

# NGO FORUM ON CAMBODIA

## Farmer Forums Impact Evaluation Report



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Analyzing Development Issues Centre  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cambodia, with 80% of Cambodians engage in agricultural work such as farming, plantation, and fishing, accounts for 32% of Cambodian GDP from agriculture sector, and employs about 80 per cent of the labor force which is dominated by small landholder farmers. Along with other development program, NGO Forum together with their partners promotes the sector through organizing annual Farmer Forum over the past six years. The study aimed to understanding changes as a result of these forums.

The study employed a qualitative approach through focus group discussion (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with key representatives of the organizing committee. Regional discussions were coordinated with sub-groups of farmers in the five (5) regional zones. Consultations with NGO Forum and its NGOs partners were conducted at national and sub-national level. Focus Group Discussion with farmers as participants. The Key informant interviews focused on respondents who participated in the Forum, including private sector representatives, government officers and NGO representatives. In-depth case study interviews were done with successful participants of the Forum. Despite the constraint of the method used, the results or findings below still bring out key insights and lessons for potential replication.

### **FINDINGS**

The Forum became a gateway where people met each other to share experiences. It offered an opportunity for people to participate and share their experiences and concerns to a large audience. Farmers gained knowledge which helped them improve their practices on the ground, especially in rice production, and to raise their concerns directly to national level for the latter's support and intervention. Some development partners were provided farmer's suggestions that would improve the design of farming-related projects that is relevant to farmers' needs.

The Forums broadly discussed concerns from the farmers at grassroots level, such as need for capital, markets and infrastructure support. One specific outcome cited by an AC in Battambang that improved their livelihood was that they were able to build link with the private sector through a farming contract and access capital with low-interest rate from the state's Rural Development Bank (RDB). In other cases, farmers got technical support from MAFF on crop-management and other related skills that led to outcomes of products with better quality that met the standards of the market. The Forum also contributed the successful outcome of enabling other type of products to access the market, e.g., palm sugar products, where the producers successfully established a social enterprise now progressively running well.

The Forum positively addressed the farmer's purpose to build wider networks and to relate to other institutions, including public, private and capital investment agencies. Some farmer groups gained access to these by participating in the Forum. For example, the AC in Battambang signed a farming contract with a private rice miller to purchase regularly the rice they produced; it also accesses low-rate loan from state rural development bank. Other farmers cited accessing related information to ensure their products would be sold at peak period and the quality is right to the market's demand. Other farmers expanded an informal network with other regions to supply local products to those alternative markets. However, this networking is made as individual initiative rather than as a larger institutional mechanism. This meant that individual farmers who are active and committed to networking tend to have better benefits in their participation in the Forum.

All government, civil society and donors gradually agreed and recognized the Forum as a mainly platform of discussing and sharing relevant agricultural issues. It updates farmers and stakeholders rather than as influence to policies or an advocacy engagement. There is no monitoring mechanism in place to follow up what each Forum prioritized or declared as statement. No party translated the results into actual activities or as an institution's strategy; except perhaps, what informal agreements that transpired between an individual farmer and a committed stakeholder.

The Forums support existing policies. The implication of these policies and the challenges of its implementation or lack of implementation were what was brought out from the grassroots and its intended farmer beneficiaries. For the relevant agencies, mainly national government agencies, the Forums were platforms of sharing and dissemination and to accept what farmer participants say about its challenges. The Forums were organized at a broad scale at all regions of the country. The participants recognized that the Forum significantly contributed to knowing the issues and challenges seen by farmers. Changes and improvements are more on farmers' local practices and behavior. Organizers of the Forums also saw that it was well-organized and achieved its set of agenda.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND OPTIONS**

The past six Forums have produced mixed results and been useful to stakeholders. On the knowledge level, farmer-to-farmer exchanged of ideas and experiences, and interaction between farmers and government officials and private sector representatives have enriched them with new knowledge from practices, existing policies and market opportunities. As a result, their link with others have established or strengthened. Farmer Water User Groups negotiated with companies for lowering the price of fertilizer and bought in bulk to further distribute to their members at lower rate. Some farmer groups were able to access loan from the banks with flexible rates for different purposes through the facilitation by government agencies, RDB and private banks. Some farmer groups extended their networks from Prey

Veng to Katie and Kandal through calls and social media groups. Some were able to link with company for contract farming with guaranteed price in recent years. This ultimately resulted to economic benefits for farmers, especially the ACs or small enterprises that were able to link to wider domestic and foreign markets. While policy changes were not an explicit purpose of the Forums, it contributed to facilitate registration and support for strengthening the capacity of ACs. It improved the collective stand of farmers such that there were adjustments or clarification of the provisions in the Extension Policy and Agricultural Land Law.

There remained a mismatch between their farmers' products and market needs. Rice surplus of farmers are not absorbed by markets, mainly because quality and sale-ability of the variety of rice, but also of limited capacity of large millers to export the rice. There is a weak connection between local buyers and export companies. There is a lack of coordination among different agencies and farmers on product and market information. This restrained farmers access to better product quality and markets. Crop failures were experienced by farmers. Yet there is still no firm concept about crop insurance which can help farmers recover from failures.

The Forums created an atmosphere for friendly dialogue between farmers, government officials and the private sector. It enabled them a mutual understanding and support. As it turned more widely known, the Forums became effective for more sharing of information, for linking up, and to some extent to influence policy. It is an important place to project farmers' voice among policy makers and business entities. It offered people the opportunity to learn new policies, regulations and updates on programs by government officials. It can continue to run on itself, aside from Farmer Assemblies annually organized by the Ministry of Agriculture which serves a different orientation and purpose.

Given its gains and the appreciation of the participants, they suggested to continue organizing the Farmer Forum in the future. However, there are some consideration on how it should be organized and what topics to cover.

First, programming should align to the Agricultural Sector Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018 with its shift from extensive to intensive farming focused on priority value chains. This re-focusing is also apparent in major donor responses (e.g., IFAD-FAO, ADB, USAID or the World Economic Forum (WEF) Cambodia Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture (CPSA). The re-focusing includes infrastructure, financing and adaptive agricultural practices/technologies to climate change and disaster management, but clearly directed to the relevant bodies (e.g., MOWRAM for irrigation or MoC and the banking sector for agri-financing).

Second, there may be a need for programming to be regionally specific. For example, the north region is more focused on organic; the northwest more concerned about drought than the flood-adaptive cropping technologies in the central plain; the northeast is still struggling with sale-able crops given its ethnic and low-value crops.

Third, the programming should link to and encompass new developments. For example, there are several national programs on value-chain intensification (e.g. Accelerating Inclusive Markets for Smallholders (AIMS) program by IFAD); on improving extension services (e.g. Agriculture Services Programme for Innovation, Resilience and Extension (ASPIRE)); on horticulture (Cambodia Horticulture Advancing Income and Nutrition (CHAIN) by SNV and Feed the Future Cambodia Harvest II by USAID).

Fourth, clearly the Forum serves to stir the interest, but there is no follow-through activity to deepen such interest and transform it into practice. Therefore, the Forum as a method should be linked to a step-up method, either as specific training on adaptive agricultural technologies initially discussed (see ASPIRE) or a Workshop to consolidate initial agreements (e.g. Farmer Water user Committee Consultative Meeting on their engagement for Integrated Water Resource Management with the ADB-MOWRAM irrigation projects). It would be good for NGO Forum to situate the link of the Forum as a method to training and other advocacy methods as well which can be jointly partner with agencies interested to provide the next step.

The evaluator further suggest two options – there need to be guarantee for no political discussions and follow-up strategy and plan is required to gauge changes as a result.

Option 1: Maintain the same level of scope of previous Forums but need to better organize by having parallel session and have pre-Forum properly done as a preparation for the participants before coming to the national level Farmer Forum.

Option 2: Make the Forum smaller (propose 30-50 participants) with participants from government agencies, private sector and NGOs coming together with farmers to discuss gaps, recommendation, design action and follow-up on changes.

Regardless of any options, the topics for future discussion may include each or some of these:

- Market information, production strategy, supporting mechanism of the State, State-recognized products (for example, fish sources from farmers, can the Government issue a statement of acceptance?);
- Insurances for crops using lessons learned from other countries;
- The theme of water, capital and market is still very relevant, especially in following up the achievements from the previous Forum;
- Value chains and markets where producers like ACs, farmers, rice millers, exporters to be part of the Forum among others;
- Inclusive trade and competitive markets, link to farm enterprises;
- Improve our value chains for foreign currency earning;
- Organic production and potential pilots and its implication on health, education and environment; and
- Collective production for markets and production planning.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Agricultural Cooperatives
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADIC	Analyzing Development Issues Centre
AFD	Agence Francais de Developpment
AIMS	Accelerating Inclusive Markets for Smallholders
AVSF	Agronomes & Veterinaires sans Frontieres
CHAIN	Cambodian Horticulture Advancing Income and Nutrition
CIRD	Cambodian Institute for Research and Rural Development
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASPIRE	Agriculture Services Programme for Innovation, Resilience and Extension
CARD	Council for Agricultural and Rural Development
CEDAC	Centre d'Etude et de Développement Agricole Cambodgien
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CC	Commune Council
CCCSP	Cambodia Climate Change Strategic Plan
CIS	Community Irrigation System
DPA	Development and Partnership in Action
FAEC	Federation of famers Association promoting agriculture Enterprise in Cambodia
EU	European Union
FWN	Farmers and Water Net
FWUC	Farmer Water User Committee
GAP	Good Agriculture Practices
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ISC	Irrigation Service Center
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
JCCI	Joint Climate Change Initiative
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LWD	Life with Dignity
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery
MoEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MoE	Ministry of Environment
Mol	Ministry of Information
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MFI	Micro-Finance Institution
MoWRAM	Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology
MRD	Ministry of Rural Development
NDCM	National Committee for Disaster Management
NPRS	National Poverty Reduction Strategy
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
PCDM	Provincial Committee for Disaster Management
PDA	Provincial Department of Agriculture
PDE	Provincial Department of Environment
PDoWRAM	Provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology
RDB	Rural Development Bank
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
SNAP-DRR	Strategic National Action Plan-Disaster Risk Reduction
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WOCAT	World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies network

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# I. PROJECT BACKGROUND

## 1.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Cambodia lies on a point equidistant between the Tropic of Cancer and the equator. Its climate is dominated by the monsoons, which are known as tropical wet and dry because of the distinctly marked seasonal differences, dry from January to June and wet from July to December as the monsoon season. The dominant features of the Cambodian landscape are the Tonle Sap (Great Lake) and the Bassac River Systems and the Mekong River which crosses the country from North to South. About 75 percent of the total land area is within the Tonle Sap Basin and the Mekong Lowlands which are arable lands for agriculture when waters recede, as well as the main sources of fish resources. About 80% of Cambodians settle in rural areas heavily involved in agricultural work and fishing. The capital and provincial centers play important role as distribution centers of the agricultural value chain. Agriculture is commonly identified as a main issue for food security and sustainable development.

The geography of Cambodia makes the country vulnerable to water and climatic fluctuations which results to consistent flooding and drought calamities. These phenomena have consistently afflicted farmers and are made worse by climate change. These often have disastrous impact on livelihoods that are dependent on agriculture, since disasters adversely impact as crop failures that ruin livelihoods and push farmers into indebtedness. The Cambodian agriculture sector, especially small landholders are bearing the brunt disastrous effects of the climate change.

The agriculture sector in Cambodia accounts for 32% of Cambodian GDP and employs about 80 per cent of the labor force in the country. This sector is dominated by small and rural landholder farmers. Majority of these farmers are non-paid family members working on their own farmland. A report by the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) on the worse floods of 2011 affected 1.5 million people, inundated about 400,000 hectare of cultivated land, killed 250 people, and caused an estimated total financial loss of US\$ 520 million<sup>1</sup>. Data collected by the NGO Forum found that floods more often led to production losses by 70% in most the cases, while droughts impacts are lesser, by 20%, but both have occurred concurrently.<sup>2</sup>

The impacts of climate change to the agriculture mean negative effects to the whole ranges of agriculture-related issues such as food security, poverty reduction, and sustainable livelihood. Food security is top priority of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs). It is specifically addressed in the Government's Rectangular Strategy, the National Strategic Development Plan Update (2009-2013) and recognized as a basic human right under the Universal Declaration on Human Right and the

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<sup>1</sup> The National Committee for Disaster and Management (NCDM) report in 2011

<sup>2</sup> Report of Ministry of Environment 2002

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. RGC has made two stages of a Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (SFFSN 2008-2012; NSFSCN 2014-2018) to reconfirm its commitment to support the agricultural sector through improving: (1) food availability, (2) food access, (3) food usage and utilization, (4) food reliability and supply, and (5) institutional and policy environment for food security and nutrition in Cambodia<sup>3</sup>.

The importance of agriculture and the recurring impact of climate change to food security, and livelihoods was a cause for alarm by both government and for civil society organizations (CSO). Recent years saw the development of National Plans of Action to address both disaster management and climate change. National government developed its Climate Change Strategic Plan 2014-2023 (CCSP) and started mainstreaming climate change in most national plans of line ministries, including agriculture, education, health and environment. CSOs set up a Climate Change Alliance since 2010. NGO Forum, along with government agencies, NGOs, private sector, development partners, monks, academia, students, journalists and farmers agreed to host an annual event, called “National Farmer Forum” since 2010. The National Farmer Forum is an advocacy platform for men and women farmers working with other stakeholders to come together annually to share best practices, lesson learnt, new creative ideas, experiences and challenges. These Forums provide opportunities for farmers, NGOs/CSOs, private sector, and the Royal Government of Cambodia to meet, discuss and seek for strategies to address issues being faced by farmers.

There has been six “Farmer Forums” conducted with key event objectives as follows:

1. Together Raising Awareness on Climate Change for Sustainable Agriculture, March 04, 2010, at National Institute of Education, with 406 (116F) participants. The objectives/purposes of the Forum are: a) To disseminate information to farmers on the root causes, impact, and current situation of climate change in Cambodia to increase their knowledge and understanding of the issue; b) to share and disseminate knowledge and experience on household food production in the context of climate change; and, to hold roundtable discussions (farmer, GO, NGO) to deepen farmers' understanding on climate change, get their recommendations, and provide platform for farmers to raise their concerns on the issue.
2. Working Together to Help Smallholder Farmers to Adapt to Climate Change for Livelihood Sustainability, April 27-28, 2011, at Phnom Penh Hotel, with 408 participants. The objectives are: a) to provide opportunities for farmers and relevant institutions to share successful experiences and to discuss effects, challenges, and problems being experienced to be more resilient in the event of the climate change; and, b) to document recommendations from this farmer Forum for helping smallholder farmers to be better resilient in the event of the climate change

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<sup>3</sup> Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (SFFSN 2008-2012)

3. Working Together to Help Smallholder Farmers in Cambodian Adapt to Climate Change and Attain Food Security, Nov 6-7, 2012, at Koh Pich, with 591 (196F) participants. The objectives are: a) to reflect and share on the impact, experience and lesson learn from the previous national farmer Forums; b) to improve farmers and civil society's understanding and make recommendation to government of how to improve policies on climate change and Strategic Framework of Food Security and Nutrition SFFSN (2008-2012) and pro-poor policies, with a focus on food availability; c) to build a strong level of cooperation between smallholders, CSOs, private sector, and government and to share experiences of sustainable agriculture development in Cambodia; and, d) to share new creativities and experiences through exhibition from government, farmer and NGOs.
4. Working Together to Improve Farmers' Capacity of Adaptation to Climate Change to Ensure Food Security, October 17-18, 2013, Phnom Penh, 550 (35%F) participants. The objectives are: a) to reflect and share results, experiences and lessons obtained from the previous national Forums ; b) to increase better understanding and consult with participants on implementation and development of policies related to climate change and the Strategic Plan for Food Security and Nutrition (2008-2012) and policies responding to the poor; c) to strengthen good collaboration and relationship between civil society, smallholder farmers, the private sector and government officials in participation in development and implementation of policies related to climate change and the Strategic Plan for Food Security and Nutrition (2008-2012) to ensure food security; and, d) to share new creative ideas and experiences through exhibition of achievements by farmers, NGOs, the private sector and the government, focusing mainly on adaptation to climate change and obtaining food security.
5. Together to Empower Smallholder Farmers towards Market Oriented Interventions and Climate Resilience in Agriculture, December 04-05, 2014, at Institute of Technology of Cambodia, with 856 (325F) participants. The objectives are: a) to reflect and share the output achieved by government, civil society, farmer and private sector that have been raised in 4th Annual National Farmer Forum; b) to enhance farmer participation in sharing new initiative ideas, good practices and challenges that occurred in their area; c) to join discussion on food security and nutrition strategy plan implementation (2014-2018) and policy especially agriculture marketing policy to improve economic empowerment of small-scale farmers; and, d) to strengthen cooperation and good relations between civil society, farmer, private sector and government at both nation and sub-nation level through joint action plan.
6. Women Champion in Agriculture, March 09, 2016, at Imperial Garden Villa & Hotel Phnom Penh, with 320 (208F) participants. The objectives are: a) to empower small landholder farmers, especially woman champions from the sub-national farmer Forum, to discuss and develop a common interest and voice to raise to the national

government, policy-makers, and development partners; b) to take part in discussion on policy issues to support small landholder farmers, especially female farmers, so they will gain access to water, capital, and market for agricultural products; and, c) to strengthen collaboration and partnership between farmers, CSOs, private sectors, and the Royal Government of Cambodia.

## **1.2 OVERALL ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM THE FORUMS**

The workshop objectives of the Farmer Forums are along key thematic areas, as follows: (a) climate change, including its root causes, current situations and impacts; (b) agriculture and livelihoods/food security, including practices, successes, challenges and suggestions among RGC, CSOs and farmers; (c) infrastructure/irrigation development for mitigating impacts of the climate change and for increasing agricultural productivity; (d) markets for agricultural seeds, products, and techniques, especially for supporting those smallholders and female farmers; (e) networking/capacity building for increasing farmers' confidence and resilient agricultural practices, and (f) policy/strategy of the government as a result or parallel/correlation of the Farmer Forums. These are described as follows:

**A. Climate change:** it is a natural and man-made change in weather patterns which produce irregular and unusual levels of rain, wind, storm, drought, diseases, pollution, soil erosion, etc. Climate change affects agriculture the most. For example, droughts were experienced by farmers as extended small dry season, late rainfall, irregular rainfall, or no rainfall in some areas. This results to the lack of water from underground and surface water for agricultural activities. They experienced heavy rain causing rice and other crops to rot. In the eastern provinces, farmers encounter flash floods whose recession was slow. Some areas are short of safety high grounds where people can move to during an emergency. There is a consistent lack of irrigation from canals, ponds or wells that can support water flow needed for agricultural production.

Predicting climate change and disseminating information are the responsibilities of the government, especially the Ministry of Water Resource and Meteorology (MOWRAM). The ministry should work with Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (MAFF), National Commission for Disaster Risk Management (NCDD), Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS), and other government ministries and agencies to share the most updated information on the climate change to the public and the farmers through their websites, radios, TVs, and other social media.

**B. Agriculture and livelihoods/food security:** Agriculture is an integral part of Cambodia's livelihood and food security for income and job creation. Adaptive, innovative and advanced agricultural techniques are required to reduce potential impacts from the climate change. However, these techniques for farmers inadequately disseminated or not available and not adopted. This is both an issue of weak extension services and insufficient budget allocation

that would have shared sustainable agricultural management techniques or strengthened the capacity of smallholder men and women farmers. Capacity building should go along with access to micro credits at low interest rates.

**C. Infrastructure/Irrigation development:** Cambodian farmers are accustomed to agricultural work during a rainy season because water availability from rainfall and impounded sources. However, water supply may be too much, hence water-logged farms, or too little because of the lack of water impounding and distribution systems that can reach to the farms. Forum participants consistently brought this out. The irrigation system in Cambodia dates back to the Angkorian era and the Khmer Rouge period. Many are in need of rehabilitation and irrigation infrastructure development has been slow in the past decades. Therefore, the rehabilitation of large water systems as well as small and medium systems, including canals, ponds, creeks and dikes is crucial as brought out in the Farmer Forum.

**D. Markets:** An agricultural market system is about supply and demand. The “supply” side is the production with all its associated factors taken into account. These factors includes the basic inputs of land, water, climate, labour and capital investment such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, machinery and technology. The production process starts from land preparation, plant growth to harvest, post-harvest and processing into the final product. The trade aspect involves competition against other producer on issues of product quality and price. Information on efficient production and market information are vital aspects. The demand side is basically the market—usually from farm gate to the consumer and involves traders, distributors, wholesalers and retailers. The important issue here is market demand against the availability of supply which sets the prices of the products. This is influenced by several factors such as the logistical costs, competition from other producers, importation and regional/global demand if the product is intended for export. The supply and demand is greatly influenced by boom-and-bust cycle, like bumper crop may result to a glut in the market or crop failures may result to overwhelming demand. Farmers need to know the demand side so that they can make decisions on whether to go into the general market or find niche market. The demand side also set standards for product quality that relates to prices. Overall, farmers should have knowledge the inter-relation of climate, production, logistics, trade and market along as this has bearing on their investment. They should have a sense of investment and return, including information on financing. In reality, farmers attending the Forum have limited understanding and information on this inter-relationship.

The market access and information, for example, have constrained people in many ways in producing their agricultural products. There has been the lack of enhancement of small trade. An added problem is farmers lack transport and bad roads from farm to markets, therefore, their dependence on middle traders who exploit them through low farm gate prices. People called for support in establishing agricultural cooperatives, and also strengthen effective implementation of the Law on Management of Agricultural Chemicals. They also appealed that

the government should develop a market policy that responds to poor farmers, especially the need to strengthen the supervision of quality of imported agricultural products.

**E. Networking/capacity building:** Networking and capacity building were key agenda items of the Forums for all cross-sector stakeholders – farmers, civil society organizations, government, and private sectors.

Hundreds of Cambodian farmers from different parts of Cambodia, namely:

- Region 1: Mekong (6 provinces: Kratie, Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, Kampong Cham, and Tboung Kmom),
- Region 2: Southern Tonle Sap (4 provinces: Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, and Pailin),
- Region 3: Northern Tonle Sap (5 provinces: Kampong Thom, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap, Oddar Meanchey, Banteay Meanchey),
- Region 4: Coastal (4 provinces: Kep, Kampot, Kampong Som, Koh Kong), and
- Region 5: Lowland (5 provinces: Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Takeo, Kandal, Kampong Speu).

Key civil society organizations are Action Aid, AVSF, Caritas Cambodia, Caritas Switzerland, Catholic Agency for Oversea Development, Catholic Relief Service, CEDAC, Christian Aid, Danish Church Aid, FAEC, FINN Church Aid, Geres Cambodia, Helen Keller, JCCI, Kanhchna, LWD, NGOF, Oxfam, Padek, People in Need, Samaritan, Purse Relief, Southern Voices, Srer Khmer, UNDP, World Vision, etc.

Key Government ministries/institutes are Council for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), Chamber of Commerce (CC), Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry (MAFF), Ministry of Economics and Finance (MoEF), Ministry of Environment (MoE), Ministry of Information (Moi), Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Ministry of Water Resource and Metrology (MoWRAM), National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDD) and Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDA), etc.

Key private sector institutes are ACLEDA, ADB, AMRU, Cambodia Rice Mill Federation, Canada Bank, FORTE (Rice Insurance Pilot project), Green Eagle, International Financial Cooperation, Japan Farm, KREDIT MFI, Mong Rithy Group, Rural Development Bank, Vision Fund Cambodia, etc.

Along with issues of climate change, insecticide and chemicals, Cambodian farmers have problems with fewer seed selections, farming techniques, and water management capacity so as to be more resilient to the climate change. Resilient rice seeds and animal breeds resilient diseases were recommended through the Forums. A long term plan is needed to increase awareness on impacts of pesticides, guidance on rice, and conservation of farming areas for quality of land and agricultural products.

**F. Policy:** Policy is the government purview. The first and second Forums were more about general discussions, experiences, and recommendations on climate change and agriculture. From the third to the sixth Forum from 2012 to 2016, the term “policy” was more frequently referred to. Both small and plenary discussions in these Forums discussed climate change and agricultural problems, challenges, and recommendations for the government to adapt policies or improve policy implementation on pro-poor policy, climate change, food security and nutrition (livelihoods), infrastructure/irrigation system, and market including loans. Government officials appreciated those suggestions, responding with presentations on their progressive activities and efforts to support the farmers, agriculture, and food and nutrition in Cambodia.

Policy support and concessions to farmers are highly needed since their financial, skills and adaptable capacity is relatively low. An average daily income of a farmer is mostly just over 1 USD (4,000 Riel). It is highly likely that the farmer does not savings to invest back into farming. This is the reason why traditional methods of production and trade are prevalent.

### 1.3 DATA COLLECTED UNDER THIS ASSIGNMENT

The following table offers a quick snapshot on the types of key data collected under this consultancy from those six main points in the “1.2 Overall Issues Identified From the Forums”. The data was collected, organized, and tabulated into forms. “Learning or memory from Forums” is the first important information. This is followed by “Suggestions from the Forums” for the supports which have later been provided or not. Lastly, is how these support or learning resulted to changes as “Government’s long term development outcomes”.

Table 1: Data Collected in this Assignment

Learning from the Forum	Some suggestions from the Forum	Government’s Development Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- one or two key learning point(s) that helps to orientate their practices in agriculture and climate change adaptation</li> <li>- networking and linking with Forum participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- capacity building and information dissemination, Awareness raising on the impacts and effect of climate change,</li> <li>- provide social land concession and technical support to smallholder farmers</li> <li>- develop small- and medium-scale irrigation system</li> <li>- research and widely spread out to create high-yielding seeds in response to current market demand and climate resilience. Improve management and quality and agriculture equipment control</li> <li>- provide credit to farmers with the interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improved capacity building</li> <li>- infrastructure development,</li> <li>- markets for agricultural products</li> <li>- rural employment by benefiting from rural and urban migration</li> <li>- improved living conditions of rural</li> </ul>

<p>through constant discussions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exchanges of ideas and experiences since the Forums</li> </ul>	<p>rates of less than 1% per month,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provide agricultural insurance</li> <li>- provide subsidies to the farmers whose farms are damaged and destroyed by flood, drought and other natural disasters</li> <li>- reduce gas price</li> <li>- promote community organization and community-based information dissemination including weather forecasting and early warning system</li> <li>- provide SME training</li> </ul>	<p>dwellers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- investment on smallholder agriculture</li> <li>- reduced impacts of farmers' vulnerabilities and risks</li> </ul>
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## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSIGNMENT

1. To assess the impacts of the six Annual National Farmer Forums.
2. To develop future direction for effectively organizing the future of Annual National Farmer Forum.

## III. DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

Given the nature of the project and the objective of this study, the study team adopted appropriate qualitative approach to data collection. Since the Forum participants were from all over Cambodia and given the study's time limit, NGO Forum agreed to group them into four geographical locations including Tonle Sap, Northeast, Lower Mekong and Coastal areas. The final selection of four provinces included Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, Kratie and Battambang Provinces. NGO Forum and their affiliated networks helped to coordinate the convening of the group of about 10-15 participants in each focus area.

Interview of key informants complemented the Focus Groups. This was done with respondents from government departments who engaged in the Forums. This aims to hear their perceptions regarding the usefulness or relevance of the Forum to the farmers and how such events contribute to realizing the policy objectives of the government. They offered lessons for future events and expounded on the support they have provided. Private sector representatives were approached for discussions regarding how they feel about the management of the event and on how they link to farmer's practices. Event organizers among NGOs were also key informants. They created the initial concept or rationale behind the Forum. They shared the Forum documentation of processes and challenges on how it ran. They offered important lessons for upcoming and future Forums. In addition, they helped to indicate changes they have seen on the ground.

For individual case study, the focus was on the impact resulting from the Forum. Due to perceived differences of impact against the participant's characteristics, the study suggested

four types of respondents: a) participants who have been through all or most Forums; b) those who attended the first few Forum; c) those who attended in recent Forum; and, d) Women who attended in any Forum. These were interviewed as successful cases that may be replicated and will form important evidences to substantiate the results from FGDs and KIIs. Each of the respondents was asked to give their ideas or opinions according to the set objectives of the evaluation. The impact assessment was made using some parts of OECD/DAC Criteria. These objectives and focus of the questions became the basis for developing the structure of the report and the detailed questions for interviews.

Table 2: Study Methods against the Number of Participants

No	Sources	Interview methods	Male	Female	Total
1	Government officials	KII	9	2	11
2	NGO representatives	KII	9	4	13
3	Private sector	KII	3	1	4
4	Farmers	FGD	11	17	28
5	Farmers	IDI	2	4	6
Total			34	28	62

Note: All data collected were entered in a pre-determined database (Excel) which has helped to do thematic analysis.

All researches have their limitations, and likewise this consultancy research has its own limitations. First, documents such as concept notes from the first and second meetings were not well recorded and shared to the consultant team. Second, all participant lists and their contacts were not available, and accordingly, it is impossible to know if any participants had participated all the six forums while at the same time so many phone numbers were not contactable. Third, nature of this study is a qualitative research, data, and analysis, therefore, the results are indicative – not representative (as the quantitative study may suggest). Fourth, given the fact that fewer participants joined the study, the results of this research more likely tend to address their opinions. Fifth, there are no monitoring and evaluating mechanisms in place for implementing organizations, organizer committee members, farmers, development partners, and the government officials to actually and statistically track all suggestions and recommendations made in any of the forums. However, even though there are some limitations, this research and the research results offer some insights and lessons.

## IV. FINDINGS

The study categorizes the findings into five parts: (1) farmers' memories of the Forums, (2) interrelation between the Forums and perceived livelihood changes, (3) interrelation between the Forums and networking abilities, (4) aspects of policies/strategy inclusion from the Forums, and (5) efficiency of the Forums.

#### 4.1 FARMER'S MEMORIES OF THE FORUMS

*“As one of the 300 participants to the 6<sup>th</sup> Forum in Phnom Penh, I heard the talk about market issue and low price of the products. It has something to do with low quality product and no storage especially for rice. Farmers generally sell their products immediately for cash since they cannot delay due to rain but poor product quality results in a low price. As this is an issue of the commune, the Forum raised the point of having contract with rice millers as an option, which I never thought of before.” [AC Chief in Battambang]*

The Forum was a place or gateway where old and new people meet each other to share experiences. It offers an opportunity for people to participate and share their experiences and concerns to a larger audience. There are a lot of people that joined the events. I don't know if I will ever meet the people again after the events. The participants were active, participatory and vocal in expressing their concerns and contributing to event activities. They called for support from the government, civil society organizations and the private sector. Prior to the large event, many small, regional events were organized to prepare key issues and to mobilize resources among development partners/organizing committees, including Oxfam, CARITAS, NGO Forum, World Vision, DPA, HEKS, Sre Khmer, Action Aids, etc. Apart from farmers, government officials, NGO representatives and the private banking sector also joined, but not in all events. The farmer participants were eager to learn and get more the information. They asked lots of questions in the plenary session and at break time. They were already equipped with knowledge because they raised the right questions which the experts answered. The Forum provided participants update of priorities by focal persons coming from the government, civil society and development partners.

There are several ways that local farmers gained knowledge which helped them improve their practices, especially on rice production. The sharing by local organizations working in Battambang exposed other farmers on their best practices. Farmers learned from others on the method to purify the seeds in areas of the Cambodian Institute for Research and Rural Development (CIRD). PDAFF also has had the role to play in training farmers on the agriculture technique and purify the seeds. In 2017, the organization brought farmers to visit Preah Vihear on organic rice production. But it would be difficult to apply this on a 2 hectare farmland with no source of water. Some others have learned from ASPIRE, a government's project, on the technical aspects of raising chickens and planting crops/vegetables and climate change; that knowledge was further shared to others.

Farmers referred to the coordination of NGOs that helped them attend the Forum. Oxfam called local farmers to a meeting where they identified three farmers' issues on water, capital, and market. They held subsequent meetings to explore alternatives. MFIs were invited to join the meeting for its financing services. For the market's problem, the Ministry of Agriculture and government networks help with technical services. NGOs such as Oxfam want women farmers to raise their concern to the government and want the government heard

their concerns. The Forum built up local farmers understanding of demand side, the activities of government agencies and other stakeholders shared related information. The Forum assisted farmers in capacity improvement, to gain more confidence, to share experience with others and allowed some to apply in practice what they learned through the instructions.

The learning gained by farmers in the Forum were continually shared to others and had there has ripple effects. Some farmer learned and changed their behavior in growing rice when they saw that members of Agriculture Cooperative (AC) could sell better rice at a good price. They learn from each other to grow with purified seed and not to use banned fertilizers and pesticides. They had experienced the previous year a market crisis caused by contaminated substance in their products. In the past, they followed each other to produce larger volumes of rice to sell by using hormones and spraying chemicals to make rice ripen faster. These substances were banned by the Company who contracted with AC. The staff of Company monitors the quality of rice often. Traders can hardly compete with this Company that buy good quality rice. The people now do not worry to sell their product at trader's lower price. The Company also buys wet paddy, so people do not worry about drying the rice after harvest which is sometimes damaged by rain.

Another result of the Forum was that it assisted participants, especially local farmers, to understand the workings of self-help group through their shared experiences. For example, farmers in Kratie dramatically changed became confident; they know how to prepare their business plan and clearly understood projections of their cost-and-income. They found external capital support which they used to grow high quality rice crop.

The Forum engaged farmers to raise their concerns with MAFF. They challenged agencies and their own organizations on how to promote gender equity. It served as a platform where policy-makers at the national level got information directly from grassroots, rather than relying on the reports of their sub-ordinates or their own agency network. The reflections in the Forum made for a balance of opinions and views from diverse sources.

On the other hand, farmers were able to get information directly from the policy level, business, and private sectors. The Forum actively brought in women farmers' voices in the advocacy and was listened to very well by policy-makers in the top leadership. The Forum reminded sub-national authorities to pay more attention and have better collaboration with civil societies and to be active on solving challenges and issues in their communities.

The Forum helped to consolidate collective voices and make is more visible for stakeholders, especially policy makers. Cambodia is an agricultural country, in which farmers and agricultures are important for economic development, poverty reduction, food security, and nutrition. The Farmer Forum discussed and sought out solutions for farmers in a more inclusive way. Supporting farmers in commercialization process would help farmers not only to produce and harvest for subsistence but also for sales to generate incomes for their

households. It stimulated farmers' thinking to thoughts in specific market demands. They have to learn the concept of "producing more with less" and be guided on these practices. However, to enable more learning the Forum need to continue to share and discuss best practices.

#### **4.2 INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE FORUMS AND PERCEIVED LIVELIHOOD CHANGES**

Extension services by NGOs play a key role to ensure learning from the Forum is applied as practical measure. For example, the Irrigation Service Center (ISC) has been helping water user farmer groups on the technical services in irrigation and agriculture and linking their rice products to the markets. ISC works with Farmers and Water Net (FWN) which is comprised of 26 Farmer Water Users Committees covering 30,000 households working on 40,000ha of rice land in 11 provinces. ISC works in area where government has built irrigation infrastructure. The Forum offered farmer-to-farmer exchange of ideas and experiences. ISC conducted a follow-up with rice farmers in Battambang to track progress after the Forum. The farmers as a water user group negotiated with companies to lower the price of fertilizer and they bought in bulk to distribute to their members at lower price than the retail markets. They companies agreed that they can pay immediately after harvest. This happened in the last two years in Battambang, but also Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey and Kampong Thom where ISC has been working.

The Forum discussed a lot about the issues of market, water and capital. It has in some way influenced the policy and practices of banking sector. An interviewed bank representative said that the bank tried to serve all clients, especially farmers, by providing access to multiple flexible loan and repayment schemes. Currently, 40% of their clients are farmers who benefited from several loan options and repayments. The interest of the loan is classified by the periods of borrowing, as short term loan or the seasonal loan which is used by farmers to invest in crop growing or buying the products within 10.5% per year interest rate. The long term loan is for 1-5 years with the interest 9.5% per year. They can use the loan to invest the real-estate, machinery and building the business.

An example is the community in Kampot. They were good at managing their members and have good stock management with quality products. This community got \$10,000-to-\$100,000\$ loans with collateral as required by the National Bank to private banks. If the farmer's business failed, an evaluation was done by the group on a case-to-case basis so as to find appropriate solutions. Furthermore, the government issued a policy for interest rate cap (ceiling); this meant that borrowers, including the farmers, will pay less interest than in the past. One interviewed participant acknowledges the decrease in MFI interest rate. However, farmers still problem of using loans since the prices of their products are cheap. They cannot earn enough to pay to MFI on time. ACLEDA claimed that many farmers in the Forum

managed to get loans. Another development is that the government Rural Development Bank (RDB) has received capital from government to support the community in similar ways.

An important learning from the Forum instilled in farmers' practices is the selection of purified seed. This is crucial to result to high quality products. For example, Agriculture Cooperatives sold 1st grade and 2nd grade rice seeds at a higher price. We buy the seed and sell it to our members after it is purified at about 1000Riels/kg. We did this for four years already. Rumduol seed that was previously used took 6 months to harvest; now, using Sen Kra-ob or dry season seed, it takes a shorter time of 3.5 months to harvest. With our link to the company, we are guaranteed a higher price for our rice. The disadvantage is that they get the money late when they sell to the company as it has set a schedule of two weeks to purchase rice from AC. Some people who cannot wait out the two week period sell directly to middlemen at lower prices but quicker cash. Moreover, some non-member farmers who use chemical pesticide may contaminate their products resulting to the company's not buying their product or lowering the price.

Another major change of practices contributed by the Forum, as asserted by government officials, was the reduced use of chemical fertilizer and pesticide. Many previous events had discussed the impact of fertilizers on agricultural and human health. The Forum and follow-up extension of the government agencies only re-affirmed this message. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) introduced the good agriculture practices (GAP) which farmers reported to have understood. They started to apply lower amount of chemical in their farming practices. Another event that helped out was the NGO Forum on the role of pesticide on food safety campaign held 30 August 2017. This brought further the message of the impact of toxic substances on people and health.

Still another contribution of the Forum was that chemical insect pesticides and fertilizer sellers are more compliant to a standard of practice and proper packing. Farmers and local communities integrated the reduced use of chemical fertilizer and local communities into the commune investment plan (CIP). They included actions for them to learn more on raising animals (pig, duck, chicken), water issues, capital and the market. For instance, local farmers can find market demand and investors for their products with bargain price and offering. As result of participation in the Forums, a local woman farmer in Prey Veng Province can expand and enlarge their local products cropping and have generated more income and provided helping hands to neighbors. Moreover, she also joined training courses on how to grow crops and animals raising—sharing what they learned to other local people on applicable and efficient techniques. Her family has better livelihood and can save some money for supporting her children's schooling.

### **Case story 1: Successful Agricultural Cooperative in Battambang**

As a chief of AC of Chamroeun Phal Raing Kesey, I had participated in the first Forum held in Battambang with about 100 participants and then the 6<sup>th</sup> Forum held in Phnom Penh with more than 300 participants. In the Forum, much of the talk that I remember was the market issue and low price of the products as that was raised by many participants. It has something to do with low quality product and no storage place for rice products. Farmers generally sell their products immediately for cash as they cannot delay due to rain and poor quality which result in low price. Given that common issue, the Forum raised the point of having contract with rice millers as an option which I have never thought of that before.

Our AC was established in 2013 with current 288 members belonging to four villages and is inclusive of Poor1 and Poor 2 households. It was contracted with a rice miller AMRU after coordination by KAWP, FEAC, SNEC and Department of Agriculture. They all played distinct and complementary role to support us. AMRU taught us the technique in rice production (non-organic), VSO on M&E and bookkeeping, SNEC on contract preparation, and the Department of Agriculture recognized the deal. Our AC took the initiative. Our AC used to sell rice directly to AMRU in 2016 for 600 tons per season where they have rice miller in the nearby Kampong Preang commune. Now we have made contract with the company for 1300 tons per season according to our capacity while the rice miller need for about 2,000 tons. AMRU purchased our rice and pay us on a weekly basis. We have been fortunate that Rural Development Bank gave us a \$6,000 loan with 10% annual interest. We have repaid that completely after six months. We want to have access to larger loan amount but they require additional document such as land title as collateral which has constrained us.

We gained the trust of the company because we guaranteed the quality of rice supplied to them. They even conceded to accepting our rice supply into their mill even until late night. Our AC now opposes the purchase by individual middlemen. Our rice production achieved the terms of the contract because we can produce twice a year with an irrigation system constructed since three years ago. With our profit this year, we are planning to share our dividends amongst our members. Our AC plans to continue renewing the contract with AMRU and explore ways to connect with other bank to increase the capital. We need about 100,000\$ revolving fund to be used per week during the harvesting season. We are also planning to organize a General Assembly meeting where we invite members and non-members to hear update of our AC progress. I expected that we will have more members in the coming years. Our success depends to a large extent on the coordination of several stakeholders as stated above.

[Ms. Dem Sreylim, AC chief, Raing Kesey commune, Sangke district, Battambang Province.

The Forum has a contribution to social and economic life of farmers in a number of ways including those who attended in the past and those attending the recent ones. 1) The AC is considered to be part of the thought-ahead concept as there is a Government's Prakas. The Forum contributed to the establishment of ACs approved in the last three years, as the Forum has been running for six years now. It has given farmers opportunity to work together more closely. 2) An AC in Battambang was linked with the private sector as result of the Forum. As a result, rice production in their area was successful due to two factors: various stakeholders

linked their AC to the company and encouraged farmers to put extra effort to produce more as per buyer demand; and, the stakeholders supported irrigation infrastructure which allowed them to cultivate rice twice a year. The increase of their agricultural productivity strengthened the collective spirit of the AC as it ultimately brought more economic benefits for the farmers. Lastly, such linkage with private sector offers great lessons for community people. They have to sustain supply and quality of products and adopt new procedures compliant to the market. (See case story 1).

There are other successful cases in rice trade and vegetable growing supported by government agencies and NGOs worth describing here. For example, ACs in Battambang, Pursat and Kampong Speu provinces were helped by MAFF on technical seed production for some years after they found out high demand after they attended the Forums. Farmers with constant encouragement from NGO workers have produced rice and vegetable seeds to sell. However, they have not been trained on processing (packaging) techniques. ACs in Pursat Pteah Rung commune and in Borvel's Sambour commune that were linked to markets achieved good sales and their members' lives have improved significantly. Farmers who used traditional seeds were able to get resilient seeds from other farmers, for example, from Battambang which used Nambong seeds (rice seed from Vietnam). In Pursat Phnom Kravanh district, farmers used drip system the last three years for vegetable growing as learned by AC members in the Forum. They shared among themselves with even small starting capital. Also, there was technical support from government officials to farmers that did not result to positive changes or change was slow to see. For example, several ACs have not yet functioned and unable to make use of market networks discussed in the Forum.

#### **Case Story 2: Palm Sugar for Domestic and Overseas Markets, Kratie**

The Natural Palm Sugar enterprise was started after participation in the Forum. The business initiative was mobilized and established. It now run successfully as demand has sustainably increased with our link to 85 supermarkets and marts, 29 restaurants, 29 active kitchens and 1 food enterprise. Those clients demand palm sugar regularly for their own use and for retail sales. Furthermore, overseas markets have also demanded and ordered--including from Thailand and European markets. The enterprise is working in partnership with AC and core producers with universal standards and criteria. The benefit is that product collected by the enterprise got higher price and general market price. Our main challenge is the lack of capital since we need to expand. Access to private loan usually requires collateral, either individually, and assured business support at the same time. Another challenge is the proliferation of fake palm sugar products freely sold in the market, the inaction on these may smear our product's reputation. The future is to expand markets and diversify into supermarkets, restaurants, and public markets. Our current supply covers only a part of the existing markets; public markets would greatly expand the demand.

[Natural Golden Palm Sugar Enterprise, Mr. Keo Chet, Chief]

The Forum also contributed to the success of other type of products for the market, like in palm sugar production. As claimed by the participant, the Forum encouraged the community to start running social enterprise for Palm Sugar. They were successful in both domestic and overseas markets. The enterprise also expanded to include other types of products like cashew, fermented fish and even raised chickens. As a Group Enterprise, they gained better bargaining power for their products. They follow social enterprise procedure of direct dealing with the market than relying on middlemen. Their challenge is the need for additional capital to expand their production and better access to assured buyers. (See case story 2).

Despite successes seen in the case stories above, other farmers still faced market challenges for their products. Many farmers still depended on middlemen who purchase by bulk what farmers can offer but at their set price. Farmers cannot produce enough rice and other products to support demand. Farmers kept calling for government and NGOs support to link them to market, but they do not consolidate by bulk and as a group negotiate for better prices. Many members of ACs still sell product individually rather than as a group, hence, they lose out to traders. Also the desperation to sell immediately also meant that farmers are not using technical skills for post-harvest processing of their products. This constrained them from being able to improve their living condition. There were reports of some farmers that tried to process surplus pumpkins into juice when there were low price, but the market was limited them. The need for coordinated efforts, as seen in the case study on organic rice, is greatly needed among other products within a value-chain.

A big challenge is the inability of the market to absorb farmers' products, especially during bumper crop harvest. There was a case of farmers that barricaded the road with sacks full of rice this year because rice prices dropped to all time low and few traders were buying. Government has to step in to provide supporting funds for millers to buy rice. Many farmers do not have the connection to large-scale local buyers and export companies to sell their products. Some farmers grow rice varieties that are not marketable at the domestic and global market, e.g., Northeast Cambodia. Many farmers also have no sustained water sources to make second crop production. Finally, there is an influx of imported products that consumer buy and that discouraged local production of the same products. More work is needed to help farmers move from consumption to commercial crops for longer term benefits.

#### **4.3 INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE FORUMS AND NETWORKING ABILITIES**

*“The Forum led me to link with more networks. Because of the Forum a leading investor promised to buy our local products and rice if farmers and communities can collect the required volume (30-40 tons of rice per day. I was able identify a new market demand for our products in the northeast area. I also learned how to use social media to check progress related to local products nationwide, especially the MAFF product information page before considering sale so as to ensure peak prices at peak demand”. (Model Women Farmer from Kratie)*

Networking is crucial for everyone—including producers, traders, policy makers, lenders, investors, and even the market. The Forum serves to these different stakeholders. Local farmers who are members of the Farmer and Water Net (FWN), a national network of farmers, are at an advantage because they have earlier inter-linkages and addressed capacity building as key components of the national Forums. There were several meetings at sub regions plus field work preparation and field visits. Therefore, network members knew each other. For example, farmers from Prey Veng have had contact with farmers from Kandal province to discuss about farming and the market to sell their rice and animals they raised. They were in contact with farmers from Kratie on issues of farming and the issue of pig prices against the importation of pigs from the neighboring country. The Forum had a positive contribution to all concerned and serves as platform to expand communication.

*For the AC in Battambang (Case Story 1), the positive contribution of the Forum was towards its building a network with AMRU Rice for contract farming and secured purchase of rice with weekly payment and its connection to the Rural Development Bank which gave a loan a \$6000 loan at 10% of annual interest. The AMRU has also provided capacity building on technique aspects while VSO trained them on the financial aspects and M&E. These were built from their participation in the Forums.*

Another benefit and positive contribution by the Forum is the opportunity for farmers to gain and expand their contact and relationship, to exchange opinions and experiences so that they can understand what the market demands and replicate what successful local producers have done. The Forum also established a new channel of Women Model Farmer Networking that works in partnership with Agriculture Cooperative (AC) and engages with other actors from other sectors. NGO respondents from the validation meeting have maintained that they have seen changes of bavior of government officials now focusing on working with farmers, especially Department of Agriculture, to respond to community needs and demand, even with or without incentives (DSA), and community people become engaged with them for addressing their concerns.

In order to align with Info-Communications Technology (ICT), the Forum made a directory of contacts that participants can use to call each other and learn from each other on chemical pesticide control, the technical requirement of products and applied technology on parts of their production or processing. Participants have used the social media platform (Facebook) to post and share their relevant information and achievement to the public. Other farmers who saw their experiences were inspired by it. A model woman farmer from Kratie now use social media and check relevant information before she decided on her pig business and before she sells her products. In some cases, having understood climate change, they changed the traditional method of animal raising and adopted more resilient or saleable product, for example, goat farming.

The Forum's discussion was meant to bring together stakeholders. It starts off with farmer's issues, and then invites stakeholders to find reasonable ways of addressing the issue. The Forum is the way of raising all concerns so that it can stream into strategic plan or projects by

both and interpret into government, civil society or the farmer's association themselves. This is also a bridge for government to realize and get full update from farmers and find solutions promptly, as well as promoting gender through Women Model Farmer as key figures in the Forum. After the Forum, all participants can share the update information toward communities directly. The government usually shared information about processes and procedures. For example, the condition or criteria and application form on how to get the loan from Rural Development Bank. Some communities that have already received the loan from the bank would further share how they were able to get loans and voice their experiences on the requirements. On a different instance, MAFF would advise farmers to officially register as legal community to be able to access capacity building supports on management, marketing and crop techniques. A good example of the use of what transpired in the Forum was that the PDA in Kampong Thom Province made use the action plans from the Forum to work with community people in the Farmer's Field School, identified model farmers, and improved water supply and sanitation in the communities<sup>4</sup>.

*“The Forum has created a good initiative for local farmers on capital mobilization; for instance farmers in Baphnom District of Prey Veng have mobilized as Saving Group and the capital is up to 40 million Riel in 2017.” (Women Farmer in Prey Veng Province)*

Gender promotion has been prioritized by the Forum. Women farmers were given opportunities to express their voices, to make linkage with others and to raise their livelihood's concerns. Civil societies documented concerns from the communities during the Forum to find collectively solutions on how to address them. Women got updated of projects implementation, understood more on climate change, advocated for their issues and made linkages with government and donors. The Forum mobilized the National Women Model Farmer Network and documented a directory of phone contact and other basic information. Women can keep then keep in touch and communicate regularly across the country on specific issues and share local updates. Thus, women could give more value to their families and to social development. This is a very good initiative of the Forum that aligns to national and global priorities.

One local rice miller—AMRU Rice; has started to contact and convince local farmers to crop rice following the market demand—organic rice with applying the requirements set by the investor. The farmers must produce rice in the standard with the good rice seed, not use the chemical substances and reduce the amount of chemical fertilizers use; thus that the rice has no pollution substance and also gain the profit from the expense less use chemical fertilizers. While, the outcome of the rice without chemical fertilizer is about 4 tons per hectare and technical support from the investor has often provided and come to visit the rice field to check and monitoring the progress. As result, not only concerning on market demand and

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<sup>4</sup> Follow-up Trip report, 13-15 August 2014, on the farmers of the fourth Farmer Forum, organized by NGO Forum on Cambodia, participated by officials of Government agencies, NGO representatives, private sector representatives and National Farmer Network representatives.

price, but more investors also come to buy all rice with high price. Another way is to show that partnership building among different agricultural stakeholders is beneficial for identifying agricultural type, rate, place, and time producing any particular products.

Also related to the Forum, one leading investor promised local farmers in Kratie that if farmers can collect local vegetable 300 kg per day, the company will buy those products. Similarly, for rice volume of 30-40 tons trucks will be sent to the community directly. She started discussion with her network in northeast region in order to supply her local products as the demand is very high and it would be a good start. Despite this good promise, there was no actual result as any concrete action and communication was pursued by government and the farmers. This brings to fore two main challenges--transportation resources and capital. Without these, supply cannot reach the buyer or the buyer cannot reach the product. This is very important, as often there can be many talks but without the actual action by stakeholders then promises cannot translate into benefits.

Lastly, some Forums have given spaces for exhibition of local product. This is a good opportunity to find business partners, make contracts and expand one's market. The private sector is usually invited to participate in the Forums. It is likely good initiative and gathering all actors to see the products and made as a bridge between supply and demand sides.

Despite the number of advantages made by the Forums, there are many challenges. First, the function of Farmer Women Network (FWN) has not been determined so far. Second, engagement with private sector for market linkage brought out the demand, but it is often beyond the farmers' capacity to supply—for example—the demand of 100 tons of rice per day for 250 days per year where actual supply can be 10-20 tons per day for up to 200 days per year only. There is also issue not just of the volume but of the quality of local rice which does not meet the standards required. Buyers from Vietnam, on the other hand, will buy all types of rice but at a negotiated price or so-called diplomatic promise and agreement. This meant low prices that will contribute not much too local farmers' livelihood and changes. The Model Woman Farmer in Kratie also observed that many national contacts in the directory have not responded or continued the communication to them. Any expansion of their markets for the local products was more the farmer's self-initiative.

Interaction and communication between local farmers with sub-national level government bodies remained weak and technical support from the sub-national level on rice seed and adaptive practices are not yet forthcoming. Government in practice does not have access to markets. They can facilitate inter-action but the bureaucracy is often out of the business loop, therefore, expanding accessing to markets by the farmers remains a challenge. Also, some farmers tried contacting with interest investors and private sector for some local support and formal farm contracts. But it was not achieved. There was also a challenge to the arrangement and management of the Forum sessions. Practically, the Forum is just annual gathering and networking meeting to strengthening and policy enforcement. But the Forums

are limited by time and group division by organizers by the type of participants, rather than mixed together.

### **Case Story 3: Networking and Local Product Market Expansion in Kratie**

I have been involved in the Farmer Forum in 2014 through sub-national level interaction, and in a separate event I was nominated and eventually won national Women Model Farmer status, annually organized by MAFF. Because of the forum, I have expanded my link with farmer networks and farmers from the other regions and provinces, as well as some engagement with private sector in order to promote our local community products.

As many concerns were raised in the forums, some solutions were found for purchasing of local products—markets for rice and vegetables. Mong Rethy Group has guaranteed to buy local rice and vegetable if we can supply per the orders—for rice is suggested to supply 30-40 tons per day and vegetable is for about at least 300 kg per day. However, the operations and any formal contract has never been made and no any follow-up made by all concerned actors.

Now, our group start contacting with some farmer networks from the northeast province—Ratanakiri to explore some possibilities of local vegetable demand as our local community products are more likely for those markets. The connection has been possible for upon getting to know each other from the forums.

[Ms. Yin Sam Un, MAFF Women Model Farmer, Chroy Bantey Commune, Prek Prosob District, Kratie Province.

#### **4.4 ASPECTS OF POLICIES/STRATEGIES INCLUSION FROM THE FORUMS**

*“All actors—government, civil society and donor, have gradually agreed and recognised the Forum as just a platform of discussing and sharing relevant information and issues rather than influencing policies and engagement. It is more to share and update concerned actors only. There is no monitoring mechanism in place to follow up what each Forum has prioritized and put in final statement; no any parties have translated discussion outputs into actual activities or even integrated into institution’s strategies.”*

The impact of the Forum on policy is not easily observed to the nature of complex process that it underwent. However, despite the Forum is understood as a space of sharing and discussing of experiences and technologies in agriculture rather than influencing policy. There are two indications that the Forum relates to policies. One, most points raised in the Forum were in line with existing policies. For example, CARD has two relevant policies such as Food Security and Nutrition Policy, and Social Protection Policy which show the need for lowering the interest rate in order to be helpful to farmers. Second, there were subsequent occasions on policy discussions when resource speakers were invited and they made key points to discuss policy issues. For instance, the drafting of agriculture land law has considerable inputs

from civil society under umbrella of NGO Forum. Another instance was the national government's lowering of the interest rate of loans to 1.5% monthly at maximum rate and the intervention of government on the rice price through budget for rice millers through Rural Development Bank. Throughout these policy discussions, the Forum's role is minimal.

One of remarkable achievements is that the Forum has usually produced final statement and submitted it to the government. These were for the top leadership to recheck as to the existing regulations and legal documents and as possible inputs towards formulating new policies and regulations aligned with local context and demand. One result from the Forum was that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) set up a program to promote local product and sharing information among local farmers using an ITC platform in 196 communes in 5 provinces starting from 2010 and ended by 2023. It will expand into two more provinces with total 272 communes by 2018. Each commune has one focal person with one tablet containing information related to local products and how to crop as well as guidelines and instructions for applying those practices into the communities.

With regards to Agricultural Land Law, Extension Policies, and Agricultural Cooperatives; the Forum has had influence on some provisions. On Agricultural Land Law, The draft law has a provision that "if large land is not used for 3 years, it will be seized." This clause was really sensitive to farmers. When brought up for discussion and clarification, government officials responded that they will ensure no such thing would be added. On the Extension Policies, it was included that model farmers, with proper training will be used extension workers Commune level. On the Agricultural Cooperative Policy, there is a provision that state Interim AC and AC Federation should be facilitated in such a way they can have access to license, market access, and technical support and access to financial resources.

A popular agenda from the farmers was for government and MFIs to reconsider lowering the interest rate for loans. In 2017, the annual interest rate was allowed up to 18% annually per official guideline and instruction National Bank of Cambodia (NBC); where farmers requested 1.2% monthly. Although there were several discussions for change during the Forums, the farmer's request was unclear and non-assessable. There is no evidence that any revision came from the Forum in the absence of follow up and after-Forum mechanism. To respond to the local farmers' demand, the RDB has provided budget to AIM (Long Form) for pilot in Takeo, Battambang and Kampong Cham to provide loan to farmers.

One of the ideas emerged from the interviewed government officials were to focus on crop insurance. The idea is that any loss or damage to crop or livestock could be compensated by an insurance company. One company, known as FORTE, piloted the concept in Battambang and Pursat Provinces but it is yet to be seen whether it is acceptable by farmers or successful. Cambodia is an agriculture country and crop insurance is necessary, but what would be a good working model given the poverty of farmers and inability to invest in local production, much more in security of the crops.

As local products price (especially rice) has been unpredictable, the government started to mobilize agriculture cooperative (AC) to collect pre-capital so as to ensure capacity to purchase what local farmers can produce. The AC is an effective platform where farmer representatives can bargain with investors and traders through farming contract. The AC is also new initiative by MAFF to ensure the agriculture products, especially rice can be sold at profitable to local farmers as well as achieving government’s goal of rice export annually and to ensure the products can be linked to market through farming contracts with relevant investors. The government has a plan to support 20 million dollars to install dryer facilities— one machine could dry 100 tons of rice within two-day period. However, the government’s support and promotion is unlikely to be linked to the results of the Forums.

Table 3: Key Suggestions from the Forums and Responses

Key suggestions from all six forums (mainly from the farmers)	Themes	Key responses, including more policy implementation (mainly from the government)
Build capacity to be resilient to the climate change and prepare for its risks by redesigning houses, reforestation, and creating alert systems for the farmers and the public	Capacity building	The government had hosted many sharing and learning events in response to demanded capacity building and technical skill development through the progressive work of: Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (MAFF), Ministry of Water Resource and Meteorology (MWRM), Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Ministry of Environment (MoE), Ministry of Woman Affairs (MoWA), and Ministry of Commerce (MoC). Also, some areas where NGOs has been working on improving irrigation and rice production have helped to reduce risks in time of both floods and droughts.
Strengthen regional farmers’ technical skills including small and medium entrepreneurship (SME), improve skills of local members in disaster management committees, promote community-based organizations and smallholder farmers, and improve management and agricultural equipment control	Networking and capacity building	The farmer forums are reflections of the successes in collaboration among the government, civil society organizations, private sectors, and farmers. Lots of highly relevant trainings relating to SME and disaster management, to name a few, were made by MoRD, MAFF, MoC, and NCDM. Furthermore, the farmers in different parts of the country have continued to share among themselves at least through their phone contacts and Facebook groups.

Strengthen collaboration between CSOs, farmers, the private sector and the government at both national and sub-national levels through the development of joint action plans	Networking	The Royal Government has paid close attention to this issue and established a national coordination committee on climate change and line ministries have worked closely with local communities.
Develop and expand small-scale and medium-scale irrigation systems and strengthen their mechanisms of management and maintenance	Irrigation (water)	MWRM, MRD, and NCDM are in full speeds in supporting the community to develop both irrigation and infrastructure development systems. For example, 67 canals of up to more than 100 km were renovated, 31 dikes with total catchments of more than 24 km were renewed, and irrigation systems for more than 30 thousands hectares of fertilized land were improved.
Provide low-interest and small-scale loan and promote farmers' deposit, and provide loans to farmers with the interest rates of less than 1% per month	Private sector (capital)	Private sectors, especially the bank such as Rural Development Bank and ACLEDA, were active for flexibly adjusting their conditions to be easier and friendlier for the farmers while at the same time they are still on top of their business. Up to now, approximately 40% of ACLEDA's loans are for agriculture.
Mainstream gender (encourage and promote women to participate in all priority activities)	Gender	Ministry of Women Affairs has been trying to mainstream and promote the concepts on gender in all aspects of the agriculture, especially in agricultural production value chains and market value chains.
Conduct research and identify as well as provide high-yielding seeds, which are in high demand of the markets and are resilient to the climate resilience	Livelihoods (market)	The display also included publications on vital research topics about Cambodian issues, including the agriculture of different regions in the country organic fruits, and vegetables and the use of technology in agriculture.  Some farmers have already adopted the resilient seeds such as Nambong which has shorter period of three months and can stand against shortage of water.
Reduce gas price and other expenses on inputs, promote organic cultivation, and provide agricultural insurance  Provide subsidies to the farmers whose farms are damaged and destroyed by	Livelihoods (capital)	A lot of prevention has been made, but look like the existing scope is far too much, therefore, more progress is expected.

flood, drought and other natural disasters		
Mobilize resources, especially finance, for designing and implementing climate change projects at sub-national levels	Policy	<p>The Royal Government has paid close attention to this issue and established a national coordination committee on climate change and line ministries have worked closely with local communities, in order to raise the living standards of the people.</p> <p>The respondents have mentioned about their high likelihood of farmers' abilities to respond to the effects when they are in areas where irrigation is in place and their rice productivity is high.</p>
Discuss the implementation of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategic Plan(2014-2018), economic/social land concessions, and other policies relating to land, water, capital, and markets for the small landholders and the farmers	Policy	<p>All the governmental institutes, especially MAFF, MoE, and MoC, highlighted their positive contributions in these sectors by day-to-day implementation of their roles – including cooperating with development partners to provide support and enable the environment through a number of joint projects. Contributing discussions went to policies such as Rectangular Strategies, National Strategic Development Plan, National Policy on Food and Nutrition, and Climate Change Policy.</p> <p>Agricultural Land Law's provision on sensitive land tenure was clarified. For Agricultural Extension Policy include a provision that offer model farmers to become commune level extension agents. For Agricultural Cooperative Policy's provision that Interim AC and AC Federation need to have access to license and other support.</p>
Promote policy discussions, development, and implementation related to improvement of small landholder farmer's livelihood including access to water, capital, and market.	Policy	<p>Before, during, and after the forums, the government officials, especially these service providers at the sub-national levels in Kandal, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, and Battambang were noticeably more cooperative in their services to help farmers, particularly smallholder, females ones. In the line with this success, the government and private sector have cooperated to boost the export of 1 million tons of rice annually.</p>

Exhibit various agricultural products from the CSOs/NGOs and farmers from 25 cities/provinces	Exhibition (market)	The products are simply nothing without the market. The exhibition is so much attractive for both the farmers and buyers (possibly investors) to come and arrange some agricultural business together. This was the source of getting to know each other better and close interaction between participants.
Continue to hosting the farmer forums by NGOs, the development partners, and the government for farmers to dialogue, to learn from relevant stakeholders, and to be more productive in their agricultural work.	Efficiency	The farmer forums are great sharing and learning events, in which different stakeholders come and share their work, successes, and challenges. The forum is one of the greatest places for the farmers to get the latest information on climate change, market, irrigation system, and other agricultural related work.

#### 4.5 EFFICIENCY OF THE FORUMS

*The Forum was co-organized by civil societies with different topics and schemes. It was partnered by CARD for first four-Forum and the last two was partnered with MAFF. Its budget is subject to what can be raised on an annual basis, but the last one was on shortfall. However, UNDP is willing to support the next Forum, but what matter is theme of the Forum. All funds were from donors with no contribution from government and private sector.*

The start of the Forum in 2010 was for more of a friendly dialogue because there were hesitations on both sides for the fears that each may place blames on each other rather than look for ways to work together. At that time, the focus was on smaller farmers from CARITAS's area and its partners, private some private sector with participation by several government agencies as it was attempted to get polices down to the ground. In the end it was widely appreciated and then suggestion to continue the Forum together with exhibition since then. From the second one, they normally organize pre-Forum at regional level (group of provinces) and then they prioritized issues for the national level Farmer Forum. As it is generally mentioned, the Forum aims at providing stakeholders the opportunity to share and exchanges of idea and experiences while having access to better update on the latest Government policies and progress. In that process, it would minimize the potential confusion or different interpretation to existing policies, laws and relevant regulations.

The Forum was organized in parallel with the existing practices of local communities and civil societies. For example, one organizer has the program to produce seed for two years ahead of the Forum starting. Then the Forum discussed the topic of new seed invention aligning with climate change and adaptation. Furthermore, ran parallel with the government's will to find out model farmers to enlarging and production and marketing networks—the key

speakers from public institutions presented about the existing concepts and the laws. Government and development partners as well as donors have updated and shared relevant activities, projects and plans to local farmers and communities. This became effective and efficient channel of interaction and intervention by all stakeholders, specifically to local farmers to get more access information and narrow down some gaps delivery by the national level. For instance, farmers from Life with Dignity (LWD) areas have good opportunity to express and share their concerns—these include lack of water, lack of understanding of agricultural techniques, markets for their products, and lower interest rate of loan from Micro Finance Institutions (MFI).

Sometimes there were mixed of participants and large numbers for some Forums. Therefore, it has benefited of having parallel sessions of government officials, farmers, producers and private sectors focusing their discussions on specific issues of concern and finding ways of how they can be linked to private sector for market demands with support and endorsement from the government. Producers and farmers should have access to some data and information—capacity and volume of supply, quality of products and locations. However, there are other participants who are less articulate and were unable to express their own opinions or share their experiences, even in (small) group discussion of about 20-30 participants.

Given the large number of participants in each Forum, there is concern on the expense budget. Some organizers wanted to collect information from grassroots rather than take a large contingent of participants in national level. The former is cost-saving, less time consuming and reflect their area focus. There should be 30-50 participants and engaged with relevant departments and NGOs to design what to do and to set policy framework aiming for resilience and have bold vision in agriculture—such as early warning system, and how promote production to one million ton of rice annual for export.

All actors gradually agreed and realized that the Forum is very important for the community and helps the community to gain new knowledge from different sectors. It is also a platform of shortcut relation and communication between farmers and national level and the way of enforcing of more active of public institutions—after the Forums, the sub-national level has contacted people regularly and appear to stay closer as all concerns from farmers has been taken into account and get results within short period. The Forums have brought good discussion points where climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR), as crosscut, was brought forward with issue of water, food security and fisheries, but the discussion before tend to be standalone—group discussion of 20-30 participants is too big and some talked more than others. Given that lesson, ADB has designed program to conduct training on Disaster Risk Management to relevant public sectors both national and sub-national; where national is focused on policy design and implication as well as strengthen legal system; while sub-national level how to prepare again natural disasters including capacity, materials and equipment, and technical support.

Consensually, the organizers of the Forums have actively engaged in the all processes. NGO Forum led the process with support from its NGO networks at national and sub-national level. The Forum has finally produced final statement to government bodies but no follow up activities after that. Thus, a follow up and monitoring mechanism is needed to assess which activities have been reached and which have not been reached. In the history of the Forums, especially the first few ones they did not even have proper records of the Forum. There was only one follow-up trip jointly organized by the private sector, government and civil society group. After the fourth Forum, even the prioritized actions were set for a quarterly follow-up. In addition, there were delays in producing the document of the Forum and in disseminating to the Forum's participation which left participants untraced. Farmers wanted to be provided the document even if long delayed.

A concern in the last one or two Farmer Forum was some interference of political agenda. Some participants wanted to share their struggle in their advocacy process for land conflict and illegal logging issues. These runs counter to the purpose of the Forum which focuses more on the technical issues in agricultural development. This issue may crowd out the participation of some agencies that are interested in learning and sharing on agriculture issue and lessons. There is a need for properly informed process about how each selected participant need to do when joining the Forum. This could then create favorable climate for exchange and learning as one of the participants expressed that unlike before the NGOs and Government tended to isolate each other in working for common goal and claimed result or achievements from particular communities respectively even working in the same area. But now it is time for us to work together and share each other concerns and give each other credit for the positive change that each have made in a community.

When asked if the Farmer Forum overlap with the Farmers Assembly by Ministry of Agriculture, they all have expressed each has different roles to play or the Farmer Assembly appear to be driven by the supply side while Farmer Forum as the demand side. The Farmer Assembly appears to be wider in scope and they have farmer champion program where they screen for best farmers in production, processing and seed selection, mainly for vegetable and rice. The Farmers Assembly aims at evaluating results and creative to compile key lessons, technologies and innovation for further study and share with farmers, producers, AC, community forestry, and community fisheries throughout the country for improved quality and productivity. The idea is that they may transform their operations from smaller, to medium and commercial scale<sup>5</sup>, especially among farmer champions who can show their creativity and full ownership by keeping in minds both quantity and quality of their products. Whereas the Farmer Forum, it is a place for exchange of ideas and experiences, and collection of inputs for each participant to eventually make use in their policy and practical discussions when they have good opportunities. Separating both events is advantageous of fulfilling its

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.maff.gov.kh/news-events/1853>

respective objectives despite the resource spending are big. Combining them would make space smaller for people to participate but more efficient use of resources.

It is important to continue to the Forum as offer hooking up between farmers and other relevant agencies to share experiences and challenges. Most participants expressed the satisfaction with the Forum for it offer opportunity to meet up new people and establish links. Some still meet each other and make calls for sharing of new knowledge and information. Some even suggests that there should be follow-up trip every three months to assess changes on the ground and further reinforce the sharing of knowledge on the ground with farmers as well as agencies that support them. However, there are different suggestions on how it should be organized in the future.

- Maintain the same level of scope of last Forum but need to better organize by having parallel session with those who present come prepared, and provide more time for questioning and interaction but less for the speech and talking. There were too many panelist and have little time to express, but better to live short time for talk but more for questioning. Ensure that this should not include any political issues or discussions. Pre-Forum (regional or group of province) is better to organize to sensitize the view points and issues to be raised by participants prior to coming to national level, with that we will have collected inputs and lessons before organizing the bigger (national) one.
- It should be made smaller (focus on policy dialogues which in the end make clear policy messages, or technical discussions on for example, water, capital, forestry, fisheries) to make it cost effective. But need to have the right participants and the decision makers of the Forum. The process of doing it may involve identify gaps and recommendation in the dialogue were 30-50 participants from government agencies, private sector and NGOs coming together to design action and follow-up on changes how people link up with others and how they have become more resilient.

The topics for future discussions may include:

- Market information, production strategy, supporting mechanism of the State, State-recognized products (for example, fish sources from farmers, can the start issue a statement of acceptance?),
- Insurances for crops using lessons learned from other countries and contextualize it for Cambodian farmers
- The theme of water, capital and market is still very relevant, especially in following up the achievements from the previous Forum
- Value chains and markets where producers like ACs, farmers, rice millers, exporters to be part of the Forum among others

- Inclusive trade and competitive markets, and resilient farm enterprises that link to markets
- Improve our value chains for foreign currency earning
- Organic production and potential pilots and its implication on health, education and environment;
- Collective production for markets and production planning

## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **5.1 Gains of the Forum**

The past six Forums have produced mixed results while been useful to all stakeholders. On the knowledge level, farmer-to-farmer exchanges of ideas and experiences and interactions between farmers and government officials and private sector representatives have enriched them with new knowledge from practices, existing policies and market opportunities. As a result, their links with others have been established or strengthened. Farmers have negotiated with companies for lowering the price of fertilizer and they bought in bulks to further distribute (sell) to their members at lower rate. They have a better access to loan from the banks with flexibility for different types of purposes with facilitation by government agencies, RDB and private banks. They have extended networks all the way from Prey Veng to Katie and Kandal through calls and social media groups. They have also linked to companies for contracting farming and guaranteed price in recent years, which will ultimately produce economic benefits for farmers, especially those who work in ACs or Enterprises where links to both domestic and foreign markets. For policy changes, the Forums have contributed to the birth ACs and improved the collective spirit of farmers in addition to adjustment or clarification of the provisions in the Extension Policy and Agricultural Land Law.

Although laudable progress above, there are still challenge for farmers is the mismatch between their products and market needs. Surplus of rice by farmers are not absorbed by markets which may be due to quality and the type of rice. They hardly connect with local buyers and export companies. It is observed that the lack of coordinated effort between different agencies and farmers along with access to information has restrained farmers from being able to access to better product quality and market opportunities contributed to such challenge. Crop failure have been experienced by farmers, and to address such problem there is an idea of crop insurance to be compensated by insurance company when people encountered any damages. Despite piloted in Cambodia, result remains to be seen.

### **5.2 Future Forum?**

The Forum was initially been aimed to create an atmosphere for friendly dialogue between farmers and government officials and private sector to gain better mutual understanding and

support. Later, it became widely known and useful for more sharing, linking up, and to influence policies to a limited extent. It is an important place for making farmers' voice more visible among policy makers and business entities. It also offers peoples opportunity to learn new policies, regulation and progress from the Government officials. There is a potential for it to be sustained, by itself but complementing the Farmer Assembly annually organized by the Ministry of Agriculture for it serves different purposes and orientation.

Given the gains and appreciation of the participants, it is suggested to continue organizing the Farmer Forum in the future. However, policy context should influence how its programming may be organized.

### **Policy and Broad Programmatic Context**

There is an upgrade in the government's strategies on the economy, including agriculture, and on overall response to climate change. An improved framework on national development was ushered as the country came to be a mid-level economy. For example, there is now a current diversification of the economic sectors as embodied in the Cambodia Trade Integration Strategy 2014-2018 (CTIS). The agriculture sector, as source for the processed foods sector, would expect to have more focused policy as an updated SME Development Framework.

Related to this is a shifting paradigm in agriculture seen in the Agriculture Sector Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018 which calls for a shift from the extensive to intensive agriculture—within value-chain framework.

There is several large-scale agricultural support programs of donors now focused on the value-chain. To name a few, under the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) are the Accelerating Inclusive Markets for Smallholders (AIMS) and the Agriculture Services Programme for Innovation, Resilience and Extension (ASPIRE) project; the first focused on 5 value chains including rice, chicken, vegetables, silk and cashew while the second focused on improving extension services by training on sustainable land management practices that worked well.<sup>6</sup> The USAID is implementing a new phase, "Feed the Future Harvest II" Program which aims to accelerate growth in Cambodia's commercial horticulture domain in four provinces. SNV is running several programs including the Cambodian Horticulture Advancing Income and Nutrition (CHAIN) Project focused on vegetables and fruits in Preah Vihear, Stung Treng, Kratie and Oddar Meanchey provinces. Agence France pour Developpment (AFD) and JICA are into organic rice production in the Northern provinces. ADB has a slew of programs focused on enhancing productivity, diversification, commercialization and connectivity, sustainable NRM and gender development. Among these are the Uplands Irrigation and Water Resources Management Sector Project, Climate

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<sup>6</sup> MAFF and NGO agricultural extension workers shall be trained on the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT)

Resilient Rice Commercialization Project, Quality and Safety Enhancement Project for Cambodian High-Value Crops and the Greater Climate-Friendly Agribusiness Value Chain Project in the GMS Economic Corridors.

Farmer's discussion of agricultural issues within the climate change context should follow a more value-chain programming, as well. This suits the Farmer Forum program to specific concerns per product in the value-chain. It can also enable a joint project with the donors and implementing agencies on this specific value-chain program. These large value-chain projects have multi-stakeholders, which includes a private-public partnership, partnership with producers, specific financing portfolios by microfinance institutions, infrastructure development and policy-development and institutional capacity-building.

Similarly, climate change programming by the RGC was also updated. This is embodied in the Cambodia Climate Change Strategic Plan (CCCSP) 2014-2023 which is also backed by the Law on Disaster Management 2015. The CCCSP has strategic objectives on capacity development, enabling environment, adaptation, sustainable development, mitigation and financing. It is planned to be integrated into each line ministry strategic plan. The focus in the next years would be on communities and farmers adopting adaptive and mitigation measures more than climate change orientation.

Integrated Water Resource Management is the current framework on irrigation and water management. The slow development in this sector was because the initial focus was on broad-scale water resource management by basin and sub-basin (e.g., Tonle Sap River Basin Management). Since these are strategic in scope, the actual structure design and construction were slow. In fact, since 2007 when the mega-scale projects were studied for infrastructure design, it is only now that some are nearing completion (e.g. Northwest Irrigation Project). However, there was a recent shift to more manageable community irrigation systems. But even completed irrigation projects were weak in management, particularly because of the weak functions or low participation by Farmer Water User Committees (FWUC), along with low capacity in MoWRAM.

It would be important to the design of the Farmer's Forum to focus on infrastructure as distinct from value-chain issues (although these are inter-linked). This is so that the discussion would have focus, as it can be a venue to improved FWUC and MoWRAM engagement on water system operations, maintenance, distribution and efficient water usage as adaptive and mitigation measures against the adverse impact of climate change.

## **Suggestions**

First, programming should align to the shift to value-chain programming that looks at issues along specific crop or product lines.

Second, Programming should be regionally specific, such as flood-adaptive versus drought-adaptive; organic vs. commercial production; informal cross-border trade vs. broad domestic trade (e.g. Northwest and Southeast have large informal exports and imports across the border as trade issues)

Third, the programming should link to broad-scale agriculture programs, e.g. AIMS, aspire, chain, HARVEST II, ADB, EU and WB-funded agriculture programs

Fourth, design a concept on how the Forum is linked to step-up method of specific training, consultative workshops and other advocacy, not just a stand-alone project to stir interest.

Fifth, look at way how the Forum can be joint activities not solely funded by NGO Forum. Design its concept and broadly market it to multiple-stakeholders, for example, as government-donor-NGO or NGO-private sector partnership.

The evaluator raises two options for NGO Forum and its partners to consider. In any of the options, there are two important issues – there need to be guarantee for no political discussions and follow-up strategy and plan is required to gauge changes as a result.

Option 1: Maintain the same level of scope of last Forum but need to better organize by Having parallel session and have pre-Forum properly done as a preparation for the participants before coming to the national level Farmer Forum

Option 2: Make the Forum smaller (propose 30-50 participants) with participants from government agencies, private sector and NGOs coming together with farmers to discuss gaps, recommendation, design action and follow-up on changes.

Regardless of any options, the topics for future discussion may include each or some of these:

- Market information, production strategy, supporting mechanism of the State, State-recognized products (for example, fish sources from farmers, can the start issue a statement of acceptance?),
- Insurances for crops using lessons learned from other countries and contextualize it for Cambodian farmers
- The theme of water, capital and market is still very relevant, especially in following up the achievements from the previous Forum
- Value chains and markets where producers like ACs, farmers, rice millers, exporters to be part of the Forum among others
- Inclusive trade and competitive markets, and resilient farm enterprises that link to markets
- Improve our value chains for foreign currency earning
- Organic production and potential pilots and its implication on health, education and environment;
- Collective production for markets and production planning

## **APPENDIX 1: LIST OF REVIEWED DOCUMENTS**

- Concept notes of National Farmer Forum
- Opening Speech of Deputy Prime Minister HE Yim Chhaily at the Third National Farmer Forum
- Fifth National Farmer Forum Report
- Farmers' Statement at Fifth National Farmer Forum
- Presentation Slides of HE Rath Virak at the Fifth National Farmer Forum
- Closing Speech of HE. Ouk Rabun, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries at the sixth National Farmer Forum, 2016
- Closing Speech of Deputy Prime Minister HE Yim Chhaily at the Fifth National Farmer Forum
- Opening Speech of HE Sun Kunthor, Minister delegate attached to the Prime Minister at the Fifth National Farmer Forum
- Joint Action Plan of the Fourth National Farmer Forum
- Joint Field Monitoring Report

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

No	Name	Gender	Year attended	Agencies
1	Dr. Mak Soeun	M	2016	Deputy Director, General Department of Agriculture
2	Ieng Sotheara	M	2016	Green Eagle
3	HE. Rath Virak	M	2011, 2012, 2013, 2014	CARD, Advisor, Ministry of Environment
4	Heng Chanthou	M	2016	ADB
5	Ouch Chantha, Sok Sorano	M	2016	Rural Development Bank
6	Dr. So Phonnary	F	2016	ACLEDA Bank Plc.
7	HE. Ty Sokun	M	2016	Secretary of State, MAFF
8	HE. Hor Malin	F	2016	Technical Working Group on Gender in Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries
9	Ngin Navirak	F	2016	UNDP
10	Sin Sovanary	F	2010	LWD
11	Kim Ratana	M	2016	CARITAS-Cambodia
12	Keam Makarady	M	2014, 2016	Moderator of the Forum, CEDAC Steering Committee
13	SyTrek Phalline	M	2016	Steering Committee, HEKS
14	Chhun Sophorn		2016	Steering Committee, Srer Khmer
15	Dr. Soth Kimkolmony	M	2012-2014	Advisor to NCDM
16	Pen Yuteka	M		Ministry of Women's Affairs
17	Srun Pithou	M		Ministry of Rural Development
18	Sun Kolvira	M		Ministry of Environment
19	Keo Sovatepheap	M		Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology
20	Ms. Asisah Man	F		Oxfam
21	Sok Dara	M		AVSF
22	Seu Rany	M		National Farmer Network
23	Khuon Sey	F		National Women Farmer Network
24	Nop Polin	M		DCA/CA
25	H.E Math Mara	F	2016	Secretary of state of MRD
26	Chap Sovannara	F	2016	Deputy Director of Ministry of Economic and Finance
27	Seng Sopheak	M	2016	ISC
28	In Sovanmuny	M	2015-2016	Deputy Agriculture Department Director of Battambang province

### APPENDIX 3: LIST OF FGD AND IDI PARTICIPANTS

No	Name	Gender	Year attended	Agencies
1	Sa Rorn	F		Farmer, Kratie
2	Poch Vanthy	F		Farmer, Kratie
3	Som Seyha	F		Farmer, Kratie
4	Hom Seang	F		Farmer, Kratie
5	Chom Oun	F		Farmer, Kratie
6	Choun Karin	F		Outstanding Women, Kratie
7	Eng Lina	F		CEW, Kratie
8	Yin Som un	F		Outstanding Women, Kratie
9	Ul Pheap	M		Village Chief, Kratie
10	Sem Sok	F		Cashier, Prey Veng
11	San Salen	F		Secretary, , Prey Veng
12	Chhom Srey	F		Director, , Prey Veng
13	Nhor Va	M		Member, Prey Veng
14	Mong Hai Na	F		Monitor, Prey Veng
15	Phon Savon	F		Monitor, Prey Veng
16	Phan Phearom	F		Financier, Prey Veng
17	Keo Yam	M		FNN member, Svay Rieng
18	Pok Sarveasna	M		FNN member, Battambang
19	Dem Sreylim	F		Farmer, Battambang
20	Ang Chamreun	F		FNN member, Kampong Speu
21	Mao Ron	M		FNN member, Prey Veng
22	Sok Chamreun	M		FNN member, Kandal
23	Van Vireak	M		FNN member, Prey Veng
24	Hout Laundry	M		FNN member, Bantey Meanchey
25	Kim Saron	M		FNN member, Kampong Speu
26	Youth Thy	F		FNN member, Kratie
27	Keo Chet	M		FNN member, Phnom Penh
28	Koe Sarath	M		FNN member, Kampot