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Young Labor Force Is Country's Most Precious Asset

Cambodia stands out as one of the most youthful countries of the Asia-Pacific region, with 60 percent of the population younger than 24 years of age. The country is now in a demographic window of opportunity, wherein large youth cohorts, with fewer children and elderly to support, are now entering the labor market and will remain active for the next thirty to forty years. Whether this sizeable young labor force will be a blessing or a burden will depend to a large extent on their opportunities to acquire skills that will be rewarded in the labor market. So investing in youth skill development is very important for their future earnings and for the potential for socio-economic growth.

The World Bank is finalizing a study on constraints and opportunities for young people in Cambodian labor markets in both the formal and informal economies. The main aim of this study is to understand the labor market trajectories of young Cambodian workers to be able to provide policy priorities to remove some of the constraints fac-

ing young people and improve their opportunities for socio-economic mobility.

Since the quantitative evidence on Cambodian labor markets is scarce, part of the contribution of this report is to better inform the policy debate on the subject. The report will look at how to

address poor youth preparation for the labor market, how to improve the quality of non-formal training and how to engage both industry and training providers in developing youth. It will also look at how to guarantee good governance all along the system.



60 percent of Cambodian population are younger than 24 years of age.

World Bank Organizes Study Tour for Youth

The World Bank Cambodia Country Office organized a study tour for 13 young people representing several youth associations and universities. The three-day tour was to help participants understand the benefits of projects the World Bank supports, and to give them the chance to see their country's development achievements as well as issues that still need to be addressed. The young people visited four projects, dealing with commune development support, the health equity fund, land allocation for social and economic development, and a scholarship program. Below are reflections written by study tour participants.

Land Gift Transforms the Lives of Poor People

The Youth Study Tour was a great opportunity for me and other young people to learn about development work in communities, and especially about development programs supported by the World Bank. It has made me aware of how much financial support the World Bank gives the Cambodian people for development.

Members of the tour group are describing different aspects of the various projects

we visited; I shall focus on the Land Allocation for Social and Economic Development (LASED) project in Sambok commune of Kratie province. This project exists in three provinces – Kratie, Kampong Cham and Kampong Thom. In Kratie we met Mr Kao Long from the non-governmental organization (NGO) Wathanakpheap. This NGO helps the LASED project by encouraging the civic engagement and participation of poor people and

*By Mr. Thorn
Ratana,
Representative
from Youth
Resource
Development
Program (YRDP)*



building their trust. Its role is also to provide poor people who want to apply for a land grant with information they need to

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Lak Youssef (left), Lim Pichlin (second left) and Thorn Ratana (right) talk to a farmer on his new land which was given under LASED in Kratie province.

Land Gift...

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help with their application and to explain the criteria. Mr Long told us Wathanakpheap is working diligently at these tasks.

We also met the director of the LASED project in Kratie, Mr Khan Chamnan. From him I learned how the land-poor were cho-

sen to be given grants of land. I was happy to hear that villagers and everyone involved all participated in the selection process, it was fully transparent and fair to everyone.

I was also pleased to know that the poor people got enough information

about the project to be able to apply to participate. What I am most happy about is that at the end of the process the poor got grants of land along with a supporting package of agricultural tools, seed, and home instruments.

During our visit we spent some time with the people who got land from the project. I noticed how happy they all are. These villagers are committed to developing their land to improve their livelihood. One elderly man we met said: *"I won't go anywhere. I am here for ever. Though I have no money, I am very happy because I have seen my crops are growing, which can support my family. I am so happy the government has given me some land and that these other organizations contribute their support."*

We visitors all saw how the villagers' lives had been transformed, and how they all are busily working at growing varieties of vegetables on their plots of land and around their houses. We bought cucumbers and beans from them for our lunch, which we ate under a big tree near a newly built community building.

Additional comment by Lim Phechlin, AIESEC member and a student of National University of Management

Health Equity Fund a Lifesaver for the Poor

The youth study tour in the Chhlong health operational district of Kratie province made me happy to know that Cambodia has established a Health Equity Fund (HEF) scheme for helping the country's poorest and most vulnerable people. Helping them to access health care at the Chhlong Referral Hospital and other

hospitals and health centers significantly reduces the cost burden on poor people when they become sick. This HEF scheme means people will not be left to die because of lack of funds for treatment, nor will they be forced to sell their land or livestock when a member of their family gets sick.

By Ms. Moe Sophany, Representative from Youth for Peace (YFP)



For us young people, certainly for me, this study tour was the first time that I learned there is a HEF scheme for helping the poor with their health care. I am a community worker, engaged particularly with poor people, so I can bring this important information to those who face difficulty finding money to pay for their health care. Before the tour, I was able only to advise people to visit a health center or hospital when they get sick, so this study tour is a real help to me and therefore to the communities I work with.

Mr. Houy Chea, project manager for the Health Equity Fund in Chhlong operational district, told us that besides paying poor people's treatment fees, the HEF also pays for transportation costs for bringing sick people and their carers from the villages to health facilities. In addition, the fund provides a food allowance for one person who looks after each patient. We visited

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Yim Savuth (left) and Van Sophal (right) talk to mothers of sick children at Chhlong Referral Hospital, Kratie Province.

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Chhlong referral hospital and saw that almost all patients were supported by HEF. Most of them had diarrhea, malaria, or dengue fever.

My feeling is that HEF is critical for helping our poor people, and I urge the Ministry of Health to expand HEF coverage to reach more poor, particularly to those living in remote areas. I have often heard that these people become ill easily

and have difficulty getting treatment because they are poor and the health centers and hospitals are far away.

I have sometimes heard that nurses or doctors ask patients to pay them extra for their treatment. I suggest that health center and hospital managements should not allow this to happen to the poor, whom we should all be helping.

This study tour has been extremely meaningful for me and for other students

looking to build their knowledge and experience. I express my sincere thanks to the World Bank, which has provided the opportunity for all of us to understand about the social issues we in Cambodian society are facing. I will take this knowledge to share within the community where I work and also with my family.

Additional comment by Sorm Sira, Youth for Peace.

Oustanding Award for Model Sangkat

I and other students joined a Youth Study Tour on June 19 organized by the World Bank Cambodia to two provinces, Kampong Cham and Kratie.

The first program of the tour was to meet the Vihear Loung Sangkat Council in Krong Soung, Kampong Cham province.

This is a model sangkat, and I admire its achievements under the leadership of Mr. Y Lay Theng, the Vihear Loung Sangkat chief. He briefed us about his cur-

rent achievements such as new roads, new irrigation schemes, water wells, restoration of water pounds, and some training programs for his community. These achievements were supported by the World Bank and generous individual donors. Under a project called: Rural Investment and Local governance which is supported by the World Bank, we learned that the Sangkat is able to build 17 rural roads (18 km), and a 1.5 km irrigation cannel.



Y Lay Theng, Sangkat Chief (right) explains his Sangkat Development Projects.

Scholarships Ease Burden for Student's Families

The scholarship program is very important for students to push themselves to study hard and to improve education for all in Cambodia.

A group of students we spoke to who had received scholarships all said the scholarship program provided the best opportunity for them to further their education and made it much easier for them to focus on their studies.

At the beginning of every new school year, buying their children's study materials and uniforms is a heavy responsibility for parents to shoulder, especially poor parents.

However, the scholarships mean stu-

dents can buy the study materials they need and appropriate uniforms. One female student said that before receiving a scholarship she did not have enough notebooks to write in, and had to wear the same uniform year after year.

"This scholarship program encourages me to study hard," she said. "And it means I won't be skipping school regularly like before, because my parents have stopped pushing me to find jobs to earn money to support the family."

Another student spoke up: "If there were no scholarship, I would not have been able to continue studying till today".

There are two kinds of scholarship: one

By Mr. Lak Yousey, Representative from Khmer Youth and Social Development (KYSD)



gives \$60 to students from the poorest families; the other gives \$45 to students from averagely poor families.

Since 2008 the scholarship project has been the total responsibility of the government since the World Bank finan-

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Scholarships Ease Burden for Student's Families

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cial support finished.

Nevertheless there are still many poor families finding it very hard to send their kids to school or to continue their education.

So we study tour participants urge the government, the World Bank and other organizations involved in the scholarship project to continue and expand the program, provide more scholarships and increase the amount of scholarship money for poor students in all provinces.

As young Cambodians, we are fiercely proud of and admire the government and other organizations that have developed the scholarship project to accomplish the campaign of *Education for All and All for Education*.

The Youth Study Tour organized by The World Bank has been extremely important for all participants. We have learned about the contribution of the

World Bank in the development of Cambodia, especially its Education Sector Support Project (ESSP). We have be-

come aware of the challenges, solutions and successes of many projects, and are immensely proud of these activities.



Study Tour Members Talk to Scholarship Students at Sambok Secondary School in Kratie province.



Members of the Study Tour. Front row from left: Yim Savuth, Lak Youssef, Chhem Sophy, Lim Pichlin, Chamroeun Puthy Deth. Back row from left: Lim Luy, Kao Long (Wathanakpheap), Soeum Savorn, Heng Sokhunthea, Mao Sophany, Thorn Ratana, Bou Saroeun (World Bank), Ham Khmemarin, Sorm Sira, Van Sophal, and Khiev Amara (World Bank).