



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Cambodia

2025

Context

From June to November 2025, Cambodia's civic space remained restricted, marked by intensified government control over freedoms of expression, association, and assembly. The enactment of a nationality revocation law in August deepened fears among activists and CSOs, signalling a chilling effect on dissent. Judicial harassment persisted, with opposition figures, environmental defenders, and journalists facing arbitrary detention and politically motivated charges. Civil society organisations operated under heavy administrative burdens, including stringent reporting requirements and unpredictable regulatory changes, while donor funding continued to decline, threatening sustainability. Advocacy on sensitive issues – human rights, land rights, and natural resource management – was constrained by surveillance and intimidation, limiting participation in policy dialogue.

This restrictive environment was compounded by escalating tensions with Thailand, which culminated in a border conflict during this period. The dispute fuelled nationalist rhetoric and reinforced the government's security-first narrative, further shrinking space for dissent and civic engagement. These dynamics created an even more challenging backdrop for civil society actors and shaped the overall enabling environment assessment.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Civil society organisations (CSOs) remain subject to restrictive provisions under the [Law on Associations and NGOs](#) (LANGO). Mandatory registration, intrusive reporting requirements, and broad government discretion to revoke legal status persist as structural barriers. International partners reiterated concerns about shrinking civic space during meetings with Cambodian authorities in mid-2025, urging reforms to ensure compliance with global human rights standards.

The right to peaceful assembly continued to be undermined by restrictive laws and heavy-handed enforcement. Authorities maintained onerous notification requirements and frequently denied permission for public gatherings. During this reporting period, peaceful protests related to land rights and environmental issues - such as [demonstrations against deforestation in Prey Lang Forest](#) - were met with intimidation and judicial harassment. Community leaders defending land rights were summoned by police, and activists, including members of [Mother Nature Cambodia](#), faced prolonged pretrial detention on politically motivated charges following convictions for "plotting" and "insulting the king". These patterns reflect a broader trend of criminalising dissent and discouraging collective action, despite Cambodia's obligations under Article 21 of the ICCPR.

Freedom of expression remained constrained. Independent media outlets continued to experience harassment, censorship, and legal threats. In August 2025, the National Assembly passed a controversial nationality law allowing revocation of citizenship for alleged "collusion with foreign powers," raising fears of further silencing critics. Journalists and online commentators faced arrests and intimidation, reinforcing an environment of self-censorship. For example, in July 2025, four journalists from UMA News and Phnom Kravanh Post were arrested while covering a land dispute in Pursat provinces. In July 2025, the independent news

outlet Voice of Democracy (VOD) – one of Cambodia’s last remaining independent media organisations – was [shut down](#) after reporting alleged government overreach, a move widely condemned by rights groups as a blow to press freedom. Additionally, environmental reporter Ouk Mao was [detained](#) in 2025 for investigating waste pollution. Even though he was later released, he still has to report to the local police monthly and is banned from traveling abroad. [Reports from local networks](#) indicate that, particularly in the context of the border conflict with Thailand, critics repeatedly faced [harassment and intimidation including arrests](#).

International assessments, including [Freedom House](#), classify Cambodia as “Not Free,” citing systemic restrictions on speech and press freedom. The closure of independent media outlets and arrests of journalists reporting on corruption and environmental issues exemplify the deteriorating situation.

2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

From June to November 2025, Cambodia’s legal environment for associations continued to be shaped by the [2015 Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations](#) (LANGO), which remains the primary instrument governing registration and operations. [Despite persistent advocacy for reform, no amendments were adopted during this period](#). Registration processes are legally permitted but remain administratively burdensome.

While the Ministry of Interior (MoI) piloted an online registration portal in late 2024, the full digital transition accelerated in July 2025 with the [launch of the Digital Registration System](#) under Prakas No. 8277 BRK. This system aims to streamline procedures and improve transparency, yet grassroots organisations still report delays of three to six months and excessive documentation requirements, particularly for those operating at sub-national levels. Associations seeking to implement projects outside Phnom Penh must obtain additional approvals from provincial governors, even after MoI registration, creating operational inefficiencies and financial strain.

The operational environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) remains challenging. Compliance obligations under LANGO were [reiterated through MoI Notification No. 571](#), February 2025 requiring timely submission of annual reports, bank account disclosures, and notifications of any changes in statutes or leadership. Failure to comply risks suspension or deregistration. Moreover, the enforcement of related laws—such as the [Law on Taxation](#) and [Law on Auditing and Accounting](#)—has tightened, [increasing costs and complexity for NGOs](#). For example, the revised Law on Taxation (May 2023) explicitly includes NGOs under its definition of “legal persons” requiring them to comply with tax registration, filing, and reporting obligations similar to businesses, including submitting supporting documents for funds from donors. Additionally, under the law on Accounting and Auditing (2016) and sub-Decree No. 79 (2020), NGOs must prepare financial statements according to Cambodian Accounting Standards, submit annual audited financial reports to the Accounting and Auditing Regulator (ACAR), and comply with auditor independence rules (e.g., mandatory rotation every five years, no prior accounting service within three years). While these requirements have been in

place prior to 2025, CSOs are now required to submit additional supporting documents within short timeframes, creating an additional reporting burden CSOs struggle to meet.

Protection from interference remains limited. While formal appeal mechanisms exist, they are rarely effective due to ambiguous standards and [fear of political repercussions](#). Reports from rights groups and international monitors indicate continued restrictions of the enabling environment, with intrusive reporting obligations and broad government discretion to revoke legal status. The enactment of new legislation in August 2025 granting authorities power to strip nationality for alleged collusion with foreign powers underscores the [fragile state of civic freedoms](#). Combined with harassment of activists and heavy-handed enforcement, these measures perpetuate a climate of uncertainty for CSOs, undermining their ability to operate independently and advocate for democratic governance.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

From June to November 2025, Cambodian NGOs faced a complex landscape in securing accessible and sustainable resources. Accessibility remained uneven: while larger organisations continued to access international grants, smaller and provincial NGOs struggled with stringent donor requirements and new regulatory obligations, such as submission to the Ministry of Interior of mandatory verified bank documentation and financial records. These administrative burdens, combined with [declining foreign aid](#)—USAID alone cut \$371 million since 2020—limited opportunities for grassroots actors, and left many CSOs underfunded or excluded from competitive channels.

Sustainability emerged as a pressing concern. Heavy reliance on external funding persists, with [only 4% of CSO revenue sourced locally](#). A few large donors [initiated the concept of environmental, social, and governance principles](#) combined with the ongoing digital transformation (ESG+D), with the main purpose to provide a platform for CSOs to engage in a focused dialogue with private sectors to create sustainable, innovative, and digitally enabled mechanisms for enhanced organisational sustainability. Taking into account the challenge of achieving funding sustainability, the 2025-2035 CSO Roadmap proposed by CSOs in Cambodia introduced a social enterprise model for CSOs. However, an NGO-commissioned online research study found that 71% of CSOs do not want to engage in social enterprises because they lack experience, capital, and, most significantly, face uncertainties in how to comply with the legal requirements necessary for setting up social enterprises.

Considering the decrease in foreign funding, CSOs are also increasingly considering local fundraising. In 2025, 45 NGOs in Cambodia received capacity building on local fundraising, with some of them, such as [Indochina Star Fish](#), successfully testing this model. Similarly, Kuntha Bopha hospital raised approximately US\$ 5.5 million from 300,000 local donors. The founder of Kontha Bopha hospital said the [“10,000 Riels, 10,000 Donors” campaign](#) was a nationwide fundraising initiative by Cambodian First Lady Lok Chumteav Dr. Pich Chanmony Hun Manet to contribute to bringing hope and healing to newborns, children, and pregnant mothers in Cambodia.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Cambodia's civic space for CSOs remained constrained, yet showed selective engagement opportunities with the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). Transparency improved marginally through initiatives like the [Regional Dialogue on Open Data](#), held on 27 October 2025, where CSOs contributed to shaping policy inputs for the [Ministry of Post and Telecommunications](#). However, access to government information continues to be inconsistent, limiting CSOs' ability to influence decision-making effectively.

Participation in policy processes remained largely symbolic. While consultations occurred during frameworks such as the [National Strategic Development Plan](#), adopted on 12 June 2025, and other cooperation dialogues, CSOs reported limited integration of their recommendations. For example, the government [proposed to amend the constitution](#) to revoke the citizenship of individuals accused of colluding with foreign powers. From the initial stages of the process to finalising the constitutional amendment, the process did not include consultations with either the Cambodian people or CSO representatives. Other laws and policies similarly passed without civil society participation, [such as the Law on National Budget 2026](#). In some cases, the government allowed CSOs to join in the consultative process but did not integrate their inputs.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Cambodia government rhetoric emphasised partnership for development, yet critical voices advocating for transparency, accountability, and rights faced marginalisation. Public perception of civil society remained polarised—service-delivery organisations were tolerated, while rights-based groups were portrayed negatively, reinforcing mistrust.

In the second national conference organized by the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training on 15 December 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic and Finance [praised](#) the effort of the Labour Ministry and civil society and development partners for jointly advancing the objectives in line with the Pentagonal Strategy-Phase 1, which places "people" as the first key priority. This statement constitutes a rare acknowledgment of the positive contributions of civil society.

Despite remaining challenges, CSOs leveraged digital platforms and citizen-driven accountability tools - such as community scorecards assessing the quality of public services - to sustain citizen engagement, though outreach was hampered by low digital literacy and fear of reprisals. Overall, constructive dialogue during this period was limited, characterised by controlled spaces rather than open debate, underscoring the need for stronger institutional guarantees for inclusive civic engagement.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Cambodian civil society organisations navigated a rapidly evolving digital landscape marked by both opportunity and risk. The government's rollout of the [Cambodia Digital Government Policy 2022–2035](#) continued to shape engagement, with CSOs actively participating in workshops to align advocacy with national priorities. While these efforts aimed to promote trust and inclusivity, significant challenges persisted.

Digital rights remained fragile as the digital environment faced heightened surveillance and regulatory pressures, particularly in border provinces. The absence of comprehensive cybersecurity and data protection legislation left CSOs vulnerable to breaches and online harassment, despite the July announcement of a [draft Personal Data Protection Law](#) requiring a two-year implementation period. Women-led CSOs reported [disproportionate exposure](#) to cyber threats, prompting targeted capacity-building initiatives on secure communication and data handling.

Accessibility gaps also widened as Cambodia's [digital transformation progressed unevenly](#). Rural CSOs and marginalised groups struggled with limited connectivity and [low digital literacy](#), hindering participation in governance and advocacy. Although internet penetration reached over 60%, disparities in infrastructure and skills continued to exclude vulnerable communities. This widening gap was driven not by a decline in rural access, but by rapid improvements in urban areas. Cities benefited from fibre rollout, competitive 4G services, and targeted digital literacy programmes, enabling greater engagement in governance and advocacy. In contrast, rural communities remained dependent on patchy mobile networks, faced higher data costs, and lacked training opportunities—leaving CSOs and vulnerable groups unable to leverage online platforms effectively despite overall national progress.

Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next four months, civil society in Cambodia will continue to face significant challenges, particularly the limited funding availability and donor shifts, shrinking civic space and regulatory pressure, digital transformation readiness, operational risks, and human rights concerns. All of these issues will further limit civil society's capacity to perform their roles actively to address the development challenges in Cambodia.

However, opportunities exist to improve the sustainability of organisations. [CSOs engage in fundraising at the local level](#) to replenish the funding shortage from overseas and [especially to initiate the concept of social enterprise](#). Development partners are further called upon to fund CSOs in Cambodia to advocate for regulation and laws that provide an opportunity for CSOs to engage in social enterprises. This is a particularly important opportunity to improve civil society's access to resources, in the context of funding shortages as well as the widespread boycott of products from Thailand. The newly gained momentum of the ESG agenda furthermore provides a chance for CSOs to access [funding from development partners to promote ESG](#) as well as to stay engaged with key relevant stakeholders: NGOs, government, development partners, and the private sector.

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