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World Bank Team Visits the Northeast on a Learning Trip

A World Bank team led by Nisha Agrawal and including social development specialist Nil Vanna, poverty specialist Mia Hyun, program assistant Khieu Amara and communications specialist Bou Saroeun visited the northeast to learn more about the lives of those living in the region. During the one week visit, July 11–15, 2005, the team visited the provinces of Kampong Cham, Kratie and Mondulkiri, where they met provincial officials, commune council members, villagers, and civil society. Together they discussed what had changed in the provinces during the last five years, what challenges people faced, and how they foresaw their provinces in the next five years.

The World Bank team also used this visit to distribute and disseminate the World Bank's new Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for Cambodia. The new CAS for 2005–2008 identifies priority areas where World Bank assistance will have the greatest impact on poverty reduction, and defines the level and composition of financial and technical assistance the Bank is able to provide. The team also distributed Khmer translations of many recent publications that the World Bank has produced including Fair Share for Women,



Farmers: "We live entirely dependent on our land for farming. Whenever our land is safe we are safe."

Seizing Global Opportunity, Cambodia IFAPER, Environment Monitor, and World Bank in Cambodia brochure, Monthly Newsletters, and posters with implementation on World Bank-supported projects. These publications were eagerly received by people in the provinces since many of them did not have access to publications that are available in Phnom Penh.

The program of assistance laid out in the new CAS will help support the Government in implementing its Rectangular Strategy and in tackling some of the critical governance issues threatening the country's ability to reduce poverty and

Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This most recent Strategy will focus its activities in six major areas, clustered under the two broader pillars of improving governance and improving service delivery.

Kampong Cham

On the first day, in the grounds of a beautiful new pagoda on National Route 7, the World Bank team met with a group of villagers from Srour Ngei commune, Prey Chor district, who had each recently received land titles from the provincial land administration department. Armed with these land titles the villagers appeared relaxed and happy – because for the villagers, these titles mean progress.

Sitting in the shadow of a young banyan tree, 56-year-old Mov Mon said his land title was equivalent to the value of his life. "We farmers live entirely dependent on our land for farming. Whenever our land is safe we are safe," he said.

Another villager, Khat Khemarin, 31,



World Bank team is looking at the database for land titling in Kampong Cham province

said the land titles are easy to transfer; they can solve boundary conflicts, they mean access to financial credit, and an increase in land value. A total of 7,205 land titles have been given so far to all the villagers in Srongei commune.

Kampong Cham province is one of 11 provinces and cities implementing the Land Management and Administration Project (LMAP) – a multi-donor program which the World Bank has supported through concessional loans worth US\$24.3 million. In Kampong Cham, so far 20,000 land titles have been issued and it is expected that the provincial land department will issue about 100,000 land titles by the end of 2007.

However, now landowners face other challenges. When they want to transfer their land to a relative, or sell the land to a buyer outside of the family, many reported that they have been asked to pay unofficial, and high, costs to provincial and district authorities, particularly to the tax department.

In Kampong Cham, the team also met with H.E Governor Hun Neng, deputy governors, heads and deputy heads of provincial departments, commune council members, and civil society, to learn about what progress the province had achieved in the last five years.

In response to questions about changes in the province, the Governor said that since the 1993 National Election, the province had achieved peace, political stability, decentralization and improved service delivery, particularly in education and health.

Even though there has been improvement in Kampong Cham, the province still faces a lack of human resources, low salaries, and a complicated budget flow and procurement process. The Governor urged the Central Government to adopt simpler and more decentralized budget and procurement processes.

The team also visited a teak plantation and heard for themselves about problems relating to land grabbing. The villagers complained that the provincial forest authority had grabbed some land on which



H.E Hun Neng, the Governor, briefs the team about the situation in Kampong Cham

they had been farming. A group of villagers claimed the land belonged to about 5,000 families from three different districts – Dambae, Tboung Khmum and Ponhea Kraek. According to the villagers, until now, several altercations had occurred between the authorities and villagers, when the authorities tried to bulldoze the villagers' land for extending the plantation.

Kratie

In Kratie, the team met 40 young stu-

dents who were gathering at a Youth in Democracy workshop, funded by a World Bank Small Grant Program through the Volunteer Youth Congress for Democracy. The students welcomed the presence of the team, telling the team about the changes they had witnessed in Kratie.

When asked about improvements, the students agreed that the province has made some progress in five years, pointing out that the main road had been improved, and a school had been built.



Youth: "I want to become a lawyer to help the poor, fight against corruption and help to develop our country."

Kampong Cham province

Size: 9,799 sq.km

Population: 1,694,578 comprising 824,931 males and 869,647 females

Economically active population: 85.4 percent are in the primary sector.

Number of districts: 16

Literary and Education: 68.8 % of population had not completed the primary level.

World Bank-supported current projects: Land Management and Administration, Health Support, Education Sector Support, Agriculture Productivity Improvement, Rural Investment and Local Governance, and Provincial and Peri-Urban Water Supply and Sanitation

But they said there were still more challenges ahead, challenges like: corruption and poverty (which for many meant foregoing higher level study), price increases for goods and services and a lack of irrigation.

"I want to become a lawyer to help the poor, fight against corruption and help to develop our country," said one young woman. "But I have lost all hope; my parents will not be able to send me to study at a university because they are poor."

In an attempt to raise the students' hopes, Agrawal said they should realize that the development of Cambodia was in their hands. "You have the ability to bring about change and improvement because you are the next generation to lead the country. It doesn't matter if you are working with the government, private sector or civil society—you can contribute to the development of your country in many, many ways," she said.

In an afternoon meeting, the team met with provincial officials. Governor Kham Phoeun talked about the progress that Kratie province had made in agriculture, tourism and decentralization. Over the last five years this included introducing short-term rice varieties to farmers in Kratie, to help them cope with irregular rainfall and a shortage of irrigation systems. However, the Governor said even though there has been some improvement, the result was still not fully satisfactory.

The team also discussed issues of decentralization and deconcentration, which came up in all the three provinces. The World Bank has recently completed a study on these issues, comparing countries in East Asia. The Bank—together with the Decentralization and Deconcentration Technical Working Group—recently organized a seminar in Phnom Penh to share the findings of this study with the Government and other stakeholders.

Agrawal was asked how the World Bank ensured its money went to the people. She said the World Bank has strict policies and procedures to ensure that our money is used wisely. The Bank also send teams to supervise its projects and see how they are being implemented and who is benefiting from them.

"The reason why we are here is also to see, and to learn, how our support has



SBCA officers: Three factors that threaten the conservation area are forest clearing by the increasing number of new people, illegal logging, and illegal hunting contributed to the improvement in people's living conditions."

Mondulkiri

Before reaching the provincial capital of Sen Monorom, the team met with Forestry Administration officials and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) staff member who work on a collaborative project to manage the Seima Biodiversity Conservation Area (SBCA) - located in the former Samling forest concession along National Route 76 - to learn about the work there and the challenges they face.

The SBCA covers more than 290,000 ha of evergreen hill forest and deciduous forest in Mondulkiri and Kratie provinces. There are over 40 threatened species, many of them globally or critically endangered. There include tigers, elephants, gibbons, black-shanked Douc Langur and green peafowl. There are also more than 10,000 people in the area, mostly from the Phnong and Stieng indigenous groups.

"It has exceptional value for biodiversity, especially large mammals and birds, and includes one of the best evergreen forests in the Annamite mountain range," Tom Evan, Technical Advisor on Natural Resource Management of WCS said. "It also has great livelihood importance - around 30,000 people live in it or within 5 km of the boundaries, at least 17,000 of them from indigenous ethnic minorities, and many of these people are dependent on the forest for a significant part of their livelihood."

Seima Biodiversity Conservation Area officer Khiev Rithiphan said only 12 patrolling staff were employed, eight of whom are military police. These small teams cover a large proportion of the res-

ervation area each month. Other teams work on the community outreach and research aspects of the program.

Khiev said there were three main threats to the SBCA: forest clearance, illegal logging and illegal hunting. However he said while logging seems to have lessened, the other two challenges remain.

An influx in the number of migrants moving from the lowlands onto land near the SBCA was also a huge challenge, for it meant uncontrolled cutting, clearing and the claiming of land. In the last two years, thousands of people have moved into the area.

"These rapid increases are a big threat to the conservation," Khiev said. "Some of them clear the forest and sell it; some were hired by rich people to clear the forest."

As part of management planning for this area, Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) activities are currently underway to reinforce biodiversity conservation activities and provide the framework for communal land titling activities.

Tom said that the program aims to conserve the biodiversity values while maintaining protection for community needs through a participatory land-use planning approach.

"We also see this as being a productive, working forest landscape and hope to see some timber harvesting, ecotourism, agroforestry and other economic activities in appropriate zones, once the governance, sustainability and benefit-sharing aspects are well worked out," he said.

Andoung Kraloung community member Sim Saat said the community has decided to allow a maximum of 5 ha for each family, to provide enough land for them to conduct their rotational shifting cultivation. The community has also reserved some areas

Kratie

Size: 11,094 sq.km

Population: 302,113 comprising 150,254 males and 151,859 females

Economically active population: 78.3 percent are in the primary sector.

Number of districts: 5

Literacy and Education: 66.4% of population had not completed the primary level.

World Bank-support current projects: Agriculture Productivity Improvement, Rural Investment and Local Governance, Health Sector Support, Education Sector Support, and Forest concession Management and Control Pilot.

for the next generation of villagers. Currently, a family can cultivate only up to 1.5 ha of farm land due to shortage of family labor.

On their farms, the villagers grow multiple crops on the same plot, such as rice, corn and cashew nuts. This initiative has given Sim hope that his community will have a higher living standard, without impacting on the Seima Biodiversity Conservation Area.

Agrawal felt that the way that the Government was approaching the issue of ensuring a proper livelihood for the minority communities living in this Conservation area could be a model to dealing with this issue in other contexts so that economic development was not done in a way that was harmful for the minority groups. "There is enough land in Mondulkiri and in the rest of Cambodia to accommodate both the interests of minority groups and other poor people and to promote development and conservation in an ethical manner".

In the provincial town hall of Mondulkiri province, the World Bank team again met with provincial authorities. Governor H.E Thou Son praised the province's great potential, but he stressed that improvements needed to be made to local infrastructure.

"Mondulkiri is an unspoiled place, which everyone wants a share in," he said. "We have rich, fertile land, forests, minerals, wildlife, and the possibility of small-scale hydro power."

He also acknowledged that agricultural productivity was still poor because many continued to use traditional methods of farming.

Agrawal asked those present why Mondulkiri could not develop its agriculture like neighboring provinces in Vietnam, where there was similar geography and



World Bank Team posing for a picture with a vendor who sells domestic products at the Bousra waterfall, Mondulkiri province

climate, and why they were importing foodstuffs from across the border.

In order to compete in the international market, Agrawal said farmers in the province could think about concentrating on more unique farming methods, such as growing organic crops. She continued, saying that in the industrialized world consumers want to buy goods which are produced by workers who are treated well, and they want to buy goods which are environmentally sound.

"They would rather drink a more expensive cup of coffee, knowing that the coffee came from a factory which didn't harm the environment, a factory which treated its workers well and paid them well."

Participants at the meeting also said that they felt remote from Phnom Penh because of lack of information and lack of access to newspapers, radio and TV. They requested assistance in building a radio tower so that they could have access to

Mondulkiri

Size: 14,682 sq.km
Population: 42,148 comprising 21,967 males and 20,181 females
Economically active population: 75.6 percent are in the primary sector.
Number of districts: 5
Literacy and Education: 62.9 percent of population had not completed the primary level.
World Bank- supported current projects: Rural Investment and Local Governance, Health Sector Support, Forest concession Management and Control, and Education Sector Support.

information from the rest of the country.

The team met with representatives from the NGO community who work on land issues and were briefed about the Wuzhan L.S Group, who have been awarded a concession for a pine tree plantation in Mondulkiri. Before returning from the northeast, the team visited Dak Dam commune, O'Rang district in Mondulkiri, which is located in the middle of the concession awarded to the Wuzhan L.S Group. The villagers said that they were waiting for the government to resolve the issues surrounding the granting of this concession and also complained that since the company came, their cattle, dogs, chicken, fruits, and vegetables have been stolen by the company workers.



Mondulkiri: Government and Civil Society representatives attended the meeting

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