

Mr. Merwin Hilvano Salazar (ASCI-GSID Student, Executive Director, Senate, Economic Planning Office)

Title: Unlocking Labor Force Potential in the Philippines: An Analysis of Participation Factors and Policy Options

Abstract:

This paper analyzes the factors influencing the decisions of men and women to enter and remain in the labor force in the Philippines within the context of the country's ongoing demographic transition. As the country experiences a significant shift in its age structure, understanding the determinants of labor force participation becomes crucial for informing policy and program reforms aimed at harnessing the demographic dividend. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative analysis, including logistic regression models, with qualitative insights from key informant interviews and focused group discussions. Initial findings reveal that educational attainment, marital status, household income, and urban versus rural residence significantly affect labor force participation for both genders. Moreover, qualitative data reveals that job availability, regional disparities, and high competition in the job market pose additional barriers to employment, particularly for women and those residing outside metropolitan areas. Respondents also identified the need for more supportive labor policies, including better access to childcare, flexible work arrangements, and the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, to enhance labor force participation and gender equality in the workforce. The study highlights the need for targeted policy interventions to increase labor force participation, reduce gender gaps, and take full advantage of the country's demographic transition.

Key words: labor force participation; gender dynamics; demographic dividend; Philippines; employment barriers; gender disparities; policy reform; workforce participation; socio-economic factors; mixed-methods analysis

Mr. Meas Sopheak (ASCI-GSID Student, Stakeholder Engagement Specialist, Mekong River Commission)

Title: Evolution of the Mekong River Commission as an Intergovernmental River Basin Organization

Abstract:

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) has undergone a remarkable transformation since its inception in 1957 as the Mekong Committee, a United Nations-backed initiative aimed at promoting the coordinated development of the Mekong River Basin. This article traces the evolution of the MRC over nearly seven decades, highlighting its successes, challenges, and the significant changes that have shaped its trajectory, such as the transition to the MRC in 1995, the development of legal frameworks like the procedures for data sharing and consulting each other on major water infrastructure projects, and the increasing focus on climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability. Employing Institutional Theory and the Transboundary Water Management Framework for analysis, the study examines how the MRC has adapted to the complex political and environmental challenges of the Mekong River Basin through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and MRC documents, supplemented by insider perspectives from MRC Secretariat officials and expert interviews.

We argue that while the MRC has made strides in fostering regional cooperation, building technical expertise, and developing legal and policy frameworks, it has also faced critical challenges related to uptakes of agreements and guidelines, limited influence on sustainable hydropower development, and, crucially, balancing national interests with regional priorities. Nevertheless, the MRC's challenges are universal and its experience will provide valuable insights for other intergovernmental river basin organizations.

Looking ahead, the article argues that the MRC must continue to evolve by strengthening regional integration, enhancing climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability, improving water governance and data sharing, monitoring and forecasting, promoting sustainable hydropower development, and ensuring financial sustainability. We particularly emphasize the necessity for its Member States—Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam—to improve data-sharing practices, particularly regarding mainstream and tributary projects, and to actively engage civil society organizations and local communities in the planning process and execution of its initiatives to bolster the MRC's effectiveness in addressing the basin's pressing water management issues. Ultimately, the MRC can be a model for international governance over shared water resources, provided that it can navigate the intricate dynamics of regional cooperation and sustainable development.

Dr. Thath Rido (Lecturer, Faculty of Development Studies, Royal University of Phnom Penh)

Title: The Status of Agriculture in Cambodia: Current Development and Prospect

Abstract:

Agriculture remains one of the key drivers of Cambodia's economy, contributing significantly to GDP, foreign exchange earnings, and employment. The sector has shown resilience and potential for growth, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Cambodian agriculture is characterized by diverse sub-sectors, which include crop production, livestock, and fisheries. Crop production is a dominant sub-sector, with rice being a major crop, supported by favorable climatic conditions and government policies. Recent progress and transformation have been noticeable regarding the production and exports of crops and other agricultural products. Farmers have been gradually adopting modern farming techniques and technologies, which improve productivity and efficiency. The exports of crops have been diversified from milled rice to other crops such as cassava and cashew nuts and fisheries products. Additionally, there is an increasing potential for exports due to recently enacted free trade agreements such as the Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Despite the positive prospects, the agricultural sector in Cambodia faces several challenges including climate change which poses a significant threat, with unpredictable weather patterns affecting crop yields and livestock production. Limited infrastructure, such as inadequate irrigation systems and poor road networks, hampers efficient agricultural practices and market access. Smallholder farmers often lack access to credit and modern inputs, limiting their ability to invest in improved technologies and practices. In addition, limited access to markets depress prices of many produces during peak harvesting time.

This study aims at exploring and examining the recent development of the Cambodian agricultural sector. Specifically, the study focuses on the transformation and advancement of production techniques and technologies, which are crucial for improving productivity. The study will also investigate the access to finance for farmers and agricultural enterprises, identifying both opportunities and challenges. In addition, the study will assess the potential for expanding agricultural exports, as well as the constraints that currently hinder its growth. Finally, the study will evaluate various policy initiatives designed to support and promote the agricultural sector, providing insights into their effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Dr. Maria Kristina G. Alinsunurin (Associate Professor, College of Public Affairs and Development, University of the Philippines Los Baños)

Title: Navigating Administrative Burden: The Hidden Complexities of Social Protection Delivery in the Philippines

Abstract:

This research investigates the critical dynamics between street-level bureaucracy and administrative burden in welfare delivery systems, focusing specifically on Philippine local governments. By examining the intersection of public service implementation and citizen experience, the study illuminates how administrative burdens manifest in developing country contexts where institutional capacity and resource constraints shape service delivery outcomes. The investigation centers on social welfare officers and beneficiaries in Laguna, Philippines, providing crucial insights into how street-level bureaucrats navigate their discretionary role while mediating between state policy imperatives and citizen needs. Initial findings reveal multifaceted dimensions of administrative burden that extend beyond conventional procedural challenges to encompass significant psychological costs for beneficiaries.

This analysis makes vital contributions to both public management scholarship and development studies by providing empirical evidence from a Global South perspective. The research advances our understanding of how administrative burdens operate in developing country contexts, while offering insights into the challenges of achieving universal social protection goals. By examining these dynamics through the lens of street-level bureaucracy, the study illuminates crucial aspects of policy implementation that affect service delivery outcomes. This focused investigation opens new pathways for understanding how local government capacity interfaces with broader welfare delivery systems, while maintaining scholarly rigor in its examination of citizen-state interactions in social protection programs.

The forthcoming chapter will extend this analysis by examining deeper intersections between institutional constraints, bureaucratic discretion, and citizen experiences, offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding welfare delivery dynamics in emerging economies.

Dr. Ngov Penghuy (Director, Asian Satellite Campuses Institute Cambodia)

Title: Trade, Structural Transformation and Economic Growth in Cambodia

Abstract:

Since its transition into a market economy in the early 1990s, Cambodia has achieved high and sustained growth, averaging about 7 per cent from 1995 to 2023 (MEF, 2023). This rapid growth prompted Cambodia to transition from a low-income to a lower-middle-income economy in 2015 and aspire to become upper-middle-income by 2030 and high-income by 2050.

Cambodian economy has been characterized by “trade-led growth”. It started with the concentrated export of garment products to the US and EU markets due to preferential market access. This sector alone created roughly one million jobs and contributed significantly to poverty reduction in the country. Low wages and preferential market access were key to the country’s early success. However, the increase in minimum wage in the past years and the erosion of trade preferences are expected to affect Cambodia’s export competitiveness in the coming years.

Cambodia is scheduled to graduate from the Least-Developed Country (LDC) status in 2029. While this graduation is a development milestone for the country, it also means the erosion of preferential market access that Cambodia has enjoyed. With the erosion of trade preference, Cambodia is expected to face fiercer export competition, prompting the country to better prepare itself for a smooth transition to minimize its impact.

This paper discusses the importance of trade and trade-led structural transformation in Cambodia by focusing on key trade-related issues pertinent to Cambodia. The structure of the paper is as follows.

- First, it started with the evolution of trade structure such as export concentration – both products and partners.
- Second, it examines the issues of trade facilitation and trade logistics.
- Third, it discusses how trade preferences have contributed to Cambodia's export growth in the past years.
- Fourth, it discusses the potential impact of LDC graduation on growth.
- Finally, it concluded with a policy implication on the importance of domestic policy reforms in order to stay competitive in the global markets.