

Keynote Remarks

by

Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Lu Lay Sreng
First Meeting of the C-BIRD Public-Private Partnership Task Force
Sunway Hotel, 24 August 2005

Excellencies, Okhnas, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all members of the newly-formed C-BIRD Public-Private Partnership Task Force for taking your valuable time to attend this meeting today.

We see the Task Force as a critical element of the project as it brings together key stakeholders from the private and public sectors, either as members or observers, to provide guidance throughout the project life

Second, as chairman of the Task Force, it is my honor this morning to officially launch this ambitious project, kindly supported by the Asian Development Bank, to build sustainable partnerships between rural areas and the business community – the so-called Cambodia Business Initiative in Rural Development or C-BIRD for short.

In a nutshell, C-BIRD is an innovative program that aims to stimulate the transfer of the business skills and other resources of the business community to rural areas; thus having a significant impact on addressing rural poverty in Cambodia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The basic idea of this project has been in my mind for many years. Often I sit on the stairs of my house looking over the Mekong River thinking about how to respond to the critical needs of the Cambodian people in terms of food, clean water, good roads, hospitals or health centers, and schools. I even become more ambitious sometimes and consider how to generate enough incomes in rural areas to allow rural people to be wealthy enough to be able to pay taxes to the government!

After considerable reflection, I was fortunate enough to learn about a concept that offers a sustainable solution to this problem, namely to involve the business community in developing business opportunities and addressing basic human needs in rural areas.

The exciting concept that is flourishing in my mind owes much to the efforts of Senator Mechai Viravaidhya who kindly hosted me at the Population and Community Development Association and allowed me to observe first-hand some of the innovative projects that he and his team have pioneered under the Thai BIRD program. Indeed, we are honored today with the presence of three colleagues from PDA who are working with us on the project, and sharing their invaluable experiences.

I would like to highlight the fact that we have placed top priority on the involvement of the Cambodian business community in the project and on the Task Force. We have already met the six major business associations in Cambodia and I am most gratified that they have all agreed to be a part of the C-BIRD process and to play a proactive role in stimulating C-BIRD-type activities among their members.

I feel confident that the C-BIRD approach will be able to achieve the ambitious objectives that I mentioned earlier. In this regard, our project aims to undertake two key activities: first to develop a strategy and program to establish and scale-up C-BIRD activities; and second to catalyze a selected number of C-BIRD-type partnerships in order to demonstrate the potential of such projects.

In addition, through creating income generation opportunities in rural areas, C-BIRD will play a role in stemming migration and its associated social costs. C-BIRD will reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, and play a role in motivating Khmer society to help each other. Finally, C-BIRD will provide a vehicle that can attract support from national and international organizations to leverage resources from private enterprises to participate in one corner of the government's Rectangular Strategy and create employment and meet the basic human needs of citizens living in rural areas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

MRD is honored to be the executing agency for the project to develop C-BIRD, but I would like to emphasize that we see ourselves simply as a facilitator of partnerships between the business community and rural areas. Through the Project Focal Unit set up at the Ministry specifically to implement the project, we at the MRD aim to reach out and to bring other government agencies, NGOs and donors into the C-BIRD process as much as possible to support the implementation of the project activities.

In order to make this project successful, we will count heavily on all members of the Task Force from all walks of life for your support. Following this inaugural meeting today, we expect to hold 3-4 more meetings of the Task Force, with the project concluding in early March 2006. However, our Project Focal Unit at

MRD and our consulting team plan to be in close contact with you all throughout the project period.

I firmly believe that Cambodia has many possibilities and opportunities for development that will greatly increase the well-being of our rural people. And I believe equally firmly that the C-BIRD initiative will be able to play a major role alleviating poverty in rural areas.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that all C-BIRD partnerships are win-win activities. All parties involved benefit in one way or another and all parties will have the incentive to continue and enhance their activities.

I could not close my remarks today without expressing my sincere appreciation to Mr. Shyam Bajpai, ADB's Country Director, for his strong support to the project and to Mr. Mar Sophea, the ADB project officer, for his active commitment to and involvement in realizing the C-BIRD project.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like you to leave you today with the five Buddhist blessings – long life, wealth, happiness, good health, and wisdom.