

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CAMBODIA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2011



Ministry of Environment  
Cambodia



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# Climate Change and Human Development in Cambodia

## 1. Introduction

Climate change will intensify existing vulnerabilities as well bring new areas of vulnerability and risk. The challenge of building resilient rural livelihoods requires both addressing these existing vulnerabilities, while also forging a development pathway that is viable in the face of a changing climate.

The predictions of climate change – in shifting agricultural and natural resource productivity, increased frequency and intensity of hazards and disasters, and changing patterns of disease and health problems – are those most closely associated with people becoming poor and destitute in Cambodia.

Poverty is still very much a rural issue for Cambodia. Most of the population is rural, and by all estimates, the vast majority of poor people are in rural areas (up to 90 percent, according to WB2007). The challenge of poverty reduction in the face of climate change is firmly grounded in addressing rural livelihoods and rural futures.

Understanding the dynamics of current poverty and vulnerability – why and in what ways people are poor and vulnerable to becoming poor – is therefore central to understanding the human implications of climate change, and to identifying who is likely to be vulnerable. This is critical for thinking through appropriate actions.



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*Over the last decade, important improvements have occurred in Cambodia's health indicators, but as with other indicators, the national improvements are starting from a low baseline; the quality of health services may require further strengthening.*

## 2. Understanding human development

The concept of human development arose with the recognition that national economic growth alone does not guarantee progress in human welfare.

Human development is defined in the global Human Development Report (2010) as:

*“the expansion of people’s freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet. People are both the beneficiaries and the drivers of human development as individuals and in groups.”*  
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Human development considers people as the real wealth of a nation. It is about ensuring freedom to live long, healthy and creative lives with human dignity. Experience from across the world has demonstrated that substantial development achievements are possible even without high growth. The human development approach considers people not just as the beneficiaries, but also as the key drivers of development, both as individuals and in groups.

The key elements of the human development approach are:

- **Sustainability:** Development gains may be fragile and vulnerable to reversal. Special efforts are needed to ensure that human development endures; that it is sustainable.

- **Equity:** Human development is also about addressing structural disparities; it must be equitable.
- **Empowerment and participation:** People, as drivers of development, should be empowered to exercise individual choice and to participate in, shape and benefit from processes at the household, community and national levels.
- **Efficiency:** Economic efficiency involves looking at whether people and institutions can be made better off by reallocating resources or goods, without making others worse off over time or across locations.

Human development focuses both on people’s assets – physical, natural, financial, human, social and political – and the ways in which people can access and convert assets into tangible benefits. The focus on assets draws attention to diverse types of assets: land, labour, livestock, natural resources (forests and fisheries), agricultural inputs and credit, health services, safe drinking water and sanitation, food and nutrition, knowledge and information, and skills. But it is also important to consider entitlements and rights – the ways in which people are able (or not) to convert these assets into benefits, and how these are shaped by institutions and processes such as the influence of markets, community structures, local development planning institutions, how decisions are made, laws and policies, and the accountability of State processes.

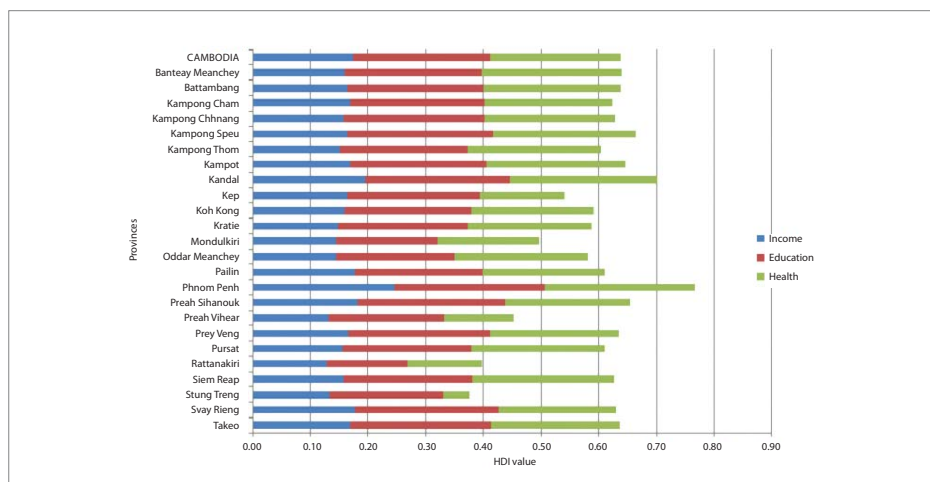
### 3. Cambodia's performance in human development

Over the last decade, Cambodia has made significant progress in addressing many of the critical aspects of poverty.

During this time of economic growth, income poverty also has decreased substantially. However, a third of the population still lives below the national poverty line, and the average rural poverty rate is 35 percent, much higher than the Phnom Penh rate of 1 percent and the 'other urban' rate of 22 percent (MoP 2010).

There is much debate about which poverty line should be applied in Cambodia. However, it is clear that a great majority of Cambodians still survive on low incomes – and that they are poor or close to being poor. With the kinds of shocks and crises predicted with climate change, a large proportion of the population is potentially at risk.

#### Cambodia Human Development Index 2010



Source: Computed by the HDI analysis team (NCDD) 2010

### 4. Outstanding human development challenges

There are still outstanding challenges that become all the more critical in preparing for climate change and building resilient rural livelihoods.

#### Uneven performance across the country

Development performance varies from province to province, and even among districts of the same province, in terms of the pace and areas of improvement. The performance of some districts demonstrates that there is a long way to go in meeting several key MDG targets.

#### Inequality

Cambodia faces a long-term issue of inequality, given that the period of economic growth and reduced poverty rates corresponds with a period of increased inequality, both between and within provinces. This issue of inequality is

a key concern with regard to climate change. Inequality indicates the level of people's entitlements, or their ability to transfer assets into positive outcomes. Planned climate change adaptation strategies, as with other planned interventions, are likely to favour certain people over others, exacerbating existing discrepancies in wealth, voice and power.

#### **Access to and control over productive resources**

Access to productive resources – land, water, forests or fisheries – is a critical component of rural livelihood security (Markussen 2008), ensuring people's agricultural production is economically viable, and giving them the security to make long-term investments.

Evidence across Cambodia suggests that access to these productive natural resources is seriously constrained. Indeed, the history of such access in post-conflict Cambodia has been fraught with tension and remains highly contentious. There exists widespread concern that access to these resources is determined by wealth, position and power, and that the most productive resources have been degraded, privatised and enclosed to the disadvantage of most rural people (CARD 2010).

Secure access to land is fundamental for agriculture. Massive social upheavals during the Khmer Rouge regime and decades of armed conflict have severely weakened traditional customs regulating land use, and modern institutions for handling land disputes remain weak (Markussen 2008). This issue has become critical in Cambodia, where problems of tenure insecurity and land conflict are widespread, with the situation described as 'anarchic' (NSDP 2010). As a result, land conflict is a persistent feature in rural Cambodia (MoP/UNDP 2007).

#### **Welfare: Health, education and nutrition**

Health, food security and education are key determinants of human development and well-being, yet it is also in these areas that Cambodia has historically faced many constraints.

Health is a major factor in people becoming poor. In Cambodia, people's resilience to health-related shocks is limited. If the intensity and frequency of these shocks were to increase, it would bring additional pressures that could become unmanageable (CARD 2010).

Even so, Cambodia has made significant progress in reducing the prevalence of major diseases, and has been internationally recognised for its efforts in response to HIV/AIDS (MoP 2010) while making steady progress in reducing fatality rates from both malaria and dengue.

Over the last decade important improvements have occurred in Cambodia's health indicators, but as with other indicators, these national improvements are starting from a low baseline and the quality of health services may require further strengthening.

Food- and water-borne diseases remain critical factors in the prevalence of illness. There are many reasons for this (MoH 2010). Despite improvements, the percentage of rural people who have access to safe water and sanitation is still very limited. Villagers often have only a single water source for drinking (including ponds, streams or rivers), which can be easily contaminated. Even if access to toilets exists, education regarding their appropriate use is often lacking. Water and sanitation programmes may not reach very remote parts of the country, and infrastructure may not be accessed or maintained.



Despite achieving a surplus in rice production, many people in many areas of the country face food insecurity. Food poverty has fallen only from 24 percent to 18 percent (MoP 2010).

More schools and their increased physical accessibility means that overall school enrolment has improved. In addition, improvements have been found in the highest grade that students have achieved, even among poorer households (WB 2007).

Critically, the quality of education remains a serious issue. Qualifications of teachers in rural areas limit the effectiveness of education provision, with fewer than a quarter of teachers having completed upper secondary education (Naron 2009). The relevance of education in terms of building a skilled workforce and of people's ability to participate as active citizens also remains questionable.

### Natural disasters

Poverty is a key determinant of people's vulnerability to natural disasters and their ability to recover. But natural disasters also cause people to become poor or, in some cases, destitute.

Disasters affect a significant proportion of all Cambodians, irrespective of wealth. However, the poorer the household is, the more significant the implications are. Despite a general reduction in the percentage of people affected by disasters, the rate of improvement is much lower for poor and middle-income groups. Dealing with disasters thus remains a problem that is intimately linked with poverty.

### Vulnerable people

Analysis of human development in Cambodia



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Where communities have been given viable natural resources to manage, evidence suggests that important economic benefits can be created.

demonstrates that people are poor in different ways, highlighting the importance of targeting actions to fit with people's particular needs and circumstances. For Cambodia, it is especially important to consider the different needs and circumstances of children, women, the elderly, and indigenous peoples.

### Children

Climate change remains an issue for the future, and as such, of future generations who will bear the costs of actions for which they have no responsibility. Responding to climate change is thus very much about how we prepare a world for our children and future generations.

The story of children and climate change is all the more important given the relatively young population of Cambodia and the many challenges that it faces under current circumstances. More than 65 percent of the people are younger than age 30, with 41 percent under 18 and more than 10 percent younger than 5 (NIS 2008).

Estimates suggest that a large number of children are living in poverty, with figures from 2004 indicating a number of about 1.7 million. Many factors influence child poverty, including household size, ethnicity and health dimensions. Nutrition levels for children in Cambodia stand out as a key area of concern.

### Gender

Poverty in Cambodia has a clear gender dimension. Women, and particularly female-headed households, tend to be poorer, with less social capital and less ability to access public services and to influence local decision-making. This includes access to resources, even within community-based initiatives (MoWA 2008).

Cambodia is on track to eliminate gender disparities in agriculture and industry. MoP (2010) shows 75 percent of women's wage labour derives from agriculture while the percentage from industry remains very low. "Economic opportunities for women are still largely constrained, with most credit, training, extension and support programmes not sufficiently tailored to their needs." (MoP 2010)

While the levels of more violent physical abuse have dropped by more than 50 percent, about 10 percent of the population still finds extreme forms of violence acceptable under certain circumstances (MoP 2010). Most victims of violence still do not seek help and, if they do, most often seek help from relatives, friends or commune or village authorities, not from the police, courts or professionals (MoP 2010).

## 5. Priority areas of action

### Social protection and Disaster Risk Reduction

Applying the principle of 'no regrets', based on what is already known about human development in Cambodia, draws attention to key inter-related factors in people being poor and vulnerable to becoming poor – particularly as related to health and to the impacts of disasters, floods and droughts.

Priority actions include ensuring universal access to health care and enhancing the quality of health service delivery, as well as in improving disease monitoring and surveillance; establishing social safety nets; and improving Disaster Risk Reduction. These climate change priorities fit well with current development priorities and figure prominently in national development strategies and action plans. However, there is greater urgency in

addressing these challenges. By strengthening these critical areas of vulnerability and poverty, the likely impacts of climate change can be reduced. At the same time, the human capital of the country can be strengthened and directed toward the kinds of actions needed to make positive longer term development changes.

Measures to strengthen social protection and Disaster Risk Reduction can support people to overcome such shocks and crises and enable them to contribute to long-term development, as well as to build long-term solutions to climate change.

#### Securing assets, entitlements and rights

While climate change threatens the future of agriculture and rural livelihoods, it is clear that much of the wealth and prosperity of the people of Cambodia will continue to depend on agriculture and natural resources. These sectors constitute the backbone of the national economy and will continue to provide opportunities to improve human well-being

while also driving further national prosperity. Increasingly, this prosperity will depend on strengthening linkages between human development, environmental protection and sustainability, and social equity.

It is essential that rights of access to key productive resources – most importantly, land – are secured to allow for households and communities to make the long-term commitments to resource management that will create tangible livelihood benefits while securing the sustainability of these resources. But this also requires a dramatic shift in the way that natural resources and development planning and action are conceived and implemented.

Underpinning actions to both address current vulnerabilities and forge a viable long-term development pathway are the requirements of improving environmental governance – to strengthen access to information, access to participation in decision-making, and to ensure rights of redress and remedy.



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There are clear gender dimensions to poverty and vulnerability in Cambodia. Women tend to have lower education levels, less access to services, less access to assets and information, and a high level of responsibility within the household.