

CAMBODIA: LOAN 1862
NORTHWEST RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT¹
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After nearly three decades of armed conflict, northwestern Cambodia is one of the poorest regions of the country. As a result of the high rate of death and disabilities of men, women have become the backbone of agriculture. At the time of the Project design, many rural inhabitants received little or no schooling and there was high level of illiteracy, particularly among women. 59% of the children aged 5-14 years attended school. About 50% of existing school facilities in villages needed repair. Existing health centers lacked staff, equipment, and drugs. More than 96% of all households lacked toilets. The main sources of water were unprotected hand-dug wells (46%) and rivers, ponds, and streams (41%). Road infrastructure was poor where most villages were inaccessible during the rainy season and some were cut off for several months a year. Lack of access to markets, infrastructure, economic services and limited access to schools and basic health care services resulted in frequent food shortages and illnesses leading to indebtedness and the loss of farm assets.

ADB's Northwest Rural Development Project (2003-2009) supported the Government's efforts to reduce poverty emphasizing the direct participation of villagers by (i) using local-level planning and village development plans reflecting the priority needs of the poor and women; and (ii) building village development councils' (VDCs) and commune, district, and provincial authorities' understanding of participatory development and empowerment. NRDP was a core poverty intervention loan with human development thematic priority.

¹ Loan 1862-CAM: *Northwest Rural Development Project* was approved 27 November 2001 for \$27.2 million. The loan became effective on 3 September 2002. The implementation was closed on 21 January 2009.

Objectives and Scope:

The overall objective of the *Cambodia: Northwest Rural Development Project* (NRDP) was to support the Government's effort to reduce poverty through accelerated rural development by establishing physical transport and social infrastructure, improving socio-economic conditions, and enhancing rural livelihoods in northwestern Cambodia. Project activities targeted 50 communes in 14 districts where more than 1200 villages were located in the four provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Oddar Meanchey and Siem Reap. NRDP had 3 components:

- 1. Rural Infrastructure Development:** extended the rural road network and established social infrastructure by building schools, health facilities, and markets. Large-scale rural infrastructure investments were identified and prioritized by local communities through a consultative process under the integrated rural access planning (IRAP) exercise applied at the district level and adopted by Ministry of Rural Development.
- 2. Capacity Building:** enhanced the capacity of both private and public sectors associated with the planning, design, construction, maintenance, and monitoring of project activities.
- 3. Rural Livelihood Enhancement:** involved and empowered the beneficiaries, built small-scale infrastructure at the village level (i.e. water supply and sanitation, rice drying and storage facilities, community buildings) and established savings and credit initiatives in the villages and communes. Contracted NGOs strengthened existing savings and credit groups using group guarantees, created new groups, and facilitated beneficiaries' access to the formal financial system.

Framework for GAD Activities:

Gender analysis conducted during Project design revealed that the high loss of men during the war has significantly reduced male labor force in agriculture. As the majority of the working age population (52%) and primary income earners in many households, women have undertaken activities and assumed roles traditionally held by men. However, women's role in decision making at the village, commune, district or higher levels have remained weak. Even if women members made up 30% of the VDCs, they did not articulate their needs and concerns. Poor and very poor women could not afford to attend meetings due to their time constraints in managing household responsibilities and earning a livelihood. Female heads of households in the Project area at the time of design were about 14% and in many households, women were in charge of managing the family income.

Gender Inclusive Design/Revised Gender Action Plan:

To address women's needs and constraints to effective participation, a Project Gender Action Plan (GAP) was prepared during the design stage. However, the Project staff had limited awareness about the gender related provisions and assurances of the Project. As a result, an ADB rapid gender assessment and the Project mid-term review conducted in 2004 recommended the revision of the NRDP GAP through a consultative

workshop with the implementing groups. NRDP staff and contracted NGOs (24 men and 10 women) worked in groups under the joint guidance of the ADB Cambodia and Nepal Gender Specialists to integrate gender provisions into the project framework, to develop gender sensitive indicators and to draft a revised GAP, outlining specific interventions under each project component. A summary of the revised GAP is presented below:

1. Rural Infrastructure

- Gender orientation sessions for all contractors, NGO Staff involved in the participatory planning exercise (IRAP process), VDC, village chiefs, commune councils, district and provincial NRDP staff. Cooperation with provincial and district Departments of Women's Affairs for gender trainers;
- Contractors agreements (labor-based appropriate technology-LBAT-) to include: (i) 50% of female workers, of which 15-20% are from women supported households; (ii) equal pay for men and women for work of equal value in the labor intensive construction works;
- NGOs to disseminate LBAT requirements and inform women of job opportunities in construction;
- 40% female workers in the construction of schools, health centers and markets to be monitored by NGOs;
- 40% female members of maintenance committees of schools, health centers and, markets to be trained on roles and responsibilities and communication and leadership skills;
- Awareness campaigns for men and women on joint registration and land titling;
- Changes to be made in the supervision, monitoring and evaluation procedural manual in relation to gender disaggregated data collection and ways of improving poor people's and women's participation.

2. Capacity Building

- Provincial and District Departments of Women's Affairs staff involved as facilitators for gender orientation sessions;
- Gender orientation in the technical training sessions such as participatory techniques and work methodologies, data analysis techniques and resource inventory survey methodologies for provincial and district NRDP staff to respond effectively to community identified development initiatives;
- Training for district facilitators to undertake village and commune level meetings;
- Training of local contractors in bidding procedures and project implementation, and to ensure 50% women's participation in LBAT;
- NGOs to organize leadership and communications skills training for female members of VDCs, other community based organizations (CBOs) and female commune councilors.

3. Rural Livelihood Improvement

- Separate consultations with men and women in local planning processes in villages and communes;
- Organization of women's groups to develop gender sensitive investments;
- Establishment of savings and credit groups for women;
- Review of NGO contracts to ensure management and maintenance committees have 30% women and receive training; conduct gender training for all village chiefs, VDCs, commune councils and CBOs; include gender disaggregated data in NGO progress reports ; organize small women-only groups for local planning

processes; provide literacy classes for women and men; provide awareness campaigns for women and men in joint land registration and titling; and give priority for recruitment of female commune facilitators.

4. Project Management Support

- The Project provided four male community development specialists in each province to support project implementation with participatory approaches to involve the poor and the very poor. A competent local gender consultant could not be found to implement the revised Project GAP. The ADB Cambodia Gender Specialist supported the project community development specialists in monitoring the implementation of the revised GAP through loan review missions and other requests for direct technical assistance.

Achievements:

With close monitoring and assistance in GAP revision and implementation, good gender-based results have been achieved under the Cambodia: Northwest Rural Development Project. NGOs recruited and trained 32 male and 14 female commune facilitators (one in each target commune) to assist village development committees (VDCs) and village leaders to organize community consultations.

Under the Rural Livelihood Component, NGOs assisted commune councilors and VDCs to develop village action plans for small scale infrastructure (SSI) projects. Women represented over 25% of VDC members and their direct involvement in identifying the SSI projects led to addressing their practical needs such as village paths, pump wells, pipe culverts, community meeting halls, a community kindergarten and family latrines.

Under the Capacity Development Component, the Project strengthened capacity of commune councilors and empowered communities by direct provision of funds to commune councils for building SSI projects. Also, leadership and communication skills training were organized for VDCs, for well maintenance committees, and for CBOs to facilitate their active participation in decision making and participatory workshops. NGOs built the capacity of many CBOs with at least 30% female members such as the Village Sustainable Agriculture Committee, Village Literacy Teacher Committee, Village Health Agent Committee, Village Gender Training Team Committee and Water User Committees. Female representation in well committees was around 80%. Targets of 30% women were mostly achieved in training for management and maintenance of small scale infrastructure, except for road maintenance committees and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) where more male members were noted.

Under the Rural Infrastructure Component, at least 50% of the laborers were women due to the lottery system which selected men and women laborers from separate pools for men and women. Women and men got equal pay for work of equal value.

Results at Project Completion:

Income generation: Small scale infrastructure (SSI) projects directly contributed to increasing villagers' income through contracts awarded to villagers and through the employment of non-skilled female and male villagers to dig holes for latrines, and repair dams and schools. CBOs were encouraged to participate in bidding with external contractors if the SSI cost was less than US\$ 5,000. To cope with the CBOs' lack of cash reserves, 30% of the budget was given to them at the start of the work.²

Community Center for Development: The village meeting hall was very valued by villagers. It became the central place for meetings among villagers; for annual New Year celebrations and other religious ceremonies; for health education; for children's and women's vaccinations; for ante-natal care of pregnant women; and, for night literacy classes offered by NGOs to adults and out-of school youth. Before the project, villagers had their meetings under trees.

Safe Access to Schools, Markets and Connections to other Villages: Village paths and culverts have replaced flooded or sandy paths. During the rainy season, parents used to not send children to school since the paths were flooded with high levels of water where children could drown. With the good village paths, these dangers have been overcome and children's school attendance has not dropped during the rainy season. Moreover, women's travel time to the market for selling their chickens, eggs and vegetables have been reduced from 3 hours to less than one hour and they no longer have the danger of falling from their bicycles on sandy paths. Village paths have also been built to connect villages which have enabled young couples to leave their parents safely and have their own houses with plots of land for gardening.

Improved School Attendance and Nutrition for Students: Under the SSI projects, some schools in remote villages were rehabilitated and new tables, banks and blackboards were provided. Before NRDP, students could not attend these schools during the rainy season due to leaking roofs and damaged walls. After NRDP support, children could start school on time as they were supervised by a teacher and got breakfast from the World Food Program while parents worked in the rice fields.

Increased Food Security: The commune funds were also used to rehabilitate dams which were damaged under the Khmer Rouge Regime. For example, due to the rehabilitated dam, people in Svay Sar commune had enough rice to eat for the whole year and some extra for sale. Similarly, the Prasat commune could restore production of rice for the whole province with the rehabilitated dam instead of facing shortages of rice for several months.

Direct Access to Clean Water/Time Savings for Women and Girls: Although exact time savings for women and girls has not been recorded, women and girls in NRDP Project communities used to spend a lot of time carrying water from distant sources. Like in so many villages under the Project, women and girls in Sangkerlak Village no longer have to carry water from the top of the mountain. With the commune council fund, 2,400 meters of pipes were used to connect each house with a water meter including families in remote areas. A committee of two men and one woman has been

² There was no specific information available on how many person months in total jobs were created for men and women in project communities.

established to collect money for maintenance. Each family pays 200 riels (0.05 US\$) for 1 m³ of water use. 30% of the total earnings are given to the water committee for savings and 70% are used for maintenance.

Empowerment of Local Authorities: In 2008, the NGO service contract was revised to better define the roles and responsibilities of the NGOs and the community development (CD) staff of the provincial department of rural development (PDRD) in the project exit strategy. In each target province, several teams were formed composed of one NGO staff and one CD/PDRD staff, responsible for assisting commune councilors of three communes in their development planning and implementation, and using the commune council fund in a transparent way. This new initiative contributed to better implementation of the rural livelihood component and gave benefits to female and male stakeholders. First, it provided for NGO and CD staff to clearly identify the communes that they were responsible and accountable for. Second, it promoted skills transfer from the NGOs to provincial department staff. Third, it imparted greater ownership and responsibility to the NGO and CD staff for the empowerment of local authorities in the decentralization process. Fourth, it promoted a strong team spirit among the NGO, provincial staff, commune councilors and village authorities.

