



Micro-Policy Intervention

CONTEMPORARY POLICY DISCUSSION IN CAMBODIA



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Chapter 2 | No Outdoor Trash: Root Cause Analysis and Policy Suggestions

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Executive Summary

Suggested Policies:

- Introduce public water refill stations.

Alternative policies:

- Waste Reduction:
 - Promote a more comprehensive usage of reusable containers.
 - Introduce more refill-shops in the market.
 - Change people's behavior to use more of their own bags by providing incentives.
- Management and Control:
 - Prevent improper disposal of waste on the street and in the public through laws and regulations.
 - Fine those who violate the law.

Introduction

The problem of waste is one of the biggest challenges in Cambodia. Phnom Penh alone generates around 1 million tons of waste per year in which 51.9 percent is organic, 20.9 percent is plastic waste, 9.9 percent is paper waste and the rest, 17.3 percent, is general waste (Clean Green Cambodia, 2019; see the figure below). According to a report done by the Ministry of Environment in 2018, the amount of waste in Cambodia has been increasing by 10 percent each year. The causes of this problem are population growth, an increase in consumption, a variety of packaging types and a lack of understanding on how to sort waste (Hiezle, 2018). In Cambodia, the responsibility of waste collection and management falls under the Phnom Penh Municipal Hall and a contracted waste collecting company, Cinti (Thou, 2019). However, with the current situation as observed, Cambodia is still

having problems regarding waste. Effective policies and solutions have to be taken seriously to tackle the issue. This paper will focus specifically on outdoor waste that is unmanaged and improperly thrown away on the street and in public places in Phnom Penh.

An article published by Phnom Penh Post on March 3, 2015 described that the government of Cambodia had taken a step forward into tackling waste management issue in Cambodia by funding 5 million USD to its sub-governments to assist municipalities with initiating their own strategies for improving garbage management. Without any concrete review of the impacts of the program, it could not be concluded whether the project was successfully implemented (Turton, 2015). Regardless, it is evident that there still is much work that needs to be done to solve the problem of unmanaged outdoor trash.

It is worth pointing out that most of the trash in Cambodia is generated from plastics, such as single-use plastic bottles, plastic bags, plastic boxes, straws so on and so forth. There is no clear data as to how much total plastic waste is generated in Phnom Penh, however, according to UNDP (2019), around 10 million plastic bags are used daily.

Background to the Problem

Causes of Outdoor Trash

The four main factors that contribute to the problem of trash being misplaced include: (1) excessive amounts of unnecessary waste, (2) cheap and accessible plastic bags & bottles, (3) people's behavior, and (4) the lack of enforcement in waste management.

(1) Excessive amounts of unnecessary waste:

Today it can be seen that consumers in Phnom Penh are very exposed to variety of goods sold in the market, from essential supplies to food and beverages. With these goods comes various types of packaging that result in huge amounts of waste. Vast numbers of single-use plastic bags, boxes, straws, cups and as well as bottles are being consumed daily. From massive shopping malls to small marts and local markets/businesses, plastic bags are one of the main ingredients in this issue as people are not accustomed to bringing their own bags to the market. Plastic bags are handed out to consumers even with the smallest of purchases.

(2) Packaging supplies are cheap and convenient:

The excessive use of plastic containers is also driven by the cheap convenience of plastic packaging. Consumers can find plastic bags, bottles and cups available everywhere in the market at a low cost. Plastic supplies are popular because of their convenience. Even for parties, people like to use plastic to reduce the clean-up afterward. According to an article from the United Nations Development Program Cambodia, in Phnom Penh alone, around 10 million plastic products are being used on a daily basis, as goods are wrapped, packed and served with plastic each day (UNDP, 2019).

(3) The behavior of the people:

The behavior of people is one of the most difficult challenges to tackle regarding the issue of outdoor trash. People like to use plastic bags, bottles and single-use kitchen supplies, as it is very convenient and has been a practice since those supplies were introduced everywhere in the market.

(4) Lack of enforcement in waste management:

Last but not least, waste management is also an issue. Regardless of the amount of waste from the consumption of goods, outdoor trash should not become problematic if waste management practices properly tackle the issue. In Phnom Penh, the waste collecting company does not operate effectively. From time to time, waste is left uncollected for days (Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, 2019).

Why should we care about unmanaged outdoor trash?

Public Health Effects

Personal and human health is under threat by excessive unmanaged outdoor trash. With waste being improperly disposed of in public spaces, people are directly in contact with germs and micro-bacteria. These bacteria and germs can be harmful and can pollute the air that we breathe in every day. Breathing in the dirty air can cause several issues, such as respiratory illnesses, aggravation of cardiovascular systems, development of diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, and possibly cancer (Spare The Air, n.d.). Water pollution can also be

an issue, as wastes can end up the water stream and pollute and harm those who are using the water.

Aesthetic & Tourism Effects

With trash being dumped uncontrollably on the street, in the rivers and in many other public places, the aesthetics of Phnom Penh can be affected heavily. According to the Ministry of Tourism, in 2018, 4,096,870 international tourists arrived in Phnom Penh International Airport (2018). This large inflow of foreigners is critical to Cambodia's economy, brings about a productive workforce, and betters the economic well-being of families. If this issue is left untouched, trash may be seen everywhere in Phnom Penh, the sidewalk, river and other tourist destinations in the city, leading to a decrease in tourism.

Micro-Interventions: Introducing Water Refill Stations

Overview

One of the possible solutions to reduce the number of single-use plastic bottles is to introduce more public water refill stations. Currently, there is a small number of water refill stations in Phnom Penh. However, most are indoors, like in coffee shops, rather than set up outdoors for public use. With more public water refill stations, consumers could use their bottle to refill water when needed. This way only one bottle would be used for an extended period of time and reducing the consumption of plastic bottles.

Justification

As mentioned above, a huge amount of trash in Cambodia is plastic. One of the most commonly used plastic containers are single-use plastic bottles. In Cambodia, the tourism industry alone produces 4.6 million single-use plastic bottles every month (McCormick, 2019). Therefore, one of the most feasible and effective solutions to keeping the city clean is to introduce more public water refill stations to reduce the wastes generated from single-use plastic bottles.

Intervention

However, if we look at the situation in Cambodia, the habit of refilling water is still a challenge. The first reason for that is because there are not many refill stations outdoors, making it inconvenient for people to hold onto their refill bottle as it is hard to find refill stations. To tackle this challenges, more water refill stations should be introduced to the public, and people will be encouraged to use them because of their convenience. Secondly, people are not yet convinced of the safety of the water from the refill stations. Efforts must be made to assure people the water from the stations is safe to drink. In addition, the water refill stations themselves can be set up with the option of cold or hot water, increasing satisfaction of water refill station users.

This policy could be used as an experiment in Phnom Penh City and data could be collected for numerical analyses on the effectiveness of the intervention. The amount water consumed from the station every day could be tracked, enabling calculations on the number of single-use plastic bottles reduced and the users financial savings. If the data shows the water refill stations can reduce the amount of trash from plastic bottles, the policy should also be introduced to other cities/provinces of Cambodia.

Alternative Policies

Besides the use of water refill stations, the following alternative policies are also suggested to tackle the issue of trash outdoors.

1) Reducing waste:

Before looking at how to clean up the streets and the rivers that are full of trash, we should look at how that trash can be reduced in the first place. There are many things that can be done, namely using reusable containers, increasing the amount of refill-shops and changing the behavior of people.

More refill-shops—shops where consumers have to bring their own containers (bags, boxes, bottles) to the shop to refill and get what they need from the store—should be introduced into the market. Even with purchasing a freshly made beverage, consumers can bring their own reusable bottles or cups. If these practices are implemented and well-practiced, Phnom Penh will become a city

with less trash than today. However, to be able to do that, refill-shops and refill stations should be encouraged to join the market. The government could encourage this through providing shop owners with a tax incentive for a certain period as well as reducing their taxes.

Beside refill-shops, it is also possible to reduce unnecessary waste through using reusable container supplies. For instance, many big shopping malls in Cambodia have already been encouraging their consumers to bring their own bags by charging 4000 riel for each plastic bag consumed. However, this initiative can only contribute to a small percentage of waste reduction as it is not as widely implemented.

Other shops could participate in such efforts through providing incentives to those who bring their own bags and encourage others to change their behavior. This could be done by providing shoppers some percentage of discount on the overall purchase if they bring their own bags. The government could help to promote this through providing participating shops and malls with some sort of tax incentive just like with the refill-shops.

2) Waste control/management:

Apart from reducing trash, waste management and control is another important solution to take a look at. The government or the Municipality of Phnom Penh should lay out certain rules that people must follow. For instance, for those who are caught misplacing their trash should be fined a certain amount of money. Rules could also be instituted to prohibit people from putting their trash bin in front of their homes and declare them responsible for cleaning the area and the street in front of their houses. If caught violating those basic rules, they would be punished with fines of a certain amount.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are four main contributors to the excessive unmanaged outdoor trash in Cambodia, including the large amount of unnecessary waste, the cheap price and convenience of packaging supplies, the behavior of people, and the lack of enforcement in waste management. Outdoor trash can harm people's health, affect the aesthetic of Phnom Penh, and discourage tourists from exploring

the city. Therefore, it is crucial to take effective measures to manage outdoor trash. In doing so there are two levels of approaches that should be taken into consideration. At the micro-level, water refill stations should be introduced to the public. Through the provision of many functions on the water refill station (such as providing the option of hot and cold water), the use of plastic bottles or cups will decrease, reducing unnecessary waste. At the macro-level, this issue can be tackled by providing more incentive for people to use their refill bottles, containers, or bags when shopping or through laws and regulations on improper waste disposal. The elimination of outdoor trash is very important as it increases the aesthetic of the city as well as people's quality of life. This is crucial to the city's economic vitality as tourism is a sector greatly contributing to the Cambodian economy. This effort must not be undertaken by only the government or only the people, but rather by a combination of these two actors.

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