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CITIES PLANNING IN THE COASTAL PROVINCES OF CAMBODIA

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Abstract

Urban planning involves the design, regulation, and development of urban spaces to ensure sustainable growth and livable environments. In Cambodia's coastal provinces, urbanization remains a pressing concern as city plans for districts and Sangkat/communes remain incomplete, delaying sustainable development efforts. This report identifies challenges in the city planning process and proposes actionable recommendations for improvement. It begins by reviewing national and international policies, including those of Cambodia, Singapore, and Japan, to establish benchmarks for evaluating city planning practices. Findings from consultative meetings in Kampot and Kep provinces further validate the challenges faced by sub-national administrations in adopting and implementing city plans. The report highlights similarities between Cambodia's regulatory frameworks and those of advanced systems in Singapore and Japan, identifying best practices that can be adapted locally. Finally, the paper offers short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations for completing and enhancing city planning in the coastal provinces, emphasizing collaboration between government, private sector, civil society, and communities to achieve inclusive and sustainable urbanization

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

According to World Bank Group, 21% of the population in Cambodia lived in urban areas in 2017 and this number is expected to rise to 36% in the year 2050.¹ While the migration rate of rural-to-rural areas (50.9%) was higher than that of rural-to-urban areas (27.5%) in 2008, the 2019 Census showed a remarkable change in urbanization process in Cambodia as the migration rate of rural-to-urban areas is 37.5%, which is comparatively higher than that of rural-to-rural areas (27.1%) and that of urban-to-rural areas (6.3%).² According to the General Population Census of 2019, the total population in Cambodia reached 15.5 million.³ In the same year, the Census showed that people living in urban areas, excluding foreign residents, across the country were more than 6.1 million, including the population of Phnom Penh, the Capital City of Cambodia, which was approximately more than 1.3 million.⁴

Cambodia defines urban area based on the population size (excess of 2,000 inhabitants), population density (exceeding 200 persons per square kilometer) and percentage of employment in non-agricultural occupations (excess of 50 %).⁵ The term “city” in this paper refers to capital, municipality or populated area. The status of a city or municipality in Cambodia is recognized by the government in the form of Sub-decree.

Law on Land Management, Urbanization and Construction which was promulgated in 1994 requires for the adoption of master plan for management and development of the capital, provinces and municipalities.⁶ In addition, Sub-decree on Urbanization of Capital, City and Urban Areas adopted in 2015 requires that urbanization must adhere to a number of principles, including taking the urban physical plan as a basis for urban development, urban conservation, land development, infrastructure development and all kinds of construction, as well as integration to make land use in the right, efficient, sustainable, balanced and equitable manner.⁷ Urban physical plans or city plans consist of master plan on land use, land use plan and detailed plan of urbanization. The Ministry of Land Management, Urbanization and Construction demonstrated 15 policy priorities. One of which is urban development through urban development planning at municipals, districts, Khans, communes and Sangkat in capital and provinces of the Kingdom of Cambodia.⁸ This policy priority well aligns with Pentagonal Strategies (Phase I) which focuses on strengthening the management and modernization of urbanization.⁹

The coastline of Cambodia is approximately 440 kilometer-long, covering 4 provinces in the south-west part of the country. These provinces, including Preah Sihanouk Province, Kampot Province, Kep Province and Koh Kong Province, are famous for tourists because they are by the sea with beautiful beaches and rich in nature biodiversity and priceless natural environment, ecology, economy, society, culture and local traditions,

¹ World Bank Group, Urban Development in Phnom Penh (2017), visited on 31 August 2024 at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/publication/urban-development-in-phnom-penh>.

² National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, General Population Census of the Kingdom of Cambodia 2019 (National Report on Final Census), p.74 (2020)

³ *Id.* at p.147.

⁴ *Id.* at p.22 & 72.

⁵ *Id.* at p. 9.

⁶ Law on Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, Royal Code No. 04/NS/94, art. 5 (1994).

⁷ Urbanization of Capital, Sub-Decree on City and Urban Area, No. 42, art. 5 (2015).

⁸ The 15 priority policies of the Ministry of Land Management, Urbanization and Construction include (1) making policies, (2) preparing legal frameworks, (3) building modern public institution and administrations, (4) improving modern public services and data management, (5) land registration, (6) land management, (7) urban development, (8) contemporary Khmer architecture, (9) housing work, (10) inspection and internal audit, (11) housing, social land concession, (12) framework for international cooperation, (13) human resource development, (14) risk awareness, (15) political security and economic security affairs.

⁹ Royal Government of Cambodia, Pentagonal Strategies-Phase I for Growth, Employment, Equity, Efficiency and Sustainability: Building the Foundation Towards Realizing the Cambodia Vision 2050 (2023). This policy consists of 5 Pentagons and each Pentagon comprise of 5 Side. Regarding Pentagon 4, Side 1 is about optimization of demographic dividends, strengthening demographic resilience and promotion of gender equality. Side 2 is about sustainable management of natural resource, cultural heritages and tourism. Side 3 is about promotion of agriculture and rural development. Side 4 is about strengthening of management and modernization of urbanization. Side 5 is about ensuring environmental sustainability, and readiness for responding to climate change, as well promotion of green economy.

and tourism attractions. During the closing ceremony of the 10th Sea Festival (Round 3) on December 3, 2023 in Kep Province, Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei HUN MANET, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia made an insightful recommendation on the master plan for the development of the 4 coastal provinces to ensure the value of long-term development plan based on the potentials of each province and to ensure non-competition among the four provinces.¹⁰ For example, the government's ambition to develop Sihanouk Province into a multipurpose model Special Economic zone by currently working on the master plan. The multi-purpose SEZ aims to become a major economic zone in Southeast Asia that is empowered by smart technology, as well as an advanced industrial zone serving regional and global production chains.

Urbanization in Cambodia poses several challenges, including pollution, and securing access to decent jobs, affordable housing, and other basic services for urban inhabitants.¹¹ Coastal areas are affected by climate change. For example, in Kampot and Koh Kong provinces, negative impacts of climate change include the rise of temperatures, extreme rainfall, flooding, droughts, and sea-level rise which cause a considerable concern on food security, health care and lack of water resources.¹²

Cambodia's coastal areas have played a crucial role in driving the country's economic development. However, recent coastal developments have faced widespread criticism from both public and private stakeholders. Large-scale land-use decisions, particularly those related to the gaming industry and land concessions, have often been made informally, without comprehensive planning, stakeholder consultation, or consideration of long-term environmental and socioeconomic impacts (World Bank 2021).¹³ This lack of structured investment and planning has led to significant challenges, especially in Sihanoukville, which is now widely regarded as a failed case of urban development. The rapid, uncoordinated expansion has left the city dotted with over 300 unfinished buildings, a stark reminder of poor investment management and inadequate urban planning.¹⁴ These issues highlight the urgent need for a more thoughtful approach to urbanization that balances social, economic, and environmental factors. To avoid repeating these mistakes, future development must prioritize comprehensive planning, community involvement, and sustainable practices to ensure long-term success and positive outcomes for the region.

1.2 Research problem

Urban planning contributes to resilient, sustainable and inclusive development of cities and urban areas in Cambodia.¹⁵ Urbanization must adhere to master plan on land use, land use plan and detailed urbanization plan. Due to complexities of urbanization, adoption of the said urban physical plans with long-term visions cannot be accomplished overnight or in a short period of time.¹⁶ The common consequences of unplanned urbanization might be enlargement of urban sprawl, ineffective land use via change from agricultural land to residential land, environmental damage, residence settlements within areas with potential natural disasters, increase of construction and need for infrastructure and public services.¹⁷ Based on the literature review, the

¹⁰ *Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet Provides Principles for Planning the Development of the Four Seaside Provinces to Ensure the Value of Long-Term Development, Avoid Competition Leading to Loss of Common Interest*, Fresh News, 03 December 2023, available at <https://freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/localnews/319824-2023-12-03-12-00-51.html>, last visited 22 December 2023.

¹¹ UN-HABITAT Cambodia, 2023 Cambodia Country Report (2023), Available at <https://fukuoka.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2.-Cambodia-Country-Report-16-Pages-final.pdf>, last visited 24 November 2024.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ The World Bank, *Building a Blue Economy Roadmap for Cambodia* (2023), available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099556207032341413/pdf/IDU00eec67aa0872b04096088cd02fda633553f1.pdf>, last visit 22 November 2024.

¹⁴ *A city transformed: Over 1,000 high-rise buildings built or in progress in Sihanoukville*, Khmer Times, 19 October 2023, available at <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501378991/a-city-transformed-over-1000-high-rise-buildings-built-or-in-progress-in-sihanoukville/>, last visited 21 November 2024.

¹⁵ Pentagonal strategies-Phase I comprises of 5 Pentagons and each Pentagon comprise of 5 Side. Regarding Pentagon 4, Side 1 is about optimization of demographic dividends, strengthening demographic resilience and promotion of gender equality. Side 2 is about sustainable management of natural resource, cultural heritages and tourism. Side 3 is about promotion of agriculture and rural development. Side 4 is about strengthening of management and modernization of urbanization. Side 5 is about ensuring environmental sustainability, and readiness for responding to climate change, as well promotion of green economy.

¹⁶ Urbanization of Capital, City and Urban Area, *Supra* note 7, Art. 5.

¹⁷ Presentation material of the General Department of Land Management and Urban Planning, Ministry of Land Management, Urbanization and Construction, during the Second Cambodian Urban and Housing Forum, under the

master plans on land use at most of the cities in Cambodia, including the cities at the coastal provinces, do not layout the plan on land use and detailed urbanization plan as guideline for city development.

1.3 Objective

The paper aims to provide policy recommendation on adopting of physical plans of cities or city plans at the coastal provinces by presenting city planning concepts and processes in Singapore and Japan. By doing so, the objectives of the study are three-pronged.

1. To review the key concepts or framework related to sustainable urban planning;
2. To explore the existing laws, policies and regulations related to the physical urban planning in the coastal zones in Cambodia;
3. To explore the challenges and opportunity for developing sustainable cities in the coastal zones in Cambodia.
4. To review case studies and draw recommendations for developing sustainable urban development planning for Cambodia's coastal provinces.

1.4 Methodologies

The study employed the qualitative method of data collection and analysis, which includes (i) desk review and analysis of policies and regulations on urban planning; (ii) collecting and reviewing city plans of the coastal provinces; (iii) reviewing the case studies of city planning in Singapore and Japan; and (iv) consultative meetings with senior provincial officials and experts in Kampot province and Kep province in the early of March 2024. The consultative meetings were conducted with the support from the MLMUC. There were more than 40 participants in each meeting. The senior provincial officials made a presentation on key consideration and process of city planning in the provinces. Certain challenges were also discussed during the meetings.

1.5 Significances of the paper

Urbanization is a global trend and development of the cities and urban areas has become a topic for international, regional and national principles and policies agenda. This is because urban areas are centers of economic, social and cultural activities which impose potential challenges on housing, food supply, energy supply, management and use of natural resources, infrastructures, transportations, health, safety, education, employment, waste management and environmental issues. Recently, the Royal Government of Cambodia issued a Sub-decree on 28 August 2024 to establish a new city named Kompongsm city in addition to existing cities such as Preah Sihanouk city and Koh Rong City at Preah Sihanouk province.¹⁸ This new city remarks the urban expansion at coastal region in which there are 7 cities in total, which include 3 cities in Preah Sihanouk province, 2 cities in Kampot Province and 1 city in Koh Kong province and 1 city in Kep province. In this scenario, the city planning is desperately needed for the new city and as well as other cities of the coastal provinces which do not have complete urban physical plans. This report highlights key concepts and procedures together with lessons learned from Japan and Singapore.

1.6 Scope of the paper

This paper mainly focuses on the concepts and processes on adoption of the city plans or physical urban plans which include master plan on land use, land use plan and detailed urban plans of the 6 cities in the coastal provinces.¹⁹ This paper does not discuss the development plans adopted for specific sectors or sub-national administration at capital, provincial, municipal, district, Khan, commune and Sangkat levels.²⁰

theme “Smart, Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Cities” at the Ministry of Land Management, Urbanization and Construction from (30-31 May 2024).

¹⁸ Royal Government of Cambodia, Sub-Decree on Establishment of Kompongsm City of Preah Sihanouk Province, No. 201 (2024). This new city has 5 Sangkats and Sangkat Ream is a administrative location.

¹⁹ Master plan on land use of Kompongsm city is not discussed in this report.

²⁰ A five-year development plan that must be updated annually in accordance with the three-year rolling investment program is required under Law on Management of Capital-Province-Municipal-Khan Administration, dated 28 May 2008, Articles 36-41. Law on Commune-Sangkat Administration, dated 19 March 2001, article 60 stipulates that Commune / Sangkat councils must prepare, approve and implement the commune / Sangkat development plan in order to determine the vision of the program and the development of the commune / Sangkat.

2. Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Sustainable Urban Planning

Conceptual framework for analyzing sustainable urbanization development can be drawn from various sources. Currently, various international and regional organizations have recommended the framework or indicator related to sustainable cities. Table 1 depicts key concepts of each framework.

2.1 SDG11: UN Sustainable Cities and Communities

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations adopted a resolution on transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²¹ According to this resolution, there are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and among which, Goal 11 is to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.”²² The UN Sustainable Cities and Communities framework emphasizes the critical role of urban planning and infrastructure in addressing housing, transportation, and resource efficiency. Central themes include disaster risk reduction and environmental conservation, such as green public spaces and heritage preservation. This framework prioritizes policies for inclusive growth and resilience-building, especially in the least developed countries. The focus on sustainability ensures that urbanization addresses immediate societal needs while safeguarding future generations through long-term resource efficiency and resilience.

2.2 New Urban Agenda

On 23 December 2016, the United Nations endorsed the New Agenda regarding the QUITO Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All by implementing the interlinked principles that leave no one behind (social sustainability), ensure sustainable and inclusive urban economies (economic sustainability), and ensure environmental sustainability.²³ The New Urban Agenda builds upon social, economic, and environmental sustainability, adding spatial sustainability to its goals. This approach seeks to balance urban growth with the preservation of cultural and ecological systems, encouraging cities to align their development goals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The emphasis on inclusivity and equity ensures that urban expansion does not exacerbate inequality, promoting accessible public spaces, housing, and opportunities for all citizens.

2.3 UNESCO Creative Cities Network

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) underscores the role of creativity in urban development.²⁴ It focuses on fostering cooperation among cities that integrate creativity as a pillar of sustainable economic, social, and cultural growth. Covering seven creative fields—Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music—the UCCN highlights how cultural industries can drive urban innovation and community engagement. This initiative positions cultural creativity as a strategic asset for enhancing urban identity and economic diversification.

²¹ The United Nations, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 14 (2015), available at <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/291/89/pdf/n1529189.pdf?token=x4sNAeCyQUHsQFvQD1&fe=true>, last visited 04 April 2024.

²² *Id.* p.21-22. The Goal 11 specifically consider on Housing; transportation; urbanization; world’s cultural and natural heritage; natural disaster; environmental effect; green and public space; national and regional development planning; policies for inclusive; resource efficiency, and disaster risk reduction; support least development country in sustainable development and resilience building.

²³ The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016. The New Urban Agenda was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at its sixty-eighth plenary meeting of the seventy-first session on 23 December 2016.

²⁴ UNESCO, Creative Cities Network, (2024), Mission Statement available at https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/03/UCCN%20Mission%20Statement_rev2023.pdf, last visited 21 November 2024.

2.4 ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy

In 2018, the Secretariat of Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy aiming to build sustainable and livable cities in ASEAN.²⁵ The ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy addresses urbanization through multiple lenses, including civic and social dimensions, health and well-being, quality environment, built infrastructure, and industry and innovation. A notable aspect is its attention to equitable growth and personal security, emphasizing sanitation, water management, and urban resilience. The focus on mobility and education supports the integration of urban planning with human resource development, fostering sustainable cities that prioritize human-centric design and innovation.

2.5 ASEAN Smart Cities Framework

The ASEAN Smart Cities Framework complements these concepts by integrating technology and governance into urbanization.²⁶ It addresses civic and social cohesion, public safety, and cybersecurity while focusing on health, education, and environmental sustainability. Key priorities include urban resilience, clean energy, and sustainable infrastructure development. Additionally, the framework promotes industry and innovation through entrepreneurship, trade, and upskilling initiatives, ensuring cities adapt to evolving economic landscapes.

All in all, urbanization frameworks highlight common principles: sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience. While the UN Sustainable Cities and Communities and New Urban Agenda prioritize broad policy frameworks and infrastructure, initiatives like the UCCN and ASEAN strategies emphasize specific aspects, such as creativity and technological innovation. Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive understanding of urbanization, balancing traditional development with modern demands for smart, sustainable cities.

Table 1: Contemporary Sustainable Urban Planning Frameworks

UN Sustainable Cities and Communities	New Urban Agenda	UNESCO Creative Cities Network	ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy	ASEAN Smart Cities Framework
Housing; transportation; urbanization; world's cultural and natural heritage; natural disaster; environmental effect; green and public space; national and regional development planning; policies for inclusive; resource efficiency, and disaster risk reduction; support least development country in sustainable development and resilience building	Social sustainability; economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and spatial sustainability	It aims to strengthen cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development as regards economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects. It covers seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music.	Civic & social (inclusive & equitable growth); health & well-being (housing & home); security (personal safety & security); quality environment (water, waste & sanitation); built infrastructure (mobility & urban resilience); industry & innovation (education)	Civic & social (social cohesion, culture and heritage, tourism, public and municipal services, governance); health & well-being (housing & home, healthcare, education); security (resource security, cybersecurity, public safety, city surveillance and crime protection personal); quality environment (clean environment, resource access and management, urban resilience); built infrastructure (utilities, mobility and transportation, buildings and construction); industry & innovation

²⁵ Secretariat of the Association of South-east Asian Nations, The ASEAN Sustainable Strategy (2018), available at <https://asean.org/book/asean-sustainable-urbanisation-strategy/> , last visited 05 May 2024. The strategy has 6 priority policies which include civic & social (inclusive & equitable growth); health & well-being (housing & home); security (personal safety & security); quality environment (water, waste & sanitation); built infrastructure (mobility & urban resilience); industry & innovation (education).

²⁶ ASEAN Smart Cities Network, ASEAN Smart Cities Framework (2018), available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ASCN-ASEAN-Smart-Cities-Framework.pdf> , last visited 21 November 2024.

3. Urban Planning at Coastal Provinces

The coastline of Cambodia is approximately 440 kilometer-long and located within 4 provinces in the south-west part of Cambodia. Koh Kong Province has longest coastline of 237 kilometers and total administrative territory size of 10,045.58 square kilometers, divided into 1 city, 6 districts, 26 communes and 3 Sangkat with the population of 143,492.²⁷ Preah Sihanouk province has coastline of 110 kilometers and total land size of 2,658.90 square kilometers, divided into 3 cities, 3 districts, 18 communes and 11 Sangkat with the population of 310,072.²⁸ Kampot Province has the coastline of 67 kilometers and total land size of 4,873.20 square kilometers, divided into 2 cities and 7 districts, 85 communes and 8 Sangkat with population of 593,829.²⁹ Kep province is the smallest city in Cambodia with the total land size of, 187.24 square kilometers, divided into 1 city, 1 district, 2 communes and 3 Sangkat with the total population of 42,665. It has the shortest coastline of 26 kilometers.³⁰

Table 2 describes the population trend in the four provinces. In Preah Sihanouk Province, the urban population was remarkably high at 100% in 1998, with a total population of 155,690. However, by 2008, this figure dropped sharply to 41%, even as the total population increased to 221,396. By 2019, the urban population rebounded to 73%, though the total population slightly declined to 219,865. This fluctuation suggests dynamic changes in settlement patterns and urban classifications over time.

Kampot Province showed consistently low levels of urbanization throughout the observed years. In 1998, only 6% of its population (528,405 people) was urban. This increased marginally to 8% in 2008, alongside a rise in total population to 585,850. By 2019, the urban population reached 10%, with the total population growing slightly to 588,066. These figures reflect Kampot’s predominantly rural character and slow urbanization progress over the decades.

For Koh Kong Province, urbanization showed steady growth. In 1998, 22% of its population (132,106 people) was urban. By 2008, this had risen to 31%, despite a decrease in the total population to 117,481. In 2019, urbanization increased further to 46%, with the total population rebounding slightly to 122,883. This trend indicates a gradual but significant shift toward urban living in Koh Kong over the years.

Kep province lacked data for 1998, making it difficult to assess earlier trends. However, by 2008, 13% of its population was urban, with a total population of 35,753. By 2019, urbanization had surged to 79%, while the total population rose modestly to 41,539. This sharp increase in urban population percentage suggests rapid development and urban growth in Kep during this period.

Table 2: Urban population trends in the four provinces

Provinces	1998		2008		2019	
	Urban	Total	Urban	Total	Urban	Total
Preah Sihanouk	100%	155,690	41%	221,396	73%	219,865
Kampot	6%	528,405	8%	585,850	10%	588,066
Koh Kong	22%	132,106	31%	117,481	46%	122,883
Kep	N/A	N/A	13%	35,753	79%	41,539

Source: General Population Census of the Kingdom of Cambodia 1998, 2008 & 2019

²⁷ Ministry of Interior, Information Book on Capital and Provinces (in Khmer), p. 91-92 (2024).
²⁸ *Id.* p. 173-174. At the date of this report, another city called “Kompongsom” was established pursuant to Sub-decree No. 201, dated 28 August 2024, on Establishment of Komponsom City of Preah Sihanouk Province. This new city has 5 Sangkats which were formerly the 5 communes of and Sangkat Ream is a administrative location.
²⁹ Information Book on Capital and Provinces (in Khmer), *Supra* note, p. 68-69.
³⁰ *Infra* note 29, p. 221-222.

Urbanization patterns vary significantly across the four provinces. Preah Sihanouk and Kep experienced the most notable growth in urbanization percentages, with Kep showing a dramatic rise from 13% in 2008 to 79% in 2019. In contrast, Kampot's urbanization grew modestly, remaining largely rural. Koh Kong displayed consistent urban growth, despite fluctuations in total population. While Kampot and Kep experienced continuous population increases, Preah Sihanouk saw a slight decline in its total population by 2019, possibly due to migration or reclassification of urban areas. Koh Kong's population decreased between 1998 and 2008 but showed a slight recovery by 2019. Factors such as development, migration, and administrative changes likely influenced these trends. Preah Sihanouk and Kep emerged as urbanization leaders, while Kampot retained its rural identity. Koh Kong exhibited steady progress, reflecting a balanced transition toward urban living.

Table 3: Economic Potentials of the four provinces

Description	Preah Sihanouk	Kampot	Koh Kong	Kep
Size	1,938 Km ²	4,873 Km ²	10,090 Km ²	336Km ²
Administration	3 municipalities & 3 districts	2 municipalities & 7 districts	1 municipality & 6 districts	1 municipality & 1 district
Tourism	32 islands, beaches (110 Km), national parks	3 islands, beaches (67 Km), waterfalls, national parks	23 islands, beaches (237 Km), national parks	13 islands, beaches (26 Km), national parks
Industry	Manufacturing, 5 special economic zones	Manufacturing, 1 special economic zone, hydropower	Manufacturing, 1 economic zone	
Infrastructure & Connectivity	Seaports, airport, train, express way, national roads, ferries	Seaports, train, national roads,	Seaport, national roads	Kep international tourist port, national roads

Source: Authors' compilation from various sources³¹

Table 3 highlights the economic potential of the four Cambodia's coastal provinces. Each province has unique attributes that contribute to its economic development. Preah Sihanouk is a hub of economic activity, with a size of 1,938 km², three cities, and three districts. Its strong tourism sector includes 32 islands, 110 kilometers of beaches, and national parks, which attract domestic and international visitors. Additionally, the province is an industrial powerhouse, hosting 12 special economic zones. Infrastructure, including seaports, an airport, train services, expressways, national roads, and ferries, facilitates trade and investment, solidifying its status as a key economic zone.

Kampot, spanning 4,873 km² with two cities and seven districts, also has significant economic potential. Its tourism assets include three islands, 67 kilometers of beaches, waterfalls, and national parks. The province has a growing industrial base, with two special economic zones and hydropower projects. Kampot's

³¹ There are a number of special economic zones (SEZs) in the coastal provinces, However, only operating SEZs are mentioned here. The list of operating SEZs is available at <https://cdc.gov.kh/sez-smart-search/>, last visited 25 November 2024.

infrastructure, consisting of seaports, train lines, and national roads, supports connectivity and economic activity in the region.

Koh Kong stands out for its expansive land area of 10,090 km², with one city and six districts. This province boasts 23 islands, 237 kilometers of beaches, and lush national parks, making it a vital destination for eco-tourism and nature-based tourism. On the industrial front, Koh Kong has nine economic zones and benefits from a seaport and national road networks, which bolster trade and industrial development.

Kep, the smallest province at 336 km² with one city and one district, leverages its tourism-oriented economy. It features 13 islands, 26 kilometers of beaches, and national parks. The province is home to the Kep International Tourist Port and national road connections, enhancing its accessibility and tourism-driven economic potential. Despite its small size, Kep's focus on tourism and connectivity underpins its economic significance.

3.1. Urban Planning at Preah Sihanouk Province

Based on the literature, there are 4 main documents on city planning which include (i) Sub-decree No. 81 dated 13 June 2018 on Implementation of Preah Sihanouk Provincial Land Management Plan; (ii) Land Management and Use Policy for the Development of Sihanoukville into a Multi-Purpose Special Economic Zone, 2022-2038; (iii) Decision No. 045 dated 08 September 2021 on Implementation of Master Plan for Land Use at Preah Sihanouk City, Preah Sihanouk Province, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 13 January 2023; (iv) Decision No. 88 dated 28 June 2019 on Implementation of Master Plan for Land at Koh Rong, Koh Rong City, Preah Sihanouk Province.

3.1.1 Master Plan for Land Management

Preah Sihanouk Provincial Land Management Plan was proposed by the National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization and implemented by Sub-decree No. 81 dated 13 June 2018 with a vision of 2030. The vision of the master plan for land management is to organize and develop "Preah Sihanouk Province as a pole for sustainable national development in the coastal areas of Cambodia through the development of modern cities, the most beautiful beaches in the world, special economic zones, multi-purpose model, international gateway, national development center, national logistics center with links to ASEAN and global markets and modern technology manufacturing centers that harmonize with a better living environment" based on economic potential, geographical location of Cambodia's coastal areas and national, regional and international frameworks.³²

Urban development strategies include the development of master plan and land use plan for the municipalities, districts and populated areas, development of islands adjacent to eco-tourism sites by maintaining existing forest cover on at least 60% of the total island area, and by setting up solid and liquid waste management systems to ensure quality and environmental sustainability.³³ The strategies also include management, protection and planning the use of coastal reserved land as a public space and green space for the public and tourists. Moreover, the strategies are to promote the preparation of public roads along the coastal reserved land and to prepare detailed urban planning to manage and protect the landscape, beauty and environment of the coastal area of Cambodia in Preah Sihanouk Province.

There are 2 main types of land which are buildable land and land limiting contraction. The buildable land includes residential areas, business areas, industrial areas, mixed areas, tourist areas, transportation areas, administrative and public service areas, public space and green space, cultural and religious areas and other areas in accordance with the geographical location of the Preah Sihanouk Province. The land limited for construction include agricultural areas, forest areas, multi-use areas, freshwater river, mangrove forests, seagrass, coral and flooded forest areas, freshwater marine biodiversity, protected areas, natural resources, seas, beaches, coastal reserved areas, marine parks and islands, biodiversity conservation area, natural protection system, national defense areas.

³² The vision was adopted according to the Rectangular Strategy-Phase 3, National Policy on Land Management of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Industrial Development Policy in Cambodia and many other key policies of the Royal Government.

³³ Regulation on land development on the island. The land use index is 1.5. the ratio of the constructed area and land area must not more than 35%. Remaining land should be prepared for planting trees and green garden at least 50%. Maximum construction height is 3 floors (maximum height 12 meters).

3.1.2 Master Plan on Land Use in Preah Sihanouk Municipal

The Master Plan for Land Use in Preah Sihanouk Municipal is implemented under the Decision No. 045 of the National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization, dated 8 September. Its 2038 vision can be updated every 5 years according to the need of social and economic development.³⁴ The plan is envisioned “Preah Sihanouk Municipal to be the core city of sustainable development pole in the coastal areas of Cambodia in promoting economic growth, business development, trade and tourism with vibrancy, intelligence and environment” through the development of (i) modern, green, creative and vibrant city with the best living environment; (ii) multipurpose special economic zone, international financial center and national growth center; (iii) the most beautiful beaches and islands in the world for leisure and recreation; (iv) support center for the technological and innovative manufacturing industries; (v) international gateway and natural logistics related to ASEAN and global markets; (vi) model cities in good management and governance, with city services, urban infrastructure, urban facilities and rich jobs.

To realize the above vision, the master plan divides the strategies for development and conservation into 8 strategies. First, the master plan focuses on urban development and direction, coastal and islands conservation and development and development of the municipal to be a smart, sustainable and environmentally friendly city. Second, the master plan identifies the type of land that can be built and the type of land which limits construction. Third, the master plan defines the axis of development of logistics, tourism and trade on the national road; the axis of the development of logistics and industry on the railway connecting Preah Sihanouk Municipal and Phnom Penh Capital City; roads and public transport services; railway; waterways and ports; civil aviation; power and electricity supply; water supply and water resources; infrastructure integration. Fourth, economic development strategies cover development of tourism, industry and agriculture. Fifth, social development strategies include development of education, health, model cities for good governance with urban services, urban infrastructure, urban facilities and diverse work, public spaces, gardens and green belt areas, physical and cultural facilities and social development. Sixth, environmental protection and waste management strategies include solid waste management, liquid waste management, land use zoning for environmental protection, and necessary measures to protect key areas. Seventh, the disaster prevention strategies include measures to prevent disasters from canals and major waterways, measures to prevent blockages of waterways, measures to prevent blockages of streams by new developments, measures to prevent disasters on slopes and preventive measures against coastal disasters. Eighth, the plan set the strategy to strengthen good governance, local administration and finance management.

New urban development area: The government has determined the development of a new metropolitan area by expanding into the sea area of the Ream coastal area. Physical infrastructure development area must be limited to at least 25% of the new urban development area, including (i) public road network: bicycle lane, pedestrian road, disabled road, tree planting and green network, equipped with street lighting, traffic lights, traffic signs in accordance with the regulations in force; (ii) public facilities include clean water system, sewer system, sewer system, rainwater system, electricity network, telecommunication network in accordance with the regulations in force; (iii) solid and liquid waste management systems, including landfills, waste processing plants, sewer systems, wastewater treatment plants in accordance with applicable regulations; and (iv) fire and risk management systems in accordance with applicable regulations.

Development of public space and green space is limited to at least 10% of the new urban development area or 10 square meters per person, including public parks, playgrounds, gyms, sports fields and playgrounds. The construction area for providing services to the public must be determined according to the needs of each development project, such as schools, health centers, administrative buildings, markets to ensure the efficient and equitable provision of public services. Green development, adaptation and climate change mitigation plans must clearly identify potential fire hazards to ensure safety, security and public welfare, protect the environment and promote cultural values and national identity.

The area of the new urban development area remaining from the above development is defined as a development area with low land use index, development area with medium land use index and development area with high land use index. Development in this area must comply with the rules on (i) the ratio of floor area to plot area (ii) land use index (iii) building height (iv) building space (v) aesthetics and color (vi) Khmer and natural architecture (vii) toilets and wastewater treatment plants in accordance with technical regulations (viii), tree planting and (ix) parking. Land limiting construction is divided into (i) agricultural areas, (ii) forest

³⁴ National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization, Implementation of Master Plan on Land Use at Preah Sihanouk Municipal, Decision No. 045, clause 3 (2021).

areas, (iii) water resources areas, (iv) coastal protected areas, and (v) Kbal Chhay freshwater diversified areas.

3.1.3 Master Plan on Land Use in Koh Rong Municipal

Koh Rong is an archipelago city established by Sub-decree No. 02 dated 08 January 2019, covering an area of 11,323.89 hectares, with 2 communes: Koh Rong (3 villages) and Koh Rong Samloem (2 villages).³⁵ The city is 25 km from Sihanoukville Autonomous Port and 17 km from Botum Sakor District, Koh Kong Province. Koh Rong Land Use Master Plan of Koh Rong City, Preah Sihanouk Province was adopted by Resolution No. 088 dated 30 December 2022 of the National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization. This master plan has a vision until 2038.

Preah Sihanouk Provincial Committee for Land Management and Urbanization and Koh Rong Municipal Committee for Land Management and Urbanization have mandate to prepare a plan for the effective implementation of this land use master plan and report the progress to the National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization and the MLMUC.³⁶ Koh Rong Municipal Committee for Land Management and Urbanization must update Koh Rong Land Use Master Plan every 5 years as necessary for economic and social development. Early revision of can be done if there is a need to serve the public interest or the national interest. This revision must be carried out according to the procedures set out in Resolution No. 041, dated 22 July 2014 on the detailed procedures for the preparation of land use master plan and land use plan at the municipal, district and khan level.³⁷

The detail master plan of Koh Rong Municipal is being developed. Pursuant to Resolution No. 089 of the National Committee for Coastal Management and Development of Cambodia dated October 20, 2023, it was decided to establish a working group to update the master plan for Koh Rong land use in Koh Rong Municipal, Preah Sihanouk Province.

3.2. Urban Planning at Kampot Province

Kampot Provincial administration is divided into 2 municipalities, 7 districts, 85 communes and 8 Sangkat. Accordingly, physical urban plan for Kampot Province will be composed of Kampot provincial plan on land management, master plan on land use of 2 municipalities and of 7 districts, plans on land use at 85 communes and 8 Sangkat; and plan on detailed urbanization at each urban area. Based on the literature regarding urbanization in Kampot Province, the provincial plan on land management, master plan on land use at 6 districts and plan on land use at 26 communes and 3 Sangkat are not found. The Master Plan on Land Use of the Kampot Municipal and of Bokor Municipal in Kampot Province, were issued by the National Committee of Land Management and Urbanization in 2018 and 2019 respectively.³⁸

3.2.1. Master Plan for Land Use in Kampot Municipal

The Master Plan for Land Use in Kampot Municipal is implemented under the Decision of the National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization No. 003 dated 05 July 2018. This master plan has a vision for 2030 and can be revised by the Municipal Committee for Land Management and Urbanization within 5 years. Kampot Provincial Committee for Land Management and Urbanization and Kampot Municipal Committee for Land Management and Urbanization are responsible to adopt the implementation plan of this master plan and report of implementation to the National Committee of Land Management and Urbanization and the MLMUC.³⁹

The master plan has a vision to organize and develop Kampot municipal to be a green pearl city, natural beach, culture and trade through urban development to becoming (i) the most beautiful pearl resort, beach,

³⁵ Royal Government of Cambodia, Sub-Decree on Establishment of Koh Rong Municipal, Preah Sihanouk Province, No. 02 (2019).

³⁶ National Land Management and Urban Planning Committee, Implementation of Master Plan on Land Use in Koh Rong Municipal, Resolution No. 088, clause 2 (2022).

³⁷ *Id.* clause 3.

³⁸ National Committee of Land Management and Urbanization, Implementation of Master Plan for Land Use in Kampot Municipality for the vision of 2030, Decision No. 003 (2018); and Royal Government of Cambodia, Implementation of Master Plan for Land Development Project at Bokor Municipality for the vision 2030, Sub-decree No. 88 (2019).

³⁹ National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization, Implementation of Master Plan for Land Use in Kep Municipality of Kep Province 2030, Decision No. 001, Clause 2 (2018).

nature and culture in the world; (ii) agricultural and industrial processing center; (iii) international market for agricultural products and distribution; (iv) a modern city with good infrastructure, urban services and quality of living environment; and (v) good management and governance. The master plan sets out a number of development and conservation strategies for Kampot municipal including (i) management, conservation, development, land use and urbanization in an effective, balance and sustainable manner; (ii) development of tourism sector strategies; (iii) development strategies for infrastructures, technologies and services (iv) development strategies for agricultural sector and advertisement of domestic products; (v) strategies in social development; (vi) strategies in protection of environment and natural resources; (vii) disaster prevention strategies; and (viii) strategies to strengthen local management and finance.

The area under the Master Plan in Kampot Municipal has a total land area of 6,027 hectares, consists of two types of land uses including buildable land and land restricting the construction. Land restricting the construction is divided into 4 areas, such as agricultural area, plantations and livestock farms, the salt field and mangrove forest area, the forest area, and water resource area. Buildable land is divided into (i) residential area, (ii) construction sites of historical and cultural heritage area, (iii) commercial area, (iv) mixed area, (v) transport area, (vi) tourist area, (vii) administrative and public services area, (viii) public and green area, (ix) cultural and religious area, (x) and technical infrastructure area. Construction regulations in each area include consideration on proportion to the floor area compared to the land area, garden area, tree planting, parking space, toilet height, wastewater treatment plant, wastewater treatment, building color, aesthetics and Khmer architectural style and/or nature.

3.2.2. Master Plan for Land Use in Bokor Municipal

The Master Plan for Land Use in Bokor Municipal is implemented under the Sub-degree No. 88 dated 28 June 2019. This master plan has a vision for 2035 and can be revised according to the need of social and economic development. The amendment to this master plan is allowed before the due date if it is based on the public interest or national interest.⁴⁰ The master plan composes of 8 sections, including the (i) introduction, (ii) visions, (iii) purposes and targets, (iv) strategies for development and conservation of the development project at Bokor Municipal, (v) actions plan, (vi) financial resources, (vii) monitoring and evaluation, and (viii) conclusion.

The master plan has a vision to design and develop “Bokor Mountain to be a smart city, tourism, history, green, natural and unique mountain-sea climate city of the Kingdom of Cambodia” by (i) adopting policies and legal norms in order to establish the city for leisure, recreation, study, work and business with healthy and good quality environment and high-end luxury tourism destination for regional and international attraction and competition; (ii) promoting the nature conservation of natural water resources, landscape and mountain-sea climate; (iii) constructing public infrastructure, buildings which provide services to the public, public space and integrated infrastructure in the region; (iv) attracting incentive and supporting public and private investment to develop business, developing rich, high-quality tourism products and promote economic growth; and (v) promoting good governance and human resource development. Strategies for development and conservation of the Bokor Development Project include effective and sustainable land use and urban management strategy, the development of tourism, technical and service infrastructure, social development strategy, natural resource management strategy and green development, strategy for disaster prevention and expansion of management and finance at the local level.

Bokor Development Project is defined as two types of land use, such as buildable land type and land restricting construction. Monivong National Park has a total area of 154,458 hectares. In which, the share of the construct area is 18.09% of the total park area while that of the land restricting construction is 81.91% of the total park area. The land of 18,987 hectares of land was subdivided and handed over to Sokha Hotel in accordance with Sub-Decree No. 59, dated March 30, 2011 on the Designation of Protected Areas in Protected Areas as Sustainable Use Areas.

Regarding land restricting construction, the State Land’s Sustainable Use Area of Monivong “Bokor” National Park has the following types of land which restrict construction. Firstly, the protected area of Monivong National Park covers an area of 81,257 hectares, equivalent to 52.61% of the remaining land area of Monivong Bokor Park, after being leased to Sokha Hotel and prepared for the development of Bokor City. This area is used as a historical city, mountains, water resources, forests, roads and agricultural areas. Secondly, water resources area includes streams, canals, rivers, reservoirs, covers an area of 1,094 hectares,

⁴⁰ Royal Government of Cambodia, Sub-Decree on Implementation of Master Plan for Land Development Project at Bokor Municipal, No. 88, clause 2 (2019).

equivalent to 0.71% of the area of Monivong Park (excluding the water resources of Sokha Hotel). Thirdly, the agricultural area consists of agricultural land as a zoo with an area of about 160 hectares, equivalent to 1.10% of the area of Monivong Park. This area is maintained as agricultural land with plan to manage agricultural land by clearly defining and dividing agricultural potential areas and implementation of urban expansion plans using modern techniques to minimize the allocated agricultural land and expand agricultural land along the slope. Fourthly, Sokha Hotel's land area is about 18,987 hectares, equivalent to 12.29% of the area of Monivong Park. This location was developed by Sokha Hotel to form a tourist center, accommodation and other infrastructure.

Type of land that can be built. The Bokor Development Project is divided into 8 locations, each of which is defined as a land use area, and each area has its own land use regulations. Based on the land use map of Bokor City Development Vision 2035, the types of land that can be built are divided into 9 main areas, including (i) residential areas, (ii) commercial areas, (iii) mixed areas, (iv) transport areas, (v) tourist areas, (vi) administrative areas and public services, (vii) public spaces and areas; (viii) green, cultural and religious areas and (ix) technical infrastructure areas. Construction regulations in each area must be compared to the area of the basement compared to the area of the waterproof garden plot, tree planting, alignment, yard space, height, parking lot, toilet, wastewater treatment plant, building color, aesthetics and has a Khmer architectural style and natural correctness.

3.3. Urban Planning at Koh Kong Province

3.3.1. Urban Physical Plans

Koh Kong Province is divided into 1 municipal, 6 districts, 26 communes and 3 Sangkat. Hence, physical urban plan for Koh Kong Province should consist of Koh Kong provincial plan on land management, master plan on land use of 1 municipal and of 6 districts, plans on land use at 26 communes and 3 Sangkat. Based on the literature, the provincial plan on land management, master plan on land use at 6 districts and plan on land use at 26 communes and 3 Sangkat are not found. It is found that only Master Plan on Land Use of the Khemarak Phoumin Municipality in Koh Kong Province was issued by the National Committee of Land Management and Urbanization in 2019.⁴¹

This master plan has a vision for 2030 and can be revised by the Municipal Committee for Land Management and Urbanization within 5 years. Koh Kong Provincial Committee and Khemarak Phoumin Municipal Committee for Land Management and Urbanization are responsible to adopt the implementation plan of this master plan and report of implementation to the National Committee of Land Management and Urbanization and the MLMUC.⁴²

The Master Plan sets out a number of development and conservation strategies for the municipal, including (i) management, conservation, development, land use and urbanization in an effective, balance and sustainable manner; (ii) development strategies for sustainable and smart city; (iii) development of tourism sector strategies; (iv) development strategies for commerce, business and services; (v) development strategies for infrastructures, technologies and public services; (vi) agriculture and procession industry strategies; (vii) strategies in social development; (viii) strategies in protection of environment and natural resources; (ix) disaster Prevention Strategies; and (x) strategies to strengthen local management and finance. Koh Kong provincial administration, Khemarak Phoumin municipal administration and relevant authorities must implement the actions plans according to the National Policy on Land Management of Cambodia and the Master Plan on Land Use of Khemark Phoumin Municipal.

Khemarak Phoumin Municipal has a total land area of 10,047 hectares, divided into two types of land uses: buildable land with the size of 2,316.47 hectares, equivalent to 23.05% of the city land size, and land restricting the construction with the size of 7,730.53 hectares, equivalent to 76.95% of the total municipal land size. Buildable land type is divided into 10 areas. Construction regulations in each area must be comparable to the floor area compared to the land plot area, waterproof garden, tree planting, row alignment, yard height, parking lot, toilet, sewage treatment plant, building color, aesthetics, Khmer architectural style and natural correctness.

⁴¹ National Committee of Land Management and Urbanization, Implementation of Master Plan on Land Use in Khemarak Phoumin Municipality of Koh Kong Province for the vision of 2030, Decision No. 076, (2019).

⁴² *Id.* clause 2.

3.4. Urban Planning at Kep Province

3.4.1. Urban Physical Plans

Kep Province, the smallest province in Cambodia, is administratively divided into 1 municipal, 1 district, 2 communes and 3 Sangkat. There should be a plan on land management at the provincial level, master plans on land use for 1 municipal and 1 district, plan on land use for 2 communes and 3 Sangkat, and plan on detailed urbanization. Among these physical plans, only Master Plan for Land Use in Kep Municipal was issued by the National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization in 2018.⁴³

3.4.2. Development Plans

Tourism Master Plan for Kep Province 2023-2035 approved by the Royal Government of Cambodia on 14 July 2023 in consideration to the fact that Kep Province is located on the coast with favorable conditions and natural potential for tourism development, especially eco-tourism and cultural tourism.

The Master Plan sets out 3 main strategies in order to realize the vision of turning Kep into a “high-end eco-tourism destination and resort.”⁴⁴ The first strategy is Kep Tourism Pole Development Strategy which aims to turn Kep into one of the main tourism poles through the development of 4 main tourism poles including (i) the development of tourism in the old Kep area into a natural city in a world-class luxury park; (ii) the development of Angkor tourism pole into a modern natural beach tourism area; (iii) the development of Phnom Vole ecotourism into agro-tourism and historical eco-tourism; and (iv) the development of marine and archipelago tourism poles into luxury islands. The second strategy is to promote investment, and promotion aims to attract investment and participation from the private sector in the development of tourism in Kep, as well as set up a promotion mechanism to enhance the reputation of Kep as a world-class quality tourism destination. The third strategy is to develop sectors that support the development of tourism in Kep province and to find solutions to challenges in those areas, including solid and liquid waste management and the construction of key support infrastructure.

3.5. Challenges in city planning in the coastal provinces

Based on the review of city planning documents and the consultative meetings, it is observed that while there are master plans on land use for the municipalities in the 4 coastal provinces, the master plans for district and the plans on land use for districts, and Sangkat/commune are being developed. In Preah Sihanouk Province, it is important to note that since the Kompong Som Municipal was just recently established, the master plan for this new city has not been adopted. In Kampot Province, there are currently land use master plan for the city levels (Kampot municipality and Bokor municipality) and the city plans for below administrations in province are in development. Under the support the MLMUC, along with support from the ADB bank, city plans for certain districts, such as Kampong Trach District and Chhouk District are also in progress. Similar to Kampot Province, Kep Province has had a land use master plan for the city level since 2017. However, no city plans exist for the district, Sangkat/commune levels. Pursuant to the consultative meetings with officials at Kampot province and Kep province, there are a number of reasons which delay the adoption of city planning for the entire provinces.

3.5.1. Lack of Capacity

One of the most critical challenges in advancing city planning in these provinces is the limited availability of skilled personnel. Urban planning requires expertise in various disciplines, including land management, architecture, and environmental sustainability. Consultative meetings with officials in Kampot and Kep provinces revealed that the provinces often rely heavily on support from the Ministry of Land Management, Urbanization, and Construction as well as international partners like the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Without sufficient in-house expertise, provincial administrations struggle to meet the technical demands of developing and implementing comprehensive master plans.

Provincial and district officials often lack the necessary training to effectively engage in land-use planning. This knowledge gap hinders the creation of localized plans that address the unique socio-economic and environmental contexts of districts and communes. For instance, despite Kampot Province having a master plan at the city level for Kampot and Bokor municipalities, progress at the district level—such as in Kampong

⁴³ National Committee for Land Management and Urbanization, Implementation of Master Plan for Land Use in Kep Municipality of Kep Province 2030, Decision No. 001 (2018).

⁴⁴ Royal Government of Cambodia, Tourism Master Plan for Kep Province 2023-2035, p. v-vi (2023).

Trach and Chhouk—is in the progress due to these capacity constraints. Similarly, Kep Province, despite its master plan since 2017, has yet to develop district or commune-level plans.

3.5.2. Lack of Financing

Urban planning is a resource-intensive process requiring substantial financial investments for data collection, analysis, stakeholder engagement, and plan formulation. Provinces like Preah Sihanouk and Kampot face significant budget constraints, particularly at the district and commune levels. For example, while ADB's support has facilitated progress in some areas, such as Kampong Trach and Chhouk districts, reliance on external funding underscores the inadequacy of provincial budgets. In addition, international organizations like ADB play a vital role in supporting urban planning in Cambodia, but this dependence creates challenges. External funding often comes with specific conditions and timelines, which may not align with the provinces' unique needs or capacities. Moreover, donor-driven projects sometimes prioritize high-visibility outcomes, potentially sidelining the holistic development of smaller or less prominent areas. Last, local governments in Cambodia have limited revenue-generation mechanisms. Municipalities and provinces often depend on transfers from the central government, which may not be sufficient to address their planning needs. This funding gap affects not only the preparation of master plans but also their implementation and monitoring.

3.5.3. Lack of Coordination

Effective urban planning requires seamless coordination among various government entities. In Cambodia, this involves the MLMUC, provincial governments, district administrations, and commune councils. However, a lack of clear communication channels and overlapping responsibilities often result in delays. For example, in Preah Sihanouk Province, the recent establishment of Kompong Som Municipality has introduced additional layers of administrative complexity, further complicating coordination efforts.

Public participation is a cornerstone of sustainable urban planning, yet it remains a significant challenge in Cambodia's coastal provinces. Low rates of resident involvement in planning processes hinder the creation of inclusive and community-driven plans. Consultative meetings with officials highlighted that many residents are either unaware of planning activities or lack trust in the process. This disconnect reduces the effectiveness of plans and can lead to conflicts during implementation.

The absence of integrated planning frameworks across different administrative levels—municipal, district, and commune—is another major challenge. While municipalities like Kampot and Bokor have master plans, these do not always align with district or commune-level planning efforts. Such misalignment can result in inconsistencies, with potential negative impacts on land use, infrastructure development, and environmental management.

4 Case Studies of Urban Planning in Singapore and Japan and Lessons Learned

Box 1: Urban Planning in Singapore

Singapore's urban planning framework provides a valuable model for addressing the challenges of urbanization in Cambodia's coastal provinces, including Preah Sihanouk, Kampot, Kep, and Koh Kong. Singapore, despite its limited land area of approximately 700 square kilometers and a population nearing six million, has successfully implemented sustainable urban planning strategies under the governance of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). These strategies emphasize efficient land use, long-term planning, public participation, resilient infrastructure, and centralized governance. By adapting these approaches, Cambodia can address its pressing urbanization challenges while ensuring sustainable development in its vulnerable coastal regions.

A critical lesson from Singapore is its strategic land-use management, which balances high-density development with ecological preservation through effective zoning policies. Considering ecological value in Cambodia where natural resources are abundant and potential for tourism development, Cambodia can tailor and improve effectiveness of its existing mechanism of restricted buildable area under Sub-decree No. 42 adopted in 2015 on Urbanization of Capital, City and Urban Area for ecological preservation. Singapore's integrated planning process, combining a 50-year Concept Plan with short- and medium-term Master Plans reviewed every five years, offers another vital takeaway. Cambodia's coastal provinces can benefit from a 20–30-year urbanization vision aligned with national strategies, supported by regularly updated master plans to accommodate dynamic socio-economic and environmental needs.

Public engagement is a cornerstone of Singapore's urban planning. Community involvement in the planning process ensures that developments address local needs and gain public trust. Cambodia can enhance public participation by organizing workshops, accessible displays of proposed plans, and mechanisms for community feedback. Furthermore, Singapore's focus on climate-resilient infrastructure, including flood defenses and sustainable waste management, provides a blueprint for Cambodia to address its climate vulnerabilities in coastal areas. Finally, Singapore's centralized yet holistic governance, where the URA oversees urbanization while coordinating with other agencies such as HDB, National Parks Board, and LTA, could inspire Cambodia to strengthen collaboration of its Ministry of Land Management, Urbanization and Construction with other concerning ministries while empowering provincial administrations to implement context-specific strategies.

While inspired by Singapore's strategies, Cambodia must consider its local constraints, such as limited technical expertise and financial resources. A phased approach, beginning with pilot projects in key provinces/urban areas, can demonstrate the viability of these strategies while fostering capacity building. By prioritizing sustainable practices, community engagement, and climate resilience, Cambodia's coastal provinces can achieve balanced urbanization that supports economic growth while preserving environmental integrity and cultural heritage. While the new draft of Sub decree 42 is under reviewing and public consultation, it provides a good timing to examine its mechanisms to address the needs in urban planning processes in Cambodia.

Box 2: Urban Planning in Japan

Japan's urban planning framework, governed by the City Planning Act of 1968, provides a model of sustainable and orderly urban development. The Act focuses on promoting sound growth while balancing economic development, public welfare, and environmental conservation. Central to Japan's approach is the designation of city planning and quasi-city planning areas, which regulate land use and prevent unregulated urban sprawl. Detailed zoning within these areas defines land for residential, commercial, industrial, and green space use, with strict regulations on building height, aesthetics, and environmental conservation. Disaster resilience is a core feature, with zoning for disaster prevention, fire safety, and recovery zones integrated into city plans. Japan's urban planning policies also emphasize stakeholder participation, requiring public hearings and consultations to incorporate community input, ensuring transparency and inclusivity.

Governance in Japan operates at two levels—national and local—with 47 prefectures and over 1,700 municipalities collaborating to implement city plans tailored to local needs. This multi-level governance ensures cohesive urban development aligned with national goals while addressing regional challenges. The framework also emphasizes proactive measures, such as classifying urbanization promotion and control areas to guide sustainable growth and integrating green space conservation and disaster preparedness to safeguard public welfare and the environment. Public participation is institutionalized through mandated public hearings and information dissemination, fostering community engagement in urban planning decisions.

For Cambodia's coastal provinces, Japan's framework offers valuable lessons. Integrated planning and zoning can balance rapid urbanization with environmental preservation, while governance structures can delineate responsibilities to streamline decision-making. Public engagement, a cornerstone of Japan's system, can improve transparency and ensure that local communities are active participants in shaping development plans. Finally, disaster resilience strategies, such as zoning and infrastructure planning, can mitigate climate risks in Cambodia's vulnerable coastal regions. By adapting these principles, Cambodia can build urban environments that are inclusive, sustainable, and resilient to future challenges.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

The study identifies several challenges in Cambodia's city planning and urbanization efforts, including capacity constraints, inadequate funding, poor coordination, limited public participation, and insufficient disaster resilience measures. These issues hinder sustainable urban development in the coastal provinces. Drawing lessons from Cambodia, Singapore, and Japan, this study emphasizes the importance of integrated, inclusive, and resilient urban planning. To address these challenges, the following recommendations are provided, categorized by stakeholders: government, private sector, civil society, and community, with timelines for short-, medium-, and long-term action.

Government: In the short term, the government should prioritize capacity building for sub-national administrators through workshops, exchange programs, and scholarships. Immediate efforts should also focus on improving policy access and transparency by publishing urban planning guidelines online and facilitating public consultations. In the medium term, the government should revise land management laws to reflect modern urbanization needs, establish mechanisms for local revenue generation such as property taxes, and integrate technological tools like Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for better land-use planning. Long-term strategies should include developing and revising comprehensive master plans for municipalities and communes every five years, establishing provincial urban planning authorities to oversee regional efforts, and institutionalizing climate adaptation measures, such as afforestation and coastal protection.

Private Sector: In the short term, the private sector should engage in public-private partnerships to co-fund small-scale urban pilot projects, such as green spaces in Kep and Preah Sihanouk provinces. Over the medium term, private entities should invest in critical infrastructure like waste management systems and public transportation networks while adhering to green building standards. For the long term, the private sector should focus on transforming Preah Sihanouk into a multipurpose economic hub and developing eco-tourism infrastructure in Kep, promoting sustainable practices in both economic zones.

Civil Society: Civil society should focus on raising public awareness about the importance of urban planning through workshops and social media campaigns in the short term. It can play a vital role in advocating for transparency and inclusivity in urban planning processes. Medium-term initiatives should include training programs for local administrators and monitoring the implementation of urban plans to ensure accountability. Over the long term, civil society organizations can advocate for public participation as a legal requirement and support large-scale environmental projects such as reforestation and wetland conservation to promote sustainability.

Community: Communities should engage actively in urban planning by participating in workshops, consultations, and local initiatives such as waste reduction and beautification projects. In the medium term, community members can collaborate with municipal authorities on co-managing infrastructure projects and develop local leadership through training programs. Long-term involvement should focus on resilience-building activities, including disaster preparedness and participation in climate adaptation measures. Empowering community groups to oversee urban development and monitor local government initiatives will ensure sustained engagement and accountability.

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