

How media content engages young people and parents in youth civic engagement in Cambodia

BBC Media Action Cambodia conducted research to understand the influence of our multi-media content and activities on the Klahan9 SPACE project. The work focused on young people and parents' knowledge and attitudes to increase youth participation in public life. Panel findings showed that people participated more after exposure to our media content.

Context

Data from the 2021 nationally representative survey [conducted by BBC Media Action](#) showed that the sizeable youth population is not represented in policy setting and decision-making and while young Cambodians report positive attitude toward civic engagement, this does not translate to active and consistent practice. The research showed that common barriers that prevent young people from participating in public life include a lack of knowledge, low confidence and motivation, a lack of soft skills and a perception that their voice and opinions are not valued by parents and decision-makers.

The project

With funding support from SIDA and SDC, Klahan9 SPACE project aims to provide young people with the knowledge, skills, confidence, motivation, and networks they need to participate and engage in their communities and in public life. The primary target group is young people, aged 15 to 30 either in rural or urban

areas of Cambodia. To further encourage civic engagement among young people, the project also reaches parents and other community gatekeepers such as community leaders, teachers etc. influencers on young people's decision-making and civic participation. The project reaches out to these audiences through media outputs (social media and TV programmes) as well as community outreach activities (roadshow academy event) and support to civil society, including working with youth-focused organisations, media outlets and practitioners.

Research methodology

Mid-way through the project, research was conducted to understand how the project was performing, specifically:-

- Qualitative research - semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 32 youths and 39 elders (parents, local authorities, or decision-makers).
- Phone survey - 159 young Cambodians who participated in a baseline survey at the start of the project.

In addition, two panels were set up where people were exposed to output. Survey data was collected before and after they were exposed to project output to measure any change. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were also conducted to gain deeper insights.

- Youth panel study - 116 young people aged 15 to 30 (10% of people from a non-binary gender and 8% of people with disabilities) from Phnom Penh and Kampong Chhnang province were recruited and then exposed to the project's output such as *Sok San Family* TV programme, digital content and outreach activities for three months in 2022.

- Parent panel - In 2023, another group of 108 parents both mothers and fathers who have at least one child aged 15-30, were recruited in Phnom Penh and Takeo province to be exposed to *Sok San Family* TV programme for two months.

Key findings

- **Engagement:** The Klahan9 SPACE project is engaging audiences and demonstrating alignment between the project's progress and the overall project theory of change. Media outputs and outreach work have received positive feedback from the target audiences, who find useful and relevant to their lives.
- **Knowledge:** Results from the panel studies show that 93% of youth panellists and 96% of parents, self-reported learning something new after being exposed to the Klahan9 SPACE project. Youth participants reported learning soft life skills and understanding development work in their community. Parents felt the TV programme provides good examples of parenting and community participation.
- **Participation:** There has been an increase in civic participation amongst people most engaged with Klahan9. Training participants, and those who have been highly exposed to media outputs and outreach activities had taken informal actions such as volunteering or raising concerns with elders.
- **Civic action:** 83% of youth panellists reported taking actions after being exposed to Klahan9 SPACE digital content, TV programme or roadshow academy event. Most of them (73%) took preparatory action, followed by beginner action (55%), which is simple and doable actions without intensive effort. More than one-third took intermediate action which is directly interlinked with the civic participation objective, such as voicing opinions about things that matter to them or their community.

- **Supporting youth civic engagement:** 51% of parents who participated in the study reported doing something different after watching the TV episodes. Most of them used better language to talk to children and husbands or wives; e.g. the drama shows them how to talk with their children in a way that they are more likely to listen to and follow their advice. Some parents also discussed issues with children on household matters, their children's study, and outdoor activities and 13% encouraged their children or young people to participate in community activities.

"I was not interested in sending my daughter to any meetings because I thought she was too young. After watching the drama, I realised that my daughter is at Kdep Ampil's age too. Later, I encouraged her to join (community meetings) and she has attended twice already."

Mother, 42, Takeo

Key implications

- The TV programme has been successful in driving positive perceptions and behaviours among young people and parents toward youth civic engagement.
- Young people prefer media content which entertains as well as informs while parents prefer more educational content.
- Media content that shows practical problem solving is more likely to inspire young people to engage in civic life.
- Whilst people heavily engaged in project output have taken informal civic action such as volunteering or voiced their opinions, for the majority it is more realistic to encourage them to take preparatory or beginner action.

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