

# Poverty and the Linkage to Criminal Enhancement and Human Trafficking in Cambodia

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## Abstract

*Cambodia is one of the ASEAN country members. This country is facing problem of poverty and criminality. The old and new political system in Cambodia since 1970s determined as the cause of current condition. Poverty is the cause of many problems and it impacts on other fields as well. Human trafficking is the most alarming problem currently. Furthermore, the problem is getting worse since 2015 when ASEAN Economic Community declared for free trade service among ASEAN member states. Cooperation may show another side of globalization. The cooperation causes liberalization; include laboring in the other side. ASEAN Economic Community can be seen as another side of slavery and Cambodia face the worse problem, called human trafficking. Human trafficking can be caused by many things and poverty is one of the most determinants. In the case of poverty in Cambodia, can be seen as domino effect of poverty itself, but it takes time to figure out the main player on it. Policy and government can be the main actor, but still the consideration of this problem should be taken carefully and the solution needed here involved coordination of many fields which can be researched further. Competition among ASEAN country members create bigger problem and consequences which should be faced. Meanwhile, Cambodia still included as one of Third World Countries and it still need more time to take this cooperation challenge then turn it into profitable moment.*

Keywords: poverty, human trafficking, ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), criminality

## Introduction

Cambodia is one of the members of ASEAN (Association of South East Asia Nations). In terms of AEC euphoria, which has been started by the end of December 2015, it is important to take into closer toward each country members' economic development. Still, it is too early to conclude that Cambodia is considered as the poorest country in the Southeast Asia region. As a regional organization, ASEAN has big responsibility

to enhance economic development of each country members. The fact is economic rate of Cambodia is included as one of the Least of Developed Countries at the ranked 8 (United Nations Committee for Development Policy, 2016). This ranked is not absolutely exposes all countries around the world, but we need to consider the consequences of this ranked, related to the development of ASEAN as a regional union in South East Asia.

As one of the ASEAN country members, Cambodia, which has been facing much pain for years caused by civil war, will face more consequences which related to the consequences of the rank. The Least of Developed Country rank is made by an organization which suggests that country with less liberalization will be included in the rank. As we know, that Cambodia civil war caused by political condition in the past which correlates to economy, politic, and social welfare until nowadays. Thus, UN conflict resolution at that time was considered as the best answer for Cambodia.

One of the implementation of UN big role in Cambodia is MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) program. This program aims to solve many problems around the world, such as eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other disease; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development (United Nations, 2015). The goal of MDGs relates to the global development, not only for ASEAN country members.

ASEAN as a basic regional organization in South East Asia Nation should take care each member. Then, united achievement as is very important. If we may take into closer consideration about the Cambodia economy, we will see that Cambodia still left behind other countries in ASEAN, which ranked on 8 positions as one of the 50 Poorest Countries in the world (Ranker, 2016). It doesn't mean that the others do not care much about Cambodia economic

development, but political conflict in this country forced other ASEAN countries member not to be involved into political problem. Political conflict in Cambodia affects poverty rate in the country.

Conflict in Cambodia has been started in March 1970, a US-supported group, led by General Lon Nol, launched a coup against Prince Norodom Sihanouk, a hero for Cambodia's independence from France in 1953. An armed element, called the "Khmer Rouge", was formed and overthrew Lon Nol's rule in April 1975. When coming to power, the Khmer Rouge carried out genocide, resulting in death of 1.7 million people (Cambodian Institute for Coordination and Peace, 2016). However, the conflict could be solved by assistance of United Nations in brokering several negotiations. The negotiations then led to the Paris Peace Agreement (PPA), UN brought Cambodia conflict to agreement assignment which was signed by the four warring parties on 23 October 1991 and held an election in the country. Though, UN failed to secure full peace and unity in this country because the Khmer Rouge boycotted the UN-sponsored election in 1993 and continued launching military attack against the de jure government (Cambodian Institute for Coordination and Peace, 2016).

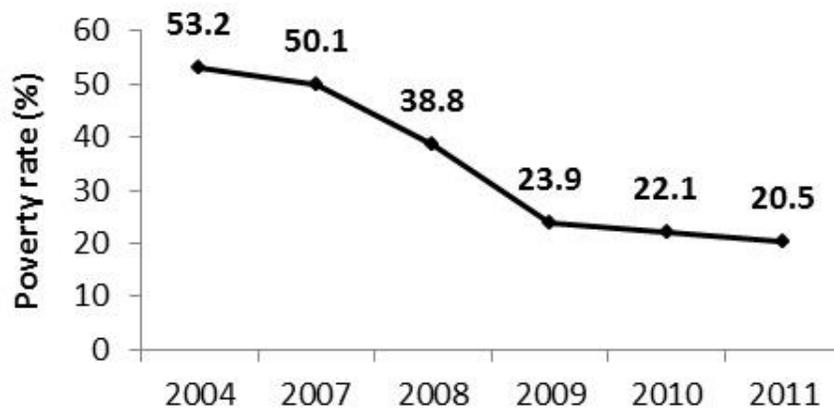
To deal with the prolonged armed conflict, the Cambodian government initiated the so-called "win-win" policy, which successfully dismantled the Khmer Rouge's last stronghold without bloodshed and integrated the separatists into the mainstream society in late 1998 (Cambodian Institute for Coordination and Peace, 2016). Since that time, there has been relative peace, but socio-economic development has been slow and

people still face severe living conditions. Poverty is widespread, health care resources are underdeveloped and under-funded, roads and other infrastructure are in poor condition, literacy rates are low, and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are high (Annear 1998; Beresford et al. 2004; Coates 2005; Hugu et al. 2000; Kola 2004; Lanjouw, Macreae and Zwi 1999; Ott 1997) (Population Studies Center, 2016). The report gave such good view that poverty can't be separated from political condition, since it is interrelated to each other. In other words, we can say that the poverty and un-welfare condition in a country affected by political condition. In Cambodia, we can see that conflict of radical activities has affected the economic and political condition in the country which remains exist. In Cambodia, UN Conflict Resolution is evidence that political condition in this country is a tool for other organization to set the economic condition.

### **Reduction of Poverty in Cambodia (correlates with MDGs Program)**

Cambodia as one of the agricultural countries has faced terrible radicalization for years. However, the conflict resolution has challenged this country to prove better economic condition after civil war by its own. Based on data, poverty rate more than halved, from 53% (2004) to 20.5% (2011). Increased rice prices and increased rice production has contributed to poverty reduction, along with greater road access for farmers to markets, better access to market information through mobile phones, improved irrigation, and a liberal undistorted agricultural market (The World Bank, 2014) Related to MDGs program, Cambodia is not the only country in the world which has been assisted by UN. The aims of program will bring a country to better condition.

At first, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in Cambodia can be seen as the "fragile aims" in this point. Though, it is important to take more consideration to index of poverty reduce year by year in Cambodia. As we can see in the diagram below:

**Figure 1: Cambodia Headcount Poverty Rate, 2004-2011.**

The diagram shows us that poverty rate in Cambodia has been reduced by assistance given by World Bank. However, this assistance is a fragile and non-permanent condition for better economic condition. It can lead Cambodia to the worse condition in the future, since it is still too early to conclude that assistance from World Bank is what Cambodia need at this time. As has been said by Neak Samsen, a Poverty Analyst of the World Bank in Cambodia and the co-author of the Poverty Assessment Report (The World Bank, 2014):

*“Despite impressive reduction in poverty, these hard-won gains are fragile. Many people who have escaped poverty are still at high risk of falling back into poverty,”* said. *“For example, the loss of just 1,200 Riel (about \$0.30) per day in income would throw an estimated three million Cambodians back into poverty, doubling the poverty rate to 40%”.*

However, we still have to believe that many things may happen in the future for a better economic condition in Cambodia. One of evidence is that poverty reduction in

Cambodia has shown better impact for investment in this country. Second, WHO profound that

*“...dollar per dollar spent on health, many countries are falling short of their performance potential. The result is a large number of preventable deaths and lives stunted by disability. The impact of this failure is born disproportionately by the poor, but several developing countries, were judged to have the least fair financing of health system, including Sierra Leone, Myanmar, Brazil, China, Vietnam, Nepal, the Russian federation, Peru, and Cambodia”* (Michael, 2012).

The result was just about making better condition for certain time. It proves that decline on agriculture, fisheries, forestry, industry, and services as well as the GDP remain low until 2011. Though, spreading number and rank concluded that Cambodia has improving its economic condition. We need to take more consideration for what extend the rank is made.

*“The health status of Cambodians has been steadily improving since the 1980s, but*

*remains relatively poor when compared to other countries in the region. Today, health status is characterized by falling but still high rates of infant and maternal mortality, increased but still low life expectancy, under nutrition, and a double disease burden with prevalent communicable diseases and emerging non-communicable diseases. There are significant inequalities in health status by socioeconomic status and between urban and rural populations (Asia Pacific Observatory on Health System and Policies, 2015)."*

As we can see that not all improving report will show the condition for real. The use of traditional medicine is strong in Cambodia, with a culture of robust traditional medicine centered on the Kru Khmer, the traditional healers who are found all throughout the country. The two most salient health-related problems linked to poverty in Cambodia are malnutrition and access to health care (WHO and Ministry of Health in Cambodia, 2012). In other words, we can say that the better condition of Cambodia, along with economic improvement, reported remains to be fragile report that indicate by the time Cambodia as one of the ASEAN country members facing better improvement in some cases. Though, we still need to figure out the main problem which should be solved in Cambodia, since it will relate to other terms, such as economic development, social welfare, and political condition. Thus, it will be one of the biggest responsibilities of ASEAN as a regional organization to make united improvement of each country members.

### **The Enhancing Criminal Rate in Cambodia (Human Trafficking Case)**

This raises poverty which eventually enhance criminal, and Human Trafficking

need more consideration, indeed. Crime caused by the enhancement of poverty and ignorance of citizens form trafficking criminal action. Women and men are transferred to be slaves for commercial exploitation or prostitution as well. Then it directs toward humanitarian issues. We need to take into more consideration into concept of free trade area among ASEAN country members which also applied for services. The chance then turns into serious risk when it comes to human trafficking.

This condition will be another face of liberalization and the high desire to develop global cooperation, as it is does by all member states in ASEAN which called AEC. Human trafficking is the process through which individuals are placed or maintained in an exploitative situation for economic gain. Trafficking can occur within a country or may involve movement across border. Women, men, and children are trafficked for a range of purposes, including forced and exploitative labor in factories, farms, ad private households, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage. Trafficking affects all region most countries of the world (United Nations, 2014).

Women and children are trafficked to Cambodia in Thailand and Malaysia for sexual exploitation and forced labor in factories or as domestic servants, while the Cambodian men trafficked as forced labor in agriculture, fishery, and construction sectors. Cambodian children transferred commercially to be slaves to Vietnam and Thailand to serve as beggars (Sari, 2010).

In addition, Cambodian women and children also trafficked to China and Vietnam or sexual exploitation. They come from both rural areas such as Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville (Sari, 2010). There are no

exact figures on the number of prostitutes in Cambodia, but highest estimate reached 100 thousand of the 13 million population of Cambodia with 35% of those aged 18 years. Human trafficking in Cambodia increased since the early 1990s, with estimates varying from 18 thousand to 100 thousand of commercial sex workers (Sari, 2010). On the other hand, the Cambodian government tries hard to solve the problems caused by human trafficking in Cambodia. The seriousness of Cambodian government shown by set up the stages of the National Action Plan (NAP), human trafficking handler National Action Plan Five-Year Plan Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia for 2000-2004; which followed the National Plan of Action Plan Against trafficking and sexual exploitation of children 2006-2010 which contains a number of work programs, including the importance of establishing mechanisms for collaboration and other countries and a number of related parties that the implementation involves a number of international organizations and NGOs, local and foreign NGOs, namely combat child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children which was developed based on a policy that has been made by the government and by the applicable law in Cambodia. In ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Abuse and Trafficking) who have problems focusing on the elimination of all forms of CSEC (ECPAT International, 2008).

In addition, Cambodian government cooperated with Thai government. The two countries agreed on a bilateral cooperation to eliminate trafficking of women and children as well as working together to help the victims. On June 1, 2005, ECPAT Cambodia in cooperation with the Cambodian National

Council for Children. These activities include training, workshops and raising awareness of the dangers of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The members of the coalition who provide direct services to victims to get protection from the government by increasing the capacity of care and protection, ECPAT also put through cooperation with the tourism ministry in conducting workshops to prevent child sex tourism (Cambodian National Council for Children, 2002-2010).

ECPAT then did a one-day Seminar on Sharing Good Practices and Establishment of the Child Protection Network. The group also held a national workshop on Tourism is safe from child sex, in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism, World Vision Cambodia and Child Wise Australia. Cambodia Ministry of Social Affairs and representatives from 24 cities and provinces also participated in this activity. ECPAT also monitor the National Plan of Action against CSEC (2000-2004). This group publishes three issues of their newsletter and distributed 4,000 copies, published through the mass media articles and analysis of the situation in the local newspaper on reported cases of rape and human trafficking, informing the public about trends and routes of trafficking. Then the children who are victims of human trafficking brought to the organization the right to obtain reparation and rehabilitation, such as Cambodia Recovery Centre (Cambodian National Council for Children, 2002-2010).

### **Cambodia Globalization and Poverty**

Globalization is a process in which between individuals, between groups and between countries interact with each other and influence each other across borders. Globalization may cause positive effects such as improving the welfare and progress of

civilization, but it can also have a negative impact that encourage poverty, inequality, unemployment and even cross-border crimes in all parts of the world. Global developments have changed the characteristics of an area that was originally in the domestic sphere shifted to cross-border or transnational.

After civil war ended, the Congress of the United States discontinued its support for the government in Cambodia. Mr. Lon Nol as chosen candidate for president of Cambodia, faced many conflicts in terms of the financial crisis and civil war with Khmer Rouge (Communist Party) that was controlled by General Pol Pot. In the year of 1975, Pol Pot occupied the entire country and adopted communism. The Pol Pot focused on the rural areas and agriculture manufactures as their main primary production functions. The country was renamed as the Democratic Kampuchea. In the following years, Vietnam and Mr. Hun Sen, a leader of the New People's Republic of Kampuchea became allies, and used their combined military forces to remove Khmer Rouge from power in 1979. The country was unstable for decades until the United Nations stepped in. In the year of 1991, Cambodia declared a cease-fire under the supervision of the UN. In the year of 1993, Cambodia formed a new government, which was scrutinized by UNTAC. Cambodia stayed in peace, and a new modern society had begun (BBC News).

UN support for Cambodia government is beneficial; however, it can also be seen as bundling problem since the current government of Cambodia at that time had not ready yet to be "released" and control the country. But at that time, it was impossible to be depending on global peace organization any longer. In other words, the unpreparedness of Cambodia government at

that time might cause bigger problem. It was caused by the unfinished conflict resolution strategy to solve civil war problem in Cambodia, then national election was like something forced but it still could not solve the root problem in Cambodia at that time. Then, the most horrifying problem is getting bigger and relates to poverty and human trafficking.

### **The Benefits of Globalization and Positive Effect in Cambodia**

One of the benefits of globalization Cambodia can be seen through enhancement rate of GDP which is ten percent per year in 1998-2008. Globalization also supports the quality of education, health care and standard of living for Cambodian. During the economic crisis in 2008 to 2009, Cambodia suffered stagnation in their real GDP. In 2010 to 2011 however the GDP bounced back again at six percent. It is expected that their GDP will continue to grow at 6.5 percent annual rate from 2012 to 2013 (World Bank).

In fact, economy rate of Cambodia is increasing, since the country still relies on agriculture. Cambodia conducted international trade cooperation with China, South Korea, and Kuwait, and Vietnam after civil war. China is the main foreign investor in Cambodia, indeed. It embarks direct capital investment of agriculture sector amounting to about 4.2 billion dollars, which is 40.14% of total foreign investment in Cambodia. Korea has invested about 40 million dollars to purchase Cassava from Cambodian farmers. Kuwait has made a bilateral agreement with Cambodia to provide a loan of about 546 million dollars to support rice production for the Kuwait market. They will also provide technical support such as buildings for hydro-power

plants and direct flights for tourism (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016). The enhancement of economy power in Cambodia then becomes so real. However, Cambodia still included as poor country in South East Asia region. The agricultural sector is really support but still cannot lift Cambodia into better place in economic sector. The complexity of problem still become the main reason, hence we need take more consideration into the effort of Cambodia government to solve this domestic problem post of civil war.

However, globalization era at the other side forces Cambodia to solve the domestic problem soon. The cooperation among ASEAN country members cannot be conducted if there is still domestic problem which can't be solved in which it may related to the cooperation among ASEAN members, instead. The international trading relationships helped to create more jobs for Cambodian people and improved their standard of living, indeed. We can imagine that economy problem may impact to another field and the horrifying risk revealed by human trafficking practice in Cambodia.

In the year of 2004, Cambodia became a member of WTO (WTO, 2016) and expended their economy into the global market. They gained benefits in trade policy and made agreements with their members of WTO. According to WTO agreements, each county has to permit equal opportunity in terms of trade to all countries with regard to trade policies including subsidies, low tariffs, and regulations. Members especially have to adhere to laws that help to protect property rights.

Then, the opportunity was not taken for granted; Cambodia attracted more foreign

investment such as a big Multination Corporation Company (MNCs) from other countries such as China, Korea, Japan, Australia, Kuwait, and other members of the WTO. For instance, news that was published in The World's Peace website in Dec 27, 2011 said that the Japanese had planned investment in Cambodia. There were more than 65 Japanese's companies attended the meeting. They spent their capital for investment in the environment, human resources and infrastructure. On the other hand, WTO's policy can be seen as favoring to the developed countries more than the developing countries, which results in deteriorating terms of international trade with those developed countries (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016). The beneficial of globalization again become real and at the same time impact on cooperation among countries which included non-ASEAN country members.

### **The Negative Effects of Globalization and Poverty**

Globalization may also impact on cooperation practice among non-state actors, such as cooperation among Multinational Corporations (MNCs). The company spreads all over region and it has power to control resources in those regions. Then, problem comes when there is imbalance with capital and local sources in a region. MNC produce services and good by cultivate local sources, but when it can be fulfilled, MNC will bring in sources from the other region. It can enhance the competition among citizens. In the other hand, it will raise the benefits of local revenue.

Investment from China came after free trade momentum agreed. Many of these companies used to produce the cloth in their

home country, but because to take advantage of cheap labor forces, they removed their capital from China and invested in factories in Cambodia. People in the factories have to work long hours—at least 40 hours a week. They only get paid \$70 to \$80 per a month. If we compare these wages to the United States, the wages in the U.S. are quite different. American people, who are uneducated, can still earn at least \$60 to \$70 per a day in the factory. This terrible condition has made Cambodia become poorer (IMF, 2016).

Cambodia has taken this path. It opened to free market and gave incentive to the foreign investors such as lower taxes, no regulations, and free land concession. Many problems have occurred with the MNCs operating in Cambodia. For instance, the Cambodian government gave 340 sq. km to a Chinese company called Tianjin Union Development to build resorts and a casino. In this company's framework, they need to cut down many trees in the forest of their land concession in order to build their resorts and casino. This company not only destroyed the forest, but also many settlements of Cambodia in the area. The people lost their own property, land and housing (IMF, 2016).

The competition occurred after globalization era can't be avoided. Local resources such as labor should increase their capability and local encouragement about product in which investments are attracted to. It means, there still lot of things to be forced in order to chase the gap among ASEAN country members in the globalization era. The happening problem may occur continuously if the Cambodia government still can't solve domestic problem. Thus, it is important to not only take poverty into economical consideration, but empowering of human capability as main resources is very

important. Social and security problem should be followed to be settled; otherwise the cooperation among countries will be harmful. Then, Cambodia can't reach the gap to other countries. Meanwhile, coordination to solve human trafficking problem should be conducted and well set by all ASEAN country members.

### **Conclusion**

The government has implemented various programs to be developed under a National Action Plan to address trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. ECPAT assist Cambodia government implementing the work programs to solve humanitarian issues by increasing awareness of the dangers of sexual crimes against children, workshops conducted for the owners of hotels, guest houses and travel agencies from engaging in any act that leading to the CSEC, and monitor the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) for Cambodia. Besides, Cambodia government cooperates with Thai government to tackle human trafficking across borders and from Thailand and Cambodia. Cooperation is carried out by Thailand also aims to help the victims to return to their home countries. The Cambodia government has conducted effort to deal with sexual crimes against children through a variety of programs. However, obstacles in the implementation existed.

Positive effects of globalization in Cambodia have not solved economic problems. In the other side, it creates more problems in Cambodian society than benefits, such as human trafficking. The foreign investment to Cambodia has helped to create more jobs for Cambodian people, but the MNCs have paid too low of salaries to the Cambodian people for them to feed their

families and maintain a decent standard of living.

According to the discursive material theory, we can bring every part of these structures concerning globalization, including MNCs, WTO policy, foreign aids, and the role of government in Cambodia. Poverty plays as main problem and impacts on security. There is the more important need for countries like Cambodia to solve its domestic problem and make sure that they are ready for the competition era which included globalization and cooperation in the surface of all relations among countries.

#### About the Author

Dwi Ardiyanti, born in Semarang, 11 November 1987. She was the Head of International Relations Study Program in Potensi Utama University (2015-2016). She was graduated from Semarang State University 2005-2009 majoring English Literature then continued her study in International Relations Postgraduate Program in Gadjahmada University, Yogyakarta (2013-2015). She published some articles such as "Peran Perempuan Dalam Penguatan Sumber Daya Manusia Indonesia Memasuki Masyarakat Ekonomi ASEAN", "Kebudayaan Dan Perannya Dalam Pembentukan Moral Menurut Perspektif Konstruktivis" which were published in national journal *Power in International Relations*, Potensi Utama University. Her latest publication is "Impact of Population Migration on Environment through Economic and Political Policy" as part of ISBN-book published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta on International Seminar on Social Politics (2017).

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