

Country Study Summary
Kingdom of Cambodia

Country context

After achieving peace and political stability in 1998, Cambodia's annual gross domestic product (GDP) grew from 9.1 per cent on average from 1998 to 2008 and hit double-digits in 2004-2006. Despite high economic growth in the last decade, Cambodia is registered as a poor country for which the per capita gross national product (GNP) is approximately USD 760, or USD 2,400 in terms of purchasing power parity (World Bank, 2011). The majority of people, however, live in rural areas and have a poorer standard of living. The per capita GDP in agriculture was only USD 280 compared to USD 855 and USD 644 in the industry and service sectors.¹ According to the 2008 population census, Cambodia's youth comprised 33 % of the total population.

Map of Cambodia



Source: Map No. 3860 Rev. 4. UNITED NATIONS, January 2004

<http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/cambodia.pdf>

¹ These statistics are from the World Bank Data (World Development Indicator) and Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), as calculated by Likanan Luch (see Luch, 2012a, ‘unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kyoto, Japan).

Site selection

The research team adopted an ethnographic-style approach to explore young people's everyday experiences and how they learned knowledge and skills relevant to agriculture in two selected communities in Cambodia: Popis Village in Siem Reap Province and Ou Touch Village in Kampot Province. These villages were selected for the common pattern of diverse livelihood strategies employed by inhabitants, and the socio-economic impacts that could change the attitude or behavior of youth in the future, as well as geographic distinctions of flatland versus coastal region.

'Popis Village' (Sangkat Krabey Riel, Siem Reap Town) is located in the southern part of Cambodia, 3 kilometers from Siem Reap Town, where a number of hotels, restaurants, and markets are concentrated, with access to the Great Lake. Agricultural activities range from growing rice paddy and vegetables to raising pigs and domestic chickens. Rattan basket-weaving is one of the main livelihoods, in addition to other off-farm jobs.

In Kampot Province, 'Ou Touch Village,' located in Sangkat Andoung Khmer, on the slope of Mount Bokor in the northwestern part of Cambodia and about 2.5 kilometers from Kampot Town, was selected due to its diversity in livelihoods. The villagers do a myriad of things: rice paddy production, fruit orchards (e.g. durian and mango), weaving bamboo containers, family-based animal raising, and collecting forest by-products.

Overview of main findings of the country study

The literature review and field research generates insights into the evolving nature of Cambodian societies, how rural populations' lives have changed and perceptions towards agriculture and learning of related knowledge and skills.

Modes of transferring knowledge and skills, specifically those applied to agriculture, have been stable over generations amid some intervention by NGOs, private institutions and public institutions. In the villages studied, it was evident that senior farmers interviewed continued transferring agricultural knowledge and skills acquired from previous generations and training programmes to new contexts and the younger generation through everyday practices. However rapid changes, many associated with internal migration, are taking place as young women and men from rural communities seek to improve their social and economic situation.

Perceptions of youth about learning agricultural knowledge and skills varied greatly according to age, marital status, and gender. The married youth in the study were more interested in developing agricultural knowledge and skills because they own land, and conceivably had more responsibilities to their families, to their children, and were therefore more committed to this type of learning. In contrast to the married group, unmarried youth were interested in entertainment, such as Thai and Korean drama and music, and drinking and working in a place where they could socialise with each other.

Learning by observation through everyday activities was a major part of skill transfer, even within formal learning programmes. The research team found that both senior

farmers and youth learned by observing what others were doing, not by going to ask directly. Learning from parents and seniors was shaped by hierarchical relationships.

Formal education seems to have become a means for youth to leave agriculture rather than encouraging an interest and positioning within this sector. Young students who performed well in school viewed education as a way out of agriculture, especially as a possible career in accountancy or working as a tour guide in Phnom Penh and other tourist sites. This was partly explained by the view that young people have about working in agriculture as an inferior career.

Different kinds of learning are associated with different kinds of providers, such as private companies, NGOs, and government institutions (e.g. TVET). Among them, farmers who attended pig-raising programmes provided by the private company Mong Rithy Group (MRG) were more motivated as their learning and practices were associated with profit, and risk was borne by the two parties. The reason that training programmes provided by the private sector appeared more successful was related partly to the issue of self-selection.

Regarding NGO training programmes geared towards poor farmers, the successfulness and sustainability of these projects depended on how flexible their approach was in admitting participants. ADDA (Agricultural Development Denmark Asia) and AgriSud, for instance, were more flexible compared to UCC (United Cambodian Community). They target the poor and aim at reducing poverty, but also allow middle-class farmers who own land and have capital to attend their classes. These programmes were also open to admitting women and youth who were willing to learn. TVET programmes that targeted poor or very poor people only found difficulties in successfully providing knowledge and skills that these people could apply to their livelihoods.

Recommendations

Overall, from the study in the two villages it appears that ways need to be explored to bring together the strength of the private sector in providing high quality and profitable knowledge and skill development programmes (e.g. in contract farming) with the NGO and government's commitment to intervening and enhancing the livelihoods of the poorest in the community. Policy and programmes in this area urgently need to respond to the differing perceptions and aspirations of young people, according to their age, gender, economic condition and marital status, in order to counter the common perception that working in agriculture and farming is an occupation of last resort.

Three key issues were identified as possibilities for informing future policy direction:

1. Increase the use of media to influence the perception of agriculture in the minds of young people and help them to access knowledge and skill development initiatives. The research team's findings indicated that in these communities the media has not played a significant role in helping the youth acquire knowledge and skills. There must be close coordination between

agents from either public or private institutions to make agricultural programmes more attractive, relevant, instructive, and also linked to potential profits generated from agricultural development.

2. The research team also found that married youth tended to approach learning new agricultural knowledge and skills more seriously than their unmarried counterparts and could benefit from being targeted more specifically. In order for such programs to be effective, land distribution as well as incentives and subsidies should be prioritized. Married couples cannot generate profits from a small piece of farmland. Yet the larger the farmland the more labour and capital required, so subsidies are needed.
3. It is also important to create linkages between agriculture and other sectors in which farmers are trained in various knowledge and skills, including soft skills (e.g. marketing, etc.), to reap further benefits. These programmes could be enhanced and broadened to develop a wider range of benefits for people to enjoy from working in agriculture and farming, and to attract more youth in the future.

Country Research Team Members

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