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Needs and uses of a Commune Database: the case of Kratie Province in Cambodia*

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The Community-Based Poverty Monitoring System (CBMS) was successfully pilot tested in Cambodia in 2003-2005 by the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) in close collaboration with the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the Seila programme. It provided valuable results, which satisfactorily describe the different facets of poverty in 6 communes of two different provinces. The pilot project has successfully promoted links between the communes, and between provincial and national level planning processes through the use of CBMS data.

Because of the success of the pilot project, a second phase of CBMS in Cambodia was approved and currently being implemented by the NIS, which took over from the CDRI. The NIS has received a mandate from the recently passed Statistical Law to expand its statistical activities down to the commune level. It proposed a new research programme on developing statistics for local development planning on local governance and decentralization, a five-year commitment strongly supported by the Cambodian Government and major donors. A CBMS will nicely complement such decentralization efforts.

Selection of sites

Under Phase I, three communes each in Ek Phnom district of Battambang province and Snuol district of Kratie province, were selected as sites. For the second Phase, the same sites were also selected with the addition of six communes in Stung district in Kampong Thom province.

This article focuses on the experience of Kratie province in implementing the CBMS.

Administrative structure

The Provincial Rural Development Committee (PRDC) plays an important role in budget allocation. It provides technical support to local authority via line departments, ensures that departments are fully supported, and sees to it that the Commune Administration uses its authority as stated in the national decentralization policy.

Decentralization at the commune level, the lowest level for local development, focuses on the formulation of the commune development plan, budget preparation, and contract implementation, among others. The Commune Council, an elected body with a 5-year mandate, is responsible in effecting good governance to meet the community needs in accordance with public interest.

To meet the needs in implementing the decentralization reform policy, a Commune Database (CDB) has been set up. From an initial set of 17 questions drawn up (and updated annually) in 2002 by the Ministry of Planning (MOP), there are now 341 questions being used in collecting data from all communes in the whole country under the coordination of the MOP and with the support of the PRDC. All village leaders collect data and send them to

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Inside

* Excerpt from a report prepared by the CMBS-Cambodia Team and from the presentation of the H.E. Kham Phoeun, Governor of Kratie Province, in the 6th PEP Network Meeting held in Lima, Peru on June 11-16, 2007.

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the commune level which then sends them to the Department of Planning for data entry. These are later consolidated by the Ministry of Planning for the whole country database. After data checking, the Ministry will send them back to the Department for analysis for the provincial, district, and commune profiles. At the commune level, data analysis and interpretation are conducted with the support of the Department of Planning.

Data usage

Data are the basic information being used by all institutions, including NGOs, for purposes of research and development. Their uses include the preparation of the Five-Year Provincial Development Plan and the Three-year Provincial Investment Plan. At the commune level, the same plans are also being prepared.

Before the CDB was set up, there were not enough local data for planning preparation. The NGOs' data were then the most important sources for any research and development usage and the data were generally representative of the whole country rather than of any specific commune.

After the establishment of the CDB, basic data for each of the communes were gathered and updated annually. Today, the CDB plays an important role in the National Database and serves as a major source of data for development planning.

CBMS vs. CDB

How does the CBMS compare with the CDB?

CBMS, for one, addresses all the data needs at the village and commune levels, with detailed information coming from households and individuals. Data are accurate and because they are collected by the villagers themselves, the data are considered as the property of the commune.

On the other hand, CDB data are mainly for general study/research. They are also publicly known and applied country- and commune-wide. The data, which are updated annually, are based on administrative reports. They also directly benefit the commune. However, the questions are not asked directly to the people and the information may be gathered through observations of the village leader. Moreover, ownership of the data does not belong to the commune but to the MOP.

Issues and challenges of the CDB and CBMS

For the CDB, the major challenge facing it is the still relatively low reliability of the data. In addition, commune-level capacity is very limited. Thus, most of the work is still supported by the government and civil society. Commune data collection capacity is quite inadequate and thus, data entry, analysis, and description are still done at the provincial level (Department of Planning). The perception of the communes is therefore that the data belong to the MOP rather than to them for their own use. Moreover, data collection is not done on time.

For the CBMS, on the other hand, its limitation is that its coverage is very small. In addition, there is very limited budget at the commune. The human resources are also still limited and new especially in data processing, analysis and report writing.

Profile

Kratie province is located in the northeastern part of Cambodia, about 340 kilometers (kms) from Phnom Penh along National Route 7. It has a total land area of 11,094 square kilometers (km²), with the highlands covered by red soil with grasses and forests, and ideal for agriculture. The major part of the province is within the Mekong Delta and is very fertile.

The province has a total population of 290,695, with the number of families totaling 57,187. Birth rate is 1.87 percent per year and population density is at 26 per km². There are seven ethnic groups. Administratively, the province has five districts, 46 communes and 2,502 villages.

The province has agro-industrial crops and mine resources like marble and gold. Its exports include agro-industrial crops, rubber, maize, peanut, sesame, cattle, sand, gravel and marble while its imports are metal steel, cement, and agricultural machinery.

Start of the CBMS in Kratie

In 2004, with support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada through the CDRI, the CBMS was pilot tested in three communes in Snoul district. These sites were again selected for the second phase of CBMS.

The system is focused on poverty monitoring within the commune and households are the sources of the data collected.

For communes without electricity, computerized processing can be done using a laptop powered by car battery as what was done in Kratie province.

The CBMS implementation was directly managed and supervised by the NIS in cooperation with the provincial, district and commune councils. Data are collected by the commune councils and villagers while data entry is done at the provincial planning and statistics office. The data, once analyzed and interpreted, are sent back to the communes for validation. CBMS reporting is done at three levels: commune, district and province. The CBMS-Cambodia team provides a training module for commune officials on how to read tables.

One key innovation of CBMS-Cambodia is that even in communes without electricity, they can do computerized processing by using a laptop powered by car battery.

Dissemination forum

On August 27, 2007, a dissemination workshop was conducted to share the results of the CBMS in Kratie Province. The governor, H.E. Kham Phoeun, was in attendance, together with commune officials from non-CBMS implementing areas who were also invited to encourage them to implement the CBMS in their respective localities.

Presented in this forum were the poverty profiles of the CBMS sites in the province. The CBMS results contained in a book were likewise handed to the Governor.

H.E Kham Phoeun declared that the CBMS data are at present the only accurate data for the Commune Database that they have at the commune level and they are the only official data recognized by commune councilors and other officials at all levels. From these data, they were able to target or prioritize areas that need development not only at the commune or village levels but also down to the household level.

The CBMS database is also the tool that the commune officials could use to be able to measure their development in a particular area against the Cambodia Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs).

During the workshop, the Governor also committed funds for the province- wide implementation of the CBMS in the next phase. He also encouraged other commune chiefs to implement the CBMS so that they can easily identify who and where the poor are.

Kratie Province's policy to support both CDB and CBMS

As a matter of policy, the Province of Kratie has agreed to support the setting up and maintenance of both the CDB and CBMS.

Specifically, it:

- Supports and monitors the Commune Council operation.
- Assures that line departments in the province provide technical support to the Commune Council.
- Supports and coordinates the application of the decentralization policy.
- Encourages development institutions and NGOs to support the commune in workshops and training programs, among others, to enhance local livelihood means.
- Supports and motivates the development of the CBMS province-wide and supports the conduct of fund mobilization to be able to implement this project.

Conclusion

The preparation of a reliable and valid CDB is a tool for and step toward formulating a good development plan to meet actual needs. The CDB has contributed much to local development. CBMS, meanwhile, has provided detailed information on local progress and poverty monitoring.

H.E. Kham Phoeun (second from right), governor of Kratie province, declared his full support for the CBMS in his province.

Hence, the support of the district authority to both the development and maintenance of the CDB and CBMS is very important to reach the development goal. Regular monitoring and evaluation on local development, data use and management on community participation under district and involved agencies are strong instruments in ensuring the success of the decentralization process.

Recommendations

To ensure success in reaching the commune's development objectives with complementary uses of CDB and CBMS, the following recommendations are being proposed by the provincial government of Kratie Province:

1. Strengthen and build the capacity of the Commune Council, civil society, CBOs, and community for purposes of doing better planning. In this regard, CBMS is contributing toward this end.
2. The Department of Planning, MOP has to play a more important role in the guidance and preparation of planning and data collection of the CDB and CBMS.
3. Seek for more support in terms of financial and technical matters for CDB and CBMS application from other agencies/ donors.

CBMS researchers and practitioners converge in Lima for the 6th PEP Network General Meeting

Researchers and practitioners of the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) from several countries in Asia and Africa gathered in Lima, Peru on June 11-16, 2007 to participate in the 6th Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) Network General Meeting.

Organized once a year to provide a venue for the presentation, discussion and evaluation of proposals and reports, the annual meeting also allows PEP researchers to work with invited resource persons. The meeting was organized by the PEP Network in partnership with Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE), Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Peru. A set of training workshops and two policy conferences preceded the meeting.

As part of the meeting, members of the CBMS Network discussed their ongoing activities in the area of community-based poverty monitoring systems. Meanwhile, policymakers from CBMS countries explained how the CBMS is addressing a long-felt need for a system that can provide reliable and credible information base at the local level for policymaking, program design and impact monitoring.

Bangladesh

Ranjan Kumar Guha, CBMS-Bangladesh Team Leader, provided an overview of the process as well as some findings and lessons learned in the implementation of the CBMS in Bangladesh which is known locally as Local-Level Poverty Monitoring System (LLPMS). He said that the Ward Information Book (WIB) prepared under the LLPMS is now with the Union Parishad and that functionaries of local governments now consult the WIB for identifying beneficiaries of their programs.

However, he said that the potential uses of the WIB need further promotion and for this reason, advocacy efforts are being continued for the formulation of the WIB in other Unions. He also noted that while the LLPMS database, developed through the Natural Resources Database (NRDB), is appreciated by the functionaries at the local level, there is, however, a lack of capacity to handle the database at said level. Thereupon, there is a need for further advocacy to have the initiative taken at the higher level, i.e., Upazila level (sub district level).

Benin

Dr. Marie Odile Attanasso, CBMS-Benin Team Leader, presented the results of the census on the living conditions of households in the District of Adogbe and 13th District of Cotonou in Benin. The results showed that majority of the households lack financial resources to provide for the needs of their families. Dr. Attanasso recommended that indicators of living conditions must be monitored through periodic censuses in order to make it possible for the local authorities to (i) better direct and target the actions which they must carry out in their localities, and (ii) easily note the improvements of the living conditions of the households and the effects—positive as well as negative—of their interventions.

Cambodia

Try Sothearith, CBMS-Cambodia Team Leader, gave an overview of the methodology of CBMS in Cambodia which was successfully pilot tested in the country in 2003-2005 by the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) in close collaboration with the National Institute of Statistics and the Seila programme. According to him, CBMS has provided valuable results which satisfactorily described the different facets of poverty in 6 communes of two different provinces. It also developed the capacity of local authorities to implement the CBMS in their localities.

Participants in the CBMS parallel sessions were all ears as they listen to the presentations outlining how the CBMS has helped improve governance in CBMS-implementing countries..

Kham Phoueng, Governor of the Province of Kratie, said that CBMS has provided valuable information on the situation of households, particularly on health and poverty. This, according to him, complements the Commune Database (CBD) which was created in response to the decentralization policy and is currently being implemented in all communes all over the country. He said that many agencies as well as NGOs have likewise expressed interest in CBMS-generated data and on how these can help them in formulating their development programs.

Ghana

Cynthia Tagoe of the University of Ghana discussed the processes involved in the CBMS approach in Ghana and compared the national Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the CBMS indicators for Dangme West District. She said that CBMS indicators can help assess progress in the MDGs at the local level provided that CBMS is done on a regular basis to afford the opportunity for comparison over time and in space.

Mr. Bruno Dery, Deputy Director of the National Development Planning Commission of Ghana, highlighted the following potential uses of CBMS in the country: (i) a window of opportunity to build the capacity of the district planning coordinating units (DPCUs) to monitor and evaluate the district medium-term development plans, (ii) source of data for updating existing poverty maps, (iii) effective programming and targeting of scarce district resources to communities, households and individuals, and (iv) guide in the formulation of district development plans.

Indonesia

Dr. Sudarno Sumarto of the SMERU Research Institute provided an overview of the CBMS implementation in Indonesia and noted that many anti-poverty programs are poorly coordinated and targeting is insufficient. He said that efforts to target beneficiaries and monitor social impacts of development projects, including MDGs, rely on national socio-economic surveys or village census (Podes) data. However, given the decentralized system in Indonesia, identifying beneficiaries and monitoring MDGs at the local level should involve local governments. Thus, a localized monitoring system and locally tailored indicators are needed. He said that CBMS can very well provide for these needs.

Secretary Domingo Panganiban (at the podium) of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) presents how the CBMS can be utilized to localize the MDGs at the community level in the Philippines.

Lao PDR

Sengmany Keolangsy, Director of the Social Division of the National Statistical Center of Lao PDR, discussed the CBMS design and methodology, including the survey instruments and training modules, developed by the National Statistics Centre of Lao PDR. He said that CBMS was implemented in 24 villages in the Provinces of Saravan and Toumlan. However, CBMS coverage will be expanded to 54 villages in both provinces as many organizations have already expressed interest in the data generated by the CBMS, including line ministries, department of planning, district and provincial governments, and the National Committee on Poverty Reduction.

Meanwhile, Phosy Keosiphandone, Deputy Director General of the Department of Planning and Investment of the Province of Saravan, discussed how the CBMS complements current government efforts to monitor welfare situations at the local level. One of these is the "Village Book" which aims to collect socio-economic information from grassroots level that consists of data on population, housing, agriculture, labor statistics, education, health and poverty. The village chief is responsible for filling this book and elevates this report to higher authorities.

According to Mr. Keosiphandone, many types of organizations in the local areas still collect data for their own purposes by using different methods and formats. These duplications waste resources and require more work for village chiefs. CBMS significantly reduces this burden on local functionaires by providing more appropriate data for many kinds of data-users and stakeholders.

Philippines

Dr. Celia Reyes, CBMS Network Leader and concurrent CBMS Philippines Project Director, provided an overview of the design, process and uses of CBMS in the Philippine context. She likewise highlighted the commitments made by national government agencies (NGAs) to support the scaling up and institutionalization of CBMS as well as the growing list of local government units all over the country which have adopted and used CBMS as part of their local development planning and monitoring processes.

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Researchers and practitioners take note of Dr. Vu Tuan Anh's suggestion (left picture) that there ought to be a closer partnership between researchers and governmental authorities as well as NGOs in the local areas in order to institutionalize the CBMS.

Implemented in the Philippines since the early 90s, Dr. Reyes acknowledged that it takes a long time for a monitoring system that involves many stakeholders to be institutionalized. She cited a number of ways on how this can be done which includes the following: (i) continuing advocacy efforts with national and local policymakers and program implementers to adopt CBMS; (ii) creation of a resource center for CBMS that can provide technical assistance to local government units which would like to adopt the system, and (iii) further capacity-building programs for LGUs to enable them to switch to new CBMS technologies and do further analysis of their data.

For his part, Secretary Domingo Panganiban of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) presented how the CBMS can be utilized in localizing the MDGs at the community level. He reiterated that the Philippine government is determined to find sufficient funding for the expansion of CBMS sites because CBMS is a sensible first step toward the attainment of the MDGs.

Meanwhile, Governor Joel Reyes of the Province of Palawan gave a first-hand account of how the provincial government has relied on CBMS-generated data as basis for planning and program impact assessment. Director Erlinda Capones of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), on the other hand, said that the present policy environment and framework in the Philippines remain supportive of CBMS promotion, adoption and advocacy at the highest level. Various policy issuances have in fact been issued by concerned national government agencies to move the CBMS agenda forward.

Senegal

Dr. Momar Sylla of the Directorate of Forecast and Statistics in Dakar, Senegal presented the results of the CBMS survey in the rural community of Nettéboulou which can be found in the region of Tambacounda. According to him, the CBMS-generated data allowed for an analysis of the amount of time that community members allocate among the different activities that they undertake. The time use surveys were developed mainly to determine differences, even disparities, in the use of time of individuals according to gender, age, locality and the availability of economic and social infrastructures. Dr. Sylla said that the statistics produced by CBMS in their country can be used to build indicators of poverty, cohesion or social exclusion and well-being.

On the other hand, Mr. Diop El Hadji Malick, mayor of Tivaoune, which is one of the three CBMS sites in Senegal, underscored the difficulties encountered by local planners who have to make sense of data whose sources are diverse and varied. He said that the task of ensuring that these data were consistent was a very delicate one, owing to conceptual and methodological differences. He expressed optimism that the CBMS will finally be able to provide a reliable and credible information base at the local level for policymaking

Tanzania

Rangya Muro, CBMS-Tanzania Team Leader, gave an overview of the ongoing CBMS work in two pilot sites in the Dodoma Municipal Council which is expected to be completed this year. He said that after the establishment of the CBMS process for the pilot areas, it will be replicated incrementally in other wards and villages and subsequently in the whole Municipality of Dodoma. It is also expected that with the support of the Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania (ALAT), the CBMS process will be promoted at the national level.

Vietnam

Dr. Vu Tuan Anh, CBMS-Vietnam Team Leader, also discussed the features, methodologies and uses of CBMS in Vietnam. According to him, the CBMS research and piloting in Vietnam has showed that CBMS implementation should be guided by the following considerations: (i) local ownership of CBMS, (ii) the set of indicators should reflect the multi-dimensionality of poverty and should meet the immediate demands of local planners for community- and household-level data, (iii) qualitative and quantitative methods should be used in tandem with data

collection, (iv) survey tools should be simple and easy to understand and use and should take into account the knowledge levels of the local people as well as the availability of data processing equipment and software in the localities in order to facilitate the transfer of methods, tools and survey results to local residents and authorities, and finally, (v), there ought to be a closer partnership between researchers and governmental authorities as well as NGOs in the local areas in order to institutionalize the CBMS.

Vu Thi Than, President of the Women's Union in Ninh Binh (WUNB) Province, discussed how her organization has used the CBMS to monitor the status of women's advancement in her province. Apart from the CBMS core indicators, the CBMS in the province also collects information on women's situation, including: (i) education and vocational qualification level of women, (ii) employment and income of women, (iii) participation of women in social activities, and (iv) family relations.

She said that data generated by the CBMS showed gender disparities in access to education, membership in community organizations, and participation in cultural activities, among others.

Kenya

Ms. Sussy Nchogu of African Institute for Health and Development (AIHD), in her presentation, mentioned that although the government of Kenya conducts regular welfare monitoring surveys, the macro-level analysis camouflages wide regional variations. Even at the provincial level, there are differences in poverty that are based on district, location and sub-location level specific conditions. These differences can be explained in terms of the general multidimensional nature of poverty. In Tana River district, factors such as drought, changes in climatic conditions, changing livelihoods and ethnic conflicts have contributed to high poverty levels. It is against this background that the current study seeks to develop a local poverty monitoring system (LPMS) in cooperation with the residents of Tana River district.

The study will be conducted in three sub-locations representing the three divisions of Bura, Galole and Garsen in Tana River District, Kenya. This will be a collaborative study between the AIHD, the government of Kenya and the communities.

Three phases of the study will be carried out: (i) the first phase will be a qualitative study that will utilize seasonal calendars, focus group discussions and key informant interviews to identify local specific variables to facilitate the formulation/adaptation of a CBMS questionnaire; and (ii) conduct of the household census; and (iii) implementation of the revised LPMS design in one of the divisions of Tana River district. It is expected that the study will contribute to the government and its development partners' poverty monitoring and mitigation efforts not only in Tana River district but also in other areas with similar characteristics.

New proposals: Sri Lanka and Peru

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka and Peru presented their proposals for the implementation of CBMS in their respective countries.

The CBMS in Sri Lanka will provide a unique opportunity to analyze the welfare conditions of the people in the communities that were affected by the Tsunami that hit Asia in 2004. It will also be able to directly monitor the impact of the respective rehabilitation efforts by governmental, non-governmental and private organizations, besides focusing on developments in other locations to be selected for the project.

Moreover, the project seeks to launch an advocacy campaign in Sri Lanka on the importance and relevance of CBMS for collecting and analyzing data on poverty at the sub-national level, particularly in relation to diverse contexts such as the national program of poverty alleviation, and empowerment of local councils and community-based organizations under the Ministries of Local Government and Rural Livelihood Development.

On the other hand, implementing a CBMS in Peru may be a solution to the problems of lack of accurate, regular and timely data to allow for a more efficient estimation of the impact and efficiency of poverty alleviation policies and actions. The implementation of a CBMS will improve local government's capacity for data collection, providing a warning tool and improving the timing for policy reactions. It seeks to provide communities with easy and simple poverty indicators as a tool to assess poverty status and to promote welfare at the community level.

There is an urgent need to establish this mechanism in Peru to measure and monitor poverty indicators over time. This need is more urgent given the scarcity in financial resources and the variety and magnitude of the needs.

To view the full papers presented during the CBMS Network Conference, please visit the conference section of PEP website (http://www.pep-net.org/NEW-PEP/index.html).

News Updates-Philippines

CBMS meeting in 2008

Community-based monitoring system (CBMS) practitioners and other stakeholders in the Philippines will gather together on January 30-February 1, 2008 for the CBMS conference. The 3-day conference will convene national and local planners, policymakers and program implementers to share recent experiences, strategies and lessons learned from their CBMS work, and to present findings on the use of the CBMS for localizing the millennium development goals (MDGs), program targeting and impact monitoring at the national and local levels.

The conference is being organized by the PEP-CBMS Network Coordinating Team of the Angelo King Institute for Economic and Business Studies in collaboration with CBMS partners from the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the League of Municipalities of the Philippines (LMP).

Updates on the said meeting will be continuously posted at the CBMS section of the PEP website (www.pep-net.org).

Training on StatSim and NRDB

To be held back-to-back with the CBMS-Philippines' annual gathering is a 2-day training on the CBMS Statistics Simulator and Natural Resource Database (CBMS-NRDB). These softwares are two of three (the other software is the CBMS Encoding System) being utilized to process data and produce poverty maps, respectively. The computerized processing softwares are being distributed for free to CBMS-implementing LGUs.

The training course is primarily for participants who have undergone trainings on the CBMS Computerized Data Processing System (CBMS Modules 2 and 3). The objective is to refresh and broaden their knowledge and skills in generating basic computerized outputs and statistics and recognize the important role of these softwares in data generation, analysis and dissemination of statistical information.

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