

Community Well-being and Household Mobility in Post-Conflict Cambodia¹

by Dr Brett Ballard²

1. Introduction

Social and economic development in countries that experience political upheaval and violent conflict tend to lag behind that of countries that enjoy peace and stability. However, the local linkages between conflict and development are not yet adequately understood. This article aims to contribute to our understanding of these linkages by analysing how conflict and the onset of peace have interacted with multiple variables to affected community well-being and household mobility in nine villages in Cambodia.

The nine villages vary according to location and geophysical endowments. These factors shape livelihood strategies and the capacity of households to diversify income sources and access services, information and markets for trade and employment. The villages also experienced varied levels of armed conflict and

realised peace at different times. At first glance, villages in which fighting ceased prior to or early in the study period (1993–2003/04) appear to have performed better than villages in which fighting was more intense and

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protracted. Upon closer scrutiny, however, when armed conflict ended is not always a reliable predictor of community well-being and household mobility.

The following section briefly introduces the nine MOPS villages. Section 3 examines how armed conflict or its absence interacted with four key factors to impact on community well-being and household mobility. The four factors are land acquisition and characteristics, the timing of the end of conflict, development assistance and location and access. Section 4 concludes with a discussion about prioritising, targeting and sequencing development assistance in post-conflict communities and how to sustain development once it “takes off”.

2. The MOPS Villages

The nine MOPS villages were originally selected in 2001 according to agro-ecological zones for a study on rural livelihoods. In 2004–05, 890 of the original 1010 households were surveyed, thus creating a panel data set that enabled CDRI researchers to measure changes

in community well-being and household mobility over the three-year interval.

Villages were grouped into three well-being clusters according to consumption, income and poverty rates. Strongly performing villages experienced rising consumption and incomes and falling poverty rates. These villages were characterised by better accessibility, better

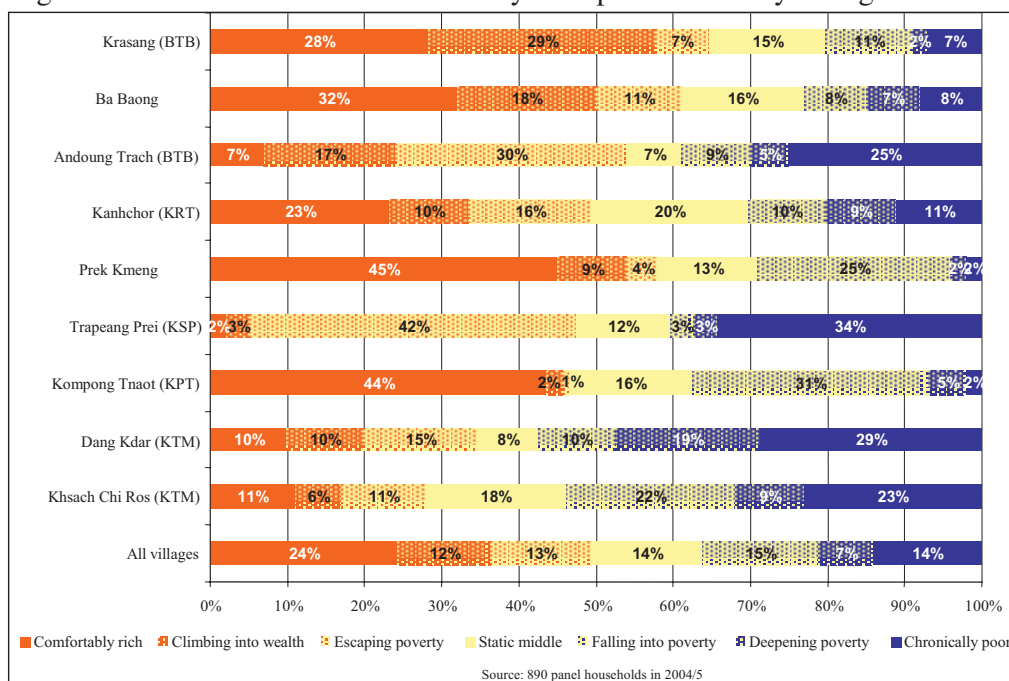
geophysical endowments, access to markets for trade and employment, more development assistance and higher agricultural productivity. Moderately performing villages achieved income and/or consumption growth, or poverty reduction, but not both. Although these villages varied somewhat, they tended to be less accessible, to be more dependent on common property resources and to have less agricultural land. Poorly performing villages were unable to achieve substantial income or consumption growth or poverty reduction. These villages were isolated and natural resource dependent, had limited agricultural land and poor soils and received fewer development interventions.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of mobility groups across the nine study villages. The strongly performing villages of Krasang, Ba Baong and Andoung Trach tend to have more upwardly mobile and better off households, while the poorly performing villages of Kompong Tnaot, Dang Kdar and Khsach Chi Ros have more downwardly

1 Much of the evidence and analysis in this article is synthesised from the CDRI report *Moving Out of Poverty?: Trends in Community Well-Being and Household Mobility in Nine Cambodian Villages* (FitzGerald, So et al. 2007). This article introduces additional material and analysis concerning the role of conflict in shaping community well-being and household mobility in the nine study villages.

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Figure 1.0: Distribution of Each Mobility Group in Nine Study Villages



mobile and chronically poor households. In the three moderately performing villages of Kanhchor, Prek Kmeng, and Trapeang Prei, households appear to be moving in opposite directions: the number of better-off and upwardly mobile households is more or less offset by a similar number of downwardly mobile and chronically poor households.

3. Conflict and Community Well-being

Table 1 categorises the nine villages according to the community performance typologies and conflict typologies. In green area villages, armed conflict had ceased either well before or at the beginning of the study period. In red area villages, armed conflict extended well into the study period. The matrix suggests some relationship between community well-being and armed

Table 1: Conflict and Community Performance Matrix (Year Conflict Ended)

	Green	Red
Strong	Ba Baong (1984) Andoung Trach (1994)	Krasang (1998)
Moderate	Prek Kmeng (1984) Trapeang Prei (1993)	Kanhchor (1998)
Poor	Kompong Tnaot (1993)	Khsach Chi Ros (1997) Dang Kdar (1998)

conflict. For example, two of the three poorly performing villages, Khsach Chi Ros and Dang Kdar, were in red areas where fighting was intense and protracted, not ending until 1997 or 1998. Meanwhile, two of the three strong performers, Ba Baong and Andoung Trach, were in green areas where fighting ended well before or very early in the study period.

However, the matrix shows also that Krasang is a red area

village that performed strongly, while another red area village, Kanhchor, performed moderately. Kompong Tnaot is a poorly performing green area village. These cases suggest that armed conflict and when it ended are not entirely reliable predictors of community well-being. Performance must therefore depend on additional factors. The rest of this section examines four key factors that link conflict, community well-being and household mobility: land acquisition and characteristics, the timing of the end of conflict, development assistance and location and access.

3.1. Land Acquisition and Characteristics

Land acquisition established the foundation upon which households could eventually accumulate assets and diversify income sources, the keys to upward mobility. The local land distributions in the 1980s and early 1990s and the capacity of households to clear new land were both affected by the scope and scale of the armed conflict and by the timing and circumstances of the end of conflict in each area. In all nine villages, the krom samakki (i.e., solidarity group) was followed by a distribution of agricultural land. In two villages, people were allowed to reacquire the land they held prior to the Khmer Rouge regime. In other villages, land was divided according to the number of household members. Although the formula varied, larger households tended to receive more land than smaller households. In other villages, land was divided equally among households regardless of their size. Efforts were also usually made

to provide households with similar quality land.

The ability of households to acquire additional land by clearing forest depended on the amount and mobility of available labour. Larger households that may have acquired more land through distribution were also better able to acquire more land through clearing when security conditions permitted. For example, in the red area village of Khsach Chi Ros, people were allowed to clear additional land but were generally unable to do so because of heavy fighting and the presence of land mines. In other villages, local leaders and the military limited people's mobility in areas where they could be harassed by or consort with KR soldiers. In Ba Baong, however, villagers had been able to clear additional land since the early 1980s.

Geophysical endowments such as soil quality and location also influenced the degree to which households were able to accumulate productive assets and diversify income sources. For example, in Khsach Chi Ros the land that was farmed was of poor quality soil, so overall production was limited. This retarded community performance and slowed household mobility. In Krasang, armed conflict also impacted on efforts to farm, but was not as disruptive as in Khsach Chi Ros. Better quality soils enabled people to obtain better yields on the land they could farm. People also had better access to markets, which enabled some degree of trade. Good quality soil and good location therefore offset to a certain extent the impact of armed conflict, promoting better community performance and enabling better endowed households to accumulate more assets (e.g. hand tractors) with which to intensify farming and increase productivity.

The circumstances surrounding the end of conflict also played an important role in land acquisitions in some villages. In Andoung Trach, a strongly performing green area village, around 100 refugee households were resettled in 1992. Nearly all of these returnees were considered poor upon their arrival, because they had no land and very few financial resources. In 1994, flooded forest land that had previously been inaccessible because of the presence of Khmer Rouge forces was distributed to the returnees, each household receiving about one hectare. However, many of them did not have the financial or human resources to clear the land and eventually left the village.

3.2. Timing

When the fighting ended also had important implications for community well-being and household mobility. One aspect of the timing concerns public security. Nearly all the villages reported problems of theft and robbery, particularly during the transition from conflict to peace. Several green area villages reported that theft and robbery seemed to increase in the early to mid-1990s, coinciding with the UNTAC period. In the red area villages, it appears that theft and robbery were widespread during the fighting and then in some cases intensified once the conflict was over.

For example, Khmer Rouge units established themselves in forest areas near Khsach Chi Ros, from which they conducted military operations. As various units began to defect to the government, other units remained in the forests and essentially became bandits. Another case in point is Kanhchor village, where armed conflict had been particularly intense during the early to mid-1990s. Around the middle of the decade, some KR units defected to the government, but others continued fighting and eventually took up banditry. Thus, the pattern of the end of conflict in red area villages was not always a sudden end to fighting and the immediate resumption of peace. Rather, the conflict in particular areas transformed into security issues associated with banditry, which also affected people's capacity to clear new land and conduct trade.

The second factor concerns when the fighting ended relative to external events, including floods and drought and forest concessions. All nine villages experienced severe flood and drought during the second half of the study period. Households in Ba Baong and Andoung Trach, however, had sufficient time after the end of conflict in their areas to accumulate productive assets and diversify income sources that enabled the village to withstand the negative effects of floods or drought. In Khsach Chi Ros and Dang Kdar, the time between the end of the conflict and the onset of drought was by comparison quite brief. Households in these two villages did not have sufficient time to accumulate productive assets, expand land and develop infrastructure before the onslaught of drought. As a result, overall village well-being stagnated or declined, even though some households were able to benefit. In Krasang and Kanhchor, more productive soils to some extent offset the impact of protracted fighting, helping to account for their better performance.

Soil quality and location also influenced the degree to which households were able to accumulate productive assets and diversify income sources.

Table 2: Development Interventions, by Conflict Type, 1992– 2004/05

Sectors	Green Area Villages					Red Area Villages			
	Ba Baong*	Prek Kmeng	Andoung Trach*	Trapeang Prei	Kompong Tnaot	Krasang*	Kanhchor	Dang Kdar	Khsach Chi Ros
Agriculture	6	-	5	-	-	3	-	-	2
Credit	4	-	3	2	4	4	-	-	1
Health care	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	-
Clean water	3	1	3	-	-	1	-	-	-
Roads	-	-	2	1	1	3	-	1	-
Education	-	1	2	1	1	-	-	1	1
Total	14	3	16	5	7	14	1	3	4

* denotes strongly performing villages.

Several villages also benefited from improved access to natural resources, which enabled people to expand farmland and/or collect wood and other forest products or fish more openly. In areas such as Dang Kdar, however, forest concessionaires had already established control over nearby forest land by the time peace arrived. As a result, constraints on access to forest areas were already well in place, which limited local people's ability to clear new land or access forest products. In essence, constraints imposed by the fighting were replaced by constraints imposed by concessionaires. Perhaps the most significant difference was that some people were able to obtain wage labour under the concessionaires, while others acted as agents for mobilising labour.

3.3. Development Assistance

At first glance, there appears to be a strong relationship between the level of conflict and the number of development interventions.³ Table 2 shows that three of the four red area villages had few development interventions during the study period, while a green area village had one of the highest numbers of interventions. The level of conflict in a particular area and the timing of its end do not, however, always predict the level and type of development assistance. For example, a red area village, Krasang, had one of the highest numbers of development interventions among all villages, while Kompong Tnaot, a green area village, had one of the lowest.

The scope and scale of armed conflict and the timing of its end certainly had a significant impact on the number and type of development interventions in certain villages. Ba Baong, which has enjoyed peace and stability since the early to mid-1980s, received a number of government and NGO development interventions to support agricultural production and public health. It also appears that some households in Krasang may have indirectly benefited from similar assistance provided to a nearby village in which 80 returnee households were resettled. There, development assistance was provided in the late 1980s by a government programme, and there was some NGO activity as well. This was certainly the case in the third strongly performing village, Andoung Trach, where significant reconstruction and development assistance was provided in support of about 100 households returning from refugee camps along the Thailand-Cambodia border.

The three strongly performing villages, therefore, all benefited from targeted assistance in one way or another. In Ba Baong, the absence of conflict enabled the government to focus early development interventions in that area, while in Andoung Trach and perhaps to a lesser extent in Krasang, development interventions supported people who returned from refugee camps when the peace agreement was signed. In each of these cases, development assistance also appears to have been somewhat more integrated with support for agricultural production and social services. These included road construction, irrigation (except in Andoung Trach), credit services and clean drinking water and especially health care and schools.

The scope and scale of armed conflict, combined with location and accessibility, also help account for

³ The number of development interventions does not reflect the scope and scale of such assistance, and as a result provides only an approximate indication of the overall potential impact of assistance.

the absence of development interventions in the three other red area villages, and probably help explain why two of these, Khsach Chi Ros and Dang Kdar, are poorly performing villages. They received little or no support for agricultural production and virtually no support for infrastructure or public health. The same is true of Kanhchor, where practically no development interventions were provided because of its remote location and heavy fighting.

Several green area villages also did not receive many development interventions. These include the poorly performing village of Kompong Tnaot and the moderately performing villages of Prek Kmeng and Trapeang Prei. In these three villages, location was probably significant in limiting assistance. Another factor may have been that these villages were not located in areas targeted by the development community or for some reason did not meet the criteria for assistance. In Prek Kmeng, development assistance arrived almost by accident when CDRI provided support for drinking water wells after conducting research in the village.

3.4. Location and Access

Location and transportation affect market access and trade, the availability of social services and the amount and type of development assistance. In the green area village of Ba Baong, road conditions were not ideal during the 1990s, but access was not impeded by security problems and farmers were still able to get their produce to nearby markets. Location and favourable agro-economic conditions in addition to peace and stability made this an attractive area for development investments. In other green area villages, poor location and access help to account for inability to take advantage of the absence of conflict. Both Kompong Tnaot and Prek Kmeng were hampered by poor road conditions, which undermined market access and development assistance.

The most direct links between location, access and armed conflict can be observed in the two poorly performing red area villages of Khsach Chi Ros and Dang Kdar and the moderately performing red area village of Kanhchor. In all three, Khmer Rouge forces stationed themselves in less accessible forest areas to avoid government forces. In Khsach Chi Ros, access to distant markets was severely impeded by conflict and related banditry as well as the lack of roads. This was also the case in Dang Kdar and Kanhchor.

The armed conflict also affected travel to and from red area villages by delaying the introduction of roads and other infrastructure, which in turn affected other assistance. In Dang Kdar and Kanhchor, roads

connecting the villages to commercial and administrative centres were not constructed until 2002. Although there has been little assistance even after the roads were built, they have played an important role in connecting the village to local markets and opening the areas for other activities. Once a road is introduced, it takes time to plan and mobilise resources before other development projects can be implemented.

4. Conclusion

Peace and stability are factors that enable some villages to perform well over time under favourable circumstances. Such villages have fertile soils and good market access, and received substantial assistance for agricultural and social development. Households were able to concentrate on asset accumulation, which enabled many of them to cope better with subsequent flood and drought. In other villages, good soils and location, as well as substantial development assistance, offset the effects of protracted conflict. Although ongoing fighting constrained most households' ability to clear and farm additional land, good quality soils and accessible locations enabled them to produce and market more than most other villages during the fighting, which eventually enabled them to withstand subsequent shocks.

When armed conflict is combined with unfavourable circumstances, however, community well-being and household mobility are difficult to achieve and sustain. In such villages, protracted conflict and banditry constrained the capacity to expand landholdings and exacerbated problems of poor soils and a lack of markets, natural resources and development assistance. This constrained agricultural production and the ability to accumulate assets and diversify income sources, weakening the ability to withstand flood and drought shocks that occurred shortly after the fighting ended. Because of their remote locations and poor access, these villages have also lagged behind in development assistance.

Once peace is achieved in such areas, concerted poverty reduction efforts need to target and sequence development interventions in order to promote household mobility and community well-being. The state, civil society, and private sectors will need to play an important role in strengthening productivity and market access. Each sector enjoys certain comparative advantages and so coordination is required to ensure that development interventions are complementary.