What do we mean by youth?

The United Nations defines youth as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and young people as those between the ages of 10 and 24 years. The terms ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ are used interchangeably here.

Messaging goal:
- CMDG1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- CMDG2: Achieve universal nine-year basic education
- CMDG3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- CMDG6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Advocacy objective:
Support the implementation of the National Youth Policy to:
- improve the availability, accessibility and quality of public services required by young people;
- increase opportunities, expand capabilities and provide choices for young people, which should also include employability and entrepreneurship;
- promote youth participation in all aspects that affect their lives and improve their opportunities to be involved in decision-making.

Target audience:
Prime Minister; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport; Ministry of Planning; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Economy and Finance; Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation; Ministry of Women’s Affairs; Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training; Technical Working Group on Education; the UN and other development partners; private sector; young people.

Why do youth matter?

Young people in Cambodia are a dynamic and promising economic, social and cultural force. They offer new perspectives, new ideas and a willingness to build a brighter future.

Two out of every three people in Cambodia are under 25, and more than 30 per cent are aged between 10-24 years. The country has one of the largest youth populations in Southeast Asia. As such, young people can be an enthusiastic, challenging and energetic boost to any country – they will be Cambodia’s biggest asset over the next decade, but could potentially be a disenfranchised group in a country with widening inequalities.

Unemployment, higher among youth than any other age group, is the single most important issue confronting Cambodian youth today. There are simply not enough jobs for the increasing number of young people leaving school each year. For those without a basic education, decent employment prospects are low.

Migration for economic and educational opportunities is transforming the composition of village life and sending more young people into urban centres and into cross-border migration, providing new opportunities, but also exposing them to greater risks and vulnerabilities. Marginalised young people are extremely vulnerable and this, combined with limited choices, can expose them to reproductive health risks, HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence, gang violence, and alcohol and drug abuse.

Cambodian tradition and culture emphasizes respect for elders, and combined with patriarchal beliefs, tradition tends to respect elder men, limiting opportunities for young people, in particular young women, to express their views. Increasing the involvement of young people in local development and decision-making is a real opportunity and will provide decision-makers with the perspectives and experiences of young people.

Young people comprise the majority of volunteers in Cambodia, but their contributions to development are often unacknowledged.
Quick facts:

- 34.8 per cent of the population is between 10 and 24 years old
- 300,000 young people enter the work force every year
- In 2008, an estimated 6.8 million people over 15 years of age were engaged in work. Youth are more than a quarter of these (25.8 per cent)
- Youth participation in the labour force was 60 per cent in 2008
- The youth employment to population ratio was 58 per cent in 2008
- An estimated 20,000-30,000 children and youths live or work on the street. This increases by 20 per cent each year
- The literacy rate for youth between the ages of 15-24 years is 87.5 per cent
- While statistics vary, drug dependence is an issue for young people in Cambodia. The estimated number of drug users in Cambodia in 2007 was between 13,000 and 40,000. More than 80 per cent of illicit drug users are aged 25 years of age or younger.

Achievements:

The Cambodian National Youth Policy and Action Plan was finalized by a Technical Working Group led by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) in close collaboration with a number of partners, including the UN. The draft policy has been reviewed by the legal committee of MoEYS and is currently with the Council of Ministers for adoption.

The UN undertook a Youth Situation Analysis in 2009, identifying young people’s opportunities and challenges. This provided critical evidence upon which the Government based its National Youth Policy development and on which the UN is developing a coordinated strategy for youth planning and programming.

In late 2007, the United Nations Country Team in Cambodia established a UN Youth Advisory Panel for Cambodia, which seeks to create an environment in which young people can enter into debate and discussions on emerging issues and challenges facing young people. This is the first panel of its kind anywhere in the UN system and is an example for other UN country offices around the world.

The process of developing the National Youth Policy established closer working relationships across the different UN agencies and with MoEYS.

Following the Situation Analysis of Youth, the UN country team acknowledged “Youth” as a cross-cutting issue in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2011-2015.

UN agencies have partnered with a variety of civil society organizations, NGOs and the private sector on policy development, programmes, systems and research to influence and advocate for greater youth involvement.

The Government signed a letter of intent affirming its commitment to implementing a voluntary, community-based drug treatment programme (as an alternative to compulsory/temporary treatment centers) in September 2010. The programme is currently being piloted in Banteay Meanchay province and Phnom Penh (Methadone Maintenance) with technical and financial support provided by the UN.

Including the voices of youth in Cambodia’s development

- Promote increased youth engagement in decentralization and deconcentration efforts.
- Engage national youth organizations as implementing partners.
- Engage young people in development programmes.
- Create a safe and supportive environment for youth participation with a particular focus on youth leadership programmes, including by establishing youth exchange activities both internationally and between and within communities.
- Support opportunities for youth to access vocational skills training, particularly in rural areas.
- Take measures to increase youth political participation, which is currently still very low.
- Review current initiatives for young people among NGOs, INGOs and the government to understand which strategies are managing to effectively engage young people in development issues.

Key messages

1. Governance
   “Cambodia’s youth have a right to participate in the political life of their country”

2. Development
   “Investment in Cambodia’s youth is an investment in Cambodia’s future”
   “Invest in youth, invest in the future”

3. Employment
   “Young people have the right to full and productive employment”
   “Quality education links Cambodia’s youth to decent employment”

4. Health and education
   “Every young person has a right to a good quality education”
   “Better education, better health, better future”
   “Drug use prevention and treatment should be available for every young person in Cambodia”

5. Gender
   “Young women and young men are legally entitled to equal rights and opportunities”

6. Social safety nets
   “Social protection for poverty reduction for young people”
   “Reduce poverty, promote social protection for young women and men”

i. Census 2008
ii. Census 2008
iii. UNDP/ILO, 2007
v. National Institute of Statistics/ILO 2010
vi. National Institute of Statistics/ILO 2010
vii. Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2005
viii. Census 2008
ix. NCHADS and UNAIDS, 2007
x. NACD, 2008