



GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) PROMISING PRACTICES
ACCESS | DECISION-MAKING | PARTICIPATION | SYSTEMS | WELL-BEING

GESI IMPACT STORIES - CAMBODIA

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**GENDER EQUALITY
AND SOCIAL
INCLUSION
PROMISING PRACTICES
IN YOUTH FOR CHANGE
PROJECT IN CAMBODIA**



**WORLD VISION'S
GESI APPROACH
PROMOTES THE
DOMAINS OF ACCESS,
DECISION-MAKING,
PARTICIPATION,
SYSTEMS, AND
WELL-BEING**

01

Access

Improved access to life skill information and training to empower vulnerable boys and girls with competencies and skills to take control of their lives and become agents of change in their communities.

02

Decision-making

The Youth for Change clubs empowered vulnerable adolescents and youth especially girls to take leadership roles in these clubs. The youth leaders acted as peer facilitators of youth clubs and were equipped with leadership. They were engaged in the planning, structure, focus, and implementation of Community Service Learning Projects where young people made decisions on how to best respond to specific social challenges in their community. Young people also led a reflection process which helped determine the direction and focus of life skill training. Young people also made decisions on monitoring and feedback mechanisms and were engaged in local government decision-making process by utilizing existing local platforms or developing and implement youth-led advocacy projects.

03

Participation

The project ensured girls are active participants, including in leadership and sports. At the beginning of project implementation, most girls were excluded from participating in Youth for Change life skills training, sports, and other activities. The Youth for Change clubs, fostered active participation for boys and girls, and provided a platform for skill building and information sharing among adolescent boys and girls.

04

Systems

The Youth for Change challenged gender and social norms that excluded girls from sports. The stereotype was that sports is an activity for boys only and girls are not allowed to be part of those activities. The project developed positive messaging and community dialogues and sensitization activities on gender equality. Girls were also empowered to be confident to join Youth clubs. The life skills training helped to build knowledge and experience that strengthened youth participants' confidence to make positive life choices.

05

Well-being

Integration of sports into the project helped young people to engage meaningfully in a safe space, especially for the most vulnerable. The community projects and community dialogue events promoted a sense of solidarity, confidence, and capability among young people as well as adults.

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Cambodia is the youngest country in Southeast Asia with 52.2% of its population being below 25 years of ageⁱ. While this represents significant opportunity for economic growth, social change and innovation, young people in Cambodia face many challenges which prevent them from being equipped and empowered to create a positive future for themselves, their families and communities. These include: (1) lack of confidence, skill and experience in using their voice and decision making; (2) unrealised potential for youth to lead change through social action; (3) lack of preparation and readiness among youth for transitioning into active and sustainable livelihoods; and (4) the extent to which vulnerable youth are able to keep themselves safe and healthy.

YOUTH FOR CHANGE PROJECT

Youth for Change (Y4C) project is designed to support adolescents and youth (12-18 years) to be able to 1) lead positive social change through community service-learning projects, 2) be represented in accountability and engaged in local decision making, and 3) to nurture positive relationship. Youth for Change use various approaches to reach those who are hard to reach, supporting them by providing opportunities, safe spaces, and capacity building to be able to participate effectively in their community.

The project is structured around 5 main learning themes:



Active Citizenship Strengthening youth and develop skills to help them become responsible, trustworthy citizens of integrity, who are able to contribute to the common good.



Employability Building social, organizational, and technical skills to increase their likelihood of success in a competitive marketplace.



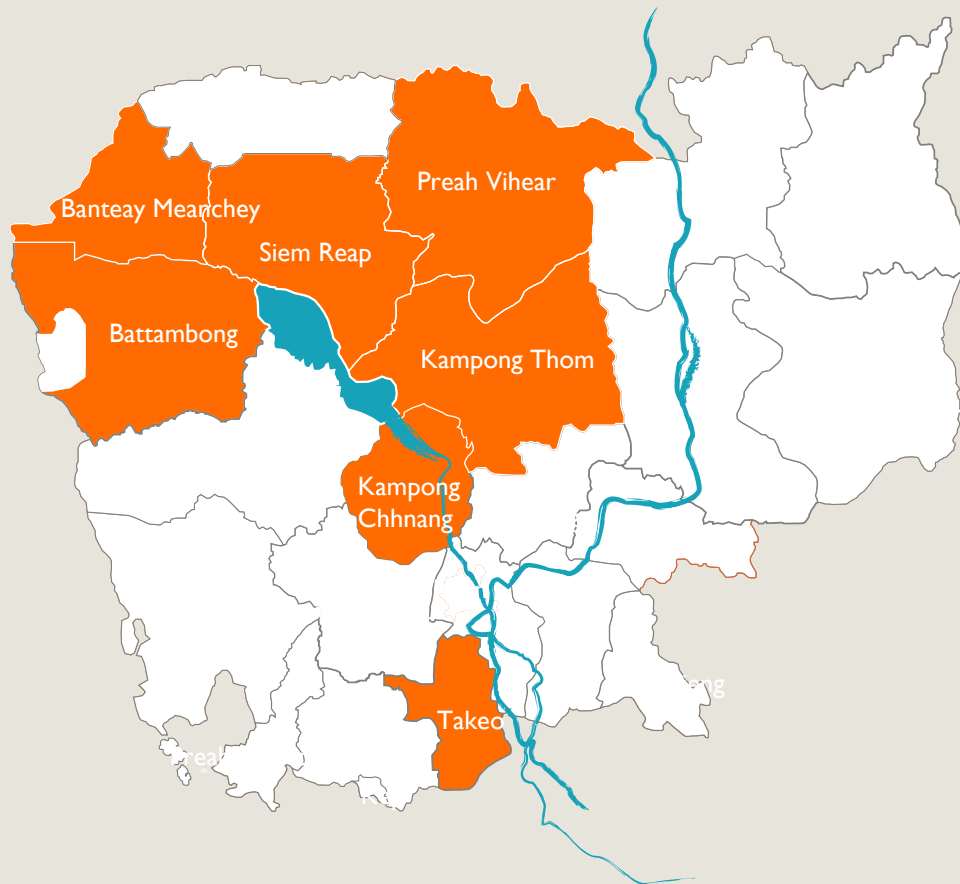
Leadership Engage youth in facilitating and/or coordinating activities related to leadership skill building that will enable them to pursue the long-term welfare of their communities.



Social Accountability Promoting youth participation as active citizens, allowing them to identify and fulfill their roles, rights and responsibilities within their communities and country.

ICT4D Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D) Youth become creative, capturing their stories and transforming their lives through digital communications and advocacy.

PROJECT - IN BRIEF



23 districts across **7** provinces



231 youth clubs of **8,636** members

(**5381** female) participated in the project



21,612 adolescents reached



3,042 most vulnerable adolescents reached



70% of youth leaders are girls



642 community service-learning projects implemented.

CONTENTS



10

PROMOTING ACCESS TO
EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

26

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS PROMOTES WELL-BEING FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE

42

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT PROMOTES THE REALIZATION OF
YOUTH'S DECISION MAKING

58

YOUTH CLUB ENHANCES A MEANINGFUL
YOUTH PARTICIPATION

76

YOUTH CLUB MEMBERS CHANGE LOCAL
LEADERS' WAYS OF WORKING



Ratha is from Takeo province. Utilizing all the experiences from her participation as a youth leader in Youth for Change project, she continues her higher education in Phnom Penh with a commitment to make positive change for herself, others and community.



Sok Chiva, from an invisible kid to a role model teacher with a strong hope of making a great impact on the next generations. He is inspired to create an inclusive platform for young people to education.



Phou Navy participated in Youth for Change since 2019 at Stoung, Kampong Thom province. She led many community projects back in her days with Youth for Change project, and it was her aspiration to make a decision to be a teacher in a hope that she can make a ripple affects on the younger generation.



Phorn Leat, is helping his family to pill off the tamarin for sale at the market and plays a role as a youth club leader in Chikraeng.



Kruey Vuthy, a former youth leader in Youth for Change from Kampong Chhnang province. He continues to contribute to his community by raising awareness about violence against children which is embedded into his current work in social media production and radio broadcasting.



Ratha is from Takeo province. Utilizing all the experiences from her participation as a youth leader in Youth for Change project, she continues her higher education in Phnom Penh with a commitment to make positive change for herself, others and community.

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

CASE STUDY

CAMBODIA: PROMOTING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS



INTRODUCTION

Young people under the age of 30 in Cambodia make up almost 60% of the total population¹ with the majority living in rural areas. While this represents significant opportunity for economic growth, social change and innovation, young people in Cambodia face many challenges which prevent them being equipped and empowered to create a positive future for themselves, their families, and communities. These include: (1) lack of confidence, skill and experience in using their voice to enact accountability and participate in decision-making; (2) unrealized potential to lead change through social action; (3) lack of preparation and readiness among youth for transitioning into active and sustainable livelihoods; and (4) the extent to which vulnerable youth are able to keep themselves safe and healthy. The majority of Cambodia young people are poorly educated, live in poverty, experience social exclusion and have poor employment prospects.²

Given these challenges, World Vision International in Cambodia (WVI-C) implemented a Youth for Change project using an asset-focused positive adolescent and youth development approach³ with the clear aim to bring interventions directly to most vulnerable adolescent youth groups in rural communities where WVI-C works to create spaces and opportunities for them to learn, grow, and develop their life skills, confidence, and resilience to accessing community services. Likewise, this program as well as to strengthen understanding and relationships between genders and ensure meaningful participation of adolescent and youth.

¹ Cambodia Population Census 2019, RGC.

² OECD Development Centre (2017), "Youth Well-being Policy Review of Cambodia", EU-OECD Youth Inclusion Project, Paris.

³ WVI-C's programming approach in line with USAID's YouthPower: <https://youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>



World Vision prioritizes Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Approach that promotes equal and inclusive access, decision-making, participation, systems and well-being of the most vulnerable; transforms systems, social norms, and relations to enable the most vulnerable to participate in and benefit equally from development interventions, builds individual and collective agency, resilience, and action and promotes the empowerment and well-being of vulnerable children, their families and communities. The goal is to achieve sustained, transformational change at individual, household, community, and societal levels so that all persons can enjoy fullness of life.⁴ The approach advances World Vision's mission of promoting human transformation and development by reaching out to the most vulnerable children and adults and challenging the root causes of vulnerability that sustain gender inequality and social exclusion, such as restrictive socio-cultural norms, unequal power relations, and disempowering systems.



Under the Youth for Change Project, World Vision targeted Adolescent and Youth aged 12 to 18 years old, including registered children (RCs), in 23 districts in 7 provinces (Takeo, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Beanteay Meanchey, Siem Reap Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom) and worked with a total of 231 youth clubs from 2018 to 2020.

⁴ World Vision GESI Approach and Theory of Change



The goal was to support a new generation of young Cambodian who have the capacity and agency to approach life and its challenges with a creative and innovative mind-set that demonstrates critical thinking and flexibility for their environment. The project used life skill training which enabled adolescents to access informal education through youth club activities and learning, building their positive relationship skills, and to socially engage in the community through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) to educate themselves with knowledge, experiences, and leadership, including local advocacy for community changes. This contributed to the informal education access for 8, 636 adolescents (5, 381 females), especially 3, 042 were the most vulnerable youth⁵ and they have experienced new ways of learning and opportunities in their community engagement. The self-esteem and confidence building project-focus has created youth leaders to be more active in their communities.

This case study on **“Promoting Access to Education for Girls,”** highlights how Youth for Change Project contributed to education access for youth, especially girls of the most vulnerable background. This case study uses data from World Vision Technical Program Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation in 2021, Gender Review for Youth for Change in 2018, USAID’s Gender Analysis and Assessment in 2016, Ministry of Women’s Affaires’ Report in 2014, World Vision Technical Program & Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study in 2023, and an interview with Youth Club leader, **Ratha Chhoeurt**. The data reveal that girls’ access to education in Cambodia is limited and required more engagement to provide learning opportunities for girls to build self-esteem, confidence, resilience, and competencies to overcome the entrenched influences of cultural norms and practices, and poverty; in particular, for those who are living in rural and urban communities.

¹ TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, (WVI-C, 2021)



THE PROBLEM

Cambodia is a highly patriarchal and hierarchical society, with strong gender and social norms that discriminate women and girls. Traditionally, women have lower status and girls' education is devalued. As a result, there is a significant education gap between girls and boys, and this gap is bigger in rural than urban areas.⁶ Despite many efforts by the Cambodia's Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) to promote gender equality in education and improve girls access to education. Many girls are still out of schools, they drop out earlier and in greater number compared to boys. Parents may not invest in their daughters' education because of the perception that educating girls is a waste. These traditional and gender and social norms and attitudes are deeply rooted in society and prevent girls from enjoying their human right, including the right to education.⁷ Girls also face challenges related to security and household responsibilities.⁸

Although school infrastructure has been established and free education is encouraged and integrated into the Education Law (at least 9 years of free education) of Ministry of Education and Sport (Moeys)⁹ the WVI-C's recent Technical Program and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Survey in 2023¹⁰ revealed that 55.9% of girls aged from 12 to 18 years old do not attend school. This depicts that the limited access to education by many girls.

⁶ USAID.2016. Gender Analysis and Assessment. Volume I. Phnom Penh: USAID/Cambodia

⁷ MoWA. (2014e). Attitudes – Gender relations and attitudes: Cambodia gender assessment [Policy brief 2].

⁸ USAID.2016. Gender Analysis and Assessment. Volume I. Phnom Penh: USAID/Cambodia

⁹ Law on Education, Chapter VII, article 31, "Rights to Access Education":
https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/cambodia_education_law.pdf

¹⁰ WVI-C's National Technical Program (TP) and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Programme (CESP) Baseline Study for WV's New Strategy in 2023



This in turn affect their participation in formal employment, and other economic activities. Needless to say, girls are expected to be conformed with house chores, and housewife idea-shaped teaching to serve their husbands in the future. This has highlighted the impact of gender role and patriarchal system that is continuously enforced against girls to be more subordinated, care for their homes, and be child-bearers; and many have fallen into child marriage and given up on schooling.

During an interview, Chhoeut Ratha, a 20 years old female Youth Club leader in Youth for Change Project, shared her experience on how harmful social norms and perceptions affect girls in her community. Just like other girls, Ratha experienced a struggled to go to school because education for girls is viewed as not important, and she was raised to focus on domestic work. She has observed that her aspiration was undermined for accessing equal education. Ratha did not have confidence in herself and she even dared not to talk with strangers, as she compared the situation was like “A frog living in the well”—referring to the narrow social mindset on civilized society and no opportunities exposing herself to learn from the outside world. This has increasingly created fears, shyness, and cowardness to explore new opportunities which sabotages her potentials, learning, and losing creativities to challenge those harmful social norms. Rotha has become more resilient and courageous to challenge herself with the support from World Vision Youth for Change (Y4C) Project, she was able to go to school and continue with education and now she has reached the University level.

“

Rotha said, “in the previous regulated girl’s social norms, we were taught that a girl cannot even spin over a cooking stove ; thus, girls should not get more education.” In her opinion, she believes that, “if this old teaching continues to influence girls’ opportunities to education, girls would not grow and consequently becoming a frog in the well. I do not agree for this social norm to influence me and I need to challenge it.”



Rotha facilitating community issue analysis session and presenting to her peers and community.

Rotha has been inspired by World Vision's programme and this have led her to pursue for her tertiary education journey that led her to Royal University of Phnom Penh and currently she is a university student at one of prestigious Universities in Phnom Penh. She is also working temporarily as a retailer. Her skills and experiences gained from Y4C Project enabled her to get a job and make an informed decision on her study and future career.




Rotha sharing her experiences with World Vision staff at World Vision Cambodia's National Office



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Youth for Change Project was designed to encourage girls and boys to become active agents of change in their communities. This project has three main expected outcomes: (1) Adolescents/youth have improved life skills and assets for positive self-concept and future orientation, (2) Adolescents/youth have the capacity to lead social change, and (3) positive, caring, and nurturing relationships are developed between adolescents and adults including parents, peers, facilitators, and community members. To meet this end, this project created opportunities for youth to learn and increase their potentials by engaging themselves in life skill trainings to increase their self-efficacy, citizenship, leadership, civil engagement, critical thinking and goal orientation. These project activities also informed the negative impact of gender role and support the accessibility for girls and boys to education and life skill development.

This has contributed to equip adolescents/youth with full capacity to approach life and its challenges with a creative and innovative mindset so that they could demonstrate critical thinking and flexible adaptation for living and challenging the environment of strong cultural norms and practices that continually undermine young people's growth, learning opportunities, and social engagement. To add on the training curriculum, the building of youth's confidence, self-efficacy, resilience, and local advocacy engagement has been integrated into Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) which have immensely impacted youth's learning; especially girls in project's engagement on club leading, awareness raising, local advocacy, and community mobilization of support to girls' learning opportunities.



These were conducted on awareness raising and dialogues engaged by faith leaders and community stakeholders such as community volunteers to discuss on negative social norms that undermine girls' access to education and the risky motivated behaviors among adolescents. The messages were also integrated in youth club activities and community events with public space under the support of local authorities, WV staff, communities, and community-based faith leaders. This has mobilized community support and shifted community mindset in promoting girls' education in their communities.

GESI IMPACT

In the Gender Review report for Youth for Change (Y4C) in 2019 among 2031 youth participants, it found that 70% of girls benefited from Y4C project¹¹. Girls benefited from learning opportunities in Youth for Change project and, in TP Evaluation in 2021, it found that youth have developed their confidence to facilitate their own future, improved their social competencies and relationships, and become more matured, responsible, and committed to learning. Based on the TP Baseline Analysis, it demonstrated that, “the high female participation in Youth for Change is a result of the program being seen as a learning club and got supported of activity for their daughters.”

This could show that the introduction of learning activities by using youth club approach could engage more girls in learning with the support of their parents that has transformed some perception of negative look on girls' education in communities.

¹¹ WV Gender Evaluation Report in 2019: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, p.12.



In the interview with Ratha, a female youth club leader in Youth for Change, she has also stated the fact of social mindset that “girls should not learn more or going to school” and with her participation in the project, she has improved herself and gained more opportunities to learn and train herself to commit in breaking the social barrier of stereotype against girl’s education. This is because she got trainings from World Vision and led many project implementations for raising awareness and engaging girls in learnings and transforming themselves from “fear to dare” for girls’ education. Ratha is currently at University in Phnom Penh and committed to promote others’ girls’ education opportunity and local business strengthening for her communities.

Moreover, with supported opportunities and proactive engagement of young girls in Youth for Change activities, they gained more comprehension and increased knowledge on life skills. The Y4C evaluation revealed that females reported higher scores for positive identity, positive value, boundary and expectation and social competencies.¹² Despite similar progress between boys and girls, there was a remarkable demonstration how girls could access to learning opportunities as boys who are frequently provided privilege in education accessibility in Cambodia. This has reflected to Ratha’s experiences with Youth for Change that she has gained more skills and knowledge, not only learning opportunities, but also, she has gained skills which have shaped her life goal as a businesswoman to support and help improve economic growth of her community.

This inspired story has shown her commitment and courageousness to move forward with her education. As proved, she is currently a university student in capital city in Cambodia. It is important to note that the resilience is powerful to break the social norms that undermine girl’s education.

¹² WV Gender Evaluation Report in 2019: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, p.17




This support has injected the positive mindset and courage to advocate for girls' education in Cambodia. Likewise, UNICEF¹³ also found that, "girls' education strengthens economies and reduces inequality. It contributes to more stable, resilient societies that give all individuals – including boys and men – the opportunity to fulfil their potential." With Ratha's story, social norms need to be broken down so that girls could equally access education and asset development for their lives, families, communities. Though youth's learning in Youth for Change was not more to formal education curriculum at school, it has impacted capacity and learning opportunities, including resilience, that could inspire commitment and efforts for girl groups' education and support of their parents and communities.

Based on Review Report for Youth For Change project in 2018¹⁴, female groups accessed 104 Youth Clubs in which 67% of youth club leaders were females who were trained and delivered weekly life skill training to other club members. Through the CSLP Initiatives, 410 CSLPs were initiated by youth groups in partnership with 16, 928 community adults and stakeholders that, through awareness raising, dialogues, and local campaigns, addressed community identified issues including the school dropouts, which benefited 16, 229 children¹⁵. Undoubtedly, the Youth for Change Project has provided equal access to the life skill training which enabled young people to build their competencies, experiences, resilience, and self-confidence so that they have been empowered to break the cycle of social norms that has stigmatized girls; in particular, those who are living in rural areas not to be able to equally embrace education as boys.

¹³ Girls' Education: Gender Equality in education benefits every child: <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education#:~:text=Gender%20equality%20in%20education%20benefits%20every%20child.&text=Girls%20education%20strengthens%20economies%20and,opportunity%20to%20fulfil%20their%20potential>

¹⁴ World Vision Gender Review Report in 2019: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, p.9

¹⁵ Adolescent and Youth participation programme Factsheet, WVI-C 2019




This was trained and empowered through trainings, dialogue reflection and Community Service-Learning Projects (CSLPs) initiated by youth clubs and supported by World Vision. Combined with learnings and practices, this has reinforced the practical skills gained from learning in the Youth for Change and youth could have capacity to initiate community projects through their leadership to design and identify community issues, including promoting learnings for girls, to respond and mobilize funding and resources. Given their engagement, they could inspire other young people to learn and engage in making social changes in their own communities. Youth representation has been recognized by authorities and communities to be part of solutions in local level. For instance, girls' access to learning was promoted in within Y4C project (70% of female participants)¹⁶ through training opportunities in youth clubs, leadership and experience building in CSLPs, and positive relationships. This confidence and resilience development have enabled young people to have more courage to access more learning opportunities from project and community engagement.

CHALLENGES

- Youth for Change project would also need to ensure that youth leaders, coaches and Technical Program Coordinators (TPCs) are equipped with additional competencies that enable them to provide more an inclusive and equitable learning experiences for all youth members, regardless of gender and different identities groups. With limited capacity on GESI, it would create bias in inclusive youth engagement; especially, when working with communities and partners that have been influenced by harmful social norms.

¹⁶ World Vision Gender Evaluation Report in 2019: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, p.12



This negative impact would affect their engagement and may re-enforce or validate these harmful social norms rather than transforming them. The GESI approach and strategized coordination are required to mitigate these unintended consequences from program implementation. To mitigate this, WVI-C has trained and guided staff on how to apply a GESI lens and engage girls who have limited access to education. Bringing youth and girls in particular to meet with GESI advocates and experts have enriched staff and youth more on the significance of GESI.

- Harmful gender norms still prevent girls and some boys from being able to freely join the youth programmes. Stereotypes that exist both on what boys and girls can do --- as well as early judgements on what the programmes are about, have prevented some girls and boys to participate in Y4C, respectively. To handle these challenges, the technical team developed counter messages against “pain hooks” or underlying reasons that people have that influence stereotypes. These counter messages could be used in various channels and venues where community stakeholders joined the events. Community dialogue would be another approach to strengthen community knowledge on GESI perspective and girls’ education and participation in social activities, and could raise more awareness on the value of education for girls and encourage parents and communities to support education for girls.
- Community Service-Learning Project (CSLP) were not more focused on actual community issues identified by youth groups. As seen, girls’ dropouts of school were more increasingly happening and CSLPs would target more on mitigating real issues and support GESI work.

SUSTAINABILITY

When girls are engaged and built on their capacity and inspiration, they are embedded with increased knowledge and active engagement in community work. In the project, more girls participated in youth Clubs and learning activities. Their active engagement and progress have convinced the community perspective to believe in education accessibility for youth; in particular, young girls who could grow and have abilities as boys/men in what they have learnt and done. Until now, girls' parents have increasingly sent their daughters to school and reduce the dropouts and the trend of going to work in the factory. Some project participants have a great pursuit of their studies at universities and some have got jobs and continue to inspire and assist their own communities. Despite challenges of harmful social norm existence, parents, project partners, and local government have begun to mobilize communities to provide education opportunities for girls and support them more than the start of project implementation. Some girls in this Area Program where the project was implemented have been invited to speak and share their experiences in Singapore and got appraisal for their courage and story bringing to the international stage in which, never before, rural girls could access this opportunity.





CONCLUSION

Harmful gender and social norms have tremendously impacted girls' access to education and followed by their lost opportunity to grow and fulfil their potentials. With no education, many girls will continue being marginalized, experience violence, and focus on house work and child bearing. Most men are the breadwinners that devalue girls and deprive them from decision-making, learning, and participation. With access to education for girls, their capacity is built on life skills, leadership, advocacy, and active citizenship, this has brought a huge change in perspective and has empowered girls to be agents of change, including to challenge harmful social norms that affect their personal growth; especially the stereotypes and stigmatization that they were raised with. As Ratha's story, she has lived with stereotypes and stigmatized situation influenced from her parents and communities and with her engagement with WV program, she has changed and dares to challenge those harmful social norms until she graduated her high school and continues her education at university.

This is a good learning that when girls are included in all accessibilities either in education, social activities, and leadership, they could impact more, and they could thrive equally as men. In addition, the provision of more space for youth's voices could make them more encouraging and feel supported and valued to get involved in social activities and learning. This has built their competencies and confidence to challenge negative social norms and practices that affect their potentials and growth. To reach equal education opportunity for girls, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) needs to be mainstreamed and used as the important tool in the project to ensure full benefits and prioritization from all identities; in particular, girl groups who are considered to get low opportunities in accessing education and personal growth compared to boy groups. To achieve this, the increased budget for both local and national campaign would better inform program design, multi-stakeholders, and community to support and promote more education for girls and the supportive programme intervention for girls' access to both formal and informal learnings.



Sok Chiva, from an invisible kid to a role model teacher with a strong hope of making a great impact on the next generations. He is inspired to create an inclusive platform for young people to education.

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

CASE STUDY

CAMBODIA: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP PROMOTES WELL-BEING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Introduction

Youth in Cambodia are increasingly exposed to certain forms of risky behaviors that contributes to violence, drug use, early marriage, and early pregnancy. The alcohol consumption has also become the increasing concerns among youth as there has not yet been any regulations to prohibit minors' access to alcohols in Cambodia, including free access to purchase and its consumption. The prevalence of alcohol consumption is very high and this has been rooted into and accepted by society and culture. According to the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2004¹, alcohol consumption among youth is on the rising trend where about 14% of young Cambodians aged between 11 to 18 years old drink alcohol, and most of them started to drink at the age of 12 years old. This drinking behavior is expected to keep increasing. In general, 7 in 10 men drink (69%) and 16% of women consumed alcoholic beverages in the month prior to Demographic and Health Survey (2021-2022)². This has contributed to the development of risky attitudes and socially constructed perception of social gathering to include alcohols among young and adult Cambodians.

Moreover, the incidences of physical and emotional abuse are still a remarkable challenge that undermining adolescent's well-being and healthy relationships with their caregivers/parents, peers, and community. The World Vision Technical Programme Evaluation Report in 2021 indicated that 37.9%³ of adolescents reported to have experienced some forms of physical violence and/or psychological aggression for the last 12 months, and 65.7%⁴ caregivers/parents used physical punishment and/or psychological aggression with their children.

¹ Ministry of Health.2013. National Policy and Strategic Plan for the Reduction of Use of Alcohol, 2013-2017

² Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2021-22, (DHS, 2022), p.35

³ WVI-C 2021. Child Protection and Participation Technical Program Evaluation, p.16

⁴ WVI-C 2021. Child Protection and Participation Technical Program Evaluation, p.17



In most cases, mothers are the most perpetrators compared to fathers as they stay close with their children. This is influenced by gender and social norms that mothers are responsible to take care of their children and doing housework at home while men go to work. Despite all these challenges, very limited support is provided to mothers/caregivers when it comes to stress management, child care and other household responsibilities. Regarding family relationships, corporal punishment/ discipline method is still practical in Cambodia, where 36.5% of parents/caregivers⁵ still use this method as it is perceived to be more effective in bringing up good and disciplined children. Furthermore, corporal punishment of children at home is lawful (except in schools) in Cambodia. The Civil Code states that “the parental power holder may personally discipline the child to the extent necessary.” Despite repeated recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee to stop it, corporal punishment continues to take place at home.⁶

Given these youth well-being challenges, World Vision International in Cambodia (WVI-C) implemented a Youth for Change project to support most vulnerable adolescents to be able to develop positive relationships and gain essential life skills necessary for building resilience and making healthy life choices and become an agent of positive change. To achieve this, the project provided a series of life skills training sessions to improve the overall well-being of vulnerable youth/adolescents.

⁵ WVI-C 2021. Child Protection and Participation Technical Program Evaluation, p.26

⁶ Country Report for Cambodia, 2022. Cambodia Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (endcorporalpunishment.org)



The Youth for Change incorporated life skill capacity building that equipped adolescents with skills and comprehension that helped to improve their confidence, sense of worth, and capability, it also helped them to be self-aware of their value and the importance of making safe choices, issues of child protection, and to actively engage in social activities that promote a healthy family and community. This included dialogues and advocacy to prevent any forms of abuses and negative attitudes. The project conducted gender training sessions that helped youth/adolescents understand the concept of gender roles and social norms and empowered them to challenge some strong cultural practices by encouraging positive interaction and negotiation with their families and community. On the other hand, Community Service-learning projects (CSLPs) and football activities were put in place to provide opportunity for vulnerable youth/adolescents to work together, build teamwork, and join hands to address and solve community issues that negatively affect their well-being.

World Vision prioritizes Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Approach that promotes equal and inclusive access, decision-making, participation, systems and well-being of the most vulnerable; transforms systems, social norms, and relations to enable the most vulnerable to participate in and benefit equally from development interventions, builds individual and collective agency, resilience, and action and promotes the empowerment and well-being of vulnerable children, their families and communities.





The goal is to achieve sustained, transformational change at individual, household, community, and societal levels so that all persons can enjoy fullness of life.⁷ The approach advances World Vision's mission of promoting human transformation and development by reaching out to the most vulnerable children and adults and challenging the root causes of vulnerability that sustain gender inequality and social exclusion, such as restrictive socio-cultural norms, unequal power relations, and disempowering systems.

Under the Youth for Change Project, World Vision targeted Adolescents and Youth aged 12 to 18 years old, including registered children (RCs), in 23 districts in 7 provinces (Takeo, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Beanteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom) and it has created a total of 231 youth clubs from 2018 to 2020. The goal was to support a new generation of young Cambodians to have capacity to approach healthy life and its challenges with a creative and innovative mind-set that demonstrates critical thinking and engage in leadership and become the active citizen. More than 8,636 adolescents (5,381 females), especially 3,042 were the most vulnerable youth⁸ participated in the project and they have experienced new ways of learning and improving their lives in their community. As the result, the positive relationship building boosted both their physical and psychological well-being and enriched a healthy social interaction within families and communities, including their contribution to community transformation.

This case study on "Healthy Relationship Promotes Social Well-Being for Young People." highlights how Youth for Change Project contributed in promoting well-being for young people through the implementation of trainings, Sport and Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs).

⁷ World Vision GESi Approach and Theory of Change

⁸ WVI-C.2021. TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation



This case study uses data from World Vision Technical Programme Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation in 2021, Gender Review for Youth for Change in 2018, World Vision Technical Programme & Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study in 2023, Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2021-22, Child Protection Community Incident Monitoring Report 2021-22, and an interview with Youth Club leader, Sok Chiva, in Kors Kralor, Battambang. The data reveal that youth are facing many challenges that affects their well-being. These challenges include their life choices, social relationships, and the experience of abuses in childhood from families, peers, partners, and the environment that they are living.

The Problem

World Vision's 2018 Baseline survey on Child Protection reports that nearly half youth respondents (49.3%)⁹ have experienced physical and/or psychological aggression in the last 12 months prior to the survey. The forms of violence included shouting at, being insulted and humiliated, sexual abuse (sexual touching, attempted rape, and rape). Based on Community Child Protection Incident Monitoring report for the last two years (FY21&FY22) accounted for 363 cases: sexual abuses (130 cases), child early marriage (81 cases), physical abuse (50 cases), and other forms of abuses (101 cases)¹⁰ happened in World Vision Area Programmes.

⁹ WVI-C.2021. TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, p.15

¹⁰ WV CPI Monitoring report (2021-22)



There is a possibility that these data on child abuse cases were less likely to be very due to potentials under or lack of reporting. The report indicated that about 65.7% of parents/caregivers used physical punishment and/or psychological aggression with their children for the last 12 months¹¹ and they still believe in using violence as a good approach to bring up good children. This continues to be an issue of concern because the use of violence against children in communities has become the practical methods and culturally perceived the right thing to do by parents/caregivers. It is also legally permitted to discipline children using corporal punishment. In a wider survey study by Ministry of Health in Cambodia, it was found that a belief in physical punishment among adult group over 40 (29%) is still the pattern of their perception on child discipline; literally the physical punishment on their children; in particular, compared to all groups in the study, the percentage of physical punishment is more likely to be higher in urban areas than rural areas (29% versus 23%).¹²

In terms of safe environment, only 16.7% of adolescents reported to feel safe most of the time in their community despite the safe feeling within families being very high (72.7%)¹³. This is due to the fact that the concerns of violence, drug trafficking, traffic accidents, gang fight, and conflict among communities. By looking at segregated data, girls feel more unsafe than boys in communities and most sexual abuses happens against girls more than boys. Violence, abuse, cultural practice (such as child and early marriages), and corporal punishment contributed to have unsafe environment that undermined youth's well-being. Childhood abuse or negative experiences have demonstrated to have life-long consequences on well-being and behaviour.

¹¹ WVI-C.2021. TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, p.17

¹² Cambodia DHS Final report, (2021-22): <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-FR377-DHS-Final-Reports.cfm>

¹³ WVI-C.2021. TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, p.27



Program Activities

Youth for Change project worked through Area Programs' existing youth-led clubs by using Youth for Change's curriculum and community service learning methodologies. This project that was implemented in 12 Area Programs, prepared and facilitated Youth Clubs where young people gained an understanding of themselves, their values, self-worth, capability, status, and their goal in life, as well as strengthening personal competencies, confidence, and empowering them to contribute to their communities through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs). The project also conducted self-protections, and built their positive relationships with parents/caregivers and their communities to promote their well-being as individuals, families, and community through trainings, advocacy, and dialogue. With weekly life skill and sport training, the awareness of negative risky behaviours was provided to youth with the support from faith leaders and community stakeholders for providing learnings to youth groups. Faith leaders supported in mobilizing youth engagement as community volunteers to open dialogue on negative cultural norms (corporal punishment, violence, and self-protection). In addition, youth leaders led to train life skills to other youth clubs and ran community service learning projects to address the barriers of gender norms such as the disengagement of girls in sport and engage both boys and girls to have equal opportunities in learning, for community engagement, and playing sports.

The Youth for Change model was built on developing adolescents' capacity, resilience, and social well-being contributed to have better social interactions in their communities. Given leadership and active citizenship curriculum, the project supported young people develop life skills such as: self-efficacy, citizenship, leadership, civil engagement, critical thinking and goal-orientation.



With these learned skills, youth club members initiated a variety of projects to address violence, child protection issues, positive parenting/relationships, and discussions/reflections of how positive social relationship was important for young people, families, and communities. With an interview with Sok Chiva, male youth club leader, in Kars Kralor Area Program, Battambang province, who have involved in Youth for Change project and his inspired story has shown that his participation with Youth for Change has transformed his well-being to have better communication with others and be more opened to friends, and started to help build his community.

GESI Impacts

The Youth for Change project has trained and engaged approximately 8,636 adolescents (5,381 females), especially 3,042 of them have come from the most vulnerable background from the period of 2018 to 2020 project.¹⁴ Many of these adolescents and youth demonstrated their positive behaviors and attitude changes after their engagement with the project. From 2017 to 2019, the project impacted the increased engagement between boys and girls in community activities through youth club activities and Community Service Learning Projects.

The risk-taking behaviors among adolescents have sharply decreased from 78% in World Vision baseline study in 2018 to 44.6% in Technical Program Child Protection Evaluation in 2021¹⁵ by looking at their experience engagement in physical fights, drug use, alcohol consumption, and sexual intimacy.

¹⁴ WVIC Adolescent and Youth Participation Annual Programme Monitoring Data 2018, 2019 and 2020.

¹⁵ WVI-C.2021. TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, p.24



This has been observed that, with the engagement in project, young people have become more confident, aware of themselves better, enriched in better communication with others, and competent in supporting their own communities. Youth have also improved their social connections and relationships with their friends, peers, parents, community members, and local leaders through their involvement in youth clubs of Youth for Change project¹⁶. Their improvements in behavior changes and social relationships have contributed in boosting their well-being. In addition, youth have become more active and committed in exploring new learning opportunities for the pursuit of their self-development, resilience building, and community support through youth club activities or World Vision future programs.

The interviews with Sok Chiva, a youth club leader, in Kors Kralor Area Program, Battambang, indicated that Sok was empowered to socially engage in community affairs through building his communication skills, life skills, and resilience. His participation in the project enabled him to overcome his past terrible experiences due to poverty, illegal emigration to Thailand, and the mental intimidation of being arrested by Thai police because of his illegal migration status there. With his commitment and resilience, he has successfully challenged many barriers.

¹⁶ WVI-C.2021. TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation.



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Chiva said: *“I have been trained with many life skill lessons which had enriched my knowledge such as a better communication building and that helped me to deal with my friends. The life skills were about building a better communication and built the positive thinking. One more thing was to train me how to think as an adult not like a kid. We should not think only about ourselves or blame them and we didn’t think they felt hurt, but when they spoke ill of us, we got angry. Therefore, when we got trained all these lessons, we could understand the consequences of what we do to others and they feel the same thing to us so that we start to correct ourselves.”*

He used to be blamed and mocked because of his engagement in World Vision project activities by others because the community considered his participation in the project was a waste of time. This is mainly because participation in the project was not a paid activity. He also did some volunteer work that was also unpaid, so he did not make any income to support his family’s financial burden. However, self-confidence, positivity, and resilience he gained through his participation in the project helped him to become mentally strong and his confidence and self-esteem was improved. Until now, Chiva has become a football coach and also a teacher in one of secondary schools in his community.

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Chiva said that, “I volunteered as a role model in my village for this project to teach kids and share knowledge to them. Initially, there were two World Vision staff as my trainers. Then, that was not only me, but there has also a lot of changes among my friends who, before, used to hang out excessively; then, for a while, we had worked hard for our studies until I and some of them have got jobs until got jobs until now.”



Chiva coaching his students how to play football.



Chiva coaching his students how to play football.

Challenges

- Despite the progress, parents/caregivers are still embedded in their cultural and social norms that support the use of using physical and psychological aggression against their children that continue to undermine their children's well-being.



- Drug abuse is still a big concern for community and local police and law enforcement are still struggling to tackle this issue many youths continue to will face a high risk of engaging in drug abuse and other risky behaviors such as violence.
- Alcohol consumption continue to be a socially constructed and acceptable behavior among adults and adolescents. There is no regulated prohibition of alcohol by local laws so everyone, including young people have free access to alcohol purchase.
- Local government ability to response to child protection incidents limited. For example, there is lack/limited availability of support services (medical support, law enforcement, etc) which make adolescents and their parents/caregivers feel unsafe in their communities. This contributed to many parents in rural areas not allowing their youth to travel to participate in World Vision programs.
- Many World Vision staff in Cambodia have not been trained in GESI for them to have the capacity to integrate GESI in programming

Sustainability

The Youth for Change project focused on personal development among young people which build their self-competency, life skills, and resilience to be able to overcome and challenge social norm practices of violence and risky-motivated behaviors. By using training and Community Service Learning project approaches, the project equipped youth, their parents/caregivers, and community with skills and knowledge on negative consequences of corporal punishment and toxic relationships within their families. This has contributed to a culture of open conversation and working together to transform the risky behavior, and replacing them with safe and better life choices.

CONCLUSION

Adolescents/youth are still facing different forms of abuses within their homes. In addition, the risky-behavior taking are still a major concern among youth groups as the drug use and alcohol consumption are widely absorbed into their daily living. Contributing factors include unregulated use of alcohol in Cambodia (such as no age limitation for drinking and free access to alcohol regardless of age), This, combined with child abuse and other harmful cultural practices such as child marriage, greatly affected youth's well-being both physically and psychologically. To transform risky-behaviors and child abuse behaviors in families, World Vision Youth for Change project aimed at building healthy relationships among youth and communities to promote well-being for young Cambodians.





This has been done through trainings and community service learning projects which engaged adolescents/youth; in particular the most vulnerable ones, in building their self-efficacy, knowledge, self-protection, resilience, and introduced the safe life choice making. With their active engagement in learning and doing their projects, the violence has been observed decreasing and parents/caregivers have been aware and tried their best to transform the way they are educating their children. Local leaders have also joined to promote social healthy relationships, awareness raising on child protection, and strengthen community support on child incidents and family support. However, there is a need to strengthen GESI in the Youth for Change project. This can be done by strengthening the capacity to integrate GESI in programming through training of staff GESI, and providing technical support to program staff to implement GESI transformative programs that will develop strategies to transform harmful social norms, beliefs and perspectives that affect the well-being of young people and create an enabling environment for vulnerable youth to enjoy life in its fullness.





GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

CASE STUDY

CAMBODIA: COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT PROMOTES THE REALIZATION OF YOUTH'S DECISION MAKING

Phou Navy participated in Youth for Change since 2019 at Stoung, Kampong Thom province. She led many community projects back in her days with Youth for Change project, and it was her aspiration to make a decision to be a teacher in a hope that she can make a ripple affects on the younger generation.



Introduction

Youth have increasingly been given the opportunities to participate in public forums, events, and other social platforms in government's activities both at sub and national levels, NGOs' events, and private companies' activities, including platforms on social media, in Cambodia. However, most events or youth engagement are one-offs, ad hoc, and lack of clear youth institutionalization to truly influence decision making that impact their lives. In terms of youth's structure or advisory councils or youth clubs, there are no any in local level which could not be empowered enough to advocate for their interests in local governance.

In CDRI's study in 2018, it shows that the participation of youth in local events is very low and one of the reasons is the lack of support and respect by disregarding them in any planning processes in commune¹ by local government. Most engagement are considered for old people (youth's parents/caregivers) to make decision in the substitution of young people. In the recent WV FGD² with local leaders in one commune in Kratie province, it is been discussed that the youth participation has never been incorporated into commune agenda and their participation existed as some of them came along with their parents in the meeting. Only 48% of adolescents among 12, 621 youth reported to have their ideas incorporated into local decision making for the last 12 months³; however, no clear tracking on how local leaders integrated their ideas or feedback into decision making process.

¹ CDRI's Cambodia Development Review: Youth Participation in Local Cambodian Politics, issued March 2023

² WVI-C.2023. Technical Program and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study

³ WVI-C.2023. Technical Program and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study



In family institution, young people also have less voice and ownership on their decision making on important issues such as marriage, major selection at university, and the participation in social activities.

The inclusion and empowerment of youth in decision making process are still limited and could undermine the voices and feedback from adolescents from the inclusive and informed decision making. This might be the influence of social norms and stereotypes of adults that sabotage youth's voices in families and communities. The mindset per se is more likely focusing on the devalue on young age, no experiences in life, or young people cannot think hard or big on difficult issues as adults.

World Vision International in Cambodia (WVI-C) implemented a Youth for Change project using an asset-focused positive adolescent and youth development approach⁴ with the clear aim to bring interventions directly to most vulnerable adolescent youth groups in rural communities where WVI-C works to create spaces and opportunities for them to learn, grow, and develop their life skills, confidence, and resilience to accessing community services. Likewise, this project promoted youth's decision making by empowering youth clubs to have their ownership on their project initiatives through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs), Joint partnership with local different stakeholders, and project implementation in cooperation with local leaders and communities.


⁴ WVI-C's programming approach in line with USAID's YouthPower: <https://youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>

World Vision prioritizes Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Approach that promotes equal and inclusive access, decision-making, participation, systems and well-being of the most vulnerable; transforms systems, social norms, and relations to enable the most vulnerable to participate in and benefit equally from development interventions, builds individual and collective agency, resilience, and action and promotes the empowerment and well-being of vulnerable children, their families and communities. The goal is to achieve sustained, transformational change at individual, household, community, and societal levels so that all persons can enjoy fullness of life⁵. The approach advances World Vision's mission of promoting human transformation and development by reaching out to the most vulnerable children and adults and challenging the root causes of vulnerability that sustain gender inequality and social exclusion, such as restrictive socio-cultural norms, unequal power relations, and disempowering systems.



Under the Youth for Change Project, World Vision targeted Adolescent and Youth aged 12 to 18 years old, including registered children (RCs), in 23 districts in 7 provinces (Takeo, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Beanteay Meanchey, Siem Reap Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom) and worked with a total of 231 youth clubs from 2018 to 2020.

⁵ World Vision GESI Approach and Theory of Change




The goal was to support a new generation of young Cambodian who have the capacity and agency to approach life and its challenges with a creative and innovative mind-set that demonstrates critical thinking and flexibility for their environment. The project used life skill training which enabled adolescents to build their confidence, strong communications, and capacity to work with local authorities and communities where they were living. With their engagement in youth club activities, youth not only learned the positive relationship skills, but they also took important roles to socially engage in the community through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) which were the promising platforms that they could gain experiences, exercise their learned leadership skills, and led local advocacy for community changes. From 2018 to 2020, 231 youth clubs⁶ were created and more than 281⁷ youth-led advocacy projects were developed and implemented by Youth for Change clubs to advocate with local duty bearers on the issues such as child protection, security, lack of material for learning, road reconstruction, COVID-19 awareness information, environmental issues, and the ongoing supports to most vulnerable families. The Youth for Change project contributed to benefit 8, 636 adolescents (5, 381 females), especially 3,042 were the most vulnerable youth⁸ and they have experienced new ways of learning and opportunities in their community engagement. The self-esteem and confidence building project-focus has created youth leaders to be more active in their community activities.

⁶ World Vision. 2021. Child Protection and Participation Evaluation

⁷ WVIC Adolescent and Youth Participation Annual Programme Monitoring Data 2018, 2019 and 2020.

⁸ TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, (WVI-C, 2021)




This case study on **“Community Service Learning Project Promotes the Realization of Youth’s Decision Making,”** highlights how Community Learning Service Learning Projects (CLSPs) in Youth For Change creates spaces for young people to exercise their leaderships in decision making in managing Youth Clubs and joint cooperation by working with local authorities on youth’s related issues in their communities. This case study uses data from WV TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation in 2021, WV TP & CESP Baseline Study in 2023, WV Child Protection Review 2019, CDRI’s Cambodia Development Review issued 2023, and an interview with a Youth Club leader, Navy, Santuk Area Program, Kampong Thom. The data reveal that the level of youth’s decision making is still limited; in particular, their engagement in local decision-making process are frequently missed out. Social norms are parts of this opportunity sabotaging motivated by age, experiences, inaccessibility to information in local governance, and fears and low confidence from young people themselves.

The problem

Despite the large number of young Cambodians, the level of local participation is very low and limited in civic spaces. Based on Transparency International (TI) survey in 2022 among 1, 600 youth aged from 15 to 30 years old, it finds that youth never participated in the meetings of commune/district development plans (83%), monthly commune/district meetings or public forums organized by local authorities (88%), and monitoring on the implementation of commune/district development plans (90%) .

⁹ Cambodian Youth Policy Survey, 2022: <https://www.ticambodia.org/cambodian-youth-policy-survey-en/>



Many youth respondents felt that the government's efforts to promote youth civic and political engagement remain insufficient. In WV survey among 12, 621 adolescents, only 48% of them reported that their views are sought and incorporated into the decision making of local governance¹⁰. Local leaders are influenced of seniority, hierarchy, and power to govern and make decision for young people in communities. In the Youth for Change project survey in 2019, it found that 56% of adolescents who did not have opportunity to voice their concerns to local duty bearers and 58.3% of them did not feel their ideas were considered¹¹. Surprisingly, youth were not invited or aware of the local meetings either on commune planning, development, or other local events not even to look thoroughly on the level of inputs/feedback incorporation into local decision making. When holding meeting discussions with some local leaders, they perceived youth as the beneficiaries of their administration not the ownership or contribution on the progress or changes.

Program activities

To promote the realization of youth's decision-making opportunities in local level, WV Youth for Change Project was implemented, which worked through Area Programs' existing youth-led clubs by using Youth for Change's curriculum and Community Service Learning Methodologies adapted from SKYE, IMPACT, ISAF and Creative Youth curriculums.

¹⁰ WVI-C.2023. Technical Program and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study

¹¹ WVI-C.2019. Child Protection Review, TSO



This project was being implemented in 12 APs. It prepared and facilitated Youth Clubs where young people gain an understanding of themselves, their values, and goal orientation as well as increasing their personal competencies contributing to their communities through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs). This project also enhanced leadership roles and project management skills for youth in communities; especially building cooperation and putting youth's issues in commune agenda.

The Youth for Change Project initiated the youth club creation to mobilize youngsters to join and learn to build their capacity, resilience, leadership, and create their own projects with consultation and working with their club members. Through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs), youth led their own clubs with many learning activities, regular meetings for club work reflection, and identify youth and community issues to create projects to implement and raise them to local government. During the process, the Youth For Change through CSLPs, youth leaders and members had their own decision making and independently worked and sought cooperation from communities, parents/caregivers, and local authorities to support their initiatives for the sake of community development and awareness raising. Despite some technical support and coordination were provided by WV staff, youth club leaders had their own autonomy and decision making in working with their club members on every work they did in their club activities such as advocacy with local authorities, local fundraising, child protection issues, dialogue with communities, and even during the Covid-19 responses.



GESI Impact

Among 2,031 youth participants, it found that 70% of girls benefited from Y4C project¹². In TP for Child Protection and Participation Evaluation in 2021, it found that youth have developed their confidence to facilitate their own future, improved their social competencies and relationships, and become more matured, responsible, and committed to learning. The creation of 231 youth clubs with more than 281 CSLPs¹³ initiated has provided potential opportunities for young people to own their voices and processes in club running, mobilize communities, and engaged in decision making process with local authorities. By taking roles in leading clubs, youth learned to manage clubs, facilitated learning activities, and especially initiated community projects to respond the needs identified in their communities. With discussion with club leaders and members in Youth For Change project, it was shared that local leaders have expressed appreciation of youth clubs' contribution in bringing positive changes in communities. This has made them feel valued and be part of this positive change in the process. In the same discussion, local leaders have changed the way they made decision to increasingly engage youth clubs in commune processes of other development work.

Based on the TP Baseline Analysis, by looking at gender perspective, “the high female participation in Youth for Change is a result of the program being seen as a learning club and got supported of activity for their daughters.” This could show that the introduction of learning activities by using youth club approach could engage more girls in learning with the support of their parents that has transformed some perception of negative look on girls' engagement in social activities.

¹² WV Gender Evaluation Report in 2019: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, p.12.

¹³ World Vision. 2021. Child Protection and Participation Evaluation




Based on Review Report for Youth For Change project in 2018¹⁴, female groups accessed 104 Youth Clubs in which 67% of youth club leaders were females who were trained and delivered weekly life skill training to other club members. Through the CSLP Initiatives, 410 CSLPs were initiated by youth groups in partnership with 16, 928 community adults and stakeholders that, through awareness raising, dialogues, and local campaigns, addressed community identified issues including the school dropouts, which benefited 16, 229 children¹⁵.

Interestingly, with an interview with Navy, a female youth club leader, in Santuk Area Program, Kampong Thom province, who have involved in Youth for Change project has highlighted the impact of project in her personal transformation. Navy has challenged her own fears and the social barrier of being young and led the old to engage in community activities. With her engagement with WV Youth For Change Project, she got recognized and praised for her leadership for the common good of her community from local authorities, old people, and her family itself. She has observed that having been empowered and provided opportunities to work on our own has made her become more courageous, independent, and get more trust on herself. CSLPs through club running has contributed to her transformation and they bridge the generation gaps between young and old; in particular local authorities to value and support young people's voice and potentials in community development.

¹⁴ WV Gender Review Report in 2019: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, p.9

¹⁵ Adolescent and Youth participation programme Factsheet, WVI-C 2019



Among 2,031 youth participants, it found that 70% of girls benefited from Y4C project. In TP for Child Protection and Participation Evaluation in 2021, it found that youth have developed their confidence to facilitate their own future, improved their social competencies and relationships, and become more matured, responsible, and committed to learning. The creation of 231 youth clubs with more than 281 CSLPs initiated has provided potential opportunities for young people to own their voices and processes in club running, mobilize communities, and engaged in decision making process with local authorities. By taking roles in leading clubs, youth learned to manage clubs, facilitated learning activities, and especially initiated community projects to respond the needs identified in their communities. With discussion with club leaders and members in Youth For Change project, it was shared that local leaders have expressed appreciation of youth clubs' contribution in bringing positive changes in communities. This has made them feel valued and be part of this positive change in the process. In the same discussion, local leaders have changed the way they made decision to increasingly engage youth clubs in commune processes of other development work.

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Navy, a female youth club leader, said that, “I have changed a lot since I joined social activities with WV Youth for Change Project. I started to understand myself and the inspiration to join community activities. When I ride my bike in my community, I feel happy what I have done as it comes to my thought that I have contributed to make this community more beautiful than before in trash collection.”



Representative Photo: Youth Club leader is facilitating club activity to identify community issues and making decision to implement their project in their local community. © World Vision | 2018

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“My parents praise me and I have become more confident in making my own decision. Whatever I do now, I have my independence and trust on myself. Wherever I go in my community, I keep hearing people say that I have become more courageous and known how to socialize and engage in community activities. They are happy for me. Beyond than this, I have gained a lot of skills to work in my pedagogy trainings as I have chosen a teaching career.”



Navy is leading young people in her community to clean trash in her community.

Photographer @ Lam Sokchea © World Vision | 2023



Challenges

- Parents and local leaders have not fully engaged youth in commune/village decision making process that undermines the full youth empowerment in commune/village development planning, design, and plan execution. This disengagement has made youth not to be aware of information, no access to opportunities that influence commune's decision making, and have been left behind all important issues related to them.
- Parents and communities have not seen the importance of youth participation and fears of social engagement as they are concerned of risks as volunteered work or social engagement are easily seen as political motivated activities and Youth for Change Project needs to carefully inform parents/caregivers, community members, and local authorities to gain trust and well informed of every youth engagement.
- Community Service-Learning Projects (CSLPs) were not more focused on actual community issues identified by youth groups and sometimes the projects were motivated and introduced by WV staff and local leaders or to meet the existing commune agenda of development. The project initiatives should shape the authority and ownership for youth more so that they feel belonged to their project implementation rather than too much guiding and project oriented leading by adults.



Sustainability

Youth for Change Project has adapted and incorporated the Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) to pay the way for youth club leaders and members to exercise their learned skills from the project to initiate, lead, and engage in community activities. With the space within CLSPs, it has created culture of discussion, consultation, and inclusive decision making in Youth Clubs which train young people to learn and see the inclusive decision making is important in community development. With the CSLPs, local leaders, parents, and community support the roles of young people and they start to engage them more in their commune development process in which it has created incentives for youth engagement in decision making through the projects they are doing. This contributes to bridge the generation gaps and has resulted in the transformed perception of local leaders and seniors in communities towards youth's issues.

Conclusion

Youth's participation in decision making is still limited and the overlook of their importance in the process is still the ongoing issue. Local governance frequently disregards youth from decision making process as they only involve old people—literally focusing more on adult engagement than young people influenced by seniority value and hierarchy both in government and family structures. With this youth disengagement, youth have no courage, confidence, and support to speak up or engage in local decision making.



As result, youth have no sufficient ability to make decisions free from coercion at individual, family, community, and societal levels. This barrier contributes to the control over assets and capacity to make decisions in leadership. To bridge this barrier, WV Youth For Change Project has proved the remarkable transformation of the way of youth engagement in learning and decision making. With the introduced trainings, youth have been equipped with life skills, capacity, resilience, and self-protection to approach their lives with health choice making and more courageous in challenging social barrier that undermined their access to influence decision making in local governance. With Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs), youngsters have trained themselves with leading club activities, consultation, reflection, and exercised their inclusive decision making in project design, preparation, and implementation. By going beyond than youth club running, youth have used CSLPs to engage and advocate with local authorities, parents/caregivers, and community to listen and recognize their roles, inputs/feedback, and the subsequent contribution in community development. This CSLP implementation has enabled them to realize their potentials and rights in decision making process either in youth clubs or local community setting.

However, CSLPs should be specifically reshaped and clearly informed to ensure more autonomy and ownership in all decision making to initiate, plan, and execute the projects. This should also encourage to reconnect the dots of youth's issues to commune office so that their concerns and challenges could be addressed and considered in commune decision making rather than focusing on infrastructure, trash cleaning, or other projects motivated and oriented by local leaders and WV staff in AP levels. In addition, AP level should form a youth council/network so that they could have more powerful voice to advocate with local leaders and use CSLPs as their incentives to influence more decision making.



Phorn Leat, is helping his family to pull off the tamarin for sale at the market and plays a role as a youth club leader in Chikraeng.

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

CASE STUDY

CAMBODIA: YOUTH CLUB ENHANCES A MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION



Introduction

Cambodian government has established respective channels for youth participation to provide inputs in policy making, development programming, and decision-making process in all levels of government agencies. With the ongoing commitment and efforts to integrate youth participation, there are still; however, constraints to impact children and adolescent to participate in all levels of governance in Cambodian context. In 2019, children constituted 34.8^{1,2} per cent of the population, a percentage that is growing rapidly and is believed to have been increasing based on the current trend.


The country's Decentralization and De-concentration (D&D) framework³ has established spaces for full youth participation and the National Action Plan for Cambodian Youth Development⁴ has mapped the needs of youth engagement by identifying the comprehensive youth services and participation at both national and local levels. In this action plan, youth is structured and institutionalized to be the closest direct key actors in providing collaboration and cooperation with government, including the feedback provision and monitoring on development action plan and development partnership mobilization.

¹ An Analysis of The Situation of Children and Adolescents in Cambodia 2023: <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/media/7286/file/SITAN%20Cambodia%202023.pdf>

² RGC General Population Census of Cambodia 2019

³ Strategic Framework for Decentralization and De-concentration Reforms: [https://ncdd.gov.kh/images/NCDD/About_NCDD/026_2005%20Strategic%20Framework%20for%20Decentralization%20and%20Deconcentration%20Reforms\(Eng\).pdf](https://ncdd.gov.kh/images/NCDD/About_NCDD/026_2005%20Strategic%20Framework%20for%20Decentralization%20and%20Deconcentration%20Reforms(Eng).pdf)

⁴ National Action Plan for Youth Development: https://data.opendevelopmentcambodia.net/laws_record/national-action-plan-on-cambodian-youth-development-2016-2018



In addition, the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Cambodia has established the UN Youth Advisory Panel (UNYAP)⁵ in 2007 for youth groups to advise the UN in the design of youth-friendly policies, strategies, and programme aimed at addressing adolescent and youth issues in Cambodia. However, youth engagement is still limited and more symbolic of their participation in both local and national level with constraints and discouraging environment. In CDRI's study in 2018, it shows that the participation of youth in local events is very low and one of the reasons is the lack of support and respect by disregarding them in any planning processes in commune⁶ by local government

Driven by the barriers of youth participation, World Vision International in Cambodia (WVI-C) has increased youth participation in club leadership and community activities through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs). This contribution has formed 231 youth clubs⁷ from 2018 to 2020 and it keeps increasing in numbers based on the expansion of Child Protection Program adaptation in 39 Area Programmes (APs) across Cambodia. This youth engagement has integrated into WV policy and technical program design, program implementation and local advocacy engagement such as the ongoing opportunities for youth/adolescents to provide inputs to local governance on their identified issues through Community Analysis and Social Accountability for Child Protection (CASA4CP) and co-joint advocacy influenced decision-making that affect them which local authorities have mobilized and integrated their own budget through commune investment plan (CIP).

⁵ UN Youth Advisory Panel (UNYAP) Cambodia: https://web.facebook.com/UNYAPCambodia/?ref=page_internal

⁶ CDRI's Cambodia Development Review: Youth Participation in Local Cambodian Politics, issued March 2023

⁷ World Vision, 2021. Child Protection and Participation Evaluation

World Vision prioritizes Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Approach that promotes equal and inclusive access, decision-making, participation, systems and well-being of the most vulnerable; transforms systems, social norms, and relations to enable the most vulnerable to participate in and benefit equally from development interventions, builds individual and collective agency, resilience, and action and promotes the empowerment and well-being of vulnerable children, their families and communities. The goal is to achieve sustained, transformational change at individual, household, community, and societal levels so that all persons can enjoy fullness of life.⁸ The approach advances World Vision's mission of promoting human transformation and development by reaching out to the most vulnerable children and adults and challenging the root causes of vulnerability that sustain gender inequality and social exclusion, such as restrictive socio-cultural norms, unequal power relations, and disempowering systems.



⁸ World Vision GESi Approach and Theory of Change



Under the Youth for Change Project, World Vision targeted Adolescent and Youth aged 12 to 18 years old, including registered children (RCs), in 23 districts in 7 provinces (Takeo, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Beanteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom) and it has created a total of 231 youth clubs from 2018 to 2020. The goal was to support a new generation of young Cambodian who have the capacity and agency to approach life and its challenges with a creative and innovative mind-set that demonstrates critical thinking and engage in leadership and become the active citizen. The project used life skill training which enabled adolescents to have self-confidence in their participation through youth club activities and learning, building their positive relationship skills, and to socially participate in the community through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) to bring voices, issues, and solutions for their communities; in particular their inputs on concerns affected them with local governance. This contributed to impact youth participation for 8,636 adolescents (5,381 females), especially 3,042 were the most vulnerable youth⁹ and they have experienced new ways of learning and participation opportunities in their community. The self-esteem and confidence building project-focus has enabled more youth engagement in youth club and commune activities to challenge senior dominance culture.

This case study on **“Youth Club Enhances a Meaningful Youth Participation”** highlights how Youth Clubs in Youth for Change Project built up youth’s confidence in leadership and promote commune activity engagement through life skill trainings, CSLPs, and local advocacy.

⁹ WVI-C.2021. TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation.



This case study uses data from WV TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation in 2021, Gender Review for Youth for Change in 2018, UNICEF's Analysis report 2023, WV Child Participation Review Phase2, WV TP & CESP Baseline Study in 2023, CDRI's Study on Youth Participation in Local Cambodian Politics, Cambodian Government Census 2019, and an interview with Youth Club leader, Leat Phorn, in Chikraeng Area Program, Siem Reap. The data reveal that youth participation is limited in local governance due to lack of information access, respect and support from elders, education, experiences, and the economic factor which has caused migration for job seeking leading to downgrade youth participation in commune level. However, in WV's program level of Youth for Change, youth were more active and sufficiently engaged in Youth Club Activities which have more spaces to speak up, sharing concerns and experiences, access peer support and the opportunities to exercise their leadership roles.

The problem

Despite the increased commitment, youth participation still has limitation in the practical administration and implementation, especially the youth engagement in local governance. 60%¹⁰ of children among 104 child respondents from WV's Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in 2019, ranked their participation as "informed but not asked" or "excluded or not participating".

¹⁰ Child Participation Review Phase2: Strengthening Child and Youth Participation in and through Programming WVI Cambodia, p.12



Given the study, children and adolescents are not sufficiently provided the full participation in addressing their concerns and inputs in planning process, decision-making, feedback and other development programmes in their communities. It seems that whilst children understand the potential of their participation to enhance quality and access of basic services, they do not sense that adult stakeholders full embrace and utilize their ideas or participation. In CDRI's study¹¹, it finds that a matter of lack of support and no respect to young people has undermined a full youth participation. The child's inclusion per se is very limited and youth engagement focuses more likely on their attendance or just the symbolic engagement. Not to mention the constraints on traveling to group and community events which is difficult and even unsafe, especially for young girls¹² in rural areas.

For youth's views which are incorporated into the decision-making in local government, only 48% of adolescents among 12,621 respondents are positive for this engagement¹³ but this participation is more on attendance or uninvited present rather than the idea respect and integration into decision making. For Local leaders, they view youth participation is more likely less than their older counterparts in local development activities and public forum¹⁴. This has undermined youth full engagement which is probably because of their limited information access, education and experience, low self-confidence, shyness, and no sufficient supportive process in commune level.

¹¹ CDRI's Cambodia Development Review: Youth Participation in Local Cambodian Politics, issued March 2023

¹² See Parkinson S. et al Final Report Cross-Sector Cambodia Youth Assessment USAID 2019 accessed 21 October, 2022 at [https:// docslib.org/ doc/9113463/final-report-cross-sector-cambo- dia-youth-assessment](https://docslib.org/doc/9113463/final-report-cross-sector-cambo-dia-youth-assessment), extracted by UNICEF, 2023

¹³ WV TP and CESP Baseline Study in 2023

¹⁴ CDRI's Cambodia Development Review: Youth Participation in Local Cambodian Politics, issued March 2023



However, there is still not clear in terms of full participation as youth considers the call to join event or meeting as the engagement by local government which is convincingly conducted to only meet the youth quorum attendance not to speak up. Based on CDRI's survey study among 1, 600 respondents, youth asked questions so little compared to adult participants in local meetings (5.9% in public forum, 3.6% in commune meeting, and 10.7% in village meeting). In the FGD in TP and CESP Baseline Study in 2023 with one commune in Kratie province, local leaders; in particular commune, have never engaged youth in their meetings or commune planning and though there were some youth participants in some meetings, they just came uninvited and accompanied their parents to the meeting only.

Based on UNICEF's Adolescent and Youth Situation Analysis (AYS)¹⁵ in 2020, highlighted that youth civic engagement is determined by their parents and at local level, they are culturally expected to be submissive and listen to their elders. Some engagement in sensitive issues such as activism, human rights, and environmental movement is subjected to risk ostracism and oppression and they end up to give up their trying to participate due to no support from parents and communities. This fact proves that, despite the existence of official structures, systems and processes for child participation, children and adolescent groups in Cambodia have insufficient space, voice, audience, ownership, and no enough support from families and society to influence truly and productively to participate in social processes as they aspire to. Most activities they have joined either with government and NGOs are more likely the oriented engagement with no ownership and autonomy.

¹⁵ An Analysis of The Situation of Children and Adolescents in Cambodia 2023: <https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/media/7286/file/SITAN%20Cambodia%202023.pdf>



Program Activities

Youth for Change (Y4C) was a program, which worked through Area Programmes' existing youth-led clubs by using Youth for Change curriculum and Community Service Learning methodologies adapted from SKYE, IMPACT, ISAF and Creative Youth curriculums. Youth for Change project was being implemented in 12 APs. It prepared and facilitated Y4C clubs where young people gain an understanding of themselves, their values, and goal orientation as well as increasing their personal competencies contributing to their communities through community service learning projects (CSLPs). This has created a variety of opportunities that they can lead and engage in club activities and community team-led project initiatives for addressing their commune and youth issues compared to local engagement from commune/village leaders. Their youth club project initiatives were under the sufficient technical and budget support from WV to ensure they were well equipped with knowledge and practical skills in executing their projects and leadership by their communities.

The Youth for Change model was built on developing adolescents' capacity to contribute and participate in their communities. With motivated leadership and active citizenship core curriculum, the project supported young people develop skills, confident and leadership capacity to become responsible, trustworthy citizens who were able to contribute to the common good of their community. The ongoing support and coaching were provided by WV AP teams to ensure that they were confident, felt supported and knew how to identify community issues, defend their project proposal, and initiate action plan for executing their CSLPs; in particular, the consultation and coordination led capacity with community stakeholders and local leaders.



This learning, ownership, and leadership roles have motivated young people to join WV Youth Club activities and be well equipped with facilitation skills in their club activities and engage with community inspired by their initiatives in CSLPs. With the interview with Phorn Leat, male youth club leader, in Chikraeng AP, Siem Reap, he has involved in Youth for Change project and have seen the remarkable transformation both for his personal, household, and community level of his participation. And with his participation experiences in leading youth club and community engagement has built him with confidence to join public debate and made him win the scholarship to pursue his study at university.

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Phorn Leat, male youth club leader, 22 years old, a youth club leader in Youth for Change, said that, “Thanks to WV who have trained me and built my capacity to have made a lot of progress. I have become courageous to participate in public debates, WV youth clubs and become a part of community resources to fully join in community development. With the awareness raising initiatives [through CSLPs], we have changed families’ attitudes towards the perception of asking youth to drop out of school and migrate to work in Thailand; instead, they encourage their children to go to school, graduate, and get jobs.”



Representative photo: WV youth club leader is facilitating forum theater to raise awareness about violence against children in families and communities. Storyhub ©World Vision 2018

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Phorn Leat, male, 22 years old, a youth club leader in Youth for Change, said that, “my participation in community is also undermined by the family situation as we were poor and at that time, they had migrated to work in Thailand and I was left behind with my elder sister who also had her children in financial burden. I had to help her with family business and help out to support the daily basic needs. With this, I was not allowed to participate in community work; however, I still took time to join as I thought that I was part of community development and got recognized of my participation from parents, local leaders, and community for the impact of our participation.”




*Phorn Leat, male youth club leader, 22 years old, is helping his family to pill off the tamarin for sale at the market.
Photographer: Lam Sokchea ©World Vision 2023*

GESI Impacts

From 2018 to 2019, the project¹⁶ had mobilized and built capacity of 455 youth club leaders, local coaches and volunteers which 68% of them were females. And in 2018 alone, 102 Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) were initiated and conducted by youth clubs. During the Reflection Workshop on CLSP¹⁷ process, by looking at the combined experiences from youth club members, rating of member engagement was around 3.5 agreed by all club members involved in reflection.

¹⁶ WVI-C 2019. Adolescent and Youth Participation Programme Factsheet.

¹⁷ World Vision International Cambodia: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, Report 2029, p.26



This has proved that program intervention has achieved a remarkable assurance of youth participation in leadership, ownership, planning, implementation and decision-making process in WV youth club in WV programming and 93.7% of Youth for Change participants were able to identify at least a platform to raise their concerns to local duty bearers compared to only 34.7% in baseline study in 2018 in local governance. This has contributed in personal transformation of fears and be able to socially engage more in community activities. Youth have considerably changed their attitudes and shift some social norms of being submissive and listening to only elders or leaders to actively engage as active citizen and youth club leaders in rural areas. Youth for Change project has broken the culture of silence, shyness and fears embedded in youth's perception to be courageous and fully participated in club and community activities.

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“The volunteered participation is very important for me; in particular, my engagement has built my robust experiences and expose myself to see more outside world and the work that I am doing. I have joined a lot of WV activities and this has reflected myself and community. I have got the scholarship to study at University because of my experiences working with WV and community volunteered work.” ___ **Phorn Leat**, male youth club leader, Chikraeng AP, Siem Reap.

¹⁸ WVI-C 2021. Child Protection and Participation Technical Programme Evaluation


¹⁹ Child Protection Review Phase 2: Strengthening Child and Youth Participation in and through Programming WV Cambodia, 2019, p.15



However, in terms of child's participation in local governance, the incorporation of children's ideas into decision-making was still limited and their participation was the lack of listening and no clear commune guideline for youth engagement in their plan though local leaders ideally showed the desire to do so. Furthermore, with the responses from parents and community leaders, it demonstrated that there are still the socially constructed attitudes towards children's participation by parents which prevented them getting involved. This was probably due to the perceived unseen benefits of children's participation from parents, to keep them helping out at home, or worrying about their safety. Despite this, youth's learning, capacity building, and CSLP's initiatives have been recognized by local leaders, community, and parents as the incentives for permission from their parents to learn and engage. This has been seen in the WV gender review that, despite the lack of meaningful partnering with children, local leaders and parents seem open to hearing children's ideas and finding ways to work with them on implementing those which serve the greater good. The recognition of youth participation has attracted from Youth for Change Project and gained cooperation from local government that connected the missing dots between old and young generation.

Challenges

- Youth participation is more program oriented; in particular, Community Service Learning Project (CSLPs) which requires implementing staff to be trained and provide more spaces for ownership, empowerment, and autonomy for youth club members to initiate their own projects which reflect more their current issues in their own communities rather than program shaped project initiatives influenced from AP staff and local authorities.

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- Youth clubs are established based on the informal structure based and youth club members join and initiate respective projects that respond to actual needs or issues in their communities; however, they are not structured as youth network or groups that could be fully empowered and have strong voice to influence local governance. This has made their groups to be only participants that are more oriented or directed instead of being part or owning the process and decision-making.
 - There is lack of sufficient support from parents, community, and local leaders which youth participation in local governance are more likely the attendance or symbolic and they are expected to be submissive and obedient to elders and local leaders rather than fully participating to influence local administration and decision-making process.
 - There is a lack of close monitoring (tools, approach, etc.) on child participation in local governance which cannot be assured/measured how much child's ideas/voices are integrated into village/commune planning, implementation, and decision-making.

Sustainability

The strategy adopted by World Vision Cambodia for Youth for Change is proven to have a self-sustaining in terms of individual competency and resilience, increased household encouragement, and community recognition of child participation. WV Youth for Change has used the youth-led club model in which youth are trained to build their personal capacities so that they are enable to contribute well in their community work through Community Service Learning Project.



Given this potential, adolescents could identify community issues and address them through the holistic and collaborative work with families, parents, and local leaders. Their participation builds up youth's empowerment and address gender issues and social inclusion; in particular, the generation gaps through strengthening club leading process which includes project design, planning, implementation, and decision-making. With community and resource mobilization, youth have nurtured their experiences of public engagement, leadership roles, team work, and local advocacy through their participation within youth clubs, project initiatives, and meeting/consultation with local authorities and other. This continues to transform parents' and communities' perception to value and engage youth's participation as they are parts of important process in their coordinated inputs and feedback in decision-making regarding to youth and community problem solving.



Conclusion

Youth participation is not fully recognized and engaged in local governance though there are some encouraging policy frameworks in place. The entrenched social norms are still the ongoing issues to undermine youth opportunity in gaining equal value, respect, and support compared to their old counterparts either in family or commune space.

This happens when young people are socially shaped to be a good listener, submissive, and obedient rather than be able to participate in or engage in community affairs and systems of power that influence and determine development, life activities, and outcomes that affect them. However, some progresses have been made and impacted from the implementation of WV Youth for Change Project in Area Programmes.



It has introduced life skills trainings, formed youth clubs, and provided spaces for youth to exercise their rights and potentials through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs). This project engagement has enabled young people to learn skills, be aware of their roles and significance in community participation and they have begun to identify issues that affect their lives and formed projects to address and advocate for better changes in community. Youth Club creation and activities are a stunning impact in the project that has not only created safe space for youth/adolescent to learn, voice themselves, exercise their leadership skill, but also a place for peer support and to create a culture of youth participation to influence the leadership of local governance. There have been positive changes impacted from Youth for Change Project when youth are equipped with skills, experiences, and leadership roles, they have become more confident in participating community activities with old people and they have additionally led community to make better changes in their communes. However, gender barriers and generation gaps are rooted on more intangible nature such as gender norms, hierarchy, and stereotypes which require World Vision to address more in community. This will help bridge the gaps of generations in social participation and promote GESI quality work in project implementation.





Kruey Vuthy, a former youth leader in Youth for Change from Kampong Chhnang province. He continues to contribute to his community by raising awareness about violence against children which is embedded into his current work in social media production and radio broadcasting.

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

CASE STUDY

CAMBODIA: YOUTH CLUB MEMBERS CHANGE LOCAL LEADERS' WAYS OF WORKING



Introduction

In Cambodia, gender norms remain heavily rooted in society which has created the inequality between men and women, including girls and boys, depriving their basic rights. In the social spectrum, social inclusion is also at the horizon; especially the most vulnerable youth who are not put in the specific agenda of local governance. Local leaders¹ have not yet fully integrated youth in commune structure such as commune planning, design, commune investment plan (CIP), and decision-making process. Most local leaders are old which reflect on the seniority structure that demands respect, submission, and listening more than youth inclusion. Mostly, youth are symbolized in the local meetings and their participation is not structured or institutionalized in local governance due to age, lack of education and experiences, and no respect of old people in the local governance structure. If looking at the leverage of youth's voice in local decision-making process, only 48% of adolescents among 12,621 youth surveyed reported to have their ideas incorporated into local decision making for the last 12 months² ; however, no clear tracking on how local leaders integrated their ideas or feedback into decision making process. When checked with local leaders through FGD, it is found that they rarely engage youth in commune work and in some areas, they have never engaged them or structured youth in their administration. Given the barrier, even the youth candidates in commune council members have not seen more listed and elected in a few mandates of commune election since 2001. Youth have become a large number of voters; however, the youth candidates and youth elected at national and commune level nationwide in previous elections was still very low and there were only 163 youth commune councilors which was equal to 1.43% of 11, 353 elected councilors nationwide³. And the youth are not much increased in their candidacies in the following elections.

¹ WVI-C.2023. Technical Program and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study

² WVI-C.2023. Technical Program and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study

³ CONFREL, Neak Kloam Meul, Article Vol:73, 2007: https://comfrel.org/english/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/257_COMFREL_Editorial_YouthInElection__En_.pdf



World Vision International in Cambodia (WVI-C) implemented a Youth for Change project using an asset-focused positive adolescent and youth development approach⁴ with the clear aim to bring interventions directly to most vulnerable adolescent groups in rural communities where WVI-C worked to create spaces and opportunities for them to learn, grow, and develop their life skills, confidence, and resilience to cooperate and influence local decision making. Likewise, this project promoted youth’s engagement to coordinate both formal and informal actors working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of violence against children. With youth club formation model, the project empowered youth to be more active on their citizenship and have their ownership on their project initiatives through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs), Joint partnership with local different stakeholders, and project implementation in cooperation with local leaders and communities to ensure the local system serve all under youth’s coordination.

World Vision prioritizes Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Approach that promotes equal and inclusive access, decision-making, participation, systems and well-being of the most vulnerable; transforms systems, social norms, and relations to enable the most vulnerable to participate in and benefit equally from development interventions, builds individual and collective agency, resilience, and action and promotes the empowerment and well-being of vulnerable children, their families and communities.



⁴ WVI-C’s programming approach in line with USAID’s YouthPower: <https://youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>



The goal is to achieve sustained, transformational change at individual, household, community, and societal levels so that all persons can enjoy fullness of life⁵. The approach advances World Vision's mission of promoting human transformation and development by reaching out to the most vulnerable children and adults and challenging the root causes of vulnerability that sustain gender inequality and social exclusion, such as restrictive socio-cultural norms, unequal power relations, and disempowering systems.

Under the Youth for Change Project, World Vision targeted Adolescent and Youth aged 12 to 18 years old, including registered children (RCs), in 23 districts in 7 provinces (Takeo, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Beanteay Meanchey, Siem Reap Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom) and worked with a total of 231 youth clubs from 2018 to 2020. The goal was to support a new generation of young Cambodians who have the capacity and agency to approach life and its challenges with a creative and innovative mind-set that demonstrates critical thinking and flexibility to work in their communities. The project used life skill training which enabled adolescents to build their confidence, strong communications, and capacity to work with local authorities and communities where they were living. With their engagement in youth club activities, youth not only learned the positive relationship skills, but they also took important roles to socially and actively engage with local leaders through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) which were the promising platforms that they could gain support and lead local advocacy for community structure changes for integrate the children's vulnerability within the system to be addressed.

⁵ World Vision GESi Approach and Theory of Change



Given the outcome, from 2018 to 2020, 231 youth clubs⁶ were created and more than 281⁷ youth-led advocacy projects were developed and implemented by Youth for Change club members to advocate with local duty bearers on the issues such as child protection, security, road reconstruction, COVID-19 awareness raising, youth issues, and the ongoing supports to most vulnerable families. The Youth for Change project contributed to benefit 8, 636 adolescents (5, 381 females), especially 3, 042 were the most vulnerable youth⁸ and they have experienced new ways of learning and opportunities in their community engagement. The self-esteem and confidence building project-focused has created youth club leaders to be more active in their coordination and support on system changing.

This case study on “**Youth Club Members Change Local Leaders’ Way of Working,**” highlights how youth club members’ coordination and support could influence commune working mechanisms to institutionalize adolescents in their operation in local governance. This case study uses data from WV TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation in 2021, WV TP & CESP Baseline Study in 2023, WV Child Protection Review 2019, COMFREL’s Report 2007, and an interview with a male Youth Club leader, **Vuthy**. The data reveal that youth are not yet institutionalized and all local governance processes lack of youth participation in the way they are working though some concerns relate to youth’s interests. No any significant aspects of system support to all children and social or gender norms that increase the vulnerability of certain adolescents/children within the system are not yet fully addressed.

⁶ World Vision. 2021. Child Protection and Participation Evaluation

⁷ WWIC Adolescent and Youth Participation Annual Programme Monitoring Data 2018, 2019 and 2020

⁸ TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, (WVI-C, 2021)



The problem

In ASEAN demography, Cambodia has the fourth largest youth population in the region (UNDESA, 2020, extracted by ILO, 2020)⁹. One in six Cambodians was between 15 and 24 years old and more than a quarter of the population was at the age of between 15 and 29, (Cambodia Population Census, 2019). Despite large number of youth demography, youth representatives are still very low both in national and local levels in local governance. The data show more on percentage of youth voters but very limited in youth candidates in national and local elections. In addition, the level of local participation from youth is very low and limited in civic spaces. Based on Transparency International (TI) survey in 2022 among 1, 600 youth aged from 15 to 30 years old, it finds that youth never participated in the meetings of commune/district development plans (83%), monthly commune/district meetings or public forums organized by local authorities (88%), and monitoring on the implementation of commune/district development plans (90%)¹⁰. Many youth respondents felt that the government's efforts to promote youth civic and political engagement remain insufficient in terms of addressing youth concerns and no clear structure of youth in coordination and working closely with local government.

In WV survey among 12, 621 adolescents, only 48% of them reported that their views are sought and incorporated into the decision making of local governance¹¹ compared to WV TP evaluation (41.7%) in 2021. This has shown little progress on youth engagement in decision making and youth council or institutionalized youth have not yet been established in local administration. Despite the encouragement from government policy framework, there has no youth quota or representative body in local seats.

⁹ ILO, 2020: Decent Employment for Youth in Cambodia Programme (Phase2)

¹⁰ Cambodian Youth Policy Survey, 2022: <https://www.ticambodia.org/cambodian-youth-policy-survey-en/>

¹¹ WVI-C.2023. Technical Program and Community Engagement and Sponsorship Baseline Study



In the Youth for Change project survey in 2019, it found that 56% of adolescents who did not have opportunity to voice their concerns to local duty bearers and 58.3% of them did not feel their ideas were considered¹². Surprisingly, not to mention youth structure in local governance, youth were not invited or aware of the local meetings either on commune planning, development, or other local events not even to look thoroughly on the level of inputs/ feedback incorporation into local decision making. When holding meeting discussions with some local leaders, they perceived youth as the beneficiaries of their administration not the ownership or contribution on the progress or changes. Mostly, local authorities work with youth's parents as they claim that their parents could represent their children and make decision on their behalf. In this regard, youth are left behind and local government do not establish or strengthen youth structures for coordination, support, and being focal person(s) as partners with them to work and address youth issues and responding their needs and supports in commune level.

Program activities

To promote changes of local leaders' way of working, WV Youth for Change Project was implemented, which worked through Area Programs' existing youth-led clubs by using Youth for Change's curriculum and Community Service Learning Methodologies adapted from SKYE, IMPACT, ISAF and Creative Youth curriculums.

¹² WVI-C.2019. Child Protection Review, TSO



This project was initially being implemented in 12 APs and expanded its scopes for other APs. It equipped Youth Club members with capacity to build their potential strengths and confidence in working as teams, leading project design and implementation, mobilizing community members and as well as increasing their coordination and support with local leaders through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs). The CSLPs provided the connecting dots of generation gaps between young and old people and promoted cooperation and collaboration in different aspects of local governance work; in particular, work related to youth and their engagement with authorities.

The Youth for Change Project introduced Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) and provided technical support for young people to create their own clubs in the purpose of learning activities, facilitating regular meetings for club work, and identifying youth and community issues to create projects so that they could advocate and seek support from local government. During the process, the Youth For Change through CSLPs, youth leaders played more roles in meeting with formal and informal actors to raise youth's concerns, mobilize community funding, and sit in with local leaders to find possible solutions. This has bridged generation gaps and introduced new ways of working closely with community and authorities to initiate a culture of youth inclusion in local working process.



GESI IMPACT

Youth for Change Project has benefited 8, 636 adolescents (5, 381 females), especially 3, 042 were the most vulnerable youth¹³ in different aspect of their engagement. This is not yet mentioned the indirect beneficiaries who also gained support and engagement from CSLPs' implementation. In Technical Program for Child Protection and Participation Evaluation in 2021, it demonstrated that youth have developed their confidence to facilitate their own future, improved their social competencies and relationships, and become more matured, responsible, and committed to learning. The creation of 231 youth clubs with more than 281 CSLPs¹⁴ initiated has provided potential opportunities for young people to own their voices and processes in club running, mobilize communities, and engaged in influencing the ways the local authorities worked. With no culture of youth engagement in commune work, local leaders have begun to see their importance and potentials to work collaboratively and jointly support in addressing and solving youth's and community's issues. One commune chief has highlighted his commune's progress and changes compared to the last three mandates of his commune due to the fact that he has never seen any youth engagement in commune work before. This change has happened because there has been the encouragement from government; especially the support and motivation from WV Youth for Change Project in his commune which the project itself supported four communes in his district administration.

¹³ TP Evaluation for Child Protection and Participation, (WVI-C, 2021)

¹⁴ World Vision. 2021. Child Protection and Participation Evaluation



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A commune Chief in Youth for Change Project said that, “During the first and second mandate of the commune councilor, there had not been a lot of youth participation because we did not pay much attention on them. It seemed that we ignored their participation. Later, there has been directed from government; especially, the encouragement from our NGO partner [WV], they have promoted youth participation to help social activities and provide more support to community people. With their participation, there has been a lot of changes and currently youth always have their roles to join most of the activities in our commune.”

As the remark from local leader, he has seen a great impact of youth’s engagement to support commune and this was not only youth club running, but also other social activities such as their assistance to natural disaster responses, rescuing work, child protection, including teaching support to kids in communities. The commune chief has called this as the legacy of youth and become change maker in his commune. This has been endorsed by police who used to engage in Youth’s CSLPs and he has seen a great impact of youth mainstreaming in police administration work such as the work to promote Commune Village Safety Policy in his commune. This has indicated the structured engagement of youth in policy awareness raising that benefited youth and their communities.



In according to the Review Report for Youth For Change project in 2018¹⁵, female groups accessed 104 Youth Clubs in which 67% of youth club leaders were females who were trained and delivered weekly life skill training to other club members. Through the CSLP Initiatives, 410 CSLPs were initiated by youth groups in partnership with 16, 928 community adults and stakeholders that, through awareness raising, dialogues, and local campaigns, addressed community identified issues including the school dropouts, which benefited 16, 229 children¹⁶. This has increased the coordination and joint work between youth and local leaders, including community adults, to influence commune structure of working regarding to youth's issues.

Concretely, with an interview with **Vuthy**, a male youth club leader, in Rolea Ba'lr Area Program, Kampong Chhnang province, who have involved in Youth for Change project has highlighted the impact of project in his work coordination with local leaders. Vuthy has challenged his community mindset and social norms on environmental issue such as hygiene and trash disposal management and his seeking support to handle social mindset and activity mobilization. In addition, he also did the radio broadcasting to raise awareness about child protection, youth's issues, and other related topics for the common good of wide communities in his hometown. Discussing about the impact, Vuthy has seen the cooperation with different stakeholders as highly important to address community issues; especially the work closely with competent authorities, communities themselves, and youth groups who have brought positive changes in structures and human behaviors. With **Vuthy's** observation, youth engagement in joint cooperation with commune and other stakeholders have not only changed community's behaviors and way of thinking, but it also promotes their active citizenship within commune working process.

¹⁵ WV Gender Review Report in 2019: Gender Review of Youth for Change and One Goal, p.9

¹⁶ Adolescent and Youth participation programme Factsheet, WVI-C 2019

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Vuthy, a male Youth Club Leader, said that, “My engagement in this project, the progress I have seen is that, to find solutions, we have discussed with competent authorities such as village chief and commune chief. When we were able to find solutions, we took prompt action and youth group led the action with the joint participation from those who had competent authorities such as the village guards who also could join us.”



Vuthy is discussing the project with his team members. Photographer @TheCurve © World Vision | April 2023

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Vuthy, a male Youth Club Leader, views the importance of joint coordination and partnership to boost the system change in a way that, “First, it’s citizens themselves to join and work together. Secondly, it’s youth to play roles to support, advocate, and monitor the youth engagement in commune process. Thirdly, it’s local authorities to show this commitment. And fourthly, it’s the non-profit organizations who are the main partners. These are the key stakeholders who contribute to the positive changes in the community.”



Vuthy is broadcasting the awareness raising on child protection on radio program.

Photographer @TheCurve © World Vision | April 2023



Challenges

- Youth for Change project has not yet shaped clear way of youth club leaders/representatives to join commune work; especially the youth advocacy plan to promote more youth institutionalization in local governance.
- Youth engagement were more on trash collection/cleaning, though some youth related matters have been addressed and joint work with local government, there are still limited and requires more systematic and strategic approach to change the way commune work in youth structure integration in their governance.
- Community Service-Learning Projects (CSLPs) were not more focused on actual community issues identified by youth groups and sometimes the projects were motivated and introduced by WV staff and local leaders or to meet the existing commune agenda of development. The project initiatives should shape the authority and ownership for youth more so that they feel belonged to their project implementation rather than too much guiding and project oriented leading by adults.

Sustainability

- Youth for Change Project has adapted and incorporated the Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs) to pay the way for youth club leaders and members to coordinate and advocate their roles and engagement with local leaders. Despite the limitations, the project empowered youth's initiatives and engagement in working closely with community adults and local authorities to ensure the change of way working of local administration. With new way of working between different generations, commune structure has encouraged more young people in joint working process for community development. As WV youth club leaders approached their project work with multi-stakeholder engagement, this has introduced new way of working within communes and look more on youth inclusion in community development projects.



Conclusion

Youth institutionalization is not clear in local government and the youth engagement itself has more limitations than effective in terms of administration execution. More youth have not felt included for their voices and participation. Likewise, local leaders seem not so clear about youth structure and the way they are working depend on seniority and old people's power to make decision on behalf of young people and expect more of their obedience, respect, and cooperation. However, with the implementation of Youth for Change Project through Community Service Learning Projects (CSLPs), youth have trained themselves with life skill development, project initiative and exercised their leadership and work with local leaders to make community changes. With coordination and working closely with local government, commune/village leaders have recognized their potentials and contribution in making positive changes in community; in addition, they have begun to include youth's support and mobilization in commune working process. Compared to the last few mandates of commune election, it has been observed that youth have been integrated into commune's agenda for joint collaboration in addressing youth related issues and working with commune to ensure communities are sufficiently supported and made progress. However, Youth for Change Project needs to more strategically address the gaps of youth structure in commune and reshape CSLPs to address youth's issues; especially the system changes in local government.





World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.

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