

Solid Waste Management Market Assessment in Rural Cambodia Reveals Urgent Need for Waste Collection Services

PHNOM PENH, September 7, 2023 – Representatives from concerned sectors including public, private, and development partners met today at a consultation workshop to discuss findings from the first ever *Solid Waste Management (SWM) Market Assessment in Rural Cambodia*.

Led by iDE Cambodia and the iDE Innovation Lab, with financial support partly from the European Union, the SWM market study assessed selected districts adjacent to the Tonle Sap Lake in the provinces of Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, and Siem Reap. The objectives of these studies are to identify critical market failures in rural Cambodia, exploring strategic entry points, and recognizing opportunities for possible interventions and for catalytic impact by iDE and different relevant players in the sector.

The results showed that food waste was the highest waste generated by households in the surveyed areas, making up about 50-60% of the total waste, followed by plastic waste (9-15%). Waste generated annually by households in the Kampong Chhnang, Pursat and Siem Reap was estimated at 125, 331, and 316 tons, respectively. A majority of these wastes entered the Tonle Sap Lake, the largest freshwater lake in South East Asia, posing risk to ecosystems, particularly rivers, lakes, and ocean, while threatening the livelihoods of communities relying on these ecosystems for their food and income.

The absence of residential waste collection services has led to unsustainable waste disposal practices in rural areas. Currently, waste collection service is limited to urban and peri-urban areas leaving rural areas with very limited or non-existent collection services.

Furthermore, the lack of SWM infrastructure in rural areas leads to unsustainable practices such as waste burning, burying, and dumping, which can contaminate ecosystems, including vital water resources. The health and environmental impacts of these practices remain largely unquantified, but the dangers of inhaling carcinogenic plastic fumes are well-documented. Food waste is a leading cause of water pollution. It can also contaminate groundwater and surface water sources. When foods are disposed of in landfills, they decompose and release methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

While this problem is dire, there is also evidence of an existing demand for improved SWM services among rural communities. The study has shown that a significant percentage of households desire waste collection services and are willing to pay for them. 69% of all households engaged had cash on hand and were willing to pay 10,000 Riel for monthly solid waste collection services.

“Drawing on our extensive experience in catalyzing markets for agricultural and sanitation services in rural areas, we aim to apply this expertise to address the growing concern of solid waste management and make a positive impact on the lives of rural Cambodians,” said iDE Country Director, Mr. Kevin Robbins.

He added that “To improve waste management efforts across the country, we need to join hands across sectors - public, private, and development - to facilitate sustainable and scalable solutions.”

The assessment has identified some opportunities to cope with inefficiencies within the sector and challenges at different stages of waste management: collection, disposal and recycling. These include investing in waste reduction and upstream initiatives, which are crucial to reduce the need for more landfills. Other opportunities include implementing collection systems that efficiently manage various material streams, including organic waste and mixed recyclables. Decentralized waste collection models would offer the potential for collection points at the commune level. It will also be critical to engage informal workers to increase safety and efficiency of waste collection and recycling efforts. In the longer term, there is a need to explore operational improvements and institutional arrangements for landfills to make them more efficient and sustainable.

The assessment revealed that women play active roles in waste management. Initiatives and programs to empower women in various roles in waste management, including waste collection, sorting, and recycling will allow them to become effective contributors to waste management efforts.

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