**POIPET AREA REVIEW: EVALUATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF INFORMATION RELEVANT TO POIPET**

**Draft Report**
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Eviction of 250 families in Balilay September 2004 (ZOA Poipet)

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# 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION[1]

ZOA Refugee Care is a Dutch non-government organization that provides relief to the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDP) and victims of disaster regardless of race, religion, and social background as an expression of Christian compassion. ZOA started its activities in the early seventies and initially assistance was given to displaced persons and refugees in South East Asia. Since then ZOA has expanded its operations throughout South East Asia and other parts of the world. Various projects have been implemented in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe.

ZOA's involvement with Cambodian refugees started in 1979 in the Thai-Cambodian border during the Pol Pot regime. In 1993, ZOA established an office in Phnom Penh and signed a memorandum of agreement with the Ministry of Foreign affairs to facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration process of returnees and internally displaced persons. Its strategy is not to focus primarily on returnees or internally displaced persons alone, but also on the receiving district, commune or village.

Currently, ZOA is implementing the O'Chrouv Integrated Rural Development and Reintegration Project for the years 2001-2004. This development-oriented project focuses on: health care, water & sanitation facilities, alternative income generation, education, infrastructure and strengthening of local communities. ZOA has been active in O'Chrouv district since 1996, first through supporting activities of a Cambodian NGO (CAAFW) and then through implementing its own activities, starting in April 1998 with a 3 month UNHCR funded Quick Impact Project (QIP) for returnees and vulnerable groups.

ZOA's activities in O'Chrouv will end by January 2005. Some of its programs will be continued by other stakeholders.

In addition to ZOA, other NGO's have been working in Poipet on a variety of activities. Each of these NGO's have gathered information and data for their own purposes and using a variety of methods.

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[1] Nearly all taken from the ToR of the consultancy assignment

**2. WHY DO A REVIEW?**

For a relief and rehabilitation organization, ZOA is very research oriented. Apart from establishing baselines for the evaluation of their interventions, and implementing monitoring systems ZOA has:

❑ Conducted situational assessments, case studies, and topical research projects itself;
❑ Commissioned outside consultants to conduct such studies;
❑ Collected and shared with all who are interested data collected and studies done by other NGOs, IO's or government agencies.

This research orientation is an explicit part of ZOA's policy objectives. Other stakeholders in the area explicitly recognize the leadership role of ZOA in this area[2]. ZOA's role as the originator and (until autumn 2004) coordinator of the interagency network[3] is based on them being the only organization with reliable data[4].

However, although a lot of the existing data are interesting in themselves, no one has ever looked at the pile of existing reports as a body of location specific information that might contain added value if analyzed holistically. This is in no way specific to the Poipet data. Although the argument that it makes a lot of sense to see what a body of information "adds up to" is easily made and difficult to refute, systematically reviewing existing information to "discover what is known" already is surprisingly rare.

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[2] In my contacts with other organizations working in Poipet to request access to available (research) information, the very first question invariably was "have you contacted ZOA already?".
[3] NGO's working in Poipet sharing information through bimonthly meetings and a newsletter.
[4] See Annex 12 (Participatory) Monitoring and Evaluation, to the *Process Report on Establishing a Monitoring System* – draft version 3, February 2003

### 3. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DO A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW?

The tricky bit in the above claim is hidden within the adjective "systematic". Systematic basically means that one follows transparent procedures and thereby creates accountable results. Anyone doubting the results can (try to) replicate them by following the same procedures, or can check them by following an alternative, equally transparent but different procedure. However common sense that may sound, in research circles it is usually assumed that one "knows" how to do a proper review but if pressured to specify *what exactly* is to be done most researchers will be unable to provide an answer. Therefore, a major reason for the scarcity of reviews is that we lack agreed upon synthesizing procedures for such diverse piles of information as is currently available for Poipet.

Reviewing a limited number of reports is feasible, even without a systematic approach, even if only because one can mentally juggle the various corroborating and contradictory bits of information. But with a pile of half a meter this juggling strategy is a sure ticket to frustration. One needs some kind of procedure to make the chaos manageable[5]. If there is no such procedure, there is not going to be much enthusiasm to give it a try.

But let us look for guidance to those that do take the question of transparency seriously. They are to be found in what is slowly turning into a "movement" of Evidence-Based-Policy (EBP)[6]. Its basic focus is on the effectiveness of certain interventions (what works/what is likely to work?) but it also includes reviews on issues of implementation (how to make it work?), diversity of implications (what is the variability of effectiveness) and some other issues. Box 1 describes the conceptual rationale of this "movement" and illustrates the basic argument for systematically reviewing existing evidence.

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**Box 1: Why is Evidence Based Policy booming?[7]**

"…[P]olicy research has much to gain by following the sequence whereby social interventions are mounted and in trying, trying, and then trying again to tackle the stubborn problems that confront modern society…Few major public initiatives these days are mounted without a sustained attempt to evaluate them. Rival policy ideas are thus run through endless trials with plenty of error and it is often difficult to know which of them really have withstood the test of time. It is arguable, therefore, that the prime function of evaluation research should be to take the longer view. By building a systematic evidence base that captures the ebb and flow of programme ideas, we might be able to adjudicate between contending policy claims and so capture a progressive understanding of 'what works'. Such 'resolutions of knowledge disputes', to use Donald Campbell's phrase…, are the aim of the research strategies variously known as 'meta-analysis', 'review' and 'synthesis'.

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[5] As the economist Kenneth Boulding argued a long time ago "Knowledge is always gained by the orderly loss of information, that is, by condensing and abstracting the great buzzing confusion that comes from the world around us into a form that we can appreciate and comprehend" (Boulding, K. *The impact of the social sciences*. 1966. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press)

[6] Within the world of development assistance there is a certain measure of it to be found under the label of "meta-evaluation", largely practiced development policy think tanks of major players like the World Bank.

[7] Pawson I, October 2001, p.3

As is obvious from this box, this kind of 'reviewing' is more specific than our broader interest in "what is known" about Poipet. However, the methodological guidelines that are currently being generated within these circles are certainly a good starting point (See Annex 3 for a selection of recent papers and reports).

## 4. SYSTEMATICALLY REVIEWING WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT AN AREA

Systematic reviews are defined as reviews that are carried out to agreed standards. I will use 6 of these EBP review standards[8] to outline the nature of this Poipet area review and illustrate what it means to review data systematically. I also try to indicate where and how a review on "what is known" about an area differs from its more usual cousin, a review on program effectiveness.

### 4.1 Using a protocol to guide the review process

A protocol is the plan which the review follows to identify, appraise and collate evidence[9]. It is the main tool for ensuring transparency and replicability, and therefore the most significant characteristic of the *systematic* review. The standards described below in this "staged" account of how to conduct a review together constitute the elements of the protocol for this Poipet research review.

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**Box 2: Area review versus effectiveness review I**
Using a protocol is a defining element of all systematic reviewing.

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### 4.2 Focus of answering (a) specific question(s)

Without (a) focused question(s) the review lacks clarity of purpose and of content. Having a clear-cut (set of) question(s) is a basic principle of *all* good quality research and reviews are no exception to this rule.

The **overall objective** of this review is to establish what the relevance of existing material and research documents is for assessing the impact of ZOA's interventions in Poipet and what we can learn from this.

This can be translated into a whole set of questions:

- Given the overall objective, what is to be regarded as relevant material?
- What does the relevant material tell us about the objectives of the ZOA interventions?
- What does the relevant material tell us about the relationship between interventions and their objectives?
- What does the relevant material tell us about the major situational changes over time in the ZOA target area (macro-level: events/changes like border opening, resettlements, casino building, etc. that affect the social and economic environment of Poipet as a whole)?
- What does the relevant material tell us about the major situational changes over time in the ZOA target area (meso-level: events/changes like other NGO's starting operations, infrastructure build, etc. the effects of which are primarily affecting one particular sector – education, health, etc.)?
- What does the existing material tell us about the major situational changes over time in the ZOA target area (micro-level: changes at beneficiary level)?
- For assessing impact: What relevant data have not been collected, and why not, looked at from two perspectives:

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[8] See especially Boaz (unpublished) and Ashby (2002)
[9] NHS CRD, 2001

     o Given the ZOA program intervention logic?
     o Given changes at macro-level, meso-level and micro-level?
❑ What recommendations can be made for future data-collection accompanying long-term programs trying to improve the situation of beneficiaries in a particular area.

Given resource constraints we have taken on board as many of them as possible.

> **Box 3: Area review versus effectiveness review II**
> An area review will need quite a set of specific questions to extract all that is worthwhile knowing from the sources that it appraises. In that it differs from a standard effectiveness review that focuses on one indicator.

### 4.3 Exhaustive searching of relevant material

The search strategy for the Poipet review was very straightforward. In close collaboration with ZOA the aim was to collect *every piece of potentially relevant information* (data, reports – from very 'official' to very 'grey'). Apart from ZOA, only IOM and NPA were personally approached and requested for anything that might be interesting. ZOA's institutional memory and interagency coordination role probably ensured a pretty good coverage of existing **research** material. Much of what ZOA knew about but did not have available (research data produced by and for other NGO's) was acquired from the NGO's themselves. However, the search strategy followed implies that anything produced by other NGO's that was not shared in the interagency public realm, and thus unknown to ZOA, is excluded.

Still, while collecting existing research information it was evident that the main objective of the review, the guiding question of it, *what can existing information tell us about the impact of ZOA interventions, and what can it not tell us*, implies looking far beyond research information.

In as far as the log-frame descriptions of ZOA's interventions as contained in its policy documents covers all relevant factors – and that is a contestable assumption as we will argue later on (see section 7) – these factors are only very partially covered by research information. The universe of potentially relevant sources of information goes way beyond what is officially labelled research and includes policy documents, problem assessments by policy or project staff or external consultants, meeting notes, (government) administrative data, and newspaper articles. Therefore the request for *potentially relevant* information was framed as open as possible in order to let the material speak for itself as to its *actual relevance*.

However, for this other kind of information we have limited ourselves to what could be provided by ZOA. This means that we miss out on any potentially relevant information, **not officially labelled research**, produced by other NGO's and government agencies. The constraining factor for both kinds of excluded information is time. The only way to improve the coverage of all potentially relevant information is to personally contact each and every information holder, explain the search, persuade them to collaborate and follow up on promises to share.

> **Box 4: Policy Lesson 1**
> Systematically reviewing impact relevant material is very time consuming unless it is known in advance what is relevant material, and this material is available to the review team.

The search strategy as followed in this review can be summarized as follows:

❑ Collect all potentially available material, research and otherwise, from ZOA;
❑ Collect all potentially relevant-research-based material from other sources that ZOA is aware of;
❑ With collaboration of ZOA check with the following other INGO's if they have additional research-based material: IOM, CARE, NPA, MSF-NL, UNICEF;
❑ Follow up on any document or data source referred to and not yet in hand;
❑ Share the search results with ZOA staff and other stakeholders and organize a participatory check for exhaustiveness;
❑ Follow up on any data source identified as missing.

The result of the search is available in annex 1.

> **Box 5: Area review versus effectiveness review III**
> An area review has probably the widest possible definition of potentially relevant kinds of data sources of any review exercise. In that it differs from a standard effectiveness reviews that focuses on research information.

### 4.4 Selecting studies

The regular kind of review, using systematic search procedures, will result in many studies being identified as *potentially relevant*, that turn out to be *irrelevant* when assessed in detail from the perspective of the review question. The review will then report on numbers of studies identified by the search, and numbers selected for reviewing. But only the studies selected included in the quality appraisal (next stage) will be listed in the review.

Some reviewers, however, choose to 'map' all the potentially relevant information sources to provide a clearer picture of what the body of material looks like. We follow this strategy for the Poipet review. As described above, the overall objective of the review does not translate into straightforward criteria for inclusion/exclusion of material as relevant. It rather translates into:

☐ The need to find proper ways to classify types of knowledge that are potentially relevant in order to draw lessons for how to systematize the search procedure in future area reviews of this kind
☐ And possibly into the question how to design monitoring and collection mechanisms for the production of this knowledge.

The issue of classification is dealt with in the next paragraph.

**Box 6: Area review versus effectiveness review IV**
An area review will normally need to *map* rather than *select* all potentially relevant information. The point of the exercise not being to identify what is relevant to one particular review question that we are looking into at present but what is available as the potential evidence base for as wide a net as possible of future review questions.

### 4.5 Classifying types of information and appraising its quality

To map the relevant information regarding Poipet it is necessary to have some kind of classification system. Fortunately, the growing EBP guideline literature contains an example of a body of knowledge as diverse in its origins, coverage areas, purposes etc. as the Poipet material: an exploration of the types and quality standards of social care knowledge[10].

Of all possible ways to classify social care knowledge a master classification based on sources was identified as being most appropriate[11]. In the case of social care, these sources were organizational knowledge, practitioner knowledge, user knowledge, research knowledge and policy community knowledge. Two key intentions underlying the choice of this classification were[12]:

- ❑ "Any classification system must face the standard methodological expectations that it be uni-dimensional, totally inclusive, mutually exclusive and so forth"[13] to be intellectually defensible.
- ❑ All sources have a vital role to play in building up the evidence base, there being no hierarchy implied in the list;
- ❑ It is important not to neglect sources of knowledge that are tacit, that currently lack prestige and seem less compelling;
- ❑ Furthermore, to be useful a classification has to contain a limited number of classes, let's say a max. of eight. One can then accommodate complexity in various ways, by sub-classification, or by creating a so-called property-space of two or more dimensions, each of which defines a number of classes that when cross-tabulated result in a typology.

The classification chosen is also used as an entry point for thinking about appropriate quality criteria to appraise the actual information within each kind of source.

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[10] Barnes et al. 2003
[11] In this study, many potential classifications were assessed; the authors classified these possibilities into four kinds of classifications: methods-based, practice-based, purpose-based and source-based.
[12] Opus cit. p.viii
[13] Pawson I (2001), p.8

Looking at the diversity of information on Poipet through the lens of this example, and taking the basic intentions as our guide we decided that sources as defined above as a **master classification** makes sense and that the kinds of sources can be defined in terms of the following **types**:

- *Research information*: be it produced by research institutions or individual research consultants or by NGO staff, or by a combination of both, be it qualitative or quantitative data, be it program-related (baseline, evaluation) or general, be it with or without primary data-collection
- *Administrative/monitoring information*: be it program related or general (local government), be it data only, or interview and observation based narratives (progress reports, mission reports) or a combination of both
- *Practitioner/Advocacy information*: information from particular individuals such as practice-based policy reflections, problem or context descriptions, etc.
- *Policy information*: be it plans, proposals, strategy papers
- *Media information*: newspaper articles, newsletters,

For each source of information a checklist of quality assessment criteria is defined to judge the transparency and accuracy of the information/claims contained therein.

The master classification might fulfil the standard methodological expectations and be easy to use but without additional sub-classifications it remains content empty. We decided to use the following **additional sub-classifications** to describe each individual report, data-set, paper, etc.

- *Description or Data or Theory*: does the source contain information about important events and situational descriptions, primary or secondary empirical data or does it describe (policy) theory relevant to understand the social and economic processes underlying impact
- *Sector*: about which sector(s) does the source contain information
- *Period of field work*
- *Locations of field work*
- *Number of interviewees/focus groups/... per location*

The data/theory and sector classifications contain classes that are NOT mutually exclusive. A policy information source can contain both secondary data AND describe policy theory, it can address both the health and the Alternative Income Generation sector. However, sub-classification based on these classes help the user to quickly grasp the relevance of the material.

The Sector classification used is:

- Basic demographic and socio-economic data
- Accessibility (roads, transport, mine-clearance, land preparation)
- Border (border research, trafficking, labor migration)
- Health (Health system infrastructure, supplies and training, health education, watsan infrastructure and education)
- Education (infrastructure and training)
- Alternative Income Generation (Agricultural seeds and tools, agricultural technical and marketing training, other vocational training, credit)

However, the classification is just an instrument to see what kind of information is available in helicopter view. In order to make the inventory useful for practical purposes, a much more detailed overview of available information is needed. For this purpose we have created **sector-level inventories** of the kinds of information available. The sector level inventories provide information at the level of topics.

Ideally, information would be stored down to the level of the actual *question* used to collect the information. Within the scope of this exercise this is not feasible. However, for future inventories to be created as part of the monitoring efforts of development stakeholder active in particular areas (see recommendations), this is certainly within the practical possibilities of coordinated stakeholder action.

Ideally, one designs a database to deal with the issue of how to store the classified information in such a way that it is easy to retrieve the specific combination of information that one looks for in a particular query (how man data sources do we have for village X before year Y, what information do we have about the health sector in village Z, for which villages do we have information on education for both year A and year B, etc.). Because of time constraints we have opted to use the spreadsheet program.

However that may be, in both kinds of programs the retrieval possibilities are determined by how the 'raw' material is stored. It takes creativity and time to figure out an effective and efficient storage design, allowing for maximum retrieval options. We probably lack in both and do not claim to have found the best solution.

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**Box 7: Area review versus effectiveness review V**
The issue of classification is the crucial problematic of area reviews. Normally, for effectiveness reviews the crucial problematic is mastering the synthesis stage of the process. Both kinds of review share the quality appraisal problem.

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**Box 8: Policy lesson 2**
Inventories/Maps of existing area-specific information need to be classified in a very detailed way to best serve all possible purposes. Determining the optimal level of detail for the classification and designing an optimally efficient and effective storage system based on the classification is a major hurdle to take for area reviews. As there is normally a fair bit of trial and error involved, time is a crucial factor.

**Quality appraisal** is challenging for this kind of evidence and there exist no agreed quality assessment tools: "Even in areas where criteria and standards are well-established their are debates about their quality and application"[14]. The "credibility hierarchy" that places research evidence above other forms of knowledge will not do for our purpose. Also the associated "hierarchy of research evidence" that is commonly applied to effectiveness studies, with meta-analyses being seen as most powerful, followed by well designed randomised controlled trials, with descriptive studies and expert opinion at the bottom is also not very helpful.

However, the aspects of the study that have to be appraised for the purpose of this particular review are limited, more limited then in the case of a review of effectiveness. Because each of the information sources addresses different issues, results from different purposes, has different audiences, tries to answer different questions, we will NOT appraise the following aspects of what are normally considered required checks of research information that is to be included in a systematic review:

❑ The appropriateness of the design to answer the question
❑ The quality of the data analysis
❑ The extent to which particular conclusions are substantiated by the data collected/referred to

For **research data and administrative and monitoring information**, our quality appraisal only addresses:

❑ *The transparency of the information*. If it concerns primary data, do we know how the sampling was done, how the data were collected? If it concerns secondary data, do we know where they come from, and can we check the above questions for the original source?
❑ *The accuracy of the information*. Can we be sure that the data collection was done properly?
❑ *Can the information be generalized*. About which population can we say something on the basis of the data?

Because of the limited scope of this review the quality of the other kinds of information has not been assessed. With proper time and man power resources available we would have looked at the following aspects:

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[14] Boaz, unpublished, p.7

Quality appraisal for **policy information**:

❑ *The transparency of the information* provided by the source. Is the theory underlying the analysis, plans, claims, or assumptions made explicit? And if not, can one deduce them easily? Is it clear how the theory was arrived at, are alternatives indicated?
❑ *The ideological limitations of the information*. Are the links in the theoretical argument and its contextual assumptions very limited or do they include a wide variety of factors and relationships?

Quality appraisal for **media and personal information**:

❑ How trustworthy is the factual information?

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**Box 9: Area review versus effectiveness review VI**
Both kinds of review share the quality appraisal problem, but the area review requires less specific quality assessment.

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For some of the research and administrative and monitoring information the quality assessment has been done in a participatory process with ZOA Poipet program staff. As yet, no one can claim definitive answers to the question of how to properly conduct a systematic review of complex social issues and situations. Involvement of those who have a comprehensive understanding of the issue or location "is clearly a prerequisite for conducting any such review"[15]. As in many other fields "the level of methods reporting [is] generally poor, perhaps due to the dominance of the idea that policymakers and other users have little interest in this area"[16]. Under such circumstances, involving practitioner stakeholders in the review is not only a good way to ensure critical reflection on aspects of the review like the applicability of the review questions and checking the exhaustiveness of the search results but also on the quality appraisal because of their tacit knowledge of data collection procedures followed, reputation of individuals, etc.

Making this aspect of the review process a consultative exercise also reduces potential reviewer bias. When quality is individually appraised rather than through team work proper reviewing methodology would require at least one second opinion on all decisions made by the main reviewer. By arriving at quality judgements in team sessions involving an external reviewer and local stakeholders more than one second opinion is involved.

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[15] Baldwin et al. to be published, p. 15.
[16] Opus cit. p.15

**4.6 Synthesizing the research findings in the studies included**

"Normal" review questions ask for a real synthesis of data from the various studies, the established model being a statistical meta-analysis of research results on program effectiveness. Methodological efforts in the EBP field are currently concentrated on developing alternative methods of synthesis that allow reviews to deal with diversity in interventions and outcomes and studies of both quantitative and qualitative types in more systematic ways than through essayistic narratives. However, "Reviews do not have to synthesize. They can describe and summarize studies and this in itself can be very useful to research users"[17]. The review questions that we have formulated for this location review ask for such a descriptive summary. At issue is what we know and what we do not know.

What we are after is a map of the territory, in terms of:

- ❑ The data available;
- ❑ ZOA's policy theories underlying interventions;

And an assessment of this map in terms of:

- ❑ Gaps in the policy theories or missing links between theory and interventions, or actual interventions and log-framed interventions;
- ❑ Given the above: the reflection of these gaps in the data collected.
- ❑ The important contextual changes over time;
- ❑ Given the above: the extent to which the available data reflect these changes.

To be able to assess the available material with these questions in mind two conditions have to be fulfilled:

- ❑ The material has to be classified at a sufficient level of detail.
- ❑ Because inductive approaches do not in themselves allow for identification of gaps the background information used to identify gaps must be made explicit.

The first condition is taken care of through the classification system used in this review exercise.

The second condition implies transparency in the sources used. The next paragraph describes how we went about gathering input for the assessment of gaps.

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[17] Boaz, unpublished, p.8

**5. ASSESSMENT OF GAPS**

Mapping what one knows is not enough for assessing what one doesn't know. Assessing what one doesn't know implies some kind of conceptual frame of what is worth knowing. One must have an idea of what is potentially relevant.

Most data collection by development organizations is related to a specific purpose. Decisions about sample designs and kinds of data to collect are driven by the most pressing information needs of particular programs in particular sectors (health, education, etc…). This implies that the resulting body of information is determined by the particular project-specific purposes of the data sources. Obviously, sometimes purposes are quite broad, e.g. the administrative data collection by various levels of local authority (province, district, commune).

This implies that there are two levels at which one can assess gaps:

❑ Have the pragmatic decisions regarding what to collect and what not to collect, decisions steered by what sector stakeholders defined as most useful, important, etc., resulted in ALL that is potentially interesting/useful to know from the perspectives of the sectors/issues that they represent?
❑ Have these sector-determined decisions resulted in overlooking (cross-cutting) issues that are relevant but happen to be either outside the mandate of the data collecting agencies, or beyond the possibilities of each individual agency?

It does not take much imagination to picture the difference ideal data collection conditions would have made on what is now available. If budgets for data collection had been unlimited, data collection had been optimally coordinated between stakeholders and data collection had not only been determined by single purpose but (also) by multi-purpose usefulness as seen from the perspective of the area as a whole, we would have known much more about Poipet and its residents than we do now. Unfortunately, ideal conditions exist nowhere.

The purpose of this exercise is two-fold. First of all it is meant to indicate obvious information gaps in the existing body of knowledge. The second is to suggest strategies for organizing data collection in the future that can be expected to produce more comprehensive bodies of knowledge on areas without loosing sight of the real world budgetary and organizational constraints that are the practical reasons for the gaps in the Poipet body of information.

To develop the required conceptual frame, the perspective on what is potentially relevant, beyond including as much descriptive situational information as possible by casting our net of potentially relevant data sources as wide as possible (incl. Media information) we have used the following sources and methods:

- Explicate the policy theory of ZOA underlying their interventions *and thus* their data collection
- Do a limited number of key informant interviews with persons who have known Poipet over the years and ask their assessment of what have been the important developments, what factual information is available about these developments and their effects and what kind of data would have enabled better documentation/analysis/intervention had they been available.
- Document to the extent possible the implicit knowledge of ZOA program staff in collaborative review sessions.

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**Box 10: Area review versus effectiveness review VII**

As the main purpose of an area review is to map the existing material, identifying the white areas of the map becomes of primary importance. This is not possible without close involvement of local stakeholders and implies some primary data gathering.

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**Box 11: Policy lesson 3**

Inventories/Maps of existing area-specific information are more useful to the extent that they point beyond what exists to what is NOT known. This cannot be done inductively and assumes both theoretical assessment of policy theories underlying past data collection priorities and collecting some primary information. Again, time is a crucial factor.

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1 Overview of available material on Poipet

Annex 1 provides the overview of available material. The spreadsheet contains many sheets.

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**1. Data source by ID**

This is the master sheet of the spreadsheet. It lists all data sources by
- Identification nr. (ID)
- Year and Month of publication
- Organization(s) involved in the production
- Author(s)
- Classification by type (research info, admin/monitoring info, practitioner/advocacy info, policy info and media info)

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**2. Data source by Year**

This is the same information as the master sheet but now **sorted** by year and month of publication

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**3. Data source by type by year**

This sheet contains the same information as the master sheet but now **sorted** by type and within type by year and month of publication

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**4. Source by kind of data**

This sheet gives more detailed information about the kind of info and the sectors covered
- ID
- Sub-classification by kind of information (description, data or theory)
- Sector (Basic demographic and socio-economic data, Accessibility (roads, transport, mine-clearance, land preparation), Border (border research, trafficking, labor migration), Health (Health system infrastructure, supplies and training, health education, watsan infrastructure and education), Education (infrastructure and training, Alternative Income Generation (Agricultural seeds and tools, agricultural technical and marketing training, other vocational training, credit)
- Month(s) and year of data gathering
- Area covered (Poipet, Poipet and surrounding areas, areas outside Poipet)

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**5. Research by location**

This sheet gives more detailed information about the studies containing **data** only. All studies are classified in terms of
- Kind of data (survey, group-based information, key informants, admin data)
- Exact location of data collection
- Number of individual informants involved
- Quality assessment of the data

**6a-f. Sector information**
The next six sheets present the available information per sector and indicate what data exactly are available in the particular source. Obviously, in an ideal database the level of detail is at the level of singular questions and/or indicators. In this spreadsheet the info is available at more aggregate level only

**Population information at individual level about**
Demographics, Health, Watsan, Education, Livelihood, Income, SES, Housing & Assets, Agricultural Resource & Production & Animals, Participation in CBO, Sexual Health

**Village level information about**
Accessibility, Education, Agricultural Resource & Production & Animals, Industry/ Shops, Health, Community Groups, Other Development Projects, Watsan, Places of Worship

**Knowledge about**
Community Groups, Watsan, Health, Attitudes, Opinions, Intentions, Needs, Wants Sexual Health, Legal issues, Agriculture & Animal Husbandry

**Attitudes, Opinions, Intentions, Needs, Wants about**
Education, Border, Health, Quality of Life, Agricultural Resource & Production & Animals, AIG, Sexual Health, Watsan, Credit, Trafficking
**Industry information**
Sewing, Casino's, Waste Collection, Agriculture, Health, Border Market, Border Trade, Trafficking, Brothels, Fish trade

**Evaluation of Interventions**
Infrastructure, Training and other Programs

**Human Rights issues**
Bad Treatment
Trafficking

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**7a-b. Overviews of headings and codes used**
The two last sheets contain the headings and codes used and for the aggregate level of sector information it contains a non-comprehensive overview of kinds of questions and indicators that are part of the aggregate categories

In total more than 200 documents were entered. The table below presents the build up of the body of information according to the master classification of types of sources.

**Table 1: Summary of available information on Poipet**

| Type of Information | Nr. of sources | ZOA | ZOA & others | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Research** | 76 | 36 | 4 | 36 |
| **Administrative/monitoring** | 15 | 4 | | 11 |
| **Practitioner/advocacy** | 64 | 58 | | 6 |
| **Policy** | 9 | 8 | | 1 |
| **Media** | 42 | | | 42 |
| **Total** | 206 | 106 | 4 | 96 |

## 6.2 First conclusions regarding available information

An inspection of the available material, without focusing on possible gaps reveals some noteworthy patterns:

### 6.2.1 Little solid basic data on what goes on in Poipet

If one considers the available research and monitoring information, nearly all is very specific. This means that despite the seemingly large quantity of information we have very little in terms of solid *basic* data on what goes on in the area. Apart from the administrative data collected by village leaders – the transparency and accuracy of which is very questionable – there is really nothing that allows for overall statements about poverty levels, sources of income, etc. The only covering survey is the 1999 NPA/ZOA survey of the city slum area residents.

### 6.2.2 *The material reflects the program objectives of the associated development organizations*

The accumulated material is a near direct reflection of the immediate program objectives of the sponsors of the studies. Obviously, this is not only a problem regarding Poipet (as an area of development interventions). It is a reflection of the funding and the role of research in Cambodia as a whole. Box12 below describes this in general terms.

**Box 12: Research in Cambodia**
The availability of adequate research-based information for policy and practice in Cambodia is determined by two interrelated factors.

As a less developed country (LDC), a post-conflict society and a transitional economy[18], Cambodia is characterized by huge socio-economic differences, non-transparent and unaccountable governance structures, a lack of coordination within and between public, private and civil society institutions working in the same sector, and a questionable rule of law. The country is very IDA dependent and can hardly be said to have a real 'economy'. All of these conditions hamper the development of a substantial independent research sector. This causes a lack of basic research, and monitoring and evaluation information that decision-makers need for designing effective interventions.

They also cause the presence of a huge contingent of international development organizations. Development co-operation worldwide is a very research intensive enterprise. The policy and practice of development co-operation is, to a lager extent than most sectors, informed and legitimized by research-based assessments and characterized by monitoring and evaluation routines. Cambodia is no exception to this rule. Given the size and history of the country it is relatively data-rich and has a thriving contract research market[19].

However, the absence of a financially independent research sector means that donor interests dominate the research agenda. On the one hand, this means that most research is directly policy and practice relevant. However, it also implies that a lot of very relevant but less *immediately* applicable knowledge is never generated.

From a body of development organization sponsored research this is exactly what one expects. It does, however, create a curious *mismatch* between the body of *research information* about Poipet and the body of *other types of information*, including the policy documents. This is explored further in section 6.3 that explicitly addresses gaps in the body of information.

The spreadsheet overview in annex 1 allows for some insights into the program objectives. Table 2 below visualizes the reflection of the specific program related objectives. The table only analyzes the sectors of Health, Education, Border, and (Alternative) Income generation/Livelihoods. Nearly all material that contains data reports some basic demographic and socio-economic information, but much is secondary material. The sector 'Accessibility' reflects one particular (infrastructural) objective in itself.

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[18] Cambodia's development sector brings in much more money than government generates in terms of revenue and has virtually taken over vital public services like education, health, social welfare, agricultural extension, etc.
[19] A rough guesstimate of this market is US$ 25 million/year.

**Table 2: Research information is closely associated with objectives of development organizations funding the studies**

| | ZOA programs | Admin data | Other programs | Other objectives | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Health** | 15 | 7 | 10 | - Trafficking of women & children<br>- child labor<br>- Sex work & HIV/AIDS | 32 |
| **Education** | 22 | 6 | 3 | | 31 |
| **Border** | 6 | - | 19 | - Trafficking of women & children<br>- child labor<br>- Sex work & HIV/AIDS<br>- Exports<br>- Labor migration | 25 |
| **AIG** | 16 | 7 | 16 | - Trafficking of women & children<br>- child labor<br>- Sex work & HIV/AIDS<br>- Exports<br>- Labor migration | 43 |

Apart from the ZOA program objectives the only other issues that have attracted data gathering attention are Trafficking of women & children, child labor, Sex work & HIV/AIDS, Exports and Labor migration. And of these issues, it is the first two that constitute the bulk and the last one is not Poipet specific.

*6.2.3 Not enough data to allow for meaningful village specific estimates of indicators*
If one looks at the actual locations where data have been collected (sheet 5 data by location) it is immediately evident that none of the studies apart from the above mentioned slum area survey resulted in accurate data at village level. No study had sufficient sample sizes to allow for meaningful village specific estimates of indicators.

This does not prevent reporting of results at village level, sometimes with explicit caveats that the results are to be taken as with a lot of caution (in the technically more rigorous studies), but sometimes without which creates the suggestion that the reported figures/percentages actually represent reality. The major reason to report information at village level rather than aggregated is because the interest is at village level. The (ZOA) program with which the research is associated defines its interventions at village level and is understandably interested to see what differences and similarities are to be found between various intervention sites. Unfortunately, proper sampling would require much larger sample sizes to enable analysis of the resulting data sets at village level.

**6.3 Where are the gaps?**
Above we reported the observation that there is a curious mismatch between the research and administrative information available and all the other types of information.

A pregnant illustration of what is meant by this statement is the conclusion of ZOA's back ground analysis in its O'Chrou Integrated Rural Development and Reintegration Project 2003-2004 phase out plan.

> **Box 13: ZOA's assessment of the situation in Poipet**
> The situation of the people of Poipet remains precarious. Land speculation and the resulting evictions of the poorest of the poor to crowding resettlement sites, unstable income-earning possibilities, and seasonal outbreaks of disease has led to a life of continuous instability and difficulty. In addition Poipet continues to attract migrants from other areas of Cambodia seeking opportunity at the Thai border. What they find is a life often more difficult than the one they led in their home areas. In addition this puts a continual strain on limited local resources, creating continual problems with sufficient water sources, overburdening the local labor market and the limited opportunities it provides, and tapping out limited health services, while increasingly crowded conditions leads to problems with sanitation and outbreaks of disease.
>
> It is anticipated and widely acknowledged that addressing all these problems is far beyond the capacity and possibilities of Cambodia and the district in specific in the coming decade. Moreover, without continuation of the interventions of International Organizations and NGO's the fragile reforms that started will quickly vanish. In specific the community organizing efforts for resettled persons would fall apart, resulting in further impoverishing the most vulnerable people.

### 6.3.1 Land speculation and continuing economically motivated in-migration
This assessment mentions two crucial contextual determinants for any organization designing and implementing development interventions:

☐ Land speculation and evictions
☐ Continuous in-migration

*Land speculation*, land grabbing, evictions, etc. dominate the practitioner/advocacy type of material and the media-reports on Poipet. At least two-thirds of this material focuses solely or at least substantially on this issue. In addition to this, from the beginning policy and evaluation documents have identified land speculation as *the major determinant* of happens in Poipet[20].

*Continuous in-migration* is much less explicitly defined as a problem, and much more as a matter of fact that characterizes the instability of the Poipet environment. Early on during ZOA's involvement with this area it became clear than most of the target families were actually not 'real' refugees (i.e. returnees from Thai border camps) but economic migrants, sometimes with an IDP background. Whatever the academic disagreements around these labels (refugee, economic migrant, IDP), there is a broad consensus that Cambodians usually only move when they feel that is the only option left, and the vast majority of the in-migrants is very poor.

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[20] E.g. "This issue of land ownership, pervades all the activities of humanitarian, development and administrative agencies in the area" ( Upadhyaya c.s. 2000 End-of-project evaluation report of ZOA's ECHO funded project in Poipet Commune)

These contextual determinants are very prominent topics in all practitioner/advocacy documents and in the media reports on Poipet but do not figure at all as core issues of research studies (with one very recent small research study by NPA).

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**Box 14: Policy lesson 4**

Research for development, because of its intervention related orientation, limited budgets, and uncoordinated implementation, tends to:
- Not generate basic population information at either the level of the area as a whole nor at the level of individual sites of intervention
- Not generate basic information on major contextual determinants that affect all organizations working in a particular area

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### 6.3.2 The land game

Originally we had hoped to be able to describe the changes over time, the major developments in Poipet, to provide a sound basis for assessing the gaps in the existing knowledge. However, we gravely underestimated the time investment necessary to produce a reliable synthesis of the bits and pieces of information contained in descriptive sections of research reports, and in practitioner and media reports. There is a lot of missing information and a lot of contradictory or at least non-matching information regarding the when, how, why, by whom and how many kind of aspects of eviction stories, land speculation, and major developments.

We had to conclude that writing a history of Poipet from the time it was handed over from military to civil authorities in the early nineties was beyond the possibilities of this review exercise. This is unfortunate because we are convinced that it would be an extremely worthwhile project because Poipet may indeed be a pressure cooker version of development in Cambodia. Better understanding of the processes at work here may enlighten understanding of Cambodian development in general.

Nevertheless, the review exercise gave us access to a sizable body of documents on developments in Poipet over the last decade. In addition to this, a field visit to Poipet coordinated and supported by ZOA, enabled us to do a series of interviews with ZOA program staff and some other key informants about land speculation, migration and changes over time. A non-systematic assessment of the available information suggests some additional contextual determinants to the two mentioned above:

At present, migration movements are not limited to people moving into Poipet from outside to seek for economic improvement and people being evicted from urban sites to rural resettlement areas. There is also movement from resettlement areas back to urban areas, from one resettlement area to another and from resettlement areas within Poipet commune to new settlements in other nearby communes.

Land speculation is a much more complicated game than the basic scenario of land becoming more valuable because of external developments (like the opening of an international border), and legally sanctioned evictions of current occupants of that land. This basic scenario is indeed the most blatant consequence of speculation but another scenario is equally important:

Local leaders of areas as yet not yet very valuable – often in apparent collusion with outside interests, be they higher level local authorities, outsiders with a claim on the land (in Poipet often military with claims from the time Poipet was under military administration) or political power holders from the national level - actively offer people residential and chamkar plots to create 'communities'. Residents means clearing of land, and a legitimate claim on infrastructural facilities, especially roads (and mine clearance). In this way inaccessible and un-cleared land is turned into accessible and cleared land. This change increases the value of the land. Often only the promises on the (small) residential plots are legalized into some kind of locally recognized title, the promises regarding the (much larger) chamkar plot are hardly ever formalized. When it becomes opportune for the outside interests to make their claims public, a regular scenario seems to be an offer of some monetary compensation for the residential land, and sometimes an offer of another plot in a new settlement area – but always of lesser quality, size, etc. The offers are often accompanied by implicit threats of no compensation at all and/or violence in case of the offer being turned down[21].

That a scenario like this is actually intended from the beginning is supported by other aspects of the land game. The local leaders organizing these settlement processes are as often invited to do so by higher level local authorities, on the basis of their perceived ability to attract and control 'clients', as that they force their way into the game bottom up. Also, the original division of the settlement's area amongst the new settlers, the local leader and outside interests, seems to be anticipating later claims. And regularly the division is based on inflated numbers of new settlers and/ or includes settlers who do not physically move to the new settlement, to create maximum opportunities for honouring power holder claims when the time has come.

It is important to stress that the division of spoils of the game is evidently very unequal. Nevertheless, it is a game that *both* the powerful and the poor participate in. We have no basis for any assertions regarding the proportion of the new 'settlers'[22] who are fully aware of what the game is all about. Nevertheless, the fact that all are getting something out of it suggests that it is going to be difficult to stop.

One indicator for this difficulty is that the described scenario lacks the kind of public attention that 'evictions', 'land conflicts', 'human rights abuses', etc. attract. The apparent collusion of all involved denies the scenario the moral handles for pressure on authorities, and empowerment of the victims, that the other, 'the powerful abuse the powerless' events, have.

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[21] An occasional rape or beating is sufficient to get the message across to the whole community….
[22] Including both those that actually move and start clearing and those that only move on paper

Again, there are indications that Poipet is like a pressure cooker version of what is happening all across Cambodia and better understanding of the processes involved would be very valuable input for the debates amongst policy makers and practitioners about possible strategies to come to grips with it. Obviously the game has a natural limit: when there is no more new land to hand out for clearing. But waiting for this natural 'death' of the land game is not an option. The social, economic and ecological costs of this strategy would be staggering. Annex 3 contains some comparative (new) data to substantiate this pressure cooker claim for the Poipet case.

The consequences of all the described people movements are twofold:

☐ Population figures are continuously changing
☐ Because of the high turn-over, at any moment in time, those living at a particular place will include a relatively large contingent of recent arrivals

Again, these issues are often mentioned as contextual determinants of what happens in Poipet in many policy documents, practitioner/advocacy and media reports. But have never been systematically documented through a research study or identified as a topic for systematic monitoring.

**6.3.3 Communities and leaders**
A last gap emerging from the body of material collected and the interviews conducted in Poipet that is related to the above, is indicated by the practitioner/advocacy reports of the difficulties to facilitate effective community groups. Development interventions are defined in terms of beneficiaries and it is well-known that without ownership and participation of beneficiaries interventions are unlikely to have much long-term impact. However, ownership and participation are closely linked to some kind of underlying 'community'. The above described continuously changing composition of the site specific 'communities', and the very particular relationship between local leaders and those residing within his 'territory', as well as the allegiances of this same leader to outside networks of power and interest, make the Poipet different from a more 'stable', 'regular' or however one wants to describe the village or commune environment that has given rise to the effectiveness-of-development-interventions wisdom. How to effectively sow for longer-term impact within such a 'fleeting' environment as Poipet has not been taken up for systematic investigation.

**6.3.4 Summary of what we know and what we don't know**
Poipet commune is like a magnet for mostly very poor fortune seekers, many of whom have burned their ships behind them, with a lot of movement between urban and rural population clusters, and also some out-migration to neighbouring communes. This means that at any one time the population of most clusters consists of recent uprooted in-migrants, and that the number of families in each cluster changes continuously. This again implies that only for some purposes and during particular periods of time population clusters can be regarded as 'communities' in the normal sense of the term. The internal migration and the out-migration are mostly related to the 'land game'.

About in-migration, internal migration and out-migration and about the land game we have no systematic information, not about numbers, not about processes. As is evident from this very general description, it is probably necessary to look beyond Poipet commune, not necessarily to the administrative unit of O'Chrouv district, but to an area consisting of communes linked through resettlement migration, to better understand how the game operates. About this larger area, we have hardly any information at all.

**7. IMPACT ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE POIPET ENVIRONMENT**
All of the knowledge gaps are interrelated. We do not know enough to understand exactly how but it seems clear that the landscape of Poipet is not one of stable or even stabilizing communities settled in a particular site. Relief, rehabilitation and development activities, by there very nature, are site and 'target population' oriented. Infrastructural provisions and the required community participation for making them sustainable, improvement of service provision, training, all of these assume a client population that is sit-specific for the normal kind of indicator approach to be a fair instrument for assessing impact.

The purpose of this review is not an actual impact assessment of ZOA interventions but an evaluation of the available material from the perspective of its potential relevance for impact assessment. Such an objective assumes some kind of definition of impact. In the log frame world of project and program assessment the real life difficulties, ambiguities and limitations of determining impact has been made manageable through the a priori specification of Objectively Verifiable Indicators on the one hand and Assumptions on the other. The manifold pros and cons of these management tools are well known and this is not the place to repeat them. We only point out that this operationalization of impact is restrictive in the best of circumstances, but even more so in an environment that lacks stable target populations and is not easy to describe unambiguously as predominantly in need of relief, rehabilitation or development activities.

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**Box 15: Policy lesson 5**
Measuring impact through Objectively Verifiable Indicators is more difficult to the extent that the stability of the environment cannot be assumed
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**7.1 Target population**
Given the fleeting nature of site-specific target populations it seems dubious to judge ZOA interventions solely on the indicators defined in the log frame of the program. Some interventions, e.g. providing/improving basic service provision, can to a certain extent be defined in terms of access and quality without bothering about the changing composition of the target group. Other interventions are more difficult to assess without taking actual beneficiaries into account.  And some interventions – especially roads – may have had an unavoidable but still very real double-edged sword quality to them that does not register by using conventional indicators.

ZOA has responded very flexibly – as can be expected from a relief-oriented organization – to the continuously changing sit-specific realities, stretching the margins of what the resources available and the accountability constraints vis-à-vis outside donors allowed for to the max. During the four years of their Integrated Rural Development and reintegration Project, new sites and new activities have been added and sites and others have been phased out. Trying to capture this in terms of the originally defined OVI's seems too limited a perspective.

Another way of looking at it is to argue that in a situation like Poipet impact assessment of site-specific interventions should at least include a bird's eye perspective on the area as a whole and the movement of beneficiaries into, out of and within this area. Development

activities are being frustrated by unforeseen – a least given our current insight into the land game – depopulation of communities.  By including the site choice for interventions as an assessment criterion, next to the activity OVI's, a more comprehensive and fair evaluation is possible.

## 7.2 Crisis interventions and prevention

When assessing the available body of material from the perspective of what can be said about impact, another glaring gap is the fact that a lot of ZOA activities have targeted the prevention of something rather than the bringing about of something. Obviously the non-occurrence of something is difficult to measure. The relationship between the absence of a disease outbreak amongst a group of recently evicted people, who have been resettled on a muddy, inaccessible piece of land without any facilities, and a quick relief intervention can be presumed but hardly proved.

Obviously, the situation in Poipet has changed over time. Facilities have improved, security has improved, and for many residents socio-economic conditions have improved too. Nevertheless, conceptualizing these changes as a move from relief and rehabilitation needs to development needs, misconstrues Poipet reality. Although ZOA's program is defined in terms of reintegration and development, quite some interventions are actually better described as relief and rehabilitation. Again, the willingness and capacity to respond to real emergencies seems commendable rather than anything else. But to impact assessment limited to the evaluation of planned activities emergency responses remain invisible.

In hind sight, one can speculate that a major cause for the mismatch between plans and expectations and the reality of the last four years are to be found in very basic assumptions underlying the original log frame of ZOA interventions, so basic that they are not specified in the log frame. ZOA defines itself as a refugee care organization. As its Country Policy plan 2003-2006 states:

> *ZOA's target groups are refugees, internally displaced people and people affected by war or disaster. The common characteristic is that society is disturbed and therefore not stable. The disturbance is caused by manmade or natural disasters.*

Today's funding realities increasingly force development organizations like ZOA to live up to their mission statements in the strictest possible way. Without doubt the resulting 'stick to the core business' strategy has all kinds of advantages but it is not without weaknesses. One weakness is that whatever the mission statement, reality is always more ambiguous and multifaceted than to conform to any one strict definition of its terms. All the more so in a 'fleeting' environment like Poipet.

ZOA HQ decided very early on that Poipet did not have enough people that meet the criteria of a very strict definition of 'refugees'. Those moving back into Cambodia from Thai border camps qualified, but all others not really. This assessment seems to have been accompanied by an underlying image of refugees moving into a more or less established community, needing to be reintegrated within a context of the development of the overall community. The 2001-2004 IRDR Project is infused as it where with this image as it's basic but implicit contextual assumption. Unfortunately, whatever Poipet is,

that image is an unrealistic representation. The evictions of larger groups of poor are the most obvious examples. Within the log frame world these can probably be construed as 'man-made disasters' but, as we try to show above, evictions are only one manifestation of a much more encompassing phenomenon that we have labelled a 'land game'. The environment created by this game can hardly be called a 'war zone' or a 'refugee camp'. But it is not your standard 'permanent resettlement area' either.

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**Box 16: Policy lesson 6**
Although log frames include assumptions – conditions that need to be fulfilled for the activities to be feasible and/or effective – these assumptions tend to leave some important basics unspecified.

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ZOA recognized the grassroots realities soon enough and made the HQ decisions to disengage from the area that are to be expected from an organization guarding its profile while letting its fieldwork operations, as long as they lasted, be guided by the realities to the maximum extent possible. For impact assessment that has a four year old and somewhat 'misguided' log frame as its basis, this creates obvious difficulties.

Box 14 takes the argument one step further.

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**Box 17: Definitions and realities**
Obviously Poipet is a very specific environment, e.g. its location right at an international border crossing. Nevertheless it does not take much imagination to see it as an example of a much more general phenomenon: an environment that does not fit into one of the types for which the institutional landscape of development agencies has a pre-defined slot. To use a metaphor, Poipet is like an interdisciplinary problem.

Interdisciplinary problems are often avoided by academics because their disciplinary tools do not really fit, their disciplinary incentives do not reward interdisciplinary adventures, and in a strange variation on the 'tragedy of the commons' mechanism, it is always another discipline that seems more suited to tackle it. The result is no one assuming ownership of the problem. Poipet's unstable, 'fleeting' character make it an unattractive site for both relief-oriented and development-oriented development agencies.

Obviously, from a needs or rights perspective Poipet certainly deserves ample attention. It's problems are big, it's poverty is great, it's injustices are blatant, and it all applies to large numbers of people. Poipet's population can hardly be blamed for not conforming to one of the recognized types of beneficiaries of development attention. An environment like that of Poipet asks for policy definitions that are more fluid than the current categories and allow for more tailoring to field realities.

## 7.3 Networking, lobby and advocacy

Another major sphere of ZOA activities that remains pretty much invisible from the perspective of the pre-established OVI's is the networking, lobby and advocacy activities. A non-exhaustive list would include;

□ ZOA's role as the initiator of a generic interagency NGO network, with two monthly meetings for the exchange of information and ideas, and a newsletter;
□ ZOA's role as initiator and coordinator of a working group on border issues;
□ ZOA's role as initiator and coordinator of lobby and advocacy initiatives regarding border problems (corruption, human rights abuses)
□ ZOA's role as initiator and coordinator of lobby and advocacy initiatives regarding evictions
□ ZOA's role as initiator and coordinator of lobby and advocacy initiatives regarding land conflicts in general
□ ZOA's role as producer of research information, active investigator of hot issues, clearing house for all information available on Poipet, and active distributor of information amongst local but also national level stakeholders;

These activities are well recognized by all who work in Poipet or who need information about Poipet. ZOA's internal assessments also recognize this category of activities as crucial. We do not have access to policy documents from before 2000 but it certainly looks like ZOA would score quite high on any organizational assessment of policy learning. The experiences of Poipet seem to have resulted in policy choices[23] that are given concrete translations in e.g. the Project plan 2005-2007 for the Oddar Meanchey plan[24] that ZOA takes the lead in.

However, for impact assessment, the available material does not provide anything near a sufficient basis.

## 7.4 Not everything can be solved by log frame adjustments

One of the policy lessons drawn by ZOA from its lobby and advocacy experience in Poipet is that some assumptions in the log frame may be affected by lobby and advocacy and should therefore be included as activities, especially if the organization spends a considerable amount of time on it[25]. This is certainly a viable strategy for some of the L & A activities and we do not want to discount it as a solution but the strategy has limits.

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[23] E.g. as formulated in the Country Policy Plan 2003-2006, p.3-4
[24] ZOA/Care/MHD (April 2004) Community Empowerment and strengthening of Government Capacity for the Development of Oddar Meanchey Province Cambodia, 2005-2007.
[25] Powerpoint presentation on Lobby& Advocacy experience in Poipet by country director at ZOA HQ, June 2004

**7.4.1 Not all assumptions can become objectives**
Nevertheless, we propose to take a wider perspective. It is indeed true that a lot of the networking, lobby and advocacy activities are targeting assumptions of the log frame. This in itself is a very interesting observation. In terms of log frame logic this indeed turns the assumptions into objectives. At the same time is expresses that the assumptions were not really justified in the first place. To give an example from the ZOA IRDR Project log frame, consider the assumption that "government provides proper land and – titles for resettled families". The fact that this is a target for lobby and advocacy activities for ZOA shows that the government is 'under performing' (to put it mildly) regarding this issue.

However, there was a *reason* to define this issue as an assumption rather than an objective. Objectives need to be accompanied by OVI's, assumptions are exempted from this. Overall, it is definitely more difficult to formulate feasible OVI's for the assumptions in the log frame than for the objectives. One practical reason for this is that some assumptions are phrased in terms of something taking place now and continuing to take place. This creates a difficulty for impact assessment very similar to the difficulties described above for preventative relief measures. Another, even more important reason is that most assumptions are formulated at a level at which changes are much more difficult to attribute to the activities of one particular organization.

It is certainly true that for some assumptions it would be possible to design intervention activities for which OVI's can be defined. But in general, it seems more realistic to assume that the fact that particular issues have been defined as assumptions rather than having been translated into project activities is related to the fact that they are difficult to conceptualize as project activities with OVI's.

We reach the limits here of what can be done with the kind of pre-specified OVI's that are at the heart of the log frame. Again, this is not the place to elaborate upon the ongoing debates on impact assessment but we suggest that much networking, lobby and advocacy activities require innovative impact assessment tools. A very basic change is to keep the criteria of what makes for a good indicator (Specific regarding quality, quantity, time, target group and place, measurable, and achievable) but allow for formulation of indicators during or even at the end of the activity, rather than requiring the indicator to be specified before implementing the activity. But even this 'innovation' will not solve all impact assessment problems. One has to allow for tools that are able to capture less specific, difficult to quantify changes if one wants meaningful impact assessments.

**7.4.2 Overall impact assessment**
Another issue of the wider perspective is the hardly ever addressed problem of 'overall' impact assessment. But this is exactly the question that ZOA would like to be able to answer at the end of their engagement with Poipet. Most individual activities have been assessed already in terms of having achieved of what they set out to do. But what about the aggregate impact? Log frames and their OVI's do not in themselves allow for evaluating the overall impact that the total portfolio of activities of an organization has had. How many activities must have been successful to what extent before we evaluate the impact positively? And is this the right way of thinking about overall impact in the first place?

An easy answer to the question is to deny the limits of the log frame approach and claim that log frames do allow for an overall evaluation. Log frames not only specify OVI's for project outputs but also for the encompassing project purpose. And, as one can argue, it is the evaluation of these higher level indicators that allow for an overall impact assessment. Sure, no one will deny that this is a pretty rough proxy for impact. Evaluation manuals are filled with expositions on the difficulties surrounding the linking of interventions to outcomes, on establishing the contribution of program impact versus extraneous confounding factors to gross outcomes[26]. But, there is nothing wrong with rough proxies. They are often good enough for the purpose they serve.

However, the issue under consideration here is meaningfulness in a particular sense: actual understanding of the linkage between interventions, assumptions and outcomes. Impact assessment not primarily for accountability, efficiency etc. purposes but for organizational and policy learning. From this perspective the log frame and the underlying very schematic policy theory of causes and effects (expressed in the problem tree) is just not enough. One cannot get around asking questions about what are core interventions and what are contributing or optional/additional interventions, about correct timing of interventions, about aspects of the desired project purpose that are more important than others, and about the relative importance of the issues relegated to the assumptions versus those defined as objectives.

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[26] To give but one well-known example Rossi, c.s. (1999) Evaluation, a systematic approach. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 6th ed.

**7.4.3 Basic services provision as credentials for advocacy**
The last question is the most 'radical one'. And it is in a way a revisit of what we discussed in 7.4.1. In its policy learning[27] ZOA itself has looked at the relationship between objectives and assumptions in an interesting and illuminating way. When 'thinking through' lobby and advocacy, amongst the prerequisites for L & A activities they identified possessing thorough knowledge of the case and context, having a good network, and being perceived as reputable and trustworthy. In this analysis all of these prerequisites – knowledge, network, trust - are grounded in longer term, hands-on, basic services project implementation. In other words, an organization can be a successful advocate to the extent that it successfully implements basic services. Another element of ZOA's analysis is that in order to realize basic services and capacity building there is always *a certain level* of lobby and advocacy needed.

Obviously, the above does not imply any priority setting between basic services provision and L & A regarding important 'contextual' issues. But to the extent that one agrees with the argument that development organizations develop programs of interventions for issues that they feel they have control over and regarding which they can accomplish specific, measurable results, and define those aspects/factors of their policy theory that they feel they have less control over, and regarding which it is difficult to formulate specific, measurable results for as assumptions, the insights above do bring us full circle. The objectives and the assumptions are all part of one interrelated network of processes. targeting one cannot be done without targeting the other to *a certain level*.

It is a pragmatic debate *what* level will do, *for both objectives and assumptions*, in a particular context. For the Poipet environment it seems beyond doubt that the relative importance of networking, lobby and advocacy vis-à-vis basic services provision is substantial.

This can only imply that the assessment of ZOA's overall impact on developments in Poipet must assign substantial weight to its accomplishments regarding networking, lobby and advocacy. Unfortunately, the *research* information available does not provide any input for this.

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[27] Powerpoint presentation on Lobby& Advocacy experience in Poipet by country director at ZOA HQ, June 2004

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS
This concluding section formulates some recommendations for information collection and management in areas like Poipet, in which many development organizations and local government agencies operate, to accomplish a variety of objectives.

### 8.1 Networking
The first conclusions regarding available information about Poipet (6.2) all point towards the need for efforts to counter the tragedy-of-the-commons aspects of individual project-related data gathering. All organizations active in an area suffer from the lack of reliable basic data for the area as a whole, from the lack of data at the (village) level at which their activities are being implemented, and from the lack of systematic information on various processes that are important contextual determinants of the area but not direct targets of anyone's project objectives.

In Poipet, the need to network for general information and idea exchange is already recognized. Sometimes, on a particular topic, research efforts were already undertaken collectively. However, we recommend taking networking one step further and define collective building up a solid body of research and monitoring information on areas of intervention as a one of the goals of interagency as well as NGO-government networking.

The collective data gathering could include both regularly repeated generic surveys or other representative data collection efforts, and ongoing monitoring of all kinds of developments. Also ongoing user friendly data base storage and assessment of available material can be included as a network objective.

One important side benefit of collectivizing data gathering and organizing a clearing house is that it makes for real shared activities. Networks with shared activities are always more vibrant than networks that only exchange information.

*All of the above is not to suggest that development organizations should not do project-specific research and monitoring. The collective data gathering is not meant to replace but to complement current praxis. Or, maybe more accurately formulated, to replace a particular proportion of current praxis by a better alternative. Ideally total research expenditure for the area does not increase.*

Ideally, the network participants would allocate a particular proportion of their total research budget to collective efforts.

## 8.2 Collective and coordinated basic data gathering

Given the data needs for the GO and NGO's working in a particular area one can imagine various operationalizations of the idea of collective and coordinated data gathering. A first operationalization would be collective agreement on a comprehensive set of demographic and KAP indicators, on the levels of aggregation that one wants representative data on these indicators, and on the regularity with which one wants to update one's information. With such agreement in hand one can discuss possible ways to produce the desired data. This can be done in collaboration with either local government, the network of NGO's or a combination of both.

### 8.2.1 With other NGO's

As argued earlier, there is a direct relationship between current data collection practice and its limitations. This relationship has basically only two aspects to it. One is the accountability towards outside stakeholders (donors), the other is costs. Box 18 deals with accountability.

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**Box 18: Research for development and the unintended consequences of accountability**

Development agencies are under heavy pressure from governmental and other donors and from the public opinion to minimize overhead and maximize direct investments in core activities. Research is regarded as a necessary but non-core activity and budgetary allotments are closely scrutinized. Research expenditure is only considered permissible for a limited number of purposes. Development interventions being under such close public scrutiny makes everything related to evaluation permissible (baselines, monitoring, mid-terms, end-of-project assessments etc.). Otherwise, only needs assessments and other directly intervention related studies that are unproblematic. Unproblematic in principle that is because more likely than not there will be restrictions in terms of the percentage of the total budget that can be allotted to research.

However laudable the stress on maximizing the share of the budget directly targeting beneficiaries, it does have some negative consequences. Knowledge needs for optimal project implementation cannot all be covered by research questions that are directly related to the interventions.

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Research budgets have a couple of basic expenditure items. The costs for the analytic skills needed for the project (formulating good questions, designing good instruments, analyzing results, writing reports), the field work costs (number of researchers involved, the time spend, transportation), training, data processing, and some material costs. In general, at least for quantitative studies, cost-effectiveness increases substantially with scale of a study (costs per questionnaire decrease substantially with larger sample sizes). However, because of the budgetary constraints with respect to *absolute* amounts that can be spend on research, most development agencies still opt for small scale studies. A factor that contributes to this choice is that many opt to use their own development workers as data collectors (to save costs). This restricts the number of days data collection can take because normal program activities have to be stalled for the duration of the field work.

The advantages of pooling resources are obvious. If one organization can afford an particular amount of money and a particular number of person days of its staff, this will allow for a study at a particular, normally small scale. If six organizations pool their resources, the scale can be increased manifold; the combination of more resources and the benefits of scale increases the universe of the possible dramatically.

The pooling strategy has other advantages. In general development agencies take care of as many aspects of the research process as possible by themselves. Staff is already paid for so anything that can be dealt with in-house saves expenditure. An unfortunate consequence of this very legitimate effort to keep costs at a minimum is that it compromises quality. Research requires professionalism in all of its stages to steer clear from the garbage-in-garbage-out pole of the quality continuum. Professionalism requires a lot of relevant training and a lot of experience. NGO staff normally lack both[28]. A pooled research project has more scope for involvement of research professionals and does not have to cut as many corners as a project implemented with the limited resources of just one organization. To give but one example of what such involvement could consist of is including field work supervision by experienced professional enumerators, thereby drastically improving correct application of the procedure for choosing respondents (including substitution etc.), ensuring ongoing monitoring of correct interviewing techniques, field editing of questionnaires, etc.

Next to the possibilities to enlarge the scale and improve the quality, a third advantage of pooling resources is that part of the 'savings' can be devoted to increasing the frequency of data collection.

### 8.2.2 With local government
As is obvious from the overview of available material, the administrative data that are being generated cover quite a lot of ground, but are not very reliable. Whatever one may think about the current quality, two assumptions are quite safe to make: administrative data production will continue and decentralization support structures (e.g. Seila) will continue their efforts to improve this production. So it makes a lot of sense for an area-based interagency network to enter ongoing discussions with the local authorities in charge of administrative data collection and with their support structures about collaboration, support and coordination of efforts.

### 8.3 Using development workers and community leaders as ongoing monitors
The 'mismatch' between research information and practitioner/advocacy information on Poipet suggests that there is a lot to win by thinking through possibilities for using development workers local knowledge, networks, and trust to systematically monitor a whole array of issues. Obviously, most development worker task descriptions already include monitoring. These monitoring responsibilities usually consist of a combination of systematic regular monitoring of very specific issues indicators (with structured

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[28] This issue is addressed in more detail elsewhere: Good data require good field work. A discussion paper on the professional disinterest in transparent, methodologically rigorous quantitative data collection (Paper for the sixth socio-cultural research congress on Cambodia, November 18-20, 2002. Royal University of Phnom Penh)

instruments to do so) and keeping narrative logs of general impressions of field visits. The data production potential of the latter is as yet not systematically evaluated and mined. The amount, depth and quality of information that development workers who are in constant contact with beneficiaries have access to is staggering. What is lacking is organization.

Obviously this is not rocket science. Nevertheless we do not know of serious efforts to exploit the possibilities. One major reason why is the risk of creating more reporting requirements and administrative hassle for grassroots development workers. This risk is real and any proposal for trying to mine this possibility should be assessed for its effects on increasing paper work. However, risks are to be managed, rather than accepted at face value as legitimizing not trying.

Obviously, an even more interesting monitoring data source is community representatives. In the same way that e.g. well management committees can be involved in ongoing data collection of a limited number of indicators regarding the upkeep, use, etc. of wells in a village, individuals or groups can be identified that monitor other indicators.

Combining both strategies into a collaborative effort between development workers and community representatives also might hold lots of promise.

### 8.4 Collective and ongoing data storage
This review is a post hoc effort by an outsider. To be really effective, keeping track of what is becoming available should be an ongoing effort during the implementation of the interventions. Adding individual sources of information to a database as they become available seems manageable in terms of time investment. Creating the data base will constitute an initial investment but once the tool is there, data entry does not require additional staff. For the same reason it is possible to enter information about the data sources at a much more detailed level (individual indicators) than if a substantial existing body of sources has to be entered from scratch.

**ANNEXES**

Annex 1 Digital overview of Poipet Information

Annex 2 Selective bibliography of systematic reviewing literature

Annex 3 Poipet: GIS data on changes over time and current status in comparison to other parts of Cambodia

**Annex 2**
**Selected Literature on Systematic Reviewing**
Available from the Website of the ESRC UK Centre for evidence based Policy and practice, Queen Mary, University of London: www.evidencenetwork.org

- Ashby, D., Boaz, A. & Young, K. (January 2002) *Systematic Reviews: What have they got to offer evidence based policy and practice?* Working Paper 2. ESRC UK Centre for evidence based Policy and practice, Queen Mary, University of London
- Baldwin, S., Croucher, K., Quilgars, D. & Wallace, A. (to be published in Policy and Politics) *Meeting the challenge: developing systematic reviewing in social policy.* University of York
- Barnes, C., Boaz, A., Grayson, L., Long, A. & Pawson, R. (2003) Types and quality of knowledge in social care. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence
- Bauman, P. (September 1999) *Information and power: implications for process monitoring. A review of the literature.* Working paper 120. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Boaz, A. (unpublished paper) *Towards an evidence based public health: current methodological developments and challenges.* UK Centre for evidence Based Policy and Practice, Queen Mary, University of London.
- Davies, H., Nutley, S. & Walter, I. (February 2002) *Briefing Note 1: What is a conceptual synthesis?* Research Unit for research Utilisation, Dept. of management, University of St. Andrews.
- Davies, H., Nutley, S. & Walter, I. (January 2003) *Research Impact: a cross sector review. Literature review*. Research Unit for research Utilisation, Dept. of management, University of St. Andrews.
- NHS CRD (2001) *Undertaking Systematic Reviews of Research on Effectiveness. CRD's Guidance for those Carrying out or Commissioning Reviews*, CRD Report Number 4 (2nd Ed.) York: CRD
- Pawson, R. (October 2001) *Evidence Based Policy: I. In search of a Method* Working Paper 3. ESRC UK Centre for evidence based Policy and practice, Queen Mary, University of London
- Pawson, R. (October 2001) *Evidence Based Policy: II The promise of 'Realist Synthesis'* Working Paper 4. ESRC UK Centre for evidence based Policy and practice, Queen Mary, University of London
- Pawson, R. (November 2001) *Evidence and Policy and Naming and Shaming.* Working Paper 5. ESRC UK Centre for evidence based Policy and practice, Queen Mary, University of London
- Pawson, R. (June 2003) *Assessing the quality of evidence in evidence-based policy: why, how and when?* ESRC Research Methods Programme, Working Paper 1.

Other:
- Buss, T. & Vaughan, R. (1998) *Communicating social science research to policy-makers.* Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 48. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Light, R. & Pillemer, D. (1984*). Summing up. The science of reviewing research.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.