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**Ministry of Planning**

## **The National Identification of Poor Households Programme —a Key Tool to Support Equitable Development**

### ***Background***

In Cambodia until recently, poverty-oriented development planning and service provision has not focused enough attention on targeting assistance to poor people. Where household targeting has been implemented, each institution has developed and applied its own procedures and criteria for identifying beneficiaries. This means that results are not comparable with each other, and are generally also not shared with other organisations and institutions.

At a National Forum organised by the Ministry of Planning (MOP) in February 2005, there was broad consensus on the necessity to develop standardised national procedures for identification of poor households, in order to reduce the overall administrative costs of selecting target groups and to allow more efficient distribution of scarce development resources to those who need them most. A national Working Group on Identification of Poor Households, chaired by the MOP and with technical support from the German Government through German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), was established in June 2005 as a sub-working group of the Technical Working Group on Planning & Poverty Reduction. Working Group members include representatives of key line ministries, donors, and international and non-governmental organisations. A smaller Core Group worked in 2005 and 2006 in a consultative process to develop initial procedures and a standard questionnaire for conducting poor household identification in rural areas (urban areas were not yet considered a priority).

In order to secure mid-term assistance to introduce a standardised tool, the MOP approached the German Government for additional financial and technical support. This was granted and the German Government in early 2006 commissioned GTZ Cambodia to assist the MOP through the programme “Support to Identification of Poor Households Programme” (IDPoor). This support began in April 2006, and the current phase will be completed at the end of 2009.

### ***Objectives***

The overall objective of the MOP Identification of Poor Households Programme is to officially mandate Standardised Procedures for Identification of Poor Households and to achieve their increasing implementation throughout Cambodia. A key component of this will be to achieve the integration of identification of poor households as a routine task of Commune Councils and their support structures (e.g. the Provincial Local Administration Unit (PLAU), Provincial and District Facilitation Teams (PFTs and DFTs)).

Another key objective of the Programme is to promote widespread use of the collected data by government institutions, non-governmental organisations, and sector programmes and projects, as well as Commune Councils, as a tool for targeting services and assistance to poor households.

## **What is Identification of Poor Households? Why do we need it?**

Identification of poor households, according to the procedures used by the Ministry of Planning and partner organisations, seeks to determine which households are poor and the poverty level of these individual households in rural villages. These households and their members are identified by name as well as location. The purpose of identification of individual households is to directly target services and development assistance to the poorest households in a village in order to help lift them out of poverty and to protect them from the impact of shocks (e.g. serious illness, crop failure) which may deepen their poverty.

The Identification of Poor Households data can also be used for calculating comparative poverty levels of villages, based on the number of households in each poverty category as a percentage of the total number of households in each village. Service providers can use this data for targeting poorer communes or villages, and the poor households within those areas.

In Cambodia there are many potential uses for data on poor households, such as the provision of free or discounted medical services (e.g. through Health Equity Funds or Social Health Insurance), scholarships or other financial support to poor school pupils and students, rural development and agriculture-related services, allocation of social concession land to the poor, and many other uses. There is also potential for developing conditional or unconditional cash transfer programmes.

## **Where is Identification of Poor Households being conducted?**

The MOP, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, carried out identification of poor households in a total of 2109 villages in five provinces during 2007 and 2008. In 2009, it is planned to cover approximately 3001 villages in seven provinces (partially or fully). Please see the table below for more details.

<b>Province</b>	<b>Operational Districts</b>	<b>Number of villages (rural)</b>
<b>2007</b>		
Kratie	Kratie, Chhlong	249 villages - whole province
Siem Reap	Kralanh, Sotnikum	464 villages
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>713 villages</b>
<b>2008</b>		
Oddor Meanchey	Samraong	231 villages - whole province
Siem Reap	Angkor Chum, Siem Reap	422 villages (to complete rest of province)
Kompong Cham	Chomkar Leu-Steung Trong, Cheung Prey-Batheay, Prey Chhor-Kong Meas	492 villages
Prey Veng	Preah Sdach, Peareang	251 villages
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1396 villages</b>
<b>2009</b>		
Svay Rieng	Chi Phu, Romeas Hek, Svay Rieng	684 villages - whole province
Kompong Thom	Baray-Santuk, Kompong Thom, Stong	737 villages - whole province
Kompot	Angkor Chey, Chhouk, Kompong Trach, Kompot	482 villages - whole province
Banteay Meanchey	Mongul Borei	219 villages
Kompong Cham	Memut, Ponhea Krek-Dambae	405 villages
Pursat	Sampouv Meas	349 villages
Steung Treng	Steung Treng	125 villages - whole province
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3001 villages</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL 2007-2009</b>		<b>5110 villages</b>

In addition to the 11 provinces partially or fully covered by the MOP, Health Equity Fund Operators and their partners have been using the Procedures for Identification of Poor Households in a number of other areas. In 2007 and 2008, URC implemented procedures for identification of poor

households based on the national Procedures in 5 ODs in the 3 provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang and Pursat provinces. In the same period, the NGO Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC) implemented the Procedures in 5 ODs in Sihanoukville, Kompong Chhnang and Kompong Cham. In total, URC and RHAC conducted identification in 1322 villages in 2007-2008. URC plans to cover Preah Vihear, Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, and Koh Kong (Srae Ambil and Smach Meanchey ODs) in late 2008-early 2009.

All areas covered by the Ministry of Planning, as well as partner organisations, are areas in which Health Equity Funds (HEFs) are operating. Many of these areas have substantial numbers of other types of service providers as well. The MOP considered it important to select areas in which there are sufficient services available to justify the effort and cost of implementation and to maximise the likelihood that the benefits of conducting identification of poor households will be recognised and valued by local communities and authorities.

### **How is Identification of Poor Households conducted?**

The identification process in each village is carried out by a Village Representative Group (VRG), with the support and supervision of a Planning and Budgeting Committee Representative Group (PBCRG), the Commune Council, and representatives from the District Facilitation Team (DFT). The whole process in a province is coordinated by the Provincial Department of Planning, in cooperation with the Provincial Local Administration Unit. The Ministry of Planning provides training at the provincial level, monitors implementation and gives ongoing technical support.

Implementation of the process depends on a cascade training approach. National-level Ministry staff train Provincial Facilitation Team (PFT) and District Facilitation Team (DFT) members as trainers and provide support to enable them to train Commune Councils, Planning and Budgeting Committee Representative Groups, Village Representative Groups and other stakeholders to implement the process for identification of poor households.

The process for identification of poor households consists of seven steps. These are described in detail in the document *Procedures for Identification of Poor Households in Cambodia* (available on webpage: [www.mop.gov.kh/ProgramsProjects/IDPoor/tabid/154/Default.aspx](http://www.mop.gov.kh/ProgramsProjects/IDPoor/tabid/154/Default.aspx)). These steps are summarised in the box below.

- Step 1:
- Hold meeting to select Planning and Budgeting Committee Representative Group (PBCRG)
  - Conduct training of PBCRG members
  - Conduct training of commune-level trainers
- Step 2:
- Conduct First Village Meeting to select members of Village Representative Group (VRG)
  - Commune-level trainers train VRGs, conduct interview practice
- Step 3:
- Compile List of Households in the Village for Identification of Poor Households
  - Conduct household interviews
  - Count scores, prepare Draft Household Poverty Categorisation List
  - Discuss special household circumstances in VRG and modify classifications of some households as required
  - Hold Commune Review Meeting to check Draft Household Poverty Categorisation List
  - Prepare First Draft List of Poor Households
- Step 4:
- Display First Draft List of Poor Household in public place in village
  - Conduct Village Consultation Meeting
  - Receive villager complaints
  - Prepare the Final Draft List of Poor Households, submit to Commune Council

<p>Step 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commune Council reviews Final Draft Lists of Poor Households for each village, resolves any outstanding complaints</li><li>• Commune Council approves Final List of Poor Households</li><li>• Commune Council sends List of Households in the Village, Final List of Poor Households, Questionnaires and Approval Form to Provincial Department of Planning</li><li>• Commune Council Chairman stamps and signs Equity Cards, and VRGs distribute them to poor households (after data entry and photography in Steps 6 and 7)</li></ul> <p>Step 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provincial Department of Planning enters List of Households in the Village, Final List of Poor Households, Questionnaires, household photographs, and Photography Tracking Sheets for each village into Provincial Database of Poor Households</li></ul> <p>Step 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Photography Teams photograph Poor Households</li><li>• Provincial Department of Planning enters photos into Provincial Database</li><li>• Equity Cards are printed, and Provincial Department of Planning distributes them to Commune Councils</li></ul>
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The above process involves substantial villager participation and consultation: they elect the Village Representative Group, some villagers become members of the Village Representative Group, they are respondents in interviews, they take part in a Village Consultation Meeting to discuss the First Draft List of Poor Households, and they can make suggestions or objections relating to the composition of the first and final draft List of Poor Households.

The key output of the process at the commune and village level is a Final List of Poor Households in each village.

In addition, depending on requirements, all households identified as poor can be issued with Equity Cards (ECs), which include the following information: name of village / commune / district / province; name, sex and year of birth of household head; poverty level; household photo. These cards 1) help to raise the awareness of poor households that they can seek out services and assistance and assert their eligibility to receive them, and 2) help service providers to quickly verify the identity of poor household members in order to provide services to them.

Lists of Poor Households are **updated every two years** in order to maintain their accuracy.

## **Questionnaire**

Currently, a standard questionnaire is used in all areas, regardless of whether the process is carried out by the Ministry of Planning or by partner organisations, in order to optimise comparability of the results of identification among households and among geographical regions (village, commune, district, province). The questionnaire consists of a set of commonsense proxy indicators for poverty, agreed by the national Working Group on Identification of Poor Households, which are mainly based on easily observable and verifiable assets, but also include a number of other issues such as dependency ratio, school attendance, crises or shocks, and special circumstances that induce vulnerability. Interviews are conducted by Village Representative Group members themselves, whose local knowledge makes it easier to verify whether respondents are accurately reporting their situation, as well as to assess the special circumstances of households.

The questionnaire contains a number of scoring and non-scoring questions. The **scoring questions** are the primary basis for assigning households to poverty categories or for excluding them from the List of Poor Households. The questions have different score weights, based on their perceived contribution to or reflection of poverty. These questions are summarised below.

- Housing – roof, wall, floor area, general condition
- Productive land area in hectares (land-based villages) / fishing equipment (floating villages) / other sources of income such as waged labour, salary or business.

- Borrow rice or buy rice on credit (indicates capacity to meet own food needs)
- Animal raising (including fish raising for sale)
- Ratio of dependent household members to productive members
- Electronic and other assets
- Means of transportation (includes boats for floating villages)

There are also a number of **non-scoring questions** (relating to issues that are difficult to assign a simple score to), the responses to which the Village Representative Group discusses and considers in terms of their impact on a household. The VRG also takes into account any information, suggestions or complaints made by villagers during the public consultation process. This information may be used by the VRG to modify the poverty category of a household. The non-scoring questions cover the following issues:

- Unexpected problems or crises which caused household to lose income, produce less food, sell assets, or borrow money in last 12 months
- Number of children aged 6-11 years who missed school for at least 1 month in last 12 months
- Special household situations (disabled, sick, elderly, single female-headed households with many young children, no adults, etc)
- Circumstances that can improve the living standard of the household (e.g. remittances from children or relatives, sale of land)

For more detail about the questionnaire, please see the detailed questionnaire on the webpage: [www.mop.gov.kh/ProgramsProjects/IDPoor/tabid/154/Default.aspx](http://www.mop.gov.kh/ProgramsProjects/IDPoor/tabid/154/Default.aspx).

## **Poverty Categories**

There are two poverty categories to which poor households can be assigned: Poor Level 1 (very poor) or Poor Level 2 (poor). These poverty categories are assigned based on the questionnaire scores (according to specific cut-off points) and a consideration of the special circumstances of households. The proportions of households falling into the two poverty categories have been calibrated to approximately reflect the 2004 Cambodian Socioeconomic Survey results (with some allowance for variation over time). Poor Level 1 roughly corresponds to those households under the CSES Food Poverty Line, while Poor Level 2 approximately equates to the households between the CSES Food Poverty Line and the Poverty Line. On average, a total of about one-third of households are classified as Poor 1 or 2, and included in the List of Poor Households.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

A key emphasis of the IDPoor Programme has been to use identification procedures that maximise implementation by government structures and village representatives, in order to build local capacity and enhance sustainability. However, this strong emphasis on capacity building requires a significant amount of training, which is relatively costly.

The identification procedures also involve a high degree of participation by and consultation with villagers themselves. This increases the transparency of the process and the accuracy of the results, and therefore the acceptability to local people and to data users. However, it also makes the process more complex and time-consuming.

A positive likely side-effect of this process is the strengthening of democratic values in communities, such as raising local leaders' level of concern about the welfare of their constituents and their degree of accountability to them; active public involvement in community affairs; and enhancing the level of consultation and the transparency of decision-making.

While the use of the standardised questionnaire has the important role of making results more comparable from one location to another, it may be the case that not all questions will be fully applicable in all areas of the country and among all ethnic groups and livelihood types, which may

make it necessary to make modifications to the questionnaire as experience is gained from implementation.

The use of the questionnaire by Village Representative Group members introduces a challenging level of complexity, but with training and guidance, VRGs have proven capable of using it. Due to strong community pressures to include households in the List of Poor Households, the questionnaire is important as a means of promoting objectivity and fairness in determining the poverty level of households.

### ***Database of Poor Households***

A Database of Poor Households has been developed to support the implementation of identification of poor households, and to generate data for dissemination to service providers. This database was developed in Cambodia and is bilingual (Khmer and English). The database is designed so that data entry can be conducted on a distributed basis in different locations, and then consolidated at the national level. In areas covered by the MOP, the Provincial Departments of Planning do the data entry. The MOP also makes the database freely available to partner organisations to enable them to enter data in their own coverage areas. The intention is to consolidate data from areas covered by the MOP as well as by partner organisations, and make this data available to all interested service providers, in order to maximise the use of the data.

### ***What kind of data is available?***

The Identification of Poor Households Programme can provide different types of data for use by government institutions, non-governmental organisations, and sector programmes and projects to target services and development assistance to the poor more effectively. These include:

- The original handwritten List of Poor Households on paper, a copy of which remains in the village and at commune level, which is available as soon as Communes have approved the List (before data entry is carried out).
- Database-generated reports, including:
  - List of Poor Households, which includes the name and sex of household head, spouse name, poverty level.
  - Profile of Household Members, with name, sex, age, year of birth, relationship to head of household for each household member; poverty level.
  - Poverty Rate Comparison Report: total Poor Level 1 %, total Poor Level 2 %, and total % of all poor households in each village in the coverage area. This report can also analyse these poverty rates in terms of the number of people.
  - Summary Statistics for coverage area: median % of Poor Level 1 and Poor Level 2 households, median % total poor households in villages covered; median % of persons in Poor Level 1 and Poor Level 2 households, median % total poor persons in villages covered; percentage of male and female-headed households in each poverty category.
  - List of Names and Photos of Poor Household Members: thumbnail household photos; poverty level; names, sex and year of birth of all household members, which can be printed out in a handy format for reference. This is particularly useful for service providers at the local level who do not have easy access to computers.
- Full Database of Poor Households, including photos of poor households and details of all household members, with the ability to generate reports based on user selection of parameters.

### ***For which areas is data available?***

In addition to the data from all areas covered by MOP, the MOP Identification of Poor Households Programme will also endeavour to consolidate data collected by partner organisations during 2008 in Kompong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Kompong Cham provinces (selected ODs), and will disseminate this data when it becomes available. It is also expected that in 2009, data will be available for the provinces of Preah Vihear, Rattanakiri, Mondulakiri, and Koh Kong provinces.

## **Looking ahead**

Currently, the MOP has limited resources and can therefore only conduct identification of poor households in selected areas of the country. Therefore, the MOP is cooperating with partner organisations in order to cover as many areas as possible, with a focus on areas in which Health Equity Funds are operating. The MOP provides some training and guidance for these organisations.

The MOP has the medium-term aim of being able to conduct identification of poor households in rural areas nationwide, and to carry out regular updates. However, in order to do this, the MOP will require additional resources. In 2009, MOP and its development partners plan to establish a **Multi-Donor Trust Fund**. Within the framework of this Trust Fund, the government and various development partners will be able to contribute to the overall budget of the Identification of Poor Households Programme. This will help to ensure the ongoing viability of the programme and the sharing of data with all governmental and non-governmental service providers, in order to provide the maximum benefit to poor households.

Another key objective of the MOP is to work closely with the Ministry of Interior to achieve the **integration of identification of poor households as a routine task of Commune Councils** and their support structures. Institutionalisation of this programme within these structures will promote its long-term sustainability, and the widespread use of data on poor households by commune councils as a tool for commune planning. The MOP will seek to identify funding sources for support of identification activities at the commune and village level, preferably through the Commune Fund.

Another key task is to promote widespread use of the collected data by government institutions, non-governmental organisations, and sector programmes and projects, as well as Commune Councils, as a tool for targeting services and assistance to poor households. The MOP Identification of Poor Households Programme, in addition to conducting district- and provincial-level workshops to disseminate poor households data, is conducting national-level promotion to raise awareness about the programme and dissemination of data.

## **Contact details**

If you are interested in finding out more about the MOP Identification of Poor Households Programme, please contact:

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