



ID-Poor Program: the On-Demand ID-Poor from urban poor communities in Phnom Penh

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អង្គការសហគមន៍ចន្លោត

Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organization • a Cambodian Urban NGO

Tables of Contents

- 1. Introduction.....1
 - 1.1.What is ID-Poor?.....1
 - 1.2. Benefits of the ID-Poor Program.....2
 - 1.3. Identification Process.....2
- 2. Methodology.....3
 - 2.1. Objective.....3
 - 2.2. Selection criteria and scope.....3
 - 2.3. Information gathering.....3
 - 2.4. Limitations.....3
- 3. Key findings.....4
 - Part 1: General information about getting ID-poor card.....4
 - Part 2: General information about the communities without ID-poor card.....6
 - Part 3: Local authority ID-poor distribution process.....6
 - Part 4: ID-poor card procedure.....7
- 4. Conclusions and Next Steps.....8
- 5. Recommendations.....9

1. Introduction

1.1. What is ID-Poor?

The 'Identification of Poor Households' or 'ID-Poor', is Cambodia's first all encompassing social protection mechanism, created to serve as a single basis for targeting programs for the poor. Established in 2006, within the Ministry of Planning, the purpose of the program is to reduce poverty and support socioeconomic development throughout Cambodia.¹

Up to 50% of the population of Cambodia are estimated to be either poor or vulnerable to becoming poor when certain measurements of multidimensional poverty are used,² but prior to the ID-Poor program being established, there was no standardized, universally recognized and nationally applied procedure for recognizing poor households in Cambodia. Although numerous social protection programs for the poor were set up, each program and implementing organization had their own criteria and process to identify the poor, which was inefficient, often did not reach the most vulnerable populations and meant that poor households were unable to assert their rights to basic social services, such as free medical treatment and education. To address this issue, the Ministry of Planning set up a new poverty identification system, with the support of the World Bank, UNDP, and notably the German government through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).³ The ID-poor process was revamped recently in 2020, with financial and technical support from GIZ as well as the Australian Department of foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The identification of poor household system is now fully digitalized, after having evolved and improved since the pilot in 2007. All data collection, monitoring, and dissemination can now happen through the ID-poor digital systems a website and an application making it easier for urban and rural poor communities to have access to essential social services. Before digitalization, the ID-poor identification procedure was done through in-person interviews and surveys. Authorities would visit and interview communities to assess their social and financial situations.

The 2007 pilot only covered four rural communities. The ID-poor procedure was then implemented in eight different provinces per year, so that all 24 of Cambodia's provinces could be covered over a three-year period by 2011.⁴ ID-poor was initially designed to only target rural areas and was extended to urban areas in 2016.⁵ Today, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians are registered onto the system throughout the country.

The ID-poor system was developed and conceptualized under a backdrop of key Cambodian legislations. The RGC promulgated Sub-Decree 291 on Identification of Poor Households in December 2011. This Sub-Decree regulates the management and implementation of the identification of poor households and the utilization of poor household data in Cambodia. Sub-Decree No. 291 mandates that "relevant government ministries/institutions, non-governmental organisations and local communities which intend to provide services or assistance to poor households or individuals, including any appropriate emergency interventions, must primarily use valid national poor household data."⁷

¹ Kaba Mary White, Baesel Klaus, Poch Bunnak, Bun Samnang, Cerceau Sabine, Bury Louise et al. ID-Poor: a poverty identification programme that enables collaboration across sectors for maternal and child health in Cambodia BMJ 2018.

² UNDP and OPHI. 2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste and gender. 2021, p 32.

³ GIZ. Identification Of Poor Households. <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/17300.html>.

⁴ German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Leave No One Behind: Insights from Cambodia's National Poverty Identification System. 2017, p 5.

⁵ Ministry of Planning Cambodia. ID-Poor Process. <https://mop.idpoor.gov.kh/about/process>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sub-Decree N 291 on the 'On Identification of Poor Households', 2011.Chapter 4. Article 17.

1.2. Benefits of the ID-Poor Program

The ID-Poor program directly targets services and development assistance to vulnerable poor households to help lift them out of poverty and to protect them from the impact of financial hardship and shocks.⁸ The program collects data from poor households and connects ID-poor beneficiaries to relevant organisations and institutions who can then provide concrete assistance to those in need. Benefits of the ID-Poor program include:

- Provision of free or discounted medical services and reimbursement of other associated costs (e.g., through Health Equity Funds or Social Health Insurance).⁹
- Scholarships, waiving of tuition fees, or other financial support to poor children for general education and vocational training.
- Agriculture-related services, such as distribution of agricultural equipment (fertiliser, seed, livestock) and training on agricultural and animal husbandry techniques.
- Allocation of social land concessions.
- Distribution of free food (supplementary feeding and emergency feeding) as well as other vital necessities
- Cash Transfer programs (e.g., to improve child and maternal nutrition, health and education, Covid-19 pandemic relief).
- Water connection fee subsidies as well as discounted water usage rates.

1.3. Identification Process

Since the 2007 ID-poor pilot, the identification process has developed and was digitalized in 2020. Prior to 2020, the success of the ID-poor procedure depended on authorities' competency and diligence: authorities would visit communities every three years, to conduct interviews and enter household data onto the ID-poor database, using a standardized questionnaire.¹⁰ Communities' poverty status would then be established, leaning on information related to assets, health, education, income, and debt. Equity cards would be distributed to beneficiaries, providing access to services such as clean water, education, agricultural equipment, healthcare, and cash transfers.

Today in 2022, services offered by the ID-poor system remain the same. However, the digitalized process allows for a more straightforward identification procedure and allows ID-poor recipients to update and modify their information onto the platform, at any time. Thanks to the online system, referred to as ON-Demand ID-Poor, households can request inclusion into the register every month, by asking their commune councilor or village chief for an interview.¹¹

The entire process is overseen, managed, and coordinated by the Ministry of Planning (MoP). The MoP oversees operations at the national level. Furthermore, the MoP acts as a connector between data uploaded onto the system, and relevant ministries and institutions, such as the National Social Security Council.

Every province is expected to have their own committee, armed with a secretariat who deals with daily operations and procedures on the local level – such as monitoring the collection of data, and supervising the distribution of equity cards. The Commune / Sangkat have their local actors on the ground – the Sangkat Working Group for the Identification of Poor Households and Vulnerable People, and the Village Working Group (VWG). The Village Working Group is comprised of the village chief and their deputy and works to compile and regularly update the list of poor households within their community.

The Commune / Sangkat Working Group then uses the information provided by the VWG to process any request for interviews, and eventually to conduct interviews leading to the acquisition of ID-poor / equity cards. Once communities have their equity cards, poor households can now amend any information regarding their situation which could potentially lead to the removal of equity cards – if their financial situation improved, for example. The digitalized system also allows for members to easily file objections, and suggestions with regards to the overall system procedure.

⁸ Ministry of Planning Cambodia. The National Identification of Poor Households Programme—a Key Tool to Support Equitable Development. 2009, p 2.

⁹ Ibid, p 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ministry of Planning Cambodia. The National Identification of Poor Households Programme—a Key Tool to Support Equitable Development. 2009.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Objective

This report was designed to assess the success of the ID-Poor program within Phnom Penh to serve as a baseline for future monitoring, and to ensure accountability and transparency of existing and new mechanisms introduced within the program. A mixed-methods approach was used, from desk review; monitoring reports; semi-structured stakeholder interviews, to provide recommendations based on the findings. This assessment leans on previous STT reports – notably the Phnom Penh Survey (2017) – in which it was found that Phnom Penh has a total of 277 urban poor settlements.

A further internal and unpublished report was done in 2019, in which representatives from 232 urban poor communities were interviewed about the ID-Poor system during Covid-19.

This ID-poor research aims to provide some insights into the experiences of the urban poor communities of Phnom Penh, when accessing and using the system.

2.2. Selection criteria and scope

37 out of the 277 total urban poor communities were contacted for this research – encompassing 5,019 families, or 3,860 households. No communities from outside of Phnom Penh were included in the study.

2.3. Information gathering

Data collection took place in May 2022, solely through questionnaires distributed to community representatives, about their communities' ID-poor status and situation. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Part 1 covered general questions about the communities and their general usage of ID-Poor cards, including the types of services they received and the difficulties faced when using the card. The situation of communities that do not have ID-Poor cards was investigated in Part 2. Part 3 surveyed the effectiveness of local authorities' distribution processes by asking how and when the information was delivered from authorities. Part 4 enquired about the ID-Poor card distribution process, including any recommendations that community representatives may have.

2.4. Limitations

The study was conducted with 37 target communities – and data was collected via written questionnaires, as opposed to multiple rounds of in-person or phone interviews which was the case in the 2019 internal research. Therefore, the study is not as comprehensive as the previous report, and it may not reflect the opinions of communities as precisely. In addition, researchers were heavily reliant upon the answers of respondents for data.

This research is not presented as statistically representative of the ID-Poor status of urban poor communities in Phnom Penh. It should be used to outline the main trends in the ID-Poor process. The researchers acknowledge that it is possible that residents who were not interviewed from the communities studied, could disagree with findings, based on their individual experiences.

This follow-up research was conducted after the launching of the ON-Demand ID-Poor program, which started during the previous survey in 2019/2020.

This report is meant to serve only as a baseline. STT is working with partners responsible for the implementation of the ID-Poor program to ensure that its services are available to all people who are poor and vulnerable.

3. Key Findings

Part 1: General information about getting the ID-poor card

The number of people who received the ID-poor card from the ID-poor program of the Ministry of Planning

Amazingly, STT found that only 3 out of 37 communities monitored in 2022 have not received the ID-poor card at all. This accounts for 242 households and 243 families. Most of the members in the target communities are working as factory workers, garment workers, and other low-paying jobs. The community representatives answered that the people's domestic fiscal situation has worsened during the first and the second cycles of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the people had to live under tough conditions. Notably, one of the families without an ID-poor card has a disabled family member. Families without an ID-poor card flagged their concerns over their domestic situations to their local authorities, but no responses nor solutions were given. One community member worried that their insecure land and tenure situation was the reason for them not receiving the card.



Community Quote: Now, I am still looking forward to seeing the ID-poor provide some support for my family in this hard situation.

Graphic 1: The number of target communities that possess the ID-poor card in 2022

Most of the surveyed community members, that had received the ID-poor card mentioned that they did not have other key legal documents such as their family book. This indicates that poor community members can effectively receive the ID-poor card and its services without the need for any particular document. However, the lack of identification documents was widespread, and remains a challenge for the urban and rural poor, notably for matters related to land and tenure security.

Based on the findings, 34 target communities had at least one family that possessed the ID-poor card during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing them to receive timely support. On the other hand, only a small number of families within these communities owned the card, as expressed in Table 1. Among the 4,776 families in the 34 communities, only 1,069 families (22%) received the ID-poor card by the end of the second outbreak of COVID-19 in 2022. The breakdown of the number of families that possess the ID-poor card shows that the majority of the 34 communities have less than 50 families in possession of the ID-poor card (Table 1).

Table 1: The comparison between the total number of families in each community with the number of families who have received the ID-poor card from the ID-poor program as of 2022. Note that the names of communities have been emitted for safety reasons.

Less than 20 families with ID-poor cards per community		21 to 50 families with ID-poor card		Over 50 families with ID-poor card	
Total number of families per community	The number of families who have the ID-poor card	Total number of families per community	The number of families who have the ID-poor card	Total number of families per community	The number of families who have the ID-poor card
140	5	80	40	138	70
110	3	121	25	367	105
83	1	24	22	113	75
75	3	145	25	392	244
93	8	244	50	63	63
30	10	112	25		
130	1	140	50		
42	15	766	24		
250	12	46	20		
33	6	160	24		
80	7	104	44		
50	6	250	44		
72	6				
27	19				
150	7				
42	4				
104	6				

Complaints of the ID-poor program from urban poor communities

73% of the 37 surveyed urban poor communities have raised complaints against the ID-poor process, and the way it was implemented within their jurisdiction. Most of the complaints were related to bad access to ID-poor services, slow interview processes, and slow responses to community requests. Some community members even raised some concerns with regards to bias: community members were seen to be receiving ID-poor cards because of social proximity with authorities. This led to complainants asking for more transparency and monitoring over the implementation process, especially as authorities were prone to prioritizing their acquaintances.

Community Quote: The ID-poor is being shared among the rich people and their friends or relatives. Sometimes I feel disappointed with this process; I always question why the ID-poor is being provided to rich people, not the really poor people.

Nearly 32% of all surveyed families who received the ID-poor card are categorized as poor number one (P1 – very poor according to the Ministry of Planning's scoring system). They have a strong need to use the program for hospital fees, and for improving their general living conditions.

The 34 urban poor communities that did have the ID-poor card require financial support and better access to daily food and public services such as school education, medical services, and cash transfers. However, in many cases, there is no prioritized consideration nor assistance for the ID-card holders by the service providers. Community members claimed doctors at the public hospitals are often still not well informed about the ID-poor program or are unwilling to assist ID-poor card holders.

Community quote: The government officials who work at the public hospital did not respond to me at all; they just provided me with a serum and did not look at me more. It seems that they are careless for poor people.

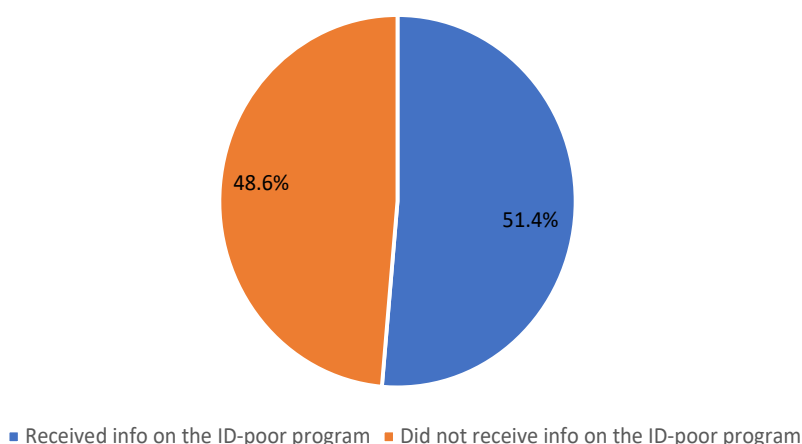
Part 2: General information about the communities without ID-poor card

Respondents from the 3 communities where no family possessed the ID-poor card claimed that they heard about the ID-poor card via their community neighbours and that they received a joint NGO training. However, this seemingly wasn't enough information – as they still didn't manage to get the card. NGOs and other relevant institutions could play a bigger part in raising awareness of the ID-poor system and procedures.

Community quote: I don't know why the authority did not come to inform us on ID-Poor card even though we live under the threat of flood and poverty.

Part 3: Local authority ID-poor distribution process

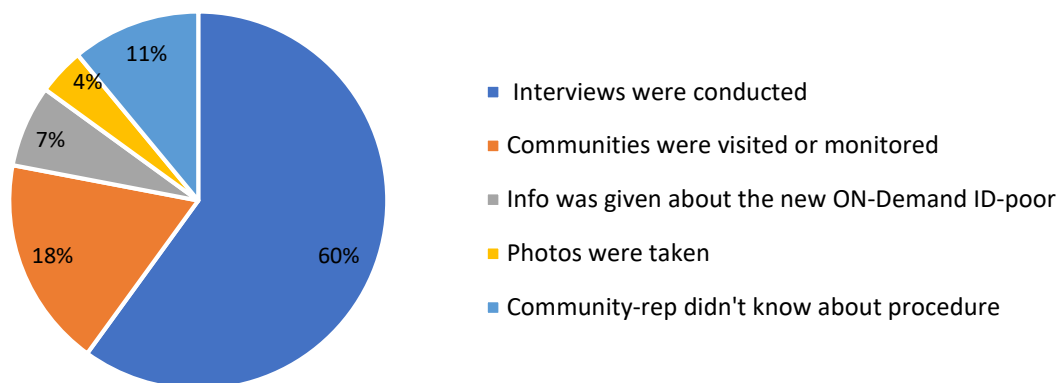
51.4% of the 37 surveyed communities claimed to have received information on the benefits of the ID-poor program. Local authorities reached out to communities by using various means, such as loudspeaker announcements, word-of-mouth through individual household visits, or posters. These approaches were insufficient in raising awareness to every community, especially as some community members were absent at the time of visits. Four communities (744 families) did say that their local authorities left a poster in their home while they were away, which allowed them to learn about ID-poor. Community members are still too reliant on authorities to bring information to them. There should be more widespread awareness that information is already available both online, and at the local level: community members can approach their Village Working Groups anytime to learn about the ID-poor and to set up interviews.



Graphic 2: ID-poor distribution process

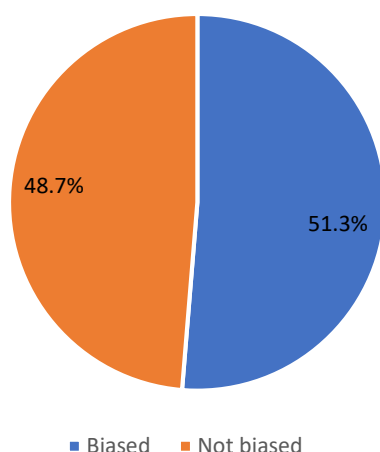
Part 4: ID-poor card procedure

60% of the community interviewees claimed that the local authorities conducted interviews with the households, and 18% said the authority visited them only to monitor the general situation of their community. 7% of the respondents stated that the local authority only informed them about the upcoming ID-poor program, and 4% said authorities just took photos of community members – without clear indications as to why. 11% of community representatives remain completely unaware of the program.



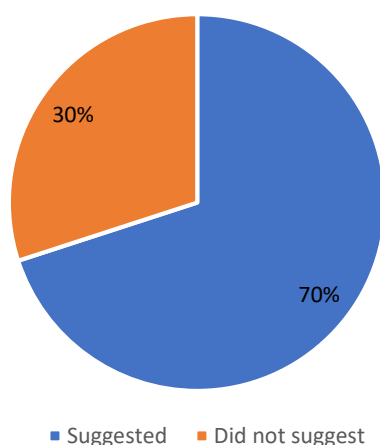
Graphic 3: ID-poor card procedure

51.3% of the respondents think the ID-poor program is still very biased, and that it is difficult to apply for the program and to access its benefits. The authorities and other relevant institutions are yet to inform people clearly about the program and its procedure.



Graphic 4: Communities who considered the ID-poor program to be biased

Almost 70% of the 37 communities suggested that the Ministry of Planning revamp parts of the ID-poor procedure. Meanwhile, it would be a good idea to devise a monitoring procedure to make sure the process is effective and fair for those who are poverty-ridden. The ON-Demand system does have a new suggestion and objection mechanism hopefully this will work to address and solve issues of bias and discrimination in the future.



Graphic 5: Communities suggested that the MoP change some parts of the ID-poor procedure

4. Conclusions and Next Steps

In Phnom Penh, there are 243 families who are prospective ID-Poor recipients, yet still lack access to ID-Poor cards and its services. These 243 families are from the 3 communities out of the 37 surveyed, that claimed not to have received information about the system. The main outcome of this research is that awareness has to be improved so that the ID-Poor system can benefit all vulnerable people in Phnom Penh.

Indeed, there seems to be a lingering lack of understanding of the system from both communities and authorities with regards to the implementation process. The lack of cooperation and assistance from other institutions such as NGOs and civil society groups must also be acknowledged. NGOs can and should play a key role in raising awareness of the ON-Demand ID-poor system in the future, notably as the system becomes fully digital.

The ID-Poor program is a step towards social inclusion, access to justice, access to health care, access to education, and with better implementation in urban areas, this should become a reality. The On-Demand ID-Poor system will make things easier for communities, but also needs to be monitored in order to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of the system.

5. Recommendations

Technical and Funding Partners:

- Conduct monitoring of the authorities given the responsibility of implementing the program, to ensure bias and discrimination are kept in check.
- Provide more resources, funding, trainings or otherwise, to local authorities to allow them to implement the program at best possible capacity.
- Increase support for CSOs working on poverty alleviation and human rights issues so that they can participate in monitoring the implementation of the program.

Ministry of Planning

- Lead or commission investigations to make sure interviewers or authorities do not use personal bias, political prejudice, or any other form of discrimination.
- Monitor and increase pressure on local authorities in areas where significant discrepancies are identified, such as slow implementation, and lack of information.
- Publish information and regular updates on the ID-Poor program through as many mediums as possible.
- Revise the urban ID-Poor questionnaire to better reflect the multi variant poverty indicators in urban areas.

Local Authorities

- Educate the public on social protection mechanisms created to benefit them, through different mediums.
- Provide sufficient notice to community members regarding the exact date and time interviews will be conducted
- Collaborate with grassroot NGOs as much as possible to ensure that every poor citizen receives an ID-Poor card.

CSOs

- Consider a variety of ways to share and disseminate information about the ID-poor in accordance to the local context
- Work with the Commune / Sangkat authorities to receive and provide information on urban poor households and the situation of communities
- Collaborate with other NGOs in order not to flood communities with too much information coming from different sources (ex: have a monitoring/ mapping system where NGOs can see who is already active within different regions and communities).

Community Members

- Approach Village Working Groups, or village chiefs and other authorities to obtain information related to the ID-poor process.
- Use online tools and information to keep informed of the ID-poor process.
- Community members should be proactive in signing up and registering onto the system – notably as the On-Demand system will be easily accessible on smartphones.



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Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organization • a Cambodian Urban NGO

Tel: (855) 23 555 1964

Website: www.teangtnaut.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sttcambodia>