

CDRI: Leading think tank in Cambodia

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The purpose of my talk is to introduce CDRI to the audience. The Cambodia Development Resource Institute is the leading think tank in Cambodia. CDRI's vision is to examine the inclusive and sustainable development of Cambodia through independent policy research and developing capacity. Its mission is to contribute to Cambodia's sustainable development and the well-being of its people through the generation of high quality policy research, knowledge dissemination and capacity development. CDRI's core values are summarized by the acronym MERIT™:

We create the professional conditions that nurture merit.

We foster excellence, as a professional and personal habit.

We practice a culture of respect and responsibility.

We pledge to live and act with independence and integrity.

We build deep trust through transparent operations and teamwork, capable of achieving the mission and vision of the Institute.

CDRI is led by a senior management team made of the Executive Director, the Research Director and the Senior Administrative manager. It is governed by a Board of Directors composed of 8 members (4 Cambodians and 4 Foreigners). CDRI comprises of 25 researchers, all of them are Cambodians.

CDRI draw its funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, The International Development Research Center (Canada), the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Australia, USAID. CDRI policy research programs covers various fields that include agriculture, economics, education, environment and governance.

The agriculture unit explore agriculture and socioeconomic issues, rural livelihoods, agricultural economics, value chains analysis and agricultural trade.

The Economics unit explores the economic trends in Cambodia and their effects on different sectors of society through survey of small and medium-sized enterprises, measurement of impact of health financing policy on household health expenditure, and chronic poverty and assessment of the private sector development. The education unit conduct a 5-year policy-research program called the “Research and Policy Dialogue Program on Cambodia's Education Reforms”. The two major areas include the evaluation of the Professional Education and Training (TVET) and Higher Education. The environment unit aims at improving knowledge about climate change adaptation and mitigation, deepening the understanding of low-carbon development with a focus on hydropower and other renewable energy sources, national. The unit assess also the trans-boundary natural resource governance, and the sustainable management and use of natural resources. The Governance unit studies the institutional reform with a focus on State capacity and the accountability, responsiveness and service delivery aspects of Cambodia's decentralisation and deconcentration (D&D) reform programs. Another goal the unit is to deliver research knowledge through engagement directly with stakeholders at all levels.

CDRI is situated at the nexus of many think tanks circle that include North East Asia Development Cooperation, ATT Network (ADB), South Asia TT Initiative (IDRC) and Silk Road Global TT Network (DRC-China). Like all other think tanks, these organizations have to address the issues of relevance, independence, quality, sustainability of funding, recruitment of researchers, administrative task.

Regional cooperation: A perspective from Cambodia

Cambodia indeed welcomes the SDGs

Many goals set great challenges for Cambodia in terms of policy formulation, planning and implementation to address them.

Despite Cambodia's strong economic growth over the last two decades (7%), and its recent graduation to lower-middle-income country status, many obstacles will have to be overcome if Cambodia wishes to maintain this steady growth. The 10-year Cambodian Industrial Development Policy 2015-25 has just completed its first year of implementation. The success of this policy lies in many political economic and social factors. Strengthening state institutions, governance and the rule of law, building a competitive qualified and trained workforce, improving coordination between government, national and international development partners remain a challenge.

Sustainable and inclusive development is recognised by all stakeholders as the foundation for lasting peace and stability. All the steps towards realising these bigger development ideals are indeed envisioned in the SDGs. But how will Cambodia attain those goals? From the Cambodian perspective, SDG implementation represents a huge challenge and a tremendous strain on current resources and capacity of national bodies. Too many goals (17) and too many targets (169) if one considers the Cambodian capacity to analyse, formulate, implement and monitor policy that reflects every single SDG goal.

Despite the challenges, there are many opportunities Cambodia can capitalise on. With the new China Belt and Road Initiative and Silk Road Fund, new sources of funding are available for regional infrastructure development. These funds and foreign direct investment represent a flow of capital that will fuel economic growth in the years to come. Nevertheless, with growth come potential negative impacts on the environment and livelihoods, especially of the poor.

In view of this, policy coordination at the national, regional (ASEAN Economic Community, Greater Mekong Subregion, Mekong Lancang Project, One Belt One Road Initiative, Silk Road Fund) and global scale is a major challenge. Arguably, there has never been a more important time for a think tank network, especially at the regional level, to conduct policy dialogue.

This North-East Asia Development Cooperation Forum is a unique opportunity to share experience and to learn from each other.

Two current projects conducted by CDRI

1. Greater Mekong Sub-region Network (Funded by IDRC, Canada)

The Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), a leading think tank, is the hub for the Greater Mekong Sub-region Network (GMS-Net). In 2015, CDRI launched a competitive research call that selected 8 research projects from regional think tanks and non-governmental organizations. All selected projects address the effects of fast-paced economic growth on jobs. They examine current policies and practices to upgrade skills and improve working conditions for young, low-skilled workers, mainly women, and those belonging to ethnic communities. CDRI oversees the research and aims at linking it to the wider community of policymakers, private sector, and civil society within the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

2- Enhancing China-Mekong Research and Policy Dialogue Program (Funded by China/CASS)

The proposed program has two main objectives: (1) to conduct research that is of policy relevance to all participating countries, and (2) to enhance people-to-people connectivity through joint research and China-Mekong policy dialogue. The program consists of two components: research and policy dialogue: 1. Research for development to provide empirical evidence and policy suggestions to the Lancang-Mekong River Dialogue, with a focus on three theme of agricultural value chains and Mekong countries' development agenda. 2. Policy dialogue to support and strengthen policy dialogue and scholar exchange between China and Mekong countries especially in the context of Lancang-Mekong River Dialogue and Cooperation.