

Justice and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (CPS)

BMZ 2030: Peaceful and inclusive societies

Background

The aftermath of the Khmer Rouge has continued to affect Cambodians for more than forty years. Torture, sexual violence, execution, starvation and forced labour occurred from 1975 to 1979 and resulted in the death of a quarter of Cambodia’s population. The end of the Khmer Rouge period was followed by a civil war that finally ended in 1998 when the Khmer Rouge political and military structures were dismantled. In an effort to prosecute the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge and to prosecute serious crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge period (1975-1979), the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) were installed in 2005. In the context of the ECCC, three former senior leaders have been convicted. Nevertheless, the Cambodian society still struggles to come to terms with the crimes committed. This is amplified by the collective depoliticization of the Khmer Rouge era in which much of the population sees itself in the role of victims, and perpetrators in lower positions are not held accountable in the judiciary. As a result, a differentiated dealing with the past process finds its way only slowly and inadequately into Cambodian society and formal education. While survivors of the regime experience only a limited sense of justice and recognition of past suffering and trauma, future generations only get an insufficient understanding of what happened in their country and how these events were integrated into a larger regional and international context.

Our approach

The CPS project utilizes various approaches to support the Cambodian society towards sustainable peace and reconciliation. To assist the Khmer Rouge survivors and wider public in trauma healing, CPS strengthens education in the field of mental health and the capacities of MHPSS service providers. To address Cambodia’s violent past, CPS contributes to a holistic ‘dealing with the past’ in the context of the ECCC. Further, it promotes non-violent conflict transformation through



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peacebuilding education and communication with a focus on youth. To facilitate this approach, CPS supports various civil society and government institutions by seconding national and international Advisors. The Advisors provide technical support, capacity building and knowledge transfer in their respective specialist fields. CPS works closely with actors at the ECCC, especially the Victim Support Section to support a meaningful and participatory reconciliation for survivors in the transitional justice process.

The benefits

The four pillars of the United Nations in the field of transitional justice are present in the work of the ECCC in Cambodia and are complemented by the approaches of the CPS. Several CPS supported activities are linked to the ECCC and are recognized as reparations projects. All CPS activities are directed towards non-recurrence and non-violent conflict transformation.

Through the support of the CPS, survivors are supported to overcome suffering and trauma and empowered to actively contribute to dealing with the past processes beyond the ECCC. Young generations are enabled to reflect on their own past and its relevance for the present and future Cambodian society.



Photo (L): Forced Marriage Exhibition

Photo (R): Youth Mental Health Day at the Department of Psychology (DP)



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Photo (L): Self Help Group with Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO)

Photo (R): Exhibition at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (TSGM)

Achievements

Memory and truth-finding

Memory and reconciliation in dealing with the past is facilitated by the partner organizations of CPS. The Victim Support Section of the ECCC, responsible for outreach and administrative processes related to procedural participation for Civil Parties, is working through forums, meetings, and dialogues to ensure that Civil Party voices are heard at the ECCC and to deliver updated information about the development of their case.

Partner organizations like the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Kdei Karuna Organization or Youth Resource Development Program organize exhibitions, workshops, dialogues, and other formats that initiate a differentiated public discourse about Cambodia's violent past. CPS is specifically engaging various ethnic groups and genders to bring in their perspectives, and thus exploring and integrating their experiences of the past in the public discourse.

Mental Health and Capacity Building

Survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime receive psychosocial support to deal with the consequences of inflicted trauma. The partner organization Transcultural Psychosocial Organization is supporting Self-Help Groups for Survivors, Intergenerational-Community Based Dialogues and Testimonial Therapies, activities that also involve the next generations. These activities support the psychosocial wellbeing, raise awareness about trauma and

enable a public discussion about the experience of violence and its consequences. Cambodian psychologists are trained in the CPS supported Master Program in Clinical Psychology at the Royal University of Phnom Penh to meet the vast therapeutic needs in Cambodia. The training of psychologists and the establishment of institutionalised therapy services increase the professionalisation in the field of mental health as well as the contribution to the reconciliation process in Cambodia.

Peacebuilding Education and Conflict Sensitive Communication

CPS partner organizations, in formal and informal education, are encouraging young Cambodians to reflect on their own past and present in relation to multiple identities regarding family relations, political affiliation, ethnic origin and gender.

Additionally, youth is engaged by various partner organizations in training courses on conflict transformation and resolution. Woman Peace Makers (WPM) especially supports women and youth in their efforts to prevent violence and to understand its causes. Together with CPS, WPM is building and strengthening local capacities for non-violent conflict transformation in schools. Moreover, the Bachelor of Media Communication at the Department for Media and Communication of the Royal University of Phnom Penh contributes to the capacity building of future journalists to report about societal issues in a conflict-sensitive manner.



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Women Peace Makers



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