

Food Security in an Asian Transitional Economy: The Cambodian Experience

Working Paper 6

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**Cambodia Development
Resource Institute
Phnom Penh**



**United Nations Research Institute
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Contents

Abstract	i
Glossary	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter One—Introduction	1
1) Economic Trends	2
2) Food Security and Poverty	4
3) Organisation of the Study	7
Chapter Two—Conceptual Framework and Methodological Notes	9
1) The Conceptual Framework	9
2) Methodological Approach	11
3) An Approach to the Socio-Economic Stratification of Households	13
Chapter Three—The Status of Food Security	15
1) Rice and Food Consumption	15
2) The Extent of Poverty	21
3) Conclusion	24
Chapter Four—The Structure of Income	25
1) Levels and Sources	25
2) Seasonal Fluctuations	27
3) Income Composition and Distribution	27
4) Discussion	28
Chapter Five—The Distribution of Assets	29
1) Asset Ownership	29
Chapter Six—Rice Production, Prices and Marketed Surplus	33
1) Participation and Productivity	33
2) Marketed Surplus	34
Chapter Seven—Market Participation	39
1) The Land Market	39
2) The Market for Animals	40
3) The Tenancy Market	40
4) The Labour Market	41
5) The Credit Market	45
6) Informal Credit—A Disaggregated View	47
7) Conclusion	50

Chapter Eight—Crises, Adjustments and Responses	51
1) The Structure of Crises	52
2) Responses to Crises	56
Chapter Nine—Conclusion	59
1) Review of Findings	59
2) Policy Implications	61
Appendix One—Note on Socio-Economic Classification of Households	65
Appendix Two—Basic Characteristics of the Study Villages	67
Appendix Three—Additional Data on Food Security	71
Appendix Four—Additional Data on Income Distribution	75
Appendix Five—Additional Data on Asset Distribution	79
Appendix Six—Additional Data on Market Participation	81
Bibliography	85

This working paper is one of three related papers stemming from a two-year study on food security in rural Cambodia conducted by the Cambodia Development Resource Institute and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. The other two papers are Vincent Tickner, 'Food Security in Cambodia: A Preliminary Assessment' (Geneva: UNRISD, October 1996) Discussion Paper 80, and John P. McAndrew, 'Interdependence in Household Livelihood Strategies in Two Cambodian Villages' (Phnom Penh: CDRI, December 1998) Working Paper 7. The CDRI/UNRISD food security project was supported by a grant from DANIDA.

Abstract

This working paper details the results of a study carried out from 1996 to 1997 of 244 households in three villages selected for their contrasting characteristics. One is in a rice surplus area of Prey Veng province; the second, in Kompong Speu province, is in a drought-prone area subject to violent fluctuations in rice production; the third, on the banks of the Mekong River in Kandal province, is primarily a fishing village, but with rice and reed production as additional sources of employment and income. The study therefore covers a range of agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions representative of Cambodia.

The paper finds that rural Cambodians are highly dependent on rice. Rice accounts for between 80 and 84 percent of calorie intake in the three villages, and for between 38 and 50 percent of expenditure on food. In the foreseeable future, rice will continue to be at the centre of food security in Cambodia. But this does not mean that to achieve food security a household has to produce all its own rice. Food security derives from the power to obtain food, whether directly by growing it or indirectly by having something to exchange for it.

Rural poverty and mild to moderate malnutrition are a widespread, though the incidence of "extreme" poverty and severe malnutrition are relatively low. Particularly disturbing is the precarious situation of the rural poor. Compared with many other Asian countries, Cambodia has an abundance of land and the benefit of recent land reform. Yet the poor have increasingly limited access to land, and few own animals. To a large extent, they have to rely on their access to common property resources and the sale of their labour. Migration in search of wage work is desperate in some places, with women in particular taking on heavy labour in agriculture and construction in order to repay loans. As well as financing agricultural production, an important purpose of such loans, at high rates of interest, is to deal with health emergencies, which often have catastrophic consequences.

The paper concludes with recommendations for a phased approach to policy implementation for food security. Interventions in credit and health are seen as a short- to medium-term strategy, along with policies supportive of agricultural and rural economic growth. Work on policies for land and common property resources needs to be started immediately, but these will take longer to implement. A prerequisite of an effective food security policy of any kind is the existence of suitable development institutions at the local level—in the form both of government rural development institutions (currently non-existent at this level) and non-governmental organisations (not operating in the areas of highest food insecurity).

Glossary

Acronyms

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GRET	Groupe de Recherche et d'Echanges Technologiques
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HEKS	Swiss Interchurch Aid
HYV	high-yielding varieties
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PEM	protein-energy malnutrition
RG	Royal Government of Cambodia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WAZ	weight-for-age Z-scores
WFP	World Food Programme
WID	Women in Development

Place Names

Kandal province	ខេត្តកណ្តាល
Kompong Speu province	ខេត្តកំពង់ស្ពឺ
Phnom Penh municipality	ក្រុងភ្នំពេញ
Prey Veng province	ខេត្តព្រៃវែង
Lvea Em district	ស្រុកល្វាឯម
Odong district	ស្រុកខ្ពង់ស្ពឺ
Peam Ro district	ស្រុកពាមរ
Babaong commune	ឃុំបាបោង
Ksem Ksan commune	ឃុំក្សេមក្សាន្ត

Prek Kmeng commune

ឃុំព្រែកក្មេង

Babaong village

ភូមិបាបោង

Prek Kmeng village

ភូមិព្រែកក្មេង

Trapeang Prei village

ភូមិត្រពាំងប្រី

Neak Loeang

ឃុំកលៀង

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