



PRO-POOR POLICY OPTIONS: AGRICULTURAL LAND USE IN CAMBODIA

INTRODUCTION

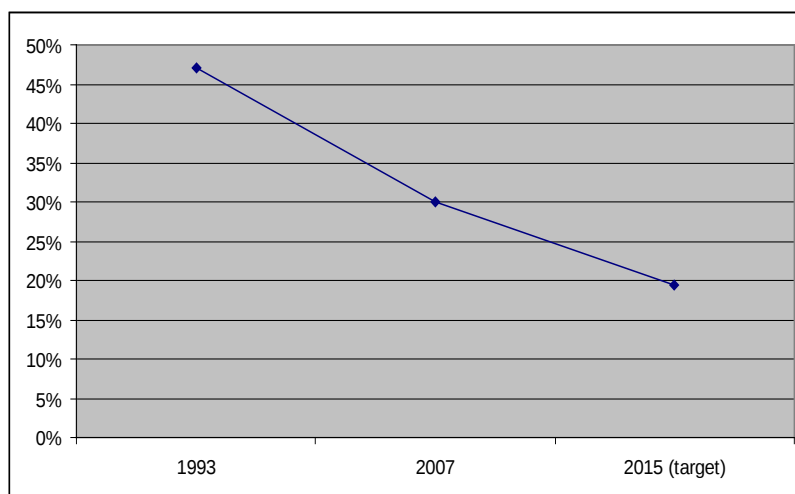
This policy brief suggests that creating an enabling policy environment as well as prioritizing land assessment and strategic directions for land management are important steps for more productive use of agricultural land resources and improved livelihoods of the poor in Cambodia.

Policy analysis findings and recommendations from a study conducted under the auspices of a “Pro-poor Policy Formulation, Dialogue and Implementation at the Country Level” project inform this brief¹. Between 2007 and 2010, the Food and Agriculture Organization–Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO-RAP), with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), implemented this project in partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations in eight Asian countries. The project goal was to enhance institutional capacity to conduct policy analysis, formulate and implement pro-poor agricultural and rural development policies. In total, twenty-three policy studies examined issues identified at national level dialogues in all project countries².

CONTEXT

Between 1993 and 2007, poverty rates in Cambodia declined from 47 percent to 30 percent (World Bank, 2009). Cambodia’s recent economic growth, however, has not been accompanied by dramatic decreases in poverty. Ninety percent of Cambodia’s poor continue to live and work in rural areas and most depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (Ministry of Planning, 2007 & RCG, 2005).

Figure 1. Poverty incidence in Cambodia



Source: World Bank, 2009

Secure access to land resources impacts the rural poor’s socioeconomic situation (Ballard, 2008). As the majority of Cambodian families are small land holders, with less 0.5 hectares of land, the national government has committed itself to strengthen land management, distribution and utilization

¹ Dr Seng Vang authored the study on which this brief was based. Study methods included desk review of relevant documents, as well as qualitative field study consulting farmers, commune council chief/members, district agriculture office, and directors of provincial department of agriculture (PDA) in three different provinces. The original study can be accessed by contacting: INFORMATION.

² Cambodia’s other selected policy issues include Bolstering Farmers’ Organizations and Strengthening Agricultural Service Delivery at the District Level.

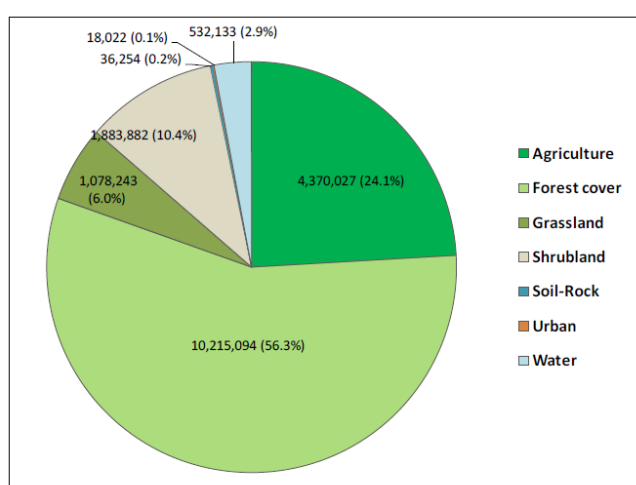
systems, with supportive policy and legal decisions and documents³. However, land concentration and landlessness are rising which adversely impacts the equity and efficiency of land use.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Implementation of Cambodia's 2001 Land Law and related sub-decrees on economic and social land concessions⁴ continues to face a number of challenges, including:

1. **Unproductive use and underutilization of cropland:** Almost one-quarter of land resources- or 4.3 million hectares- are used for agriculture, second only to forest cover (Figure 2). However, more than 1.3 million hectares of agricultural land remains unused- due, in part to speculative land holding, as well as productive issues like low access to improved technology, credit and poor extension support.
2. **Agricultural cropland conversion to non-agricultural uses:** Lack of land development coordination, a dearth of suitability assessment to facilitate optimal land conversion, and lack of land use and management policy threaten a loss in productive croplands and decline in agricultural production potential. Two dynamics are currently underway- on the one hand, demand for agricultural land is expanding in the uplands, while demand for land use by other sectors is growing elsewhere.

Figure 2. Major uses of land resources in Cambodia



Source: JICA, 2002.

These constraints have policy and technical elements, related to a lack of updated information and knowledge on land resources and poor policy direction regarding land use and management. Ownership conflicts and land degradation are only some of the perils illustrating the need for stronger coordination by related institutions to implement and enforce existing legislation requires.

POLICY OPTIONS

Revising existing policies and creating new ones, along with prioritizing land use coordination and assessment, are some of the strategies suggested to improve use of land resources in Cambodia in a manner which increases agricultural production and accrues benefits to the poor. These recommendations correspond to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' mandate to sustainably, efficiently and transparently manage the use of agricultural land resources. All efforts should correspond to the broader framework of the the Ministry of Land

³ In addition to the 2001 Land Law and related sub-decrees on economic land concessions and social land concessions, the state land management and policy framework, the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2006-2010, Rectangular Strategy- Phase II, and several other documents frame Cambodia's land policy.

⁴ Economic Land Concessions (ELC) and Social Land Concessions (SLC) are intended to promote agricultural production on unused land and guide the development of state lands in an orderly fashion. SLCs have a 5-year term, after which recipients can apply for land ownership titles for their residential construction or subsistence use. ELCs have a 99-year term and apply to land sizes of less than 10,000 ha. ELCs cannot be transferred into ownership.

Management, Urban planning and Construction's role in land allocation and administration, and land-use planning.

1. Create enabling policy environment

- **Revise existing policies and strengthen their enforcement:** The existing Agricultural Land Law (2001) should be altered to include a clause for protection, conservation and use of agricultural lands for sustainable production- a critical provision given the current speed of land transformation to other land uses. In addition, Sub decree No. 6/April 6, 1985 regarding agricultural land use management and administration must be reviewed and updated so that it corresponds to current social and economic realities.
- **Develop new policies to enhance the productive use of agricultural land:** Decree and sub-decree level policy instruments for protection and conservation of agricultural lands are required, so there is adequate weight to support policy implementation and enforcement. Mechanisms to strengthen taxation of unused agricultural land are suggested as a means to discourage speculation and encourage production, especially in areas with improved irrigation infrastructure. Creating policy guidelines on sustainable land management is also recommended as a means to prevent land degradation and stabilize land areas.

2. Prioritize land use assessment and strategic direction

Knowledge about land resource suitability, use and management are fundamental for strategic and effective use of resources. Such assessment creates a critical link between data and its application for agro-ecological zoning and related land use planning.

- **Establish a coordinating body for agricultural land use and management:** Create a National Agricultural Soil Committee (NASC) to facilitate and harmonize land resource assessment and to give strategic direction for policy and technical work. Such a committee can consist of soil scientists and experts from policy, research and education institutions, under the leadership of the Department of Agricultural Land Management (DALAM).
- **Utilize frameworks for land assessment and land resource management:** Land resources inventory, evaluation and planning tools from the FAO International Framework for Land Resources Assessment (1976) are recommended. The framework also assesses land suitability according to the requirements for different types of land use. In particular land resource evaluation is necessary in the Northern, North-western, North-eastern, Eastern and coastal regions of the country. This suitability analysis can, in the first place, build a platform for mobilizing political will for sustainable use of resources. Moreover, nation-wide assessment of field crop suitability can help Cambodia ensure that valuable crop lands with most potential are protected, and that unsuited lands are converted to other uses as necessary.
- **Strengthen human resource and research capacity:** Existing soil scientist and researcher capacity should be improved through further specializing knowledge, such that their contributions may be most useful to agricultural development. In addition, degree and non-degree training courses on soil science can build capacity of the next generation of scientists. Research capacity for assessment, land management, land policy, and information management shall also be prioritized.
- **Institute national land use census:** Considering the dearth of up-to-date information, and lack of institutionalized system for collecting and disseminating data for land-use planning, an authorized and reliable source should conduct the census every five years.

This process will provide comprehensive and updated information concerning agricultural land use trends and productivity, which are essential for informed decision-making. Concerned departments of MAFF will undertake routine work on land resource monitoring.

CONCLUSION

Cambodia has made significant strides on poverty reduction but rural farmers remain disproportionately poor compared to the general population. Most land-holders have 0.5 hectares or less, and challenges to effective agricultural land use and management remain-including conversion of agricultural cropland to non-agricultural use and underutilization of crop land.

As such, policy approaches as well as systems for assessment and strategic direction are crucial steps improving land use. In particular, it is recommended to:

- Revise existing policies and strengthen their implementation and enforcement
- Develop new policies to enhance the productive use of agricultural land
- Establish a coordinating body for agricultural land use and management
- Utilize frameworks for land assessment and land resource management
- Strengthen human resource and research capacity
- Institute national land use census.

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