

# IDRC in Cambodia

**I**DRC was among the first donors to establish contacts in Cambodia. This was as the country prepared for the 1993 UN-sponsored elections, a milestone in the transition to peace. Efforts to rebuild the country after decades of dictatorship and external and internal warfare brought several challenges.

Among these, the unsustainable exploitation of primary resources, particularly forests, was and remains a critical issue for this mostly rural society and is a major focus for IDRC-supported research in Cambodia.

In the early years of transition, IDRC provided technical assistance to several new government departments and developed particularly strong links with the Ministry of Environment. An important part of this support has involved capacity building in the implementation of policies that foster community-based natural resource management (CBNRM).

The CBNRM approach, which IDRC is promoting in 10 Asian countries, consists of research to improve local productivity and sustainability of such resources as water, land, and forests with the active participation and leadership of local people. The Centre began supporting the implementation of this approach in Ratanakiri province, in north-eastern Cambodia, in 1996. Researchers helped several villages map their customary boundaries and articulate traditional resource allocation rules. These plans proved vital in securing villagers'

rights to the forests they depend on for their livelihoods; the experience has since become a national model used throughout the country.

Another initiative will see the Centre, along with several other donors, support the creation of a national Community-based Natural Resource Management Learning Institute, an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) that will help position the CBNRM approach in the mainstream of Cambodia's ongoing local governance reform.

IDRC also supports the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Cambodia. The Cambodian Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications is collaborating with the Ministry of Commerce to conduct research that will inform the country's ICT and telecommunications policies and promote access for the rural poor. This IDRC-supported initiative involves pilot studies, small research grants, and the development of a universal access policy and action plan. IDRC's partnership with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications began in 1998 when the Centre supported the creation of Cambodia's first Internet service provider, CAMNET. Cambodia was also part of a regional localization effort — the development of local language programming and Web content — to promote Internet use in Asia beyond the urban, educated, English-speaking population. A localization training workshop was held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, in 2005.

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From 1997 to 2003, the Cambodia Development Resource Institute played a key role in three phases of research on labour markets and the role of policy in creating non-traditional rural employment in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. This collaborative effort brought together seven research institutions from the four countries to form the Development Analysis Network. The first two phases looked at how the 1997 Asian economic crisis affected labour markets in those four countries. It was the first systematic effort to collect and analyze data related to employment and introduced the labour market as a policy and research issue in several countries, including Cambodia. The research contributed to institutional strengthening in the use of complex databases and in developing recommendations for government policy.

IDRC also supported the creation of the Asian Research Partnership for Avian Influenza Research (APAIR), in which the Cambodian Ministries of Public Health and of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries are participating, along with ministries and granting councils from China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Through this Partnership, IDRC will support the study, by Asian researchers, of the social and environmental factors that contribute to the spread of disease as well as protocols for developing national preparedness strategies.

IDRC has supported 50 projects since 1992, representing an allocation of more than CA\$11 million. There are 10 current IDRC initiatives worth CA\$4 million in the country, some of which are regional in scope. IDRC operated a branch office in Phnom Penh from 1994 to 1996.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

#### Strengthening Community Forestry

The lives and livelihoods of nearly all Cambodians are closely linked to forests and forest resources. But war, agricultural expansion, and accelerated timber harvesting have significantly depleted Cambodia's forests over the last two decades. Today, the pressure continues with rapid population growth, inappropriate use, uncertain

ownership, and extensive commercial exploitation.

Traditional ways of using and managing forests show that rural Cambodians value this resource highly, and community forestry is increasingly recognized as an important strategy for sustaining forest resources and enhancing rural livelihoods. IDRC supported three key institutions (the Ministry of Environment, Royal University of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) in the development and testing of community forestry management plans. One test site, in the Chumkiri district, has become a model in Cambodia. The community embraced the concept and the provincial government has recognized in law their community forestry agreement.

Now that the three partners have demonstrated that community forestry is possible, they are engaged in a second phase, with support from IDRC, to strengthen their capacity to foster more examples. They are conducting additional field research, sharing information, networking, providing training, and developing policy recommendations.

(Project # 101247, Community Forestry (Cambodia) Phase II; Duration: 2003–2006; IDRC allocation: CA\$463 144; IDRC contact: Hein Mallee; Research partner: Sy Ramony, Department of Nature Conservation and Protection, Ministry of Environment, 48 Samdech Preah, Sihanouk Boulevard, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Tel./Fax: 855-23-721073; Email: ramony@bigpond.com.kh)

#### Protecting Forests in the Ratanakiri Highlands

Ratanakiri Province in northeastern Cambodia is home to several highland minority groups that have practiced swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture and hunting and gathering on their traditional forested lands for centuries. Since the early 1990s, however, both legal and illegal logging and landclearing for palm oil and rubber plantations have threatened the rich natural resource base and traditional livelihoods.

IDRC supported two previous phases of research in Ratanakiri that concentrated on the conservation and more effective use of natural resources.

The research team, led by a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Phnom Penh, prepared detailed maps of the traditional territory and resource use of three communities. When the provincial governor approved these plans, concessionaires in conflict with the villages over land tenure were obliged to back down. An adapted model is now being used for local planning by the UNDP and Cambodian government throughout the country. The researchers also successfully demonstrated the need to include provisions for community land tenure in a new land law.

In the current phase of this project, which IDRC is jointly supporting with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the project team is looking for ways to formalize community forestry systems and land rights, and to improve the livelihoods of the hill people.

(Project # 100488, Resource Management Policy Ratanakiri (Cambodia) Phase III; Duration: 2001–2006; IDRC allocation: CA\$415 720; IDRC contact: Hein Mallee; Research partner: Touch Tonet, UNDP/UNOPS/CARERE Ratanakiri, 57 Street 352, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Tel.: 855-75-974016; Fax: 855-23-210569; Email: tonet@camintel.com; Website: www.undp.org)

### Building a Natural Resources Management Network

As Cambodia emerges from years of instability and isolation, new market forces threaten to push out traditional ways of managing forests, fisheries, and protected areas. For any new resource management system to work, communities must be involved and have a fair share of any benefits.

Co-funded by OXFAM America and the Food and Agriculture Organization, this project is supporting the establishment and core operations of a Cambodian learning institute for community-based natural resources management (CBNRM). It builds on an earlier IDRC-supported effort that used this approach to foster networking and capacity building of Cambodian researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

With the initial technical support of WWF Indonesia, the CBNRM Learning Institute is being

registered as an independent Cambodian NGO with a mandate to offer networking and advocacy support to all stakeholders in participatory natural resource management across the country. The Institute's role is to foster, document, and share knowledge about this activity, as the government continues to decentralize its governance structure.

(Project # 102454, Cambodian CBNRM Learning Institute; Duration: 2004–2007; IDRC allocation: CA\$414 544; IDRC contact: Hein Mallee; Research partners: Srey Marona, WWF Cambodia Conservation Programme, PO Box 2467, House #28, Street 9, Tonle Basac, Chamcarmon, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Tel.: 855-23-218034; Fax: 855-23-211909; Email: marona@everyday.com.kh ; and Ken Serey Rotha, Executive Director, Community-based Natural Resource Management Learning Institute, #30 Street 9, Tonle Basac, Chamcarmon, PO Box 2509, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Tel./Fax: 855-23-224 171; Email: cbnrm@everyday.com.kh)

### Communities Managing Coastal Resources

Cambodia is home to Southeast Asia's last pristine mangrove forests. One of the most biologically diverse wetlands on earth, these forests are threatened in a postwar economy, where everyone from villagers to entrepreneurs is cutting them down for quick cash. In Cambodia, as in many other parts of the world, top-down control of coastal resources has not been able to resolve people's need to secure a livelihood.

Earlier IDRC-supported research into resources and income in Koh Sralao village analyzed how commodities like charcoal and fish are produced in the mangrove forests. In two other projects, Cambodia's Ministry of Environment used IDRC grants to introduce community-based planning and management in nationally protected coastal areas of Koh Kong Province. A research team assisted local community workers to make inventories, analyze ways to make a living, manage their own natural resources, and apply for project funding from national government programs.

In this project, the Ministry of Environment is assessing models for the integration of natural resource management into community development by facilitating collaboration between village

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management committees, commune councils, and technical teams from SEILA (Cambodia's flagship local government reconstruction effort). Researchers are looking at how communities can develop workable and replicable participatory management plans. The national Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the new Cambodian CBNRM Learning Institute are among some of the institutions involved in this project.

(Project # 102446, Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (Cambodia); Duration: 2004–2007; IDRC allocation: CA \$399 990; IDRC contact: Hein Mallee; Research partner: Kim Nong, Cambodian Ministry of Environment, 48 Samdech Preah Sihanouk Tonle Bassac, Chamkarmon, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Tel./Fax: 855-16-890089; Email: pmmr@online.com.kh)

### Community Access to Computers

In Cambodia, new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are almost non-existent outside the major cities. The country's national ICT policy framework is in its formative stage and is receptive to policy research findings on how to connect poor rural areas.

This project is supporting collaboration between the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Commerce, and involving researchers, NGOs, and business in the design of a new approach to achieve universal access to ICTs. Two pilot projects will introduce innovative wireless technologies, participatory ICT service

development, alternative energy use, and local institutional development. Research teams are also supporting the evolution of locally driven cooperative enterprises to manage ICT services for all sectors of the community. A small grants fund is also being established to finance relevant studies by Cambodian researchers.

The lessons learned and recommendations from the two pilot projects along with small grants will contribute to the development of a national universal access policy and action plan, capacity building among Cambodian researchers, and the sharing of experiences with neighbouring Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

(Project #103013, Community Driven Universal Access Solutions in Cambodia: Pilots to Policy Research; Duration: 2006–2009; IDRC allocation: CA\$1 462 400; IDRC contact: Maria Lee-Hoon Ng; Research partner: Pan Sorasak, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, Government of Cambodia, Corner Street 13 & 102, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Tel.: 855-23-426818; Email: great\_lake@camnet.com.kh)

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