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“Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—
Challenges for Agricultural Research”

Processes and Disparities in the Cambodia Agricultural Sector

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Abstract

Agriculture plays the most important role in Cambodian society by ensuring food security at community and national level. Although Cambodia has achieved overall national rice self sufficiency with a very small surplus at the national level since 2000, there are still regional and local deficit regions, in particular in remote rural areas on unsuitable soils. A growing number of families are not able to survive on their own rice production, especially in the areas affected by the worst floods in the Mekong floodplain in 2000 and 2001 or irregular severe drought on poor sandy soils in 2004–2005. Cambodian agriculture is still remarkably undiversified with more than 2.3 million ha planted with rice only and no significant robust growth in the agricultural sector over the past five years.

Today, processes of land occupation and land use change intensify the challenges in ensuring food security, especially in recently cultivated upland regions. Current population dynamics are driven by land occupation and land shortage in the lowlands. Land use planning issues and economically motivated large scale land distributions characterise growing disparities and transitions in the agrarian sector. Continuous intervention of the state into land regulations, ownership policy, land use planning measures and distribution of land use rights to large scale agro-industrial investors illustrate the Cambodian practise. Comparing Cambodia to other South East Asian countries the agrarian question concentrates primarily on the dispute whether or not concentration of land ownership is indispensable for a full capitalist transition into a modern economic agriculture. Land and access to land became one of the most crucial factors in Cambodian agriculture since 1991, when Cambodia transferred its collective economy into a modern market economy. Nevertheless, predominant agrarian strategies for small farmers as well as economic investors are exploitations and even over-exploitations of natural resources with little investment into sustainable production. As a result, the Cambodian government’s goal to reduce rural poverty will not be successful without a more rapid and sustained agricultural growth including poor and landless small-scale farmers.

Keywords: Agricultural development, cambodia, Disparities, Food security, Land concessions