

Cambodia in Brief



Map: wikipedia

Cambodia is situated in the heart of Southeast Asia and shares its borders with Thailand in the Northwest, Laos in the North and Vietnam in the East. The Mekong River, flowing through the country's North to the South, is an important source for water supply and fishing.

The region in which Cambodia is located can look back on a long and eventful, not always peaceful, history: the rise and the fall of the Khmer Empire between the 9th and the 15th century, various Thai and Vietnamese occupations, the French protectorate and the "Democratic Kampuchea", the cruel Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 – 1979 where more than 1.7 million, almost 1/4 of the total population, people were killed, followed by years of civil war. This traumatic war in recent history still has an impact on the daily life and may not be forgotten when one tries to analyse and understand modern Cambodian society.

Today 13.3 (est.) million people are living in Cambodia, almost 40% of them below the poverty line. Cambodia is one of the poorest countries not only in Southeast Asia but in the whole world with a GDP of approximately 300 USD and a Human Development Index of 0.583 (Human Development Report 2006), it ranks 129th of 177 countries. Cambodia is structured into 20 provinces and four municipalities that are subdivided into districts, communes and villages/islands. About 80% of the total population are working in the agricultural sector which makes them easy vulnerable for

crop failure. Rice is the principal food; it is cultivated all over the country. The infant mortality rate is one of the highest in the world.



Photo: DWHH

90% of the population are Khmer but there are also some ethnic minorities, most of them are living in remote areas in the country's North. Their livelihoods are especially threatened as they face the loss of their natural environment, the forest that is pushed by deforestation through mainly not local investors. The jungle is losing ground for vast rubber tree or cashew nut plantations.

Major problems in the rural areas of Cambodia are the insufficient supply of potable water that causes diseases as well as the bad condition of the roads, especially during the rainy season when the unpaved roads turn into muddy, difficult to pass ways. Besides that some farming households experience a food shortage between 3 to 7 months a year. During that period they depend on high interest loans and on alternative sources of food supply.