Chapter 8
Internal Migration in Cambodia

Jean-Christophe Diepart and Chanrith Ngin

8.1 Introduction

From the early 1970s until the late 1990s, internal population movements driven by war and conflicts were central in the life of most Cambodians. In the first half of the 1970s, civil war and bombing displaced people from their hometowns. During the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime (1975–1979), cities were literally emptied and most of the rural population were forceably moved out of their villages to live and work in the countryside (Kiernan 1996; Vickery 1984). An estimated two-thirds of the population were involved in migration to rural areas during the early KR period (Desbarats 1995). After the KR regime was toppled in 1979, masses of Cambodians made their way across the country – usually returning to their home villages – in search of relatives and land. But ensuing war and political upheavals continued to displace people within and across national borders. Large-scale international migration to Vietnam and Thailand soared during periods of crisis and were followed by periods of return migration.

When the country achieved peace in 1998, internal migration did not stop, but the nature of mobility changed. The liberalisation and growth of the economy opened new avenues for the development of services and industries, which triggered structural transformation from a primarily rural and agricultural-based economy to one that was increasingly urban, industrial and service-based. These opportunities have lured people to work in urban areas and incentivised migration from rural areas (MoP 2012). However, the capacity of non-agricultural sectors to create [unskilled]

J.-C. Diepart (✉)
Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium
e-mail: jcdiepart@uliege.be

C. Ngin
Development Studies, School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand
e-mail: chanrith.ngin@gmail.com

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jobs remains limited and employment growth lags behind growth of the economically active rural population (Diepart 2016). This limitation lies at the core of the labour question in contemporary Cambodia and, combined with development constraints in core agricultural areas, it has resulted in the resurgence of internal and international labour migration (Diepart et al. 2014).

The magnitude of internal migration is significant. In 2008, the number of lifetime migrants – using village as the spatial unit measuring migration – was 3,239,184 representing a migration rate of 24.2% for Cambodia as a whole (NIS 2010). This is more than the total number of people who have been involved in international migration in their lifetime (NCDD 2017), even though cross-border migration has increased substantially over the last decade. Despite its significance, studies of internal migration in Cambodia are scant. This impedes policymaking to address the role internal migration plays in the redistribution of population across the territory, and the resulting socioeconomic transformation of both rural and urban regions.

To address this gap, we focus on internal migration by analysing data from the 1998 and 2008 censuses. Our objective is twofold. We first examine internal migration quantitatively with metrics that describe the intensity of migration, the demographic characteristics of migrants, and the spatial impacts of internal migration in Cambodia. We do so by situating Cambodia in a broader Asian and global context. Second, we aim to understand the contribution of internal migration to development, particularly with regard to the contemporary labour market.

8.2 Internal Migration Data

During the prolonged period of war and political instability that stretched from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, the collection of demographic information was neglected because of internal security problems as well as the dearth of material and human resources (Desbarats 1995). Demographic data have been collected systematically since the 1998 population census. That census was a milestone because the migration-related questions asked in 1998 have been used in all subsequent national population censuses and surveys (Table 8.1).

The nature of the migration data collected in Cambodia mirrors most other Asian countries. Both the 1998 and 2008 population censuses captured lifetime migration, which is the most common form of data collected on migration in Asia. Likewise, migration measured over a discrete period of one or five years, which is less frequent in Asia, is not captured in Cambodia (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). However, both censuses included questions on each individual's latest migration, which can be combined with information on duration of residence to generate measures of migration over a defined interval.

In addition to the population censuses, inter-censal sample surveys were organised in 2004 and 2013 to update information on key demographic parameters. Both surveys included migration-related questions that are identical to those asked in the 1998 census.

Table 8.1 Migration questions, 1998 Census, Cambodia

Birthplace	Previous residence	Duration of stay	Reason for migration
9	10	11	12
Place of birth If in this village, enter code 1. If in another village, give name of district of that village and write name of province within brackets. If outside Cambodia, write name of country.	Where have you been living before? If always lived in this village, enter code 1 and skip to 13. If in another village, give name of district of that village and write name of province within brackets. If outside Cambodia, write name of country.	How long have you lived in this village? (*Enter Code from list below*)	Give reason for change of residence, if present residence is different from previous residence. (*Enter Code from list below*)

Source: NIS (2002)

In 2012, the Ministry of Planning conducted a comprehensive survey to examine the characteristics of migrants and the links between migration and the welfare of individuals, families and communities. The survey is rich in detail but limited to the population that has been streaming into Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia, which is the main destination of rural-to-urban migrants (MoP 2012).

In addition to census-like datasets collected and analysed by the National Institute of Statistics, local governments (at commune level) update a so-called 'Commune Database' annually, which comprises a large number of socioeconomic indicators, including job-related migration. The information, available at village level for rural and urban areas throughout the entire country, includes the number of people who have left their household for a period during the year (duration unspecified) to seek jobs elsewhere. Unlike previous data, the information about this migration does not imply a permanent change of residence but rather captures the mobility of labour over an extended period. As such, it provides information to complement the migration data obtained in censuses. However, the accuracy of the information recorded by village chiefs depends on their knowledge of the labour situation in their village. As a result, the headcount of job-migrants needs to be considered with caution. The main advantage is that the data are collected annually by the same person, which should therefore provide reliable information on trends.

Bringing these sources together, Table 8.2 provides an overview of the data on internal migration available in Cambodia.

8.3 The Spatial Framework

The spatial hierarchy of administrative entities in Cambodia has undergone considerable change since 1998, and there have also been changes in the classification of these entities as rural or urban areas. In 1998, the country consisted of 24 provinces,

Table 8.2 Internal migration data collected in Cambodia, 1998 onwards

	1998 and 2008	2004 and 2013	2012	2011 to 2016
Type of datasets	Census	Intercensal survey	One-off survey	Commune database
Information collected	Lifetime migration Last-move migration Previous residence (district) Duration of residence in current location Reason for migration		Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of migrants to Phnom Penh	Number of people involved in job-related internal migration
Geographic coverage	National	National	Phnom Penh	National

of which Phnom Penh had the special status of capital. Each province was divided into districts (n = 183), communes (n = 1609) and villages (n = 13,406) (NIS 2002). At that stage, there was no functional classification of 'urban areas'. The designation of places as 'urban' or 'rural' was based only on administrative criteria: all provincial towns (whole district), four districts in the capital city of Phnom Penh, and the entire provinces of Sihanoukville, Kep and Pailin (also known as *krong* or municipalities) were considered as 'urban'. There were a number of problems with this because the purely administrative classification did not take into account the urban or rural conditions observed on the ground.

To address the problem, in 2004 the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) adopted an additional set of criteria consistent with the Cambodian context, which classifies an area as 'urban' if it has a population density greater than 200 people/km^2, a total population of more than 2000 people and less than 50% of employment is in agriculture. This reclassification was conducted at the commune level because villages in Cambodia do not have administrative boundaries (NIS 2012).

In 2008, the law on the Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans, and the sub-decrees relating to the application of this law, reorganised the sub-national administration systems (Royal Government of Cambodia 2008a). Sub-decree 18 (Royal Government of Cambodia 2008b) divided the capital city of Phnom Penh (equivalent to a province) into eight Khans (equivalent to districts) and upgraded the status of Sihanoukville, Kep and Pailin from municipalities to provinces. Including the capital Phnom Penh, the total number of provinces remained at 24. Each province consisted of districts (n = 159) and cities (also known as municipalities) (n = 26).

In 2011, the NIS revised the classification of 'urban area' to take the 2008 census results into account. Consequently, areas declared as 'urban' included the communes (*sangkat*) of Phnom Penh and of the 26 cities (also known as *krong*) identified in sub-decree 18 as well as any other communes that met the criteria set out above. In addition, some semi-urban communes close to major cities were reclassified as 'urban' based on local knowledge and field visits. Figure 8.1 represents the spatial framework of administrative entities in Cambodia in 2011 and the classification of communes as 'urban' and 'rural'.

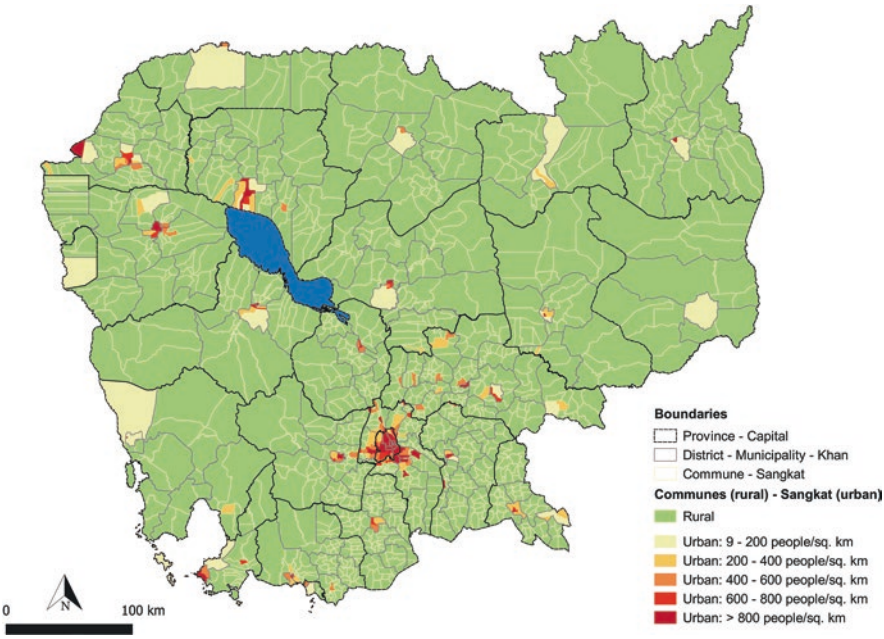

Fig. 8.1 Provinces, districts and urbanisation, Cambodia, 2011. (Source: Mapping by the authors)

Changing numbers of spatial units at various levels of the hierarchy is a common issue in developing countries, particularly in a post-conflict context. In this case, it is problematic because it is difficult to compare the results of the 1998 and 2008 censuses at district and provincial levels.

In both the 1998 and 2008 censuses, people are considered to be migrants if the village in which they were enumerated differs from their birthplace (life-time migrants) or from their previous place of residence. However, the location of the birthplace and place of the previous residence is coded only at district level, so the district is the lowest level of the hierarchy at which out-migration can be measured. As with many other countries, this limits the analysis that can be undertaken because it does not match the classification of urban and rural areas, which are identified at commune level. In order to compute net migration rates at district level and identify the different migration streams, all districts identified as municipalities or having a population density higher than 200 people/km^2 were considered as urban areas.

8.4 Prior Research

The literature on internal migration in Cambodia consists of a rich collection of case studies that examine particular aspects or geographies of the phenomenon. These studies are insightful but, with the notable exception of the thematic reports of national population censuses that provide a complete statistical description of the

process, they fail to document the issue in a comprehensive manner. Migration studies that are framed by key national development issues, such as the labour question, are absent from the policy research landscape.

Studies of rural-to-urban migration comprise a large part of the research effort. One outstanding piece of research was a detailed examination of mobility from rural areas to Phnom Penh, which is the main destination for rural-to-urban migrants. Comprehensive in scope, the study shows that in 90% of the villages investigated, the total population fell as a result of out-migration (MoP 2012). Migrants to Phnom Penh are mainly young adults seeking economic and employment opportunities. As a result, the capital's population more than doubled between 1998 and 2010 – from 570,000 to 1,240,000 people – 80% of whom were lifetime migrants.

The migrant population in Phnom Penh is young (median age of 25). Women migrate somewhat more frequently than men (MoP 2012). About 30% of migrants are women aged between 15 and 30. This is driven by the dominance of the garment industry in the city (and its outskirts) and in the national economy, which chiefly employs female workers. In 2008, the garment sector employed 41% of female migrants to the capital (NIS 2009). Women are less likely to migrate for education than for work. According to the 2008 census (NIS 2009), 25% of male migrants were students compared with only 17% of female migrants. Women are also less likely to migrate if they have children (MoP 2012).

According to the 2008 census (NIS 2009), 51% of the migrant population had engaged in rural-to-rural migration, while those undertaking rural-to-urban migration accounted for only 28% of the total. However, despite its significance, little is known about rural-to-rural migration. One reason for this is that these migrants are far less visible and are much more diffused throughout the country. However, the few case studies that focus on these migrations have suggested that they contribute significantly to the redistribution of the population within the national territory (Maltoni 2010), particularly from lowland areas to upland frontier regions, fuelling the formation of post-forest agrarian systems (Chheang and Dulioust 2012; Diepart et al. 2014). However, not much is known about the intensity, characterisation, and spatial patterns of this particular stream of internal migration.

Qualitative, small-scale research on internal migration provides insights into the cycles, needs and networks of migrants. Parsons and Lawreniuk (2016) assert that internal migration is not always a lengthy, one-off phenomenon, but consists, to a significant extent, of smaller cycles lasting from a few weeks (for begging migrants) to a few months or years (for construction and garment workers). They show that the mean period of stay for migrants has fallen significantly during the past half-decade (Parsons and Lawreniuk 2016) and suggest that rural and urban areas have become linked by more nuanced systems of movement and remittances. In addition to economic incentives, rural-urban links are induced by changing patterns of social relations (Kheam and Treleaven n.d.; Lim 2007) and cultural norms (Czymoniewicz-Klippel 2013; Parsons and Lawreniuk 2016) partly influenced by women's economic empowerment thanks to their employment in the garment industry (Cuyvers et al. 2009; Derks 2008).

On migratory networks, Parsons (2017) argues that poor households lack the networks needed to undertake the initial migration, and that this affects them throughout the migration process. Even if poor household members find employment in an urban area, the long-term benefits of their labour are difficult to sustain because their jobs are usually temporary. In such circumstances, rural assets and income are helpful and sometimes vital to support a migrant's livelihood.

There is no real physical disconnect between migrants and their parents or family members in their home village. Contacts are maintained through the sending of food (rice and dried fish) to migrants, through migrants visiting their hometown during special occasions such as Khmer New Year and Pchum Ben,[1] and through return visits to hometowns to help with rice planting and harvesting, and income transfer. Remittances sent by migrant workers to their families represent an increasingly important part of the income stream in rural areas. Females are likely to remit larger amounts and a higher share of their earnings to their rural households (MoP 2012).

The level of indebtedness is important in Cambodia, and debt management is a critical mechanism that supports the decision to migrate, particularly in rural areas where livelihoods are highly dependent on agriculture.

In rural Cambodia, people borrow money to cover upfront costs for agricultural production but also to cover a number of other 'non-productive' expenditures (education, food, ceremonies, transportation etc.). However, income from agriculture has become increasingly vulnerable due to climate hazards and market fluctuations (Bylander 2013a, 2014; Oeur et al. 2012). The risk of over-indebtedness is reinforced when expenditure is incurred for medical care. When over-indebtedness becomes unmanageable, migration is seen as a coping strategy.

Debt as a push factor has been identified in both internal and international migration (Bylander and Hamilton 2015; Chan 2009; Deelen and Vasuprasat 2010). These studies show that a significant part of the remittances sent by migrant workers is spent on debt repayment. Qualitative, interview-based research in the Siem Reap province by Bylander (2013b, 2017) found that loans were sometimes used to fund the migration of a household member. More often, household members sought loans for 'non-productive' purchases with the expectation that these would be repaid by their own or a family member's plan to migrate for employment.

8.5 How Much Movement? Migration Intensity

To make sense of the intensity of internal migration in Cambodia, it is useful to step back and examine its evolution since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. Calculated using the latest migration data from the 2008 census, Fig. 8.2 presents the annual number of people involved in internal migration since 1979, as indicated by the data

[1] An important religious festival during which Cambodians pay their respect to deceased relatives.

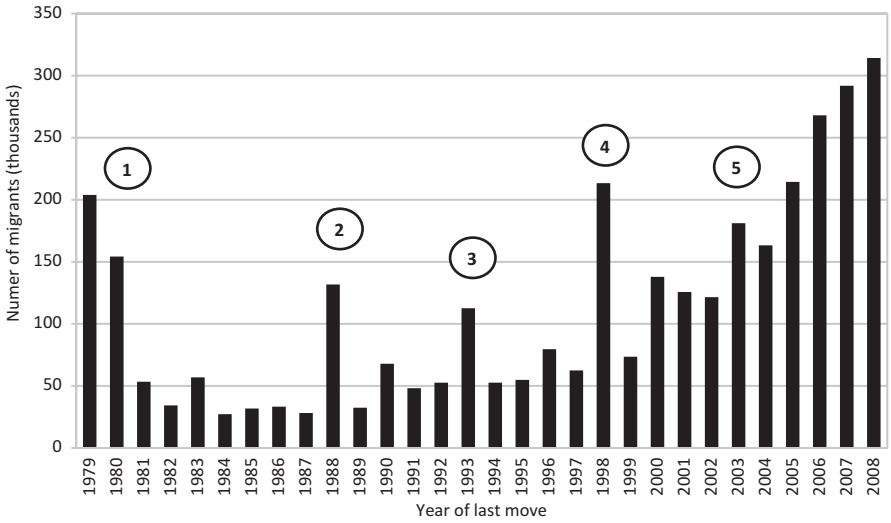

Fig. 8.2 Year of last move, residents of Cambodia, 2008. (Source: 2008 Census. Note: for legend see text)

on duration of residence collected at the 2008 census. As such, it does not include migrants who had passed away or moved overseas before 2008. Since only the date of the last move is captured, it may also understate movement intensities for earlier years by migrants who have made multiple moves. However, Fig. 8.2 provides an overall impression of recent internal migration history as it highlights years with peak migration, which are specifically related to important socio-political events.

Because the Khmer Rouge forcibly displaced most of the Cambodian population from 1975 to 1979, the fall of the regime in early 1979 initiated country-wide return migration (1). In the late 1980s, the conjunction of the Vietnamese withdrawal and introduction of a more liberal constitution created the conditions for increased population movement (2). The period 1991–1993 corresponds to the return of refugees from Thai border camps (3) and 1998 marks the reintegration of the Khmer Rouge army and guerrilla forces (4). Starting in 2001, the liberalisation and structural transformation of the economy and the promulgation of a more liberal Land Law intensified migratory movements that increased steadily until 2008 (5).

The volume and mobility of internal migration (lifetime and latest-move) in 1998 were relatively high as a result of the historical events outlined above. As shown in Table 8.3, between 1998 and 2008, the total number of internal migrants (lifetime and latest-move) increased to 3.2 million and 3.4 million, respectively. However, due to population growth, the intensity of migration decreased; lifetime migration intensity fell from 25.3% to 24.2% and the latest-move intensity declined from 29.6% to 25.8%. Although migration intensity decreased by only a small margin, the mobility of the population remained quite high. This can be attributed to movement from 2001 onwards in the context of post-war reconstruction and the

Table 8.3 Number of migrants and internal migration rate, inter-village moves, Cambodia, 1998 and 2008

		1998	2008
Total population		11,437,656	13,395,682
Lifetime	Internal migrants (persons)	2,890,117	3,239,184
	Internal migration rate (percent)	25.3	24.2
Latest-move data (no defined duration)	Internal migrants (persons)	3,387,140	3,457,228
	Internal migration rate (percent)	29.6	25.8

Source: NIS (2010)

Table 8.4 Migration intensities by type of move, Cambodia, 1998 and 2008

Time interval	Indicators	1998	2008
Lifetime	*ACMI*	N-A	N-A
	CMI – Inter-district	18.0 (n = 149)	N-A
	CMI – Inter-province	11.6 (n = 24)	13.6 (n = 24)
Five-year	*ACMI*	18.4	16.1
	CMI – Inter-district	7.3 (n = 149)	7.7 (n = 184)
	CMI – Inter-province	N-A	5.3 (n = 24)
Ratio lifetime/five-year		2.4 (inter-district)	2.5 (inter-province)

Source: NIS (2002) and NIS (2009)
Notes: *CMI* Crude Migration Intensity, *ACMI* Aggregate Crude Migration Intensity, *N-A* not available

rapid economic transformation of the country. Between 1998 and 2008, the proportion of people who had changed residence within the previous decade rose, while the proportion with longer residence durations fell (NIS 2010).

Bell et al. (2002) have argued that cross-national comparison of migration intensity is best achieved using the Aggregate Crude Migration Intensity (*ACMI*), which estimates all permanent changes of residence within a country, irrespective of the distance moved. For countries that do not collect this information directly, the *ACMI* can be determined using the procedure proposed by Courgeau et al. (2012), which involves fitting a linear regression equation to Crude Migration Intensities (*CMI*) generated at different spatial scales (See Chapter three of this volume). *ACMI* values calculated using the IMAGE studio offer a reliable basis to situate internal migration in Cambodia within the broader Asian and global context (Table 8.4).

In 1998, lifetime inter-district migration intensity, which captures the cumulative migration history of the population, is higher than the five-year inter-district migration. Likewise, in 2008, lifetime inter-provincial migration intensity is higher than the five-year migration intensity at the same level of geography. In other words, the influence of historical movements on migration continues to prevail in the migration signature of Cambodia. However, the ratio of lifetime to five-year intensity exhibits lower values than those of many other Asian countries, although it is similar to those of China, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan and Myanmar (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). In

the wider Asian context this suggests that the current internal migration intensity in Cambodia is relatively high in relation to historical movements.

In 1998 and 2008, the *ACMIs* for five-year data were 18.4 and 16.1 respectively, close to the Asian mean (16.5) (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). However, these values were lower than the global mean (21.0), and well below the values recorded in countries of the New World (Canada, New Zealand and the United States), where geographical mobility remains high despite declines tied to completion of the urban transition, economic maturation and population ageing (Bell and Charles-Edwards 2014).

The five-year *ACMI* decreased between 1998 (18.4) and 2008 (16.1). Comparison of migration intensities at district level is affected by changes in the spatial framework between 1998 and 2008 but it is notable that the *CMI* rose only marginally from 7.3% to 7.7%, despite a marked rise in the number of districts, suggesting that the underlying migration intensity actually fell. However, at the provincial level, values are comparable and indicate that between 1998 and 2008, the lifetime *CMI* increased from 11.6% to 13.6% (Table 8.4). Altogether, this suggests that migration intensities declined between 1998 and 2008, but changes in residence now occur over longer distances than in the past. This increase reflects post-conflict economic development and the progressive urbanisation of the population, and also relates to agrarian development, particularly in frontier areas (see below).

8.6 Who Moves? The Characteristics of Migrants

The age structure of migration in Cambodia follows a pattern observed elsewhere in Asia. The propensity to migrate rises quickly and peaks in young adulthood, then steadily declines and rises again at age 80 or above (Fig. 8.3). This pattern is consistent for both inter-provincial and inter-district migration.

Like most other Asian countries (particularly those in Southeast Asia), the migration age profile of Cambodia is best described as ‘early and concentrated’ (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). Five-year migration intensity peaks among 22 year olds for inter-province migration and 23 year olds for intra-province migration. This is slightly earlier in the life course of individuals than the global average. Figure 8.3 also reveals the concentration of migration at peak ages: the normalised migration intensity at the peak is 0.5 standard deviations higher than the global mean (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). This concentration of migration at an early age can be attributed to the eagerness of young people to grasp job opportunities when they enter the labour market. It is also underpinned by different life-course events, such as marriage or the arrival of a first child, which are encouraged by social norms in Cambodia that support a quick transition to adulthood in the early twenties. However, it is becoming increasingly common for a young married couple to cohabit with their in-laws until they have sufficient means to form a new independent family unit (Heuveline 2017). These pragmatic adjustments also influence the migration decisions of young couples.

Fig. 8.3 Age-specific migration intensities, Cambodia, 2003–2008. (Source: calculated from the 2008 census)

The age structure of migration shows important differences by sex and between rural and urban areas. For the country as a whole, the five-year migration rate was 9.34% but it was higher for males (9.95) than for females (8.77). The dominance of male migration is manifested in the 25–49 age group, corresponding to the core working age. Migration is more important for females in the 15–19 age group than for males, corresponding to the difference in high school dropout.

Although the profile is similar, the in-migration rate in urban areas is distinctly higher than in rural areas. In urban areas, the in-migration rate (at ages 20–24) peaks at 40.1%, but is higher for females (41.4%) than for males (38.5%). In contrast, at ages 25–54 the rate is higher for males. In rural areas, the in-migration rate peaks at ages 20–24 at just 11.0% but is higher for men in all age groups (NIS 2010).

To shed light on these differences, we present the age and sex composition of all migrants currently living in Phnom Penh (an urban area) and Pailin (a rural area), which are the two provinces with the highest in-migration rates in the country (NIS 2010).

In 2008, the five-year migration rates in Phnom Penh and Pailin were, respectively, 32.0% and 31.4%. In Phnom Penh, the female and male migration rates were, respectively, 32.8% and 31.2%. The age structure of migrants (Fig. 8.4) is typically 'early and concentrated' but is also characterised by the dominance of women in the 15–24 age group, while men dominate the 25–54 age group. In contrast, the age structure of migrants in Pailin follows a sinusoidal pattern (Fig. 8.5). In the main, the migration rate of men (32.1%) is higher than that of women (30.6%). In addition to a first peak at a young age (20–24), with men dominating from the age of 15 to 49, there is a secondary peak at age 6569. The mobility of older people is sometimes

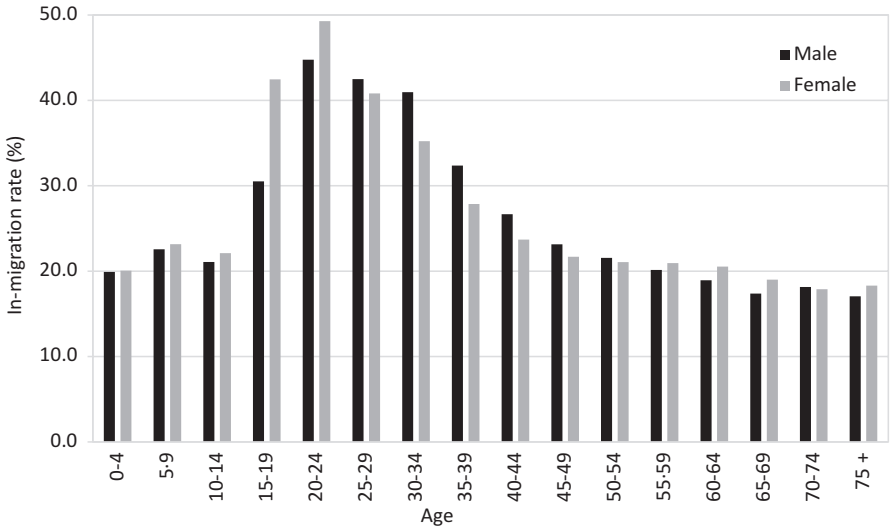

Fig. 8.4 Inter-village moves to Phnom Penh by age and sex, 2003–2008. (Source: NIS 2010)

a result of return-migration but in most instances it is due to the tied migration of parents with their adult children.

Educational attainment is low in Cambodia. In 2008, 41% of people aged 15 and over had completed education at primary level or above. Only 3.1% had completed education at secondary level or above. This characteristic is broadly reflected in the educational attainment of life-time migrants but education among the migrant population is slightly higher, with more people having completed lower secondary or secondary school level, or above (Table 8.5).

8.7 Where Do They Move? Spatial Patterns

The internal mobility of people in Cambodia is multi-directional. Inter-district migrants (latest move) who left a rural area to travel to another rural area in the five years to 2008 represent more than half the total number of migrants (Fig. 8.6). This stream is significantly more important than the rural-to-urban flow (27.5%), which is typically associated with the urban transition. The counter-flow of people – from urban to rural areas – is less than a quarter of this value (6.5%). Redistribution of population from one urban area to another also occurs but at a much lower level (15.1%). Overall, most migration is rural-to-rural flow, but the net redistribution is towards urban areas, a characteristic Cambodia shares with other countries of mainland Southeast Asia (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019).

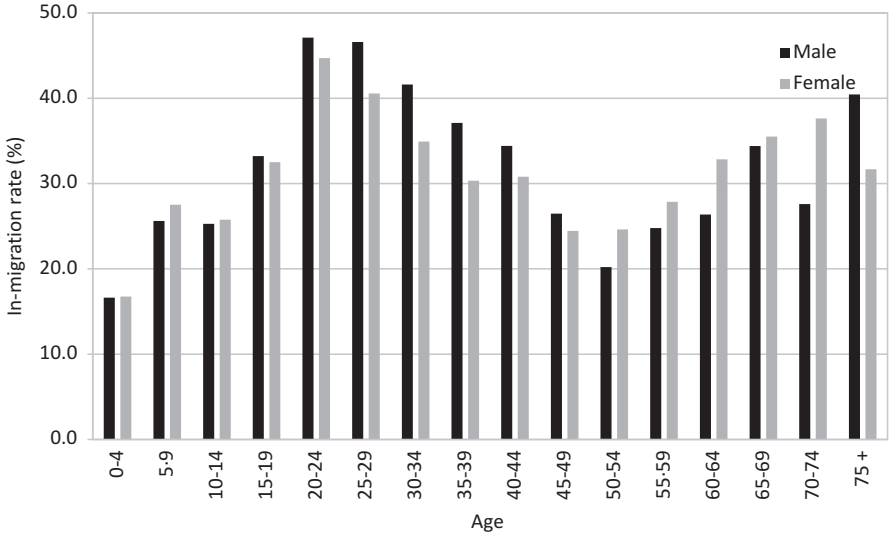

Fig. 8.5 Inter-village moves to Pailin by age and sex, 2003–2008. (Source: NIS 2010)

Table 8.5 Educational attainment, total population and life-time migrants aged 15 and over, 2008

	Men		Women	
Level of education	Total (%)	Migrants(%)	Total(%)	Migrants(%)
No education/illiterate	16.7	14.4	31.4	29.1
Primary not completed	30.1	27.6	32.7	31.6
Primary	27.4	25.5	20.9	20.3
Lower secondary	21.4	24.4	13.0	15.2
Secondary or above	4.3	7.9	2.0	3.7
Other	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: NIS (2010)

The Migration Effectiveness Ratio (MER_{RU})[2] is a simple metric that captures the balance between rural-to-urban flows and counter-flows. The value of this index in Cambodia is 40.9%, which is relatively high when compared with other Asian countries. It shows a net balance in favour of urban areas but also suggests that Cambodia is at an early stage in its urban transition (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). This is certainly true given the very low rate of urbanisation in Cambodia: 18.6% in 1998 and 19.5% in 2008 (NIS 2009). In fact, the MER_{RU} offers a useful window through which to examine internal migration, that is, in relation to the flow and counter-flow between urban and rural areas. However, rural-to-rural and urban-to-urban flows are

[2] $MER_{RU} = 100 \times (M_{RU} - M_{UR})/(M_{RU} + M_{UR})$ where M_{RU} represents migration flows from rural to urban areas and M_{UR} re-migration flows from urban to rural

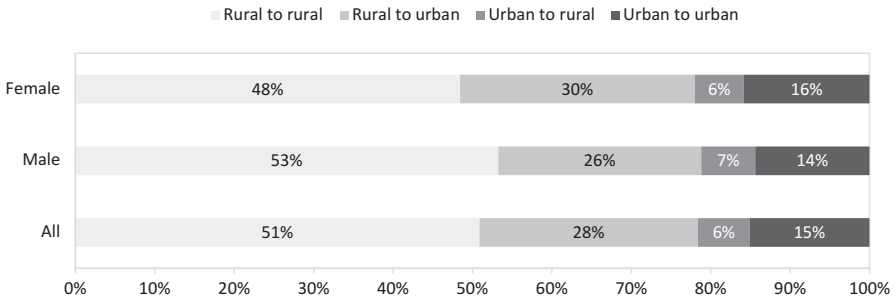

Fig. 8.6 Composition of migration streams, Cambodia, 2003–2008. (Source: NIS 2009)

not factored into $MER_{RU.}$ And for countries where these flows are important, the MER_{RU} does not fully capture the dynamics of internal migration. This is the case in Cambodia where rural-to-rural flows are of paramount importance.

Net Migration Rates (*NMR*s)[3] were calculated with five-year migration data derived from the 2008 census. As indicated earlier, *NMRs* are only available at district level. As such, they do not capture intra-district movements, which can be important in the Cambodian context.

In aggregate, the Migration Effectiveness Index (*MEI*)[4] – a measure of the overall effect of migration in redistributing population – is 49.69. This suggests that, overall, migration is a fairly efficient mechanism for population redistribution (Bell et al. 2002). The Aggregate Net Migration Rate (*ANMR*),[5] which measures the redistributive impact of migration is 3.8%.

In Cambodia, 109 of the 184 districts registered a negative *NMR* (with a mean of −5.48) with just 75 displaying a positive value (mean = 10.09). The geography of Net Migration Rates is distinctive (Fig. 8.7). A large number of districts – typically located in the rural lowland central area of the country (around the Tonle Sap Lake) – form a large region clearly characterised by a net outflow of migrants. On the periphery of this central area, a large number of districts form an arc-shape region characterised by an inflow of migrants. Some areas display strong net gains. Scattered throughout the national territory, some districts registered positive *NMRs*; these are primarily major urban centres, including Phnom Penh (PP).

The relationship between the *NMR* and population density sheds light on this spatial distribution. For Cambodia, Charles-Edwards et al. (2019) identified a strong relationship between population density and the net migration rate, suggesting a high level of migration from low-density to high-density regions. However, they note that internal migration in Cambodia – like that in many other Asian countries – has been driven by forces more complex than the urban transition pathways

[3] NMR = [(Inflow-Outflow)/population × 100]

[4] $MEI = 100\ iDi - Oi/iDi + Oi$ where D_i represents total inflows in zone i and O_i represents total outflows in zone i

[5] $ANMR = CMP \times MEI$

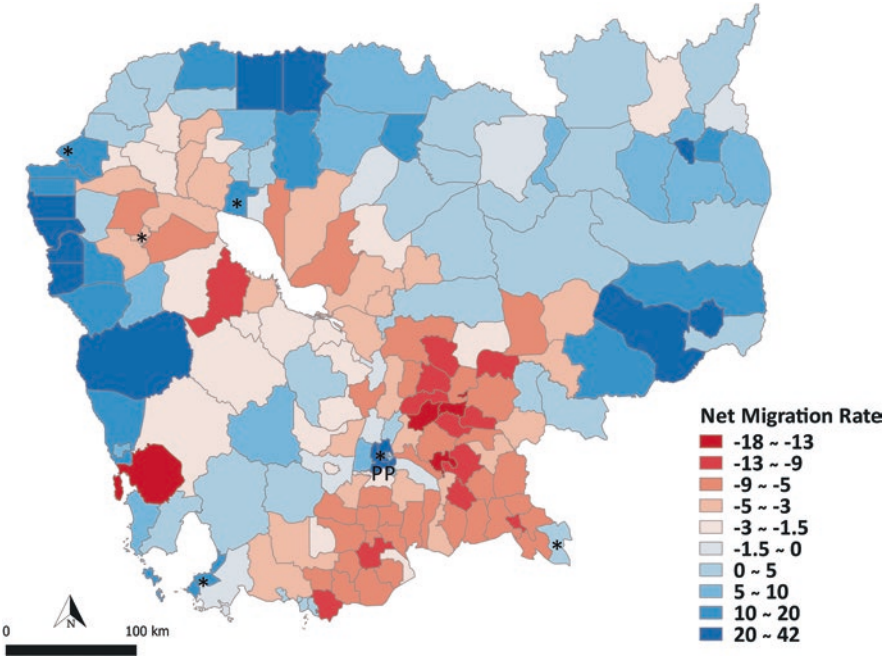

Fig. 8.7 Net migration rates, districts of Cambodia, 2003–2008. (Source: 2008 population census, data computation and mapping by the authors. Note: Stars (∗) indicate main urban centres)

theorised by Rees et al. (2017) who take population density as a proxy for urbanisation. Indeed, the situation is more intricate in Cambodia. The relationship between population density and *NMR* suggests that different migration dynamics co-exist in the Kingdom (Fig. 8.8). Four groups of districts can be readily identified, each characterised by a particular pattern of internal migration:

- Districts with low population density and very high positive *NMRs* are rural and located in the peripheral upland region
- Districts with moderate population density and negative *NMRs* are mostly rural and located in the lowland central region
- Districts with high population density and high levels of *NMR* are all districts (*khan*) of the capital city of Phnom Penh
- Districts in which population density is lower than in Phnom Penh but higher than rural lowland and upland districts. These have a range of *NMR* values. Those with positive *NMRs* are important secondary cities such as Siem Reap, Battambang and Krong Preah Sihanouk, while those with negative *NMRs* are urban centres in less economically dynamic and mainly rural provinces such as Pursat, Svay Rieng, Takeo and Kratie.

Figure 8.8 shows that not all districts fall easily into these four groups, but outliers are few in number.

Fig. 8.8 Net migration rates by log population density, districts of Cambodia, 2003–2008. (Source: 2008 Census. Data computation by the authors)

Combined with Fig. 8.7, Fig. 8.8 brings a much more differentiated view of internal migrations in Cambodia than would be suggested sole by reference to the urban transition model. Migration to urban areas (Phnom Penh and some secondary cities) is undeniably intense and represents movements that accompany the urbanisation and industrialisation of the country. It seems that this flow of migration is fed by flows from the central rural lowland districts. However, comparing Cambodia with other Asian countries only on that basis would be misleading because it only captures a fragment of the picture. Far less visible, though relatively more important, is migration to less densely populated rural upland regions. This migration flow is typically a movement to resource frontiers, as discussed in the next section.

By connecting origin and destination districts, the main patterns of mobility become very explicit (Fig. 8.9). The flows that link rural lowland to rural upland districts, Phnom Penh and secondary cities clearly stand out. Migration flows from rural lowland and upland districts to secondary urban centres are also very distinctive, as are the moves from secondary cities to Phnom Penh.

To illustrate the links between origin and destination regions, we focus on the cases of Phnom Penh (urban area) and Pailin (rural area), which are the two provinces with the highest migration rates in the country. Migrants to Phnom Penh come from every corner of the country, but this migration conforms to a basic 'gravity' model with the main source being neighbouring provinces with large populations, most notably in the southeast of the country and in the rural lowland districts identified above (Figs. 8.9 and 8.10). Figure 8.9 also depicts an urban-to-urban flow with a significant number of migrants moving from secondary urban centres.

In a similar way, migrants to Pailin were drawn from all corners of the country. Figure 8.11 reveals at least three major migration flows: (i) movements between

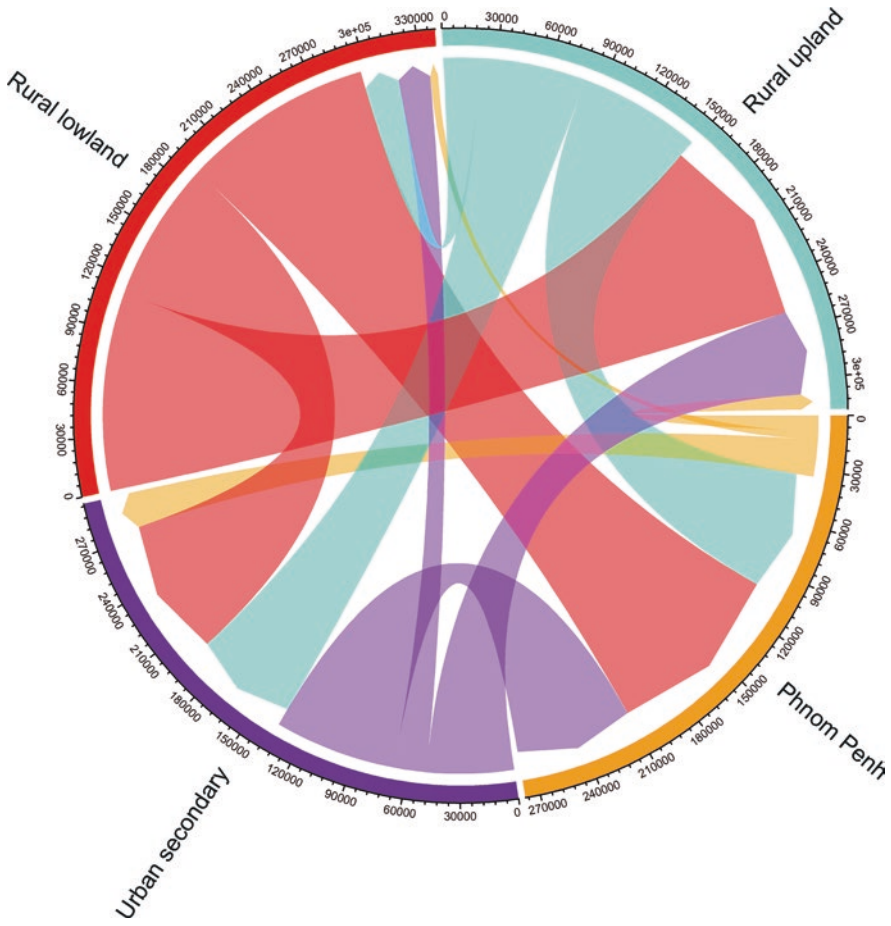

Fig. 8.9 Bilateral migration flows, rural and urban areas of Cambodia, 2003–2008. (Source: Calculated from the 2008 Census (IMAGE-Asia Project)

districts within Pailin, (ii) a flow from neighbouring districts; and (iii) a flow of long-distance migrants from the southwest and central regions of the country. The last of these flows, from rural lowlands to rural uplands, represents a key feature of internal migration in Cambodia (Fig. 8.8).

8.8 Understanding Internal Migration in Cambodia

Cambodia is one of Asia's poorest countries, but it has witnessed sustained growth over the past two decades. Amidst a challenging global economic environment, the annual growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 2006 and 2016 was 6.9%. Although its relative share of GDP has declined, agriculture is still a central

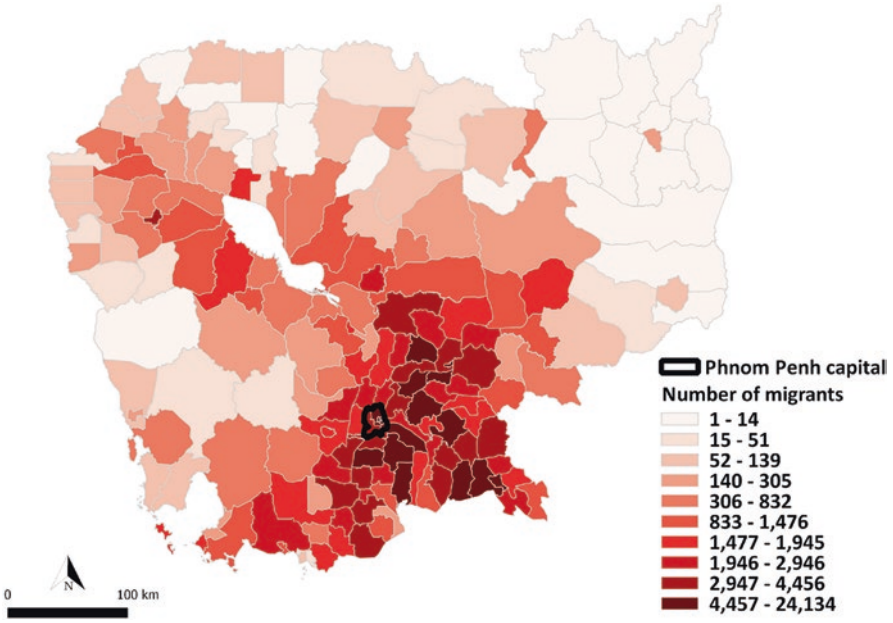

Fig. 8.10 Origin of migrants living in Phnom Penh, 2003–2008. (Source: 2008 population census, data computation and mapping by the authors)

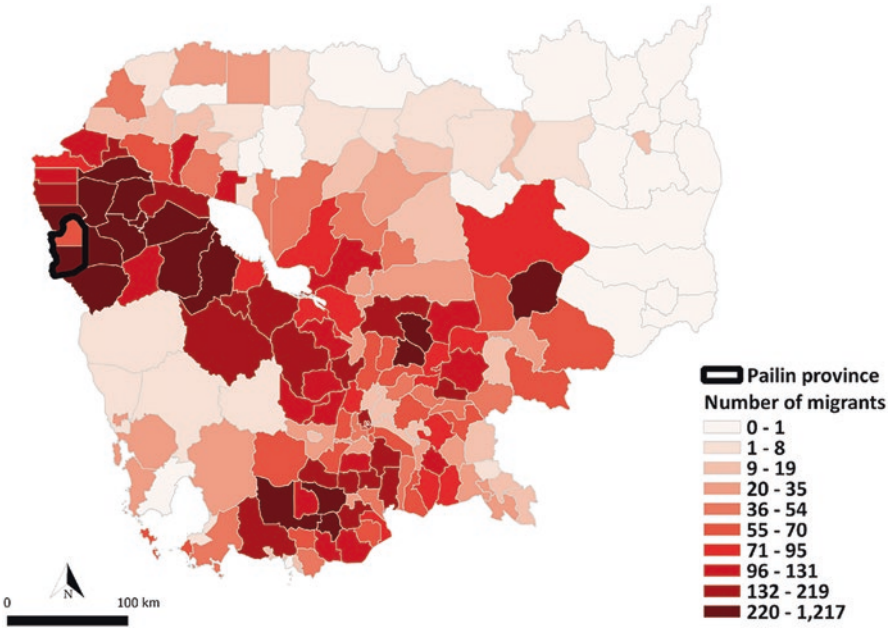

Fig. 8.11 Origin of migrants living in Pailin, 2003–2008. (Source: 2008 population census, data computation and mapping by the authors)

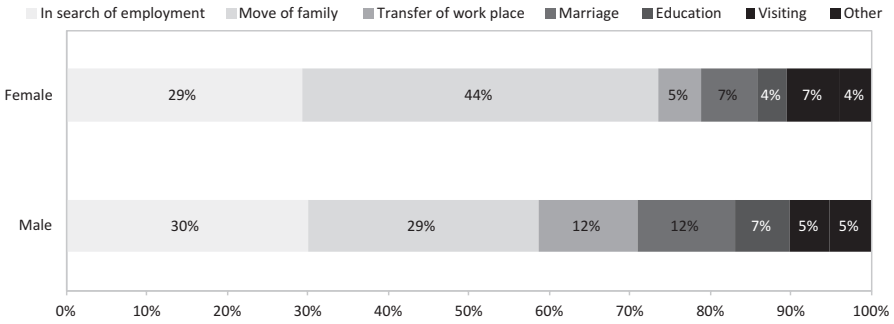

Fig. 8.12 Reason for last move by sex, Cambodia, 2008. (Source: NIS 2010)

pillar of the economy. It represents 26.7% of the country's GDP (World Bank 2017) and continues to provide the main employment for 50% of the population aged over 18 years (68.8% if both primary and secondary occupations are considered). However, labour productivity is low in agriculture and the search for employment is cited by most migrants as the main reason for their mobility (Fig. 8.12).

Inundated rice cultivation is the cropping system best suited to the agro-ecological conditions of the central lowland plain around the Tonle Sap Lake and in the Mekong Delta, a region that corresponds to the rural lowland districts identified in Figs. 8.8 and 8.9. Historically, this is where the Cambodian population has been concentrated and this area is the most densely populated rural region in the country.

A factor underlying low labour productivity in the agricultural sector is the decline in the size of landholding per household, which is associated with demographic pressure in this lowland central region. In fact, the expansion of agricultural landholdings at the periphery of this region is no longer possible even though this has been a historical trend in the life of Cambodian peasants. This process is now constrained by law and by the privatisation of the commons. Land access is further complicated by a process of land commoditisation that neo-liberal land reform has exacerbated through the promotion of land titling, micro-credit and land markets, which are substantially wealth-biased and exacerbate land concentration (Diepart and Sem 2018b). A land squeeze is affecting a growing number of agricultural households in this region. In 2011, agricultural landlessness affected 29% (Phann et al. 2015), and 47% of households had less than 1 ha to cultivate, which is far from sufficient to sustain a household's livelihood.

In reaction to this land squeeze, a significant number of people have migrated to the cities in search of employment. This movement has been particularly pronounced among young women who have been recruited to work in the booming garment sector in Phnom Penh and its outskirts; this sector employed 23% of 2003–2008 migrants to urban areas. The other main categories of migrant occupation are street vendors (16%), construction workers (7%), and transport workers (5%). The dominant feature of migrant employment in urban areas is the predominance of wage labour in occupations that require relatively low skills and levels of education (13%).

A recent study suggests that by 2030 the annual increase in the rural labour force will be approximately 140,000 (Diepart 2016), which is lower than the annual increase of 221,000 that occurred between 1998 and 2004, (Lundström and Ronnas 2006). Nevertheless, the transfer of unskilled labour from agriculture to industry and the tertiary sector will lag behind this increase in the active rural population because total job creation in the non-agricultural sectors remains limited. Diepart (2016) estimated that 40,000 unskilled jobs were created each year between 2008 and 2014, including jobs in both the industry and service sectors. Another study, commissioned by the International Labour Organisation, indicates that between 2004 and 2009 the industrial sector created 162,736 jobs (27,122 jobs per year) while the number of unskilled jobs in the service sector did not increase significantly during the same period (Kang and Liv 2013).

For many farmers, the strategy to cope with this job shortage has been to migrate to upland regions in search of economic opportunities. As Figs. 8.6 and 8.7 show, this migration stream involved a large number of farmers and their families. In fact, 65% of those who migrated to rural areas between 2003 and 2008 were employed in agriculture. Most (91%) were working on their own farms, which clearly shows that rural-to-rural migration is primarily driven by the search for agricultural land. Wage labour is significant however (and the number of migrants who are primarily involved in farm and non-farm wage labour) has become proportionally more important since 2003, suggesting that the migrants have shifted to wage employment because less land is available for agricultural expansion. This feature echoes findings from the Northwest frontier area, which have shown that migrations are fluid and often involve multiple migration events. The arrival of migrants is motivated by the search for land, but migrants also turn to agricultural wages when the opportunity arises. To maximise family labour use in the lean season and cope with more constrained access to land, an increasing number of families rely on cross-border migration to look for jobs in Thailand (Diepart and Sem 2018a; Pilgrim et al. 2012).

Movements to rural uplands are voluntary and are not organised by the government. To a large extent, they can be seen as an expression of the agency of peasant households in responding to rural poverty. They are also the expression of an ongoing response on the part of Cambodian peasants to use the principle of appropriation ‘by the plough’ as a legitimate mode of land acquisition, which has been a consistent trend throughout Cambodian agrarian history.

Central State authorities have been aware of this situation and have not impeded it. They were probably happy to see spontaneous migration taking place because these movements were helping to solve poverty issues in the central plains, which the government was unable or unwilling to tackle. It also seems that migrant smallholder farmers have acted as the territorial spearhead of the State in helping to stabilise the peripheral margins of the country and consolidate the sovereignty of the State (De Koninck 1996). The State has also relied heavily on smallholder farmers to manage agrarian expansion across the country and to endorse their role in the production of cash crops that are heavily influenced by global markets (cassava, corn, soybean, etc.).

8.9 Impacts and Implications

To a large extent, the agricultural land appropriated by migrants in the upland regions comprises degraded forests classified as State land under the 2001 Land Law. The authorities have not publicised these movements as they have been inconsistent with land policy. Indeed, insofar as the Land Law forbade the acquisition of State land after 2001, these lowland-upland migrations are completely at odds with the legal framework for land that authorities were supposed to implement. This has resulted in a huge population living on land that they appropriated after 2001, in respect of which they have virtually no land tenure security under the 2001 Land Law.

In a parallel and uncoordinated process, the government has granted large tracts of land and forests as agro-industrial concessions of up to 10,000 ha in the form of Economic Land Concessions (ELCs), and other agro-industrial concessions or mining concessions. The large-scale agricultural development model was expected to result in new types of investment and job creation in rural Cambodia, to stimulate agro-industrial activities requiring capital investment that the State could not provide, and to develop so-called 'under-utilised' land. Recent data show that following a comprehensive evaluation of all agro-industrial concessions in Cambodia, the number of projects at the time of writing was 255, covering a total area of 1.8 million ha. As far as mining concessions are concerned, there were 61 projects involving a total area of 0.8 million ha (Diepart and Sem 2018b). Adding to these large-scale agricultural land concessions, Protected Areas (7.5 million ha) complete the picture of State land management in the peripheral upland regions (Fig. 8.13).

In fact, agricultural or mining concessions often occupy land that is already cultivated or used by smallholder farmers, resulting in an encroachment on farmland or pooled resources, thus having an adverse impact on farmers' livelihoods. This has resulted in considerable conflict and tensions around questions of land access and control that occupy a central place in the political and social life of Cambodia.

The figures released in relation to land conflicts differ because the methodologies and criteria used to calculate them are based on different definitions of conflict and rely on different sources of information. However, they all suggest that the magnitude of the problem is not small. During the period 2000–2013, land conflicts and resulting evictions affected 770,000 people (ADHOC 2014). According to data collected by LICADHO (2014), more than half a million people were affected by State-involved land conflicts between 2000 and 2014. Based on their monitoring of media sources and reports from network members, the NGO Forum on Cambodia (2015) reported that a total of 352 land disputes broke out between 1990 and 2014, of which 77% remained unresolved.

A fundamental cause of land conflicts is that the genuine need for land by smallholder farmers has led to country-wide migration that is not adequately addressed in the current land reform. Another impact of labour migration is the shortage of labour at the peak of the cropping seasons (planting and harvest). To address this labour shortage, the main adaptation has been the mechanisation of agriculture, which further incentivises the increase in agricultural landholding and further exacerbates the problems of job creation.

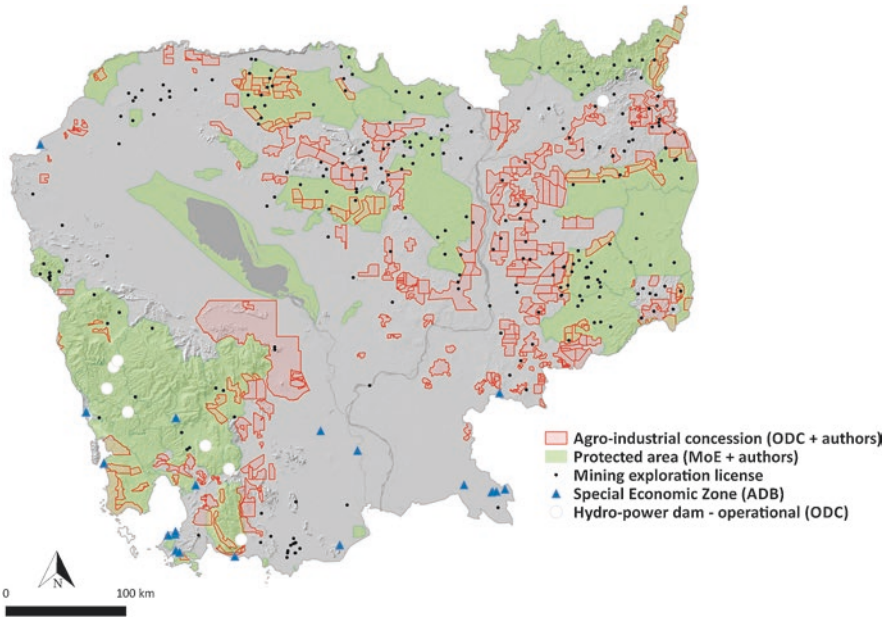

Fig. 8.13 Agro-industrial concessions, Protected Areas, hydropower dams, mining concessions and Special Economic Zones, Cambodia. (Source: Data computation and mapping by the authors)

8.10 Conclusions

We have examined the intensity of migration, the demographic characteristics of migrants, and the spatial impacts of internal migration in Cambodia. We have also discussed the contribution of internal migration to development, particularly in addressing the contemporary labour conundrum.

Internal migration has been related to socio-political events in the country, particularly wars, post-war reconstruction, and economic transformation. Lifetime migration intensity is higher than recent migration intensity. However, the ratio of lifetime migration to recent intensity is lower than that of other Asian countries. This suggests that the effect of historical migration events is still prominent in the country's migration profile, but contemporary internal migration intensity in Cambodia is still moderately high.

The propensity to migrate rises quickly and peaks in young adulthood, then declines steadily, rising again at the oldest ages. This 'early and concentrated' migration age profile is a common pattern among Asian nations. The age structure of migration also varies between the sexes and between rural and urban areas. The recent (five-year) migration rate is higher for men in the core working ages but higher for women of lower secondary or high school age. The migration rate into urban areas is substantially higher than that into rural areas and the peak is higher for women than for men.

On the development front, internal migrations in Cambodia offer insights beyond the urban transition model. Migration to urban areas, mainly from the central rural lowland districts is strong, attracted by urbanisation and industrialisation. Job-seeking is the main reason for this migration flow. This is because agricultural labour productivity is low due to the fall in landholding per household, which is under pressure from population growth and wealth-biased land market dynamics in the lowland central region. To cope with the scarcity of land, a substantial number of people have migrated to the cities to find jobs, particularly young women who find employment in the garment sector in Phnom Penh and its outskirts.

Comparing Cambodia with other Asian countries solely by reference to the urban transition would be incomplete because migration to less-populated, resource-rich rural upland regions is perhaps more strategically important. Over half of migrants to rural areas were employed in agriculture, and most of these were working on their own farms. This suggests that rural-to-rural migration is chiefly driven by the search for agricultural land. However, land for agricultural expansion has become scarcer, as is evident from the rising number of migrants involved in agricultural wage labour and non-farm employment. This is exacerbated by the increasing need for land sought by unskilled labourers; these labourers have been marginalised by the imbalance between growth in the labour force and the absorptive capacity of the non-agricultural sectors.

This rural-to-rural migration is managed entirely by households. The State has allowed these spontaneous movements to occur because they were instrumental in reducing poverty in the central plains, in stabilising the peripheral margins of the country and managing the agrarian expansion in the uplands, especially the formation of new agrarian systems driven by global commodity markets. However, these movements have remained uncoordinated with the granting of large-scale land and mining concessions on upland territories. The overlay of land claims between migrant farmers and concessions has resulted in numerous land conflicts across the country. In order to promote more balanced development between rural and urban areas, a central challenge is to focus the discussion on internal migration when revising the legal framework, policies and practices of current land reform.

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