Briefing Note

Senate Region 6

Causes of Poverty and its Implications in Rural Cambodia

Researcher: **Dr. LUCH Likanan**

Assisted by: **Mrs. CHEA Malika**

July, 2015

Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia

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Introduction

Cambodia's high economic growth in the past two decades (except during the global economic crisis between 2008 and 2010) has not translated into development albeit the poverty head count has dropped significantly from well around 50% in 2004 to 17.7% across the nation in 2012 vis-à-vis 54% in 2004 and 20.8% in rural areas in 2012 (see Graph 2).[1] Poverty is multi-dimensions and interlocked issues for which no single factor explains all.[2] The root causes are diverse which range from political history spectrum,[3] to natural hazard,[4] agricultural land, soft and hard infrastructures (e.g. institution and irrigation and road),[5] and education and employability.[6]

Political history, i.e. genocide, the prolonged civil war and political instability, is a precondition for a high poverty incidence in Cambodia for decades to come as has left Cambodia with a very few human resources to build on and a fragile institution to fix (see fragile states). Natural hazard puts further downward pressure on the rural poors who mainly rely on agriculture for their livelihood in combination with the effect of global warming and sharp diminishing natural resources.[7] Small farm land is a long withstanding issue as it affects productivity which results in a more likelihood of poverty incidence.[8] Soft and hard infrastructure is also an important variable in the poverty equation as institution impedes the development process that requires a structural reform such as D&D.[9] Irrigation has been the central part in agricultural development around the world but in Cambodia famers rely on rain which is unpredictable. While most farmers living rural areas have to rely on agriculture for their livelihood, employment opportunities which are a main income source in rural areas are limited.[10]

Since the poverty is dynamic and evolved over time, it is difficult to account all factors that could induce poverty incidence in rural areas, this briefing note is to provide some important the root causes of the poverty at rural areas and the implication that policy could be drawn up on. The organization begins by introduction, root causes of poverty, implications, and conclusion.

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[1] World-Bank. 2014. *World Bank Data.* Accessed 1 19, 2014.

[2] CDRI. 2012. *Understanding the Poverty Dynamics: Evidence from Nine Villages in Cambodia.* Working Paper Series No. 69, Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institstute (CDRI).

[3] Marston, John. 2011. "Introduction ." In *Anthropology and Community in Cambodia: Reflection on the Work of May Ebihara*, by John Marston, pp. 5-20. Monash: Monash University Press Caulfield.

[4] Kim, Sour, Chem Phalla, So Sovannarith, Kim Sean Somatra, Pech Sokhem. 2014. *Methods and Tools Applied for Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment in Cambodia's Tonle Sap Basin.* Working Paper No. 97, Cambodia Development Resource Institute, Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute.

[5] Chea, Chou, Nang Phirum, Whitehead Isabelle, Hirsch Phillip, and Thompson Anna. 2011. *Decentralized Governance of Irrigation Water in Cambodia: Matching Principles to Local Realities.* Working Paper Series No. 62, Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute and University of Sydney.

Governance of Irrigation Water in Cambodia: Matching Principles to Local Realities. Working Paper Series No. 62, Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute and University of Sydney.

[6] Phann, Dalis. 2014. *Links between Employment and Poverty in Cambodia.* Working Paper Series No. 92, Cambodia Development Resource Institute, Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute.

[7] Luch, Likanan. 2012. "A Role of Remittances for Smoothing Variations in Household Income in Rural Cambodia." *The Journal of Rural Problems* 48 (2): 10-21.

Yagura, Kenjiro. 2005. "Why Illness Causes More Serious Damage than Crop Failure in Rural Camboida." *Development Change* 36 (4): 759-783.

[8] Luch, Likanan. 2012. "A Role of Remittances

[9] Chea, Chou, Nang Phirum, Whitehead Isabelle, Hirsch Phillip, and Thompson Anna. 2011. *Decentralized*

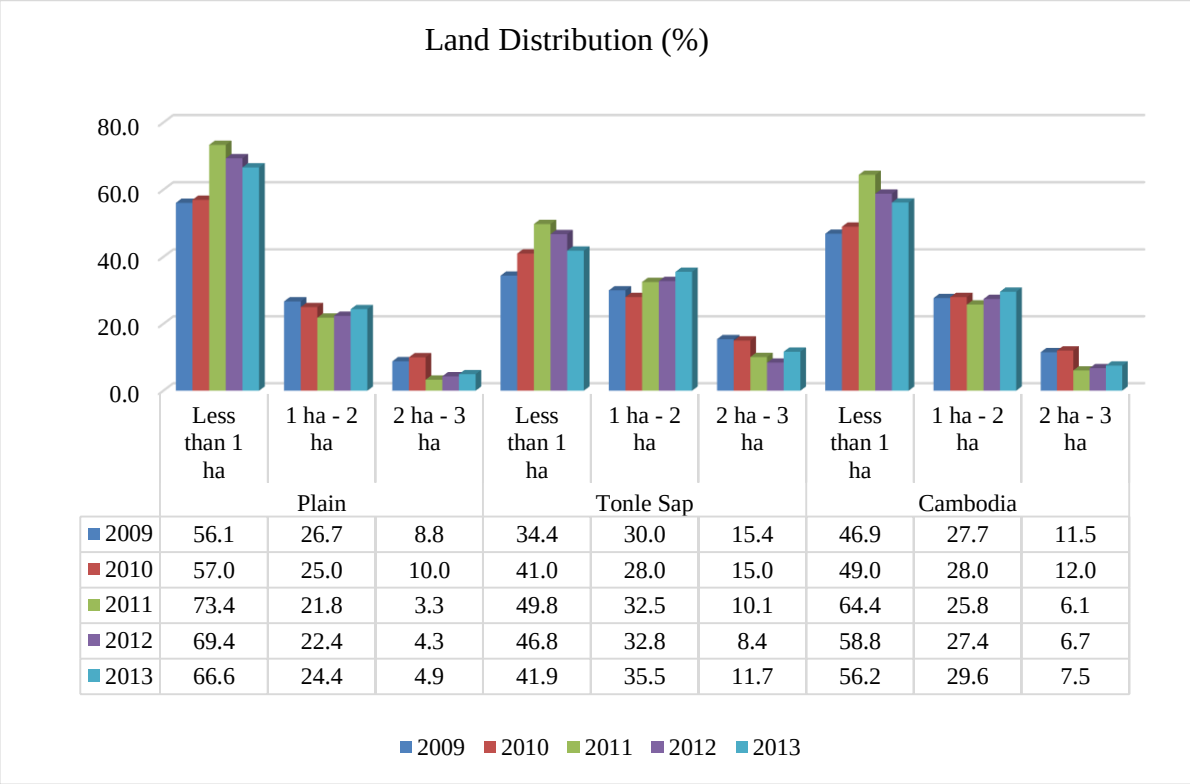
[10] Luch, Likanan. 2012. "A Role of Remittances

Phann, Dalis. 2014. *Links between Employment and Poverty in Cambodia*

Agricultural Land and Poverty

Agricultural land is one of the most important variables in the production process as it determines the level of agricultural productivity and poverty.[11] However, the percentage of Cambodian farm households living in plain area possess less than 1 ha of agricultural land increased from 56% in 2009 to 73%[12] in 2011 and declined to 69% in 2012 and 66% and 2013 (Figure 1).[13] Moreover there are only about 20% of farm households from the plain area process agricultural land between 1 ha and 2 ha. Thus, in total, about 95% of farm households living in plain possess small agricultural land (less than 3 ha). It is even more interesting to break the land possession by gender for which only around 15% of women possess land between 2009 and 2013 (Table A1),[14] implying that women are more likely to be poorer prone to shocks than men who possess more agricultural land. However, at the aggregate level, it clearly suggests that majority of Cambodian are working in agriculture and living on a small piece of land that could prone to shocks at household level and village level and could also place them into poverty as they need to sell productive assets to mitigate shocks.[15]

Figure 1. Selected Land Distribution by Region



	Plain			Tonle Sap			Cambodia		
	Less than 1 ha	1 ha - 2 ha	2 ha - 3 ha	Less than 1 ha	1 ha - 2 ha	2 ha - 3 ha	Less than 1 ha	1 ha - 2 ha	2 ha - 3 ha
2009	56.1	26.7	8.8	34.4	30.0	15.4	46.9	27.7	11.5
2010	57.0	25.0	10.0	41.0	28.0	15.0	49.0	28.0	12.0
2011	73.4	21.8	3.3	49.8	32.5	10.1	64.4	25.8	6.1
2012	69.4	22.4	4.3	46.8	32.8	8.4	58.8	27.4	6.7
2013	66.6	24.4	4.9	41.9	35.5	11.7	56.2	29.6	7.5

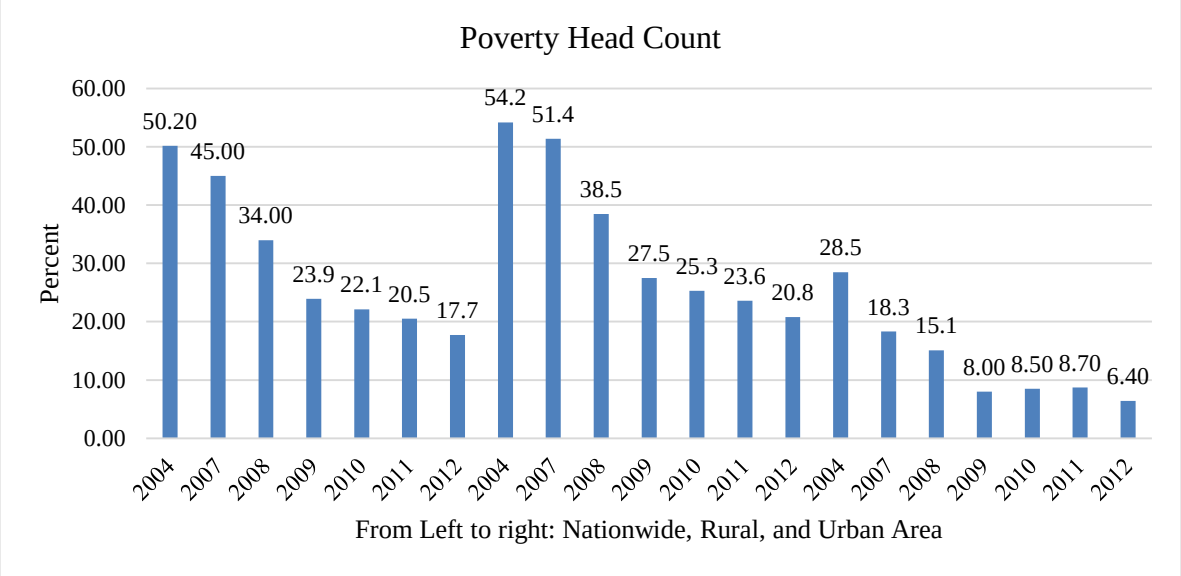
Source: NIS (CSES 2009-2013)

Small agricultural land also reflects the higher rate of poverty incidence in rural areas[16] and long run inequality as a result of unequal land distribution between geographical differences and between men and women.[17] Table A1 reveals the

[11] It is important to note that agricultural land is the most important key determinant, but other associated factors also play an important role. They are farming method, technological adoption, and impute intensification are commonly observed in rural Cambodia.
[12] This may due to the effect of global financial crisis where land become less speculative.
[13] NIS. 2014. *NIS: CSES Table 2013.* Accessed 3 18, 2015.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Yagura, Kenjiro. 2005. "Why Illness Causes More Serious Damage than Crop Failure in." *Development Change* 36 (4): 759-783.
[16] Luch, Likanan. 2012. "A Role of Remittances
[17] NIS. 2014. *NIS: CSES Table 2013*

poverty different rates between urban and rural areas. Although poverty head count has significantly declined by almost half, the rate in rural areas is well around 21% compared to only 6.4% in 2012. Remarkably poverty rate in Kamchaymear District, Prey Veng province is as high as 56% by taking ID poor classification into consideration (Poor level 1, 12.1%, Poor level 2, 18.5%, and Poor level 3, 28.6%).[18] Table A1 suggests further on the greater inequality between people living in urban and rural. The total income of the poorest 20% is fewer than that of the richest 10%. The combination of income of the lowest 20% and second lowest 20% is still smaller than that of the richest 10% which suggests that inequality has been widening.[19]

Figure 2. Poverty Head Count at Urban, Rural and Nationwide



Source: The authors manipulate World Bank Data (2015)

A number of empirical studies found the significant effects of agricultural land on the poverty rate at rural Cambodia. The larger the non-irrigated agricultural land, the less likely the household being poor as it increases the consumption per capita of the households up to 4.12%.[20] Agricultural land is also found to contribute to the household income significantly but if the land size is greater than 2 ha. Agricultural land which less than 2 ha has an inverse relationship with household income since it is inefficient. It is optimal to have more than 2 ha of farm land at least.[21]

Table 1. Income Inequality by People Group

Income Share by Group (percent)	**Year**						
	1994	2004	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Group 1: The poorest 20%	8.04	7.98	6.95	7.85	8.03	8.51	8.99
Group 2: The very poor 20%	10.96	11.43	10.05	11.6	11.66	12.02	12.46
Group 3: The poor 20%	14.44	15.37	13.95	15.67	15.68	15.80	16.11

[18] RGC. 2011. *ID Poor.* Poverty Report, Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning. http://www.idpoor.gov.kh/ReportFiles/Public/Rd05_Year2011/P14_Prey_Veng_PVG_Eng/Rd05_P14_PVG_Report14_Eng_HholdBased.pdf.

[19] World-Bank. 2014. *World Bank Data*

[20] Phim, Runsinarith. 2011. *Determinants of Rural Poverty in Cambodia.* Doctoral Dissertation, Nagoya: Nagoya University.

[21] Luch, Likanan. 2012. "A Role of Remittances

Group 4: The middle income group 20%	19.73	21.22	20.16	21.43	21.48	21.18	21.24
Group 5: The high income group 20%	46.83	44.00	48.89	43.45	43.15	42.49	41.20
Highest income group 10%	32.99	29.09	33.99	28.57	28.20	28.01	26.91
Lowest income group 10%	3.67	3.56	3.12	3.44	3.55	3.80	4.04

Source: The authors manipulate World Bank Data (2015)

However, the question is would poverty decrease in the presence of irrigation system? The answer is yes, but with greater irrigation system, poverty incidence is fewer. Irrigation has been found to have a profound impact on rural poverty around the globe. The empirical study from Cambodia suggests that irrigated land contributes to the increase of per capita consumption by 4.27%; meaning that if the land is arranged, the farm households' consumption are more like increase and poverty is reduced.[22] Moreover irrigation enable not only manageable the natural hazard during rainy season, but also allows dry season agricultural diversification which is the main source of income enhancement as it leads to increase a household income by 15%.[23] As estimated, a 1% increase in the water use will lead to 0.06% rise in the wet season rice production or a 0.12% in the dry season.[24] These evidences suggest the important of irrigation system and the optimal land size to boost the agricultural productivity and reduce poverty in the rural areas.

Table 2. Agricultural Land by Sex of Household Head and by Zone (Percent)

Zone	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Cambodia	13.2	86.6	15.0	85.0	14.7	85.3	12.5	87.5	12.6	87.4
Phnom Penh	7.0	93.0	8.0	92.0	14.0	86.0	9.3	90.7	8.0	92.0
Plain	15.8	84.2	13.0	87.0	16.9	83.1	16.0	84.0	14.0	86.0
Tonle Sap	12.4	87.6	22.0	79.0	13.7	86.3	12.6	87.4	11.8	88.2
Coastal	12.9	87.1	13.0	87.0	20.3	79.7	6.1	93.9	12.2	87.8
Plateau/Mountain	10.4	89.6	9.0	92.0	11.4	88.6	7.8	92.2	11.8	88.2

Source: NIS (CSES 2009-2013)

Shocks and Poverty

In the absence of social safety net, farm household in Cambodia is prone to shocks. In a well-documented paper on how farm household cope with shocks, it suggested that farm households very often face disease and unemployed which put them on the forefront of poverty or possible chronic poverty where they have to sell their productive assets such as agricultural land, cattle, and agricultural machineries to spend on medical treatment.[25]

[22] Phim, Runsinarith. 2011. *Determinants of Rural Poverty in Cambodia*

[23] Engval, Anders and Ari Kokko. 2007. *Poverty and Land Policy in Cambodia.* Working Paper 233, Stockhom: Stockhom School of Economics.

[24] Cited in Silva, Sanjiv de, Robyn Johnston and Sonali Senaratna Sellamuttu. 2013. *Agriculture, Irrigation, and Poverty Reduction in Cambodia: Policy Narratives and Ground Realities Compared.* Working Paper, Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute. http://publications.iwmi.org/pdf/H046294.pdf.

[25] Yagura, Kenjiro. 2005. "Why Illness Causes More Serious Damage than Crop Failure

The data from National Institute of Statistics (Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2009-2013) shows that in rural Cambodia between 2009-2013 the share of consumption on health care accounts for around 10% compared to food and beverage around 50% and water, housing, and electricity around 30%.[26] Thus, it is estimated that the per capita consumption of a household may deducted by 7.94% if the household face shocks.[27] The impacts could lead to long run inequality between the rich and poor and between female headed household and male headed one. Farm household who possesses agricultural land more than 3 ha are less likely to fall into chronic poverty as the household that has no land or has a small piece of land.[28]

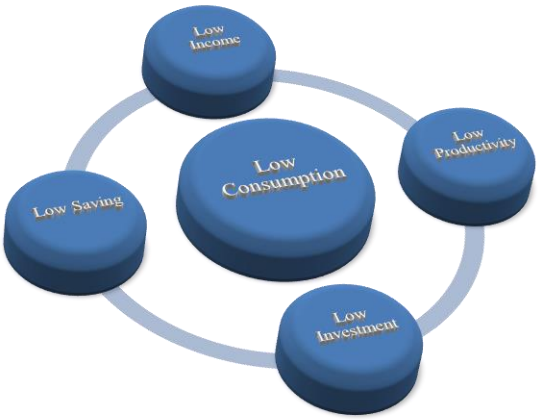
The effect is even greater for female headed farm households as about 15% of them own agricultural land.[29] As estimated, a head or any member of farm households are unable to perform the task and estimate to have income lost about 0.2 million riels and the cost of unemployed would up to 0.7 million riels.[30] Although this figure would be significantly higher if all shocks at both household and village levels are compounded, shocks at the village level are less likely to be idiosyncratic for which shocks affect all most all the farm households at the same magnitude at the same and farm households that hold more assets or land are likely to affect most too, so shocks at village level may place entire community into poverty and reduce inequality gap in the future albeit at risk of reducing social wellbeing of the whole community.[31]

Education and Poverty

Human resource is the most important factor in the development process. Empirically, countries, East Asia and Europe, which has historically, culturally and institutionally high degree of educated population have developed at faster pace with more equal and equitable as quality population contributed to stable institutional building, mature political system, innovation, etc.[32] In ASEAN, the picture is at stark except Singapore. Most ASEAN nations have underperformed in terms of educational outcome though some countries have performed moderately overtime and achieved greater outcome than the rest.[33] Despite Cambodia has tried so hard to improve the quality of education and resulting in huge improvement in the primary school attendance rate, educational attainment remains low at lower and upper secondary school among rural population and women group.[34]

Figure 3. The Vicious Cycle of Poverty

[26] NIS. 2014. *NIS: CSES Table 2013*
[27] Phim, Runsinarith. 2011. *Determinants of Rural Poverty in Cambodia*
[28] Luch, Likanan. 2012. "A Role of Remittances
[29] NIS. 2014. *NIS: CSES Table 2013*
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Aoki, Masahiko, Hyung-Ki Kim, and Masahiro Okuno-Fujiwara. 1997. *The Role of Government in East Asian Economic Development: Comparative Institutional Analysis.* Oxford: Clarendon Press Oxford.
[33] UNDP. 2013. *Human Development Report.* 11 15. Accessed 7 21, 2015. http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/education-index.
[34] NIS. 2014. *NIS: CSES Table 2013*



Source: Adopted from Soubbontina, Tatyana P. and Chaterine A. Sheram (2000)
Note: Low level of education that leads to unequal distribution of educational opportunities is the main cause of poverty and long run inequality. Numerous studies suggest that households with low level of education are poorer than their counterparts. Because they are poor, they are less likely to invest on their children education and big share of their disposable income is spent on food consumption not saving. As a result, they earn little, consume more on food, save less or no saving, and spend little on children education. This is called vicious cycle of poverty which is impossible to break unless people are given an equal opportunity in accessing to good education.[35]

The implication is that higher level of education of household heads will lead to higher income and lower poverty incidence. Since income and expenditure are the two most important poverty indices, increases in either consumption or income are hypothesized to decrease in poverty incidence. Empirical evidences from Cambodia strongly suggest that educational level has a positive effect on the poverty incidence. A one-year increase in the education of household heads lead to a probability of 1.8% decrease in poverty.[36] Moreover, a one-year increase in the maximum years of education of any member in the household contributes to the increase in household income for household with agricultural land by 7% and for household with no land by 6%.[37] The figure is even higher when taking female headed household into account, household income increases by 53% for households with land and 74% for households with no land.[38] Moreover other studies also found similar outcomes. Households that household heads completed lower and upper secondary school earned higher income, 7.5 million riels and 1.3 million riels. Households that have the heads completed higher education even significantly earn more income, some colleges, 2.3 million riels and, college, 3.96 million riels. These findings clearly suggest that low education is a root cause of poverty and inequality (also see figure 3).[39]

[35] Soubbontina, Tatyana P. and Chaterine A. Sheram. 2000. "Poverty." Chap. 6 in *Beyond the Economic Growth: Meeting the Challenge of Global Development*, by Tatyana P. and Chaterine A. Sheram Soubbontina. Washington, D.C: World Bank. http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/beyond/beyondco/beg_all.pdf.
[36] Phann, Dalis. 2014. *Links between Employment and Poverty in Cambodia*
[37] Engval, Anders and Ari Kokko. 2007. *Poverty and Land Policy in Cambodia*
[38] Ibid.
[39] Luch, Likanan. 2012. "A Role of Remittances

Conclusion and Implication

During the past decades Cambodia experienced fast economic growth and robust poverty reduction but has yet translated into inclusive development since the growth concentrated in a few sectors such as garment and services. The growth in agricultural sector is slow and resulted in the high concentration of poverty in rural areas.

There are a number of policy responses by the Royal Government of Cambodia notably the land distribution prior and after the general election in 2013. Land reform is on the key optical platform and has found to contribute to the poverty reduction in rural areas where around 80% of the households living in the rural areas possess land less than 2 ha which is not optimal for agricultural production. The existing studies suggests the inverse relationship between poverty and land holding especially land with irrigation. Combined with lack of access to credit and traditional cultivation practice, land intensification diminishes land quality hence productivity that could even push farm households into poverty.

Shocks and poverty have a strong positive correlation. In rural areas where agricultural land holding is small and farm households have to rely on farming for their livelihood, shocks could weep out their assets accumulated over years. Diseases have been the catalyst of chronic poverty for the people living above poverty line as they have to sell their productive assets to mitigate shocks and relocate their productive household members to diversify household income which could hinder the probability of school aged children education. Increasing the number of health care centers and the number of medical doctors and nurse and reduce the cost of medical treatment could relief their burden and hold them beck from falling into chronic poverty. This put them further into the vicious cycle which impossible for them to break without effective policy responses. Natural hazard resilience via technological adoption, access to credit, and accessible irrigation system would be a short and medium term responses but providing equal opportunity to good education to school aged children through some practical public services such as targeted cash transfer, scholarship, health care, and transportation could be the possible responses in the longer term.

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Yagura, Kenjiro. 2005. "Why Illness Causes More Serious Damage than Crop Failure in." *Development Change* 36 (4): 759-783.

Appendix

Table A3. The Size of Agricultural Land by Sex and Year

Area (m^2)	Cambodia	Phnom Penh	Plain	Tonle Sap	Coastal	Plateau/ Mountain
			2009			
Less than 10,000	46.9	65.9	56.1	34.4	55.3	38.9
10,000 - 19,999	27.7	24.2	26.7	30.0	29.3	25.3
20,000 - 29,999	11.5	1.6	8.8	15.4	7.8	14.5
30,000 - 39,999	5.8	1.3	3.9	8.2	3.5	8.0
40,000 - 49,999	3.0	2.2	1.7	4.2	1.5	5.0
50,000 - 99,999	4.1	4.1	2.3	5.9	2.0	7.1
100,000-	1.0	0.8	0.4	2.0	0.6	1.2
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
			2010			
Less than 10,000	49.0	67.0	57.0	41.0	55.0	34.0
10,000 - 19,999	28.0	17.0	25.0	28.0	31.0	32.0
20,000 - 29,999	12.0	7.0	10.0	15.0	5.0	16.0
30,000 - 39,999	5.0	5.0	4.0	7.0	5.0	7.0
40,000 - 49,999	3.0	3.0	1.0	4.0	2.0	3.0
50,000 - 99,999	3.0	0.0	2.0	5.0	1.0	6.0
100,000-	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
			2011			
Less than 10,000	64.4	74.3	73.4	49.8	80.3	57.8
10,000 - 19,999	25.8	16.0	21.8	32.5	16.6	30.0
20,000 - 29,999	6.1	3.7	3.3	10.1	2.7	8.2
30,000 - 39,999	1.8	0.0	0.6	3.6	0.5	2.6
40,000 - 49,999	0.7	0.9	0.5	1.0	0.0	0.9
50,000 - 99,999	1.0	2.8	0.3	2.5	0.0	0.6
100,000-	0.3	2.3	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.0
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
			2012			
Less than 10,000	58.8	80.8	69.4	46.8	60.8	51.3
10,000 - 19,999	27.4	15.4	22.4	32.8	28.4	31.2
20,000 - 29,999	6.7	2.4	4.3	8.4	9.1	9.4
30,000 - 39,999	2.9	0.0	1.3	4.7	1.1	4.7
40,000 - 49,999	1.5	0.0	0.8	3.4	0.0	0.7
50,000 - 99,999	2.0	0.4	1.6	2.7	0.5	2.3
100,000-	0.6	0.9	0.3	1.2	0.0	0.4
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
			2013			
Less that 10,000	56.2	69.4	66.6	41.9	60.9	51.9
10,000 - 19,999	29.6	26.5	24.4	35.5	31.9	31.8
20,000 - 29,999	7.5	1.5	4.9	11.7	4.9	8.2
30,000 - 39,999	3.2	2.6	1.6	5.2	0.7	5.0

40,000 - 49,999	1.7	0.0	1.3	2.8	1.5	0.9
50,000 - 99,999	1.6	0.0	1.1	2.4	0.1	2.3
100,000-	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.0
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: NIS (CSES 2009-2013)