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Urban Vulnerability in Phnom Penh



May 2019

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Contents

List of boxes, figures, and tables	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Executive summary	v
1. Introduction.....	1
2. The survey, its limitations and the report structure.....	3
2.1. The survey	3
2.2 The limitations	4
2.3. The report structure	4
3. The context: Urbanization in Phnom Penh	5
3.1. Key urbanization trends.....	5
3.2. Urban planning, infrastructure and public services.....	6
3.3. Urban poverty and vulnerability	7
4. Findings	9
4.1. Household characteristics.....	9
4.2. Economic situation, income, expenditure, and indebtedness.....	12
4.3. Food security and nutrition.....	18
4.4. Access to health services.....	20
4.5. Children’s health and environment.....	21
4.6. Migrant status.....	22
4.7. Factory workers and other non-skilled labourers	24
5. Discussion and future research areas.....	25
5.1. Overall situation of households in Phnom Penh.....	25
5.2. Vulnerability in Phnom Penh – Gaps for future research.....	27

List of boxes, figures, and tables

Boxes

Box 1: Urban poor households defined	1
Box 2: Survey modules.....	3

Figures

Figure 1: Geographic distribution of the sample.....	2
Figure 2: Phnom Penh population growth by inner and outer zones.....	5
Figure 3: Percentage of share total income in each quintile group.....	13

Tables

Table 1: Sample selection.....	3
Table 2: Demographic characteristics.....	9
Table 3: Assets.....	11
Table 4: Access to clean water	11
Table 5: Toilet use and hand-washing practices.....	12
Table 6: Poverty and income (riels).....	12
Table 7: Main income activities	13
Table 8: Annual per capita expenditure (riels)	14
Table 9: Annual per capita income and expenditure by gender of household head	15
Table 10: Food expenditures.....	15
Table 11: Non-food expenditures	16
Table 12: Purpose of loans.....	17
Table 13: Indebtedness (riels)	18
Table 14: Frequency of food consumption and sources of food	19
Table 15: Food consumption and dietary diversity	20
Table 16: Access to public health services	21
Table 17: Children's diarrhea incidence and stool disposal	21
Table 18: In-migrants living in Phnom Penh	22
Table 19: Main reasons for migrating to Phnom Penh	23

Acknowledgement

Following the drought associated with the 2015/2016 El Niño event, the World Food Programme (WFP), together with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and in collaboration with the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM), conducted a national household survey in May 2016. A subsequent round of the national household survey was conducted in December 2016 and a separate urban household survey was conducted in Phnom Penh. This report is based on the latter exercise and additional secondary information.

This report was prepared by Kimchoeun Pak, an independent researcher, based on analysis by Sodany Saing, an independent analyst. Additional analysis, inputs and review were provided by World Food Programme staff, namely Yav Long, Chanvibol Choeur, Jonathan Rivers, Kurt Burja, Indira Bose and Francesca Erdelmann. The report was designed by Chamroeun Chim and Ratanak Leng. Data collection was done by SBK Research and Development.

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Executive summary

With fast economic growth and increasing rural-urban migration, Cambodia has gone through a fast-paced urbanization process in the last decade. Global experience shows that urbanization, while bringing opportunities, also poses challenges and can introduce new forms of vulnerability. Similar observations have been made in the case of Cambodia's growing urban centres, especially in the capital of Phnom Penh. However, literature on urbanization in Cambodia is still scant, especially with regard to the overall situation and vulnerability status of households in the capital.

This report seeks to provide a better understanding on the overall situation and drivers of vulnerability, food security, and migration in Phnom Penh. It is based on household survey data collected in December 2016, with a total of 1,200 households in Phnom Penh, in both the inner and outer zones. The findings of this report contribute to a better understanding of urbanization and urban vulnerability in Cambodia and also to the future strategy on food security and nutrition.

Cambodia is still largely a rural country, although it is rapidly urbanizing. According to a recent United Nations report, in 2014, about 21 percent of the population were living in cities. This is still a small proportion, compared to other countries in the region. A large portion of urbanization in Cambodia is concentrated in Phnom Penh, followed by Battambang and Siem Reap. As of 2012, Phnom Penh was estimated to have a population of 1.85 million and is expected to have reached 2.86 million by 2035. In-migration has been a significant factor in this growth.

Urbanization in Phnom Penh (and other cities in Cambodia) has been largely unplanned and unregulated, despite the existence of various plans and strategies. The situation has led to rising concerns over the current capacity of infrastructure and public services to meet growing political, social and economic demand. Traffic congestion and accidents, drainage system capacity and management, solid waste management, insufficiently regulated real estate development and urban poor communities are among the key concerns for the future development of the capital.

Within this broader context of urban development, the report, based on the household survey data, presents the situation of households in the inner and outer zones of Phnom Penh. It shows that households in these areas are similar in terms of family size (on average 5 members). Households in both zones have acceptable housing conditions if we consider the materials used for their roofs and exterior walls. However, a much higher percentage of households in the outer zones still report earth/clay/sand as the material of their floor. More data is needed, however, on housing conditions for the urban poor and those without a permanent residence, such as people living on the street.

All households in the survey report having access to electricity. A large majority of them have a television (92 percent), a mobile phone (94 percent), and a motorcycle (82 percent). However, more than twice the proportion of households in the inner zone have a refrigerator compared to those in the outer zone (59 percent and 24 percent, respectively). Households in the inner zone are more than twice as likely to have an account at a bank or micro-finance institution compared to those in the outer zone (41 percent and 18 percent, respectively). Access to clean water is very high for the inner zone (92 percent) but 66 percent in the outer zone. Access to toilets are high, but hygiene practices still require improvement, with only 72 percent of households in the inner zone and 76 percent of households in the outer zone having an observed hand-washing facility with soap.

Households in the outer zone earn less compared to households in the inner zone (7 million riels and 11 million riels per capita per year, respectively). However, households in both zones still earn much more than rural households (4 million riels per capita per year). The annual per capita expenditure for households in the outer zone (total including food and non-food) is only slightly (roughly 15 percent) lower than that of those in the inner zone. The share of food expenditure is roughly the same for both groups (around 38 percent of total expenditure). A more detailed breakdown of their expenditure demonstrates that both the inner and outer zones spend a similar proportion of their total expenditure on each food group, with the exception of alcohol for which households in the outer zone spend more. In terms of non-food expenditure a higher proportion is spent on health for the outer zone, whereas the inner zone spend more on transportation and education.

A higher percentage of households in the outer zone borrow money than those in the inner zone (39 percent and 11 percent, respectively). Yet, this is still lower than that of rural households (55 percent). The comparable loan amount between households in the inner and outer zones differ depending on whether the mean or median amount is used. The mean loan amount of households in the outer zone is larger than that of those in the inner zone (27 million riels and 16 million riels, respectively) and both are larger than that of rural households (9 million riels). However, when the median is used, a reverse picture is presented: the loan amount

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