EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Cambodia

Country Focus Report

2026



Photo credit: Timothy Cohen

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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:



In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the 6 principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Reporting period covered: May 2025 to June 2026

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Cambodia's current situation combines long-term development gains with significant political, economic, security, and environmental pressures. The country reached lower-middle-income status in 2015 after two decades of rapid growth supported by manufacturing exports, tourism, construction, and investment. However, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has been uneven, and poverty has not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels. According to the World Bank's Cambodia overview, weaker informal economic activity, household debt, and the prolonged property-sector downturn continue to place pressure on livelihoods, particularly among poorer households dependent on agriculture and services.

The political landscape remains dominated by the Cambodian People's Party. Freedom House describes elections as taking place in a severely restrictive environment, while Human Rights Watch's World Report 2026, covering events in 2025, documents continuing pressure on opposition politicians, independent journalists, and government critics. These conditions provide important background for understanding public debate, accountability, and relations between state institutions and civil society.

Peace and security have also become more immediate concerns. Armed clashes along the Cambodia-Thailand border in 2025 caused civilian casualties, displacement, and disruption to border communities. Humanitarian needs continued into 2026: in February, the European Union and UNICEF delivered emergency supplies for approximately 15,000 people across four affected provinces. Assistance included temporary learning spaces, safe water and hygiene supplies, and support addressing the psychological effects of conflict. The crisis therefore has implications beyond territorial security, affecting children's education, family wellbeing, and access to essential services.

Cambodia also faces serious challenges associated with organised cyber-scam operations. Amnesty International's June 2025 report identified at least 53 compounds where documented abuses included human trafficking, forced labour, deprivation of liberty, and torture. These operations pose serious risks to people recruited or trafficked into them. A June 2026 follow-up report highlighted continuing gaps in enforcement and survivor protection despite government crackdowns. This situation provides important context for understanding public security, access to justice, and the role of independent journalism and civil society in documenting abuses and supporting victims.

Economic pressures have compounded these disruptions. The World Bank's June 2026 economic update highlights falling remittances following the return of nearly one million migrant workers from Thailand amid the border conflict, alongside rising fuel costs linked to

conflict in the Middle East. Higher transport and production costs have affected businesses and household purchasing power, with low-income families particularly exposed. At the same time, strong goods exports and foreign investment have provided important economic buffers. Creating sufficient employment for returning migrants and protecting vulnerable households remain major development priorities.

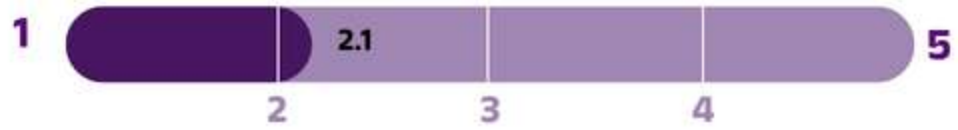
Recent environmental shocks have added another layer of vulnerability. According to Agence Kampuchea Presse, flooding across ten provinces had affected approximately 44,800 families and forced around 3,600 families to evacuate by 28 September 2026. These events underscore the importance of disaster preparedness, coordination, and timely assistance. To sum up, political constraints, border-related displacement, economic insecurity, and environmental shocks characterise the context in which Cambodian civil society responds to community needs and engages with public institutions.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: () [1]



1.1 Freedom of Association

Cambodia's Constitution recognises freedom of expression and peaceful assembly under Article 41 and freedom of association under Article 42. These rights are also protected under Articles 19, 21, and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Cambodia is a party. However, formal recognition does not consistently translate into effective protection in practice.

CIVICUS Monitor's 2025 assessment assigns Cambodia a score of 27/100, categorising its civic space as "Repressed"; this remains the rating displayed on its country page in 2026. Its updates published in July and December 2025 and May 2026 document continuing restrictions affecting civil society organisations (CSOs), community representatives, trade unionists, environmental defenders, journalists, and government critics.

The panel assessment indicates that many NGOs and associations continue to register and implement activities, particularly in service delivery and community development. Nevertheless, organisations working on human rights, democratic governance, labour rights, land, and natural resources describe a more uncertain operating environment. Administrative requirements, monitoring, and concerns about adverse official reactions can limit their ability to organise independently. CIVICUS's December 2025 update identifies continuing restrictions under the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO), alongside the use of criminal proceedings against civil society actors.

[1] *This is a rebased score derived from the CIVICUS Monitor rating published in December 2025.*

Recent cases illustrate how pressure on individual leaders can affect collective organisation. On 15 July 2025, the Phnom Penh Appeal Court upheld the conviction of Chea Chantha, a leader of the Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA). The case concerned his dissemination of information about National Social Security Fund registration to informal workers. CIVICUS reported that both his lawyers and the prosecutor had recommended overturning the conviction because of insufficient evidence.

Restrictions continued into 2026. On 26 January 2026, the Appeal Court upheld the four-year prison sentence of Koet Saray, president of the Khmer Student Intelligent League Association, following comments about a land dispute. On 2 March 2026, the Supreme Court again rejected bail for five Mother Nature Cambodia environmental activists convicted in July 2024. These developments, documented in CIVICUS's May 2026 update, demonstrate the continuing consequences of earlier prosecutions during the current reporting period.

The implications extend beyond those directly prosecuted. Removing organisational leaders and exposing members to prolonged legal uncertainty can weaken leadership continuity, discourage recruitment, and reduce collective advocacy. Freedom of association therefore depends on whether organisations and their members can pursue legitimate activities safely, as well as whether registration is available.

1.2 Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The panel observations describe uneven opportunities to hold meetings, community events, and peaceful gatherings. Activities related to development and service delivery may proceed, while gatherings concerning land, labour, governance, or detained activists can attract closer monitoring. Especially for gatherings held in rural communities, police officers or local authorities have been reported to observe the gatherings or request attendance lists, thereby creating an intimidating effect on these forms of assembly. Although Cambodia's peaceful demonstration framework provides for advance notification, ICNL describes implementation practices in which notification operates as a de facto permission system. This distinction matters because administrative discretion can determine whether communities are able to assemble in practice.

Judicial proceedings also continued to affect communities involved in earlier protests. On 16 July 2025, nine Boeung Tamok villagers received one-month prison sentences for "less severe acts of violence" and "obstruction of a public official" under Articles 228 and 503 of the Criminal Code, on charges arising from protests linked to their longstanding land dispute. CIVICUS reported uncertainty over whether the sentences would be served or suspended, leaving the villagers' legal position unclear even after they had accepted a relocation arrangement.

A direct restriction occurred on 11 March 2026, when local authorities prevented approximately 140 members of two land communities in Preah Vihear from travelling to an International Women's Day gathering. LICADHO reported that other participants attended the event, where community members and the district governor spoke and participants called for women's rights and resolution of a land conflict. This illustrates selective restrictions on participation rather than a complete prohibition of the gathering.

These experiences indicate that opportunities for peaceful assembly remain conditional and uneven. Restrictions on travel, uncertainty over official authorisation, and legal consequences associated with protest can discourage communities from organising collectively or presenting concerns to decision-makers.

1.3 Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression remains constrained by the risk of prosecution, detention, and interference with reporting. The panel observations describe self-censorship among organisations addressing accountability and sensitive public issues. Supporting this concern, LICADHO reported in February 2026 that at least 82 people had been arrested and charged

during 2025 for expressing their views, with 76 still detained at the time of publication. These figures cover the whole of 2025 and provide broader context for developments during the reporting period. In June 2025, a journalist investigating alleged scam operations in Bavet was briefly detained by individuals at a compound and ordered to delete photographs. Such interference can discourage public-interest reporting and contribute to self-censorship.

Journalists reporting on sensitive issues faced serious consequences. CIVICUS reported that journalists Phon Sopheap and Pheap Pheara received 14-year prison sentences in December 2025 on treason charges connected to reporting on the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict. The Battambang Appeal Court upheld their convictions on 26 March 2026. Such cases raise substantial concerns about the boundary between legitimate national-security restrictions and protection of public-interest journalism.

Prosecutions connected to public criticism also continued. On 29 April 2026, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court convicted 33 people of incitement in cases concerning expression about the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area initiative. Although the underlying arrests occurred in 2024, the 2026 judgments demonstrate the prolonged consequences of public criticism and related civic mobilisation.

The continued prosecution and detention of environmental activists, journalists, labour leaders, and human rights defenders demonstrate the limited practical protection available for independent civil society actors. Throughout 2025, LICADHO documented numerous cases involving the detention and prosecution of activists exercising their rights to peaceful expression and advocacy. The continued imprisonment of five Mother Nature Cambodia environmental activists following their 2024 convictions, together with repeated denials of bail during the appeals process, has become a prominent example of the risks faced by rights-based organisations and civic movements. International human rights organisations and United Nations Special Rapporteurs have expressed concern that these prosecutions undermine freedom of association and discourage legitimate civil society engagement. In an opinion published in February 2026, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found the five Mother Nature Cambodia activists' detention arbitrary and called for their immediate release, compensation, and other reparations. It also found violations of their rights to a fair trial and an effective appeal.

The 2025 amendments to citizenship legislation also raised concerns about freedom of expression. Human Rights Watch warned that citizenship revocation could be used to silence political opponents and critics, while a joint civil society statement published by LICADHO highlighted the potential chilling effect on independent criticism and public debate.

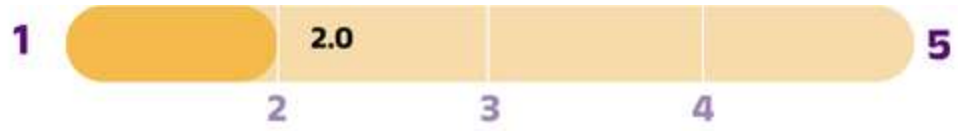
The resulting uncertainty can encourage journalists, community representatives, and CSOs to avoid sensitive subjects, moderate criticism, or withhold information. This reduces the range of perspectives available to the public and weakens opportunities for informed policy debate and independent scrutiny.

Overall, these restrictions weaken the enabling environment by limiting civil society's ability to organise, mobilise communities, and communicate concerns without fear of repercussions. Pressure on association disrupts collective representation; restrictions on assembly reduce opportunities to present shared demands; and constraints on expression limit evidence, debate, and public scrutiny. Consequently, formal opportunities for consultation and cooperation may remain available while civil society's capacity to influence decisions and hold institutions accountable is substantially constrained.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



2.1 Registration

Cambodia's legal framework formally permits the establishment and registration of civil society organisations (CSOs) through the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO). While registration remains legally possible for most organisations, the process continues to impose administrative, procedural, and practical barriers, particularly for local NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), and organisations working on governance, human rights, land rights, labour, and environmental issues.

While the legal framework for registration has remained the same, 2026 has seen a deterioration in the practical implementation of registration procedures. Panellists reported longer delays, repeated requests for additional or corrected documents, and limited predictability regarding when applications would be processed. For example, one NGO in Kampot Province reported that the process of renewing its MoU with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) was both lengthy and cumbersome, despite having submitted all required documentation six months prior to the expiration of the existing MoU. Several international NGOs based in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap province reported encountering similar challenges.

The panellists reported that registration procedures are slow, involve repeated administrative requirements, and frequently require applicants to make multiple visits to the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to correct documentation or provide additional information. Although legal timelines for registration exist, there is often no effective mechanism to ensure that authorities respond within the prescribed period, resulting in prolonged delays and uncertainty. Several panellists also reported informal administrative payments or unofficial facilitation fees during the registration process, increasing both financial costs and perceptions of unequal treatment.

The MoI launched a digital registration system for Associations and Local NGOs on 16 July 2025, which is a positive step toward improving efficiency and transparency. However, panellists noted that online registration remains only partially operational and inaccessible for

many organisations. Most registration procedures, including amendments to statutes, changes in organisational leadership, office relocation, and updates to registration information, continue to require in-person submissions and repeated interactions with government officials. Administrative requirements can place particular pressure on smaller local organisations with limited staff and resources. ICNL's Civic Freedom Monitor describes registration procedures for domestic and international NGOs as complex and burdensome, with insufficient procedural safeguards and broad government discretion. The JICA Cambodia NGO Handbook (2025) also notes that documents beyond those specified in Article 6 of LANGO are required in practice. These include supporting identity documents, certification of the office address, and permission from the property owner. Preparing and obtaining this documentation can create additional compliance demands for organisations with limited administrative capacity.

Registration challenges extend beyond the initial establishment of organisations. CSOs reported that updating the information, including changes in directors, staff, office addresses, or governing boards, remains time-consuming. These administrative requirements divert limited organisational resources away from programme implementation and create additional uncertainty for organisations seeking to maintain legal compliance. The CSO Road Map 2020–2025 similarly identifies administrative procedures and regulatory compliance as continuing institutional challenges affecting the development of Cambodia's civil society sector.

The registration environment is particularly restrictive for organisations working on politically or socially sensitive issues. While service-delivery organisations generally complete registration successfully, organisations engaged in human rights, environmental protection, labour rights, democratic governance, or land issues reported greater scrutiny and additional procedural barriers. Several panellists observed that approval processes appear to vary depending on the perceived sensitivity of an organisation's mandate rather than solely on legal compliance.

Overall, although registration is legally available, the combination of bureaucratic procedures, prolonged processing times, repeated documentation requirements, inconsistent implementation, informal costs reported by panellists, and scrutiny of advocacy-oriented organisations creates a registration system that remains disabling rather than partially enabling. These barriers particularly disadvantage smaller, grassroots, and rights-based organisations and continue to constrain the development of an independent and diverse civil society sector.

2.2 Operational Environment

Cambodia's legal framework formally allows CSOs to establish their internal governance structures, determine their objectives, and implement programmes. However, in practice, the operational environment remains disabling due to administrative requirements, regulatory uncertainty, selective implementation of laws, and increasing restrictions affecting CSOs working on governance, human rights, labour rights, environmental protection, media freedom, and other sensitive issues. Although most service-delivery organisations continue to operate, independent advocacy organisations face operational constraints. The deterioration reflects a more restrictive practical operating environment, rather than a fundamental change in the legal right of CSOs to operate. Panellists reported administrative requirements, greater scrutiny of advocacy organisations, and additional conditions for implementing activities at sub-national level.

The panellists consistently reported that CSOs remain subject to reporting and compliance obligations beyond their initial registration. Under Article 25 of the LANGO, domestic NGOs must submit activity and annual financial reports by the end of February of the following year. Article 10 also requires domestic associations and NGOs to notify the Ministry of Interior within 15 days of changes to their statutes, office locations, presidents or executive directors, or bank account information. These obligations operate alongside separate tax and sector-specific requirements. Panellists reported that, in practice, reporting to multiple institutions and obtaining administrative acknowledgement, approval or MoUs from line ministries and sub-

national authorities consumes organisational resources and can delay programme implementation as well as result in missed funding opportunities.

Access to foreign funding remains legally possible for registered CSOs. However, foreign-funded organisations remain subject to registration, reporting, financial, and regulatory requirements, including obligations under LANGO and relevant tax regulations. These requirements can create additional administrative burdens, particularly for smaller organisations. The current concern is therefore less about a formal prohibition on foreign funding and more about the regulatory and compliance conditions attached to accessing and managing it.

Although the legal framework does not explicitly prohibit CSOs from determining their own objectives, organisations working on politically sensitive issues reported scrutiny and more restrictive operating conditions than service-delivery organisations. Panel members observed that advocacy on governance, corruption, human rights, environmental protection, labour rights, and democratic participation is often approached cautiously because organisations fear increased monitoring, administrative intervention, or reputational risks. Several panellists also highlighted that the current regulatory framework provides limited flexibility for CSOs to diversify their income through social enterprise or other revenue-generating activities, while increasing tax and financial compliance requirements place additional pressure on organisational sustainability.

The year-on-year decline therefore reflects the combination of administrative and operational requirements, increased scrutiny of advocacy-oriented CSOs, additional conditions for sub-national activities, and reduced flexibility in organisational operations. While CSOs continue to operate and there is no general legal prohibition on accessing foreign funding, the cumulative effect of these requirements has made the operating environment less predictable and more burdensome.

Overall, although Cambodian law formally permits CSOs to establish their governance structures and implement programmes, extensive administrative procedures, multiple reporting obligations, declining funding opportunities, regulatory uncertainty, and scrutiny of advocacy organisations constrain operational autonomy. These factors collectively create an operating environment that remains disabling.

2.3 Protection from Interference

Cambodia's legal framework provides limited protection for CSOs against undue state interference. Although the Constitution guarantees freedom of association and LANGO establishes procedures for the registration and operation of CSOs, the discretionary powers remain available to government authorities to monitor, suspend, or dissolve organisations on vaguely defined grounds such as activities affecting “national security,” “public order,” or “political neutrality.” LANGO requires political neutrality under Article 24, while Article 30 provides for the suspension or removal of domestic organisations from the register, including on broadly defined grounds concerning national security, stability, and public order. However, panellists stressed that interference also arises from practices that go beyond legal requirements. Particularly at the provincial and local levels, authorities may impose additional requirements or follow instructions from higher officials without observing established legal procedures. These provisions create legal uncertainty and expose independent organisations to selective enforcement, particularly those working on governance, human rights, labour rights, environmental protection, and democratic participation.

The panellists reported that protection from interference remains weak in practice, although they did not identify cases in which this scrutiny directly resulted in an organisation being closed. Most panel members reported that CSOs operating in sensitive sectors face closer government scrutiny, while organisations implementing development or service-delivery programmes generally experience fewer obstacles. Several panellists indicated that organisations are reluctant to use terminology perceived as politically sensitive in project

proposals or public communications, while others reported that activities may attract additional monitoring when authorities consider them related to national security or public order.

CSOs further reported limited protection from third-party interference. Advocacy organisations reported coordinated public criticism, online harassment, and reputational attacks by government-aligned actors or affiliated groups, with limited access to effective legal remedies. The absence of independent complaint mechanisms and inconsistent judicial safeguards reduces confidence that CSOs can challenge arbitrary administrative actions or politically motivated restrictions. Consequently, many organisations adopt precautionary measures, including self-censorship, limiting public advocacy, or avoiding issues perceived as politically sensitive.

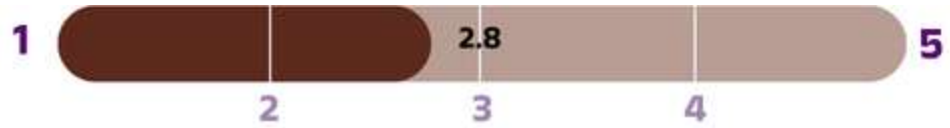
International assessments, for instance by ICNL, identify selective use of registration, reporting, suspension, and dissolution powers, together with weak safeguards for challenging arbitrary administrative decisions, particularly those affecting independent and advocacy-oriented CSOs.

Overall, although Cambodian law formally recognises CSOs, broad administrative discretion, selective implementation of laws, and weak mechanisms for reviewing administrative decisions leave organisations vulnerable to undue state interference and limit their ability to operate independently.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



3.1 Accessibility

Financial and non-financial resources remain available for Cambodian CSOs, but access has become significantly constrained due to declining international assistance, changing donor priorities, growing competition for limited funding, and varying organisational capacity. Panellists noted that funding opportunities remain available in areas such as education, gender equality, and community development, with donor priorities increasingly emphasising climate change, biodiversity conservation, resilience, and sustainable development. However, accessing these opportunities requires stronger technical capacity, competitive proposals, and innovative approaches. Others highlighted that many available funding opportunities no longer align with their organisational mandates, particularly for organisations working on human rights, governance, labour rights, and legal empowerment. Youth-led and smaller community-based organisations were considered particularly disadvantaged because they often lack the institutional capacity, proposal-writing experience, and financial management systems required to compete successfully for donor funding.

Cambodia aims to achieve upper-middle-income status by 2030. This national development target, with formally scheduled graduation from the United Nations' least developed country category on 19 December 2029, has accelerated changes in the development financing landscape. Several bilateral and multilateral donors have begun reducing or phasing out traditional development assistance, while humanitarian and governance funding has become very limited. The suspension of numerous USAID-funded programmes in early 2025 significantly affected many Cambodian CSOs, forcing organisations to reduce staff, postpone activities, diversify funding strategies, or seek alternative partnerships. Although some organisations have successfully transitioned toward private sector partnerships, philanthropy, or climate-related financing, these alternatives remain limited and highly competitive.

Panellists noted that funding information is generally available through donor networks and online platforms, but organisations' ability to compete remains unequal. Smaller local CSOs often lack dedicated fundraising staff and the systems needed to meet requirements such as audited accounts, safeguarding policies, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. These

capacity gaps limit their ability to prepare competitive proposals and secure funding.

The changing financing landscape has also encouraged diversification of funding sources. Recent studies indicate growing interest in locally led development, climate finance, private sector engagement, and community philanthropy as alternative financing mechanisms for Cambodian civil society. The Asia Foundation's Amplify Cambodia (2025) and the Network of Education Partnerships (NEP) CSO Mapping Report (2026) both highlight increasing opportunities for locally driven partnerships while acknowledging that institutional capacity gaps continue to limit many CSOs' ability to access these resources.

Despite these opportunities, the structural challenges remain. CSOs continue to report limited domestic philanthropy, few tax incentives for charitable giving, and minimal access to government funding for independent CSOs. Organisations working on human rights and other politically sensitive issues continue to face more challenges in accessing financial resources than organisations implementing service delivery programmes.

Overall, although financial and non-financial resources remain available, access has become apparently uneven due to shrinking international assistance, changing donor priorities, greater competition, and institutional capacity requirements. These conditions particularly disadvantage smaller, grassroots, youth-led, and advocacy-oriented organisations, resulting in an inaccessibility of resources.

3.2 Effectiveness

Resources available to Cambodian CSOs continue to support important development and advocacy work; however, restrictive funding conditions, declining donor resources, and limited flexibility reduce the effectiveness of these resources in enabling CSOs to achieve their long-term missions. Although some panellists described more collaborative dialogue with donors, funding terms remain largely project-based and donor-driven, limiting organisational autonomy and adaptive programming.

Despite more collaborative dialogue, panellists reported that donor compliance requirements have become more demanding. Funding agreements now commonly include detailed logical frameworks, measurable indicators, extensive financial reporting, safeguarding policies, procurement compliance, and regular monitoring and evaluation. While these requirements strengthen accountability, they also increase administrative workloads and leave fewer organisational resources for programme implementation. Several panellists observed that donors particularly emphasise financial sustainability and risk management, requiring CSOs to demonstrate long-term institutional resilience before funding decisions are made. Smaller organisations often lack the technical and administrative capacity to satisfy these complex requirements, reducing their ability to compete for funding.

Panel members also noted that funding priorities are donor-driven rather than locally determined. Many opportunities are concentrated in climate change, biodiversity conservation, resilience, and sustainable development, requiring organisations to align their programming with donor priorities rather than community needs. Although these thematic areas remain important, organisations working on governance, democracy, labour rights, legal empowerment, and human rights reported difficulty securing flexible funding. Several panellists expressed concern that declining funding and more restrictive conditions enable organisations to achieve only part of their intended outcomes, rather than their broader institutional missions.

Donor-CSO relationships have shown some positive developments, although these vary across development partners. Several panellists observed that some donors are willing to engage in dialogue, share strategic priorities, and provide direct support to local organisations and communities. Some development partners have adopted localisation approaches by increasing direct funding to community-based organisations and local actors, strengthening local ownership and reducing reliance on international intermediaries. However, these approaches remain uneven across the sector, and many organisations still face fragmented

funding, short project cycles, and limited coordination among development partners. Several panellists also expressed concern that CSOs should conduct stronger due diligence before accepting private-sector funding to ensure that prospective funders align with organisational values and do not create reputational or ethical risks.

Recent research also highlights the need for flexibility in donor funding. The Asia Foundation's Amplify Cambodia Brief (2025) emphasises locally led development and adaptive programming as important approaches for strengthening civil society effectiveness. Similarly, the Heinrich Böll Foundation argues that Cambodia's changing development landscape requires donors to move beyond short-term project funding toward more sustainable partnership models that strengthen organisational resilience. Nevertheless, many funding mechanisms continue to prioritise project outputs over long-term institutional development, limiting the ability of CSOs to respond effectively to emerging social and political challenges.

Overall, donor relationships remain generally constructive and funding continues to support important development outcomes. However, restrictive funding conditions, fragmented financing, declining international assistance, and limited flexibility reduce the overall effectiveness of available resources.

3.3 Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of Cambodia's civil society sector has become fragile as traditional sources of international development assistance continue to decline while domestic resource mobilisation remains limited. Although many CSOs continue to implement important programmes through project-based funding, predictable and long-term financial support remains insufficient to sustain organisational development, retain skilled staff, and support strategic planning.

The panellists identified declining donor support as the greatest challenge affecting organisational sustainability. Many organisations continue to depend heavily on external donor funding, with few alternative financing options available. Several panellists observed that reductions in international development assistance, particularly following Cambodia's transition toward upper-middle-income status, have increased financial uncertainty across the sector. Others reported that shrinking donor budgets have resulted in smaller grants, shorter funding cycles, and increasing competition for limited resources, making it difficult for organisations to maintain long-term programmes or retain experienced personnel.

Short-term project funding remains the dominant financing model for Cambodian CSOs. While project grants enable organisations to implement specific activities, they rarely provide adequate support for institutional development, core operational costs, or organisational resilience. Panel members reported that funding interruptions between projects frequently disrupt programme continuity, create uncertainty for beneficiaries, and force organisations to reduce staff or suspend activities while seeking new grants. Smaller provincial organisations are particularly vulnerable because they often lack financial reserves and depend on a limited number of donors to sustain operations.

Several panellists emphasised that Cambodian CSOs must strengthen self-reliance through innovation, local fundraising, social enterprise models, and diversified partnerships. However, opportunities for domestic philanthropy, charitable giving, and income generation remain relatively limited. Although some organisations have begun exploring social enterprise approaches, consortium funding arrangements, private sector partnerships, and community-based fundraising, these initiatives remain at an early stage and are insufficient to offset the continuing reduction in international development assistance. Panel members also highlighted that local fundraising remains underdeveloped, while many organisations lack the technical capacity and legal flexibility needed to generate sustainable unrestricted income.

Panellists reported that the loss of USAID funding in 2025 disrupted organisational continuity, forcing affected CSOs to reduce staffing, scale back programmes, and seek alternative funding. These adjustments weakened their capacity to sustain activities and retain

experienced staff. Civil society organisations have consequently called for increased public investment in health, education, and social services while encouraging donors to maintain support for locally led development initiatives.

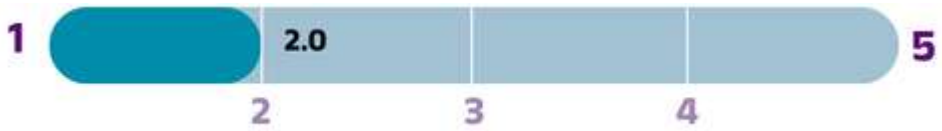
These funding disruptions jeopardise CSOs' long-term sustainability by interrupting programmes, reducing staff capacity, and making strategic planning more difficult. As traditional aid declines, more predictable and diversified funding is needed to sustain core operations. Short project cycles also limit organisations' ability to invest in staff development and institutional capacity, as noted in the Asia Foundation's AMPLIFY Cambodia country brief (2025). Panellists identified consortium arrangements, private-sector partnerships, and community-based initiatives as potential ways to diversify resources, although these opportunities remain uneven.

Overall, Cambodian CSOs continue to show strong resilience and adaptability. However, the sector remains highly dependent on unpredictable external funding, short-term project cycles, limited unrestricted support, and weak domestic resource mobilisation. These conditions constrain long-term strategic planning, organisational stability, staff retention, and programme continuity.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



4.1 Transparency

Cambodia has taken steps to improve government transparency through the publication of selected policies, laws, budget information, and administrative procedures on ministerial websites and digital government platforms. Several ministries have increased the availability of online information, particularly regarding public services, investment procedures, and sectoral policies. Nevertheless, transparency remains uneven across government institutions, and access to public information continues to be constrained by the absence of a comprehensive legal framework guaranteeing the right to information.

Although Article 12 of the Code on Environment and Natural Resources requires environmental information to be made widely available and publicly accessible, this sector-specific obligation does not replace a comprehensive framework governing access to government-held information across all sectors. In September 2026, civil society organisations continued to call for an A2I law. Panel members further observed that government agencies generally publish final decisions and approved policies but seldom disclose draft legislation, policy options, supporting analyses, or detailed implementation documents during the decision-making process.

The panel discussion also highlighted inconsistencies in the availability and accessibility of public information. Several participants noted that information relating to politically sensitive issues, including political reform, legislation regulating citizenship status, land governance, border management, and environmental governance, is often difficult to obtain. At the sub-national level, opportunities for CSOs to access planning documents, monitor government implementation, or obtain official information remain uneven and largely dependent on local authorities' willingness to engage. Other panelists noted that important public information and digital content are not always available in accessible formats or local languages, creating additional barriers for indigenous communities, older persons, and citizens with limited educational backgrounds.

Several panellists also noted that spokespersons and government institutions do not consistently respond to information requests from journalists or civil society organisations. Restrictions on independent reporting and gaps in access to government-held information thus present additional challenges to transparency. The Human Rights Watch World Report 2026 documents legal intimidation, censorship, and threats of closure affecting independent media, while the U.S. Department of State Investment Climate Statement (2025) observes that regulatory transparency remains inconsistent despite ongoing public administration reforms.

Overall, Cambodia has made gradual progress in digital government and the proactive publication of selected public information. However, transparency remains limited by the absence of a comprehensive right-to-information law, inconsistent disclosure practices, limited publication of draft policies, and weak mechanisms for accessing government-held information.

4.2 Participation

Cambodia provides mechanisms for CSO participation through both legal provisions and government policy arrangements. Article 38 of the 2008 Organic Law on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans requires councils to consult citizens and relevant stakeholders when formulating and implementing development plans. At the national level, the Development Cooperation and Partnerships Strategy 2024–2028 establishes dialogue mechanisms, including technical working groups, government-NGO consultations, and sub-national partnership dialogue. CSOs participate in selected public policy processes, particularly in sectoral working groups, technical consultations, and sub-national planning mechanisms. Through decentralisation reforms and government-development partner coordination platforms, CSOs are periodically invited to contribute to policy discussions on education, health, social protection, climate change, environmental management, and local development. Nevertheless, participation remains uneven across sectors and levels of government, and meaningful engagement in governance, legal reform, democratic participation, and politically sensitive policy areas remains limited as also highlighted in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation Country Report.

The panellists acknowledged that ministries invite CSOs to consultations on draft policies, strategic plans, and sectoral programmes. However, many participants observed that consultations frequently occur after key policy directions have already been determined, limiting opportunities for substantive influence on decision-making. Several panellists reported that although CSOs are encouraged to provide comments, recommendations from local organisations are not consistently incorporated into final policies. Others noted that participation is generally stronger at the technical level, where CSOs can contribute technical expertise, research, and community priorities through technical working groups, than in high-level policy formulation; whereas, engagement at the provincial and commune levels depends heavily on the openness and capacity of local authorities. Others reported that although consultation meetings are occasionally organised by line ministries, supporting documents are frequently distributed shortly before consultations or are not made publicly available afterwards

Panel discussions further highlighted that participation varies considerably depending on the thematic area. Organisations working on service delivery, education, health, disaster risk reduction, climate change, and community development generally experience better opportunities to engage with government institutions. In contrast, advocacy-oriented organisations working on governance, elections, human rights, land issues, and democratic reform reported more limited opportunities to participate in policy dialogue or monitor public decision-making. Several participants also observed that legal and administrative reforms affecting civil society are often developed with limited public consultation or insufficient time for meaningful review.

Recent legislative developments have also generated concerns regarding civic participation. Human rights organisations have warned that the constitutional amendments concerning citizenship, national security, and public order could grant authorities broad discretion with limited independent review. The subsequent amendments to the Law on Nationality established grounds for citizenship revocation. The possibility of sanctions under broadly framed provisions may deter citizens and CSOs from criticising public policy, joining consultations, or advocating on politically sensitive issues. LICADHO, Human Rights Watch, and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) have noted that advocacy organisations continue to face greater challenges participating in public debate than service-oriented organisations, contributing to a cautious civic environment. At the same time, government officials have publicly reaffirmed their commitment to working with "genuine" civil society organisations. This qualification suggests that participation is selective: organisations aligned with national development priorities may be welcomed, while critical or advocacy-oriented CSOs may be perceived as politically aligned or influenced by foreign interests, limiting their opportunities for meaningful dialogue and policy influence.

Overall, Cambodia has established formal mechanisms for civil society participation, but meaningful influence over public policy remains constrained by inconsistent consultation practices, selective engagement, limited incorporation of CSO recommendations, and reduced opportunities for organisations working on sensitive governance issues.

4.3 Accountability

Cambodia has established legal and institutional mechanisms intended to promote government accountability, including the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), the National Audit Authority, judicial institutions, parliamentary oversight, and sub-national accountability mechanisms. However, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness, independence, and accessibility of these institutions in ensuring that public authorities remain accountable to citizens. CSOs continue to face significant challenges in monitoring government performance, seeking redress for alleged abuses, and ensuring that public institutions respond effectively to concerns raised by communities and independent organisations.

Panellists reported that, although accountability mechanisms formally exist, CSOs often find them difficult to use effectively. Several participants noted that government agencies rarely provide full explanations for policy decisions or administrative actions, while opportunities for independent review remain limited. Others observed that legal reforms and major policy decisions are often implemented without adequate public justification or systematic responses to civil society concerns. Panel members also expressed concern that organisations offering critical or constructive feedback may experience reduced cooperation from public authorities, further limiting the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms.

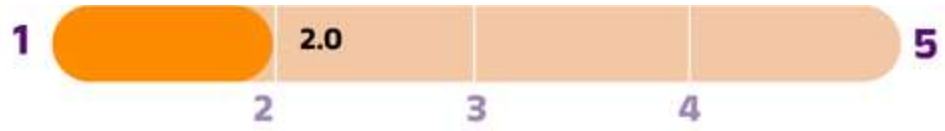
Panellists reported that consultation outcomes and government responses are not consistently published, and CSOs often receive no clear explanation when their recommendations are not adopted. Follow-up arrangements also vary across sectors, limiting CSOs' ability to track commitments made during consultations and seek explanations when agreed actions are not implemented. Opportunities to provide input therefore do not consistently translate into accountability for responding to that input or fulfilling commitments.

Overall, Cambodia has established formal accountability institutions and made progress in public administration reforms. However, significant limitations remain in institutional independence, responsiveness, access to effective remedies, and meaningful oversight of government actions. CSOs continue to face considerable obstacles when seeking accountability on politically sensitive issues, while public authorities do not consistently respond to concerns raised through civic participation mechanisms.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



5.1 Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

CSOs continue to contribute actively to Cambodia's socio-economic development through service delivery, humanitarian assistance, education, health, environmental protection, and community development. Government leaders have publicly acknowledged the important role of civil society in supporting national development and have continued to engage selected organisations through sectoral dialogues and development partnerships. However, public discourse surrounding civil society remains uneven, with advocacy-oriented organisations, human rights groups, independent media, and organisations working on governance and democratic reform frequently facing more critical public narratives than organisations delivering development services. As a result, constructive dialogue remains limited and inconsistent across different areas of civil society engagement.

Government rhetoric presents a mixed picture. Prime Minister Hun Manet has repeatedly stated that the government supports "genuine" civil society organisations that contribute constructively to Cambodia's development and welcomes evidence-based cooperation with civil society. At the same time, senior political leaders have continued to distinguish between organisations viewed as constructive development partners and those perceived as pursuing political agendas or undermining national interests. Such narratives contribute to a public environment in which advocacy organisations are viewed with more suspicion than service-delivery organisations, limiting opportunities for open and inclusive civic dialogue. This distinction can encourage advocacy organisations to frame their public messages in technical and development-oriented terms to avoid being portrayed as confrontational.

Media coverage often reflects the same divide, reporting development activities positively while presenting rights-based advocacy and political reform within a more critical or polarised narrative. For example, on 13 March 2026, the state news agency Agence Kampuchea Presse positively covered World Vision Cambodia's school meals programme, highlighting its provision of nutritious meals to 100,640 children in 316 primary schools. Conversely, public reporting on human rights advocacy, political reform, freedom of expression, and civic activism often occur within a more polarised environment, as evidenced by the repression faced by

journalists covering these topics. CamboJA's assessment of 2025 also found that journalists covering environmental issues, land disputes, corruption, and human rights were disproportionately targeted. Recent cases involving journalists, environmental defenders, and human rights advocates have prompted concerns from domestic and international organisations that public discourse on sensitive issues remains constrained and that some civil society actors practise self-censorship when engaging in public debate.

Overall, Cambodia's public discourse on civil society remains characterised by selective recognition and uneven opportunities for constructive engagement. While development-oriented organisations are generally acknowledged as important national partners, advocacy organisations continue to face more constrained public discourse and less inclusive political dialogue.

5.2 Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

CSOs continue to enjoy relatively positive public recognition for their contributions to community development, humanitarian assistance, education, health, environmental protection, and social welfare. Many Cambodian citizens view CSOs as important partners in addressing local needs and improving community well-being. However, public confidence in the ability of civil society to influence government decision-making or governance reforms remains limited.

According to the panellists, citizens generally trust CSOs to deliver development programmes and represent community concerns, particularly in areas such as education, gender equality, environmental protection, indigenous rights, and local development. However, many participants noted that citizens have limited confidence that their participation can meaningfully influence government decisions, particularly on politically sensitive issues. Several panellists reported that many people perceive major policy decisions as being determined primarily by government authorities, reducing incentives for active civic participation. Others observed that citizens are more willing to engage in community initiatives than in governance or political processes.

Panel discussions also highlighted challenges affecting civic education and political participation. Several participants noted that schools and educational institutions generally provide limited civic education on democratic participation, citizens' rights, and public accountability. The civic education, when provided, is often politically linked as school leaders and principals are usually members of the CPP party. Some panellists further reported that students are discouraged from discussing political issues or participating in activities perceived as politically sensitive, while parents may also discourage young people from engaging in political discussions due to concerns about potential consequences. These factors contribute to a culture of caution and reduce citizens' confidence in their ability to influence governance processes.

At the same time, there are positive examples of civic engagement at the community level. Decentralisation reforms, social accountability initiatives, and community development programmes have created opportunities for citizens to engage with commune councils, local authorities, and service providers. Several panellists acknowledged that local communities participate in village meetings, commune planning processes, and sectoral consultations, particularly on issues related to education, health, and local infrastructure. Civil society organisations continue to play an important role in facilitating community participation and strengthening dialogue between citizens and local government institutions.

Recent research similarly suggests that Cambodian civil society retains considerable public legitimacy despite operating within a constrained civic environment. A World Bank feature published in January 2026 documents how CSO-supported community facilitators help citizens assess local services and develop joint action plans with service providers. These examples demonstrate continuing opportunities for constructive engagement, alongside the restrictions on independent advocacy documented by Human Rights Watch.

Panellists suggested that citizens' differing perceptions of service-delivery and advocacy-oriented CSOs may also be shaped by the Prime Minister's emphasis on supporting "genuine" civil society organisations. Such messaging may reinforce positive views of development-oriented organisations while contributing to uncertainty about the legitimacy of organisations engaged in critical advocacy.

Overall, Cambodian citizens generally recognise the positive social contributions of CSOs and continue to participate in community-based initiatives. However, confidence in civil society's ability to influence public policy and governance remains limited, while civic education and political participation continue to face important constraints.

5.3 Civic Equality and Inclusion

Cambodia's legal framework includes Article 31 of the Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law and non-discrimination, and Articles 45–46 on women's equality and protection. It also includes the 2009 Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and Sub-Decree No. 83 on collective land registration for indigenous communities; and Neary Rattanak VI, the national strategic plan for gender equality and women's empowerment. CSOs have played an important role in advancing Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), promoting women's leadership, strengthening indigenous community participation, and supporting vulnerable populations. However, disparities remain between legal commitments and practical implementation. Opportunities for meaningful civic participation continue to vary according to socio-economic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, geographic location, and political context.

The panellists acknowledged that government institutions and CSOs have incorporated inclusive approaches into consultations, development programmes, and community engagement activities. Several noted that women, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities are now more frequently invited to participate in policy consultations, local planning processes, and development forums than in previous years. However, many panellists also observed that participation often remains symbolic rather than substantive. Invitations may include only a small number of representatives from marginalised communities, while opportunities to influence decisions remain limited. Several participants further noted that participation mechanisms rarely assess whether the poorest households, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, or other underrepresented groups are adequately represented.

Several panellists specifically identified limited participation of persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQI+ individuals in public decision-making processes. IWGIA's Cambodia assessment documents social stigmatisation and the exclusion of indigenous community representatives from decisions affecting ancestral land. Human Rights Watch's World Report 2025, documents inadequate consultation with indigenous communities affected by a carbon-offsetting project. It also identifies complex procedures for obtaining communal land titles, illustrating barriers to recognition and meaningful participation in decisions affecting their land and livelihoods. Others observed that political influence, social status, and institutional hierarchy continue to affect whose voices are heard during consultations and public dialogue.

Despite these challenges, positive progress is evident. Gender equality is integrated into national development policies, disability inclusion has received policy attention, and many development partners now require inclusive participation throughout project implementation. However, these efforts have not yet translated into consistently equal opportunities for all citizens to participate meaningfully in civic and governance processes. Representation of marginalised groups in public decision-making remains uneven, particularly in national-level policy discussions and politically sensitive issues.

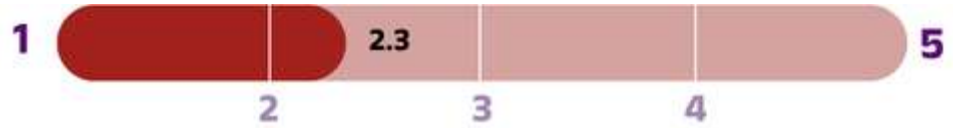
Overall, Cambodia has strengthened legal commitments and institutional efforts to promote equality and inclusion. However, the barriers continue to limit meaningful participation by

disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



6.1 Digital Rights and Freedom

Internet services generally remain available, but access alone does not ensure digital freedom. Cambodia has not experienced widespread nationwide internet shutdowns. However, the digital environment remains limited by increasing government regulation of online content, surveillance concerns, and restrictions affecting freedom of expression on digital platforms.

CSOs and citizens generally enjoy unrestricted access to internet services and widely use social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, YouTube, and messaging applications for public communication and civic engagement. However, most participants also reported increasing monitoring of online activities, particularly those involving political issues, environmental activism, human rights, and criticism of government policies.

Panel members further noted that although internet access remains available, online freedom is gradually shaped by legal and regulatory measures. As of September 2026, neither the proposed Cybercrime Law nor the draft Personal Data Protection Law had been enacted. The proposed Cybercrime Law, which has been under development since 2014 and was updated in 2024, continues to raise civil society concerns that broadly framed offences and investigative powers could restrict online expression, privacy, and access to information if adopted. The draft Personal Data Protection Law remained under review in August 2026. ICNL has called for stronger safeguards concerning independent oversight, proportionality, and protection against excessive state surveillance. Likewise, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) argues that several existing and proposed laws regulating cyberspace may restrict freedom of expression if implemented without stronger safeguards for fundamental rights.

Recent developments illustrate continuing challenges for digital civic space. LICADHO's review of 2025 documented 82 arrests related to freedom of expression, most often following social media commentary on issues including the Cambodia–Thailand border conflict and other public concerns. Journalists have also reported pressure to remove digital content, while independent media organisations continue to face legal and administrative restrictions affecting their online reporting. These developments contribute to increasing caution among

CSOs when using digital platforms for advocacy and public debate.

Several panellists expressed concern that social media activities, online communications, and digital advocacy are subject to monitoring, particularly when related to politically sensitive topics. Others noted that concerns over surveillance and privacy violations have contributed to greater caution among civil society organisations when communicating online, particularly through messaging applications and social media platforms.

Overall, while Cambodia has achieved progress in expanding digital infrastructure and internet access, the digital environment continues to be characterised by monitoring of politically sensitive online activities, selective restrictions on digital expression, and legal uncertainty surrounding online freedoms.

6.2 Digital Security and Privacy

As Cambodia's digital transformation accelerates, CSOs rely on digital technologies for communication, advocacy, programme implementation, fundraising, and engagement with communities. However, digital security and privacy protections have not developed at the same pace. Though the government has introduced initiatives to strengthen digital governance and has prepared draft legislation on personal data protection, the concerns remain regarding surveillance, cyber threats, weak legal safeguards, and limited accountability mechanisms for protecting civil society actors operating online. Consequently, digital security and privacy remain disabling.

Expert panellists consistently reported concerns regarding the security of digital communications used by CSOs. Participants described incidents involving hacked social media and messaging accounts, phishing attempts, spam attacks, unauthorised access to digital platforms, and increasing cybercrime affecting both organisations and individuals.

Panel discussions also highlighted gaps in legal protection for digital privacy. The Draft Law on Personal Data Protection represents a potential step towards stronger protection, but its safeguards require further attention. In its July 2025 legal analysis, ICNL raised concerns about independent oversight, state access to personal data, and effective remedies for rights violations. These safeguards are particularly important for CSOs handling sensitive information about human rights defenders, community activists, whistleblowers, and vulnerable populations.

The digital security environment is further affected by increasing cybercrime and online fraud. Kiripost reported in September 2025 on warnings about impersonation, phishing, and fraudulent investment schemes on Telegram. Cambodianess also reported that, according to government figures, Cambodians lost more than US$45 million to online scams in 2025. Although these threats affect the public rather than civil society alone, they increase operational risks for CSOs that rely heavily on digital communications and online financial transactions. Several panellists noted that organisations have experienced compromised Telegram accounts, fraudulent online activities, and concerns regarding the protection of sensitive organisational information.

Although awareness of digital security has gradually increased, practical support remains limited. Several civil society organisations have begun adopting cybersecurity training, encrypted communications, and internal digital security policies with support from international partners. Nevertheless, these initiatives remain uneven across the sector, and many smaller organisations continue to lack the technical expertise and financial resources necessary to manage cyber risks. Panel members further noted that available legal remedies for cyber harassment, digital surveillance, or privacy violations remain difficult to access and are not widely trusted by civil society actors.

Overall, Cambodia has made progress in promoting digital transformation and developing a legal framework for data protection, but significant gaps remain in protecting digital privacy,

preventing cyber threats, and ensuring effective remedies for CSOs experiencing digital security incidents.

6.3 Digital Accessibility

Cambodia has expanded digital infrastructure and public services under the Digital Government Policy 2022–2035 and the Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035. The latest government data available in 2026 reports that 68.48% of individuals used the internet in 2025; internet subscriptions were equivalent to 111.62% of the population, reflecting multiple subscriptions per user. This connectivity enables CSOs to use digital platforms for communication, public awareness, advocacy, service delivery, fundraising, and community engagement.

The panellists acknowledged that internet access has improved substantially, with widespread availability of 4G services and expanding 5G infrastructure in urban areas. Several participants noted that digital platforms, social media, artificial intelligence (AI), and online collaboration tools have become more accessible and are now widely used by CSOs, educational institutions, businesses, and government agencies. Government initiatives such as digital complaint mechanisms, online public services, and electronic public financial management systems have also improved citizens' access to government information and administrative services.

Despite these improvements, panellists highlighted continuing gaps in digital inclusion. Internet affordability, connection quality, and service reliability remain uneven between urban and rural areas, while digital infrastructure in remote communities continues to lag behind major cities. Several participants reported that many local communities continue to experience difficulties accessing online information because of poor connectivity, limited digital devices, or inadequate digital skills.

Digital literacy remains a significant challenge for both CSOs and the public. Panel members observed that many organisations, particularly smaller provincial CSOs, continue to face difficulties using advanced digital tools, cybersecurity practices, artificial intelligence, and data management systems. Although awareness and interest in AI have increased rapidly, participants generally agreed that knowledge of its effective and responsible use remains limited. Several panellists also expressed concern that CSOs often lack sufficient capacity to understand emerging technologies, protect themselves against digital threats, or maximise the opportunities presented by digital transformation. These capacity gaps are particularly evident among smaller organisations with limited financial and technical resources.

Emerging technologies present both opportunities and challenges. AI, cloud-based collaboration tools, and digital communication platforms increasingly support civil society's programme delivery, monitoring, research, and advocacy. However, effective adoption remains uneven. Larger national organisations generally possess greater technical capacity than smaller community-based organisations, while many citizens continue to require basic digital literacy training before benefiting fully from digital services. Without continued investment in digital skills, affordable internet access, and inclusive digital education, the benefits of Cambodia's digital transformation may not be shared equally across society.

Overall, Cambodia has made important progress in expanding digital infrastructure and promoting digital transformation, creating new opportunities for civil society engagement. However, persistent disparities in internet affordability, digital literacy, technical capacity, language accessibility, and preparedness to utilise emerging technologies continue to limit equitable digital participation.

C) Recommendations

The following recommendations provide practical directions for strengthening Cambodia's enabling environment for civil society. They call for coordinated action by the Government of Cambodia, donors and the international community, and civil society organisations to protect civic freedoms, improve transparent and consistent regulation, support meaningful participation and accountability, strengthen digital safety, and expand sustainable and diversified financing. Implementation should be inclusive, proportionate to organisational capacity, sensitive to risk, and guided by the needs and consent of affected communities.

1. Government of Cambodia
   - Ensure that LANGO is implemented consistently and strictly according to its stated provisions, without adding requirements or interpreting the law differently across ministries or provinces. The Ministry of Interior should issue practical implementation guidance that clearly lists the documents, procedures, responsible offices, and timelines applicable to registration, reporting, suspension, and dissolution. The Ministry should train national and sub-national officials on the guidance, publish standard forms and service timelines, and establish a help desk and administrative review channel for CSOs facing inconsistent requirements. It should also conduct quarterly implementation reviews with independent and provincial CSOs and publish corrective actions where officials have imposed requirements not contained in the law. CSOs should also continue strategic advocacy for LANGO reform through existing working-group meetings and consultative workshops. Given concerns that amendments could introduce further restrictions, this engagement should prioritise protecting existing safeguards and securing changes that strengthen freedom of association.
   - Apply clear due-process safeguards in cases involving civil society actors, journalists, activists, and political critics. Police and prosecutors should provide written notice of the legal basis for arrest or questioning, allow prompt access to a lawyer and family, and avoid detention where summons or bail would be sufficient. Courts should hold timely bail hearings, provide reasoned decisions, and prioritise review of prolonged pretrial detention. Beginning in 2027, the Ministry of Justice should publish quarterly aggregate data on detention, bail, case duration, and outcomes and establish a channel for reporting procedural violations.
   - Standardise government consultation with CSOs. Adopt an Access to Information Law aligned with international human rights standards, establishing clear disclosure obligations, procedures and timelines for information requests, and independent appeal mechanisms when access is denied. Each lead ministry should designate a CSO liaison, publish an annual consultation calendar, and circulate draft laws or policies and supporting materials at least 30 days before consultation. Within 30 days after each consultation, the ministry should publish a short response table showing the recommendations received and whether each was accepted, partly accepted, deferred, or rejected, with reasons. Participation should include provincial, women-led, youth-led, disability, indigenous, labour, media, service-delivery, and rights-based organisations and should not affect an organisation's registration, funding access, or cooperation with authorities.

- Introduce practical civic and digital-rights safeguards. During the school year, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport should pilot civic rights, media literacy, critical thinking, and safe online participation modules in selected teacher-training institutions and secondary schools before national expansion. For proposed cybercrime, personal-data, or online-content laws, the responsible ministry should publish the full draft and a human-rights impact assessment, allow at least 60 days for public comments, and publish a response to submissions. Final drafts should require independent oversight, judicial authorisation for surveillance, necessity and proportionality tests, and accessible complaint and remedy procedures.

2. Donors and International Community
    - Provide flexible, multi-year funding that smaller CSOs can access. Donors should offer two- to three-year grants for programmes that require continuity and allow funding for essential organisational costs, including staff, rent, financial management, safeguarding, security, and capacity development. Applications and reports should be shorter for small and provincial CSOs, available in Khmer where possible, and proportionate to the grant size and level of risk. Grant agreements should also allow reasonable budget changes when community needs, funding conditions, or security risks change.
    - Plan funding closures responsibly and provide emergency support. Donors should normally give CSOs at least six months' notice before ending a major programme and, where possible, provide a short transition grant to cover essential staff, secure records, safeguarding duties, and commitments to communities.
    - Provide targeted support for independent media and inclusive access to information. Donors should fund core editorial costs, legal defence, cybersecurity, equipment, revenue development, and source-protection systems for independent media and community reporters. Calls for proposals should include support for Khmer and minority-language content, accessible formats for persons with disabilities, and reporting from provinces. Recipients should adopt written consent, data-protection, and risk-assessment procedures to reduce exposure of journalists, sources, and affected communities.
    - Agree on a few shared priorities for protecting civic space. Development partners should select three to five practical benchmarks, such as consistent implementation of LANGO, timely publication of consultation documents, written government responses to CSO recommendations, respect for due process, and safeguards in proposed digital laws. They should review progress with independent Cambodian CSOs every six months and publish a short update. Diplomatic engagement and technical assistance should support these priorities without reducing essential services for vulnerable communities.

3. Civil Society Organisations
    - Strengthen coordination and collaboration among CSOs. CSOs should use existing networks and partnerships to identify shared priorities, exchange information, coordinate advocacy, and refer organisations to appropriate legal, communications, security, or funding support. Coordination arrangements should be simple, inclusive of national and provincial organisations and marginalised groups, and guided by clear decision-making, confidentiality, and consent procedures.
    - Maintain essential governance and accountability systems. Each CSO should have an active governing body, clear roles and decision-making authority, conflict-of-interest procedures, basic financial controls, safeguarding responsibilities, and a confidential complaints mechanism. Organisations should share concise information on their governance, funding, expenditure, programme results, and complaint handling, while protecting sensitive information. Larger CSOs and networks should provide practical technical support for smaller CSOs where possible.
    - Strengthen digital and physical security. CSOs should protect sensitive information through multi-factor authentication, secure backups, limited access, and clear incident-response procedures. They should appoint a security focal point, maintain emergency contacts, train staff regularly, and remove identifying details from public communications where disclosure could cause harm.

- Monitor changes in the operating environment for civil society. CSO networks should use a simple common tool to document legal, administrative, financial, participation, civic-freedom, and digital challenges affecting organisations and communities. Information should be collected with informed consent, verified through available records or independent sources, and analysed to identify trends and practical responses. Sensitive cases should remain confidential and be shared only in anonymised form when appropriate.
- Diversify funding and strengthen advocacy. CSOs should manage funding risks and explore suitable options, including joint and pooled grants, community and diaspora giving, climate and Aid for Trade finance, social enterprise, ethical private-sector partnerships, impact investment, and blended finance. New approaches should be tested carefully with proper due diligence and legal or financial advice. Larger networks should help smaller CSOs access opportunities and negotiate fair terms, while advocacy should be evidence-based, targeted, and accountable to affected communities.

D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the CIVICUS Monitor. However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. **The panel for this report was convened in June 2026.** The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as V-Dem, the Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index, the RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy, and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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