



CICP Commentaries

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SOCIAL SAFETY NETS IN CAMBODIA

Ha Virayuth,

International Intern,

Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

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After attending the national forum on “**Food Security and Nutrition under the theme of Social Safety Nets in Cambodia (SSN)**” which was organized by the Council for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), in Phnom Penh on 6-7 July 2009, and supported by World Bank (WB), I found out that social safety nets program is very essential for the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) to follow up and implement appropriate projects to reduce human risks and vulnerabilities either caused by natural disaster or poverty.

“Safety nets are a subset of social protection policy. State-provided social protection typically includes safety nets, social insurance, a legal and policy framework and target social services. Safety nets usually consist of interventions that are designed for the most poor and vulnerable poor, and are non-contributory (by contrast to social insurance schemes, which rely on prior contributions from the recipient). Safety net interventions include workfare (food and cash for work), unconditional and conditional transfers (in cash or kind), and under some definitions, subsidies designed to ensure the poor to have access to health, education, housing or public utilities such as water or electricity”.

High general economic growth over the fifteen last years has contributed to the reduction of poverty level, officially, from 47% in 1994 to 35% in 2004 and 30% in 2007 in Cambodia. But, a main part of the population still remains vulnerable to natural risks (seasonal or catastrophic) and economic shocks (intrinsic or external).

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The provision of SSN is important to mitigate social effects of the current global crisis, negatively impacting on employment (In the garment sector, about 63.000 jobs were lost between September 2008 and March 2009) and income opportunities especially to chronic and transitory poor and food insecure people, and then on the Government poverty reduction policy, especially on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

The governmental Rectangular Strategy since 2004 and the updated National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2009-2013 in preparation seem to confirm the commitment of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to promote and to consolidate an equal and sustainable oriented development.

“The experience in social safety net is not new to Cambodia, but the term and understanding might be conceptually differed. Cambodia has been implemented many major donors supported projects and programs, [...] but Cambodia still does not have an effective and affordable social safety net system in place. Institutionally, [there are] many ministries and institutions involved in the development and the implementation of some kind of social safety nets program and projects in the country, from emergency to recovery, rehabilitation and to development. But [they are] not able to develop yet an integrated system nor a sustainable program to respond to crisis as it occurs. They are fragmented, un-coordinated and unsustainable”.

For developing a more systematic and effective SSN at the national level, the RGC had set up an Inter-Ministerial Technical Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition (TWG-FSN) under the coordination of the CARD with the support of the WB and in collaboration with many development partners, specifically the World Food Programme (WFP). At the end of May 2009, the TWG-FSN had realized a “draft concept note”, which was presented and debated at this July National Forum.

According to the Prime Minister final speech, a SSN policy options core paper will be finalized by September 2009 and a national integrated SSN strategy by December 2009. In the context of the first anniversary of Preah Vihear temple's World Heritage listing, he encourages the Ministry of Rural Development to transform the province of Preah Vihear, from a conflict border zone to a region of development, by promoting the installation of the people and the cultivation of new land.

The Ministry of Planning (MoP) plays an important role through his Identification of Poor Households Program (ID Poor), with the German technical cooperation of GTZ. The control of data is indeed strategic to target the different vulnerable groups [faced of one or of several social gaps simultaneously: income poverty, asset poverty (e.g. landlessness), unemployment, underemployment, disability, old age, sickness, special circumstances (e.g. widowhood, or orphanhood)], and to provide efficiently the right type of SSN.

The MoP should work closely with the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), for a better understanding and a statistical consistency at the national scale. But the success of the implementation of SSN needs a perfect knowledge of local situations complexity, which requires effective implementation of the decentralization and de-concentration policy issued by the RGC.

The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICIP) was among actors from the civil society to attend this national event. Having contributed significantly to development research in Cambodiaⁱ and as the only one Cambodian think tank affiliated with the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), it may participate in feeding the intellectual debate, notably by promoting a regional and comparative approach, and by proposing a platform for

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roundtable discussion between Cambodian and ASEAN researchers, public and civil society leaders.

ⁱ KAO Kim Hourn and CHAP Sotharith (Ed.), *Sustainable Development, Poverty and Good Gouvernance in Cambodia*, CICIP, 2002, 385 p.

KAO Kim Hourn and SAMRANG Kamsan (Ed.), *Legislative Review and Development in Cambodia in the last Ten Years: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects*, CICIP, 2004, 401 p.