

# Identification of Poor Households

Most Vulnerable Household List (MVHL)



## A village based list

devised under the leadership of the Commune Council

*When villages identify their poorest families*



GTZ in cooperation with the provincial departments of Rural Development and of Planning, Kampong and Kampong Thom

## Background

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to reduce extreme poverty by half by 2015 and to achieve significant improvements in health, education, environmental and livelihood conditions of the poorest present a big challenge. While the Goals are widely accepted, there is still a need for effective strategies on how best to target the poor with specific development efforts.

In Cambodia, most approaches to improve the targeting of the poor for development activities and social transfers have so far focused on “area targeting” (identification of poor districts, communes or villages). Within a village, however, the differences between the very poor, poor and better off can be quite large. Existing disparities of influence frequently prevent the very poor from being heard and exclude them from development benefits. As a consequence, targeting interventions often fail to reach really poor and vulnerable families.

Recent studies have shown that specifically targeting the poverty status of households can significantly improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness of social transfers and development assistance. The GTZ assisted Community Based Rural Development Programme (CBRDP/RDP), in collaboration with provincial partners in Kampot and Kampong Thom Provinces, have developed identification mechanisms of the poor at household level and have piloted this instrument within already existing projects. They would now like to share their practical experiences and thus hope to contribute to the development of a standardised approach that effectively targets the poor and can be implemented across the country.

## When villages identify their poorest families: Most Vulnerable Household List (MVHL)

Together with the Provincial Rural Development Committees in Kampong and Kampong Thom Provinces, the Community Based Rural Development Programme (CBRDP/RDP) has developed a participatory approach for the identification and the targeting of the most vulnerable families at village level. The "Most Vulnerable Household List (MVHL)" is established by the villagers under the leadership of the Commune Councils (CC). The aim is to develop an instrument that supports the implementation of activities targeted towards the poor.

### Key actors in the establishment of the MVHL

- **The villagers:** check and comment on the lists
  - **Village Level Working Group** with Key Village Representatives: identify the most vulnerable families and draft the MVHL
- Commune Councils:** guide the process, agree on criteria harmonise the village draft lists and endorse the MVHL
- **District and Provincial Authorities:** facilitate the process and provide capacity training to Commune Councils; promote and share information about MVHL with other departments and organisations

# IDENTIFICATION

The proposed selection criteria for establishing the MVHL are reviewed and adapted by the village representatives at commune level. The following criteria for the selection of the most vulnerable families have been used:

**Housing situation:** Families living in very basic housing conditions

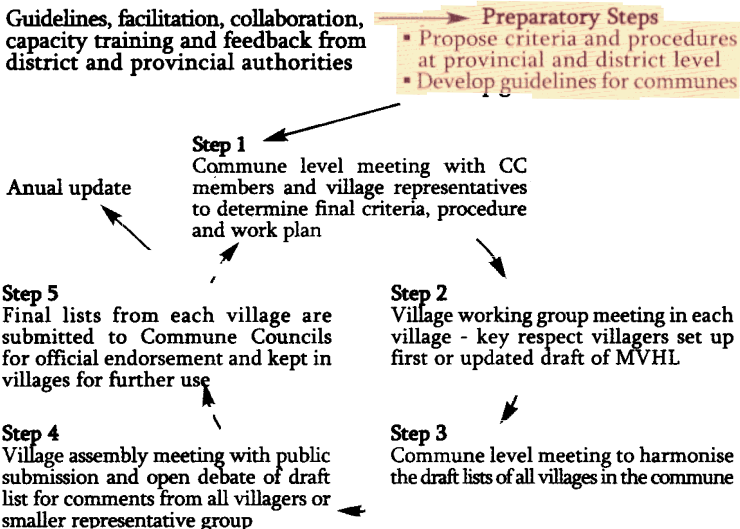
**Income situation:** Families who have no regular income outside agriculture and who depend on daily income for food (no reserves)

**Transport:** Families who have no draught animals or only one young draught animal and no other means of transportation

**Land ownership:** Families with very little productive land (less than 2 ares)

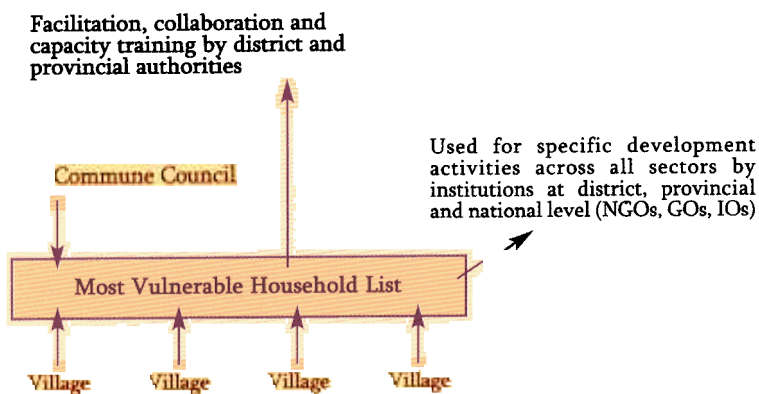
**Rice production:** Families whose own rice production can only cover 2 months of consumption per year

Diagram 1: The procedure for the establishment of the MVHL



The identification process and establishment of the MVHL are fully integrated into the commune planning process. The main actors are the villages, key village representatives, community based organisations (CBOs) and the Commune Councils (CC):

**Diagram 2: Identification and targeting of poor families**



Identification and targeting of poor families become two separate but complementary components. Identification of the poor remains community-owned and is independent from targeting measures, which are usually external. Thus transfer and development activities are more likely to reach the individuals that they were originally intended for.

Once established, the MVHL can be used by diverse development actors across all sectors.

## What are the advantages of this method of pre-identification?

**Ownership** remains at village and commune level. The villagers use their local knowledge for identifying poor families in their community under the leadership of the Commune Council

- **Transparency and good governance** through a participatory public process within villages

**Institutional sustainability** in poverty identification and reduction through alignment with commune planning processes and annual updates

- **Time-saving** because it can be integrated into regular village/commune meetings

**Acceptance** through suitable identification criteria and increased awareness of poorest families within the villages and communes; solidarity is strengthened and conflicts are minimised

**Cost efficiency** by using existing local structures and resources instead of costly targeting interventions from outside

- **Better coordination and efficiency of development efforts.** Different actors at all levels and in all kind of sectors can refer to the same "Most Vulnerable Household List" when targeting the poor

## Who can use the MVHL?

- **Commune Councils and Community Based Organisations** for local development planning processes and provisions of own contributions in supporting the poor

**Authorities** at local, district and provincial level as well as **national government institutions, NGOs and international organisations** to better target the poor with specific development activities and social transfers

- **All kinds of sectors**, such as infrastructure, agricultural, health, humanitarian aid, land distribution, etc.

## Experiences to date

Following the introduction of the MVHL in Kampot Province, 8,370 poor families were registered on 445 lists - an average of 19 families on each list. Around 50,000 villagers, half of whom were women, participated in the village meetings to discuss the lists.

In August 2004, most communes updated the lists along with the commune planning process and reported familiarity with the procedure.

As a result of initial awareness workshops on the MVHL, many new ideas are emerging regarding usage of the MVHL and new commitments towards the poor are arising among local, district and provincial government:

- The Department of Education will provide scholarships to poor families

The Provincial Health Department promises to provide free services to poor families in all their health centres in Kampot Province

The police wants to provide free ID cards to the poor

- Families on the MVHL are exempted from annual contributions to the commune fund project

District chiefs start to use MVHL as a reference instrument

With the transparency created by the MVHL, Commune Council members report an increase in donations and an improvement in the transfer of benefits to poor families. New values of solidarity seem to be emerging.

## Future outlook

With the first encouraging results from the introduction of the "Most Vulnerable Household List" in our pilot projects in Kampot and Kampong Thom Provinces we hope that:

- The introduction of self-managed poverty identification processes will lead to further discussion and improvement among governmental and non-governmental organisations and stimulate further cooperation and application in the national context
- Communes and Commune Councils will adopt this instrument to improve their own local planning processes
- The MVHL will be used as a simple, yet efficient method of poverty identification by an increasing number of development actors to target the poor across all kinds of sectors
- This time-saving and cost-efficient procedure of self-managed poverty identification at village level will quickly expand all over Cambodia as a standardised approach to poverty identification
- The MVHL will become an important contribution to the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) in Cambodia
- The MVHL will help reduce extreme poverty in Cambodia by reaching poor families more efficiently

o f p o o r h o u s e h o l d s



**For further information and to share your ideas and experiences,  
please contact us:**

**Community Based Rural Development Programme**

**PO Box 1226**

**Phnom Penh**

**Cambodia**

**E-mail: [rdpadminpnh@online.com.kh](mailto:rdpadminpnh@online.com.kh)**