

# Translocal relations, migration and the importance of the family in supporting farmers in Cambodia

## Authors

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## Abstract

Through both people and place, farming in Cambodia has a translocal dimension (Lawreniuk and Parsons 2017, Green and Estes 2022). There is limited understanding and exclusion of the social-political processes which hinder farmer empowerment and influence farmer decision making (Cook et al. 2021). There is a need to understand both farming and non-farming, production and reproduction and rural and urban. The socio-political process which is present across all these constructs is mobility/migration. And the people who move between, within and connect up these constructs are family members (grandparents, adult children, siblings). As argued by Natarajan, Parsons and Brickell (2019) families in Cambodia are linked to their rural homesteads through persistent and durable financial and social arrangements. Understanding these relations, migration patterns and arrangements could provide insight into farmers' realities and practices. Based on a household census undertaken in 2022-2023 with approximately 2555 households in Battambang and Pailin Provinces in Northwest Cambodia, we analyse the patterns of migration and the translocal relations that exist to support farmer decision making and rural livelihoods. Our data shows that households in the Northwest of Cambodia demonstrate diverse and dynamic household economies in which migration plays a pivotal role not just at the level of income. Relations span across place, from rural to urban, from rural to rural, from national to international and back again. These patterns provide insights into how farming families build livelihoods and how translocal relations support farmers.

## Current stage

Data analysis of the household census as part of Activity 2 is currently underway, with writing scheduled to begin Q3, 2023. Paper to be submitted for review Q1, 2023.

## Emergent findings

The census data highlights that across the eight villages, most migration was internal to another province within Cambodia. Internal migrants constitute a significant population in Cambodia. In 2013, the National Institute estimated that approximately 4.1 million individuals had migrated internally with approximately 58.4% of that migration being rural-rural (UNESCO 2018). This pattern is still dominant 10 years later with the data from this household census in Battambang and Pailin.

However this was not the case in two villages in the census, Anlong Ta Mei (Battambang) and Boeng Prolit (Pailin), where Thailand was the key destination for migrating household members. Empirical Data from our photo diary also supports

these findings. It was noted that there were many empty houses during the data collection process, from families who were still working in Thailand and who had left their house vacant and fenced in Cambodia or left children with other family members, hoping to return to live with their families and to start their own business.

Male migrants are dominant making up over 50% of the cohort in each of the eight villages. The village with the highest number of male migrants was Anlong Ta Mei at 65%. These patterns also reflect National statistics which show that men are more migratory and in particular dominate rural-rural migration (60.3%) (UNESCO 2018).

The paper supports the perspective of migration as a means to exert human agency and improve livelihoods (Lieten and Nieuwenhuys 1989) (see de Haas et al. 2020:55).

Further a pattern emerges of a **circular livelihood system**. The household-based livelihood system is complex with migrants neither abandoning their rural livelihoods or engagement with agriculture, but rather enhancing such livelihoods and remaining connected to them through urban or rural labour and bi-directional remittances (Lawreniuk 2017: 202).

## References

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