

IDPoor: The cornerstone of Cambodia's social protection system

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Key learnings

Since its establishment in 2007, IDPoor has evolved into the cornerstone of social protection in Cambodia, helping to ensure that a growing array of benefits reach the households and individuals who need them most. Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has supported its partners at the Ministry of Planning for more than 15 years as they have incrementally developed IDPoor from its original rounds-based approach into a fully digitised, on-demand poverty identification system.

The following key learnings emerged in the course of this cooperation:

- **A sustained systems-building approach pays off in times of crisis.** Continuous investments in the institutions, human resources, information systems and processes which underpin IDPoor have laid the foundations of a comprehensive social protection system that can serve the country well in the long term. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Cambodia was able to draw upon IDPoor data and existing payment mechanisms to rapidly roll out a nationwide cash transfer programme for poor and vulnerable households.
- **A poverty identification system can act as a catalyst for integrated social protection.** While IDPoor was not designed with a vision of a comprehensive social protection system in mind, its regular identification rounds and steadily growing digital capacities have helped to lay the groundwork for the eventual emergence of a full-fledged social registry and a digital, interoperable social protection system for Cambodia.
- **The transition to on-demand identification has opened up possibilities for more comprehensive social protection for poor households, and particularly those with vulnerable members.** It also holds the potential to facilitate shock-responsive social assistance for Cambodians who live just above the poverty line and are vulnerable in the face of shocks including climate-related natural disasters (e.g. flooding), recurring cycles of food insecurity, and health emergencies, including pandemics.

The challenge

Cambodia joined the ranks of lower middle-income countries in 2015, yet nearly one in five Cambodians still live in poverty and many more live just above the poverty line. By some estimates, three-fifths of Cambodians are at risk of impoverishment in the face of economic shocks, natural disasters or health emergencies. In response to these risks and to ensure shared prosperity, the Government of Cambodia is working to provide comprehensive social protection to all Cambodians. To deliver on this commitment, it requires a systematic way to identify poor and vulnerable households and to target social assistance to them in times of need. Periodic household-based poverty identification assessments cannot capture dynamic changes in people's economic circumstances, however. Nor are they flexible enough to respond quickly in the face of unexpected shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The response

Beginning in 2005, the Cambodian Ministry of Planning, with support from Germany through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), developed IDPoor as a single basis for targeting programmes for the poor. IDPoor initially used a hybrid model to combine the objectivity of a proxy means test survey with the accuracy and affordability of a community-based selection process. Households identified as poor received Equity Cards which entitled them to a range of benefits, from access to free health services to school scholarships. Poverty identification was carried out in recurring rounds, with all 24 of Cambodia's provinces covered over a three-year period.

In 2011 IDPoor was formally adopted by the Government of Cambodia as its official poverty identification mechanism.



→ Noun Seang, age 89, lives in Sihanoukville.

The German Health Practice Collection (GHPC) is built around a series of case studies which identify and document insights generated during the implementation of German-supported health and social protection programmes. Since 2017, it also includes evidence briefs which synthesise current knowledge about specific questions of relevance to German Development Cooperation in the areas of health and social protection.

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All organisations targeting poor households, be they government, non-government, local or international, were required to use IDPoor data to identify beneficiaries. In 2016 IDPoor was extended to urban areas and the system attained national coverage.

While the three-year cycle was impressive compared to poverty surveys in other countries, households that missed the IDPoor round in their village had to wait until the next cycle to be evaluated for eligibility. With one in four Cambodians migrating for work, and with many households cycling in and out of poverty, IDPoor needed a more flexible way to allow for assessments between rounds. In 2017 the Ministry of Planning piloted a new 'on-demand' mechanism, including digital data collection, in selected communes, and subsequently announced its intention to gradually roll out the new, more flexible procedures over a three-year period, starting in 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which inflicted massive economic harm on Cambodia, accelerated these plans. In cooperation with Cambodia's 1,646 commune/sangkat councils, the Ministry of Planning used the new IDPoor procedures to update lists of poor and vulnerable households through a countrywide campaign. Identified households could register for cash transfers through a social assistance programme funded by the Government of Cambodia and administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. New digital solutions linked the cash transfer delivery system with the IDPoor database of households holding Equity Cards.

Convinced by the speed, efficiency and power of the flexible new procedures, the Government of Cambodia decided in August 2020 that, henceforth, IDPoor would employ a fully on-demand approach. Since that time the Ministry of Planning has been working to strengthen the internal systems which will underpin these new procedures. This includes e.g. continuous data updates from commune/sangkat councils and real-time information about Equity Card holders; a suggestions and complaints mechanism to enhance transparency; and a continuous approach to monitoring and evaluation aimed at reducing inclusion and exclusion errors.

THE RESULTS

- **IDPoor is a national system fully owned, implemented and funded by the Government of Cambodia.** Cambodia has succeeded in establishing a poverty identification system with national coverage which is implemented by decentralised administrative structures. In June 2022 there were 692,000 households with Equity Cards in the IDPoor database. This represents 2.73 million people, or about 18% of Cambodia's population.
- **IDPoor offers real-time data on poor households.** Since 2020 the IDPoor system has allowed for the continuous addition, removal and updating of households through on-demand procedures carried out by commune/sangkat councils. This enables policymakers to design programmes based on up-to-date data, to deliver social assistance to beneficiaries more smoothly and efficiently, and to ramp up support more quickly in times of shock.
- **IDPoor is seen as fair and impartial.** Thanks to its origins as a community-driven approach, IDPoor is accepted and trusted by Cambodians. Since responsibility for the identification of poor households shifted to the commune/sangkat level in 2020, the Ministry of Planning has strengthened measures to enhance transparency and retain community participation.
- **IDPoor offers a sound basis for designing and targeting programmes.** Since the adoption of the National Social Protection Policy Framework, the government has used IDPoor data to plan new social assistance schemes. The number of organisations using IDPoor data to target services has increased, from 42 projects in 2012 to 181 projects in 2020.
- **IDPoor has steadily developed its digital capacities and become interoperable with other systems.** The IDPoor team has invested in the development of both front-end and back-end solutions which enable it to efficiently collect, manage and share data. In developing these systems, it was careful not to outpace existing levels of infrastructure, connectivity and digital literacy in the country. The introduction of Application Programme Interfaces in 2019 was a critical milestone, as it enabled other stakeholders to seamlessly access IDPoor data.

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