

CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter summarizes the needs of the poor in the different regions of Cambodia and identifies potential policy recommendations based on a synthesis and analysis of the findings. The results provide a menu of concerns and associated solutions that the Government, civil society and the donor community may want to further explore and examine.

Needs Identified During the PPA

In the previous part of this report, concerns of the poor who participated in this PPA were highlighted; PPA participants offered explanations as to the causes of poverty, the effects on the poor and the relationship between different aspects of poverty. The major needs of the poor are summarized in Table 4.

As this was the first ever countrywide PPA conducted, it should be viewed as an iterative process that is Government-, as well as other stakeholder-owned. The key to its effectiveness is continued engagement with civil society, donors and the poor in defining, refining and implementing policies and programs that give a voice to those affected—the poor themselves.

Potential Policy Recommendations for Follow-up Activities

As part of the PPA process, a synthesis of potential policy recommendation has been compiled based upon the findings emanating from discussions with the PPA participants (rural and urban areas) and their communities (rural areas only). Based on the existing information emanating from the PPA that could warrant further examination:

- Food insecurity is a major issue for the very poor. The Government is correct to advocate food-for-work programs as large numbers of the very poor in all regions support such programs. However, the Government has to ensure that not only are the poorest communes in Cambodia targeted but more importantly, the poorest villages within these

Table 3: The Needs of the Poor Ranked in Order of Frequency Cited

Need	Mekong Plain	Tonle Sap	Coastal	NE Mountain
Food security				
Draft animals	1	1	1	1
Food-for-work	2	2	1	2
Resettlement	3	3	3	4
Farm implements	4	4	2	3
Cheap rice credit	5	6	4	5
Mine clearance	7	5	-	-
Safety net	6	-	-	5
Rice rations	-	-	-	5
Social Infrastructure				
Health care	1	2	1	1
Wells	2	1	2	2
Education	3	3	3	3
Latrines	4	3	4	4
Mosquito nets	5	4	5	3
School texts	-	5	-	4
Physical Infrastructure				
Irrigation	1	2	2	1
Farm-to-market				
Roads	2	1	1	2
Reclaim land	3	3	3	3
Ponds	4	4	-	5
Electricity	5	-	-	4
Livelihood Issues				
TVET	1	1	1	1
Job creation	3	3	2	4
Market support	4	2	3	2
Lower fuel prices	2	4	3	4
Promote investment	5	4	-	3
Agricultural Needs				
Cheap agricultural inputs	1	2	2	2
New technologies	2	1	1	1
HYV rice	3	4	-	3
Pumps	5	3	-	4
Pesticides	4	5	-	5
Tractors	6	6	3	5
Animal health	6	7	-	-
Rice mills	7	-	-	6
Agro-forestry	-	-	-	6
Threshing machines	7	-	-	-
Good Governance				
Demarcation of				
Fishing grounds	1	1	2	1
Teacher transparency	2	-	1	-
Lower fishing taxes	3	-	-	-
Fewer arrests	3	-	-	-

HYV=high yielding variety; TVET=technical and vocational education and training.

communes. This is not possible currently with the available databases it has, but the Government can support efforts by the WFP, through its poverty mapping under the United Nations Development Programme to ensure that poor villages in these communes are highlighted in the poverty maps. The Government should also ensure that agreed-upon poverty indicators provide the basis for the poverty mapping. NGOs are likely to have an important role to play in assisting both poor communities and the Government in this process.

- The stated need by the poor to purchase rice or exchange labor and other services in return for rice has to also examine what varieties of rice farmers should be growing in Cambodia. Farmers with surpluses are clearly more likely to be interested in supplying the export market, whether it be through neighboring Thailand or Viet Nam, than making rice available at an affordable price for the very poor. The Government should consider importing cheaper varieties of rice, which the poor can afford to purchase. These varieties should be of acceptable taste and nutritional value, and the cultural preferences of upland ethnic minority groups for varieties other than those of the majority of lowland people is an important consideration. Such a policy does not compromise food security. It could be more effective than trying to prevent farmers from exporting rice across the porous borders.
- The Government has already stated that it wants to address land issues in Cambodia, but to benefit the poor the specific land issues identified by the poor need to be considered. The land problems are not simply of ownership, although this is important, but also one of secure access to it. It is necessary for the Government to reconsider the effects of land redistribution in the late 1980s on the poor and of land that was allocated to border returnees and internally displaced persons in the 1990s. Urban housing should also be included in this land policy. Additionally, the land rights of upland ethnic minorities need to be clearly formulated, taking into account indigenous concepts of land.
- Affordable public health care for the very poor is essential. Illness in households often leads to poverty because the poor have a very limited ability to pay for health care. Illness can even reduce households that are not poor into poverty, as this PPA was able to corroborate. While the Ministry of Health is

attempting to restructure the public health system so that the poor can benefit, an emphasis should continue to be on preventive health care. Well-trained public health workers prepared to live and work in poor communities are in great demand. It may be necessary for the Government to offer inducements for professionally trained public health workers to live and work among the poor, but the Government should actively recruit and train from among the poor, utilizing a pro-poor affirmative action policy if necessary. This is especially important in the upland provinces where non-Khmer culturally sensitive health delivery services are important. Some important programs such as those associated with reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS programs, have barely reached the very poorest communities.

- As for public education, the Government needs to address both the quantity and quality of education for people living in poverty. More schools are required in locations that the poor can readily access, and the quality of teaching needs to be strengthened. The poor are not getting access to well-trained teachers, and teachers in the poorest rural areas often do not conduct scheduled classes, and/or demand supplementary fees from students who are already from very poor families. Other forms of education, including technical and vocational education and training, are also necessary as are adult literacy programs. It needs to be recognized that different groups have different priorities for training, for example, knowledge of improved rice varieties for most lowland groups, sawmilling for upland ethnic minorities, fish preservation for lowland ethnic minorities, computer training for street children and sex workers. The Government does not currently have a formal policy to promote adult learning but clearly there is a need, one that NGOs could play a leading role in promoting.
- The Government should continue to encourage small-scale irrigation systems that contribute to the enhancement of food security by providing dry season opportunities to cultivate rice and other agricultural crops. However, the Government also needs to recognize that operating and maintaining these small-scale systems will be more effective if greater forms of participatory management is encouraged. The Government agency responsible for water resources development needs to enhance a better understanding of the capacity dimensions of

its activities. Given the increasing preponderance of heavy flooding during the wet season, effective flood control systems should be developed, recognizing the difference between upland area concerns based on flash flooding and lowland area concerns based on gradual flooding as rains during the wet season intensify.

- Potable drinking water is also a concern of the very poor. The Government should devise a participatory mapping program of existing sources of potable drinking water and determine to what extent the poor have been excluded or under-provided. The Ministry of Rural Development should note that the poor are prepared to contribute to the cost of building tube or pump wells if they can benefit but not toward the provision of ponds. The latter lend themselves to food-for-work programs. Cost norms agreed upon with the local communities should ensure the maximum benefits accrue for the least cost.
- The poor want micro-finance, whether it be to purchase draft animals, farm implements or other agricultural inputs and also to meet the high cost of health care, wedding ceremonies and even the purchase of food (mainly rice and other necessary condiments) and micro-business activities. In the upland provinces, appropriate credit systems have to take account of indigenous landownership principles and the dynamics of non-Khmer forms of social organization. Information on available sources of credit and how it can be utilized should also be more widely disseminated.
- The Government is committed to improving the inadequate physical infrastructure in Cambodia as it clearly recognizes that more than 30 years of internecine conflict destroyed much of the existing physical infrastructure. The Government also has to support infrastructural improvements that are more pro-poor than at present. The Government needs to more clearly understand beneficiary distribution and analysis in physical infrastructure projects and demonstrate some bias in favor of the poor if it is committed to reducing poverty.
- In natural resource management, the Government has made some impressive gains in the past few years, with the announcement that existing private fishing lots would be subject to monitoring and enforcement of regulations. This scrutiny also has to be applied to fishing lots that the Department of Fisheries (or some of its officials) and the private sector jointly own.

Fisheries officials have, in some instances, earned a bad reputation by poor treatment of subsistence-level fisherfolk, including both Cham and Vietnamese ethnic minority groups. Significant levels of illegal logging has ceased in Cambodia, but the poor are still being discriminated against, particularly in the upland areas, while logging companies often circumvent regulations. The Government should promote community ownership of natural resources and not regulations that restrict the traditional rights of local communities, especially in the upland provinces.

- Local authorities could be more accountable and transparent if directly elected by local communities. By promoting commune elections, the Government could ensure that local authorities are more accountable in reporting the needs of the local communities they serve rather than simply relaying news in times of emergencies. A new culture of demand-driven development needs to take place. Ideally, each commune should have access to a development fund that it would manage. As an incremental measure, the Government should provide people with the information they need on targeted programs and services. The Government needs to accept that local communities also have ideas on what is best for them—not just the local authorities or officials at either the provincial or national levels. For ethnic minorities, the Government needs to improve access to all kinds of information. Culturally appropriate communication strategies also have to be designed jointly by ethnic minority groups and the Government.
- The Government should consider the need to implement more effective gender-sensitive policies. The creation of the Ministry of Women and Veteran Affairs devoted to women's affairs is a step in the right direction. But this Ministry does not appear to have an active presence in areas where it is needed, that is, the very poorest communes in the countryside nor the resources to carry out critical programs. While the PPA did uncover some gender-specific concerns, other issues such as the importance of women's reproductive health and gender analysis of poor women in agriculture need more attention. The PPA did highlight, where relevant, the differing perspectives of men and women, especially in relation to the prioritization of needs.
- The Government should not overlook cultural development programs. It may be unrealistic to expect the Government to fund the construction of

pagodas or mosques for the poor, but it may be appropriate for the Ministry of Religion and Cults to maintain a revolving fund that it could use to disburse, on a cost-recovery basis, funds for such purposes to very poor communities. If this is impractical, then the Government should ensure that public land is available for such purposes and does not impose unnecessary administrative obstacles. The Government should also look closely into the cultural development needs of the poor living in the upland areas of Cambodia. This requires a closer understanding of the ethnic minorities' needs in those areas.

Concluding Remarks

The Government should view the PPA as an iterative process and recognize that a national PPA could be undertaken by the Government on a periodic basis — perhaps every five years as part of the socioeconomic survey or linking with the impressive efforts made to date

by the WFP. A core of experienced staff in the Ministry of Planning has been trained as part of this PPA in questionnaire design, field practices and compilation of information and data. This group of staff should be given the opportunity to train others at both the national and provincial level in order to institutionalize the process and provide a more holistic understanding of poverty and the impacts of Government policies on the poor.

The PPA has demonstrated that there are regional, gender, ethnic and urban-rural perceptions and realities of poverty. The real value of the PPA in the context of the Government's poverty reduction strategy is that it is capable of highlighting these differences. Because of the level at which they operate, NGOs are well placed to assist the Government in conducting PPAs that bring out these differences. The validation of PPAs do not rely on whether they are conducted in exactly the same manner but whether they utilize a family of methodologies and approaches that are participatory in nature. Participation per se in the context of the PPA involves joint ownership based ultimately on its being validated by local participants.