

YOUTH, VOLUNTEERING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN CAMBODIA

**Results of a feasibility study
conducted for a Cambodian youth service program**

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Hundreds of people have contributed precious time, experience, expertise, advice, material and moral support in the process of the study. It is not possible to name them all, though many are listed in Annexe I. An intensive consultation process involved persons, national and international, from all sectors of life and work, all potential stakeholders. The consultation process yielded a wealth of information, ideas and suggestions, and though we will not be able to act on all of them, this has stimulated our imaginations and influenced the shaping of the Program. We now feel confident to move forward in establishing a Cambodian Youth Service Program, fully aware of the exciting challenges that lie ahead and of all the resources that are available in Cambodia and that can be drawn upon.

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Since completion of the feasibility study we have held a number of brainstorming sessions with youth leaders and leaders of local NGOs to find an inspiring name for the new organisation and program which has been developed on the basis of this study. After testing some initial concepts with young people and other stakeholders, we have decided on the name *Youth Star Cambodia*. *Youth Star Cambodia* embodies our vision: to create an organisation that encourages and supports young people to reach for, and become stars - leaders and change agents, working towards a better future for Cambodia.

Thank you all for helping to shape the vision and for advancing it on its way. I look forward to working even more closely with you in the coming months and years.

Eva Mysliwicz

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a feasibility study designed to inform development of a initiative for youth volunteers. The study, conducted in late 2004, was designed to assess the environment for establishing such an initiative, and to examine traditional understandings and practices of volunteering, young people's perceptions of volunteering and service to others, the current challenges facing Cambodia, and the contribution that a youth volunteer service could make to development, poverty reduction, and building social capital.

The study methodology included a literature review, consultations with over 200 interlocutors from youth organisations, universities, civil society organisations, teachers and religious leaders, community and national leaders, public officials from various sectors, commune councillors, the private sector, donors and diplomatic corps, in Phnom Penh and five provinces. The study also included a survey of 215 university students, and consultation with a volunteer organisation in Laos.

The study identified the following key issues and challenges:

- While there are numerous examples of traditional mutual and self-help organisations and activities, the concept of volunteerism and service is misunderstood and undervalued.
- In addition, the traditional concept of volunteering is associated with religious service, not secular activity that helps people. Significant investment is required to raise awareness, reposition volunteering and increase involvement in volunteer activities in particular among young people.
- Young people in Cambodia face an uncertain future. With 70% of the population under 30, young people represent a huge resource which Cambodia can draw on. Yet with few opportunities to find employment, young people experience despair and hopelessness. Even those students who finish university are not guaranteed employment. It is hardly surprising that their aspirations are practical – to get a qualification, and a job – rather than visionary or entrepreneurial. In addition, they lack role models and heroes who can model striving for excellence or realising dreams. Importantly, young people feel powerless to affect change in their society, and are generally risk averse and fearful of the unknown.
- The Cambodian education system is gradually improving, but it is still weak and does not adequately prepare young people to be able to contribute effectively to their society. Nor does it adequately prepare them for employment or provide work readiness or life skills.
- Parents want their children to get a job, and earn an income. It will be a critical challenge to change the attitudes of parents and society towards young people's role and capabilities, and also towards volunteering.
- As a result of these factors, it will be a significant challenge to engage young people and keep them involved in volunteer activity. It will be critical to promote volunteerism, and demonstrate its benefits to individual volunteers and to society. Volunteers and host communities will need to be well prepared and have realistic expectations. A clear system of mentoring and support that provides a rewarding experience will need to be put in place to support youth volunteers.

Nevertheless, the study team identified strong support for establishing a youth volunteer initiative:

- Communities are in need of skilled support and human resources in particular in the provinces. However, when communities experience difficulties they tend to look for funding and projects rather than human resources, or relying on their own ingenuity. Young people have a role to play in providing much needed skills and capability in communities.
- Communities consulted identified skill gaps and priority needs where youth volunteers could play a key role. These included education and youth development, employment creation and sustainable livelihoods, business development, and health and well-being.
- Involving young people as volunteers enables them to develop skills and aspirations, as well as leadership and hope. Youth volunteers have a vital role to play in contributing to

communities, to development and poverty reduction, and to securing a just and peaceful future for Cambodia.

- Volunteering provides hands on experience in governance, responsibility and accountability, as well as reciprocity. It therefore contributes to good governance, participation, and citizenship, as well as building social capital.
- In addition, a youth volunteer initiative can promote corporate social responsibility, a relatively novel concept in Cambodia, but one which is gaining ground as Cambodia aims to position the country as attractive to socially responsible investors. More work needs to be done to identify clearly the benefits, responsibilities, and requirements of private sector partners, in order to engage them in formal partnerships.
- Positive feedback from those consulted at the national and local level indicates that there is strong support from all stakeholders for establishing such an initiative, as well as offers of support and formal partnership.
- Finally, there exist many examples of good practice, creativity and innovation, resources and expertise in Cambodia to support such an initiative. Similarly, there is willingness from many quarters to contribute to a successful youth volunteer program.

At a time when volunteerism is gaining recognition and acceptance worldwide as an important third force and partner without whose help poverty reduction and other development goals cannot be achieved, a youth volunteer initiative is timely, fits well with, and can make an important contribution to national development objectives. More importantly, the study affirmed that there are many idealistic young people, chomping at the bit and eager to do something meaningful to help develop their country. This study demonstrates how their energy and enthusiasm can best be harnessed to effectively contribute to building a just and peaceful Cambodia.

“Volunteering, Volunteerism and Voluntary Activity: A wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor.”

(UN Resolution 56/38. Recommendations on Support for Volunteering)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale for the Study

Cambodia continues to show many of the characteristics of a post-conflict society, and the consequences of this long period of internal conflict and repression have had a significant impact on Cambodia's people and the moral fabric of society, institutions and infrastructure. Rebuilding human resource capacity is therefore a major challenge and key to a better future for Cambodia. Today many hundreds of highly motivated, curious and intelligent Cambodian youth graduate from university with little prospect of employment. Frustrated and bitter about the limited options for employment and the slow pace of reform and development, Cambodian youth are increasingly marginalized and some are turning to violence, drugs, crime and other socially unacceptable behaviours. If not addressed this situation poses a serious threat to Cambodia's stability and efforts to develop the country. Even more importantly it is a lost opportunity to take advantage of a valuable national resource, and puts Cambodia's future at risk.

Rebuilding human resources in Cambodia is a major challenge. The majority of Cambodia's professionals, including teachers, doctors and lawyers, left the country or died during the Pol Pot era. Cambodia has an extremely limited cohort of qualified, experienced professionals to draw upon resulting in high levels of external technical assistance while a younger generation of technocrats and leaders are gradually educated to enter the civil service.

While much investment and progress has been made in strengthening and further developing human resources over the last two decades, the results still lag considerably behind demand. Not only is human resource capacity not up to the levels or basic needs as they were before the war but it must go much further still if Cambodia is to meet the new demands and challenges engendered by globalisation. It is not unlikely that Cambodia will face an even bigger human resource crisis 10 to 15 years from today, when the senior generation of leaders and technocrats reach retirement age. Educated in the 1950's and 1960's in an education system of much higher quality than exists today, this cohort also possessed a more professional work ethic than is evident today. While there is a promising younger generation of professionals emerging in the public and civic sector in Cambodia today they constitute but a very, very small minority.

Today youth represents the majority of the population with nearly 70 percent of the country's 13.4 million people under 30 years of age.¹ Potentially this cohort of young people represents massive potential and a valuable resource for Cambodia's development. However, huge efforts and further reforms are still needed to ensure that this generation of young people are educated to become productive citizens with secure livelihoods, and that a new generation of competent and responsible civic leaders is groomed to assume leadership positions in the private and public sectors.

A youth service program has the potential to harness and channel the energies and resources of Cambodia's youth in support of development and democratisation, and to develop and build a network of principled and aware young leaders and citizens, who will be agents of transformation committed to building a better future for all Cambodians. This study was conducted to assess the feasibility and inform the process of creating such a program.

However, the findings of the study are relevant for a broader audience interested in young people and their development, including policy-makers, development agencies, youth organisations, educators and leaders.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to explore, assess and seek advice on a number of issues including, the volunteer environment in Cambodia, perceptions and understanding of volunteerism, traditional and past experiences of volunteering (and lessons learned), the potential focus of a youth service

¹ The Youth Department under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports defines youth as young people between the ages of 14 and 30 years old.

program, priority needs of communities and target areas and groups which the program might address, resource availability and potential partnerships, opportunities and risks, resources which will be required in order to set up and implement the proposed program, and receptivity among a broad range of potential stakeholders to the proposed creation of a youth service program.

A second important aim was to explore the feasibility of and ways to engage Cambodia's private sector in partnering with a youth service program, and to promote corporate social responsibility.

Finally, the study aimed to plant the seed and share the vision for, and enlist broad based support and ownership of this program.

The study findings will serve as the basis for the program framework and for preparation of proposals to secure the resources required. It is hoped that the findings will also inform the work of those engaged with developing young people and providing them with education, employment options, and hope for the future.

Methodology

The study involved an extensive literature review, over 200 consultations/interviews with students and a broad range of interlocutors in youth organisations, local and international NGOs working with youth and in many sectors of development, national and international volunteer organisations, local and national public officials and leaders, representatives of community based organisations, commune councillors, representatives of Cambodia's private sector and business associations, teachers, Buddhist and Islamic religious leaders, and members of the diplomatic and donor community. A list of those consulted is included in Annexe I.

In addition to the above, a brief written survey was administered to a random sample of 215 students from four universities in Phnom Penh and to the participants in two YRDP² training programs. The purpose of the survey was to explore youth's perceptions regarding volunteerism, values, and career choices. At the same time, the survey offered an opportunity to share information about the proposed volunteer initiative.

Consultations were conducted not only at a national level but also in five provinces including Siem Reap, Battambang, Kompong Cham, Prey Veng, and Kratie. Provinces were selected to offer a range of representative situations. Criteria considered included poverty levels, levels of infrastructure, presence of ethnic and religious minorities, availability or otherwise of natural resources and different sources of livelihood, human resource capacity, presence and/or lack of NGOs and development projects, and accessibility, among others. After preliminary inquiries, more attention was focused on three provinces as potential program pilot areas: Kompong Cham, Prey Veng and Kratie. All three have significant pockets of poverty and represent different socio-economic situations and potential. Battambang on the other hand offers a number of examples of good practice and volunteerism (literacy in the prison, alternative conflict resolution, social work and hospice care, livelihood training for the handicapped) that may serve as models or as a training ground for youth volunteers.

A number of focus group discussions were organised in Phnom Penh and in the provinces: the team leader offered lectures and held discussions in three university classrooms and attended a youth conference and youth fair. These provided valuable insights into young people's values and role models, as well as about students' perceptions of how they can contribute to development. The youth conference provided information about some of the issues on young people's minds, particularly unemployment and corruption, and offered exposure to the wide range of inspiring voluntary activities being implemented by high school and university students around the country. The team leader also had the opportunity to briefly join a workshop organised by PADEK for 32 leaders of community-based organisations (CBO) from four provinces. The discussion with this group helped to identify human resource gaps in participant's communities and ways in which

² YRDP - Youth Resource Development Program is a Cambodian NGO focusing on HRD activities for Youth.

volunteers could fill some of these gaps and support local initiatives. Business literacy, business organisation and marketing were high on their list of priorities for volunteers. The CBO leaders suggested important criteria for the selection of volunteers and pledged to provide support and guidance to volunteers, who might work in their communities.

Another focus group of 20 women, dynamic members of a credit association in Kratie, were quite proud of their achievements but were concerned about the limited livelihood options for young people in their community. They see an important role for volunteers to tutor school children who are falling behind in school, to help organise pre-school centres, and to help school drop outs to earn a living. Helping farmers to improve farming and animal husbandry practices were also suggested as useful roles for skilled volunteers.

Meetings with two focus groups in a Stieng Minority area of Kratie highlighted the isolation of the villagers, poor access to public services, and the precarious state of their livelihoods. Changes in their environment, decreasing access to forest resources, land ownership issues, lack of health services, and the recent drought were their main concerns.

Meetings with monks in Prey Veng, Kompong Cham, and Kratie revealed a keen interest to engage in work in the community, side by side with volunteers. This presents an interesting opportunity for partnership that would also offer a valuable source of moral support for youth volunteers.

Commune Councils in Prey Veng and Kompong Cham gave the study team a good overview of the achievements and challenges of decentralisation and highlighted areas of potential cooperation in support of local development goals. Council members identified livelihood skills for youth and health education as the two main areas where volunteers could make the most useful contribution. They also mentioned that they would like to strengthen their capability in planning and evaluation.

In each of the field visits to the provinces the study team leader invited the leader of a Cambodian youth association, or NGO resource person working in that province to join the team as a consultant. This created an opportunity to learn about the work and approaches of each youth association, and for the consultants to learn about the proposed project as well. The team benefited from each other's contacts and knowledge of the areas visited, and provided privileged insights into local specific issues. This also proved to be a good way to learn about each other's vision for Cambodia, and to build a base of support for and share ownership of the proposed project.

Two brainstorming sessions organised by the study team with leaders of youth associations and local NGOs helped to advance the study team's understanding of concepts of volunteerism and service, and to identify the values associated with them. The sessions also came up with a list of names for the new organisation.

Meetings with national and international volunteer organisations helped the study team to appreciate the nature and scope of voluntary services in Cambodia, to draw on valuable lessons learned from their experience, and to think through a range of practical organisational and management issues relevant to the setting up and implementation of a volunteer organisation and program.

Meetings with IFC/MPDF and representatives of the private sector focused on understanding the business environment in Cambodia, and ideas about and current practice of corporate social responsibility. A coordination meeting organised by IFC for NGOs engaged in support of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) provided useful contacts, an overview of projects under way, insights into some of the challenges, and ideas for potential volunteer roles. A conference organised jointly by the World Bank and IMF in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Finance prior to the CG meeting provided a good overview of the Royal Government's Rectangular Strategy and assessment of Cambodia's performance in the various sectors of development and reform.

During the course of the feasibility study, the team leader had the opportunity to travel to Laos to meet with PADETC Lao, a Lao NGO reputed for its effective community development programs and volunteer program. This yielded some innovative ideas and resources for working with young people, and showcased good practice in the agriculture, fisheries and environment sectors. What had worked and not worked in the PADETC volunteer program merits consideration in planning the Cambodian volunteer program.

Key findings from the study are presented in the following sections of this report and include:

- An overview of the history of volunteerism in Cambodia
- Results from a survey assessing young people's attitudes and perceptions towards volunteering
- A summary of key challenges facing Cambodia
- An assessment of the role volunteers can play in supporting Cambodia's development.
- Specific needs and demand for volunteer services in communities at the provincial level
- A summary of key conclusions from the study.

Findings from the study will guide development of the youth service program and will be shared with those consulted during the process.

II. VOLUNTEERING IN CAMBODIA

Traditional Forms of Volunteerism in Cambodia

The ethos of volunteerism is inherent in every society and manifests itself in different ways over time, and in different cultural contexts.

In Cambodia there is a long tradition of mutual assistance and various forms of helping centred on the temple. One concept of volunteerism is manifested in pagoda associations. These associations existed in Cambodia before 1970 and re-emerged in the 1980s after having been suppressed during the Khmer Rouge regime. Today, these associations are once again a traditional feature of local life throughout Cambodia. In one district of Kompong Thom Province for example, twenty-nine different kinds of assistance related associations linked to pagodas were identified.³ These associations or grassroots organisations are formed by the villagers themselves for the purpose of mutual help, and are usually motivated by Buddhist teachings which encourage people to “save themselves through their own efforts”.⁴ Pagoda associations span a broad range of activity from cash and rice associations to school associations, teacher associations, health associations, rice banks, road construction committees, funeral associations cooking groups, pot and dishes exchange groups, emergency help groups, elderly groups and, boat racing groups, and so on.

Critical to the formation and effectiveness of these associations is social capital. This includes dynamic leadership and personalities who are widely respected by the community, but more importantly the existence of a critical level of trust and reciprocity among the members of a community that makes collective action possible.

A number of recent studies⁵ point to the many changes since the colonial period that have affected traditional community structures and which have resulted in loss of unity and a heightened sense of individualism. No period has had a more devastating impact on the whole of society as the Khmer Rouge regime, leaving deep scars among Cambodian people. Khmer communities, once composed of extended family networks, have been shattered by forced population movements and displacements. Oppressive military structures have instilled a sense of passivity among the population that has affected participation in decision-making unless this is requested from above.⁶ The trauma of the Khmer Rouge regime and years of armed conflict have contributed to increased conflict, domestic violence, dependency, emotional and psychological stress as well as loss of confidence. Behaviours and attitudes of people have changed after the war and KR regimes such that trust is now found to be missing among individuals and in communities. Community relationships have also changed due to the influence of modern development processes, the cash economy, and rural-urban migrations. What has not changed according to scholars, is the notion of patronage and the traditional hierarchical structure of society.

Social capital has been severely damaged by events in Cambodia. However, while lack of trust is still a critical issue in many communities, others such as the ones in Kompong Thom have started processes to rebuild local structures that support and promote volunteer efforts.

Traditional Volunteer Profile

Volunteer efforts or mutual help processes are most often initiated by individuals who are willing to work together in a spirit of solidarity; who are trusted by the community and who have the ability to motivate others. One can find such individuals throughout Cambodia today. Villagers respect them for their honesty, reliability and trustworthiness. They are trusted by the community because they work in a transparent manner and often because they are connected in some way to

³ Narak, S. (1998) *Historically Rooted Organisations in the Traditional Rural Community in Stung District, Kompong Thom Province, Cambodia*. Internal Report for GTZ.

⁴ Aschmoneit, W. (1998) *Traditional Self-help Associations in Cambodia*. Paper written for GTZ.

⁵ Meas Nee, Serge Thion, Ovensen, Watts.

⁶ Meas Nee, (1999). *The Concept of Community*.

the temple and work to gain merit. They are perceived as kind and generous people who have compassion for the poor and want to see their communities work in harmony. They offer not only material help but also address people's mental and spiritual needs; they are often older and wiser persons whom people feel comfortable to approach for advice. They tend to be creative, energetic people who know how to get things done and how to motivate people.⁷

Motivations for volunteering are varied. Perhaps the most powerful motivation, especially among older volunteers, is to earn merit for the next life. Combined with this is the desire to see their communities live in harmony, and to see the poor be supported to survive and improve their lives. Preservation of culture and tradition is another important motivation.

Another important lesson to draw from the above discussion of traditional voluntary organisations is that building trust is critical to working effectively with communities, to building cohesiveness and solidarity, and to facilitating collective action for the common good. This must therefore be at the core of volunteer activities.

Recent Forms of Volunteerism

In the early 1980's, volunteerism, though state controlled and not without a political agenda, was recognized as an important resource for rebuilding the country. The Mass Youth Organisation mobilised thousands of students during school breaks to conduct literacy classes throughout the country. The Women's Association mobilised many volunteers to support war widows and conduct other social work activities. The Cambodian Red Cross, made up of hundreds of volunteers throughout the country, played a critical role in reuniting families separated by the mass population movements and displacements of the Khmer Rouge period. They also provided relief to the most vulnerable sectors of the population and to those affected by natural disasters and continued fighting. Monks and temple committees played an invaluable role in bringing solace to a traumatised population and in mobilising communities to rebuild schools, and other community institutions.

In addition to the traditional forms of volunteerism described above, there has been in recent years an important resurgence in organisations promoting volunteerism, particularly among the young people of Cambodia. An inventory of youth organisations in Cambodia undertaken by Forum Syd in 2002⁸ list between 50-60 youth initiated organisations in the country. Many of these promote and rely on volunteers. Many of them work directly with youth and their key influences including their community, parents, and teachers. These youth activities range from promotion of good citizenship to bringing about social change, each of which is very valid to youth development. Many of these organisations are motivated by a desire to make an impact on society and to work for Cambodia's future. It is impressive to see the important role that these youth organisations have played in recruiting and training thousands of young people as observers in the Cambodian elections, thus demonstrating the interest and commitment of the younger generation to the democratic process in Cambodia. They mobilize and engage thousands of high school and university students throughout the country in social action. They offer youth an opportunity to develop self-awareness, improve their knowledge of social issues and democracy, test their values and increase their sense of self-confidence and worth. They also offer them an opportunity to gain work experience and enhance their job prospects. This is perhaps the leading motivation for volunteering among university students, according to the youth survey conducted in the course of this study.

Youth organisations are active and highly motivated yet many are not very strong organisations, suffering from the same organisational weaknesses as many Cambodian NGOs, mainly lack of experience and knowledge about basic organisational structures. Many also lack long term-vision and a clear focus, and suffer from internal problems. They also struggle with lack of resources,

⁷ UNDP/UNV, (2002) *Volunteer Resurgence in Cambodia, 5 Grassroots Volunteers Share Their Life Stories*. UNDP, Phnom Penh.

⁸ Forum Syd (2002) *Youth in Cambodia, Organisations, Activities and Policies*. Phnom Penh.

and are undervalued as potential partners in development by government and aid agencies alike, although this is beginning to change.

How is it that volunteers and especially youth, once recognised during Cambodia's isolation in the 1980s as an important third force for rebuilding the country, are today neglected or on the fringes, at a time when the challenges to development are equally if not more daunting than in the past?

Consultations conducted in the course of this study with representatives from many sectors of society and with students themselves, revealed many different understandings and expectations of volunteerism, especially in rural areas of Cambodia. The concept of 'service' was particularly challenging to many interviewees. A representative of the Nun's Association gave the following example to illustrate the fact that many Cambodians do not understand the concept of 'service'. If a young woman joins the Nun's Association in order to devote her life to Buddha's teachings and service to others, people will say that she became a nun because of a broken heart, or problems in the family.

Thus, how will communities view young volunteers? How will the volunteers interact with traditional community organisations? How will the concept of 'service' be understood and promoted? These issues will need to be considered for an effective communications and advocacy campaign, as well as for the training of volunteers and the preparation of the host communities that will receive them.

III. YOUTH PERCEPTIONS REGARDING VOLUNTEERISM: A SURVEY

Purpose of the Survey

A brief written survey was administered to a random sample of 215 students from four universities in Phnom Penh and to the participants in YRDP⁹ training programs in order to explore youth's perceptions regarding volunteerism, values, and career choices. The survey also offered an opportunity to share information about the proposed volunteer initiative.

Methodology

A questionnaire (Annexe I) was developed in English and Khmer (but administered in Khmer) and was pilot tested with 13 fourth-year students from the National University of Management and the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Based on pilot testing and further discussion with the respondents, a number of questions were revised to ensure greater clarity.

Five universities (and different faculties within each university) were invited to participate in the study. However, only four universities participated in the survey as the fifth would not allow students to participate unless copies of completed questionnaires were provided to the university management afterwards. The participating universities were Pannasastra University (38 students), National University of Management (20 students), Chamcar Daung University (40 students), and Norton University (20 students), a total of 118 students. Attempts were made in most cases to target fourth year students, as they will most likely be the target group for future recruitment of volunteers under the proposed project. Access to the students was kindly facilitated by the teachers.

A brief note attached to the questionnaire provided information regarding the purpose of the questionnaire. The research assistant implementing the survey also gave the respondents a brief introduction to the survey and the proposed project prior to start-up of the exercise. The questionnaire took an average of 20 minutes to complete. After completion of the questionnaires, the research assistant took and answered questions from the students regarding the proposed project or aspects of the survey.

Another cohort of 97 respondents was identified through two YRDP training programs. YRDP generously offered cooperation for this exercise and administered the questionnaires on the study team's behalf. YRDP had been consulted on two previous occasions regarding the proposed project and the organisation possesses a good understanding of the project and its aims. This cohort was more varied and included university students from all levels from over 15 institutions of higher learning, high school students, and also a few employees of state and non-governmental organisations. It was considered an important cohort to include in the study because many of these young people have been volunteers themselves and could therefore provide insights about motivation and the type of volunteer activities youth were currently engaged in. The questionnaires were returned to the study team after closure of the training workshop. No unusual difficulties with the questionnaire were raised with the research assistant.

A copy of the survey report was provided to all participating institutions after compilation of the data and analysis was completed.

Limitations of the Survey

The survey sample was relatively small and is therefore not statistically representative of the student population in Cambodia. However the value and intention of the study is to support and complement information obtained through other research and consultation including focus group discussions with students in and outside the classroom, as well as with members of youth associations in formal meetings and informal dinners organised for that purpose, individual interviews with participants in youth conferences and activities such as at the Youth Fair, as well as students in the provinces.

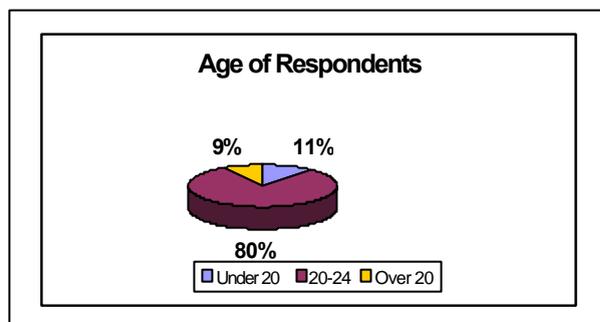
⁹ YRDP - Youth Resource Development Program is a Cambodian NGO focusing on HRD activities for youth.

The survey findings support and are consistent with information gathered through other research, as will be shown later. While a large number of responses were vague, responses to similar questions asked in personal interviews were equally vague, although attempts were made to restate these questions in numerous different ways. Where cultural bias was suspected as a constraint in answering the question (i.e. the question on role models) the study team leader asked Cambodian resource persons (colleagues) to explore the question with youth representatives using different approaches. The response was still similar. This suggests other reasons for this constraint and may offer a valuable insight into youth's perceptions of their society. This is discussed in Section IV of the report.

One area where questionnaire responses were not consistent with responses given in personal interviews was on the issue of religion. Respondents were asked whether religion was an important factor in their lives. The purpose of the question was to ascertain whether religious values/ or religious affiliation was or could be an effective tool for motivating young people to volunteer. The question was also intended to explore who or what institutions in today's society are playing the role of transmitting values and ethics to young people. In the survey almost all respondents responded positively to the question – “that religion was an important factor in life because it provided moral guidance”. However, in personal or focus group interviews many young people said that religion was not an important factor in their life.

Profile of Respondents

Among the 215 respondents to the survey, 123 were male and 92 female. Students under the age of 20 comprised 11% of the sample, while 80% of the sample were between the ages of 20 and 24. The remaining 9% were over the age of 24.



The largest group represented in the sample (57%) were fourth-year students in private and public universities, whereas the remaining 43% were almost evenly split between the first three years of university.

In the sample, students who come from the provinces (63%) outnumbered Phnom Penh residents (37%). Of the former, the largest number of students came from Kandal, Kompong Cham and Takeo provinces.

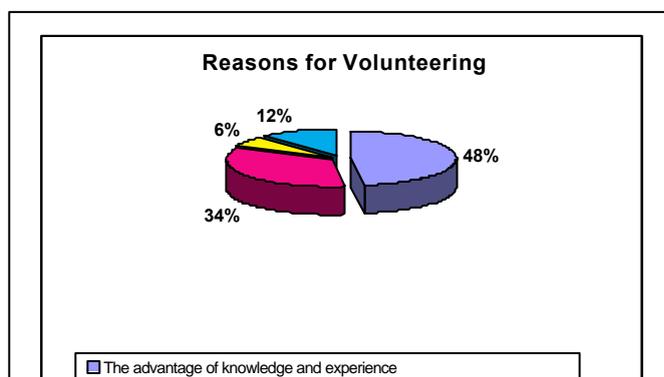
Regarding religion, 94% of the respondents said that they were Buddhists, 4.6% Christians, and 1.4% Muslims.

Key Findings

Key findings from the survey are summarized below.

Among the 215 respondents to the survey, one third (79) have had some volunteer experience. These experiences span a broad range of activities from community work (47%), to volunteering in NGOs (25%), to volunteering in the private sector (13%), Nine percent volunteer in youth associations and another 5% volunteer in the public sector. Finally a small number (1.3%), volunteer in international organisations.

The main motivation for volunteering is in order to gain knowledge and work experience (48%). In discussions with students outside this cohort, it is evident that students are very aware that it is difficult to find jobs without experience



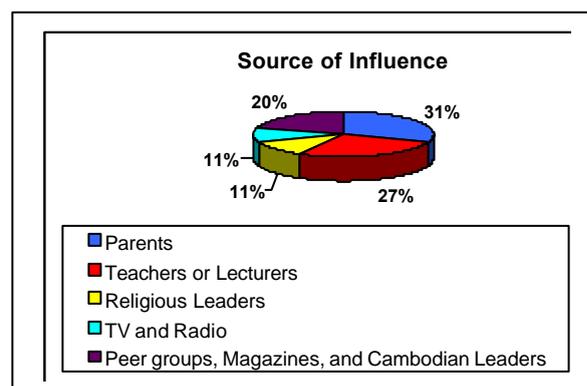
– they say most job advertisements ask for experience. Another 34% of the group with volunteer experience stated that they volunteer in order to “develop their ideas” so that they are better able to contribute to the development of the country. A third group (6%) volunteer in order to gain an understanding of social issues. The remainder gave other reasons for volunteering such as “to make friends, to improve their own character, and to have the opportunity to go the provinces”.

Responses to questions dealing with the type of work students would like to do upon graduating from university were very general. Among the 215 respondents 21% replied that they wanted to do “all kinds of work which can develop Cambodia - both urban and rural”. Another 11% of the sample said they wanted to work in NGOs but did not specify what kind of work would interest them. A third group of respondents (11%) stated that they wanted to do any work related to their field of study, while the remainder mentioned work in a number of sectors including the private sector, public sector, agriculture, and business among others (the health sector was not mentioned probably because there were no students from the Health Faculty in the sample). One conclusion (drawing from other experience as well) is that most Cambodian students do not have very clear professional or career goals. It is important to get “knowledge” - any kind of knowledge - and a university diploma is in itself valuable as a status symbol, but also because it is needed for future employment or for enhancing marriage prospects. However, some schools and professions do carry greater status than others, and are perceived to have more lucrative potential.

The most favoured job option among the respondents is to work for an NGO, followed by the private sector. Few respondents either in the survey sample or in other research settings had original thoughts about professions they might pursue, or ambitions to be entrepreneurs or to create something new. There are many reasons for this, which are rooted in social and cultural factors. These factors will be discussed later in the report as they have a significant bearing on developing leaders and social entrepreneurs.

One question in the survey asked students what they thought they could do, as students, to contribute to Cambodia’s development. The purpose of the question was to explore whether students assumed a sense of civic responsibility, believed that they had a role to play in development, or believed that they could make a difference. Of the 215 respondents, the largest number (27%) believed that their role was to do their best in their studies. Another 22% said that they could contribute to Cambodia’s development by sharing the knowledge and information gained from their studies with relatives and “others”. Being a good citizen in the society was cited by 19% of the respondents, although it is not yet clear from our research what being a good citizen means to young people. Smaller numbers of respondents cited other roles such as conservation of the environment and of culture, engaging in social works, “raising criticism in order to reform bad practices”, engaging in volunteer work and going after training opportunities.

Another question in the survey aimed to get more information on which people or institutions have the greatest influence on youth in terms of transmitting morals and values. The assumption behind the question was that the traditional social institutions for transmitting morals and values have been weakened as a result of decades of conflict and violence. The respondents were given multiple-choice answers. Among the 215 sampled, 31% said that their parents had the



most influence on their moral education, whereas 27% said teachers, and another 11% cited religious leaders. Another 11% said that TV and radio influenced them. Peer groups, magazines, and Cambodian leaders followed in descending percentages.

The most difficult question, which evoked the most surprising responses, revolved around the issue of role models. Who do the students perceive as role models? Respondents were told that this could be a national or international person. This question caused the greatest difficulty for both respondents in the survey and students interviewed in other research settings. The question was asked in various ways to elicit an answer for example, who in society do you admire and would you want to emulate? More than half simply said “no-one”. In a similar context, the study leader asked a class of university students if they knew who Nelson Mandela was and no one raised their hand. They were asked if they knew who Gandhi was, and only one person was able to answer. However, Mother Theresa and Aung San Suu Kyi were better (though not widely) known.

The few individuals who did name a role model put up an interesting slate including, Princess Diana, the King, Jackie Chan, George Bush, “Mr. Jesus Christ”, Thaksin Shinawatra, the Prime Minister, the former Mayor of Phnom Penh, as well as a handful of Oknha, Cambodian officials, opposition leaders and NGO leaders. *However, there was no widely recognised charismatic Cambodian or international personality identified as role model among this group of respondents.*

The last three questions in the questionnaire revolved around volunteering in the context of the proposed project. Respondents were asked what type of work they thought they would be capable of doing as volunteers that would contribute to development. Nearly 61% cited educating people in rural areas, especially in the agriculture sector, health sector, in democracy and human rights, against drug abuse, and on conservation of the environment, as roles they could play. Another 10% cited social works such as helping orphans, widows, people with HIV/AIDS, illiterate persons, people with a disability, and glue-sniffers.

Respondents were also asked to list the qualities and skills which volunteers need to have in order to be effective in their roles. Qualities cited by respondents included flexibility, good morality, virtue, patience, and courtesy. Honesty, friendliness and good communication skills were also cited, as was problem solving.

Regarding skills, this question was answered in too general a way, perhaps indicating that the question was not appropriately phrased, and also suggesting a weak appreciation of volunteer roles and potential. It is also possible that students are not quite sure how their education can be applied in a work situation, certainly this fits with their limited career aspirations. Responses ranged from general knowledge to having a specific skill, such as having a Masters or Bachelor’s degree, computer and language skills, agriculture skills. However, respondents interviewed outside this survey cohort, especially local officials, teachers, monks and community-based leaders gave more specific and useful responses.

The last question asked respondents whether they would consider volunteering for one year upon completion of their studies. Out of 215 respondents only 205 answered the question. Of these, 85% said yes, and 15% said no. Among those who answered “yes”, most would volunteer in order to “improve their knowledge” and get work experience. Others cited broadening their ideas and having an opportunity to compare theory with practice as reasons for volunteering. Those who said they would not volunteer cited the need to earn a living as one reason, while others were sceptical about being able to make an impact in developing their country in such a short time frame.

Analysis and Conclusions

The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into a number of issues including, perceptions of ‘volunteerism’, the values which youth consider important, sources of influence in transmitting morality, and job preferences.

On the one hand it was encouraging to learn that at least one third of respondents have engaged in some type of volunteer activity, albeit part time, and usually in the social sectors. Most of those who volunteer do so to gain knowledge and experience, in order to improve their job prospects.

Responses regarding job preferences upon completion of studies were quite vague, consistent with information gathered through interviews. Many Cambodian students do not appear to have very clear professional or career goals. In addition, many students do not have a good understanding of the job market, and have difficulty in making the link between their studies and any potential application in the workplace. Interviews with students indicate a general sense of hopelessness about finding a job. This hopelessness is realistic: it is estimated that only one in nine university graduates is able to find a job upon completion of their studies.¹⁰

Perhaps what is more significant is that the most favoured job option among respondents is to work for an NGO, followed by the private sector. There were few dreams or ambitions, or indications of willingness to take risks to realise aspirations, expressed by students in the survey. There are many reasons for this, which are rooted in social factors such as fear of responsibility or of making mistakes, both of which are perceived to entail high risk. Indeed young Cambodians appear to be quite risk-averse, perhaps because Cambodian culture does not encourage reaching too high. In addition, having a high profile, taking initiative and being successful can also entail risk in Cambodia's political environment. These factors have a significant bearing on developing leaders and social entrepreneurs.

Responses to the question about what students thought they could do, as students, to contribute to Cambodia's development were also interesting and indicated some (though not a high level) sense of civic responsibility. However, the means of contributing were mostly about being a good person, for example by being a good citizen, or studying well. Fewer students thought they could engage actively in changing society or making a contribution, for example by conserving the environment and their cultural heritage, "criticising bad practices" in order to promote reform, engaging in volunteer work and going after training opportunities. In interviews and focus group discussions, it is interesting to note that many students see it as the "leaders' responsibility to find solutions to corruption, poverty and other social problems", and don't view themselves as part of the equation. Partly, this may be about not wanting to take risks, but it also, presumably, reflects a sense of powerlessness and inability to influence Cambodian society.

Responses relating to social values and role models support the assumption that the institutions of society responsible for transmitting morality and ethical values are still weak. Most young people said they were influenced by their parents or teachers. Only 11% talked about religious leaders and notably, very few mentioned figures in public life as role models. While only 11% mentioned the media as a key influence there is reason to believe (borne out by other media surveys) that the media plays a much more influential role on Cambodian youth today than in the past, particularly in promoting consumerism and violence.

A related question on the importance of religion in the life of young people today unfortunately did not provide the insights expected. While in the written survey almost all respondents replied that religion was important for the moral guidance that it provides in one's life, when asked in interviews most respondents said that religion was not an important factor or source of motivation in their life. One interpretation may be that in principle religion is important but in reality it has little bearing on everyday life of young people today, however this would require further investigation.

The question and answers that offer the most poignant reflection of a society in crisis relate to role models. Based on this survey, plus a much broader range of interviews and focus group discussions, about seven out of ten youth cannot identify a role model (responded "no one"), or someone whom they admire and would want to emulate. Also, many young Cambodians are very insular in their worldview – only a few knew of internationally recognised figures such as

¹⁰ Interview, Ministry of Education official.

Mandela or Gandhi. In brief, there was no charismatic Cambodian or international personality *widely* recognised or accepted by Cambodian respondents as a role model, although a minority of respondents did name different individuals. Two significant challenges ahead in engaging young people as volunteers will be, “how to inspire Cambodian youth?” and “how to develop civic responsibility and leadership if youth do not recognise/see (or if it is not present) it in their own society?”

In relation to criteria that volunteers should possess, responses varied considerably and included qualities such as flexibility, good morality, virtue, patience, and courtesy. Honesty, friendliness and good communication skills were also cited, as was problem solving. In terms of hard skills, responses were very vague and high general knowledge was generally considered to be sufficient.

In contrast, community leaders interviewed in the course of the study had clear criteria for volunteer recruitment. They suggested that volunteers be respectful and humble, good at problem solving and able to communicate well. They also suggested that volunteers should have good health and be able to adapt to difficult living conditions. In terms of skills - education, agricultural extension, entrepreneurial/ basic business skills, were considered as high priorities. Many community leaders also expressed a desire to see volunteers working with youth in rural areas, helping them with their studies and also offering them skills to create a sustainable livelihood.

Finally, a high percentage (85%) of survey respondents stated that they would consider volunteering for a year, in order to gain knowledge or work experience, *provided that there was some means of support*. They were less clear about imagining what types of specific roles they could usefully play – education and social work were the main areas mentioned. On the other hand, a small percentage of respondents expressed scepticism that they would be able to make much of an impact in such a short period of time. In other focus group discussions and interviews, many youth thought that a year was a bit long for volunteering. Most saw a role for themselves in teaching - passing on their knowledge to others. None thought of volunteerism in reciprocal terms, for example that the host community might have something to teach them. Positioning volunteering as a reciprocal relationship will be a critical issue in engaging young people as volunteers.

The results of the survey demonstrate the need for strategies to raise awareness about volunteerism, to recruit volunteers, to create role models, to develop training curriculum for volunteers, and to promote citizenship and leadership values.

IV. CAMBODIA: THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Social entrepreneurship is a critical element to building democracies. The world needs social entrepreneurs just as it needs private sector entrepreneurs with imagination, skills and passion. The latter work to develop new technologies and to develop the economy, whereas the former, social entrepreneurs, act on idealism, to offer innovative solutions to pressing social problems, develop new civic and social institutions and reinvigorate the public and civic sectors. Private entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship however, differ in one major respect. While the economic marketplace is organised to support business entrepreneurship, there is no comprehensive support system for developing and supporting social entrepreneurs.

For Cambodia, the challenge of developing social entrepreneurs is even greater. Firstly, Cambodia lacks the ‘social marketplace’ (institutions and systems) to support social entrepreneurship. For example, Cambodia does not have a Youth Policy; the role of the education system in transmitting civic values is still weak; and the concept of ‘service to others’ is undervalued by society.

Some socio-cultural factors also work to discourage some of the core principles which underpin social entrepreneurship. For example, there is a proverb in Cambodia that says, “do not reach for the stars”, “do not embrace the mountain”, “do not look over the mountain”, because “you cannot reach it, you cannot achieve it, you may be disappointed, you will not succeed, you will fail!”

Stratification of the society, which still exists today, also discourages social entrepreneurship. A study by Ovensen used by many scholars and development practitioners seeking to understand Cambodia, concludes that social stratification remains extremely important in Cambodia today. “All relationships are hierarchically ordered. The hierarchy is expressed first in terms of age, then comes gender, wealth, knowledge reputation of the family, political position, employment, character of individual and religious piety”.¹¹ The hierarchy depends on everyone observing the status hierarchy and keeping his/her place in it.¹² In their study of education, O’Leary and Nee point out that correct behaviour is taught first in the family and then reinforced in the school:

[W]ithin the family children are taught not to challenge their parents and their authority, to be polite and respect elders. In schools the traditional system is reinforced through respect granted to the teacher, and by learning by heart what the teachers teach. Students are generally not given the authority to think independently or to ask questions, and they must follow what the teacher says even if it is wrong.¹³

This is further reflected in the society as a general discouragement to try something new, in the belief that things should be done in the way they have always been done. One need not look far to find examples of what happens when one dares to go beyond the ‘accepted’ position; being too successful or high profile can lead to one’s downfall, taking initiative and risk or making mistakes can also have adverse consequences for the individual as recent Cambodian history can attest. Similarly, conformity in the public administration or in the political sphere is the way to get ahead leaving little space for idealism, new thinking and new energy.

However, there are many signs that this trend is changing. Traditional notions and practices are today being challenged by the advent of modernisation and globalisation. New ideas such as participation, empowerment, good governance and democracy are beginning to take root.

Another factor whose significance to social entrepreneurship is under-estimated is the effect of the many years of isolation which Cambodians experienced in the 1970’s and 80’s. This has had a significant impact on the psyche, and on people’s worldview. Cambodia is still in many ways a very insular country. At the same time globalisation and Cambodia’s recent accession to various regional and international bodies, as well as the obligations the government has embraced through

¹¹ Ovensen, J., Trankell, I., & Ojendal, J. (1996) *When Every Household Is An Island*, Uppsala Research Report, Uppsala University, Sweden.

¹² O’Leary and Nee (2001) *Learning for Transformation*, Krom Akphivoat Phum, Phnom Penh.

¹³ Ibid.

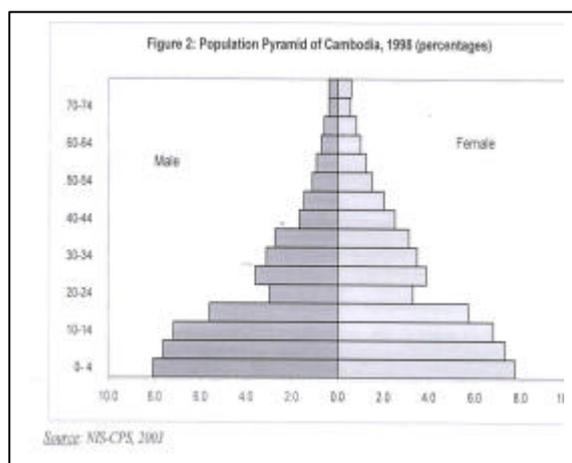
various international instruments call for unprecedented reserves of social capital. Thus, there is a critical need for youth to be well informed, well read, and highly skilled. One can say that Cambodia is not a strong reading society, though a visit to the Hun Sen Library indicates that this is slowly beginning to change. Although current day youth are opening up their world through the Internet there remains a huge gap in general knowledge. In the face of weaknesses in the education system, students must take greater initiative and responsibility for their own learning. They must take an interest in the world beyond their immediate environment, and seek to learn from other societies; the future will belong to those who go after knowledge and not those who expect it to come to them or to be given to them.

In order to address these issues, any program that seeks to engage young people as volunteers must play *a critical role as an incubator for social entrepreneurs*. It must offer youth the opportunity to act on their idealism, encourage them to 'reach for the stars', to be all that they can be, to take risks, to take initiative and responsibility, to be creative and innovative, to formulate their own opinions, to strive for excellence and to learn from mistakes.

The Situation of Youth in Cambodia: Opportunity and Challenge

The Cambodian population is an estimated 13.4 million, of which nearly 84% is rural and lives on subsistence agriculture. An estimated 36% of the population live under the poverty line and that figure is even higher in rural areas. The country has an estimated average annual pop growth rate of 2.4%. Ninety percent are ethnic Khmer Buddhists. Ethnic minorities constitute more than 30 groups living on the coastal plains and the remote and hard to reach mountainous areas in the north-eastern highlands.

Today youth represents the majority of the population with nearly 70% of the country's 13.4 million people being younger than 30 years of age (52 % are under 18 years of age).¹⁴ As poor families tend to have more children than non-poor families this means that children are disproportionately represented among the poor and are more likely to continue living in a cycle of poverty. Although maternal and infant mortality rates have recently decreased, they are still the highest in S.E. Asia (maternal mortality: 437 per 100,000 and infant mortality: 95 per 1000 live births).¹⁵



Poor health and nutrition are often the reasons for high mortality rates and lack of resistance to disease, and affect the mental capacity and ability of children to perform well in school. According to the Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey, in 2000 58% of women between 15-49, 66 % of pregnant women, and 87 % of children were anaemic; 44% of children were stunted, 15 % wasted, and 45.2% were underweight. HIV prevalence among the age group 15-49 years has decreased from 3.3% in 1997 to 2.6% in 2002¹⁶ but the social and economic impact of HIV/AIDS have yet to be fully felt in Cambodia.

Other statistics also point to a phenomenal, but not hopeless, challenge. In addition to post conflict problems such as weakened social fabric, displacement, landmines, and endemic violence, Cambodians now face contemporary problems as well: a newly emerging market economy, a widening gap between rich and poor in urban and rural areas, and the invasive spread of HIV/AIDS. It is important however to remember that Cambodia has had to rebuild its social and economic infrastructure (including the education system) from scratch following the Khmer

¹⁴ Census 1998.

¹⁵ Cambodia Demographic and Health survey (2000).

¹⁶ RGC/UNICEF Mid-Term Review Report, UNICEF Country Programme 2001-2005, October 2003.

Rouge period which was noted for its mass destruction of social capital, particularly the intelligentsia. And it is equally important to remember that open hostilities ended only as recently as 1998. In light of this, rehabilitation of the education system in Cambodia is quite remarkable, and there has been consistent progress from year to year, in quality and quantity in the education sector, however there are still some important hurdles ahead. For example, pre-school services are inaccessible to over 90% of the child population. For school age children, only 52% of primary schools offer all six grades, and in 2001-2002 only 19% of all children in the appropriate age group were in lower secondary school.¹⁷

By the age of 15 years, less than 5% of Cambodia's children are still in the education system. During adolescence, many children living in urban areas, and increasingly in rural areas are exposed to a range of risky behaviours, including alcohol and drug abuse, and unprotected sex. Large numbers of Cambodian children are also exposed to exploitation. Lack of employment or prospects of employment among the young also poses serious social problems.

The Link Between Poverty and Education

It is widely known that literacy has a direct relationship to poverty, life skills, and quality of life. Studies also show that a highly literate and educated workforce is more flexible and better able to respond to changing economic forces such as those brought about by globalisation. Also, competitiveness in regional and international markets will depend as much on ingenuity and skill, as on the business environment and legal infrastructure. Cambodia has still a steep hill to climb in order to build up its human resource base. An assessment of the functional literacy levels of the adult population in Cambodia, conducted by the MoEYS in 1999 indicates that up to 4 million youths and adults, 15 years old and older, are basically illiterate.¹⁸ This represents 62% of the 6.5 million adult population. Among this population 42% of women over the age of 15 have never attended school. A teacher in Prey Veng told us that some parents don't send their children to school if it is far from home because they are afraid that they will be intimidated or hurt by gangs. This is especially true of parents of young girls.

Interviews and observations made during field visits in five provinces during the course of this study corroborated this picture. In some rural communities the absence of young men of working age was noticeable. "We have nothing to offer them", one local official said. Farming under current practices and constraints is not viable, landholdings are too small to feed a family year round, and non-forest resources are becoming scarcer and more difficult to access. In a Muslim community in Kompong Cham the study team was told that only 10% of primary school graduates go on to high school because the education is not considered very relevant to their livelihood, and because children are needed to help the family earn a living. Many of their youth go to Malaysia in search of work, where they are said to be well received by the Islamic community there.

Young people are increasingly migrating to the cities, to Thailand, Malaysia and other destinations. The current education system does not prepare rural children with livelihood skills and is not linked to their reality. Parents do not believe education is an asset since their children cannot earn a living even when educated; hence there is a high drop out rate. Poverty is cited as the principal reason for dropping out of school. Poverty and high dropout rates lead to increasing hopelessness among Cambodian youth.

The Cambodia National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey¹⁹ conducted in 2004 found that 20% of almost 10,000 respondents aged 11 to 18 years old, in 24 provinces felt worried, hopeless and reluctant to work, leaving them incapacitated for more than one week in the past year. The same study also found that a quarter of the respondents had experienced violence in their families in the previous 30 days. This hopelessness combined with feelings of powerlessness, feeling that they

¹⁷ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Non-formal Education Department. *Report of the Assessment of the Functional Literacy Levels of the Adult Population in Cambodia*, May 2000.

¹⁸ A projection based on a statically representative sample suggests that that 2.4 million (36.3%) are completely illiterate and 1.7 million (26.6%) semi-literate.

¹⁹ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Department of Pedagogical Research. *Cambodia National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey*, 2004.

have no voice and poor self-image is linked to increasing prevalence and use of drugs among young people. Youth gangs (*Bong Thom*) who disrupt social order and resort to violence are no longer a phenomenon of the urban centres; they are now a feature of rural villages as well. This was cited by community leaders, provincial leaders, teachers, parents, monks, security people etc as a serious concern in all five provinces visited during consultations. Another respondent opined that changing social trends, such as the migration of many young women to work in the garment factories, contributed to the 'gang phenomenon': "young women get jobs in the cities; they become wage earners and when they return to the provinces they look down on the young men there".

Unemployment and under employment are a source of great concern and potential cause of future social unrest and instability. The composition of the population, with 70% under the age of 30, means that there are over 200,000 new entrants in the labour force each year. While the Cambodian economy has managed consistent growth over the last decade it is not obvious that the country is or will be able to absorb the growth of the labour force unless the pace and depth of reforms is significantly accelerated and improved. The garment sector, the largest employer outside of the agriculture sector may well have peaked and faces new challenges with Cambodia's recent accession to the WTO. The service sector remains underdeveloped as does the agriculture sector and both hold tremendous potential for growth and employment. Key to attracting investment in both sectors is a proper regulatory environment based on good governance and human resources. Entrepreneurial spirit and drive are also a key ingredient for developing the private sector and stimulating local economies, yet few young Cambodians in the survey or consultations expressed any interest in breaking new ground in this field.

In urban centres, the number of private institutions of higher education has mushroomed in recent years, offering young people a greater choice of professional options. There are currently 10 public institutions of higher education and 29 private ones throughout the country (including provincial ones that are not branches).²⁰ For numerous reasons including poor teacher quality, and weaknesses in regulation and in developing and implementing policy and standards, the quality of these institutions varies significantly. In general most educational institutions in Cambodia are not yet up to international standards and many graduates are poorly equipped for either the job market or for continuing on to graduate courses, though they are not lacking in motivation and idealism. The increasing number of students entering higher education would suggest that there is demand and opportunity in the job market. Reality suggests otherwise. According to MoEYS data for the school year 2002-2003, a total 41,309 student are enrolled in tertiary education, 7,974 in public institutions and 33,335 in private courses. However, an official in the Ministry of Education estimates that only one out of nine university graduates finds employment.

Turning the Tide; What Will It Take?

The Education Strategic Plan 2004-2008 attempts to address a number of social problems head-on. Building on the previous plan of action which enabled many improvements in the education sector including broadening equity in coverage of education opportunities and improving quality, standards and management of education services, the ESP 2004-2008 recognises that the education reform process must be accelerated and give highest priority to equitable access to high quality basic education. The plan also gives greater emphasis to the expansion of non-formal education skills, making a greater effort to link education to viable livelihoods. Strengthening education legislation, governance and accountability systems is a third priority that will maximize impact and give higher value to education. The ESP 2004-2008 is encouraging. It reflects the integration of lessons learned from the past, and introduces new strategies to put in place the human resources and infrastructure necessary to meet the multiple challenges to sustainable development, and is more responsive to social and labour market requirements. The next phase of education reform aims to expand education and training opportunities for the significant and growing number of under employed and under productive young people between the ages of 12 and 24 years old; improve retention of young people in the formal education sector, expand non-formal and informal education opportunities; give greater

²⁰ Patricia Noelle O'Brien, *Challenges to Higher Education in Cambodia*, April 2004.

attention to education and training in border areas, including measures to address vulnerability of out of school youth to cross border social problems such as child labour, HIV/AIDS and child trafficking; and supply high quality and trainable secondary school graduates to Universities and technical and vocational training institutions.²¹

To achieve the 2004-2008 ESP as well as the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education and gender equity by 2015, and the Government's Education for All plan which commits to achieving universal access to nine years of high quality basic education by 2015, the RGC will need to work in close partnership with parents, the private sector, communities, commune councils and civil society. Youth volunteers represent massive potential, which if properly resourced and nurtured can be channelled towards making a valuable contribution towards reaching these goals. Developing a youth policy, which reflects the participation and aspirations of youth, and recognises and values youth as a partner in development would be an important first step for the Ministry to take in respect to building this partnership.

²¹ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. *Education Strategic Plan 2004-2008*. September 2004.

V. VOLUNTEERS: A THIRD FORCE IN SUPPORT OF CAMBODIA'S DEVELOPMENT

There exists today in the world at large a favourable environment for promoting and supporting volunteerism. There is for example growing recognition that volunteerism is a powerful and indispensable resource for development and that it makes important contributions economically and socially, to building more cohesive societies by building trust and reciprocity among citizens.²² Just as it took governments decades to recognise the contribution that NGOs can make to development and to give them due recognition and respect, and just as it took governments many years to recognise the necessity of partnering with the private sector in order to harness the vast influence and resources which they can muster, it is time now for governments and the development sector to also recognize the valuable resource that youth and volunteerism represent for meeting development targets and for ensuring a strong human resource base and developing future leaders. The challenges before the world community, of reducing poverty, of ensuring environmental sustainability, of building just and peaceful societies cannot be achieved without the energy, ingenuity, solidarity and creativity of thousands of ordinary people, channelled through voluntary action.

On December 5th 2001, the General Assembly of the United Nations at its 56th session, adopted Resolution A/RES/56/38 recognising:

The valuable contribution of volunteering, including forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, to economic and social development, benefiting society at large, communities and the individual volunteer. It also recognizes volunteerism as an important component of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management and social integration, and in particular overcoming social exclusion and discrimination.”²³

This Resolution, signed by 126 member states, including Cambodia, lays down recommendations for ways in which governments can recognise, enable and support volunteerism. The recommendations focus on creating a favourable environment through specific policies and measures within which volunteerism can flourish.

On May 28 2002, in the Beijing Declaration, 150 participants at the International Conference on Volunteerism urged governments and the UN to encourage the use of voluntary action in addressing the full range of development challenges. In 2003, in a follow-up action the Chinese government in a tremendous show of support for volunteerism honoured volunteers from all its provinces at the Great Hall of the People, for their contribution toward the betterment of society. Volunteers and their contributions to society are similarly honoured in many countries of the world on December 5th, designated by the United Nations as International Volunteers Day.

In Cambodia, there is a massive, as yet untapped potential in volunteers, which if properly resourced and nurtured, can be harnessed and channelled towards making a significant contribution towards reaching development goals. The Rectangular Strategy of the Royal Government, sectoral strategic plans, and the international conventions and instruments which Cambodia has adopted present countless opportunities for strategic partnership. The following are but a few examples of how the proposed Youth Service Program could contribute towards achieving national development goals.

Rectangular Strategy of the Third Legislature of the Royal Government

The over riding goal of the Royal Government of Cambodia in its third legislature is to: firmly and steadily build Cambodian society by strengthening peace, stability and social order, entrenching democracy, promoting human rights and dignity, ensuring sustainable

²² Speech by Ad de Raad, Executive Coordinator United Nations Volunteer Program on the Occasion of the 18th IAVE World Assembly, Barcelona August 2004.

²³ United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/56/38. December 5, 2001.

and equitable development, and strengthening Cambodia's social fabric to ensure that Cambodian people are well educated, culturally advanced, engaged in dignified livelihood and living in harmony in family and society²⁴.

A youth volunteer initiative could make a valuable contribution towards reaching the following objectives set out in the Rectangular Strategy:

- Good governance (through promotion of civic values, volunteers as role models for young people)
- Enhancement of the agriculture sector (through diversification, innovative technology, marketing)
- Private sector development (through entrepreneurship and business development)
- Capacity building and human resources development (through support of innovative educational activities and promotion of life and livelihood skills)

The Rectangular Strategy acknowledges that an indispensable element for implementing the Strategy is "partnership in development with all stakeholders, including the private sector, donor community, and civil society". In the closing statement the "RGC appeals to all development partners and *every citizen* to provide the necessary support and actively participate in partnership with the Royal government in the implementation of the Rectangular Strategy of growth, employment, equity, and efficiency in Cambodia".²⁵

Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Declaration was adopted by 189 heads of state and governments at the Millennium Summit held in the UN General Assembly in September 2000. Cambodia as a member of the world community firmly committed itself to an expanded vision of poverty reduction and pro-poor growth that places human development at the centre of social and economic progress. This commitment expresses itself through eight millennium development goals with measurable targets and specific timeframes. The first and all encompassing goal is poverty reduction; in Cambodia 36% of the population struggle to survive on less than \$1.00 a day. Other goals are central to social development; for example, achieving primary education for all, promoting gender equity and ensuring environmental sustainability. The achievement of the MDGs presents a formidable challenge to Cambodia and requires the full engagement of government on the one hand, and on the other, the engagement of thousands of ordinary people in playing their part through voluntary action. In fact it is hard to imagine how the MDGs and other development goals can be achieved without the mobilisation of thousands of Cambodian citizens.

For volunteer organisations, the MDGs are both a responsibility and an opportunity. MDGs provide a framework for action and for holding governments accountable. Engaging young people as volunteers will be critical in helping to harness and channel volunteer energy towards achieving the MDGs.

International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Ministry of Women's Affairs' Draft Five Year Strategic Plan 2005 -2009

Cambodia ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women on 15 October 1992. The obligations and goals articulated in the convention as well as in the Ministry of Women's Affairs' draft Five Year Strategic Plan 2005-2009, aim for gender equity and empowerment. It is essential that young women have an equal opportunity to engage in volunteerism. In addition, a volunteer youth initiative could contribute to gender equity by acting to:

- Reduce repeat and drop out rates of female students at different levels, through special tutoring programs

²⁴ Address by Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia, First Cabinet meeting of the Third Legislature of the National Assembly. 16 July 2004.

²⁵ Ibid.

- Promote literacy and useful life skills among young women, (basic business literacy to generate new streams of income and enhance livelihood options)
- Raise awareness and educate the community about domestic violence
- Increase awareness about sexual exploitation and prostitution
- Promote women's participation in decision-making (by working in partnership with commune councils)
- Facilitate women's access to production related resources (help to organise self-help groups and cooperatives)
- Promote legal rights awareness through education programs (especially the right to legal protection against domestic violence, trafficking, rape and other types of violence).

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Developing informed young citizens and the next generation of young leaders and social entrepreneurs, is also consistent with goals embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Cambodia in 1992. Among the rights of youth and adolescents are the right to acquire life skills, express their views, and lead meaningful and secure lives.

A youth volunteer initiative can make an important contribution towards reaching the Royal Government's education and HRD objectives of capacity building and human resources development by cooperating with parents, community organisations and NGO, including to:

- Support pre-vocational skills programs that assist young people to gain employment and contribute effectively to the local community
- Promote knowledge about community life, care of the environment, democracy, human rights, rule of law and that enables them to be active citizens
- Replicate innovative approaches to learning and impart learning skills that will allow young people to be life-long learners
- Promote reading among young children through community based libraries
- Reduce school drop-out rates by mentoring
- Promote business literacy and entrepreneurial skills among young people
- Promote civic values by engaging young people in voluntary work for the good of the community
- Expand peer education activities for youth, gang members and out of school children
- Facilitate effective participation of young people in local decision-making processes and give young people a voice in local development.

Global Opportunity and Cambodia's Competitive Advantage

With its accession to WTO in 2004 and with the end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement in 2005, Cambodia enters the second half of this decade facing new opportunities and challenges. In order to capture global opportunity and make globalisation work for Cambodia, Cambodia is pioneering the use of corporate social responsibility as a niche for itself in the region and the world. In fact, Cambodia may well be the first country in the world to pursue corporate social responsibility as a *national strategy* across sectors. Many Cambodian stakeholders, as well other developing countries have a stake in seeing this model of free and fair trade work. Making the strategy work however, will require the engagement and partnership among various stakeholders, labour, owners, buyers, government and civil society.

It will be important that any volunteer youth initiative offers the private sector opportunities to engage in corporate social responsibility, through partnership (joint activities that promote business development in the provinces and rural areas), sharing of expertise and other resources as well as an opportunity to contribute to the development of a new generation of Cambodian entrepreneurs.

Priorities for volunteer activity

There is no shortage of possibilities for engaging volunteer oriented organisations in support of development goals however, taking into consideration the critical situation of youth in

Cambodia, Cambodian development goals and priorities, the capacities of volunteers, and the many challenges involved in creating a new organisation and program. Four key sectors were identified in this study.

- Education and Youth Development
- Health and Well-being
- Sustainable Livelihoods
- Entrepreneurship and Business Development

The key target group for youth volunteer action should be young people, because this is where the best hope for change now and for shaping Cambodia's future lies.

Creating a Favourable Environment for Volunteerism

One objective of the study was to explore whether there would be a favourable environment to support a new initiative for youth volunteers. The answer is without reservation - YES. The enthusiastic responses of all persons consulted in the course of the study were very encouraging. All persons sought out for consultation generously contributed their time, advice, and relevant reports or documents. A number of NGOs offered their office services to facilitate contact with others, particularly in the provinces while others still, contributed hardware or a grant to facilitate the feasibility study. Many persons (from national to village level) offered pledges of support and expressed interest in collaborative partnerships. For example, the Minister of Education suggested that it would be appropriate to offer recognition and formal accreditation for service successfully completed. The Minister of Information suggested that media resources could be made available for dissemination of information and for raising awareness regarding volunteerism. Provincial leaders in the three pilot provinces committed their support for hosting and facilitating volunteer programs in their provinces. Buddhist leaders offered accommodation and moral support for the volunteers. Community leaders also pledged their support and offered to mentor volunteers entrusted to their communities. Many NGOs and some universities offered to share their training resources and to provide volunteers with exposure to successful pilot projects. These positive responses reflect a keen interest in the proposed project as well as a genuine concern for the human resource situation in Cambodia, and especially the situation of youth.

Recommendations

While the responses of all stakeholders were enthusiastic and promising, additional concrete measures are needed from government, funders, and the private sector, in order to create a favourable environment that encourages and supports volunteerism. In this spirit, the following actions are recommended.²⁶

- Integrate volunteerism into national development planning and, recognising the potential contribution of volunteerism to the achievement of sustainable development goals, extend the notion of volunteerism as a valuable component of national development planning to development cooperation policy. This can open the way to building up a new constituency in support of development efforts and will also help to build social capital.
- Increase public awareness of the vital contribution of volunteerism to the social and economic functioning of communities through public information activities and public events.
- Take measures concerning encouragement and facilitation, preparation, training and recognition of volunteers for example, facilitate the establishment and functioning of volunteer centres as volunteer centres provide effective leadership in the community.

²⁶ Many of these recommendations are put forward in UN General Assembly A/Res/56/38, co-sponsored by Cambodia and 125 other nations.

- Assist in the development of informed policies that take into account the different levels of participation of women and men, youth and older people in different fields of volunteering.
- Ensure citizens' access to information on opportunities for volunteering.
- Disseminate information through the media, schools and other channels. Encourage media companies to support and expand the concept of pro-bono public service announcements on behalf of volunteer based organisations and activities.
- Make public spaces available to enhance the capacity of people to organise for voluntary activities, especially in geographically poor areas.
- Promote volunteering within educational establishments and youth services; develop specific programs to encourage youth volunteering; put in place systems to recognize and accredit volunteering by youth; and work with the media to present an attractive image of volunteering. This can include a formal volunteer movement, while regional and local centres ensure linkages with the grassroots communities and organisations.
- Enable fiscal, legislative and other frameworks, including for community based organisations and not-for-profit engaged in volunteering. For example the goal of enabling legislation is to inspire people to volunteer. Also, provide tax incentives and subsidies and facilitate partnership building around volunteer based activities of civil society, including arrangements for joint planning, implementation and monitoring.
- Encourage and undertake research in the various aspects of volunteering and its impact on society. Research parameters might include: to profile volunteering and trends in Cambodia and establish the economic value of volunteering to help highlight one important aspect of its overall contribution to development.

The above-recommended actions can have a significant impact on the level of youth participation in volunteerism and constitute a sound investment in Cambodia's human resources

VI. DEMAND FOR VOLUNTEER SERVICES: Field Visits to Kampong Cham, Kratie, and Prey Veng, and Laos PDR

Field visits and consultations with a broad range of interlocutors and villagers in Kompong Cham, Kratie and Prey Veng provided invaluable insights into the changes taking place in communities around the country, challenging social and economic issues, achievements and local development goals, how people perceive their current needs and priorities, resources available in the communities and potential partnership opportunities, people's appreciation and understanding of volunteerism and their receptivity a youth volunteer initiative. The study team received many recommendations and opinions about the profile volunteers should have, roles they should play, how they should be prepared for service, and what risks or constraints might be encountered. Less extensive field visits to Battambang and Siem Reap were also undertaken in order to learn more about local social service initiatives reputed to be effective in bringing about positive change in communities, that might serve as examples of 'good practice' and which could be replicated. A visit to PADETC Lao, a Lao volunteer organisation based in Vientiane, also yielded important lessons.

Cambodia: A Country Undergoing Dynamic Changes

A first important observation from such an extensive consultation process is that Cambodia is a dynamic country. Most communities are dynamic entities that are undergoing significant social and economic change since the advent of peace and stability, and as a result of liberalisation of the economy, influx of information and foreign culture, increasing mobility, globalisation, and development efforts including democratisation. How those communities negotiate their way through these changes of course varies significantly depending on their particular histories, geographic and demographic factors, the quality of human resources available to them, their access to information and influential political figures, their economic potential and capacity to see and respond to opportunities.

There is no denying that Cambodia faces daunting developmental challenges today, including inequities and extreme poverty, as well as a culture of violence and impunity. However, the many examples of positive developments indicate that there is hope and potential for much more. To say that Cambodia is just as poor as it was ten years ago (if not more so) or that nothing has changed (as is too often stated) does an injustice to the many people striving to improve their lives and those of other people in Cambodia. The study team was privileged to meet many such people during the consultation process.

Field visits demonstrated that there are dynamic changes taking place and that the problems communities face are changing and becoming more complex. For example, today it is possible to access all provinces quite easily by road, though internal travel is still difficult in some areas. As recently as three or four years ago provinces like Preah Vihear, Mondolkiri, Ratanakiri, Kratie and Stung Treng were quite isolated. An aggressive infrastructure building program has opened up these provinces to new developments and access to markets and services, as well as to new issues such as trafficking, drugs, logging etc. It is possible to find mobile phones even in these once remote provinces. Whereas villagers used to cite poor production and food shortages as their main difficulty, in many places we visited one of the key constraints identified by farmers was difficulty in marketing their goods. Trips made to local markets during field visits showed a greater variety and quantity of goods and produce available, and sadly also showed fruits and vegetables rotting - evidence of greater supply than local demand. For many farmers the cost of transport to markets further afield is prohibitive.

This is not to say that there is no hunger in Cambodia. In fact many areas visited had suffered serious rice crop losses due to drought, however the point is that a few years ago farmers did not cite difficulties in marketing as one of the problems they faced. Their chief problem was producing enough to market. As one woman in Prey Veng said, "yes, you can see I am still poor, I still have a thatch roof on my house, and I still work hard in the fields, I have no sons. But it is not the same as before. I am still poor but [with] what money I have I am sending my daughters to school so that their lives will be different from mine."

Many more children in Cambodia today are starting school than ever before. This is a positive development. On the other hand the problem today is keeping them in school. Where parents may have been convinced that sending their children to school was important, today they see that even with schooling their children are not able to earn a living. So there is less incentive to keep their children in school and the school fees are also a heavy burden on many families. The relevance of school curriculum to livelihoods is a critical issue on the Ministry of Education's agenda. There are many efforts under way at national level, to revise school curriculum in order to offer more practical life and livelihood skills, and there are a number of innovative community based learning centres and projects that work with school drop-outs and young adults to promote their development as productive citizens and contributors to the community.

Another significant area of change is democratisation. Whereas seven years ago one security and peace were among people's top concerns, today they are confidently asking for rule of law, justice and information about human rights. They are also exercising their right to vote. Newly elected Commune Councils have embraced their responsibilities to their constituencies in spite of numerous constraints. According to a recent study of the decentralisation process conducted by the CDRI:

All 1621 commune councils have as part of their devolved functions, developed five-year commune development plans and three-year rolling investment plans and annual budgets. These plans allowed the commune councils to agree on in excess of 40,000 (in 2003) and 32,000 (in 2004) local development projects financed by NGOs, line ministries and donors.²⁷

In addition they have initiated local projects funded by their own commune funds. The report also states that, "transparent and accountable usage of the Commune Fund has hindered elite grabbing of the development projects".²⁸ During visits to Kompong Cham, Kratie and Prey Veng, the study team was fortunate to meet with Commune Councils that were active, articulate, proud of their achievements and, where different party members appeared to cooperate well together. The presence of local community-based organisations with articulate and confident leaders and members all working in self-help projects was also encouraging. These are not insignificant changes.

The growth of the private sector in Cambodia over the last decade has been remarkable as well and has proven to be an effective strategy in reducing poverty. "Households headed by those with industrial employment had only 4% poverty incidence, while 80% of families where the head of household was employed in agriculture were poor".²⁹ Industrialisation, which creates opportunity and employment for thousands of young women, has at the same time introduced new social issues associated with migration of young women to urban centres, and has changed traditional perceptions of gender roles and economic power in the rural areas. Many of our interlocutors in the provinces expressed their concern over the increasing 'gang culture' in the provinces and rural areas, a phenomenon they believe to be partly associated with lack of employment opportunity and changing social norms.

Discussions with local interlocutors indicated an acute awareness among policy makers, national and local leaders about the important link between private sector development and poverty reduction. There is still untapped potential for further growth and job creation, particularly in a more diversified private sector and in agro-industry. A great deal has been invested in diagnostic analysis of the constraints to private sector development. Clear strategies and needs for an enabling institutional environment and for its development are elaborated in several key documents such as the National Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Rectangular Strategy of the Royal Government. In this particular case the solutions are known, and concerted political will

²⁷ CDRI, *The Challenges of Decentralisation Design in Cambodia*. October 2004.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ RGC and World Bank Group, *Cambodia Seizing the Global Opportunity: Investment Climate, Assessment and Reform Strategy*, August 2004.

and action on the part of all partners are required to achieve any significant further progress in this sector.

Local Needs and Priorities and Potential Roles for Volunteers

One of the purposes of the mission to the provinces was to try to identify areas where volunteers could make a meaningful contribution to communities, drawing on their dynamism, idealism, and skills, while at the same time recognising their limited experience and exposure to development issues. Discussions focused on what communities wished to accomplish but lacked the skills to achieve. While discussions were enthusiastic and cooperative discussions were not always easy. There is a general misunderstanding in communities about what a youth volunteer initiative might have to offer; and about the value of volunteering. Most people's immediate response to any offers of support is to ask first for funding and second for projects such as building a school or road. Few people think in terms of what could be achieved if the community had human resources or skills to complement what is already available. Also, while everyone has a good appreciation of problems and challenges facing their communities there is a shortage of ideas and solutions for dealing with them. This suggests fertile ground for social entrepreneurship. However, it means that volunteers will need to have good general knowledge, exposure to good practice and innovative development approaches and skills in problem solving as well.

Education and Youth Development

Responses from province to province were quite homogeneous and consistent. Number one on everyone's list was support for education. A range of suggestions were offered, most with a particular focus on promoting livelihood skills and civic education among young people. There was a consensus among most interlocutors that traditional institutions such as the family, the school, and religion, which normally transmit moral and civic values to children and young adults, were still weak. Many interlocutors highlighted the increase in school drop-out rates, the increase in drug use and gangs and the hopelessness of youth due to lack of employment and the feeling that they have no voice or identity and no employment options. In a number of areas visited, the absence of young men between the ages of 16 and 30 was noticeable, and interlocutors confirmed that many migrated to urban centres and neighbouring countries in search of employment. A provincial official reflected that the government had focused national attention on rehabilitation of infrastructure, investment, private sector development, and gender awareness but that until now it had neglected the issue of youth. In the two Islamic communities visited, interlocutors informed the team that only about 10% of students actually completed high school because their families are poor and youth are needed to help with work during the fishing season. The school calendar and peak period of fishing activity conflict so many students are absent for extended periods during the school year, thus contributing to failure and eventually to dropping out of school entirely. On the other hand, Islamic interlocutors reported that "gang culture and violence" is less of an issue in their communities due to the strong religious beliefs of the community and strong leadership of the Imams.

Suggestions included volunteers playing a role to support:

- Activities centred on the physical and cognitive development of children and early childhood education.
- Programs and activities that increase the awareness and skills of young people to adopt behaviours leading to better survival, well-being, development, protection and participation and increase youth and adolescent participation in prevention and promotion of activities on issues that affect them most, particularly HIV/AIDS, sexuality, drugs etc.
- Civic education which promotes knowledge about community life, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and Cambodia's government to enable young people to be active citizens, facilitate participation of youth in democratic governance and have a voice in commune development plans and on local issues.
- Activities that centre on care for the environment.
- Vocational skills that assist young people to gain employment and contribute effectively to the local community.
- Activities that encourage volunteerism among young people.
- Expansion of peer education activities for youth and out of school children such as reading libraries, introduction to IT, theatre, sports, the arts and small business activities.
- Training of trainers, training local school teachers in new life skill curriculum and creative approaches to teaching; support community learning centres, and teachers in pre-school education. Teachers also asked for training in conflict management.
- Teaching English was cited as a way to become very popular and quickly accepted in the community and among peers.

Many interlocutors avowed their powerlessness and lack of know how in dealing with 'Bong Thom' or gangs and expressed a wish that volunteers, who are their peers, could mentor these young people and offer some useful skills. Interesting initiatives implemented by Friends/Mith Samlang with street children in Phnom Penh, may offer some useful lessons and models relevant for working with gangs in the provinces.

The Stieng Minority villages present even greater challenges. Two focus group discussions with Stieng villagers in Kratie province revealed that no member of the community had more than a third grade education. According to local leaders, government teachers who come to the area do not stay because of isolation and the difficult living conditions there. Livelihoods are threatened by contentious land issues and decreasing access to common property resources. Public health services are scarce, some distance away and inadequate to meet the needs of the people. Many villagers rely on traditional medicines but this knowledge is being lost as well. Some community members bemoaned the fact that when village elders die, young people will not know about their history and traditions. In one village focus group, only three out of about 30 people owned a radio and no-one had a TV which further illustrates the degree of isolation which these communities face, and the general lack of information which no doubt limits their own development as well their capacity to participate in national development. Some provincial authorities seemed aware of the tremendous challenges and the potential opportunity which minority populations represent. However, it was not clear from limited contact with provincial and sectoral authorities how much understanding and appreciation there is for the situation of minority peoples, nor how much of a priority this is in a development agenda with many competing priorities.

Volunteers could play a meaningful role as a bridge between ethnic minorities, local communities and provincial authorities, on the one hand disseminating information on a broad range of issues relevant to well-being and civic participation and on the other, promoting a better understanding of and interest in minority issues among local, provincial and national decision makers and development practitioners. In addition to the roles cited in the previous sections above, volunteers could also:

- Engage local youth in learning about and documenting their local histories and traditions and facilitate communication and promotion of their unique cultural heritage;

- Promote transfer of traditional skills and occupations such as music, artisanry, and traditional healing.
- Facilitate connections between minority communities and external resources, which can help them to improve their living conditions and to develop and diversify their livelihoods in a manner consistent with their culture and values.

Another education related area of intervention which targets young adults, but also other sectors of the population is bringing literacy, civic education, and livelihood skills to prisons. A successful experience initiated in Battambang by volunteers from the Dammayetra Centre demonstrates openness on the part of authorities, receptivity on the part of prisoners, and immense social value to the individuals concerned and to the society as a whole. Such activity needs to be approached with sensitivity, working with responsible authorities, and preparing the volunteers appropriately. The Battambang experience could serve as a model of ‘good practice’.

Health and Well-being

A second area where volunteers could fill an important gap in human resources is in the health and social welfare sectors. Most suggestions were modest and revolved around health education for well-being. However, according to local informants, community people are often recruited and volunteer to assist in education campaigns whether they are about vaccinations, hygiene, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, cigarette smoking, gender awareness, Avian Flu or other issues important for the community’s well-being. It will be important to identify existing local resources and potential, and strengthen and further encourage this rather than supplant it. The weakness, according to our local informants, is that community volunteers are usually poor and insufficiently prepared, information campaigns are irregular and short-term, and too few resources are invested or available for training and developing creative resource materials. Some interlocutors also asked for volunteer medical personnel, citing shortages of staff in local clinics and medical centres. This however, may prove to be quite challenging from a recruitment perspective. Our interlocutors identified numerous other ways that volunteers can contribute to the community’s well being:

- Educate (and train community volunteers) on social issues such as domestic violence, trafficking, HIV/AIDS, sexuality, drug abuse using creative approaches to issues and increase youth and adolescent participation in prevention and promotion of activities on issues that affect them most, particularly HIV/AIDS, sexuality, health education.
- Facilitate access to educational resource materials.
- Facilitate linkages between vulnerable members of the community (especially at risk youth and adolescents) and support groups or services (for example help amputees to get prosthetics, deaf and blind to access services, those in need to access HIV/AIDS treatment, etc; encourage home and community care of the sick where appropriate, especially people with HIV/AIDS).
- Promote education on health issues focusing on prevention and well-being, including nutrition (vitamin and iodised deficiency disorders) malaria and dengue prevention, hygiene and sanitation, among others.
- Promote non-violence and conflict prevention and management, especially among youth.

A lot of creative initiatives and resources have already been pilot tested and are available within the public services and NGO community in Cambodia. Young people especially have proven to be very effective communicators and teachers in their families and with peer groups. Education through entertainment has also proven to be a very effective tool for reaching Cambodian audiences.

Sustainable Livelihoods

The third most commonly cited area of need and involvement for volunteers, according to the majority of our interlocutors is to expand viable livelihood options in rural areas. Employment creation is perhaps one of the biggest challenges facing the nation. Although there has been remarkable growth in the garment and tourism sectors (since 1998 these sectors combined employ well over 400,000 workers), this represents only 3% of the population. The majority of the

population reside in rural areas and are employed in subsistence agriculture, often supported by off-farm activity. Up to one third of this population live on less than \$0.63 per day. By 2004 industrial employment grew by 42% per year; employment in the travel and tourism sector is growing at 10.5%, while agriculture shows less than 2% growth per year.³⁰ In 2005 the children of the post-war baby boom of the 1980s, which has increased the population from 6 million to 13 million, are coming of working age and entering the labour force at the rate of approximately 200,000 per year. Only about 15,000 of the latter get formal sector jobs; the rest have to accommodate themselves in the informal sectors. Most of this labour force lives in rural areas, is poorly educated and has few options for employment. Cambodia's hard won stability is at risk unless this looming challenge can be urgently addressed.

Once again diagnostic research and solutions are clearly articulated and are generally accepted within Cambodia's decision-making and development community. The good news is that there is tremendous as yet untapped potential for expanding rural development options. Recent progress in restoring rural infrastructure, especially in the public works and communications sectors, as well as initiatives in land reform and land titling are important steps in the right direction but are not enough. An area with tremendous growth potential for Cambodia, and possibly an area in which the country may have a comparative advantage, is in diversification of agriculture, animal husbandry and agro-industry. Innovative technology and practices, water control, availability of affordable electricity and transport, expanded productivity, diversification, integration of local economies into the national economy and international markets, access to information through enhanced telecommunications, and coherent development policies are some of the elements required in order to develop the vast potential in this sector.

A number of the activities suggested by interlocutors for volunteer involvement are probably beyond the scope of young inexperienced graduates but with exposure to 'good practice' (there is a good body of experience to tap in Cambodia), technical resources existing in the country, and strategic partnerships with NGOs and the private sector, there is scope for volunteers to make an impact in the following roles:

- Transfer technology and demonstrate good practice; introduce and demonstrate innovative and environmentally sound agriculture and animal husbandry practices and support efforts in crop diversification.
- Facilitate access to information on markets and technology, and facilitate communication and exchanges between farmers and producers around the country.
- Play the role of catalyst, facilitating farmer organisations for credit, marketing, and other self-help projects.
- Teach basic business literacy to producers and farmers.
- Support community efforts to manage community property and the environment.
- Facilitate links with private sector resource persons to explore and identify potential for SMEs.
- Engage young people and communities in reforestation, in protection and care for the environment.

In Kratie (more than in the other provinces), several interlocutors expressed a keen interest in volunteers who could help them to expand and improve livestock raising, as an important source of income.

The priority target group in these activities is the young adult population in rural communities, ensuring the active participation of young women.

Entrepreneurship and Business Development

The fourth priority identified by interlocutors in the three provinces is business or private sector development, with a particular emphasis on employment creation and marketing issues. The

³⁰ Global Fairness Initiative, *A Growth Strategy in an Era of Free Trade*, International Conference, February 10-11, 2005, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

issue of employment creation has been briefly addressed in previous sections, and its important role in stimulating local economies and reducing poverty has also been highlighted. It is also widely recognised that development will not be sustainable unless there is private sector (SME) development at a provincial level. As family farms become smaller and less viable (close to 40% of rural households have less than 0.5 hectares of land³¹), the private sector offers scope for job creation and opportunity for young people.

The Cambodian private sector is largely informal, and made up of small, family oriented enterprises that may or may not be integrated in the national economy. Most of these businesses are involved in consumer services, retail and food processing. While many measures and policies have been enacted to improve the climate for developing the private sector, a variety of administrative and market-based barriers continue to impede its growth. Improving the investment climate and investing in people are two key elements for spurring growth of this sector. In this context, what would constitute an appropriate role for volunteers?

According to advice from many interlocutors consulted in Phnom Penh as well as the provinces, volunteers could perhaps play useful roles in the following:

- Teach basic skills such as business literacy, book keeping and organising
- Help out on the lower end of the supply chain; for example, by helping villagers prepare applications for credit; and to understand how the credit system works
- Support SMEs to get organised, and involve them in policy advocacy where they can take action in common to promote their interests
- Gather information from the Internet on markets, prices, technology, etc.
- Encourage and mentor youth groups to plan, raise funds and manage small business activities, allowing room to make mistakes and learn from practice
- Facilitate communication and linkages with expertise and resources in Cambodia's private sector and work together with the private sector to assess and identify potential for business development
- Facilitate peer-to-peer education and exchanges between young entrepreneurs in and outside Cambodia.

Local Partners

Interlocutors suggested many other roles for volunteers, outside the four priority sectors discussed above, but it would not be realistic to branch out into too many fields, especially at the initial stages of a new program. The capacity of volunteers and the capacity of a new organisation to offer them adequate support and training have to be seriously considered in this regard. This preliminary consultative process allowed the study team to canvas the range of resources, needs and potential challenges that might be encountered in the communities. Return visits will be made in the next few months to identify demand and specific placements, identify key local partners, ensure commitment through contracts, clarify goals and expectations, identify housing for volunteers and to look into a number of other practical issues. Communities, local institutions and/or organisations for placement of volunteers will be selected based on criteria such as, demand, high poverty incidence, security, minimum level of infrastructure and local support, demonstration of commitment from the community or partner institution.

Volunteer Profiles

Local interlocutors suggested the following criteria for volunteers:

- Willingness to work in remote areas, and with low "salary".
- They should be humble and modest (not arrogant).
- They should have respect for elders and local knowledge. "Volunteers should respect the people they will be working with and not look down on them for being less educated".
- They should have good character (get along with people) and good communication skills.

³¹ CDRI, Cambodia 1999-2000: Land, Labour and Rural Livelihoods in Focus. Working Paper. December 2001.

- They should have good general knowledge and the ability to teach.
- They should have skills in agriculture, health education and business entrepreneurship.
- They should be willing to learn and develop their capacity.
- They should have basic critical thinking capability and problem solving skills.
- They should be healthy.

A number of interlocutors expressed scepticism about Cambodian volunteers being willing and able to adapt to difficult living conditions. Several suggested that volunteers be put ‘to the test’ during the recruitment or orientation process in order to see if they are resilient enough and able to solve problems. Many interlocutors also stressed the importance of preparing volunteers well regarding local conditions, and possible differences between local and city culture. Others also suggested that volunteer stipends should not exceed that of local public servants, so as to create a more equal and accepting work environment, and to demonstrate that one can still be motivated and achieve something even on a low salary.

Other Partners and Resources

The extensive consultative process undertaken as part of this study identified a wealth of resources, examples of good practice, innovative approaches and initiatives, and committed resource persons and potential partners.

At national level, there is keen interest among leadership to support and collaborate with a youth volunteer initiative. Shared goals and objectives, and how youth volunteers can contribute towards achieving national development objectives is already discussed in Section V. Close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, as well as the Ministry of Women Affairs would be strategic and benefit all parties.

Commune Councils, community-based organisations, pagoda committees, and other traditional local self-help organisations also expressed an interest in partnering with volunteers, and are well suited to provide support structure, guidance, and mentoring for volunteers in exchange for skills and knowledge, energy and entrepreneurship. These institutions/organisations would also offer credibility and facilitate acceptance of volunteers by the community. Initiatives undertaken jointly under these auspices would have a greater chance of sustainability and replication, and thus offer greater potential for impact.

All monks consulted in the course of the study expressed an interest in playing a more active role in communities, and to be involved in activities that contribute to building a culture of peace, and to developing good morality and ethics among young people. Some senior Buddhist clergy would like to see young monks working alongside volunteers, and expressed a wish to see monks benefit from the training to be offered to volunteers. The head of Kratie’s Buddhist clergy also offered accommodation and moral support for volunteers placed in the province.

Other partners in the provinces could include, local associations such as farmer’s associations, women’s organisations, or public services such as schools, health centres, or local agriculture or extension offices, where there is active leadership, openness to new ideas and learning, and commitment to partnership.

Local and International NGOs offer a wealth of experience, teaching resources, and local knowledge that will be invaluable to young volunteers. Exposure to new initiatives, technology and approaches which they have already tried and tested and which have produced positive results will be critical in preparing volunteers for service. Engaging these organisations in the training and mentoring of volunteers will contribute to enhancing the impact of their own interventions and to replicating successful good practice and models of development.

A number of organisations are known and respected for their innovative work in various sectors: SME Cambodia in the business development sector and MPDF/IFC offer many resources and services related to SME development; UNICEF and World Education in the OPTIONS program as well as in Life and Livelihood Skills; Maryknoll in pre-school education and HIV/AIDS Care;

CEDAC in its work in agriculture extension, transfer of appropriate and environment friendly technology, and development of farmer associations; PADEK for its work with community based organisations; and Sipar for its promotion of mobile libraries. There are also other organisations which have extensive experience in educating about domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, and trafficking and democracy and human rights. Other organisations with strengths in organisational development such as VBNK, and organisations with a rich experience of developing and managing volunteer programs such as VSO are already providing practical expertise to support the initiative. It is not possible to list all of the resources, organisations and potential partners here; the point is that these constitute an ideal environment for a youth volunteer initiative to take root. There is tremendous opportunity for partnership, and for drawing on local experiences and resources.

Another valuable resource in Cambodia are the youth associations, many of which promote volunteerism among young people and share a common aim of developing civic responsibility and leadership among Cambodia's youth. Many of them have already shared their experiences with the study team and some have joined in conducting the study. These youth associations offer young people their first exposure and opportunity to engage in volunteerism, thus creating a pool of desirable future candidates. The study team foresees a very close working partnership with them, sharing resources, learning from each other, and joining efforts to advocate for youth policy and to give youth a greater voice on other issues as well.

One of the aims of a youth volunteer initiative will be to promote corporate social responsibility through formal partnership. This concept is relatively novel in Cambodia although there are examples of corporate social responsibility and 'good practice', albeit with differing motivations. Discussions with representatives of the private sector on potential areas of partnership were inconclusive and businesses will require a more concrete and clearly developed picture of what the partnership will look like, what will be required of them, and what the benefits to them will be. The private sector could provide expertise (work with volunteers to assess economic potential, or business potential in areas where they are working), share training resources, provide information regarding technology, as well as financial support or in kind support for starting up SMEs in rural areas.

Case Study: PADETC Volunteer Program in Laos

The Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC) was founded in Lao PDR in 1996 as a non-government youth development organisation which aims to produce a new generation of Lao with life skills, strong ethics, and a greater sense of responsibility to themselves, their families and their community. Its main partner in Laos is the Ministry of Education, under whose auspices the organisation is registered. Today, PADETC mobilises up to 1,000 youth volunteers, mostly high school students, throughout the country and its programs reach out to an estimated 200,000 people annually.

The work of PADETC spans a range of activities. Its main impact has been in education where they have been able to introduce and train teachers in life skills education. PADETC staff work with teachers to create tools for teachers and get volunteers to demonstrate them. Their aim is to develop quality teachers. The target group in the life skills program are primary schools students because they have the best potential to influence teachers, parents and the community. At present, up to 60 discovery-based learning centres are being implemented in Lao schools. In primary schools volunteers also teach children to express themselves through painting, and to lead, negotiate and facilitate meetings.

Community service is another sector which engages many student volunteers in a range of programs including awareness raising in communities about HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, and human trafficking, establishing and managing community radios (village loudspeakers), fundraising to build libraries in rural communities, environmental education, promotion of appropriate technology, and promotion of cultural identities. To promote livelihood skills, PADETC volunteers have devised alternative ways to educate people who don't read, by producing CDs and DVDs on skills such as practical management skills, raising earthworms, and

IPM, among others. Young students have also been instrumental in promoting and leading recycling campaigns.

Reforestation is another sector where PADETC volunteers have made a difference. In Sin Quanh Province, PADETC staff and volunteers worked with villagers to identify tree types that will grow in mountain acidic soils; villagers with volunteers have successfully reforested the mountainside with pine trees - the program paid 600 kip for every tree planted.

A popular PADETC program deals with encouraging and supporting youth developed and managed SMEs. Through this program young people have introduced efficient technology such as fuel-efficient stoves, fish raising, bio-fertiliser, waste recycling, and have organised trade fairs. Volunteers are provided with video cameras to develop their own documentaries.

PADETC volunteer training curriculum is extensive and includes: conducting meetings, facilitation, team work, writing, critical thinking, planning appropriate technology, IPM, HIV/AIDS education, effective media/communication, ethics and youth camps.

Lessons from Laos

PADETC attributes its success in motivating young Lao people to volunteer to their 'edu-tainment' approach to training which focuses on involving young people in real-life practice in communities, in peer education and in-camp activities. The programs encourage young volunteers to plan and manage their own activities, and to assume greater responsibility as they gain experience.

Another factor that contributes to their success is the care and time invested in recruitment which involves interviews and field trials, and which gives priority to those with previous volunteer experience.

Other lessons which PADETC learned from experience:

- Working with university students was unsuccessful in Laos because they lack basic skills such as analytical thinking, writing, and flexibility. It is best to promote volunteerism at a very early age
- Edu-tainment is an effective teaching tool
- Children are very effective in addressing corruption in a non-threatening manner
- Children are very effective in raising their own funds from the communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The following is a summary of conclusions and recommendations considered relevant for shaping a youth volunteer initiative:

- There is a general misunderstanding in communities about what youth volunteers might have to offer, and about the value of volunteering. Therefore, the youth volunteer program will need a strong unified message about the purpose of the project: developing citizenship and leadership among young people, as well as the potential benefits.
- Everyone has a good appreciation of problems and challenges facing their communities but there is a shortage of ideas and solutions for dealing with them. This is fertile ground for social entrepreneurship but it means that volunteers will need to have been exposed to innovative solutions to social issues in Cambodia and must have skills in problem solving.
- Volunteers can play an important role in transfer of knowledge and experiences, however they must be well informed about what exists in Cambodia. Study tours are a good way to share knowledge and experiences

- It is important to research the needs of communities before placing volunteers and to ensure some level of commitment. It would also be strategic for volunteers to be aware of what local development goals are and to see how their activities might contribute toward reaching relevant goals.
- Young volunteers will be better received in the countryside than in the towns.
- If volunteers are to be helpful to communities they must be well informed about the services and resources available in the province, or know how to get the information (for example; where to refer a person with HIV/AIDS for assistance).
- There are local (active) resource persons who would be good mentors for volunteers; involving these persons in advisory bodies at the local level would provide useful guidance and support and would also encourage local ownership of the program.
- Monks would like to play a more active role in their communities and would welcome partnership opportunities. Such a partnership would offer volunteers a valuable source of moral support and credibility in the community. It will also be important to explore ways of including monks in appropriate aspects of the training that will be offered to volunteers.
- A youth volunteer initiative must aim to educate for change, to help people change their behaviour. Educating through fun is an approach particularly appreciated and effective with young people.
- Volunteers can play a valuable role in building bridges of understanding between people. For example they can facilitate communication between people and local authorities, they can help local authorities to better understand what minorities are experiencing, and can also help local communities to be better informed about laws, rights and responsibilities.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess the feasibility and potential support for a youth volunteer initiative targeting Cambodian young people. The study found that there is considerable support for such an initiative, and clear identified needs at the community level which youth volunteers can help to address.

The next steps for the youth volunteer initiative are to finalise and roll-out the organisational structure, communications plan and fundraising program. Much of this work is already underway, and a name for the organisation has been chosen, *Youth Star Cambodia*.

Some of the issues identified in this study that will be addressed in developing and implementing the program include the need to:

- Create a supportive environment by positioning volunteering as a positive contribution and a reciprocal relationship where volunteers can benefit just as much as they contribute to the communities they serve.
- Target young people and their key influences, including parents to promote the program and encourage participation in volunteering.
- Identify the benefits of support for a youth volunteer initiative and promote corporate social responsibility to local Cambodian businesses.
- Ensure that the expectations of young people, and communities are realistic and the role of volunteers clearly understood.
- Encourage young people to ‘reach for the stars’, to seek excellence, to take risks and learn from mistakes, in order to develop as leaders and social entrepreneurs.

Youth Star Cambodia is well-placed to achieve these goals. We look forward to working with young people and our partners to realise our vision and contribute to building a dynamic, sustainable volunteer sector that can help to achieve key development goals and create a just and peaceful Cambodia.

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