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Reporting on slums in selected cities
for the
Global Report on Human Settlements 2003
PHNOM PENH

August 2002

Picture 1: Squatter settlement along the railroad track, next to Boeng Kok lake, Phnom Penh



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I. INTRODUCTION: THE CITY

I.A The urban context

I.A.1 Overview of urbanisation in the national context in Cambodia

Cambodia is a predominantly rural society, with 84.3% of its 14 million estimated population living in rural areas. The remaining 15.7% urban dwellers live predominantly in Phnom Penh, which has an estimated population of 1.2 million in 2002 and is about 16 times the size of the second largest city, Battambang. The population in Phnom Penh grows at a faster rate than in the country overall, with an estimated 8% per annum made of a 3% in-migration rate and a 5% natural increase (see Table 1, page 4).

The country has one of the lowest Human Development Index in Asia (a HDI of 0.517 in 2000), with a life expectancy of 54.4 years, an adult literacy of 71.2%, and a yearly gross domestic product per capita of \$1,257. Conversely, it scores high on the Human Poverty Index (42.53), with a high level of mortality and child malnutrition, and a limited availability of public services (Ministry of Planning - Cambodia 2000 :4-7).

Although the HDI is 21% higher in cities than in the countryside, cities are also where disparities are most marked. In Phnom Penh low income settlements, indicators of health, access to education and living standards are thus worse than in rural Cambodia with 56% of houses made of bamboo and leaves, only 17.3% with access to water distributed by the governmental water supply authority, and 33% without access to storm drainage (Fallavier 1999 :56; Slingsby 2000; Squatter and Urban Poor Federation 1999).

I.A.2 History of Phnom Penh

The transformation of Phnom Penh from a bustling small port of wooden houses into a modern city started in 1865 when it became the new royal capital. It accelerated by 1890, as the French administration introduced new concepts to customary land laws: streets as public spaces that could not be encroached, and land as an individual private property, officially registered in a cadastre. These helped the administration redesign the rural city after models of physical planning developed in Paris, for instance uniformly widening streets to 20 meters, and organizing the city around its main administrative buildings.

Between the two world wars, French urban policies aimed to reconstruct and embellish cities in France and in its colonies, providing social housing and public services to the majority of their inhabitants. As part of this approach, Cambodia adopted the Civil Code in 1920, hence strengthening the role of private ownership, and the official separation between urban and rural spaces. This removed the principle that one owned land as long as one used it for productive purposes, a basis of customary land ownership for rural Khmers. This change allowed to organize and finance the development and modernization of the city, by reclaiming new territories on wetlands, creating sanitation, railways, and road networks.

After World War II, the French administration started to redesign Phnom Penh to the needs of its expected industrialization, increasing density in residential areas and preparing a zoning and a master plan for the growth of the city, but the 1953 independence cut short these efforts. From 1956 to 1970, under an independent administration, Phnom Penh then doubled its size. It also regained some national identity as architects adapted the legacies of French schools to Khmer architecture to realize large scale projects that redesigned the city: an Angkorian-style Olympic stadium, a large housing project on concrete stilts in front of the Basac river, a national theatre marrying traditional Khmer style to modern uses, and a garden-city residential district centred around a new telecommunication tower, symbol of modern Cambodia (Ministère de la Culture du Cambodge and Atelier Parisien d'Urbanisme 1997 :27-59).

The 1970s witnessed the abandonment of Phnom Penh under the Khmer Rouge régime that emptied cities of their inhabitants and did not maintain their infrastructures. During the subsequent occupation by Vietnamese authorities from 1978 to 1989, and then until 1998, the continuing civil conflicts, political instability, and relative wealth of Phnom Penh compared to the rest of the country, did not make urban development a priority. Urban issues came back on a national agenda only since the end of 1998.

I.A.3 Physical characteristics of Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh was built at the intersection of the Mekong, Tonle Sap and Basac rivers at the end of the 14th century with its first structures erected on the bulge of the riverside. The city then developed by reclaiming wetlands, surrounding new perimeters by dikes, and land-filling these reclaimed compartments. Today, the major avenues are still built on these dikes and recall the growth stages of the city.

Its location at the junction of two rivers that represent major exchange routes is vital for Phnom Penh. The Mekong is a main artery of transportation and commerce in Southeast Asia, which links China, Myanmar, Lao, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam to the South China Sea, and the Tonle Sap River irrigates Lake Tonle Sap, the largest reservoir of fresh water in Southeast Asia.

As most of Phnom Penh was established on inundated areas, protecting the city from floods by maintaining dikes and pumping stations has always been a major public concern. Yet, the management of hydraulic infrastructures was almost abandoned between 1972 and 1990, destroying the city's drainage and pumping systems. From the early 1990s, diverse missions from bilateral development agencies and development banks have planned the rehabilitation and extension of the water network, but it was only by 1998, with the return of political stability that the city started to address the problem with several projects to improve water supply drainage and sewerage. It has now become a priority of the Municipality.

I.A.4 Demographics of Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh had a population of one million in 1998, 94% living in urban areas, and the remainder living in peri-urban districts with semi-rural economies. Out of this population, a survey by local NGOs estimated in 1999 that 35,000 families – or about 173,000 persons – lived in low-income settlements.

Yet, even if a large part of low-income residents are registered with local authorities, up to 20% may have not been counted. They are renters, seasonal migrants, and people too poor to participate in community saving schemes. They are typically not counted as members of the “communities” whose data the surveys used. Counting this missing 20% would add 35,000 “invisible” poor for a 1999 figure of 207,150.

Based on an estimated annual growth of 8%, the 2002 population of Phnom Penh is thus about 1,160,000 persons, with 214,620 urban poor, or 19.7% of the population (Royal Government of Cambodia 2000; Slingsby 2000; Squatter and Urban Poor Federation 1999).

I.A.5 The economy of Phnom Penh

In 1999, 9.9% of the working population worked in agriculture, 22.2% in transformation and manufacturing, and 67.9% in services. The unemployment rate was 12.6% (Royal Government of Cambodia 2000).¹

The municipal government aims to develop the leisure and tourism industry in Phnom Penh. As part of this approach, it has recently undertaken major projects to beautify the river front and public spaces, and to improve public infrastructure, with roads, drainage, water supply and water treatment. These projects aim to attract new investment while improving urban services for all. As is later explained, they also have major negative effects on the urban poor as they force the removal of many slum communities.

A major limitation to attract value-adding industries yet remains the country's weakness to enforce a rule of law by which investments could be secured and contracts enforced. Within this, the lack of a land law to ensure ownership rights on estate has restricted foreign investment to labour intensive, light industries such as garment manufacturing, which require low-skill and no long-term commitment from investors.²

I.A.6 Governance in Phnom Penh

The Municipality of Phnom Penh (MPP) has limited autonomy to plan and finance its activities. It is under the Ministry of Interior and its budget is part of that ministry's. The Governor and the six Vice-Governors share authority with individual ministers over municipal departments, which remain under the control of the ministries for budgeting and staffing. Accordingly, many decisions are made outside the Municipality, and the municipal autonomy depends on the relations between the Vice-Governors and their ministerial counterparts. The MPP is thus rather small institutionally: it includes the Governor, the Vice-Governors, their personal staff and the staff of the Cabinet, who are mainly support staff, with little technical expertise. As the MPP cannot establish its own departments apart from the Cabinet, it has divided the Cabinet into eight sub-cabinets, each dealing with its allocated sectors.

Although the Municipality officially gained financial autonomy in 1998, its budget remains constrained as a national law predefines all lines, the Minister of Interior must approve the budget, and the National Assembly ratifies it. Besides, the city has little power or incentive to raise its own revenue: it cannot borrow, and even if it collects taxes (e.g., on vacant land or property transfer) and income from public utilities, it is under no obligation to balance its budget, and must transfer all collection to the Ministry of Finance.

The city is divided into seven Khans (districts). The Chiefs of Khan report to the Chief of Cabinet. The three Deputy Chiefs of Khan are responsible for administration, socio-economic programs and public works. Under the Khans are Sangkats (wards), which have officers responsible for administration and statistics, economic, financial, and social affairs, culture, religion and hygiene (Slingsby 2000).

¹ Phnom Penh has a very recent history of economic development due to the political instability that kept foreign investment away until late 1998, and any trend is thus derived from limited data.

² Its entry into the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) should motivate Cambodia to improve its communications, adopt a rule of law, and ensure adequate training to its workforce. It should also promote political stability and peace with neighbouring states, all factors attractive to investors.

II. SLUMS AND POVERTY

II.B Different types of slums in Phnom Penh

II.B.1 Types of low-income settlements

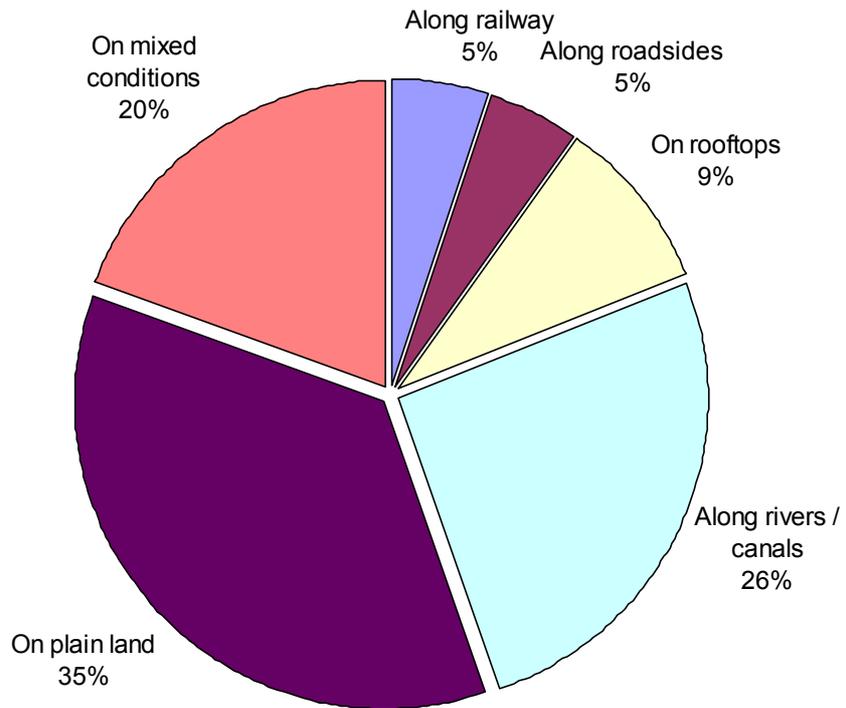
A quarter of Phnom Penh inhabitants live in low-income settlements, or slums.

On public land, these settlements developed alongside relatively wide streets, railway tracks, riversides, and *boengs* (water reservoirs used to irrigate farm land during dry season).

On private lands, small clusters of families settled in disaffected alleys of better-off districts, while other groups live as squatters in dilapidated, multiple-occupancy buildings in the centre of the city, where owners wait to sell the building for commercial development. Increasingly, urban poor also informally purchase plots on the rooftops of these buildings where they live as squatters relatively close to their place of work.

Since 1995, rural migrants have also developed squatter areas on the rural fringe of the city, on non-constructible public land where they expect that long-term occupation may provide them some tenure rights.

Figure 1: Types of low-income settlements in Phnom Penh



Source: SUPF 1999

Case 1 : Living on the grounds of a pagoda

A settlement of 60 families developed along a dirt lane leading to the pagoda.

People came here because of the proximity to the city centre and jobs. Most heads of households are unskilled construction workers or vendors, and find work on nearby construction sites and markets. They earn an average of \$10 to \$15 per week. To settle on this public land, each family had to pay a bribe of \$10 to \$20 to the Sangkat authority as a "registration fee".

There are three kinds of houses, each housing a different segment of the population:

- About 10 families, most headed by widows, live in the poorest shacks. These cost about \$25. They are made of palms and old rice sacks, have no door or window, and are only furnished with basic cooking utensils. People sleep on the floor.
- About 30 families of unskilled workers and labourers live in low-quality shelters that cost about \$50. Their roofs and walls are of palms, their floor of recycled plywood, and door and shutters of leaves. They are furnished with a few dishes and pots, and a stove.
- Another 20 families live in better houses, which cost about \$150. These have zinc roofs, thatched walls, wood floor, palm doors and shutters. They are equipped with a bed, a table, a few dishes and pots, and a stove.

II.B.2 Location

Low-income settlements are mostly located where their inhabitants can easily find work: in the city centre, near main markets, or next to the train station. Most are located on public land or on land with low value for private development. These areas are isolated from access to roads, water and power supply, sewerage and drainage, and are often insalubrious, situated above sewer lines, nearby or on dump sites.

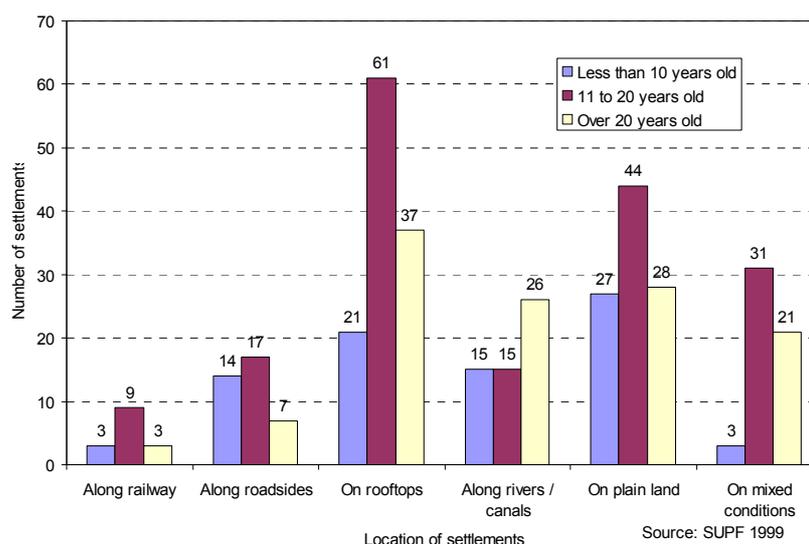
Within poor communities, the most vulnerable families live on public land where private owners cannot claim property rights and evict them. This is also where living conditions are the harshest: in makeshift shelters under the level of flooding for a large part of the year, in areas very difficult to reach, in the alleys and corridors of dilapidated buildings, or on their rooftops (Fallavier 1999).

II.B.3 Age

The more stable settlements (e.g., within or atop old buildings) have been created after 1985, when occupation rights in Phnom Penh were granted to all common inhabitants. They were given family books that allowed them to be considered stable dwellers and to receive legal access to public authorities, even though they did not have ownership titles. With family books, they could still be considered squatters and be evicted, but with greater chances of obtaining some sort of compensation.

Other types of low-income settlements were created at the end of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1994, when human right NGOs and United Nations agencies supported homeless refugees and Internally Displaced Persons who settled new communities along streets, waterways, and railroad tracks. The MPP then semi-formally recognised them as “transitional communities.” Families did not receive family books though, which did not allow them to claim connection to public utility networks. They could easily be evicted without compensation.

Figure 2: Characteristics of low-income settlements by age



Many people who lived in centrally located squatter settlements have also later been pushed to the limits of habitable land by the commercial development of these areas, and the resulting evictions. Hence, while squatter and urban poor settlements have developed mostly in the city centre until 1998, recent massive relocation programs of squatters have contributed to establish peri-urban zones of poverty. Allegedly, these relocations have also created more rental communities in Phnom Penh slums, as some relocated families cannot find work near relocation sites and come back as renters in squatter settlements near employment areas. Some opportunists settle in squatter sites which may soon be relocated, hoping to receive free plots on resettlement sites.

II.B.4 Population size and characteristics

In 2002, between 228,400 and 241,600 people live in low-income communities. The majority are considered “squatters”, while a few urban poor groups live in slum-like conditions, but claim occupancy rights. All live on marginal, seasonally or permanently flooded land, or in multi-occupancy dilapidated buildings in the city centre. Squatters and urban poor form up to 25% of the city's population.

Table 1 : Population estimation for Phnom Penh, including the urban poor

	1998	1999		2002 (estimate)		
	total	total (est.)	urban poor	total	urban poor	urban poverty
5% growth p.a.	999,800	1,049,790	207,150	1,157,400	<u>228,400</u>	19.7%
8% growth p.a.	999,800	1,079,790	207,150	1,224,480	<u>241,600</u>	19.7%

(Royal Government of Cambodia 2000; Squatter and Urban Poor Federation 1999), estimates by author

II.C Official definitions related to slums used for policy purposes

II.C.1 Definitions and their predominant use

Until 2000, the Municipality of Phnom Penh categorized slums into “squatter” and “urban poor” settlements. Squatters illegally occupied public or private land, while urban poor were low-income families with a recognized occupancy status that gave them some security of tenure, but no ownership rights.

The irony of such a definition is that there is no clear distinction between legal and illegal occupancy in Phnom Penh, since all private ownership of land was abolished in 1974, and no clear ownership system has been implemented since then. Almost no-one has full ownership titles in Phnom Penh, and most city dwellers could indeed be considered as squatters (Payne mimeo; Williams 1999).

The term “squatter”, long used in Phnom Penh to classify most inhabitants of low-income settlements yet conveys much more than a connotation of illegality. In Khmer, it refers to “people living in anarchy”, and is strongly linked to immorality, disorder and criminality. At the official level, this gives the municipality grounds to refuse dialogue with squatters and to not acknowledge the legitimacy of their claims for public recognition. This official view is quite widely shared by the middle and upper classes, which consider squatters an aesthetic nuisance to the city, and a threat to public order, all feelings based on the same stereotypes of anarchy, and reinforced by a press that is poorly informed and sensationalistic.

In 2000, Prime Minister Hun Sen yet renamed squatter dwellers, or “anarchists”, as “temporary residents”, while publicly recognizing their economic value to the city. He emphasized that accompanying them to rebuild new, live-able communities in locations outside the city had become a priority of the municipality (Hun Sen speech at the inauguration of Mean Chey Development Community, April 20, 2000). This change of status coincided with a first step of implementing the Urban Poverty Reduction Strategy.

II.D Unofficial definitions of slum

II.D.1 Popular understandings of slums

Most people in Phnom Penh hold more contempt than sympathy for the urban poor. Because of the stereotype of anarchy, the middle and upper classes often consider slum dwellers more as culprits of social evils than victims of exclusion, and are mostly afraid of them. Yet, this feeling is often based on no more than irrational fears. Most poor settlements are in fact quite discreet or even invisible to many city dwellers, as they are located away from main roads or above the city on its rooftops. Because of this, few people actually know the living conditions in slums, and the actual situations their inhabitants face.

II.D.2 Slum dwellers' perception of their own status as slum dwellers

In 1999 a participatory study outlined people’s perception of their status as residents of squatter and urban poor settlements. The residents of slums linked the low quality of their living conditions to four main causes: isolation, high risks, lack of access to productive resources, and lack of political representation.

Box 1: Slum dwellers' views of the causes of their living conditions

1. Isolation:

- Geographical, because of floods, and the lack of electricity, public lights, and road access;
- Intellectual, because of high barriers to education due to cost and distance;
- Social, as the urban poor (especially squatters and renters) feel excluded from the larger communities where their settlements are located; and
- Economic, because of difficult access to markets and employment opportunities.

2. High risks:

- Physical, because of floods, insalubrious living conditions, the high incidence of illness, criminality, and a lack of access to medical care; and
- Economic, because of low and unstable revenue, the high cost of corruption, and the high levels of indebtedness as survival needs are funded with credit from usurers.

3. Lack of access to productive resources:

- High cost barriers to accessing basic education and vocational training, and
- Lack of access to credit for people without collateral.

4. Lack of political representation:

- Relations between poor communities and the Municipality still remain tense, as until recently the MPP did not approve political dialogue with representatives of squatters, which it considered illegal
- Within low-income communities, the most vulnerable populations are not included in the community planning process and represented at the Sangkat or Khan levels (Fallavier 1999).

II.E Official definition of poverty used for policy purposes

Officially, in its 1999 Urban Poverty Reduction Strategy (UPRS), the Municipality of Phnom Penh recognized that poverty has more than the economic dimensions of low income or low productivity. It detailed three main facets of poverty as: (i) *economic*, with low income, or lack of subsistence means, (ii) *social*, with inadequate housing conditions and living environment, including the lack of access to basic services, and (iii) *political*, when some citizens do not have a voice in decision-making, or are not recognized the same rights as others (Municipality of Phnom Penh 1999).

In reality though, this definition is not understood by most levels of the municipal government. Like the recognition that “squatters” had become “temporary residents of the city”, it has remained mainly on official documents unknown to most civil servants. Most authorities still consider the poor as responsible of their own situations. Having “decided” to live in slums, they “created” their own living conditions, and “should go back to their provinces”. As for the recognition of different facets of poverty, the implementation of the UPRS by the municipality does not yet tackle in depth any single elements of this definition, let alone all three together.

II.F Unofficial definitions of poverty, not recognised in official documents

During a consultation on the situations and needs of the urban poor, low-income dwellers defined the causes of their situations as: (1) the lack of community organization, and the discrimination within existing communities against the poorest, (2) the lack of basic education, employable skills, and access to capital for investment, and (3) poor access to health services, sanitation and shelter (Fonseka and Mani 1998).

To plan for the long term, they needed (1) stable housing and revenue, and protection from health risks; (2) affordable access to basic education, vocational training, and credit; and (3) the recognition by development agencies of the special needs of the poorest, which needed targeted intervention.

Box 2: Needs of slum dwellers, as expressed by themselves

1. Physical security and stability of livelihoods

- “Security of tenure to be eligible for access to public utilities - including rights for renters”
- “Improved road access with footbridges, elevated paths, and public lights”
- “Low rents during flood seasons for those who need to relocate”
- “Improved and accessible health and family planning services”
- “Longer term employment opportunities for income security”
- “Removal of violence, crime, and corruption”

2. Access to basic services at affordable prices

- “Clean water and power supply at low cost”
- “Drainage to remove stagnant water after the rains”
- “Free garbage removal”
- “Access to indoor toilets”
- “Free access to basic education and vocational training”
- “Schools, markets and hospitals located close to settlements”
- “Information on health and sanitation issues, including maternal health, basic hygiene and child care”
- “Low-cost health services for the poor, and access to affordable loans for health spending”

3. Access to resources to increase income generation capacity

- “Basic education for adults”
- “Vocational training for adults and children over 15 years old”
- “Micro-credit for all urban poor, not only for the house owners”
- “More jobs for all through the creation of micro-enterprises or factories”

4. Recognition of the needs of the poorest

- “Elders, women, and ethnic minorities need to be better represented in local planning process”
- “Projects must directly reach the poorest; intervention through community leaders never reach them”
- “Projects should be in settlements, to benefit those who cannot attend outside meetings and training”
- “The poorest need support with survival needs such as food, health care, and shelter” (Fallavier 1999:46).

II.G Origins of slums

II.G.1 Social, economic and political forces that form and remove slums

At the end of the Pol Pot regime, returnees to Phnom Penh were authorized to occupy buildings on a first-come-first served basis. The few professionals alive after the mass killing of all educated people in Cambodia were allowed to occupy any vacant dwellings close to their new places of employment in the civil service. These new owners took many centrally located buildings in the city, which some then subdivided and sold, even though there were no formal titles. Once all existing buildings were occupied, people started to settle on vacant land, creating the communities that are now considered illegal.

Low-income settlements in Phnom Penh were created by rural migrants fleeing the countryside because of indebtedness and the lack of economic opportunities, by refugees returning from camps, and by Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). Most came to Phnom Penh for economic reasons, and settled close to where they could earn a living. The slum population then increased from natural growth, and from the migration of relatives of existing dwellers. Seasonal migrants, and people who move regularly in and out because of floods, account for the seasonal variation in the size of the settlements (Fallavier 1999).

II.G.2 Social, political and economic advantages of slums to the city

Industrial and service activities in Phnom Penh are increasing, and most of the poor find employment in the city's informal economy or in garment factories. Informal activities represent the backbone of the city's economy: slum dwellers provide labour on construction sites, the bulk of food peddlers, market vendors, and micro-entrepreneurs, and domestic help. They also recycle a large part of the city's waste.

Politically, the poor and their representatives are the most active citizens. In an authoritative political environment where public officials are not held accountable,³ they have created space for democratic participation. Since 1994, urban poor representatives created the Urban Sector Group (USG), and the Squatter and Urban Poor Federation (SUPF), two associations that support the urban poor to organize into communities to plan for their own improvement projects and to voice their concerns to the government. Since then, several other "people's organizations" have been created to strengthen this bottom-up approach to urban planning, providing for instance technical support for small scale planning (the Urban Resource Centre, URC), or microfinance for housing and income generation (the Urban Poor Development Fund, UPDF). Although these organizations still need to strengthen their abilities to propose viable policies for poverty reduction, they form strong foundations upon which a popular democracy could develop from the slums in the coming years, unmatched by any similar initiative from the middle or upper classes.

II.H Data available on low-income settlements / slums in Phnom Penh

II.H.1 Maps

No computer map is currently available showing the location of low-income settlements in Phnom Penh.⁴ During 2002, NGOs, CBOs and the MPP will collaborate with UN-Habitat and the City Development Strategy to update the 1999 census of low-income settlements, and map them accurately. Map 2 (see in appendix) shows the locations of the sites created since 1998 to relocate slum dwellers.

II.H.2 Census Data

a. Permanent structures by type

Most shelters in slums are made of low-cost recycled material, ranging from paper to palm leaves and old wood. These structures are vulnerable to winds and heavy rains, and can be easily destroyed by fires. People who own brick and cement houses are typically the better-off in the settlements (see Figure 3).

b. Access to water

In 1999, only a quarter of the slums were officially connected to the city's water supply network. Because they are considered illegal dwellers, their inhabitants cannot obtain official connections. They purchase water from private sellers who have official connections, or who pump water from the river.

Water is often of low quality, and always proportionally more expensive than for someone with an official connection to the public network. A cubic meter of water privately purchased costs 1,000 to 10,000 Riels, while it costs 350 to 700 Riels from the public network. Because of this high cost, the poorest often use surface water from the rivers or *boengs*. They often fall sick because of its low quality.

³ Most municipal officials are appointed. The Governor was appointed by the Prime Minister, after a substantial pay-off was officially given to the contender from the opposition party to accept the nomination. All vice-governors and Khan leaders are also appointed. Sangkat officials represent the only elected level of government. They have been elected in February 2002, and yet have little decisional power.

⁴ A wall-size map of 1999 data is available at the Urban Resource Centre but could not be digitized.

The burden of carrying water in small containers over sometimes dangerous paths also falls on women, who often spend a couple of hours a day just fetching water.

Since 2000 though, with support from development banks, the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority (PPWSA) has extended its coverage of the city, and has developed schemes to reach the urban poor, by providing main connections in low-income settlements when communities are able to organize their own distribution and fee collection. No figures on the actual coverage are available yet.

Figure 3: Building material for shelters in Phnom Penh low-income settlements

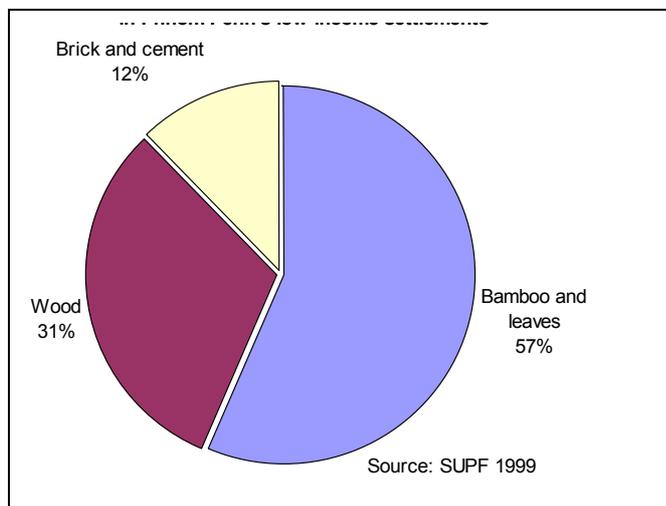
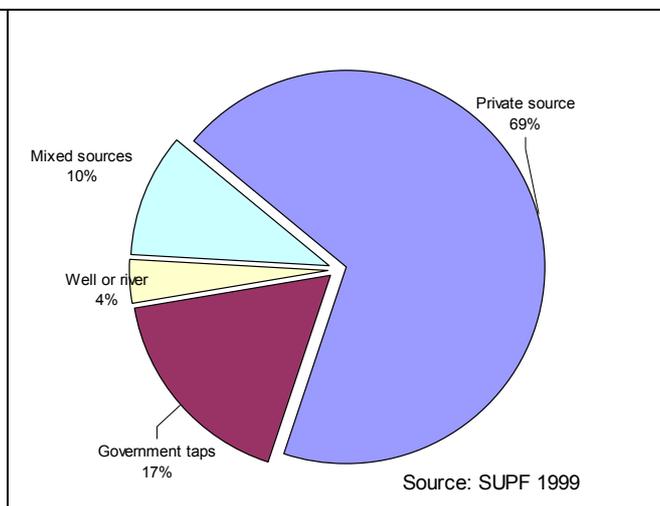


Figure 4: Water supply in Phnom Penh low-income settlements



c. Access to sanitation

Most slums face major drainage and sewerage problems, especially during the rain season. A third of the settlements do not have any system to evacuate storm or waste waters. Another third set up their own drainage systems, with support from Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and international agencies such as DFID and UN-Habitat, sometime linking the mains to the government-built network. The remaining settlements have access to the municipal network. All systems yet fail to reach the poorest who live in the lower parts of settlements and live surrounded by water discharged in the streets upstream. Poor drainage causes lasting floods after heavy rains, and stagnant water is a main source of disease in slums, with mosquitoes, parasites and water borne diseases infecting wide areas (See Figure 5).

Only about 30% of families in poor settlements have access to indoor toilets, and human waste is mostly discharged in open spaces, ending under or nearby houses where it represents a health hazard and contributes to the degradation of the local environment.

A minority of slums organize to collect their solid waste for removal by the service that covers Phnom Penh for a monthly charge of one dollar per family. These communities are usually situated close to the collection routes, and have been organized by an NGO or CBO on environmental management. Most settlements are yet away from collection routes and have no organized system to manage waste. At best, they burn garbage, but often simply throw them in open public spaces (Fallavier 1999; Squatter and Urban Poor Federation 1999).

d. Access to electricity

Households considered squatters cannot have official connection to the main distribution network run by Electricité Du Cambodge (EDC). EDC has started to develop a network of registered vendors who resell electricity to unregistered houses. The system is metered and people pay two to three times the rate of regular households. Where there is no EDC distributor, private households with an official meter redistribute power at a price three to five times this of EDC (see Figure 6).

In areas without close access to the public network, private vendors run their own generators, and usually charge a flat, monthly rate, based on the number of lights or electrical appliances one has in the house. The cost is at least five times EDC rate.

Typically 20% of the households in a settlement do not have electricity. They are the poorest families who cannot afford the cost of the service or live in such isolated or unstable housing that power lines cannot be installed. They use batteries, candles and kerosene for lamps, and usually own no electric appliance but a bare light bulb.

Figure 5: Access to storm drainage in Phnom Penh low-income settlements

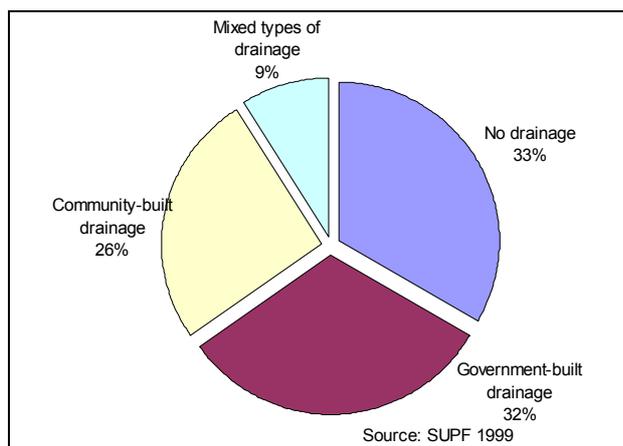
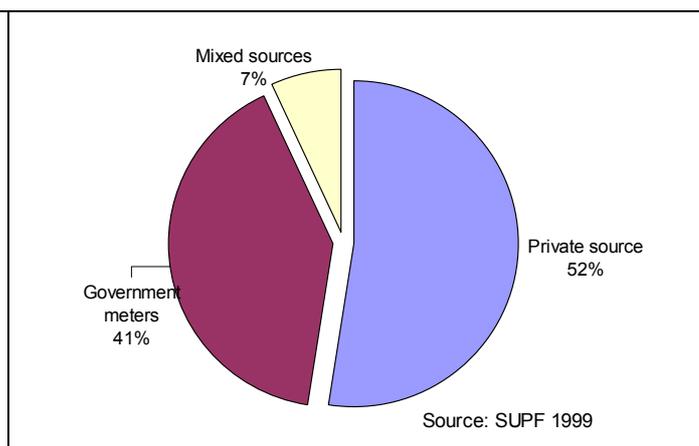


Figure 6: Access to electricity in Phnom Penh low-income settlements



e. Transport and delivery

Most slums are located in areas difficult to reach, and physical isolation is a main problem that affects access to services, economic opportunities, and personal security. It worsens during the rain season when the poorest settlements located in on nearby waterways are cut from access to roads.

Isolation from main roads limits access to schools and services such as health care or waste collection. It also prevents people from reaching markets and increases the cost of food, which they must purchase from a single retailer in the settlements. Then, isolation decreases economic opportunities for housewives, who cannot for instance set up small shops on their doorstep, selling to passers-by.

Another key concern is personal safety. Within settlements, poor road quality prevents people from moving during floods, or forces them to walk in sludge or stagnant water, or on dangerous, dilapidated footbridges, resulting in many sicknesses, infections, and deaths by drowning. Outside settlements, poorly lit roads are where people get assaulted, especially in isolated areas on the outskirts of Phnom Penh.

f. Access to health care

There are no figures on the citywide outreach of health services in slums, but situations are similar in most settlements: health services are not easily available, their cost is high and unpredictable, and slum dwellers have very limited knowledge about basic preventive health practices.⁵

Most slums do not have a health post, or one that answers local needs, such as early opening and availability for night emergencies. When people fall sick, they must be transported to hospital, but transportation cost and the fear of all bribes to pay often prevents them from seeking medical care.

Then, health care is often not affordable for the poor. Even though the poorest are supposed to receive free treatment, everyone must bribe nurses and physicians to be treated. The poor thus often do not get proper treatment. Never knowing what they will have to pay outside their settlement, many poor families mostly rely on local remedies and traditional medicine. These are cheap and easily available, but often unable to cope with the severe conditions that deplorable living conditions inflict on people. In case of emergency people must borrow, and can only obtain emergency loans through usurers who charge interests up to 1000% per month.⁶ Health costs then often contribute to run people into debt traps.

Lastly, most people do not know basic preventive health care, or where they can obtain free treatment. Women know little about reproductive health, basic health care of children, and family planning. Beside, because of the lack of sanitation and waste management, people often get sick from walking in waste, but do not organize to change their own practices. Then, many people do not know about programs offering free treatment, or do not go there, as they suspect having to pay “informal fees” anyway. They often let sicknesses worsen, and only seek help once they are very sick, and then become indebted.

⁵ Since 1999, the Municipal Department of Health, in collaboration with the World Health Organization have set pilot projects to design quality affordable health care in low-income settlements. They have provided improved low-costs service in two large slum areas, but it is unclear how they can scale up.

⁶ For 10,000 Riels lent to buy medicine, usurers will collect daily 2,500 to 4,000 Riels for 24 days. When a family cannot pay, collectors seize equipment, or even abduct a child to sell in the commercial sex trade. As the last resort, if the family cannot pay, the loan-shark will take the house as a payment.

g. Access to education

As of 1997, Cambodian adults had each received on average 3.5 years of education (Ministry of Planning - Cambodia and United Nations Development Programme 1997: 39). In the low-income settlements of Phnom Penh, about 74% of the adults have received some formal education, but their degree of literacy is difficult to determine. Parents yet often strongly believe that education can help the family increase earnings and improve living conditions. Many families thus spend a substantial part of their resources sending children to school. Although adult women have less formal education than men (see Table 2 in appendix), there is no obvious gender selection of which children can go to school when funding is limited. Only in the rural fringe are girls more likely than boys to stay home or to work with their parents rather than attend school, usually for safety reasons.

Distance is a major problem to access education for isolated settlements, where children may walk one to two hours to school during the dry season, and must stay home during the rainy season as they cannot reach school. Cost is also a barrier to education for the poor. Although public education is supposed to be free, teachers request a daily “informal fee” of 200 to 500 Riels from each pupil. Including food, book, and uniform, it costs 2,000 to 4,000 Riels daily to send a child to school, while the average gross income of a cyclo driver is 7,000 Riels and the average number of children is four per family.

h. Crime rates

Crime happens in the form of mugging, robbery and abduction, but no figures are available on the extent of these as most are not reported. Sellers are assaulted for the cash they may bring home, houses are robbed of their few valuables, and some young girls disappear coming back from work or school.

Inside the city’s large slums, criminals may be from the settlements where armed gangs of youth sometime threaten people, but in more rural parts of Phnom Penh threats come mostly from the outside. People are attacked on the dark access roads but within villages, there is usually no theft or physical threats.

In most slums, people rarely seek help from the police. They are as afraid of the police as of gangsters, as police officers regularly abuse their power to ask all kinds of bribes and favours.

i. Security of tenure

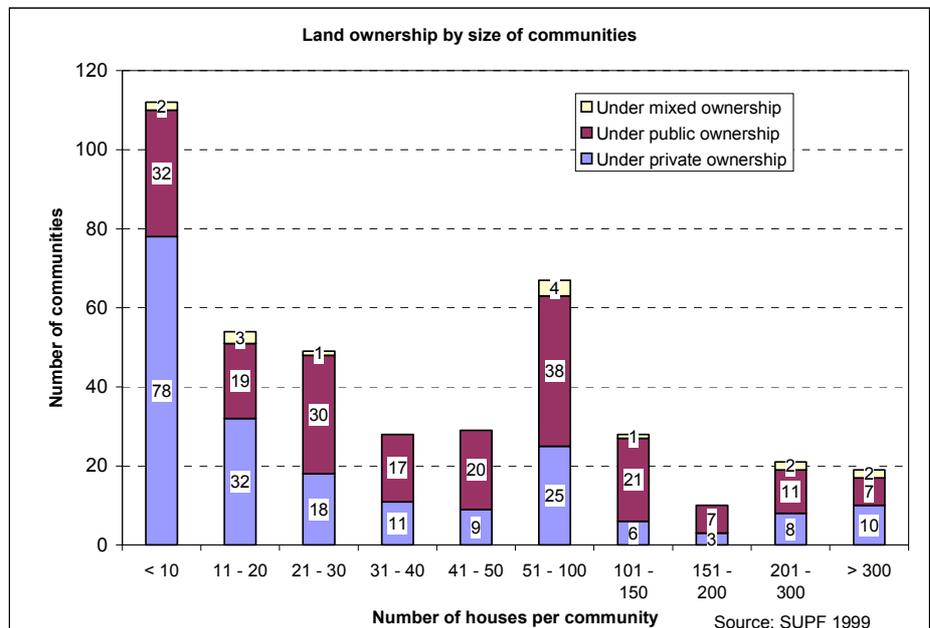
Figure 7: Status of ownership in Phnom Penh low-income settlements

The land tenure situation in Phnom Penh is complex as there is no clear distinction between legal and illegal occupancy and/or ownership.

Slums are located on public and private land, and since recently, some have been granted social concessions by the government.⁷ No family yet holds any certificate of ownership.

As mentioned earlier, families with a registration book may feel more secure than others without, but even this does not give them any strong claim to ownership. These unclear

rights of tenure make eviction a constant threat to most low-income families, who can hardly plan for their future, or simply feel part of a community that has a common future (Fallavier 1999; Payne mimeo).



⁷ In a series of emergency resettlements of squatter families victims of fires in Phnom Penh since May 2001, the MPP has allocated plots to displaced families on “social concessions” on the outskirts of the city. After five years in the new settlement, families should receive ownership titles of the plots they occupy. Meanwhile, they cannot sell the land, and the government can take it back if they do not live on it.

III. SLUMS: THE PEOPLE

III.1 Who lives in slums?

III.1.1 Histories and key events in lives of typical slum households

Case 2: Female-headed household renting a shelter along a lane

Nieng lives with her husband and their five children in a squatter settlement along a small road. She is a street cleaner employed by the municipality, and works seven days a week for 80,000 Riels (\$20) per month. Her husband is sick and stays home all day.

She rents a small wooden shelter for 30,000 Riels a month. It has no electricity and no toilet. Water from private vendors cost 1,000 Riels per bucket.

Every morning, she gets up at three to go and clean the central market, with a broom she had to buy herself. Her employer only provided a pushcart, and she must take care not to have it stolen. Replacing it would cost a month salary. If she is sick and stays home, her salary is cut by 2,500 Riels per day. Sometimes she does not get paid at the end of the month, and must wait till the next month; meanwhile, she must borrow rice from her neighbours to feed her children.

Feeding her family everyday is her main concern; she cannot plan for her future past a day.

Case 3: A blind man and his family on a single bed living in a corridor

She sits on a bed in the dark corridor of an old multi-store building in the city centre. She is the second wife of a blind man who begs from market to market. Her 54 year old husband lost his sight 30 years ago and has been a beggar since then. He had a house in Kampong Cham Province, but sold it when his first wife got sick. When she died, they had sold everything to pay her health cost. He placed his three children in an orphanage, and came to Phnom Penh to beg.

There, he married his current wife and they now have four more children. Everyday, two of them go to beg with him. He makes 4,000 to 5,000 Riels a day begging, while his wife brings 2,000 to 3,000 from cleaning dishes in a restaurant. This is hardly enough to pay for food, and does not allow them to get medical treatment for the many times they get sick.

They own nothing but a bed given by neighbours. They live in the dark without even a lamp.

III.1.2 Aspirations, plans and barriers to their fulfilment

Most families came to Phnom Penh hoping a job for the parents, and an education for the children. Many think they will find access to basic education, to vocational training, and to credit to start their small business. But all face the same problems in the city: difficult access to any public services, very unhealthy conditions that force them to spend high amounts for health, and limited job opportunities.

Case 4: Cyclo driver living along an open sewer with a sick child

A 50-year-old woman and her husband live with their two children in a wood shack hidden by middle class houses near an open sewer.

She used to sell vegetables on the market until her 16 year-old daughter fell sick and had to stay in bed. The mother now stopped work to stay home and look after her daughter.

The family moved from Kandal Province ten years ago to allow their two children to attend school. They thought they were poor because they had never received education, and wanted their children to receive good education in Phnom Penh. The husband has been riding a cyclo since then, while his wife sold vegetable and the children went to school for a few years.

Now, illness affects the entire family. The father's income is too low to pay for medicine, and is hardly enough to purchase enough food. They can rarely pay a visit to the doctor, but still try to purchase drugs from the local seller. Recently, they borrowed 10,000 Riels (\$2.5) from a loan shark. They must repay 6,000 Riels every other day for 24 days. They are afraid the lender will take their home away if they cannot pay. Both children had to leave school, which destroyed their parents' hope that they could one day rely on them for a better life.

Life in Kandal was easier than here but they see no way back there: they sold all they had to come to Phnom Penh.

Despite progress since 1994 in providing access to basic utilities to more urban poor and in developing their representation in the local planning process, two main issues still greatly constrain the prospects of all slum dwellers for a better life: land tenure, and corruption.

The issue of land tenure is thorny for all, but the poor have much difficulty reclaiming legitimate ownership of the land they occupy. Since the Khmer Rouges abolished private ownership in 1974, it has only been re-introduced gradually on an ad hoc basis, with lengthy disputes about land redistribution. In a society quickly opening to market economy and still dominated by the power of the military, land ownership concentrates in the hands of a few powerful officials, and the poor have little voice in land bargaining. As many slums are erected on state-public land, which can be claimed by the State for public use without compensation, the majority of slum dwellers are afraid of eviction and/or relocation to sites without access to basic services, and far from their sources of employment and social networks. Pressures from investors in the leisure and tourism industry represent a threat upon the poor, as many of the current slums are located along the riverside, on land with high potential value for tourism development.⁸

Corruption is another major cause of poverty as it affects all aspects of the lives of slum dwellers. In squatter settlements, local authorities extort a heavy proportion of the poor's income in bribes: they sell them land or shacks, or the "right" to settle on public land, and then levy regular fees for protection, for the right to repair a leaking roof, or to install an indoor toilet. School teachers, health staff, or the police require similar bribes. All these fees diminish the income available to their basic needs of housing, feeding, clothing and educating their families. While these informal taxes may represent minimal amount for the middle and classes, they are a disproportionate weight on the urban poor.

Case 5: Corruption and exploitation as barriers to obtain and keep a salaried job

When young women want to work in a garment factory, they first typically only receive half a salary (i.e., \$30) for the first two months of work, as they receive training.

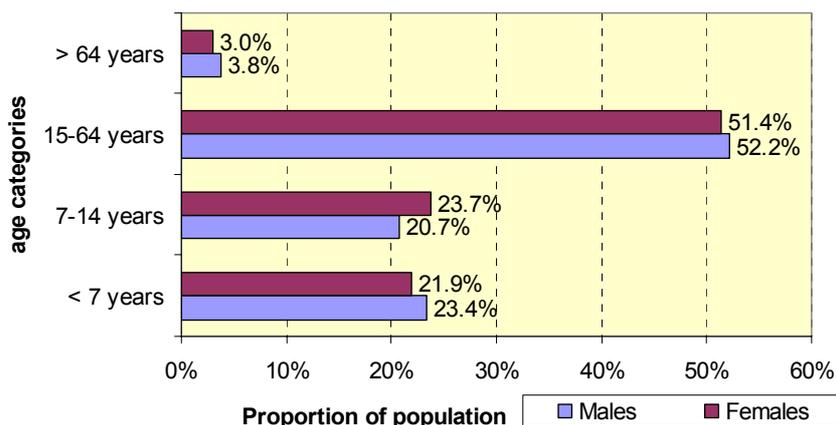
After two months of training, they are often informally required to pay the equivalent of two month of full salary to the foreman, so that they can obtain the full-time position. Many also report that sexual abuse is prevalent for them to keep the job. All workers know that if they get sick more than two days in a row, they will be laid off without compensation.

III.1.3 Household indicators

Data presented in this section refers to results of a survey conducted between February and March 2002 among 140 families living in five low-income settlements on the outskirts of Phnom Penh.⁹

III.1.4 Household types and their percentage

Figure 8: Demographics in sample of 140 slum families



In the settlements surveyed, the typical household size is 5.7 persons, 17% of households are headed by women, and there are 116 females per 100 males, or a 53.61% female share of the population.

While the household size is similar to the national average of 5.8, there seems to be more females in poor settlements than the nationwide figure of 112 females for 100 males, or 52.8% female share of the population (Ministry of Planning - Cambodia 1998:49).

⁸ A land law was passed in October 2001, and the process of land regularization and titling should start in Phnom Penh by July 2002.

⁹ A team of four researchers from the Urban Resource Centre and two from Cambodia Volunteer for Community Development conducted a baseline study of the living conditions in Samaki 6 Phum Veal, Samaki, Anlong Kong Thmey, Anlong Kngnan, and Lor Kanbor communities.

III.1.5 Income by quintile and household type

Most slum dwellers work as unskilled workers: men are taxi drivers (on cyclos or on motordups) and unskilled labourers on construction sites, and women are street sellers.

Skilled men are often masons, mechanics or iron workers, while women are seamstresses.

Women are most represented in small trading business. They are also more likely to be unemployed than men.

Figure 9: Occupation of heads of household in 140 families

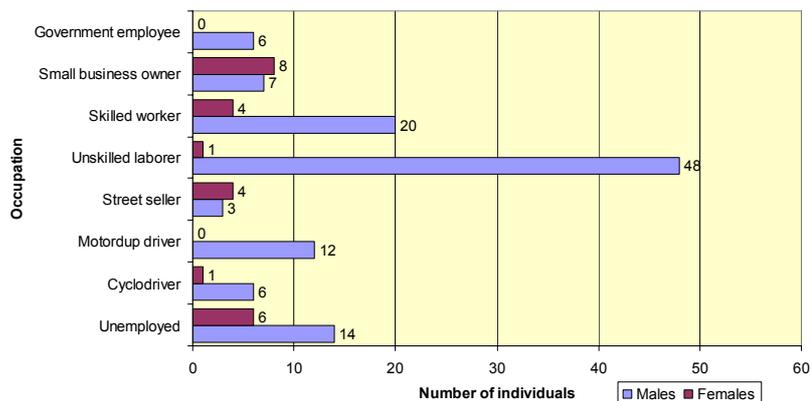
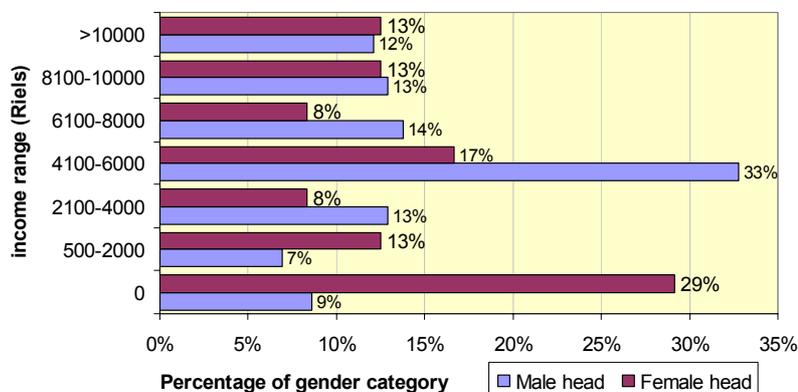


Figure 10: Daily family income by gender of head of household



The average daily income for a family is 12,500 Riels (\$3.20), with a contribution of about 7,200 Riels from the head of household, and 5,300 Riels from other family members (see Table 3).

The average income in our survey shows no significant differences between income for men and women, but these figures may be biased by a few outlying results. In-depth interviews usually show a lower income for women than men.

III.1.6 Types of tenure and house ownership

Most dwellers of low-income settlements are officially regarded as squatters, i.e., illegally occupying the plot where they live. Yet, typically at least 75% of slum dwellers consider themselves as owners of their plots. They have purchased these plots either from the previous owner, or from local authorities (the police, chief of village, and/or representatives of the Sangkat or Khan), who themselves may not have any prior ownership rights, but sell public land to their benefit. Most transactions are recorded at least on a handwritten receipt, and although most dwellers understand that such record has no legal authority, it is often enough for them to claim some compensation in case of relocation organized by the municipality.

Others rent their habitation. Renters are either seasonal migrants who have a house in the countryside and come for a short term in Phnom Penh, or the poorest of the poor, who cannot afford to purchase a house in a squatter settlement, and rent on a weekly or monthly basis, with the constant threat of eviction by their slum landlord. Many renter households are headed by single women.

III.1.7 Literacy

Literacy rate in urban Cambodia is estimated at 78.06% (Ministry of Planning - Cambodia 2000:60). With 74% of heads of households having received some formal education, the level of education received by adult slum dwellers is only slightly lower than national urban average. These figures may yet mask the very low quality of the Cambodian education system in which people with three or four years of schooling may still be illiterate. Despite this level of formal education, experience working in Phnom Penh slums suggests that half the urban poor are functionally illiterate.¹⁰

¹⁰ Indeed in 1997, the UNDP estimated a literacy rate of 35%, while the socioeconomic survey of Cambodia estimated it in the range of 65-69% (Ministry of Planning - Cambodia and United Nations Development Programme 1997:38)

Figure 11: Educational attainment in low-income settlements by gender of head of household

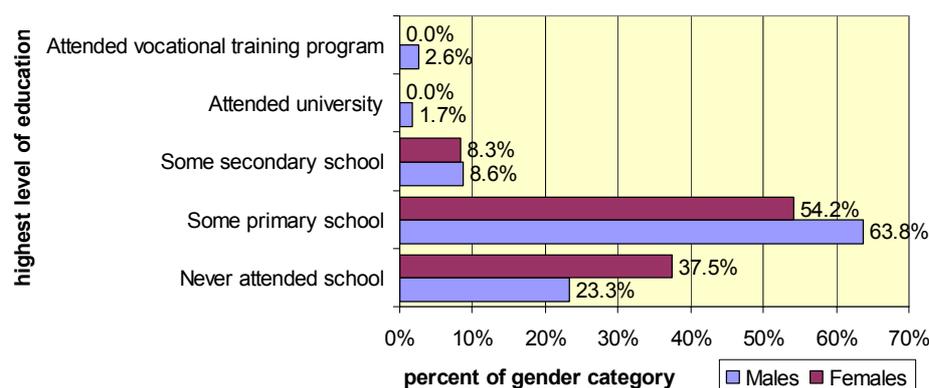


Table 2: School attendance in low-income settlements

The combined enrolment rate of children over 7 years old in school is 61.5%, a figure similar to this of 62.07% for urban Cambodia calculated in 2000 (Ministry of Planning - Cambodia 2000:60).

Children 7 and over attending school		
	frequency	% of total
Primary school	164	54.8%
Secondary School	13	4.3%
University or vocational training	7	2.3%
Combined enrolment rate in school	184	61.5%
Total children over 7 in settlement	299	100.0%

III.I.8 Occupancy ratios

The average number of persons per household is 5.7, and our survey shows an average dwelling size of 20 m². The mean floor area per person is thus 3.5 m².

III.I.9 Length of household residency in slum

There is typically little mobility out of the low-income settlements in Phnom Penh among home owners. People usually only leave their community when they are evicted by the municipality. Figure 12 in appendix shows that 75% of low-income settlements were more than 10 years old in 1999, with 31%, or 121 settlements over 20 years old. Given that most settlements were fully occupied by 1995, it is safe to think that average residency in slums today is thus over 10 years.

III.J Costs of living in slums

Table 3: Typical expense pattern per household in low-income settlements

Although results are only indicative, our survey shows that food and transportation are the most important budget lines (see Figure 13 in appendix). It points that revenue covers daily expenses only when the income of another family member supplements this of the head of household. This suggests that two incomes are necessary to make ends meet, and that single heads of households cannot support their families without supplementary income (often from a working child).

Income and expense patterns	Riels	\$	% of total income
Daily income from head of household	7,176	\$1.84	57.33%
Daily income from other members of the household	5,341	\$1.37	42.67%
Total daily income	12,518	\$3.21	100.00%
Daily household spending on food	3,165	\$0.81	25.28%
Daily household spending on water	693	\$0.18	5.53%
Daily household spending on firewood	519	\$0.13	4.15%
Daily household spending on electricity	270	\$0.07	2.16%
Daily household spending on transportation	1,916	\$0.49	15.30%
Daily household spending on education	662	\$0.17	5.29%
Total daily spending 1	7,225	\$1.85	57.72%
Monthly household spending on health	10,583	\$2.71	3.38%
Monthly household spending on religion	3,712	\$0.95	1.19%
Amount of loan repayments	51,637	\$13.24	16.50%
Total daily spending including monthly expenses	9,862	\$2.53	78.79%
Average saving reported per week	2,332	\$0.60	2.66%
number of working days counted per month: 25			

Our survey was conducted during the dry season, when health costs are annually low. On a yearly average, counting for the effect of the rainy season, health cost may be much higher. Given the recorded average spending of 22,000 Riels every time a family member gets sick (7% of the total monthly income) a typical household is very vulnerable to the emergency costs of a health problem for which they must often borrow at very high rates. Corruption is also often under-reported. In other surveys, fees paid for services that should be free often amount to 20% of the total income of low-income families.

Case 6: Repairman along a street

Sem Hong is 43 and his wife is 46. He repairs bicycles and motorcycles for 5,000 Riels per day. His wife is sick and cannot work outside of the house.

They live with their 6 children. Three are married and living with their families in the 4 by 6 meter house, made of palm, wood and zinc. One of the married sons is unemployed, but his wife works selling beer and earns \$40 a month. Another work as a repairman with his father, while his wife stays at home. The husband of their 20 year old daughter works for \$60 a month in a hotel. Another son is unemployed, and two other attend school.

Their typical weekly expense and income pattern is as follows (in Riels):

Income from repair job	35,000	\$8.97
Income from son and daughter in law	82,000	\$21.03
(Expense for) water	(10,500)	-\$2.69
Electricity	(6,000)	-\$1.54
Wood and coal	(3,500)	-\$0.90
Rice	(30,000)	-\$7.69
Other food	(56,000)	-\$14.36
Fee paid to teacher	(7,000)	-\$1.79
Medicine	(1,000)	-\$0.26

Remaining weekly disposable income: about 2,000 Riels \$0.77

At times, the family borrows money from the chief of village to buy food (Fallavier 1999:25).

III.J.1 Availability of housing finance

In our survey, the average expenditure for housing construction was 315,000 Riels, or \$81, which 68% of the people financed from their savings and 21% from family loans. Only 1% borrowed from an NGO, and another 6% from private money lenders.

The Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF), a CBO set up by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, started providing housing loans to low-income communities in 1998. As of early 2002, it had provided about \$370,000 in loans to 2,400 families, mostly for house construction (Asian Coalition for Housing Rights 2002:17). It remains the only lending program for house construction in Phnom Penh. Indeed, the very weak financial sector in Cambodia does not provide housing finance, even for better-off families.

III.J.2 Health problems

The most common kinds of sickness in the settlements surveyed are diarrhoea (20.5%), fever (19.5%), and cold (16.3%) mostly due to the low quality of water and the unsanitary living conditions.

People respond to health problems by self-medicating (59%), or visiting a private doctor (22%). Only 7.6% go to the community health centre when one is available, and 10.5% go to a public hospital.¹¹ Most say they do not think public hospitals can treat them well. They fear the cost they have to pay in bribes to hospital staff and say that at least with private doctors, one knows upfront what to pay.

The average cost of an illness is 22,000 Riels, which represents almost ten weeks of savings. People finance their health cost in majority by borrowing from family (35.7%), from neighbours (33%), or from private money lenders (15%). Only 12% had enough saving to finance the last sickness in the family.

III.J.3 Discrimination

Slum dwellers suffer from a social discrimination that does not allow them to have access to basic services, only reserved to "legal" owners in the city. The middle and upper classes also tend to consider them as "social evils", responsible for crime, and degradation of the environment.

¹¹ The settlements we visited were far from the city centre, which may in part explain why people seek health care near their homes.

In slums, community members themselves discriminate against transient dwellers and those too poor to contribute to community projects. Communities thus exclude seasonal migrants and renters from their development plans because they are not likely to stay in the long term, or because they cannot afford to save with the community groups – a requirement of most NGOs or CBOs to be “part of the community”, and be eligible to development projects. Yet, many renters are the poorest of the poor, and are often women-headed households, or families with severe sicknesses or disabilities. Excluding them from the community development process prevents them from ever hoping to get out of poverty.

III.J.4 Victimisation and insecurity

The extent of criminal activities in slums remains unclear because of the lack of reporting and data. Although 25% of our sample classified their settlement as unsafe, only 16% could remember any recent crime committed, which were mostly petty thefts. This may suggest that the bad local press about the extent of criminality in slums is more based on fear than on reality.

Insecurity is more caused by difficult living conditions than criminal activities. Dark alleys and unlit foot-bridges, especially near or above water are for instance dangerous. Typically, for a 50 to 60 household settlement located above water four to five children die every year falling in the water, mostly at night. The use of oil lamps also increases fire hazards in settlements made of very light, flammable material.

III.K **Assets of slum dwellers**

III.K.1 Social capital

Slum dwellers in Phnom Penh are represented by local NGOs and CBOs who work with them and with the municipality to improve living conditions by supporting local development projects. NGOs and CBOs help people organize themselves into “communities” as a basis for informal political representation. To join local community organizations, people typically need to belong to a community saving group.

The definition of *community* has fuelled discussion since the creation of USG and SUPF in mid 1990s. The current view of a community as the organization of families around a formal saving mechanism may not be adapted to answer the needs of all poor families. On one hand, the saving requirement excludes from the local planning process those too poor to save, and on the other hand, the hierarchic structure of the community organization concentrates authority in the hands of the leader and a few deputies, often close to him or her, strengthening existing structures of nepotism. Indeed, after repeated scandals in which leaders lost community savings, many people lost trust in this kind of organization. In our survey, 63% of respondents did not belong to an organized saving group, and 16.4% did not trust organized saving schemes. Another 65.7% did not understand the meaning of “living in a community”. In the light of this evolution, NGOs and CBOs could experiment other types of organizations, based for instance more on concrete community planning projects than merely the cultivation of community savings.

Informally though, slum dwellers do help each other in informal mechanisms that could be used to design new processes for participation. A third of the families interviewed borrow from their neighbours for emergency purpose, and another 25% for investment loans. A third received help from their neighbours to build their houses, and 22% from their families. Table 8 and Table 9 in appendix give basis for reflections of mechanisms that can strengthen social capital in low-income settlements.

III.K.2 Financial capital

As most slum dwellers do not own any registered house to use as collateral, they are not eligible to micro finance programs from NGOs and CBOs. They must turn to the private money-market where a motordup driver can use his motorcycle as collateral for a \$100 loan at 30% interest over 3 weeks.

Yet, 80% of the households interviewed said they wanted to borrow: 49% to improve their houses, and 37.5% to invest in a business. The poorest (13.4%) need low interest credit to refund previous loans from usurers. Productive loans are mostly requested by women who stay home and need capital to buy a sewing machine (a second-hand machine costs \$20), or to get a basket and buy vegetable to resell on the market. Men would borrow to purchase a motorcycle and work as motordup drivers.

As mentioned earlier, many people have little capacity to save, or trust in saving. In our survey 39.3% of the families recently lost their savings because of a problem with the saving groups,¹² and 25.7% had never been able to have enough income to save any of it. There are yet NGOs and CBOs saving schemes in which members can withdraw their savings quickly. Schemes in which the chief of community is (trained and) responsible for the collection and disbursement of funds are more likely to be run in the best interest of members than funds managed by the CBO or NGO from outside the settlement.

¹² In 2001, the government closed overnight several banks which handled community savings.

IV. SLUMS AND POVERTY: THE POLICIES

IV.L A government - civil society synergy: the Urban Poverty Reduction Strategy

Until 1998-1999, the Municipality of Phnom Penh kept a rigid position of not recognising “squatters” as legitimate inhabitants of the city and its agencies did not support development activities to reach slum dwellers. They rather evicted squatters, often violently, without compensation or support to relocate.

Despite this position, a few high-level municipal officials collaborated with UN-Habitat to improve the living conditions of the urban poor through a series of community-based in-situ upgrading projects since 1996. So doing, they have recognized the potentials of many the city’s poor to help provide solutions to their own problems of low income and dismal living conditions, provided that they be enabled to do so.

The MPP and UN-Habitat thus jointly developed an *Urban Poverty Reduction Strategy* (UPRS) in 1999, after extensive consultations with communities, NGOs and CBOs. This strategy is based on lessons from the prior collaboration and aims at:

- (1) improving access to basic services for the urban poor – by securing affordable land and housing, enabling the delivery of physical infrastructure (water supply, drainage, roads, sanitation, electricity, transport, solid waste collection), of social infrastructure (education, health care, family planning) and the implementation of disaster management (against fire and floods);
- (2) enhancing local economic potentials (especially for women) – by providing education, vocational and business skills, credit and savings, industrial employment, marketing information, and space for small businesses and marketing; and
- (3) strengthening participatory urban governance mechanisms – by facilitating community organization and leadership, setting community development management committees, creating land and housing policies for the urban poor, simplifying procedures for government services, eliminating corruption, and securing tenure (Municipality of Phnom Penh 1999).

The implementation of the UPRS implies the decentralization of decision-making mechanisms from the MPP to the *Khan* and community levels. This will establish Community Development Management Committees (CDMCs) with representatives from squatter and urban poor communities, NGOs, the MPP and the private sector at the Khan level. It will support the development and implementation of poverty reduction action plans at the community level to be decided by Community Development Committees (CDCs), funded partly by UN-Habitat, and implemented by the communities along with NGOs and CBOs. With support of NGOs, CBOs and international agencies, the Municipality will thus enable poor communities to implement the projects they will plan themselves, provided they fit with the municipal guidelines.

Table 4: Institutional arrangements to implement the Urban Poverty reduction Strategy

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL	DECISIONAL BODY	ACTIVITY	SUPPORT RECEIVED
Municipality	Urban Poverty Reduction Unit (UPRU)	Gathers inputs from the 7 Khans and produces city-wide policies and projects	
Khan	Community Relation Office (CRO)	Interacts between MPP regulations and community needs, provides resources to CDMCs and communities for local planning	UN-Habitat strengthens MPP and Khans capacities
Coalition of Khan, NGOs/CBOs and community representatives	Community Development Management Committee (CDMC)	Revises and approves community action plans	
Community	Community Development Committee (CDC)	Prepares community action plans to improve local living conditions	Local and international NGOs, CBOs and funding agencies support community initiatives with technical and financial assistance

IV.M Impacts of efforts

The most notable success in urban poverty reduction from 1995 to 2000 have been to set up a federative structure among low-income settlements, and develop some sense of community organization through saving mobilization, the realisation of small scale in-situ upgrading, and the organization of a few successful voluntary relocation programs outside the city. The two main civic organizations representing the urban poor, SUPF and USG, have thus reached about 130 squatter settlements, organizing, federating and significantly empowering many communities. The most stable communities can now prepare proposals for local improvement plans, raise funds from the communities and external donors, and implement their projects. The training of some leaders by local advocacy groups on human rights and criminal law has also enabled communities to be recognized by the MPP and to enforce a semblance of rule of law in some settlements formerly plagued by crime and insecurity.¹³ The UN-Habitat support has helped provide footbridges, streetlights, drains, toilets, roads, and footpaths in squatter and urban poor settlements. It has also supported development works for communities involved in voluntary relocation, and has established vocational training and apprenticeship programs.

The experience demonstrated that poor communities in Phnom Penh can improve their living conditions and prospects for human development provided that (i) they receive security of tenure, education, training, credit, and technical advice; that (ii) the MPP removes legal, procedural, financial, and practical barriers to self-improvement; that (iii) urban poor communities, the government, NGOs and the private sector develop partnerships; and that (iv) decisions on policies and programs affecting the urban poor are made at the lowest possible level of government in close consultation with those affected (Slingsby 2000).

It has also shown some important limitations of the efforts to date: the limited outreach of the NGO and CBOs activities (the impact of the credit and saving programs maybe over-reported), the lack of mechanism to reach the poorest, and the fragility of many community organizations in ensuring the ownership of the projects by communities and their operation and maintenance.

Despite their relative success, local organizations have faced serious limitations in reaching out and representing the urban poor. Their intervention often reinforced existing social and political inequalities as they strengthened the organization of settlements into "communities" by supporting existing power structure of clientelism, without always providing the mechanism to care for the excluded. At times, some leaders even only support politically affiliated community members, limit access to project benefits to themselves, their friends and families, or only extend help against bribes. Even successful programs then only benefit stable parts of the poor settlements, as they cannot consider the needs, capacities and constraints of the most excluded and vulnerable.

The government has increased its official capacity to work with the poor with the creation of the Urban Poverty Reduction Unit (UPRU) and the Urban Health Project, but still need much capacity strengthening, especially to curb the still prevalent corruption that plagues many projects with the urban poor, and prevents the implementation of the official policies and guidelines. Another major challenge to the UPRU is to better help coordinate policies and activities of the different development actors in the city.

IV.N Monitoring, feedback and adjustment of policies and programmes

The recent interest on urban poverty in Phnom Penh, the emergency character of many projects, the limited local capacity in research and the gaps in information exchange have not yet allowed to develop a strong body of knowledge to analyze poverty situations and develop adapted projects and policies in Phnom Penh. NGOs regularly gather information on their projects as required by funding agencies, but many reports remain descriptive and do not analyse the projects' contribution to citywide poverty reduction efforts. Their limited capacity for research also prevents NGOs from using research methods that could be replicated to measure the long term impacts of projects over harmonized indicators of poverty.¹⁴

Bilateral and multilateral development agencies then produce more analytical studies on poverty, but these have limited circulation and their results are not widely used for policy discussion as they are often

¹³ Other NGOs also provide important services to the urban poor: Action Nord Sud, with the funding of small scale in-situ rehabilitation projects and help in emergency relocations after fires, the Urban Resource Centre, which provides technical services for low-cost housing design, Cambodia Volunteer for Community Development, Padek, World Vision, Servants to Asia's Poor and Women's Development Association, which all help communities organize and fund small scale in-situ upgrading projects.

¹⁴ NGOs are aware of the need to understand the scope and limitations of their intervention to improve their activities and contribute at a policy level to poverty reduction strategies. Several are currently, learning to monitor and evaluate the results of their activities to feed the dialogue on projects and policies.

not published in Khmer, or not discussed in terms that make sense to local policy makers. For its part, the capacity of government agencies to collect quality data has greatly improved since the large-scale training of specialists for the 1998 census, and in 2001, the MPP started to develop its own statistical information system. Yet, government data available today remain limited as they rely on indicators ill-suited to describe or analyse living conditions in poor settlements.

Lastly, it is difficult to assess the extent of academic literature on urban poverty in Phnom Penh, as researchers often do not disseminate their findings among local development stakeholders.

In terms of research directions, neither the links between public, private and voluntary agencies in terms of poverty reduction, nor the mechanisms of decision making and institutional change have been studied, while their understanding is central for designing projects and policies likely to reach significant numbers of urban poor, and to translate into policy decisions and practices that incorporate the needs of all inhabitants and economic and political players of the city.

UN-Habitat has taken a leading role in the coordination of policy-oriented research to document changes in urban poverty, and the impacts of projects and policies over time. In 1999, it analyzed the nature of poverty in Phnom Penh, investigating qualitative elements of the Global Urban Indicators as they applied to the urban poor, and setting a baseline for future studies of the evolution of poverty. The findings aligned the Urban Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the methodology served as a basis for a current participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) project that is building local capacity among governmental and non-governmental agencies to systematically collect poverty data over time and analyze the contribution of policies and activities to the objectives of poverty reduction.¹⁵ The PME measures how UPRS activities affect people's levels of poverty by documenting to what extent such activities contribute to improve access to basic services, enhance income generation and strengthen participatory governance. It is developing a participatory impact assessment and monitoring methodology, training communities in self-surveying, and translating this into an information networking system that will enable communities, all levels of the MPP, NGOs and CBOs to share results and take policy decisions documented by a systematic assessment of which policies are effective under which conditions. While conducting these activities, the PME team is transferring capacity to NGOs, CBOs, and the MPP for the design, implementation and use of such a monitoring and evaluation process (see Table 6 in appendix).

More than an instrument to ensure accountability for result, the PME will also be a planning and learning tool in the capacity building process for participatory planning. It will give inhabitants of low-income settlements voices in directing and monitoring their development processes, and will promote transparent and professional municipal management from both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the bleak situation presented, several urban upgrading projects, part of the new Urban Poverty Reduction Strategy, are slowly putting in place the basis of a more democratic urban governance system. They are based on (i) strengthening self-help planning capacity at the community level, (ii) involving the participation of the poor in policy making, (iii) strengthening local NGOs and CBOs to represent the vulnerable, and (iv) training municipal authorities in professional/technical areas and promoting good governance practices. These projects supported by UN-Habitat should have the dual impact of enabling the emergence of locally adapted self-help projects, and of promoting increased dialogue, information exchange and transparency between the Municipality, the urban poor and civil society in general.

The strength of the UPRS is its clear focus: it aims to improve living standards, economic opportunities, and governance. Concretely, this translates into providing or facilitating (i) improved and secure access and circulation in the slums; (ii) access to affordable basic services (drinking water, health services, education); (iii) reduction of illnesses related to unsanitary living conditions, improved hygiene, drainage, waste collection, and sanitation; and (iv) participation of the poor and excluded in the political decisions that affect their lives.

The last point might be the most important as existing research has identified the significant impact that harassment by corrupt officials has on the daily life of the poor, and the lack of legal recourse from slum dwellers against such exploitation. Real participation of the poor in decision-making that affects their lives

¹⁵ Over the coming years, UN-Habitat expects that a significant number of local development agencies will adopt this methodology to provide a common understanding of the situations, needs and capacities in terms of urban poverty, and to help Phnom Penh, and Cambodia enter the international discussions of urban poverty reduction with an in-depth understanding of its local conditions.

can reduce the opportunity and tendency for such harassment and exploitation while helping strengthen their voice and democratic participation.

Due to continuous efforts by UN-Habitat and some municipality officials, and to the positive results achieved by such organizations as SUPF and USG to create a dialogue between the Municipality of Phnom Penh, and representatives of the poor, there seems to be an increasing willingness from the MPP to find solutions to the situations of unbearable poverty that many squatter and urban poor live in. Members of the MPP attend SUPF planning meetings, and SUPF/USG members work in collaboration with *Khan* and *Sangkat* authorities, with support from UN-Habitat and international funding agencies.

Yet, a gap remains between the way some officials still understand “the problem of illegal squatters” in Phnom Penh, and what maybe needed to improve the conditions of the poorest. Many official representatives view squatter settlements literally, as the phrase translates into Khmer, as “places where anarchy and confusion reign”. They also emphasize how much of a nuisance squatter settlements present to the aesthetics of the cityscape, or how much they contribute to environmental degradation. They consider the squatter populations themselves as being the problem, which must be solved by removal of the poor. Fortunately there are others that recognize that the poor lack the luxury of choices, of alternatives and that the task of poverty reduction has to be innovative and flexible to create such choices and opportunities for the poor to regain their economic and social rights.

Continuous exchanges are thus needed between members of the Government and of the Municipality, representatives of the poor populations of Phnom Penh, and local and international organization representing the rights and aspirations of the poorest, so that all parties better understand the needs and constraints of each other, and that solutions to the problems of deep human poverty can be put in place to reach the most vulnerable and excluded in Phnom Penh.

VI. APPENDIXES

Example of a Broad-Based partnership: the UPRS

The Urban Poverty Reduction Strategy (UPRS) in Phnom Penh is a broad-based partnership between governmental institutions, NGOs and CBOs established in Phnom Penh in 2000. It resulted from a joint MPP / UNCHS / Civil society project entitled "Phnom Penh Urban Poor Communities and Municipality Development Project", which from 1996 to 2000 developed the capacity of the MPP, its local authorities, local and international NGOs, CBOs, and squatter and urban poor communities to define the priorities and meet the needs of the squatter and urban poor communities. It developed collaborations between governmental and non-governmental institutions through jointly-planned in-situ upgrading of low-income communities and voluntary resettlements.

Table 5: The UPRS as a broad-based partnership

Mechanisms of the UPRS ¹⁶	Contribution from public agencies	Contribution from civil society ¹⁷
Objective 1. Improve access to basic services for the urban poor with adapted land and housing, physical and social infrastructure, and disaster management against fire and floods		
Roles and Outcomes	<p>MPP: Created 19 sites as of July 2002 to relocate volunteers and victims of fires from slums; Developed the access to public networks of water and electricity; Improves the drainage and flood prevention infrastructure citywide.</p> <p>UN-Habitat: Provides technical support to MPP, poor communities and NGOs for in situ upgrading and relocation work. Advises all actors of urban development about technical approaches, long term policies and potential synergies they could develop.</p>	<p>URC: Provides technical support to communities to plan for resettlement or in-situ upgrading.</p> <p>USG/SUPF: support communities to organize and plan by themselves their upgrading or relocation</p> <p>UPDF: Sets up a community-owned system for housing loan directed at slum communities</p> <p>CVCD and other specialized NGOs provide education and vocational training programs in slums</p>
Challenges	<p>Resettlement locations are inadequate to provide employment opportunities to former slum dwellers</p> <p>The free plots allocated to slum dwellers have fuelled land speculation and opportunism from Sangkat officials</p>	<p>The scale of NGO and CBO activities does not allow to reach all urban poor</p> <p>Community organization and savings have been undermined by distrust of financial institutions</p>
Lessons learned	As of mid-2002, the MPP has decided to stop massive emergency resettlements	
Objective 2: Enhance local economic potentials by providing education, vocational and business skills, credit and savings, industrial employment, marketing information, and space for small businesses		
Roles and Outcomes	UN-Habitat in partnership with NGOs has developed apprenticeship programs in numerous low-income settlements	SUPF and USG: Help communities develop community-based saving and credit groups
Challenges	<p>Government and NGO operate without links to large-scale private employers;</p> <p>The impacts of efforts remain limited in front of the needs</p>	<p>Current NGOs and CBOs are specialized into technical and social activities. They are not adapted mechanisms to promote the necessary business-minded approach to local economic development</p> <p>Recent bank closures have weak-</p>

¹⁶ The private sector still occupies no significant role in the efforts for poverty reduction in Phnom Penh.

¹⁷ The NGOs and CBOs listed are the most active Cambodian organizations as of mid-2002; the list is not exhaustive.

		ened communities trust in NGOs offering credit and savings
Lessons learned	MPP recognizes the need to request from new investors that they hire and train workers from low-income settlements, and to plan for economic issues in its approaches to relocation.	Credit and saving NGOs and CBOs are reflecting on how to regain trust from communities and to create sustainable credit and savings mechanisms.
Objective 3: strengthen participatory urban governance by facilitating community organization and leadership, setting community development management committees, creating land and housing policies for the urban poor, simplifying procedures for government services, eliminating corruption, and securing tenure		
Roles and Outcomes	<p>Sangkat-level elections in February 2002 made local levels of the MPP accountable to community members, as Sangkat chiefs were elected.</p> <p>UN-Habitat supports MPP institutionally and financially to plan its long term approach to poverty reduction and to delegate responsibility to Sangkat levels. It also provides extensive training to NGOs and CBOs on developing adapted capacities and conducting policy-oriented research</p>	<p>Local NGOS help develop an action research mechanism to monitor the impacts of the UPRS in collaboration with the MPP and UN-Habitat.</p> <p>Information exchange and collaborations between NGOs, CBOs, the MPP and UN-Habitat have greatly increased since 1999.</p>
Challenges	Corruption in government institutions are a major barrier to poverty reduction: private interest often prevent official policies from being implemented. Meanwhile community-level information does not reach decision-makers at the municipality	
Lessons learned	The information system currently developed by the MPP, UN-Habitat and the NGOs/CBOs should promote information exchange and provide a sound understanding of local issues to decision makers, reducing the power of discretion of implementers that lack of information cultivates	
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Table 6: Qualitative indicators of urban poverty in Phnom Penh

Category	Qualitative indicator of local development – differentiated by gender when appropriate	Relation to UPRS objectives, and to UN-Habitat mission – numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraph # of the Habitat Agenda
A. Background data	<p>A1. Administrative and demographic data</p> <p>A2. Physical characteristics of settlement</p> <p>A3. History of settlement's creation & development</p>	
B. Organization, participation and sense of community	<p>B1. Organization of people's participation</p> <p>B2. Representation of minority groups</p> <p>B3. Social cohesion</p> <p>B4. Weight of corruption</p>	<p>3. Strengthening governance by: promoting decentralization and strengthening local authorities (180), encouraging and supporting participation and civic engagement (182), and ensuring transparent, accountable and efficient use of public resources (45a)</p> <p>Integrating the poorest by: providing equal opportunities for a healthy and safe life (42), promoting social integration and support of disadvantaged groups (117&96b), and supporting gender equality in human settlements development (46)</p>
C. Socioeconomic development	<p>C1. Employment patterns</p> <p>C2. Income generation and expenses</p> <p>C3. Access to financial services; indebtedness</p> <p>C4. Health problems, access to care, cost, financing</p> <p>C5. Education levels, cost, barriers</p> <p>C6. Physical safety and criminality</p>	<p>2. Enhancing income generation, especially for women by: strengthening small and micro-enterprises, particularly those developed by women (160b), encouraging public – private sector partnerships, and stimulating productive employment opportunities (158b & 118a)</p>
D. Housing	<p>D1. Housing types, household equipment, cost, quality, financing</p> <p>D2. Security of tenure, threat of eviction</p> <p>D3. Housing for the poorest</p>	<p>1. Improving access to basic services by: providing security of tenure (40b), promoting the right to adequate housing (39 & 61), providing equal access to land (40b), promoting equal access to credit (48e), promoting access to basic services (40c).</p>
E. Infrastructure	<p>E1. Water supply, access and affordability</p> <p>E2. Electricity</p> <p>E3. Drainage and sewerage</p> <p>E4. Sanitation and health</p>	<p>1. Improving access to basic services by: managing supply and demand for water in an effective manner (141c)</p>
F. Transportation	<p>F1. Transport availability</p> <p>F2. Usage Pattern</p> <p>F3. Road access</p>	<p>Promoting effective and environmentally sound transportation systems (141c)</p>
G. Environmental management	<p>G1. Air and water quality</p> <p>G2. Solid waste management</p> <p>G3. Disaster risk and management</p> <p>G4. Green spaces</p>	<p>Reducing urban pollution (43), preventing disasters and rebuilding settlements (43z), supporting mechanisms to prepare & implement local environmental plans and local Agenda 21 initiatives (137i)</p>

(Fallavier 1999; United Nations Centre for Human Settlements 1999)

Acronyms

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CDC	Community Development Council
DfID UK	Department for International Development, UK
EDC	Electricité Du Cambodge
HDI	Human Development Index
MPP	Municipality of Phnom Penh
NGO	Non Government Organization
PADEK	Partners for Development of Kampuchea
PPWSA	Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority
SUPF	Solidarity for the Urban Poor Federation
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPDF	Urban Poor Development Fund
URC	Urban Resource Centre
USG	Urban Sector Group

Working Definitions

Community: a group of individuals and/or families sharing similar economic, social and/or cultural characteristics and feeling a moral/spiritual bound to each other.

Corruption: the misuse of public power for private profit.

Exclusion: encompasses isolation, lack of access to resources, and lack of participation

Household: a person or group of persons who make common provision for food or other essentials of living, and often share a common budget.

Human Development: the aim and process of reducing human poverty by enlarging people's choices - the three essential choices are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge, and to have access to resources necessary for a decent standard of living.

Informal activities: economic activities that are not regulated for labour standard, public health hazard, etc, and do not officially contribute to government revenue through the payment of taxes.

Khan: a city district, administrative division of the Municipality of Phnom Penh. There are seven Khans in Phnom Penh.

People's time-orientation on life: the length of time they can "afford" to plan for. For people so poor that they can only rent a dwelling on a daily or weekly basis, time planning horizons maybe a day or a week, as they cannot even know where they will live after that time. For people with a stable dwelling and a regular source of income, planning horizons maybe several months or years, looking into home improvements or education for the children.

Sangkat: An urban commune, administrative sub-division of the Khan, made of eight to over ten Phums, or villages.

Settlement: a geographically or administratively defined area in which human activities take place.

Squatter: In Phnom Penh, the term "squatters" describes people living on land and in buildings over which the government claims ownership. However, as "squatters" translates as "anarchists" in Khmer, the word is usually avoided in official documents. The term "urban poor" is used to describe families who claim some form of occupancy rights, but who are economically poor, and live in inadequate housing conditions, with poor environment and lack of access to basic services (Slingsby 2000:1).

Vulnerability: a lack of control over one's life directions. In our study, it is primarily measured by a high level of risks (i.e., income volatility and income poverty, lack of health and housing security, unsanitary living conditions, etc).

Supplementary statistical tables

Table 7: Highest level of education completed according to Gender of head of household

Highest level of education completed by respondent	Gender of head of household				Total
	Male		Female		
	count	% of total	count	% of total	
Never attended school	27	23.28%	9	37.50%	36
Some primary school	74	63.79%	13	54.17%	87
Some secondary school	10	8.62%	2	8.33%	12
Attended university	2	1.72%		0.00%	2
Attended vocational training program	3	2.59%		0.00%	3
Total	116		24		140

Source: survey conducted Feb-Mar 2002 by the author in 5 low-income settlements in Phnom Penh

Table 8 : Major reasons for a lack of trust and social cohesion within settlements

- Administrative boundaries that split a community into several administrative units;
- Uncertainty about tenure security, and prospects of eviction, which prevent any long interest in the betterment of the settlement or strengthening of the community
- A high level of crime within the settlement, which frightens people, isolates them from each other, and prevents NGOs or CBOs from providing support
- A high level of racketeering and corruption by the police, which reinforces the lack of trust in local authorities, and in people supposed to represent the interests of the community
- The distrust from students and their parents into teachers, who daily ask for money to attend school, and beat the children who cannot pay
- Nepotism of some community or village leaders who extend the benefits of community-development processes to their friends, families, and political affiliates.

Source: Fallavier (1999)

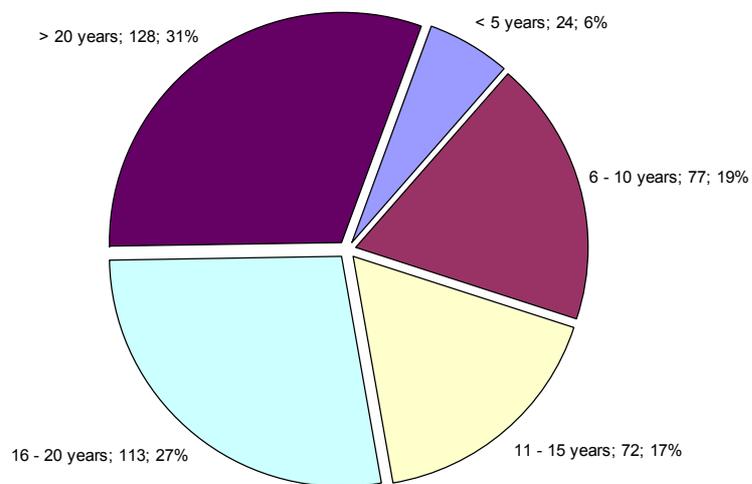
Table 9 : Some basis of social capital that cement poor communities

- Religious obligations
- Intervention of CBOs or NGOs, which helps strengthen commonality of goals and efforts, even if it excludes some people from the settlement - as people see that their common efforts are concretized in better living conditions, they start believing in the system
- Some private entrepreneurs who act as public service providers, and bring access to water or electricity to people who were totally excluded from the services
- The presence of a strong leader, who can gather people, and federate them to take decisions and act together.

Source: Fallavier (1999)

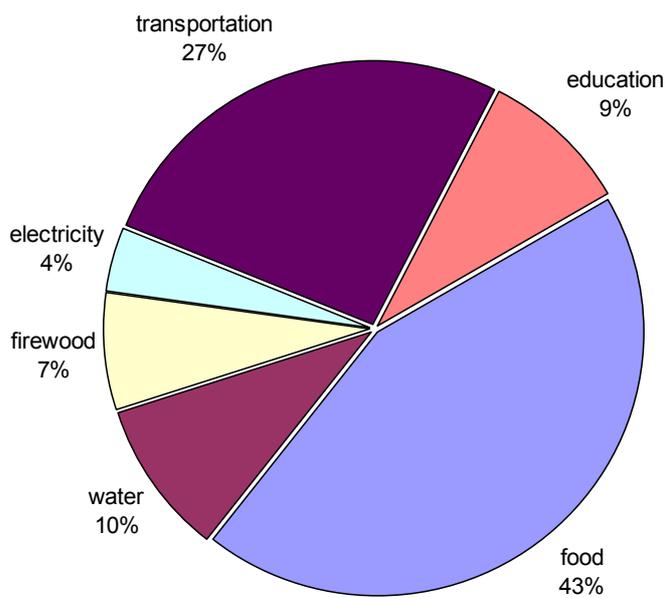
Supplementary figures from Household survey in low-income settlements in Phnom Penh

Figure 12: Age of low-income settlements in Phnom Penh



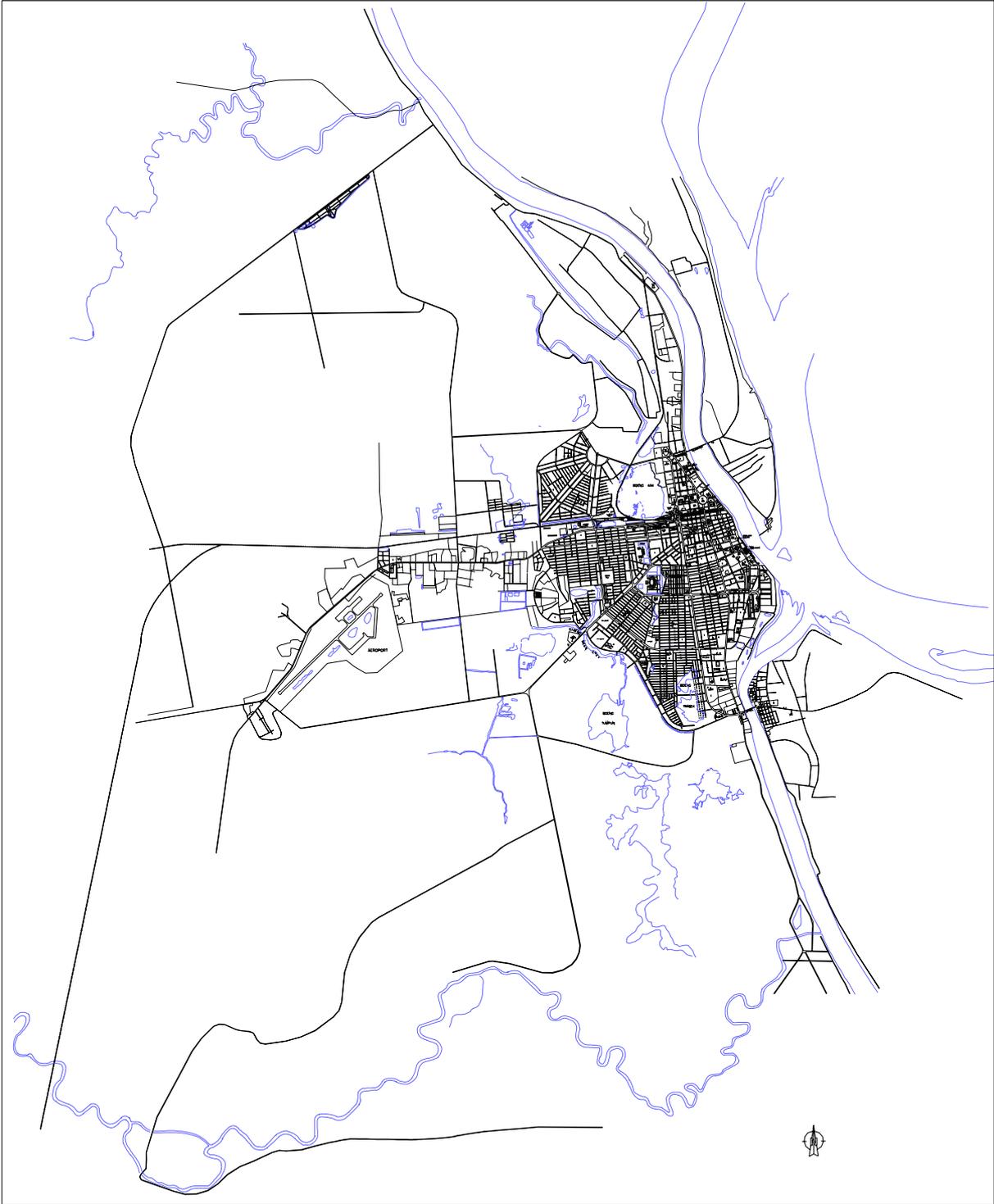
Source: SUPF 1999

Figure 13: Typical daily expense pattern per household



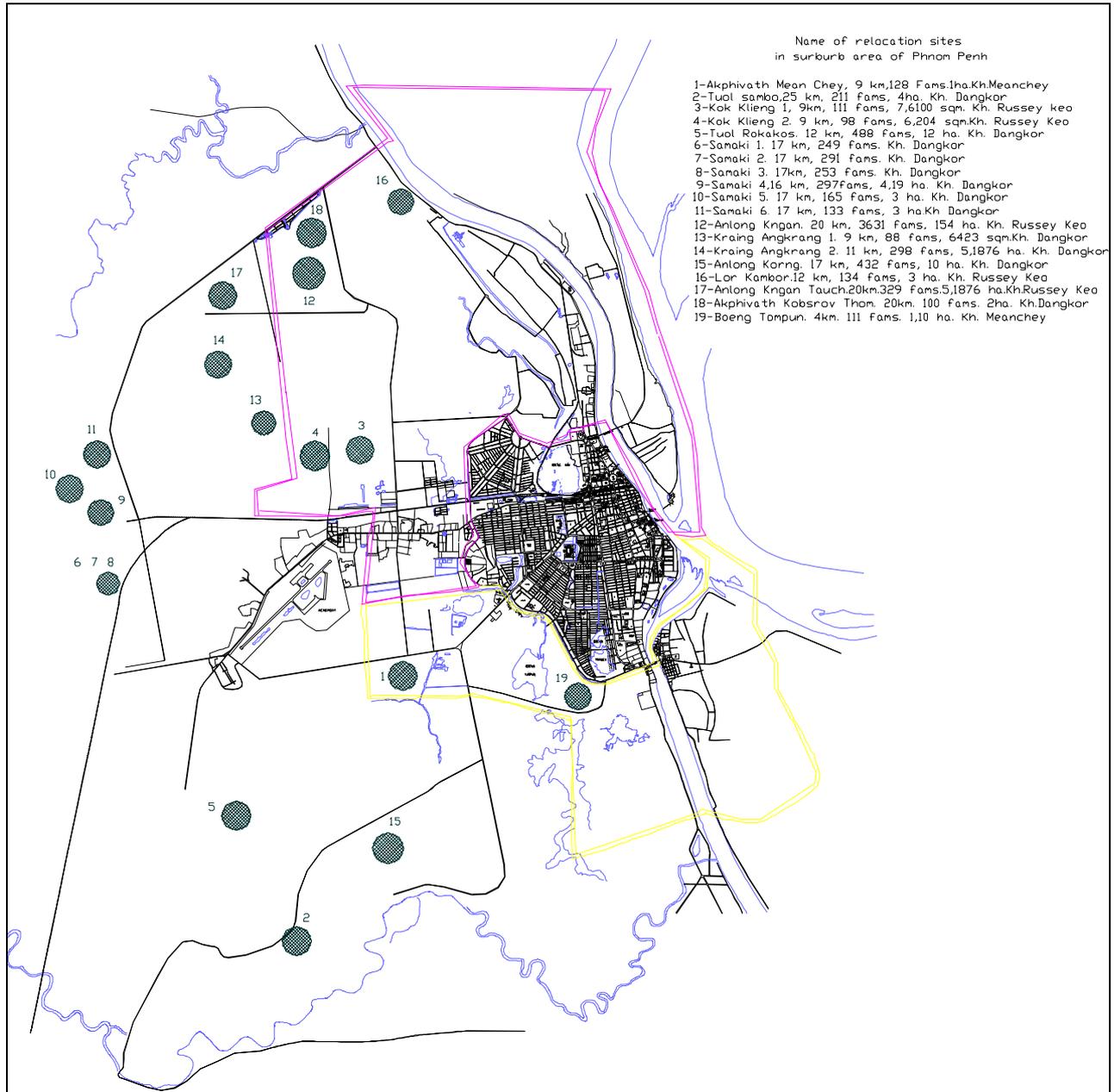
Maps

Map 1: Phnom Penh - a developed city core with rural suburbs



Map 1 courtesy of the Bureau of Urban Affairs, Municipality of Phnom Penh

Map 2: Location of squatter and urban poor settlements in Phnom Penh



Map 2 courtesy of UN-Habitat, - Phnom Penh

Pictures

Picture 2: Rooftop community on a dilapidated building in the centre of Phnom Penh



Picture 3: Shelter along a street



Picture 4: Living above a sewer outlet



Picture 5: Making a living washing cement bags in wastewater



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