

Migration in Cambodia: Internal vs. External Flows

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Introduction

Population movements inside and between countries have been exponentially increasing in the last 20 years, especially in countries with surplus work force, low economic development and young population. The growth of migration movements is caused not only by the decisions of the individuals, but by globalisation and the new organization of labour that has seen many manufacturing activities move to third world countries. It has to be considered also the exponential improvement in information technology, accompanied by increased opportunities to travel at affordable costs as variables influencing the decision to migrate or to decentralize the production of goods abroad.

The decision to migrate is not based exclusively on the perception of economic advantages, as wage differentials between sending and receiving areas, but on the perception of an improvement in the quality of life, not only related to economic factors (Massey, 1993; Harris and Todaro, 1970). The combination of push factors (such as political instability, low economic development, poverty, natural disasters and increasing demographic pressure), and pull factors (the rise of new industries needing a low skilled workforce, perception of a better life style, learning from past experiences of earlier migrants, etc) contribute to enlarge the number of migrants. If, for Western countries, where in-migration paths are well established, the push-pull factors theory needs to be augmented by other considerations, such as relative deprivation and the different aspects of economic migration, for LDCs this theory is still valid to explain, in general, the reasons for migration, that, in many cases, are more based on push factors and survival strategies than on life planning and improving of economic standards.

Southeast Asian countries are no exception. Urban-industrial growth in specific areas acts as a pull factor on low-wage workers in rural areas. Usually the industrial development is concentrated in the main cities or, as in the case of Cambodia, in the capital. This situation creates a centripetal attraction on the poorest areas of the country.

The 1997 economic crisis slowed the economic development of the region and receiving countries tried to control the migration process, but until now, the balance between supply and demand of migrant workers has largely been left to the invisible hand of the market.

For some post-conflict countries in the region, such as Cambodia, population growth in recent years has risen more than at any time in the past. The transportation network has also improved in the last few years, facilitating the physical movement of migrants within and outside countries (Acharya, 2003).

Migration in Cambodia

Migration in Cambodia is, by and large, concentrated within its borders. Reports from the Ministry of Planning set the percentage of internal migrants at 35% of the total population (NIS, 2004), most of these internal movements are intra-provincial and very short-range.

Migration is a relatively new topic for the government, international organizations, and NGOs working in Cambodia. Previously, the focus of interventions and research related to mobility was concentrated on human trafficking, especially sexual exploitation, and forced migration (diasporas, resettlement of refugees, displacement, etc.).

Since 2004, migration has started to become a key area both for research and project activities. The main target of these interventions has been, and still is, internal labor migration, particularly, rural-urban flows, with a specific attention to strongly defined groups of migrants such as garment factories workers. The garment sector represents the only effective pull factor in Cambodia providing, in the last ten years, more than 250,000 jobs, mostly for young female migrants coming from the provinces surrounding Phnom Penh.

The internal flows moving from rural areas to rural destination are still largely uninvestigated, even if they represent the great majority of internal migrants.

The research on migration related topics is scarce; except for the data provided by national samples (Census 1998, Cambodia Inter Censal Survey 2004), the data are taken from case studies with limited sample and which representativity is limited at the communities investigated. Anyway, for the scope of the present paper, they provide an interesting insight of migration in selected areas in Cambodia and, even if they cannot provide a generalization at national level, are fit as basis for discussion.

In 2005, there was an increasing awareness of the relevance of international migration from Cambodia to the GMS (mainly Thailand) or other Asian countries by the government, International Organizations, and NGOs in Cambodia.

Cambodia is still in the early stages of migration management and understanding. Migration itself is considered by Cambodian migrants, in general, as a short-term coping strategy to face unexpected shocks and not as a long-medium term process aimed to increase the socio-economic status of the family. Those who decide to migrate from Cambodia are expelled from the sending communities by a combination of factors ranging from chronic poverty, to landlessness passing through lack of employment, lack of access to markets, materialism, debt and natural disasters such as droughts and floods. Consequently, they are forced to move from Cambodia by overwhelming predominance of push factors over pull factors. These migrants often find employment in 3D jobs (Dirty, Dangerous and Disliked) which only allow them to maintain the status quo rather than improving their standard of living.

Internal Migration

According to NIS 2004¹, 35% of the Cambodian population are migrants, an increase of four points over the Census of 1998 (31%), with males representing 35.15% and females 34.05%. The percentage of persons not born in the place of enumeration is 28.6%, very close to the corresponding percentage of 26.8% in 1998. Although the male migration rate is slightly higher than that for females, the number of female migrants actually outweighs that of males due to the smaller proportion of males in the population.

Tab.1 Percentage of Migrants on Total Population (%)

Migrant and non-migrant population (Based on previous residence) by sex and residence,					
Residence and Sex	Total Population (In thousand)	Non-Migrants Number (In Thousand)	Per cent	Migrants Number (In thousand)	Per cent
Cambodia					
Both Sexes	12,824	8,323	64.90	4,501	35.10
Males	6,197	4,019	64.85	2,178	35.15
Females	6,627	4,304	64.95	2,323	35.05
Urban					
Both Sexes	1,921	841	43.77	1,080	56.23
Males	932	427	45.84	505	54.16
Females	989	413	41.81	575	58.19
Rural					
Both Sexes	10,903	7,483	68.63	3,421	31.37
Males	5,265	3,592	68.22	1,673	31.78
Females	5,638	3,891	69.01	1,748	30.99

(Source: CICS, 2005a)

The percentage of migrants among the urban population is 56.23%, easily understandable if we consider that Phnom Penh was virtually a ghost town until 1980, when, after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge regime, the previously displaced population started to come back

Rural migrants represent only 31.37% of the rural population but, considering that Cambodia is still a predominantly rural country, they largely outnumber the urban migrants (3.42 millions vs. 1.08)..

Young people (aged 15-25 years) from a disproportionately large section of migrants² at 30%, although they only represent 18% of the population. One key rural push factor is the lack of land. New households are not able to acquire or access land in their village of origin, through donation by their parents or other relatives, as it was traditional in Cambodia until few years ago. Hence they out-migrate in search of livelihoods.

Urban female migrants outnumber males in the 15-19 age group, while their number declines in the 20-39 age group, due to childbearing and housework linked to the management of the households.

It would appear that young, unmarried women are most likely to migrate to work either in the garment industry, as domestic workers, in the sex industry or tourism industry. Otherwise, in all other age groups there are slightly fewer women than men, except in the older age groups when the population ratios are skewed due to the civil war.

According to the Census of 1998 and RUPP 2003, of the total number of migrants in Cambodia 42.46% are urban migrants between 15 and 29 years old, while 40.35% are rural migrants in the same age group. More than 80% of migrants are of working age (15-64 years), though as a proportion of the total population this age group constitutes only 54%. In contrast, 14.7% of migrants are in the 0-14 age group, while the same group constitutes 42.8% of the total population

Tab. 2 Percentage of migrants on total population by age groups

	Cambodia		Urban		Rural	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
All Ages	11.52	9.27	23.66	21.38	8.09	7.05
15-19	12.63	12.48	25.76	28.45	9.93	9.04
20-24	24.20	17.05	43.12	37.78	20.06	12.90
25-29	23.44	14.13	40.31	30.70	19.60	10.73

(Source: NIS 2000)

Over 22% of urban residents had migrated in the previous five years, compared with 8% of rural residents. The migration rates in urban areas may be high partially because the census was conducted on a *de facto* basis during the dry season. As such, it probably includes all the seasonal migrants that move to the urban areas in search of work during the dry season. Forty per cent of urban residents in the 20-24 age group had migrated within the previous five years. At least 10% of every age group in urban areas were recent migrants. Male migration rates in urban areas exceeded those of females between 20 and 59 years. Below 20 years and above 60, female migration rates in urban areas are somewhat higher than male migration rates. Among the rural population, male migration rates exceed females in all age groups except below 10 years.

² Those who migrated in the last five years previous to the survey

Tab. 3 Distribution of migrants by previous residence (%)

	CENSUS 1998		CICS 2005a	
	MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES
In the district	36.01	34.34	37.0	36.4
In other districts	23.64	23.69	24.8	25.0
Other provinces	35.56	36.06	34.3	34.7

(Source: NIS 2000; CICS 2005a)

Tab. 3 shows how most of the internal migration is short ranged. Only roughly one third of the internal migration flows is outside of the province of enumeration. According to the data of the National Institute of Statistics for the 2005, there is a slight increase in the intra-provincial migration, compared with the Census of 1998. This result seems to contradict the inputs coming from the main economic sectors, where an increase in migration has constantly registered in last years.

Tab. 4 Distribution of migrants by origin and destination (%)

Percentage distributions of internal migrants by migration stream, residence and sex, Cambodia,						
Migration Stream	Census-1998			CIPS-2004		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Rural to Rural	64.23	64.80	63.66	68.90	69.60	68.40
Rural to Urban	17.27	16.74	17.79	13.90	13.40	14.30
Urban to Rural	6.21	6.30	6.13	7.00	7.20	6.70
Urban to Urban	12.29	12.16	12.41	10.20	9.80	10.60
Migrants in the last Five-Years						
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Rural to Rural	58.23	59.57	56.68	61.02	62.70	59.13
Rural to Urban	19.2	18.47	20.05	16.38	15.15	17.75
Urban to Rural	8.05	8.12	7.97	9.38	9.85	8.84
Urban to Urban	14.52	13.84	15.3	13.23	12.29	14.28

(Source: CICS 2005a)

Data from the NIS 2000 suggest that 58% of all migrants had moved from one rural location to another, 19% from rural to urban areas, 14% from one urban area to another, and about 8% from urban to rural areas. The data from 2005 suggest, as in the previous

case, an apparent contradiction, with a decrease of rural-urban and urban-urban migration flows and an increase of the rural migration flows.

These results contradict what can be observed simply walking in the streets of Phnom Penh. There is a booming construction sector and the new buildings and commercial malls are mushrooming all over the city.

While it is understandable a decrease in the pace of the growth of the urban flows, due to lack of urban infrastructures, capacity of absorbing large groups of migrants and lack of pull factors (except for the garment industry, pole of attraction especially for young female migrants), it is still unclear how this trend has, apparently, reversed in only few years.

The increase in the rural-rural migration pattern can be partially explained with the country's rapid population growth, land issues, ranging from land grabbing to the small size of land plots, decreased productivity caused by soil deterioration, and loss of land for a variety of different reasons, forcing people out to look for alternative livelihoods.

External migration

The main destinations for Cambodian migrant workers are: Thailand, South Korea and Malaysia. There is anecdotal evidence of the presence of Cambodian migrant workers in Gulf Countries (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) and other Asian countries (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, etc.), but there is no information available on their number and occupation.

Migration to Thailand

In the last few years, Thailand has become the main hub for labor migrants from all over the GMS region. While Thailand has decreasing birth rates and a strong economy Cambodia continues to have one of the fastest growing populations in the GMS and few employment opportunities for a growing workforce. Consequently, Thailand has become the prime destination for irregular Cambodian labor Migrants. As of October 2005, there were 182,007 registered Cambodian labor migrants in Thailand (123,998 Male and 57,581 Female), representing approximately 13% of legal migrant workers in Thailand.

Both for registered and undocumented migrants, the employment sectors with the highest number of Cambodian migrants are: fisheries, construction and agriculture.

Most of the migrants are employed in the fishing sectors, either in fishing boats or fish processing factories. There is anecdotal evidence of large numbers of mostly female Cambodian migrant workers in the Thai domestic, entertainment and sex-related sectors.

Tab. 5: Work Permits Issued to all Migrants and Cambodian Migrants for Employment Sector (1st July-15th December 2004)

EMPLOYMENT SECTORS	Work Permits Issued to all Migrants	Work Permits Issued to Cambodian Migrants
Fishing Boats	58,686	22,874
Fishery Processing	68,602	4,666
Agriculture	179,404	18,816
Rice Mill	6,923	186
Brick Factory	5,820	280
Ice Factory	4,514	387
Transport	3,002	1,770
Construction	114,459	24,463
Mining	1,489	93
Private Household	128,514	8,746
Others	243,374	22,508
TOTAL	812,247	104,789

(Source: Adapted from Huguet; Punpuing, 2005)

Undocumented Migration to Thailand

The great majority of labor migration to Thailand from neighbouring countries is undocumented. Estimates suggest that 90% of the migrants in Thailand are irregular. (World Bank, 2005)

In Thailand, as is common for the great majority of receiving countries all over the world (i.e. Western Europe, United States), migrant workers integrate rather than compete with the local workforce. The migrant workforce is largely, and in some cases exclusively, employed in economic sectors characterized by harsh and dangerous working conditions, low salaries and requiring low-skilled workers. The local workforce, usually because of a general economic development at country level, tends to move to other economic sectors with higher wages and better working conditions. The employers, facing a scarceness of local employees, replace them with migrant workers to the point that there is no substitution for it. Consequently, some economic sectors (i.e. fisheries in Thailand, domestic workers in Malaysia, garbage pickers in Cambodia) become strongly identified as fit only for migrants and this “ethnic identification” is usually a no-return process. In Thailand, this trend was very clear during the 1997 crisis. Unemployed Thai workers preferred to remain unemployed rather than taking jobs traditionally covered by migrants, as they were characterized by low salaries and, especially, very low prestige.

The main push factors leading many Cambodian irregular labor migrants to move to Thailand include landlessness, natural disasters, debt and land grabbing. Debt for health reasons is considered one of the main causes of landlessness in Cambodia. (Biddulph, 2004)

Most of the informal migration networks from Cambodia to Thailand are managed by middlemen (or *mekhal*), who represent the link between the household living primarily rural areas of Cambodia and the destinations in Thailand.

The middlemen are a category of individual considered to have certain leadership skills or a potential that can be used to organize community activities but also, in Cambodia, to recruit people to work elsewhere. They are not necessarily individuals with high status, but they do have certain capacities or contacts that allow them to operate as mediators in specific situations. They are usually men (although there are also a number of women) (Derks 1999, 2004).

There are two categories of middlemen: former migrants who decided to use the networks and knowledge developed living abroad to assist friends, relatives or villagers and professional brokers linking Thai employers with Cambodian migrant workers.

The informal recruitment of migrant workers to Thailand often is managed by many independent middlemen, each one in charge of one segment of the migration journey.

The middlemen play a fundamental role in determining the final outcome of the migration process. Migrants using unskilled middlemen with limited social networks can end up working for exploitative employers and, consequently, face an unsuccessful migration experience, while others, using expert middlemen can have a positive migration experience and be able to accumulate savings to buy land, houses etc. It is not unusual that even within the same village, households can have different results according to skills of the middleman they decide, or afford, to employ.

Migration to Malaysia

The Cambodian government signed a labor export agreement with Malaysia in 1997, and has given two agencies, namely, Cambodian Labor Supply and Human Resource Development, authorization to recruit Cambodians and issue permits for them to work in Malaysia. As of July 2006, there are 11 officially registered private recruitment agencies, but only the two above mentioned agencies are operational.

The private recruitment agencies in Cambodia work through advertisement in national newspapers or word of mouth. The recruitment agencies should provide training on language, culture and skills, but not on migrant workers rights.

Tab. 6 Cambodian Migrant Workers in Malaysia

	Migrants			Domestic Work*	Factories		
	Both sexes	Male	Female		Both Sexes	Male	Females
1998	120	/	120	120	/	/	/
1999	86	/	86	86	/	/	/
2000	502	307	195	82	420	307	113
2001	846	342	504	393	453	342	111
2002	1049	246	803	437	612	246	366
2003	573	73	500	500	73	73	/
2004	809	105	704	582	227	105	122
2005	1776	467	1309	1008	768	467	301
2006	859	172	687	497	362	172	190
Total	6620	1712	4908	3705	2915	1712	1203

(Source: MoLVT, 2006) (*All the Cambodian migrant workers employed in the domestic sector in Malaysia are female)

According to research done by CARAM-Malaysia (quote by Asian Migrants Resource Book, 2003), there are approximately 10,000, regular and irregular, Cambodians working in Malaysia, while other sources estimate the total number at around 20,000. This latter estimate is based on unquoted sources and it is considered more a guess than an estimate based on available data.

Most the Cambodian migrants are females employed as domestic workers. Other economic sectors with a relevant presence of Cambodian migrant workers are: the construction sector, the manufacturing sector, and the entertainment sector which primarily employs irregular migrants. However, according to the CARAM report, while the majority of Cambodians entered Malaysia with proper documentation, many later became irregular migrants, particularly upon leaving their original place of employment. Other sources (Stock, 2006) report the presence of a large number of Cambodian irregular migrants belonging to the Cham ethnic group. The Cham community in Cambodia is a Muslim ethnic group and consequently Malaysia, with a predominantly Muslim population, is the preferred destination for both legal and irregular Cham migrants.

Since the Malaysian Immigration Act gives employers the right to terminate and cancel work permits and does not allow migrant workers, whose employment has been terminated or who run away from their employer, to stay in the country, migrant workers are put in a vulnerable situation and are abused and exploited.

Furthermore, the provision 2.17 of the “Recruitment Procedures for Cambodian Nationals for Employment in Malaysia” explicitly declares that: *“The employers shall be responsible for the safe keeping of the workers passport and to surrender such passport to the Cambodian in the event of abscondment”*. Even if formally limited to the passport, this provision essentially authorizes the confiscation of documents and other relevant papers by the employer.

Migration to South Korea

Since 2003, Cambodia has been sending approximately 650 migrant workers (trainees) per year to The Republic of Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea) through a “trainee system” which allows Cambodian nationals to work in Korea for short periods of time to acquire new skills that they may be able to use upon their return to Cambodia to secure gainful employment.

Currently there are 2464 Cambodian migrant workers employed in Korea. All of them are documented migrants and the great majority are male. The modalities of recruitment are similar to those of the migrants to Malaysia.

Tab. 7 Cambodian Migrant Workers in The Republic of Korea

	Migrants			Factories			Agric.*	Fisheries*
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females		
2003	756	638	118	756	638	118		
2004	674	519	155	598	443	155	76	
2005	468	432	36	341	305	36	100	27
2006	566	508	58	554	496	58	12	
Total	2464	2097	367	2249	1882	367	188	27

(Source, MLVT, 2006) (* All the workers employed in the agriculture and fisheries sectors are males)

Analysis of the migration flows

The analysis of the migration flows will be made through the reasons given by the migrants for their decision to migrate. At national level, the CICS 2005a (Tab.5) used a closed-questions questionnaire which does not allow an in-depth analysis of the reasons for migration. Clearly, a demographic tool as the CICS 2005a is not tailored to specifically measure migration. It is interesting, anyway, to analyze some categories: marriage seems a very important reason for young male migrants, especially in rural areas (25.89%). The Cambodian culture follows the matrilinear system, with the newly-wed couples moving in with the bride’s family. Also interesting is the high number of internally displaced people that, after more than 25 years is still wandering, looking for a stable settlement, especially in rural areas.

Categories as “Family moved”, while representing 44% of the migrants, do not explain the reasons behind this choice.

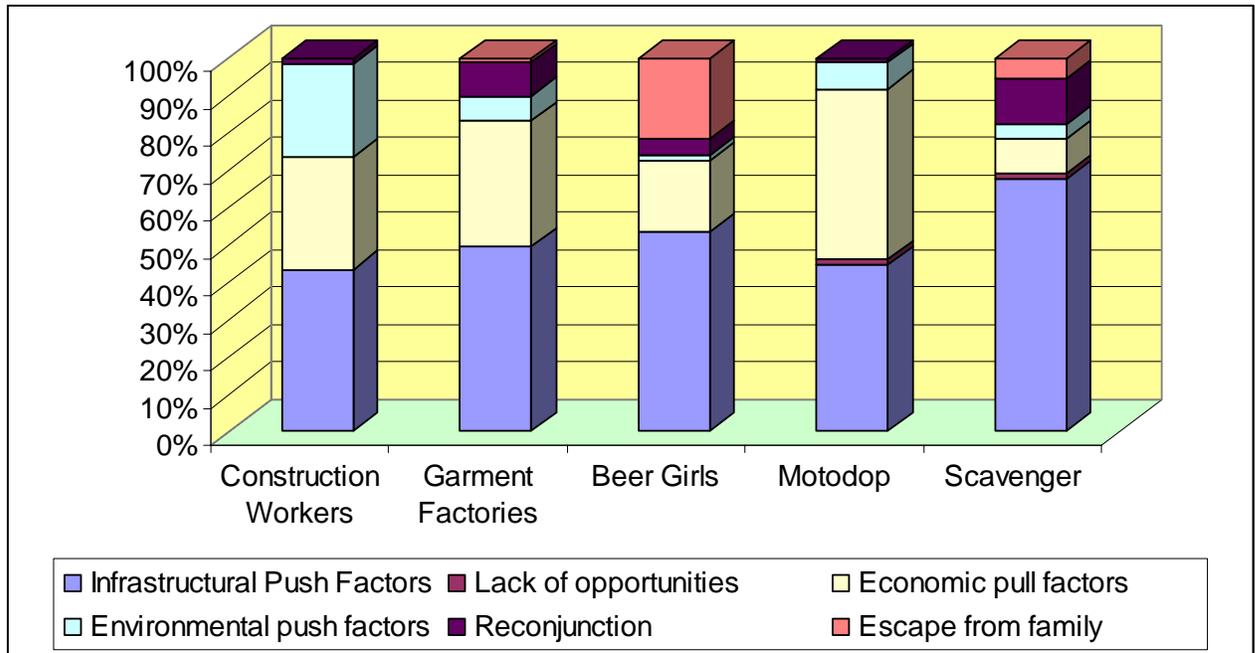
Tab. 8 Percentage distributions of migrants by reason for migration, sex and residence

Reason for migration	Percentage								
	Cambodia			Urban			Rural		
	Both sexes	Males	Females	Both sexes	Males	Females	Both sexes	Males	Females
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Transfer of work place	2.94	4.96	1.05	4.19	7.21	1.54	2.54	4.28	0.88
In search of employment	12.18	17.56	7.14	16.84	23.83	10.71	10.71	15.66	5.97
Education	1.03	1.27	0.80	2.43	3.01	1.92	0.59	0.74	0.44
Marriage	16.35	22.30	10.77	7.89	10.38	5.70	19.02	25.89	12.44
Family moved	44.00	29.93	57.18	50.79	35.82	63.93	41.85	28.16	54.96
Natural calamities/insecurity	3.06	3.20	2.92	1.50	1.63	1.38	3.55	3.67	3.43
Repatriation or return after displacement	13.54	13.90	13.21	7.09	8.00	6.29	15.58	15.67	15.49
Visiting only/other	6.56	6.55	6.57	8.90	9.70	8.20	5.83	5.61	6.04
Not stated	0.35	0.34	0.36	0.38	0.42	0.34	0.34	0.31	0.36
Number of migrants (in thousand)	4500.90	2178.01	2322.89	1080.06	504.79	575.26	3420.82	1673.20	1747.62

(Source: CICS, 2005a)

To better analyze the differences between rural, urban and international migrants in this paper, I will use three researches conducted between 2005 and 2006: “*Rural-urban migration in Cambodia*” (Maltoni, 2005), “*The invisible flow. Rural to rural migration in Cambodia*” (Maltoni, 2006b) and “*The impact of remittances on local communities in Cambodia*” (Maltoni, 2006a).

Chart 1 Comparison among urban migrants by reasons for migration

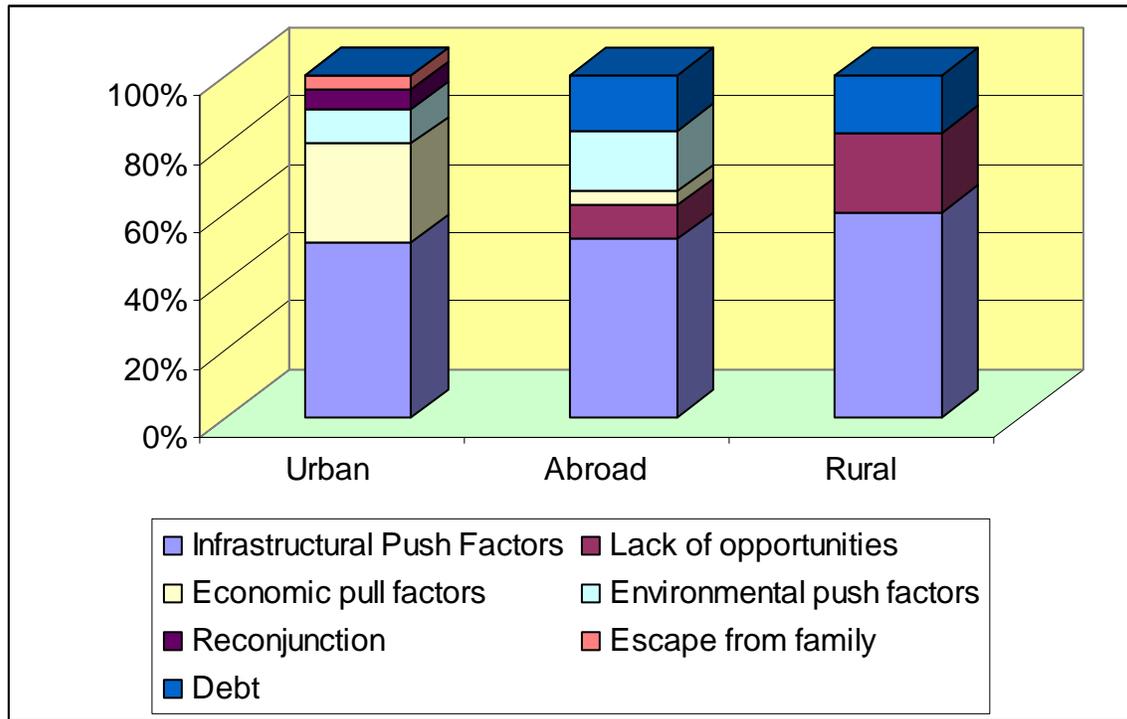


The data show how the motivations for migrate differ from group to group according to their characteristics. Construction workers and motodop (mototaxi drivers) are, generally, short term or seasonal migrants. Motodop move to the city during the dry season, when the rural activities stop, while construction workers use migration as a short term strategy to overcome the loss of the crops due to drought, floods or other causes. Most of the Garment factories workers migrate as result of a household strategy aimed at diversify as much as possible the human resources within the household.

Beer promotion girls and scavengers (people living in the public dump of Phnom Penh) are two groups of long term migrants who, in most cases, have burnt their bridges with the sending communities. Scavengers migrate as a result of the loss of land and other relevant assets and, usually, the migration is carried on by the household as a whole.

Beer promotion girls migrate by themselves and quite often they break every link with the household. The reasons can be harassment, forced to marry a man chosen by the household, undesired pregnancies, rape, etc.

Chart 2 Comparison among migration flows by reasons for migration



The comparison among the three main migration flows shows how economic pull factors play a more significant role for urban migrants than for rural and international migrants. The main difference, anyway, is represented by the impact of debt on the decision to migrate. While urban migrants do not mention it, it appears quite significant for rural and international migrants.

The data on rural migrants should be taken with some caution because they are referred only to landless rural households.

The kind of debt with the biggest impact on rural families is, according to many scholars, the debt related to health issues. It seems that there is strong connection between landlessness, debt and health issues.

According to Biddulph (2000, 2004), in Cambodia more people are landless because they have never owned land (55%) than because they had had land and lost it (45%).

"Growing landlessness is an indicator of growing destitution amongst Cambodia's poorest of the poor. This sector of the population is increasingly resorting to migration in a largely fruitless search for adequate livelihoods. The potential social and political unrest that could result from the continuing growth of their numbers is substantial and a real cause for concern. There are therefore strong economic, social and political reasons why it is important to find effective ways to address the problem of increasing landlessness. Families that have lost agricultural land and have little or no capital often

have no recourse other than labour migration, even though returns in terms of remittances are uncertain" (Biddulph, 2004).

Many people migrated in the mid-90s to areas of intensive logging activity until the logging ban in 1999. They work as land cleaners either as employees of land speculators/investors or independently to farm or to sell, or migrate elsewhere. In areas with increased market activity, settlers obtain land rights from indigenous groups. Land sales in such villages not only reduce the natural resources required for sustaining livelihoods, but also debilitate the cultural and social resources needed to deal with the exigencies of change itself.

It is difficult to have reliable data on the degree of landlessness in Cambodia, because various studies have found that many families who defined themselves as landless had alternative sources of income and investment. In general, it can be estimated that 12-15% of the rural population is landless (with an increase of 1-2% every year) and an additional 40% are near landless (or land-poor), having less than 0.5 hectares of cultivatable land. Landlessness is highest in the Tonle Sap region where over 17 percent of the households are landless, compared to around 9 percent in the coastal areas of Cambodia. (Haapala, 2003)

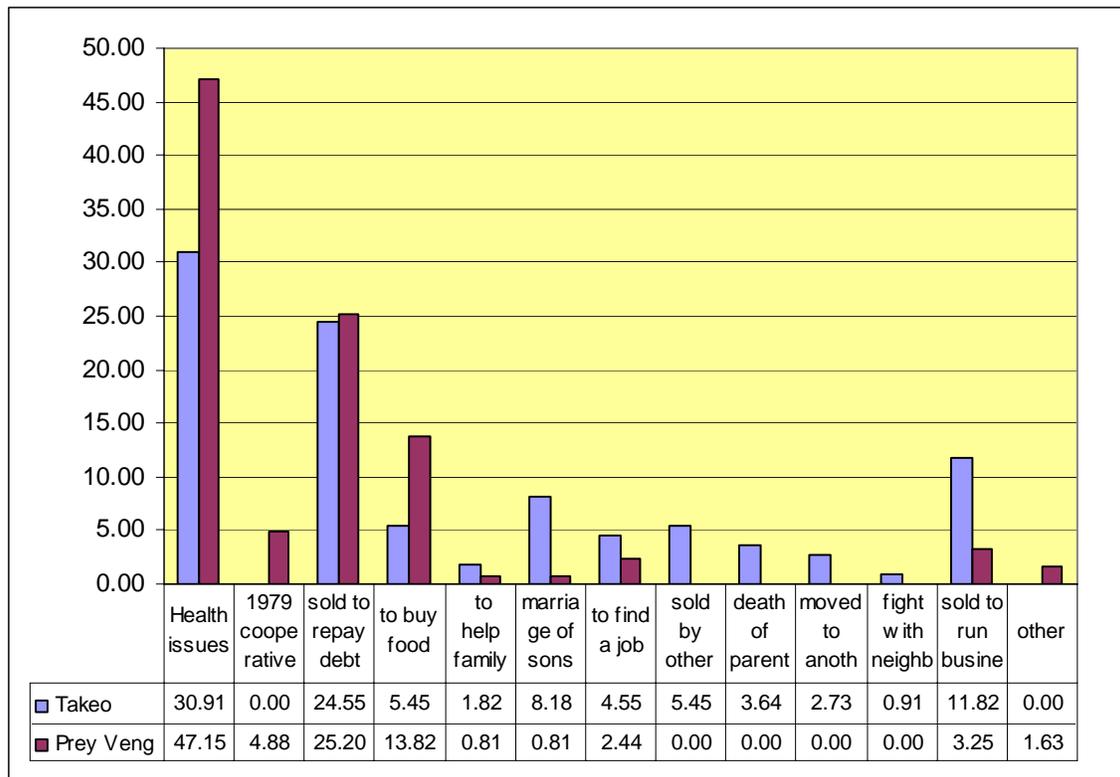
The people most affected by this situation are the rural poor, female-headed households, returnees and internally displaced people, demobilized soldiers and their families, and indigenous minority populations.

Rural people who have never owned land are mainly newly married couples, most commonly following matrilocal patterns. In earlier generations, a newly married couple might have received land from the local authorities, have cleared new land themselves, and/or have been given land by their parents. None of these options is now realistic for most new families in rural Cambodia.

It appears to be few alternatives to increased reliance on migration for survival, as prospects for subdividing already minimal smallholdings, renting land, working as agricultural field workers, or obtaining rural-non agricultural employment are extremely limited in practice.

Of the people who had previously owned land, but had lost it, the largest cause of landlessness was related to health issues (as confirmed by Chart 3, referred to rural migrants). Or more specifically, the poverty and indebtedness caused by having to pay very large sums of money for the treatment of illness within the family. Other causes related to general poverty and indebtedness, which were in turn related to the poor quality of land, unpredictability of the climate and weather, reduced access to common property resources and the lack of other employment possibilities (Biddulph, 2000; 2004).

Chart 3 Reasons for landlessness among rural migrants (%)



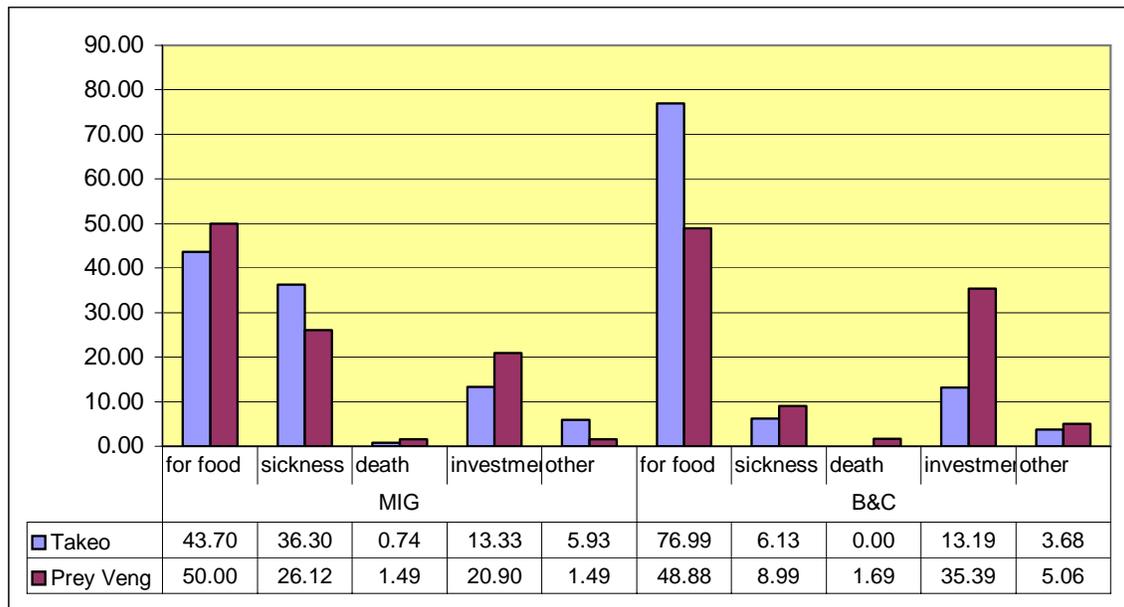
(Source: Maltoni, 2006b)

Seriously indebted families usually adopt two strategies to try to settle and repay their loans. Families with a majority of working age members try to increase their income through diversification, sending family members to work in urban or rural areas, or even abroad. Such strategies can help the family to meet their subsistence needs but rarely enable the poor to repay major debts without the sale of assets, especially land. For the most indebted families, loss of disposable assets such as land, home, livestock and labour is virtually inevitable. In some cases, rural households also incur further debts to set up new livelihood sources such as a small business, skill training, availing themselves of employment opportunities, or the cost of clearing and occupying land in new areas. However, unless the credit is from relatives, friends or villagers with a relatively low interest rate, families frequently end up in debt and poverty.

Outstanding debts and poverty act as major push factors for migration, resulting in either individual workers or entire families being forced to leave in search of alternative employment (OXF 2000).

To confirm this close link between debt, landlessness, migration and health issues see Chart 4, rural households falling into debt for health issues are much more among migrants households than for non-migrants households

Chart 4 Reasons for Debt among rural migrants (%)

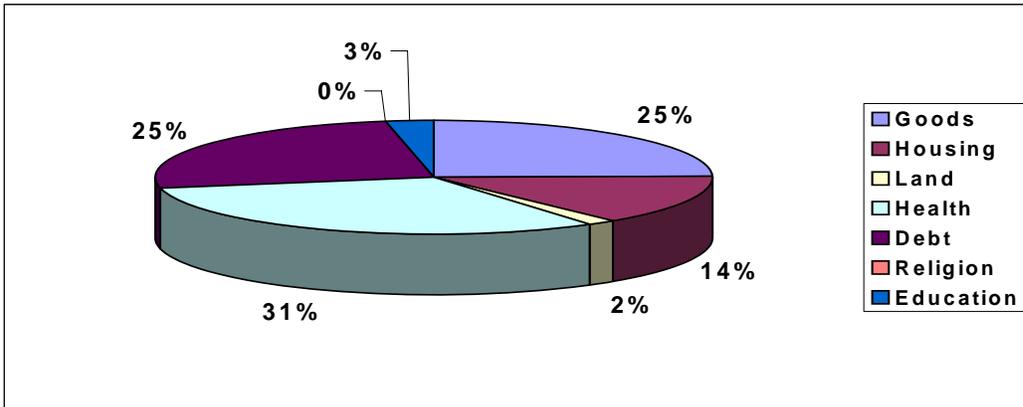


(Source; Maltoni, 2006b)

For those households unable to repay the debt, the next step was the loss of the key assets, above all, the land. Health is one of the main reasons for the loss of land in rural Cambodia. Health issues can have a direct or indirect impact on the household's assets or on the debt situation. Even if the household is able to pay for the medical care and for the cost of the medicines, the amount of money required is such that the household has to borrow money for its daily needs as food, etc.

Another indicator of the impact of health issues on rural households in Cambodia is the amount of remittances that migrants' households invest to repay the health expenses or, indirectly, the debt caused by health issues. In Chart 5, the remittances invested are divided by area. Health represents the main area of investment with 31% of the remittances invested.

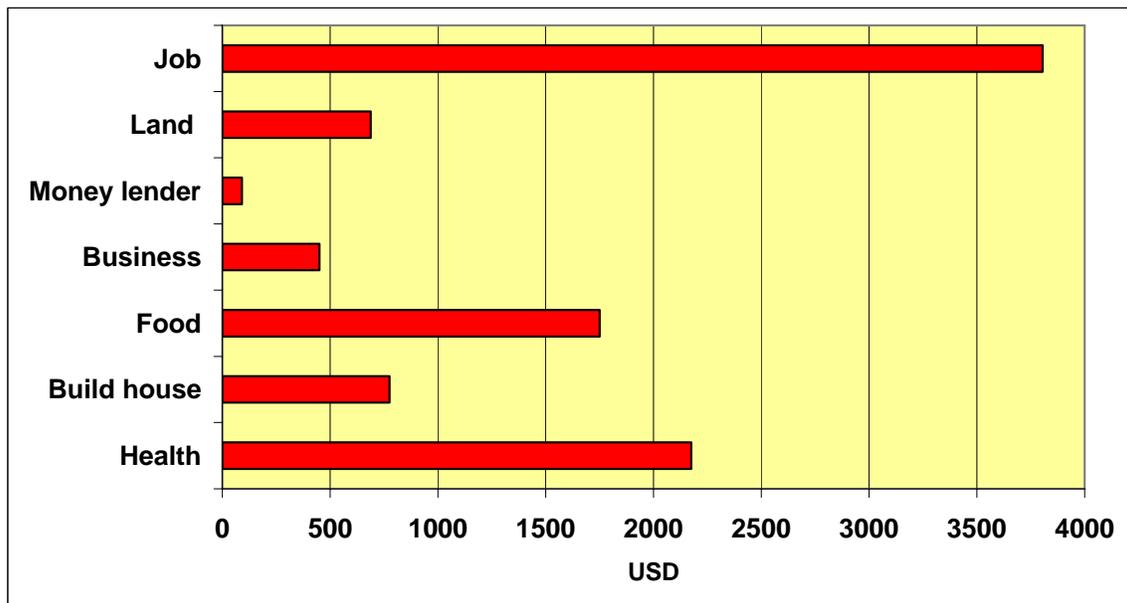
Chart 5 Remittances by area of investment (%)



(Source: Maltoni, 2006a) "Housing" is a misleading variable because involves only 4 cases and three of them have an investment of 5500\$.

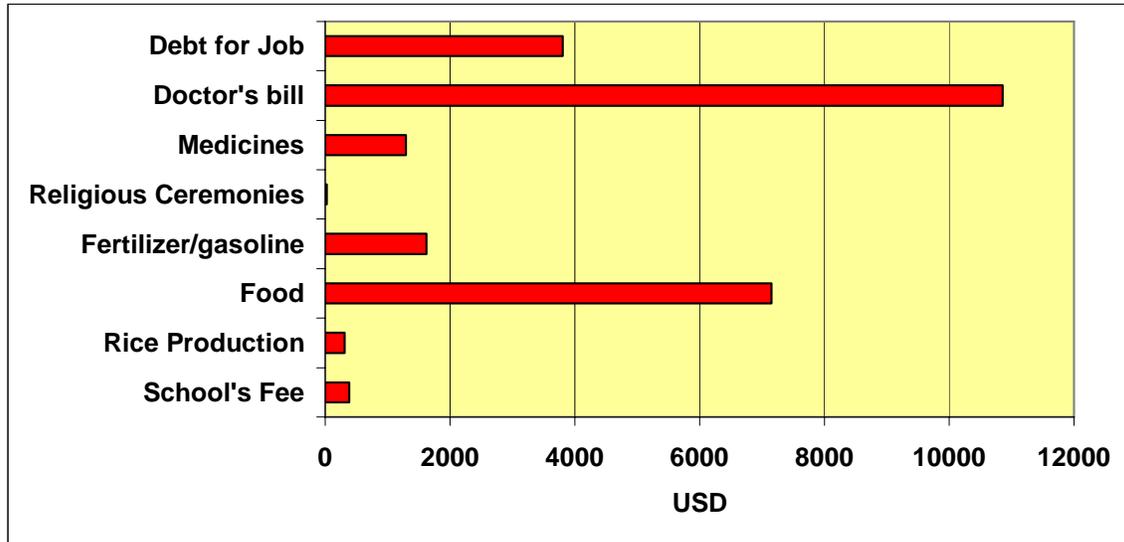
A further analysis of the data shows how for the debt, the health issues represent the second item, after the debt for job. Even in the case of debt for job, the in-depth interviews showed that this kind of debt is strictly related to the health issues. Members of the households stricken by disease of accident and unable to pay the high costs for the health care, decide to migrate abroad, looking for well-paid jobs. The access to the foreign labor markets pass through the middlemen that require an up-front payment, forcing the migrants to borrow money, and increasing their debt, in order to migrate with some chance of success.

Chart 6 Area of investment by issues and total amount of remittances (\$): Debt



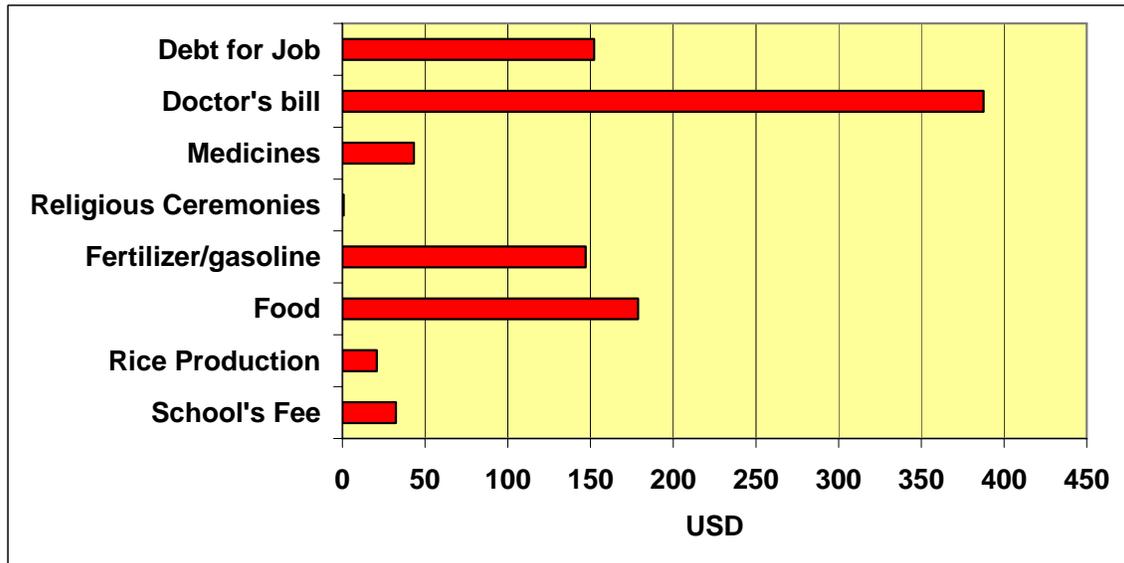
The investment of remittances by single issues shows how the cost of the healthcare is, by far, the most expensive voice in the migrant households' budget, even larger than the investment for food.

Chart 7 Issues by total amount of money invested



The impact of the healthcare on households' budget is confirmed by the average amount of money invested (380\$ per household).

Chart 8 Issues by average amount of money invested



Different studies have demonstrated how the health issues have a much more devastating impact on the household's economy than natural disasters (CDRI, 2002; Yagura, 2005; Biddulph, 2000, 2004; ILO, 2004, Maltoni, 2006a,b).

The extremely unstable balance on which most of the rural Cambodian households live is clearly explained in following extract:

"The traditional Cambodian society safety net relies on most people having almost enough land, water and forest to produce almost enough food to feed their families. Most Cambodians survive by seasonally switching between different modes of production - farming, fishing and foraging. In the absence of any formal social security services or other income support mechanism, access to farmland, wetlands and forest is all that stands between most Cambodians and chronic food insecurity. Restricting public access to any of these domains could suddenly end this diversified, range-dependent survival strategy with devastating consequences for many rural people." (NGO Forum on Cambodia, 2002; quot. by Mazur, 2004)

On such precarious situation, health-related issues can have a strong impact on the households' livelihood

Applying the Yagura's dichotomy of common and idiosyncratic shocks to the migration patterns, it is possible to link the reason for migration with the migration dynamics adopted by the households.

Tab. 9 Migration patterns by typology of shocks

<i>Typology</i>	<i>Subjects Affected</i>	<i>Economic Consequences</i>	<i>Migration Pattern</i>
COMMON SHOCKS	COMMUNITIES	SMALL AMOUNT OF MONEY IN LONG TIME	SEASONAL MIGRATION - INTERNAL
IDIOSYNCRATIC SHOCKS	HOUSEHOLDS	LARGE AMOUNT OF MONEY IN SHORT TIME	LONG TERM INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION -

(Maltoni, 2006, adapted from Yagura, 2005)

Considering natural disasters as common shocks, often shared by a single community or by all the communities in a specific area at the same time, and health issues as idiosyncratic shocks, it is possible to analyze the different coping strategies for the two phenomena.

In the first case, the household can respond to the common shocks trying to substitute the lost income with other economic activities as hiring out households labor. In case the common shock invest all the community(es), the sale of the assets (especially land) is not convenient because there will probably be a decrease of the prices and. because all the households are in the same situation, few households would be able to buy the assets on sale. In this situation, the household can cope with the loss of the crop through the seasonal migration strategy, sending one or more households members to work in rural or urban destinations, both within or outside Cambodia, in order to earn enough money to allow the daily life of the household, waiting for the next crop.

One household can survive more than one common shock without losing its assets. As said earlier, medical expenses are the main reason for the loss of land, but according to CDRI, (2002) no land sales were the direct result of crop failure.

In the case of idiosyncratic shocks, the case is different. One chance is that the household stricken by health issues could borrow money from other households in the community, because one of the characteristics of idiosyncratic shocks is to be an “individual” shock, in the sense that does not affect all the community (except in case of epidemic). The main obstacle to the borrowing money strategy is that the loan conditions are quite severe. Moneylenders in Cambodia can charge different rates from 5% a day to 60% a month.

The strategy of alternative economic sources can be difficult to adopt if the person victim of the sickness is an important member of the household workforce, maybe the main bread-winner or because of the lump-sum shock.

Another characteristic of the idiosyncratic shocks is, usually, their emergency. Health issues require the availability of a large amount of money in a very short time. To guarantee the immediate availability of money, the household will be obliged to sell the main assets, especially the land. (Yagura, 2005).

In this last case, the sell of the land starts a downward spiral in which the household needs to repay the debt and the interests. In many cases, the sale of land is not enough to cover the debt or the health expense, so the household needs to find alternative sources both for the repayment of debt and, eventually, the rescue of the assets sold. The fastest way to earn money for Cambodian farmers is to accept highly exploitative and dangerous jobs in Thailand or to move to rural areas looking for a plot of land or for low-skilled jobs that allows them to satisfy the basic needs of the household (food, payment of debt, etc.). If for common shocks, migration is a household strategy to cope with a momentary loss, requiring a small amount of money to guarantee the household’s survival; for idiosyncratic shocks, migration is the desperate solution to cope with emergencies requiring large amounts of money in short time.

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