



CDRI
Cambodia Development Resource Institute

30
YEAR

ANNIVERSARY

REPORT

MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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AS CDRI CELEBRATES ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, CAMBODIA'S DEVELOPMENT IS ALSO AT A CROSSROAD IN AN UNPREDICTABLE AND POST-COVID-19 CONTEXT. THE WORK OF CDRI IS CRUCIAL IN INFORMING AND FORMULATING A NEW STRATEGY FOR POST-COVID-19 DEVELOPMENT.”

- Dr Netra Eng, Executive Director

On its 30th anniversary, the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) is pleased to celebrate what has been a transformational story for both the institute and Cambodia and its deepening relations at the regional and global level.

At the time of its inception, CDRI represented visionary leadership from the Cambodian government in establishing an independent research institute, mandated to produce policy and primary research, build future research generation, and promote evidence-based policy and decision-making processes within the state and society. Our five-year Strategic Plan 2021-2025 commits to CDRI's strategic positioning as Cambodia's leading independent research institute, sustaining the quality and scope of its development policy research, influencing, and capacity building.

CDRI's research produces a primary and original body of work from its five research centres in agriculture and rural development, economics and trade, ed-

ucation and innovation, governance and inclusive society and natural resources and environment. This unique body of work has been widely recognised by policymakers, leaders, and scholars locally, regionally, and globally. Through three decades of research, CDRI has developed a reputation for rigorous and objective scholarship. Because of this, its data is widely used by other researchers within Cambodia and internationally and by government and non-government institutions. This is indicative of CDRI's continuing success and relevance.

CDRI primary research has also been significant in policy terms. Since the 1990s, its research has informed the Cambodian government and international observers with local knowledge and insights through collaborative partnerships and policy dialogues. As CDRI celebrates its 30th anniversary, Cambodia's development is also at a crossroad in an unpredictable and post-Covid-19 context. The work of CDRI is

crucial in informing and formulating a new strategy for post-Covid-19 development.

It is also worth highlighting that one of CDRI's most important achievements has been the emergence of multi-disciplinary social scientists and many passionate alumni, who remain attached to CDRI because of its rigorous trainings and committed research culture. I myself was one of the fresh graduates who benefited from capacity building and opportunities and moved up the research structure from a junior to a senior researcher and recently director of research and then executive director. Our alumni hold major leadership positions across the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and they provide trust and a distinct relationship between CDRI and key actors and institutions in Cambodia and the region. This network of alumni is probably the most significant legacy of the last 30 years which I hope to maintain, and continue working together for the betterment of Cambodia. ■

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TIMELINE

1997

Committed to fostering stability in the face of political turmoil, CDRI inaugurated the Cambodia Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCCR) as a beacon of hope dedicated to promoting reconciliation and laying the foundations for a culture of peace in Cambodia.

2000

Ten years since CDRI's arrival on the scene, the institute's early work as a training institution and commitment to excellence solidified its reputation as a leading think tank on the cutting edge of research.

1990-1994

Established in the spring of 1990, CDRI emerged to prepare the next generation of policy makers and stakeholders to lead the nation by building human capacity with workshops, seminars, and training sessions.

1999

As Cambodia was welcomed into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the policy-driven research that continues to define CDRI's work in the region was established.

2007

CDRI launched the Cambodia Outlook Conference, a symposium endorsed by Prime Minister Hun Sen that brings together key stakeholders to discuss areas vital for Cambodia's development and examine the nation's role within the Greater Mekong Subregion.

2020

Marking three decades of excellence in capacity development and policy research, CDRI's 30th was a pivotal year for Mekong-Lancang cooperation and saw the launch of the Biennial Conference of the Comparative Education Society of Cambodia as well as the second Public Private Partnership (PPP) forum.

2019

As Covid-19 swept across the globe, CDRI's rapid response included a three-year project on the pandemic's impacts on inclusive development and democratic governance in the Mekong region. PM Hun Sen also showed his continued support for CDRI at the 13th Outlook Conference.

2010

CDRI celebrated 20 years with the third annual Cambodia Outlook Conference, as well as holding the Development Research Forum and Annual Symposium and Asialink Conversations Cambodia which brought together academics, policy makers and other stakeholders from ASEAN and Australia.

LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



HE Dr Chanto Chea

Honorary Chair
Governor of the National Bank of
Cambodia



Ms Eva Mysliwicz

Founder
Former Executive Director



HE Dr Kalyan Mey

Chair
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National Economic Council
(SNEC)



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Secretary of State, Ministry of
Commerce



Dr Seet Ai Mee

Member
Former Minister of Education of
SG AML Sci-Ed Consultants Pte Ltd
Singapore



Mr Roland Rajah

Member
Lead Economist and Director of
International Economics Program,
Lowy Institute, Australia



Mr Zhang Bao

Member
Chief Correspondent of Cambodia
Bureau, Southeast Asia News,
Economic Daily



Oknha Piseth Sok

Member
Chief Executive Officer and
Co-Founder of G Gear
Company Limited



Mr Magnus Saemundsson

Member
Education Expert, Ministry of
Education, Youth and Sport,
Cambodia



Mr Suzuki Hiroshi

Member
CEO and Economist, Business
Research Institute for Cambodia (BRIC)



Dr Netra Eng

Member
Executive Director



Mrs San Sophany

Member
Staff Representative

AGRICULTURE

CENTRE FOR POLICY RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Situated in the heart of the Mekong River basin, Cambodia's fertile soil and seasonal rains have supported an agricultural society that goes back centuries. Today, verdant rice fields, sprawling fruit plantations and freshwater fisheries continue to provide livelihoods for millions of Cambodians and hold promise for the future of the nation.

Charting some of the strongest and most consistent economic growth in the region, Cambodia owes its progress over the past thirty years to a host of factors. As the Paris Peace Agreements signalled an end to the conflicts of previous decades, foreign aid poured into the country and Cambodia quickly became an attractive destination for the garment industry, tourism and, in more recent years, construction development. However, throughout these rapid changes, agriculture remained the foundation upon which Cambodian society and economic growth were built.

"Our rural population is still large and we have a lot of good agricultural land, around Tonle Sap lake, the Mekong Delta and in the mountains as well," explained Sokcheng Sim, director of the Centre for Policy Research in Agriculture and Rural Development (CPARD). "Even though agriculture doesn't generate the same money as factories and other sectors, it is still important because people rely on these natural resources."

Focused on improving the livelihoods of Cambodian farmers, CPARD research takes aim at shortcomings in agricultural production.

The 2018-2020 study, On-farm Food

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- Sokcheng Sim, Director of CPARD



Safety in Horticulture in Cambodia: The Case of Vegetable Farming examined reasons behind the country's reliance on imported produce and recommended strategies to increase supply and promote demand for local vegetables. In particular, the use of pesticides was scrutinised, as compliance with internationally recognised Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) is considered a key strategy for improving the competitiveness of Cambodian agri-products.

The study filled a gap in existing research and provided important insights on ways to influence farmer perceptions and use of pesticides. It also suggested there is space for authorities to help disseminate knowledge on best pesticide practices in rural areas. Given Cambodia's history as an agrarian society, bolstering local production is a significant goal for stakeholders across the industry.

"Much of the food that we eat is imported from Vietnam and Thailand," said Sim. "With the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficulties of cross-border travel, we have become very aware that we need to improve agriculture, at least to reach some degree of self-sufficiency."

When speaking of agriculture in Cambodia, any conversation would be remiss without mentioning rice. A national staple, the crop has been the backbone of Cambodian diets for centuries and continues to represent a significant portion of the nation's total crop production. The diminutive grain has also been the subject of CDRI research.

Looking at rice production and its associated challenges, especially for poor and small farm holders, CPARD's Comparative

Study for Sustainable and Better Market Access of the Regional Rice Sector: Case of Cambodia identified potential solutions for producers in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

“We studied farmers in three different provinces who grow three different types of rice: wet season, dry season and high-value organic rice,” explained CPARD Research Associate, Pirom Khiev. “In Preah Vihear, they grew mainly organic rice, with the goal of exporting to international markets.”

Increasing demand for high-quality rice in broader markets is identified as an area of potential for Cambodian producers, particularly when viewed through the lens of Thailand’s experience focusing on competitiveness in high-value markets over total production.

While this strategy holds promise for rice, broader, systemic issues continue to hamper the sector at large. Shortcomings in infrastructure, reliance on rainfall for irrigation, and higher export and electricity costs compared to neighbouring countries all contribute to Cambodian agriculture failing to live up to its full potential.

Once again, CDRI turned its attention to the sector’s most pressing issues. CPARD’s 2021 report, Cambodia’s Agri-Food Trade: Structure, New Emerging Potentials, Challenges & Impacts of Covid-19, provided authorities with actionable policy recommendations to increase productivity and market competitiveness.

Specifically, CDRI recommended the Cambodian government move beyond a reliance on fair trade agreements and explore broader global markets by investing in domestic value-added processing. Utilising emerging technologies such as drones and AI are also mentioned, however, there are other strategies CPARD has identified to grow the sector.

In recent years, conversations about contract farming have gained momentum, especially when it comes to Cambodia’s landscape of disjointed small holders. And while the strategy has been discussed among policy makers and agriculture ex-



CPARD research team

perts, it is yet to fully materialise.

“Here, when people talk about contract farming, it isn’t truly contract farming,” explained Sim.

More akin to promissory agreements between producers and middlemen setting prices, CDRI has provided guidance to authorities about how to more effectively implement the practice. By looking at the successes and failures of regional neighbours, the flagship publication *Contract Farming in Mekong Countries: Best Practices and Lessons Learned* produced insights into how the strategy can be adapted to the local landscape.

The culmination of two years of research and collaboration across four countries, the book provides authorities with one of the most comprehensive analyses to date. The announcement of a new law on contract farming is a promising development and demonstrates the importance of cooperation between public and private sectors.

Looking forward, CPARD and its committed researchers will continue to examine key strategies for developing Cambodia’s agricultural bounty. But regardless of the focus, it is the Cambodian people that are at the heart of CDRI’s work.

“Our main objective is examining farmer livelihoods through the lens of productivity, diversification and access to markets,” said Sim. “We have rich natural resources and great land for growing crops but we have challenges that we have to face with strategy.” ■



Alumni highlight

SOTHY EAR

Putting the skills he learned with CDRI to use in the public sector, Sothy Ear’s time with the institute set him on a trajectory to work with the Cambodian government. As a research associate with the Centre for Policy Research in Agriculture and Rural Development in 2014, the research projects he worked on taught him important lessons about teamwork and research methodology.

Since completing his time with the institute, Ear has taken up the role of Deputy Bureau Chief for the General Secretariat of National Social Protection Councils at the Ministry of Economics and Finance. In charge of Social Protection and Monitoring programs, the data analysis he completed at CDRI has given him a perspective on the importance of research in Cambodia’s sustainable development.

“We need an independent research institute that can tell the truth based on scientific evidence. CDRI needs to survive.”

ECONOMICS

CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS AND TRADE

In the bustling capital of Phnom Penh, the skyline is constantly evolving as new buildings seemingly spring up overnight and local and foreign investment drive development. Outside the heart of the city, throngs of labourers pour into factories each morning and rice fields connect the nation to an agricultural history that can be traced back to the Angkor empire.

As Cambodia transitioned to a lower-middle income country in 2015, it cemented its position as a stable base for agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism, with an explosion of construction development in the last decade pushing growth. However, the ongoing development of a national economy requires keen analysis of the challenges facing the public and private sectors within the broader conditions of global and regional markets.

“For the last thirty years we have conducted research in economics and development in the Cambodian context,” explained Dr Delux Teng, director of CDRI’s Centre for Development Economics and Trade (CDET). “A lot of our findings have been used by policy makers to direct and inform their decisions.”

While new airports and luxury condos are exciting signs of prosperity, the Cambodian economy is driven in large part by much smaller operations. With small and medium sized-enterprises (SME) accounting for 70% of employment, 98.8% of companies and 58% of GDP, it’s no surprise that CDET has turned its attention to the energetic sector.

In the 2013 working paper, Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Employment in

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WE CONDUCT DIFFERENT LINES OF RESEARCH, SUCH AS EXAMINING NEW WAYS TO DO BUSINESS AND NEW WAYS OF DIVERSIFYING OUR DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY. FOR OUR CENTRE, OUR RESEARCH IS ALWAYS FOCUSED ON NEW AREAS OF CHANGE”

- Dr Delux Teng, Director of CDET



SMEs in Cambodia, researchers examined the impacts of the 2008 economic crash on small and medium enterprises, focusing on those operating in tourism and construction. Citing difficulty accessing capital and a limited social safety net, SMEs — especially female operators — were found to be particularly vulnerable in times of economic downturn. The report suggested that boosting marketing activities and pushing the adoption of digital technologies could increase resilience during crises.

However, it’s not only the tourism and construction industries that are dominated by small operations in the Kingdom.

With the average size of a Cambodian farm at less than 1.5 hectares and more than 75% of the country’s population living outside of cities, the role of small-scale crop cultivation in rural livelihoods can’t be overestimated.

“Agriculture is a mainstay sector that provides jobs, incomes and also provides food to rural households,” explained CDET Research Associate, Narith Rouen. “This sector contributes a lot to Cambodia’s economy.”

However, rural poverty remains a major obstacle in Cambodia. The importance of addressing the challenges facing rural Cambodians is essential for the welfare of the country and the first step in ending rural poverty is understanding it.

Starting in 1996, every three years CDRI has collected household information across the countryside, building a robust data pool for further analysis of trends in rural poverty. The 2020 Round of Panel Data Collection for Agriculture, Rural Development and Poverty Reduction saw

the total number of households surveyed exceed 1,100 in 11 villages representing the country's four geological areas: the Mekong Plain, Tonle Sap, Mountainous and Coastal zones. Supplementing government census data, the goal of the latest round of research was to provide lawmakers with the information necessary to create policies that can promote prosperity in these vulnerable communities.

"Agriculture is still the main employment for Cambodians in rural areas, and without effective intervention these issues [poverty] will still be there," said Rouen. "So we want to map changes along the way, to follow the progress, look at how agriculture contributes to the development of Cambodia and identify optimum recommendations for the sector."

The world is getting smaller every year, as value chains cross borders and the logistics of local economies become increasingly entangled with stakeholders beyond national boundaries. The Covid-19 pandemic is perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of the challenges facing our globalised world to date and has become a focal point for CDRI's work over the last two years.

But the pandemic also demonstrated the need for the type of comprehensive and cross-cutting research for which the organisation has become known. Looking at the pandemic from a holistic perspec-

tive, CDET's The Impact of Covid-19 on Inclusive Development and Governance: Rapid and Post-pandemic Assessment in the CLMV examines socio-economic effects of the last two years on women as well as focusing on female-operated micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME).

Drawing on all of CDRI's significant resources, the comprehensive nature of the research is impressive. Macro-economic influences, such as Covid-19's impacts on cross-border trade are examined, as well as investigations into the ways that the pandemic has affected women's labour mobility and unpaid care work. Beyond the private sector, the research also examines the existing policy landscape, how the government responded to the pandemic and implications for democratic governance in the region.

However, the methodology of the research is also significant. Gender-disaggregated measurements and indicators were applied to the process as a means to better understand Covid-19's impacts on women and provide gender-sensitive policy recommendations to authorities. Teams were also organised so that the data collection process mirrored the broader goals of the research: at least 50% all teams were female and gender advisors assisted at every level of organisation.

With the research set to be completed near the end of 2023, the rigorous ap-

proach and comprehensive vision typifies CDRI's commitment to staying on the leading edge of research science in Cambodia.

"In the research field there is always something new and emerging, as is the case with Covid-19," explained Dr Teng. "We conduct different lines of research, such as examining new ways to do business and new ways of diversifying our different sectors of the economy. For our centre, our research is always focused on new areas of change." ■



Alumni highlight

VUTHA HING

Though he has moved on to pursue a PhD in economics at the University of Adelaide, Australia, Vutha Hing's 14 years of trade and economic-based research with CDRI was a vital period of his career. Starting as a research fellow before taking over as head of the economic unit at CDRI in 2014, Hing has published a number of papers on subjects ranging from Cambodia's economic integration into ASEAN to the impacts of migration and poverty of children.

Currently writing his thesis on "the role of human capital in global value chains in SE Asia," Hing is proud of his contributions to CDRI's ever-growing body of work.

"Apart from providing independent and constructive policy advice to the government, private sector and civil society, CDRI has contributed significantly to developing the capacity of young Cambodians via its research training, internship and collaborative research work programs."



👉 CDET research team

EDUCATION

CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

After a tumultuous 2 years, schools in Cambodia are open, students and teachers are back in the classroom and it appears that a return to business-as-usual could be in the cards for 2022. While Covid-19's unprecedented disruption to education will likely define these years in the national psyche, CDRI's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) is already looking to the future.

"With Covid-19, students learned to adapt to new situations," explained Dr Sopeak Song, CERI director. "In the next ten years, based on the current transformation in technology and in our development aspirations, students will be able to better utilise the internet and won't be restricted to the confines of a classroom."

Examining the pandemic's impact, Thnal Udom Chomnes: Reimagining Future Education of Cambodia was launched in July 2021. The first stream included studies into higher education's readiness for the "forced adoption of EdTech during Covid-19," and was introduced to stakeholders — including key government officials and leading educators — at a workshop in August 2021.

CERI also focuses on other practical aspects of skill and workforce development. Given the importance of preparing the labour force for the future of work, including implications of the 4th Industrial Revolution, it is unsurprising that CERI has turned its attention to Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET).

Permeability in Cambodian Post-sec-

ondary Education and Training: A Growing Convergence, proposed that allowing students to transition between higher education and vocational training could reduce negative perceptions of TVET as a "dead-end track." The study also suggested this type of mobility can increase agility in both educational pathways to respond to market demands and produce a new generation of more economically competitive citizens.

However, CERI's research also looks at Cambodia's emerging role in the worldwide network of academic and intellectual knowledge creation.

Published in February 2022, CERI's second edited book, *Cambodian Post-Secondary Education and Training in the Global Knowledge Societies* is a collection



📍 CERI research team

of research that demonstrated CDRI's commitment to education for Cambodia's development. Aimed at fostering a post secondary school system that provides students with pathways towards meaningful and lifelong learning, STEM pipelines and knowledge creation are integral aspects of this work.

As one of the few think tanks conducting comprehensive and rigorous primary research in the country, CDRI's work contributes directly to this vision of Cambodia participating in global knowledge societies.

"Research is new knowledge generation," said CERI Research Associate, Muy Tieng Tek.

"So in order for global knowledge societies to thrive, every individual has to contribute to knowledge generation."

The goal of all of CERI's work is to create an educational system that works for Cambodian people and whatever specific focus CDRI's committed researcher's take, this will remain at the heart of their efforts.

"If we can continue reforming education, I anticipate Cambodian academics taking part in producing knowledge and critically looking at how they are teaching to improve themselves," said Dr Song. "We must learn from knowledge and exchange with others, but at the same time we must produce something that is rooted here, that is grounded here." ■



“IF WE CAN CONTINUE REFORMING EDUCATION, I ANTICIPATE CAMBODIAN ACADEMICS TAKING PART IN PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE AND CRITICALLY LOOKING AT HOW THEY ARE TEACHING TO IMPROVE THEMSELVES”

- Dr Sopheak Song, Director of CERI



Children row a boat to school, Tonle Sap, Cambodia. October 2016



Alumni highlight

SAMBATH HENG

Joining CDRI through the internship program, Sambath Heng was promoted to research assistant at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation in mid-2017. Moving on in 2018, she gained valuable experience producing primary research and report writing. She was also responsible for fieldwork coordination and administrative support. In the years since, Heng has worked as a project coordinator at the Skill Development Fund (SDF) at the Ministry of Economy and Finance where she evaluates skill training proposals, plans projects and works with

research teams conducting studies. Currently on study leave from SDF, she is pursuing her postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom through the Chevening Scholarship program and is thankful for the hands-on experience she received at CDRI. "As social science students, we are told more about theories than the practical world of academic research. Hence, a chance to get involved with CDRI provides pragmatic experiences which are significant to apply in the future academic journey and work."

ENVIRONMENT

CENTRE FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

From tropical islands and mangroves on the coast to highland forests and the unique hydrological features of the Tonle Sap, Cambodia is home to a wealth of natural resources and ecological treasures. Their management has been a vital part of life in Cambodia for centuries, however, with the threat of climate change looming and the steamroller of economic progress ploughing ahead, their protection is more urgent than ever before.

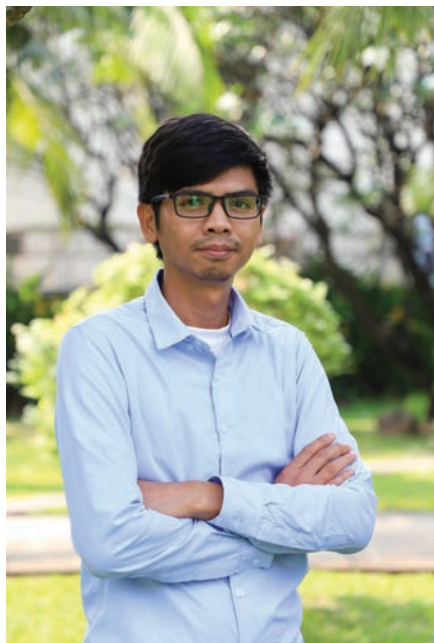
“Over the last 30 years, because of economic and population growth, there is increasing pressure on the use of land, water and natural resources,” explained Dr Tum Nhim, director of the Centre for Natural Resources and Environment (CNRE). “However, there is also growing interest in the importance of the environment and natural resources and sustainable development pathways, beyond just looking at economic growth.”

Setting the stage for policy that can steer Cambodia towards a more sustainable future is CNRE’s research and, like in the country itself, the Mekong River system plays a central role in the group’s work. However, the complex challenges of managing a river system that crosses multiple borders make intergovernmental cooperation key.

Launched in 2019, more than two years of research and analysis went into Water Diplomacy of the Mekong Basin: Toward a Shared Basin for Prosperity and featured collaboration with institutions from China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The research identified problems facing each of the Lancang-Mekong country members and



👤 CNRE research team



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WE WILL CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES SO THAT CAMBODIA CAN DEVELOP ITSELF ALONG SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS”

- Dr Tum Nhim, Director of CNRE



📌 A fish attempts to escape past Ros Narin, at the Freshwater Aquaculture Research and Development Centre in Prey Veng province, as he tries to capture threatened fish for a release on Tonle Sap Lake. Photo: Anton L. Delgado for *Southeast Asia Globe*

was designed to influence policy makers and improve the capacity and awareness of stakeholders at all levels.

While the issue of hydroelectric dams on the river was a focus of the research, the increasing disruption to historical weather patterns is also an area of concern.

“Most Cambodians live in rural areas and rely on rainfall for farming and rivers for food,” explained CNRE Research Associate, Monin Nong. “Climate change’s effects on weather and ecology will certainly impact these people so policy makers must develop strategies to cope with climate change.”

The 2020 report *Gender-based Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction in Cambodia’s Local*

Communities examined the root causes of gender-based vulnerabilities to climate change and how local people handle these stresses. Through case studies on forestry and fishing communities in Preah Vihear and Kampot provinces, researchers hope to provide policy inputs for the government’s gender-based climate change responses.

As authorities implement mitigation strategies to prepare Cambodia for the inevitability of climate change, CNRE is also examining the effectiveness of these policies. Published in December 2021, *Policy Recommendations: Impact of Climate Change Programs in Cambodia: Vulnerability, Poverty, and Gender* looked at government efforts to prepare Mekong

islands in Kampong Cham and Tboung Khmum provinces through constructing concrete roads, installing solar-powered pump stations and diversifying local income sources.

Successes were acknowledged and areas of improvement were identified, but as the realities of climate change push further into the public eye and stakeholders prepare for uncertainties, CNRE’s researchers remain committed to Cambodia’s future.

“There are still many challenges but we will not be distracted,” said Dr Nhim. “We will continue to look for opportunities so that Cambodia can develop itself along sustainable pathways.” ■



Alumni highlight

SAREN KEANG

Currently pursuing her PhD in sociology and international development while working as a teaching assistant at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Saren Keang’s time with CDRI was a formative period of her career. Working as a research associate with the Centre for Natural Resources and Environment in 2020, Keang had the opportunity to conduct primary research in the field and collaborate with experts in this sector that is so vital to the future of the nation.

The experience she gained in data analysis and report writing has helped her in her

scholastic career, however, it was exposure to CDRI’s examination of cross-cutting issues within the broader context of the Cambodian landscape that left the most lasting impression on the young academic. “The research work that CDRI does is very relevant to contemporary Cambodia where different issues are entangled and influence each other. Because CDRI does research on different fields, those findings inform each other and allow for intersectional understanding not just for the researchers, but the people who read our reports.”

GOVERNANCE

CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

The world is a much different place today than it was 30 years ago. In Cambodia, three decades of peace and political stability have created space for dynamic political and institutional reforms to evolve. CDRI's Centre for Governance and Inclusive Society (CGIS) is uniquely positioned to continue its research agenda focusing on the dynamics of change Cambodia is currently experiencing and the emergence of an indigenous governance system that is responding to a new era and serving all its citizens.

"We can leave no one behind, so when we are trying to include everyone, institutions have a key role to play," explained Sophany San, CGIS director. "Policy makers need to see, what are their peoples' needs, what are the challenges, what kinds of mechanisms are needed to include them so they can benefit and contribute to society."

Illuminating the landscape for authorities, CGIS research looks at all levels of governance. Building on ethnographic work conducted in 2007, 2020's Local Leadership in Cambodia provided a historical perspective on past trends in commune governance, how attitudes have changed in the last 12 years and was designed to provide stakeholders with context-specific data on how to improve democratic participation at the local level. There are signs of progress.

"At the community level, authorities organise public forums, so that men and women, old and young, can discuss the needs of the community and what the people need," said CGIS Research Asso-



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- Sophany San, Director of CGIS

ciate, Theavy Chhom. "Then the villages decide what is the priority so they can use the budget to address these issues."

However, in Cambodia, accountable institutions and inclusive society building go beyond the public sector.

Given the historically oversized role that non-governmental organisations (NGO) have played in the country, it makes sense that civil society organisations (CSO) and community-based organisations (CBO) would feature in CGIS research. Citing "capacity gaps, limited civic space and a polarising political discourse" as obstacles to inclusive society building, the 2020 study Building Capacities for Civic Engagement, Peacebuilding and Inclusive Dialogue: Towards Inclusive and Participatory Governance aimed to promote democratic governance and expand opportunities

through peaceful discourse.

From commune governance to public private partnerships (PPP), the core theme running through all CGIS research is the lived experiences of Cambodian people. With the impacts of Covid-19 permeating nearly every aspect of daily life, it has also become an area of focus for the group's work.

Wrapping up the first phase in January 2022, Social Protection and the Gendered Impacts of Covid-19 in Cambodia: Longitudinal Research to "Build Back Better" in the Global Garment Industry documented the pandemic experiences of 200 women garment workers. Examining the coping strategies of these women and formal and informal social protection mechanisms, the findings shined a light on problems with contemporary development mod-

els and the well-worn theme of worker exploitation within the global capitalist paradigm.

The expansion of the social safety net through programs like the National Social Protection Policy Framework are a step towards realising an inclusive society in Cambodia, however, more work remains.

“I want to see everybody, no matter who they are — rural or urban, old or young, men or women, and LGBT — included,” said San. “There has been a lot of progress and if you look at the legislation, it is good. The policy commitment for equality is much appreciated but the implementation is still a challenge.” ■



CGIS research team



A fisherman steers his boat on Tonle Sap River, near its confluence with the Mekong River, as the sun sets on Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh. Photo: Anton L. Delgado for *Southeast Asia Globe*



Alumni highlight

KIMCHOEUN PAK

With more than 20 years experience, Kimchoeun Pak is a true research veteran. Currently working as an independent researcher focused on public finance, decentralisation and data governance, Pak credits his success and longevity to his time with CDRI. Working with the institute from 2003-2007 before receiving a scholarship to study in Australia, he returned for 2011-2012 in a part time capacity. Pak earned his Ph.D. in Public Policy and Governance from the Australian National University and was awarded First Prize

at Crawford School’s 2010 Annual PhD Conference. Dedicated to preparing the next generation of Cambodians for the future, he fills his time advising for the Cambodian government’s youth volunteer program and plans to use data science to improve the public sector in Cambodia. “From my professional work, I have met many potential young researchers-to-be. They would much benefit from CDRI guidance – just as I did back in 2003 and 2011.”

BEYOND RESEARCH

Over the past thirty years, CDRI has built its reputation as Cambodia's leading institute for policy-driven research and capacity building thanks to the vision and strong commitment of its team. While the hands-on, grassroots strategies that have allowed the institute to contribute to Cambodia's sustainable development and produce some of the most comprehensive and insightful literature in the Kingdom is impressive, CDRI is also committed to getting its research findings into the hands of people who can put it to effective use.

Since 2007, the Cambodia Outlook Conference has brought together some of the most influential and distinguished stakeholders in the country for a day-long affair to discuss the future of the Kingdom. With the keynote address delivered by Prime Minister Hun Sen for 13 years running (except 2020's cancellation due to the Covid-19 pandemic) the reach and impact of the event cannot be overestimated.

Addressing key contemporary challenges and identifying potential solutions for the future of Cambodia across all sectors, the conference is a flagship event that has come to symbolise the scope and mission of the institute's work. However, it is just one of CDRI's many activities that go beyond the realm of research.

Hosted at Phnom Penh's historic Cambodiana Hotel, 2022's 10-hour dissemination workshop for Thnal Udom Chomnes: Promoting Cambodian Higher Education Innovation brought together researchers, government officials and

academics to discuss some of CDRI's latest research works. Through panel discussions, Q&A sessions and meet-and-greets with the people behind the research, guests and stakeholders from across the education sector were able to better understand CDRI's goals and how they contribute to Cambodia's progress. In the past, CDRI led the Development Research Forum which was a collaborative effort between the institute and public universities in Cambodia to share latest research findings and promote better access to research resources and research capacity.

Since its earliest days, research training and capacity building sessions have been central to CDRI's work in Cambodia, and while the subject matter may have changed over the last three decades, CDRI's commitment to building and bolstering the nation's human resource is the same. Concluding on December 15, 2021, Applied Social Research and Information Literacy was a 40-hour training course for civil society organisation (CSO) leaders based in five provincial towns across the country. Designed to expand the foundation of Cambodian knowledge production, the 16 participants who attended the course walked away with a better understanding of effective research procedures as well as improved communication research dissemination skills.

Working directly with relevant key local stakeholders is also one of CDRI's core commitments. To help address climate change and environmental issues, the Centre for Natural Resources and Environment works closely with female

leaders of local communities in several climate change affected provinces to adapt local planning for the changing climate. The Centre for Governance and Inclusive Society organises an annual knowledge and engagement workshop to share research findings and get feedback from elected local commune councillors and local administration officials.

CDRI has come to represent the leading edge of capacity building, research, and knowledge creation and dissemination in Cambodia. The use of rigorous research methodologies and commitment to excellence of its directors, project leaders, and associates contribute to the institute's success. At the same time, much of CDRI's impacts on policy and society are also a result of its works beyond the realm of research. ■

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CDRI HAS COME TO REPRESENT THE LEADING EDGE OF CAPACITY BUILDING, RESEARCH, AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION IN CAMBODIA.”



➤ Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen giving remarks at 2019 Cambodia Outlook Conference



➤ CDRI in First Biennial Conference of Comparative Education Society of Cambodia in 2019



➤ Workshop panel discussion



➤ Audiences listen attentively to workshop's discussion



➤ CDRI in the Public Private Partnership Forum, 2018

CDRI IN THE REGION

Providing stakeholders with comprehensive data across five key areas of focus, the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) has examined how Cambodia fits into the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and beyond for decades. Looking forward, the increasingly interconnected nature of the world — exemplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, and heightened geopolitical tensions — means that understanding and fortifying the relationships between regional neighbours is more important than ever.

Concerning the economic landscape, CDRI's 2019 policy brief *Gender, Employment and Wage Disparities in Laos* demonstrated the group's cross-cutting research approach within a regional focus. Building on the findings of a study conducted by Laos' Social Development Alliance Association, the paper examined the gender wage gap, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), and the key drivers leading to gendered differences in labour participation and wages.

Observing trends regarding the lower status of women in enterprises across multiple sectors, the study recommended that “the government should revise all policy documents from a gender perspective,” as well as hold workshops, seminars and meetings to educate policy makers on the importance of gender equality in the workplace. Citing a general lack of information on the subject, the paper also recommended improving data collection on wage differentials and establishing a national database to track the labour force and wages.

Another CDRI study that looked to regional neighbours for insights that can be applied within Cambodia's borders is *Tracking in Education: A Four Country Comparative Study*. Examining the educational strategy of steering students towards learning paths based on their abilities, interests and achievements, the study supplemented existing policy and educational literature from Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia with informal interviews.

While the study determined that ongoing, focused research is necessary to produce a bespoke tracking system in Cambodian education, examining the approaches of its more developed neighbours is a crucial first step in improving the local sector.

Demonstrating CDRI's commitment to governance and civil society is a comparative study examining the similarities and differences between Cambodia and its western neighbour, *Barriers and Pathways to Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Gender Equality and Decentralization*



in Myanmar -Comparisons Cambodia. A collaboration with Canada's McGill University and building on data collected by the Gender Equality Network (GEN) in Yangon, the study focused not only on opportunities and barriers to women's participation in politics, but also on differences between how men and women prioritise different issues once in positions of power.

While there has been progress concerning more equitable representation of women within Asia's political sphere — more



CDRI in 2010 Asia Link Conversations in Phnom Penh, Cambodia



“ WITHIN CAMBODIA, CDRI IS LEADING THE WAY, ESTABLISHING REGIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, LAYING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND PUSHING THE COUNTY TOWARDS ITS PLACE IN A GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY THROUGH FORWARD LOOKING AND CROSS-CUTTING RESEARCH”

CDRI former executive director, Dr Chhem Kieth Rethy giving remarks during the Public Private Partnership Forum, 2018

so in Cambodia than Myanmar — findings suggested that “the political realm remain (sic) stubbornly male dominated.”

A pillar of both society and economics in Cambodia, agriculture is another key area of CDRI’s focus that extends to the organisation’s regional studies.

A 2021 collaboration between CDRI and the China Agricultural University (CAU), Kasetsart University (Thailand), and Vietnam’s Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD) resulted in Contract Farming in Mekong Countries: Best Practices and Lessons Learned. The culmination of a two-year study focused on what many consider an important strategy for future agricultural development, the work examined the advantages, challenges and production potential of different contract farming methods across a number of crops.

While the conclusions for each country were unique to their specific agri-economic situation, the research found that the strategy of promoting collaboration between government, private sector and agricultural cooperatives is promising. According to the

book, “All four cases confirm that contract farming has provided benefits for farmers and companies, and has contributed to national economic growth.”

Finally, the growing prevalence of extreme weather events and the challenges posed by climate change make natural resource management an area of the utmost importance and one that has sparked a collaboration with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) among other regional partners.

Part of a collaborative effort between research institutions from Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, Water Diplomacy of the Mekong Basin: Toward a Shared Basin for Prosperity aims to answer important questions about the future management of the world’s 12th longest river. By examining the challenges facing Lancang-Mekong member countries, the mechanisms for addressing these challenges, and formulating a strategy for cooperation, researchers believe the study can provide actionable policy recommendations for decision-makers in each nation.

Producing effective policy between five

unique governments is inherently complex, with a host of different socio-economic perspectives and competing national interests obstructing a unified effort. This is especially true regarding a transnational river system, where the actions of one nation will have direct and potentially catastrophic consequences for those countries downriver.

This is exactly why the type of collaboration conducted by CDRI through participation in regional networks like the Silk Road Think Tank and China-ASEAN Knowledge Network for Development is so essential in today’s globalised world.

Whether it is reorganising education, increasing agricultural productivity or strengthening geopolitical relations, viewing the world as a collection of dissociated countries is no longer an option. Within Cambodia, CDRI is leading the way, establishing regional relationships, laying communication channels and pushing the county towards its place in a global knowledge society through forward looking and cross-cutting research. ■

OPPORTUNITIES



🔗 CDRI's young female researchers discussing their work

Building a knowledge-based society does not happen overnight. It requires dedication from a growing pool of passionate and well-trained individuals and, within Cambodia, CDRI has taken a leading role in shaping the landscape of knowledge creation. By providing a host of different opportunities, locals and foreigners alike are able to contribute to the development of the nation by turning their attention and energy towards the issues facing the country.

“It is definitely a great opportunity for young people that are interested in research and who want to make an impact in society,” explained Jenny Symaly, who is currently participating in the internship program with the Centre for Policy Research in Agriculture and Rural Development (CPARD). “CDRI is not only a place that collects data through projects to address social issues, but it is also a place

that nurtures and builds so many scholars who are the future of human resources.”

Stumbling upon CDRI literature while studying at university, Symaly was impressed by the quality of the research and, after learning of the think tank’s reputation, was inspired to pursue an internship. A key aspect of CDRI’s work, the internship program provides an entry point for young people interested in the field.

Once enrolled, participants are able to access a number of services, including CDRI’s mentorship program, where they are paired with a senior researcher that can guide them as they identify, understand and pursue their own goals. The relationship between mentor and mentee goes beyond that of teacher and pupil, instead using reciprocity, partnership and collaboration to create mutually defined objectives that help both parties grow and develop their skills.

“Cambodia’s research sector is still

behind other countries, especially most of ASEAN members,” Symaly explained. “So locally produced high-quality research is in great demand.”

The expertise of researchers is responsible for CDRI’s successful strategy of knowledge creation, however, the skills developed in the internship program go beyond any specific area of focus, as evidenced by former intern Seakleng Lim’s experience.

Initially referred by a friend for a paid position transcribing research interviews back in 2017, Lim felt the hands-on experience he was receiving at CDRI was far more useful than his research methodology course at university. After the transcription project wrapped up he decided to stay on and apply for an internship with the Centre for Education Research and Innovation (CERI).

While his academic focus on international relations wasn’t quite inline with his

area of study with CERl, the communication skills he honed during his time with CDRI have proven vital in his education.

“Back in university I was taught the importance of communication, but I never had the opportunity to put it to practice,” Lim said. “Although my communication is still far from perfect, I have learned to communicate and adapt to different social settings, whether it be communicating with students, parents, staff members or high-ranking government officials.”

Since the completion of his internship, Lim has received a scholarship to study remotely at Beijing Normal University and holds a research associate position at the Cambodia University of Technology and Science (CamTech). Though he has moved on from CDRI, the big picture perspective he developed during his internship was a major breakthrough for the young researcher.

“I learned the ability to connect the dots,” Lim explained. “Prior to my internship at CDRI, I had minimal exposure to other disciplines and fields of study, viewing university majors as siloed disciplines. My time at CDRI has taught me the value of reading broadly and how comprehension in one subject complements the understanding of another.”

The institute’s internship continues



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- Jenny Symaly, CPARD Intern

to play an important role in building the capacity of local talent, however, the appeal of CDRI as a destination for quality research extends well beyond Cambodia’s borders.

While conducting her own investigations into decentralisation and commune/sangkat governance in Cambodia as a PhD student at the United States’ Duke University, Lucy Right was impressed by the organisation’s expertise in the sector. After reaching out to Executive Director Netra Eng, they both realised her work aligned with the Centre for Governance and Inclusive Society’s (CGIS) research and an invitation was extended to join as a visiting fellow.

“I have benefited most from the vast expertise of the organisation’s local researchers,” she said. “As a foreigner studying Cambodia, I will always be heavily indebted to the local experts who help to ensure my research is well-informed by the experiences of real people and relevant to the policy community and civil society.”

Collaborating with the CGIS team developing publications for the Cambodia Development Policy Review — a key periodical used by public and private stakeholders — Right’s research focused on youth and female participation in local governments. While she believes CGIS’ work is particularly important with the fast approaching commune and sangkat elections, it is the methodology and commitment of team members that set CDRI apart from other groups in the country.

“Rigorous and independent research is crucial to the crafting of effective and efficient public policies,” she said. “By strengthening the capacity of local researchers, CDRI helps to train and grow the intellectual community in Cambodia that can serve as a bulwark of independent thinking, societal innovation, and evidenced-based policymaking.” ■



Seakleng Lim, CERl former intern



Lucy Right, CGIS visiting research fellow



TO THE FUTURE

30 years of trailblazing is no small feat, however, the teams behind CDRI's ever-growing body of work are not content to rest on their laurels. Always scanning the landscape for emerging issues and new challenges facing Cambodia, CDRI continues to lead in generating forward-looking and evidence-based insights and solutions to address wide-ranging challenges and inspire an effective development strategy for Cambodia and the region.

The institute's overarching focus and priority in a time of global economic change and increased uncertainty is to advise policymakers about how to navigate this environment to create a

fair, transparent and inclusive path for everyone, while delivering ambitious and sustainable long-term economic prosperity. Instrumental in achieving these goals is the high-quality policy-driven research that has set CDRI apart in the field, however, the institute's dedicated teams are always investigating more innovative and effective strategies.

"By engaging with universities, going and participating with academics and critically analysing these situations we can improve them. This is called 'action research'," said CERI Director, Dr Sopheak Song. "Research that aims to reform and change behaviour in the field, not just to reflect on data after the fact. If you want development, you need not only

to reflect but to act. This is something we are discussing."

While the dedication of CDRI's Cambodian researchers is without question, the institute also recognises the importance of collaboration to produce holistic and comprehensive findings. To this end, as part of CDRI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025, there will be increased emphasis on the role of partnerships in its work.

According to this scheme that lays out the goals, ambitions and strategies that will define CDRI's work in the coming years, the institute will "Expand and deepen national and regional research collaboration and engagement across multiple stakeholders in the public and private sectors, civil



society and think-tanks.”

Bringing together the most talented and capable academics, researchers and analysts from Cambodia and beyond is key to the past and future success of CDRI, however, just as important is providing authorities and stakeholders with the results of this research.

Organising some of the most significant conferences, workshops, and dissemination events in the country has been a hallmark of CDRI’s work over the past thirty years and will continue to provide avenues for authorities and stakeholders to apply the institute’s research. The annual Outlook Conference, which Prime Minister Hun Sen has endorsed and given the keynote address

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OUR ALUMNI HOLD MAJOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS ACROSS THE PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NON-PROFIT SECTORS, AND THEY PROVIDE TRUST AND A DISTINCT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CDRI AND KEY ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS IN CAMBODIA AND THE REGION”

- Dr Netra Eng

at for the past 13 years, has become a flagship for CDRI and demonstrates the effectiveness of how these events can get the institute’s work into the hands of Cambodia’s most influential stakeholders.

Likewise, CDRI’s Development Research Forums and a number of events hosted by CDRI’s five research centres increase the reach of the work and will continue to play an essential role in the institute’s policy-driven strategy.

“We try to see where the policy is going and we provide research to guide this policy,” said CDET Deputy Director, Dr Delux Teng. “Policy and research must go alongside each other; this is one of the most important parts of our current and future work.” ■



CDRI
Cambodia Development Resource Institute

Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

+855 (0)23 881 701 | +855 (0)23 881 916 | +855 (0)23 883 603

www.cdri.org.kh | cdri@cdri.org.kh

#56 Street 315, Tuol Kork, PO Box 622, Phnom Penh,
Cambodia Postal Code: 12152

