

**Statement on Agriculture Sector Development, Delivered by
H.E. Dr. Chan Sarun, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
at Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum
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- *Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia,*
- *Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Representatives of Development Partners, and Distinguished National and International guests,*
- *All participants*

Today, I am very honored to be here to deliver my brief statement on agricultural policy, strategies, mechanisms and achievements fulfilled in the context of agriculture sector development in Cambodia.

Agriculture sector is a cross-cutting sector which plays important roles in (1) improving livelihood of rural people amounting to about 90% of Cambodian population, (2) directly contributing to poverty reduction, (3) supporting Cambodia's economic foundation, (4) maintaining natural environment, and (4) supporting agro-tourism.

Through agriculture sector development vision, based on the agenda of its national policy and rectangular strategy, in addition to its existing structure and mechanisms, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) had established a joint technical working group on agriculture and water, in which the representatives from our development partners have actively participated, to advance the agriculture sector development. This mechanism has clearly determined its main task in mobilizing resources for formulating and implementing agriculture development programs and projects.

In all previous Consultative Group meetings between the RCG and Development Partners, that is now named Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF), both parties always agreed upon Joint Monitoring Indicators (JMIs) for joint implementation. In general, the JMIs of the last CG meeting had been remarkably fulfilled by the two parties. However, fund had been mobilized was still limited to cause the implementation of a number of activities slower than expected, although Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has managed to mobilized additional funds from other various sources including the one from private sector.

Actually, the Working Group on Agriculture and Water, in which AusAID is taking a lead from the development partners' side, had finalized Strategy on Agriculture and Water, which was approved by MAFF and MoWRAM in March 2007. The strategy will actually be used as a basis to set out specific implementing activities, and that we do not produce it for display on the shelf. The detailed results produced by the Working Group will be introduced to the forum shortly by H.E. Veng Sakhon, Secretary of State for Water Resource and Meteorology and Co-chair of the Working Group.

Now I would like to touch upon the issues of economic land concessions. In serving the purpose of agricultural production development and support to the policy for private sector partner, a number of economic land concessions (ELCs) had been granted to private investors in accordance with provisions stipulated in Law on Investment and Subdecree on Economic Land Concessions. The granting of any ELC is to serve the objective of productivity and quality improvement with the assurance of maintaining healthy environment through the use of the land in an effectively economic, social and environmental manner.

The process of ELC granting has been based on the results of field surveys through inter-disciplinary mechanism and local consultations (local authorities and people), and the recommendations of Technical Secretariat for ELCs. In this sense, land that is engaged with local people's use and occupation, and forest cover that has potential for environment and ecology are kept intact. The granted ELCs have been under close monitoring. The contacts and master plans for those ELCs have been used as indicators and tools for reviewing the concessionaires' performance. Last week, under the monitoring mechanism of MAFF, five ELCs were revoked by the RGC, several were instructed to correct and improve their activities, and the other two were suspended, pending further inspection. Those ELCs granted before the adoption of Land Law, with the area exceeding 10,000 ha, are under the process of negotiation for reduction in accordance with law and regulations. The MAFF has its plan of negotiation for the reduction of five ELCs in 2007.

Regarding ELCs information disclosure, the MAFF had established its website, for which all of you can search. This shows that under clear and comprehensive mechanism, ELCs are able to contribute to economic development and poverty reduction, through agricultural productivity growth and employment for our people.

Let me turn to the Fisheries Sub-sector of the agriculture. This sub-sector plays very important role for the livelihood and financial generation for our people and the nation, and it is regarded as valuable natural resource for Cambodia. The sub-sector has been executed in consistent to the provisions of Law on Fisheries and other relevant regulations. National Policy on Fisheries had been approved and action plan have been implemented. The MAFF has focused its attention in further pushing the sub-sector reform to (1) maintain the sustainability of the fisheries resource, (2) ensure that the access rights of local communities are widely opened, and (3) increase income from the sub-sector for national budget.

The user rights of the communities on public fishing areas are broadly opened through Subdecree on Community Fisheries. Guidelines on Community Fisheries has been finalized and will be put in use soon by the MAFF. The Guidelines set out a legal framework to ensure transparent, accountable and equitable implementation of the communities, and maintain healthy fishing areas.

Fishing lots have been improved to increase fish stock for people's needs, and incomes generated have been managed and controlled by interministerial mechanism, especially MAFF and MEF.

Not counting only on natural resource to serve the needs of the people and national economy, the MAFF has also focused its efforts on aquaculture. Rice field aquaculture and integrated aquaculture have been accepted for implementation by our farmers. There has been significant progress that we should be proud of. This has been mainly contributed to ease the pressure on the use of natural fisheries resource.

Value-added fisheries products have also been at MAFF's attention to further improve. The processing of fisheries products is a priority action for the value add. Therefore, accredited certification of fishery produce quality is an issue to be addressed. In this relation, the development partners, private sector, and especially the co-chairs of Fisheries Working Group should take this issue into account to be jointly addressed.

For forest that is also a very important natural resource, falling under mandatory management of the MAFF and Ministry of Environment, the RGC has been strongly committed to fighting against the destruction of the resource by putting out regulations, orders and certain measures.

Forest concessions had been suspended; illegally grabbed forest lands have been revoked by National and Sub-committees for Prevention, Control and Suppression of Forest Lands Encroachment for Private Entitlement, with collaboration from National Authority for Land Conflict Settlement. The revoked lands are under consideration for use for reforestation as priority, and use for the objective of social land concessions.

Illegal forest activities have been reduced, at a maximum extent. The illegal activities have transformed from commercial to small scale for supply the needs for domestic consumption. Solutions to the illicit activities have been carefully chosen in accordance with regulations, and with participation from court institutions. No discrimination and tolerance for legal prosecution of the culprits or offenders. To supply the domestic demands of timbers, annual logging coupes have been established with their operation under technical monitoring and control by officials of the Forest Administration. The owners of the coupes have been warned of any misconduct as illegal activities and would face the law.

Access to forest resource by local communities is assured by provisions of Forestry Law and is implementably governed by Subdecree on Community Forestry. The establishment of communities forestry has been pushed to ensure regular communities livings and contributed to sustainable forest management.

The verification of forest cover data, forest estate demarcation and inventory are important assignment, and key for managing forest estate. The MAFF has improved the means and methodology to verify forest cover that is more advanced if compared to the ones used in previous decades. Therefore, the accuracy and error in figure of the forest covers may also be different. The forest estate demarcation and inventory have been moving at a slow speed on a long road. The speed is a function of fund, meaning that fund for this job is a decisive factor. However, the MAFF is still optimistic as the development partners do have the same ideas as the ministry does, and will not just stand and see without help in a circumstance that their fund is available for the purpose, and before they decide to allocate fund for some organizations that have never participated in the implementation of the action plan jointly developed by the development partners and the Forest Administration, through the Joint Technical Working Group on Forestry and Environment.

- Samdech, Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I think that the statement of the MAFF on this general aspect may be sufficient for the forum to see the willingness and actual actions of the RGC on the sector, according to its political platform. For detailed information or data, our three joint technical working groups may provide upon request, as appropriate. I may stop my statement now. Thank you very much for your kind attention.