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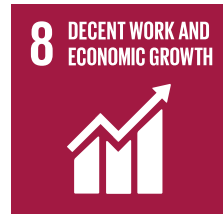


Cambodia



Youth Voices Matter

Survey Report



January 2024



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The United Nations Development Programme

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I

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Cambodia formulated a new Country Programme Document for the next five years 2024-2028. To gather insights, UNDP conducted a series of consultations with various stakeholders, including government entities, development partners, NGOs, think tanks, and the private sector. UNDP also held a series of youth activities to gather youth's perspectives on development priorities for the next five years. This focus on youth was deemed crucial due to their significant representation in the total population. Indeed, young people under the age of 30 represent two-thirds of the population in Cambodia.

The youth online survey was the first activity launched to collect inputs from various youth groups on current development issues they experience or observe in their communities. It also aimed to identify their expectations and development priorities. Young people between the ages of 15 and 30 years participated in the survey from across Cambodia. It was posted online on UNDP platforms and social media and shared with various youth organisations, associations, and networks.

The results of the survey allowed UNDP to understand young people's perception of their society and their expectations. It also highlighted their key development areas and priorities, providing insights into the real challenges that youth from different communities and socio-economic backgrounds experience. The results were used to inform the UNDP's new Country Programme and reflect young people's perspectives in Cambodia.

II

SUMMARY INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS

List of features	Number of responses	Percentage	Permanent residence	Number of responses	Percentage
Women	266	66.2%	Phnom Penh	76	18.9%
Men	131	32.6%	Kandal	10	2.5%
Non-binary	5	1.2%	Kampong Cham	7	1.7%
Total participants	402	100%	Tbong Khmum	0	0%
Ethnicity			Kampong Speu	13	3.2%
Khmer	356	88.60%	Prey Veng	0	0%
Indigenous	45	11.2%	Takeo	58	14.4%
Other ethnicities	1	0.2%	Svay Rieng	2	0.5%
Age range			Kampong Thom	8	2%
15-19	160	39.8%	Kampong Chhnang	26	6.5%
20-24	157	39.1%	Pursat	1	0.2%
25-30	85	21.1%	Battambang	10	2.5%
Educational level			Siem Reap	9	2.2%
Secondary school	58	13.9%	Banteay Meanchey	1	0.2%
High school	151	37.6%	Udor Meanchey	0	0%
University	164	40.8%	Preah Vihear	168	41.8%
Vocational training	8	2%	Preah Sihanuok	1	0.2%
Other (master's, primary school, drop-out, private sector staff)	18	7.7%	Kampot	2	0.5%
Disability			Kep	0	0%
No	393	97.7%	Steung Treng	5	1.2%
Yes	5	1.27%	Kratie	0	0%
Moderate depression	1		Mondol Kiri	4	1%
Amputated	2		Koh Kong	0	%
Visually impaired	1		Pailin	0	0%
Deaf	1				

The youth online survey was completed by 407 participants; 402 responses were included in the analysis as they complied with the published criteria. Of these, 66.2 percent identified themselves as women, 32.6 percent as men, and 1.2 percent as non-binary. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 30 years. The largest group was aged between 15 and 19, representing 39.8 percent. Youth aged between 20 and 24 accounted for 39.1 percent, and 21.1 percent were in the age range of 25-30.

Among all the participants, 88.3 percent belong to the Khmer ethnicity, 11.2 percent are indigenous people, and 0.2% belong to other ethnicities. The survey was answered by young people from various provinces in Cambodia. Interestingly, young people from Preah Vihear were the largest group in the survey, accounting for up to 168 participants or 41.8 percent, compared to only 76 participants or 18.9 percent from Phnom Penh. Youth from Takeo appeared to be the third largest group of participants at 14.4 percent, while the percentage of participants from other provinces was relatively low.

III

YOUTH AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of concern to youth and their family

According to the survey, the three SDGs that mostly concern young people are SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 1 (No Poverty), with a total rate of 58.5 percent, 46 percent, and 34.3 percent, respectively. The other two SDGs of interest were SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), with a response rate of 25.9 percent, respectively.

The remaining SDGs have different response rates, ranging from the highest rate of 24.9 percent to the lowest rate of 1.5 percent.

The Cambodian SDG 18 on the impact of Mine/ Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and victim assistance had only 18 respondents, representing 4.5 percent.

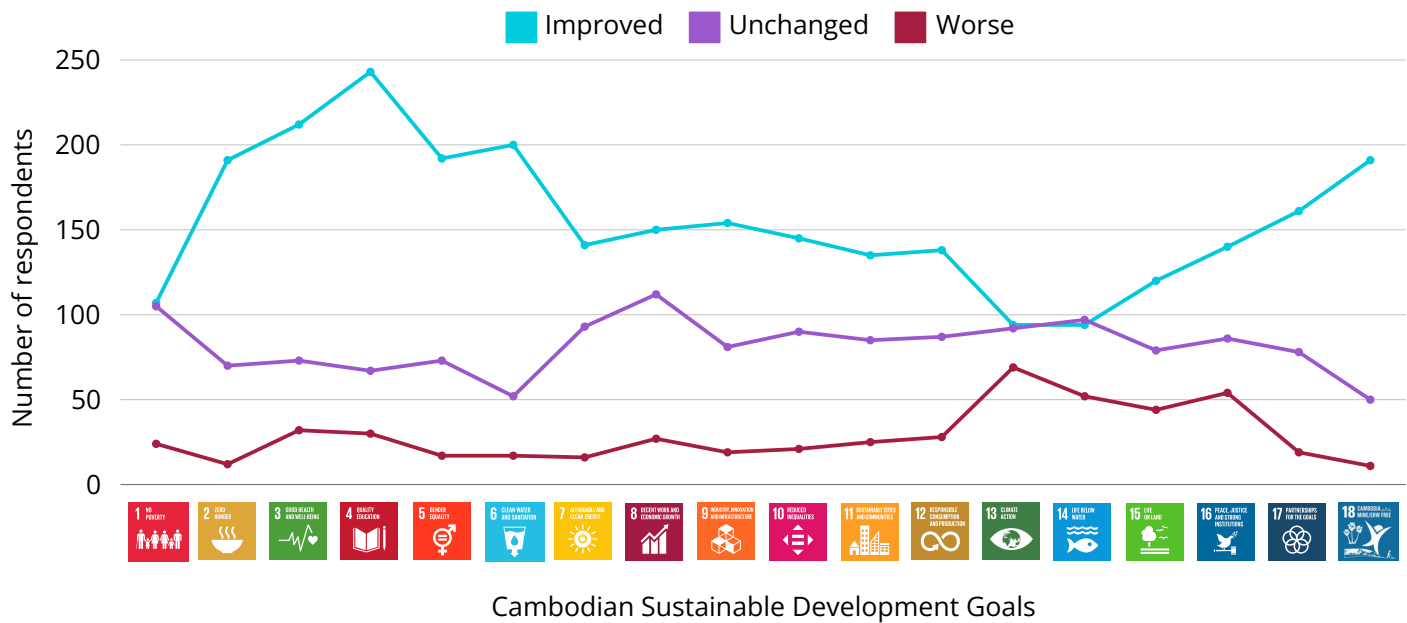




The progress of priority SDGs in the last five years

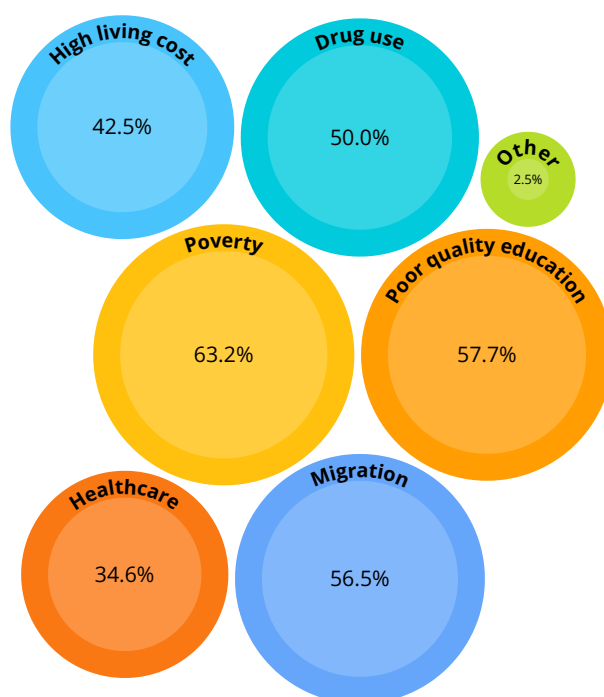
The top three priority SDGs for young people were considered on the right track of progress as per the youth's responses. For instance, SDG 4 (Quality Education) which is highly concerning for youth, has improved according to 243 youth (60.44 percent), while only 16.7 percent of them think it has remained unchanged, and 30 respondents equivalent to 7.46 percent think it has gotten worse over the last five years. Youth also believe that SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) has improved, with 52.73 percent of participants rating this SDG as getting better in comparison with only 18.15 percent considering that it remained the same, while 7.9 percent of the respondents think it got worse. Besides, about 49.75 percent of respondents rated SDG 6 (Clean Water & Sanitation) as improving over the last five years, while only 12.93 percent rated it as stalled, and 4.2 percent rated it as getting worse. The results suggested that in general, the three SDGs are on track.

Overall, 58.56 percent of the answers confirmed progress in implementing the SDGs, while 30.55 percent considered that the situation remained unchanged, and only 517 answers (representing 10.78 percent) saw that it got worse.



Challenges noted by youth in Cambodia

The three main development problems that most young people have noted are poverty, poor quality education, and migration, with a response rate of 63.2 percent, 57.7 percent, and 56.5 percent respectively. Drug use was rated at 50 percent compared to the high cost of living which was rated at 42.5 percent. Interestingly, youth do not think healthcare is one of the key development problems in Cambodia as only 139 participants out of 402, or 34.6 percent of participants see it as such. Overall, poverty is the most pervasive development problem that youth flagged.

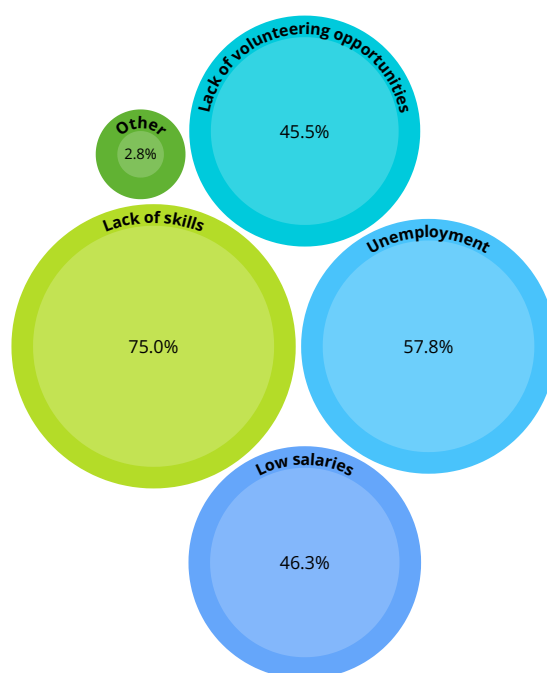


Other development challenges highlighted by 2.5 percent of young participants include:

- **Limited participatory governance:** Young people expressed concerns about the lack of their voice in crucial matters like politics and the environment, highlighting the rise of partisanship, corruption, and human rights violations. They also reported limitations in expressing themselves freely in the political sphere.
- **Physical and social health:** The increasing prevalence of alcohol consumption and gambling threaten health and societal well-being. Young people also expressed concerns about injustice, impunity, and psychological violence against children and women, as well as children's exposure to unhealthy habits and inappropriate online content.

- **Unsustainable development:** Unsustainable practices harming biodiversity and livelihoods are a major concern, as are environmental issues associated with traffic congestion, waste management, and climate change causing low agricultural production and high economic costs.
- **Education and wellbeing shortfalls:** Youth's low education, mental health services, and hygiene concerns highlight deprivations. There are plenty of volunteer work opportunities but a lack of incentives for engagement in volunteer work, making it a privilege for only youth from middle-class or well-off families.

Unpacking further the challenges that are most relevant to Cambodian Youth



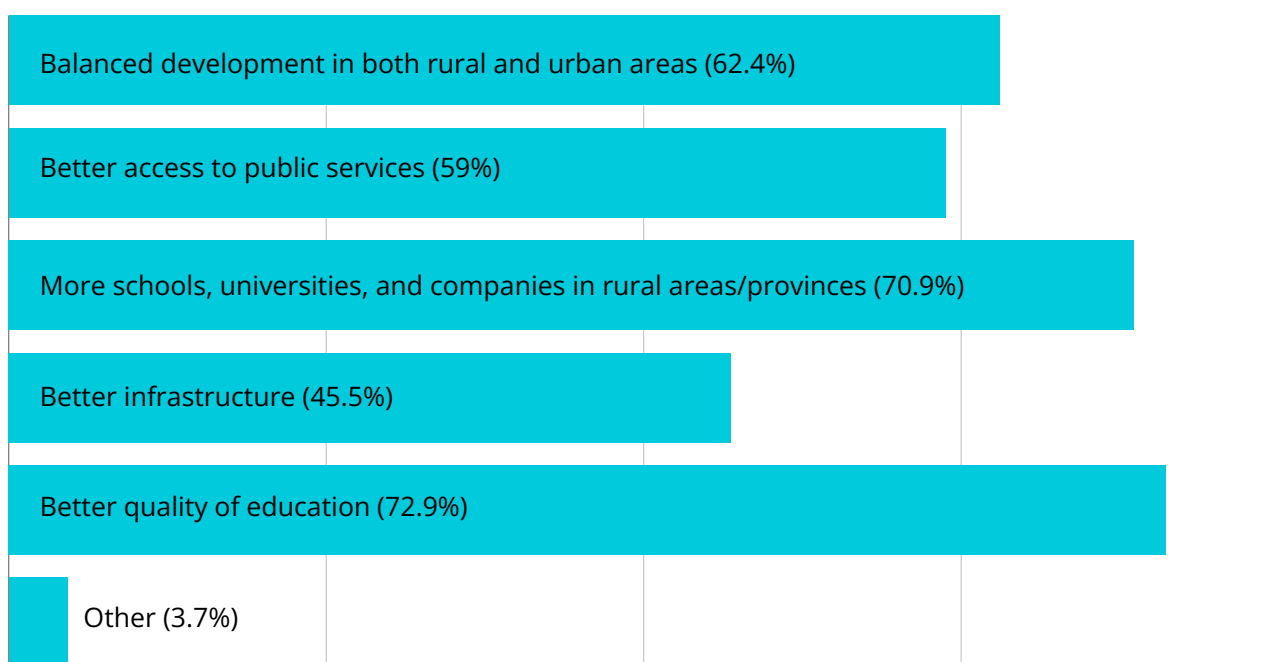
The survey results showed that 70 percent of participants consider the lack of skills as one of their most significant challenges, followed by unemployment which is rated at 57.8 percent, and low salaries rated at 46.3 percent. The lack of appropriate volunteering opportunities was also flagged as a challenge for 45.5 percent of participants.

Approximately 2 percent of young respondents stated other challenges. Those comprised:

- **Education and skills:** Struggling with poor education quality, rural drop-out rates, and a lack of career guidance, young Cambodians face difficulties in gaining the skills and opportunities they need to enter the job market.
- **Health and well-being:** Issues with drug use, alcohol, gambling, and excessive technology dependence are recognised to hinder the well-being and potential of Cambodia's youth.

- **Empowerment and participation:** Limited freedom of expression, political voice, and participation in decision-making processes leave young Cambodians feeling excluded and unheard.
- **Vision and values:** Unclear personal goals and a lack of a shared vision for the country's future contribute to uncertainty and a sense of aimlessness among young people. Environmental concerns: Young people also worry about climate change and its potential impacts on their safety and livelihoods in the future.
- **Research and labour market:** Insufficient scientific research and a flawed labour market marked by limited opportunities create barriers to innovation and career development.
- **Social issues:** Child marriage and workplace discrimination further restrict young people's prospects for growth and fulfilment.

Changes youth wish to see in Cambodian during the next five years



The top three important changes reported are: (1) better quality of education, which was rated by 293 participants out of 402, equivalent to 72.9 percent, (2) more schools, universities, and companies in rural areas or provinces, rated by 285 young people or 70.9 percent, and (3) balanced development in both rural and urban areas, which was rated by 251 respondents or 62.4 percent.

In addition, 59 percent of the participants want to have better access to public services, while 45.5 percent look for better infrastructure.



The other 3.5 percent of participants suggested the following:

- **Empowerment and participation:** Cambodian youth yearn for spaces to safely voice concerns, free from fear and threats. They dream of a society that respects human rights, combats corruption, and fosters active political participation, with accountable and transparent institutions guiding the way.
- **Education and skills:** Investing in the future, young people seek support for career and educational choices. They hope for rural schools equipped with digital technology education, and an education system nurturing their entrepreneurial spirit through real-world experience from established players.
- **Economy and environment:** Fair rewards for their skills and decent local jobs are paramount for young Cambodians. They envision a sustainable future where deforestation is halted, the environment thrives, and communities embrace environment-focused education.
- **Social and community:** A society free from violence and drug abuse is a priority, alongside opportunities for youth to contribute through volunteering and collaborative efforts in finding solutions for issues like low farming productivity.
- **Governance:** Young Cambodians desire a thriving economy coupled with responsible governance built on transparency. They believe an improved system can pave the way for a brighter future.

Social transformations youth would like to see in Cambodia during the next five years

Based on the survey, the youth's vision for the Cambodian society in the next five years can be categorised as follows:

Poverty reduction

Most participants want Cambodian people to be lifted out of poverty, ending hunger and improving food security and nutrition. There should be no death caused by starvation.



Quality education

Most participants call for a better-quality education system at all levels. Whilst there are schools and universities in rural and remote areas, it is important to ensure that those schools and universities have adequate resources and study materials. Teachers should receive ethics training with in-depth substantive knowledge, and students should receive both intellectual and spiritual education. This will help develop the country's human capital dedicated to contributing to social and economic progress.



Quality health services

Many participants wish to have high-quality health services available locally so that people do not have to seek treatment outside the country. They want healthcare and medical costs to be reasonable and for people to have a better understanding of the importance of health and access to health services. They believe that people should be physically and mentally healthy and that there should be a sense of well-being in the community. The country should prioritise hygiene and health and work towards eliminating all kinds of diseases.



Strong institutions

Youth aspire for top institutions to be independent, transparent, and prosperous, with robust systems in place. They would like these institutions to prioritise development technology, industry, and tourism for growth.



Good governance

Participants expect improvements in democratic and governance reforms, as well as more space for social engagement and participation in the decision-making process and policymaking in their village, commune, and at a national level. They believe that youth should be encouraged to talk about politics and the environment without fear of reprisal.



No corruption

Most participants wish to live in a society that is free from corruption and all forms of exploitation. Meritocracy and transparency in the government recruitment process should be eliminated.



Equality

Participants expect social justice and equal development in urban and rural areas in various sectors, including education, health services, employment, financial compensation, security, and order. They also demand gender equality, mutual respect, and an end to the gap between the rich and the poor.





End of discrimination and violence

Most participants aspire to a society where there is no discrimination against women, LGBTIQ+, indigenous communities, the poor, people with disabilities, or inexperienced young people in society and employment across public and private sectors. Additionally, youth advocate for the elimination of all forms of violence, racism, and obsolete mindsets that perpetuate gender-based discrimination.



Promotion of human rights

Participants wish to see a democratic society with a strong rule of law, respect for human rights, and universal access to fundamental rights such as the right to quality education and healthcare. They also believe that LGBT people should have the right to marry and enter a legally recognised civil marriage. In addition, they want the right to demand changes and accountability from their leaders. They expect that Cambodia should strictly implement the Paris Peace Agreement, which aims to bring peace and stability to the country.



Addressing drug consumption, gambling, and human trafficking

Participants expressed significant concern over drug and alcohol consumption, gambling, human trafficking, money laundering, and other threats and vices. They call on the government and other actors to raise awareness of these issues and educate youth about their negative effects and reduce unscrupulous alcohol advertising.



Technology

Participants are eager to witness robust technological development and its integration across various sectors, aiming to enhance efficiency and foster innovation.



Opportunity

Young people want to have a diverse range of equal opportunities, particularly in rural areas. They want to participate in volunteer work, scholarships, internships, competitions, and exchange programmes with foreign youth.



Skill training

Youth are eager to receive skills training, both soft and hard skills, life skills, and vocational training skills. They believe that vocational training is particularly important for youth from poor families, as it can help them acquire the skills needed to find employment and improve their economic situation.



Employment

Most participants wish to see youth and all the people having decent jobs with good salaries. They believe that increasing job opportunities for all will help reduce the number of migrants working abroad. Additionally, they want youth to learn how to establish their own business. Youth also called for new policies to promote equal job opportunities and markets for all people.



Environment

Participants wish to see a country that preserves its natural resources, and wildlife. They want to promote eco-friendly practices in agriculture and industries such as tourism and energy. They believe that there should be no deforestation and that people should start planting trees again. Participants also want a clean environment where people are not allowed to litter public areas. They demand awareness-raising campaigns on environmental issues and climate change, and they want the city to be free of piled refuse and waste on the streets.



Accessible clean water and electricity

Respondents expressed the desire for Cambodia to have accessible clean water and electricity across the country, especially in rural and remote areas. They asked for affordable cost of electricity and water, along with reduced taxes. Youth believe that Cambodia can harness its abundant natural resources to generate electricity rather than relying on imports from Thailand.



Quality infrastructure

Youth call for better quality infrastructure. They believe that concrete roads should be constructed in every village, especially in rural and remote areas. Road infrastructure should be designed to co-exist with nature and consider the environment and climate change. Participants also called for better urban planning for livable and clean cities.





Strong agriculture

Many participants wish to see the promotion and advancement of sustainable agriculture through the provision of technical skills to farmers, as well as assistance in accessing markets. They called for reducing taxes on agricultural inputs.



Progressive, inclusive and sustainable development

Youth in Cambodia aspire to have progressive, inclusive, and sustainable development in all sectors. They envision Cambodia as a recognised player in the international arena by all nations. Students and young adults are empowered to advocate for their basic needs and represent Cambodia globally. Besides, youth expect Cambodia to become an upper middle-income country where everyone has decent living conditions and good health.



Stable economy and politics

Participants call for economic development and political stability. They believe that Cambodian people should be able to produce a diverse range of consumer goods. They highlighted the importance of ensuring that the price of goods and salaries are balanced and that responsible prices are set for import and export products. The labour market and honest competition should be strengthened to promote growth and prosperity.



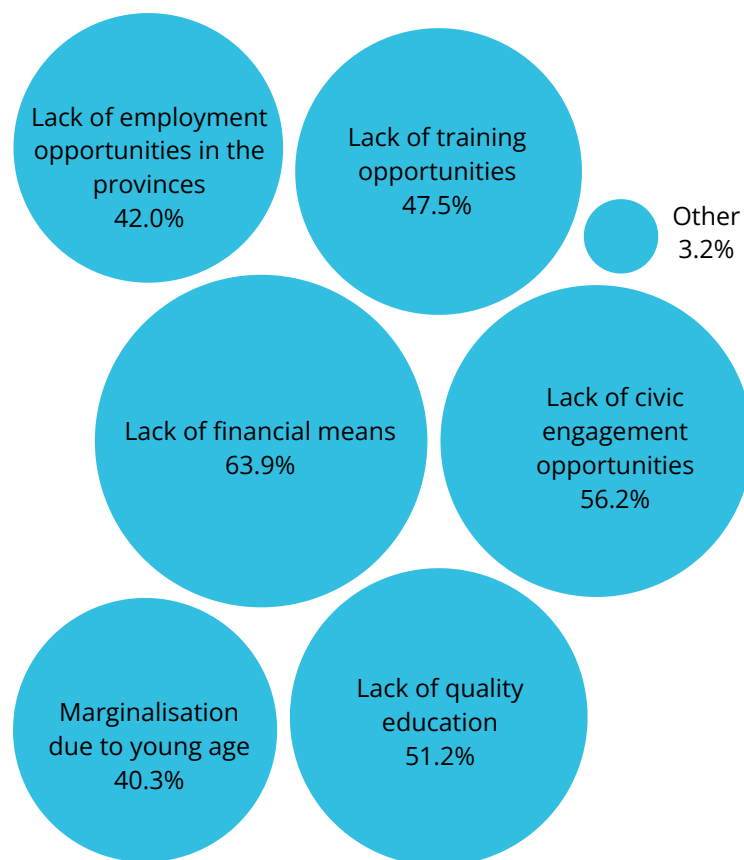
Peace and security

Participants imagine a peaceful and orderly country where people from all walks of life and provinces can enjoy prosperity and security. They also want people to be able to express their opinions freely without fear.



Barriers that hold youth from reaching their potential

Most young people in Cambodia consider the lack of quality education, training opportunities (soft skills and hard skills), civic engagement, and employment opportunities in the provinces as the main barriers that hold them back from reaching their potential. They were rated 51.2, 47.5, 56.2 and 42.0 percent, respectively. The other three obstacles include marginalisation due to young age, and lack of financial means were rated 40.3 and 63.9 percent, respectively.

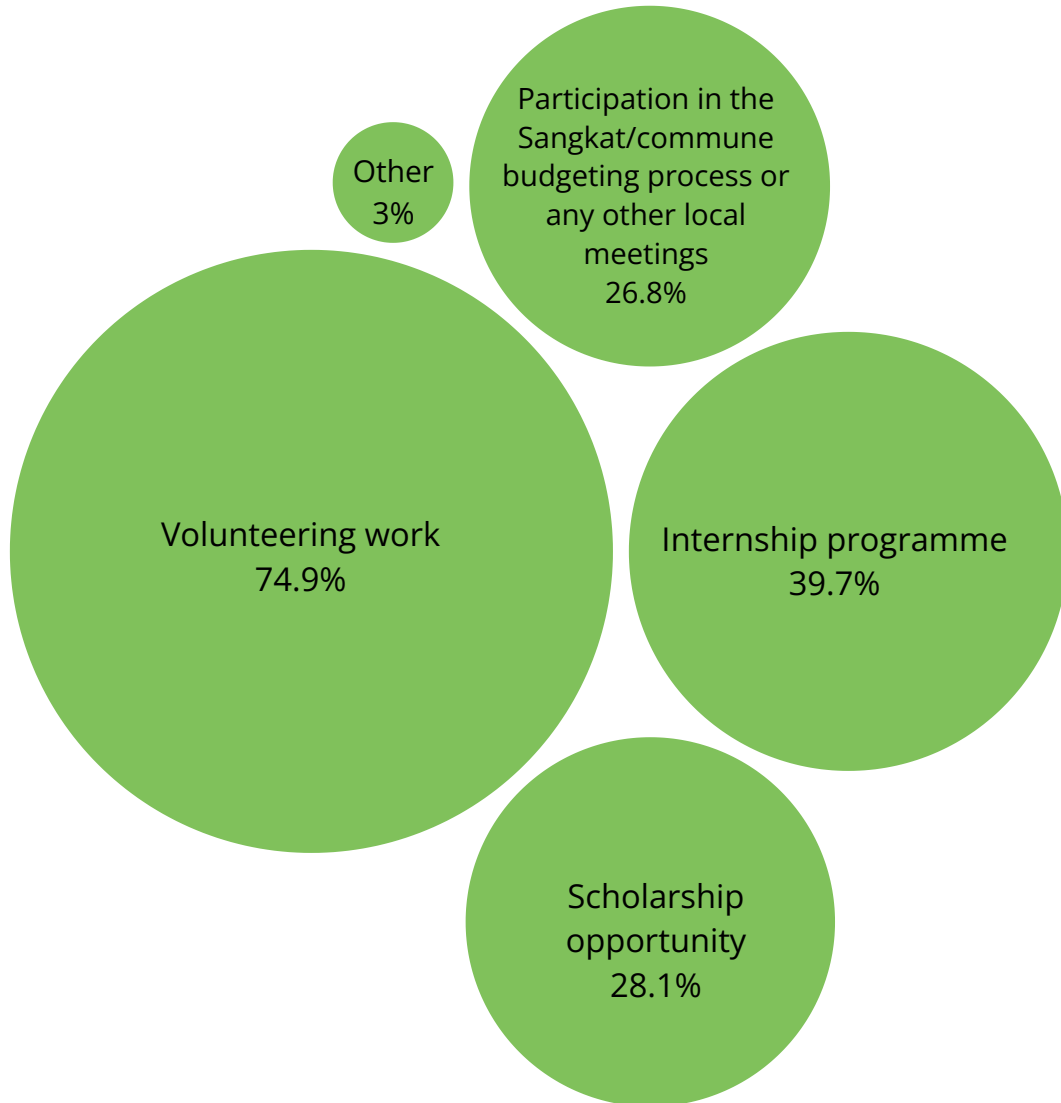


In addition, 3.2 percent of young people mentioned other factors such as:

- **Systemic obstacles:** Such as nepotism, corruption, inadequate guidance, information gaps, political and social pressures, and insufficient support mechanisms for youth participation at both national and sub-national levels.
- **Personal challenges:** Addiction, distractions, and poor preparation to seize opportunities limit their potential and motivation. Additionally, restricted freedom of expression and personal doubts can further impede their progress.
- **Resource gaps:** Lack of access to crucial technical and resource support creates unequal ground for young people seeking to empower themselves.



Youth participation in empowerment programmes during the last two years

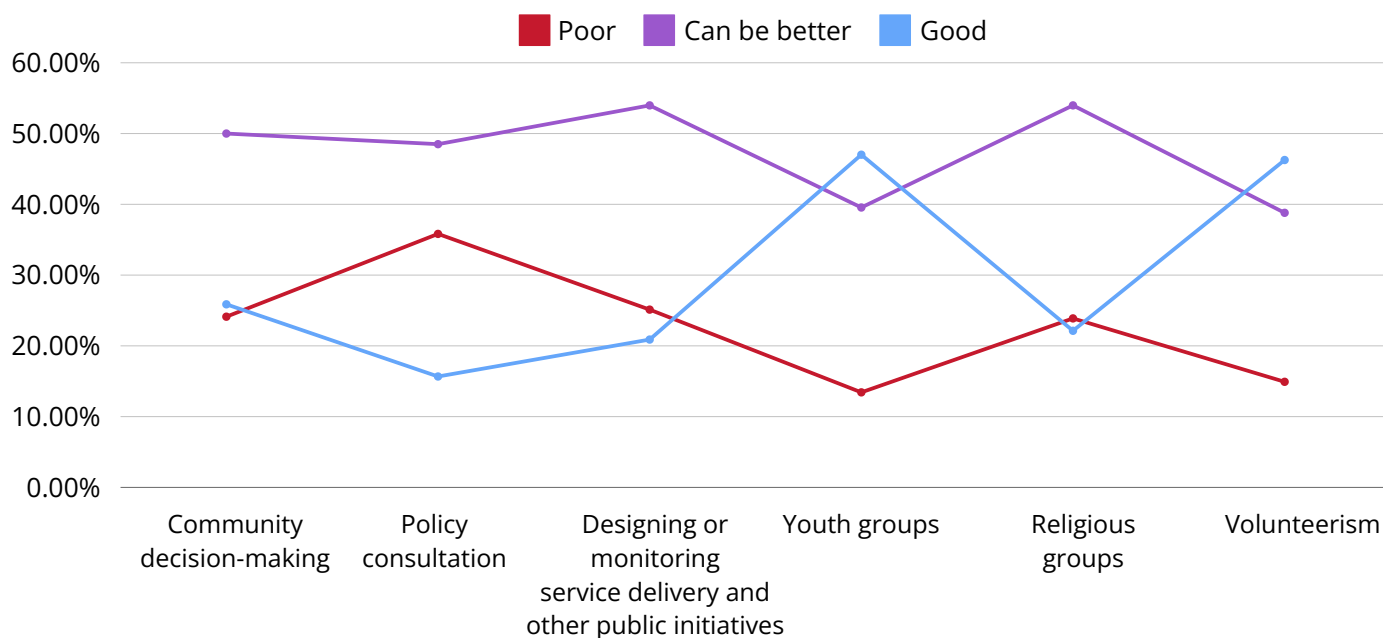


According to the survey results, 74.9 percent of all participants believe that volunteering work has benefited youth the most during the last two years. The second most beneficial activity for youth is enrollment in internships with 39.7 percent of participants citing its importance. Scholarship opportunities were also considered beneficial by 28.1 percent of participants.

Interestingly, 26.8 percent of youth claimed that they have participated in the Sangkat/ commune budgeting process or any other local meetings. In addition, approximately 3 percent of participants benefited from opportunities to participate in community activities to learn new things and gain experience.

Youth participation in public affairs

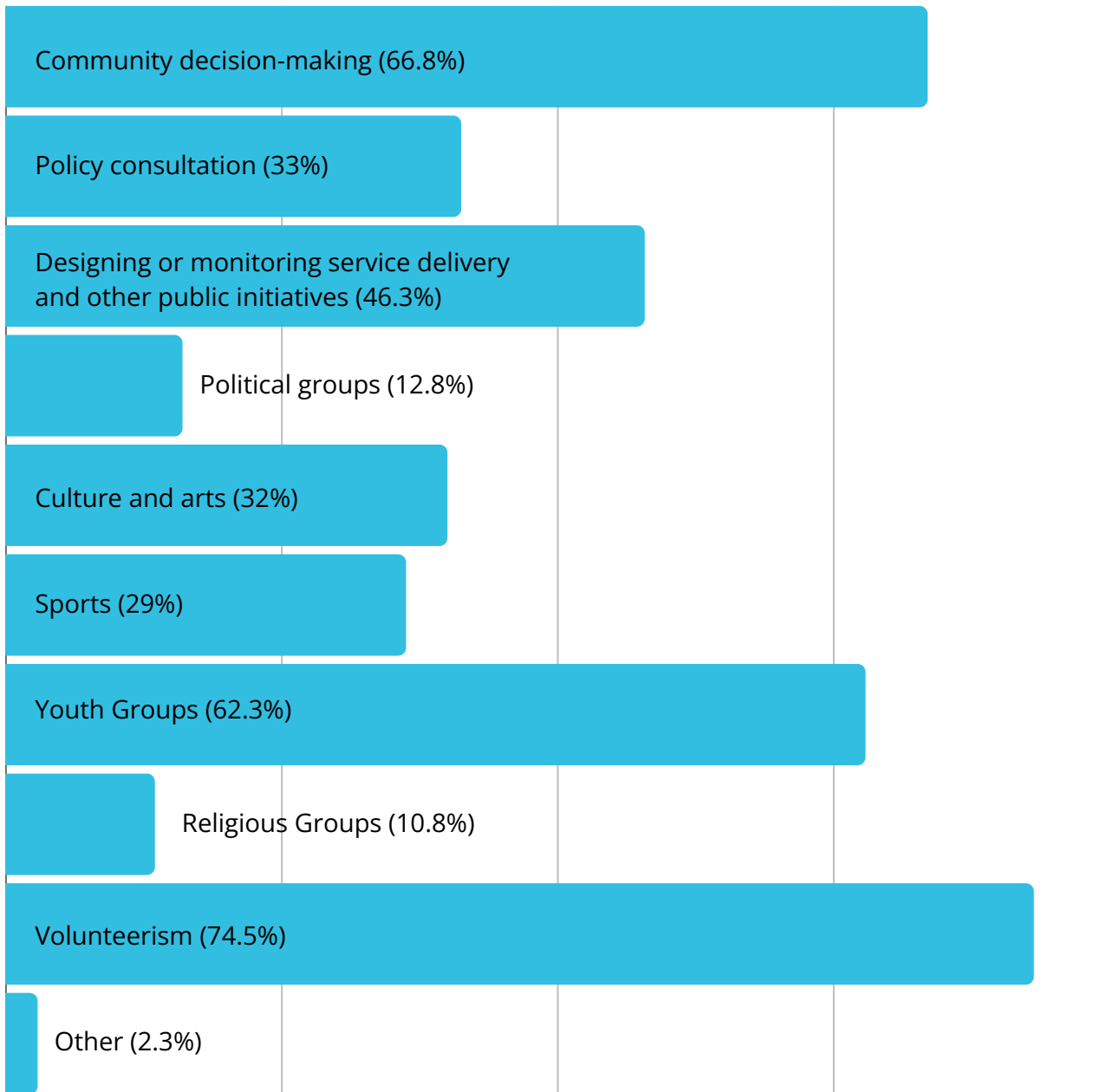
Three activities were rated the highest by all participants. Youth groups were the best-rated with 47.1 percent of all participants rating them as 'good' compared to 39.55 percent who rated them as 'can be better' and only 13.43 percent rated them as 'poor'. Volunteerism was rated as 'good' by 46.26 percent of participants against 38.80 percent who rated it as 'can be better' and 14.92 percent who rated it as 'poor'. Participation in community decision-making was considered by 25.87 percent of participants as 'good', compared to 50 percent who rated it as 'can be better' and 24.1 percent who rated it as 'poor'. This suggests that youth can participate in public affairs mainly through youth groups, volunteerism, and community processes. However, participation in community decision-making still needs more improvement.



Three activities have been rated as poor in general by most participants. First, youth engagement in policy consultation was rated 'poor' by 35.82 percent of participants, with 15.67 percent of youth rating it 'good'. Second, 25.12 percent of participants rated participation in designing and monitoring service delivery and other public initiatives as 'poor', whilst 20.89 percent of participants believe it is 'good', and 53.98 percent rated it as 'can be better'. Third, 23.88 percent of respondents rated participation with religious groups 'poor' whilst 22.13 percent rated them 'good', and 53.98 percent rated them as 'can be better'. This indicates that youth public participation is still low.



Youth would like to be involved in public affairs in the following ways



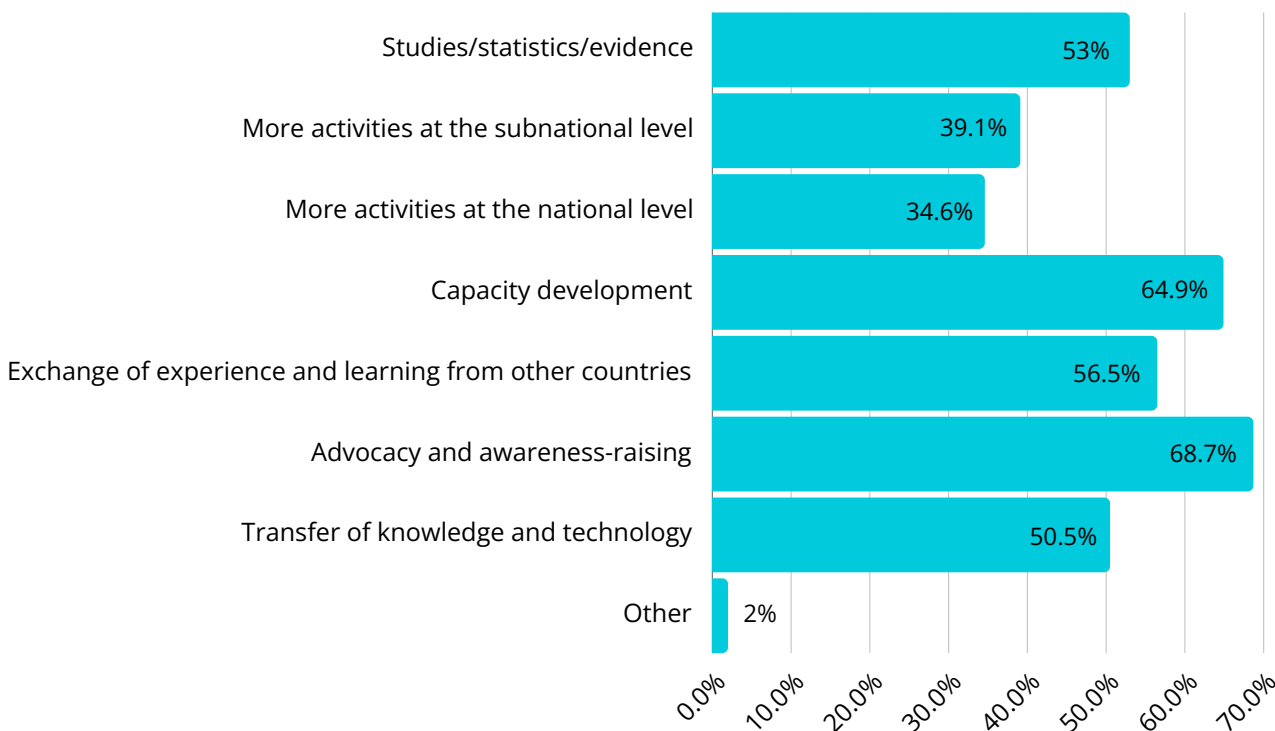
Youth would like to be involved in public affairs mainly through three main channels namely, volunteerism, community processes, and youth groups. These were rated highly by all participants with an average rating of 74.5 percent, 66.8 percent, and 62.3 percent, respectively. Interestingly, three initiatives that youth have the least interest in are religious, political groups, and sports groups which were rated at an average of 10.8 percent, 12.8 percent, and 29 percent, respectively.

UNDP supports development in Cambodia

The survey results show that youth in Cambodia believe that UNDP can support development in Cambodia via advocacy and awareness-raising, capacity development, and exchange of experience and learning from other countries. These priorities were voted on by 68.7 percent, 64.9 percent, and 56.5 percent of participants, respectively, indicating their importance.

The other two priorities were studies, statistics, and evidence with 53 percent of participants, and transfer of knowledge and technology which was cited as a priority by 50.5 percent of the respondents.

Youth also suggested that UNDP can support other areas, such as creating employment opportunities and capacity-building on digital skills.





Youth's priorities for their capacity development

Youth identified several capacity-development priorities, which can be grouped as follows:

Empowering with skills

Cambodian youth seek comprehensive skill development, encompassing digital proficiency, life skills, STEM expertise, entrepreneurial and social enterprise acumen, leadership, communication, decision-making, networking, and other crucial soft and hard skills.

Opening doors through opportunities

Internships, scholarships, diverse participation avenues, volunteering opportunities, and decent employment are top priorities for young people seeking to translate their skills into meaningful experiences.

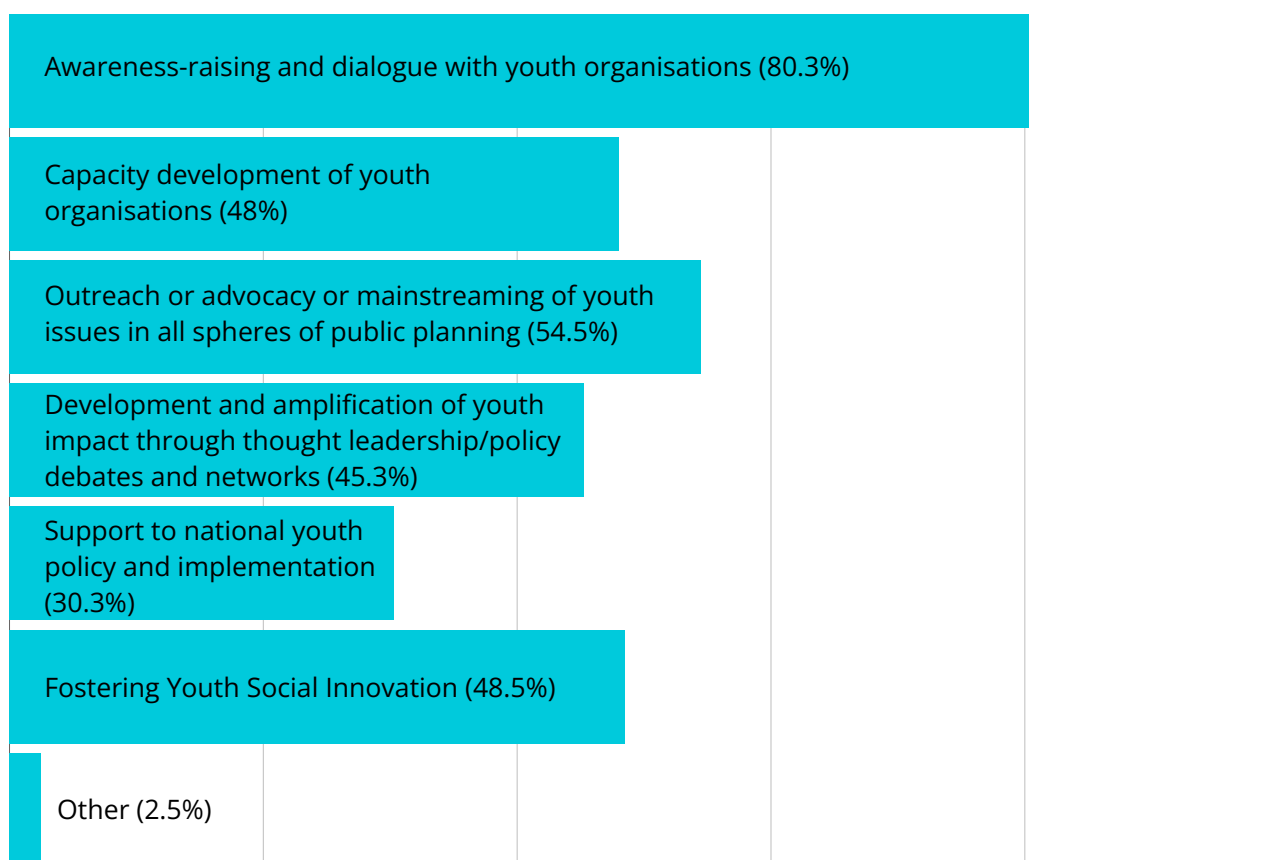
Nurturing inner strength

Guidance on building courage and self-confidence, alongside enriching exchange programmes for expanding horizons is crucial for fostering personal growth and resilience in young Cambodians.

Expanding knowledge for impact

Developing exposure and knowledge on critical social issues like health, environment and climate change, political and economic systems, rights and social work, finance and business, policy and legal matters, gender equality, ethical and moral issues, collaboration, planning, reading, and learning diverse languages are seen to empower young people to engage to succeed in their communities and beyond.

Youth prefer to engage with UNDP as young individuals in the following ways



Overall, most of the youth believe awareness-raising and dialogue with youth organisations is the best way to connect with UNDP. These were the most popular ways for young people to engage with UNDP, with 80.3 percent of participants voting for it. The other two options, outreach/advocacy/mainstreaming youth issues in all spheres of public planning and support to national youth policy and implementation were also popular, with 54.5 percent and 48.5 percent of participants voting for them, respectively.

In addition, fostering youth social innovation and capacity development of youth organisations was prioritised by 48.5 percent and 48 percent of participants, respectively. Some participants also suggested other ways to engage with UNDP as a young person through volunteerism, internships, and training.

UNDP recognises that young people can be positive agents of change and represent an immense and valuable potential that governments and institutions should nurture and invest in. Because youth are a significant force for sustainable development and key agents for social change, economic growth, and technological innovation, UNDP promotes and supports their empowerment.

As such, UNDP is committed to developing the development of capacity and agency of young people and youth-led organisations by promoting inclusive governance, increasing youth participation in decision-making, ramping up youth employment, engaging youth in peacebuilding and gender equality programmes, and ensuring youth are a part of SDG integration, implementation, and monitoring.

This commitment is reflected in UNDP Cambodia Country Programme 2024-2028 and can be consulted at <https://www.undp.org/cambodia/publications/country-programme-document-cambodia-2024-2028-0>



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