



Why Cambodia’s National Statistical System Needs More Attention?

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Introduction

In early April, Cambodia’s Ministry of Planning convened its annual conference to showcase the ministry's achievements, especially in the field of statistical data. For a country poised to be a high-income country, statistics plays a crucial role in shaping the country's policies and development strategies. The National Institute of Statistics (NIS), under the Ministry of Planning, is the center for collecting and analyzing official data on various topics, from health and demographics to labor and economic activities. These data are crucial as they are the backbone for informed decision-making across various government institutions. Good progress has been made in this field. However, there are some weaknesses to be addressed.

Overview of Cambodia’s National Statistical System

The National Statistical System is a network that collects, compiles, analyses, and disseminates official statistics in Cambodia. It comprises the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), the central coordinator of various ministries and government institutions, and the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC). It is a decentralized system. Within each ministry and institution, a statistical bureau (so-called designated statistical unit [DSU]) usually produces official statistics relevant to its sector.¹

¹ National Institute of Statistics. *Statistics Law*. Phnom Penh, 2015.
https://www.nis.gov.kh/nis/For%20Menu/statistics%20law/Statistics%20Law%202015_English.pdf.

For instance, the statistical bureau under the Ministry of Tourism or Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training collects data related to tourism or labor respectively. Meanwhile, under the Ministry of Planning, NIS is responsible for compiling and disseminating administrative data from NBC, ministries, and state institutions. In addition, NIS is also responsible for conducting periodical censuses and surveys.² Moreover, NIS is assisted by the Statistics Coordination Committee in collecting data from various government institutions and ministries. A Statistics Advisory Council also advises the Ministry of Planning in developing the National Statistical System.

Achievements in the Field of National Statistics

National Statistical System implemented various types of censuses every five to ten years, namely general population census, population projection, census of agriculture, and economic census.³ Surveys are also conducted every one or five years. These include demographic and health surveys, socio-economic surveys, agriculture surveys, labor force surveys, food and nutrition security reports, Consumer Price Index (CPI), and National Accounts.⁴ The results of these censuses and surveys are available on NIS's website. Most are in PDF format, while only a few are in Excel. The institute also published a Statistical Year Book (in PDF), listing various types of socio-economic and governmental statistics, ranging from data on environment and agriculture to governmental staff and public finance. However, this Statistical Year Book is not an annual report. There have been only five such reports (2003, 2005, 2006, 2017, and 2021) on the NIS website. Furthermore, one of the recent major achievements shown during the Ministry of Planning's annual conference in early April is Camstat. It is a digital platform where various official statistical data can be retrieved. By the time of writing, these data are arranged in 12 categories: agriculture, demography, economy, education, employment, environment, gender, governance, health and nutrition, infrastructure, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and tourism. However, the data

² Ibid.

³ Ung, Sambath. "National Statistical System in Cambodia." Global IT Challenge. Last modified November 25, 2019.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjK8rnb6siFAxXxwzGHCuWdpIQFnoECA4QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fglobalitchallenge.com%2Fbbs%2Fdownload.php%3Fbo_table%3DLibrary%26wr_id%3D12%26no%3D0%26page%3D3&usg=AOvVaw3IohWznIEglmB_4KimfeV2&opi=89978449

⁴ National Institute of Statistics. "Official Statistics of Cambodia." Last modified 2024.

<https://nis.gov.kh/index.php/km/national-statistical-systems/official-statistics-of-cambodia>.

repository remains empty. Another major achievement, which has usually been overlooked, is the IDPoor Programme. IDPoor, or Identification of Poor Households Programme, has been implemented by the Ministry of Planning to record and regularly update the information on poor and at-risk families.⁵ The data from this program has been used by the government and NGOs to provide targeted financial and non-financial assistance to at-risk households. IDPoor Programme is a crucial tool for the government in implementing its cash transfer programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

Weaknesses of Cambodia's National Statistical System

Despite the progress, Cambodia's National Statistical System needs more attention and improvement. There are three issues to be addressed. First and foremost, the system suffers from decentralization. Each ministry has its designated statistical unit to produce statistics, while NIS must coordinate to collect data from those units. Communication and 'coordination' usually break down between line ministries. This leads to ineffectiveness of data compilation and difficulty for NIS, an issue even the NIS representative acknowledged.⁷ Second, Cambodia's National Statistical System has suffered from a lack of funding. The Cambodian National Strategy for the Development of Statistics 2019-2023 shows that during the development of the National Statistical System between 2006 and 2015, Cambodia lacked USD 32.6 million of the USD 44.1 million needed for the period.⁸ This is a 74-percent financing gap. Further, each line of ministries also allocated only a small proportion of their budget to statistical work. The strategic document estimated that for every USD 100 allocated to a ministry, only USD 0.25 went to statistical activities.⁹ In fact, most of the funding for the National Statistical System and nationwide statistical

⁵ Ministry of Planning. "About the Identification of Poor Households Programme in Cambodia | IDPoor." Department of Identification of Poor Households. Last modified 2024. <https://idpoor.gov.kh/en/about/>.

⁶ Chhoeung, Norinmony, Sesokunthideth Chrea, and Nghia Nguyen. "Cambodia's Cash Transfer Program during COVID-19." Asian Development Bank. Last modified December 2022. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/845381/adbi-case-study-2022-no-5.pdf>.

⁷ Ung, Sambath. "National Statistical System in Cambodia." Global IT Challenge. Last modified November 25, 2019. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjK8rnb6siFAxXxwzgGHcUwDpIQFnoECA4QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fglobalitchallenge.com%2Fbbs%2Fdownload.php%3Fbo_table%3DLibrary%26wr_id%3D12%26no%3D0%26page%3D3&usg=AOvVaw3IohWznIEg1mB_4KimfeV2&opi=89978449.

⁸ National Institute of Statistics. *National Strategy for the Development of Statistics 2019-2023*. Phnom Penh, 2018. <https://www.nis.gov.kh/nis/NSDS/NSDS%20book.pdf>.

⁹ Ibid.

work, in general, has been funded through development aids from donor countries. As Cambodia expects to graduate from the least-developed-country status in 2027, these aids will surely run dry. Finally, concerning Camstat, there is an uncertain division of roles between Camstat and CamDX (Cambodia Data Exchange). Modeled after Estonia's X-Road, CamDX is a digital platform developed by the Cambodian government for the exchange of data and access to data in government databases to strengthen the country's digital government and digital economy.¹⁰ CamDX has been up and running for a few years now. It has improved the efficiency of business registration by simplifying the process in accordance with the once-only principle. As a result, there might be overlapping functions between the two platforms. Therefore, there should be a specific division of roles between the two or a mechanism to synergize the two platforms.

More Needs to be Done

Statistical work has been an underrated part of Cambodia's development. A well-rounded and well-organized statistical database accessible to all stakeholders inside and outside of the government is a prerequisite for an effective monitoring and evaluation process (M&E) and improved governance. Data are needed to measure a particular policy's effectiveness and prevent overlapping policy remedies by ministries and institutions. Therefore, more needs to be done. First, more of the national budget should be allocated toward the National Statistical System and NIS in particular. This reduces donor dependency and allows NIS to improve coordination and build digital infrastructure. Second, within the framework of digital government, the roles of NIS and the Ministry of Planning should be enlarged. The Cambodian government aims to digitalize governance by initiating the Cambodia Digital Government Policy 2022-2035 framework. However, within this framework, the role of the Ministry of Planning and NIS in digitalization is trivial.¹¹ The ministry is, in fact, given an equal role as other line ministries within the framework, and it is seen that the body that plays the major role in governance digitalization is the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications. The Ministry of Planning should actually co-lead this digitalization

¹⁰ Ministry of Economics and Finance. "CamDX - Cambodia Data Exchange." Last modified 2024. https://camdx.gov.kh/#what_is_camdx.

¹¹ Ministry of Post and Telecommunications. "Cambodia Digital Government Policy 2022-2035." Last modified 2022. https://asset.cambodia.gov.kh/mptc/media/Cambodia_Digital_Government_Policy_2022_2035_English.pdf.

process. Otherwise, the digital backbone achieved under this framework will have to be revamped to incorporate the needs of the National Statistical System in the future.

Conclusion

To sum up, the National Statistical System has been improving on the right track from a very scattered one to a more consolidated one (Camstat). However, we cannot deny the slow pace of this consolidating process and the reliance on donors for the operation of such a system. More needs to be done to make this statistical system useful and openly accessible to everyone. As Cambodia aims to be a higher middle-income country in 2030 and a high-income country in 2050, a modern statistical and record system is a must.

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