

## **Growing Old in the Former Khmer Rouge Stronghold of Pailin**



**Analyzing Development Issues**

**Trainees (Round 17) and Team**

**November 2006**

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Problem Statement</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Research Objectives</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Policy Framework</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Finding and Analysis</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Background Characteristics</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Migration History</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Livelihood Security</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Living Arrangements</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Health and Health Care</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Community Participation</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Appendix 1. ADI Trainee and Team Researchers</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>List of ADI Research Studies</b>	<b>31</b>

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## **Abstract**

This ADI study attempts to document the experiences and prevailing situations of elderly persons in two communes of Pailin municipality. More specifically, with respect to these elders, it seeks to identify background characteristics, livelihood strategies and security, living arrangements and support networks, and to inquire into health and health care conditions. A survey questionnaire was conducted with 153 persons, 55 years and older, in 16 villages of the two communes. In addition key informant interviews were conducted with local authorities and selected elders, and focus group discussions were convened with elderly villagers.

By and large, the elderly persons surveyed were a migrant population. Khmer Rouge forces retreating from Vietnamese troops moved into the area in early 1979. Another surge of immigration occurred after integration in late 1996. As their main source of current income, the male elders in all age groups relied more on their own work, and the work of their spouses, while the female elders relied more on their children, and the spouses of their children. While health services were available, the research indicated that the provision of competent and affordable health care remained a priority issue for the aged. Despite the different backgrounds among those surveyed, with some elders former Khmer Rouge cadre and other elders victims of the revolutionary regime, most of those interviewed suffered poor health and lived in conditions of poverty. The Pol Pot debacle and the prolonged years of conflict had brought impoverishment and tragedy to all.

# Growing Old in the Former Khmer Rouge Stronghold of Pailin

## Problem Statement

In recent years policy makers and development practitioners have become increasingly aware of the special circumstances of elderly persons in Cambodia. In 1998 HelpAge International and the then Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Veteran Affairs conducted a pioneering study on the situation of older people in Cambodia.<sup>1</sup> This study provided poignant insights into how poverty and vulnerability threatened elders in Cambodia while highlighting the contributions older people continued to make to their families and communities. The authors argued that poverty reduction and provision of competent and affordable health care remained priority issues for the aged.

In 2004 the Population Studies Center of the University of Michigan undertook a comprehensive Survey of the Elderly in Cambodia supplying a valuable empirical account of the demographic, social and economic, and health situation of the country's older generation.<sup>2</sup> In addition the 2004 Survey examined issues specific to the turbulent and debilitating aspects of Cambodia's recent history. With respect to the impact of past conflicts and social upheaval on the lives of older people the research reported that over two-fifths of the surviving elders lost at least one child and nearly one fourth of the women lost a spouse during the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979.<sup>3</sup> With regard to the impact of AIDS on elderly persons the survey findings and supplemental interviews indicated that older-aged parents played a major role in providing living quarters, caregiving, and paying expenses for adult sons and daughters who became ill and died of the disease.<sup>4</sup> In 2003 HelpAge International conducted case study research in Battambang province which revealed that older persons were the primary caregivers both for their adult children suffering from AIDS and for their orphaned grandchildren.<sup>5</sup>

The growing literature on elderly persons in Cambodia has clear potential to inform government policy and influence NGO programming. It likewise affords a useful starting point for conducting comparative research on elderly persons in regions of the country that

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Veterans Affairs and HelpAge International, *Summary Report on the Situation of Older People in Cambodia*, (Phnom Penh: Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Veterans Affairs and HelpAge International, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> John Knodel, Souvan Kiny Kim, Zachary Zimmer, and Sina Puch, *Older Persons in Cambodia: A Profile from the 2004 Survey of Elderly*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Population Studies Center, May 2005). This study was conducted with a representative sample survey of 1273 persons aged 60 years and over in an area covering half of Cambodia's population.

<sup>3</sup> See Zachary Zimmer, John Knodel, Kiny Sovan Kim, and Sina Puch, *The Impact of Past Conflicts and Social Disruption in Cambodia on the Current Generation of Older Adults*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Population Studies Center, September 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See John Knodel, Zachary Zimmer, Kiny Sovan Kim, and Sina Puch, *The Impact of AIDS on Older-age Parents in Cambodia*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Population Studies Center, April 2006 revised September 2006). See also John Knodel and Zachary Zimmer, *Older Persons AIDS Knowledge and Willingness to Provide Care in an Impoverished Nation: Evidence from Cambodia*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Population Studies Center, September 2006).

<sup>5</sup> HelpAge International, *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Older People in Cambodia*, (London: HelpAge International, 2003).

are not ordinarily covered by large scale surveys.<sup>6</sup> One such region, the municipality of Pailin in northwest Cambodia, serves as the setting of this study. For years a Khmer Rouge stronghold, Pailin maintained relative autonomy even after the Khmer Rouge defection to the government in 1996. Considered a part of Battambang province until 2001, Pailin was then awarded the status of a separate municipality or city. Although large numbers of migrants have settled in the area since integration, most of the older residents have lived there prior to the surrender of Khmer Rouge control. This makes for an interesting case study of an elderly population seldom researched apart from the Khmer Rouge high command that once controlled its territory.

This ADI study attempts to document the experiences and prevailing situations of older people in two communes of Pailin municipality. More specifically, with respect to the older generation, it seeks to identify basic background characteristics and migration history; to inquire into livelihood strategies and security; to examine living arrangements and support networks; and to assess health and health care conditions.

## **Research Objectives**

- To identify background characteristics and migration history of older people in Pailin
- To inquire into the livelihood strategies and security of older persons in Pailin
- To examine the living arrangements and support networks of older people in Pailin
- To assess the health and health care situations of older people in Pailin

## **Key Questions**

### ***Background characteristics and migration history***

What are the background characteristics of the older people in the study villages? What is the distribution of their age and sex? What is their marital status? Are they literate? Did they attend school? What is their ethnicity and religion?

What is the migration history of the older people in the study villages? How have past conflicts affected the lives? Did they experience forced migration and family separation? Did they experience the death of a spouse or a child during the years of conflict? What were the reasons why they moved in successive historical periods?

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<sup>6</sup> The 1998 HelpAge International/Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Veterans Affairs survey included Phnom Penh, Battambang, Kampot, Kampong Cham, and Takeo. The 2004 Survey of Elderly in Cambodia included Phnom Penh, Battambang, Kampong Cham, Takeo, Kandal and Prey Veng.

### ***Livelihood strategies and security***

Are the older people still engaged in productive work? What is their main work at the present time? Was this also their main work for most of their lives? Does type of work differ for male and female elders? To what extent are spouses engaged in productive work?

Do older people and their spouses contribute to the support of their households? Is the income they earn from their own or spouse's work their primary source of income? To what extent do elders rely on children as their main source of support?

### ***Living arrangements and support networks***

What are the living arrangements of the older people? Do they live alone? With a spouse? With their children or other relatives? How do these living arrangements affect their lives? To what extent do older people interact with others outside of their immediate household? How often do they go to the pagoda? To what extent do they participate in community ceremonies and activities?

### ***Health and health care situations***

What is the health situation of the older people? Do they experience any symptoms that indicate some specific disease? Do they have any difficulty undertaking physical movements e.g. lifting, walking, or climbing stairs? Do they have difficulties performing daily tasks e.g. eating, bathing, or dressing? How do the older people assess the state of their own health?

Have the older people been recently sick or injured? Did they receive treatment for their illness or injury? Where did they go for treatment? Were there costs involved? Who paid for these costs? Do they have any health insurance? Who took care of the older people when they were ill or injured?

## **Research Methods**

The study was conducted in nine villages of Tuol Lvea commune and seven villages of Boryakha commune in Pailin district, Pailin municipality, from May 26 to 28, 2006. Village chiefs provided lists of residents 55 years and over and these lists were then verified and updated during the days of field research. The survey questionnaire, which was based on the instrument used in the 2004 Survey of Elderly, was purposively administered to 153 individuals meeting the age criteria in the two communes.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the survey questionnaire key informant interviews were conducted with commune and village authorities and with selected elders. Focus group discussions were likewise convened with elderly villagers in the two communes.

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<sup>7</sup> See Knodel et al, *Older Persons in Cambodia* for the instrument used in the 2004 Survey of Elderly.



## **Policy Framework**

Over the past 25 years the notion of ageing and its links to development have undergone successive re-conceptualizations as policy makers and practitioners have deepened their understanding and appreciation of the contributions and special requirements of elderly persons. Most notable perhaps has been the shift from considering elderly people as a burden to acknowledging their tremendous potential for advancing development. Changes in the ways of thinking about elderly people have, in turn, influenced development policies and approaches. The following section traces the policy framework on ageing and elderly persons that has emerged since the early 1980s.

### ***Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing (1982)***

The Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1982 was the first international agreement on ageing. The plan aimed to ‘strengthen the capacities of countries to deal effectively with the ageing of their populations and with the special concerns and needs of their elderly.’ The document included 62 recommendations for action encompassing the areas of health and nutrition, protection of elderly consumers, housing and environment, family, social welfare, income security and employment, and education.

While the Vienna Plan helped to raise awareness about the special needs of elderly persons, periodic reviews revealed that governments had made modest progress in terms of its implementation. A major flaw of the plan was that it viewed ageing as a ‘problem’ and identified the state as the principal actor responsible for the solution to the ‘problem’. Most governments simply did not have enough resources to comply with the recommendations of the plan.<sup>8</sup>

### ***United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development (1986)***

The United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development adopted in 1986 recognized the rights of all people to development as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process. This declaration redefined development as a ‘right’ rather than a ‘problem’ and helped to provide a stronger foundation for future policy statements on elderly persons. However, the declaration did not commit governments to realize any of its objectives.

### ***United Nations Principles for Older Persons (1991)***

The United Nations Principles for Older People promulgated in 1991 defined older people’s rights to independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity. This statement too did not commit governments to fulfill any of its pronouncements.

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<sup>8</sup> HelpAge International, *Ageing and Development*, December 2000.

### ***Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific (1999)***

The Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in 1999 addressed seven major areas of concern relating to ageing and older persons: the social position of older persons; older persons and the family; health and nutrition; housing, transportation and the built environment; older persons and the market; income security, maintenance and employment; and social services and the community.

### ***Millennium Development Goals (2000)***

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed upon at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. The MDGs sought to half global poverty and hunger, achieve worldwide primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development. The overarching aim was that most of the MDGs would be achieved by 2015.

Although the MDGs did not address older people as a specific group, they helped to frame issues that would be addressed by the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in 2002. Addressing the importance of inclusion, HelpAge International proposed several actions to ensure that the MDGs would encompass the poorest and elderly persons. These included acknowledging older women and men as effective agents of change, ensuring that poverty analysis was disaggregated by gender and age, making gender equality a reality for women and men of all ages, ensuring an equitable and rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS, encompassing equity, participation, intergenerational development and effective aid, and incorporating social protection measures.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002)***

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, which was adopted by 159 United Nations member states in April 2002, called for changes in attitudes, policies and practices, so that the ‘enormous potential of ageing’ might be achieved. The Madrid Plan, which replaced the Vienna Plan, affirmed older people’s right to development, sought an end to age discrimination, and emphasized the need to mainstream ageing into the agenda of global development. The Madrid Plan contained 33 objectives and 117 recommendations, grouped into three priorities: older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age, and enabling and supportive environments.

The Madrid Plan set out a vision and values for a society of all ages. As underscored by HelpAge International, it specified that ageing can and should be mainstreamed into global development agendas and called for the right to development for older persons. It urged governments to include older persons in national development and social policy processes such as poverty reduction strategies and national development plans. It contained detailed sections on growing areas of concern for older people and their families, including HIV/AIDS, violence and abuse, access to health services and social protection. It called for

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<sup>9</sup> HelpAge International, *MDGs must target poorest say older people*, 2005.

effective collaboration and partnership between government, civil society, international agencies and the private sector, and older persons and their organizations, to achieve the plan's objectives.<sup>10</sup> At the same time the Madrid Plan provided no additional resources for implementation.

### ***Shanghai Regional Implementation Strategy (2002)***

The Shanghai Regional Implementation Strategy was formulated in September 2002 by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to implement the Madrid and Macao Plans in the Asia and Pacific Region. The Shanghai Implementation Strategy focused on the three priorities areas of the Madrid Plan: older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age, and enabling and supportive environments.

With respect to older persons and development the Shanghai Implementation Strategy enumerated key actions in the following areas: mainstreaming ageing into development policy and promoting full integration and participation of older persons; provision of social protection and security; alleviation of poverty in old age; older persons and emergencies; promoting positive attitudes towards ageing and older persons; employment of older persons; and recognizing gender specific issues in ageing.

With regard to advancing health and well-being into old age the Shanghai Implementation Strategy specified key actions in two areas: ensuring the quality of life at all ages, including independent living, health and well-being; and providing quality health and long-term care.

With respect to ensuring enabling and supportive environments the Shanghai Implementation Strategy detailed key actions in the following areas: older persons and the family; social service and community support; housing and enabling environments; care and support to caregivers; and protection of the rights of older persons.

### ***Kingdom of Cambodia, Policy for the Elderly (2003)***

The objective of this policy statement proclaimed in 2003 was to ensure that elderly people in Cambodia were provided with opportunities to contribute to, as well as share in, the benefits of national development. The Royal Government was charged with caring for the well-being of elderly people and taking action to respond to their problems and needs. The document provided that the support required by elderly people would be shared among relevant Royal government institutions with support from civil society, communities, families and elders. This included developing welfare services for older people, promoting the social inclusion of elderly people especially rural women, providing free medical treatment to elders with disabilities, establishing micro-credit schemes for income-generating activities of older people, and motivating older adults to take part in social development activities.

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<sup>10</sup> HelpAge International, *Ageing and Development*, September 2002.

## Findings and Analysis

### *Background Characteristics*

The survey questionnaire included 153 respondents 55 years and older from the Pailin communes of Tuol Lvea and Boryakha. Of these 86 (56 percent) were men and 67 (44 percent) were women.<sup>11</sup> The mean age of the men was 62.1 years and the mean age of the women was 67.2 years. While only half of the men interviewed were 60 years and over, three fourths of the women were in this age group. Similarly, while only 19 percent of the men were 70 years and older, 37 percent of the women were in this age group.<sup>12</sup>

An overwhelming majority of the respondents reported that they were ethnic Khmer and gave Buddhism as their religion. However, only 23 percent of the men, and 33 percent of the women, had gone to the pagoda at least once a week in the last month.

### *Marital status*

With regard to marital status the majority of the male respondents were currently married, while the majority of the female respondents were currently widows (Table 1).<sup>13</sup> This pattern is partially explained by the fact that Cambodian society provides more opportunities for men to remarry than women. Of the 22 men who had experienced the death of a spouse, 15 (68 percent) had remarried. By contrast, of the 48 women who had experienced the death of a spouse, only 9 (19 percent) had remarried. Clearly, the rate of remarriage was higher for the men than for the women. But the figures also revealed that the death toll of spouses in absolute numbers was much higher for the women than for the men. This was due, in part, to the women's higher average ages and, in part, to the women's higher experience of spousal death during the Pol Pot era.

<b>Table 1. Current Marital Status, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Single (never married)	1	1%	6	9%	7	5%
Currently married	73	85%	11	16%	84	55%
Separated	2	2%	3	4%	5	3%
Divorced	2	2%	5	7%	7	5%
Widowed	8	9%	41	61%	49	32%
Spouse disappeared	---	---	1	1%	1	1%
	N=86		N=67		N=153	

<sup>11</sup> By comparison, the sex distribution in the 2004 Survey of the Elderly, conducted with persons 60 years and older, was 40 percent male and 60 percent female. The survey's overall sex ratio of 67 men for every 100 women was due in part to the political violence which disproportionately took a toll on the lives of men compared to women. The divergent pattern in Pailin was less pronounced when one considered only those respondents 60 years and older. Here the sex distribution was 46 percent male and 54 percent female. The Pailin sample was skewed in favor of younger men by large numbers of former Khmer Rouge soldiers who were predominantly between the ages of 55 and 60.

<sup>12</sup> By contrast, age distributions of men and women in different age groups in the 2004 Survey of the Elderly were more similar.

<sup>13</sup> This trend was consistent with the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which reported 82 percent of the men as currently married and 64 percent of the women as widowed.

Trends in marital status were similarly contingent on the composition of the respondents in the Pailin sample. Many of the male respondents were former Khmer Rouge soldiers who had married younger women latter in life. Of note 67 percent (49 of 73) of the spouses of the currently married men were under 55 years of age. By contrast only 18 percent (2 of 11) of the spouses of the currently married women were under 55 years of age. Indeed the mean age of the married men's wives was 52.4 years, while the mean age of the married women's husbands was 65.2 years. Not only were more men married than women, they were also married to much younger partners. All of the currently married couples lived together in the same houses as their spouses.

### ***Media access***

Overall, the respondents had better access to radio and television than to print media. A total 59 percent of the men, and 34 percent of the women, had listened to the radio at least once a week in the last month. Similarly, 50 percent of the men, and 36 percent of the women, had watched television at least once a week in the last month.

By contrast, access to print media was, in part, contingent on literacy and school attendance. A rather low 27 percent of the women were literate, compared to 75 percent of the men.<sup>14</sup> Literacy, in turn, was directly related to school attendance. While 84 percent of the men had attended school or pagoda classes, only 31 percent of the women had done so.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, access to print media relied on the availability of newspapers and magazines to read. Of the 38 men respondents who asserted that they were able to read comfortably, only 17 had read a newspaper at least once a week in the last month. By contrast, four women respondents reported that they were able to read comfortably and only one had read a newspaper at least once a week in the last month.

## ***Migration History***

### ***In-migration to Pailin***

All of the 153 respondents were born in Cambodia, with 34 percent (the largest single percentage) born in Battambang province. Only 3 percent of the respondents were born in Pailin. Moreover, only 12 percent of the elders interviewed had settled in Pailin before 1979 (Table 2). These data underscored that the elderly persons surveyed in the two Pailin communes were predominantly a migrant population.

The successive movement of migrants into Pailin reflected broader historical developments. In January 1979 the Vietnamese army marched into Cambodia forcing the Khmer Rouge to flee the capital and surrounding provinces for the northwest borders of the country. At that time a large remnant of Khmer Rouge cadre moved into Pailin along the Thai border. This accounted for the surge of in-migration among the current elders from early 1979. In this year alone 19 respondents moved into the area. Pailin remained a Khmer Rouge stronghold until September 1996 and as such it continued to be a war zone, regularly erupting into fighting during the dry season offenses of the Vietnamese and Cambodian government forces. For the

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<sup>14</sup> Still these figures were higher than those of the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which documented 20 percent of the women as literate compared to 72 percent of the men.

<sup>15</sup> These numbers were also higher than those of the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which recorded 76 percent of the men as having attended school or pagoda classes compared to 21 percent of the women.

most part, in-migrants to Pailin in the years 1979 to 1995 belonged to the Khmer Rouge faction or were involved in its gem mining activities. More than half of the men surveyed in this study came to Pailin during this period (Table 2).

<b>Table 2. Year Came and Settled in Pailin, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Before 1979	12	14%	6	9%	18	12%
1979-1995	47	55%	24	36%	71	47%
1996-1999	22	26%	18	27%	40	26%
2000 to present	5	6%	18	27%	23	15%
	N=86		N=67		N=153	

In late 1996 the integration of the Khmer Rouge forces in Pailin into mainstream Cambodian society occasioned another flow of in-migration among the now older residents in the two communes. As guerilla fighters camped in the forests of Pailin, the Khmer Rouge forces had long been separated from family members. The cessation of fighting and the permanent resettlement of former Khmer Rouge cadre into lowland communes such as Tuol Lvea and Boryakha allowed parents to come and live with their children. The end of hostilities also bought a peace dividend as economic activity increased and attracted people to come and work in Pailin. By the end of 1999 the rapid in-migration of the current elders had slowed down. In the new millennium the majority of the elderly migrants were widowed women who had come to live with their children (Table 2).

### ***Forced migration***

The turbulent history of Cambodia from 1970 to the full realization of peace in 1998 occasioned the forced migration of large segments of the country's elderly survivors. To the extent that the present research included respondents from both the Khmer Rouge forces and the general population, the patterns of forced migration experienced by the study's sample were unique. Consistent with the experience of other Cambodian elders, those surveyed in Pailin suffered the greatest incidence of forced migration during the Pol Pot era. A total 50 percent of the respondents moved during this period and all were forced to move as a result of war and conflict. Moreover, 20 percent of all respondents were separated from their families at this time (Table 3.)<sup>16</sup> Incredibly, 24 percent (16 of 67) of the women respondents, and 7 percent (6 of 86) of the men respondents, experienced the death of a spouse during the Khmer Rouge regime.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, 19 percent (13 of 67) of the women respondents, and 6 percent (5 of 86) of the men respondents experienced the death of a child during the three years and eight months of Pol Pot's rule.<sup>18</sup>

Unquestionably, the study's sample included victims of the Khmer Rouge reign of terror. But it likewise included Khmer Rouge cadre who, while perpetrators of war and forced migration,

<sup>16</sup> The 2004 Survey of the Elderly revealed that 63 percent of all respondents were forced to move during the Pol Pot years and that 19 percent of all respondents were separated from their families.

<sup>17</sup> These data were nonetheless comparable to those of the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which reported that 23 percent of the women and 6 percent of the men experienced the death of a spouse during the Pol Pot regime.

<sup>18</sup> These numbers were considerably lower than those of the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which found that an astounding 48 percent of the women and 37 percent of the men experienced the death of a child during the Pol Pot era.

were also subjects of the same. Given that fighting and dislocation continued after the Pol Pot regime, and that Khmer Rouge forces were at the center of this conflict, it was not surprising that many of those surveyed experienced forced migration and separation from families in the 1979 to 1989 era, and some even in the years beyond (Table 3).<sup>19</sup>

<b>Table 3. History of Forced Migration 1970 to Present, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Respondent moved during period		Respondent separated from family during move		Respondent forced to move as a result of war and conflict	
	Number	Percent (all respondents)	Number	Percent (all respondents)	Number	Percent (all respondents)
Lon Nol period (1970 to April 1975)	27	18%	8	5%	19	12%
Pol Pot period (April 1975 to January 1979)	76	50%	31	20%	76	50%
Vietnamese supported regimes (1979 to 1989)	79	52%	30	20%	55	36%
Vietnamese left country (1989) to present	96	63%	19	12%	23	15%
N=153						

### *Reasons for moving in successive eras*

The violent upheavals that characterized Cambodian society for nearly thirty years were reflected in the reasons given by the respondents for moving during different historical epochs (Table 4). Khmer Rouge soldiers assigned by their military commanders to fight on various fronts were on the move since the Lon Nol period. Flight from violent conflict and forced migration began in the Lon Nol regime, peaked at the start of the Pol Pot era, and then dropped, albeit modestly, in the Vietnamese supported regimes. While Khmer Rouge cadre fled to the border areas of Pailin at the end of the Pol Pot era, other respondents that had been displaced by the regime in April 1975 returned home. The data revealed that only since 1989 had the respondents moved primarily of their own volition to live with their children and/or to find work in Pailin.



<sup>19</sup> By contrast, the 2004 Survey of the Elderly recorded that only 2.2 percent of sampled respondents were forced to move during the 1979 to 1989 period, and that only 0.2 percent were forced to move in the years since 1989.

**Table 4. Reasons Why Moved 1970 to Present,  
Persons 55 Years and Older,  
Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality,  
May 2006**

May 2000

	Lon Nol period (1970 to April 1975)		Pol Pot period (April 1975 to January 1979)		Vietnamese supported regimes (1979 to 1989)		Vietnamese left country to present (1989 to present)	
	#	%*	#	%*	#	%*	#	%*
Return after being displaced	---	---	---	---	14	15%	4	4%
Flee political situation or violence	7	23%	42	48%	31	34%	7	7%
Economic reasons (to work)	4	13%	---	---	11	12%	40	38%
Assigned as a soldier by military commander	12	40%	24	28%	24	26%	15	14%
To be close or live with spouse or children	2	7%	---	---	3	3%	33	31%
Natural calamities/lack of agricultural land	1	3%	---	---	1	1%	3	3%
Forced to move	2	7%	21	24%	6	6%	2	2%
Others	2	7%	---	---	2	2%	2	2%
	N=27		N=76		N=77		N=94	
*Percent of total responses								

### **The Story of Pouv Samnang and Thou Sothea**

Pouv Samnang was born in 1950 in Kratie province. At 15 years of age he entered the pagoda as a student monk and remained there for five years. When Samnang left the monastery his life took a dramatic turn. He became caught up in the nationalistic movement to counteract what he called the foreign aggression of South Vietnam and the United States. In 1970 Samnang joined the Khmer Rouge forces. For the next 22 years he was to engage in active combat.

Samnang's commitment to the Khmer Rouge cause was deepened in 1973 when two of his younger brothers were killed by the strafing of an aircraft while cultivating their upland farm in Kratie province. About the same time three of his maternal aunts and one of his maternal uncles were killed by the strafing of an aircraft while riding in their oxcart along the banks of the Mekong River. The planes were flown by the US backed Lon Nol regime.

In the years 1970 to 1975 Samnang's unit was assigned to protect the integrity of the Cambodian border with Vietnam in the eastern part of Mondulkiri province. This region fell within what came to be known as the Ho Chi Minh trail. Samnang remembered the times during these years when US airplanes bombed the area for up to 20 hours. Samnang and his fellow soldiers took shelter in man-made trenches, terrified by the thundering noise and the trembling earth. Many of his Khmer Rouge comrades were killed in the carpet bombings. Civilians suffered even higher casualties.

After the Khmer Rouge came to power in April 1975, Samnang continued to be deployed in the northeast border region. Although the war had ended, territorial disputes with the Vietnamese intensified and led to skirmishes between the former comrades. At times these clashes erupted into major conflicts. In 1977 Samnang was injured when mortar fire from Vietnamese guns caused shrapnel to lodge in his head. After the shell fragments were removed, Samanang recuperated in a Khmer Rouge hospital for one month.

In early 1979 the Vietnamese army crossed into Cambodia and forced the Khmer Rouge to retreat. Samnang joined a large faction of Khmer Rouge soldiers who took refuge in the forest areas of Pailin near the Thai border. According to Samnang the Khmer Rouge forces suffered severe hardships during their first year in Pailin. The besieged soldiers had little to eat except for leaves and roots. Many people died of hunger rather than risk foraging outside of the forest encampment.



### **The Story of Pouy Samnang and Thou Sothea (cont.)**

Samnang survived the first year of sanctuary in Pailin and married in the second. Samnang's wife, Thou Sothea, was herself a Khmer Rouge cadre who had joined the revolutionary forces in 1972. She too was from Kratie province although the couple had never met there. Sothea had previously been married to a Khmer Rouge soldier who had died in 1979 when he stepped on a landmine in Preah Vihear province. At the time of her marriage to Samnang in 1980 Sothea had a two year child from her first marriage. Samnang and Sothea were to have three more children of their own.

From 1979 to 1992 Samnang commanded a Khmer Rouge mobile unit that traveled through several provinces of Cambodia – Battambang, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Kratie, Kompong Thom, Kompong Cham, Pursat, and Koh Kong – fighting Cambodian army forces and, until 1989, occupying Vietnamese troops. The guerrilla unit would be away from Pailin for six months to one year living off villagers and confiscating weapons and ammunition from enemy soldiers. During these years Samnang suffered repeated injuries from shrapnel wounds.

In 1992 Samnang ceased to be an active combatant. By that time the Khmer Rouge soldiers had taken control of Pailin town and gemstone companies from Thailand had been allowed to mine the area to generate funds for the insurgency. Meanwhile Khmer Rouge families were gradually coming down from the mountains to settle in the lowland areas. Samnang was assigned by the rebel leadership to be a village head in Boryakha commune. The Khmer Rouge withdrawal from the 1993 elections then led to renewed fighting with the government and forced the lowland settlers back into the forest areas. In September 1996 the Khmer Rouge faction in Pailin capitulated to the government and was integrated into Cambodian society. Samnang once again took up his position as a village chief in Boryakha commune, this time recognized by the Royal Government of Cambodia.

Currently Samnang and Sothea cultivated five hectares of upland in Pailin to cash crops such as sesame, corn, and bean. The upland farm, which they cleared in 1999, was 20 kilometers away from the village. Their two older sons, both married with children, lived on the farm with their families. A younger son and daughter attended school and lived with their parents in the Boryakha village where Samnang still stood as village chief. Because of the long years fighting and living in the forest, Samnang and Sothea both suffered from various ailments and were generally weak. Samnang acknowledged that peace had given everyone the ability to speak and move about freely, but he lamented that government officials were more concerned about their parties than about the welfare of the people.



## ***Livelihood Security***

### ***Productive work***

A majority of the older persons surveyed in Tuol Lvea and Boryakha communes had engaged in productive work in the past year, although the incidence was higher for the men than for the women. Not unexpectedly, the proportion of respondents involved in productive work dropped noticeably in older age groups (Table 5).<sup>20</sup>

<b>Table 5. Worked to Support Self and Family in the Past Year, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
55 years and over**	67	78%	36	54%	103	67%
60 years and over***	26	60%	20	40%	46	49%
70 years and over****	5	31%	5	20%	10	24%
*Percent of total population in each age group **N=86 for male, 67 for female, and 153 for total ***N=43 for male, 50 for female, and 93 for total ****N=16 for male, 25 for female, and 41 for total						

The majority (78 percent) of the men who had worked in the past year did mainly upland or *chamcar* farming and most (52 percent) worked throughout the year. Although 43 percent of the men who still worked reported that they had done less work in the past year than previously, 75 percent of the total planned to continue working over the next two years. Most men who had not worked in the past year cited poor health or disability as the reason.

By contrast, the women respondents who had worked in the past year engaged mainly in upland farming (56 percent), small business or petty trade (25 percent), and wage labor (11 percent). Half of the woman who worked had done so throughout the year. While 58 percent of the working women acknowledged that they had done less work in the past year than before, 67 percent of the total planned to continue to work over the next two years. The majority of women who had not worked in the past year stated poor health or disability as the reason.

Given that the average age of all spouses at 54.1 years was lower than the average age of all respondents at 64.3 years, it was perhaps not surprising that more spouses (86 percent) were engaged in productive work in the past year than the respondents themselves (67 percent). In absolute terms this had greater consequences for the male respondents simply because a much higher percentage of them were married and had spouses who worked. Much like the respondents themselves, the spouses in the past year were primarily engaged in upland farming (65 percent) and small business or petty trade (17 percent). But for many respondents and their spouses these pursuits had not been their main work for most of their lives. The Khmer Rouge cadre had until 1996 been principally soldiers and support personnel. Meanwhile, many respondents and spouses who had in-migrated to Pailin from other provinces since 1996 had been paddy rice farmers for most of their lives.

<sup>20</sup> The 2004 Survey of the Elderly, conducted with persons 60 years and older, reported that 48 percent of the men and 28 percent of the women were still working. Most of the working men (79 percent) were engaged in farming or fishing. Most of the working women (64 percent) were also engaged in farming or fishing while others (22 percent) were involved in their own sales or service activities.

### ***Reproductive work***

While the male elders were more actively engaged in productive work than the female elders, the latter were generally more often involved in reproductive or household maintenance work. More specifically among 66 female respondents reporting, 42 often cleaned the house, 38 often washed clothes, 29 often prepared food, 29 often looked after children, 12 often went to the market, and 4 often fixed the house. By comparison, among 80 male respondents reporting, 29 often cleaned the house, 18 often washed clothes, 7 often prepared food, 23 often looked after children, 18 often went to the market, and 26 often fixed the house.

### ***Land and other assets***

Ownership of upland (*chamcar*), paddy rice land, and house lots was proportionally higher among male than female elderly in all three land categories. Overall, 63 percent of the male respondents owned *chamcar* land compared to only 24 percent of the female respondents. At the same time the average size of the *chamcar* farms owned by the women was somewhat larger at 4.3 hectares than the average size of the *chamcar* farms owned by the men at 3.6 hectares. While ownership of paddy rice land was low among both male and female respondents, it was, nevertheless, still higher among the men. Paddy rice farms were owned by 12 percent of the men surveyed and averaged 2.9 hectares. By contrast, paddy rice farms were owned by 4 percent of the women surveyed and averaged 1.4 hectares. In all, 66 percent of the male respondents and/or their spouses owned their own house lots, compared to only 21 percent of the female respondents and/or their spouses. With respect to houses 73 percent of the male respondents and/or their spouses owned their own homes, while only 42 percent of the female respondents and/or their spouses did so.

Ownership of other assets was minimal for both sexes. None of the respondents and/or their spouses had bank savings. Only 18 percent of the respondents and/or their spouses owned jewelry, and only 17 percent owned livestock. Similarly, access to cash income aside from work was rare among those interviewed. Only 16 percent of the respondents and/or their spouses received cash income from pensions, 3 percent received cash income from rental property, and 3 percent received cash income from welfare or social agencies.

### ***Sources of support***

With a relatively large percentage of the elders still in the work force, it was not surprising that a majority of all respondents and/or their spouses contributed to the support of their households. Moreover, given that higher percentages of men than women had worked in the past year and that higher percentages of men had spouses who worked, it came as no surprise that higher percentages of men and/or their spouses contributed to household support in all age groups. Equally clear, the proportion of elderly persons both men and women who contributed to the support of their households dropped significantly in older age groups (Table 6).

<b>Table 6. Respondent (and/or Spouse if Currently Married ) Contributes to the Support of the Household, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
55 years and over**	76	88%	33	49%	109	71%
60 years and over***	33	77%	18	36%	51	55%
70 years and over****	8	50%	4	16%	12	29%
*Percent of total population in each age group **N= 86 for male, 67 for female, and 153 for total ***N=43 for male, 50 for female, and 93 for total ****N=16 for male, 25 for female, and 41 for total						

For the elderly surveyed, reliance on one's own work or that of one's spouse as the main source of support was the single most important indicator of self-sufficiency. Here several trends were discernable. In all age groups the male respondents relied more on their own work, and the work of their spouses, than did the female respondents. By contrast, in all age groups the female respondents relied more on their children, and the spouses of their children, than did the male respondents. Taking into account the high percentage of married male respondents who benefited from the work of their wives, compared to the high percentage of widowed female respondents who had no husbands to rely on, these contrasting trends were easily comprehended (Table 7).<sup>21</sup>

<b>Table 7. Main Source of Support for Respondent (and Spouse if Married), Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>								
	Work (Own and/or Spouse)				Children and/or Son/Daughter-in-law			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	#	% *	#	% *	#	% *	#	% *
55 years and over**	64	74%	28	42%	19	22%	35	52%
60 years and over***	23	53%	14	28%	17	39%	32	64%
70 years and over****	5	31%	3	12%	9	56%	20	80%
*Percent of total population in each age group **N= 86 for male, and 67 for female ***N=43 for male, and 50 for female ****N=16 for male, and 25 for female Note: Other main sources of support cited, although much less frequently, were pensions (own and/or spouse) and other relatives.								

Looking more closely at the data, it likewise became apparent that both men and women in older age groups were proportionally less reliant on their own work and the work of their spouses. Conversely, both men and women in older age groups were more dependent on their children and the spouses of their children (Table 7).<sup>22</sup> While the men remained self-sufficient longer than the women, they too eventually succumbed to the contingencies of old age.

<sup>21</sup> In the 2004 Survey of the Elderly, conducted with persons 60 years and older, only 42 percent of the men and 19 percent of the women relied on their own work and/or the work of their spouses as their main source of support. Meanwhile a full 53 percent of the men and 71 percent of the women relied on their children and/or the spouses of their children as their main source of support.

<sup>22</sup> These broad trends were likewise evident in the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which reported that 12 percent of elders 70 years and older relied on their own work and/or the work of their spouses as their main source of support, compared to 39 percent of elders 60 to 69 years. Conversely, 80 percent of the elders 70 years and over

## ***Debt***

In total, 58 percent of the male respondents currently had debt compared to only 24 percent of the female respondents. While the elderly men borrowed mainly from middlemen and neighbors, the elderly women borrowed primarily from neighbors. Proportionally more of the men borrowed to finance farm production, while proportionally more of the women borrowed to pay health expenses. To be sure investments in crop production had the potential to generate returns, while the expenditures for health were not cost recoverable. But farm production loans did not always ensure good harvests, and an equal 56 percent of both male and female borrowers considered their debt a great burden. For elders already poor, the burden of debt exacerbated their vulnerability.

### **The Story of Roeun Vanarith and Noun Veary**

Roeun Vanarith was born in Kompong Cham province in 1950 and became a Khmer Rouge soldier in 1972. He maintained that in the early 1970s young men from Kompong Cham province were expected to join the Khmer Rouge forces to oppose the US backed Lon Nol army. From 1972 to 1975 Vanarith was deployed to fight Lon Nol soldiers in the provinces of Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom, and Siem Reap. When the Khmer Rouge seized control of the country in April 1975, he was assigned with other troops to cultivate rice on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. During the entire Pol Pot era, he was not allowed to visit his family in Kompong Cham.

In early 1979 Vanarith's unit was forced to flee Phnom Penh from the advancing Vietnamese army. Along with other remnants of the Khmer Rouge regime, the soldiers trekked through mountainous areas of several provinces before reaching their destination in the border regions of Pailin. Among the cadre retreating from Phnom Penh was Noun Veary, a hospital medical staff woman who had joined the Khmer Rouge in Takeo province in 1972. Two years after arriving in Pailin, Vanarith and Veary received permission from the Khmer Rouge leadership to marry.

Khmer Rouge loyalists in the ensuing years were able to set up rather permanent camps in the forest areas of Pailin during the rainy seasons. However, during the dry seasons the insurgents had to move from place to place to evade the offensives of the Cambodian government and Vietnamese forces. As a consequence Vanarith and Veary and their two older children lived for several months a year under the threat of gunfire.

As a Khmer Rouge guerilla Vanarith likewise went on the offensive. For almost a decade Vanarith engaged in sporadic attacks against the Cambodian and Vietnamese troops who controlled the lowlands of Pailin. In the late 1980s in a particularly fierce encounter with Vietnamese soldiers, Vanarith's leg was severely injured by shell fire. Vanarith's comrades carried him back to the Khmer Rouge camp on a stretcher where his leg was amputated in a makeshift hospital. This marked the end of his days as an active combatant.

In 1997, the year after the Khmer Rouge in Pailin had negotiated a peace settlement with the government, Vanarith took the opportunity to visit his family in Kompong Cham. His father and siblings were overcome with surprise and sadness when they saw him poor and disabled. They had not realized that he had survived the long years of conflict. Vanarith learned that one of his sisters had died in a women's rice collective in 1977 as a result of the hardships imposed by the Khmer Rouge regime, the very same authority that he had served for nearly all of his adult life. Vanarith's mother had survived the Pol Pot years, but had died in 1989.

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relied on their children and/or the spouses of their children as their main source of support compared to 53 percent of elders 60 to 69 years.

### **The Story of Roeun Vanarith and Noun Veary (cont.)**

In 2003 Vanarith was fitted with a polyurethane prosthesis in Battambang town by the International Committee for the Red Cross. Before that he had used the casing of a shell as an artificial limb. Since 2000 Vanarith had cultivated a five hectare upland farm 10 kilometers away from his Boryakha village. The lighter prosthesis made it easier for him to travel by motorbike from the village to the farm. Vanarith and Veary's two older sons lived and worked on the farm. Their three younger daughters lived at home and attended school in the village. In addition to the cash crop proceeds from the family farm, Vanarith received about 60,000 riels (US\$ 15) a month as a disabled veteran of the Royal Government of Cambodia armed forces, which had embraced him after integration.

In 2006, Vanarith and Veary eked out a small living on their farm and enjoyed a measure of peace and security in their advancing years. They observed that even though they were poor and sometimes had little to eat; they were still able to stay together as a family. During their years in the forest they were scared and constantly on the move. They had tasted the life of war and conflict and were full enough of it. They wanted more for their children.

## ***Living Arrangements***

### ***Living children***

As noted earlier 12 percent (18 of 153) of the elders surveyed had experienced the death of a child during the Pol Pot era. Over the course of their entire lives, 40 percent of those interviewed had sustained the death of at least one child.<sup>23</sup> Almost half of this group had suffered the death of two or more children. Most of the children had died of illnesses, although many had also died as a result of conflict and landmines.

Despite the death toll of children, the respondents had still managed to produce substantial numbers of living children. Counting own, step and adopted children the elders surveyed averaged four living children with an average distribution of two sons and two daughters. Given the higher spousal death rate among women and the higher remarriage rate among men, it is not surprising that the men had, on average, more living children than the women. While the elderly men interviewed averaged 4.5 living children, the elderly women interviewed averaged 3.5 living children. Of note, 13 percent of the women were now childless compared to only 3 percent of the men.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Household composition***

Household composition provided a visible reference point of living arrangements.<sup>25</sup> In Pailin divergent patterns were discernable between the men and women respondents (Table 8). More than two-fifths of the men lived with their spouse and children, and nearly another one-

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<sup>23</sup> These figures were much lower than those of the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which recorded that 75 percent of all respondents had experienced the death of at least one child and 43 percent had experienced the death of a child in the Pol Pot era.

<sup>24</sup> By comparison, the 2004 Survey of the Elderly reported that respondents averaged 4.7 living children with an average 2.2 sons and 2.5 daughters. Moreover, the men respondents averaged 5.6 living children while the women respondents averaged 4.2. A total 5.3 percent of the women respondents were now childless compared to only 1 percent of the men.

<sup>25</sup> See Knodel et al, *Older Persons in Cambodia* for a discussion of the caveats involved in using household composition as an indicator of living arrangements.

third lived with their spouse, children, and others. By contrast, the largest single group of women respondents, just less than half, lived with their children and others. More women than men lived alone or only with their children or only with others. By comparison, more men than women lived only with their spouse.

<b>Table 8. Household Composition of Respondents, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Living alone	2	2%	8	12%	10	6%
Spouse only	11	13%	2	3%	13	8%
Child(ran) only	1	1%	9	13%	10	6%
Others only	---	---	7	10%	7	5%
Spouse and child(ran)	36	42%	6	9%	42	27%
Spouse and others	1	1%	---	---	1	1%
Child(ran) and others	10	12%	32	48%	42	27%
Spouse, child(ran), and others	25	29%	3	4%	28	18%
	N=86		N=67		N=153	

In Pailin, the diversity of household configurations manifested between men and women respondents was related primarily to differences in marital status, living children, and age. Since more men were married than women, they were more likely to be living with a spouse. Similarly, because fewer men were childless and had more living children than women, they were more likely to be living with children. At the same time, since the women were, on average, older than the men, they were more likely to be living with grandchildren. In like manner, because more women were widows and childless than men, they were more likely to be living alone.

The disparity notwithstanding, a common trend emerged in the responses. The data revealed that fully four-fifths of all of the elders surveyed were living with at least one child (Table 9). This figure was practically identical to that found in other studies on the elderly in Cambodia and indicated a measure of well-being.<sup>26</sup> In Pailin it was more common for the men respondents to live with single children and for the women respondents to live with ever-married children.<sup>27</sup> This reflected the age differences between the male and female respondents and their spouses. The men and their wives, at younger average ages, had children less likely to be at ages where marriage usually occurred. Conversely, the women and their husbands, at higher average ages, had children more likely to be past the ages where marriage normally took place. However, considering coresidence with ever-married children alone, it was more common for both men and women elders to live with ever-married daughters than with ever-married sons.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See Knodel et al, *Older Persons in Cambodia* and Zachary Zimmer and Sovan Kiny Kim, *Living Arrangements and Socio-Demographic Conditions of Older Adults in Cambodia*, Policy Research Division Working Paper No. 157 (New York: Population Council, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> This pattern was likewise evident in the 2004 Survey of the Elderly although the variation in the men's responses was less pronounced. A total 54 percent of the men lived with a single child compared to 52 percent who lived with an ever-married child. Meanwhile only 28 percent of the women lived with a single child compared to 62 percent who lived with an ever-married child.

<sup>28</sup> This general trend too was manifest in the 2004 Survey of the Elderly. A total 44 percent of the men and 50 percent of the women lived with an ever-married daughter compared with 13 percent of the men and 14 percent of the women who lived with an ever-married son.

<b>Table 9. Coresidence with Children, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Any child	72	84%	50	75%	122	80%
Any daughter	57	66%	35	52%	92	60%
Any son	57	66%	28	42%	85	57%
Any single child	62	72%	19	28%	81	53%
Any single daughter	43	50%	11	16%	54	35%
Any single son	52	60%	15	22%	67	44%
Any ever married child	31	36%	37	55%	68	44%
Any ever-married daughter	23	27%	25	37%	48	31%
Any ever-married son	10	12%	13	19%	23	15%
Any widowed daughter	---	---	4	6%	4	3%
Any widowed son	1	1%	1	1%	2	1%
	N=86		N=67		N=153	

### *Support received from children*

In Pailin children represented a potential source of support for the majority of elderly respondents. Overall 89 percent the elders surveyed had at least one child 16 years and over. Moreover 72 percent had at least one coresident child, and 73 percent had at least one non-coresident child, 16 years and over.

Generally, the incidence of support from children was quite high. Among the parents with children 16 years and over, more than four-fifths had a child that contributed to the support of the household (Table 10). Tellingly, support was more forthcoming from coresident children than from non-coresident children. Similarly, nearly four-fifths of these parents also had a child that provided money to them. Here, too, cash assistance was more common from coresident children than from non-coresident children. In like manner, slightly more than half of these parents had a child that supplied clothes and other material things to them. Clothes and material contributions were once again more customary from coresident children than from non-coresident children.

<b>Table 10. Respondent Received Support from Any Coresident Child, Any Non-Coresident Child, and Any Child 16 Years and Over in the Past Year, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Coresident child		Non-coresident child		Any child	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Support of household	96	86%	66	59%	113	82%
Money	83	75%	75	67%	107	78%
Clothes and other material things	55	49%	41	37%	73	53%
Money and/or clothes worth US\$ 25 or more	25	22%	26	23%	39	28%
	N=111		N=112		N=137	

Still, while the prevalence of various types of support was high, the amount of support received was usually quite meager. Only a little more than one-fourth of the elderly parents



received contributions of money and/or clothing in the past year worth US\$ 25 or more.<sup>29</sup> Amounts of assistance were about the same from children living and not living with their parents. Of note, while the incidence of all types of support from children was proportionally higher for women than for men, the amounts of support received worth US\$ 25 or more was proportionally lower for women than for men. Meanwhile, more women than men received help to support the household from members other than a spouse or child.

### *Support provided to children*

In Pailin elders at times provided material support to their children. Overall nearly one-half of elderly parents with living children provided money to at least one child during the past year, while just over one-third provided clothes and other material things (Table 11). However, less than one-fourth of these parents reportedly gave amounts of support worth US\$ 25 or more.<sup>30</sup> Assistance of all types was more commonly given to coresident, than to non-coresident, children. At the same time, more men than women provided support to children, regardless of their residency, in money and in clothes and in amounts worth US\$ 25 or more.

<b>Table 11. Respondent Provided Support to Any Coresident Child, Any Non-Coresident Child, and Any Child in the Past Year, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Coresident child		Non-coresident child		Any child	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Money	60	49%	25	22%	68	48%
Clothes and other material things	48	39%	9	8%	50	35%
Money and/or clothes worth US\$ 25 or more	25	20%	10	9%	31	22%
	N=122		N=113		N=141	



<sup>29</sup> This pattern was consistent with the 2004 Survey of the Elderly which reported that while 90 percent of the respondents had received support for the household, and 94 percent had received money, and 85 percent had received clothes, only 26 percent had received money and/or clothes worth US\$ 25 or more.

<sup>30</sup> The 2004 Survey of the Elderly found that while 31 percent of the respondents provided money to children, and 24 percent supplied clothes, only 5.3 percent provided money and/or clothes worth US\$ 25 or more.

### **The Story of Phon Kanha**

Phon Kanha was born in 1933 and married in 1953. Kanha and her husband were both from Battambang province. For the first eight years of her marriage Kanha was childless. Then in 1961 she gave birth to a son, Borin, who was to be her only child.

During the Pol Pot regime Borin was recruited as part of the Khmer Rouge militia. When the Vietnamese army advanced on Battambang in 1979, Borin retreated with the Khmer Rouge forces to the forests of Pailin. Kanha missed her son deeply. Advancing in years and unable to bear the separation from her son any longer, Kanha and her husband in 1983 abandoned their home and their life in Battambang and made their way to the Khmer Rouge camp in Pailin. Although Kanha's husband was too old to take up arms, he was assigned to support tasks. Kanha too was expected to contribute to the revolutionary effort.

In the years before his parents arrived in the camp, Borin had married a Khmer Rouge cadre. The couple was to have five children, four daughters and a son. Kanha and her husband helped to take care of their son's children and survived the government's dry season offensives unharmed. Borin was not so fortunate. During a firefight he was blinded in one eye by shrapnel. He also sustained leg injuries in combat.

During the ceasefire leading up to the 1993 elections, Kanha and her husband, and Borin and his wife built separate houses, in a lowland village of Tuol Lvea commune. After integration in 1996 the two households were able to settle permanently in the village. For several years Borin and his wife supported their household livelihood as agricultural laborers. Then the couple cleared their own upland farm quite distant from the village near a heavily mined forest area. In 2003 Kanha's husband died of an illness and she came to live with the family of her son. In 2004 Borin's wife died unexpectedly while working on their upland farm. The family was so poor at the time that Borin was unable to hold proper burial ceremonies for his wife.

By 2006 Borin was married again – this time to a widow whose husband had died in combat as a Khmer Rouge soldier in 1993. Borin's new wife had three children by her first marriage. Normally, Borin and his wife lived at the upland farm with his two older daughters (one of whom was married with two children) and with his wife's two younger sons. Kanha lived in the village with Borin's two teenage daughters and preteen son and with his wife's older married daughter and her child. These rather intricate living arrangements underscored how the widowed and the orphaned, the old and the young, the impaired and the able bodied, and the step and the blood relatives in Kanha's family had come together to take care and support one another.

Living in the village with her grandchildren Kanha relied on them to cook and clean for her, while they relied on her as the resident head of the household. Kanha suffered from pains in her back and in her joints and had difficulty holding heavy objects in her hand and moving her legs. These ailments prevented her from doing much work around the house and from attending ceremonies in the pagoda of a nearby village. Kanha received money from Borin from the sale of his sesame crops to buy rice and other food. Still, she was often lonely. Her husband was dead and Borin spent most of his time at the upland farm.

## Health and Health Care

### Health assessment

Older people's self-assessments of their physical health have been shown to be a useful indicator of their well-being.<sup>31</sup> In the survey questionnaire respondents were asked to assess their physical health as very good, good, fair, poor, and very poor. Tellingly, a large percentage of both men and women elders described their physical health as poor or very poor (Table 12).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the percentages of those purporting to have poor or very poor health were almost identical for both sexes in all age groups. Meanwhile an equal 57 percent of male respondents and female respondents assessed their health as somewhat worse or much worse than other people of their own sex and age.

<b>Table 12. Respondent Assesses Physical Health at Present Time as Poor or Very Poor, Persons 55 Years and Older, Tuol Lvea and Boryakha Communes, Pailin Municipality, May 2006</b>						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
55 years and over**	53	62%	44	66%	97	63%
60 years and over***	30	70%	35	70%	65	70%
70 years and over****	13	81%	20	80%	33	80%
*Percent of total population in each age group **N=86 for male, 67 for female, and 153 for total ***N=43 for male, 50 for female, and 93 for total ****N=16 for male, 25 for female, and 41 for total						

More specifically, in the last month before the survey the principal complaints of the 153 older people interviewed were general weakness (79 percent), pain in the joints (73 percent), back pain (67 percent), headaches (67 percent), and dizziness (60 percent).<sup>33</sup> Overall 65 percent of the respondents who could not see well did not wear glasses. Meanwhile, none of the respondents who could not hear well used a hearing aid.

With respect to performing physical tasks, 51 percent of 152 respondents had at least some difficulty crouching or squatting, 48 percent - walking 200 to 300 meters, 41 percent - lifting or carrying something as heavy as 5 kilograms, 36 percent - walking up and down a set of stairs, and 32 percent - using their fingers to grasp or handle.<sup>34</sup> In performing each of these tasks in all age groups, women experienced more difficulty than men.

With regard to performing daily activities, 31 percent of 153 respondents had at least some difficulty getting up from lying down, 29 percent - eating, 16 percent - getting dressed and

<sup>31</sup> Ellen L. Idler and Yael Benyami, "Self-rated Health and Mortality: A Review of Twenty-seven Community Studies," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 1997, 36: 21-37 cited in Knodel et al, *Older Persons in Cambodia*

<sup>32</sup> These figures are generally comparable with those of the 2004 Survey of the Elderly, conducted with persons 60 years and older, which revealed that 70 percent of all respondents (64 percent of men and 74 percent of women) assessed their health as poor or very poor.

<sup>33</sup> The 2004 Survey of the Elderly recorded the major health symptoms of respondents in the last month as joint pain (88 percent), weakness (86 percent), back pain (79 percent), dizziness (74 percent), and headaches (72 percent).

<sup>34</sup> The 2004 Survey of the Elderly reported that 66 percent of the respondents had difficulty lifting, 62 percent walking, 60 percent climbing stairs, 58 percent crouching, and 39 percent grasping.

undressed, and 16 percent - bathing themselves.<sup>35</sup> Once again, in performing each of these daily activities in all age groups, women experienced more difficulty than men. Of note, only 43 percent of the respondents who experienced difficulty with at least one of these tasks received assistance. The persons who helped were primarily daughters, sons, and spouses.

### ***Illnesses and treatment***

In all, 57 percent of the elderly persons interviewed reported that they had been sick or injured in the past year. Of these 28 percent maintained that they were unable to perform their usual activities for more than one month. Remarkably, 93 percent of those reporting illness in the past year received professional treatment or took medicines, although the quality of these measures was undetermined<sup>36</sup>

Generally, when respondents received treatment for an illness or injury they went mainly to private clinics and government hospitals, and less frequently to drug stores and traditional healers. In nearly all instances the respondents had to pay costs for the health care and medicines they received. These costs were paid primarily by the respondents themselves but often as well by daughters, sons, and spouses. None of the respondents mentioned that they had health insurance. During times of illness and injury male respondents relied mainly on spouses and daughters for help, while female respondents relied mostly on daughters and sons for assistance.

### ***Community Participation***

During the past year 92 percent of the 153 elderly respondents had attended religious festivals such as P'chuben, 88 percent had attended community ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, and 69 percent had attended community meetings such as those convened by the commune council, the village chief, or NGOs. By contrast in the past year only 28 percent of the respondents had participated in political meetings or events. Except for religious festivals, the participation of men in these community activities was proportionally higher than the participation of women. The main reason given by all respondents for not participating in religious festivals, community ceremonies, and community meetings was that they were physically unable to do so.

<sup>35</sup> The 2004 Survey of the Elderly found that 19 percent of the respondents had difficulty getting up from lying down, 9 percent eating, 8 percent bathing, and 6 percent dressing. For a detailed discussion of functional limitations among older Cambodians based on the 2004 Survey of the Elderly see Zachary Zimmer, *Active Live Expectancy and Functional Limitations Among Older Cambodians: Results from a 2004 Survey*, New York: Population Council, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> The 2004 Survey of the Elderly documented that 58 percent of the respondents had been sick or injured in the past year and that 95 percent of those reporting illness had received treatment.

## Conclusions

By and large, the elderly surveyed in the Pailin communes of Tuol Lvea and Boryakha were a migrant population. Only 3 percent of the respondents were born in Pailin and only 12 percent had settled there before 1979. Given the turbulent history of Cambodia during the past 35 years the movement of migrants into Pailin must be understood in an historical context. In January 1979 the Vietnamese army advanced into Cambodia forcing the Khmer Rouge to abandon the capital and surrounding provinces for the northwest borders of the country. At that time a large detachment of Khmer Rouge cadre sought refuge in Pailin along the Thai border. This accounts for the surge of in-migration among the current older residents from early 1979. Pailin remained a Khmer Rouge stronghold until September 1996 and as such it continued to be a war zone, regularly erupting into conflict during the dry season offenses of the Vietnamese and Cambodian government forces. For the most part, in-migrants to Pailin in the years 1979 to 1995 belonged to the Khmer Rouge faction. More than half of the men surveyed came to Pailin during this period.

In late 1996 the integration of the Khmer Rouge forces in Pailin into mainstream Cambodian society ushered in another wave of in-migration. As guerilla fighters besieged in the mountainous areas of Pailin, the Khmer Rouge forces had been separated from family members for years. The termination of fighting and the permanent resettlement of former Khmer Rouge cadre into lowland communes such as Tuol Lvea and Boryaka allowed parents to come and live with their children. The end of hostilities likewise bought a peace dividend as economic activity increased and attracted people to come and work in Pailin. By the end of 1999 the rapid in-migration of the current elders had tapered off. In the new century the majority of the elderly migrants were widowed women who had come to live with their children.

With respect to livelihood security, the male respondents in all age groups relied more on their own work, and the work of their spouses, as their main source of support than did the female respondents. By contrast, in all age groups the female respondents relied more on their children, and the spouses of their children, as their main source of support than did the male respondents. This was explained largely by the high percentage of married male respondents who benefited from the work of their wives, compared to the high percentage of widowed female respondents who had no husbands to rely on. Incredibly, almost one-fourth of the women respondents had experienced the death of a spouse during the Pol Pot regime.

With regard to living arrangements, a high four-fifths of all the elders surveyed were living with at least one child, indicating a measure of well-being. In the study area it was more common for the men respondents to live with single children and for the women respondents to live with ever-married children. This reflected the age differences between the male and female respondents and their spouses. The men and their wives, at younger average ages than the women and their husbands, had children less likely to be at ages where marriage usually occurred. However, considering coresidence with ever-married children alone, it was more common for both men and women elders to live with ever-married daughters than with ever-married sons.

Notably, nearly two-thirds of the men and women surveyed described their physical health as poor or very poor. The principal complaints were general weakness, joint pain, back pain, and headaches. More than two-fifths had at least some difficulty performing physical tasks such as

crouching, lifting heavy objects, and walking far. Fewer respondents had difficulty in performing daily activities such as getting up from lying down, eating, bathing, and dressing. Still only twofifths of those who had experienced difficulty in performing daily activities had received assistance.

Most of the respondents reported that they had been sick or injured in the past year. Of those reporting illness more than one-fourth maintained that they were unable to perform their usual activities for more than one month. With regard to health services, a large majority of those who were sick in the past year had received professional treatment or took medicines, although the effectiveness of these measures was unknown. While health services were available, the research indicated that the provision of competent and affordable health care remained a priority issue for the aged.

Overall the enduring image of the elderly that emerged in the two communes was of diverse segments living in close proximity. A large segment of the respondents was former Khmer Rouge cadre who had come to Pailin to seek refuge and to establish a base to prolong their insurgency. Years of extended fighting had taken its toll on health and family life, although the negotiated settlement in 1996 had provided them with a measure of peace and security in their later years. Now no longer part of a broader armed force, they eked out their separate livelihoods cultivating cash crops on upland farms. In the wake of integration some parents of the former Khmer Rouge soldiers had come to Pailin to live with their children and grandchildren. These older people too were now part of the resident elders.

Another segment of the elderly living in Pailin was people who had come after integration to take advantage of livelihood opportunities in upland farming and petty trade. This segment also included parents accompanying migrant children who had come for economic reasons. Virtually this entire group of older people had been victims of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime. Now, ironically, they lived together in the same villages with people whose enforcement of the draconian Pol Pot rule had caused them so much suffering and hardship.

Research based on the representative sample of the 2004 Survey of the Elderly concluded that the impact of the civil war in Cambodia on the surviving older adults was substantial. The affects of the war and its aftermath led to the further impoverishment of the country and were so widespread that few people were left unaffected.<sup>37</sup> The research in Pailin affirmed this observation for elders on both sides of the conflict. For despite the different backgrounds among those surveyed, with some elders former Khmer Rouge cadre and other elders victims of the revolutionary regime, most of those interviewed suffered poor health and lived in conditions of poverty. The Pol Pot debacle and the prolonged years of conflict had brought impoverishment and tragedy to all. Still the respondents were survivors and through their remarkable resilience gave credence to the vision of the Madrid Assembly of the ‘enormous potential of ageing’

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<sup>37</sup> See Zimmer et al, *The Impact of Past Conflicts and Social Disruption in Cambodia on the Current Generation of Older Adults*.

## **Appendix 1**

### **ADI Trainee Researchers**

In Samrithy	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia
Doung Virorth	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
Meach Sothea	Church World Service
Koh Chhina	Church World Service
Sreng Phyrum	Development and Partnership for Action
Ky Samphy	Krousar Yoeung
Oeuk Pisith	Lutheran World Federation
Nhep Thy	Lutheran World Federation
Suk Ra	Lutheran World Federation
Chhin Chheun	Lutheran World Federation
Vouth Sokun	Nak Akphivath Sahakum
Nong Bunson	Ockenden International Cambodia
Ek Sunsen	Organization to Develop our Villages
Chrun Sao	Oxfam Australia
Choeun Vicheth	Peace and Development Aid Organization
Soseang Sotheary	People Center for Development and Peace
Thou Eangly	Society for Development in Cambodia
Sopha Sokun Narong	Sor Sor Troung
Preap Piseth	World Vision International

### **ADI Team Researchers**

Oeur Il	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia/ADI Project
Ang Sopha	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia/ADI Project
Kung Seakly	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia/ADI Project
Chhum Syrom	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia/ADI Project
John McAndrew	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia/ADI Project

**ADI Research Studies**  
([www.ccc-cambodia.org](http://www.ccc-cambodia.org))

- The Challenge of Living with Disability in Rural Cambodia: A Study of Mobility Impaired People in the Social Setting of Prey Veng District, Prey Veng Province, March 2006
- Impact of the Garment Industry on Rural Livelihoods: Lessons from Prey Veng Garment Workers and Rural Households, October 2005
- Domestic Violence in a Rapidly Growing Border Settlement: A Study of Two Villages in Poipet Commune, Banteay Meanchey Province, May 2005
- Upholding Indigenous Access to Natural Resources in Northeast Cambodia, December 2004
- Indigenous Response to Depletion in Natural Resources: A Study of Two Stieng Villages in Snoul District Kratie Province, September 2004
- Understanding Drug Use as a Social Issue: A View from Three Villages on the Outskirts of Battambang Town, April 2004
- Experiences of Commune Councils in Promoting Participatory Local Governance: Case Studies from Five Communes, March 2004
- Labour Migration to Thailand and the Thai-Cambodian Border: Recent Trends in Four Villages of Battambang Province, December 2003
- The Impact of the Tourism Industry in Siem Reap on the People Who live in Angkor Park, December 2002
- Small-Scale Land Distribution in Cambodia: Lessons from Three Case Studies, November 2001