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Tackling skills gap to boost Cambodia's trade competitiveness

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia has released a new trade strategy which puts focus on the need to improve skills of the workforce to boost the country's export competitiveness and job creation.

Tackling skills gap is an urgent priority especially when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community in 2015 is nearing. The regional economic integration, coupled with up to 400,000 Cambodian youths expected to enter job market each year, will present not just opportunities but also challenges to the country, government and UN officials said during the launch of Cambodia Trade Integrated Strategy (CTIS) 2014-2018.

"This strategy will help us mobilize new technical assistance to address some of the new reforms we need to pursue. In addition, it will enhance trade sector competitiveness, create new and better job, increase income and reduce poverty," H.E. Sun Chanthol, Senior Minister and Minister of Commerce, said in his speech at the event on February 18.

CTIS is the third update since 2001 when its predecessor, Diagnostic Trade Integration Strategy, was first unveiled. The latest

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Solar panels bring lights to rural homes



Photo: UNDP Cambodia

Villagers clean solar panels through which they recharge car batteries for electricity to light homes in Trabek village, Kampong Chhnang province.

KAMPONG CHHNANG – Using generator to recharge car batteries is the common method of how rural households that still remain off the national grid get electricity. But in Kampong Chhnang province, the utility has just gotten a little hi-tech.

In Por and Trabek villages, located on an island in Tonle Sap Lake, solar panels convert sunlight into electrical energy and channel it through the wire connecting to the batteries down below. They have come to replace the earsplitting, carbon-emitting generators that, until a year ago, the villagers used to depend on for power.

"I like it a lot. My battery's life also seems to last longer each time after recharging with the solar system," said Phem Da, a 69-year-old woman in Por village.

Across the dirt road from her house lives Chuop Pha, 57, who used to run a generator-powered recharging business for a living. Today, he manages a solar station in an arrangement which ensures a steady income for his family and, at the same time, gives the villagers a more affordable, environmentally-friendly source of energy.

In exchange for letting a solar facility be installed in his backyard, Chuop Pha gets 40 percent of the monthly revenue from the recharging service. The remaining 60 percent is collected by a local management committee – which is made up of commune office representatives and villagers – to use for maintenance fund and development purposes in the benefit of the community.

"The new service is gaining popularity among the villagers. One reason is the fee is cheaper than recharging with generator," Chuop Pha said. The diesel generator that he had used previously in his business now stands pretty much idly by. He would crank it up only when the sunlight is in short supply, especially during rainy season.

Recharging fees range from 500 riel to 3,000 riel depending on battery's storage capacity. But compared to using generator, the fee for every battery is cheaper by 500 riel – a small but significant amount for most people who live on just 3,871 riel (less than US\$1) a day.

Each solar station has the capacity to recharge up to 50 batteries a day. Theoretically, that means enough power to provide the average family with electricity for a year.

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Safer ground: where crops, not landmines, are planted

For many smallhold farmers in eastern Cambodia, farming can be a risky business. Not only are landmines and explosive remnants of war a safety hazard, but they also hinder agricultural productivity which is often a ticket to a better income and greater food security for poor families.

In Banteay Meanchey province, 55-year old Teng Louch is happy. Nineteen anti-personnel mines and anti-tank mines were found, removed and destroyed in Malai district, including in plots of land near his home.

"I used to be a laborer, cultivating other people's land for them and being paid 16,000 riel (US\$4) a day," says Louch. "Now, I can plant near my home and earn from it."

Through the Clearing for Results project, the United Nations Development Programme and its partners have been helping the government of Cambodia clear landmines in the most highly contaminated provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Pailin. The US\$25 million project, supported by the governments of Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Austria and the United Kingdom, has helped clear around 83 km² of land since 2006. The project, now on its second phase and implemented by the Cambodia Mine Action and Victims Assistance Authority (CMAA), has also contributed to the steady decline of landmine casualties throughout Cambodia, from 188 in 2006 to 48 in 2013.



Photot: UNDP Cambodia/Maria Frio

Len Pheap tends to the sesame seeds she grows in the backyard of her house in Battambang province. The plot used to be littered with landmines but has now been swept cleared of the deadly devices through the Clearing for Results project.

Furthermore, 80% of land cleared in the three provinces in 2011 is now being used for agricultural purposes, according to the project's post-clearance monitoring. One such family benefitting from this is Louch's.

"I was able to plant cassava and rice on

1.6 hectares of land," Louch says. "The following year, I earned US\$667 from the cassava and harvested 10 sacks of rice. I kept one sack for me and my family and it lasted us an entire year," he shares.

In Battambang province, 36-year-old Len Pheap now grows sesame and mango seedlings on a 200m x 25m plot in her backyard that was also swept clear of landmines through the project. Come harvest time, Pheap could earn around US\$138 from sesame and as much as US\$1,031 from mangoes, not a small profit considering she used to earn KHR 4,000 (US\$1) a day as a hired laborer clearing forests.

Both Louch and Pheap say they use their earnings for basic necessities such as food, clothes, medicines,

children's school fees, and for household utilities. Louch has also set aside a small portion of his profit to hire a tractor to prepare the soil for the next cropping season. Pheap, on the other hand, saved some amount to hire trucks to collect water from the nearby river for her crops.

Tackling skills gap...

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version highlighted gains that Cambodia has made since then in using trade as an engine to drive economic growth and reduce poverty among its population. It said exports of goods and services grew in value from US\$4.9 billion to US\$8.1 billion – or a 65 percent increase – between 2007 and 2011. The share of exports other than garments and tourism during this period also increased from 18 to 29 percent. Chief among them are bicycles, electrical components, footwear, natural rubber, milled and paddy rice, cassava, corn and soybeans.

But the strategy points to weak mid-level and higher skills required for more sophisticated

production process as one of the key issues that hold back productivity gains and investment to enable the economy to move up the value chains.

"For these reasons, it is important to address the gap between skills presently available in the workforce and the skills necessary for the present and prospective work place," it said.

Skill upgrading through technical and vocational education training (TVET) and improving the quality of the education curriculum to meet the needs of job market are among the objectives in the strategy. Higher skill sets and quality education, it said, are crucial for boosting chances for getting better paid employments by both current job holders and new entrants in the labour market.

"Improved skills that allow Cambodians to perform tasks presently performed by foreign personnel will reduce the costs to enterprises and enhance their competitiveness," it said.

CTIS was produced under the leadership of Ministry of Commerce with the support from Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), a multi-donor programme to help least developing countries use trade to reduce poverty, Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other development partners.

"Of all the priorities in the CTIS, the human capital agenda is particularly important. If Cambodians are to benefit from economic growth, human capital will be critical," Ms. Claire Van der Vaeren, UN Resident Coordinator, said in her remarks at the launching event.

Greater youth's awareness about civic life

PHNOM PENH – Just a few years ago many young people in Cambodia were found to have little awareness about participation in civic life to address issues concerning them and their community. That has begun to change now. Many of young people have demonstrated greater interest to contribute to civic life after being exposed to the Loy9 programme, the multi-media initiative on youth civic education.

That was among the findings of a survey of the programme, which has been implemented by the BBC Media Action with funding from Sweden and UNDP.

The survey – “Loy9: Reaching and Engaging the Cambodian Youth on Issues of Civic Participation” – said young people in Cambodia have a high awareness of opportunities for civic participation. The majority – 89 percent – have heard of at least one opportunity for participation such as contributing to the commune development plan, community service, participating in religious associations. However, youth exposed to Loy9 demonstrated greater awareness of opportunities for community participation than those not exposed. For instance, they were much less likely than those unexposed to the programme to have not heard of any opportunity (6 vs. 18 percent). Those exposed to Loy9 were more likely to be doing community service through school (36 percent exposed vs. 23 percent unexposed), attending leadership training (19 vs. 13 percent) and participating in political organizations (27 vs. 19 percent).

The level of participation in electoral process by those exposed to Loy9 was also higher compared to those not exposed to it. The survey said a higher proportion of exposed youth compared to unexposed youth, for instance, had voted in national elections (68 vs. 63 percent). Similarly, youth exposed to

Loy9 were more likely than those not exposed to have voted in the Commune Council elections (52 vs. 44 percent).

Cambodia has the youngest population in Southeast Asia. Loy9 was launched in January 2012. It was prompted by a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices study which had found a low awareness among many young people about the importance of civic life and the function of the country's key institutions such as the National Assembly and commune councils. Many young people were also found to have difficulties expressing themselves about issues concerning them and their communities.

In trying to narrow these knowledge gaps and encourage young people to be more active in civic life, Loy9 uses multi-media platforms including TV series, radio call-in show, live activity and social media channel to. It has since reached more than 2 million young people, successfully meeting its original target.

The survey was released on 17 March, three days ahead of the debut of Loy9 TV Series III which focuses on the theme of conflict resolution. Despite improvement, it said, more remains to be done to enable confidence for greater civic awareness and engagement in areas such as democracy and decision making, rights of citizens, the role of the National Assembly and commune councils, the importance of participation and equality.

“This would enable greater levels of knowledge and understanding, confidence of expression and possibly go beyond young people's awareness of participation opportunities but translate into greater participation in the community and electoral participation,” it said.

Link to the report: http://www.kh.undp.org/content/cambodia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/loy9-impact-reports/

electric poles have been erected along the red-dirt roads to the villages, offering the locals a glimpse of hope that one day they would have a steady supply of electricity for daily use. But until that actually happens, the batteries will continue to be their only alternative for sometimes to come, said Phem Da, the 69-year-old villager.

“It will also depend on the price of power from the main grid. If it is expensive, I am afraid I will just keep relying on my battery again,” she said.

The two solar stations were funded by Global Environment Facility Small Grant Programme through a UNDP-supported project.

REDD+ Readiness project gets rolling

PHNOM PENH – A project aimed at reducing carbon emission in the forestry sector in Cambodia now enters its implementation phase following an inception workshop on 14 March. The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility REDD+ Readiness Project, known as the FCPF project, is designed to assist the country to be ready to tackle deforestation and forest degradation.

At the workshop, representatives of the Royal Government of Cambodia and United Nations Development Programme formally launched the project. Some 100 people from relevant government ministries, UN agencies, development partners, and civil society organizations attended the meeting where the project's main objectives and activities were discussed.

In her speech at the event, Ms. Claire Van der Vaeren, UN Residence Coordinator, described the project as “highly relevant” to Cambodia, which has experienced deforestation at alarming rates in recent years.

“Not only does deforestation exacerbate climate change effects, it also adversely impacts the livelihoods of local communities and threatens vital biodiversity and ecosystems, which, in Cambodia, are home to globally endangered species,” she said.

Cambodia has been classified as a country with “high forest cover and high deforestation rate.” According forest resource assessment done by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2010, Cambodia had approximately 10.1 million hectares of forest, constituting 57 percent of the total land area. During recent decades, however, the country has experienced high rates of deforestation. Forest loss occurred at a rate of about 1.2 percent per year between 2005 and 2010.

FCPF was established by the World Bank in 2008 to support developing countries to be ready for the REDD+ implementation. UNDP has been selected as a delivery partner for the project in Cambodia. The project will be implemented in partnership with the Forestry Administration under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- establishment of national REDD+ readiness management arrangements,
- development of a national REDD+ strategy and implementation framework,
- building capacity of the subnational levels for REDD+ readiness, and
- development of a measuring, reporting and verifying (MRV) system under REDD+

The project spans over three and a half years from early 2014 until mid-2017. By the end of 2014, a national REDD+ strategy is expected to be formulated, covering the following key issues: the national monitoring system, measures to tackle deforestation, benefit sharing, safeguards, grievance mechanisms and creating national and sub-national capacity.

Ms. Van der Vaeren, the UN Residence Coordinator, said that, with the government playing a leading role, a well-coordinated action and effective engagement from all key stakeholders “is crucial to the successful implementation of the FCPF project.”

Solar panels bring lights...

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Currently, only 22.47 percent of Cambodian households have access to the electricity, according to Cambodian Investment Board. Among them, only 13 percent rural households have electricity versus 54 percent in urban areas. The government aims to provide electricity access to 70 percent of all the rural households by 2030.

The residents of Por and Trabek villages have relied on car batteries for light as long as they can remember. Recently though,

Equality for Women is Progress for All

by Claire Van der Vaeren
UN Resident Coordinator

In observance of International Women's Day, 8 March 2014



Photo: UNDP Cambodia/ Thomas Cristofolletti

Cambodian women receive training in producing programme for Community Women's Radio in Kratie province.

International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the progress Cambodia has made towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Equality for women and girls is a human right, enshrined under the Constitution of Cambodia and within the international human rights treaties Cambodia has ratified. Ensuring gender equality has a powerful transformative effect on developmental progress as a whole.

In prioritizing good governance in its Rectangular Strategy, the Royal Government has marked the path for Cambodia to move towards its stated goals of growth, employment, equity, and efficiency. In this path, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are key determinants of whether development will be inclusive and sustainable. Indeed, only with the fuller participation of women and girls can Cambodia reach its development goals.

Cambodia's young female population represents a development potential that has yet to be realized. When equal to boys in their safety and access to education and health, girls grow into women who undertake roles that are socially more advanced and economically more productive than when such equality is denied. Investments in girls and women enable them to assume leadership roles in society and allow them to become drivers of economic growth, thereby also improving the environment for women's popular participation and representation in democratic governance.

Gender inequalities need to be addressed for these benefits to be felt. In Cambodia,

while significant advances have been made in reducing poverty (from 53.2% of the population in 2004 to 20.5% in 2011), the nutrition of women and children remains a concern and the percentages of severely stunted and underweight children remain high. Recognizing that gender equality has essentially been achieved in entry to primary education, the continuing gaps in higher education indicate that girls are still leaving earlier than boys, with approximately 13% more boys entering upper secondary and tertiary education. Women's health in Cambodia has improved significantly. The maternal mortality has decreased over the past decade, with women increasingly accessing health care during pregnancy and delivery and more women using contraception. For younger women, however, fertility has not decreased and poorer, less educated teenage girls are more likely to become pregnant when they are not ready for motherhood. Whilst there has been substantive increase in women's wage employment in industry (from a 44% share in 2005 to 70.8% in 2011) women are still 9% more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment, will earn on average 27% less than men. In Cambodia's 2013 national elections the gender equality at the polling stations (at over 50%) was not reflected in the National Assembly (with only 20% of seats being won by women).

Indeed, women benefit less from the fruits of progress and have less access to opportunities to improving their living conditions; at the same time they are more vulnerable or exposed to hardship. A recent UN regional study found that violence against women in all its forms

is widespread, including domestic violence and rape. In addition, women who belong to disadvantaged groups, such as women with disabilities or indigenous women, will often face discrimination on multiple levels.

These inequalities must be addressed for the potential of Cambodian girls today to be realized into the lives of Cambodian women tomorrow. Equality for Cambodian girls and women is progress for all Cambodians. In his statement for International Women's Day UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon emphasises a clear message, "[...]for every girl born today, and to every woman and girl on the planet: realizing human rights and equality is not a dream, it is a duty of governments, the United Nations and every human being. [...]for my fellow men and boys: play your part. All of us benefit when women and girls – your mothers, sisters, friends and colleagues – can reach their full potential".

While the Millennium Development Goals call for gender equality, they have not explicitly addressed the need for transformation in gender relations. Instead of focusing on the causes of gender inequality, the focus has been on its consequences. Thus, in building good governance and in tackling gender inequality, Cambodia is faced with both the opportunity and the need to address the structural drivers of gender inequality, including the norms, attitudes and beliefs which enable gender discrimination.

The implementation of the upcoming National Strategic Development Plan (2016-2018) will provide an excellent opportunity to take action over the next five years. With a view beyond the MDGs, Cambodia is especially well positioned to meet its commitment to human rights and gender equality by increasing the voice, choice and safety of all Cambodian women and girls. By focusing on, responding to, and preventing violence, by empowering women legally and economically, and by strengthening women's leadership and participation in public life, Cambodia can undertake a transformative gender-responsive development agenda. In doing so, Cambodia will ensure development means progress for all.



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