
USAID HIGHLIGHTS

Youth Democracy Festivals Draw Over 140,000

Kampong Cham, Cambodia
July 18-19, 2009



Students visit interactive booths at the Youth Festival in Kampong Cham on July 18-19.

Over 69,000 young people attended a U.S.-funded Youth Festival at Kampong Cham's football stadium on July 18-19. The Kampong Cham event was the final in a series of eight Youth Festivals held since April 2006, attracting a total of 142,000 youth in provinces throughout the country.

The Youth Festivals are designed to promote democracy and engage youth in the political process, and are part of ongoing

U.S. efforts to strengthen civil society and good governance in Cambodia.

The two-day event in Kampong Cham featured skills workshops, musical performances and informational booths on topics such as how commune councils work and the history of the Khmer Rouge.

Mean Ban, a 20-year-old student at Kampong Cham's Chea Sim Kamchay Mear University, said he came to the festival because it allowed young people to come together and share their concerns and aspirations. "This festival is great because it gives us a chance to show our abilities to the community," he said.

The festival began on Saturday with an opening ceremony that featured speeches by Khoun Sun Eng, Deputy Governor of Kampong Cham, and Paul Randolph, Acting Head of USAID's Office of General Development.

"Democracy is about you getting involved and making your opinion heard through your actions, your voice and your vote. You, the youth of Cambodia, will be making the

decisions and casting the votes that will determine the future of our country,” Randolph said.

Over the next two days, the crowd visited dozens of information booths run by local NGOs and businesses. In addition, students participated in lively workshops on a variety of topics, including fundraising, debating skills and journalism. Both evenings featured performances by Cambodian pop stars Khemarak Sereymon, Sokun Nisa, Chhon Sovanareach and Meas Soksophea broadcast live on youth-oriented television station MYTV.

Salam, a 19-year-old high school student who is a volunteer with the U.S.-funded Youth Council of Cambodia, said the young people in attendance would be able to apply the skills they learned in their daily lives. “I’m already getting good results from the knowledge I’ve gained from past festivals,” he said, including how to write persuasively.

The United States is committed to promoting youth involvement in politics and civil society in Cambodia. To that end, USAID funds the Youth Festivals and the ongoing Youth Leadership Challenge, a reality television show watched by millions that will soon enter its sixth season on CTN. Previous festivals were held in Battambang, Kampong Cham, Svay Rieng, Takeo, Pursat and Prey Veng provinces.