

AVI COMMENTARY

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Cambodia's Active Role in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 13 on Climate Action

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Global warming, resulting in climate change, is one of the major concerns for every country. It is detrimental to health in an increasingly changing resource-based environment. Furthermore, climate change causes considerable damage to human society. It brings devastating effects on the environment and daily life of people. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the global temperature rose on average by 0.85 °C from 1880 to 2012. The increasing temperature has reduced the amount of snow and ice, while increasing the sea level. From 1901 to 2010, the average sea level went up by 19 centimetres, causing the ocean to expand. Since 1990, carbon dioxide (CO₂) has increased by approximately 50%.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has expressed its commitment to protecting the planet through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 on “Climate Action” to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact globally. In addition, the United Nations Member States have put great efforts to combat climate change through adaptation and mitigation, informing and shaping the global development agenda.

Cambodia's Effort to Achieve SDG 13 on Climate Action

As one of the United Nations members, the Cambodian government has worked its best to combat global climate change to reach the goals of SDG 13 and the Paris Agreement in 2015 by keeping the average global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Cambodia has always been a strong supporter of multilateral actions on climate change. At the Summit of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in Glasgow in November 2021, Cambodia demonstrated its commitment to addressing the risks of climate change. Although the country emits only a small amount of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, Cambodia has made impressive progress in establishing its protected forest areas, representing 41% of its total land area. It is one of the highest proportions in the world by all measures in multi-stakeholder cooperation to protect forests and conserve biodiversity.

Recently, Cambodia has updated its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), aiming to increase its previous coverage by including climate change mitigation targets in the agricultural and waste sectors and more detailed actions in key sub-sectors, such as energy efficiency. In its NDC, Cambodia targets approximately 42% emissions reduction by 2030.

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Nationally, Cambodia has made considerable improvements in climate responses. The Cambodian government prioritised climate change in the national development agenda and public investment, developed climate change strategic plans and sectoral plans, and mainstreamed climate into different sectors at national and sub-national levels. Moreover, Cambodia has stopped the development of coal power plants and postponed hydropower dam constructions along the Mekong River. Instead, Cambodia has embraced the goal of creating renewable energy (clean energy) such as solar power plants that can reduce the price of electricity, lower the cost of importing oil, and enhance sustainability.

Some development partners have joined the government to combat climate change. EnergyLab is a member of the global alliance of clean energy accelerators supporting the growth of the clean energy market in Cambodia, focusing on innovation and entrepreneurs by connecting and creating an energy ecosystem of industry, investors, entrepreneurs, and research institutes through a range of programmes, partnerships, and events. Oxfam Cambodia works on various climate change adaptation and mitigation projects in rural areas. This organisation supports climate-resilient agriculture production by adopting the sustainable rice platform standard and other climate-resilient livelihood practices. Additionally, Oxfam works with the public, the private sector, and government institutions to support an inclusive and green economic model through the Inclusive Green Economy programme.

Challenges and Recommendations

Challenges persist despite the great effort of both the Cambodian government and its development partners to achieve SDG 13. The implementation of the SDG in Cambodia has faced some challenges as raised by the experts from the Ministry of Environment, EnergyLab, and Oxfam Cambodia, who participated in the AVI-SDGs Dialogue in February 2022. The challenges include the government's technical and human resource capacity to implement climate change-related policies at the national and sub-national levels. Likewise, renewable and clean energy production is not enough to be supplied across the country, where the bulk of energy comes from coal power plants, hydropower, and fossil fuels. The dialogue also identified a lack of sufficient budget for climate change priorities. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed the implementation of climate change adaptation activities at the community level.

To assist Cambodia in achieving SDG 13 on climate change, first, the government should consider improving technology transfer and human resource capacity on climate change. Second, the government should increase a sufficient climate budget for climate change-related activities. Third, it should work with development partners and the private sector to encourage industry/enterprises to use renewable energy to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Fourth, the government should consider producing more solar power and biogas since they contribute to reducing carbon emissions. Finally, developing a long-term strategy is necessary to visualise aspects that make negative impacts and create solutions to climate actions.

The views expressed are the author's own and do not reflect the views of the Asian Vision Institute.