

# Minerva Fellows at The Global Child in Siem Reap, Cambodia

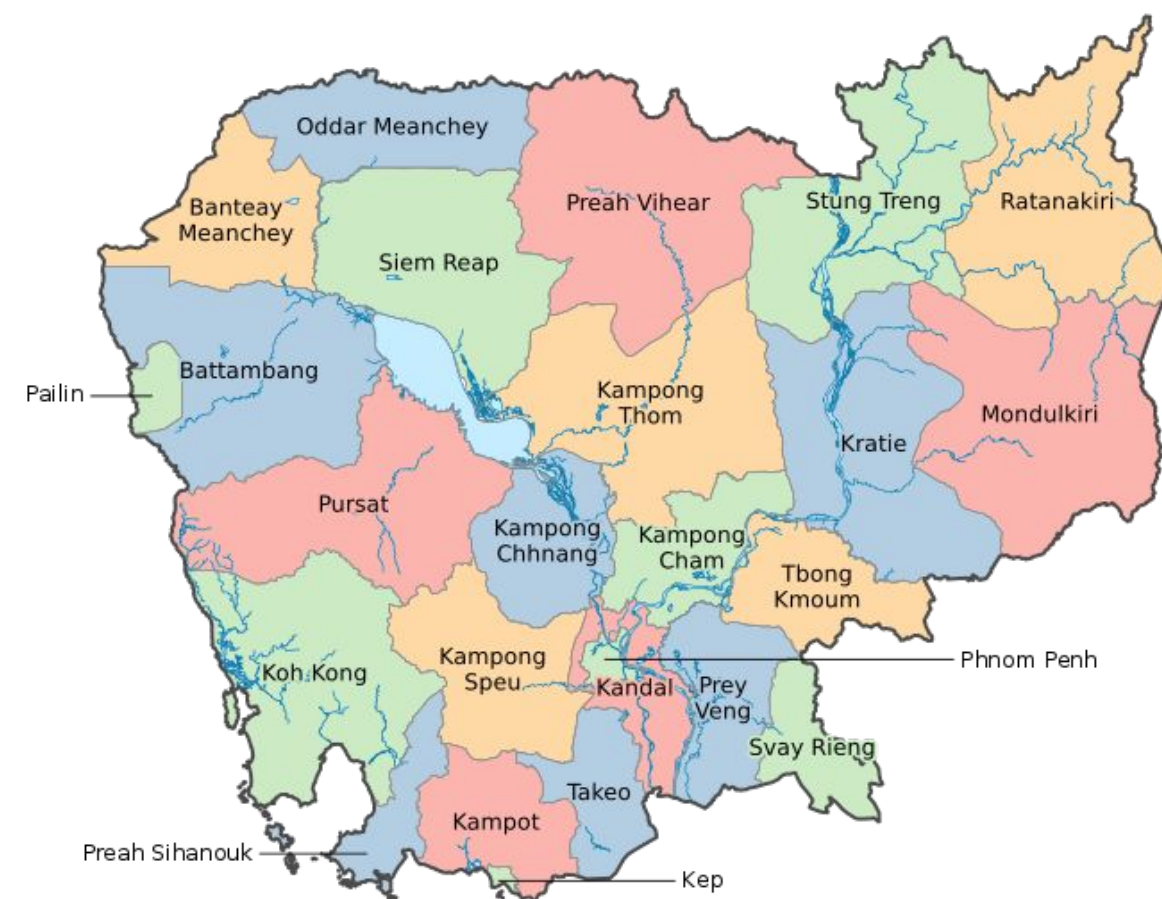
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## General Information About Cambodia

Cambodia, located in Southeast Asia, is home to the Khmer people. It is situated between Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos, sharing some culture and traditions between the countries. The climate of Cambodia is quite warm, with rainy season in the Spring/Summer months, and dry season in the Fall/Winter months. The country is home to almost 17 million people, with around 65% of Khmer people living in the rural areas/countryside (CIA).

Siem Reap, Cambodia, is famously home to the Angkor Wat Temple Complex. Large industries in the area include hospitality, tourism, and food services.



## Cultural Context & History of Cambodia

The Khmer Rouge (KR) regime took place under General Pol Pot (1975-9) where 1.5-2 million Khmer deaths occurred, and many disappeared under his rule. The regime was xenophobic, repressive, & autocratic, and it focused on eliminating the educated & rich. Several thousands of political opponents and others who were believed to have gone against the values and beliefs of the “Communist” party were victims of the time. The government also attempted to control all of the information and knowledge that Khmer people were receiving. As a result, schools were shut down, dramatically dropping literacy rates and promoting functional illiteracy. Birth rates have skyrocketed since the Khmer Rouge, and many families have not been able to recover financially, leaving a high population of those in poverty in Cambodia.

## Public Schools in Cambodia

The current education system is controlled by a national curriculum through the Ministry of Education. The school day is divided into two sections: the morning & afternoon section, as a result of the large number of students in the country. There are high dropout rates due to need for extra economic help for families, especially with adolescent-aged students. Private school in Cambodia costs much more money, within the high hundreds to the thousands. Educators at these schools are university-educated Khmer people, or Westerners in the area. The schools also have better resources available for their respective communities. Students at private schools are a mixture of ethnicities, including Westerners, public schools are mainly Khmer. The school system is a display of privilege; with higher social status comes better access to education.

## The Global Child

The Global Child (TGC) opened in 2004 in Phnom Penh with eleven students. It then moved to Siem Reap due to a higher number of attending, and an increase in applications. There are currently twelve courses offered at the school, ranging from STEM, to culture, to language. Students are provided with all materials needed to succeed including uniforms, backpacks, notebooks, writing utensils. TGC also gives students a dollar a day for school attendance, which they can save for the future, use for themselves, or for their family. TGC offers housing for students in need. There are currently seven students living in the school. TGC serves as an NGO school, and cooperates with a Board of Directors located in the United States. The school serves as a leading program that acknowledges the economic situations of children in poverty in Cambodia.

## Goals of The Global Child

The school has many goals, including but not limited to:

- Providing students with access to improved facilities that promote learning, leadership, and cultural values
- Allowing students to receive quality education in an urban environment
- Promoting the importance of education in Cambodia for cultural and familial advancement
- Giving students access to development and training to make a difference in their community
- Teaching students in smaller classes to promote skills in speaking, critical thinking, and discipline
- Exposing students to cultures outside of Cambodia through Minerva fellows, volunteers, and other guests that provide experiences and programming for the school

## Women in Cambodia

The role of a Khmer woman goes back to the ‘Angkor Era’, where women are expected to resemble a goddess. The virtuous and ideal woman is gentle, respectful of her elders, & behaves according to social norms to not be viewed as “dirty”, or disrespectful. A woman in a traditional Khmer family takes care of the household with very little value to education. Luckily, times are changing and more girls are allowed to go to school to get an education. Though with a more modern education, there is still a lack of knowledge about the physical aspect of menstruation- a taboo topic- and proper women’s health (i.e., many Khmer women still use cotton hygiene products).

## Solutions to Issues of Inequality

Programming at TGC completed by Minerva Fellows serves as a solution to accomplishing school goals & promoting equality.

- Institute programming to foster communication among female students about (mental) health, bodies, and society
- Discussed with students topics including, but not limited to, healthy relationships, family troubles, personal hygiene, mental health, and self sustainability
- Acknowledging potential conflicts in the community, and using them to make positive, and noticeable, change
- Providing students and adolescents with tools to grow, to improve their community without extra resources, and gain confidence in producing innovative results
- Motivating students using successful programs to combat inequalities and uplift minorities
- Promoting community cooperation, and constant encouragement

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our families, friends, fellow generation of Minerva Fellows, the Office of Minerva Programs, our new friends and families back in Cambodia, and *especially* our TGC staff and students for the support, and the experience we gained over our 8 months abroad!

## Sources

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