Establishing a Commune-Based Poverty Monitoring System in Cambodia

A Proposal Submitted to MIMAP/CBMS Network

by Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

I. Introduction

1.1. Background

Cambodia, having emerged from two decades of civil war, is one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia today. It has a rather young population of 13 million, which grows 2.5 percent annually. Despite a somewhat-high economic growth rate of about 5 percent on average over the past 10 years, Cambodia's GDP per capita in 2001 remained low at US$ 247, compared with US$ 405 in Vietnam and US$ 1,843 in Thailand (IMF, 2002). Applying the food calorie based poverty line, which is about $0.50 per day, it was estimated in 1993-94 that 39 percent of the Cambodian population lived in poverty. In 1999, the figure stood at 36 percent, reflecting a reduction of only 3 percent over a period of 6 years (RGC, 2001).

The fundamental development challenge facing the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) is, therefore, to alleviate poverty, while at the same time, restoring peace and maintaining stability and security for the post-conflict nation. This top priority has found its place in the agenda of all the Cambodia's development partners ranging from multilaterals to bilaterals to NGOs. Among other players, the Asian Development Bank has provided technical assistance to produce a poverty-focused national development plan called Socio-Economic Development Plan II (SEDP II) for the period from 2001 to 2005, upon which its decision to loan to Cambodia is judged. Likewise, to justify its intended poverty attacking loans, the World Bank has been gearing the production of Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), now termed...
National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) to reflect the national ownership of the paper (GSCSD/PMATU, 2002).

The NPRS is drawn from recent documents concerned with poverty reduction, including the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) and the SEDP II. However, the NPRS goes beyond both documents in several aspects to seek more practical and action-oriented approaches to reduce poverty. Nationally representative poverty data used for these papers are based on the Cambodia Socio-Economic surveys conducted in 1993/94, 1996, 1997 and 1999, and the Participatory Poverty Assessment in 2001.

1.2. Existing Poverty Monitoring Systems in Cambodia

1.2.1. At the National Level

As part of the poverty reduction efforts, in 2000, the Royal Cambodian Government established the Council for Social Development (CSD), a top ranking inter-ministrial body to promote, coordinate and monitor development policies and programs aimed at poverty reduction. The General Secretariat of the Council for Social Development oversees the Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Technical Unit (PMATU), established in January 2002 under the sponsorship of SIDA and UNDP (GSCSD/PMATU, 2002). The Cambodia Development Resources Institute provides technical assistance to PMATU to develop a national poverty monitoring system.

In support of the CSD, PMATU (i) coordinates data collection by other national institutions e.g. the National Institute of Statistics, and the statistics units of the line ministries; (2) coordinates other data collection activities (e.g. qualitative studies, impact assessment studies, specific case studies) and strengthens national capacity in data collection and analysis; (3) supports, and in some cases conducts (along with academic and private researchers) data analysis requested by decision makers; (4) provides overall capacity-building support in poverty-related monitoring and evaluation (GSCSD/PMATU, 2002).
PMATU has drafted Poverty, Vulnerability and Inequality (PVI) indicators as a tool for monitoring and evaluating the impacts of pro-poor policy and programme implementation. PVI is a consolidated list of indicators from various papers and plans shared by government and donor agencies. A broad set of some detailed 300 indicators is presented below.

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Given limited resources, the PMATU is concentrating at the central and ministrial level in the medium term for its poverty monitoring and analysis work. The next national household socioeconomic survey might be conducted in March 2003, and this will provide a massive data set for the unit to analyse. In addition, PMATU works with various ministries to collect data from them and/or improve their data collection and management systems.

1.2.2. At the Local Level
Apart from the above mentioned national system, there are other agencies that direct their concerns at the local level. The Cambodian government and donors have established and implemented a decentralised programme called "Seila" in an attempt to promote local governance for development. Through its newly established institutional structure, this programme collects data consisting some 80 questions related to broad aspects of development, at the village and commune levels from all their targeted areas. However, the data is merely based on an administrative report system, since the village chiefs are requested to fill in the booklet of questions.

Apart from the Seila programme, the UN World Food Programme, which has a long history of working at the commune level, has recently completed, in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning, its estimates of poverty at the commune level based on data generated in the Household Socioeconomic Survey in 1997 and the General Population Census in 1998 (WFP, 2002). While this data is useful for mapping poverty at the local level in most parts of Cambodia, it is rather outdated and might not be replicated in the medium term given the way it has been derived. More importantly, it indicates mainly consumption poverty, leaving other important aspects of poverty, such as education, health and security unaddressed.

A number of NGOs/IOs have also generated their own databases collected from their village based field surveys or rural appraisal methods. Their data are used mostly for their reports, which are not necessarily widely circulated/publicised, especially to the local authorities and communities concerned.

II. A Proposal for a CBMS in Cambodia

It is proposed that a community-based monitoring system (CBMS), which has been well developed by MIMAP, be adapted to Cambodia. The Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), a development-knowledge organisation and a leading independent research institute in Cambodia, would be the right place to undertake a pilot CBMS. It is expected that the Royal Government of Cambodia, through its PMATU will eventually take over the exercise and extend it to the rest of the country.
It deserves mentioning that CDRI provides a lead in technical support to PMATU. Thus, if PAMTU can be involved from the beginning of the pilot CBMS, the chance of successful takeover/buy in by the Cambodian government will greater.

2.1. Rationale for a CBMS Project

Cambodia is committed to undergo a long process of decentralisation. As part of this, the local election was conducted in February 2002 to elect the commune councils charged with local development planning and implementation. The importance of local governance is well recognised by all the Cambodia's stakeholders and many are working to contribute to enhancing the success of this new reform. CDRI, as such, has established a new research programme on local governance and decentralisation, a five year commitment strongly supported by the Cambodian Government and major donors.

A CBMS will nicely complement these decentralisation efforts in a concrete way and contribute to successful functioning of the new decentralised state apparatus. As mentioned above, Cambodia lacks community based poverty monitoring systems. Commune councils need massive information generated in a systematic and reliable way in order to effectively conduct their need assessments, planning, monitoring and evaluation of development projects. The best way to achieve this is to build a system in place and have it run in a consistent manner by the commune councils, with technical support from provincial office and/or other agencies.

It goes without saying that when local capacity is built to take over the CBMS, it will be much more cost effective than sending enumerators from the capital city as it has been commonly done so far for national and community-based surveys. Tapping in local involvement and responsibility in the survey will also guarantee local ownership and local use of data. Currently, the national surveys generate data only for analysis at the national level and provide no database for the local authorities.

It is proposed herein that a pilot CBMS project be supported by MIMAP. CDRI is able to be a pioneer in taking this exercise, within the time frame of two or three
years. CDRI will involve PMATU staff to the extent possible as it is envisaged that the Government will eventually take over the project.

2.2. Objectives of the Pilot CBMS Project

- To select appropriate indicators for commune based poverty monitoring and analysis.
- To provide scientifically generated data to commune councils for their effective planning, monitoring and evaluation of development projects.
- To build capacity of the selected commune councils in survey methods and data processing, analysis and use.
- To promote the link between commune level planning and provincial/national planning processes in utilising CBMS data.
- To start up the link between PMATU and commune councils to prepare for an eventual nation-wide CBMS.
- To promote a concrete process of decentralisation which is highly committed by the Government and donors.

2.3. Methodology for a Pilot CBMS Project

CDRI will be the sole responsible entity to undertake the pilot CBMS and achieve the objectives set above. However, during the course of the work CDRI will promote partnership with PMATU, the National Institute of Statistics, the Provincial Statistical Office of the selected province and the selected commune councils. A final selection of indicators will be based on consultation with all these partners. Capacity building will be a priority task for the partners, especially the commune councils concerned.

CDRI will draw experiences of other countries implementing CBMS and extensively consult with the CBMS sub-network through both publications and discussions to ensure that proper methodology will be applied and success of the project achieved.

As in other CBMS projects, data will be mainly gathered from households. At the household level, enumerators will be required to interview a household head and in case of absence, the oldest adult person in the house will be interviewed. Information
from the local governments will be collected. Supplemental information will be
gathered from other sources such as administrative reports, and surveys done by other
agencies in the past, if any. Focus group discussions may be desirable for in-depth
understanding of certain issues for this baseline survey.

2.4. Coverage

It is proposed at this stage that the pilot CBMS project cover five communes in one
district of a province, preferably in an area where the decentralised Seila programme
operates. However, coverage will be further discussed with inputs from other related
CDRI programmes and projects following the Hanoi meeting in January 2003, which
will also provide more inputs to refinement of this proposal.

2.5. Indicators

As stated above, indicators to be used for the pilot project will be elaborated based on
consultation with all the stakeholders and partners. Below is a draft derived from the
Cambodian national indicators, which are also not yet finalised, and from those used
for other countries.

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<th>CBMS Indicators and Variables</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AREA OF CONCERN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Composition and Characteristics</td>
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<td>2. Basic Education and Literacy</td>
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| 3. Income and Livelihood | Sources of Income  
- Wages or salaries from employed household members  
- Income from livelihood activities and other sources  
- Income from household members out-migrating | Household Literacy (ability to read and write)  
Average household income,  
Income and Economic activities of household members;  
Number of household members with a job/business |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Nutrition | Nutritional status of children 0-6years old | Number of Children (0-6yrs) by height, weight, sex and age  
Caloric intake |
| 5. Housing and Shelter | Characteristics of housing unit of the household  
Household amenities | Households living in own or rented houses;  
Number of people living in room.  
Number of household type of construction materials used for roofs and walls of dwelling |
| 6. Water and Sanitation | Households with sanitary toilet facilities  
Households with access to safe water | Type of toilet facilities used  
Source of water supply;  
Distance to one within the community |
| 7. Health | Health indicators and access to health facilities | Common diseases within community  
Infant, child and maternal mortality  
Presence of health workers, hospitals, health posts etc.  
Distance to such facilities |
| 8. Social and Community | Social and Community status as perceived by household members | Availability of Electricity; Telephone,  
Postal facilities; credit facilities  
Type of transportation facilities |
| 9. Peace and Order | Crime Incidence  
Conflicts or armed | Presence of Police post  
Number of crime victims by type of |
<table>
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<th>encounters within community members</th>
<th>crime (rape, murder, robbery, abuse, physical injury)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of conflicts or armed encounters</td>
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2.6. Dissemination

National Level: Both government and non-governmental agencies can use the CBMS data for diagnostic study of the poverty situation in the selected communes. The information shall help design policy interventions and target the vulnerable groups including the poorest of the poor in the district.

Local Level: The data obtained shall help improve and enrich the preparation of the commune development plans that will also feed into the national development agenda for the country. The Community Poverty Monitoring Reports will be disseminated through workshops to inform commune council members in order for them to better monitor and evaluate the impacts of development policies and programmes undertaken at the national level and/or the commune level.

References:


MIMAP-Ghana, *Implementing a Community-Based Poverty Monitoring System in Ghana (2003-2006), A Project Proposal presented to MIMAP-CBMS.*