

PARTICIPATORY POVERTY ASSESSMENT IN CAMBODIA

Asian Development Bank

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CMR	Cambodia riel
CSES	Cambodian Socioeconomic Survey
FGD	focus group discussion
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
MoP	Ministry of Planning
NGO	nongovernment organization
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
RRA	rapid rural appraisal
SEDPII	Second Socioeconomic Development Plan, 2001-2005
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STD	sexually transmitted disease
WFP	World Food Program

NOTES

Unless otherwise indicated the units of measurement referred to in this study are metric. The unit of currency referred to in this study is the Cambodia riel (KR); at the time this study was completed, the exchange value was KR3,910 to US\$1.

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Without the participation of the people living in poverty in both villages and in urban settings, it would have been impossible to undertake this Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA). Their involvement is greatly acknowledged, and it is hoped that the findings of this study will be translated into pro-poor growth policies that will benefit these participants and others living in poverty in Cambodia. One of the purposes of this PPA is to allow the participants to use the assessment as a source of empowerment not previously available to them in attempts to reduce poverty in their communities.

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FOREWORD

After the July 1998 elections, a new government led by Prime Minister Hun Sen was established, which stressed poverty-reducing economic development as its first priority. This Government is committed to increasing the quality of life for its people and being a genuine partner in regional and global affairs. The past few years have witnessed Cambodia well on its way to becoming a truly free nation, free from want and free from poverty.

The Government has adopted a “Triangle Strategy” to fulfill this long-term vision. One side of the strategic triangle is sustaining peace, restoring stability and maintaining security for the nation and the people. Another side of the strategic triangle is Cambodia’s economic and social integration into the region and normalization of relationships with the international community. This will allow Cambodia to attract more foreign assistance and foreign direct investment, which are crucial to the achievement of development objectives. Already, Cambodia has succeeded in regaining its seat at the United Nations and has become the 10th member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The process of joining the World Trade Organization is soon to be completed. The third side of the Government’s strategic triangle is to promote economic and social development through the implementation of an ambitious reform program. The Government is aware that promoting sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction is directly linked to major reforms.

The key elements of the reform agenda are military and police demobilization, civil service reform, fiscal reform, strengthening the banking and financial systems, establishing systems for sustainable use of natural resources, facilitating private sector development, investing in social development and promoting good governance.

In the context of the Triangle Strategy, the Second Socioeconomic Development Plan 2001-2005 (SEDPII) presents the Royal Government of Cambodia’s strategies for achieving the primary objective of reducing poverty. The strategies are: (1) to foster broad-based sustainable economic growth with equity, with the private sector in the lead role; (2) to promote social and cultural development by improving the access of the poor to education, health, water and sanitation, power, credit, markets, information and appropriate technology; and (3) to promote sustainable management and use of natural resources and the environment.

The Government understands that economic growth and political stability depends on an improved governance environment in which government and the public administration are more responsive to the needs of the poor.

To tackle the many challenges ahead, the Government will need to listen to all segments of society, particularly those less fortunate. The voices of the poor have spoken through the Participatory Poverty

Assessment (PPA) conducted as part of the SEDPII preparation process and can easily continue to be heard as a result of the decentralization of power and resources from Phnom Penh to provincial and local institutions. The Commune Council elections planned for 2002 and the establishment of the councils will provide a crucial institutional mechanism for participation of the poor in the decision-making process. The PPA is the beginning of this process. It should also be viewed as a companion document to the SEDPII that can assist in refining and informing the strategic priorities of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

The PPA study was prepared under the leadership and guidance of the Ministry of Planning in partnership with the Asian Development Bank. The perspectives and judgments expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of ADB or its Board of Directors.

I wish to thank Cambodians at all levels of government and society who contributed their insights to this report. In particular, I acknowledge those Cambodians who devoted their precious time during the fieldwork portion of the study to speak with us. Without your support the study would not have been possible.



Tadao Chino
President
Asian Development Bank

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Between late October and mid-December 2000, 154 villages in 70 communes in all 24 provinces of Cambodia and 15 nonrural socioeconomic groups participated by way of focus group discussions (FGDs) in the first nationwide Cambodian Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA). Of the 169 FGDs conducted, 47 percent took place in the Mekong Plain region, 29 percent in the Tonle Sap region, 12 percent in the Northeastern Mountain region and 12 percent in the Coastal region. More than 50 percent of the participants were female, and 13 percent were from ethnic minorities. In addition to the FGDs, selected semi-structured interviews with key informants were undertaken to clarify some of the issues raised in the FGDs or to obtain a more extensive historical background to poverty in the villages. The PPA is intended to inform poverty reduction policies emanating from the Royal Government of Cambodia's Second Socioeconomic Development Plan, 2001-2005.

Sites for FGDs were selected in a two-stage process, subject to the requirement that at least one FGD take place in each province. The Government endorsed the World Food Program's (WFP) poverty mapping in lieu of having reliable baseline data to target the poor. This approach was used to identify the poorest communes. Villages were then selected on the basis of guidelines established at the October 2000 PPA Questionnaire Workshop, and in consultation with provincial and local authorities, four PPA teams of three members each (six women and six men) made the selections and conducted the FGDs and the interviews.

Participants in the FGDs examined the definition of poverty, living conditions, the gender and ethnic dimensions of poverty as well as coping mechanisms used in

times of crises. They prioritized needs and possible solutions to poverty and poverty-related problems. FGD facilitators sought to ensure that all participants contributed to the discussions. All FGDs were documented with participants engaging in a series of ranking exercises that prioritized village and nonrural socioeconomic group concerns.

Issues and Results

- According to FGD participants, there are five broad socioeconomic strata in villages. The PPA defined the poorest as *toal*, people who live a hand-to-mouth existence on a day-by-day meal-by-meal basis. By way of contrast, the poor who are categorized as *kror imom* may have some land, very poor housing, perhaps a draft animal but no agricultural implements and insufficient rice during critical times of the year (usually from July until the first harvest in December-January). The PPA demonstrates the subtle differences among the five categories that need to be understood in any poverty reduction strategy. Being hungry is the primary concern of the poor. The PPA found that significant numbers of poor people, particularly women and children, have to spend an inordinate amount of time each year foraging for food. Consequently, they have no time to participate in village level activities. However, most FGD participants stated clearly that if they had enough food they would be more involved in village activities, including the construction or rehabilitation of existing physical infrastructure or other community projects.
- Another important finding is that in rural Cambodia, the poorest people have few, if any, assets (land, draft animals and adequate housing). It is clear that

when the poor face a major life crisis, usually arising from a natural disaster, illness or death of a family member, it is necessary to sell what few assets they have.

- Land issues are very important to the poor. These include limited land availability per household, low productivity of the land, the presence of land mines and landlessness (especially for demobilized soldiers).
- Educational opportunities are nonexistent or limited for the poor. Nearly 20 percent of all FGD participants stated that their children could not attend school because of a lack of physical accessibility, especially in the Northeastern Mountain region where minorities live. Another constraint is imposed by the cost of transport, clothing, learning materials and unofficial fees, which underpaid teachers ask for to supplement their salary. Lack of teachers, absenteeism and poor teacher quality are also identified as problems. Girls are more likely than boys to be kept out of school for a range of domestic and other activities.
- Water resources, whether it is for drinking or agricultural purposes, are widely inadequate. The lack of potable drinking water affects the poor no matter where they live.
- Lack of micro-finance is another key issue concerning the poor. Credit is needed for purchase of draft animals, farming implements and other agricultural inputs (particularly seed and fertilizer); meeting health care costs; establishment of small-scale businesses, including the raising and selling of livestock; support of technical/vocational training; and purchases of food (mainly rice).
- Inadequate physical infrastructure is also a major cause of poverty according to FGD participants. Poor or nonexistent roads and bridges not only limit access to social infrastructure facilities (health centers and schools) but also inflate the cost of goods and services transported into and out of villages. These problems are compounded by the high cost of fuel. Less than 30 percent of the villages in this PPA could be reached by vehicular traffic during the wet season.
- A significant concern for the poor is the decreasing access to community natural resources (forests and fishing grounds). Numerous examples of corruption or irregular practices by government officials were cited in the management of fishing lots (commercial concessions relevant in the lowland areas of

Cambodia), forest concessions (particularly along the Thai border), emergency food aid (everywhere in Cambodia but particularly in the northwest) and physical infrastructure projects (everywhere in Cambodia).

- Many FGD participants described local authorities as ineffectual, although during emergencies they are considered essential as a means of relaying information to the Government.
- The poor are concerned that they cannot afford to construct pagodas or mosques. This prevents the practice of their religious beliefs and weakens the social fabric of the village where there is no community meeting place.
- Young girls and women suffer disproportionately because of poverty. They work harder in the village; are forced to migrate to urban areas to work in garment factories, as domestic helpers, beer girls and sex workers; and are subject to domestic violence.

In summary:

The poor in Cambodia are in many ways no different than those in other developing countries—life crises render them even poorer; they lack access to natural resources, basic physical and social infrastructure and other services; they feel unempowered, hopeless about their lives and the lives of their children and are experiencing an erosion of family and community relationships; and women and ethnic minorities suffer from low socioeconomic status.

However, this poverty assessment has also revealed issues particular to the country:

- Poor Cambodians say they are worse off now than ever.
- Domestic violence is perceived worse now than in the past.
- The poor lack food security; many people still experience periods of hunger.
- People have a desire to participate in their communities' activities but cannot because of the immense amount of time spent looking for food.
- People are being denied access to their traditional hunting and gathering grounds by poor implementation of government policies, antilogging measures, co-optation of land and other activities which are also prohibiting people's access to land.
- The poor want information about government policies and programs including health, vocational and technical training, market information, and micro-finance availability.
- The poor have stated there is a general lack of confidence in local and provincial administration.

- One bright spot is that more women are being given or are asserting themselves in leadership roles in their community.

Potential Policy Considerations

- While the Government is well aware that food insecurity is a major issue for the poor, it needs to ensure that the poorest villages are actually targeted by programs aimed at enhancing food security. The WFP, through its poverty mapping, is playing an important role in ensuring that this occurs. It is important not to simply identify poor communes, however, as the WFP mapping does, but also poor villages need to be located. NGOs can also assist the Government in this poverty-targeting program. Food-for-work programs appear to be popular among the poor and should be continued.
- The stated need by the poor to purchase rice has to be seen in the context of what varieties of rice should be produced in Cambodia. Farmers with an eye for the export market want to produce varieties that the poor cannot afford to purchase. This being so, the Government should consider importing cheaper varieties of rice that the poor can afford to purchase. These varieties should be of acceptable taste and nutritional value.
- The Government has already stated that it wants to address land issues in Cambodia. But to really benefit the poor, the specific land issues identified by the poor must be taken into consideration. In terms of prioritizing how those issues can be resolved, the Government should explore more participatory means when dealing with the poor. The land issues at stake are not only about ownership, but of secure access to land as well. The findings suggest that the Government should reconsider the effects of land redistribution in the late 1980s on the poor. Urban housing could also be included in this land policy.
- Affordable public health care is essential for the poor. It is not simply a case of stationing trained public health workers in villages or providing a ready supply of cheap medicines, but it is a commitment to preventive rather than curative health care. Some important programs pertaining to women's health, such as reproductive health activities, have not been heard of in most of the villages visited by the PPA teams.
- To ensure that more educational opportunities are made available, the findings suggest that Government adopt pro-poor education policies. This would include providing teachers and health workers more incentives for working in rural, which are mainly poor, areas than in urban centers.
- The Government should recognize that small-scale irrigation systems contribute significantly to the enhancement of food security by providing dry season opportunities to cultivate rice and other agricultural crops. The Government acknowledges that operating and maintaining these small-scale systems will be more effective if forms of participatory irrigation management are encouraged. The PPA findings also recognize the importance of flood control.
- Potable drinking water is a real concern of the 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. PPA participants said they are prepared to contribute toward the cost of building tube or pump wells if they can benefit, but not toward the provision of ponds. Construction of ponds may work better as food-for-work programs.
- People want informal micro-finance, but clearly the Government currently cannot, by itself, meet the needs of all the rural poor. It also appears ineffective in trying to get urban-based banks in Cambodia to provide micro-finance to the poor—particularly in rural areas—although the Government could encourage these banks to make a portion of their funds available to reputable micro-finance providers for disbursement by way of re-lending to the poor. However, it is acknowledged that a sound financial system is needed to sustain micro-finance activities. Of course, the re-lending practice does increase the interest rate, which is even initially is often not affordable by the poor.
- In the field of natural resources management, the Government has made impressive gains in the past few years in some areas. Recently the Government announced that existing private fishing lots would be subject to critical scrutiny. The PPA participants strongly think this scrutiny has to be extended to fishing lots that are jointly owned by the Government (or some of its officials) and the private sector. Concerns with biodiversity have to be considered in the context of the impact on the poor. The Government encourages community-based management and ownership of natural resources as well as supports

alternative livelihood programs so that Cambodia's natural resources can be sustainably used.

- Local authorities would be more effective and accountable if they were to be directly elected by the community. The Government, by promoting commune elections, could ensure that local authorities are more effective at reporting the needs of communities they serve rather than simply relaying news in times of emergencies.
- Gender awareness and development policies that address the specific needs of women living in poverty must be implemented. Issues in relation to food insecurity as they affect women and men need to be clearly understood in order to grasp the differences, if they exist.
- The Government should not overlook cultural or religious development programs. It may be unrealistic to expect the Government to fund the construction of pagodas or mosques for the poor, but it can ensure that public land is available for such purposes and that it does not impose unnecessary administrative obstacles.
- Creating nonagricultural employment opportunities in the private sector is a high priority of the Government. The Government, however, has to be aware of how some private sector employers take advantage of poor and vulnerable people from the countryside and needs to ensure that labor practices are closely monitored.