



Policies for reducing informal housing in Phnom Penh, effectiveness and limits of the influence of networks and international organisations

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SUMMARY:

Today, urban management of informal settlements gives rise to many exchanges of experience between countries in the global South within international networks of residents' groups, NGOs and professionals. Over the last 15 years in Cambodia, these international networks, with ACHR in the forefront, have encouraged the formation of many residents' groups in informal settlements, who join together in federations and are actively engaged in upgrading their settlements, and have influenced the development of their activities.

The joint effect of the action of these networks and of the institutions and international cooperation - bilateral and multilateral - has greatly contributed to a radical change of government attitude to the informal settlements in the capital. In the space of a few years, the municipality has moved from a policy of eradicating these settlements to a determination to regularise almost all of them. Today, these international networks cite Phnom Penh as an example.

However, in practice, public intervention is a prime example of the contradiction between a policy of regularisation and a policy favourable to property development in the capital in a context of reconstructing private property, strong economic growth and a speculative

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property market, to which government authorities are notorious contributors. Grass roots organisations, supported by international organisations, are confronted with the difficulties inherent in this contradiction. Indirectly, they are also adversely affected by the inconsistencies between the different support policies of international cooperation organisations in Cambodia.

For over 30 years, urban management of informal settlements has been an ideal context in which to observe the spread of international urban experiments and models. Since the 1990s, the growing place of NGOs and residents' groups in designing urban projects for upgrading informal settlements has changed the channels through which new ways of planning cities were introduced in developing countries. Cities in the global South are increasingly the source of the most successful innovations. International networks bringing together residents' groups, NGOs and professionals play an important part in this, encouraging the building and transmission of knowledge and practices.

In Cambodia, the analysis of the recent history of policies of upgrading and gradually reducing informal settlements in Phnom Penh shows the importance of ideas from bilateral and multilateral international cooperation organisations, particularly the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and the importance of convictions conveyed by NGOs and international networks, first and foremost the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR).

In a context in which international and cooperation organisations have mushroomed since the 1990s to rebuild the capital, their ideas have become decisive and, in ten years, national and local government approaches and policy concerning informal settlements have changed radically in favour of communities of poor people. Why have governments accepted some ideas more than others? Which channels were used? In what context were they adopted? What obstacles did they encounter? Although the international networks and institutions have progressively had a determining influence in local government policy on informal settlements, today they are confronted with the contradictions in public intervention that they have helped to create².

REBUILDING PHNOM PENH, A FORUM OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge regime totally emptied Phnom Penh of its population. The inhabitants gradually returned between 1979-1989, during the Vietnamese occupation and the international embargo. In 1991, the Paris agreements ratified national reconciliation, and the country once again opened up to the outside world, and the international community began to help rebuild it. After the APRONUC mission (Autorité provisoire des Nations unies au Cambodge) and the return of the royalty in 1993, the reconstruction of the capital speeded up, largely funded by bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies. Western specialists returned in the wake of the major funding and cooperation agencies.

Cooperation agencies orientated the action, often by funding projects contingent on their own policies. The many reports that these funding bodies produced introduced the ideas and

² This presentation is based on the results of a study on land and property markets in informal settlements carried out by GRET for the Municipality of Phnom Penh and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Clerc et Rachmuhl, 2005). A further survey was done later among stakeholders of the Municipality, Un-Habitat, Cambodian NGOs and government members and international networks and institutions in Phnom Penh (Clerc 2005).

methods of engineering companies and international experts and organisations. The Cambodian urbanists that existed were themselves trained in other countries. The Cambodian authorities set up their development policy for the Phnom Penh conurbation based on this international expertise, integrating these cooperation projects.

The municipal policy on informal settlements was also influenced by this trend. From the early 1990s to the present day, experts from international organisations and bilateral cooperation agencies have produced numerous analyses, projects and recommendations for these settlements³. Some studies are part of wider programmes such as urban development, infrastructures, environment, health, women's issues, poverty, land policy or land registry. Other studies are solely concerned with informal settlements. These have usually been carried out by international institutions, notably pilot programmes and/or programmes funded by UN-Habitat since 1995. They emphasise poor people's participation in community development, and also promoting partnerships with the municipality, reducing urban poverty and improving living conditions. Recent programmes are developing a national habitat policy, an urban strategy and improving security of tenure.

A great many NGOs are also active in informal settlements, working at improving slums, relocating, savings and credit, poverty issues and community development. Some started working there even before the Paris agreements. The expertise used here is nourished by the experience that these NGOs have acquired in other countries in the South. Some NGOs have their own self-funded programmes, but many are solicited and funded by bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes, which makes it difficult to tell exactly where the recommendations have come from.

Given this abundance of programmes and projects funded by international cooperation and NGOs, national and local government policy concerning recently formed and constantly changing settlements has evolved rapidly.

RECENT REAPPEARANCE OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Unlike numerous countries in which informal settlements have existed and posed problems for public authorities for decades, the informal settlements in Phnom Penh that existed prior to the war disappeared when the city was totally emptied of its inhabitants in 1975. The inhabitants gradually resettled empty buildings and plots during the socialist period of Vietnamese occupation (1979-1989).

Informal settlements reappeared from 1989 onwards, while at the same time private property was progressively being re-introduced by a new constitution and new laws. In the same year, the government began to grant ownership of habitable plots. All heads of families could put in a request to the State for ownership of the property they were living in and the small plot of land they were working. Unclaimed plots remained State property.

Then occupants with no rights appeared, particularly those who were occupying public land and buildings, which could not be owned. Parallel to this distribution, there were major movements on the property market and a strong demand for new housing. The return to a market economy, as ensured by the 1993 Constitution, increased the number of land and

³ See the detailed list, with over 270 references, in Clerc and Rachmuhl, 2005.

property transactions. Lastly, a major population inflow took place between 1990 and 1993, as displaced persons and refugees from Thai camps returned, and demobilisation and the rural exodus increased. The new families moved onto vacant lands as previous families had, but areas suitable for appropriation were increasingly rare and so-called squatter settlements developed.

Since then, the number of residents of informal settlements has increased constantly, despite the end of the transitory period for property transaction reform in late 2001, which marked the end of the possibility of becoming an owner by occupation. At present, about 220,000 people (40,000 households) live in informal settlements, to which must be added about 75,000 tenants, which makes 1.2 million people in all, one quarter of the population of the city. Roughly 440 informal settlements have been identified⁴ generally made up of under 200 households, although one area has over 4000. They are both in the city (60%) and in the suburbs (40%). They occupy land along the banks of rivers, lakes and canals, on roadsides, on private or public State-owned land, within the premises of a former cinema, pagodas, hospitals etc., and on the roof of buildings in the city centre.

THE RAPID CHANGE IN OFFICIAL POLICY CONCERNING INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Local authority action in informal settlements in Phnom Penh began almost as soon as these settlements appeared.

In the early 1990s, the authorities regularly destroyed settlements and evicted the residents without compensation, when the land they occupied needed to be freed for building infrastructures, making the land available for its intended use (pagoda, embassy, ...) or to sell it to an investor. Sometimes the authorities forcibly removed the residents to an unequipped field in the suburbs, but they came straight back again.

The context is a specific one. After fifteen years without informal settlements, authorities and technicians had no points of reference and no preparation for dealing with their reappearance. Most people with higher education had been eliminated by the Khmer Rouge regime, and there were very few trained professionals present there in the early 1990s. Today, municipal authorities say that they did not realise then that, in the eyes of international opinion, they were guilty of forced evictions, denounced as a violation of Human Rights. The failure of these forced displacements and the negative judgement of the international community harmed the reputation of the authorities and compromised the possibility of them receiving international funding.

In 1993, some municipal services, particularly the urban affairs office, said they wanted to develop restructuring projects, and requested technical assistance from the UNDP and UN-Habitat. In the same year, they accepted offers of assistance and training by ACHR.

From then on, and over the last ten years, public authorities have been changing rapidly. In a context of increased property speculation and changes in the legal context, they have officially stopped forced evictions and have set up several successive policies for reducing poverty and gradually reducing informal settlements.

⁴ SUPF's census (2003) identifies 569 "poor settlements" within the municipal boundaries. This includes informal settlements, villages around Phnom Penh and rehousing sites.

To start with, while public authorities were still violently evicting their residents, many actions were carried out supporting these informal settlements. From 1992 to 1994, UNDP and UN-Habitat funded studies on habitat in poor settlements. Pioneering voluntary associations implemented resettlement and local improvement projects, created local savings programmes, supported community organisations and federations and created local associations, which have progressively been able to speak up for themselves. The municipality has progressively joined in this movement. In 1993 and 1994, a first audit was carried out by a team that included members of the municipality and of local settlements and associations, with the technical and financial backing of international organisations, CARE, PADEK (*Partnership for Development in Kampuchea*) and ACHR. A seminar took place to discuss the results, with participants including the Minister for Town and Country Planning, the Governor of the municipality, representatives of several UN bodies, NGOs and representatives of the settlements and the squatters.

From then on, although the municipality continued to evict people by force, its urban affairs office began to study the onsite resettlement of several informal settlements. Confronted with the need to take account of international opinion to obtain funding, public authorities took hold of the question at the highest level. The authorities recognised the importance of working with the squatters and the NGOs, and between 1993 and 1996, the municipality gradually began to change its attitude to informal settlements. It stopped talking about squatters and began to talk of the community of poor people. It accepted some compromises and partially recognised some settlements. In 1995, it began a programme with UN-Habitat, UNDP and British cooperation agencies designed to encourage partnerships between the municipality, NGOs and squatters' organisations to draw up a policy and a strategic plan for the urban poor in a participative process.

In 1996, the government officially abandoned evictions without compensation, and the authorities began significant cooperation with international organisations and local associations. In the context of the First National Plan for Socio-economic Development (1996-2000), the main purpose of which was to reduce poverty, the municipality set up a very large number of small projects for upgrading and improving living conditions in the settlements. As from 1998, it also launched a policy for negotiated displacement and relocation in the suburbs.

In May 2003, in the throes of the election campaign, the Prime Minister made a declaration that went even beyond the demands of local and international associations. He promised to stop evictions and abandon the policy of negotiated relocation, and announced a policy for regularising the situation, by distributing property deeds to the residents, except in cases where it was impossible to avoid eviction from public property. He also declared that 100 settlements would be upgraded and regularised each year, and that the government had approved the launch of the renovation of 4 large settlements in the city centre with pilot operations of land sharing of occupied land between residents and private investors in charge of creating infrastructures.

THE EFFECTS OF THE ACHR NETWORK ON THE POLICY OF THE MUNICIPALITY

This change has largely been brought about by the stakeholders of bilateral and international cooperation agencies and non-government organisations.

One of the organisations that has been the most present has been ACHR, a regional network

of experience sharing that brings together grassroots communities, NGOs and professionals actively involved in development for the poor in Asia and Africa. It was created in 1988, and works mostly at a grassroots level. The network is based in Bangkok, and funded by Western international associations such as Homeless International, Oxfam, Misereor, and by aid and cooperation agencies (United Nations, British, Dutch, etc. cooperation agencies).

The aim of the network is large-scale improvement of habitat for poor people. It promotes the organising of savings communities, international experience sharing and partnership with public authorities. It fights evictions, offers training, encourages creating local community associations and federations, and gives them the tools to help implement projects. Each year, it organises a great many international study trips and meetings (over 50 in 2004) centring on projects implemented by poor communities. These trips are for residents, community leaders and members of local associations as much as for local and national government stakeholders, technicians and professionals. The purpose of these visits from international delegations is to give the participants a broader view of possibilities, and to spread ideas. They are also the occasion for presentations that aim to break down the isolation of communities, strengthen local confidence and stimulate commitment. These visits have also sometimes been used to negotiate with the authorities. Publications and a website⁵ give news of activities and the results of the exchanges. The network also cooperates with many international organisations and institutions (UNDP, UN-Habitat, UN-ESCAP, Habitat International Coalition - HIC, SDI, Citynet...). Exploratory missions take place regularly in countries where the network is not yet present to spread the ideas and propose the activities of the network, and so it has grown regularly since it was created.

ACHR has been indirectly present in Cambodia since the early 1990s through the Filipino association Community Organization of the Philippines Enterprise (COPE), a member of the network. But the first exploratory missions took place in 1993. Members of the network came from India and Thailand to do a first audit of the situation, inform the NGOs present and carry out a census of the slums. In the following years, ACHR helped organise the communities by creating and funding several NGOs and associations of communities that federate and support them, such as the Urban Sector Group (USG) in 1993, Solidarity and Urban Poor Federation (SUPF) in 1994, Urban Resource Centre (URC) in 1997, and the Young Professionals (YP) programme. One member stayed in the city for three years (1995-1998), and other members of the network came on missions several times a year, regularly leaving work to do between their visits. Training sessions and study trips were offered each year to residents, professionals, NGOs and authorities (ACHR 2001). They went to Thailand, India, Pakistan and South Africa in 1993, then to Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Zimbabwe. These trips introduced Cambodians to groups such as the UDCO in Thailand, one of the founder members of the network, Mahmila Milan in India, a cooperative of women living in slums or in the streets, Kampung Improvement Project in Surabaya, Indonesia, the Women's Bank in Sri Lanka, and the Federation of the Homeless in South Africa. Other trips were organised to Cambodia, for delegations from other countries. According to the participants, the international trips changed their point of view and introduced new dynamics. From 1997 on, visits from Asian and African delegations to Cambodia brought importance, international visibility and external appraisal to local projects and events. For example, when the results of a census of poor settlements were made public in 1997, Thai, Indian and South African NGOs and grassroots communities were present. Another example: members of international NGOs and Asian and African delegations were

⁵ www.achr.net

present when the UDPF celebrated its fifth anniversary in 2003, during which the Prime Minister announced the new upgrading policy (Community News 2003).

From 1995 onwards, the municipal projects funded by UN-habitat and UNDP began to converge with the major goals of ACHR. International institutions noticed the results achieved by new local NGOs. They recommended supporting their initiatives and envisaged the possibility of upgrading about half of the settlements onsite. They began to try and build bridges between squatters' communities and the municipality through participative urban development, following UN-Habitat's trend at that time. Later, UN-Habitat and UNDP funded municipal projects for poverty reduction were implemented, following the principles of ACHR and the later documents of UN-Habitat. These principles state that best practice is participative slum improvement, and that actions on behalf of slum-dwellers are only effective if they are part of a wider policy of poverty reduction (UN-Habitat 2003).

Joint actions between this network and international institutions were behind the major turning points in municipal policy, and particularly their support of residents' groups and local associations that had their own programme suggestions.

For example, in 1997, the municipality had begun to evict 129 families from a canal bank to be upgraded. But unlike other settlements that the municipality had evicted previously, this settlement was organised, and was a member of the SUPF communities. Following ACHR recommendations, the community wanted to cooperate with the authorities and agreed to leave of their own accord if the residents obtained resettlement land. The governor agreed, and the municipality purchased a plot of land that the community itself chose from 9 options. Many stakeholders with close links to the network and international institutions then made it possible to carry out the project. UN-Habitat funded the levelling of the land and the basic infrastructures, and paid the residents for the work they did. Young professional volunteers from URC helped the community make the plans for the estate and the houses. All families received \$400 loans to build their new houses. The municipality granted land titles.

The success of this operation played a major part in the municipality's change of attitude in 1998. A policy of negotiated relocation was then implemented for all planned evictions, and together the municipality, ACHR and SUPF co-founded the UDPF development fund for the poor, with the personal support of the Prime Minister, to offer housing loans to poor communities.

A further example: several actions of international organisations and NGOs contributed to the Prime Minister's decision in 2003 to announce the regularisation of informal settlements. An inexpensive (\$12 000) pilot project was carried out, funded with the help of ACHR and the residents, who contributed a small sum (\$500), and carried out the infrastructure work. Apparently the authorities were convinced by the results. Experts from UN-Habitat, British cooperation agencies, ACHR and SUPF then prepared an action plan for upgrading 100 settlements in one year. The Prime Minister went even further than the NGOs and international organisations were suggesting. Not satisfied with 100 settlements, he pledged to upgrade 100 settlements a year for 5 years, to deal gradually with all informal settlements. International experts started to spread abroad the praises of this exemplary country, where ideas sown by international stakeholders were discussed and adapted to the local situation, and were finally going to be put into practice.

In 1993, ACHR experts on an exploratory mission to Phnom Penh discussed their findings in terms of competing models. "[In Cambodia] there is no grassroots community organisation

such as exists in most other Asian countries. New local NGOs follow the Western models they know (...). [However,] Asian experiences are more relevant in Phnom Penh than Western models." (ACHR/HIC 1993, p.1). Ten years later, the ideas of the ACHR network had gained ground in Cambodia. Phnom Penh became a reference for other network members. That was why trips and seminars in Cambodia were organised in 2003-2004 for network members from Bangladesh, Ghana, Nepal, Thailand, India, China, Japan and the Philippines. Model programmes built on these ideas can be found on ACHR's website.

SPREADING AND ADOPTING THE NETWORK'S IDEAS

The spread of ideas often takes circuitous routes. Although there are obvious links, there is not always any direct connection between ACHR introducing ideas and governments adopting them. Ideas are also communicated by other local or international stakeholders and organisations connected to the network. Moreover, adopting new principles is not just a question of convictions, but is also the result of increased influence exerted by these newly empowered communities.

The ideas that ACHR was proposing were not new to everyone, and some local stakeholders already had similar approaches before ACHR's first missions to Cambodia. PADEK is a case in point. This was one of the rare associations working on urban issues in the early 1990s, which arrived in Cambodia in 1992 to set up an Urban Community Development Programme. It worked in several informal settlements. It was no doubt due to the similarity of its approach as much as its position that it became the local reference for members of the network arriving in Phnom Penh. It guided them around, made locals and staff available, and organised trips to Thailand, India and Indonesia for its partners (both civil servants and residents). Cross-fertilisation took place, as PADEK became totally convinced by the network's approach, while playing an important part as consultant to ACHR in defining actions to be implemented in Phnom Penh.

It is also true that some stakeholders belong to several local or international organisations, successively or simultaneously, which makes it difficult to say exactly which organisation is behind an idea. In particular, links exist between ACHR and certain entities of the UN and the World Bank. For example, the woman who founded ACHR and became its General Secretary was a member of the Policy Advisory Board from its creation in 2000 until 2005. This board advises the Steering Committee of Cities Alliance, which sets the long term strategies of this global coalition to fight poverty, co-directed by the World Bank and UN-Habitat, and working with cities and their development partners. In fact Cities Alliance has funded several projects in Phnom Penh since 2002. This same person is also a member of the Task Force for the Millennium Development Goals (agreed upon by the UN member countries in 2000), where she is in charge of producing a report on improving living conditions in slums. There are also close relations between ACHR and the Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) network. SDI was founded in 1996, and its members are federations of community organisations from Africa (South Africa, Namibia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Kenya), Latin America (Brazil) and Asia (Thailand, India, Philippines and Cambodia). The Indian president was present in Phnom Penh with ACHR during the important Cambodian community events. SDI works in the same spirit as ACHR, with the same emphasis on community organisation and experience sharing. The links between the two are underscored by the fact that representatives of each group are members of the other group's Board of Directors. Several members of SDI are also members of the Task Force for the Millennium Goals.

Also, some professional urbanists have worked both in local Cambodian associations and then with the United Nations, thus forging another link between NGOs and international organisations. For example, the current UN-Habitat representative in Phnom Penh worked for PADEK and ACHR in the early 1990s, and then worked for the UN, creating a bridge with Cambodian NGOs and acting as consultant for SUPF.

But the gradual adoption of ideas from the network and from international organisations is also the result of other factors apart from the training, trips and idea sharing. Ideas are also adopted as part of complex and decisive interactions and power struggles between stakeholders. Some of the recommendations made by experts from international organisations were not followed because they did not coincide with the point of view or the interests of the deciders. Also the government acted for political reasons. Listening to the demands of communities was a way of differentiating itself from the totalitarian Pol Pot regime, and remaining consistent with its policy for combating poverty. The change also depended on electoral campaigns, changes in leadership of municipalities or pressure from land and property markets. So changes of attitude and political transformations were neither immediate nor definitive. There were steps forward, but also steps back. For example, after carrying out several projects of negotiated relocation of settlements in 1999 and 2000, which went slowly, but were appreciated by the population (Fallavier 2002), the process of relocation took a sudden downturn in 2001. Fires in several large informal settlements in the city centre forced thousands of families to relocate in a rush to sites planned for future relocation, but which had not yet been levelled and equipped. Sometimes, too, external pressures were brought to bear by organisations, such as the campaign of e-mails from all over Asia launched by the NGOs to stop the evictions. In other cases, the possibility of obtaining funding by using the ideas put forward by international bodies was a very real motivation and driver for projects.

However, training and experience sharing was a key element in spreading the ideas of the ACHR network. Some politicians and members of government said that they had changed their minds after explanations from international experts, or by observing practices and projects during experience sharing and study trips organised by ACHR. These people then became intermediaries, "transmitters of ideas" between communities, local governments and political decision makers. It should also be noted that the official end of evictions in 1996 corresponds to the year in which the chief of staff of the municipality said that he had changed his opinion after a trip to Mumbai, India, organised by ACHR. He was brought round to the idea of acting in favour of habitats for the poor and discovered the existence of alternative solutions. This change of perspective marked the start of a closer cooperation between the municipality and the communities. After that, the follow-up of the municipal actions for improving habitat and security of tenure of informal settlements depended on a small nucleus of people who acted as bridges between NGOs, communities of the poor, the municipality and its government. This chief of staff was recognised as one of these bridge people, and in 2005 he was appointed vice-governor in charge of Social Affairs and the policy for poor communities.

PUBLIC INTERVENTION MIXING TOGETHER ANTAGONISTIC POLICIES

In practice, though, public intervention shows the contradiction that exists between this policy of regularisation and the policy in favour of land and property development in the capital resulting from strong economic growth. The action of grassroots organisations, supported by international organisations, is faced with many obstacles in a context in which the authorities

are involved in reconstruction of private property and the speculative land and property market.

Today, the promised actions are well underway. In 2005, two years after the Prime Minister's speech, government authorities have authorised some 200 upgrading projects. They have been implemented by local NGOs and funded by bilateral cooperation agencies (New Zealand, Japan, Germany), or by UN-Habitat programmes. From July 2003 on, the Council of Ministers authorised the municipality to prepare four land sharing projects in the city centre as a prelude to upgrading settlements all across the city. At the same time it authorised the negotiated relocation of a settlement on public land which could not be upgraded onsite. Local authorities of several city districts are taking part in the current upgrading process. They have also followed the examples of federations of communities and have also started to create communities of poor people to help arouse demands for settlement upgrading.

However, these projects have been carried out without any formal upgrading or regularisation policy being set up. The law on property ownership was voted in 2001. It makes provisions for attributing social property concessions. The principle is to supply plots free of charge, on certain conditions, to families who cannot afford to buy, on estates created on the State's private land. The implementation order was adopted in 2003. In 2002, the Ministry for Town and Country Planning, Urbanism and Construction (MATUC), with the support of the World Bank and Finnish and German cooperation agencies, implemented a Land Management and Administration Project (LMAP) to set up land management policies and register all land in Cambodia. Provisions are made in it for poor communities. However, no national housing policy has yet been voted, and there is no official text to confirm the speech the Prime Minister made to residents of the communities. The projects are carried out on a one-off basis, with no official coordination. UN-Habitat and JICA are the only ones to have created small guidebooks for communities, laying out the administrative processes to follow before implementing projects. And information on the contents Prime Minister's speech has had almost no circulation outside the circle of people involved in regularisation of settlements.

At present, upgrading projects are carried out for 100 settlements per year, but land ownership regularisation for the projects is slow in following. Regularisation must take place in interaction with land policy, and in fact the rare times regularisation does begin, it is tied up with registering the plots. However, the law on property ownership only provides for possession under certain conditions, that the occupants of informal settlements rarely meet, and there is no specific policy yet for the regularisation of these settlements. So today, very few inhabitants are likely to obtain the land title that the Prime Minister promised. Land sharing projects also meet obstacles in the land ownership question. Since there is no legal framework for this type of project, the Council of Ministers has designated them as social concession projects to authorise them, referring to the implementation order of 2003. But these projects are not part of the official government programme of social concessions. So upgrading, relocation and land sharing projects are carrying on, with no formal framework, whereas the land and property management policy is developed in parallel.

All municipal and national government stakeholders agree with the Prime Minister's speech on the need for action for the poor, but they are not yet convinced that this action must be given priority over their desire for modernity and urban development driven by those who want to see Phnom Penh figuring among modern Asian capitals. Not everyone is convinced, either, that action for the poor must be given priority over other, more concrete, measures such as the development of land and property investment that drives the capital's economy.

And in fact, the creation of a systematic land registry, the steep increase in land prices and the State sale or exchange of its land to private investors all push together in this direction.

In theory, the declared policy works in favour of actions against poverty that the municipality has carried out over the last few years. But in practice, there are conflicts of interest on each plot of land to be upgraded. Land occupied by families, who sometimes have legal rights, is simultaneously assigned to investors, who often have entries with the authorities or government members. So political or legal arbitration often goes in favour of investors, who want to see the land freed up. The result is that the regularisations underway are never finalised, even when the settlement has already been upgraded.

Government land policy plays an important role in this movement. Pressure for land has increased sharply since the 2001 Act, which makes it possible to acquire land for uses other than habitation, and particularly since systematic registration began in 2003. Land prices are increasing. Investors are rapidly trying to acquire even the smallest unassigned plot, and particularly State land and buildings. The government sells public buildings to investors in exchange for plots in the suburbs on which new amenities are built. This is what has happened to the Phnom Penh Central Police Station, the Fine Arts University and the Police Hospital, for example, which are all in the city centre, and are to be rebuilt in the suburbs. Informal settlements are sometimes present on part of this public land, and the residents have to leave. Other public land is also disposed of in the city centre, in the same way. Although investors have not yet set their sights on informal settlements, they are likely to do so very soon, particularly in central areas. Today, even the residents of some upgraded informal settlements in the city centre who were invited by the Land Registry to submit a request for systematic registration of their land are threatened with expulsion.

This same movement is slowing the social mechanisms of the land policy. Social land policy and management concessions, which were the main government regulation mechanism to preserve land delivery systems for the poorest, are up against land market issues. All the concessions are proving difficult to implement, because there is no land available. A first project is being studied at the edge of the city, but it is quite clear that few government departments will choose to sell one of their plots to create social concessions if they can get far more by selling it to private investors.

Over the last ten years, activity on the property market has led to property being concentrated in the hands of a few landowners. Whereas in 1989 almost all families owned a plot of land, the poorest have sold it to cover large expenses (often health expenses). So in fact they have often ended up renting the land they formerly farmed. In 1989, the State owned all land apart from plots for habitation and family agriculture, but today it has sold or exchanged a large number of its public and private plots. All the city's inhabitants have lost their common property, the public domain, which has gone over to politicians and investors.

And evictions are still taking place. Several hundreds of families have been evicted since 2003 and several thousand are liable to be evicted or relocated in the near future. These evictions happen in different ways. Sometimes the authorities act alone to evict or relocate people living on public land so that planned public work can be carried out. But evictions are often market driven. Sometimes a private investor buys an occupied plot and wants to clear it to build on. In this case the inhabitants, who often have the right to be there, receive compensation. This second case is becoming more common. Most often, evictions involve both a private investor and public authorities.

THE CHALLENGE OF MANAGING CONTRADICTIONS

Although the government declares that it wants to ensure that the poorest people keep their rights to land, there are blatant contradictions, because some government members are committed to the opposite process of developing land and property, selling public land and evicting the inhabitants. The government sits on the fence, encouraging communities of poor people with one hand, while supporting investors with the other. Both movements are increasing in intensity, but the contradictions are only managed on a one-off basis, plot by plot, by negotiation and power struggles. The imported principles, which are gradually adapted and put forward in political speeches, are not always carried out in practice.

However, the fact that these ideas are officially adopted has changed the way upgrading projects are carried out. Grounds for agreement have been able to be reached because the government accepts ideas from inhabitants, ideas that are encouraged by NGOs and international funders. The agreement on the wording of a policy, in spite of its shadowy areas, has calmed tensions and created a common platform of ideas from which to cooperate, negotiate and manage deviations and contradictions from a point of agreement, and to continue to receive international funding. Both the Prime Minister's speech and the official implementation of land sharing projects on private State land have strengthened occupants' rights. When evictions take place, the inhabitants can negotiate greater compensation than before (if indeed there was any before). Violence is officially replaced by negotiation and the processes are longer. By putting the investors and the inhabitants face to face, the government has made them try to reach agreements and has allowed residents to exchange their land. In the city centre, around 2000 families will be resettled onsite through land sharing and 2000 others are negotiating for formal housing. Because of the pressure of the land market in the city centre, land sharing operations that are still under discussion are likely to become projects of relocation to the suburbs. But although the idea of land sharing seems to be abandoned, the idea of "interest sharing" (Rabé 2005) is appearing and the inhabitants can firmly negotiate the conditions of relocation. Overall, the living conditions of the inhabitants of the 100 upgraded settlements per year have markedly improved and surveys show paradoxically that, in spite of regular evictions, security of tenure is felt to be stronger since the upgradings and the Prime Minister's speech (URIC, 2004).

However, being aware of these antagonisms, new avenues must be explored to formalise and consolidate government policy in favour of housing for poor people and to offer a framework for resolving current contradictions. First of all, mobilisation for stopping evictions and organising communities has not weakened. National leaders are mobilising local authorities to emulate them and create new communities and carry out upgrading projects. Several local and international associations are carrying on their action and are fighting evictions. The Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF), for example, was created in 2004 to fight violations of the right to housing, and particularly forced evictions. The ACHR network is also continuing with its policy of sharing experiences. In July 2005, a trip to Bangkok was organised for the governor and municipal employees to visit the city-wide Bann Mankong upgrading programme. Another trip was organised to Thailand and Pakistan for NGO coordinators about information management and developing stakeholder networks and alternative policies for influencing governments. New avenues are also being explored. With the support of experts from bilateral cooperation agencies, MATUC is working on setting up a moratorium on evictions and a policy of security of tenure (Payne 2005). UN-Habitat is planning to propose a definition of the implementation of the policy of regularisation and new surveys on the evolution of the number of settlements. The municipality is considering the possibilities for subsidising housing reserved for poor people in new housing operations.

Experts from MATUC and UN-Habitat are thinking of how to set up a mechanism of rented housing for the poor, etc. Local and international institutions are continuing to inject their ideas and projects into the issue, with their new proposals for action, supporting government policies for the poor and for upgrading and regularising informal settlements.

However, the contradictions of public intervention reflect the contradictions in the ideas of international aid agencies. Because although the United Nations, the World Bank and the international networks and organisations encourage setting up a policy of regularising informal settlements and housing for poor people, the World Bank's assistance in land registry policy stimulates the land market and leads to a polarisation of land policy and management situations. Since the 1993 constitution re-established the market economy, of which the right to property is an essential element, the government started a policy of distributing titles to secure land and property ownership in a context of speculation. As far as land is concerned, the agreement between the Cambodian government and international aid is going forward more rapidly for land registry than for regularising informal settlements. There is no comparison between the funding given. The aid from the World Bank and German and Finnish cooperation agencies for carrying out the LMAP land management (almost 35 million dollars) is at least ten times more than the amounts given over to projects for upgrading settlements. By way of comparison, the Japanese cooperation agency and UN-Habitat gave one million dollars to fund 260 upgrading projects in 2004-2006. Government action on behalf of communities of poor people and its policy for modernising land management and urban development are both funded by international aid. But regulatory tools for managing the contradictions are taking a long time to set up.

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