The Culture of Peace Begins in The Family

The Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims Law has been adopted by both chambers of the Cambodian legislature. For this issue the World Bank Newsletter had the honor to interview H.E. Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister of Women’s Affairs.

Q: The law against domestic violence has been adopted by both chambers: the National Assembly and the Senate. Would Your Excellency please describe how important this law is?

A: I would like to express my thanks to the World Bank’s Newsletter for paying its attention to this law. The law against domestic violence and for the protection of the victims is crucial for Cambodian society. Cambodia has just emerged from a long war, lasting over three decades, which has fostered a tendency to confrontation, and a society with a culture of violence. Sometimes citizens who have disputes have not shown tolerance for one another by intensifying efforts to settle problems peacefully, but use violence instead. This is what I talk about: violence in society as well as in the family. Having seen these problems, the Royal Cambodian Government encouraged the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) to prepare this law with the aim of improving family values, and of promoting and increasing the culture of non-violence as well as the ethics, morality, virtue and compassion that we used to call the Clemencies of Buddhism, in order to encourage each other to settle problems peacefully and give good examples to children.

How the Poverty line and Poverty Rate are calculated

The World Bank is preparing a new Poverty Assessment for the Consultative Group Meeting to be held in March 2006. World Bank newsletter interviews Tim Conway, Poverty Specialist at the World Bank’s Cambodia Office, about poverty rates, poverty lines and related indicators.

Q: How is the poverty line calculated?

A: To calculate a “poverty line” requires household consumption data from a representative sample survey. For Cambodia, the latest data comes from the Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (CSES) 2004. Just under 15,000 households from throughout the country were asked questions about consumption and other important aspects of living standards. A similar survey was conducted in 1993/4.

From the consumption data collected in the CSES, the poverty line in Cambodia is calculated in the same way as in other countries. This involves first working out what food someone in Cambodia needs to consume to meet their basic nutritional needs (2,100 calories a day). This is the food poverty line. Using data on household consumption collected in a sample survey (the CSES 2004), an analyst then finds how much households on the food poverty line spend on essential non-food goods and services (e.g. clothing, shelter, healthcare). These basic food and non-food allowances are added together, and give us the poverty line.

Q: What is the poverty line in Cambodia?

A: Separate poverty lines were identified for people living in Phnom Penh, other towns, and rural areas, reflecting different consumption patterns in these areas.
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to imitate their parents when they grow up and have families of their own. Therefore we should take appropriate measures in accordance with the proverb: “Prevention is better than cure”.

Q: Would Your Excellency please describe some causes of domestic violence?  
A: There are many potential causes of domestic violence. The main ones are poverty, illiteracy, alcoholism, drug abuse, and inequality of relations between men and women. Some men think that after the wedding their wives belong to them. Sometimes, therefore, a husband will use violence against his wife: this is a gender inequality. The Royal Government is intensifying efforts to promote a culture of peace in society as well as in the family. If we want peace to reign in our society, we have to start with our family, move from there to the community, and finally extend the culture of peace to the whole society.

Q: Frequently we have heard of concerns about the efficiency of law enforcement. What is your reaction to these concerns?  
A: I have recognized that this is the very issue we should be thinking about. However, with regard to the new law, the MoWA has been formulating plans of action to implement the Law against Domestic Violence and for the Protection of Victims with concerned ministries as well as Non-Government Organization partners.

Domestic violence is not an issue for the family alone; it is an issue for the community and the whole of society. So we have to solve it together.

Relevant documents the Ministry is preparing relate to dissemination of the law, and the organization of training courses for the public and competent officials. Some other documents relate to the roles and tasks of local authorities to intervene in time to rescue victims, and the new task of officials of the MoWA, acting as Justice Police: the Ministry may play a role as a plaintiff party. This work is crucial for assuring the efficiency of law enforcement.

Q: Would Your Excellency please tell us about the role of the Ministry for Women’s Affairs in implementing this law efficiently?  
A: For victims to be rescued in time and offenders to be prevented from continuing to commit violent acts, it is the nearest local authority, such as the Commune Council, that should intervene. To this end, the Ministry is preparing and completing some laws by cooperating with other concerned ministries, especially the Ministry of Interior, in order to facilitate the intervention roles of local authorities in accordance with the law on commune-level management, and to draft new law on organizations relating to decentralization and deconcentration, etc.

Additionally, the MoWA, together with other concerned ministries and NGOs, is formulating a plan of action to eliminate violence, which has three components: (1) Prevention of violence, (2) Implementation of the law, and (3) Monitoring and evaluation. The preventive activities include a campaign of publicizing the law to make both citizens and local authority officials understand that people who engage in domestic violence are committing an offense. Regarding the implementation of the law, we seek to do our best to implement the law effectively by getting the close participation of concerned ministries. We have to organize training on this law for police officers and legal staff as well as officials from NGOs. The monitoring and evaluation are final stages of the process, because the law should first be implemented, then later monitored, and finally evaluated to assess whether the implementation has been successful or whether some modification of approach is needed. The results of monitoring and evaluation will be reported to the government.

In other words, the MoWA has a role in promoting the social and economic situation of women and strengthening the family values in Cambodian society; and it also has a role in coordinating and stimulating other concerned ministries to accomplish their tasks in response to the needs of women.

Q: Over the next five years, what does Your Excellency see happening with the implementation of this law?  
A: As I have explained, part of the answer to this question is the plans of action designed by the Ministry for monitoring and evaluation of the new law’s implementation. I can tell you that Cambodian society, espec-
The challenge for the Government now is to find new, sustainable sources of growth 2004. It is highest in rural areas and lowest in Phnom Penh.

It is harder to know precisely what the poverty rate was ten years ago, because the 1993/4 household survey did not cover the whole country: it was not safe for the survey teams to visit the outlying areas where the Khmer Rouge were still active. Almost all of the urban population were included in the sampling frame in 1993/4, but only 65 percent of the rural population were represented in the sample.

However, we can compare the rate of change in poverty between 1993/4 and 2004 in those parts of the country that were accessible and covered in 1993/4. There the poverty rate fell from 39 percent in 1993/4 to 28 percent in 2004. If we apply this rate of poverty reduction to the whole country, we project back to estimate that poverty in Cambodia in 1993/4 was 47 percent (or somewhere between 45 percent and 50 percent). This means that the poverty rate has fallen by between 10 percent and 15 percent over the ten years between the 1993/4 and 2004 surveys. This makes sense, given what we know about rates of economic growth over the last decade and the pattern of distribution of that growth. It is also broadly confirmed by other indicators of improving living standards. In the 2004 survey, indicators such as quality of housing, ownership of consumer durables such as bicycles and radios, and access to primary schooling have all improved relative to 1993/4.

Q: How is the poverty rate calculated?
A: The poverty rate (sometimes called the poverty headcount or poverty incidence) is calculated by comparing the distribution of household per capita consumption, collected during a random sample survey, to the poverty line. When we say the poverty rate in Cambodia in 2004 was 35 percent, we mean that 35 percent of the individuals surveyed in the 2004 CSES came from households with per capita consumption less than the poverty line. If the survey is well designed (and the CSES 2004 was), then we can general-
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especially the victims of violence, warmly wel-
come the adoption of the law: they under-
stand that this law can help in settling fam-
ily problems as well as broader social issues
in reducing the culture of violence in soci-
ety. This law contributes to assuring indi-
vidual safety and social justice. It constitu-
tes an important foundation of the Cam-
bodian Millennium Development Goals for
the reduction of all violence structures
against women and for the promotion of
social morality and values in Cambodian
families which experience this problem.

Q: Has the Ministry had a budget suf-
ficient to push the process you have de-
scribed forward?

A: For the time being, the Ministry has
received funding from Germany through
German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for
preparing plans of action. GTZ has provided
technical assistance and the Department for
Cooperation and Economic Development of
the Federal Republic of Germany (BMZ) has
financed operations carried out by the
MoWA and concerned institutions.

For more information contact:
Ms. Nil Vanna
Social Development Specialist
Email: vnil@worldbank.org

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to calculate the national poverty rate in
1993/4, and the updating of this line (to
allow for inflation) in 2004, have been pro-
duced specifically for Cambodia, but fol-
low accepted standard international prac-
tice (see FAQ 1 above).

The international (dollar-a-day 1990
PPP) poverty line was adopted in 2000 by
the international community – that is, all
the Governments of the world, plus the
World Bank, the UN agencies and other
international bodies – as a common base,
applicable across all countries, against
which to measure progress in reducing
global poverty. The first of the Millenni-
um Development Goals (MDGs) com-
mits the Governments of the world to
“eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”: the
first target under this goal, and the
best-known MDG, is to “halve, between
1990 and 2015, the proportion of people
who live on less than $1 a day (PPP).”

Discussions about poverty in Cambo-
dia – who is poor, where the poor live,
which groups are getting poorer or richer,
whether inequality is becoming greater or
less – should all be based on the
national poverty line, which is designed
specifically for Cambodia.

Q: Do other countries have this same
difference between two poverty lines, and
so two poverty rates?

A: Yes. For example, in Vietnam in
1998 the international, “dollar-a-day” po-
verty rate was estimated at 16.4 percent.
The poverty rate according to the national
poverty line of 4,900 dong per person per
day (S0. 35), based on the 1998 Vietnam
Living Standards Survey, was 37 percent.
In Laos the international, “dollar-a-day”
estimate in 2002 was 28.1 percent; in 2003
it was 25.8 percent. The poverty rate ac-
cording to the national poverty line (3,065
kip per person per day, or $0.26), measured
in the third Lao Economic and Consump-
tion Survey (LECS III) was 30.7 percent.

Q: Why did the World Bank revise
down its estimate of dollar-a-day pov-
ty for Cambodia from 42 per-
cent in April to 18.5 percent in October?

In April 2005 the Bank included an es-
timate of 42 percent dollar-a-day poverty
in Cambodia for 2004 in a publication called
the East Asia Update. In October 2005, in
the East Asia Update, the Bank revised
this 2004 dollar-a-day estimate signifi-
cantly down, to 19 percent. Although
dramatic, this revision is simply an attempt
to improve the accuracy of the dollar-a-
day estimates on the basis of new and
better information. The critical factor that
underpins the revision is that in April 2004
we were still working on projections of
Cambodian household consumption
based on the last available year (1997) in
which there was a household survey. By
October we had new data on actual house-
hold consumption from the 2004 CSES
(entering, checking, and analyzing the sur-
vey data took time, so the information was
only available in June). The October es-

timates were based on this actual (sur-
veyed) consumption data; the previous
estimate was based on a forward projec-
tion of the 1997 data.

Q: Is the rate of poverty reduction
seen in Cambodia over the last ten years
good, bad or average?

A: If poverty in Cambodia fell by be-
tween 1 percent and 1.5 percent per an-
um between 1993/4 and 2004 (from 45-50
percent to 35 percent), this is relatively
good. However, it also needs to be put in
context. Cambodia in 1993/4 was just com-
ing out of over 25 years of civil conflict. It
was also emerging from isolation, having
been almost entirely cut of from interna-
tional trade, investment and aid for two
decades. Since the 1990s Cambodia has
benefited from a significant influx of in-
vestment and trade (and aid) that has
helped to lift growth rates to a high aver-
age of 7 percent per year.

The achievements in rapid growth and
relatively modest poverty reduction be-

tween 1993/4 and 2004 need to be under-
stood in large part as a one-off “peace divi-
dend”: as the country was starting from
a very low economic base, initial rates of im-
provement were likely to be rapid. Some
countries emerging from similar twenty-
year legacies of conflict have, with good
policies in place, experienced higher rates
of poverty reduction (e.g. 2.4 percent per
year in Uganda between 1992 and 2000 sur-
veys; or 2.5 percent per year in Mozambique
between surveys in 1997 and 2003).

The challenge for the Government now
is to find new, sustainable sources of
growth which can continue to drive a rise
in living standards for the poor; and to
combine this with improved delivery of
basic services such as healthcare and edu-
cation. The challenge for donors is to help
the Government do this with aid that is
more coordinated and effective and bet-
ter targeted to poverty reduction.

For more information contact:

Tim Conway
Poverty Specialist
Email: tconway@worldbank.org