

Technical Completion Report

3 February 2012 to 3 December 2016

Cambodia Development Research Forum (DRF) Phase II, 2012 - 2015

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A Partnership of
CDRI, CEA, LI, NIPH, RUA and RUPP



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Summary

This technical report highlights major outputs, achievements and lessons learnt from the implementation of the Cambodia Development Research Forum (DRF) Phase II 2012-2016, a collaborative partnership of CDRI, the Learning Institute (LI), the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), the Royal University of Agriculture (RUA), the Cambodia Economic Association (CEA), and National Institute of Public Health (NIPH) with support from IDRC.

The core outputs of DRF Phase II are: six fully functioning Research Interest Groups (RIGs) that organize research workshop, policy dialogues and training on six different-but-interconnected themes; regular forums for research knowledge sharing and policy discussion; annual symposium; capacity building workshops; research publications; and ICT platform. The achieved outputs are key contributors to research capacity building, improved research networks and bridging research-policy interaction.

The DRF Phase II has in general performed well against its vision, goals and objectives; it is highly valued, locally owned and driven; it has put policy research 'on the map' in Cambodia; it has built its profile and stakeholder participation incrementally through continuous improvement and learning.

There are a number of weaknesses especially with regards to ICT platform, different quality of coordination and outputs from among RIG and lack of M&E mechanism. The key learning points are: 1) the ICT platform should be managed by a leading coordinating institution and should support the dissemination and outreach of DRF activities and promote the DRF's profile; 2) the key components, notably research workshops, annual symposium and ICT platform, should be linked; 3) the DRF and RIG leadership should deepen their media relationships and cultivate particular journalists and media organisations to improve the scope and quality of their coverage of development issues in Cambodia; and 4) There is a need to have a systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanism to closely trace the performance and effectiveness of program implementation.

1. Background

The Development Research Forum (DRF) of Cambodia was established following the All-Partners Forum organised by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in September 2007. DRF Phase I 2008-10 was a collaborative partnership of CDRI, the Learning Institute (LI), the Supreme National Economic Council (SNEC), the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) and the Cambodia Economic Association (CEA), with support from IDRC through its regional office in Singapore.

The key outputs achieved during DRF Phase I were:

- Four well-attended and lively annual symposia that provided opportunities for individuals, organisations and institutes to present their research on development issues
- An ICT platform to accelerate open sharing of research resources, administered by the LI
- A scoping study on the research capacities of Cambodia's universities
- Four collaborative grants for small research projects
- Three research interest groups: economy, environment and social capital

DRF Phase I was concluded satisfactorily. The external evaluation report confirmed the importance of the DRF and its dual role in supporting and strengthening the development research community in Cambodia and in promoting a culture in which research is understood and valued in multiple forums. This provided the rationale for securing resources for DRF Phase II 2012-16, with the overall goal of continuing to support and strengthen the capacity of the Cambodian development research community.

DRF Phase II had four objectives:

- Raise the profile of the DRF as a major contributor to the research community in Cambodia;
- Establish six fully functioning research interest groups to work collaboratively across multiple dimensions and contribute outputs to the annual symposium and other forums in Cambodia and the region;
- Position the ICT platform as the leading virtual resource for the research community in Cambodia and those outside interested in Cambodian research;
- Decide on the role, status and structure of the DRF in future phases.

DRF Phase II was coordinated by CDRI in partnership with five partner institutions: CEA, LI, RUPP, National Institute of Public Health (NIPH) and Royal University of Agriculture (RUA).

DRF Phase II comprised four core elements as follows:

- Six research interest groups each led by a DRF Phase II partner (see Table 1)
- Annual symposium, held in September of each year;
- ICT platform as a central, unifying support resource for DRF members and participants;
- Two organising committees with advisory and oversight roles:

- Steering Committee, comprising senior representatives of all DRF member institutions, as the advisory body for the governance of the DRF and its activities;
- Executive Committee, comprising the Chair of the Steering Committee, the Executive Director of CDRI as the project holder, and the DRF Coordinator, to oversee the planning and management of DRF activities and liaison between DRF partners.

This technical report summarises the major outputs, achievements and lessons learned from the implementation of DRF Phase II activities carried out between 3 February 2012 and 3 December 2016.

2. Outputs achieved

2.1 Establishment of research interest groups

A core element of DRF Phase II, the research interest groups (RIGs) were expanded to include three more and reoriented to organise research workshop policy dialogues and training on the themes set out below.

Table 1: RIG themes and coordination teams

| RIG theme | Lead institute |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Cambodia and its region | CDRI |
| Growth and inclusiveness | CEA |
| Natural resources governance | LI |
| Social policy on health | NIPH |
| Agricultural development | RUA |
| Social Policy on education | RUPP |

2.2 Regular forums for knowledge sharing and policy discussion

Research workshops were another unique output of DRF Phase II. Held quarterly, the workshops attracted 30-40 participants from member institutions. They served as an interactive forum for knowledge sharing, learning and critical discussion, where researchers could present their research findings and hone their research techniques. The 57 research workshops organised between 2012 and 2016 were participated in by 4671 people.

Policy roundtables brought together researchers, policymakers and development practitioners to discuss issues affecting policy making in each RIG theme. The primary aim was to improve research-policy dialogues. Altogether, 34 policy roundtables were held and each one hosted around 30 participants.

Table 2: Research workshops and policy roundtables

| Research forum | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | Total |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Research workshop | 17 | 19 | 16 | 3 | 2 | 57 |
| Policy roundtable | 3 | 10 | 16 | 4 | 1 | 34 |

DRF partners and other participants at the DRF review workshop unanimously agreed that they had benefited from participating in the research and policy forums. Key benefits are highlighted below:

- New knowledge, experience and skills enhanced their professional capacity and competency to perform well and contribute to their institutions;
- Development policy research knowledge transfer and information exchange between and across institutions, particularly about who is working on what, what useful recent research is available, and what research projects are planned that they could participate in;
- A platform for young emerging researchers to share their work and receive constructive advice and criticism on their research methods and findings;
- Invaluable professional networking opportunities linking younger researchers (including students) with established researchers, experts, policy makers and influencers across development sectors and public-private sectors;
- Lessons learned on how to organise and host effective research events.

2.3 Annual symposium

The annual DRF symposium served to showcase the work of the RIGs, open up new ideas and perspectives on the research-policy nexus, and add value to ongoing policy research studies. Since its inception in 2008, the symposium proved to be one of the DRF's strongest features, each year attracting some 250 emerging and established researchers, academics and scholars, recent graduates and students from a broad cross-section of Cambodian education and research communities. The symposium also played a significant role in "putting development research on the map" in Cambodia, providing a unique meeting place for an emerging generation of young researchers and those engaged in development policy making and influencing, to learn, share new knowledge and build professional networks.

The theme for the symposium was usually chosen through a consultative process involving the DRF Steering Committee and RIGs to reflect current and emerging Cambodian development and policy research priorities. Each symposium took place over two days with the program structured in two parts. The first half day involved a plenary session with opening remarks by the Chair of the DRF Steering Committee and senior representatives of CDRI and IDRC. This was followed by a moderated panel discussion on the main theme with panellists from government, the private sector, academia, development partners and the research community in Cambodia and the region. The remaining two half days involved parallel moderated presentations coordinated by each RIG on sector-specific research issues in the context of the broad symposium theme. Importantly, these sessions provided recent graduates and students with a unique opportunity to present their research findings to an interested audience, helping to build their research capacity and ultimately contribute to Cambodia's development.

Five symposiums were held during DRF Phase II:

- 2016: Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development in Cambodia

- 2015: Building Research Capacity for Cambodia
- 2014: Getting Education Right for Cambodia's Labour Market Needs: Reform and Policy Research Priorities
- 2013: Cambodia Tomorrow: Development Research Priorities for a Middle-Income Country
- 2012: Inclusive Sustainable Development for Cambodia – Regional and National Policy Research Priorities

2.4 Capacity building workshops

The primary purpose of the capacity building workshops was to improve the research and analytical skills of young researchers and RIG members. The lead institution for each RIG was responsible for designing and coordinating training to make sure RIG members had the skills and support they needed to carry out their research activities. Some 60 training courses were delivered to about 550 young researchers, university students and lecturers, and staff from civil society organisations. The courses were tailored to impart or refresh knowledge and skills specific to literature review, survey research and data analysis, including advanced statistical modelling and testing using statistical software. See Annex 3 for details of some of the training courses.

2.5 Research publications

DRF outputs included two types of research products: synthesis reports and policy briefs. Synthesis reports aimed to summarise the discussions and key messages from the symposiums. The best research papers presented at the symposiums and research workshops were also published as synthesis reports.

Below is a list of DRF synthesis reports:

Ngin Chanrith, Un Leang and Chuon Rumreasey. 2013. *Role of TVET and Higher Education in Economic Development in Cambodia*.

Hing Vutha. 2014. *Emerging Regionalism and Regional Architecture: What It Mean for Cambodia*.

Srinivasa Madhur. 2014. *Cambodia Tomorrow: Development Research Priorities for a Middle Income Country: A Synthesis of the Themes and Messages from the 2013 Development Research Forum Symposium*.

Leang Supheap and Chheng Kannarath. 2014. *Health System Service Delivery in Cambodia*.

Seng Senghor. 2014. *Financial Access and Stability in Cambodia: Opportunities and Challenges*.

Hem Chanthou. 2014. *Assessing Community-Based Natural Resource Management Effectiveness in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia*.

Khun Kimkhuy and Ngin Chhay. 2014. *Does Cambodia Need IPM? Past Experience, Present Knowledge and Future Prospects*.

Hing Vutha. 2014. *Cambodia Preparedness for ASEAN Economic Community 2015 and Beyond*.

Srinivasa Madhur. 2015. *Annual Symposium 2014: Reflection on Priorities for Development Policy Research in Cambodia*.

Seng Senghor. 2015. *Driving Forces of Future Cambodia's Economic Growth*.

Policy briefs were generated from policy roundtables. Each RIG produced policy papers pinpointing the measures that matter most to deal with specific development challenges. Eight policy brief were published and they are:

Ngin Chanrith, Un Leang and Chuon Rumreasey. 2013. *Diversification of the Cambodian Economy: The Roles of Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training*.

Heng Dyna and Ngo Sothath. 2013. *Lessons in Extractive Industries Revenue Management: Implications for Cambodia*.

Hing Vutha. 2013. *Leveraging Regional Cooperation for Economic Growth in Cambodia*.

Seng Vang. 2014. *Cambodia's Agricultural Land Resources: Status and Challenges*.

Il Oeur, So Dane, Mam Kosal and Kim Sour. 2014. *Supporting Local Post-Fishery Reform Innovation: Lessons for Multi-stakeholder Dialogues*.

Nguon Pheakkdey. 2014. *Sustainable Forest Governance in the Asia-Pacific Region: Has REDD+ Adequately Addressed Drivers of Deforestation and Forest Degradation?*

Roth Vathana. 2014. *Understanding SME Policy Environment in ASEAN*.

Chan Sophal. 2015. *Management of Economic Land Concessions*.

Published in separate Khmer and English versions, the print run for each research product was 600 copies. They were distributed to key policymakers and stakeholders and RIG members. Print copies were delivered and electronic copies sent to 1200 email recipients. The products were also disseminated via CDRI library, and the DRF ICT platform. The publications are attached in Annex 5.

2.6 ICT platform

The ICT platform, hosted and administered by the LI, was a feature of DRF Phase II. The aim of the platform was to provide useful online resources for research study and capacity development, publicise DRF activities, disseminate DRF publications to a wider audience, and facilitate online discussions around the six RIG themes.

It is an easy-to-use platform installed on the DRF website. As such, it provide a collaborative space for discussion and knowledge sharing. The platform attracted just over 1000 registered DRF members from a range of professions spanning research and academic institutions, public agencies and NGOs.

3. Objectives achieved

This section provides an objective assessment of the degree to which the DRF achieved its goal and objectives. It draws on the results of Steering Committee meetings with DRF partners and an internal review.

Goal: To support and strengthen the capacity of the Cambodian development research community

The DRF's overall goal was set at the inception stage when the Cambodian research community was far from vibrant, characterised by limited interaction and exchange. Everyone involved in the design of the DRF program acknowledged that the goal was ambitious and could take several phases to achieve. The internal review of DRF Phase II reports a general agreement among DRF partners and core RIG members that DRF Phase II performed well against this goal. More specifically, the DRF has well and truly put development and policy research "on the map" in Cambodia; it built its profile and stakeholder participation incrementally through various platforms for regular and sustained research-policy dialogues as well as via research skills training.

The annual DRF symposium proved to be an essential and effective contributor to developing research capacity and building a research culture in Cambodia. It raised awareness and understanding among students and young researchers of the value and challenges of development policy research, and stimulated ideas on where their current research and future research careers might be most productively focused. Through the various DRF platforms, young researchers were able to share their work and receive constructive feedback on their research methods and findings. DRF training courses tailored to meet the needs of early career researchers equipped some students, emerging researchers and lecturers with new knowledge and skills, particularly improved analytical thinking and writing skills. The multiple forums provided unique channels for an emerging generation of young researchers and those engaged in development policy making and influencing, to learn, share new knowledge and build professional networks.

Objective 1: To raise the profile of DRF as being valued as a major contributor to the research community in Cambodia

The strong unanimous view shared by DRF partners and participants is that DRF activities significantly raised the profile of the DRF and its partners in the broader policy and research communities, and attracted a broader range of participants from the research community, government, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, the private sector and NGOs to promote the value of research and bridge the policy-research gap in Cambodia.

Because of the invaluable benefits of participating in DRF activities, many stakeholders were keen to join DRF RIGs and their activities. Some observed that as a unique initiative in Cambodia, the DRF could serve as a model for other developing countries in the Mekong region.

Objective 2: To establish six fully functioning research interest groups that work collaboratively across multiple dimensions and contribute outputs to the annual symposium and other forums in Cambodia and the region

The establishment of RIGs to organise research workshops, policy roundtables and training and their important role in coordinating planned DRF activities including active participation in organising the annual symposium was a strong achievement. There is a clear appreciation that the DRF and the resources it provided to RIGs and their host institutions enabled them to “do things they would otherwise simply not be able to do” or “to do the things they do better”. In addition, RIG host institutions demonstrated improved capacity through their involvement and experience in the organisation of national and international research conferences and seminars.

Objective 3: To position the ICT platform as the leading virtual resource for the research community in Cambodia and those outside interested in Cambodian research

The ICT component did not perform well enough. Based on the internal review report, although the ICT platform was well managed and its functionality enhanced, along with an increase in user numbers, its use, support/ownership and perceptions of its value as a core element of the DRF were uneven among DRF partners. The report also mentions limited interactions via the DRF ICT platform both between DRF partners/RIG host institutions and with external users; a failure to systematically post links to new policy research knowledge or events; and a general failure to use the platform for interactive policy research dialogue and responding to hot topics as was envisaged in DRF Phase II design.

Objective 4: To decide on the role, status and structure of the DRF in future phases

DRF partners consulted IDRC and key development partners in Cambodia to assess the DRF’s achievements, strengths and weaknesses and determine its future direction. The results are clearly reflected in the internal review report. The major findings and recommendations of the review, endorsed by the DRF Phase II Steering Committee, were used to design the proposal for DRF Phase III. The Steering Committee presented this proposal to major development partners with a view to seeking long-term co-funding.

Despite the DRF’s significant role and invaluable contribution to building a research community in Cambodia and considerable efforts by DRF partners to convince other development partners of its potential, there was a definite lack of commitment to support the DRF’s financial sustainability. Even so, the DRF partners felt very grateful to have had the opportunity to initiate the DRF for Cambodia’s research and policy communities.

4. Conclusions

The DRF as a unique initiative brought together local research institutions and academia to form a close partnership working towards a vision of a high capacity, professional and vibrant Cambodian development research community. The DRF's achievements have established it as a highly valued contributor to developing research capacity and building a research community in Cambodia. The major outcomes and impacts of DRF Phase II include:

- Greater awareness and understanding among students and young researchers of the value and challenges of development policy research and ideas on where their current research and future research careers might be most productively focused;
- A greater appreciation of the importance of the close link between researchers and policymakers if policy making is to be evidence-based, and some of the challenges in this;
- Valuable experience as presenters, commentators and participants in DRF events including RIG activities and the annual symposium, and the generation of ideas for their own research and potential research collaborations;
- Hands-on involvement and experience in the organisation of national and international research conferences and seminars hosted or co-hosted by their institutions under the DRF-RIG framework.

The review also highlighted some weaknesses as follows:

- Uneven and sometimes weak human resource capacity in RIG host institutions to deliver planned and budgeted RIG activities;
- A relatively weak track record in the production of quality publications reflecting the research and policy outputs of RIG activities;
- Uneven quality in some RIGs' management of the parallel sectoral sessions in the annual DRF symposium and uneven quality of presentations;
- Limited interaction with the DRF ICT platform both between DRF partners/RIG host institutions and with external users, and a general failure to use the platform for interactive policy research dialogue and responding to hot topics;
- Inadequate monitoring and evaluation of RIG activities particularly in systematic feedback from participants, and no real mechanism to address areas of underachievement.

The key learning points that should be considered in DRF Phase III are:

- The ICT platform should be managed by a leading coordinating institution. It should support the dissemination and outreach of DRF activities and promote the DRF's profile;
- The key components, notably research workshops, annual symposium and ICT platform, should be linked;
- The DRF must actively reach out and attract more members if it is to enrich its work and avoid misperceptions of exclusivity. Similarly, the DRF should request relevant ministries to nominate focal persons for research-policy communication under the DRF framework;
- The DRF and RIG leadership should deepen their media relationships and cultivate particular journalists and media organisations to improve the scope and quality of their coverage of development issues in Cambodia;
- The quality of coordination of RIG host institutions is key to success;
- There is a need to have a systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanism to closely trace the performance and effectiveness of program implementation.

Annexes

Annex 1. Indicative list of institutions participating in DRF events

Annex 2. Annual symposium 2012-2016

Annex 3. DRF publications

Annex 4. Full DRF internal review report

Annex 5. Full proposal for DRF Phase III

Annex 6. IDRC program indicators