

Center for Economic and Social Rights

FACT SHEET NO. 7

CAMBODIA



In light of Cambodia's appearance before both the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council in December 2009 and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in May 2009, this fact sheet looks at the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living in Cambodia. It focuses on the rights to health, food, education, housing and water and possible policy failures in these areas. Its aim is to graphically illustrate background information to help assess compliance of the state of Cambodia with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international standards it has ratified.

Since the end of internal armed conflict in the 1990s, Cambodia has made steady social progress, including reducing child mortality and increasing the number of children enrolled in school. Serious concerns remain, however, given that the majority of Cambodians still live in grinding poverty and the gaps both between rich and poor and between urban and rural areas are wide. Eighty-five percent of Cambodia's population lives in rural areas and is dependent on agriculture (Poverty Profile 2006), but the vast majority of rural dwellers do not own the land they cultivate and are vulnerable to food insecurity. Analysis of rising levels of inequality shows that the richest 20 percent of the population now controls half the country's income (World Bank 2008), while the poorest 20 percent's share has declined to under seven percent.

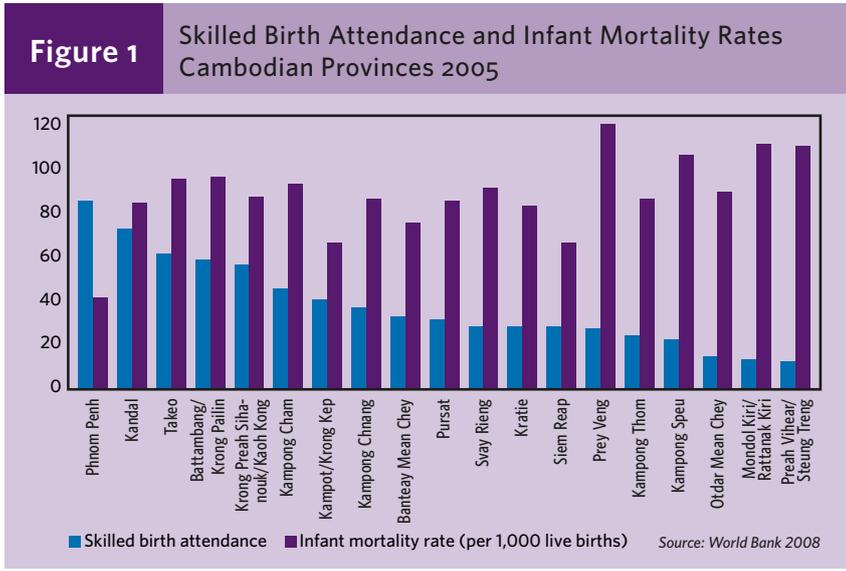
Data analyzed in this factsheet suggest that Cambodia's efforts to address these patterns of deprivation and inequality have been inadequate. Cambodia's GDP per capita continues to rise steadily which suggests that more resources are now available for addressing economic and social rights. However, government expenditure on health and education is comparatively very low, as are direct tax revenues, as a proportion of its GDP. These raise questions about whether the government is dedicating the maximum available resources to realizing economic, social and cultural rights. In education, progress has been made in enrolling more primary students, but expenditure per pupil has declined. In health, Cambodia has the highest private health expenditure as a percentage of GDP of all low income countries (World Bank 2008).

The data and graphs in this factsheet point to possible failures by the state to put in place policies needed to reduce disparities in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and to ensure these rights are realized progressively according to maximum available resources. They are based on government statistical data from Cambodia's 2000 and 2005 household surveys and the 2003/2004 Cambodia Socio-economic Survey. International comparisons are made with the latest available comparable data from the World Bank World Development Indicators.

VISUALIZING RIGHTS

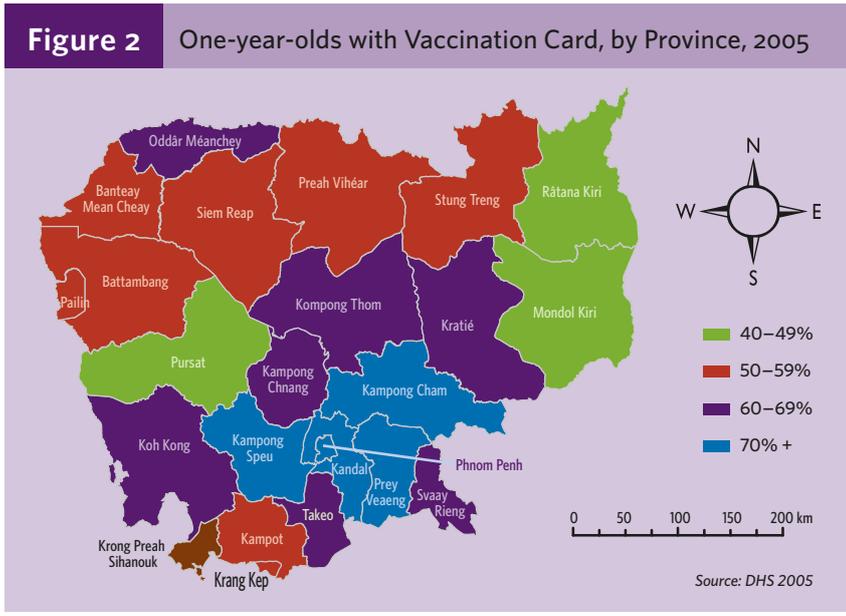
THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

“Concern is expressed that the State party’s infant mortality and under-five mortality rates remain among the highest in the region.” (CRC Concluding Observations 2000)



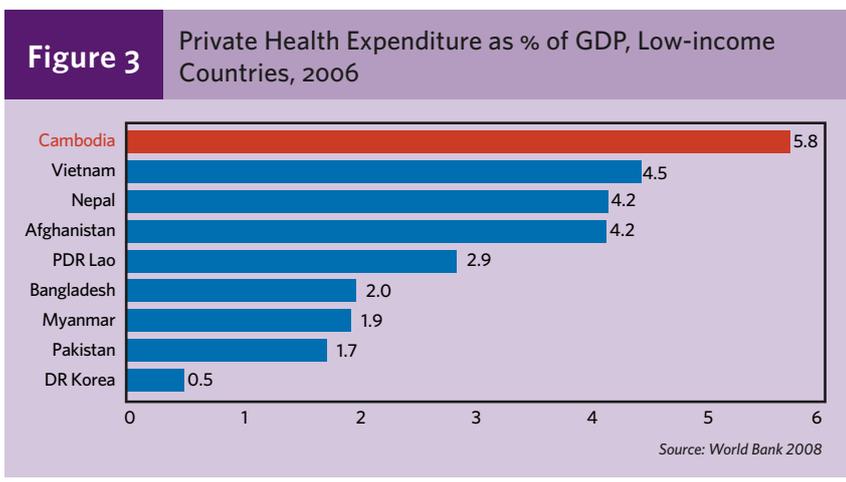
Infant mortality is much higher in provinces with less access to maternal health care

There are vast regional disparities in availability of reproductive health services in Cambodia. Women giving birth in the capital Phnom Penh are over six times as likely to be assisted by a skilled birth attendant than women in the regions of Mondol Kiri and Rattanak Kiri. This graph suggests that where there is more skilled birth attendance in a province, fewer infants die, raising questions about the government’s efforts to ensure the equal enjoyment of the right to health for Cambodian women and children.



Child vaccination is much lower in more economically-marginalized provinces

One of the most important measures to combat child mortality is ensuring immunization against the most prevalent diseases. Children from rural Pursat, however, are almost half as likely to be vaccinated as children from the more industrialized province of Kandal. While just 47 percent of children in Pursat have vaccination cards, 83 percent of children in Kandal do. The wide disparities in vaccination coverage across Cambodia suggest that there is an inequitable distribution of available resources.



The average Cambodian spends more private income on health care than in other low-income countries

Cambodians are more likely to pay out-of-pocket for health care than people in other low-income Asian countries. Private expenditure accounts for almost six percent of GDP. Despite a significant increase in GDP per capita, public health expenditure has declined in recent years, from 2.5 percent of GDP in 2003 to less than two percent the following year (World Bank 2008). This indicates a lack of government commitment to providing needed health care resources and to invest in progressive realization of the right to health.

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

"The Committee . . . urges the State party to immediately take all appropriate measures . . . to eliminate the disparity in school enrolment rates and to achieve universal primary education for girls in accordance with article 10 of the Convention [on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women]." (CEDAW Concluding Observations 2006)

Gender disparities in the realization of the right to education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels

Only 34 percent of female students enroll in secondary school, compared with 43 percent of males. The female to male enrollment ratio in primary school is 93 percent, but declines to 78 percent in secondary school, and to 50 percent at the tertiary level. This raises questions as to why male students are more likely to continue their education than female students, and why disparities increase at each subsequent education level.

Women are more likely than men to have no education, and lack of access to education is highest in Mondol Kiri and Rattanak Kiri

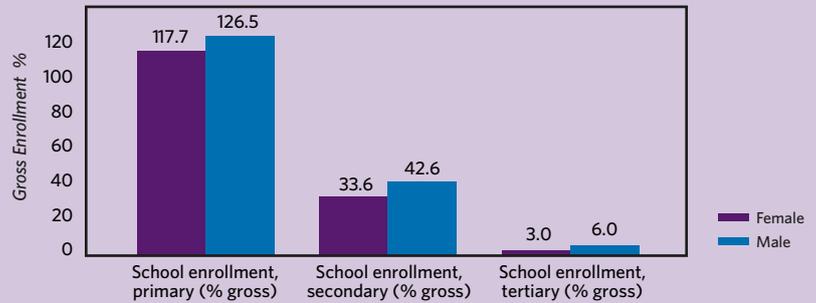
Nearly 60 percent of women and 40 percent of men in Mondol Kiri and Rattanak Kiri have no education, compared to less than 15 percent of women and five percent of men in Phnom Penh. In the province of Svay Rieng, girls are almost three times less likely to attend school than boys. This reflects wide gender and rural-urban disparities in access to education.

Since 2001, more children are enrolled in primary education but expenditure per student has declined

While Cambodia has made progress with the steady increase in primary enrolment rates since 2000, it is troubling that Cambodia's expenditure has not risen to match the increase in the number of students. Since 2001, Cambodia's expenditure per student has fallen from almost seven percent of GDP per capita to 5.6 percent in 2004 (latest available data). This decrease in expenditure per student raises concerns about the quality of education in Cambodia.

Figure 4

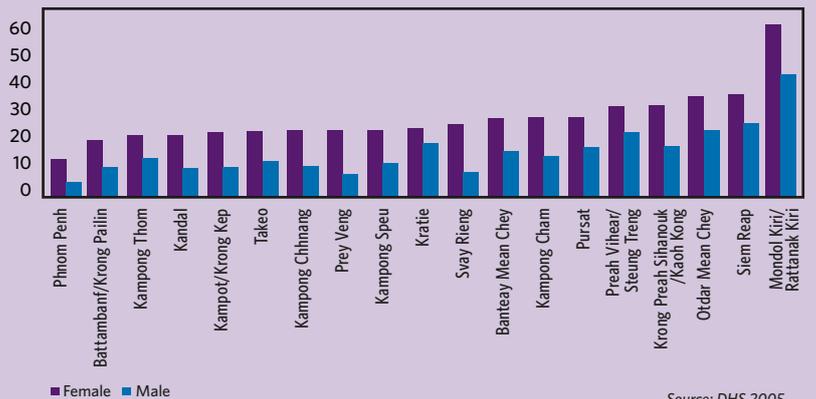
Gross School Enrollment by Level and Gender Cambodia, 2006



Source: World Bank 2008

Figure 5

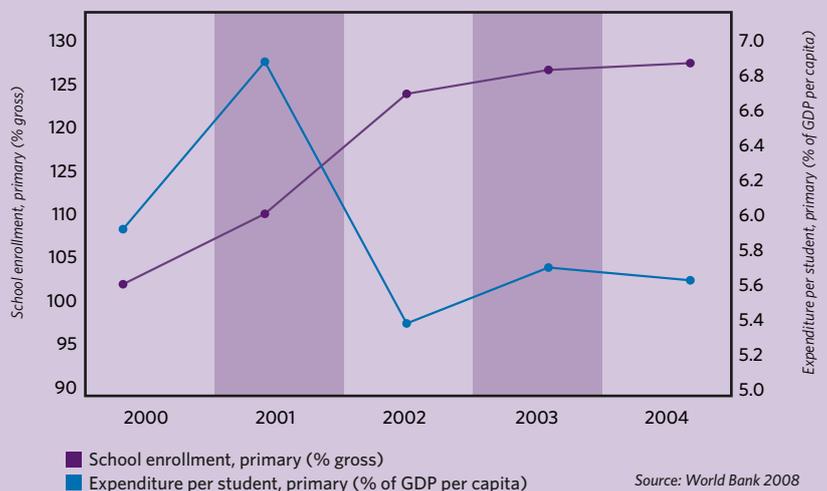
Percentage Distribution of Male and Females with No Education by Cambodian Province 2005



Source: DHS 2005

Figure 6

Expenditure per Student and Primary Gross Enrollment Rates, 2000–2004

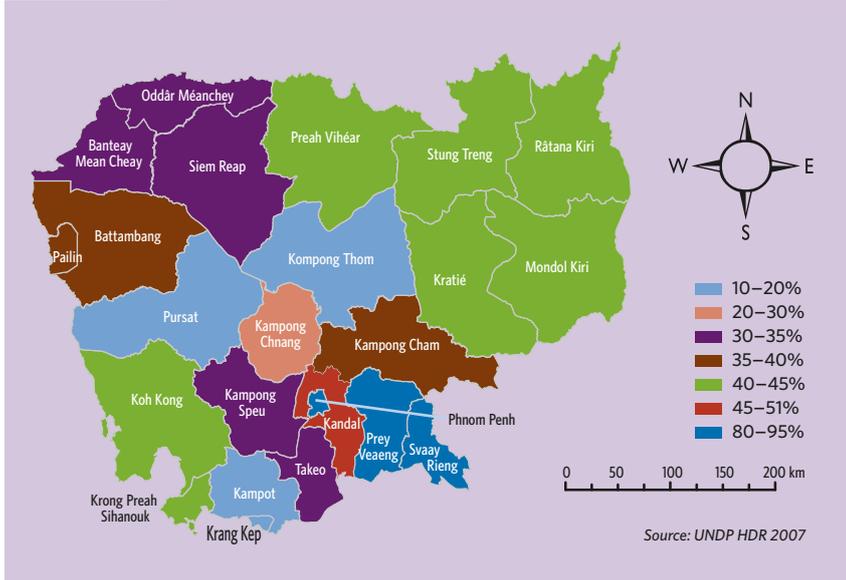


Source: World Bank 2008

THE RIGHT TO WATER

Figure 7

Percentage of Population with Access to Potable Drinking Water by Cambodian Province, 2004.



“The Committee recommends that the State party address the issue of childhood morbidity and mortality by taking a multi-sectoral approach recognizing the critical role of . . . lack of clean water supplies . . . in the current pattern of childhood illnesses.” (CRC Concluding Observations 2000)

The right to water is not enjoyed equally by all Cambodians, and access to potable water is much lower in rural areas

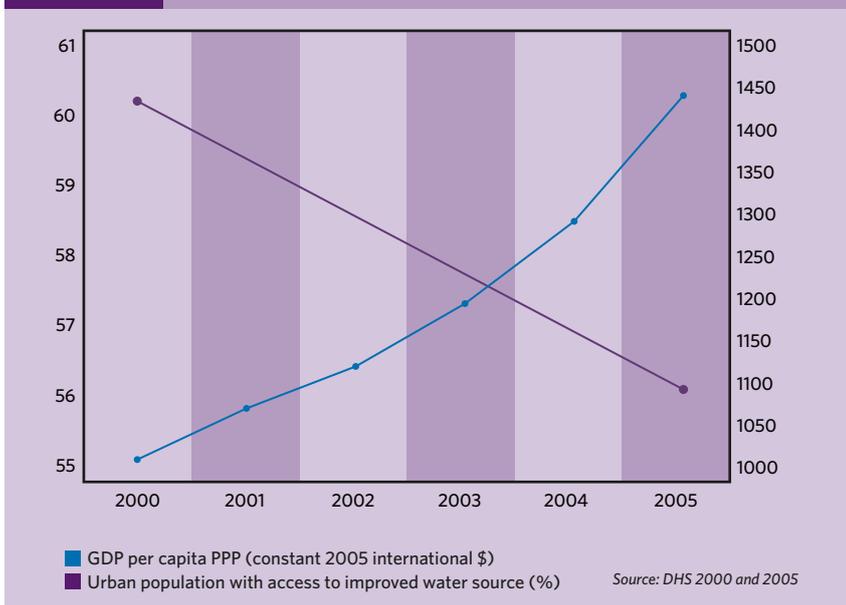
Less than 12 percent of residents in Pursat province have access to potable drinking water, compared to more than 90 percent of Phnom Penh and Prey Veng residents. These disparities among provinces raise concerns about Cambodia’s efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of the basic human right to water.

Proportion of urban people with access to safe water is declining, despite significant economic growth

Cambodia’s income (as measured by GDP per capita) is increasing, but the proportion of urban residents with access to safe water has been steadily declining. This may reflect a lack of investment in water infrastructure in urban areas to keep up with the rising number of Cambodians migrating to urban areas. Almost 80 percent of Cambodia’s urban residents live in urban slums (UN Habitat 2008/2009), where access to safe water is much lower than in other urban areas. This suggests a failure to invest adequate levels of resources in the realization of the right to water.

Figure 8

GDP per capita Growth and Urban Access to Improved Water Source, 2000–2005



THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

“Failure to enforce the Land Law... has undermined the realization of adequate housing for thousands of families in urban and rural areas, as has the absence of national housing policies and legislation that take into proper account the rights and livelihoods of the rural and urban poor who do not have access to adequate housing or the means to secure it.” (Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Cambodia country visit, March 2006)

Almost four in five urban Cambodians live in urban slums without access to adequate housing

A high proportion of Cambodia’s urban population lives in squalid conditions in urban slums. Slums do not meet the requirements of the right to adequate housing, characterized in part by legal security of tenure; availability of facilities and infrastructure (including water and sanitation); affordability; habitability (CESCR General Comment 4). The lack of legal security of tenure heightens vulnerability to forced or arbitrary eviction (Amnesty International 2008; COHRE et al 2008).

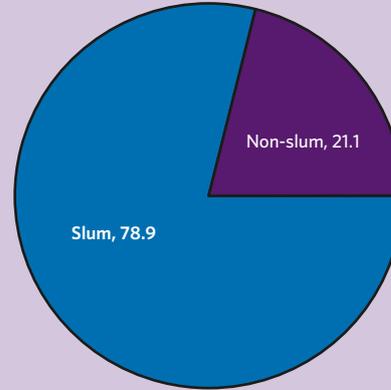
Inadequate documentation of land and housing sales contributes to insecure tenure and forced evictions

The vast majority of land and housing sales are not formally documented at the provincial level. Most sales are documented informally, or at village or communal levels. Without documentation at the provincial level, land ownership can be easily disputed by provincial and national officials, leaving Cambodians vulnerable to land-grabbing and forced eviction. Failure to promote official procedures suggests the government is not doing enough to ensure security of tenure (Ballard 2008).

Rural Cambodians have much lower rates of access to sanitation than those living in comparable countries

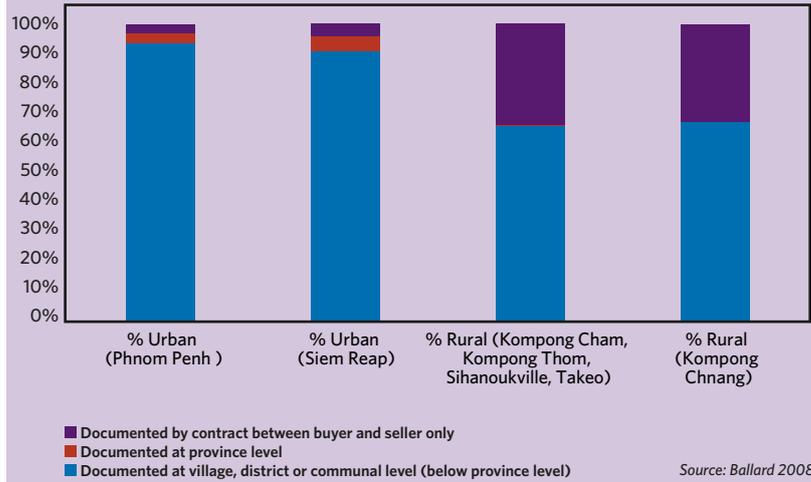
Around 85 percent of Cambodia’s population lives in rural areas, but only 19 percent of rural dwellers have access to improved sanitation facilities. Such a low rate is below the average for low-income countries, raising questions about Cambodia’s commitment to use maximum available resources to improve access to adequate sanitation.

Figure 9 Percentage of Urban Population Living in Slums, 2005



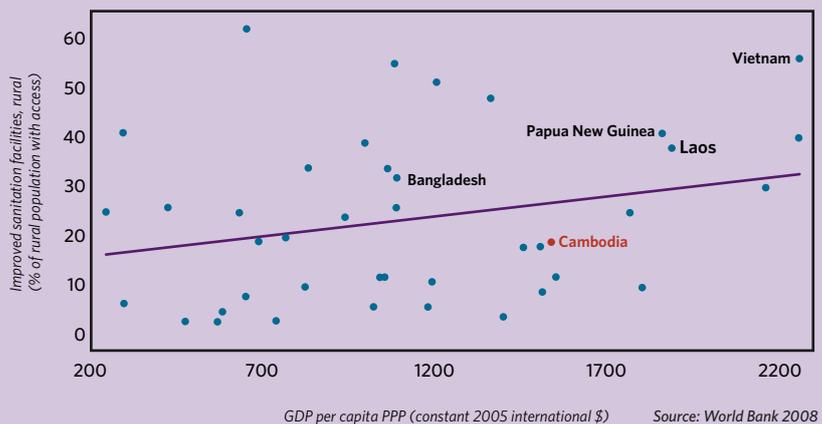
Source: UN Habitat 2008/2009

Figure 10 Documentation of Land Sales, Selected Urban and Rural Cambodian Provinces 2000–2005



Source: Ballard 2008

Figure 11 GDP per Capita and Rural Access to Improved Sanitation, Low-income Countries 2006

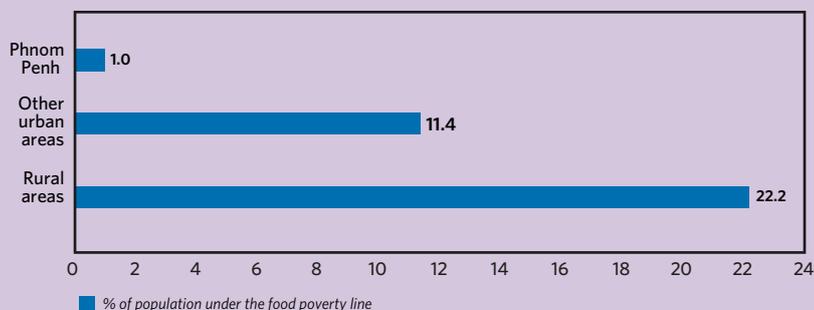


Source: World Bank 2008

THE RIGHT TO FOOD

Figure 12

Cambodians Living under the Food Poverty Line, Urban-Rural 2004



Source: Poverty Profile 2006

“The majority of Cambodia’s population lives in rural areas and depends heavily on land and natural resources as a source of livelihood. Thus the question of how Cambodia manages and distributes its land and natural resources, and for whose benefit, is one of the most pressing issues facing the country today. It is also critical to the ability of all Cambodians to benefit from equitable and sustainable development that respects and promotes their human rights.” (Report of the Special Representative for the Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia, Jan 2007)

Realization of the right to food is a serious problem in rural areas

Over 20 percent of Cambodia’s population lives below the national food poverty line, unable to afford the minimum essential calorie requirement of 2,100 calories/day, and the vast majority (95 percent) live in rural areas. The majority of Cambodia’s poor and food insecure depend on agriculture, but only 16 percent of the poorest Cambodians own land, reflecting Cambodia’s highly unequal land ownership (Poverty Profile 2006).

Child malnutrition levels vary widely across the provinces

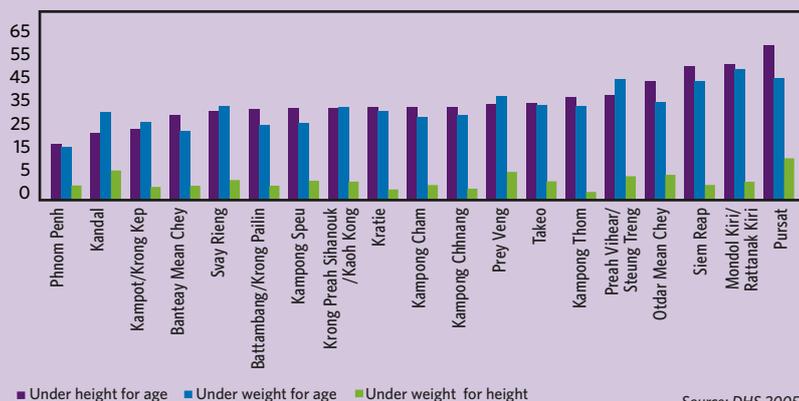
Almost two out of three children in the Pursat province are chronically malnourished, compared with in five in Phnom Penh (measured by being under height for their age). While the Kandal province has a relatively low chronic malnutrition rate, over 11 percent of its children are acutely malnourished (measured by being underweight for height).

Child mortality is higher in rural areas; rural-urban gap is higher in Cambodia than its neighbors

High levels of child mortality in rural areas are linked to high levels of food insecurity. Rural children are one and one half times more likely to die before they reach the age of five than their urban counterparts. This gap in Cambodia is wider than in its neighbors (for which data are available), suggesting a lower priority is given to rural investment in food and nutrition security, access to health care and other resources necessary for survival.

Figure 13

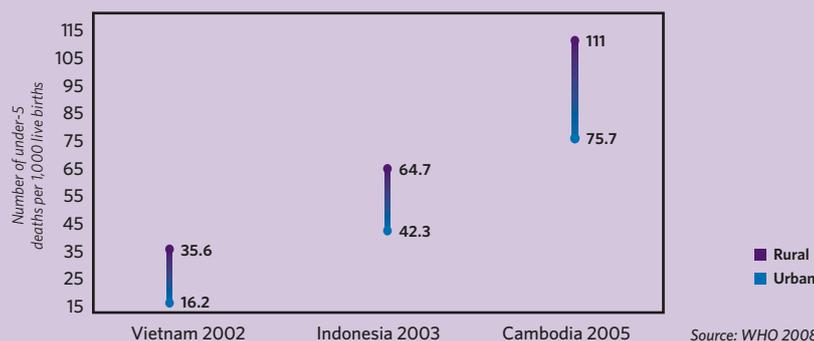
Child Malnutrition, 2005, by Province



Source: DHS 2005

Figure 14

Mortality Gaps for Children Under-5 between Urban and Rural Populations, Cambodia and Selected Neighbors, Latest Available Data



Source: WHO 2008

POVERTY & INEQUALITY

"While the Committee is aware that most of the State party's infrastructure and social services were destroyed as a result of decades of war, it expresses its concern at the insufficient attention paid to the provisions of article 4 of the Convention concerning budgetary allocations to the 'maximum extent of... available resources.'" (CRC Concluding Observations 2000)

The rate of progress in poverty reduction is slowing as inequality rises

After elections in 1993, Cambodia experienced a rapid decline in poverty. This rate slowed since the 1998 elections, despite a steady increase in GDP per capita, suggesting that economic growth has not helped poverty reduction. Indeed, economic growth has been accompanied by rising inequality (GINI Index). This suggests that the benefits of growth and development are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the rich.

Are maximum available resources being devoted to ensuring economic, social and cultural rights?

The Cambodian government's public expenditure is 3.5 percent of GDP, the smallest of all low-income countries. The government may thus be hindered in providing basic resources and services necessary for realizing ESC rights. Low expenditure reflects diversion of government resources through corruption, and low revenue generation resulting from a low or evasive tax base (Global Witness 2009).

Regressive tax policies put the burden disproportionately on the poor

Cambodia's tax base is less than nine percent (of GDP), and less than 14 percent of all tax revenues come from direct income taxes, the lowest rate of any low-income country (for which data is available). With taxes on exports declining from almost 12 percent of tax revenue in 2003 to below five percent in 2006 (World Bank 2009), revenue generation has become dependent on indirect taxes such as VAT, putting greater burden on the poor.

Figure 15

GINI Index, Poverty Headcount and GDP per capita, Cambodia 1994-2004

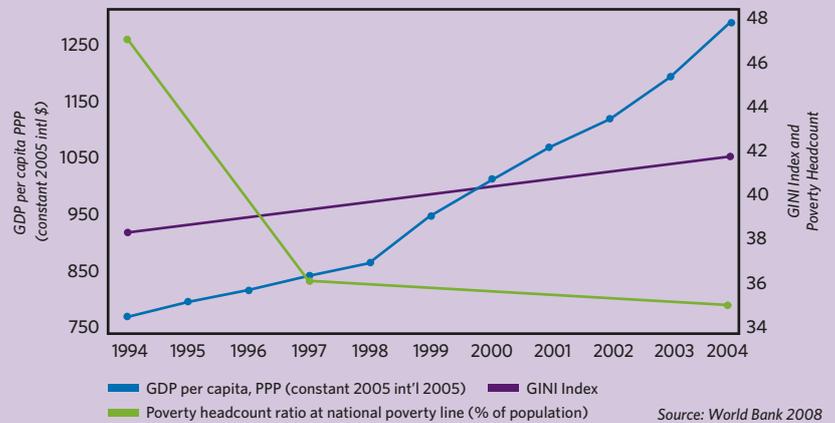


Figure 16

Government Expenditure as % of GDP Low-income Countries, 2006

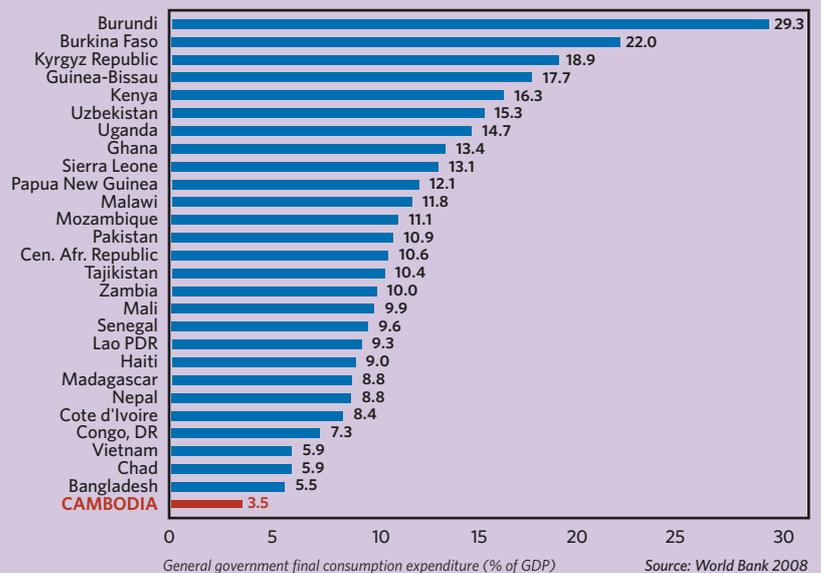
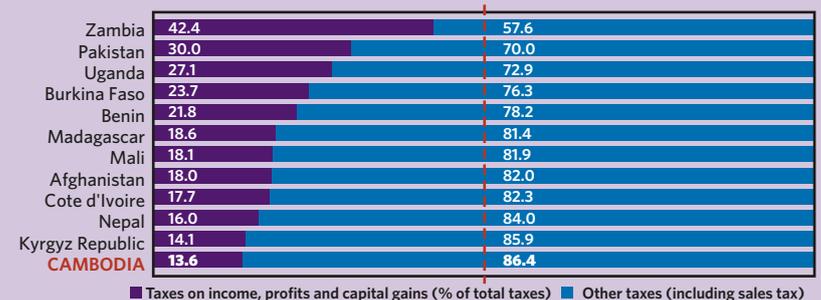


Figure 17

Taxes on Income, Profits and Capital Gains (% of Total Taxes) Low-income Countries, 2006





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ABOUT CESR

The Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) was established in 1993 with the mission to work for the recognition and enforcement of economic, social and cultural rights as a powerful tool for promoting social justice and human dignity. CESR exposes violations of economic, social and cultural rights through an interdisciplinary combination of legal and socio-economic analysis. CESR advocates for changes to economic and social policy at the international, national and local levels so as to ensure these comply with international human rights standards.

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About This Fact Sheet Series

This series is intended to contribute to the ongoing monitoring work of UN and other inter-governmental human rights mechanisms to monitor governments' compliance with their economic, social and cultural rights obligations. It is also intended to contribute to strengthening the monitoring and advocacy capabilities of national and international NGOs. Drawing on the latest available socioeconomic data, the country fact sheets display, analyze and interpret selected human development indicators in the light of three key dimensions of governments' economic and social rights obligations.

Firstly, indicators such as maternal mortality or primary completion rates are used to assess the extent to which the population is deprived of minimum essential levels of the right to health, education, food and other economic and social rights. Secondly, data tracking progress over time can help to assess whether a state is complying with its obligation to realize rights progressively according to maximum available resources. Comparisons within the same region provide a useful benchmark of what has been achieved in countries with similar resources. Finally, data disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, geographical location and socio-economic status is used to identify disparities and assess progress in eliminating discrimination and unequal enjoyment of these rights.

The fact sheets are not meant to give a comprehensive picture, nor provide conclusive evidence, of a country's compliance with these obligations. Rather, they flag some possible concerns which arise when development statistics are analyzed and visualized graphically in light of international human rights standards.