



# កិច្ចស្រាវជ្រាវស្តីពី៖ សេរីភាពអ្នកសារព័ត៌មាន ក្នុងជម្លោះព្រំដែនខ្មែរ ថៃ

Research Finding:  
Freedom of Media / Journalist  
During Khmer-Thai Border Dispute

July-October, 2025

# Contents

Introduction.....	3
History of Cambodia-Thai Border Dispute .....	4
Problems Statement.....	5
Objectives of finding .....	6
Sampling Procedure & Frame.....	6
Finding .....	7
<i>1. Journalists' Contribution to Peacebuilding.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>2. Role of Peace Journalists in Conflict Contexts.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>3. Encounter to Fake News During the Conflict.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>4. Impact of Fake News on Conflict Escalation .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>5. Views on Freedom of the Press and Openness of Information.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>6. Level of Press Freedom During the Cambodian Thai Conflict.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>7. Media and Journalists' Contribution to Conflict Situation.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>8. Challenges in Media Reporting or Collecting Information .....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>9. Challenges for Female Journalists .....</i>	<i>16</i>
Conclusion and Next Steps.....	19
Group Discussion on PESTEL.....	21

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Contribute to Peace Journalism.....	7
Figure 2: Role of Peace Journalist.....	8
Figure 3: Fake News/Misinformation.....	9
Figure 4: Impact of Fake News on Conflict Escalation .....	10
Figure 5: Views on Freedom of Expression .....	11
Figure 6: Level of Freedom of Expression.....	12
Figure 7: Contribution of Media & Journalist in Conflict.....	13
Figure 8: Challenges in Reporting & Data Collection .....	14
Figure 9: Challenges of Women Journalist in Reporting & Data Collection.....	17

## Introduction

Journalism in Cambodia is rooted in the principles of democracy, freedom of expression, and multiparty governance. The profession exists to: Inform the public with accurate, reliable, and timely information. Promote transparency and accountability, especially in governance and public affairs. Serve social development by providing a platform for diverse voices and constructive debate<sup>1</sup>.

Cambodian journalists adhere to a Code of Ethics and the Professional Journalism Charter, which emphasize: Seek and report the truth: Ensure accuracy, fairness, and neutrality in reporting. Responsibility: Follow Cambodian Press Law and Constitution, avoid plagiarism, and correct errors. Independence: Resist undue influence from political or commercial interests. Social accountability: Prioritize news that benefits society and avoid harmful content.

Pre-1975: Under French colonial rule and later during the Kingdom of Cambodia (1953–1970), print media flourished, with newspapers and magazines serving cultural and political discourse. Khmer Rouge Era (1975–1979): Journalism was almost eradicated; only about 10 journalists survived the regime. Media was used solely for propaganda. 1979–1989: Under the Vietnam-backed government, media was state-controlled. Foreign journalists were banned, and only partisan newspapers like Pracheachun operated. 1991 Paris Peace Accords & UNTAC (1992–1993): Marked a turning point. UNTAC introduced neutral radio programs, and newspapers began to flourish, promoting democratic discourse<sup>2</sup>.

Pluralism & Growth: Post-1993 elections saw rapid expansion of media outlet print, radio, TV, and later online platforms. However, lack of professional training and ethics persisted. Digital Shift: In recent years, Cambodians increasingly rely on social media (especially Facebook) for news, while traditional newspapers decline. TV remains dominant for older audiences. Ownership & Political Influence: Many outlets are politically affiliated, limiting independent journalism. About 63% of TV viewership and 43% of print readership are linked to political patrons<sup>3</sup>.

In 2025 World Press Freedom Index, Cambodia ranks 161st out of 180 countries signaling a “very serious” situation for press freedom. Independent media outlets have been systematically weakened. The closure of Voice of Democracy (VOD) in 2023 was a major blow to independent journalism. Sensitive topics such as political opposition, corruption, and deforestation are nearly impossible to cover without risk<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://ccimcambodia.org/?page\\_id=502](https://ccimcambodia.org/?page_id=502)

<sup>2</sup> <https://cambodia.mom-gmr.org/en/context/history/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://cambodia.mom-gmr.org/en/media/?ssp=1>

<sup>4</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/country/cambodia>

Since 1993 up to 2025, at least 15 journalists have been killed in Cambodia, according to multiple human rights and press freedom organizations including the CCHR and LICADHO. Most of these journalists were reporting on sensitive topics such as government corruption, illegal logging, and political issues at the time of their deaths. Unfortunately, justice has rarely been served in these cases.

## History of Cambodia-Thai Border Dispute

The Cambodia–Thailand border dispute is a long-standing territorial conflict rooted in colonial history, nationalism, and contested cultural heritage. The origins of the dispute (1904-1907), The conflict stems from Franco-Siamese treaties signed in 1904 and 1907, which attempted to define the border between Siam (Thailand) and French Indochina (Cambodia). French cartographers produced a map placing the Preah Vihear Temple on the Cambodian side, despite its easier access from Thailand.

After Cambodia gained independence in 1953, Thailand occupied the temple. Cambodia filed a case with the ICJ in 1959, and in 1962, the court ruled that Preah Vihear Temple belonged to Cambodia. Thailand was ordered to withdraw troops and return any artifacts taken from the site. Thailand (then Siam) did not formally object to the map at the time, which later became a key point in legal proceedings.

In 2008, Cambodia nominated Preah Vihear as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, triggering nationalist protests in Thailand. Armed clashes erupted between the two countries, displacing thousands and causing casualties. Cambodia returned to the ICJ in 2011 for clarification, and in 2013, the court reaffirmed Cambodia's sovereignty over the temple and surrounding land.

Tensions escalated on 24-27 July, 2025; a fragile ceasefire is holding after the most violent border clashes in more than a decade between Thailand and Cambodia, but human rights groups are urging a United Nations-led investigation into alleged war crimes and civilian harm. The five-day conflict displaced more than 300,000 people and left at least 43 dead, in what observers say was the deadliest confrontation between the two neighbors in a decade<sup>5</sup>.

The conflict's roots trace back to colonial-era border delineations and disputes over territories like the Ta Muen Thom and Preah Vihear temples. Despite a ceasefire brokered by Malaysia on July 28, 2025, the underlying issues remain unresolved, posing ongoing challenges to regional stability along the border about the economic, and civilian displacement<sup>6</sup>. Following the signing of the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord on October 26, 2025, the situation along the Khmer-Thai border has entered a fragile as 18 Cambodia military not released and other Cambodian land grabbing along the border still going on.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-01/thailand-cambodia-conflict-arms-proliferation/105586072>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.britannica.com/event/Thailand-Cambodia-Conflict?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.britannica.com/event/Thailand-Cambodia-Conflict?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## Problems Statement

The finding was collected during the Khmer-Thai border conflict from July-October, 2025 created a tense atmosphere where the media/journalism nation and international played a critical role in shaping public perception, national sentiment, and international understanding of the situation. In Cambodia, journalists were expected to report on the conflict responsibly and professionally; however, the political sensitivity, nationalistic pressure, and restrictions on freedom of expression made it difficult to maintain balanced and peace-oriented reporting.

During the Khmer-Thai border dispute 2025, Cambodian journalists faced a range of serious challenges that highlighted the fragile state of press freedom in the country. Journalists covering the border conflict were exposed to physical danger, especially those reporting from frontline areas like Oddar Meanchey and Preah Vihear provinces.

Two Cambodian journalists—Pheap Phara and Phon Sopheap—were arrested after entering a restricted battlefield zone. The Cambodian government intensified its crackdown on independent media during the dispute. Journalists and media outlet were accused of incitement or treason for reporting on sensitive topics, especially those involving national security or government accountability. This legal intimidation created a chilling effect, discouraging critical coverage of the conflict<sup>7</sup>.

Both Cambodian and Thai authorities were accused of manipulating media narratives. Social media was flooded with misinformation, including recycled footage and fake images. This undermined public understanding and fueled nationalist sentiment. Press freedom groups called for ethical journalism and warned against one-sided reporting that could escalate tensions<sup>8</sup>.

The findings from a mixed-methods study exploring the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by Cambodian journalists and media outlets during the July 2025 Cambodia–Thailand border conflict and after. Based on data collected through surveys and interviews with media/journalist networks in physical and online, the research examines how journalists navigated the complex intersection of conflict reporting, misinformation spread out tension, and peacebuilding efforts within a politically sensitive and high-risk environment.

The findings are structured research questions that collected key dimensions of journalism and media outlets in conflict contexts-specifically, the role of peace journalists contribution for conflict des-escalation, the prevalence and impact of fake news from both side country attacking to increase tension of conflict, press freedom limitation and openness of information and data that cause misunderstanding from publish and believable on government, gender-based challenges during data collection and reporting at conflict areas, and journalists' overall contributions to peacebuilding through reporting, article and dissemination not to act against any groups.

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://cpj.org/2025/09/two-cambodian-journalists-detained-over-border-conflict-coverage/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.journalismpakistan.com/press-freedom-groups-unite-over-cambodia-thailand-border-clash-coverage>



## Objectives of finding

- To identify the role of Media / Journalist in the conflict context and freedom of expression.
- To collective the challenges and pressures of journalists during the conflict-related fake news.
- To explore the impacts of fake news escalate led to discrimination and hatred via social media during the Khmer-Thai border dispute.

## Sampling Procedure & Frame

This report summarizes the discussion sharing among media and journalist focused on data collection from participants and media networks through media dialogues, panel discussions, individual data collection, and reflections on the situation of media and journalists in Cambodia during the Khmer-Thai dispute from July – October, 2025.

A total of 71 participants were involved in the research, including 12 females and 21 youths, primarily from media outlets and online journalism based in Siem Reap province, Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kep, and Phnom Penh. The methodology involved both a design questionnaire for the online survey and interviews, as well as reflections on the challenges encountered during dialogue face to face, online and social media data collection.

Participants in this study represented from diverse media sectors, including Media outlets, online journalists, community journalists and print journalism. Their reflections provide valuable insights into the ethical dilemmas, institutional constraints, freedom of expression level and professional responsibilities that shape how the media outlet and journalist practice in times of crisis. Each subsection in this research corresponds to guiding research questions, accompanied by analytical commentary and conceptual or statistical diagrams that illustrate emerging patterns and themes.

Media coverage tended to emphasize patriotic and government-aligned narratives, while independent or peace-focused voices were limited. As a result, questions arise about how Cambodian media/journalist handled conflict-sensitive reporting, what challenges journalists faced, and to what extent peace journalism principles were applied.

This study seeks to explore these issues to understand how the Cambodian media/journalist functioned during the conflict, what constraints journalists encountered, and how their practices influenced public perception and peacebuilding efforts through their reporting, article and dissemination.

## Finding

### 1. Journalists' Contribution to Peacebuilding

Peace journalists are working in an important role in contributing to peacebuilding in society. Regarding the chart, it was illustrated that among respondents, 76% responded engaged in media for peace or peace journalists contributed significantly to peacebuilding by focusing on narratives that emphasized the true and fact, shared humanity, empathy, and post-conflict recovery along the border conflict. Through their articles or reports, there exists awareness raising for the public that proposes seeking the truth for both parties of the conflict, addressing root causes, and raising awareness about peace solutions for both sides. Peace journalists do not focus on the quantity of reporting but concentrate on the quality of their articles or dissemination to ensure that it is not biased or elitist toward any parties and has clear sources before publication.

Besides that, it is also illustrated that 19.7% of respondents classified peace journalism as contributing to peacebuilding only at a medium level as many challenges during these conflict times not fully open for all media and journalists at the battlefield. While only 4.2% of media and journalist respondents respond, respond able to contribute peace journalism.

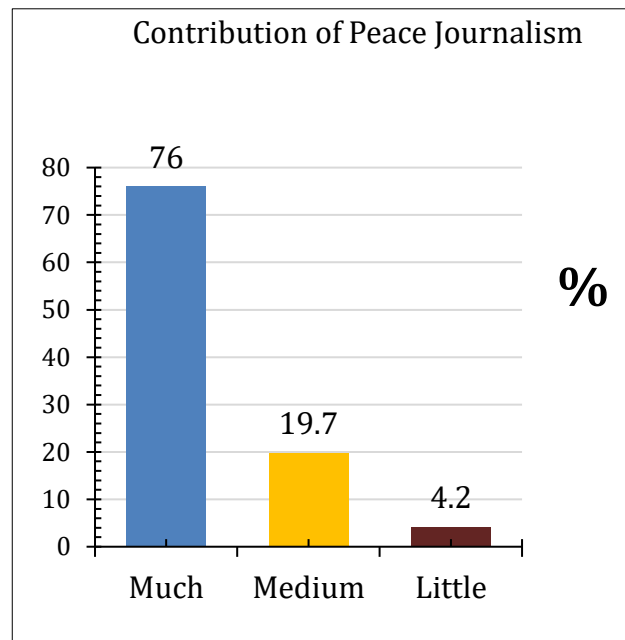
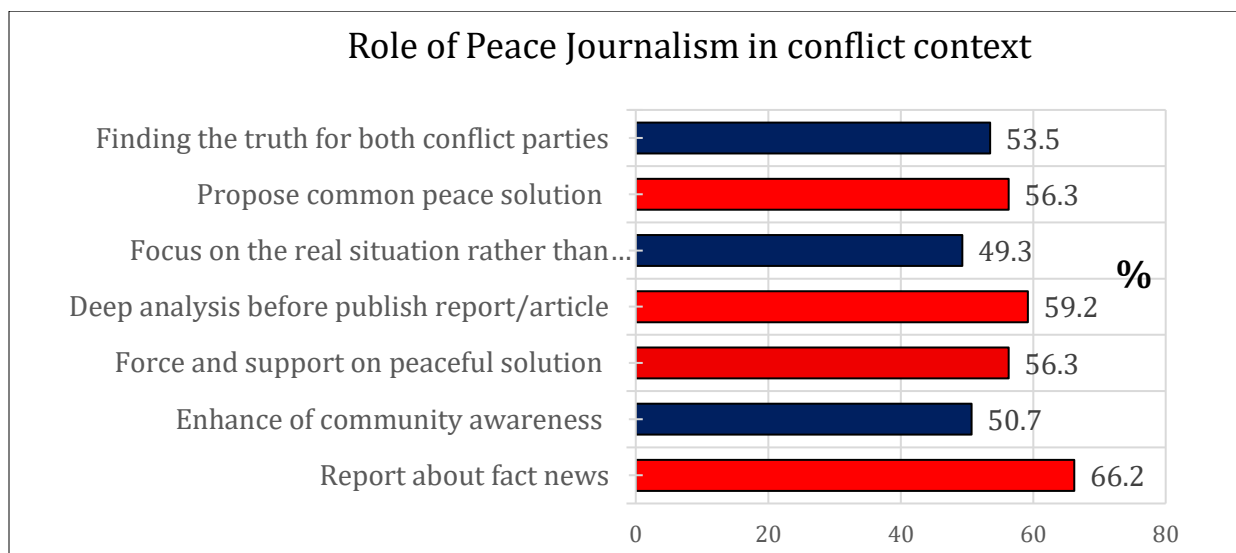


Figure 1: Contribute to Peace Journalism

### 2. Role of Peace Journalists in Conflict Contexts

During the border dispute in 2025, role of journalists became face challenges as respondent proven that only 66.2% able to report about the facts situation and what really happened in society to publish. While 59.2% raised that media for peace or peace journalists need to be more professional as journalists or reporters, with a high responsibility for deep thinking and critical analysis about any issues that occurred and seeking the root of the problem before they publish reports or articles to avoid misinformation that could lead to misunderstanding or conflict escalation. Furthermore, 56.3% of respondents have indicated that the most important role of peace journalism is to promote and propose peace solutions through their articles or dissemination, offering win-win solutions for inclusive peace in society. 53.5% stated that peace journalists should not just publish what happened but also seek the root cause to point out the truth for both conflict parties without relying on one side or being biased.





**Figure 2: Role of Peace Journalist**

Journalists played a vital role in peacebuilding during the Khmer–Thai border dispute from July to October 2025 by promoting balanced reporting, countering misinformation, and amplifying calls for dialogue. Amid escalating tensions and violent clashes near Preah Vihear and Ta Muen Thom temples, media organizations urged reporters to uphold accuracy and impartiality, avoiding nationalist rhetoric that could inflame the conflict. Journalists actively debunked viral disinformation and highlighted diplomatic efforts, peace marches, and humanitarian concerns, fostering a narrative of cooperation rather than hostility. Despite challenges such as press freedom violations and safety risks, their commitment to ethical journalism helped shape public discourse toward restraint and reconciliation, making media a key actor in reducing conflict escalation and supporting regional peace efforts.

### 3. Encounter to Fake News During the Conflict

According to results from respondents, it demonstrated that 94% of people who engaged in this finding mentioned that they faced fake news and misinformation since during these conflict period as the technology and social media platforms were rapidly increasing and many users used them for different objectives. Misinformation spread quickly through social media, particularly Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and other social media platforms. False information about border clashes and casualty accusations created confusion, misunderstanding, and fear among the public because they were not able to classify what was real or fake. Many pieces of fake news and misinformation were shared on social media platforms during the conflict between Cambodia and Thailand, with both sides trying to accuse each other, and some exhibited extreme nationalism that fostered public anger through their reports or articles on social media. And most of Thai information or news had been blocked that not allow Cambodian to see their news, and many Cambodian who pin relate to the conflict areas had been blocked and not able to see those information.



**Figure 3: Fake News/Misinformation**

As shown in the chart, only 6% of respondents illustrated that they were not noted or affected by fake news or misinformation during the conflict between Cambodia and Thailand.

Participants were highlighting the pervasive nature of misinformation in crisis situations. Journalists indicated that false information spread rapidly through social media platforms, particularly Facebook, where unverified reports, manipulated images, and

misleading videos circulated widely.

These fake narratives often claimed exaggerated military casualties, alleged attacks on civilians, or fabricated troop movements, creating confusion, fear, and heightened anxiety among the public. Journalists reported that the speed and virality of such content posed significant challenges to verification, forcing them to navigate a complex environment in which truth and rumor were often indistinguishable. Several participants emphasized that misinformation not only undermined public trust in media but also complicated their own reporting efforts, as they struggled to correct false narratives in real time. This dynamic underscore the critical need for fact-checking mechanisms and responsible digital literacy to mitigate the influence of fake news during conflicts that it shapes the public perception.

#### 4. Impact of Fake News on Conflict Escalation

Social media platforms, especially Facebook, amplify anger and hatred by spreading misinformation, emotional stories, and biased reporting. In Thailand, although the media environment is freer than Cambodia's, it often circulates misleading or anti-Cambodian stories. Cambodian participants noted their struggle to access credible information due to limited press freedom. These conditions have fostered an environment of polarization and mistrust, particularly in border communities that directly experience the effects of nationalist rhetoric. Social media has become both a battleground and a mirror of public sentiment. Peace advocates who promote dialogue report being attacked, unfriended, or silenced online, revealing the personal cost of peace work in an increasingly polarized digital space. Residents in martial-law zones face the dilemma of fleeing or staying in their homes. The climate of fear discourages collaboration and reinforces hostility.

Based on the chart, it illustrated that 93% of respondents pointed to the impact of fake news; it really forces conflict to escalate during the clashes between Cambodia and Thailand, meanwhile only 7% said it does not impact. Misinformation significantly worsened tensions in the border conflict due to viral posts, images, and videos circulating on social media, which often force anger, trigger strong emotional reactions among the public and foster nationalist extremism among youth groups and citizens to promote discrimination and hate speech that continues to foster hatred between each other.

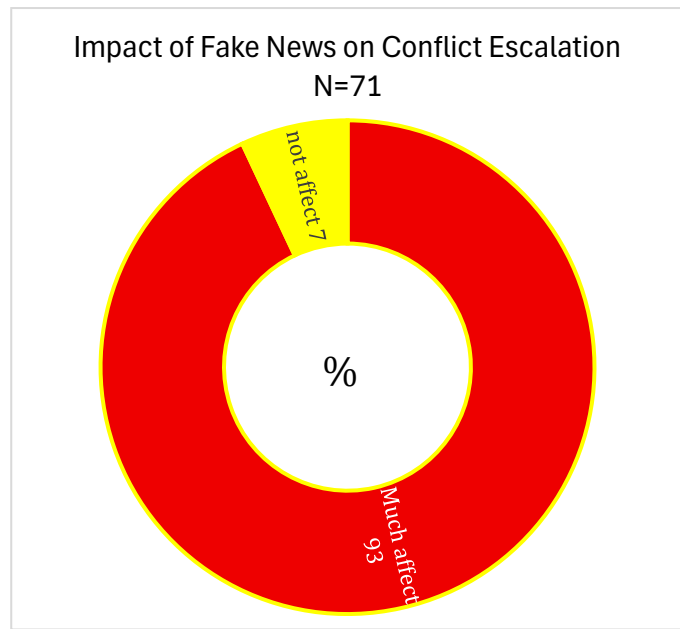


Figure 4: Impact of Fake News on Conflict Escalation

This unintentionally amplifies tension. War journalists, while striving to report rapidly from the conflict zone, faced immense pressure to deliver timely updates, which occasionally led to the dissemination of unverified information. This dynamic created a feedback loop in which misinformation and urgent reporting reinforced each other, escalating public anxiety and complicating conflict resolution efforts.

Fake news significantly worsened tensions during the Khmer Thai border dispute, fueling fear, nationalism, and hostility on both sides. Social media platforms became battlegrounds for disinformation, with viral posts spreading false claims such as troop massacres, chemical attacks, and territorial gains. These fake news narratives created panic among civilians, triggered calls for evacuation, and undermined trust in official sources. Beyond immediate security risks, fake news corroded people-to-people trust, deepened nationalist sentiment, and complicated diplomatic negotiations. Analysts warn that such disinformation campaigns not only escalated the conflict but also left long-term scars on bilateral relations, highlighting the urgent need for stronger media literacy and cross-border fact-checking mechanisms.

Respond to the fake news, the Cambodian government addressed the surge of fake news during the border dispute by issuing repeated public warnings and official statements urging citizens to trust only verified sources from state institutions. The Ministry of Information highlighted that disinformation posed serious risks to national security and bilateral relations, noting cases of AI-generated content and impersonations of officials.

## 5. Views on Freedom of the Press and Openness of Information

Reflecting on the viewing of freedom of expression during conflict, respondents demonstrated that 59.1% are restricted in freedom of expression, and any information they want to publish needs to follow informal government guidance, which issues instructions on the language and framing to be used in reporting. Neutral or analytical terminology, such as “border dispute” or “clash,” was frequently discouraged and faced risks under the defense of national security.

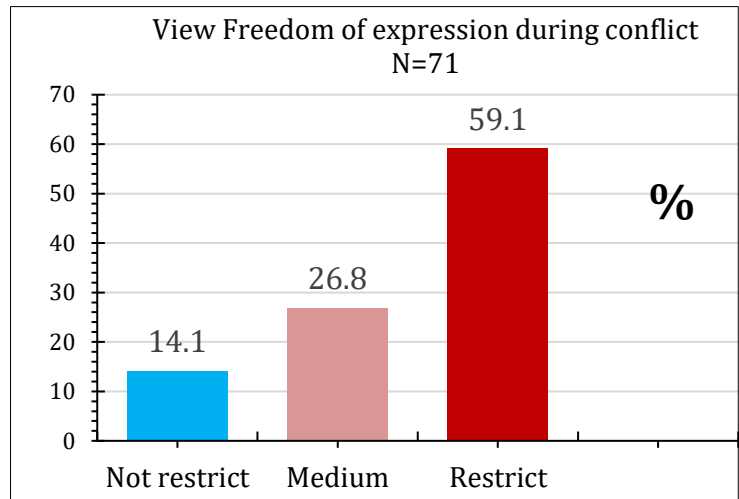


Figure 5: Views on Freedom of Expression

Respondents mentioned that during the conflict, they did not really observe the role of media or journalists, as they had personal sources of information from conflict areas that they obtained from the Ministry of Defense, the Prime Minister's Facebook page, the Ministry of Information, and other information from the government to continue disseminating on social media platforms. This posed challenges in verifying information since media outlets/journalists were not allowed to collect data or obtain any information from authorities in conflict to ensure that what the government disseminated was accurate.

Meanwhile, among respondents, 26.8% mentioned that freedom of expression was not too restricted during the conflict, allowing them to report or publish on social media platforms about the conflict situation, people's displacement, or any sensitive issues with limitations on expression. In contrast, 14.1% of respondents indicated that freedom of expression during the conflict was open for data collection, making it easy to verify the source of information, and they faced no challenges in reporting or disseminating information about the conflict situation and received good cooperation from the authorities.

Even when reporting on community impacts and governmental inaction regarding social issues, some journalists had to navigate these constraints that affect human rights and the right to express opinions on social matters. Due to the limitations on freedom of expression, opportunities for exposing corruption have increased in society, particularly for some powerful individuals or authorities who misuse their power for land grabbing and other crimes for personal gain. Furthermore, this environment causes neglect of vulnerable populations, who remain voiceless due to threats and legal challenges they face when raising social issues that conflict with the government's reputation. As a result, many sensitive issues are difficult to bring to public attention. Participants also highlighted the tension between their professional responsibility to inform the public and the structural limitations imposed by political oversight. Despite these

challenges, journalists continued to seek ways to provide accurate and balanced reporting of any issues in society that over 80% of respondents highlight about the limitation of expression.

## 6. Level of Press Freedom During the Cambodian Thai Conflict

Regarding surveys from media/journalists about the level of freedom of expression in Cambodia, it was illustrated that only 13% of respondents indicated that full freedom of expression does not oppress the freedom to discuss or raise social challenges. On the other hand, 87% of respondents said that there is a restriction of freedom of expression for media outlets/journalists who report on social realities or sensitive issues related to the government or powerful parties. They highlighted that when they publish any real problems before and during border conflicts, they face accusations from local authorities, the

Ministry of Information, and the government under the pretext of causing insecurity in society. Respondents also mentioned that during conflicts, releasing any information often requires prior editorial or local authority clearance. Any cited verbal comments or changes in the way issues are written are made to ensure that they do not impact the government or parties.

Criticism of government actions or political decisions is considered risky, with journalists expressing concerns about potential repercussions such as professional sanctions, self-censorship, or legal threats. Due to the limitations on freedom of expression, opportunities for exposing corruption have increased in society, particularly for some powerful individuals or authorities who misuse their power for land grabbing and other crimes for personal gain. Nobody dares to report or raise issues publicly due to concerns about their security when reporting sensitive issues<sup>9</sup>.

## 7. Media and Journalists' Contribution to Conflict Situation

The contribution of Media and Journalist in Conflict Media and journalists have played a pivotal role in shaping public perception and influencing the dynamics of the Khmer Thai border conflict. Their reporting has served both as a tool for information dissemination and, at times, as an instrument of psychological and information warfare. Cambodian and Thai media often framed narratives to align with national interests emphasizing their own side's legitimacy while

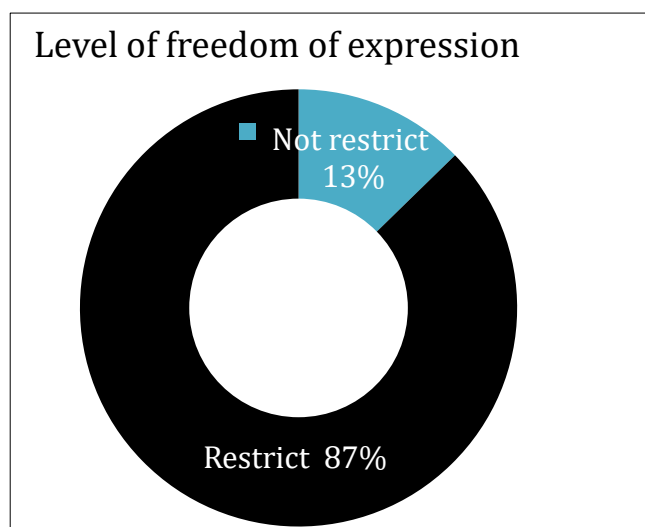
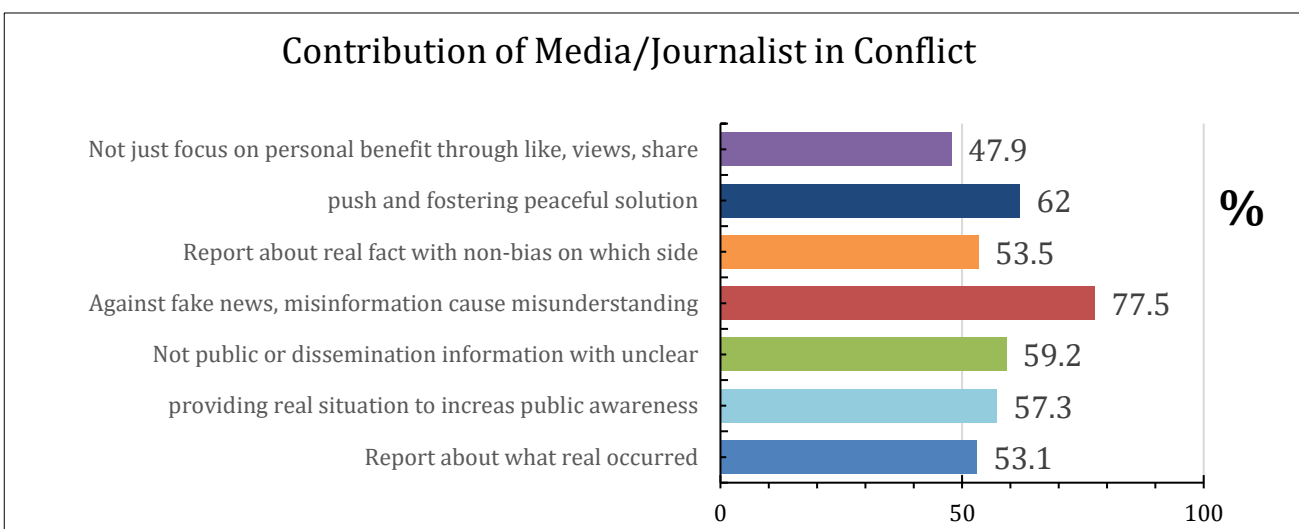


Figure 6: Level of Freedom of Expression

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBQEHZyMraY&t=241s>

downplaying unfavorable facts thus fueling nationalist sentiment and escalating tensions. Social media amplified these narratives, sometimes unintentionally reinforcing propaganda. Despite these challenges, journalists also contributed positively by providing real-time updates, exposing humanitarian issues, and advocating for peace through ethical reporting. Civil society organizations and press freedom groups stressed the importance of accuracy, fairness, and safety for journalists, urging adherence to global ethical standards to prevent misinformation and conflict escalation. However, the environment remained perilous, with arrests and crackdowns on journalists and online voices during heightened tensions, underscoring the critical yet vulnerable position of media in conflict zones.



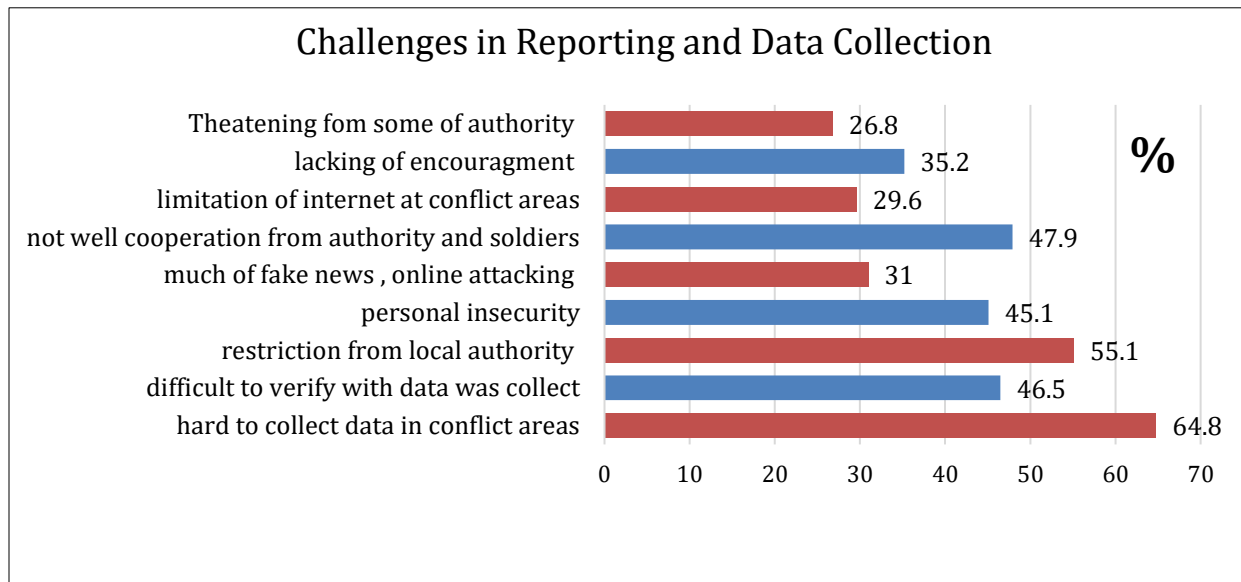
**Figure 7: Contribution of Media & Journalist in Conflict**

According to multiple views of media actors who engaged in finding about the contribution of media for peace or peace journalism, 77.5% of respondents said that they participated in efforts against fake news and misinformation, and released information without clearing sources during conflict, while maintaining silence to observe the situation to see whether what happened was consistent with social media sharing to avoid any conflict escalation or increase misunderstanding in publishing. Among the 62% of respondents, was also mentioned that their dissemination or reporting was a part of peace contribution by urging both sides of the government to solve the issue in positive ways without using weapons to rebuild connections and relationships for both countries. Additionally, 59.2% of them said that there is a need to focus on the quality of reports rather than quantity if there is no clear information about the conflict situation, and concerning any accusations from the government as well. On the other hand, 57.3% of respondents said that media outlets and journalists play a crucial role in raising awareness about the real facts and situations in publishing and promoting awareness-raising for people to build trust between people and the government as well. Not only that, 49.7% of respondents also stated that journalists need



to address publishing beneficial content, not just focusing on likes, views, and shares for getting money online, which causes problems or conflict escalation.

## 8. Challenges in Media Reporting or Collecting Information



**Figure 8: Challenges in Reporting & Data Collection**

Based on the results of respondents, it illustrated multiple levels with different percentages within the challenges faced by journalists/media outlets for data collection during and after the clashes, as shown in the chart. Among the results, it demonstrated high and low percentages regarding the real context that respondents faced and experienced. 64.8% of respondents identified the challenges of media/journalists, stating it was hard/difficult to collect data about what happened in conflict areas due to authorities and the government not allowing entry under the pretext of maintaining sustainable security and not publicizing internal issues. Even when they had information or a situation in hand, it was not possible to spread it out; they had to rely on information from the Ministry of Defense and government spokespeople. This proved that media/journalists outside the government network or any ministry are not functioning well, making it difficult to clarify what occurred since there are no independent media outlets in Cambodia.

Furthermore, 55.1% of respondents said that even when they requested to enter the conflict areas or clarify any facts, local authorities did not allow them and did not provide adequate cooperation with media/journalists to share information related to the conflict situation, which they followed at a higher level. Since there are difficulties in data collection and source verification, media

outlets and journalists are facing restrictions on data access, making it particularly challenging for them to publish or share any information regarding border conflicts that have been accused by the government or the Ministry of Information as fake news, which leads to the escalation of conflict and publishes misunderstandings.

Meanwhile, 49.7% of respondents demonstrated that during the conflict period, they did not receive adequate cooperation from local authorities or soldiers to obtain more information about the conflict situation to verify what the government was disseminating on social media, which causes mistrust between the government and the people. Among them, 45.1% of respondents are also concerned about their personal security when reporting or disseminating information that affects the government or political figures. Since the Cambodian government has just approved the revocation of citizenship for those who cause national harm, it faces accusations from the government and the process of the law regarding the revocation of citizenship.

Journalists reported that physical risks, restricted access to conflict zones, and limited availability of safety equipment were among the most significant challenges they faced during the Khmer Thai border conflict. Many were unable to enter frontline areas due to military restrictions, natural hazards, or security concerns, forcing them to rely heavily on secondhand information from local authorities, government, civilians, or social media. This reliance made verification difficult and heightened the risk of reporting inaccuracies. Additionally, the fast-paced and volatile nature of the conflict demanded rapid reporting, often under stressful and dangerous conditions, which further complicated efforts to gather reliable data. Some journalists noted that logistical constraints, such as poor communication infrastructure, lack of protective gear, and unpredictable mobility, limited their ability to observe and document events firsthand. These factors collectively hindered journalists' capacity to provide comprehensive, accurate, and context-rich reporting, highlighting the operational and ethical challenges of conflict journalism in high-risk environments<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, through face to face gathering with media/journalist networks who lived closely to conflict areas had mentioned that:



Under the reasons of sustained national security, government restricted information that may cause fear & scared to civilian people and whole country which related to the number of soldiers death, areas which Thailand controlling, Thailand break out ceasefire by using drone across Cambodia territory, using chemical on communities plantation along the border and so on, authority and government did not allow to public such news on social media even have evidence and videos of the fact in hand.

---

<sup>10</sup> P2P Group Discussion-PESTEL



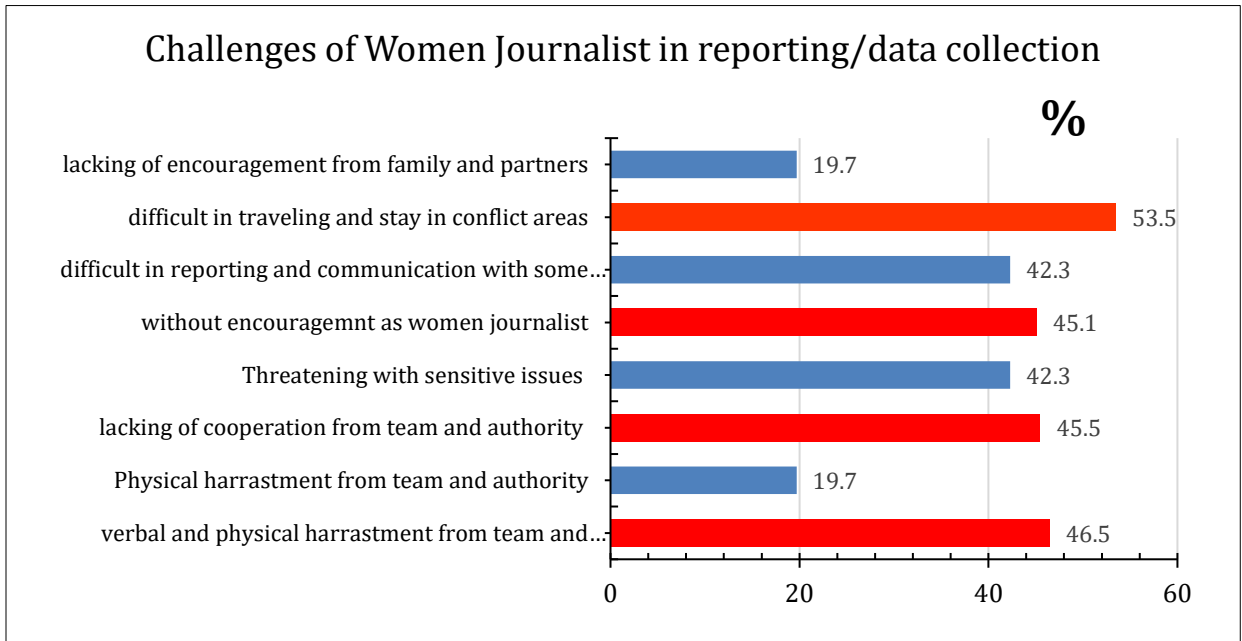
"Event Cambodia claimed as democracy country, but freedom of expression and journalism did not fully open for all because when we report or disseminated any sensitive information affected to powerful persons, especially political parties, government members, mostly reject and those who report about fact, faced high risk and insecurity, threatened and accuse that report without evidence, fake news,.... Journalist/Media is one of the important sector among the other four power regarding to constitution but it mentioned only on the paper and not applied in practice".

## 9. Challenges for Female Journalists

In the context of the media and journalism sector in Cambodia, we observed that very few women work as journalists compared to men. Due to the imbalance in the number of women and men, there is a need to promote and encourage women in this field. According to the results of a survey, it demonstrated many challenges for women who work in this role during conflict. 53.5% of respondents mentioned that it is difficult for women journalists to travel for data collection due to concerns about security and harassment, both verbal and physical, from team members and from local authorities as well.

Among them, 46.5% of respondents emphasized that women journalists faced challenges during conflict in data collection, particularly regarding verbal and physical harassment from their team and authorities, stating that females are not capable enough to work in this role and suggesting that they should pursue other jobs, which could provide more income or salary, thus discouraging verbal harassment. Besides that, 45.5% of respondents mentioned that during data collection, female journalists often lack proper cooperation from authorities in the region due to negative perceptions about women journalists not deserving to work in this role. Furthermore, 45.1% of respondents also highlighted that female journalists did not receive encouragement from their family members, teams, or society, but rather faced criticism from those around them based on their perceptions. All these challenges are also the root cause of the low engagement of women in this role as journalists in society.

Additionally, female respondents described experiences of harassment, intimidation, and unequal treatment within newsrooms and during field operations, which contribute to emotional stress and professional barriers. Balancing family responsibilities with the demands of unpredictable fieldwork further compounds these challenges, particularly in dangerous or remote areas. These obstacles highlight systemic gender inequalities and underscore the need for institutional support and protective measures to ensure equitable participation in journalism.



**Figure 9: Challenges of Women Journalist in Reporting & Data Collection**



“female journalists shared that during fieldwork, she experiences authorities or male colleagues often bullied them with inappropriate comments, implying that women are incapable of working as journalists or lack of necessary abilities. They also faced challenges while traveling and staying overnight in the field. Furthermore, the lack of encouragement from both colleagues and family members contributes to the underrepresentation of women in this sector”.

Women in journalism face many challenges related to personal security and family dynamics. Often, their families do not understand their work, leading to conflicts and even divorces. This challenge is particularly pronounced among wealthier individuals, who sometimes fail to value journalists and the media<sup>11</sup>.

“You are beautiful. You should not work as a journalist. If you come and work with me, I will provide you with a high salary, other benefits, and easy task to do no need to go to the field; hot, dusty, and not comfort in many way. This illustrates that they do not understand what gender respect and gender equality truly mean”.



Women journalists covering the Khmer Thai border conflict encountered severe challenges that compounded the inherent risks of reporting in a volatile environment. Beyond the dangers of armed clashes and restricted access to conflict zones, they faced gender-specific obstacles such as harassment, discrimination, and lack of safety measures tailored to their needs. Many reported experiencing sexual harassment from male colleagues and officials while gathering information, which undermined their professional security and mental well-being.

In addition, the absence of proper protective gear and safety protocols for women heightened vulnerability during fieldwork, while threats of arrest and intimidation by authorities created a climate of fear that discouraged investigative reporting. These conditions were exacerbated by societal stereotypes questioning women's capacity to handle conflict reporting, forcing some to self-censor or shift to less sensitive topics for personal safety.

Despite these barriers, women journalists continued to play a crucial role in documenting human stories and advocating for ethical journalism, often relying on digital tools and social media to circumvent physical and institutional restriction.

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtyiCXtKLHw&t=3s>



## Conclusion and Next Steps

The findings of this study demonstrate that Cambodian journalists operate in a highly challenging environment characterized by political pressures, widespread misinformation, and significant safety risks. Throughout the July 2025 Khmer-Thai border conflict, journalists faced structural and operational constraints that limited their ability to report freely and accurately, including editorial directives, government oversight, and restricted access to frontline zones.

Despite these obstacles, participants consistently expressed a strong awareness of the principles of peace journalism, emphasizing ethical responsibilities such as balanced reporting, human-centered narratives, and the promotion of understanding between communities.

The study also highlights the additional challenges faced by female journalists, including exclusion from high-risk assignments, harassment, and unequal treatment, which further limits the diversity and comprehensiveness of reporting. Moreover, the rapid spread of fake news and the pressures of maintaining audience engagement created ethical dilemmas that complicated journalists' efforts to contribute positively to conflict de-escalation.

These findings suggested that strengthening institutional support for journalists, enhancing safety protocols, promoting gender equality, and improving media literacy are essential for building a more resilient and peace-oriented media environment in Cambodia. By addressing these systemic challenges, journalists can more effectively fulfill their role as agents of information, accountability, and societal reconciliation during times of conflict.

- 1- Peace journalists are crucial for promoting dialogue and truth in conflict reporting, and strengthening their role requires better safety, access, training, and ethical standards.
- 2- Journalists faced significant challenges during the 2025 border dispute, with only 66.2% able to report factual situations. Next step should be considered enhancing training for peace journalists, ensure access to accurate data, and promote ethical standards that focus on root causes and peace-oriented solutions for both parties.
- 3- The 2025 border conflict notice widespread misinformation, with 94% of respondents reporting exposure to fake news on social media, which fueled confusion, fear, and nationalist tensions. Next step should strengthen fact-checking mechanisms, promote media literacy among the public, and enhance collaboration between journalists and tech platforms to curb misinformation during crises.
- 4- Fake news had a major impact on escalating the Cambodia–Thailand border conflict, with 93% of respondents noting that viral misinformation fueled anger, nationalism, and hate speech. Next step should implement stronger fact-checking systems, promote digital literacy, and collaborate with social media platforms to prevent the spread of harmful misinformation during crises.



- 5- Freedom of expression for journalists in Cambodia remains highly restricted, with 87% reporting censorship and pressure when covering sensitive issues or conflicts. Next Step: Advocate for stronger legal protections, transparent editorial processes, and independent media oversight to ensure journalists can report freely and accurately.
- 6- Media actors actively contributed to peacebuilding during the conflict by combating misinformation, promoting dialogue, and prioritizing quality reporting over sensationalism. Next Step: Enhance journalist training on ethical reporting, strengthen fact-checking systems, and encourage content that fosters trust and constructive solutions rather than engagement-driven posts.
- 7- Women remain underrepresented in Cambodian journalism, facing major challenges such as security risks, harassment, lack of cooperation from authorities, and societal discouragement, which limit their participation during conflicts. Next Step: Promote gender equality through targeted recruitment, provide safety measures and anti-harassment policies, and create supportive networks and training programs to empower women journalists.

## Group Discussion on PESTEL<sup>12</sup>

Political	Economic	Social	Technology	Environment	Law
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parties' priority</li> <li>- Power control on social media</li> <li>- Using media platform to accusation/break down group or warning</li> <li>- Avoiding reporting or dissemination about sensitive issues</li> <li>- Not security for media/journalists who report on hot &amp; sensitive issues or affect to powerful people</li> <li>- Mostly media/journalist prioritizes political parties.</li> <li>- Hard to voice up about social issues</li> <li>- Threatening from power people and some authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low income and less encouragement</li> <li>- No salary and high risk of security</li> <li>- No secure support from government or private sectors</li> <li>- Can not support family</li> <li>- Force to drop career</li> <li>- Cost of living and materials increased</li> <li>- Raw materials costly that this career difficult to continue</li> <li>- Domestic product also high price</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rapidly spread of fake information</li> <li>- Provide negative and positive impact</li> <li>- People difficult to classify real and fake news</li> <li>- Tending of people believe on what they saw not with deep thinking</li> <li>- Corruption increases</li> <li>- Independent mistrust media/journalist</li> <li>- Threatened, discrimination on those who report sensitive issues</li> <li>- Report biased, partisanship</li> <li>- System of power control</li> <li>- Less awareness about peace journalist</li> <li>- Lack of professional standard practice</li> <li>- People feared and scared about warning and faced with sued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of understanding about digital basics</li> <li>- Lack of modern materials</li> <li>- Lack of skills and opportunity</li> <li>- Viral of fake news/online harassment</li> <li>- Using digital tools for own benefit</li> <li>- Limitation of internet in somewhere</li> <li>- Insecurity on some media platforms</li> <li>- Lack of opportunity to increase their skills and awareness</li> <li>- Threat via technology / online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deforestation</li> <li>- Forest logging</li> <li>- Water and land pollution</li> <li>- Natural resources disaster</li> <li>- Media/journalists faced the threat / accusations from local authority /government when they reported these issues</li> <li>- Faced law and personal insecurity</li> <li>- Accusations of reporting fake news without evidence from local authority</li> <li>- Threat to close the institution or online media</li> <li>- No ownership for the communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not transparency in law application when media/journalist faced issues</li> <li>- They faced with criminal law</li> <li>- No protection law for journalist/media</li> <li>- Limitation of freedom of expression</li> <li>- Injustice with journalist/media when case sue with powerful persons.</li> <li>- The court priority on power people and rich people</li> <li>- Poor people mostly get injustice</li> <li>- Media/journalists do not have enough power with high corruption society</li> <li>- Voiceless of community, indigenous, and vulnerable people</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> PESTEL analysis on: *Media Outlet dialogue and workshop to support Research Finding August-September 2025*

**អង្គការក្រុមការងារដើម្បីដោះស្រាយទំនាស់ ( កជទ )**

**The Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)**

**#69, Str. Sothearos, Tonle Bassak,**

**Chamkarmorn, PO Box 2552,**

**Phnom Penh 3, Kingdom of Cambodia**

**Phone/Fax: +855 23 217830**

**Website: <https://act-kh.org>**

**Email: [act@act-kh.org](mailto:act@act-kh.org)**

