



UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime

Summary Report of the Illicit Drug Situation in Cambodia 2002

Prepared in conjunction with Project AD/CMB/01/F14

Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific

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This report has been prepared to provide an updated summary of the illicit drug control trends in Cambodia during 2002 based upon the very limited available information on drug trafficking and abuse in the country. This report is not directly an activity of the UNODC Project AD/CMB/01/F14 but has been produced in conjunction with, and utilizing data made available to, the project as well as from other sources, especially that of the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia. A comprehensive list of resource materials and data sources is provided at the end of this report.



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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Executive Summary	6
1. Illicit Drug Trafficking	9
1.1 Eastern Cambodia	9
1.2 Western / Northwestern Cambodia	10
1.3 Southern Cambodia	11
2. Illicit Drug Production	12
2.1 Cannabis	12
2.2 Methamphetamine	13
3. Drug Abuse	14
4. Transnational Organised Crime	16
5. Money Laundering	17
6. Government Responses	17
6.1 Policy	17
6.2 Financial Commitment	18
6.3 Seizures / Arrests	19
6.4 Law Enforcement Capacity Building	20
6.5 Legal Issues	21
7. Conclusion	21
List of Resource Materials	23
Data and Information References	24

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1	Map of the Kingdom of Cambodia	8
Fig. 2	Estimated illicit drug trafficking routes through Eastern Cambodia	9
Fig. 3	Seized cannabis plants being burnt by police in Battambang province, September 2002	10
Fig. 4	Estimated illicit drug trafficking routes through Western Cambodia	11
Fig. 5	Estimated areas of cannabis cultivation in Cambodia	12
Fig. 6	ATS production equipment seized in Koh Kong province, November 2002	13
Fig. 7	Types of illicit drugs used by frequent drug users in Cambodia based upon a rapid assessment survey, June 2002	14
Fig. 8	Students of Sisowath High School, Phnom Penh, receiving drug awareness information, December 2002	15
Fig. 9	Cambodian Government budget allocation to the National Authority for Combating Drugs from 2001 to 2003	18
Fig. 10	Types of illicit drug-related cases undertaken by Cambodian law enforcement in 2002	19
Fig. 11	US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) training in investigation techniques to Cambodia's anti-drug police, July 2002	20
Fig. 12	UNODC sub-regional project to develop computer based training centers for the law enforcement community in Cambodia	20

INTRODUCTION

As part of the growing economic integration of the countries of Southeast Asia, uncivil society is taking every opportunity to facilitate its activities in the realm of illicit drug production and trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking across national boundaries. Most at risk are those areas of the region that are least able to counter the nefarious activities of these transnational organized crime syndicates.

Cambodia is increasingly threatened by such criminal rings that exploit the opportunity offered by its weak human resources in the law enforcement sector together with widespread corruption and lack of equipment. In addition, contemporary Cambodian history is replete with insecurity and instability that has produced a fertile ground for the extensive activities of regional and global organized crime. As other countries of the region increase their drug control efforts, Cambodian capacity to respond to the complex threats of transnational organized crime must be urgently strengthened not only in order to guarantee national security but also not to undermine the work undertaken by other countries in the fight against illicit drugs and transnational organized crime.

It is within this environment that the availability of illicit drugs within Cambodia, especially methamphetamine, is escalating at an alarming rate similar to that experienced in neighbouring Thailand five years ago. Hand-in-hand with this increase is the likely rise in HIV/AIDS infection through intravenous drug use (IDU) and – to a much larger degree – unsafe sexual practices whilst under the influence of drugs.

The repercussions of this escalating drug abuse and trafficking situation upon the socio-economic development of Cambodia will be devastating. The impact of many billions of dollars in development assistance provided by the international community will be severely compromised if effective drug awareness, prevention and suppression activities are not undertaken immediately. It is in fact the young people of Cambodia – who constitute the majority of the entire population – that are most at risk from the scourge of illicit drugs.

While responding to a need identified by the Cambodian Government, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime calls upon the international community, the private sector and civil society groups as well as the individual to join forces in a creative and coordinated effort to support Cambodian freedom from transnational organized crime and to avoid the proliferation of illicit drugs that has so debilitated other countries of the region and of the world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2002, there has been a steady increase in the availability of illicit drugs in Cambodia, particularly in urban areas. Of particular concern is the prevalence of methamphetamine, referred to by its Thai name of 'yaba', which is increasingly being used by young people and those working in labour-intensive industries. However, a comprehensive survey of drug abuse by at-risk population groups is urgently required so that the limited resources of the Government and donors can be better focused upon those most in need.

The seizure of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), including methamphetamine, by Cambodia's law enforcement community has increased by 82% since 2001 and clearly demonstrates that with adequate training and equipment, it is possible to make in-roads into the trafficking of such drugs. However, much more needs to be done as the quantity of ATS seized during 2002 is still far below the levels seen in neighbouring countries and does not reflect the increasing enormity of the trafficking problem facing the country and its people. In addition, the steady fall in the street price of methamphetamine in Cambodia to around US\$1.00 per tablet is a further indication that substantial quantities of the drug are still making it to a market that is unaware of the dangerous consequences of the drug.

Linked with the increasing prevalence of drug abuse in Cambodia is the danger of an increase in the transmission of HIV/AIDS through intravenous drug use (IDU) and – in particular – through unsafe sexual practices whilst under the influence of illicit drugs. The rise in IDU has already been noted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with street children in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, and indicators suggest that without a widespread education and awareness campaign the rate of HIV/AIDS infection will dramatically increase in future years through drug-related activities amongst the very large group of urban youth in the 12 to 25 age range throughout the country. In addition, Cambodia has virtually no drug abuse counselling, treatment or rehabilitation facilities although efforts are being made to address this situation before the end of 2003 with international assistance.

To further exacerbate the challenges faced in reducing the availability of methamphetamines, and other drugs, is the increase in the trafficking of precursor chemicals from neighbouring countries for production of such drugs within Cambodia. Not only has 2002 seen a steady increase in the seizure of such chemicals, but equipment used for the production of ATS has also been seized in the western and northwestern provinces of the country during the year. However, precursor chemical control is a very new issue for which the Cambodian law enforcement community has very little knowledge, skill or experience. Consequently, the support of training initiatives, such as by the sub-regional precursor control project of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), to develop the human resources in this relatively new field is greatly needed.

Organised crime syndicates continue to be active in Cambodia, especially in the more remote areas of the country. For example, such criminal enterprises are enticing unknowing farmers to cultivate cannabis plants for export to countries in the region and beyond. Due to the remote areas in which such activities are taking place, it is extremely difficult for law enforcement agencies to undertake interdiction activities. Assistance from the international

community is urgently required to provide technical assistance on best practices for alternative crop cultivation and development in the cannabis cultivation areas of Cambodia.

The trafficking of heroin through Cambodia also appears to be on the increase. Indicators strongly suggest that the River Mekong in eastern Cambodia is being used by organised criminals to transit heroin from Laos into Cambodia and then overland to Vietnam. Owing to the lack of knowledge, experience and basic equipment, Cambodia's law enforcement agencies have, thus far, been unsuccessful in addressing this trafficking problem. In addition, low quality heroin is appearing in increasing quantities on the streets of the major towns of Cambodia and is being used by people living on the street. The development of interdiction techniques for law enforcement officers working on, and along, the River Mekong is considered a high priority in 2003 and beyond with international assistance needed to provide comprehensive training and equipment to such officers.

Only limited success has so far been achieved in efforts to develop the capacity of Cambodia's judiciary so that a strong drug control law can be fully and effectively utilised. Work is also required in strengthening the relationship between the various branches of the police and the courts so that a better understanding and collaborative relationship can be developed for the effective implementation of the law.

Reform of Cambodia's drug control law was undertaken in 2002 and will continue with particular emphasis upon the strengthening of penalty clauses. In addition, Cambodia has begun the process of ratifying the three international drug control conventions (1961, 1971, 1988) and will attempt to complete this activity by the end of 2003 so as to show its clear commitment to be a responsible member of the international community's fight against illicit drugs and trafficking.

Of all the activities that need to be undertaken as a matter of urgency, that of drug awareness amongst at-risk population groups - especially children and the youth - ranks amongst the most vital in order to utilize the rapidly closing window of opportunity to educate the population of the severe risks associated with consumption of illicit drugs and associated activities. Initial efforts have been made in 2002 on a small scale by the NACD and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to develop drug awareness in schools. However, a much larger and creative approach needs to be undertaken quickly with strong links with civil society groups so as to engender the full participation of the public in raising the level of awareness amongst all people to the dangerous consequences of taking illicit drugs.



Fig. 1 Map of the Kingdom of Cambodia

1. Illicit Drug Trafficking

There has been a rapid increase during 2002 in the use of Cambodia as a transit country for heroin and, to a lesser extent, methamphetamine, morphine and ecstasy and the export of cannabis cultivated within the country.¹

1.1 Eastern Cambodia

Various indicators suggest that up to several hundred kilogrammes of heroin, methamphetamine tablets, morphine and ecstasy are transported from southern Laos into Stung Treng province in north-eastern Cambodia every month. A small amount of these drugs appear to be taken overland and by riverboat from Stung Treng province into Ratanakiri province and then into central Vietnam and beyond. The majority of the heroin, however, is transported in small speedboats along the River Mekong to Kompong Cham province and Phnom Penh. From Kompong Cham it is then transported by road into Vietnam. A relatively small amount of heroin appears to be transported by air from Pochentong Airport, Phnom Penh, to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore on a regular basis. It is believed that much of the heroin transiting Cambodia originates in the Golden Triangle and that the final destination for the substance is North America, Australasia as well as the countries of South-East Asia.²



Fig. 2 Estimated illicit drug trafficking routes through Eastern Cambodia

1.2 Western Cambodia

Methamphetamine is the major drug that continues to be trafficked from Thailand into the western and northwestern provinces of Cambodia. The former Khmer Rouge held areas of Samlot, Sampou Luon, Phnom Preak and Malai Districts in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces are believed to be 'hot spots' for such trafficking. During 2002, a low ranking military person was arrested in Banteay Meanchey province with over 61,000 methamphetamine tablets, the largest such seizure in Cambodian history; however, the suspect was later released under somewhat dubious circumstances³.

Whilst such importation of methamphetamines from Thailand into this region of Cambodia has existed for several years, the quantity appears to have increased during 2002 as more people become aware of the profit that can be made from such illicit business as well as the increase in domestic demand for the drug within Cambodia, especially in urban areas⁴. The cost of one methamphetamine tablet has steadily reduced since 2000 with the street price in Poipet, on the Cambodian-Thai border, falling from approximately US\$1 per tablet in 2000 to US\$0.60 in 2002, indicating that supply is far outstripping demand in addition to the probable decrease in methamphetamine production costs within Cambodia and throughout the region; prices in Phnom Penh have dropped from around US\$1.50 to US\$1.00 over the same period⁵.

It is understood that heroin continues to be transported, albeit in relatively small quantities, from Thailand into the area around the municipality of Pailin and also into Koh Kong province for further shipment to Phnom Penh⁶. Unconfirmed reports have suggested that casino complexes are regularly used as trans-shipment points for heroin as well as for methamphetamine and money laundering activities⁷.

The deep-sea port of Sihanoukville, on the Gulf of Thailand, continues to be a major area of concern vis-à-vis the trafficking of sizable quantities of dried cannabis and possibly other drugs including ATS. Heroin trafficking is also understood to be undertaken through the use of boats and containers linked to this seaport and environs. Based upon actual seizures of containers in various parts of the world, such as the USA, Canada and Hong Kong, it appears that the quantity of illicit drugs passing through the port has increased over recent years, especially that of cannabis which has once again appeared to have dramatically increased following a relative reduction in cultivation and export in the late 1990's.⁸



Fig. 3 Seized cannabis plants being burnt by police in Battambang province, September 2002.

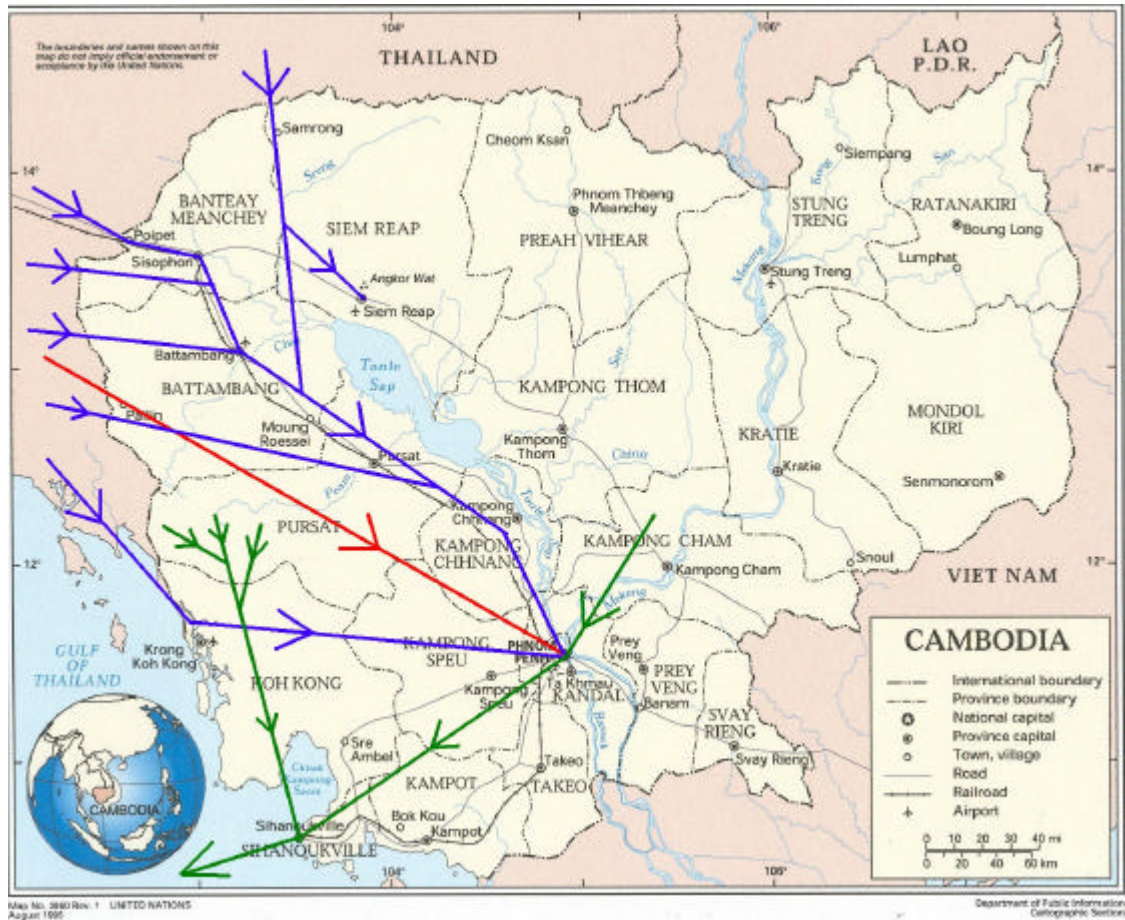


Fig. 4 Estimated illicit drug trafficking routes through Western Cambodia

➔ Methamphetamine
 ➔ Heroin
 ➔ Cannabis

1.3 Southern Cambodia

Drug trafficking between Southern Cambodia and Vietnam appears to have remained at the same general levels as in recent years. However, the lack of intelligence sharing between law enforcement officials on both sides of this border appears to have added to the lack of seizures and arrests over the past year.

The only notable development during 2002 has been the apparent increase in the trafficking of precursor chemicals used in the manufacture of ATS, especially methamphetamine. Owing to the very low human resource capacity of the law enforcement community in this new, and developing, sector of drug control, it is likely that such precursor chemical trafficking will increase in the near term⁹.

2. Illicit Drug Production

Two forms of illicit drugs are known to be produced within Cambodia.

2.1 Cannabis

During 2002, there has been an apparent increase in the quantity of cannabis under cultivation, especially in the northwestern provinces of Cambodia that border Thailand (such as Battambang, Koh Kong, Pailin, Banteay Meanchey and Oddar Meanchey) as well as certain provinces to the east of the country along the River Mekong that also have a border with Vietnam (especially Kompong Cham and Kratie).¹⁰

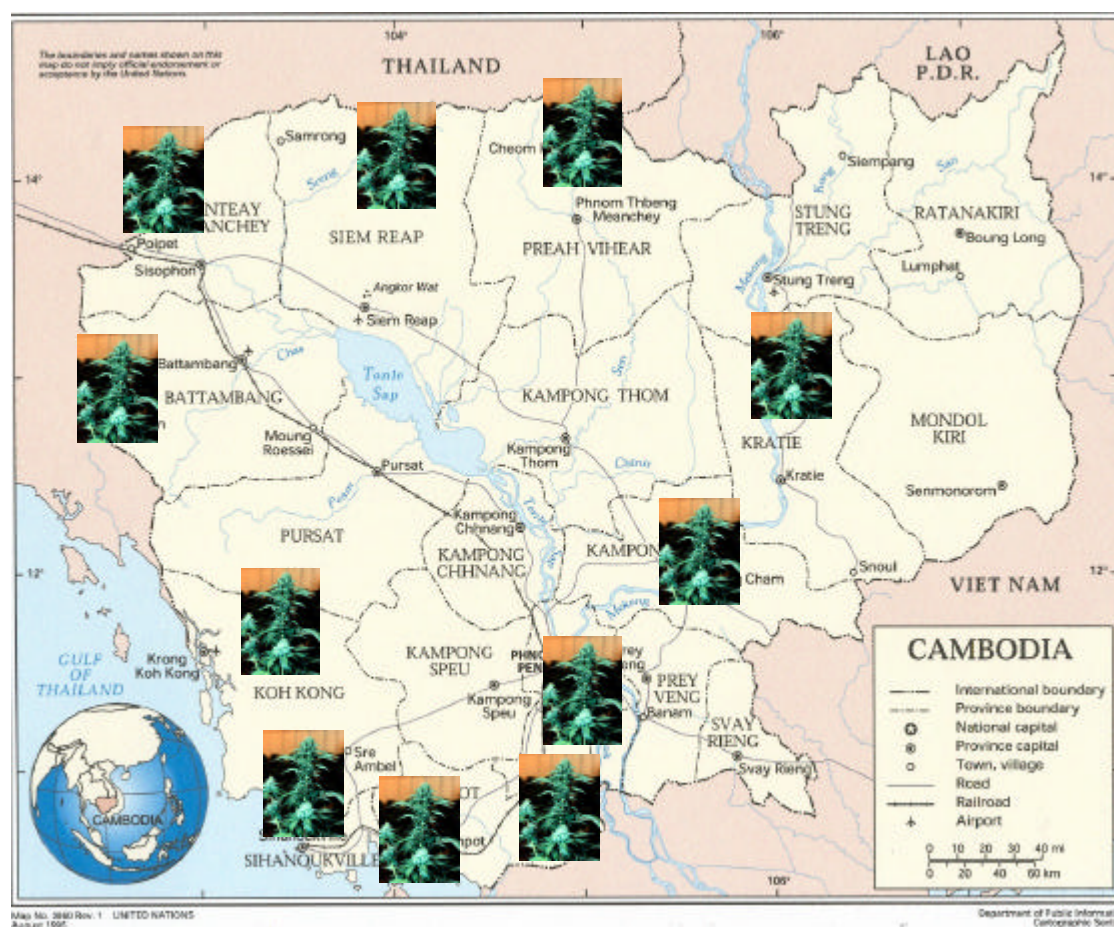


Fig. 5 Estimated areas of cannabis cultivation in Cambodia

The majority of the production has been undertaken by Cambodian farmers who have been given cannabis seeds by foreigners, especially Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese businessmen. In addition, rather than large plantations of cannabis being under cultivation as was the case in the 1990s, the trend has moved to a small number of cannabis plants being grown by each farmer, usually amongst other crops such as corn or tobacco, with such activities moving to more remote areas of the country where traditional law enforcement capacity is extremely limited.¹¹ All of these factors have resulted in an increase in the quantity of cannabis being exported from Cambodia to

countries of the region and globally, often through the use of containerized sea shipments.¹²

The typical wholesale price of cannabis in Cambodia during 2002 was in the region of US\$7.00 per kilogramme.¹³ Cambodia's law enforcement agencies have only seized a total of 1.2363 tons, equivalent to 11.9525 hectares, of cannabis during 2002 compared with 1 ton in 2001 and 13.392 tonnes in 2000.¹⁴ However, sizable quantities of cannabis cultivated in Cambodia have been seized in Hong Kong (360 Kg's seized in November 2002) and several tonnes were seized in mid-2002 in shipping containers bound for the USA and Canada.¹⁵

2.2 Methamphetamine

Very little information is available concerning the production of methamphetamine tablets within Cambodia. It appears that methamphetamine 'dough' continues to be imported from Thailand to western and northwestern Cambodia from which tablets are manually produced.¹⁶ The Cambodian National Police have also reported the importation from Thailand of several automated tablet-making machines to the area around Battambang province, although the police seized only one such machine during 2002.¹⁷

A methamphetamine production facility close to the Cham Yeam (Koh Kong province) international border crossing with Thailand was found by local anti-drug police and confiscated in November, 2002; however, it appears that the equipment had not been in use for over one year.¹⁸



Fig. 6 ATS production equipment and chemicals seized in Koh Kong province, November 2002

There has been an increase in the quantity of precursor chemicals seized by police and customs in Cambodia that could be diverted for the production of ATS, including methamphetamine. In particular, such chemicals have been seized in the southern provinces of Takeo, Kandal and Kampot and further seizures have been made in Banteay Meanchey and Battambang provinces indicating that such precursor chemicals are being imported to Cambodia from Vietnam and Thailand. The quantities being seized would also indicate that there is an increase in the number of methamphetamine tablets being produced within Cambodia, especially in the Phnom Penh municipality and surrounding province of Kandal due to market demand in the capital.¹⁹

3. Drug Abuse

The use, and abuse, of illicit drugs in Cambodia appears to be dramatically increasing compared to recent years.²⁰ The use of methamphetamine and, increasingly, of heroin is impacting upon a wide range of urban Cambodians. However, methamphetamine still remains the most popular, and most readily available, illicit drug in Cambodia, a situation that has not changed over the last couple of years.²¹ There has been a steady increase in the population groups most at-risk of drug use due to the availability of ATS and now includes:

- People living on the street or deriving their income from the street;
- School children as young as 7 years; the largest group being those aged 10-15 years of age;
- Students, aged 16 to 25 years;
- Middle-class youth, i.e. youth with enough disposable income from parents or other sources to purchase illicit drugs, especially methamphetamine;
- Unemployed / under-employed people of all ages and all socio-economic backgrounds;
- Workers in labour intensive industries, e.g. construction, portering, truck/taxi drivers, garment factory workers;
- Workers in the entertainment industry, including sex workers, girls selling beer and cigarettes, karaoke singers, etc.

In a rapid assessment undertaken during 2002 by UNODC and a local NGO, methamphetamines were available in all 12 provinces where the survey was conducted. Of all those interviewed who admitted to frequently using drugs, the number abusing each drug type was as follows:

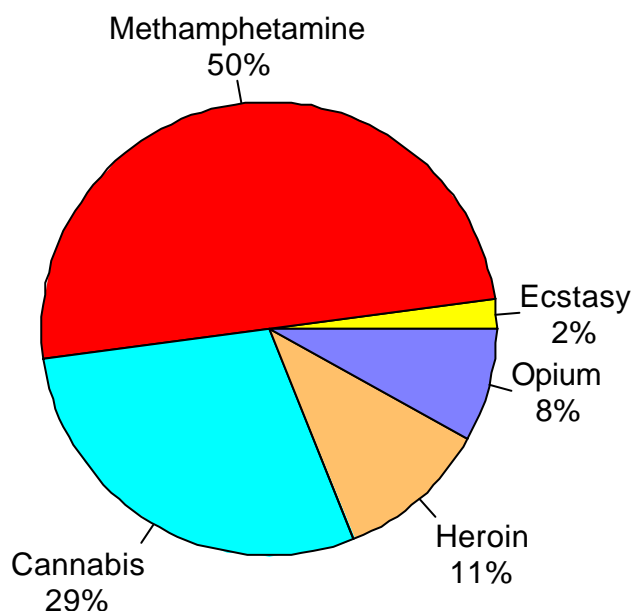


Fig. 7 Types of illicit drugs used by frequent drug users in Cambodia based upon a rapid assessment survey, June 2002

In many cases, young people – including children – are offered free samples of methamphetamine tablets by drug sellers with the aim of getting them addicted and then charging them for the drug.²²

No drug abuse counselling, treatment or rehabilitation facility exists in Cambodia, with the exception of one small local NGO treating disadvantaged young people and a private practice that is extremely expensive. UNODC, in conjunction with the Government and NGOs, is developing a programme to address this omission and is seeking funds from the international community and other interested parties to implement the project as a matter of urgency.²³



Intravenous drug use (IDU) has rapidly increased amongst street children during 2002. In a survey conducted in Phnom Penh coordinated by the local NGO, 'Mith Samlanh/Friends' in association with the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 4% of street children who took drugs in 2001 injected the drug; in 2002, the number was as high as 18% for the use of heroin, which constitutes an alarmingly rapid increase.²⁴

Consequently, the risks of transmitting HIV/AIDS through intravenous drug use have greatly increased. In addition, the increasing prevalence of drug use amongst young people raises the concern of a further rapid increase in HIV/AIDS transmission through unsafe sexual practices whilst under the influence of drugs, including the abuse of prescription drugs, for which there is little effective control in Cambodia.²⁵



Fig. 8 Students of Sisowath High School, Phnom Penh, receiving drug awareness information, December 2002.

Drug awareness focused on school age children is one of several strategies being adopted in Cambodia to help reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS by injecting drug users and through unsafe sexual practices whilst under the influence of drugs.

4. Transnational Organised Crime

As in recent years, organized crime continues to be the force behind the trafficking, distribution and sale of drugs in Cambodia. During the 1990's, foreign organized crime syndicates appeared to introduce drugs to the country. However, in recent years Cambodians have increasingly learnt from such foreign syndicates and have, in many instances, taken over all aspects of the drug trafficking and selling business throughout the country.

However, heroin trafficking and cannabis production still appear to remain largely under the overall control of foreign organized crime gangs who have very close links with senior Cambodian business, military and political groups. The increase in the number of casinos in Cambodia during 2001 and 2002 is also thought to have increased the involvement of transnational organized crime in the laundering of money through such establishments as well as the stockpiling of drugs, especially heroin, within such casinos.²⁶ However, evidence to substantiate such claims has not been forthcoming.

Those foreign organized crime gangs that appear to still be involved in the illicit drug business in Cambodia include Thai's, mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and to a more limited extent Australian, New Zealand, French and US citizens with a Cambodian origin.²⁷



A development in 2002 has been the increasing activity of West African organized crime gangs who appear to be relocating their drug-related activities from Bangkok, Thailand, to Phnom Penh owing to the fact that Thailand's law enforcement is becoming more effective. In addition, the high level of corruption evident in Cambodia, the country's porous borders and the lack of capacity to interdict cross-border crimes are further elements that appear to be enticing West African organized crime gangs to Phnom Penh.²⁸

In addition, concerns have mounted over the past year as to the role of the Cambodian Shipping Register that has extremely lax controls over who can register a ship under the flag of Cambodia. For some years, Cambodia has been listed as a 'flag of convenience' by a variety of international groups and agencies.²⁹ In 2002, the Cambodian Government cancelled the commercial agreement it had with a Singapore-based company that had been operating Cambodia's shipping registry for several year and is now seeking to enter into a new, stricter commercial contract in order to try to safeguard the use of Cambodian ships from transnational organized crime activities, including terrorism.³⁰

5. Money Laundering

Although many of the more suspicious banking operations have now been closed through tightened legislation from the National Bank of Cambodia, there is still a severe lack of knowledge, capacity and understanding of money laundering and what measures to undertake to reduce its prevalence in the banking system. No major step forward has been evident during 2002 to improve the protection of the banking system in Cambodia from attempts to use it for the laundering of money.



6. Government Responses

6.1 Policy

Unlike previous years, the Cambodian Government has now fully accepted that Cambodia is used by organized criminals to traffic illicit drugs to other countries of the region and worldwide.³¹ In addition, the Government openly admits – even in writing – that drug abuse amongst Cambodians is an increasing problem that it must address urgently, especially as most of the victims are young people who are the economic and social foundation of the country's future development.³² This is in marked contrast to previous years when illicit drugs were referred to as a foreign problem and only used by foreigners within Cambodia.

In addition, there is some evidence that the police view drug abusers as victims rather than criminals and consequently the need for drug abuse counselling, treatment and rehabilitation centres in urban areas is urgent.³³

The government has also taken steps to strengthen its national coordinating agency, the National Authority for Combating Drugs (NACD), through assigning more staff to work for the agency. Towards the end of 2002, a total of 32 staff were formally assigned to the NACD in areas such as demand reduction/education, international cooperation, training and the NACD laboratory.³⁴ There are now a total of 55 staff seconded from various government ministries to work for the Secretariat of the NACD with most being drawn from the national police.



6.2 Financial Commitment

Year-on-year, the Cambodian Government has increased the budget of the NACD since 2001 and they have once again increased the NACD budget allocation for 2003, which will total approximately US\$250,000.³⁵

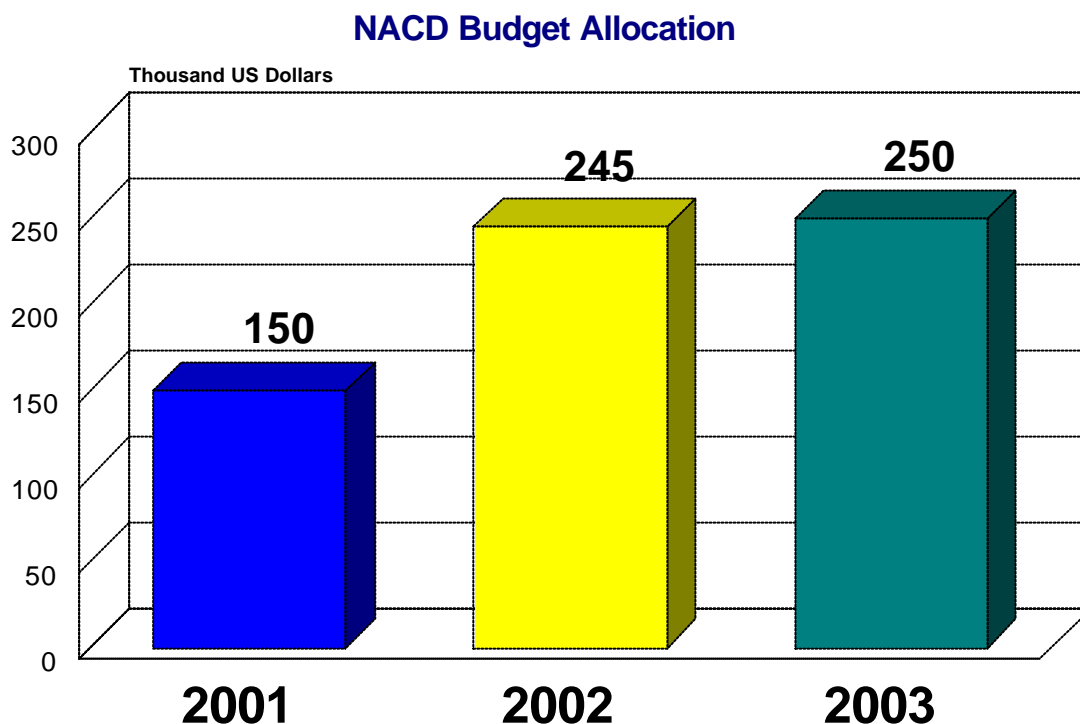


Fig. 9 Cambodian Government budget allocation to the National Authority for Combating Drugs from 2001 to 2003

Whilst this amount falls far short of the required funds, it does demonstrate the seriousness of the Government's commitment to address drug-related problems in the country and it is interesting to note that the increase of the NACD budget allocation for 2003 was supported by the Prime Minister, Hun Sen, signifying that the understanding of the drug problem in Cambodia has reached the very highest levels of government.³⁶

Further efforts, however, will need to be made by the Cambodian Government in coming years to increase the percentage of the overall annual budget dedicated to drug control activities by the NACD Secretariat as well as its constituent ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

6.3 Seizures / Arrests

The only extensive action with regards to the seizure of illicit drugs in Cambodia during 2002 has been the burning of cannabis plants, especially in the northwestern province of Battambang and the eastern province of Kompong Cham.

There has been a steady increase in very small-scale seizures of methamphetamine and heroin over recent years, especially in Phnom Penh, but these are not of any significance from a regional or global perspective. Of note, however, is the relatively high proportion of illicit drug-related cases involving ATS, especially methamphetamine trafficking³⁷.

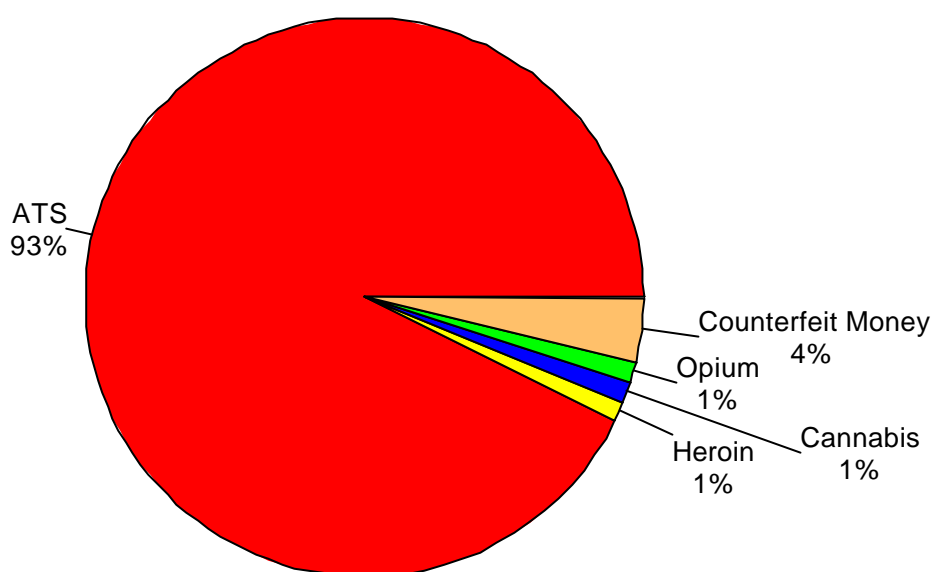


Fig. 10 Types of illicit drug-related cases undertaken by Cambodian law enforcement in 2002

There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of young people detained, but not arrested, by police in urban areas for the use or possession of methamphetamine. Such people are generally provided with ‘education’ by the police and returned to their parents / guardians.³⁸

There has been an increase in the seizure of precursor chemicals, although the overall capacity of the law enforcement community in Cambodia to undertake such work remains extremely limited.³⁹

However, the fundamental problems faced by Cambodia's law enforcement community remain the same as those evident in 2001. These constraints include:

- Low basic salary;
- Widespread corruption;
- Lack of basic education;
- Lack of knowledge concerning drugs and the consequences of their use;
- Lack of skills to undertake basic investigation and interdiction activities;
- Lack of equipment, e.g. drug testing kits;
- Poor management and direction.

Many of the frontline police want to learn and want to take steps to stop the spread of drugs throughout Cambodia and consequently there is a window of opportunity to help officials to develop their capacity in conjunction with governmental efforts to address various related issues such as salary payments. During 2002, the Government has made further steps in its administrative reform programme that will hopefully address some of the constraints outlined above over the coming years.

6.4 Law Enforcement Capacity Building

The Cambodian Government has been responsive during 2002 to opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge and operational capacity of its law enforcement community, including national police, military, customs and immigration. This is a continuation of its approach in 2001.

As in previous years, the Cambodian law enforcement authorities, together with member agencies of the NACD, have received an extensive range of training activities both in-country and overseas from the Regional Programmes of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) together with training undertaken by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP), amongst others.



Fig. 11 US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) training in investigation techniques to Cambodia's anti-drug police, July 2002.



Fig. 12 UNODC sub-regional project to develop computer based training centers for the law enforcement community in Cambodia.

6.5 Legal Issues

Cambodia continues to be faced with a very weak and corrupt legal system in which the rule of law is not applied to those with money or political/security influence. In addition, virtually all those working in the legal system lack knowledge of the drug control law and, in particular, how to apply the law.

The Government is in the process of strengthening the drug control law, such as by increasing the penalties for those convicted of trafficking as well as in mutual legal assistance with other countries. However, without a comprehensive method of tutoring and training together with an improvement in salaries and benefits to those working in the judiciary, legislation will not become operational for most people in the country.

In addition, the police and judiciary have not yet developed a method of collaboration which continues to result in a lack of mutual understanding and the failure of drug-related cases to be processed according to the law.⁴⁰

The Government has made a serious commitment during 2002 to move forward with ratification of the three international drug control conventions (1961, 1971, 1988) and intends to complete the process during 2003.⁴¹

7. **Conclusion**

Drug trafficking is an increasing problem in Cambodia. The estimated quantity of drugs transported through the country has increased markedly since 2001. The increased law enforcement capacity and action by neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, appears to have forced drug traffickers to seek less risky routes to get their produce from the area of the Golden Triangle to regional and international markets. Cambodia continues to have a very weak law enforcement capacity due to low salary, corruption, lack of knowledge and skills, as well as a lack of basic equipment. Particular emphasis is required in rapidly increasing the law enforcement ability along the River Mekong in eastern Cambodia as well as developing an effective cross-border mechanism between southern Laos and northern Cambodia as this area has seen a dramatic increase in drug trafficking, especially of heroin, in 2002 compared to previous years.

Drug abuse is a rapidly increasing health and social problem in the urban areas of Cambodia. A comprehensive drug abuse survey needs to be conducted on a national level in order to ascertain the full extent of the problem and to thereby inform policymakers as to the required steps to address the challenges. It is, however, clearly evident that the number of people using drugs has rapidly increased from the levels seen in 2001 and are expected to continue to increase unless widespread drug awareness campaigns, especially those directed at young people and children, can be implemented as a matter of urgency on a national scale.

HIV/AIDS transmission is also increasing due to intravenous drug use (IDU) and unsafe sexual practices whilst under the influence of drugs. This phenomenon was present in 2001 but the rapid increase of drug abuse, especially IDU by street children, requires a more rapid response than was originally envisaged and, if not urgently addressed, will likely result in a second major increase in the number of people becoming infected with HIV/AIDS.

The cultivation of cannabis by poor farmers continues to be a major problem owing to the lack of alternative development strategies in such agricultural areas together with the presence of criminals from organised crime gangs who provide seeds and a guaranteed market for the illicit crop. Widespread cannabis production was evident in the mid-1990's but had been somewhat reduced in the late-1990's through high profile government action. However, it appears that cannabis cultivation is increasing once again as a result of the lack of law enforcement capacity in addition to the poor economic conditions in which most of the cannabis growers exist and their lack of knowledge that it is illegal to grow cannabis plants.

Sources have indicated that methamphetamine production within Cambodia is increasing, as is the importation of precursor chemicals into the country used in the production of the drug; however, no evidence has been produced to substantiate the claim of an increase in such methamphetamine production. As the cost of methamphetamine production falls, the price of the drug is also falling, as has been the case in 2002, and consequently it will become increasingly available to the more economically disadvantaged in Cambodian society as well as to the mainstream population.

The Government of Cambodia clearly recognises the challenges of drug trafficking and drug abuse and is becoming increasingly aware of the linkages between drugs and organised crime, including terrorism. The Government is making efforts to increase its budget allocation in the drug control sector, although the amount in 2002, and that allocated for 2003 (approx. US\$500,000), is still far from adequate. Consequently, much international donor support will be required to assist the Government's drug control agency – the National Authority for Combating Drugs (NACD) and the anti-drug department of the national police – through the provision of equipment, training and skills transfer initiatives. In order to help facilitate such support, the Government recognises that it needs to ratify the three international drug control conventions at the earliest opportunity so as to clearly demonstrate its commitment to cooperation in the regional and global fight against drugs, an action it will attempt to complete in 2003.

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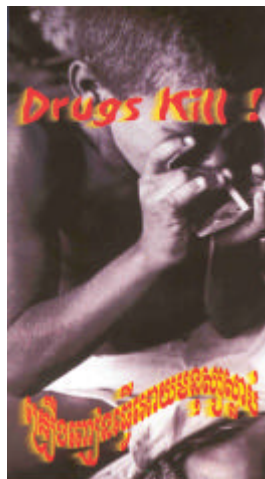
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