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The 'miracle' (World Bank 2009) of Cambodia's recent development has been driven by the movement of labour. Beginning in the 1990s, when the first garment factories opened their doors, a trickle of migrant workers to Phnom Penh's nascent export industry would soon become a flood, amounting to what is presently more than 600 000 workers employed in the garment sector alone (CCHR 2015). Taking account of the construction industry and the various other migrant employers, almost a million of Cambodia's population of fifteen million people are now urban migrant workers (NIS 2010).

Such figures are evocative of the earliest development models, such as W. Arthur Lewis' (1954) two-sector typology, wherein unemployed or underemployed rural dwellers flood inflexibly to new urban opportunities, abandoning the fields for the modern sector. However, if such a conception has ever been applied accurately, it does not do so in contemporary Cambodia, where labour migration is not unilinear, but rather complex and churning. Migrants abandon neither the countryside, nor their engagement with agriculture, but utilise the modern sector to enhance their rural livelihoods via bi-directional remittance, which flows throughout Cambodia in vast sums.

This chapter will explore the nature, meaning and implications of Cambodia's epoch defining period of mass labour migration in three parts. First, it will outline the divergent trajectories underway in Cambodia's urban and rural areas, emphasising the concomitant push and pull factors which drive the phenomenon. Though migrants frequently suppose that urban work offers prospects for 'easy' or 'comfortable' labour and living (Derks 2008), and a route out of the strictures of rural deprivation, these assumptions are tested in the second section of the chapter, which considers the stark realities of migrant experience in low wage industries in Phnom Penh. As a third and final section explores, migration is rarely an escape from rural poverty. Instead, as rural circumstances continue to impinge on urban livelihoods, rural social divisions are reinscribed in the city, and the problem of poverty is thereby reproduced.

Rural and urban: divergent development

Rice is more than simply Cambodia's staple crop. For centuries, it has been the ongoing soul of rural life in the Kingdom, in which resources and economy have been 'remarkably consistent over two millenia' (Chandler 2002:6), the monsoon has dictated the seasonal rhythm of society and the cultivation of wet rice has been the bedrock of subsistence. The centrality of rice to the organisation and very sustenance of existence has forged a deep imprint on rural identity. Indeed, the very word for 'rural dweller' in the Khmer language is '*neak srae*' or 'rice person'.

Seizing on the apparent stability of rural livelihoods, scholars have painted rural society as somehow immune to change and labels of traditionalism, conservatism, and timelessness abound in depictions of the countryside (Derks 2008). Were such labels ever apt, they carry little resonance in rural areas of Cambodia today, where farm livelihoods have come under environmental and economic strain and patterns of work and labour are in a state of flux.

The increasing frequency and ferocity of natural disasters in the Kingdom (Oeur et al. 2012), linked to humanmade pressures such as climate change and deforestation (DeLopez 2001; Le Billon and Springer 2007), has eroded the ability of smallholders to rely upon their land. The unpredictability of such shocks, alternating blows of devastating floods and droughts, limits the ability of farmers to prepare or adapt in order to mitigate losses. Wealthier farmers might hedge their bets with different varieties of seed spread over multiple plots and multiple croppings but for the poorest, with little land and little to invest, each rice season represents a high stakes spin on Cambodia's climatic roulette where success, in the words of villagers, 'depends on the sky' (Bylander 2012).

The cost of failure is borne by affected households and communities rather the national economy, to which smallholder agriculture contributes a diminishing share of GDP. For those already on the margins of survival, successive disasters of the sort which have beset the Kingdom at least six times since the turn of the millennium[1] leave few courses of action. The choice that households face is often stark: debt, land sale, or both (see Springer, this volume).

The demographic background to this dwindling agricultural contraction is a rapidly growing population, the dividend of which, in rural areas alone, sees 220 000 persons entering the workforce each year (Scheidel et al. 2013:347). As the workforce has grown, economic land concessions have swallowed up large parts of the countryside, contributing to 'rapidly declining land availability for the smallholder sector' (Schiedel et al. 2013:347). All this entails that the ranks of the landless and near landless in the countryside, already substantial, are swelling (see Biddulph this volume).

The Cambodian government has long pointed to the rising price of rice as a potential solution to this problem, arguing it will serve to maintain the value of rural labour in the face of increasing supply. Yet such a view is myopic at best, failing as it does to appreciate this high – and in view of the above pressures, increasing – proportion of rural dwellers who are net consumers of the staple, the landless and the near landless (<1ha) constituting an estimated 20% and 45% of rural households, respectively (Sophal 2008). Instead of providing relief, therefore, rising commodity prices have

[1] Flooding in 2000 affected 3.4 million Cambodians; flooding in 2001 affected 1.7 million; drought in 2002 affected 650 000 before flooding in the same year affected 1.5 million; drought in 2005 affected 600 000; flooding in 2011 affected 1.6 million; flooding in 2013 affected 1.5 million (see CRED 2015).

turned the screws of debt and poverty for all but the already wealthier fractions of rural society ever more tightly.

Whether compelled through landlessness or persuaded by an agricultural context in which the rewards for endeavour are perceived to scarcely outweigh the risks, rural households in the contemporary era have had to abandon the traditional reliance on rice and look beyond the family farm to guarantee their subsistence. In the past, Cambodia's rich forestry and fishery resources have proved bases of support for fragile farm livelihoods (McKenny and Tola 2002) but are now bound up with the same problematic processes of human and ecological transformation as the latter. Large scale logging activity over the past two decades (see Le Billion and Springer 2007), some of an illicit nature and some facilitated by state-approved forestry concessions, has decimated Cambodia's forest cover and, alongside, reduced the forest products available for households to collect, consume and trade. Drought, pollution, and stock depletion linked to over-fishing are among the myriad woes that torment fishing households, impeding the security and scale of potential income from fishery resources (Marschke and Berkes 2006, see also Marschke this volume).

As authors have pointed out (e.g. Ovesen et al. 1996), however, the survival of subsistence communities is predicated on their ability to adapt when faced with hardship. This propensity for adaptation has come to the fore in the contemporary era. Change in rural areas has not been hallmarked exclusively by the sense of additional constraint but also new opportunities for labour. Regional infrastructure developments and Cambodia's formidable record of economic growth, averaging double figures in the decade to 2007 (World Bank 2009) and continuing strong, have propelled a steady trickle of novel off-farm opportunities in rural areas where new sites of industry, commerce and public service have cropped up. Rural residents have seized the chance, where it has been offered, to establish trade around local markets, or sell their labour in newly built local factories, hospitals and schools, etc.

The penetration of these off-farm possibilities is uneven, however, and unmatched by their promulgation in urban areas of Cambodia. The years of high economic growth were fuelled by a profound structural transformation of the national economy: taking steps towards becoming 'one of the most open countries in the one of most open region of the world' (Davies 2010:158), Cambodia encouraged a high influx of foreign private investment, concentrated in services and industry, which have overtaken agriculture as sources of Cambodia's GDP (Springer 2015). This gains have accrued from a fairly narrow base, however, with garments and tourism, the growth of which has proved a catalyst for the development of construction and services, alone accounting nearly half of the total

growth over the period' (Davies 2010:153). Moreover, this narrow base has a small geographic reach and a pronounced urban bias has persisted (Acharya et al. 2002), centred around the capital and primate city of Phnom Penh.

The first handful of garment factories appeared in the industrial outskirts of Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital city, in the mid-1990s. In just two decades, the number of factories in the municipality has multiplied to around 400, who together employ a workforce that numbers in excess of 300,000 individuals (CCHR 2015) – 2% of Cambodia's population of 15 million. As other industries and activities have muddled and mushroomed alongside, the cogs of development spluttering into a frenzied whir, the city has been propelled from the status of 'fourth world' straggler of 'structural irrelevance' to the global economy (Shatkin 1998:378), to the centre of Cambodia's economic renaissance, at the vanguard of global production.

This pattern of 'lopsided modernization' (Deac 2004:23) in Cambodia is not a new phenomenon but a new chapter in a long history of rural-urban imbalance and, often, antagonism (Chandler 2000; Derks 2008). Today, the divergent realities of development in the Kingdom's rural and urban spaces means that the demographic, environmental and economic squeeze in the countryside has turned 'employment in urban areas… [into] the talk of rural villages' (Lim 2007:13).

Moreover, in increasing numbers rural Cambodians have moved beyond conversation, actualising their concerns over the labour market in wave after wave of migration to the city. At the time of the 2008 census, an estimated 850 000 people from a total labour force of 7.5 million in Cambodia, or over 10% (NIS 2010), had left their homes in the villages to take up work and residence in Phnom Penh. As the rural population and urban job market expand, new arrivals reach Phnom Penh every day, ready to try their luck in the city.

When aspirant and accomplished migrants discuss their motivations for mobility, they appeal to this dichotomy of urban renewal and rural reserve. They speak, on the one hand, of the poverty that endures in the villages and the lack of opportunity. '*Ot mien ai twer*', 'there is nothing to do', and '*men rok ban*', 'we can't make a living', were common assessments of prospects in the countryside given to Bylander (2013:6; transliteration in original), which burst into expressions of exasperation: 'Why should we stay here?' one villager demanded; another surmising, 'here we just waste our time'.

By contrast, tales of the city's riches abound from friends and family who have travelled the road to Phnom Penh already, and whose relayed experiences prove a powerful draw to the city. Those who had moved to the city 'became more fashionable', a garment worked noted in a separate study

(Parsons et al. 2014: 1376), explaining what prompted her own decision to migrate. 'They had more money and their skin was so white. These [things] really took my interest'.

As this testimony suggests, the attractions of the city extend beyond work availability and wage differentials. Though important, the exodus of individuals from Cambodia's villages to the capital city of Phnom Penh is not borne strictly of economic necessity. Like elsewhere in Asia (see e.g. Rigg 2001), the meanings attached to different forms of labour have slowly transformed in recent decades. The routines established and followed by the ancestors no longer hold allure for many, the young in particular, for whom the desirability of long days bent double in the baking sun, carefully transplanting seedlings and plucking ripe stalk by hand, has been eclipsed by ideals of 'clean' and 'comfortable' work in urban settings. As Derks has explored (2008), work away from the fields, whether on factory and shop floors or air-conditioned offices, is loaded with cultural connotations that command respect in the villages.

Above all, the prospect of urban work is intertwined with the promise of 'modernity'. In this respect, novel labour opportunities are not the only sphere in which the potential of the city supersedes that of the village. Instead, Phnom Penh's markets, malls, coffee shops, parks, funfairs, karaoke bars, beer gardens, nightclubs and cinemas boast new forms of leisure and lifestyle. The sheer scale of the city, with its burgeoning high-rises, six-lane boulevards and sky bridges, and the constant flow of traffic, goods and people, generates an atmosphere that is quite distinct from the villages.

The stories that travel back to the villages from migrants already in Phnom Penh stir high expectations and contribute to a widely subscribed legend of city life and living. One factory worker in Derks' study (2008:147) 'remembered how fellow villagers tried to convince her to come to the city by telling her about easy food (*sii sru'el*), comfortable sleep (*deik sru'el*), and air conditioners (*masin trociek*)'. Another garment worker recalled (cited in Derks 2008:143),

> 'They said Phnom Penh is a happy place, not quiet like *srok srae* [countryside]. They said it is happy to walk around at Wat Phnom, in front of the palace, to the new park and the river boulevard. When I heard about this I wanted to come and see'.

Thus, though it is patent that many migrants are driven to escape hardship, it is also clear that many harbour a simultaneous longing to be part of urban life, nurturing the fervent notion that freedom and fun as well as fortune await those who dare to seek it in the city. This helps explain why Cambodia exhibits such high rates of labour movement, in which 'not only the poor and the poorest but also the medium [and, indeed, wealthier demographics of rural society] migrate' as Lim

(2007:14) attests. There are few young people who remain in the villages who do not harbour hopes of accompanying their peers to Phnom Penh.

Urban work and migrant networks

The disgruntled noises that emanate from the Kingdom's factories and other sites of labour, increasingly resonant in the local and international press, hint that the realities of urban work almost invariably fail to live up to such hype. Though, on the surface, Phnom Penh's glimmering high rises and bustling streets appear to testify to the thorough prosperity of the urban renaissance, it does not take long to scratch the veneer of this 'development'. At work in the city, Cambodia's urban migrants are offered an unrivalled insight into the many contradictions that tarnish the gloss of the city's 'modernity', threatening to unravel the narrative of progress that propels the excursion from town to village. The fruits of high economic growth, a concentrated influx of FDI, and infrastructure development have, like elsewhere in the country, not been distributed evenly in Phnom Penh and the problem of urban inequality remains acute (Paling 2012, Fauveaud this volume).

As the urban elite head to new central malls and streets of luxury retailers, where a raft of international brands have established ready to service the demands of the city's aspirant global consumers, those on the other end of the supply chain toil twelve-hour shifts in factories at the city's periphery for wages that would scarcely cover the cost of a round *moto* taxi fare to the prime sites of commerce. The soaring land values and high rents that have accompanied Phnom Penh's boom have skewed the spatial distribution of the city: migrants do not, for the main, occupy locations in the city's central zone but have followed factories to live and work in the outer orbit of the city's industrial belt. The tree-lined boulevards of Boeung Keng Kang and the gated communities of villas in Toul Kork are little known to most. Instead, they inhabit the sprawling and dusty suburbs of Meanchey and Dangkao living not amid skyscrapers, as they might aspire, but low-rise blocks of 'rented rooms' surrounded by workshops, warehouses and factories.

The sheer grind of the industrial production process, as explored by Derks (2008), is among the many challenging realties that face migrant workers, who are often used to quite different forms of labour organisation. Rising with the sun, most factory workers are on site to clock in each morning by seven am and, though the official working day is typically over at four in the afternoon, overtime can detain workers until as late as six, eight or even ten in the evening. Throughout the working day, labour hierarchies supervise production and enforce strict disciplinary codes, in which conversation

is often forbidden and permission must be granted for toilet breaks. 'Wait and see what it means to sew from seven in the morning to ten in the evening without time for resting', one garment worker in Derks' study (Derks 2008:71) warned a newcomer expecting respite from the hard manual graft of the fields. 'If we do farming, there is nobody who scolds us. On the contrary, we have fun and rest as we wish'.

Long hours spent in high temperatures with low ventilation, loud machinery and toxic chemicals soon cause many to question the ideal of indoor work. The physical exertions of factory labour in such conditions are manifest in health and safety reports that detail frequent incidents of illness, fainting and fever. Workers protest that, when they are ill, 'managers don't care. They only send workers to the hospital. They also take out/cut money [wages] while workers are in the hospital' (Makin 2006:41).

Living conditions on the urban periphery can also be austere. The quality of the built environment is frequently poor. As urban development has encroached over areas that were once rice fields, landowners have raced to become landlords, building high density housing consisting of multi-storey single-room blocks to rent to low-income workers. Access to these units is provided by warren-like alleyways, prone to hazards of waste and flooding. Simple toilets and taps connected to the municipal water supply are included in some rooms but others share sanitary facilities in designated outdoor blocks. All of this is quite different from the modern world of 'comfortable sleep' and 'air conditioners', of which those in the villages imagine of the city.

Landlords wield a high degree of control over their territories and tenants. 'I visit every one of my rooms every five to seven days to make sure everybody who lives there is well and to make sure everything is order and there is no trouble', one owner explained (Parsons et al. 2014:1373). 'Nobody from my rented rooms has ever had a fight', clarified another (Parsons et al. 2014:1373), 'but I have seen it happen elsewhere. The owner usually stops the fight and dismisses them from their room. To avoid anything like that I always lock the gate at night to keep my residents safe'.

With migrants spending much of their time clocked in at the factory complex and then locked in to the residential compound, the strength of their affinity with the city has been questioned by some authors, such as Lim (2007), who contends that migrant interaction with the urban environment is 'sorely shallow'. Yet this view elides the highly social nature of work and life in migrant enclaves, which are, themselves, vibrant, diverse and connected urban communities.

Though living space in rented rooms is small, migrants usually share their accommodation with several friends, family and workmates in order to reduce the cost of rent, linking them into a large

and complex web of associations in the city. These groupings are often close-knit, eating breakfast together at home before work or stopping to pick up bowls of rice porridge from a favoured street vendor along the way. At lunch, as swarms of workers emerge from behind the factory walls, food stalls and other traders assemble bustling one-hour markets outside the factory gates. On the way in and out, workers browse straw mat stalls laden with clothing, cosmetics and CDs together, pausing to share news over refreshing iced desserts, point out new karaoke compilations or nail colours to test out when home time rolls round – or otherwise grouse the wait until pay day. Where they can snatch free time on evenings, they host neighbours in their rooms to catch up on the TV soaps or plan weekend excursions to call in on relatives and friends in far flung corners of the city and explore new sights.

Through all this activity, migrants nurture networks that extend beyond their immediate occupation. Garment workers are not a discrete group in the city, rather their presence has invited an array of other occupational groups to the factory areas where they work and live: *motodop*, construction workers, stallholders, tailors, recyclables traders, beauticians, food sellers, mechanics – the list continues; all are required to provide the goods and services fundamental to daily life. Moreover, these groups do not only associate for commercial reasons. Brothers and sisters, cousins, and husbands and wives work in a variety of occupations, creating strong familial and social linkages between each of these sectors. Though some of these kinship ties have clearly been sown in the village and transplanted to Phnom Penh, friendships and, increasingly, romances bud and blossom in the city, too, as Derks (2008) and Yagura (2012) have examined. Webs of mutual obligation and affiliation have long been purported to be the building blocks of Cambodian rural society and 'the need to be in *ksae* [social networks]' (Ledgerwood and Vijghen 2002:51, Brickell 2011) has been retained in the city.

These extensive networks of urban relations are of critical importance to migrant prosperity and future prospects. In the absence of many formal and institutional safety nets, the vast amounts of information that these networks conduct are a vital means by which migrant workers navigate and construct urban life and livelihoods. Opportunities for credit, housing and work are rarely publicised loudly but are, instead, reserved for sharing among friends and associates in a harried hush of Chinese whispers. Entry to even what would appear relatively easy access sectors like street trading and *motodop* work are carefully managed and protected by such networks, as patches of turf are laid claim to by groups. 'I wait [at this spot] with fellow villagers', a *motodop* detailed to Parsons et al (2014:1375). 'I previously tried to wait at a different spot, but the *motodop* already working there got angry with me and said that if I had somewhere else to wait, then I should go there'. Another

reported, 'I was advised that the roundabout in front of the Japanese Bridge is an extremely lucrative place to work. Unfortunately I am unable to work there because I don't know any of the other *motodop* there'.

Such opportunities that networks simultaneously transmit and guard are particularly prized in an urban context marked by insecurity and instability, as explored by Simone (2008). Though there are some exceptions, employment in many of the low wage sectors that migrants enter, for example, is usually offered with few rights or guarantees, and with limited potential for advancement or progression. To make gains, therefore, migrants must engage in a process that has been described as livelihood 'speculation' (Simone 2008:198), pursuing frequent lateral movements between employers and sectors. Though such movements carry some degree of uncertainty and risk, there is always the promise of better remuneration, added benefits such as meals or accommodation, improved working conditions or employment relations. Moreover, this potential is multiplied by the new associations that new sites of labour can provide.

This churning labour movement illustrates the highly pragmatic and flexible approach that migrants adopt towards labour in the city. However, their decisions in this regard are rarely solely their own. Rather, the pragmatism and flexibility with which migrants approach their urban work is based in a calculus of their own and their household's needs at any given time. Many poorer migrants, or those for whom somatic or environmental shocks have rendered the need for maximal remittance payments more urgent, consequently shift multiple times between urban jobs without improving their working conditions. Others, whose rural households are more secure, are freer to improve their urban lives, gaining promotions or training, or investing in businesses. In this way, the complex stratifications that have long characterised Khmer society, are reproduced in subtle but meaningful urban inequalities. Success in the urban speculation game is not simply random or chance but conditioned by rural circumstance, to which migrants remain closely connected and affected, as what follows considers.

The ties that bind: rural-urban linkages and the reproduction of inequality

Though a shifting environmental, economic and cultural context has restructured household and village economies in rural areas of Cambodia, this process has been far from uniform. Change has not affected all communities or residents within them, alike. The pattern of transformation in rural areas is not a simple or general worsening of conditions: what has brought ruin to some has brought riches to others. In some cases where a desperate land sale is triggered, there is not only a selling household that has lost a means to a livelihood but, too, a buyer who has augmented his plot. If

drought or flood triggers food crises among affected households in an area, others who can afford to lend money may profit, assisting their neighbours to smooth consumption by provisioning loans – to be repaid with interest. Change in rural areas, then, is not just a case of decline but diversity and differentiation.

With urbanisation in Cambodia proceeding apace, the problem of inequality in rural areas, though becoming readily acute, appears to wane in significance, superseded by the broader concerns of proletarisation and agrarian transition. Such local, rural troubles can seem petty and preordained to remedy, as high rates of rural-urban migration purport to transform villagers into a global working class. Yet migrants to the city are not cleanly separated from their rural roots when they move to the city but remain indubitably connected to their home and origins. In many ways, these ties to home shape the nature of migrant interaction with the city and affect the manner in which these workers construct livelihoods and lifestyles in the urban space.

Perhaps most obviously, migrant whose households are better off in the village enjoy a more privileged position on entering the urban labour market, being more able to meet the entry requirements attached to the most lucrative or otherwise desirable roles. In some cases, these entry requirements might include direct payments to employers or brokers. 'Buying a job', explains Derks (2008:66), procured through one's network of contacts – relatives or friends already in the city who serve to link rural residents into the dense web of urban *ksae* – is a prevalent practice in Cambodia. Finder's fees are equivalent to 'one or several months' salary' (Derks 2008:66), as much as several hundred dollars, yet carry a certain degree of risk, as they may not be reduced or refunded if employment is terminated within this period. For those from poorer households, then, the prospect of high debt in the absence of employment guarantees is troubling (see Bylander this volume).

There can also be high indirect financial entry barriers. Some garment factories, for instance, recruit workers on the basis of a selection test, in which applicants must demonstrate dexterity and experience on a sewing machine. In order to pass the assessment, aspirant factory workers undertake informal apprenticeships in small sewing shops, spending many hours training to handle and operate machinery. As most of these shops are located in the factory districts of Phnom Penh, such study requires a period of time spent in the city, incurring expenses without earning a salary See Arnold and Chang this volume). For those in the villages who live a hand to mouth existence, getting by 'day by day' as they describe, the prospect of saving enough to cover the cost of several weeks, or even days, in the city without a wage seems almost an impossibility.

However, the disadvantage transferred from the village to the city by poorer households does not only manifest at the point of entry to employment. Rather, the pressures felt by rural households are transferred to migrants via the mechanism of gradated remittances, so that whilst a minority of migrants from the best off rural households are able to keep all of their monthly salary, the vast majority return a significant proportion to rural areas. In this way, the economic hardships of home weigh on migrants in the city, who look to ease the strain endured by their rural families by contributing some portion of their urban earned income to their households in the village.

Indeed, many migrants report sending back over half their monthly salaries, ensuring that the challenge of surviving on low wages in the city is greatly exacerbated for some. Thus, instead of the $128 per month around which discussions surrounding the garment worker minimum wages have centred – and which proponents of the new basic salary have with some justification described as unliveable – many garment workers are, in reality, subsisting in Phnom Penh and other migrant enclaves on $60 per month or less. For these workers, only the poorest quality food and accommodation are available, and the little luxuries of city life, the latest clothing styles and cheap cosmetics, unthinkable.

The relative deprivation of migrants from poorer rural households is, moreover, compounded by the practice of inverse remittances, whereby transfers of material goods make their way from rural families to city dwellers (Parsons et al. 2014). With the price of rice and much other primary produce set higher in the Phnom Penh than most villages, many rural households apportion part of the household crop to share with those members working away from home. Such relief is, however, contingent on the household's ability to provide it. Thus, migrants from large landowning households may find certain expenditures almost eradicated by provisions from the family farm. Conversely, those migrants from households whose subsistence needs in the village are already compromised may receive little or no help.

In both these ways, therefore, the pressures of rural livelihoods are continually brought to bear on migrants at work in the city, and the divisions that have ruptured among rural households in an era of turbulent change are reproduced in urban society. These divisions do not only foster difference in the present, however, but have important bearing on the possibilities and aspirations of individuals moving forward in time. The discrepancies between migrants in terms of rural resources, remittance burdens and the net profits that result from urban labour have clear implications for the way in which those at work in the city plan and make preparations for the future.

With migrants from better off households typically able to retain a greater proportion of their urban income, they often find it possible to save modest sums to invest. Those who possess land or expect to receive some as a form of inheritance upon marriage, as is customary, might look to extend or broaden their agricultural activity or open a business in the village to diversify their portfolio of income in the expectation of one day returning home. They might otherwise reasonably hope to establish an enterprise in the city, using the skills they gain as garment or construction workers to build a life of independence. Indeed, they might pursue both of these options, ensuring a future that is not fixed according to present circumstance but remains adaptable and flexible to longer term needs, prospects and imaginations.

By contrast, the longer term projections for those from poorer households are mute. Without rice farms or other streams of income to withdraw or retire to, migrants from the poorest rural households are not merely urban labourers by current occupation but indelible circumstance. Where existence remains a daily struggle, thoughts remain focused on today rather than tomorrow. Stagnation or decline is the norm for the most burdened migrants, who have little to pin on hopes of a reversal of fortune.

Conclusion

The developmental divide that prevails between urban and rural areas of Cambodia in the present era has persuaded many village dwellers to leave their homes in the countryside to move to the city in search of a better way of life. The proliferation of labour opportunities in the booming garments and construction industries in Phnom Penh, and a host of other formal and informal activity alike, is perceived by migrants as a means to enhance fragile rural livelihoods and transform overall standards of living.

The harsh realities of urban life and labour typically fall short of rural imaginaries, however. Urban migrant work is concentrated in low wage sectors and performed in difficult and, often, dangerous conditions. Though the strength of migrant endeavour has transformed the Kingdom's economic fortunes, contributing for nearly two decades to untrammelled rates of rapid economic growth, the extent to which migrant workers have benefitted from this success is questionable.

Indeed, whilst a proportion of Cambodia's army of migrants has undoubtedly done so, investing their wages in sustainable improvements to their own and their families' livelihoods, a greater number have enjoyed no such opportunity. Cambodia's rural areas have been so beset by the rigours of a changing climate in recent years that the monthly salary of many in the urban sector is directed not towards investment, but debt servicing and rural subsistence, as the mounting costs of

such as failed crops and health problems lead to land sale and an increasing dependency on waged urban work. In this way, the divisions in Cambodia's rural society are being replicated in the urban space; rich and poor adopting widely divergent trajectories. Cambodia in the 21st century will increasingly reflect this divide.

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