

Reaching the poorest children in Cambodia: Multi-deprivation analysis

Abstract:

Research objective:

This paper is about children in Cambodia, one of the least-developed countries according to criteria laid down by the United Nations. It presents an empirical examination of the extent of deprivation children suffer from, measured in terms of extent of child labour, children being out of school, child (ill) health (& vaccination or lack of it), and child poverty. The main body text of the paper will assess how many children suffer from one problem, how many from two, how many from three, and how many from all four. This would permit a ranking of priorities; the policy should be, not to go for 'low-hanging fruits' but target the most deprived groups.

Literature/data review and methodology: The approach to writing this paper is unconventional in the sense that it mines existing data sets to arrive at the extent of deprivation children suffer from. The Cambodia Socio-economic Survey (CSES), the most comprehensive official database on social issues in Cambodia, now conducts annual rounds of the survey. However, it might not be too accurate to conduct this analysis from one round only, as there are not enough observations for the extent of disaggregation required. However, it is possible to merge data from more than one round, say 2009, 2010 and 2011, and arrive at a sample size of some 20,000 observations. This would permit sufficient degrees of freedom to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

Findings and analysis: All children need full social and physical protection, and a childhood. Ideally, therefore, it is the duty of the state and society to provide for these. However, in most developing societies there is high inequality in the distribution of resources, both institutionally and otherwise. As a result, many children stay deprived; some are much more than others.

Policy implications: Who are these children? What are their attributes? If it is possible to assess children by the extent of deprivation they suffer from, then targeting each of these groups of children according to their specific needs would become more accurate. Such an approach will be economical as well as more rewarding in terms of effectiveness of the intervention.

Policy recommendations. Seen in a 'life-cycle' approach to development, these children require effective but differential help now, lest they become less than desirably productive citizens in the times to come.

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