Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021–2035*
- *Review of Cambodia’s Garment Industry Adaptation towards Automation/Technologies Focusing on Youth Employment and Skills Development (2021)*
- *How Industry 4.0 can boost Cambodia’s economy after COVID-19: Opportunities for industrial upgrading and equitable development (2021)* with the *Cambridge Industrial Innovation Policy*
- *Supporting Young Entrepreneurs Guidebook – Incubator & Accelerator Programmes*
- *Guide to doing business in Siem Reap*, through a collaboration with the Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia

While it is still early for these researches to have wider and deeper impacts, they are addressing strategic areas that are key to socio-economic recovery and to promoting inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economic development as a way of building back the economy better. These strategic areas are related to youth employment, women’s entrepreneurship, and the digital economy.

MAP 4. UNDP Cambodia projects with TVET and entrepreneurship component overlaid with population density



MAP 5. UNDP Cambodia projects with TVET and entrepreneurship component overlaid with poverty instances



2.2 Planet: Sustainable living

CPD OUTCOME 2: By 2023 women and men in Cambodia, in particular the marginalized and vulnerable, live in a safer, healthier, more secure and ecologically balanced environment with improved livelihoods, and are resilient to natural and climate change-related trends and shocks.

Related outputs

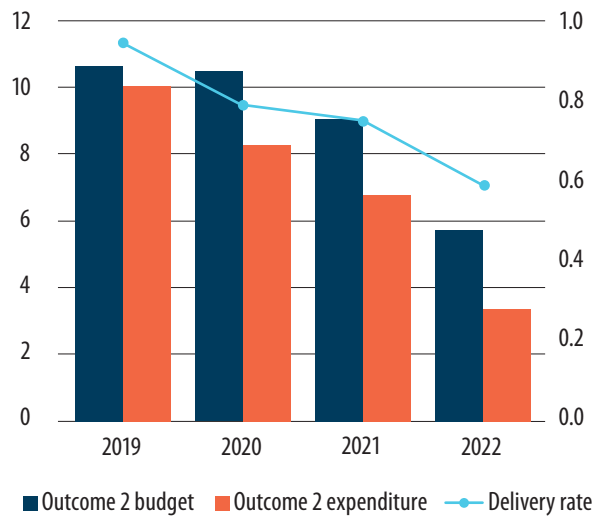
Output 2.1: Targeted cities and urban centres prepare and operationalize a solid waste management plan to reduce the environmental pollution impact from solid waste.

Output 2.2: Climate and weather information is available for public use and is utilized by policy makers for national, sectoral, and subnational planning as well as for transboundary communication in the region.

Output 2.3: Rules and regulations formulated and adopted for forest/natural resource management and market solutions are developed for conservation and renewable energy.

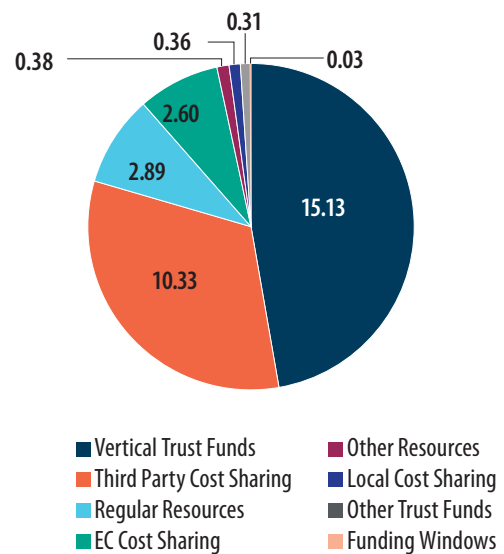
Output 2.4: Climate-smart/proofed (rural) infrastructures and services benefit rural populations, especially the poor and vulnerable.

FIGURE 5. Evolution of budget and expenditure of Outcome 2 (US\$ million)



Source: Atlas (as of 28 January 2023).

FIGURE 6. Expenditure by fund category of Outcome 2, 2019–2022 (US\$ million)



Outcome 2 has a total budget of \$36.5 million with an expenditure of \$28.4 million and is implemented through 17 projects. The portfolio can be grouped into three major pillars and four focus areas. The first pillar is Climate Action to turn the climate commitments, the *National Determined Contributions (NDC)*, and the *Long-term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality* into concrete action through influencing policies, digitalizing for transparency and measuring of the NDC, innovative financing, and readiness for climate finance and climate innovations. The second pillar is composed of two priority areas: Nature-based Solutions aiming to promote natural resource management; and a Green Economy, which focuses on energy. The third pillar is Circular Economy, which has a focus on waste management. It should be noted that projects within the portfolio contribute to one or more pillars, and finances cannot be disaggregated as compared to the other two outcomes. What can be observed by the mapping of projects is that Climate Action overlaps largely with Nature-based Solutions, and Green Economy and Circular Economy projects overlap with all other pillars or could be stand-alone projects.

Finding 5. Environmental policy and research: UNDP contributed to laying the groundwork for the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) in Cambodia, culminating in reduced import duties that are 50 per cent lower than vehicles with internal combustion engines. It also assisted in the formulation of studies related to energy and climate change. However, some policies and declarations it supported have stalled, such as the Payment for Ecosystem Services, mainly due to the lack of strong political support that reflects a complex political economy⁹³ in Cambodia, especially in the environment policy space.

⁹³ "Interaction of political and economic processes in a society; Distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals; Processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time; Politics often explains where development assistance has been effective and where it has not," <https://sdgs.un.org/statements/political-economy-and-sustainable-development-11101>.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works and Transport and the Institute of Standards of Cambodia, the standards for 2&3-wheeler electric vehicles were developed.⁹⁴ UNDP dovetailed on these results and produced high-level briefs on vehicle taxation, renewable energy, and investment activities for the Deputy Prime Minister of the Ministry of Economic and Finance, and a coal power and renewable energy technologies brief for the Prime Minister.⁹⁵ As the RGC reduces the import tax on electric vehicles and encourages EV assembling plants in Cambodia, UNDP and donors are working on other elements to help shift the market, such as working on expanding and licensing of charging stations.

UNDP supported the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD), the Ministry of Energy (MoE), and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) in conducting a joint study on *Climate change impacts on economic growth in Cambodia*. The analysis used the *Climate economic growth impact model* to inform decision-making to address the impact of climate change on Cambodia's economic development in the medium and long term. It helped quantify the impact of climate change, provided evidence, and supported the development of more realistic and practical policy options, strategies, and programmes to sustain its long-term progress and ensure optimal outcomes. UNDP also carried out a series of research initiatives aiming to identify barriers and opportunities for introducing and mainstreaming a circular economy as a solution to the problems of waste management, especially plastic. It resulted in *the National Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2035)* and *Sub-Decree on Plastic Management*.⁹⁶ UNDP assisted in developing market solutions for conservation and renewable energy, including the *Building Energy Code*, *Energy Efficiency Design Guidelines*, and *Rooftop Solar Policy*. All these contributed to raise Cambodia's climate ambition in its updated NDC.

UNDP piloted Payment for Environment Services (PES) in two sites, and developed a *draft National PES Roadmap (2021–2031)*, which defined an overall vision, priority actions, and a plan for upscaling PES to the national level.⁹⁷ Regardless of the strong optimism for PES in the NCSD and MoE, the draft PES policy has not been approved and endorsed by the MEF and RGC since 2020. It should be noted that even without the approval of the PES policy, to ensure the sustainability of results the NCSD and the Ministry of Environment identified that the PES should be integrated into ongoing activities such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+)⁹⁸ and the Cambodia Sustainable Landscape and Ecotourism project by the World Bank. Similar to the *PES policy*, the draft *Environmental Code draft Sub-decree on Green House Gas Mitigation* and the draft *Declaration on Net System on REDD+* are still pending adoption.

⁹⁴ Sustainable Urban Mobility for All Initiative.

⁹⁵ Cambodia Climate Change Alliance – Phase 3 (115517).

⁹⁶ RGC Reach Kech (2017), No. 77, pp. 83–94.

⁹⁷ UNDP, "Final Project Report Reporting Period: 01 January 2019–30 June 2021, National Council for Sustainable Development, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Mine and Energy, National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development" (2021).

⁹⁸ REDD+ is a framework created by the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties to guide activities in the forest sector that reduces emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, as well as the sustainable management of forests and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.

The limited ability to push for these policies undermines investments by UNDP. In some cases, other development partners have taken the helm on these initiatives. For example, UNDP started drafting a *Sub-decree on Renewable Energy*, but its approval was stalled. At the request of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, UNDP handed over the draft *Sub-decree on Energy Efficiency Standards and Labelling for Electrical Appliances and Equipment* to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to facilitate a policy-based loan under the Energy Transition Sector Development Programme. In the same vein, UNDP launched a study on the development of the Energy Efficiency Revolving Fund⁹⁹ and could not complete it. A bigger ADB loan project with Electricite du Cambodge and the MEF is to take up the design and operationalization of the fund, and the ADB mentioned that some of UNDP's work has been taken into consideration.

UNDP produced some important studies on Outcome 2. However, the extent to which these studies have been considered in decision and policy making is unclear to the evaluation. In 2019, for example, BIOFIN Cambodia completed key assessments such as: 1) *Policy and Intuition Review*, 2) *Biodiversity Expenditure Review*, 3) *Finance Need Assessment, Biodiversity Finance Plan, and Finance Proposals for the nine prioritized finance solutions, including PES, ecotourism, REDD+, and Good Agriculture Practice*.¹⁰⁰ However, it is unclear whether any further follow-up activities to advance those key studies and plans into concrete policies will be undertaken. UNDP played an important role in demonstrating the viability of solar photovoltaics by providing affordable energy to off-grid rural poor households, and documenting results and developing studies to convince high-level decision-makers about the potentials and benefits of such energy production, such as the *De-risking Renewable Energy Investment* study, *the Economics of Solar* study,¹⁰¹ and the *Energy Efficiency Design Guideline for Residential and Commercial Buildings*. It is important to follow up on the uptake of these studies for policy making or implementation, as it is unknown at the evaluation stage.

UNDP – through the Cambodia Climate Change Alliance and Environmental Governance Reform projects, and technical assistance to the World Bank-financed Cambodia Sustainable Landscape and Eco-Tourism project – has supported environmental data and knowledge centres that can play a crucial role in promoting and facilitating scientific and technical cooperation and exchange of information among all stakeholders as well as for verification and reporting. The government and stakeholders are keen on this result, but the budget has been modest, and the needs and scope have continued to become more ambitious – from a GIS portal to the Cambodia Environment Management Information Centre.¹⁰²

Finding 6. Energy: UNDP was able to showcase the economic and social benefits of off-grid renewable energy sources, which is consistent with the *leave no one behind* principle. It was able to leverage funds from donors and stimulate private sector investments through de-risking energy investments and facilitating private sector/government cooperation for the delivery of social services. This model has the potential to be sustained and replicated, given conducive government policies such as lowering levies. This was not the case in some pilots, however. While the initial results of solar irrigation pumps were appreciated by the beneficiaries, there is a clear need for UNDP to find options for broader adoptions. As it is, uptake by beneficiaries and their government counterpart appears unlikely.

⁹⁹ "An energy efficiency revolving fund (EERF) provides financing and related services to its clients in public or private entities to facilitate their investment in energy efficiency projects. EERFs are designed to be financially sustainable by lending for energy efficiency investment and then recovering the investment costs and associated fees through the derived energy cost savings," <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-07/Investing%20in%20Energy%20Efficiency-updated%20July%202022.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ See <https://www.biofin.org/cambodia>.

¹⁰¹ With South Pole Carbon Asset Management Ltd, 2019.

¹⁰² Since 2019 the project on Environmental Governance Reform–Environment Code has supported the component to develop the decision support system for informing the Environmental Code formulation to produce a 5-year GIS Strategic Framework of the GIS Department. The new Strategy and Action Plan envisages developing both spatial and non-spatial data and an information portal. With support from the Cambodia Climate Change Alliance (CCCA) and UNDP Technical Assistance for the Cambodia Sustainable Landscape and Eco-Tourism project, the MoE is developing Cambodia's Environment Management Information System.

Senior government officials and beneficiaries appreciate the UNDP solar off-grid electricity pilots in Kampong Chhnang and Mondulkiri, and mini-grid battery charging stations in Pursat.¹⁰³ UNDP has leveraged interests from other bilateral donors such as Australia, Japan, and South Korea. For example, a new project with assistance from Japan will install solar-based mini-grids to provide electricity access in 15 villages. The Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) highlighted that the lessons learned from the UNDP off-grid solar electricity were valuable for the design and development of similar projects for the remaining 200 off-grid villages using solar energy in about 12 villages. A senior government official advised that to achieve long-term benefits, the RGC and its development partners should mobilize additional financial resources for solar photovoltaic systems and grids, which could be synchronized to the national grid. MME noted that to date only 10–15 off-grid villages have recently been served with the off-grid solar power – of approximately 1,400 remote villages – thus pointing to a strategic niche for UNDP. According to MME estimates, \$100,000 per village is needed for electrification, which is more than \$22 million (for 245 villages) needed from grants, aid, and government subsidies.¹⁰⁴

Despite appreciation by government partners, the private solar power companies involved in UNDP pilot projects found that it was still hard for them to break into the off-grid power market due to the cap on electricity tariffs for targeted communities and other regulations (e.g., licensing system) set by the government. The current tariff (Riel 600 or \$0.148 per kWh for households¹⁰⁵) makes it unfeasible for the private solar power provider due to the risky and costly up-front investment. The recently released *Position Paper on Renewable Energy in Cambodia* by the European Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia is pushing the government to fully embrace renewable energy by removing the financial disincentives on renewables, adding that energy sources such as solar rooftops for the manufacturing sector could provide an added economic spark.¹⁰⁶

UNDP provided solar pumps to several villages. The solar pump provider estimates that the unit cost varies from \$25,000 imported from the United States or Germany, \$18,000 from Japan or Thailand, and \$12,000 from China, but with a shorter warranty. The 2021 study by Grow Further reveals that solar irrigation pumps (SIPs) potentially lead to breakthroughs for farmer-led smallholder irrigation in the form of grants, aid, and government subsidies.¹⁰⁷ A 2020 World Bank study indicated that SIPs have repeatedly been tested in various agricultural conditions for decades. It adds that solar irrigation pumps are high on capital cost, but once installed they operate at a near-zero operating cost, which is an economic advantage for smallholders for whom the high overall cost of fetching and using diesel or petrol shares a large part of the production cost.¹⁰⁸ Another research mentions that while SIPs are easy to use and potentially game-changing, there are finer details to address before smallholder solar irrigation can ever truly become mainstream. First, the devices are still expensive, though costs have been falling sharply in tandem with falling solar photovoltaic technology prices. Second, most smallholder farmers still cannot afford to purchase SIPs without financing.

¹⁰³ Solar grid by BESD and mini-grid charging station by CCCA.

¹⁰⁴ See https://eac.gov.kh/uploads/salient_feature/english/salient_feature_2022_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ See https://www.globalpetrolprices.com/electricity_prices/.

¹⁰⁶ EuroCham, “Position Paper on Renewable Energy in Cambodia” (2 September 2022) and RGC Power Development Plan 2040, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/eurocham-urges-end-solar-fee-industry>, <https://cambodiainvestmentreview.com/2022/09/03/switching-to-solar-will-provide-an-economic-spark-for-cambodias-manufacturing-industry-eurocham/>.

¹⁰⁷ Grow Further, “Will Solar Water Pumps Transform Smallholder Agriculture?” (2021), <https://www.growfurther.org/will-solar-water-pumps-transform-smallholder-agriculture/>.

¹⁰⁸ The World Bank, “Unshackling India’s Energy-Water-Agriculture Nexus: Is Solar Power the Panacea it Promises to be?,” <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/05/unshackling-india-energy-water-agriculture-nexus>.

The same paper mentioned that a basic solar-powered water pump could cost around \$1,500 at 2015 prices.¹⁰⁹ The UNDP country office confirms that the UNDP-supported solar pump of 1 kW capacity costs \$6,393, including barbed wire fencing (\$2,250), transportation, installation, training, etc. (nearly \$1,000).

The barriers to broader adoption mentioned above were resounded by UNDP SIPs beneficiaries, who noted that they lack the means to purchase the units even with bank loans – and even if they purchase as an association.¹¹⁰ The government counterpart, the National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Development, acknowledged that they do not have the funding or current plans to replicate the activities. The UNDP provider for the SIPs recommends that a cheaper alternative could be explored. Another option is to establish bigger irrigation pumps run by social or private enterprises to meet the demand by connecting to irrigation canals. They further suggested that soft loans through a community SIP revolving fund could be supported to encourage irrigation enterprises. However, they themselves had no intent to provide such financing or social enterprise.¹¹¹ The evaluation questions the intent of UNDP, asking “for whom” and “for what purpose” are demonstration pilots. Though the recipients do benefit from such pilots, the government counterparts, the private sector (supplier), and the beneficiaries have no capacity to replicate the project. As it is, the UNDP-installed SIPs are a one-time technology transfer, which does not have the potential for broader adoption.¹¹² In hindsight, the design of the pilots could have focused on more cost-effective models that can be more readily adopted by farmers.

Finding 7. Climate change: UNDP contributed to setting the climate change regulatory frameworks in Cambodia by providing technical advisory support. In fact, Cambodia is one of the 12 countries, and the first ASEAN country, that submitted its Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality by 2050. UNDP assisted in updating Cambodia’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) with a higher reduction target, and advocated for the inclusion of gender as one of its sectors in the NDC’s 29 adaptation actions. UNDP also assisted in preparing and engaging in the Voluntary Carbon Market, as well as implementing the REDD+ strategy. While it helped in developing the investment plans for these frameworks, the next challenge is working with the government in mobilizing resources and implementing these commitments to achieve Cambodia’s climate change goals.

In addition to policy and research results discussed in Finding 5, Cambodia made stronger commitments to decrease emissions and adapt to climate change impact through its updated *Nationally Determined Contribution* under the Paris Agreement. UNDP assisted the RGC in establishing new targets, including a 34 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 instead of 27 per cent in the previous NDC, a 25 per cent planned increase in the share of renewables to the country’s energy mix, and a commitment to halve deforestation rates by 2030, in line with Cambodia’s REDD+ strategy.¹¹³ Cambodia is among the very first members of the Least Developed Country group to submit in 2021 a *Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality* (LTS4CN), with priority for adaptation and mitigation actions for each sector – agriculture, energy, forest and land use, and waste – to achieve the country’s goal of a carbon neutral economy in 2050. The LTS4CN takes into consideration the balance among emissions reductions, economic growth, social justice, and climate resilience in key sectors such as agriculture, energy, forest and land use, industrial processes and product use, and

¹⁰⁹ Kashi Kafle, Oluwatoba Omotilewa, Mansoor Leh, and Petra Schmitter, “Who is Likely to Benefit from Public and Private Sector Investments in Farmer-led Irrigation Development? Evidence from Ethiopia,” *The Journal of Development Studies* (2022), 58:1, pp. 55–75, DOI: [10.1080/00220388.2021.1939866](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.1939866).

¹¹⁰ Promoting the use of solar technologies for agriculture and rural development in Cambodia (STARD); FGD 8.

¹¹¹ IMB Cambodia Group Plc, “Concept Paper: Solar Energy for Economic Growth with sustainable manner and women, Prey Veng, Svay Reang, Battamaang, Kompong Chhnang, Kampong Thom” (2022).

¹¹² Broader adoption includes mainstreaming, replication, scaling up/out, sustaining, and influencing market change.

¹¹³ UNDP Results Oriented Report KHM (2020).

waste.¹¹⁴ However, NDCs will need over \$2 billion for adaptation actions, especially for infrastructure and agriculture (NDC 2020, p. 51), and the total funding required for all mitigation actions is over \$5.8 billion, mainly for forest and land use, waste, and energy sector actions (pp. 8 and 51). An estimated \$7.8 billion is needed by 2030 to achieve its 2050 target, which requires investments to grow from around \$500 million a year to \$2.5 billion a year. In addition, according to the Investment Plan for the National REDD+ Strategy, an estimated \$185.7 million is required by 2031. The majority of these budgets are conditional upon international support, but such a large investment will be difficult to come by given the current economic and political situation in Cambodia and globally.

According to the Ministry of Environment, Cambodia was able to sell the carbon credits in the Voluntary Carbon Market; and Cambodia is among the countries implementing REDD+ well along with Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, and Viet Nam. Since 2016, Cambodia has earned \$11.6 million from the sale of carbon credits from Cambodia's two regions, including Kao Seima Wildlife Sanctuary and Southern Cardamom National Park, to big firms like Disney, Shell, and Gucci, etc. According to Forest References Level, in theory Cambodia can produce 10 million tonnes of carbon credits a year to get funds within the framework of Result-Based Payment from the Green Climate Fund.¹¹⁵ The government is indeed aware of the challenges to ensuring integrity in the voluntary markets.

UNDP – with the EU, Sweden, the World Bank, the NDC Partnership, and other development partners – supported the RGC in updating its *2020 NDC* in mainstreaming gender as one of the six sectors among 29 prioritized NDC enabling actions.¹¹⁶ The areas where women play a central role – food security, nutrition, energy, livelihoods, health, and natural resource management, among others – are those most directly affected by climate change. By emphasizing gender inequality, climate change issues and solutions reinforce a structural root cause of violence against women and girls.¹¹⁷ Mitigation priority actions, including energy, waste, and transport, all have linkages to gender equality and social inclusion, and have the potential to contribute to several gender-based indicators. The NDC 2020 highlights that gender and age disaggregated data are crucially important in measuring the success of the gender targets, not only related to women's participation but also women's access to skills and technology, as well as women in climate-related decision-making. In contrast, stakeholders mentioned that UNDP could have been more assertive in influencing Cambodia's Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality, which does not differentiate the social and economic costs and benefits for women and other vulnerable groups by assuming that it would affect or benefit all gender groups equally;¹¹⁸ and the REDD+, where there is a need to recognize the diversity of stakeholders and their needs, particularly among forest communities and women in this group.

The evaluation mapped all projects across all three CP outcomes with subnational implementation related to climate change and overlaid it with the climate change vulnerability index (see map 6). The map shows UNDP has an almost entire country presence, especially in areas with high climate vulnerability. UNDP CO justified its presence as “casting a wide net” to acquire as many diverse and innovative climate change solutions from communities as possible. Given limited programme funding, however, the evaluation sees optimal results in focusing on highly vulnerable areas.

¹¹⁴ Cambodia's vision for carbon neutrality is largely founded on the continued implementation of existing commitments in the forest and land use sector. Execution of the REDD+ Investment Plan2 will drive reduced rates of deforestation as well as an expansion of afforestation and reforestation activities. The forest and land use sector is expected to provide a significant carbon sink, leaving room for other sectors to incrementally transition towards carbon neutrality.

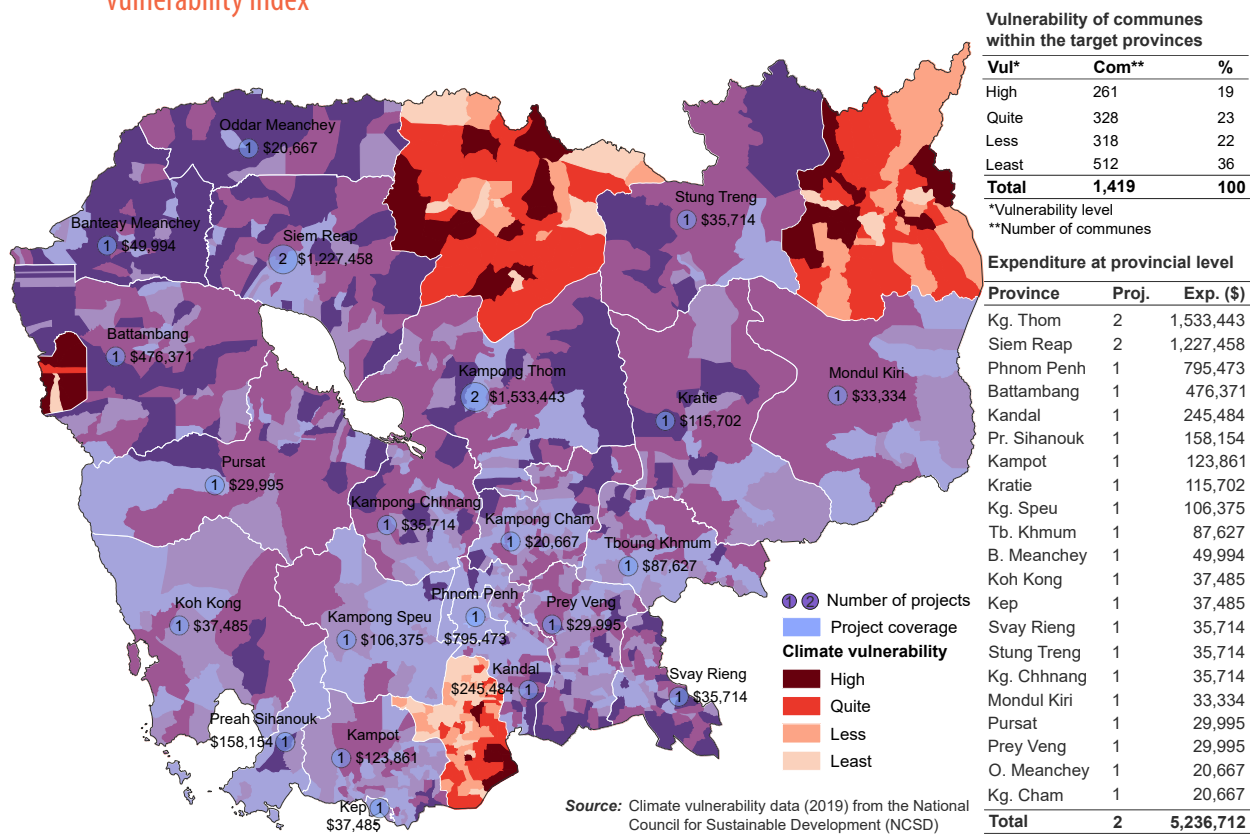
¹¹⁵ See <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50829171/cambodia-considered-as-good-redd-implementing-country/>.

¹¹⁶ See <https://pia.ndcpartnership.org/introduction/#executive-summary>.

¹¹⁷ General Secretariat, NCSD, “Cambodia's Updated Nationally Determined Contribution” (2020), <https://ncsd.moe.gov.kh>.

¹¹⁸ General Secretariat, NCSD, “Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality – Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions” (2021), <https://ncsd.moe.gov.kh>.

MAP 6. UNDP Cambodia projects with climate change components overlaid with climate change vulnerability index



Finding 8. Sustainability of environmental results: UNDP delivered important results through its Outcome 2 portfolio. However, there are serious risks to the sustainability of these results, which need to be managed and serve as lessons learned for its future portfolio. These risks stem from inadequate foresight and planning for sustainability, exacerbated by complex political economy issues. Some examples include the Early Warning System and Access and Benefits Sharing projects.

Though UNDP delivered results at the national and subnational level vis-à-vis commitments under project documents (see Finding 5 – policy and research, Finding 6 – energy, and Finding 7 – climate change), the main concern that the evaluation found related to its Outcome 2¹¹⁹ is the broader adoption of results, which is a programme implementation issue, as well as the complex political economy issues that at times have limited its influence. Interviews and reviews of terminal evaluation and project reports reveal concerns regarding the likelihood of discontinued benefits after the project ends and the high risks that are likely to affect the continuation of the project outcomes. Some examples include:

¹¹⁹ Includes natural resources management, especially land, water, forestry, and wildlife; REED +; biodiversity conservation and preservation; and mineral resources.

- The Early Warning System (2014–2020) project’s sustainability was rated as “moderately unlikely,” and the risk of discontinuation of the project outcomes was rated high due to the limited capacity of the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology and provincial partners. This was compounded by the inadequate availability of the government budget for operations and maintenance. It was noted that a financial sustainability strategy should have been prepared before the project ended.¹²⁰
- The effectiveness and sustainability of the *Collaborative Management for Watershed and Ecosystem 2017–2020* project were affected by a long gestation of project design and a slow inception until its mid-term. This meant that many activities got cramped in the latter half of implementation, allowing little time to mainstream the results and consolidate lessons. The financial sustainability was rated as “moderately unlikely,” and the country/community ownership was rated as “moderately likely.” There was also no financial strategy to sustain the project activities through domestic sources.¹²¹ Similarly, the *Cambodian Rural Livelihood 2015–2020* project’s very slow start-up phase delayed the implementation of planned interventions, substantially affecting effectiveness. The financial, institutional, and governance risks to sustainability were all assessed as “moderately likely.”¹²²
- UNDP reported that the final draft of the *Access and Benefits Sharing sub-decree (version 27)* was adopted at the technical working level in 2021. The agency planned to submit the draft to MoE’s management for decision in 2022, and the project ends the same year. At the time of writing, it is unknown if and when the draft law will be approved by the government and when it will be submitted to the national assembly.¹²³
- The Environmental Governance Reform project reported on the success and sustainability prospects for its result, that is the draft version of the *Environmental and Natural Resource Management Code (Environment Code)*, which was completed in 2019. The Environmental Code is composed of 11 books ranging from regulating pollution to protecting biodiversity. The code’s uptake and sustainability were pinned on the formal enactment process by the National Assembly and Senate in 2020 to be led by the UNDP counterparts in MoE. As of September 2022 there has been no further progress.¹²⁴
- The terminal evaluation report of the *Forest Carbon Partnership Facility phase 2 (2017–2020)* raised concerns about sustainability and up-scaling of results due to a reliance on UNDP staff for the day-to-day project administration. The report also underscored institutional and financial risks. It went on to advise that the future success of REDD+ will largely depend on intersectoral coordination and commitment to policy and regulatory enforcement by all sectors, and by ensuring that non-forestry sectors are recognized and allocated financial support from the *National REDD+ Strategy – Action and Investment Plan* as part of mainstreaming REDD+. The terminal evaluation and stakeholders consulted within this evaluation raised concerns on the issues of land tenure security, governance, and ownership (discussed in Finding 9 – land issues), pointing out that perhaps REDD+ is one of the options that can catalyse improvement in land tenure security.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Amal, A., “Terminal Evaluation Final Report – Strengthening Climate Information and Early Warning Systems in Cambodia to support Climate Resilient Development and Adaptation to Climate Change Project” (UNDP, Global Environment Fund, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, 2020).

¹²¹ UNDP/P. N. Ugen, “Terminal Evaluation Final Report: UNDP/Global Environment Fund Project on Collaborative Management for Watershed and Ecosystem Service Protection and Rehabilitation in the Cardamom Mountains, Upper Prek Thnot River Basin,” (UNDP: Phnom Penh, 2020).

¹²² UNDP/Hans van Nord, “Final Evaluation: Reducing the Vulnerability of Cambodian Rural Livelihoods through Enhanced Sub-national Climate Change Planning and Execution of Priority Actions” (UNDP: Phnom Penh, 2020).

¹²³ MoE, “Annual Project Progress Report: Developing a Comprehensive Framework for Practical Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefits Sharing.”

¹²⁴ MoE/UNDP, “Final Project Report: Environmental Governance Reform Project” (Reporting period 1 April 2016–15 August 2019 (UNDP: Phnom Penh, 2020).

¹²⁵ REDD+ Cambodia, “Terminal Evaluation findings of the implementation of the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Readiness Additional Grant (FCPF-II),” Cambodia REED+ Programme, Cambodia REED+ Secretariat (2020).

- The efficacy of UNDP contributions to the hydrological and meteorological monitoring stations for early warning systems was limited due to technical issues such as the disruption of the real-time telemetry system for data transfer from the stations to the forecasting centre. The lack of adequate capacity and financial resources for local operators to maintain and look after the systems were also cited as a main reason for low effectiveness and high risk to sustainability.¹²⁶

Many interviewees in the UN System, UNDP, and CSOs highlighted that the most challenging sector for broader adoption of results is natural resource management (NRM) and forestry, where political economy issues play a large part in its governance. While UNDP has been active in advocating for issues where the government shares a common concern, such as climate change, it has taken a more conservative approach and has been less active in issues concerning NRM, forestry, and especially in relation to land concessions (see Finding 9). The development of policy and regulation for this sector is challenging. While regulatory and policy frameworks for sustainable NRM are in place, their implementation lags due to diverse and often powerful interests surrounding resources. The other challenges related to NRM include limited participation and power of local communities for NRM, limited financing for conservation, and competing interests for land uses.¹²⁷

The evaluation found that in some cases UNDP Outcome 2 interventions were designed to ensure ownership. By expanding collaborations with development partners to tackle environmental issues within their immediate sphere of influence, UNDP hopes to secure ownership of results. For example, it engaged with the private sector to broaden the Extended Producer Responsibility schemes to reduce the amount of plastic entering the system. UNDP also partnered with CSOs and NGOs to gather more contextualized information and to deliver community-level interventions such as increasing resilience to climate change and disasters. UNDP worked on policy and planning intervention at the national level, and increasingly with subnational authorities to deliver field activities and build capacities at the local level.

Finding 9. Land issues: UNDP had limited engagement in the politically charged land conflicts issues associated with NRM work, which often involved vulnerable and poor households. Historically, UNDP CO management has taken a conservative and cautious approach to this issue, as it fulfils its role as a neutral arbiter of issues mandated to promote reforms while navigating the complex political economy in Cambodia. The evaluation recognizes that land tenure security issues are influenced by other factors that are beyond UNDP and its projects and outputs, though it is within the sphere of its mandate.

Despite efforts of development partners, including UNDP assistance and intervention with the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and the National Council for Sustainable Development, the rate of deforestation in Cambodia remains among the highest in the world. In addition, land conflicts and land tenure insecurity remain high, which threatens to disrupt peace and inclusive development.¹²⁸ At the same time, UNDP was seen by some observers to shy away from politically charged issues such as land conflict and fighting corruption, etc.¹²⁹ The Global Forest Watch estimates that Cambodia has 7.22 million hectares of natural forest and has lost 32 per cent of its humid primary forest from 2002 to 2021, around 1.34 million hectares.

¹²⁶ Amal, op. cit.

¹²⁷ Focus group discussion 9 argued that the community-based protected areas are the lowest level in the national protected areas systems, and with the least budget, but they tend to be relatively more effective and more sustainable if there is a sufficiently enabling environment.

¹²⁸ See <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/89413/cambodias-forests-are-disappearing>.

¹²⁹ Interviews 16 and 17, <https://kh.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-phnom-penh-statement-on-the-usaid-greening-prey-lang-funding-redirect/>.

As of 2017, the RGC granted 1.8 million hectares to agro-industrial concessions and 0.8 million hectares to mining concessions by both domestic and foreign investors, while since 2011 some 29 per cent of rural households did not have agricultural land and 47 per cent had less than one hectare to cultivate.¹³⁰ Land conflicts in Cambodia have been pervasive and, at times, violent between local communities and entities that invest in land and other natural and mineral resources. At the same time, the development partners, including donor agencies, have played ambivalent roles. In some cases, development partners put political and economic pressure on the government to settle the conflicts, such as the EU, World Bank, GIZ, USAID, UN OHCHR, etc.¹³¹ Other donors and development partners, however, including UNDP, seem to have shied away from this politically contentious issue.¹³²

Previously, UNDP engaged in land issues, underscoring its importance in the *2007 Cambodia Human Development Report*.¹³³ It used to support and have a strong presence in the annual tree blessing and forest festivals hosted by the local forest NGOs and communities in the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary. But since 2021, UNDP has not provided financial assistance. Confirmed reports mentioned that Cambodian authorities banned the Prey Lang Community Network patrol group from entering the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary forest in 2021, claiming they are unregistered under the controversial Law on Non-governmental Organizations.¹³⁴ In 2021 the United States declared that it was pulling out its \$21 million funding for the Greening Prey Lang project managed by the Cambodian Ministry of Environment, which stakeholders attributed to the worsening situation in this important national protected area.¹³⁵ The USAID statement listed a long list of reasons for redirecting those funds to civil society, the private sector, and local efforts to improve livelihoods and expand climate-sensitive agriculture.¹³⁶ Such change in context leaves a vacuum that UNDP could fill within its capacity and mandate, and as an organization working on environmental issues the agency has a track record of working on protected areas management and on mobilizing resources from environmental vertical funds.

¹³⁰ The NGO Forum on Cambodia Land Security Project, "A Study on Land Disputes in Four Provinces of Cambodia: Mapping, Impacts, and Possible Solutions" (2015).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Chanrith Ngin and Andreas Neef, "Contested Land Restitution Processes in Cambodia, Development Studies, School of Social Sciences" (Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland, 2021).

¹³³ See <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/cambodiahdr2007pdf.pdf>.

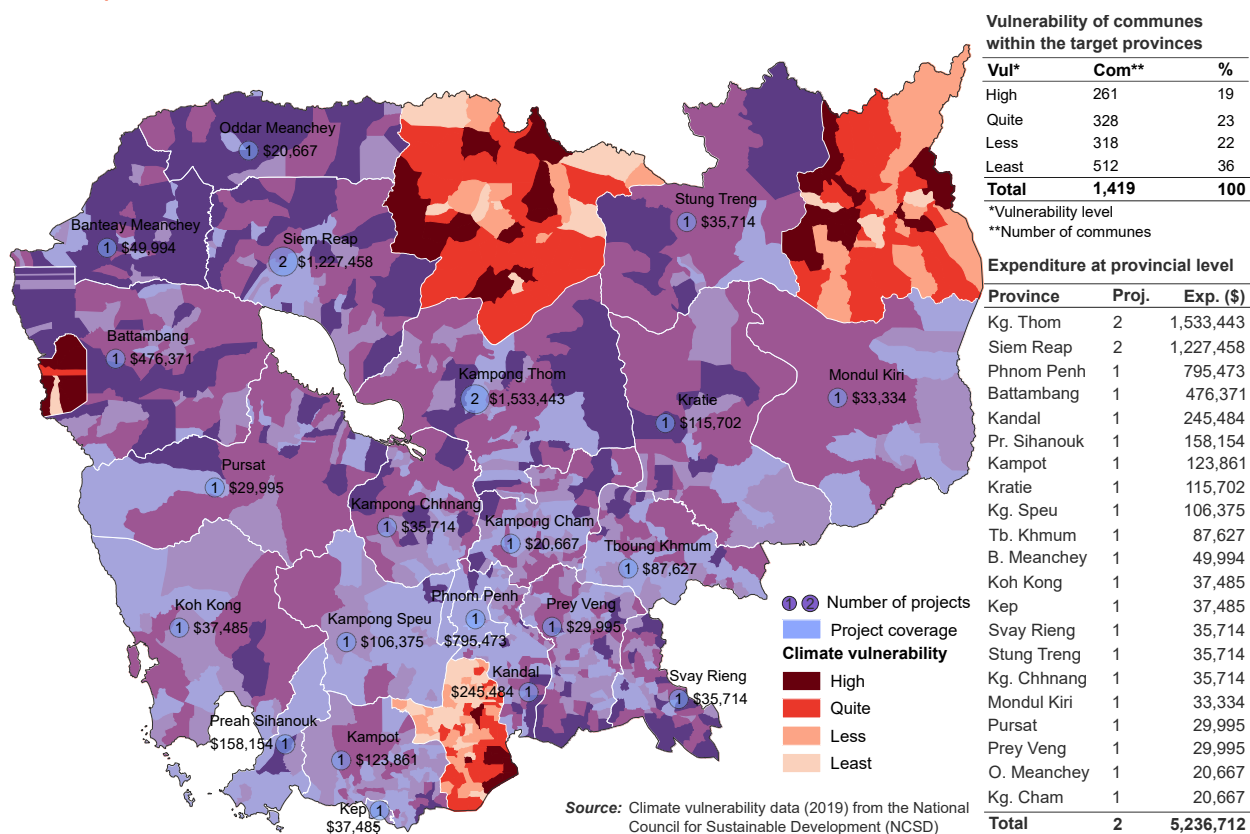
¹³⁴ See <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/us-pulls-prey-lang-funding-redirects-resources-to-local-groups/5934534.html>: "Unfortunately, the situation is worsening. Since 2016, despite USAID's support for increased ranger patrols, training of law enforcement, and development of a national protected area management system, the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary has lost approximately 38,000 hectares of forest, nearly 9 percent of its forest cover."

¹³⁵ See <https://kh.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-phnom-penh-statement-on-the-usaid-greening-prey-lang-funding-redirect/>.

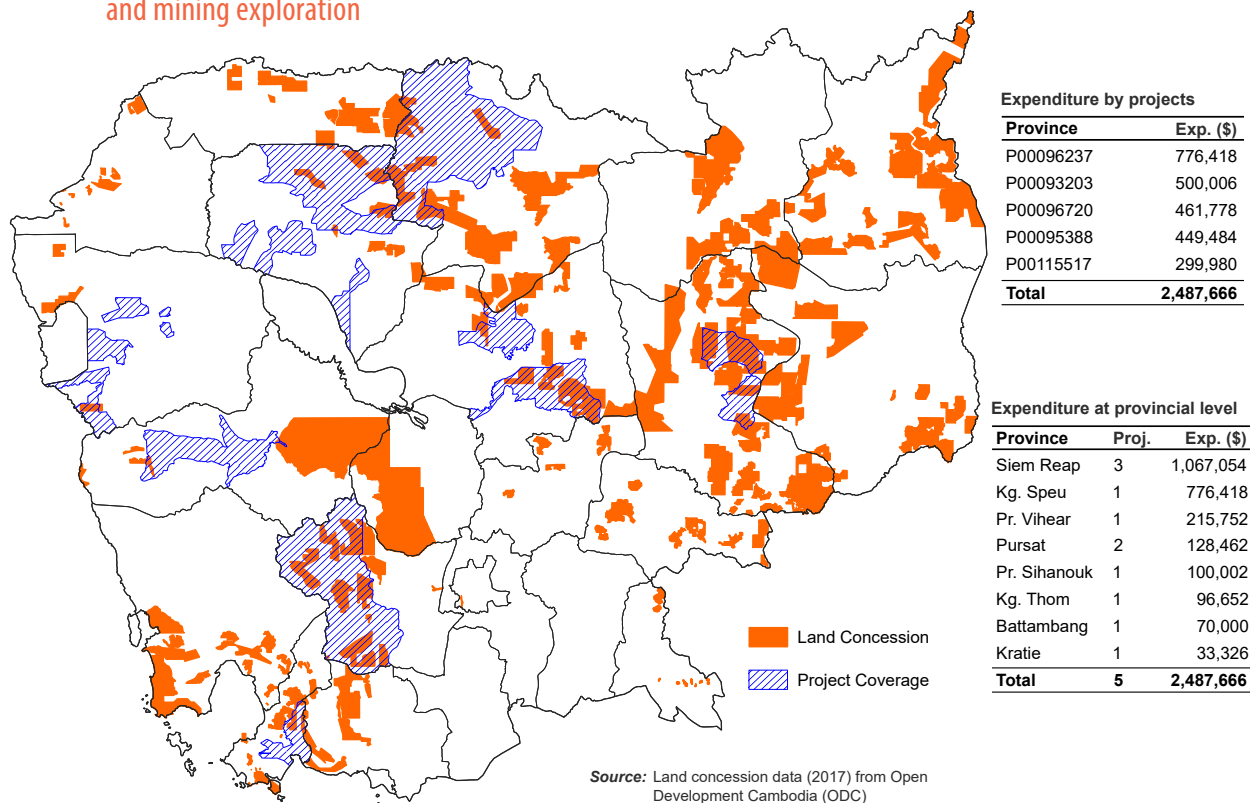
¹³⁶ See <https://kh.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-phnom-penh-statement-on-the-usaid-greening-prey-lang-funding-redirect/>. Since 2016, despite USAID's support for increased ranger patrols, training of law enforcement, and development of a national protected area management system, the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary has lost approximately 38,000 hectares of forest, nearly 9 per cent of its forest cover. Well-documented illegal logging continues in and around the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary, and Cambodian authorities have not adequately prosecuted wildlife crimes or put a stop to these illicit activities. In addition, the government continues to silence and target local communities and their civil society partners who are justifiably concerned about the loss of their natural resources.

The evaluation mapped all projects with subnational implementation of natural resource management activities and overlaid it with nature-protected areas. In addition, UNDP contrasted it with concession and mining exploration areas (see maps 7 and 8). UNDP's natural resource management activities, to an extent, had some overlap with protected areas as well as several activities at the border and outside protected areas, which the CO explained as minimizing the impact to protected areas (e.g., encroaching, water pollution, etc.). The evaluation notes that UNDP is virtually absent in areas where there is a large presence of mining and land concessions, especially those that overlap with protected areas (i.e., Strung Treng, Ratanakiri, Mondul Kiri). While the provinces of Strung Tren and Mondulkiri have climate change activities but with low expenditures, there were no activities in Ratanakiri (see map 6). Though UNDP's presence is influenced by multiple factors, including donor priority, availability of funding, and government needs, UNDP can exert influence as to where these funds could go, especially if there is a valid reason for intervention, such as pressure on natural resources.

MAP 7. UNDP Cambodia projects with natural resources management component overlaid with climate nature protected areas



MAP 8. UNDP Cambodia projects with natural resources management component overlaid with land concession and mining exploration



2.3 Peace: Participation and accountability

CPD OUTCOME 3: By 2023 women and men, including those underrepresented, marginalized, and vulnerable, benefit from more transparent and accountable legislative and governance frameworks that ensure meaningful and informed participation in economic and social development and political processes.

Related outputs

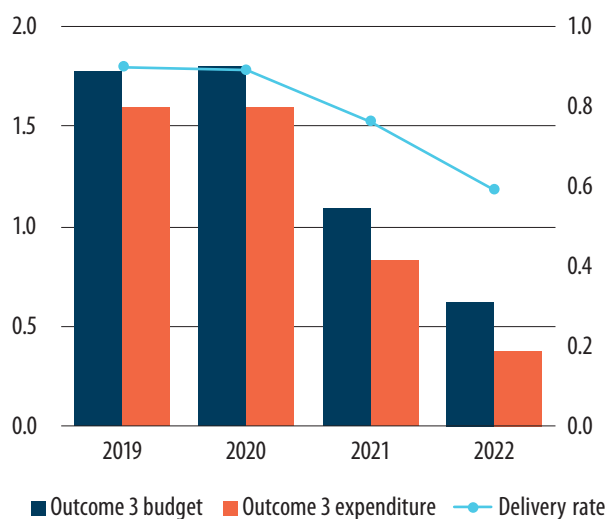
Output 3.1: Government builds an evidence-based monitoring, evaluation, and reporting system supportive of delivering the Goals.

Output 3.2: Women have improved status in leadership and decision-making.

Output 3.3: Subnational administrations are able to deliver services in a transparent and inclusive manner responsive to constituents' needs.

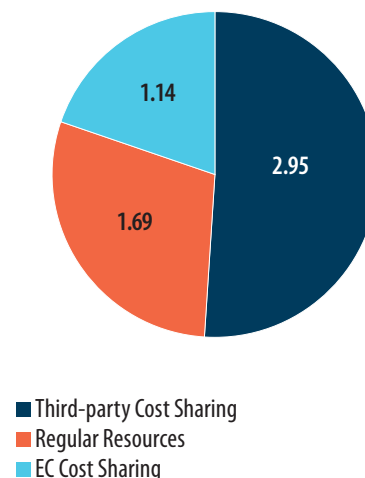
Output 3.4: Capacity of persons with disabilities organizations and networks improved to advance the rights of persons with disabilities.

FIGURE 7. Evolution of budget and expenditure of Outcome 3 (US\$ million)



Source: Atlas (as of 28 January 2023).

FIGURE 8. Expenditure by fund category of Outcome 3, 2019–2022 (US\$ million)



Outcome 3 has a budget of \$5.2 million with an expenditure of \$4.3 million. It is implemented through nine projects. The portfolio can be grouped into four areas: (1) promoting participation and accountability, which has two projects with an expenditure of \$1.2 million; (2) strengthening institutional capacity for the SDGs and accountable public service, which includes a project with \$1.2 million in expenditure; (3) promoting gender equality, with an expenditure of \$747,000; and (4) supporting rights and leaving no one behind, with two projects worth \$1.1 million. It should be noted that several projects within the whole country programme portfolio contribute to Outcome 3. The findings below cut across the four areas of Output 3.

Finding 10. Transparent and participatory governance: Within its limited space, UNDP delivered results that helped lay the foundation for more participatory governance. However, given the current civic space in the country, UNDP is likely to achieve only limited success in ensuring that people benefit from more transparent and accountable legislative and governance frameworks that promote meaningful and informed participation in economic and social development and political process.

Results of the final evaluation of *Partnership for Development Result (Phase 2)*, completed in July 2020,¹³⁷ indicate an overall satisfactory rating. However, the evaluation rated the project as “mostly unsatisfactory” for sustainability. The evaluation underscored that the project’s “biggest achievement is the work it is doing in terms of improving aid effectiveness and partner co-ordination. This includes the ODA [official development assistance] database and co-ordination of ODA disbursement process, but also aid effectiveness meetings, as well as CDC’s management of the joint monitoring indicators.”¹³⁸ Relative to the Country Programme Document Output 3.1, the Partnership for Development Result provided support in the development and integration of the Cambodia SDG Framework into the National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023. In 2019, with support of UNDP, the RGC also submitted a Voluntary National Review report on the

¹³⁷ For details of the evaluation see Cristina Mosteaga, “Partnership for Development Results (Phase2) – Final Evaluation” (July 2020).

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

status of the CSDGs. However, while the RGC was able to integrate the CSDGs into the NSDP, there are gaps and challenges – elaborated in the succeeding paragraphs – in the SDG reporting process that undermine meaningful and informed participation of the public as well as greater transparency and accountability.

UNDP is currently implementing a civic engagement project¹³⁹ with a particular focus on strengthening the existing infrastructure of civic engagement at the national and provincial levels. To an extent, UNDP is helping create and expand existing spaces for civil engagement at different levels, which is an important governance approach to building social capital through inclusive and broad-based participation of communities and groups. It is a key foundation for creating a more transparent and accountable democratic governance framework and a more vibrant democratic system. This is particularly critical at the subnational level where there is limited information, awareness, and understanding by local communities and civil society groups regarding their rights, access to public services, government policies, and the role and functions of local authorities.

An in-depth assessment of the contribution of the Civic Engagement project contributing to Outcome 3 was not possible since the project had just started the implementation activities in 2021. These initial activities focused on the development of proposals to be implemented in 2022, conduct of participatory research to inform entry points for the project, and capacity-development using the pilot curriculum of ‘Innovation for Local Administration’. Nonetheless, it can be pointed out that the civic engagement project holds promise in providing a platform for structured dialogue and engagement between civil society and local authorities in the four provinces that the project is implemented. If successfully implemented, these dialogue mechanisms can provide useful lessons learned as well as models that can be adapted in promoting civic engagement at the provincial level in other provinces amid the current challenge of a narrowing democratic space. Specifically, the Provincial Partnership Dialogue mechanism can serve as a platform for the public’s engagement with the SDGs as part of the RGC’s Voluntary National Review process that underpins the CSDG Framework.

The Civic Engagement project was focused on creating platforms for engagement at the provincial level, while the Inclusive Governance project focused on developing models for solid waste management (SWM) service delivery in three pilot districts/municipalities (D/Ms). This focus was a response to the immediate need to clarify and develop models that will identify functions of D/Ms and how D/Ms will engage with citizens following the transfer of solid waste management service delivery functions from the Ministry of Environment to D/Ms in 2015. The project was successful in developing these SWM models, including social accountability mechanisms for SWM functions.¹⁴⁰ However, the project’s potential contribution to promoting a more transparent and accountable system for service delivery failed to take off following the decision of the RGC to issue sub-decrees 183 and 184, which modified the functions and structure of D/Ms after the models were developed, making the intuitional arrangement for SWM developed in the models outdated.¹⁴¹

Despite these achievements, there has been limited progress towards Outcome 3, which is a result of a combination of systemic as well as programme specific issues. As reported by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia in 2020 and 2021, there is a narrowing of democratic space in Cambodia. This is evidenced by various legislations and judicial restrictions that limit the ability and

¹³⁹ UNDP, “Building Capacities for Civic Engagement, Peacebuilding and Inclusive Dialogue: Towards Inclusive and Participatory Governance” (2023).

¹⁴⁰ For details of the project outputs, see “Inclusive Governance for Service Delivery and Social Accountability – Final Project Report” (June 2020), p. 2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

venue by which various public interest groups, civil society organizations, and political opposition can raise issues of public interest.¹⁴² Feedback from a number of civil society stakeholders informed UNDP of the challenges faced by CSOs in raising concerns on issues that relate to community rights, such as access to natural resources, land rights, etc., that affect the livelihood and welfare of most rural households and/or communities. Quoting from the latter report, *“The Special Rapporteur urges the government to end investigations and prosecutions of members of the opposition and of human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists, bearing in mind international human rights standards, due process of law and fair trial guarantees, and to open up the space for dialogue, reconciliation, and regeneration.”*

Along the same vein, efforts by the government to advance gender equality and women empowerment are constrained by prevailing gender norms that reinforce existing power relations within the household, the government, across sectors, between levels of governments, and Cambodian society in general.¹⁴³ Existing gender norms exert negative effects by limiting women’s participation in decision-making processes that affect them and/or their families. Results from the evaluation of the UNDP project on Gender Equality as well as other studies¹⁴⁴ helped to provide strong evidence that identifies the negative role that gender norms play in promoting gender inequality. As of 2021, women occupy 21.6 percent of seats in the national parliament while comprising 51.8 per cent of the labour force.¹⁴⁵ In the RGC’s civil service, it is estimated that women comprise approximately 42 per cent of the total public servants, while comprising only 26 per cent of those in leadership positions.¹⁴⁶ Even within the subset of four RGC ministries¹⁴⁷ from which the output indicator 3.2.2 (*Percentage of women in management positions in at least four line ministries supported by UNDP*) is based, the target of 33 per cent has been achieved only by two ministries (Ministry of Information, and Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts) as of 2021.¹⁴⁸

Feedback from both the Royal School of Administration and the Cambodia National Council of Women paints a big challenge for women in the civil service aiming for leadership positions. Women in the public sector in particular have to deal with the double burden expected of them in terms of their household responsibility as well as the demand of their professional careers. UNDP provided support through facilitating capacity-development activities and platforms such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs Young Professional Network; support for the Youth Leadership Lab on Gender Equality; establishment of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs Social Media Working Group; a training programme for women leaders in the civil service in partnership with the Royal School of Administration and the National School of Local Administration; and development of an E-learning course web-based application. Indeed, while women are given priority for training and study at the Royal School of Administration, there are fewer women than men who are receiving training. Similarly, women aiming for leadership positions in the public sector not only have to hone and enhance their technical skills but also must acquire leadership skill. This requires them to engage with their peers, mentors, and the public to develop and learn leadership skills.

¹⁴² United Nations General Assembly, “Situation of human rights in Cambodia: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, A/HRC/45/51 (24 August 2020), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/216/35/PDF/G2021635.pdf?OpenElement>; United Nations, General Assembly, Situation of human rights in Cambodia; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, A/HRC/48/79 (3 August 2021), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/210/37/PDF/G2121037.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹⁴³ “Gender Equality Deep-Dive for Cambodia,” https://cambodia.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Gender%20Deep%20Dive%20-%20CCA%20Cambodia_V6_010322_LQ.pdf.

¹⁴⁴ See Transparency International Cambodia, Press Release on the Launch of an In-depth Study Report on “Leadership of Women and Youth in Cambodia: Current Status and Challenges” (Phnom Penh, 19 March 2021); UN Cambodia, “Common Country Analysis: Gender Deep Dive” (7 March 2022), p. 10, <https://cambodia.un.gender/en/171410-gender-equality-deep-dive-cambodia>.

¹⁴⁵ See UNDP data mart columns M and AH1.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Women in leadership position’ is defined as those occupying deputy head of office to general directorate.

¹⁴⁷ The four ministries are the pilot ministries for gender mainstreaming under the Gender Equality project (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Civil Service, and Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts).

¹⁴⁸ Based on the Indicator Tracking Table for the UNDP Cambodia Results-Oriented Analysis Report.

Another systemic issue relates to the pervasive lack of or limited information and knowledge by local stakeholders, especially civil society organizations, communities, and even subnational authorities. The RGC completed the localization of SDGs and their integration into the RGC's *National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023* in 2019. It also completed and submitted its *National Voluntary Report* in 2019. Both initiatives were supported by UNDP and involved consultations and engagement with multi-stakeholders at the national level. The nationalization process for the SDGs in Cambodia was a lengthy process that involved external technical missions and consultations within the RGC, and between the RGC and selected stakeholders to review the country's database and national statistical system to determine which indicators can be adopted or adapted in the context of Cambodia. In comparison, feedback from CSOs and the association of subnational administration suggests that the process of localizing¹⁴⁹ the SDGs is far from broad-based and inclusive. Insights based on the various consultations suggest that the SDG localization process in Cambodia is largely top-down and technocratic, with limited inputs from the ground. Feedback from the interviews indicates that local communities and local authorities have very limited awareness, understanding, or participation of the SDGs. For example, local communities have a limited understanding of the relationship or functional linkage between the SDGs and Commune/Sangkat planning and the resulting Commune Investment Plan, which contains the locally-identified projects of communities to be funded and implemented.

Finally, there are programme-related issues that affect the contribution towards the achievement of Outcome 3. Most of the governance projects – with the exception of the Gender Equality and Partnership for Result Phase 2 and Civic Engagement projects – have a short life of two years or less. Moreover, except for these two projects, both of which are nationally executed, the rest of the projects are implemented in a few sample provinces.¹⁵⁰ As such, the impact of the various project interventions (e.g., the capacity-development activities) is limited among the participating provinces and organizations. Thus, while there have been observed improvements in the capacity of and coordination between the Provincial Disability Action Council and Organizations of People with Disability in the provinces, which is covered by the Disability Inclusion project, other provinces do not demonstrate the same improvements. In varying degrees, a similar observation can be made with respect to the positive change in attitude towards people with disabilities in provinces where the disability rights projects are implemented. These project design features, namely, short project life, varying timetable, and pilot provinces, limits the country programme's ability to leverage synergies and complementarities that can contribute to improving the programme's internal coherence as well as contributing to greater development impact on the ground.

Finding 11. Gender equality and women empowerment: Despite some substantive breakthroughs, such as the inclusion of gender in the NDC and making the IDPoor criteria more gender-sensitive, UNDP made limited progress in systematically advancing gender equality and women empowerment across its programme. UNDP has consolidated gender programming with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. In doing so it had limited engagement in working on gender empowerment with multiple ministries and at the subnational level. To an extent, these gaps are now being addressed. The evaluation recognizes that there are consistent and systemic political, social, and behavioural challenges that limit gender empowerment in Cambodia.

Since 2001, UNDP has been providing support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) in strengthening its capacity to fulfil its mandate of developing, implementing, and coordinating gender policies and programmes in Cambodia. UNDP support is mainly through (1) establishing, strengthening, and

¹⁴⁹ We use the terms 'nationalization' and 'localization' interchangeably to mean adapting the SDGs in the national context.

¹⁵⁰ The A2J project was implemented in three provinces, while the Disability Inclusion Project covered only four provinces. The Inclusive Governance project covers three pilot districts/municipalities in three provinces. The Civic Engagement project covers four provinces.

institutionalizing the gender mainstreaming system in Cambodia through the Cambodia National Council of Women at the national level, and through the various gender mainstreaming actions groups across RCG ministries; (2) developing draft National Gender Policy; (3) developing MoWA's *Gender Strategic Plan* (e.g., Neary Rattanak), gender analysis/assessment, and mainstreaming gender in national policies (e.g., National Strategy Development Plan) and programmes (e.g., *Deconcentration and Decentralization National Action Plan* and action plans of ministries); and (4) developing the capacity of MoWA for policy development, M&E, and project management, among others.¹⁵¹ Other initiatives aimed at policy development and supporting the implementation of policies undertaken by the project include the *Third National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2019–2023*, and nationally-owned guidance on mediation to gender-based violence. Despite the achievements and progress made, findings from project evaluations point to both systemic challenges and project-specific issues – external and internal to MoWA – that have affected the effectiveness of UNDP support to MoWA in advancing gender equality and women empowerment in Cambodia.¹⁵²

UNDP faced significant challenges in contributing to outcomes on (i) increasing the number of women in leadership positions and (ii) in the effective institutionalization of gender policies across the government, and more effective performance of gender machinery to lead gender equality mainstreaming with the inclusion of disadvantaged groups of women and girls.¹⁵³ The results of the terminal evaluation of the *Project to Support Leading the Way to Gender Equality* underscored what is widely recognized:

*Gender equality is still poorly understood in many RGC ministries and in Cambodian society in general. The outputs under this outcome, such as a capacity development framework, the establishment of partnerships between MoWA and key stakeholders, and a handbook on women's leadership, are not sufficient to leverage change in the area of women's leadership. These activities fail to appreciate the complex barriers to women's leadership and the capacity for MoWA to enact change in this area. International best practice in the area of women's leadership highlights the use of special temporary measures such as quotas and targets along with other measures which seek to understand and re-define leadership opportunities for women. A leadership initiative such as this would need to be part of a much larger reform agenda lead by the highest levels of government (emphasis added).*¹⁵⁴

This analysis is supported by complementary studies by the UN Cambodia Common Country Analysis on Gender¹⁵⁵ and Transparency International Cambodia's study on *Leadership of Women and Youth in Cambodia: Current Status and Challenges*, which found that "*although certain progress have been made over the years regarding women and youth's engagement in decision-making positions and they are also considered and believed to be a key driving force for economic, cultural, and social development, they remain significantly under-represented in the public sphere, particularly in leadership positions at both the local and national levels.*" Furthermore, the study found that "*a shortage of women in leadership positions is linked to stereotypes and*

¹⁵¹ Through the Partnership for Gender Equity project. Phase 1 was 2001–2003; Phase 2 was 2004–2006, with an extension to 2010; Phase 3 was 2011–2015; and Phase 4 was 2016–2019. After 2019 the UNDP support project came to be called Project to Support the Leading Way to Gender Equality. In its various phases "the project has several interlinked components, but the focus is mainly on strengthening the gender mainstreaming process in national policies and programmes, including sectoral plans, and on capacity building of the ministry and key line ministry staff." See UNDP, "2010 Assessment of Development Results Cambodia," pp. 21–23, <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/4359>. For details of the accomplishments and performance of the Partnership for Gender Equity project, see Franz Wong and Samkol Lay, "Mid-Term Review of Partnership for Gender Equality Phase 2 Extension" (March 2010), <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/4289>; and Helen Brereton, "Mid-Term Review of Partnership for Gender Equality Project Phase 2 (2011–2015)," <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/5151>.

¹⁵² The Disability Inclusion project focuses primarily on strengthening the institutional capacity of the Disability Action Council and the Provincial Disability Action Council to develop and implement disability inclusive policies and budgets. It also aims to strengthen the institutional capacities of health and other essential services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) in selected provinces.

¹⁵³ Froniga Greig, "Final Evaluation Report: Project to Support Leading the Way to Gender Equality" (December 2020), p. 6, <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/10014>.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁵⁵ UN Cambodia, "Common Country Analysis: Gender Deep Dive" (7 March 2022), p. 10, <https://cambodia.un.gender/en/171410-gender-equality-deep-dive-cambodia>.

prejudices towards women's capacities and the expected roles for women, and these were the strongest barriers to women becoming leaders. Meanwhile, age discrimination, institutional barriers, and financial constraints were found to be common barriers preventing youth from becoming leaders."¹⁵⁶ Similar perspectives from interviews with stakeholders reinforce the above findings.

UNDP contributed to the formulation of the *National Policy on Gender Equality document*.¹⁵⁷ The document, which is still in a final draft form pending approval by the RGC's Council of Minister, represents a major shift in strategy in advancing gender equality since it shifts the onus of responsibility from MoWA to the RGC (national and subnational), including all aspects of advancing gender equality and women empowerment (policy development and legal frameworks, sectoral plans, policy development, promotion of gender equality, and budgeting and implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives across sectors and levels of government).¹⁵⁸

Given the long-standing support to MoWA, complemented by assessments carried out by other development partners, it raises the question as to why a shift in the focus of the RGC's gender strategy was not forthcoming earlier. It is also emphasized that it is long recognized by knowledgeable observers, including UNDP, that MoWA's political capital needs bolstering to influence the RGC. Indeed, the final project report of the *Support the Leading the Way for Gender Equality* project noted that "MoWA's mandate is to coordinate gender equality work, but MoWA does not have the authority at the national level to influence and challenge political processes." Furthermore, the report underscored that "MoWA does not have the resources to implement large-scale programmes that are able to deliver results across multiple ministries and to a large number of Cambodian Women."¹⁵⁹ These observations underscore one of the recommendations of the terminal evaluation to "Conduct a longitudinal review of the long-term engagement with MoWA to assess the impact of support over the last 15 years."¹⁶⁰

Finding 12. Disability: UNDP contributed to advancing the rights of those with disabilities and the principle of *leave no one behind*. Progress has been made by operationalizing a whole-of-government and human rights-based approach, working at the subnational level linked to national-level dialogue to influence policies, strengthening institutional arrangement, capitalizing on the partnership, and building coherence across the country programme outcomes and projects.

UNDP built upon the earlier UN Joint Programme on Disability Rights in Cambodia 2014–2018.¹⁶¹ At the policy level, the agency supported the RGC through the Disability Action Council (DAC) to draft substantial amendments to the *National Disability Law* and to ensure that the revised law is aligned with the *Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disability* and other international frameworks.¹⁶² The proposed amendments to the National Disability Law are still in draft form following extensive discussion.¹⁶³ UNDP also supported

¹⁵⁶ Transparency International Cambodia Press Release, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Through the *Support the Leading the Way for Gender Equality* project; the result is part of the CP indicator 3.2.1.

¹⁵⁸ National Gender Policy (2nd draft, 2020), p. 6.

¹⁵⁹ "Final Project Report: Project to Support Leading the Way for Gender Equality" (March 2017–March 2020), p. 11.

¹⁶⁰ Greig, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁶¹ UNDP under the current CP implemented two complementary projects, namely: Access to Justice without Barrier for People with Disabilities, and the Programme to Support Disability Inclusion and Quality Services for Gender-Based Violence. The two projects strongly complement each other in addressing what might be termed as two "sides of the same coin" – disability inclusion and access to justice for people with disabilities.

¹⁶² Access to Justice project.

¹⁶³ The proposed amendments to the National Disability Law are still in draft form pending submission to the Council of Minister in 2022. Accordingly, it is more likely that a revised National Disability Law incorporating the amendments may be passed into law in 2023 or possibly 2024 following the formation of a new government in 2023. There are two articles or provisions that are still not fully compliant with international legal instruments, but are generally acceptable. These provisions include: (1) the need for inclusive education for persons with disabilities, rather than having separate educational system for persons with disabilities; and (2) a provision on access to justice. These gaps result from internal disagreement within the RGC as RGC authorities still struggle to view disability through a human rights lens.

the development of a *National Policy on Legal Aid* and the development of a *Practical Guideline on Legal Aid for Persons with Disabilities*, in collaboration with Legal Aid Cambodia, Cambodia Disability People's Organization (CDPO), and organizations of peoples with disability. The policy has since been set aside in favour of the development of a National Dispute Resolution programme because of the change in the Minister of Justice. It is emphasized that while dispute resolution mechanisms can help, there are cases for persons with disabilities that should be decided in court and not through a dispute resolution mechanism, as such mechanisms can undermine the legal rights of persons with disabilities.

UNDP was also instrumental in conducting a *National Situation Analysis and Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 crisis on the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities*. This analysis helped inform the development of the *National Covid-19 Crisis Recovery Plan for PWDs* – which was instrumental in UNDP's successful advocacy to the RGC to improve the IDPoor system for social protection to better capture the disabilities status of household members.¹⁶⁴ Data on disability and their poverty rate helped in increasing awareness at various levels, including local governments, which use the data for more inclusive provincial/municipal planning. Moreover, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSAVY) has also embarked on the registration of persons with disabilities nationwide. It is envisaged that the IDPoor system for persons with disabilities will be integrated into the general IDPoor under the remit of the Ministry of Planning.

UNDP's successful advocacy led to the development of an inter-ministerial *Prakas on Requirements for Issuing the Driving Licenses for Persons with Disabilities*; a circular on *Strengthening the Implementation of the Physical Accessibility Infrastructure for Persons with Disabilities* led by the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning, and Construction; and the issuance by the Ministry of Interior of the *Prakas on Organization and Functions of the Committee In-charge of Women and Children (CWC)* in Commune/Sangkat in 2020, which included an OPD representation in the CWC. These legal instruments reflect a rights-based approach to disability¹⁶⁵ that includes strategic plans developed with persons with disabilities.

UNDP supported institutional development at two levels: (i) enhance awareness, knowledge, and skills of both duty bearers (government) and rights holders (persons with disabilities) with regard to disability as a human rights issue vis-a-vis the provision of the CRPD; (ii) increase knowledge among the CDPO and OPDs of the judicial system and develop their skills to monitor human rights cases; and (iii) strengthen the capacity of the DAC and its provincial arms, the Provincial Disability Action Council (PDAC), to be able to coordinate and implement disability inclusive policies as well as CDPO/OPDs and other legal aid NGOs. The capacity development component also included the provision of training/mentoring and provision of small grants to the Cambodian Disabled Peoples Organization – the umbrella organization and its members – to provide better referral service related to legal aid and to collect and document cases of alleged human rights violations of persons with disabilities.

Representation of persons with disabilities in local governance and a whole-of-government approach to persons with disabilities' rights and services provision were evident, but they could be more effective if strongly and deliberately linked with other projects (see Finding 3 on Mine-action).

¹⁶⁴ See also "Programme to Promote Disability Inclusion and Quality Services for Gender-Based Violence Victims," MPTF Narrative Report (1 September 2019–30 Nov 2021), p. 9: "During the pandemic, the programme made significant contributions to disability inclusive social protection in Cambodia, for instance, 61,426 persons with disabilities access to a national cash transfer programme." This figure was derived from the message of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia on the occasion of the 23rd Cambodian Day of Persons with Disabilities and the 39th International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 3 December 2021.

¹⁶⁵ These legal instruments are also part of the indicator 3.4.1.

There are a number of notable features that underpin the concrete progress achieved by UNDP. These include the following:

- **Operationalizing a rights-based approach.** UNDP was able to operationalize a rights-based approach by integrating disability inclusion in local development planning and programming. The agency was able to propose projects and access funding from the Commune Investment Fund of 12 commune councils for cash transfer, COVID-19 vaccines, and building accessible toilets and ramps for persons with disabilities. It should be underscored that although COVID-19 vaccines are free of charge and provided by the government, persons with disabilities face equity challenges in accessing these services, including access to relevant information. The commune councils also facilitated with the government the issuance of ID Poor cards to 1,508 persons with disabilities, including 737 women. Moreover, 4,995 persons with disabilities, including 2,787 women, received personal protection equipment materials, emergency support packages, and other social services assistance.¹⁶⁶
- **Strengthened institutional arrangement.** Another notable feature of UNDP disability initiatives is the strengthened institutional mechanism that reflects strong linkages and coordination among the DAC, the PDAC, and commune councils and the active coordination with OPDs. At the national level, the DAC is comprised of 58 member representatives of line ministries, Cambodia Red Cross, CDPO/OPDs, NGOs working for the disability sector, and representatives of provinces/municipalities. The DAC is also supported by a national-level disability working group composed of representatives of ministries at the under-secretary level. This representation is replicated at the provincial level, headed by a deputy governor, with more members coming from OPDs and NGOs.¹⁶⁷ There is also a district-level disability working group, which serves as a bridge between PDAC and commune councils. It elevates concerns of communes and OPDs on matters related to disability to the PDAC. This rather comprehensive structure serves as the platform for coordination among levels of government (national–provincial–district/commune), across levels of government (i.e., PDAC), and between the RGC and OPDs/NGOs. Underpinning this is the support provided by UNDP and other development partners, which provide critical capacity-development support to both RGC agencies and CDPO/OPDs, as well as serve as interlocutors engaging the RGC/DAC in policy discussions and operational management to advance the implementation of disability rights.
- UNDP-supported initiatives aimed at creating a platform for engagement and networking between provincial authorities and OPDs. This enabled Kampong Cham province to respond to issues raised by persons with disabilities, in the process providing effective support to 803 persons with disabilities in accessing the disability allowance scheme, supporting 247 in receiving personal protection equipment materials and emergency food items, and helping 93 to gain employment in 24 garment factories.¹⁶⁸ With technical support from UNDP, five provincial Disability Action Councils (Battambang, Seam Reap, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu, and Tbong Khmum provinces) were able to develop annual operational plans to implement the National Disability Strategic Plan 2019–2023 at the sub-national level.¹⁶⁹ Following a similar arrangement, a disability inclusion manual was developed and finalized in collaboration with the DAC, MoSAVY, and OPDs. The manual is intended to raise awareness on disability inclusion and to include disability in policies and programmes. Complementary to these, a guiding document on the *Organization and Functioning of the Provincial DAC* was developed. This

¹⁶⁶ Programme to Promote Disability Inclusion and Quality Services for Gender-Based Violence Victims, p. 14; field visits and interviews.

¹⁶⁷ See <https://dac.gov.kh/en/article/about-us.html#:~:text=Disability%20Action%20Council%20%28DAC%29%20is%20a%20national%20coordination,the%20rights%20of%20persons%20with%20disabilities%20in%20Cambodia>.

¹⁶⁸ Programme to Promote Disability Inclusion and Quality Services for Gender-Based Violence Victims, p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

document provides a road map to guide the provincial DACs to enable them to effectively perform their roles and responsibility.¹⁷⁰ To create a greater understanding and appreciation of how disability inclusion can be implemented, the Disability Inclusion project – drawing from the success story of Kampong Cham province – produced a video that showcases how the province promoted disability rights at the subnational level. These project activities served as mutually reinforcing components that strengthened the disability sector’s institutional mechanism in the sample provinces.

- **Partnership and coherence.** Another distinctive feature of the disability initiatives is the strong external coherence and capability that each of the UN agencies brought into the partnership. Examples include the joint programme between UNDP and OHCHR under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator¹⁷¹ and the joint programme of UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women.¹⁷² These partnerships enabled the project initiatives to leverage the strength and comparative advantages that each UN agency brought to the table. In the former, UNDP’s strong coordination capability and its relationship with the RGC opened the door for the OHCHR in its engagement and advocacy of proposed amendments to the disability law to align some of its provisions to persons with disabilities. This would have taken a much longer time if OHCHR were doing it alone. Similar feedback was made by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) on UNDP’s strong coordination experience and its integrator role, which make UNDP a partner of choice in supporting disability inclusion in Cambodia.
- UNFPA highlighted a number of value-additions from its partnership with UNDP. Aside from UNDP’s strong coordination capability, the agency brought in a disability perspective in GBV as an entry point for UNFPA’s work. Similarly, UNDP is seen as having a strong policy development and implementation capability and being the go to agency for governance and social accountability for service delivery. For UN Women, UNDP is seen as bringing solid project management and convening capabilities. It is clear that UNDP’s partnership with other UN agencies brought with it strong synergy and complementarities in capabilities that enhanced the results of the project activities to achieve broader results. These partnerships also contributed to the strong coherence of these projects.
- It is important to underscore that the partnership in these projects is not limited to UN agencies or to participating UN agencies and other partners such as DFAT through its ACCESS programme.¹⁷³ The disability projects also involve partnerships with a number of RGC ministries, such as MoSAYV, MoWA, MoJ, MoH, MoU, etc., and with the CDPO and their member OPDs in the sample provinces. The broad-based partnership involving UN agencies, RGC ministries and agencies, and civil society organizations enabled the projects to secure buy-in and strong commitment for reform from the RGC. The broad-based partnership with the RGC ministries helped facilitate coordination and contributed to UNDP’s reputation as a trusted partner of the RGC, which gives it a strong convening capability as indicated by the feedback from civil society organizations.

It should be emphasized that while some concrete progress has been achieved in advancing disability rights in Cambodia, a number of challenges remain. Disability as a human rights issue is a relatively new concept in Cambodia. Indeed, disability remains largely viewed by the public in general as a medical and/or philanthropic issue and not as a human right issue. As with any systemic challenge, it may take sustained efforts coupled with expanded or up-scaled coverage under the leadership of the government to bring about changes in attitude and behaviour. People with disability continue to face stigma and discrimination vis-à-vis access to various socio-economic and legal services. As such, making policies and programmes

¹⁷⁰ Disability Inclusion project: Narrative Report (1 September 2019–30 November 30 2021), p. 15.

¹⁷¹ A2J project.

¹⁷² Disability Inclusion project.

¹⁷³ Australia–Cambodia Cooperation for Equitable Sustainable Services.

disability inclusive is the first step. However, the process should not stop there but should ensure that persons with disabilities have access to justice. Access to justice in broad terms is not confined to legal rights, but equal access to various socio-economic services. Access to justice is what it means to operationalize disability-inclusive policies. The two go together and are the two sides of the same coin.

2.4 Country programme implementation and other cross-cutting issues

Finding 13. Strategic positioning: UNDP is working on the relevant sectors in Cambodia, such as environment, disability, economic empowerment (including MSMEs and entrepreneurship), mine action, and youth. Its portfolio tries to find the equilibrium between high-level advisory roles and subnational implementation. Stakeholders appreciate this duality and the results it brings. However, there is a need to have a strategic introspection on which areas UNDP should engage in the next Country Programme Document cycle, considering limited resources, and how to replicate successful models of connecting high-level advisory to subnational field implementation as seen in its disability programme so as to gain more leverage with the RGC and traction on issues it advocates.

UNDP successfully identified and engaged with broad key sectors and programming areas, such as social protection, entrepreneurs, MSMEs and social enterprises, the government, the private sector and CSOs, the digital economy, and a diverse set of interlocutors (i.e., persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, women, and youth) who play critical roles in achieving the overarching aim of inclusive and equitable development under the principle of *leave no one behind* (see Finding 1 – social protection; Finding 2 – COVID-19; Finding 3 – mine action; Finding 4 – entrepreneurship; and Finding 12 – disability). These sectors are also considered as leading Cambodia’s economic recovery and opening opportunities for building back better and for broad-based development, especially those that make up the informal economic sector. This ability to work in various work streams is acknowledged by other UN agencies as a strength of UNDP’s programming. These sectors were the most affected by the socio-economic shocks brought about mainly by COVID-19. The pandemic brought to light the pre-existing challenges these sectors faced even before the pandemic, including the lack of investment in their protection and development. UNDP’s funding, technical, and programming support to MSMEs, youth employment, and the use of digital technology not only highlights these challenges and imbalances but also sends a clear signal of where development efforts and investment should go, especially when its pilot projects successfully demonstrate their viability and the potential scope and magnitude of their impact.

In terms of finding the balance and creating synergies between national and subnational work, a good model that was observed was the work in the area of disability (see Finding 11). UNDP combines policy research and testing of the policy on the ground at the commune level, which links the government with CSOs and widens the democratic space, and it facilitates feedback mechanisms to national-level policy dialogues. In addition, the process unpacked the political economy and consolidated political support at the provincial level, which was then used to influence national-level discourse through wider sharing of the lesson across subnational networks and development partners. In the energy sector, UNDP has played an important strategic and policy support role, especially with the MEF, MoE, and MME on the initial thinking on the energy efficiency revolving fund¹⁷⁴ and other policy studies related to energy, climate change, economies, etc. UNDP also worked in parallel with the private sector and the government, showcasing the effects of de-risking renewable energy to provide for rural off-grid and mini-grid electricity, last-mile connection, and small-scale energy generation.

¹⁷⁴ The Asian Development Bank is now leading in the development of the Energy Efficiency Revolving Fund through a large loan and technical assistance to the energy transition sector.

UNDP was active in decentralization and deconcentration (D&D) up to 2010. At its peak one of its most extensive programmes, the Project to Support Democratic Development through Decentralization and Deconcentration, mobilized \$93 million and synergized with an extensive network of development partners.¹⁷⁵ The evaluation sees much relevance in engaging in this area to empower subnational governments and widen the democratic space. With some of its activities (e.g., disability social protection), UNDP is slowly re-engaging in D&D to a limited extent.

Finding 14. Comparative advantage: UNDP's comparative strengths include its recognition as a trusted development partner by the RGC, serving as a repository of global knowledge and new ways of addressing development issues, acknowledgment by stakeholders of its ability to see and provide expertise on the 'big picture' of the evolving development landscape, recognition of its convening power and stamp of approval, and its ability to build bridges, especially with the government. Nonetheless, there is a strong need for UNDP interventions in areas where it can use its status as a neutral arbiter, such as being more active in creating space for other development partners and engaging in more strategic partnerships with its project implementers, especially with CSOs.

Interviews with RGC mentioned that as an agency with broader political and developmental mandates, UNDP is able to respond with more agility to Cambodia's needs. The complexity of development challenges and the rapid pace of technological development and transformation mean that organizations need to be proactive and agile, and become learning and knowledge-based organizations to keep themselves relevant. To be effective, organizations need to be able to mobilize, distil, share, and facilitate the application of emerging ideas and knowledge to address development concerns. As Cambodia and the rest of the world transition into a post-COVID-19 world, most developing countries are likely to face the macro-economic trilemma¹⁷⁶ – i.e., balancing the conflicting requirements of increasing spending, lowering taxes, and reducing debt. To do so, adopting innovations (including digital transformation) is key to transforming economies and addressing 'wicked' problems on the ground.¹⁷⁷

Stakeholders view UNDP as providing the expertise that presents the *big picture* of the evolving development landscape. This underpins its role as an *integrator* in the context of the SDGs as well as facilitating the work of the UN Country Team in Cambodia. UNDP continues to provide not only funding support for policy development (e.g., research, modelling, and analysis) but also direct technical advice on policy formulation to key ministries (as discussed in Finding 1 – social protection; Finding 4 – entrepreneurship and youth; Finding 5 – policy and research; Finding 6 – energy; Finding 7 – climate change; Finding 10 – transparent and participatory governance; and Finding 11 – gender equality and women empowerment). UNDP's work on innovation through its Policy and Innovation Hub for Sustainable Development project¹⁷⁸ provides it with new ideas to test emerging concepts and test new ways of doing things to address complex and challenging development issues on the ground. The agency was instrumental in developing evidence-based studies in broad areas such as sustainable and inclusive energy development and the economic impact of the 2-degree rise in global temperature, as well as niche themes as mentioned in Finding 5 – policy and research.

¹⁷⁵ See <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/4672>.

¹⁷⁶ This trilemma results because as governments implement their economic recovery plans they have to increase government spending to ameliorate the negative impact of the pandemic on the economy, while at the same time having to lower taxes and reduce their elevated debt. It is not feasible for governments to pursue all three objectives at the same time. This trilemma is analogous to the trilemma in international finance (called 'the impossible trinity') which posits that governments cannot simultaneously pursue a policy of fixed exchange rate regime, independent monetary policy, and free capital flows. See N. Gregory Mankiw, *Macroeconomics* (2016).

¹⁷⁷ 'Wicked problems' are problems with inter-dependent factors that may seem seemingly impossible to solve. Examples include poverty, climate change, health care, and inequality.

¹⁷⁸ See <https://www.undp.org/cambodia/projects/policy-and-innovation-hub-sustainable-development>.

UNDP is seen by many of the stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation as an effective organization with strong convening power and influence due to its long presence in Cambodia, strong network, and relationships with key ministries of the RGC. UNDP's legacy in Cambodia is associated with governance, particularly decentralization and deconcentration, and with mine action, a government programme it has supported since 2006. These are two sets of projects that are considered as UNDP's banner programme in Cambodia and can be considered as the foundation of its strategic position as a key development actor in the country. This has resulted in promoting more active support, collaboration, and commitment by agencies of the RGC in advancing development work on the ground and opening doors for other development partners. For example, as a result of UNDP's partnership with OHCHR under the project *Access to Justice without Barriers for Persons with Disabilities*, the revision of the Disability Law would have taken much longer if OHCHR were working singlehandedly in advocating proposed changes in the current disability law. An Interview with the UK Embassy recalled how UNDP facilitated partnerships by establishing working contacts within the Ministry of Environment and other government agencies concerning climate change and the environment. Similarly, civil society partnership with UNDP has helped ease and build collaborative relationships with local authorities.

The evaluation recognizes the delicate balance and trade-off that UNDP is maintaining between being a *trusted* and *safe* development partner with access to the government and as an influential development actor that considers its normative values and the plight of other development actors. In comparison, UNDP's role is distinct from that of international financial institutions (IFIs) and bilateral donors in that, while its funds come from governments, it does not represent any single donor country in its relationship with the RGC, and its resources are not used to leverage trade or investment preferences. Instead, it is in a unique position to engage with the RGC or any other actor from a purely development perspective.

In most developing countries such as Cambodia any discussion of socio-economic development will always revolve around governance and democracy, and now more than ever around inclusion and sustainability. In Cambodia, UNDP is perhaps in the best position to navigate such a delicate landscape given its development mandate as a UN agency, its legacy of supporting good governance and deconcentration in the country, and its access to centres of innovations and policy analysis. The challenge is how much longer UNDP is able to maintain the goodwill and access it has been afforded and convert that into more substantial influence on socio-economic policies and practices so that they are more aligned with Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goals and international commitments.

Finding 15. Internal coherence: UNDP was able to link past projects to current ones, which allowed results to build on each other, broadened partners, and provided continuous advisory support to beneficiaries of old projects experiencing a lag in their development journey. In general, Outcomes 1 and 2 were pursued with integrated programming, which was notable. In Outcome 3 the majority of the projects have a short lifespan (two years or less), and have limited synergy across project initiatives to enable leveraging or for building on complementarities of individual projects for greater development impact. As a result, the UNDP Cambodia governance programme is fragmented and lacks a clear and coherent approach.

With some exceptions, linkages are clear between closed and existing projects and new ones, as well as between projects that tackle different dimensions of similar issues. For example, the current regional solar energy project,¹⁷⁹ funded by the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (MAFRA), was linked to the closed Enhanced Subnational Climate Change Planning and Execution of Priority Actions

¹⁷⁹ "Promoting the use of solar technologies for agricultural and rural development in Cambodia and Myanmar" is a joint initiative of UNDP and the Korean Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs); <https://www.undp.org/cambodia/projects/promoting-use-solar-technologies-agricultural-and-rural-development-cambodia>; field visit.

(SRL) project, funded by the Global Environmental Fund and implemented with the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) and National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development. Intending to increase the resilience of communities to climate change, the SRL rehabilitated 94 water schemes, formed 160 community-based groups, and built small to medium-scale water infrastructures. The current solar irrigation projects selected sites from the SRL project and provided solar irrigation equipment and capacity-training to farmer groups managing water infrastructures.

While the evaluation questions the broader adoption of solar irrigation pilots (see Finding 6 – energy), there is no doubt that the link between the two projects has contributed to the improvement of the lives of the beneficiaries. In several focus group discussions with beneficiaries in our field visits, they mentioned that both projects allowed them to cut production cost and increase yields and to build a stronger sense of community. UNDP was able to capitalize on the solar irrigation project to initiate partnership with the MAFRA and to maintain a continuous partnership with the NCSD, which was their former partner in past D&D projects – an example of UNDP’s comparative advantage as an engaged partner with the government (see Finding 14 – comparative advantage). Internal coherence was also seen with the Small Grants Programme¹⁸⁰ and Building an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Development project in Kulen Mountain, where UNDP worked with the same community grantees to tackle multiple development needs.

The Building an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Development (BESD) is a three-in-one project where climate change, energy, and circular economy were implemented by rather diverse team members and partners, and for different beneficiaries. Preparing this project in 2019 included a comprehensive assessment of existing initiatives in the NRM, waste, and energy sectors to build achieved results, and identifying remaining challenges and emergent priorities. However, during implementation coherence issues among the three BESD components remained a challenge as each component was implemented by diverse teams with differing priorities and levels of resource availability.

Interviews recounted that coherence was not high on the agenda in the design of the current CP 2019-2023. The UNDP country office recognized this gap and actively sought synergies and opportunities to collaborate across teams during implementation. For example, the UNDP CO economist and the climate change team cooperated in policy initiatives of common interest (e.g., in the modelling of potential impacts of the adoption of the policy banning imports of second-hand cars), and coordinated the approach in engaging with their respective networks with the MoE and MEF. The work on energy efficiency and on electric vehicle promotion was pushed from different angles – on energy by BESD and on climate change by the CCCA.

The internal coherence between Outcomes 2 and 3 is reflected in the inclusive governance project, which combined the use of social accountability tools in the development of a Solid Waste Management model in three municipalities. Coherence was seen between the project on civic engagement and the country office’s Accelerator Lab. Utilizing the tools and approaches (e.g., design thinking, boot camp) employed in the innovation hub initiative, the civic engagement project introduced and leveraged these tools and approaches to understand the relational dynamics between participating CSOs and local authorities and to facilitate the co-design of partnership activities. Also, coherence was seen in the UNDP mine-clearing activities from Outcome 1 and the work with persons with disabilities from Outcome 3 (see Finding 3 – mine action; and Finding 12 – disability). While UNDP worked with its executing partners the Mine Action

¹⁸⁰ The Global Environment Fund’s Small Grants Programme (SGP) operates in 123 countries, providing grants up to \$50,000 (usual grant around \$25,000) to community organizations to conduct environmental and livelihood activities. SGP has funded 224 projects in Cambodia since 2004. Total SGP grants to date, including partnership funding, is nearly \$9.3 million; site visit and FGDs.

and Victim Assistance Authority on clearing mines in the field, it conducted parallel policy-level work on disability, including strengthening of the Provincial Disability Action Council. Other synergies include the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the IDPoor system, limited capacity-development for persons with disabilities and their family members, and rehabilitation support for victims of antipersonnel mines and explosive remnants of war. UNDP was able to build synergies between the two areas, but as mentioned in Finding 3 – mine action, there is a missed opportunity to fully link UNDP demining with livelihood support projects.

Finding 16. External coherence and partnership: UNDP was able to build external coherence with a broad set of development partners in Cambodia through dovetailing on the result of partners (and vice versa), joint programming, and knowledge sharing.

In addition to the facilitation roles (see Finding 13 – strategic positioning), UNDP was active in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Result Group 3 on the environment and climate change, whose role is to coordinate joint work planning and reporting and to increase synergies across UN agencies and programmes through joint programming (e.g., identification of four strategic joint programming opportunities). In the group, UNDP coordinated the process and also integrated inputs from other non-UN agencies, whereas FAO provided modelling and inputs for the forestry sector, UN Women provided inputs on gender aspects, and UNICEF contributed to youth engagement and education.

UNDP was also able to dovetail on the results of development partners to produce incremental outcomes. For example, as the pandemic is both a health and social development challenge, UNDP contribution to the RGC response to the pandemic, including social protection, cash transfer programme, logistics, and support of key strategic sectors such as MSMEs, youth, and women (see Finding 2 – COVID-19), such that they were coherent with the strategies of the UN Country Team, World Health Organization, and the Ministry of Health. While WHO took leadership in the science and in supporting the policy response of the RGC to COVID-19, it appreciated the role of UNDP in early recovery.¹⁸¹ There are cases where other development partners and IFIs made good use of UNDP studies. For example, the Asia Development Bank has prepared a large loan for Cambodia, building on UNDP's work on the renewable energy sub-decree and the energy revolving fund (see Finding 5 – policy and research; and Finding 6 – energy).

Among ongoing joint initiatives on governance, the interrelated project on *Disability Inclusion and Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities* demonstrates by far a strong external coherence and partnership among UNDP and other UN agencies, especially OHCHR, UNFA, and UN Women, which pushed the needed reform to promote disability rights in the country. The partnership among UN agencies enabled them to build on and leverage each other's strengths and capabilities. Although it was UNFPA and UNDP that helped strengthen the institutional capacities of health and other service providers (e.g., Ministry of Health) to prevent and respond to gender-based violence/violence against women (GBV/VAW) in selected provinces, both UN agencies implemented on their own and had no synergy. While in another joint programme, UNDP, UN Women, and UNFPA helped improve multisectoral referral and coordination networks at the national and subnational level for effective response to GBV. Also, capacity-development activities were conducted for members of GBV/VAW working groups at the provincial level and for service providers.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Logistic support through Emergency Support to Government CAM in fight against COVID-19 (096281) and (120970); social protection projects through COVID-19 Rapid Cash Transfer (121244).

¹⁸² This includes, for example, training on the concept of GBV/VAW and basic counselling to ensure privacy and respect for the need of women survivors.

Feedbacks from CSOs interviewed mention that they want to engage with UNDP on a more substantive level. This would entail additional investment for UNDP, but would ensure that the development environment that it is helping to build is pluralistic.¹⁸³ For example, UNDP has engaged with World Vision International and SHE Investment (a local social enterprise). Both institutions appreciate the co-creation aspect of the work with UNDP and the transfer of capacity, and felt more confident in moving forward with the ideals of their partnership even without UNDP involvement.

The majority of partnerships engaged by UNDP are related to information sharing. For natural resources management, UNDP sought collaboration with FAO for the measuring, reporting, and verification interventions of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) programme and for mainstreaming of the Payments for Ecosystem Services.¹⁸⁴ Similar exchanges of information were made with agencies such as the World Bank, UNEP, UN Habitat, GIZ, and IGES, and with bilateral donors such as Japan on plastic waste management. Exchange of information for joint resource mobilization efforts includes the Integrated National Financing Framework project with the UN Capital Development Fund and the Partnership for Action on Green Economy with UNIDO, UNEP, UNITAR, and ILO. Other pipeline initiatives include CLEAN with UNICEF; and Green Climate Fund, Strategic Action Program, and REDD+ with FAO. Though information sharing is the simplest form of partnership, failure to do so results in the duplication of efforts. Interviews and FDGs during the field visit to Kulen Mountains confirmed the limited synergy and coordination on the ground. For example, FAO reportedly conducted a study in Kulen on the cashew nut value chain, UNESCO conducted Greener Thursday focusing on education, and the World Bank provided a loan (IDA credit) to Livelihood Enhancement and Association of the Poor. Stakeholders on the ground feel that there should be more coordination among these activities to increase efficiency and reduce transaction costs burnt by the local actors.¹⁸⁵

The two-year implementation delay of the Early Warning Systems (EWS) project underscores the importance of proactive communication. The EWS Terminal Evaluation Report (2020)¹⁸⁶ found that one of the main reasons behind the delay was “possible overlap with investments from an ADB-supported hydro-meteorological strengthening project. The final design of the ADB project suggested potential overlap between the two projects in terms of the investment in EWS infrastructure and risk of inadequate maintenance of assets after the project.”

There were also cases when UNDP’s efficiency in mobilizing funds and its wide mandate put it at odds with other UN agencies, giving the impression that it is chasing funds and not interested in joint programming. For example, there was a joint programme promoting decent youth employment that was launched in 2017 based on a multilateral cooperation agreement between the RGC and UN agencies, with ILO as the convening agency together with UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNV, with additional funding support from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation.¹⁸⁷ ILO managers in Cambodia and the region claimed there were regular joint programme meetings, but they were never informed about UNDP’s

¹⁸³ One of the recommendations in the last Cambodia Assessment of Development Results was for UNDP to strengthen its relationship and work with CSOs. Most UNDP partnerships with CSOs are through project implementation.

¹⁸⁴ The REDD+ measurement, reporting, and verification was under the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility project and the PES under the BESD project.

¹⁸⁵ Interviews and FDGs. The GEF Small Grant Project was working there to improve the poor water system; BESD was using its solar panels to rebuild the system pipe, well, and water towers and to recreate the water use group; and Livelihood Enhancement and Association of the Poor complete water access to the remaining households.

¹⁸⁶ “Terminal Evaluation Report: Strengthening Climate Information and Early Warning Systems in Cambodia to Support Climate Resilient development and Adaptation to Climate Change Project.”

¹⁸⁷ ILO, “Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth” (2017), [United for Youth Employment in Cambodia: UN agencies join forces to promote youth employment in Cambodia \(ilo.org\)](#).

plans and were surprised when it launched its own youth employment project in 2019.¹⁸⁸ Some other missed opportunities to create synergies include the UNDP Cambodia Climate Change Alliance with the Asian Development Bank-supported Strategic Programme for Climate Resilience project (total budget of \$561 million from 2011 to 2023). Both projects are located within the Ministry of Environment but within different Directorates. There was an attempt to coordinate through a joint work plan, but it failed due to communication breakdown stemming from differences in implementation modality.

Finding 17. Resource mobilization: UNDP has been successful in mobilizing funds, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$21.4 million cost-sharing it was able to secure from the RGC underscores its status as a trusted development partner. To be able to support the RGC as it moves to pandemic recovery and least developed country (LDC) graduation, there is a need for UNDP to diversify its funding sources further, and to take advantage of its global expertise in accessing vertical funds and blended financing.¹⁸⁹ UNDP needs to navigate a shrinking funding landscape due to shifts in donor strategy, donor countries focusing inward because of COVID-19 recovery, and the global energy and financial crisis triggered by the war in Europe.

UNDP support is integrated into the national development framework, as seen in the Donor Development Cooperation Programmes through the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board.¹⁹⁰ Out of 40 projects, 28 (\$56 million in budget/\$43 million in expenditure) are delivered through the Direct Implementation Modality, and 12 projects (\$42 million budget/\$32 million expenditure) are delivered through the National Implementation Modality (NIM). Some interviewees commented that there could be more NIM projects, where funds are incorporated into the rolling plans of concerned ministries or agencies, to push for a stronger ownership, accountability, and harmonization based on the *Declaration by the Royal Government of Cambodia and Development Partners on Harmonization and Alignment* (2004) and to implement the *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Rome Declaration on Harmonization* (2003) for harmonizing donor practices for effective aid delivery. A donor study found that fragmentation of development cooperation remains a hurdle to aid effectiveness in Cambodia.¹⁹¹ It highlighted Cambodia's aid dynamics, including long-term aid dependency, institutional weaknesses, and competitive development partner behaviour.¹⁹² Considering that Cambodia is moving toward LDC graduation, strengthening ownership, capacity to plan and deliver development funds, and accountability should be the focus of development organizations such as UNDP for the coming decade.

UNDP often tries to be responsive to government needs. However, the demand for funds is higher than the supply due to increasingly tough competition with several other organizations and entities, thus decreasing funding opportunities and other externalities. UNDP's ability to mobilize is not unlimited, and a further reduction in UN core funds is expected. In the current country programme, UNDP mobilized around \$102 million for the current country plan, 80 per cent of which are non-core resources mobilized from various donors. About 43 per cent of the funding received is from local cost sharing from the RGC, about \$21.54 million, which was largely dedicated to the COVID-19 response (see Figure 9). Local cost sharing are government funds from domestic resources or loans that are entrusted to UNDP. In comparison

¹⁸⁸ Promoting Decent Youth Employment (109996).

¹⁸⁹ "While there is no agreed-on definition of blended finance, the main idea behind blending is to use public resources to 'crowd in' commercial finance for SDG investments that would otherwise not have materialized. By shifting some of the risk or cost of a project from the private to the public sector, blended finance can enhance risk-return profiles for private creditors or investors. The objective is to unlock investment that the private sector would not have done on its own, and to do this with minimum concessionality or subsidy"; <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-100-effective-blended-finance-in-the-era-of-covid-19-recovery/>.

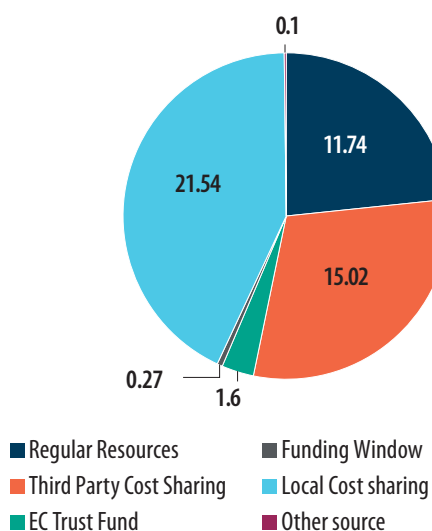
¹⁹⁰ Part of the the Council for Development of Cambodia, <http://cdc-crdb.gov.kh/en/donor.php>.

¹⁹¹ See https://kh.boell.org/sites/default/files/donor_playground_cambodia_study.pdf.

¹⁹² See https://kh.boell.org/sites/default/files/donor_playground_cambodia_study.pdf.

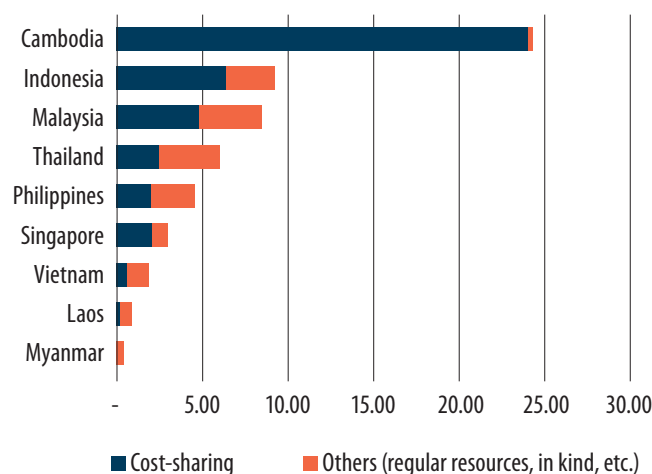
to other South-East Asian countries, Cambodia had by far the largest cost-sharing contribution to UNDP (see Figure 10). The largest share of funding to Cambodia was received in 2020 and 2021, when every country was feeling the brunt of COVID-19, including LDCs (Cambodia and Lao PDR). This underscores the RGC's confidence in UNDP to deliver vital programmes (see Finding 14 – comparative advantage). Likewise, this mobilized resource showed that UNDP in Cambodia had the readiness or the agility to receive these funds. Ultimately, UNDP was able to deliver on this RGC-funded project, as shown in the delivery rate of Outcome 1 (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 9. Funding type of total budget of UNDP Cambodia CP, 2019–2023 (US\$ millions)



Source: Atlas (as of 28 January 2023).

FIGURE 10. ASEAN countries' contribution to UNDP, 2019–2021 (US\$ millions)



Source: UNDP funding compendium 2019, 2020, 2021.

Funds from cost-sharing from the RGC and UNDP make up more than 40 per cent of the funding of the current CP. About 43 per cent comes from bilaterals/multilaterals; 15 percent comes from environmental vertical funds such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the Global Environmental Fund; and 2 per cent comes from trust funds such as the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund -MPTF (see Figure 13). The overall portfolio of UNDP in Asia and the Pacific regional resource mobilization has a large proportion of funds coming from vertical funds, mainly the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environment Fund (GEF). This has not been the case for Cambodia (see figures 9 and 10). The GCF and GEF funding account for only 13 per cent of the budget within the current CP cycle, though new projects are being developed. Based on interviews, Cambodian ministries still find it challenging to develop programme documents and technical and financial proposals, to carry out modelling (economic, climate changes, and other simulations, etc.), and to produce analytical and strategic studies, so they still need technical assistance from UNDP and other partners. In addition, some ministries' financial and accountability mechanisms could not respond to the minimum requirement of the GEF, GCF, etc., so they need UNDP and other accredited agencies for their support in the mobilization of those funds.

Several development partners observed that recently it had been more challenging to mobilize resources due to the impact of COVID-19, coupled with the broader geopolitics and intense competition for more limited funds. Some donors are stepping back from some thematic areas of UNDP. For example, the CCCA has been a flagship programme funded by the EU, Sweden, and UNDP since its first and second phases (2010 to 2019) up to its current phase (2019 to 2024). In November 2020, however, Sweden started phasing out from Cambodia, making EU the only remaining major donor. Sweden said it will focus its resources on promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the country through its renewed regional development plan for Asia and the Pacific Region. This decision follows the severe rights restrictions in democratic space in recent years.¹⁹³ As seen in UNDP's portfolio, it was quite successful in mobilizing funds for its Outcome 1 and 2, while mobilizing resources for Outcome 3 is challenging.

In the UNDP governance portfolio, except for the projects on gender equality and *Partnership for Development Result*, the rest of the portfolio have an average project life span of two years, making the contribution to outcome-level targets and even achievement at the output level challenging. Clearly, limited resources have been a significant factor that has shaped the configuration of the UNDP governance programme in Cambodia. Since the resource constraints facing the country office is unlikely to significantly improve in the next programming cycle, and may even worsen in the transition to the post-COVID-19 world, stakeholders are voicing that UNDP needs to *think outside the box* by exploring various options. The current UNDP Cambodia programmes present some entry points for a more dynamic and innovative way of governance programming. Future governance programming needs to think far *ahead of the curve*, and to identify entry points and strategic pathways as project concepts are explored so as to provide a more coherent approach that makes for a greater development contribution on the ground.

UNDP has been facing several challenges with working more closely with international finance institutions. IFIs contacted within the evaluation indicated their willingness to work with UNDP. They acknowledge the level of trust and access UNDP enjoys with the government and that UNDP is in a position to help build programme portfolios supported with blended financing – i.e., financing that combines grants, loans, and public and private sector investment in key development projects such as renewable energy, rural infrastructure, water and irrigation, and agriculture. At the moment, what might be limiting is UNDP's ability to engage with the key players in major blended financing schemes, as it has limited internal capacity in these new forms of development financing.

¹⁹³ Embassy of Sweden in Phnom Penh, Press Statement: "Greater democracy focus in development cooperation with Cambodia" (12 June 2020), <https://vodenglish.news/sweden-to-refocus-cambodia-aid-due-to-rights-concerns/>.

FIGURE 11. Available funding resources of RBAP by funding stream (US\$ millions)

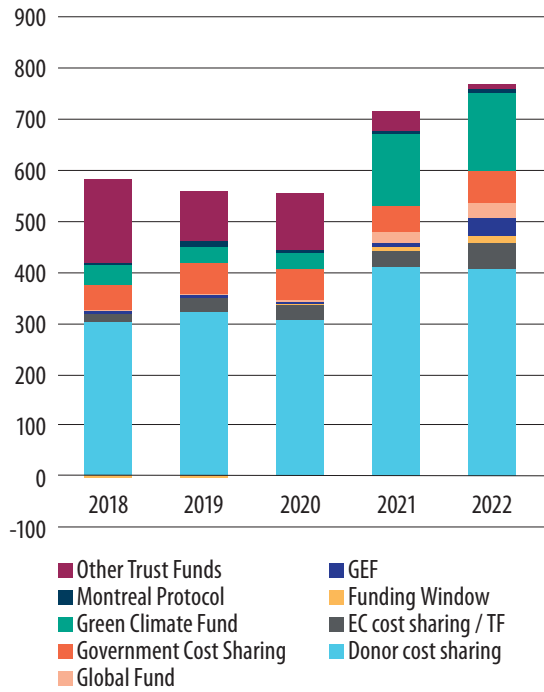
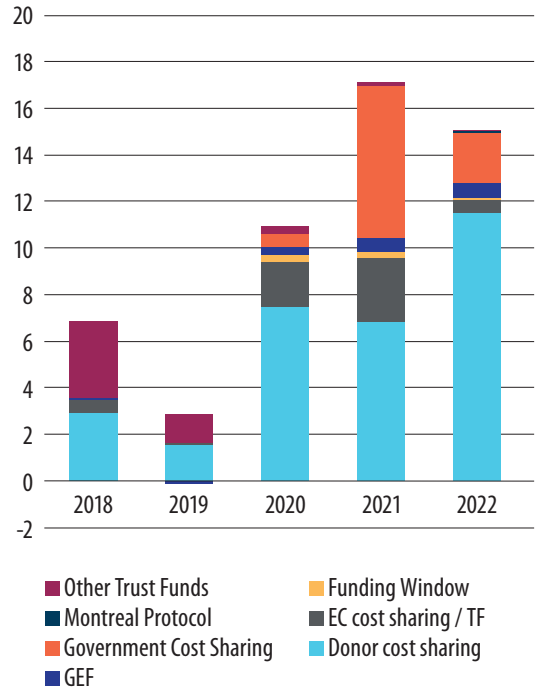
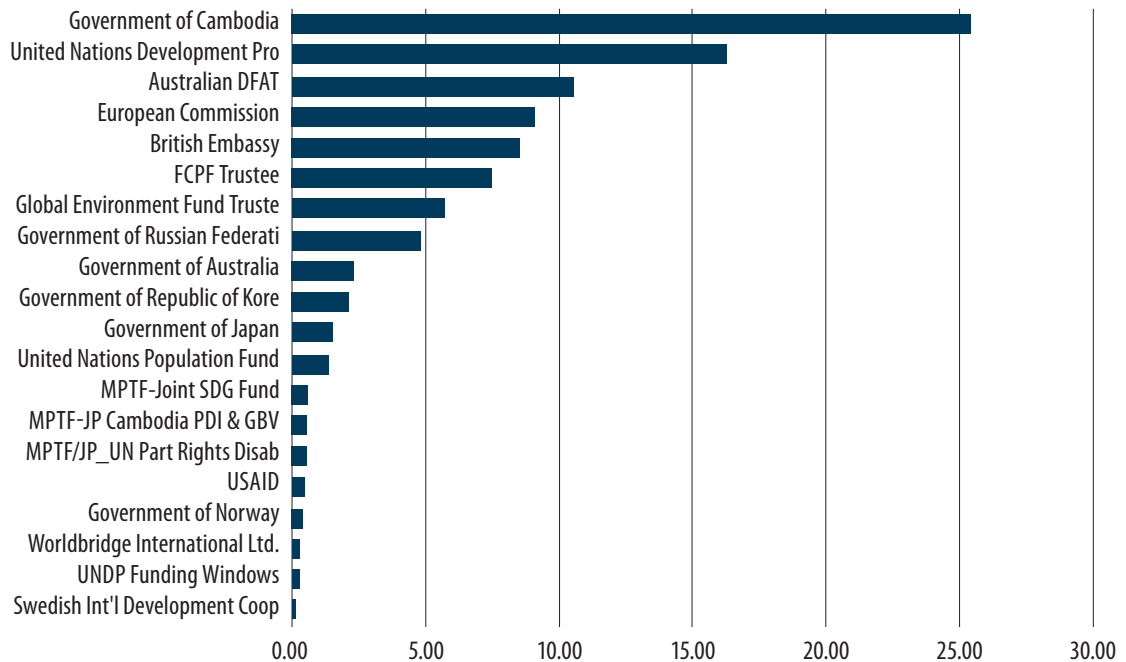


FIGURE 12. Available funding resources of Cambodia by funding stream (US\$ millions)



Source: UNDP Power BI Executive Snapshot (as of 28 January 2023).

FIGURE 13. Top donors for UNDP Cambodia CP, 2019-2023 (US\$ millions)



Source: UNDP Power BI Executive Snapshot (as of 28 January 2023).

Finding 18. Monitoring and Evaluation: Programme-level M&E was adequate to report on corporate indicators and track country programme output-level results. Due to the high-level nature of the UNDAF/CP outcomes and the lack of clarity in its result matrix and theory of change, UNDP could not make strong causal links between the results it generated and the UNDAF/CP outcomes.

UNDP systematically monitored its results against the CP outputs and the UNDP Corporate Integrated Results and Resource Framework Indicators. It collected results across its programme through its annual Results-Oriented Annual Reporting (ROAR) and a more COVID-focused mini-ROAR, which was implemented during the height of the pandemic. However, upon review of the UN Country Team (UNCT) consolidated annual reports, it showed that most of the outcome indicators that were identified in the UNDAF (and adopted in the CP) were not being tracked and reported against. For example, in the UNDAF Outcome 2.1 the indicators are “*Employment to population ratio: (a) men/women; (b) youth (15–30) men/women; (c) PNH/other rural/urban,*” but the evaluation did not find any reports alluding to the progress of this indicator. This is a wider UNCT M&E challenge. In some countries this has been a constant conundrum for the UNDAF result reporting where the outcome indicators are set very high, or the data is outside the direct responsibility of the UNCT, which leads to the outcome indicator not being properly tracked.

Between 2019 and 2022, UNDP commissioned 12 evaluations, six of which were rated to be of satisfactory quality, four were marginally satisfactory, and two were marginally unsatisfactory. The evaluation notes that there is wide use of knowledge management in terms of learning from previous projects. This was evident in synergies built across the portfolio and how projects build on the results of previous ones (see Finding 15 – internal coherence). In the same vein, UNDP is recognized by other development partners as a knowledge broker (see Finding 5 – policy and research; and Finding 14 – comparative advantage).

UNDP made some considerable contributions to improving the national evaluation capacity in various ministries. For example, it contributed to building a digital M&E system of the web application for the National Disability Strategic Plan 2019–2023. UNDP also supported the Disability Action Council (DAC) in developing an accessible mobile app called Cambodia Disability News. This app will allow persons with disabilities to keep track of disability-related information, and enable them to share their concerns, achievements, or requests to the DAC secretary-general and the provincial DAC.¹⁹⁴ Further, the M&E and knowledge management capacity that UNDP helped build within the Ministry of Environment and the National Council for Sustainable Development contributes to the *Cambodia Sustainable Landscape and Eco-Tourism* project (\$51 million), funded by the World Bank and the International Development Association.

The evaluation found some issues on M&E related to gender and the Small Grant Programme (SGP). The evaluation could not find gender disaggregated targets that are monitored under most projects under Outcome 2, even though some project outputs do benefit women, girls, and other vulnerable groups. From the review desk, the evaluation found that monitoring of gender results was limited to women beneficiaries, but there were tangible outputs that could be further documented and used as lessons for project design. The operational arrangements of the Small Grant Programme (implemented by UNDP and executed by UNOPS) created some confusion as to how it should be monitored. This confusion did not allow for systematic synergies to be created between the SGP and the rest of the CO programmes.¹⁹⁵ With the exception of linkages between SGP and BESD projects, it is unclear to the evaluation how SGP

¹⁹⁴ “Programme to Promote Disability Inclusion and Quality Services for Gender-Based Violence Victims,” p. 5.

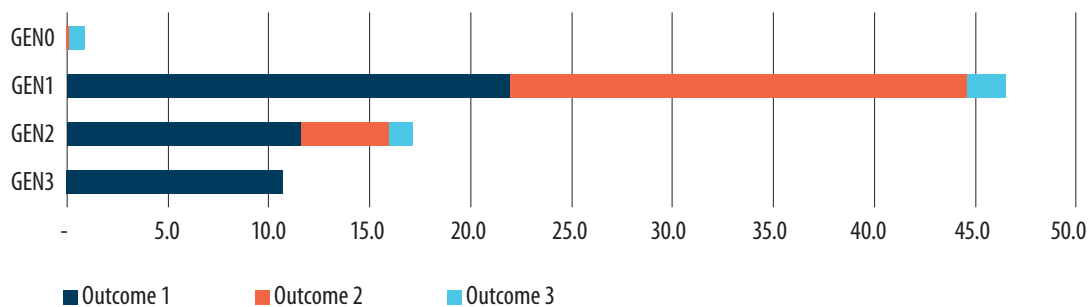
¹⁹⁵ In some cases coherence was attributed more to professional relationships built among project staff rather than to systematic M&E and synergy building.

monitoring data is being used systematically in the CO programme. Informants suggested that the new CP M&E result framework should explicitly integrate the SGP, which seems to be confirmed during the Sensing-making Process.¹⁹⁶

Finding 19. Gender equality: The majority of UNDP projects were gender-targeted.¹⁹⁷ However, the gender markers do not reflect the actual value of a project's gender-related activities, which is much less. For example, only a small fraction of activities from large environmental projects are focused on gender. UNDP gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE) results were fragmented and were not systematically mainstreamed across the whole programme portfolio. The lack of clear gender language in the country programme result statements and indicators contributed to the weak reporting and use of GEWE data in project design, synergies, and decision-making.

Of the 41 projects that were considered in the Independent Country Programme Evaluation, two were tagged as GEN 3: Gender equality is a principal objective (\$847,000); 26 as GEN 2: Significant contributions to gender equality (\$46 million); and 12 as GEN 1: Some contributions to gender equality (\$17 million). Most of the GEN 0 (No noticeable contribution to gender equality) project (\$11.9 million)¹⁹⁸ was spent on COVID-19 procurement during the height of the pandemic. The evaluation deemed that some level of effort could have been considered to practice gender-sensitive procurement.¹⁹⁹ Outcome 1 had no GEN 3 projects. The GEN 1 and 2 projects accounted for \$33 million in expenditures. Outcome 2 had the largest GEN 2 portfolio at \$22 million, while Outcome 3 houses the project that contributed most to GEN 3, which is the project to support the Leading the Way for Gender Equality (\$ 747,000; see Figure 14). Though it would seem that since a large proportion of projects are GEN 2, these are not transformative gender activities. For example, GEN 2 projects coming from Outcome 1 are mostly short-term COVID-19 responses, and those from Outcome 2 are overinflated due to the size of the project itself, and the actual gender component is much smaller in ratio to other project components.

FIGURE 14. Expenditure by outcomes and gender markers



Source: Atlas (as of 28 January 2023).

¹⁹⁶ See <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-01/UNDP-RBAP-Sensemaking-Workshop-Preparation-Guide-public-version-2021.pdf>.

¹⁹⁷ According to GRES scale, http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/guidance/gender/GRES_English.pdf.

¹⁹⁸ Emergency support to Gov't CAM in fight against COVID19 project.

¹⁹⁹ UN Women Gender Responsive Procurement, https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/PT_GRP.

The CP outcome statements had clear references to *gender equality and women empowerment* (GEWE), which is not the same for the outputs. Of the 12 output results statements, only two had explicit mention of GEWE (Output 1.4 and 3.2) and about half had specific GEWE-sensitive indicators, baselines, or targets. It should be noted that there are a number of reported gender-related results across the country programme (see Finding 3 – mine action; Finding 4 – entrepreneurship and youth; Finding 8 – climate change; Finding 10 – transparency and participatory government; Finding 11 – gender equality and women empowerment; and Finding 12 – disability). However, the lack of GEWE-sensitive language in the CP contributes to how projects are designed with GEWE dimensions and how GEWE results are being monitored, reported, and used in programme management. For example, the CP outputs could have used GEWE-sensitive language in their result statements and indicators to acknowledge the different needs and challenges faced by women and girls in issues such as early warning systems, natural resource management, renewable energy, climate-proofed infrastructure, inclusive and participatory governance, and advancing persons with disabilities rights.²⁰⁰

In addition, some outputs with explicit gender indicators did not reach their targets. For example, one output targeted 5,000 female persons with disabilities to participate in social protection supported by UNDP, but to date only 3,152 have been achieved.²⁰¹ Another output targeted 1,500 women to have access to skills certification, but the evaluation found only 710 participants were reached and that data was not gender disaggregated.²⁰² The evaluation acknowledges that the CO has experienced staff working on gender-focused projects mainly through partnership with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (see Finding 11 – gender equality and women empowerment). However, what was lacking was mainstreaming GEWE as a cross-cutting issue within the whole UNDP portfolio.

2.5 Country programme performance ratings

The following table provides an overview of the performance of the country programme, using the five internationally agreed evaluation criteria – relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability – and a set of parameters for each. A four-point rating scale is used, with 4 being the highest and 1 the lowest.²⁰³ This rating table should be read keeping in mind the findings presented in the previous sections, which provide a more detailed justification for the ratings.

²⁰⁰ Outputs 2.2., 2.3., 2.4., 3.3., and 3.4., respectively.

²⁰¹ CP Output 1.1.

²⁰² Output 1.4.

²⁰³ 4 = Fully Achieved/Exceeds Expectations; 3 = Mostly Achieved; 2 = Partially Achieved; 1 = Not Achieved.

| Criteria and parameters | Overall rating (scale 1–4) | Remarks/justification |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Relevance | 3 | <p>The UNDP programme is aligned with the national development priorities articulated in the RS-IV and the National Disability Strategic Plan 2019–2023. UNDP worked in key sectors that are critical to the recovery and future development of Cambodia’s economy. In terms of inclusion, though UNDP had a strong focus on advancing disability rights, it had a narrow set of interventions on gender equality and women empowerment. Though UNDP activities on natural resources management and climate change are relevant to Cambodia’s context, its absence on environmental issues with high political sensitivities was felt by multiple development partners.</p> <p>As seen in Outcomes 1 and 3, although UNDP support and response to narrowing democratic space is limited, it is slowly helping to open up and create space for engagement between civil society and local authorities, though much work is needed. Its work on disability rights serves as a model for both governance and a whole-of-government approach.</p> |
| 1.A. Adherence to national development priorities | 4 | |
| 1.B. Alignment with United Nations/ UNDP goals | 3 | |
| 1.C. Relevance of programme priorities | 2 | |
| 2. Coherence | 3 | <p>The UNDP portfolio exhibits internal coherence. It was able to create synergies across country programme outcomes, outputs, and projects, with some exceptions. The CP was able to mainstream governance in Outcomes 1 and 2. There were some missed opportunities for synergies, such as the inclusive governance and localization of SDGs, and linking the long-standing, adequately funded, and highly visible demining project to economic empowerment.</p> <p>UNDP showed strong external coherence with development partners at the level of information sharing. Also, it was able to dovetail with the results of other development partners. UNDP served a facilitation and coordination role for UN agencies and CSOs vis-à-vis government partners. Joint programming and working across IFIs were not evident in the CP.</p> |
| 2.A. Internal programme coherence | 3 | |
| 2.B. External programme coherence | 3 | |

| Criteria and parameters | Overall rating (scale 1–4) | Remarks/justification |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| 3. Efficiency | 4 | There were no identified programme financial management issues. Operationally, UNDP was agile and flexible in responding to rapid context change caused by the pandemic. UNDP's support to the RGC in its COVID-19 response is timely and complements efforts by the government, WHO, and other UN and international agencies. It was able to capitalize on the opportunity created through this support to help the government develop and invest in long-term social protection policies and programmes. |
| 3.A. Timeliness | 3 | |
| 3.B. Management and operational efficiency | 4 | |
| 4. Effectiveness | 3 | There are promising results that signal contribution towards the outcome level goals. Due to the high-level nature of outcomes and indicators and the lack of relevant monitoring data, the amount of contribution cannot be strongly established. UNDP had more achievements at the output level. Except for results related to COVID-19, demining, and disability, most UNDP activities stop short of fully realizing results, especially its policy work. These barriers can be largely attributed to the influence of the political economy within certain work streams (i.e., policies not being adopted or approved policies remaining dormant). UNDP gender-related work was sub-optimal. The partnership with MoWA, which is the main mechanism of its gender work, needs to be reassessed. The programme's effectiveness is constrained by the systemic challenges and programme-specific features resulting from the country's state of governance, impact of deep-seated gender norms, and the underlying project's short timeline and limited geographic coverage – all of which limit the potential effects of interventions to make meaningful contributions to identified outcome. The country programme has a strong orientation in promoting disability rights. The disability rights initiatives exhibited good progress and partnerships that provide a strong foundation for future upscaling. UNDP featured some level of innovation in its work on social protection, entrepreneurship, energy, and youth. |
| 4.A. Achieving stated outputs and outcomes | 3 | |
| 4.B. Programme inclusiveness (especially those at risk of being left behind) | 4 | |
| 4.C. Prioritizing GEWE | 2 | |
| 4.D. Prioritization of development innovation | 4 | |

| Criteria and parameters | Overall rating (scale 1–4) | Remarks/justification |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 5. Sustainability | 2 | <p>To an extent, UNDP has delivered on its output-level objectives, but in most cases the ‘last mile’ for results to achieve broader adoption has been cut short by a combination of programme factors (e.g., poor or lack of sustainability planning) and the political economy (e.g., when partner ministries do not have the influence to sponsor policies for approval up to the implementation).</p> <p>Some UNDP pilots are implemented without proper analysis of how they will achieve broader adoption. Given the limited resources of UNDP, including challenges that systemic and programme design issues pose on the programme’s effectiveness, the prospects for the broader adoption of results are limited. Improving sustainability requires rethinking UNDP’s overall programming approach to the political economy of Cambodia.</p> |
| 5.A. Sustainability capacity | 2 | |
| 5.B. Financing for development | 2 | |

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



This chapter presents the evaluation's conclusions on UNDP's performance and contributions to development results in Cambodia, recommendations, and the management response.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. UNDP achieved its output level goals that contributed to Outcome 1. UNDP delivered important results, especially in assisting the RGC in developing needed research to inform policies. Contribution to outcome-level results could not be fully established because of its high-level targets and indicators that were not systematically tracked.

UNDP's understanding of the context in Cambodia contributed to the alignment of its economic empowerment programme to the RGC's vision. UNDP responded in a timely way to government requests and provided technical research to the RGC, such as studies related to entrepreneurship, including the *Adaption and Adoption of Industry 4.0* and the *Cambodia Trade Integration Strategy*, which helped in the formulation of the National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023. It supported the RGC's social protection programme by providing technical and operational support in updating and digitalizing the Cambodia IDPoor System. UNDP is also collaborating with the government to implement a graduation-based social protection scheme and to collect evidence to inform the National Social Protection Policy Framework.

UNDP missed some opportunities to increase the probability of broader adoption due to a lack of foresight. For example, the lack of linkage between its demining activities and economic empowerment interventions did not enable a systems approach to development and maximizing the gains made from more than decades of demining. Even though UNDP has been innovative in developing platforms to build the capacities of entrepreneurs, especially the youth, and introducing technology such as solar irrigation, without the proper partners, links to the private sector, and financial sustainability planning these interventions became one-time activities and were not sustained.

Conclusion 2. UNDP's agility, flexibility, and comparative advantage as a trusted partner of the RGC contributed to the success of its COVID-19 response. The significant amount it was able to mobilize from government cost-sharing, the results achieved, and the synergies created led to additionality in the areas of social protection and disability.

The RGC recognizes UNDP as a trusted partner, which stems from UNDP's long-term collaboration with RGC ministries (e.g., demining with Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority, IDPoor with the Ministry of Planning). This trust and UNDP's positive operational track record contributed to the government engaging UNDP to implement a \$21 million COVID-19 response. This government cost-sharing, which is the largest among South-East Asia countries, especially during the height of the pandemic, presented the opportunity for UNDP to advocate for the UN norms and values that were embedded in the RGC's pandemic response. The agency was agile in adapting to the changing context and was able to repurpose some of its own project funds in various thematic areas to respond to the pandemic, which complemented the response of the government and developing partners.

Conclusion 3. UNDP successfully showcased and advocated for renewable energy and low-emission technologies. It was able to present strong evidence of the positive economic and social effects of de-risking renewable energy.

The success of UNDP's work on energy is underpinned by the following elements: (1) UNDP worked where it could provide additionality to government efforts, such as piloting solar energy for 'last mile' marginalized communities, which are also the poorest of the poor and are underserved, such as the small lake island

communities in Tonle Sap Lake. (2) UNDP tackled similar and linked issues from different angles through different projects and government partners. For example, the BESD and CCCA projects both worked on policy research on energy efficiency and advocacy for electric vehicles, with BESD tackling the issues from an energy angle and CCCA from a climate change dimension. (3) UNDP was able to facilitate collaborations among the government, the private sector, and communities, and in doing so it was able to highlight both the economic and social benefits of de-risking renewable energy. (4) UNDP demonstration is supported by studies aimed at high-level decision-makers, such as the *Climate change impacts on economic growth in Cambodia*, the *De-risking Renewable Energy Investment study*, the *Economics of Solar study*, and the *Energy Efficiency Design Guideline for Residential and Commercial Buildings*.

UNDP should be mindful of the challenge of ensuring that the results it helped produce translates into long-term outcomes. For example, though UNDP showcased positive results in the off-grid energy sector, without the full backing of the government in developing an enabling environment such as improved licensing systems, and sharing the risks through insurance, private sectors are not able to fully penetrate the energy market unless subsidized through external means such as the UNDP projects.

Conclusion 4. Stakeholders recognize UNDP's strength in providing technical inputs and access to a global network of expertise and experience on environmental issues, which contributed to the development of important products meant to influence policies and decision-making as well as reporting to international conventions. Nonetheless, there is a need to ensure there is an uptake of these studies for policy and decision-making.

UNDP supported the RGC in developing policy instruments and regulatory frameworks while advocating that its UN norms are mainstreamed. For example, with UNDP support and advocacy, Cambodia has increased its commitment through the *Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)* and underscored the importance of genders as one of the six sectors among 29 prioritized NDC enabling actions. Also, with technical support from UNDP, Cambodia was one of the two members of the Least Developed Country group, and the first one within the ASEAN community, to submit in 2021 a *Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality* with priority for adaptation and mitigation actions for each sector – agriculture, energy, forest and land use, and waste – to achieve the country's goal of a carbon neutral economy in 2050.

However, some instruments are pending approval or have stopped short of implementation, which undermines UNDP investments, such as the *Payment for Environmental Services Scheme*. Likewise, the *Environmental Code draft Sub-decree on Green House Gas Mitigation*, the draft *Declaration on Net System on REDD+*, and the *Draft Sub-decree on Energy Efficiency* are still pending adoption. One of the underlying factors faced in moving these instruments forward is the lack of strong political support to approve and/or mainstream the implementation of these products.

Conclusion 5. UNDP contributed to strengthening and advancing the institutional and legal framework of disability rights in Cambodia. It also contributed to laying the groundwork for influencing public and decision-makers' attitudes towards disability and persons with disabilities, recognizing disability rights as fundamental human rights rather than special rights, a health concern, or a charity-driven cause. This was made possible by operationalizing a whole-of-government and human-rights-based approach, and creating synergies with subnational implementation and national-level policy work. Nonetheless, significant challenges remain in advancing disability rights.

UNDP's support in partnership with UN agencies, civil society groups, and other development partners has laid a strong foundation for advancing disability rights and ensuring that the most vulnerable groups are not left behind. In some cases, UNDP was able to leverage its relationship with the RGC to open doors

and opportunities for other development partners. These gains that UNDP contributed to are evident in the progress made in developing the policy and legal framework; in strengthening the government mechanism to formulate, coordinate, and monitor the implementation of disability-inclusive policies and legal frameworks at the national and subnational levels; and in building the capacity of both the government and civil society organizations.

UNDP was successful in using the of whole-of-government approach in working with the subnational governments to integrate disability rights in various ministries and workstreams. Ministries included disability consideration in their budgets, and redesigned and implemented public services for persons with disabilities. UNDP was also able to influence the inclusion of persons with disabilities in social protection schemes, especially during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving forward, sustained efforts backed by strong political commitment at the highest level are needed to translate these initial gains into long-lasting changes.

Conclusion 6. Gender is not fully mainstreamed in the UNDP country programme. While the gender markers show a large proportion of gender-related projects, only a few projects were gender responsive and have contributed to transformational change. The limited number of gender-sensitive targets and indicators in the CPD contributed to inadequate monitoring of gender results and collection of gender-disaggregated data. In addition, despite the provision of long-term support to MoWA, progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment remains limited. There are deep-set sociocultural norms that are underlying causes of structural gender inequalities that need to be addressed in Cambodia to fully realize GEWE.

Given the long-term challenges of addressing gender norms and building adequate capacity, both technical and political, the government’s effort towards reorienting its gender strategy that shifts the focus of responsibility from MoWA to the whole-of-government is a positive step in the right direction. Advancing gender equality needs to be addressed as part of the broader reform agenda of the RGC, which requires political commitment at the highest level, and the requisite investment in the national budget that reflects the contribution that women make in Cambodian society. At the same time, there is a need to revisit UNDP’s strategy and support for advancing gender equality in Cambodia so as to adapt it to the country’s fast-changing development context and landscape, which includes widening partnerships for GEWE activities and mainstreaming gender throughout its portfolio, and dovetailing on the government’s new gender agenda.

Within its portfolio, the analysis of gender and exclusion issues and responses in project design could have been more strongly articulated. For example, in intervention on young entrepreneurs and mine clearing, the gender analyses describe mostly symptoms of development, such as women’s underrepresentation, lack of participation, higher levels of vulnerability, the extent of involvement in MSMEs, labour participation, and the specific needs of women and other excluded groups. While this is useful, it lacks an extensive analysis of the institutional dimensions of gender inequality and exclusion, such as the unequal power relations existing within households, religious and educational institutions, the government, and markets and the economy, as well as access to and control over resources. In addition, some CP gender analyses reviewed by the evaluation lacked an examination of the entrenched beliefs and misconceptions about gender roles and the relationship between women and men. Hence, the interventions do not address these institutionalized, structural inequalities and power imbalances and often failed to address rights issues.

Conclusion 7. The political and human rights concerns in Cambodia, such as the shrinking of democratic space, are expected to play an important role in shaping the country’s overall development path. UNDP has contributed to creating and widening democratic spaces to the best of its ability, though it was absent in politically sensitive issues such as land rights.

The narrowing democratic space in the country²⁰⁴ undermines policy and programme effectiveness by limiting people's voice and meaningful participation in finding solutions to issues that are key to Cambodia's post-COVID-19 economic recovery, and to its vision to graduate from LDC status. Expanding the country's democratic space that allows people to articulate needs and concerns is important to ensure that the government is responsive to people's needs. This helps reinforce the legitimacy and build public support for the government. UNDP support for strengthening the existing infrastructure for civic engagement at the national and provincial levels contributed to creating spaces for engagement to facilitate inclusive and broad-based participation of communities and groups. This is particularly critical at the subnational level, where there is limited information, awareness, and understanding by local communities and civil society groups vis-à-vis their rights, access to public services, government policies, and the role and functions of local authorities. In the context of the SDGs in Cambodia, creating spaces for dialogue can bring about greater awareness and understanding of the SDGs and how this translates to commune plans and commune investment plans. These dialogue mechanisms can also help disseminate lessons learned and/or build on the results from the Accelerator Lab experiments that developed new ways to improve public services.

UNDP's contribution to the UNDAF outcomes and achievement of its country programme outputs has significantly been affected by the political economy of Cambodia. On the one hand, it had propelled UNDP work on influencing the areas of social protection and disability; while on the other hand, it stymied policies and frameworks that UNDP supported, such as those related to environment and gender. The large COVID-19 response funded by government cost-sharing and implemented by UNDP illustrates the trust it has cultivated with the RGC. Linked to the COVID-19 response, UNDP supported the digitalization and revamp of the IDPoor system, which achieved wider, longer-lasting impacts on social protection; in promoting inclusive, sustainable growth; and on the country's response to socio-economic shocks. In the area of disability, by implementing at the subnational level, including cultivating a whole-of-government approach to issues such as disability, UNDP was able to generate lessons and feedback to policy and decision-makers and to influence necessary adjustments to policies.

In the case of environmental policies, UNDP worked well with our partner ministries to develop draft policy instruments and to test them on the ground. After developing these instruments, adoption and/or implementation of these policies fell short due to multiple reasons linked to political economy, including not having enough traction and political economy to push the policy cycle to fruition. Also, UNDP had limited engagement on some politically charged issues, such as land conflict, although it is within the agency's mandate and is a root cause of an environmental issue and unequal development.

Conclusion 8. There are noteworthy examples of coherence in the UNDP portfolio, such as building synergies across its outcomes, outputs, and projects, including the link with COVID-19 response, economic empowerment, social protection, and disability. UNDP was able to build external coherence by dovetailing the results of its development partner (or vice versa), sharing knowledge products, and taking advantage of its position as a trusted partner of the RGC to *open doors* for development partners. In doing so, UNDP is helping to broaden the array of development partners that would contribute to Cambodia's development goals in preparation for its LDC graduation.

²⁰⁴ United Nations General Assembly, "Situation of human rights in Cambodia: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia," A/HRC/45/51 (24 August 2020), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/216/35/PDF/G2021635.pdf?OpenElement>; United Nations General Assembly, "Situation of human rights in Cambodia: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia," A/HRC/48/79 (3 August 2021), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/210/37/PDF/G2121037.pdf?OpenElement>.

The breadth of UNDP's mandate allows it to have an extensive and diverse portfolio, which presents opportunities for building coherence within its programme and with other development organizations. UNDP interventions in its environmental portfolio showed that projects were designed to take into consideration the results of previous interventions, in some cases working with the same beneficiaries to sustain and upgrade results from previous projects. UNDP was also able to build synergies across its projects on COVID-19 response, social protection, and disability. Though not strictly on building coherence, UNDP was able to integrate governance interventions with environmental-related projects such as solid waste management. Similarly, it worked on increasing the employment prospects of youth by supporting the accounting technician qualification schemes. This had unintended positive consequences by increasing the number of oversight practitioners with the potential to contribute to transparency and good governance.

UNDP was present in multiple development thematic areas, and in some cases in emergency forums (e.g., COVID-19 emergency preparedness and response). It was engaged with a diverse set of development partners. UNDP Cambodia was able to express its integrator role through a limited number of joint initiatives and information sharing that resulted in incremental development results. Nonetheless, CSOs expressed the need to have more strategic collaboration with UNDP in addition to more operational project implementation roles.

3.2 Recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1.



UNDP should continue working on the areas of economic empowerment and environmental sustainability, building on the results it has delivered so far. It should underpin its future country programme by (1) strengthening internal coherence across its programme, (2) planning for broader adoption at the project onset, (3) expanding and strengthening external coherence and partnerships to deliver concerted development results, and (4) advocating for politically-sensitive issues within its mandate and duty as a United Nations entity.

In moving forward, UNDP needs to ensure that there is stronger coherence between its programme areas (e.g., demining activities with livelihood interventions). Further, it should ensure that pilot activities are well planned with rigorous sustainability analysis conducted at the design phase to identify the broader adoption pathway (mainstreaming, replication, scaling-up/out, sustaining). Though pilots are intended to *test new ways of doing* they should not lack the needed sustainability dimension even for small community demonstrations. In addition, there is a need for broader adoption of results from UNDP pilots, such as its de-risking renewable energy investments to allow the private sector to enter into the energy market. As of now, there is little appetite for private solar energy providers, and there is a continued preference for government investment and subsidies, and for donor assistance. There is also a need to strengthen coordination with partner ministries. For example, the micro-grid and battery-charging facilities in Pursat were reportedly obsolete after the national grid had been extended.

UNDP should ensure that it is working both at the technical and political levels to table important economic and environmental agendas with the RGC. Though it has been successful in producing policy research and studies, most often these products stop short of being adopted by the government and of being implemented. UNDP needs stronger collaboration and coordination with the UNCT and other UN agencies and to navigate politically sensitive issues, such as land rights. UNDP could diversify the composition of project boards to build more political traction for its projects. It should use the full extent of the UNCT to follow up on pending policies and instruments.

As the country takes strides in engaging in the carbon market, UNDP should advocate and help the RGC ensure that other ecosystem functions (e.g., hydrological, biodiversity, significance to indigenous people, etc.) are not disenfranchised when developing climate change projects, whose main focus is carbon credits, or ensuring that the distribution of revenues from the carbon market is equitable. The agency should advocate for and support the adoption and implementation of the Payment for Environmental Services scheme, which helps mainstream these essential environmental functions and distribute assets to other stakeholders who do not have the capacity to participate directly in the carbon market.

The evaluation appreciates the trade-offs that UNDP faces, a balance between addressing such issues and maintaining its relationship with the government. The evaluation also recognizes that there is only limited political space for UNDP to influence forestry and land governance reform, and even less so for CSOs and communities that are at the core of these issues. The trade-offs should not dissuade UNDP and other partners from such uncomfortable issues. Rather, these trade-offs are grey areas where UNDP and partners can work through strategic and innovative approaches. For example, in terms of land issues there is an opportunity to address the lack of quality and accessibility to information on land use and land conflict, forest conversion and loss, and questionable land concessions.

Management response: Fully accepted 

Accept fully the recommendation. The formulation of the new Country Programme will attempt to address different facets of the recommendation driven by a systems design approach.

| Key action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking* | |
|---|-----------------|---|-----------|--------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 1.1 UNDP Cambodia is using a systems design approach for developing its new Country Programme and corresponding portfolios. The evolving Country Programme covers socio-economic inclusion and environmental sustainability. Using a systems design approach will facilitate internal coherence across the new Country Programme. It will also identify where strong partnerships are needed, including external coherence within the broader UN Country Framework. | By October 2023 | Senior Management; and Policy, Programme and Results-Based Management (RBM) teams | | |
| 1.2 UNDP will engage in joint advocacy with the broader UN Country Team as part of the UN Cambodia's Human Rights Strategy or Communications and Advocacy Plan. | July 2024 | Senior Management; and Communications team | | |

RECOMMENDATION 2. 

UNDP needs to rethink its current approach to its governance programming, not necessarily having a standalone outcome, but having a country programme with a systems approach of embedding governance across all thematic areas – one that integrates a rights-based approach and political economy analyses.

With a limited resource base coupled with the challenges in the country's governance and political context that are likely to persist in the foreseeable future, UNDP's support to the promotion of good governance in Cambodia requires rethinking of its business model. Given the limited core resources allocated to UNDP Cambodia and the refocusing of the agency's traditional development partners' (e.g., SIDA, EU) support to governance, it will be challenging to support stand-alone

◀ Recommendation 2 (cont'd)

governance projects. Such projects, if at all implemented, are likely to have short project life, narrow focus, and will confront challenges in achieving tangible results over a short timeline, which will further contribute to programme fragmentation and lack of internal coherence.

With the above challenges in mind, it may be pragmatic for the country office to explore a complementary programming approach. This requires embedding or integrating a *good governance* approach across the whole programme and relevant practice areas where feasible. More specifically, the suggested approach requires adopting and integrating complementary tools such as *political economy analysis* and *right-based approach to development* to conventional governance assessment. Both tools complement the traditional governance assessment tools²⁰⁵ that focus on measuring the performance, accountability, responsiveness, and capacity of formal institutions. Political economy analysis complements conventional governance assessment by providing a deeper level of understanding about power, state capability, accountability, and responsiveness, and is why certain performance deficits in certain areas occur. Political economy issues pervade across development concerns. In Cambodia political economy issues are at the heart of natural resource management (e.g., forestry, land), which are often linked to land grabbing and corruption. Similarly, in many developing countries, including Cambodia, access to essential public services often disproportionately benefit those who are relatively well-off and/or politically connected, thus exacerbating poverty and inequality in the process.²⁰⁶ Integrating political economy analysis into the governance toolkit enables us to better understand the levers of power and influence, enabling us to sharpen the focus of intervention.

In the same vein, a human rights-based approach (HRBA) complements the conventional governance approach by providing legal and normative standards or metrics around certain principles, such as equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability, and rule of law. The benefit of integrating HRBA into governance programming is the focus on the most marginalized and excluded in society, as it is their human rights that are most widely denied or left unfulfilled (whether in the social, economic, political, civil, or cultural sphere – and often a combination of these). Integrating governance and HRBA sharpens the focus of the impact of project intervention on the marginalized and minority groups such as persons with disabilities, indigenous people, etc., consistent with the principle of *leave no one behind* that underpins the achievement of SDGs and of the RGC's Rectangular Strategy IV.

Integrating governance across practice areas has a number of implications and presents some challenges. It will mean managing a portfolio of project activities that contributes to results across practice areas rather than a governance programme alone. This would require some adjustments in programme results reporting, with an increased focus on contribution rather than attribution. This will also require a more nuanced way of reporting the contribution of governance initiatives that are embedded in a programme. From an implementation standpoint, such integration will require working on teams and more active collaboration between governance specialists with other practice area specialists (e.g., specialists on climate change, disaster management, economist, poverty specialist, etc.) to ensure the proper integration of governance approaches in the design and implementation of relevant activities. This means the breaking down of traditional silos, which is required to address the complexity of development challenges. ▶

²⁰⁵ These tools usually rely on surveys such as anti-corruption surveys or use expert feedback and/or indicators such as the World Wide Governance Indicators that the World Bank developed.

²⁰⁶ "Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reviews report of Cambodia asks about nationality, land grabs, and civic space" (29 November 2019), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/11/committee-elimination-racial-discrimination-reviews-report-cambodia-asks>.

Management response: Fully accepted



Accept fully the recommendation. The formulation of the new Country Programme and corresponding portfolios is based on a systems design approach that will determine whether it will have a standalone outcome and/or embed governance across all thematic areas.

| Key action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|-----------------|---|----------|--------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 2.1 The UN Country Framework (UNCF) under development will inform the outcomes of the Country Programme. As it currently stands, governance is cross-cutting as well as factors as a separate output under one of the pillars of the draft UNCF. UNDP will adopt a human rights-based approach and political economy analysis for its programming. There will be interventions on civic engagement and digital transformation for social change. The governance programming will also focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups that are being left behind. | By October 2023 | Senior Management; and Policy, Programme and Results-Based Management (RBM) teams | | |

RECOMMENDATION 3.



UNDP should build on the results of its disability inclusion initiatives with stronger and more explicit linkage with programming aimed at expanding social protection and poverty reduction, and at strengthening access to the social, economic, and legal aid services components for persons with disabilities. To deliver this, UNDP should continue to expand its project portfolio, form strategic partnerships, and continue working to pilot new ideas or test policies at subnational levels, while informing national policies and decision-making processes with lessons from the field implementation.

Although the initiative on advancing disability rights in Cambodia has demonstrated good progress in achieving some results, a number of challenges persist. These include: (i) the need to effectively mainstream disability awareness into policies and plans; (ii) strengthening institutional mechanisms for the development, coordination, and implementation of policies and programmes, especially at the subnational level since previous initiatives were focused only on some provinces; and (iii) the lack of disability social protection policies, among others.²⁰⁷ Although the RGC has rolled

²⁰⁷ UNDP Project Document, "Project to Promote Disability Inclusion (PPD II)," pp. 4–5.

◀ Recommendation 3 (cont'd)

out the implementation of the IDPoor as a national programme, persons with disabilities are not recognized as individuals qualified to be immediate beneficiaries.²⁰⁸ Given the economic status of persons with disabilities, the positive contribution of social assistance in ameliorating the impact of COVID-19, as well as the importance of social assistance as a safety net to prevent people from falling into poverty and deprivation, it is important that social protection for persons with disabilities is linked systematically to the broader social assistance programme of the RGC.

Similarly, it is important to emphasize that disability inclusion and access to justice (social and legal aid) are *two sides of the same coin*. Advancing disability rights requires translating disability-inclusive policies into concrete actions enabling persons with disabilities to access social, economic, and legal aid services. Drawing from previous experience, future support for disability rights should continue to build and expand on the partnership with other UN agencies to leverage competencies and resources for greater development impact.

In the context of the SDGs in Cambodia, creating spaces for dialogue can bring about greater awareness and understanding of SDGs and how they are linked to Commune Plans and Commune Investment Plans at the subnational level.²⁰⁹ These dialogue mechanisms can help disseminate lessons learned and/or build on the results from the Innovation Lab experiments that developed new ways to improve public services. A similar approach can be adopted in the context of improving the delivery of local services, i.e., improving access to social protection schemes. Integrating HRBA would mean, in this case, assessing the role and responsibilities of the duty bearer (government) and rights holders (e.g., persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, CSOs) and identifying ways to address the gaps to fulfil those roles and responsibilities. This means that in some cases UNDP needs to create platforms and use its position to arbitrate issues between the government and civil society.

Management response: **Partially accepted** 

Accept partially the recommendation. The formulation of the new Country Programme and corresponding portfolios is based on a systems design approach that will determine specific linkages to social protection, poverty reduction, access to services, etc. Piloting new ideas will be dependent on the probability for transformational change, scaling, and sustainability.

| Key action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|------------|---|----------|--------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 3.1 The new UN Country Framework, and consequently the UNDP Country Programme’s evolving focus, is to support LDC graduation and SDG acceleration, with a focus on leaving no-one behind including disability inclusion. Specific interventions will be identified through a systems-based approach to portfolios design. | July 2024 | Senior Management; and Policy, Programme and Results-Based Management (RBM) teams | | |

²⁰⁸ Government partners reports that the Disability Action Council and GS-NSPC are developing guidelines on persons with disability and social protection, and that around 60,000 persons with disability have benefitted already from the IDPoor programme.

²⁰⁹ In other countries in Africa, local voluntary reporting for SDGs has been developed. See “ICPE Kenya” (2022), p. 16.

RECOMMENDATION 4.



UNDP should reinvigorate its strategy and programme in supporting gender equality and women empowerment by exploring and broadening its partnership and collaborations to leverage and support initiatives from other development partners that have an established track record in advancing gender equality. By using its comparative advantage of being a trusted facilitator, UNDP could help expand the alliances of its partners working on gender (e.g., UN Women, MoWA, SHE Investments, etc.). In addition to fully mainstreaming gender across its whole portfolio, if possible, UNDP should have gender as one of its country programme outcomes.

For the past 20 years UNDP has been supporting MoWA to develop its capacity as the country's gender machinery to advance gender equality and women empowerment. As progress towards advancing gender equality has proved challenging for MoWA on its own to effect change, the rapid changes in the country's development context provide a strong basis for UNDP to take a fresh look at its engagement strategy and to focus on advancing gender equality. There is a need to conduct a longitudinal review of the long-term engagement with MoWA to assess the impact of support over the past two decades. Given the complexity of advancing gender rights in Cambodia, engaging multiple and diversified partners is key to accessing multiple entry points to advance GEWE. While the RGC's leadership in advancing gender equality remains critical, given its role in setting the enabling environment, other partners can play active complementary roles. In the context of Cambodia's post-COVID-19 economic recovery, for example, investing in women's economic empowerment may set a direct path towards linking gender equality, poverty eradication, and inclusive economic growth – which would require different sets of partners (e.g., social enterprise, private sector, etc.). Providing women with economic opportunities contributes to advancing gender equality in tandem with initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of inequalities, such as power relations and discrimination, which are still prevalent in Cambodia.²¹⁰

There is a need to increase the systematic integration and emphasis of gender equality in all of UNDP's programme areas (e.g., poverty and economic growth, environment, and governance) to leverage investments across sectors and draw lessons learned. These will provide more valuable insights on mainstreaming gender than what is currently the prevalent model, which mainly focuses on bolstering MoWA. As in many instances, many small initiatives that get implemented on the ground oftentimes yield more valuable insights than big initiatives at the national level that get stymied by bureaucratic inertia before they even manage to take off. This way of working needs to have a more gender-sensitive reframing of the country programme result statements, targets, and indicators. The CO M&E system should be more active in collecting gender-disaggregated data at the outcome level, and should be more active in reminding project developers to conduct deeper gender analysis, with an emphasis on understanding power relations at various levels affecting women's empowerment and gender equality.

²¹⁰ "Gender Equality and Human Rights," <https://cambodia.ohchr.org/en/issues/gender-equality-and-human-rights>.

Management response: Fully accepted



Accept fully the recommendation, subject to UNDP's new Country Programme being informed by the UN Country Framework's outcomes under development. In addition, SHE Investments is an NGO, which UNDP has collaborated with in the past as a Responsible Party.

| Key action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|----------|--------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 4.1 The UN Country Framework (UNCF) under development will inform the outcomes of the new Country Programme. As it currently stands, gender equality is cross-cutting as well as factors as a separate output under one of the pillars of the draft UNCF. | By October 2023 | | | |
| 4.2 Conduct social behavioral study on key learning area/s on gender equality emerging from the systems design of the new Country Programme, which will inform the design of portfolios. | July 2023 | | | |
| 4.3 A memorandum of understanding to be entered into with UN Women on common areas of collaboration. | July 2023 | | | |

RECOMMENDATION 5.



UNDP should consolidate its resources by implementing its programme through an area-based approach, which it has recently adopted, concentrating on provinces or regions with a clear rationale for UNDP interventions and where it can create additionality. It should also underpin its programming with a whole-of-government approach, especially at the subnational level, where it can also create civic spaces that support more inclusive governance.

For example, in the demining areas an area-based approach that links mine action and economic empowerment could be used in project design, resource mobilization, and communication, especially to leverage funds from donors who are already providing funds through their humanitarian window. A similar approach could be adopted in Kulen Mountains, where there is a need to connect fragmented projects into a cohesive programme. UNDP should take stock of lessons from its successful piloting of a whole-of-government approach in its disability programming and use it as a model for future intervention.

◀ Recommendation 5 (cont'd)

UNDP should maintain a balanced portfolio of interventions working at both national and subnational levels, with the intention of using interventions to create feedback loops between influencing national policy from evidence-based research, testing and documenting lessons learned from implementation pilots, and feedback to policy reviews and dialogues. The UNDP disability programme exemplifies a model worth replicating where it uses a whole-of-government approach, i.e., where it engages multiple ministries at the provincial level to work on persons with disabilities rights. Each ministry, coordinated through the provincial head of government, provides nuance solutions and jointly pursues a development vision for persons with disabilities. The upfront cost is minimal, with UNDP mostly providing technical support, coordination expenses, and launching national dialogues. However, UNDP needs to identify the correct level of expertise, with both technocratic and political savviness, to navigate Cambodia's complex political environment. The Clearing for Results project is fit for an area-based approach to scale-up both economic and social services activities. For example, the solar-powered micro-grids and irrigation pumps could be combined with social protection and On-demand IDPoor and other livelihoods support projects for land mine victims, their families, and communities. Service provision to persons with disabilities links well with the persons with disabilities Provincial Action Council Plans, but livelihood support should be strengthened to include access to finance to complement the limited skills training channelled through the Battambang Disabled Peoples' Organization.

Another way of consolidating its work is through working on broad transformative development challenges, such as the digitalization agenda, especially its potential to bolster the youth sector. At the time of writing, there have been several discussions within the UNCT, and UNDP has several pilots that are implemented with digitalization components. Moving forward, UNDP needs to be abreast of the current developments and work within its areas of comparative strength, such as supporting policy making and bringing various development partners together vis-à-vis digitalization. It must also be careful that it does not over-stretch itself and thus dilute its programming across a wide landscape of development agendas.

Management response: Fully accepted 

Accept fully the recommendation, subject to availability of resources or financing for implementation at scale.

| Key action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|--|------------|---------------------|----------|--------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 5.1 An area-based approach will be adopted during the design of portfolios for UNDP's new Country Programme, building on GIS mapping system introduced through the Independent Country Programme Evaluation process. | July 2024 | | | |

◀ Recommendation 5 (cont'd)

| Key action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|------------|---------------------|----------|--------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 5.2 Funding secured from Japan will focus on SDG localization, including creating/expanding civic space for more inclusive governance in 3 provinces. | May 2023 | | | |

RECOMMENDATION 6.



The next UNDP country programme should be cognizant of Cambodia’s upper middle-income country ambition and help prepare the country to transition from grants and aid to development financing. UNDP should build on its success in mobilizing and implementing the large government cost-sharing funds for COVID-19 response. The agency should be selective of its pilot projects, and should plan for broader adoption (mainstreaming, replication, scaling, sustaining) at the design phase.

In preparing for Cambodia’s graduation from LDC, UNDP should anticipate the decrease in ODA and build its own internal capacity to source and design blended financing of development projects. This means it needs to reskill its staff and to ensure that blended financing and innovative finance (i.e., green/blue bonds) is the default and mainstream approach to project resource mobilization. UNDP should take stock of the current models of innovative financing it has been piloting, especially in the environmental portfolio. As seen in its COVID-19 response, one of the funding avenues will be government cost sharing, which should be mainstreamed in all of its future interventions.

With both the LDC graduation and sustainability in mind, it is imperative that the RGC and its ministries, the private sector, academia, and CSOs takes ownership and broader adoption of successful UNDP project, pilots, and innovations. Hence, UNDP may consider strategically assisting these partners by promoting more National Implementation Modality projects, and mobilizing and delivering catalytic investments. UNDP should build on its experience in implementing large cost-sharing funds. In addition, it should mobilize donors in funding development work in tandem with the ongoing humanitarian demining activities. Furthermore, UNDP should be selective of its pilot projects. Some elements it should consider are (1) linking new pilots with results of older or closed projects, (2) ensuring that implementing and strategic partners in delivering pilots have capabilities for broader adoption, and (3) linking pilots to ongoing initiatives of development partners.

Management response: Partially accepted



Accept partially the recommendation, subject to availability of resources or financing for implementation at scale. Given its human development approach, UNDP’s focus is to support the country beyond its upper middle-income country ambition, and in graduating from LDC category and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs.

◀ Recommendation 6 (cont'd)

| Key action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|--|---------------|---------------------|----------|--------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 6.1 The UNDP new Country Programme is focused on LDC graduation, and moving from funding to financing. The Country Office is using its TRAC2 allocation to design a Sustainable Financing Facility, to facilitate support to government on implementing the Integrated National Financing Framework. | Jan 2024 | | | |
| 6.2 The Country Office has Project Initiation Plan in place for exploring the possibility of expanding medical procurements to a broader health systems support project, based on outcome of assessment to be conducted during Q2 2023. | November 2023 | | | |
| 6.3 Portfolios will determine the selection of pilots that would need to be transformational in nature. The quality assurance for pilot projects will include an exit and sustainability strategy from the design stage. | July 2024 | | | |

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database.

ANNEXES



The annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the Independent Evaluation Office website at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/22570>

Annex 1. Evaluation terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation matrix

Annex 3. List of projects

Annex 4. Documents consulted

Annex 5. Status of Country Programme Document outcome & output indicators matrix

Annex 6. Rating matrix

Annex 7. GIS analysis – Calculation of Priority



Independent
Evaluation
Office

United Nations Development Programme

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, DC1-20th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. +1(646) 781 4200

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