



**Rainbow in the rain:
The LGBTI community in
Cambodia in the pursuit of
freedom and equality**



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This publication is commissioned by ILGA Asia - the Asian Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, representing more than 170 LGBTI organizations in East, South, Southeast, and West Asia. The document has been produced in consultation with member organisations and key partners as suggested by member organisations in the country. Permission to quote or otherwise use the information has been provided by the informants.

The analysis in the report is intended to recommend ILGA Asia to produce a strategic plan for 2021-2025. Positions in the report lie with the participants of the consultations and interviews, and do not reflect the values and viewpoints of the collective network.

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Table of contents

PAGE 01

Acknowledgements

PAGE 02

Executive Summary

PAGE 04

Acronyms

PAGE 05

Literature Review

PAGE 9

Findings

PAGE 19

References



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Executive Summary

This study discusses the current social context of Cambodia and how it affects LGBTIQ people. While, there is a growing acceptance, especially from urban societies, there is a limited understanding of sexual orientation and gender identities and a general preference to heteronormative identities resulting in stigma and discrimination towards LGBTIQ people. This notion also leads to a negative notion about LGBTIQ people in their role as a family member. The engagement on LGBTIQ issues in the public is also very limited even from the LGBTIQ politicians who occupy high positions in the public sector.

The study shows the current challenges that LGBTIQ people face in Cambodia. It discusses issues of non-recognition non- heteronormative marital relations, discrimination in the employment sector and the need for 'explicit' protection in the law to counter the same, health issues like high anxiety and depression among LGBTIQ population exacerbated by family violence resulting from SOGIESC issues, HIV transmission and limited services of hormone therapy, and bullying and discrimination faced by LGBTIQ students in schools from teachers and fellow students.

In Media, LGBTIQ people are not portrayed positively which perpetuates discrimination against them. Negative notions about LGBTI people arising from the Cambodian culture continue to dominate the media narrative.

LGBTI people still cannot officially claim their identities on their ID card or obtain legal documents to show their relationships with their partner, for marriage, or adoption. Negative attitudes of government officials and non-implementation of LGBTI-friendly policies also create further challenges.

Keeping the above-mentioned challenges in mind, the study suggests the following key priorities:

- a. Using technology and social media to continuously mobilize LGBTI people.
- b. Increasing awareness through SOGIESC and human rights workshops, training, tools, materials and integration of SOGIESC issues in education curriculum will aid in increasing acceptance of LGBTI people.
- c. Creating possibilities of future interventions to address causes of discrimination in the employment sector along with exploring options of microfinancing to help LGBTI people engage in self-employment opportunities.
- d. To address, inadequate health care provisions for LGBTI people, gender affirming policies, access to healthcare, and free provisions of condoms and counselling to prevent HIV transmission should be prioritized.
- e. Existing LGBTI civil society organisations can work as a role model for upcoming organisations and help them with capacity building, technical support, and fundraising.
- f. Increase in the number of youths, civil society organisations, greater acceptance in private sector, increasing engagement on UPR, and the ever-increasing efforts of the LGBTI community are some opportunities which can help the LGBTI people and the civil society organisations working on the issues of these people to help face these challenges in the future.



Acronyms

AJWS	American Jewish World Service
APCOM	Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health
APTBY	A Place To Be Yourself
ASC	The ASEAN SOGIE Caucus
BC	Bandanh Chaktomok
CCC	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CCHR	Cambodian Center for Human Rights
CHRC	Cambodian Human Rights Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DoFR	Declaration of Family Relationship
EU	European Union
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
LANGO	Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, Intersex, Asexual people, non-binary people, and those who do not identify as majorities, binary norms
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoLVT	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
MoWA	Ministry of Women Affairs
MRI	Micro Rainbow International Foundation
NAPVAW	National Action Plan on Prevention of Violence Against Women
NCHADS	National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
RoCK	Rainbow Community Kampuchea
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Express and Sex Characteristics
SOGIE Training	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Express training
TGF	Transgender female
TGM	Transgender male
UPR	Universal Periodic Review



Literature Review

Introduction

In Cambodia, LGBTIQ people have faced numerous issues such as self-discrimination, social exclusion, and bullying at school and at home. Some registered NGOs and non-registered groups have been working to advocate for the acceptance and recognition of the LGBTIQ community. Yet, the community continues to encounter social, economic, and political hardships.

Policy and law

In Cambodia, three government ministries have included the LGBTIQ population into their portfolios: MoWA , which included lesbian, bisexual, and trans women in national plans MoE , which included SOGIESC in new Health Education curriculums; and the CHRC , which provided space for dialogues.¹ Leaders among the ministries encourage NGOs to educate and raise awareness amongst the general public before proposing the law amendments on issues such as same-sex marriage or legal gender recognition.²

Matters pertaining to SOGIESC or LGBTIQ persons are not mentioned in Cambodian laws; and same-sex marriages are neither criminalized nor legal.³ The Cambodian Constitution in which Article 45 defines marriage as a union between “one husband” and “one wife” means that LGBTIQ families

¹ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, *The right to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics in employment in Cambodia* (2019), https://cchrcambodia.org/index_old.php?url=project_page/project_page.php&p=report_detail.php&reid=139&id=3.

² Cambodian Human Rights Committee (CHRC) is a governmental body which is established to address human rights issues in Cambodia. CHRC is currently working closely with Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, United Nations Organizations such as OHCHR as well as international governments. CHRC also works with other ministries to implement the recommendations of UPR; for example, the recommendations related to LGBTIQ persons.

³ Cambodia Constitution (1993), <https://pressocm.gov.kh/en/archives/9539>.

are not legally recognized.⁴ This means LGBTIQ families can obtain family and residential books with their partners; however, these documents list them as brothers and sisters rather than a couple, which does not correctly reflect their relationships.⁵

Lastly, judicial officers have not received any SOGIESC-related training because the MoJ claims that the backlog of cases in Cambodia have few SOGIESC-related cases. Moreover, access to legal aid among LGBTIQ people is limited, and 25% of LGBTIQ people feel uncomfortable seeking help from lawyers because of their SOGIESC identities.⁶

Employment

Among the LGBTIQ population, 20% of them experience rejection during the hiring process. Trans people face more discriminatory experiences at the workplace compared to lesbian, bisexual, and queer persons with conforming expressions. LGBTIQ employees have faced not only discrimination but also bullying and harassment by their colleagues and management members.¹ Additionally, LGBTIQ employees are not legally protected. The Royal Government of Cambodia's national employment policy only states 'both sexes' which fails to inclusively address the employment issues of the community. In Cambodian context, when talking about LGBTIQ persons in the workplace, transgender people, butch lesbians, or feminine gays are more visible but also more vulnerable to discrimination. Those groups are often perceived as a third gender. Hence, this is why there is a need for inclusive language in the law to protect LGBTIQ employees. On the other hand, some companies such as Kantar, Grab and Rambutan in Cambodia have policies to protect LGBTIQ employees from discrimination at the workplace.⁷

⁴ 'Marriage and family forming' (Rainbow Community Kampuchea Organisation 2020), <https://rockcambodia.org/marriage-and-law/>
⁵ TNS and Rainbow Community Kampuchea, *Opinions, attitudes and behavior toward the LGBT Population in Cambodia* (2015), <https://www.rockcambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TNS-Research-Report-on-Opinions-Attitudes-and-Behavior-toward-the-LGBT-Population-in-Cambodia.pdf>.

⁶ Destination Justice, *Rainbow legal aid: Access to legal aid services by the LGBTIQ Community in Cambodia* (2019), <http://destinationjustice.org/launching-the-rainbow-legal-aid-in-cambodia-report/>.

⁷ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, *The right to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics in employment in Cambodia* (2019), https://cchrcambodia.org/index_old.php?url=project_page/project_page.php&p=report_detail.php&reid=139&id=3.

Health

Three main health issues specifically associated with the LGBTIQ population are mental health, HIV/STI transmission, and hormone therapy. Firstly, the LGBTIQ population has a higher rate of acute anxiety compared to the general population, and LGBTIQ persons have shared experiences associated with depression resulting from discrimination of their SOGIESC identities.⁸ A recent study from Rainbow Community Kampuchea shows that more than half of lesbian, bisexual, and trans persons have emotional difficulties that are exacerbated by family violence based on their SOGIESC.⁹ The second issue is that TGFs and gay and bisexual males are in the key population of HIV/STI transmission accounting for 4% of all transmissions.¹⁰ Finally, while hormone therapy was recently available for transgender people, services are limited.¹¹

Families

Family rejection impacts LGBTIQ children profoundly. TNS and Rainbow Community Kampuchea shared that more than three quarters of families would coerce their LGBTIQ children to “convert” their sexual orientation or gender identity, including through arranged marriage with partners that they do not love, or separating their children from their same-sex partners. Additionally, if they failed to change, almost half of those parents would reject their LGBTIQ children.¹² Also, the percentage of lesbian, bisexual, and trans women who experience emotional violence, sexual violence and have suicidal thoughts are 81%, 10% and 35% respectively.¹³

⁸ TNS and Rainbow Community Kampuchea, *Opinions, attitudes and behavior toward the LGBT Population in Cambodia*.

⁹ Rainbow Community Kampuchea, *Family violence towards lesbian, bisexual, and transgender man (LBT) people in Cambodia (2019)*, <https://rockcambodia.org/i-married-a-man-to-satisfy-my-parents-2019/>.

¹⁰ UNAIDS, *Country factsheet: Cambodia 2019 (2019)*, <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/cambodia>.

¹¹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020.

¹² TNS and Rainbow Community Kampuchea, *Opinions, attitudes and behavior toward the LGBT Population in Cambodia (2015)*, <https://www.rockcambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TNS-Research-Report-on-Opinions-Attitudes-and-Behavior-toward-the-LGBT-Population-in-Cambodia.pdf>.

¹³ Rainbow Community Kampuchea, *Family violence towards lesbian, bisexual, and transgender man (LBT) people in Cambodia (2019)*, <https://rockcambodia.org/i-married-a-man-to-satisfy-my-parents-2019/>.

School/Education

According to the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (2015), the vast majority (93.59%) of LGBTIQ students reported being bullied in schools, the dominant form of which is verbal bullying, which accounted for 88.64%, followed by social exclusion, physical and sexual bullying. Discrimination based on SOGIESC is perpetuated by male students (67.95%), teachers of both sexes (20.51%) and female students (14.10%). Community members and the police also bully LGBTIQ persons, which demonstrates the difficulties faced by LGBTIQ students.¹⁴

International Advocacy

In the third cycle of the UPR, Cambodia's government In the third cycle of the UPR, Cambodia's government accepted all recommendations regarding SOGIESC including same-sex marriage, gender recognition, and anti-discrimination in 2019, when different organizations worked together on the joint statement.¹⁵ Ministries have been engaged in the process of responding to the UPR, such as CHRC, MoWA, MoE, MoJ, MoLVT and MoI.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, *LGBT Bullying in Cambodia's Schools* (2015), [https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2015_12_17_CCHR_REPORT_LGBT_Bullying_in_Cam_School_\(ENG\).pdf](https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2015_12_17_CCHR_REPORT_LGBT_Bullying_in_Cam_School_(ENG).pdf).

¹⁵ SOGI Coalition Cambodia, *Cambodia UPR 3rd cycle on SOGIESC/SRHR* (2018), <https://rockcambodia.org/cambodia-3rd-cycle-of-universal-periodic-review-upr-on-sogiesc-srhr/>.

¹⁶ Rainbow Community Kampuchea-rock, 2 July, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/RoCKHMERLGBT2009/photos/pcb.2877310262310371/2877285605646170>.



Findings

The LGBTIQ situation in Cambodia

Social norms, culture, and a lack of education

In general, people living in the urban areas seem more understanding towards LGBTIQ persons compared to those living in the rural areas. Additionally, by comparing the current situation with the past ten years, things are better now, even if LGBTIQ persons still face challenges. The public generally does not understand the notion of LGBTIQ persons having or building a family, because they are expected to follow traditional gender roles, and are not familiar with non-normative identities.¹⁷

Firstly, in terms of building a family, some people think that gay men are disgusting and have some concerns that being LGBTIQ means one could not reproduce, and claim without any statistics that society will have less people to develop the country.¹⁸ From parents' perspective, being

¹⁷ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10th October 2020.

¹⁸ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 9th October 2020.

LGBTIQ is just a temporary state, and some also think that LGBTIQ people are following a trend of dating same-sex people.¹⁹ It is sometimes assumed that LGBTIQ persons have relationship problems with their straight partners, or that LGBTIQ persons are controlled by bad spirits.²⁰ Also, some men still hold the perception that rape correction for lesbian women can change their SOGIE.²¹

Secondly, regarding gender identities and gender roles, the public thinks that how one dresses is their gender identity. Social norms about gender roles still hold strongly. For example, most TGFs work for wedding salons because they are good at providing beauty services; however, TGFs did not choose this profession by themselves, but because they had no other option for work. These binary gender roles have significantly impacted the perceptions of and attitudes toward trans people to behave in a certain way to fit in society.¹⁴

Lastly, because of a lack of understanding about SOGIESC, LGBTIQ politicians themselves, who occupy high positions in the public sector, also avoid discussing LGBTIQ issues in office. This also indicates the fear of LGBTIQ persons being judged at the workplace.²² In conjunction with safe environments, policies also contribute to the visibility of LGBTIQ persons. Although inclusive policies are in place such as in the Neary Rattanak²³ issued by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the implementations do not result in the creation of safe spaces for LGBTIQ persons.²⁴ For example, according to the general public and some staff members who work for the government, NGOs still focus on men and women when talking about gender equality.²⁵ Therefore, by reflecting on the experiences with women's movements, advocacy work needs a lot of engagement, dialogues, and debates. When everyone starts speaking up, it increases the visibility of LGBTIQ persons and improves the image of the community.²⁶

¹⁹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020.

²⁰ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phone call, 17th October 2020.

²¹ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, *LGBT Bullying in Cambodia's Schools* (2015), [https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2015_12_17_CCHR_REPORT_LGBT_Bullying_in_Cam_School_\(ENG\).pdf](https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2015_12_17_CCHR_REPORT_LGBT_Bullying_in_Cam_School_(ENG).pdf).

²² Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phone call, 17th October 2020.

²³ Five Years Strategic Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

²⁴ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020.

²⁵ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 9th October 2020.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Family

Family rejection remains a great challenge; for example, kicking their LGBTIQ child off from home and forcing them to marry someone they do not love. LGBTIQ children are hence vulnerable to domestic violence.²⁷ On the other hand, LGBTIQ people now have more support and access to social media to seek for information, inspiration from LGBTIQ influencers, other family members, and supporters.¹³ Yet, a vast majority of LBQ women living in provinces got the family pressure. They dropped out of school and were forced to get blessings from the monk, which was believed to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.²⁸

Employment

Although there are positive changes towards LGBTIQ persons because more of them are coming out and have a lot more access to information, LGBTIQ persons still face economic pressure and exclusion from friends, families, society, and their workplaces, as well as the social pressure on those who are assigned female at birth.²⁹ Discrimination during the recruitment process still exists. Some people choose to hide their identities to get jobs and avoid discrimination. This also leads to less opportunities in finding good jobs, which ultimately contributes to a higher poverty rate within LGBTIQ population.³⁰ Because LGBTIQ persons tend to drop out from school early, they usually work in low-skill jobs, become domestic workers, or take on garbage collection work.³¹ In addition, because of COVID-19, some TGFs are facing food insecurity, and some migrated to Thailand to find job opportunities. TGFs who work as wedding planners or make up artists are facing significant economic hardships during the pandemic.³²

Media

LGBTIQ are not portrayed positively in the media, and are often presented as jokes, perpetuating discrimination against LGBTIQ persons and increasing cases of rape correction. A popular narrative exists in Cambodian culture, where a LGBTIQ women runs away from home to earn

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 8th October 2020.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phone call, 17th October 2020.

³² Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 9th October 2020.

money. When she becomes successful with an established career, she returns home and is accepted by her family. This story reinforced the problematic notion that LGBTIQ people have to compensate for their sexual orientation or gender identity. In this case, money is crucial in gaining acceptance from one's parents and society. While there are these problematic portrayals of LGBTIQ people in the media, there are also affirming media products such as a video that presents a LGBTIQ child and a mother talking to each other. This touching video is available to the public through RoCK's Facebook Page.³³

School

LGBTIQ persons are bullied in public spaces and in schools, and some have dropped out of school as a result. Consequently, some LGBTIQ persons can only find low or unskilled employment.³⁴ Also, LGBTIQ or SOGIESC matters are not being taught in schools or universities. Yet, if LGBTIQ topics are taught in schools, families may not approve of this, especially for private schools.³⁵

Health

At the sub-national level, general healthcare services are still insufficient, which impacts sub-populations including LGBTIQ persons, especially in HIV healthcare.³⁶ A study reveals that community-based HIV programs can only reach out to less than half of the TGFs in Cambodia, and those who encounter discrimination and police violations are highly unlikely to be able to access community-based HIV programs.³⁷ As a result of this, and with economic hardships, TGFs and gay and bisexual males sometimes cannot afford condoms, which puts them at high risk of HIV transmission.³⁸ Furthermore, the popularity of online dating applications, as well as migration, exacerbates HIV transmission. Mental health services are also inaccessible for the whole community, especially since they are very expensive (approximately 5 – 20 USD per session).³⁹

³³ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 9th October 2020.

³⁴ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020.

³⁵ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 13th October 2020.

³⁶ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

³⁷ Siyan Yi et al., "Access to community-based HIV services among transgender women in Cambodia: findings from a national survey," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 18, no. 72 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-019-0974-6>.

³⁸ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020.

³⁹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25th October 2020.

Regarding medical transitions for trans people, surgeries are not available in Cambodia. However, RHAC has now made hormone therapy available for both TGMs and TGFs.⁴⁰ Hormone therapy has also been proposed to be included as a part of the service package provided to trans people by NCHADS and Global Fund 2021 – 2023, but there has been inadequate evidence to advocate for the rolling out of this service in reality. Additionally, LGBTIQ persons are medically underserved populations with limited resources for both individuals and organizations.⁴¹

Recognition of relationship, family and adoption

LGBTIQ people cannot obtain legal documents showing relationships with same-sex partners for marriage and adoption. Therefore, LGBTIQ persons cannot legally marry and adopt children as a same-sex couple.⁴²

Legal gender recognition

Regarding gender recognition, one's ID card cannot be changed to one's preferred gender/sex. Although a case of legal gender recognition was submitted to the court, the case was rejected because the judge said there is no law regarding changing one's gender.⁴³

The government's support

At the sub-national level, although MoWA's national plans mention lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, the implementation has been less than successful because local government officials only respond to women and children, and even some of them bully LGBTIQ persons when they ask for help.⁴⁴ At the national level, the consultant of NAPVAW also does not fully understand the issues of LGBTIQ people. Consequently, the reinforcement cannot tackle issues effectively because the assessment

⁴⁰ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020.

⁴¹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, online, 22nd October 2020.

⁴² Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 8th October 2020

⁴³ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25th October 2020.

⁴⁴ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25th October 2020; Ministry of Womens' Affairs, *Neary Rattanak IV* (2014), http://www.undp.org/content/dam/cambodia/docs/DemoGov/NearyRattanak4/Cambodian%20Gender%20Strategic%20Plan%20-%20Neary%20Rattanak%204_Eng.pdf.

does not reflect the reality well.⁴⁵ MoE provided SOGIESC training to high school teachers in 13 provinces, and national institutions who are responsible for HIV issues surrounding MSM and TGFs.⁴⁶ The Prime Minister's speeches during the public forum in 2012 urged the public to stop discriminating against LGBTIQ people.⁴⁷

Lastly, some LGBTIQ persons still do not enjoy social protection because they change their residential address frequently and work in the informal work sector, so they do not have sufficient legal documents to receive an ID-poor card and have access to the National Social Security Fund scheme. Therefore, they cannot access the public services like the others.⁴⁸ Recently because of the COVID-19 pandemic and flooding, the government has other priorities to address so the implementation of UPR recommendations might be delayed. Also, reallocation of resources to COVID-19 could impact the implementation and research on LGBTIQ-friendly policies.⁴⁹

Key priorities

Access to information and community mobilizing

The LGBTIQ community can explore, express their concerns, and learn from each other when they have safe physical and cyber spaces. Moreover, community organizing and outreach efforts are also a priority to raise awareness. Besides that, technology, social media and public awareness can increase their scopes to mobilize LGBTIQ persons as a whole community.⁵⁰

Raising awareness

LGBTIQ organizations can create more awareness raising tools and materials, including booklets and videos. They also organize workshops and training related to SOGIESC issues among the general public, specifically for the youth, university students, new secondary school teachers, the

⁴⁵ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 9th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 9th October 2020.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25th October 2020.

⁴⁸ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 10th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

media, and the community. Moreover, media productions such as posters, pictures and videos will be disseminated as hard copies, and published on social media.⁵¹

Advocacy and capacity building

RoCK is providing SOGIESC and human rights workshops, and hosting exchanged trips between local authorities and LGBTIQ to promoting DoFR, gain acceptance from local government to reduce discrimination and prevent domestic violence.⁵² With regards to UPR implementation, continuing advocacy plans and finding ways to lobby the government to include LGBTIQ needs to be one of the government's agenda; for instance, keep contact with the relevant ministries.⁵³

Additionally, integration of SOGIESC into formal education curriculums at the high school level is also in the advocacy plan.⁵⁴ Lastly, APTBY provided scholarships to three LGBTIQ people for academic training in counselling courses and two other LGBTIQ persons for English language courses scholarships in Cambodia to build their capacity to work for the community more effectively and efficiently. It also helps to fill the gaps in mental health services.⁵⁵

Employment

MRI is aiming for poverty reduction by enhancing employment opportunities for those who want to start their business by providing loans, training, and on-going coaching. MRI is also working with microfinance companies in Cambodia to advocate for the removal of LGBTIQ persons from the high-risk category so that they can receive loans.⁵⁶

Focusing the employment sector creates possibilities for future interventions to address the causes of discrimination at the workplace, including advocating for anti-discrimination policies and working closely with

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 8th October 2020.

⁵³ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 8th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 9th October 2020; Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

⁵⁴ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 8th October 2020.

⁵⁵ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

⁵⁶ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25th October 2020.

the private sector. Yet, advocacy for legal changes will be a tall order, and therefore, require a longer-term plan, despite it being an urgent matter. Furthermore, because of the limitations of human and financial resources of the organizations and the LGBTIQ community, working with the private sector may be considered a key priority in the future.

Health

The provision of free condoms and formal counselling to LGBTIQ people must continue, as well as the addressing of multi-sectoral issues including social protection and policy to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS.⁵⁷ Regarding the prevention of HIV transmission, the government and NGOs are using a tracking strategy for those who have been in sexual contact with people living with HIV to prevent further transmission.⁵⁸

Although the access to healthcare in general for LGBTIQ people and gender affirming services have been recognized as needs, the lack of the interest from the government and the private sector could be the result of insufficient data and systematic engagement to lobby these stakeholders.⁵⁹ In order to tackle the challenges of inadequate healthcare service provision, research studies and continuous engagement might be entry points.

⁵⁷ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

⁵⁸ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 8th October 2020.

⁵⁹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

Risk analysis

National

Local LGBTIQ organizations have expressed their concerns that LGBTIQ rights can also be at risk if some people use LGBTIQ voices for gain without the awareness or consent of LGBTIQ persons or community.⁶⁰ Hence, using a soft approach and following the legal compliance can be alternatives to prevent and protect the LGBTIQ community from any false legal excuses.⁶¹ Lastly, in the near future, the instability of political situations may occur during the elections in 2022 (communal election) and 2023 (national election).⁶²

Globally

One concern is the increase in right-wing politics, as well as Catholic and conservative governments among international development partners which will impact funding for the LGBTIQ community. For example, the United States has weakened the protection policy for LGBTIQ persons.⁶³ Although Cambodia is more tolerant, international trends, including politics and religion, can impact Cambodia through foreign policies. These policies could adversely and/or beneficially influence local movements through financial or technical support supplied directly to the community or the government. Taking the United States as an example, the funding from the United States to Cambodia on safe abortion was cut.⁶⁴ That said, there are still other countries that believe in equality, such as Canada, Australia, and Sweden, who work on feminist foreign policies. In addition to foreign policies, environmental issues such as flooding could be a concern, which may lead to the postponement of important work that will exacerbate the living conditions of LGBTIQ persons.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 8th October 2020.

⁶¹ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 9th October 2020.

⁶² Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Online, 22nd October 2020.

⁶³ "The discrimination administration," n.d., <https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration>.

⁶⁴ Alessandro Marazzi Sassoon and Leonie Kijewski, "Family-planning NGOs could see loss of USAID funding as Trump inks 'Gag Rule,'" *The Phnom Penh Post*, 25 January 2017. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/family-planning-ngos-could-see-loss-usaid-funding-trump-inks-gag-rule>.

⁶⁵ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 9th October 2020.

Opportunity

The number of youths, NGOs and INGOs is increasing, which can create jobs and spaces for the community. The private sector has also adopted inclusive policies to support LGBTIQ employees. The UPR is an international mechanism in which LGBTIQ issues in Cambodia have been included. This also reflects the global efforts and funds supporting the community.⁶⁶ An additional point worth mentioning is that this could be the result of international, regional, local LGBTIQ communities and feminist movements working together and collaborating to lobby for LGBTIQ rights.

Another opportunity lies in how the local LGBTIQ community has reached out to the rural areas to lend support. Taking that into account, the national and local governments have recognized and supported the community by contributing to national advocacy efforts and public awareness, including marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTIQ persons. For instance, the understanding and cooperation of local authorities on the DoFR is evidence of support from the central government.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Undisclosed ILGA Asia interview, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 9th October 2020.



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ILGA Asia is the Asian Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, representing more than 170 member organizations in East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and West Asia.

Our vision is a world where Asia is a safe place for all, where all can live in freedom and equality, be properly informed in the nature of sexual orientation and gender identity & expression and sex characteristic (SOGIESC) rights, have access to justice, and diversity is respected.

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