

Our Work in Cambodia



In rural Cambodia, nearly

50%

of young girls
are laborers instead
of students.



Our Presence in Cambodia



Country Overview

Cambodia is a country that has seen many dark days. When the Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975, it attempted to violently restructure the country as a communal agrarian society by abolishing private property and currency, sending city-dwellers to work in rural fields, and killing educated Cambodians. During the Khmer Rouge's nearly four-year reign, over 1.8 million Cambodians died of torture, execution, disease, exhaustion and starvation.

After years of warfare and strife, Cambodians are still at work clearing thousands of land mines, creating commerce, and reviving their culture. Although vast improvements have been made in Cambodia with respect to previous decades, 79 percent of Cambodians still reside in rural, plateau and mountainous areas, where they experience high levels of poverty. Permanent employment, electricity and drinkable water are extremely scarce in these areas.

Country Information

Population	15 million
Land area	181,035 km ²
Languages of instruction	Khmer
Launch of operations	2002
Room to Read office	Phnom Penh



Educational Landscape

Nearly all educated Cambodians were executed during the Khmer Rouge’s brutal regime. By 1978, there were almost no surviving teachers, writers or scientists in the country—an entire generation of literate role models eliminated.

The Cambodian government has been engaged in ongoing efforts to improve the quality of the education system and increased the annual education budget by 19 percent in 2014. Since 2000 the net enrollment rate in primary school has jumped from 83 percent to 95.6 percent, and gender disparity has decreased across all education levels.

Despite the improvements in primary school enrollment, only 55 percent of students continue on to secondary school. Partially, this is due to widespread child labor including farming, scavenging, garment manufacturing, sexual exploitation, fishing, and construction. Cambodia’s schools also lack basic classroom provisions and there is often a low morale among teachers.

For girls in Cambodia, additional educational barriers exist. Many families continue to see no value in educating their daughters. Instead, girls are expected to help in the home, contribute to the family income, or marry early. Half of all young girls and one third of boys work, and as a result the ratio of girls to boys in school is 1:3.

History and Results

Room to Read Cambodia is committed to helping the country rebuild its educational system from the ground up. Our local staff speaks the language, knows the customs, and understands the challenges that exist in implementing our programs in the country. Since we began operations in Cambodia, we have worked with our wide network of local partners across four provinces, covering a quarter of the total population.

We have found one of the greatest needs in Cambodia to be affordable Khmer-language books that meet the demand of the country’s young readers. With that in mind, publishing local language children’s books has been a priority for our team since the early days of our operations in Cambodia. Our work in the country also includes other components of our holistic Literacy Program like establishing school libraries, constructing or renovating school rooms, and training teachers on a phonics-based approach to literacy instruction.

We have also had great success with our Girls’ Education Program in Cambodia, which has received international attention. In March of 2015, the First Lady of the United States and the First Lady of Cambodia visited one of our Girls’ Education Program sites in Siem Reap where they met with 10 of our program participants. These scholars shared their personal stories of overcoming obstacles to stay in school, and discussed how they have benefited from community-led programs, including Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program.

2018 Cambodia Targets

Literacy Program

Schools supported	279
Children benefited	53,680
New local language titles	8
Reprinted local language titles	5

Girls’ Education Program

New participants	1,220
Total participants	9,370



Give with confidence. Room to Read has received 11 four-star ratings for best charities from Charity Navigator since 2007. We take pride in our transparency and accountability.

Room to Read Global Offices: San Francisco
Delhi • Hong Kong • London • Mumbai
New York • Sydney • Tokyo • Zurich