



UNITED NATIONS
CAMBODIA



Analysis of Multi-Stakeholder Engagement for Sustainable Development in Cambodia

Civil society engagement lens



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List of Abbreviations

BSP :Budget Strategic Plan
BSRS : Budget System Reform Strategy
CAVAC : Cambodia Agricultural Value Chain Program
CCC : Cooperation Committee for Cambodia
CCHR : Cambodian Center for Human Rights
CDC : Council for the Development of Cambodia
CDF: Cambodian Development Forum
CEDAW : Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CMDG : Cambodian Millennium Development Goal
CRS : Corporate Social Responsibility
CSARO : Community Sanitation and Recycling Organization
CSDG : Cambodian Sustainable Development Goal
CSO : Civil Society Organisation
DCPS : Development Cooperation and Partnership Strategy
DP : Development Partner
DSDG : Division for Sustainable Development Goals
GADC : Gender and Development for Cambodia
HRBA : Human Rights-Based Approach
ICSO : Indigenous Community Support Organisation
INGO : International Non-Governmental Organisation
JMI : Joint Monitoring Indicator
LANGO : Law on Associatiions and Non-Governmental Organizations
LMIC : Lower-Middle Income Country
LNOB : Leaving No One Behind
MDG : Millennium Development Goal
MEF : Ministry of Economy and Finance
MoE : Ministry of Energy
Mol : Ministry of Interior
MoP : Ministry of Planning
MoWA : Ministry of Women's Affairs
MRD : Ministry of Rural Development
NCC : National Coordinating Committee
NCDD : National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development
NGO : Non-Governmental Organisation

NGOF : NGO Forum
NSDP : National Strategic Development Plan
ODA : Official Development Assistance
PB : Programme Budgeting
PFMRP : Public Financial Management Reform Programme
RGC : Royal Government of Cambodia
RS IV : Rectangular Strategy IV
RUPP : Royal University of Phnom Penh
SDG : Sustainable Development Goal
TWG : Technical Working Group
UNCT : UN Country Team
UNDG : United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UNDP : United Nations Development Programme
UNRCO : United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
VNR : Voluntary National Review
YEAC : Young Entrepreneur Association of Cambodia

Executive Summary

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, reflect the aspirations of millions of people from all over the world, for the world they want. Civil society, major groups and other stakeholders, showing unprecedented commitment and dynamism, made concrete contributions to the intergovernmental process that resulted in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, which is expected to be implemented with the participation of all stakeholders and all people. The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed considerable challenges to effective stakeholder engagement around the world.

The report attempts to contribute to strengthening the multi-stakeholder dimension of national development planning and SDGs mainstreaming by analyzing current practices in Cambodia, share good practices and propose recommendations in alignment with the implementation of the United Nations Cooperation Framework. The report focuses specifically on CSO engagement and participation in the 2030 Agenda implementation in Cambodia, challenges and opportunities to strengthen stakeholder engagement, and identification of solutions to address the challenges posed to effective stakeholder engagement by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is prepared based on key document reviews and interviews with stakeholders from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), government, and academia.

The report includes key stakeholders who were engaged in the Cambodia SDG (CSDG) process mainly via the existing Technical Working Groups (TWGs) mechanism of the government. The Technical Working Groups were the vehicle to collect inputs from relevant actors with regards to the selection of the CSDG indicators and the production of the Voluntary National Review (VNR). The Ministry of Planning (MoP) is mandated to coordinate at the national levels with line ministries, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the private sector and academia. At the ministerial level, line ministries also coordinated and collected inputs vertically within the ministries and horizontally with other lines ministries as well as with development partners, CSOs, and the private sector. During the VNR process, representing CSOs in Cambodia, the NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGOF) and the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) collected inputs from their CSO networks. The Chamber of Commerce of Cambodia coordinated the private sector via their members. The academia has been invited to join workshops related to planning, monitoring and evaluation as well as VNR. The MoP, line ministries and CSOs have been working to promote the awareness of the CSDGs.

The multi-stakeholder engagement approach has been widely applied in the early design stages of SDG mainstreaming and VNR preparation processes. This is evidenced by their participation in numerous consultative workshops, conducted both at the technical and high levels, where stakeholders comprised of representatives of the RGC, development partners, academia, private sector, and civil society organizations, attended to verify data, validate inputs, and provide further information and feedback to refine drafts of the CSDG framework and that of the VNR, as well as to get approval for key messages of the reports.

However, this study finds some gaps and challenges with regards to the Human-Right-Based Approach (HRBA) and Leaving No One Behind approach (LNOP). The gaps are specially related to the depth and width of the engagement. First, the government has allocated spaces for CSOs to participate in the process, but there is a lack of broad consultation involving all stakeholders. The government has been working to promote indigenous rights and women's rights. However, human rights organizations have not been included as the result of prioritization in the initial list of indicators. Human rights targets and indicators are absent from the CSDG 16, there are no engagements with those organization working on human rights.

Second, due to limited resources, the localization process has taken place primarily at the national level. Localization of the SDGs at the sub-national levels have not taken place, except a pilot project to localize the CSDG11 supported by UNESCAP at Battambang Province. Sub-national levels have not been engaged during the CSDGs, except when they are requested to provide input that can be used, for example, for developing the VNR.

Third, respondents also claimed that development partners and large international organizations have more power in the engagement process considering their capacity and financial resources to commit to activities, while smaller CSOs are not closely engaged despite their inputs being channeled through their peer CSO representatives, who compile and forward to the government. While smaller CSOs have been active at the sub-national levels and have aligned their activities and strategic plans to achieve certain CSDGs, a closer engagement is vital for effective implementation of the CSDGs.

Fourth, the engagement of academia and think-tanks, which should also be key resources to support the CSDG processes are low in terms of providing technical comments or providing concrete inputs such as in science and technology for CSDG implementation. There is also very limited engagement from the private sector especially from youth business associations.

Finally, while there is a lack of depth and width of stakeholder engagement in Cambodia, COVID-19 has hindered the stakeholder engagement further. Since the pandemic,

communication channels were cut significantly. CSOs in Phnom Penh rotated their staff and companies also allowed their staff to work from home. Universities turned to online teaching. The effectiveness of working online is perceived differently among stakeholders. For small groups with high level of technical skills to use online tools, they found working online is very effective. It became less effective when there were large number of participants. Although online working also allows for a larger number of participants, the quality of engagement was questioned. While engaging stakeholders online allows for a wider participation from stakeholders, the quality may not be as effective as face-to-face arrangements. Face-to-face help stakeholders understand and connect with each other easier.

Recommendations

Inclusiveness

- Although Cambodia has a framework to engage stakeholders, especially the CSOs, challenges remain. In order to address the challenges of stakeholder engagement, the UN and the government of Cambodia should consider the following recommendations.
- The UNCT should broaden its engagement with CSOs, especially human rights organizations as well as community-based organisations to ensure more inclusivity in the design, implementation and evaluation of UNSDCF processes, and in line with multi-stakeholder partnership principles. By doing so, it would allow for an opportunity to advance SDGs through multi-stakeholder engagement and participation. This can be strengthened by developing a dedicated multi-stakeholder database, including sectoral/thematic line ministries and relevant CSOs.
- The UNCT should consider advocating with the Government to open more space for CSOs' engagement at both national level and sub-national level through its partnership forums. This way it will help CSOs working at sub-national level to work and provide services better and directly to the people in the communities. Although small CSOs have fewer financial resources, their personnel who are working with people are experienced. They can align their activities and strategic plans to fit CSDGs. Promoting awareness to lower sub-national levels, district and commune levels, would accelerate the implementation of CSDGs.
- The Government should encourage more research on CSDGs at universities and research centers to fully engage with the CSDG process by including the faculty

members or researchers in TWGs. At the same time, the UNCT could initiate collaborative projects with universities to conduct evidence-based and scientific research related to CSDGs. There is a good example from Battambang University which is one of the TWG members in SDG localization project in Battambang. This pilot project has been supported by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). In addition, embedding CSDGs in the university curriculum would increase the awareness of the CSDGs.

Overcome COVID-19 challenges

- To address the challenge of working arrangement during COVID-19, there are several recommendations. There is a need for capacity building for working online. The UN and the government should work harder to improve the capacity of officials to work online. For people who do not have resources and low education, they might find it difficult to adapt to the technology.
- The UNCT should provide facilitation and support for continuation of the Government-CSOs partnership forums, which were postponed since late 2020 due to COVID-19, by encouraging the Government to use online platforms for that purpose. If needed, the UNCT could consider providing technical advice and capacity building on conducting online discussions to the Government with appropriate platforms through consultation with the CSOs.
- Stakeholders should be encouraged to be well-prepared to ensure quality engagement online. However, some NGOs are worried about confidentiality during online meetings because the Government has already introduced the internet gateway sub-decree, which is perceived by the NGOs as a legal means used to harm the online contents. In addition, there has been initiative by the Government to draft a law on cybercrimes which could also potentially affect freedom online. Therefore, the UNCT should help the CSOs to advocate with the Government to ensure that these legal provisions are made in line with Cambodia's human rights obligations and avoid restricting the fundamental freedoms, including freedom online.

Accelerating CSDG implementation

- There is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic has profound impact on every aspect of life including CSDG implementation. Resources have been diverted to fight the pandemic leaving fewer resources for other purposes. In this sense, several issues could be addressed to accelerate CSDG implementation.

- At the national level, CSDG indicators should be reviewed and reprioritized. All stakeholders should have a clear idea what their roles are and which CSDG(s) their institutions need to achieve. Specific CSDGs should become the ultimate objective for each institution to achieve. Not every stakeholder needs to achieve all CSDGs. Activities and strategic plans should be designed with flexibility for the implementation. Cooperation and collaboration to work in specific areas would help accelerate the implementation of the CSDGs. There is a need to strengthening the coordination platform.
- More efforts need to be made with regards to CSDG awareness raising at the subnational level especially at the district and commune levels. This will help sub-national planners better align their development plans (5-year development plan and 3-year rolling plan) to the CSDG framework. This would accelerate the CSDG implementation. It is worth noting that, the implementation of both the 3-year rolling plan and the 5-year development plan is also supported by Development Partners and NGOs. It is also important that donors continue to commit financial support to CSOs that work at the grassroots level which saw a drop in funding due to COVID-19.
- Finally, undertaking a second Voluntary National Review provides a great opportunity to strengthen stakeholder engagement and build further understanding of the SDGs. Integrating stakeholder engagement in all stages of the VNR process is vital to ensure that the VNR is based on inputs from all parts of society and government.

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was the result of an inclusive and participatory process, calls for the meaningful and active participation of people and stakeholders at all stages, from Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) integration into national strategies to implementation and national monitoring and review. It highlights the importance of participatory approaches to sustainable development and places the most vulnerable and voiceless people as central to leaving no one behind.

UN Country Teams (UNCTs) have a key role to play in supporting Member States in implementing the commitment of inclusive and transparent participation of all stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda and in facilitating inclusive, safe and enabling environments where stakeholders can contribute. The Secretary-General has noted that, in moving towards a new generation of UNCTs, it must be ensured that, at the country level, Resident Coordinator Offices are empowered to serve as a hub for multi-stakeholder engagement and partnerships with a wide range of representatives.

Globally, the form and level of stakeholder engagement in support to SDG implementation and follow-up varies between countries, ranging from stakeholder consultations in decision-making processes to the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships to advance on certain goals and targets, to involving stakeholders in monitoring and reporting. However, countries have also been facing challenges when it comes to stakeholder engagement and not all Member States have reported on to what extent stakeholders were engaged in their SDG implementation and on the SDG follow-up processes including Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

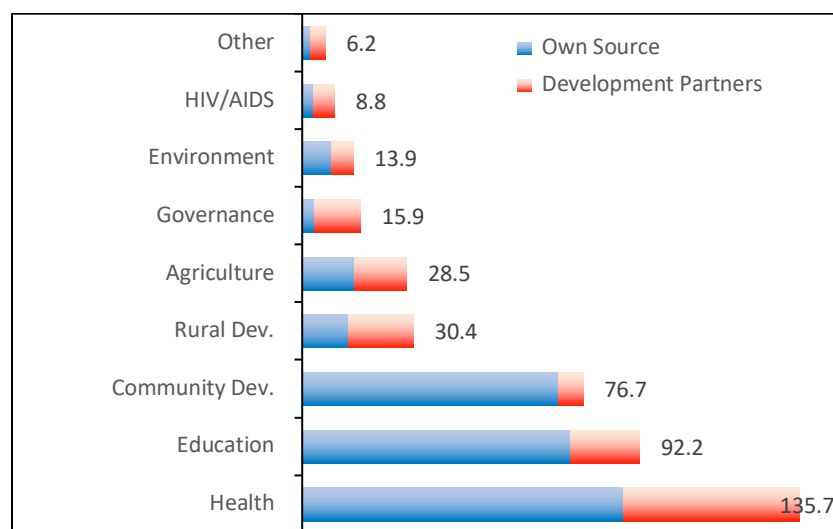
This project was supported by UN DESA, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) through a grant with the European Commission (SD2015: Delivering on the promise of the SDGs) in order to assist the UN Country Team in Cambodia analyze the national stakeholder landscape. The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed considerable challenges to effective stakeholder engagement around the world. The report attempts to contribute to strengthening multi-stakeholder dimension of national development planning and SDGs mainstreaming by analyzing current practices in Cambodia, share good practices and propose concrete actions in alignment with the implementation of the United Nations Cooperation Framework.

2. Stakeholder Engagement on 2030 Agenda and CSDG

This section provides an overview of the stakeholder engagement landscape regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at national level and discusses concerned engagement mechanisms set up by the government, UN agencies and civil society. This is based on a desk review of a number of documents including Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) Framework, Cambodia’s Voluntary National Review, Development Cooperation and Partnership Strategy (DCPS), UNSDG’s Common Minimum Standards for Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in the UN Development Assistance Framework and other related documents, as well as secondary data analysis.

It is worth noting that stakeholders, for the purpose of this study, mainly refers to civil society, which has existed since Cambodia’s general election in 1993. The Cambodian civil society consists largely of NGOs. As of 2021, the number of NGOs in total was around 2000, more than 60 percent of which are international NGOs.¹ Total NGO finance encompasses both international and local NGOs, while the former not only support their own programmes but also fund the latter². The proliferation of NGOs is largely due to the belief that they can offer advantages over the public sector in aid effectiveness. NGO disbursement was estimated to be around 0.9 percent of GDP in 2019 and the fund was used to support various sectors of development in Cambodia (Figure 1).

Figure 1: NGO Sector Support in 2019 (Millions of US Dollars)



Source: CRDB/CDC database 2021

¹ <http://odacambodia.com/ngo/summary/summary.asp>

² See Cambodia Development Finance Assessment

2.1 Stakeholder engagement in CSDG and VNR process

CSDG process and stakeholder engagement

The SDGs underpin the wider Sustainable Development Agenda, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly's 2015 session, and herald new priorities and thinking on global development needs and directions. They aim to be transformative toward sustainable development for all countries, offering both a guide to policy choices and a mean of checking national progress. They explicitly recognize the importance of equity within and between countries, the universality of human needs and rights, and the interconnectedness of the development challenge. The approach asserts that the task of delivery is everyone's business – the state, the public and private sectors, and citizens themselves – and that the SDGs are owned and driven by each country based on its own priorities, resources and capacities.

Cambodia started this process in late 2015 by reviewing and mapping the global goals and targets to national priorities. All 17 SDGs were selected and one additional goal, related to clearance of land mines and of Explosive Remnants of War (reflecting the national priority of de-mining Cambodia's territory), was added. Many meetings and workshops with key stakeholders including line ministries and agencies, thinktanks, academia and NGO representatives were conducted to discuss on the targets and indicators of CSDGs until 2018. This resulted in a final version of the CSDG framework, which comprises of 18 Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs), 88 nationally relevant targets, and 148 (global and locally defined) indicators including 96 as national indicators. The framework was adopted by the Royal Government in November 2018. In line with the global goals, the CSDGs frame a longer period running to 2030 and are therefore also a counterpart to the Government's Vision 2050³.

The CSDG framework highlights a need to build "an ecosystem" supportive of wider feedback and to engage with the private sector, civil society and international organizations, given the wide scope of CSDGs, and their delivery requires the contribution of all Cambodian stakeholders and their partners. Recognizing the distinct contribution that private sector actors can make, the Government has provided avenues for business, civil society and citizen-actions to contribute to the CSDGs, by motivating and incentivizing behavioral change in production and consumption to green the economy, introducing appropriate tax and other incentives, and by facilitating Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to directly deliver CSDG objectives.

³ See CSDG Framework 2016-2030

Voluntary National Review process and stakeholder engagement

Each UN member state is called on to fulfil its commitments by nationalizing the goals to support their own development agenda and to enable effective progress monitoring and evaluation. The process underpinning Cambodia's first VNR began in late 2018, led by the Ministry of Planning. As with the CSDG Framework, the VNR relies on a wide consultative process, adopting a whole of government approach - drawing on line ministries and agencies, and local administrations; and a whole of society approach - open to civil society and business actors; with regular consultations taking place throughout the process.

In late January 2019, the MOP in partnership with the UNESCAP and the United Nations Country Team in Cambodia organized a VNR inception workshop, which initiated the preparation process for the review. Its objectives were: (1) Presentation of the RGC's key plans and policies and their alignment with the CSDGs; (2) Explanation of the general guidelines and timeline for the preparation of the VNR 2019; (3) Exploration of various challenges and opportunities - data, policy coherence and means of SDG implementation; and (4) Informing and drawing diverse stakeholders into the process. The latter included civil society, development partners, and the UN agencies.

An additional consultative meeting with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), organized by the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) also took place to collect inputs for contribution to the VNR 2019. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA-IC) also organized a similar consultative forum with international NGOs. NGOs could also provide inputs through line ministries and UN agencies that they worked with. The engagement mechanisms of the government and of the UN agencies will be reviewed in the next section.

Drafting of the VNR 2019 started after receiving inputs from line ministries/agencies, based on the data and goals provided in the CSDGs Framework. Feedback on the draft was received via a series of consultative meetings and regular circulation of drafts to focal points in key ministries. The UN agencies also offered inputs on their respective mandates, often working in close collaboration with their government counterparts. Contacts based outside of Cambodia, notably UNESCAP and UNDG at the regional level also offered their inputs. Past experience of VNR preparation from the neighboring countries also provided valuable guidance on the content and format of the text.

In sum, it can be said that stakeholders were engaged from the early stage in both SDG mainstreaming and VNR processes. This is evidenced by numerous consultative workshops, conducted both at the technical and high levels, where representatives of the

RGC, development partners, academia, private sector, and civil society organizations, attended to verify data, validate inputs, and provide further information and feedback to refine drafts of the CSDG framework and that of VNR, as well as to get approval for key messages of the reports.

2.2 Stakeholder engagement mechanisms and institutional set-up

Government's engagement mechanism

The RGC has established several mechanisms to engage different stakeholders to mobilize resources for national development. The Development Cooperation and Partnership Strategy 2019-2023 (DCPS), which provides a comprehensive framework for promoting development partnerships in Cambodia, is the only mechanism that recognizes the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in achieving the CSDGs. The DCPS (2019-2023) provides for new consultation mechanisms with civil society, and with all development partners at sector and at sub-national levels. With regards to CSDGs mainstreaming process, a host of existing and new engagement mechanisms were summarized in the DCPS (2019-2023), however due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the below mechanisms stipulated in the DCPS have not yet been activated.⁴

Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

The TWGs, which were established in 2004, are mechanisms for facilitating dialogue and for coordinating external assistance. The TWGs are a vital tool for the government to promote technical dialogue and influence programming of resources by sector ministries and agencies, development partners and NGOs. While all TWGs have indicated their intention to continue their work, there is a need to consider the extent to which the TWG mechanism provides a framework for addressing all development priorities outlined in the CSDGs. Many TWGs have identified, for example, the need to engage at sub-national level to address issues of capacity and service delivery.

Joint Monitoring Indicators (JMIs)

The JMIs have evolved in Cambodia through the Consultative Group process originally informed by the need to establish indicators for the purpose of monitoring of progress made by the government in key reform areas. This mechanism has been applied since the MDGs.⁵ The JMIs have been used successfully by many TWGs to provide a forum to

⁴ http://old.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/dcps/dcps_2019_2023/docs/eng.pdf

⁵ http://old.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/gdcc/fifteenth/JMI_en.htm

discuss priorities, to ensure a closely alignment of external financing with these priorities and, together, to identify meaningful objectives and targets. The JMIs continue to be derived from the NSDP and sector policies/plans but will become increasingly embedded in programming and budgeting dialogue as the performance-informed budgeting process (and the integration of external finance) progresses.

Sectoral Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

This is a new government mechanism, issued in April 2019, which focuses on a broader range of matters, including development effectiveness and financing issues at the sector level with an intention to ensure wider inclusiveness with an increased representation of a variety of stakeholders. This multi-stakeholder arrangement is complemented by the improved use of the TWG mechanism and JMIs. The comprehensive platform for consultations include the Royal Government, development partners, civil society, the private sector, and the academic community. The Sectoral Multi-stakeholder Dialogue is convened once per annum or as deemed appropriate by the leadership of each line ministry in collaboration and facilitation with CRDB/CDC who acts in a capacity of the RGC's coordinating agency.

Government-NGO Consultative Meeting

This is another new mechanism established with the objective to promote mutual trust, transparency and accountability as well as effective information sharing especially on development progress, challenges, and proposed solutions for improving performance and better delivering development results. The specific objective of future RGC-NGO collaboration will be to support the implementation of the Rectangular Strategy–Phase IV, the NSDP, and sector/thematic/ reform strategies. NGOs were recognized by the government to have been playing an important role in terms of mobilizing resources and local partnerships for supporting service provision, especially in social sectors.

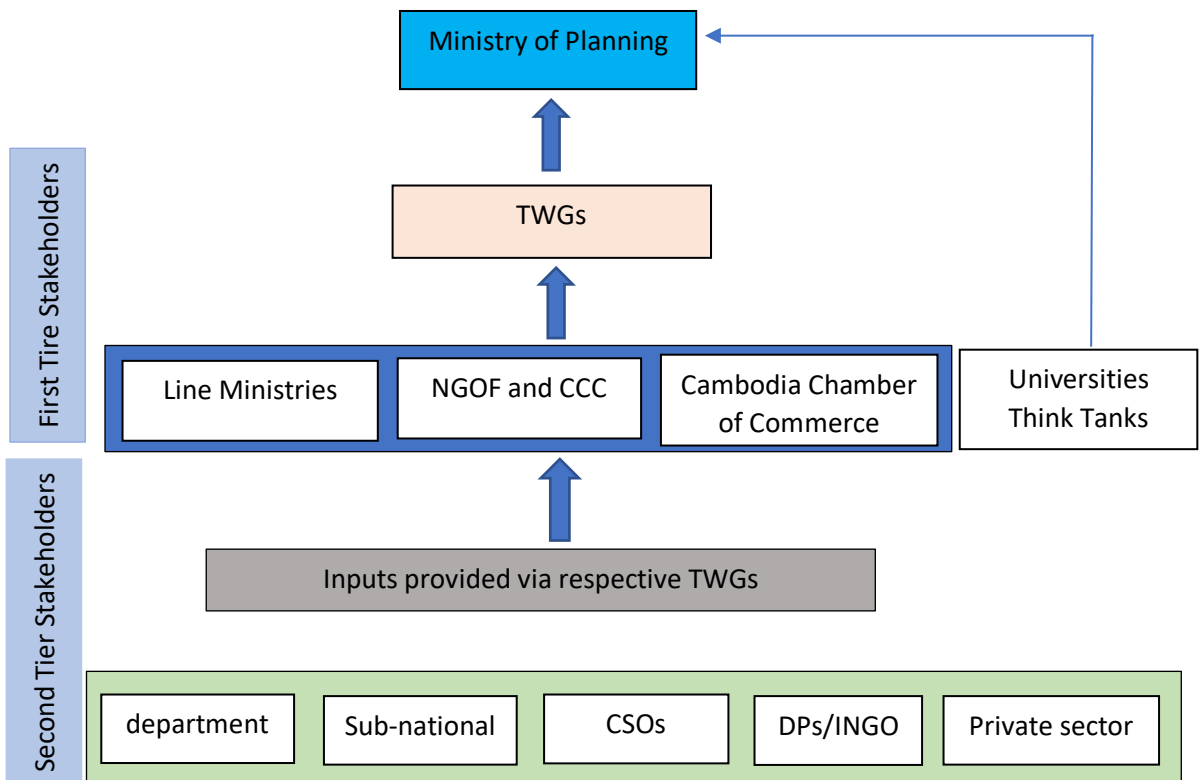
Provincial Partnership Dialogue

A Provincial Partnership Dialogue mechanism will be introduced to serve as a sub-national platform for inclusive participation of all relevant development actors (development partners, civil society representatives, grassroots communities and the private sector) under the leadership of the Provincial administration. The objective of this partnering arrangement is to promote a participatory approach and improve the quality of public services at the sub-national level. This mechanism will also help promote democratic development at the sub-national level and commits to improving the quality of public service delivery and addressing local development disparities by enhancing the capacity of sub-national authorities. The sub-national administrations play a fundamental

role in achieving the national priority objective of poverty reduction and socio-economic development.

Figure 2 outlines the channel through which each kind of stakeholders is engaged in CSDG process.

Figure 2: Stakeholder Engagement in CSDG process



UN's Partnerships for Development

In 2021, partnership between UN agencies and CSOs concentrated on building peace and institutions (CSD16) in term of projects and on zero hunger (CSDG2), quality education (CSDG4) and health and well-being (CSDG3) in term of grant. Table 1 shows the UN-CSO joint projects in 2021 which have been distributed based on CSDGs and the amount of fund required for each Goal. As can be seen, there are 8 goals that are funded by the UN agencies and implemented by CSOs. Among the 8 goals, the highest number of projects jointly implemented by the UN-CSO is CSDG 16, accounted for 18 projects followed by CSDG 3, accounting for 11 projects, and CSDG 4, accounting for 8 projects. CSDG 5, CSDG 2, CSDG 1, 8 and 14 receives 4, 3, 2, 2 and 1 projects, respectively.

Despite CSDG8 and CSDG2 received fewer projects than CSDG16, the amount of funding of the two former is much larger than that of the latter. The total funding of CSDG4 accounts for 11,000,000 \$US (36.7%) and for CSDG2 accounts for 10,700,000 \$US (35.7%). CSDG16 received around 3,000,000 \$US (9.8%), which is slightly below to that of CSDG3, accounting for about 32,000,000 \$US (10.8%). Each of the rest 4 CSDGs received from 380,000 \$US for CSDG8 to 815,000 \$US for CSDG1. CSDG

14 was allocated with 470,000 \$US and CSDG5 was allocated with 431,2919 \$US.

Table 1: List of UN-NGO joint projects by CSDG targets from 2019-2021

CSDGs	Number of Projects	Total Fund Required	
		US\$	%
1 End poverty	2	815,400	2.7%
2 Zero hunger	3	10,700,000	35.7%
3 Health & well-being	11	3,236,700	10.8%
4 Quality education	8	11,000,000	36.7%
5 Gender quality	4	431,929	1.4%
8 Decent work & growth	2	381,063	1.3%
14 Life below water	1	470,000	1.6%
16 Peace and Institution	18	2,932,989	9.8%
Total	49	29,968,081	100.0%

Source: Author's estimation based on UNDAF report

This allocation of fund from UN agencies to CSOs toward these eight CSDGs above, reaffirms UN's commitment to ensure that Cambodia can achieve inclusive, equitable, sustainable recovery and prosperity, reflected the UN's strategic priorities in the Common Country Analysis (CCA). The CCA outlines the following key strategic priorities for UN to

focus to ensure that Cambodia can achieve inclusive, equitable, sustainable recovery and prosperity. This includes:

- 1) strengthening pandemic health response and vaccination;
- 2) elevating human capital development; and
- 3) green growth and the digital economy,
- 4) underpinned by an overarching commitment to gender-transformative recovery from the pandemic and promoting and protecting human rights.

UN Cooperation Framework Joint Analysis

The purpose of the Common Country Analysis (CCA) is to provide an up-to-date, systematic analysis and description of situational developments in Cambodia, involving a range of stakeholders. The CCA aims to analyze and identify the underlying factors of development challenges and opportunities, as well as risk and vulnerability in terms of progressing towards SDG achievement. The CCA is integral to the preparation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

The 2020 CCA was prepared amid rising demands for the UN system to respond rapidly to the COVID-19 pandemic that has severely affected Cambodia, ranging from health emergencies to socio-economic impacts. Numerous consultations with relevant stakeholders were conducted through the UN75 Conversations campaign and the UN Cambodia Framework for Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 (SERF) to solicit insights, evidence and feedback, to inform the CCA. Through the UN75 Conversations, consultations were carried out with various local communities, including factory workers and LGBTI groups in Phnom Penh, female farmers and youth in Kampong Thom province, and indigenous youth and children in Rattanakiri province. Through the SERF, consultations were conducted with the diplomatic corps, international financial institutions, development partners, civil society organizations and relevant government line ministries such as the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), and the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC).

CSO's partnerships for Development

After the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) was adopted in August 2015, many CSOs have mentioned that their activities and operations were disturbed or disrupted by the LANGO enforcement. Therefore, in 2019, the Government through the Ministry of Interior started a Government-CSO partnership forum bringing all relevant authorities and CSOs to come together aiming at building trust and partnership between the Government and CSOs for social development. This mechanism is applied at the national and sub-national level. However, there is dissatisfactions among

some CSOs, especially those working on human rights and advocacy, that this forum doesn't really serve the purpose because their issues and challenges on the ground – shrinking civic space – is not properly and adequately addressed by the Government.

2.3 Stakeholder selection for the current study

The focus of this study is to find innovative solutions to strengthen the engagement of stakeholders particularly that of civil society, on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at national level. The selection was based on reviews of relevant stakeholders in Cambodia, who have been engaged in the SDGs process, or who should be the potential stakeholders in the SDG process. Since the study is based on in-depth interviews with a relatively small number of key informants, key relevant respondents were identified. From the Government, MoP and MoWA were identified for the interviews. For the CSO, NGOF and CCC represent NGO network in Cambodia,⁶ ICSO represents indigenous CSO in Cambodia, and CCHR and GADC represent rights organization.⁷ As a result, the sample of this study consists largely of respondents from CSOs, while some respondents from academia/thinktanks and line ministries and local administration were included to get complimentary information (see annex 1).

CSOs

As discussed earlier, CSOs' involvement is crucial to the CSDG localization, monitoring and evaluation, and VNR. This study focuses on the challenges faced by CSOs with regards to the implementation of CSDGs. Therefore, the number of CSOs included in the interviews is relatively large compared to other stakeholders. There are different types of CSOs operating in Cambodia, which represent or bring together women, youth, people with disabilities, elderly, professional associations, trades unions and more.

Academia

⁶ CCC) is a membership organization with nearly 200 Local and International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Cambodia since 1990, an enabling agent to facilitate CSOs to collectively, responsibly and accountably work together for good governance, enabling environment and sustainability of CSOs in Cambodia. NGOF has 89 full member organisations and 2 associate members. NGOF's programs are governance and management, National Development, Environment and Culture, Land and Forestry, and Research M&E and Development.

⁷ CCHR works to address these issues, through monitoring human rights violations and the democratic process, advocating for policy and legislative changes necessary to the promotion of human rights, and through empowering activists and communities to advocate for their rights. GADC focuses on gender equality as a human right, which is strongly tied to women's rights.

Universities and Cambodia Resource Development Institute (CDRI) were regularly invited to join CSDG consultation workshops during localization, monitoring and evaluation and VNRs. Nevertheless, they just passively participated with very little engagement or contribution to CSDG process. In this sense, there is room for the academic and think-tanks to be engaged and contributed to effective implementation of the CSDGs, going forward. The study includes Royal University of Phnom Penh and National University of Management in the survey sample.

Government

With the experience from the MDGs, the Ministry of Planning (MoP) was mandated to lead and coordinate with line ministries/agencies and other stakeholders on the SDG localization, monitoring and evaluation and reporting via Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Line ministries/agencies, on the other hand, lead or coordinate their departments, offices, DPs and INGOs and CSOs on their areas of work. The process is straight forward in a sense that line ministries forward the inputs collected to MoP for final prioritization and selection. Although MoP is the lead ministry in the CSDG process, the selection of indicators need agreement from line ministries and/or CSOs. For the VNR, MoP takes the lead in this country-driven process of the review of and reporting on Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs). To prepare for the VNR process, MoP needs to gather and consolidate inputs from and join effort with line-ministries as well as CSOs working in sectors corresponding to the goals. MOP and MOWA are selected to be interviewed for the study to improve understanding on the challenges faced during the CSDG roll out.

Local government

Local governments play a vital role in the delivery of CSDGs as they are working close to the people. There three levels of local government or sub-national levels, including the provincial, district/city and commune levels. The localization of the CSDGs ended in 2018, and the next step is the localization of the goals at the sub-national levels. So far, there has been only one province, Battambang, undertaking a pilot project of localizing the SDG 11 under the financial and technical support from the ESCAP.

Private sector

The private is also a key stakeholder in the delivery of the SDGs in terms of goods and service providers. So far, only a few private companies whose activities are related to smart agriculture and climate have participated in the SDG process. Beside the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce, Young Entrepreneur Association of Cambodia (YEAC), with members from all sectors in Cambodia is a potential stakeholder if involved.

3. Findings

This section discusses the findings from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders discussed in the previous section, and the rating results of a list of questionnaires based on Likard scale from 1 to 5 (1 totally disagree and 5 totally agree) on the perspectives those stakeholders on key issues centered to CSDG process. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders focus on the SDG process, including how the stakeholders are involved, the level of involvement, stakeholders' perspectives toward the SDG process, and what inputs are collected. The questionnaire measures their understanding on the SDGs, the level of engagement, capacity to implement the CSDGs and the challenges and opportunities to engage stakeholders.

3.1 Stakeholder engagement arrangements – evidence from the interviews

This subsection provides an analysis of the stakeholder engagement arrangements based on in-depth interviews. The DPSCs 2019-2023 requires the engagement of CSOs to ensure participation and inclusiveness, via the government existing TWG mechanism which continues to be useful to facilitate technical dialogue, coordinate and mobilize external assistances. However, the mechanism is not intended to substitute for or to duplicate the functions of ministries/agencies. Based on the TWG guidelines on the CSDGs, the multi-stakeholder engagement is arranged to collect the inputs. Each TWGs could be co-led by the government and DPs/CSOs. At the planning stages, the TWGs discuss the initial list of CSDG indicators provided by the MoP, among their members. Some NGOs join different TWGs simultaneously. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC), for example, is working with both MoWA and NGOF at the same time. On another hand, the private sector, which is traditionally engaged by the government through the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce, is now directly involved by the government line ministries as well. As the private sectors' objectives differ from those of the CSOs, different engagement strategies are required. While line ministries focus on the outcomes, DPs and CSO focus on activities or program outputs. *"We are working with other ministries to promote Gender, too. While we focus on outcome, DPs focus on activities. After collecting inputs from the stakeholders, we consult with Joint Monitoring Indicators (JMI) to make sure that indicators are interlinked."* Said a high-level government official from MoWA.

From the CSO side, the CCC/NGOF engaged Cambodia's CSOs in parallel with the government engagement with line ministries/agencies. The CCC/NGOF, however, have a different roadmap to do the localization from the MoP. The NGOF and CCC raised the awareness about CSDGs among their network members and eventually collected inputs from those CSOs. The CCC/NGOF compared the initial draft from the MoP with their own, then tried to convince the government by providing a number of evident-based studies to support their findings in the initial draft. Through CCC and NGOF, CSO members were encouraged to provide comments and suggestions, and to align their activities and work plans based on the SDGs. NGO Forum uses the final version of the CSDGs to inform its 392 members, so that they can prepare their activities and budgets in line with the CSDGs. CSOs provided technical inputs and financial resources based on their respective areas of work, and available financial resources. *"We encourage CSOs to implement their activities in line with the CSDGs. For example, CSARO has worked with waste. Their 5-year work plan has been based on CSDGs and their budget has been tailored to implementing the CSDGs. They report the budget through the MoE and it counted as national budget but implemented by the NGO. Some NGOs working in constructing rural roads with is resilient to disasters, they also report their committed budget through the TWGs or lead ministry they are working with."* Said the Executive Director of NGOF.

The MoP has assigned responsibilities to stakeholders based on their existing activities. Large NGOs or international NGOs have both human resource capacity and financial resources to implement the CSDGs. For example, Save the Children Cambodia has collaborated with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), Ministry of Interior (MoI) and a few other ministries to work in the areas of child protection, water and sanitation, and nutrition. However, as a local NGO, the voice may not be as strong as the international ones. GADC also claims that there is a shallow level of engagement although the organization's activities very much contribute to the SDG6, the SDG15 and the SDG16. *"I indirectly implement SDG5, SDG15 and SDG16. I promote people rights and political rights. We have always call for respect of human rights and our can be the inputs for SDG16 which is about peace. We promote Gender and same sex rights. We also promote rights on land ownership, and we train local activists on land rights. We do research and share our research finding with the government."* Said a representative from GADC.

Academia has a number of potentially important roles in multi-stakeholder partnerships including playing a trusted convening role early on and/or hosting the partnership or providing the secretariat; undertaking context analysis, providing key information and essential data to the partnership; undertaking monitoring and evaluation; drawing out learning and developing partnership case studies; empowering citizens who understand

SDGs; teaching to ensure skills for the new economy, etc; teaching (as well as research), including teacher training; and providing evidence-based policy advice for joint advocacy. MoP has always invited representatives from universities to participate at workshops and meetings. Respondents from universities think that their engagement is still low because they have not provided inputs due to lack of research on the SDGs. What they could do is raise the awareness of the CSDGs among the students.

Private sector which is represented by Cambodia Chamber of Commerce. According to the interview, the private sector engagement is quite low compared with CSOs. So far, only large companies working with CSR join. They are working in smart agriculture, green technology, etc. When asked whether they defined roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder, respondents think that, besides, working through TWGs, each of stakeholders has not been provided any roles and responsibilities. What they do is to provide inputs in the forms of comments and align their activities accordingly when the CSDGs are approved.

3.2 Challenges and opportunities – evidence from the survey

Respondents were asked to rate the statements from 1 (highly disagree) to 5 (highly agree) in Figure 3 below. There were a mixed of answers based on types of organizations. Figure 3 describes the results and qualitative explanation from the interviews, which reflect the challenges and opportunities to strengthen stakeholder engagement in the CSDG process. It should be noted that most respondents are largely selected from CSOs and some from the government and academia to get a different perspective. Hence the average ranking score is a weight average of the scores rated by the three types of stakeholders. For comparison purpose, the ratings by different types of stakeholders are also presented.

Generality of the CSDGs. Because the CSDGs broadly cover the three dimensions, economic, social and environmental, and the goals and indicators are interlinked, which requires stakeholders' capacity to assess the interlinkage, interaction and coherence, the answers from the respondents are mixed. However, the average ranking of this statement is 3.7, implying that the majority of respondents agree that the CSDG concept is too broad to understand.

National priorities and quantifiable targets. The ranking score for the statement "the CSDGs lack of nationally specific priorities and quantitative target" from CSO is around 3 more or less the same as the average rating, implying that CSOs and average respondents

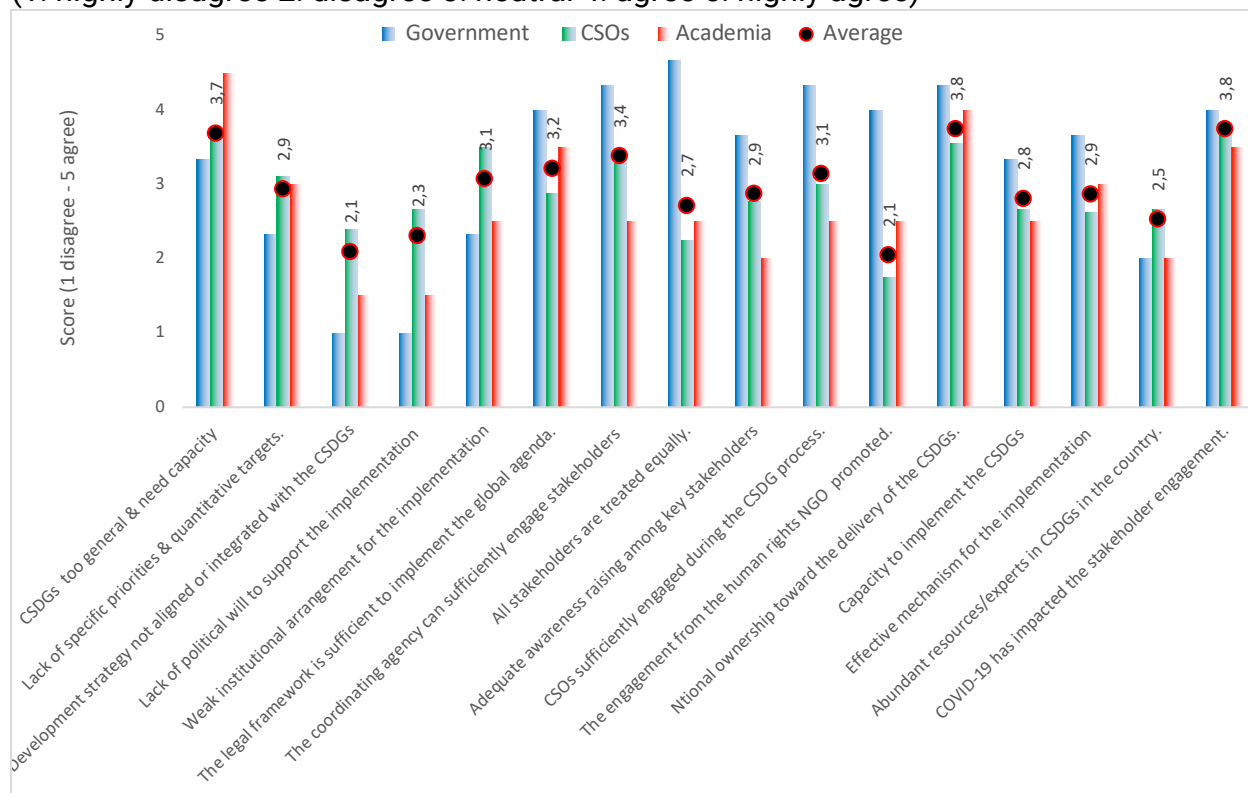
believe the CSDGs are developed based on the country's specific needs and quantifiable targets. This could be an opportunity for Cambodia to implement the CSDGs.

The alignment of the CSDGs with the national policies and strategies. The CSO and average rating on “development strategy not aligned or integrated with the CSDGs” is less than 3, suggesting that most respondents think the opposite is true. That means the CSDGs are aligned with country's development strategies and policies such as the NSDPs and others sectoral plans. Nonetheless, it is very important to make sure that all activities and plans are aligned at the beginning to ensure effective implementation of the goals. *“In order to achieve the CSDGs by 2030, the NSDPs have to be rolled 3 times and the strategies must be aligned with the CSDGs,” said the executive director of the NGOF.*

Political will to implement the CSDGs. Both CSO's ranking and the average ranking on “lack of political will to support the implementation of CSDGs” is lower than 3 suggesting that most respondents disagree with that statement. On the contrary, they believe that there is a strong political will or commitment to implement the CSDGs as evidenced by the attendance of the Cambodia's Prime Minister at the UN General Assembly in New York in 2015 and the government participation in the VNR process. However, a representative from a human rights organization thinks that Cambodia does not have political will to implement the goals as it does not include rights group as a stakeholder.

Figure 3: Ranking of key statements

(1: highly disagree 2: disagree 3: neutral 4: agree 5: highly agree)



Institutional arrangement for the CSDGs. The institutional arrangement for the CSDG is viewed to be neutral on average but is somewhat weak by CSO group, although, they can be engaged through TWG or via CSO representative. This can be attributed to the fact that even though most of the stakeholders have been engaged, but their contribution is minimal especially those from the private sector and academia. Moreover, the human rights organizations are not able to engage since indicators related to rights are not included in the CSDG Framework. While some CSOs could send staff to attend meetings or workshops organized by CCC/NGOF to provide their view, others might not due to financial constraints and this issue can even be more exacerbated after COVID-19 outbreak. *“We have mostly been involved in the planning stage. CCC and NGO Forum invited us to the workshops to discuss and collect inputs. The process has been very open to everyone to join. However, some NGOs are very small, and in order to join they need fund for travel and accommodation, so it could be a challenge for them. We have enough fund to send a couple of our staff to attend all events. Talking about source of fund, before 2020, we had various sources of funding, channeled directly to our bank account or through INGOs in Cambodia. From 2020, funding sees a significant drop. We*

only have two sources and the amount of funding promised is very small,” said a representative from ICSO.

Legal framework for the CSDGs. In 2014, the RGC issued a sub-decree on establishing technical working groups for CSDGs, and the coordination mechanism is under the MoP. Based on the guidelines, the MoP thinks that it is very effective because it is based on aid effectiveness guidelines that requires participation from CSOs. However, a few CSOs think that there is a lack of clear legal framework to ensure participation from various stakeholders. One key issue raised by CSO is that the working time and style of the CSOs and the government is different. For example, the government ministries do not extend deadlines for receiving feedbacks if they are fall on public holidays or weekend, but the CSOs do. This makes communication less effective, and some CSOs say that the government does not allow enough time for them to prepare.

Power of the lead/coordinating Ministry. Despite ranking relatively low on legal framework many respondents agree that “the coordinating agency can sufficiently engagement stakeholders”. Both CSO and average rating is around 3.4, suggesting the MoP has sufficient authority to engage relevant stakeholders on CSDG implementation. Qualitative evidence from the interview also reinforces this argument. The MoWA officials expressed their satisfaction with the MoP for its being active and helpful. NGOs working with the government are also satisfied since the MoP allocated the space for NGOs, INGOs and the CSOs to participate and give inputs during the planning process. According to MoP, when there was disagreement on indicators and stuffs between CSOs and line ministries or CSO representatives, MoP invited those stakeholders to discuss and negotiate until the agreement is reached.

Equal treatment of the stakeholders. The rating on the statement that all stakeholders are treated equally is lower than 3, suggesting a disagreement on that by the majority. Larger and more resourceful CSOs are reported to be more influential in both CSDG preparation and implementation process. However, at the government side, the coordinating ministry has a mechanism to ensure that no line ministries dominate others during the CSDG process. From the CSO perspective, though, those CSOs who have money have more opinions accepted while smaller CSOs’ involvement is just complementary. The NGO Forum and CCC are created as the main channels through which CSO inputs are collected because it is widely believed that CSOs will not speak frankly and freely with the presence of the government officials. Despite the availability of this mechanisms, ICSOs, a grassroots organization working with ethnicity rights, complained that only large NGOs and INGOs are invited to participate in CSDG process, while small NGOs participation is still limited. GADC, which is another CSO, also insisted

that the UN agencies are influential with regards to Cambodia's CSDG process. GADC raised an example that GADC could not access directly to the UN at the regional office if it does not go through the UN Women. For those who do not have network with UN, they do not have chance to attend. GADC also noted that female participants are limited (gender inclusiveness).

Adequate awareness raising on the CSDGs. This statement received rating around 3 by both CSO and all stakeholders in the sample signifying that stakeholder holders especially CSOs are more or less neutral. The government side, however, ranked this statement around 4 on average emphasizing their perception on the adequacy of awareness raising to concerned stakeholders both at the national and subnational levels through the following means. First, the MoP conducted workshops with line ministries and concerned stakeholders to raise awareness at national level. To reach to the sub-national level, MoP conducted workshop with sub-national level administrators and also collaborated with the Council of Ministers to raise the awareness of the CSDGs with CSO across the country. MoP also worked with the CCC to reach to the private sector. In addition to MoP, each of the line ministries also work to promote the awareness of the CSDGs to their stakeholders and other departments working under the ministries. *"After the CSDGs were out, we started to raise the awareness at the sub-national level. We also conduct annual conference to raise the awareness. In addition, we use allocated PB as one of the awareness raising activities through training and to link it to implementation. MoWA is different from other ministries. We take the opportunity to get CSOs, sub-national levels to help raise the awareness,"* said a high-level official from MoWA.

Besides MoP and line ministries, large NGO networks in Cambodia, namely the NGO Forum and CCC also reported to have promoted the CSDGs to their network CSOs, by inviting them to the workshops and providing them with relevant documents about the CSDGs as well as the NSDP, one of the key objectives of doing so is to encourage them to align their activities and action plans with the CSDGs and the NSDP. In addition, NGOF and CCC created telegram group and social media to share knowledge on CSDGs. Once in a while, workshops were organized to update the progress of CSDGs. The information flow is mainly through telegram/social media effectively. *"I could see that it is effective to the current context. CCC and NGO Forum are active and they always share us documents related to the CSDGs. Sometimes, they send us questionnaires to fill in. I think the current mechanism is enough. All of our activities must be aligned with the national strategic plan. For example, we are aligned with the Ministry or Rural development's Policy on Indigenous People,"* said a representative from ICSO.

Inclusiveness of CSOs in CSDG process. The results from the interviews show the CSO and average rating on this statement is around 3, which is somewhat neutral. From the government point of view, however, the CSDG process is inclusive, indicating that during her visit to Cambodia, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia Rhona Smith was surprisingly pleased when she received information on CSDG indicators and on how human rights has been promoted in Cambodia. However, MoP explained that though CSOs are not involved directly they could engage via TWG mechanism. This is also confirmed by MoWA which added that CSOs can involve in the process via their network, namely, CCC and NGOF, which always calls CSOs to meet and discuss. The government is later invited by CCC and NGOF to hear the feedbacks received from their CSO network. Nevertheless, one NGO working with disabilities, complained that it has never been invited to attend any workshops or meetings by CSO network either, arguing that it should be invited due to its significance working with the government and providing a wide range of education services to students with hearing disability and blind students. Another CSO namely CCHR also claimed that it has not been engaged because the government excluded indicators relevant to human rights of the goals 16. CSOs express their need to participate directly in the process, for example, when the government needs to prepare administrative law such as annual budget, GADC provides inputs through CCC or NGO Forum.

Stakeholders are engaged more on the prioritization and selection of the CSDG targets and indicators and implementation. They are engaged less in the monitoring and VNRs. *“There is no M&E at sub-national level. We only report to the national level only. I have been involved in the planning process, but less in the monitoring and evaluation. I have not been involved in VNRs. Every year, for monitoring and evaluation, our organization provide a progress report on our areas of work. There is no regular meeting, only when they need report,”* said an official from Battambang Provincial Administration.

Engagement with human rights organization. There is a mixed view on the statement that “the engagement from the human rights NGO is promoted” resulting in a score which suggests a disagreement. On one hand, the ranking given by government is as high as 4 because they consider that the existing mechanisms and the compliment from Ms Ronald Smith during her visit to Cambodia are good indicators proving that. On the other hands, CSOs argued that since the government does not prioritize human rights targets and indicators, the engagement from human right organization such as the CCHR is not included. From the interviews, some CSOs working on rights expressed their need to be more engaged by the line ministries they work with.

National ownership toward CSDGs. This statement received ranking score more than 3 from both CSOs and all the stakeholders. This implies an agreement on a national ownership toward the delivery of CSDGs. From the government side, the coordinating ministry and a line ministry both confirmed the national ownership because the localization of SDG work was conducted by the government although with technical support from DPs. On another hand, CSO and NGOF representatives feel strong ownership, reasoning that the inputs collected from their network, which was channeled through the technical working groups, was largely accepted by the government. However, there are some inequalities among CSOs too. One respondent indicated that for international NGOs what they suggested was taken into consideration by the government and this is because those NGOs have resources to implement the proposed projects.

Capacity for implementing the CSDGs. Regarding the capacity to provide inputs to the CSDG process, there are mixed responses. MoP claims that it has enough capacity to deal with CSDGs in terms from planning to monitoring and evaluation and VNRs. At the beginning, the ministry has very limited capacity, but due to support from UNDP, now MoP is capable enough to perform coordinating, monitoring and evaluation and other CSDG process. Capacity to handle with the CSDGs from various stakeholders are varied, but they have made significant progress. At the beginning, UNDP handled everything and some of line ministries even complained they did not have enough capacity to implement according to UNDP's targets. At the sub-national level, they claim that they are capable enough to implement as they have different stakeholders from different areas of work, but if looked closely the story tells different things as some of the stakeholders are unable to fully participate in the process due to their time constraints and financial support. They have enough people to work, but there is also a lack of incentive for them to take part. International NGOs' voices seem to be strong as they have both capacity and financial resources for the implementation. For small local NGOs, they can only comment on the indicators relevant to their areas of work they have been working on and the comments are provided through TWGs. Only high-level staff at GADC seem to understand the CSDGs, the rest are not knowledgeable and thus the inputs provided may not respond to the needs of beneficiaries. Sub-national level is still limited in terms of CSDG knowledge.

Effectiveness of coordinating mechanism. On this statement, stakeholder views seem to be quite divided. Government representatives believed that the current engagement mechanism is effective, adding that the multi-stakeholder engagement will allow for check-and-balance. *"We are continuing to work with CSOs at the sub-national levels. CSOs working with at grassroot levels have potentials. We are pushing it forward and we welcome CSOs from all walks, regardless of their political tendency. We listen to them all, but sometimes, CSOs themselves feel uncomfortable with us,"* said a high-level official

from MoWA. However, from CSOs' views, stakeholder engagement practice is rather dominated by large and resourceful organization. The work arrangement is effective depending on the size of grants. Representative from GADC thinks that the engagement is not active enough due to a lack of involvement from relevant stakeholders. The reasons for the CSO to view that the mechanism is not adequate because they think that the TWGs are sometime passive. They do not call for regular meetings. *"We discussed about GMAP and there is an absence of involvement from other ministries. They only come down to us when they need our report," said a representative from GADC.*

Available CSDG experts. In general, all stakeholders agree that there is a lack of CSDG experts in Cambodia, reflected by low ranking on the statement. They asserted that some goals really need experts to work on and so far, those experts could only be mobilized from international sources. There are needs to enhance and expand the roles of the academia by creating enabling environment for researchers to conduct scientific research which could be used as inputs for CSDGs process.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Stakeholder Engagement. COVID-19 has severely disrupted the workflows. Respondents agree that COVID-19 has impacted their work. Working with grassroot levels, it is difficult as people out there do not know how to use online applications for communication, plus the challenge of unreliable internet. People working in the community have to find places such as cafés, where they can get access to the internet. Doing so, they need to spend money on coffee. *"It is rather quantitative rather than qualitative; just for counts; we are yet well-prepared qualitative engagement via online; some NGOs are worried about confidentiality during online meeting; the hecticness of online meeting make people less interested and less engaged; there is a lack of supportive system such as internet; budget allocation should be made for participants such as internet access and electricity," said a representative from GADC.*

3.3 Discussion of Lesson Learned on Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

Leaving no one behind (LNOB) is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. The Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and

operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyze inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress and often result in groups of people being left behind. Based on LNOB framework, deprivation, geography, vulnerability to shocks, governance and socio-economic status are the core considerations to the framework. Human rights principles are universality and inalienability; indivisibility; interdependence and inter-relatedness; non-discrimination and equality; participation and inclusion; accountability and the rule of law. Cambodia has progressed with the SDGs process by creating TWGs to include stakeholders, and developing guidelines to promote stakeholder participation. Despite the progress, key informant interviews and survey responses reflect a mixed of challenges and lessons learned.

a) Localization

Despite the government belief that the current stakeholder engagement mechanism particularly the TWGs is effective, more needs to be done from the viewpoints of CSOs. CCC and NGOOF perceived that TWGs could have been more effective if they had regular meetings. In addition, clear responsibilities are vital to stakeholder engagement. Having TWGs to work on specific CSDGs and working arrangement within and across sectors is a good practice. However, at the sub-national level, there is no specific group working for the CSDGs. The creation of the taskforce is rather ad hoc. It means there are roles and responsibilities of the taskforce as a whole. There are no roles and responsibilities stated for each member of the taskforce. This could be a weakness about this arrangement. At the national level, the levels of stakeholder engagement are different among TWGs, depending on the co-leads and depending on the guidelines from the CDC. If the co-leads are active, the TWGs are active. One of the TWGs claims that clear roles and responsibilities have been provided given their respective areas that we have worked on in Cambodia. At sub-national level, there is a decision issued by the Provincial Administration to create the taskforce for localizing CSDGs, for example Battambang. The decision is based on guidelines that consists of 8 points; one of which is the involvement of stakeholders such as the CSOs in the process. However, having only the decision to create the taskforce is not adequate to ensure effective engagement from each stakeholder. *“In order to localize the CSDGs, there is a decision to create a taskforce, which requires participants from provincial departments, communes, CSOs and Battambang University. However, the establishment of the taskforce is ad hoc approach. There are responsibilities for taskforce as a whole, and no responsibilities for each member,”* said an official from Battambang Provincial Administration.

b) Coordination

The government has provided spaces for CSOs to engage in the CSDGs process through two CSO network organization, namely the CCC and the NGOF, as the CSOs representatives due to the nature of their work and large membership. Comments are collected from the CSOs based on the areas of work. This could be a good resource mobilization strategy as CCC and the NGOF have encouraged their network CSOs members both at national level and sub-national level to design activities and action plan to match their respective CSDGs. This mechanism could be used to coordinate difference perspectives between CSOs and the government. One concern regarding this mechanism, however, is the legitimacy and recognition of the role these major NGO umbrellas have towards other non-member CSOs or organisations and those who have different working approaches in engaging with the government. A focal point from each CSO member is nominated, and the TWGs are usually divided into 3 or 4 sub-groups. In practices, CCC and the NGOF have provided support to CSO members when they need any clarification and explanation. They always refer to the guideline for TWGs. The CCC and NGOF encourage their CSO members to have their achievements reported at the national level. CSOs are seen to be important to coordinate with political parties as MoWA notes that, working with political parties, CSOs have played a very important roles to add value to the work. *“CCC could plays a role as a coordinator between CSOs and the government. When we know that it would not be possible to openly discuss issues when both sides are present. We sometimes organize separate meetings with our CSO members for inputs and then another separate meeting with the government.” Said a representative of CCC.*

An open mind is required to ensure the engagement and benefits. Both MoP and MoWA think that the engagement with CSOs would ensure no complaints and benefits. For example, working with political parties, CSOs have played a very important roles to add value to the work. NGOF has invited MoWA to speak to their network. Regarding VNRs, CSOs have also been engaged. GADC also invited MoWA to speak at the workshop. *“Working on gender we allow all stakeholders from all walks and perspectives to participate. We listen to everyone regardless of their political tendency. If we do not listen to them, we do not know what they want. We try to accommodate all stakeholders’ comments to the best of our capacity,” said a high-level government official from MoWA.*

CSOs also view that the arrangement of stakeholder engagement is very effective at the national levels, but they are not sure about the sub-national level. They think it is not adequate for the sub-national level because officials from the sub-national level just came to join the workshop and then leave. There is not much happening there.

c) Inclusiveness

First, there is a need to engage human rights organizations in addition to those working with ethnic rights and women rights. It would expand opportunity to advance CSDGs that will lead to improvement of the CSDG 16 and harmonization between rights organizations and the government. As discussed earlier, even though the government is trying to engage all stakeholders in the process, several of them have not been included due to lack of broad consultation which can enable all stakeholders to participate. MoWA officials indicated that the ministry made an effort to promote women's rights by involving actors working in the areas, without discriminating, but human rights organizations were not included either, because human rights targets and indicators are absent from the CSDG 16. Similarly, due to limited resources, the localization process has taken primarily at the national level. Localization of the CSDGs at the sub-national levels have not taken place, except a pilot project to localize the CSDG11 supported by UNESCAP at Battambang Province. Sub-national levels have not been engaged during the CSDGs, except when they are requested to provide report that can be used, for example, for developing the VNRs. *"We have worked on CSDGs related to human rights. We promote people's rights in Cambodia. We monitor and report to the UN about human rights situation in Cambodia, but regarding the engagement in the process we are not included. There are no indicators on human rights in the CSDG 16," said a representative from CCHR.*

Second, giving more space to directly engage smaller CSOs working at sub-national levels is crucial as they are working to provide services directly to the people in the community. Most CSOs respondents agreed that large international NGOs have more power in the engagement process considering their capacity and financial resources, while small CSOs have been active at the sub-national levels and have aligned their activities and strategic plans to achieve certain CSDGs. *"Some NGOs such as GADC are treated better as we are given more privilege due to expertise, funding status, but other NGOs who have less funding are not invited," said a representative from GADC.*

Third, a closer engagement with academia and think-tanks is also important. As these institutions can provide human resource, encouraging more research on CSDGs at universities and research centers as well as embedding CSDGs in the university curriculum would help accelerate the CSDG implementation process. Based on interviews, with faculty members from the Royal University of Phnom Penh and the National University of Management, the current engagements are more like participating in the consultation workshops and providing comments. However, the level of engagement is low in terms of providing technical inputs. There is no curriculum taught university

students about the CSDGs. *“Engagement with universities should be strengthened to promote scientific evidence-based and scientific research on the CSDGs and awareness raising on the CSDGs such embedding the CSDGs in the curriculum,” said a university lecturer from NUM.*

d) Work arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic

Distance working emerges as the new working modality during the COVID-19 outbreak. Distance working relies on several online meeting tools such as Zoom or google meet complimented by other communication tools such as email and Telegram. Respondents reported to have started using or learning how to use those tools since the first cases of COVID-19. *“At the beginning, working online was very difficult, but we must learn to live with it. We are learning to use it. The UNDP and UNFPA a set of equipment for conducting online communications such as for meeting and workshop. It takes time to learn, and we need license to operate in a large-scale meeting,” said a high-level official from MoP.*

The effectiveness of this modality, however, depends on participant capability, especially IT skill, and their work nature. There is a concern among respondents about the quality of online working as they perceived that this modality would be effective only among a small and IT literate group. Respondents identified other challenges resulting from distance working, in general and online meetings in particular. Those challenges include the quality of work and unreliable internet connection, lack of equipment, and limited knowledge to use online applications. Despite of those challenges and even though the quality is said not to be as effective as face-to-face arrangement, online platform can also bring many advantages, one of which is cost saving. *“We can widely involve more people during the meeting because we do not require travels. Trips cost a lot of time and financial resource, so I think in the future online platform would be even effective that face to face,” said a representative from CSOs.*

There are several things that UN and the government can collaborate to address issues pertaining to distance working. There should be budget allocation for people who regularly attend the workshops or meetings as they will use it to spend on internet connection. Stakeholders whose roles are similar could be grouped together when there is any webinar or teleconference. In addition to online modes, Telegram groups for those stakeholders should be created so that every stakeholder can share their opinion in the platform. There is a need for capacity building for working online to those who do not have resources and low education and have difficulty to adapt to the technology. This can also be supplemented by facilitation mechanism to help the application of ICT at the community levels.

4. Conclusion

Based on the desk review and interview, stakeholders were engaged in the CSDG process mainly via the existing TWG mechanism of the government, which is claimed to have been effective for the government to collect inputs from relevant actors with regards to the selection of the CSDG indicators and the production of VNR. The key stakeholders involving in CSDG process include the government, UNCT, CSOs, private and academia at different layers. MoP is mandated to coordinate at the national levels with lines ministries, CSOs, the private sector and academia. At the ministerial levels, line ministries also coordinated and collected inputs vertically within the ministries and horizontally with other lines ministries, with development partners and CSOs as well as the private sector. Representing CSOs in Cambodia, NGOF and CCC collected inputs from their CSO networks. The Chamber of Commerce of Cambodia coordinates the private sector via their members. The academia has been invited to join workshops related to planning, monitoring and evaluation as well as VNR. MoP, line ministries and CSOs have been working to promote the awareness of the CSDGs.

There are still gaps and challenges to implement the Human-Right-Based Approach (HRBA) and Leaving No One Behind approach (LNOB). First, the gaps are found to be related to the depth and width of the engagement, due to a lack of broad consultation to involve all stakeholders due to the absence of human rights targets and indicators in the framework and limited resources to undertake the localization process at the sub-national level. Second, unequal treatment issue was mentioned by small CSOs that are active at the sub-national levels and have aligned their activities and strategic plans to achieve certain CSDGs, that big resourceful NGOs tend to be relatively more influential. Third, COVID-19 has disrupted the stakeholder engagement, leaving online working as the only alternative to the conventional way of working. The effectiveness of working online, however, uneven across types of positions and work.

5. Recommendations

Inclusiveness

- Although Cambodia has a framework to engage stakeholders, especially the CSOs, challenges remain. In order to address the challenges of stakeholder engagement, the UN and the government of Cambodia should consider the following recommendations.
- The UNCT should broaden its engagement with CSOs, especially human rights organizations as well as community-based organisations to ensure more inclusivity in the design, implementation and evaluation of UNSDCF processes, and in line with multi-stakeholder partnership principles. By doing so, it would allow for an opportunity to advance SDGs through multi-stakeholder engagement and participation. This can be strengthened by developing a dedicated multi-stakeholder database, including sectoral/thematic line ministries and relevant CSOs.
- The UNCT should consider advocating with the Government to open more space for CSOs' engagement at both national level and sub-national level through its partnership forums. This way it will help CSOs working at sub-national level to work and provide services better and directly to the people in the communities. Although small CSOs have fewer financial resources, their personnel who are working with people are experienced. They can align their activities and strategic plans to fit CSDGs. Promoting awareness to lower sub-national levels, district and commune levels, would accelerate the implementation of CSDGs.
- The Government should encourage more research on CSDGs at universities and research centers to fully engage with the CSDG process by including the faculty members or researchers in TWGs. At the same time, the UNCT could initiate collaborative projects with universities to conduct evidence-based and scientific research related to CSDGs. There is a good example from Battambang University which is one of the TWG members in SDG localization project in Battambang. This pilot project has been supported by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). In addition, embedding CSDGs in the university curriculum would increase the awareness of the CSDGs.

Overcome COVID-19 challenges

- To address the challenge of working arrangement during COVID-19, there are several recommendations. There is a need for capacity building for working online. The UN and the government should work harder to improve the capacity of officials to work online. For people who do not have resources and low education, they might find it difficult to adapt to the technology.
- The UNCT should provide facilitation and support for continuation of the Government-CSOs partnership forums, which were postponed since late 2020 due to COVID-19, by encouraging the Government to use online platforms for that purpose. If needed, the UNCT could consider providing technical advice and capacity building on conducting online discussions to the Government with appropriate platforms through consultation with the CSOs.
- Stakeholders should be encouraged to be well-prepared to ensure quality engagement online. However, some NGOs are worried about confidentiality during online meetings because the Government has already introduced the internet gateway sub-decree, which is perceived by the NGOs as a legal means used to harm the online contents. In addition, there has been initiative by the Government to draft a law on cybercrimes which could also potentially affect freedom online. Therefore, the UNCT should help the CSOs to advocate with the Government to ensure that these legal provisions are made in line with Cambodia's human rights obligations and avoid restricting the fundamental freedoms, including freedom online.

Accelerating CSDG implementation

- There is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic has profound impact on every aspect of life including CSDG implementation. Resources have been diverted to fight the pandemic leaving fewer resources for other purposes. In this sense, several issues could be addressed to accelerate CSDG implementation.
- At the national level, CSDG indicators should be reviewed and reprioritized. All stakeholders should have a clear idea what their roles are and which CSDG(s) their institutions need to achieve. Specific CSDGs should become the ultimate objective for each institution to achieve. Not every stakeholder needs to achieve all CSDGs. Activities and strategic plans should be designed with flexibility for the implementation. Cooperation and collaboration to work in specific areas would help accelerate the implementation of the CSDGs. There is a need to strengthening the coordination platform.

- More efforts need to be made with regards to CSDG awareness raising at the subnational level especially at the district and commune levels. This will help subnational planners better align their development plans (5-year development plan and 3-year rolling plan) to the CSDG framework. This would accelerate the CSDG implementation. It is worth noting that, the implementation of both the 3-year rolling plan and the 5-year development plan is also supported by Development Partners and NGOs. It is also important that donors continue to commit financial support to CSOs that work at the grassroots level which saw a drop in funding due to COVID-19.
- Finally, undertaking a second Voluntary National Review provides a great opportunity to strengthen stakeholder engagement and build further understanding of the SDGs. Integrating stakeholder engagement in all stages of the VNR process is vital to ensure that the VNR is based on inputs from all parts of society and government.

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Annex 1: Stakeholder Selection for Interviews

Key informants and Institutions	Description of Institution
A. Government	
1. H.E. THENG Panhathun Director General (General Directorate of Planning, Ministry of Planning)	The General Directorate of Planning is mandated with the development of national development policies. The most notable one is the National Strategic Development Plans (NSDP), the five-year roadmap for the implementation of the Rectangular Strategies of the Royal Government of Cambodia. The latest NSDP integrates SDGs in the implementation. Related to SDGs, the general department has recently issued Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals Framework and Voluntary National Reviews.
2. Mr. LIM Y Meng Director of Inter-sectorial (Battambang Province)	Battambang Province a province in Cambodia, being implemented the New Urban Agenda and SDG11 localization. The province administration has actively engaged in the SDG process.
3. H.E. THE Chhunhak Director General (Ministry of Women’s Affairs)	Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) coordinates the work related to gender equality and women’s rights by way of working across the line ministries. H.E. Chunthak has helped the Ministry in this portfolio. MoWA also reports on Cambodia’s progress regarding situation of women rights and gender equality (including CSDG5) and implements recommendations of CEDAW as well as of the Universal Periodic Review undertaken by the UN Human Rights Council.
B. Civil Society	
1. Dr. TEK Vannara Executive Director (NGO Forum on Cambodia)	NGO Forum (NGOF) on Cambodia works to improve life for poor and vulnerable people in Cambodia. It is a membership Organization that builds NGO cooperation and capacity, supporting NGO networks and other civil society organizations to engage in policy dialogue, debate and advocacy. NGO Forum on Cambodia has been involving with the government in policy development consultation.
2. Ms. CHEU Ponleu Coordinator of Milling and Export (Cambodia Agricultural Value Chain Program (CAVAC))	CAVAC’s goal is to increase productivity and incomes for smallholder farmers in Cambodia. Rather than work directly with farmers, most of our activities are delivered in partnership with their suppliers and regulators, the government and the private sector, using a market systems approach to spread knowledge about new agricultural techniques.

3. Mr. BUN Sambath, Secretary General (Young Entrepreneur Association)	Young Entrepreneur Association was established as a volunteer-driven non-profit organization with the ambition to empower young entrepreneurs and enhance youth entrepreneurship. It attempts to contribute to productive employment and sustainable development of Cambodia's future economy.
4. Mr. VONG Makara Manager of Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (Save the Children)	Save the Children is the world's largest independent child rights organisation, working in more than 120 countries, and working in Cambodia since 1970. The programmatic work focuses on the areas of early childhood care and development, basic inclusive education, child protection, health and nutrition, child poverty, and disaster risk reduction.
5. Mr. HANG Kimchhorn National Coordinator (Krousa Thmei)	Krousar Thmey offers a portfolio of interconnected programs and projects supporting over 2,500 children in their development. The Foundation provides them with education, personal support and professional coaching, adapted to their needs, with respect to their traditions and beliefs.
6. Ms. CHAK Sopheap Executive Director (Cambodian Center for Human Rights)	Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) works to promote and protect human rights and freedoms, including SGD 16, through evidence-based advocacy and community support.
7. Ms. ROS Sopheap Executive Director (Gender and Development of Cambodia)	Gender and Development of Cambodia (GADC) works to promote and protect women rights and gender equality through capacity building, networking advocacy on social norms and legal framework and policies.
8. Mr. SAO Vansey Executive Director (Indigenous Community Support Organisation)	Indigenous Community Support Organisation (ICSO) works to strengthen and ensure that indigenous peoples are able to access their basic services and rights for improving their living condition.
9. Ms. SIN Putheavy Executive Director (Cooperation Committee for Cambodia)	The Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) is a leading membership organization with nearly 170 Local and International NGOs in Cambodia. CCC has facilitated Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to collectively, responsibly and accountably work together for good governance, enabling environment and sustainability of CSOs in Cambodia.
C. Academia & Education	
1. Mr. KIM Veara Lecturer	The National University of Management (NUM) is a leading business school in Cambodia, providing training programmes to all people in the areas of management, economics, commerce,

(National University of Management)	IT, business law, tourism, and foreign languages, accompanied by research and development in response to the needs of the job market. NUM has been invited to participate in CSDGs formulation process led by the Ministry of Planning.
2. Dr. VONG Rylida Research Coordinator (Techo Startup Center-Royal University of Phnom Penh)	Techo Startup Center shapes knowledge in the startup world through a specialized training program relating to entrepreneurship, business development, pitching for funding, and marketing strategy. Together with mentorship, startup team shall have a concrete business model at the end of the program. RUPP has been invited to participate in CSDGs formulation process led by the Ministry of Planning.

Annex 2: Questionnaire

Part 1 – Institutional Setup for Stakeholder Participation

This section seeks to understand the institutional setup for stakeholder engagement by identifying lead agency or coordinating agency, types of stakeholders, stakeholder engagement mechanism, level of engagement, defined roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder and legal/policy framework or mechanism to ensure an effective engagement. This section starts with following questions:

1. Who leads/coordinates the process of CSDGs in Cambodia?
2. Which stakeholders have been engaged in the CSDG process?
3. How have you been involved in the CSDG process including planning, implementing and monitoring and evaluation?
4. Are there any clear roles and responsibilities for each of the stakeholders? If so, what are your roles and responsibilities?
5. Is there any legal/policy framework to ensure an effective engagement? Please explain.
6. In the current context, do you think there is an adequate mechanism for meaningful and effective civic engagement? Why?

Part 2 – Stakeholder Engagement Arrangements

Stakeholder engagement arrangements are crucial to ensure inclusiveness and effectiveness of the CSDG process. It starts with the awareness raising on the CSDGs among key stakeholders, resource and inputs provided by each stakeholder, stakeholders' interest, level of engagement from each stakeholder, capacity of the stakeholders, and voices of the stakeholders.

7. How has the awareness raising about the CSDGs been conducted among key stakeholders?
8. What types of inputs or resources that you have contributed to the CSDG implementation?
9. Please rate the importance your perceived on your engagement at during the national process from 1-5 (1:not importance 5:very important)
 - Prioritization and selection of CSDG target and indicators
 - CSDG implementation
 - Monitoring and evaluation
 - Voluntary National Review
 - Other – please specify
10. Can you identify the specific areas/goals/indicators that you have participated and engaged in the CSDG process?
11. Please rate the level of engagement you perceive during the CSDG process such as planning, monitoring and evaluation and reporting (VNRs) from 1-5 (1:no engagement 5:very engaged). Please explain.
12. Please rate how well have your inputs or opinions been received, acknowledged or considered the stakeholder consultation and engagement from 1-5 (1: not acknowledged 5:very acknowledged). Please explain in detail.

13. Please rate how much you are satisfied with the stakeholder engagement process from 1-5 (1:not satisfied 5:very satisfied). Please explain in detail.
14. Please rate how inclusive is the stakeholder engagement in the CSDG process in Cambodia from 1-5 (1:not inclusive 5:very inclusive). Please explain in detail.
15. Is/are there any dominant stakeholder(s) in the CSDG process? What makes you think so?
16. Please rate your/your organization have enough capacity to provide inputs in the CSDG process from 1-5 (1:no capacity 5:highly capable). Please explain in detail.
17. What are available engagement/practice arrangements do you know of? And what do you think which arrangement would work best to strengthen the stakeholder engagement in the CSDG process?

Part 3 – Challenges and Opportunities for Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging multi-stakeholders is a big challenge for developing countries due to limited capacity, institutional arrangements, and consultation/engagement arrangements. Amid the challenges, there are also opportunities that developing countries could take to strengthen the multi-stakeholder engagement in the CSDG process. Please rate from 1-5 to what extent do you agree with the following statement (1 not agree 5 agree):

Question	Score
18. The CSDGs are too general, and each of the goals/targets are interlinked, which requires stakeholders' capacity to assess the interlinkage, interaction, and coherence.	
19. There is a lack of nationally specific priorities and quantitative targets. The decision to treat all 17 CSDGs equally undermines the effectiveness of the implementation.	
20. The development strategy and policy are not aligned or integrated with the CSDGs, which makes it difficult to implement.	
21. There is a lack of political will to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.	
22. There is a weak institutional arrangement for the implementation of the CSDGs.	
23. The legal framework is sufficient to implement the global agenda.	
24. The coordinating agency is powerful enough to engage stakeholders during the CSDGs process including prioritization and selection of the goals/targets/indicators, VNRs and other important events.	
25. All stakeholders are treated equally.	
26. There is an adequate awareness raising among key stakeholders of the CSDGs.	

27. The civil society has been sufficiently engaged during the CSDG process.	
28. The engagement from the human rights organization has been promoted.	
29. Cambodia has a national ownership toward the delivery of the CSDGs.	
30. Cambodia has a capacity to implement the CSDGs both in terms of human resource and financial resources.	
31. The establishment of implementation mechanism for the implementation is effective.	
32. There are abundant resources/experts in CSDGs in the country.	
33. COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted the stakeholder engagement.	

Part 4 – Addressing Challenges of Stakeholders Engagement During COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 poses a challenge in all fronts. Consultation/stakeholder engagement is even more difficult to achieve considering the limitation from the pandemic. This section explores an effective approach to stakeholder engagement through the following discussion questions:

34. How have you been engaged during the COVID-19?
35. Do you find it effective to be working through online mode such as teleconferencing, virtual meetings, and webinars?
36. Please rate following statements from 1-5 (1: not agree 5: agree):
 - Using online platform to engage stakeholders in the CSDGs process is effective.
 - I have enough capacity to use ICT during stakeholder engagement.
37. What work arrangements could be done to address the challenges of stakeholder engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic?
38. How to accelerate the CSDG implementation? Are there any innovative ideas to accelerate the results to achieve CCSDGs by 2030?
39. Are there any other comments or suggestions?



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