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## **CICP Policy Brief No. 1**

# **The issues of Cambodian illegal migration to Neighboring Countries**

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*Phnom Penh, December 2009*

## **I- Introduction:**

Cambodia is the small country, poor country and developing country which population 14.7 million (World Bank 2009). Cambodia has an area of 181,035 square kilometers (69,898 sq mi) and lies entirely within the tropics. It borders Thailand to the north and west, Laos to the northeast, and Vietnam to the east and southeast. It has a 443-kilometer (275 mi) coastline along the Gulf of Thailand (Wikipedia website).

Look at the past, we had been suffering social and political instability interrupted the country in the prospects of economic and social development. Cambodia had successful conclusion of the October 1991 Paris Peace Accord which ended civil war, as well as the May 1993 elections, which brought about a newly elected democratic government for the first time in three long decades. On April 30, 1999 Cambodia was admitted to become full member in ASEAN and became the 148th member of the World Trade Organization on 13 October 2004.

Moreover Cambodia also the member of Greater Mekong Sub- region (GMS) that linking the Mekong long river bank the member Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam and Yunnan province of the People's Republic of China, under the assistance of ADB, the six countries entered into a program of sub-regional economic cooperation, designed to enhance economic relation, well-integrated prosperous Mekong sub-region free from poverty (Chap Sotharith, 2007).

The Southeast Asian region has hosted- cross border movement of people, most of them irregular migrant workers, in particularly Greater Mekong Sub-region (Labor Migration-GMS). There were 965,750 undocumented migrations within and out side out GMS (ASIA Migration Center 2002).

International migration is estimated to involve some 175 million migrations worldwide (Elizabeth Kelly, 2002). Currently, about half of the world's 185-192 millions international migrant are women, women have become increasingly vital and visible in all forms of migration in many region and across the global in this "age of migration" (Shirlena Huang 2006).

## **II- Problem:**

Currently the problem of illegal Cambodian migration to Thailand and Vietnam arose from Poverty, Landless, disaster, uneven economic development, relaxation of border controls, economic inequality between the rural and urban area (RAO, 2007). As a result, the migrants is faced into many forms such exploitation on human rights and human dignity while women and girls, who are forced into sexual exploitation are also exposed to contracting HIV/AIDS. Sometimes those people are also at times forced into illicit organizational crimes such as robbery, banditry, and smuggling. These circumstances are the result of economic underdevelopment, landlessness, unemployment, gender inequality, and broken family backgrounds.

As mentioned, poverty has been a crucial factor for Cambodians to seek employment abroad- namely Thailand and Vietnam.

This paper are sought to examine what are the cause of migration? what are the particular needs of the migrant people? and what can we do to help the migrant people not to do migrant?

## **III- The cause of origin country:**

Poverty is an important factor which has increased to the issues of migration– particularly the poor and the unemployed due to their willingness to find jobs for living (Yasunubu, 2004). The Chen Chen Lee report in 2007 showed that the interviewees cited poverty is one of the main drivers behind their decisions to migrate overseas for work. According to Vijghen John L. and Anoushka Jeronimous (2007) the low level of education, family debt, agricultural failure, lack of land and off-season work were pushing people to the big cities or to other countries as the men go into construction, women into services and prostitution.

In addition to poverty, the lack of education and unemployment there are also significant social and cultural variables lead people to do migrant, for instance, cultural norms that perpetuate a lack of respect for women increase the likelihood of them being exploited through migration (Cambodia Women Crisis Center global report, 2005).

Poverty, broken families, landlessness, disasters, uneven economic development, relaxation of border controls, economic inequality between the rural and urban area are

also significant contributing factors to migration (RAO, 2007). According to the International Migration Organization, based in Phnom Penh, in 2004 the pull factor connected to the push factor whereby people became disillusioned with their community due to extreme poverty. The pull factor is the expectation that destination countries are places better than their impoverished communities and where migrants can earn more money for remittances back home (Phiev Khay, 2005).

#### **IV. Cause of destination country**

It is seen that the root causes are push and pull factors through which people who wish to seek job for living later on doing migration.

##### **Vietnam:**

Vietnam currently enjoys a booming economic growth with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capital of \$US 1,055 while Cambodian GDP per capital only of \$US 690 (Economics Today 2008, p.56). The other pull factor is the belief among the poor people that Vietnamese are kind and generous if being asked for money. Most of the poor people who live on the Cambodia-Vietnam border often migrate to Vietnam illegally because they find it easy to across the border, while Vietnamese like to donate some money to beggars. Other expectations include the wartime friendly relations between Cambodia and Vietnam. There are arguments which purported that Vietnam does not want to provide protection to migrants as it is perhaps meant to convince Cambodia that Vietnamese like Cambodians and that both countries used to have close friendship during wartime. Moreover, most of the Vietnamese irregular migrants are living in the Cambodia territory.

##### **Thailand:**

There are many reasons why these people had been willing to go to Thailand. Thailand was thought to be a good place where a lot of money could be earned. The brokers had used the attraction of high incomes to trick these migrant people. There were also some victims who desired to go abroad and who took pride to work in Thailand.

In general, the poor people from many Cambodian provinces migrated to Thailand because they expected to earn a lot of money to remit home and sometimes they were attracted by the stories of former migrants who told them that Thailand was the place to earn a lot of money.

As mentioned the socio-economic imbalances among the countries is among the main causes of regular and irregular migration and it is closely related to migration activities. In terms of GDP per capita, in 2008 Cambodia's was \$US 690 while Thailand's was \$US 4,134. Thailand has an economic growth higher than Cambodia's (Economics Today, 2008 p.56). The strong economic growth is a result the large number of labourers brought in to assist in development, in particular, unskilled labour from neighboring countries. According to the Asian Migration Center (2002), after the Asian Economic Crisis in 1997, changes in Thailand's industrial and economic policies contributed to rapid growth of Thailand's low-wage economic sectors. These industries needed large numbers of unskilled, cheap, and hard working labourers (Archavanitkut, 1998), to do jobs that were disorderly, dirty and dangerous ('3D's) – i.e. - jobs shunned by the Thai people. Moreover, the prospering sex tourism constituted a part of the country's economic development policies (Piper, 2005, p. 204).

In particularly Thailand and Philippines is the connections have been made feminizing to traffic for prosperous sex tourism as part of both countries in economic development policy (Nicola Piper, 2005). The Southeast Asian region has hosted- cross border movements of people, most of them irregular migrant workers, in particularly Great Mekong Sub-region (Labor Migration-GMS). According to 1996-2004 Number of Border Migrations Registered by Nationally (Ministry of Labor) there was a total of 1,269,074 migrant from 181,614 Cambodian, 181,579 Laotian and Myanmar.

#### **V- Analysis and conclusion:**

The issues of unemployment, landlessness, low levels of education and agricultural failure have contributed to poverty. Due to poverty, people were willing to find jobs overseas to support themselves and their families since they perceived Thailand and Vietnam to be good places for them to earn money.

These push and pull factors have thus led people to do migration. In order to help these people not do migrant, we have to do in articulating their roles and efforts to address these issues and formulate policies to provide for the basic needs of the population at large.

Income generation in particular is a crucial way to help these migrant. Job training and employment is stated as one of the criteria that can help migrant people to find a job with better income.

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