



**Sites of Practice: Negotiating Sustainability  
and Livelihoods in Rural Cambodia**

# Sites of Practice: Negotiating Sustainability and Livelihoods in Rural Cambodia

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to the University of Exeter as a thesis  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography  
February 2010

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# Abstract

In literature and popular discourse sustainable development debates have a habit of polarizing around conflicting understandings. On the one hand sustainable development is interpreted as an extension of dominant neoliberal agendas, on the other it is constructed as an alternative to the mainstream. This thesis works through these positions, to argue for an understanding of sustainable development in the spaces between; where hegemony and counterhegemony slip and slide, collide, disrupt and confuse. It is a thesis about the entanglements of sustainable development policy; a study in which I contend that sustainable development is best understood through the multiple sites of practice where policy is enacted. Drawing upon notions of messiness and bringing together actor-orientated sociology and livelihoods approaches, I explore sustainable development as it is negotiated through networks of actors and livelihoods in rural Cambodia.

Specifically, I present a study of two projects implementing community fisheries as an instrument of sustainable development policy in two remote provinces of Cambodia. It is a study about the different actors responsible for implementing each project, as well as the life worlds of rural villagers affected by them. Through an in-depth analysis grounded in the diverse realities of people in particular places, I uncover the struggles through which sustainable development is negotiated. I expose a policy interpreted through multiple, overlapping simplifications and assumptions and uncover how these are simultaneously produced, recirculated, contested and transformed in practice. Significantly, I highlight the destabilising consequences of a policy which attempts to legislate away diversity or difference. Thus, I reveal the possibility of alternative realities finding expression through spaces otherwise characterised by domination.

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# Acknowledgments

Though at times producing this thesis has felt like a lonely project, in reality it has come into being through the efforts, knowledge and support of so many people. It is difficult to know where to start!

I'll begin at the beginning and thank Jock Campbell the Director of IMM Ltd who initially supported my idea of returning to study and even the possibility of combining it with consultancy work. It was then Jo Little who agreed this was a project that could have a home in the (then) Department of Geography, and even that she would be willing to supervise it. To both my supervisors, Jo Little and Henry Buller, I owe an enormous thank you; for your patience, belief and insights into a field of study a little outside your normal concerns! Through a combination of this work and all the different reading groups, seminars and more, I think I have become the 'geographer' Jo said they'd turn me into!

Toby Carson in Cambodia was then instrumental in seeing the potential for my early research ideas and championing this project within the CBNRM Learning Institute, where he is a Senior Programme Advisor. He also found me places to stay and together with his wife Katrin and their many friends introduced me to the antics of Phnom Penh after office hours. Alongside Toby, I am grateful for the backing and ever positive outlook and energies of the Learning Institute's (then) Executive Director, Ken Serey Rotha, and its Senior Management Team; especially Sim Bunthoeun, Ken Sopheap and Samoeun Sothyro. But all the staff at the Learning Institute deserve my gratitude for their welcoming spirit, interest in the project, fun on the football field and dancing on rooftops in Kampot!

Thanks next extend to the great team that joined the research once underway. I am indebted to the tireless efforts, good humour, patience, reflections and Buddhist teachings (Kimsan!) of Tep Chansothea and Meng Kimsan, who have been by my side throughout. Also to Heng Ponley, Koem Ratana, Keo Sopheap, Nop Sokhai, Chap Sopanha and Lunh Chandara who have joined at different times along the way.

Of course this is a thesis whose substance would be entirely different without the willingness and support from the staff of each case study project and the many people in Stung Treng and Koh Kong provinces, who gave up their time to talk and contribute their stories and knowledge. Particular thanks to Kim Nong and his team from PMCR and to Tep Bunnarith and the CEPA team in Stung Treng. Also to Chanty and her family in Stung Treng and Ta Mich and his family in Koh Kong, who hosted us with seeming effortless and love.

Back home I am thankful, as always, for the understanding, patience and huge help from friends and family. Justin, my parents Gayle & David, Margaret, Alison, Leah, Lucy and not leaving out Bryn and Molly-the-dog and all the rest – you're as happy as I am that this thesis is finished at last!

And finally, this thesis project has been made possible through financial support provided by: a CBNRM Learning Institute research grant; a RGS-IBG Slawson Award; and a Departmental Scholarship (fees only).

*Dedicated to memories of Barbara Little*

# Chapter 1

## A thesis beginning

Here begins my thesis. It is a thesis about sustainable development, about different projects, actors and livelihoods in rural Cambodia. It is a thesis which sets out to understand sustainable development as a policy between hegemony and counterhegemony. It looks to explore policy by attending to the struggles of different actors as they attempt to make sense of sustainable development and battle with its implementation. It also sets out to understand sustainable development practice as I had come to engage in it, as a practitioner working alongside government and non-government organisations in Cambodia.

My aim in this first chapter is to introduce the overall goal and research questions which have directed this thesis project and the intellectual and personal perspectives which have shaped its passage. I end the chapter with an outline of how the thesis is organised through the following eight chapters.

### ***Thesis goal, questions and framing***

The purpose of this thesis is to understand sustainable development policy as it is negotiated through multiple sites of practice in rural Cambodia. Central to this endeavour is the unravelling of complexities; an analysis of the tensions, ambivalences and incoherences of sustainable development, or sustainable development's messy processes. This is a thesis concerned with understanding sustainable development as a poststructural policy; a policy no longer interpreted as a universalism, or simply as a *'struggle between 'capitalism' and 'sustainability'* but *'as it actually exists in local places as a set of evolving practices'* (Krueger & Agyeman 2005, p416). My intention, then, is to address the complexities of sustainable development as it is enacted in specific places; what is it like, how can it be known and what are the implications for policy and practice?

In both posing and tackling these questions, I work from a perspective open to the coexistence of multiple, divergent and partially overlapping interpretations and

practices; complexities concealed within the singularities of policy. This is a perspective, as I subsequently explore, which evolves through debates over the productions and practices of sustainable development. It is also informed by Law's work on messiness and his attention to different locations, or sites of practice, as a means of attending to multiplicities (Law 2004). Moreover, it draws upon a combination of two contemporary modes of development thinking; actor-orientated development sociology and livelihoods approaches, as a means of addressing complexities in practice. In other words, I look to the situated specificities of networks of actors; their knowledge, actions and the intricacies of their lifeworlds, as a means of understanding the multiple sites of practice of sustainable development policy. Thus, it is through attending to the diverse realities of life in rural Cambodia that the entanglements of policy as it is negotiated in place come alive.

Overlapping and informing these particular intellectual framings, my thesis also takes shape within my own set of experiences and relationships with development actors and practices. Thus, the thesis develops within the context of a wider commitment to an action-research project in partnership with a Cambodian non-governmental organisation. Moreover, it is grounded within the empirical realities of two community fishery projects, as a window onto the workings of sustainable development policy. Through each case I attend to three different sites of practice: 1) the networks of actors involved in the production of each project; 2) the livelihoods these projects intend to change; and 3) the spaces inbetween policy and local worlds mediated by a meso-level. In doing so my aim is to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the agendas of sustainable development as they are interpreted by two community fishery projects?
2. How are these agendas articulated through people's livelihoods?
3. What are the outcomes of this process for sustainable development policy and practice?

## ***Thesis organisation***

I organise the content of this thesis project around the following eight chapters:

In **Chapter 2** I set out to establish in detail the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. In particular, I examine the ways in which sustainable development as a contested discourse has been opposingly rationalised as hegemonic, reformist, pragmatic or counterhegemonic, alternative, radical. Thus, I explore the arguments led by thinkers such as Escobar, that denounce agendas of sustainable development as subjugating the South; colonising indigenous knowledges and violating local livelihoods through instrumental strategies of participatory governance. On the other hand, I also lay out an alternative case, which establishes sustainable development as a policy challenging dominant development ideologies; based on rationalities of social justice and ideals of equality and human rights. This is a position aligned with popular movements for participatory development and post-development's counterhegemonic social movements. Ultimately, it is a viewpoint which accepts multiple and diverse interpretations and practices. It is at once local and place-based and at the same time translocal, transnational and global; simultaneously radical and part of mainstream development. It is through this alternative rationality, then, that sustainable development moves beyond, or between, hegemony and counterhegemony. Sustainable development I argue should be understood as a multiplicity of trajectories emerging through a collection of messy processes.

I move on in **Chapter 3** to consider the implications of this theoretical perspective for understanding sustainable development policy in practice. It is here that I introduce actor-orientated development sociology and livelihoods approaches and consider how these contemporary modes of development thinking might help address sustainable development's complexities. Though distinct in substance and affiliated differently to academic, practice and policy, both actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches seek to attend to the diversities of development experience. Specifically, they do this by focussing on people and the situated particularities of their relations and practices. In this way, they provide critical insights on the tensions between structure and agency. Used in combination both approaches offer a means of looking beneath the

simplifications of ideology and exploring the contradictions and inconsistencies of policy.

From these conceptual beginnings I continue in **Chapter 4** to introduce the context and directions of my empirical research. Thus, I outline the specific histories and current realities of Cambodia; its fishery sector and policies as I had come to experience them. I establish how this particular context worked to shape my empirical research and its focus on two community fisheries projects. I also introduce the two locations where these projects are implemented, as a foregrounding for the analysis chapters to follow.

I set out in the following **Chapter 5** to explore in detail how this work took place. I do so through a personal reflection on my research, as a situated and often uncertain process enacted within the context of my own life and evolving relationships with other people and places. Thus, I outline my approach to method and how this took shape through an interpretivist ethnography embedded within a reflexive strategy.

From reflecting on the research process, I move on to relate the knowledge that process produced. This is an account which stretches over the next three chapters, each dealing with a particular site of practice encountered within each case of community fisheries. Thus in **Chapter 6** I begin by exploring the agendas of sustainable development as they are interpreted by each community fishery project. Considering each project in turn, I attend to the institutional contexts and agendas of community fisheries framing each project. I next reflect on the situated histories of relations with natural resources through which each project came into being. And finally I consider the networks of actors involved in each project and how their relations work to further shape meaning in practice.

In **Chapter 7**, I look to the local livelihoods, or life worlds of people living in two rural villages where each project attempts to intervene. I present something of the complex agencies of livelihoods and consider how people relate and respond to each project's agenda in practice. Making use of a selection of livelihood examples illustrating varying degrees of freedom to manoeuvre, I show how these varied perspectives act to complicate and contest both projects' agendas for sustainable development.

I continue in **Chapter 8**, the third and final analysis chapter, to examine a site of practice which exists in a middle ground, between institutional orderings of sustainable development and the complex realities of people's livelihoods. This is a field of action mediated by a particular group of actors caught in the inbetween; intermediary actors from local or meso-level institutions, variously and multiply positioned as appointed authority, elected representative and local resident. Thus, I explore the perspectives and actions of different meso-level actors as they make sense of their position and navigate the middle ground. In particular, I explore their struggle to deal with illegality; a struggle between the overlapping influences of relations of authority, the realities of local livelihoods and their own individual interests.

Finally, I close the thesis in **Chapter 9**; a chapter which deliberates on four key conclusions I draw from my empirical work and suggests what these insights offer to wider sustainable development debates and practices.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Sustainable development: contested discourse to messy processes**

#### ***Sustainable development: from idealism to contestation***

The aim of this chapter is to establish the conceptual background for a thesis exploring meanings and articulations of sustainable development among the practices of community fisheries projects in Cambodia. I wish to examine ways in which sustainable development is produced and contested through hegemonic and counter-hegemonic rationalities. A conflicting dualism, which I will argue ultimately leads to an understanding of sustainable development as a multiplicity of trajectories emerging through a collection of messy processes.

As way of introduction, I begin by briefly presenting the contemporary concept of sustainable development and its emergence as an ideal policy, that brought together concerns of environment and development. I turn then to outline the controversies which lay just beneath the surface of this apparent global consensus; tensions between conflicting and contradictory interests and values. Thus, I establish sustainable development as a contested discourse, influenced by multiple perspectives that may be understood as arising from two conflicting trends in thinking, or rationalities; one pragmatic and reformist, the other radical and alternative.

Current notions of sustainable development have their roots in the 1960s and 70s and the growing concerns among northern environmentalists of the deleterious impacts of development and population growth. By 1980 the idea of sustainable development appeared in the World Conservation Union (IUCN) *World Conservation Strategy* recommending sustainable modes of development, especially to avoid developing countries repeating the same environmental destruction that had occurred in industrialised countries (Grainger 2004). However, it was not until the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development produced the report *Our Common Future* in 1987, that sustainable development emerged as a global policy goal to ‘meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED 1987). Five years later at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, or the Rio Earth Summit, it then took

shape within the detailed framework of Agenda 21. This was recognised as the blueprint for sustainable development, which had now become '*a global agenda of action*' (Robinson 1992b). This was an agenda which was restated a decade later, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

As a global policy, sustainable development was significant in explicitly linking environmental concerns with those of development and poverty. Thus it proposed that the human as well as environmental side-effects of existing modes of development could be simultaneously addressed. Critically, this depended on a '*new era of economic growth*', which though still devoted to neoliberal ideals of further expansion and liberalisation of world trade, would be based on '*policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base*' (WCED 1987). In spite of the aesthetic and preservationist interests of many environmentalists who had instigated sustainable development's ascendancy, the essential value of the environment was utilitarian. Biological resources constituted '*a capital asset with great potential for yielding sustainable benefits*' (UNCED 1992, Chapter 14). Sustaining the environment was key to long term economic growth. This in turn was necessary for tackling poverty, which itself was seen as crucial to environmental sustainability, as poverty represented a '*major cause and effect of global environmental problems*' (WCED 1987).

Alongside an attachment to the ideal of economic growth as a solution to concerns of poverty and environmental decline, people's participation also emerged as a fundamental theme. The public and especially those groups considered marginalised were recognised as having a key role to play in putting sustainable development policy into practice. Indeed, *Our Common Future* called for '*a campaign of education, debate and public participation*' in order to change attitudes and gain consensus in support of sustainable development (WCED 1987). Through Agenda 21 an ethic of local empowerment for participation was established as integral to sustainable development practices and instrumental to its success. Decentralised participatory governance was the order of the day. This called for community-based and community-driven approaches to management and planning; promising to ensure sustainable access to the resources needed to overcome poverty (UNCED 1992, Chapter 3) and to increase '*the incentive for economic and human resources development*' (UNCED 1992, Chapter 14).

This was a vision which saw non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as key agents vital for '*shaping and implementing participatory democracy*' (UNCED 1992, Chapter

27). Through NGOs, sustainable development might promote the interests of the local and marginal and challenge dominant political and economic structures. Yet participation was not restricted to the public, NGOs and the state, it also extended to the private sector. Industry was considered to be *'on the leading edge of the interface between people and the environment'* (WCED 1987) and a crucial driver of the development process and increasing prosperity (UNCED 1992, Chapter 30). Thus sustainable development was a multi-stakeholder political process. It was an idealistic agenda of cooperation and collective action to achieve a sense of *'common purpose'* on behalf of all sectors of society.

Sustainable development had emerged as a normative agenda; of environmentally-friendly and poverty-focussed economic growth. It seductively suggested positive outcomes all-round, reassuringly promising economic growth, poverty reduction and environmental protection now and into the future (Drysek 1997). It was based on a sense of universal responsibility for global environmental, economic and social problems. Yet at the same time it extended to local spaces and marginalised peoples whose empowerment to participate in the collective agenda was critical. But of course such an ideal policy could never be that simple.

Indeed, as acknowledged in the preface of Agenda 21, in spite of the apparent global consensus emerging from the international policy arenas, sustainable development was fraught with conflicts.

*'Of course there is still much controversy; conflicts of values in environmental policy turn up again and again. But - and this is a heartening thing - people are not indifferent to these conflicts, nor do policy-makers override them. The conflicts themselves are immensely useful, for they provoke a continuing debate about moral choice: choice between hard and soft values, choice between indulgence in the present and consideration for the future.'* (Robinson 1992a, piii).

For many, sustainable development was characterised as a discourse of controversy rather than consensus. For though it promised rescue from the contradictory demands of environment and development (Becker et al 1999), the form of that rescue remained ambiguous. Indeed, this ambiguity was arguably necessary to establish a common ground, or consensus, between developed and developing countries (Grainger 2004). It

had the effect to make sustainable development ubiquitous, serving the interests of an unlikely diversity of actors.

*'the new lexicon (of sustainable development) is so endemic that it appears with as much frequency in the frothy promotional literature of the World Bank as in the rhetoric of the Sierra Club, the US military, or the myriads of Third World grassroots environmental and community movements'* (Watts & Peet 2004, p5).

Yet underlying sustainable development's ambiguity and superficial universality are a number of serious tensions. Tensions between global and local frames of reference; between the interests of developed and developing countries, or the North and the South; and between differing values of the environment and the role of economic growth. Thus, while at the international level, global environmental problems have often been the point of reference, framed by natural sciences and systems modelling, at regional and local levels this focus and framing holds limited relevance (Becker 1999). And though conserving the environment has been the primary focus for developed countries, for developing countries the priority has been poverty reduction (Grainger 2004). Likewise, differing environmental objectives for the preservation of nature in the North and the conversion of nature for material growth in the South, represent a fundamental contradiction of values (Redclift 1987). Similarly, views on economic growth conflicted; some favouring continued economic growth based on a wiser use of nature, while others view nature as having finite limits requiring an end to economic growth (Dryzek 1997).

The problem, as Choucri (1999) highlights, is that *'there is not a single problem, but several, not one notable challenge, but many, and not one viable perspective, but alternatives ones. With regard to the definition of sustainability, there is not one single definition, but a whole host of views and approaches, as well as definitions'*.

For Redclift (1992) and Acselrad (1999), these multiple perspectives on sustainable development are governed by two conflicting trends in thinking, or rationalities. The first is pragmatic or reformist; conserving the current social order and viewing sustainable development as a modification to current development. This is a rationality based around utility; sustaining the capitalist system and material ideas of progress through market induced efficiency. Thus, it legitimises certain social practices as being objectively and unanimously good and desirable by the dominant views of those in

dominant positions (Acselrad 1999). It is a rationality which emerges through the United Nations policy idealism outlined above. It is also the perspective widely criticised as being hegemonic in its dominance over any alternatives. Thus, it runs counter to the second trend in thinking; a cultural or transformative rationality (Acselrad 1999), positioning sustainable development as an alternative or radical concept of development (Redclift 1992). Such an alternative rationality goes beyond utilitarian logic and sees action as mediated by culture, linking sustainability to principles of equity, ethics and self-sufficiency (Acselrad 1999). Found beyond the intergovernmental policies of Rio and Johannesburg, this is a perspective which positions sustainable development as a counterhegemony.

My aim now is to make use of this dichotomy to examine the contested nature of sustainable development as it emerges through these two conflicting trends in thinking, or rationalities; beginning with a pragmatic hegemony, and continuing with a radical alternative. Moreover, as I work through the second perspective on sustainable development, I show that this is a dualism which ultimately breaks down. For what surfaces here, I argue, is a policy which can no longer be understood as an ideal, a goal or end-state, confined to opposing rationalities. Rather it is a complex and dynamic narrative embedded in the multiplicities of practice. So I end the chapter by conceptualising sustainable development policy as a collection of messy processes; informed by alternative or post-developmental perspectives. Sustainable development has thus become multiple, diverse, contradictory and emergent, produced by place-based but not place-bound relations and practices.

### ***Sustainable development: a pragmatic hegemony***

The view of sustainable development as hegemonic, is one which has been well developed by Escobar (1995) in his book *Encountering Development*. According to Escobar sustainable development is:

*'the last attempt to articulate modernity and capitalism.....the resignification of nature as environment; the reinscription of Earth into capital via the gaze of science; the reinterpretation of poverty as effect of destroyed environments; and the new lease on management and planning as arbiters between people and nature..'* (p202).

Thus, sustainable development is based on a dominance of western or northern modes of knowledge and science, which continue dominant models of growth and development through rational and objective planning and management of social change. In this vision, global survival is problematised in terms of the sustainability of global ecosystems, not local cultures. Ecological problems defined at global levels are assumed to be of common concern for all communities. So the sustainability of nature is promoted, eroding the sustainability of culture through the rule of a market logic which views nature as capital, as *'reservoirs of value that research and knowledge, along with biotechnology, can release for capital and communities'* (p203). As more people adopt this discourse of sustainable development, then *'institutions again, will continue to reproduce the world as seen by those who rule it'*.

Escobar's critique gives many faces to the hegemony of sustainable development; from the hegemony of capitalism and the logic of the individual and market, to the hegemony of science and environmentalism, all of which are associated with western or northern views, which dominate the locals of the south. Escobar is not alone in his critique.

Dryzek (1997) also highlights how radical environmentalists view sustainable development as an *'anthropocentric arrogance'* in the belief that economic growth can ever be sustainable. Similarly, for Fernando (2003b) sustainable development is unable to address the concerns of socio-economic inequality and environmental degradation while it remains embedded in the hegemonic ideologies and institutions of capitalism. Political ecologists assert a similar view and are *'highly sceptical of the merits of the concept of sustainable development'* as it has been embraced by powerful political and economic actors and assimilated into an agenda of global capitalism (Bryant & Bailey 1997). Indeed, the outcomes of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, claim Bryant and Bailey (1997), were shaped by states, multilateral institutions and transnational corporations, who promoted the existing political and economic order, supporting the inequalities that in theory they are intent on eradicating. As Raco (2005) admits:

*'Given the speed with which SD (sustainable development) has been adopted by big businesses and governments intent on supporting (and sustaining) economic growth, there appears to be much justification for characterising SD as another discourse which has been subsumed by a wider neoliberal, regulatory logic.'* (p330)

The dominance of sustainable development discourse by neoliberal agendas arguably reaches its pinnacle within ecological modernisation theory. A theory which does not accept it is necessary to reject the core institutions of capitalism and the state in order to achieve sustainable development (Mol & Spaargaren 2000). Rather what is required is a redirection or transformation, so that capitalism will increasingly contribute to sustainability. At its core, ecological modernisation envisions a decoupling of the economy and environment, of economic and material flows, such that economic growth no longer leads to environmental destruction. The key to this, as Drysek (1997) points out, *'is that there is money in it for business'*. Not only that, the market and economic actors are transformed into far-sighted *'carriers of ecological restructuring and reform'* (Mol & Sonnenfeld 2000). This transformation is supported by a shifting role of science and technology from being the cause of environmental problems, to being a source of innovation to both restore and prevent environmental ills. At the same time, regulations governing the environment become decentralised from the state, making room for non-state actors and transnational institutions. Social movements also become integrated into decision-making and take on more reformist ideologies, while the accepted reality no longer tolerates disregard of the environment, or considers that environmental and economic interests are incompatible. Thus, Mol and Spaargaren (2000) claim that a growing consensus for market-based approaches to change has replaced conflictual relations associated with environmental reform and modernisation.

Through ecological modernisation sustainable development is firmly embedded within the mainstream of what Craig and Porter (2006) call an *'inclusive neoliberalism'*. An agenda which not only positions the market at the centre of development, but also adopts ideals of decentralisation and participatory governance. Through sustainable development there exists what Dagnino (2008) terms a *'perverse confluence' between participatory and neoliberal projects'*. Thus, participation and empowerment are represented as a *'top-down' strategy'* by the state and non-government organisations (NGOs) which functions to extend neoliberal development and maintain power with the powerful (Mohan & Stokke 2000). Indeed the orthodoxy of participatory democracy within development discourses has through the 1990s become predicated on the *'efficiency and effectiveness'* of achieving predetermined development goals (Mohan 2007). As such its populism has been the subject of considerable critique. Contributors to Cooke and Kothari (2001) highlight the *'tyrannical potential'* of participatory development in facilitating the *'illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power'*. Rather

than empower, local participation and the use of local knowledge simply extends existing power imbalances and co-opts local people into external development agendas. Projects which outwardly appear committed to public participation and decentralisation, in reality result in excluding local people and '*strengthening elites and local power relationships*' (Hildyard et al 2001). Participation is no longer a means to empower local people to identify their own development priorities, but a form of manipulation, to gain local collaboration, to ensure efficiency and reduce transaction costs (Clever 2001).

Moreover, the popularity of participation and its emphasis on community solidarity often obscures the fact that participation may not be beneficial to everyone, and communities may represent places of exclusion as well as inclusion (Clever 2001). Instead the community is often conceived of as a small, homogenous entity of integrated groups, with shared understandings and identities, and there is a failure to fully recognise the diverse and often conflicting interests and motivations of individuals and how these vary over life courses (Agrawal & Gibson 1999). Thus, Watts and Peet (2004) argue, the idea of community itself becomes a hegemony where '*not everyone participates or benefits equally in the construction and reproduction of communities, or from the claims made in the name of community interest*' (p18-19). Indeed, as Raco (2005) points out, the notion of 'community' has become critical to the '*regulationist characterisation of neoliberalism... to re-draw subjectivities and to create new entrepreneurial, active modes of citizenship*'. Here then, sustainability relies on citizens reducing their dependence on the state, conforming to market principles to play a role in the economic security of the community.

Such critiques extend to community-based and community-driven approaches to natural resource management promoted as instruments of sustainable development policy, particularly in the developing world. For in reality, such approaches are merely a '*Trojan horse*', with a facade of decentralised participatory governance concealing an externally promoted policy, which ultimately benefits regional and national elites (Blaikie 2006). Or it is simply used to gain local support for preconceived conservation priorities and strategies (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila 2003). Indeed, Blaikie (2006) claims that it is through community-based natural resource management that '*communities characterised by wide social and environmental variability seem to be regularised, reduced, manualised, replicated and inserted into program targets*'. In part this is related to the dominance of official scientific knowledge dictating environmental

goals and controlling what local knowledge will be heard and represented as the supposed voice of the community.

The hegemony of 19<sup>th</sup> century science is not only apparent within community-based approaches to natural resource management. According to Redclift (1987), it is the intellectual basis of sustainable development, making it difficult to '*assimilate and utilise the experience and epistemology of poor people*' (p204). So while "'rational" environmental management makes the world safe for development...., it does not make the environment safe for the poor and their livelihoods' (p172). Instead science dominates the environment for economic gain and excludes the underprivileged (Braidotti 1999).

For in spite of the claims of sustainable development valuing local and indigenous knowledge as a means to empower marginalised indigenous peoples, the use of indigenous knowledge has instead resulted in the '*colonisation of local communities by transnational capital*' and the configuration of development according to the imperatives of capitalism (Fernando 2003a). Indigenous knowledge becomes elevated as superior and distinct, but at the same time is collected and archived using the instruments of western science, consigning it to '*strangulation by centralized control and management*' (Agrawal 1995). It is then often an '*unintended effect*' of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in their support for biodiversity conservation and indigenous empowerment, that they extend the power of the state or '*deepen governmentality*' and so become '*central to a process whereby hitherto "peripheral" people and biota are brought within the remit of political rationalities of control and surveillance*' (Bryant 2002).

Significantly, the supposedly independent voice of NGOs promoting the interests of the local and marginalised and challenging dominant political and economic structures, has been widely contested. Indeed, in spite of the uncritical enthusiasm linked to NGOs growing prominence during the 1980s, there has subsequently been considerable unease over their role in development (Bebbington et al 2008). Unease which stems from the recognition that the rise in NGO activity has largely been propelled by a neoliberal agenda, in which NGOs have become agents of official development aid acting as '*subcontracted service providers*' to the state. Such a position clearly calls into question their autonomy and the legitimacy of their position as representatives of the marginalised. Functioning within the parameters of the state, their role in mainstreaming

sustainable development is then one which Fernando (2003b) claims is complicit in strengthening and legitimising capitalist institutions and power relations.

Not only are NGOs accused of perpetuating the hegemony of neoliberalism, they have also been associated with extending first world global environmental concerns over third world development problems. Negotiations at the Rio Earth Summit saw the interests and anxieties of powerful first world environmental NGOs overshadow those of their third world counterparts, giving priority to problems of wildlife depletion and tropical deforestation popular with the first world public (Bryant and Bailey 1997). Moreover, certain larger Northern environmental NGOs have even branded as '*eco-imperialists*' in their pursuit of environmental protection at the expense of the lives of poor people in the South (Bryant 2009).

Indeed, it is argued that in developed countries sustainable development was simply a new name for environmental protection (Grainger 2004). An extension of a northern environmental movement in which the North, argues Guha (2000) '*lays excessive claim to the South's "environmental space"*' and in doing so is insensitive to the needs of local people, who depend on the wildlife and habitats northern conservationists wish to protect. Local people are thus the '*enemy of the environment*' which needs to be protected from them through parks which serve the interests of '*northern wilderness lovers and urban pleasure seekers*'. Such environmental imperialism is often associated with the view that environmental concern arises from post-materialism, as a luxury of the rich and prosperous, which the poor can ill afford faced with immediate demands of daily survival (Guha & Martinez-Alier 1997). As northern conservation concerns travel south, it is often the poor who pay the price, as their access to resources are restricted in efforts to protect nature. These are efforts, which have sometimes shown to follow '*coercive patterns of conservation*' where international conservation groups legitimise the '*militarisation of environmental and resource conservation*' (Peluso 1993 in Watts and Peet 2004). Clearly Redclift's cautionary note that achieving sustainable development '*requires political measures that are so authoritarian they would immediately contradict the liberating, human objectives that would make development sustainable in the first place*' (1987, p199-200) is closer to reality than initially supposed.

Moreover, these environmental concerns are now framed as global issues to be managed by external experts with their own distinct conceptions of nature, overriding local values

and priorities (Sachs 1992). Indeed, the scientific uncertainties which surround environmental issues force governments to search out authoritative advice from experts, who exert great influence over how the issue is represented and responded to (Watts & Peet 2004). These representations often dominate our understanding and yet, as work in political ecology has shown, they are often based on highly uncertain science and more closely linked to historical political agendas. Thus, Neumann (2004) highlights how different '*consensus views*' associated with ideas of unspoilt wilderness, ecological fragility and degradation, or the threat of human land use practices, have resulted in the resettlement of local populations to make way for national parks in many parts of Africa. Challenging the '*received wisdom*' has revealed that in some cases wild landscapes are actually the result of centuries of local activities, or that resource management strategies are often based on the acceptance of unexamined and sometimes false claims over the cause of ecological degradation. Yet the hegemony of expert '*scientific*' and often external views prevails underpinning the '*global consensus*' that sustainable development supposedly represents.

The pragmatic or reformist perspective of sustainable development as a hegemonic discourse is, as Escobar argued, multi-faceted. It positions sustainable development within the mainstream agenda of an '*inclusive*' neoliberalism. An agenda which is dominated by priorities of economic growth and market-led development, supported by instrumental practices of participation and empowerment and implemented by the neoliberal agents of the non-governmental sector. It is represented as a global agenda, through which supposedly expert views informed by Western science and Northern environmental imperialism impose their order. Thus, sustainable development subjugates the South; colonising indigenous knowledges and violating local livelihoods through top-down strategies of participatory governance.

Yet in spite of this damning narrative, sustainable development is simultaneously positioned as an alternative and even radical policy, as I explore in the following section.

### ***Sustainable development: a radical alternative***

The counter-rationality to the pragmatic, reformist or hegemonic representation of sustainable development, is a cultural or transformative trend in thinking (Acsehrad

1999). It is a rationality which positions sustainable development as an alternative or radical concept of development (Redclift 1992). Thus, Redclift (1992) argues that the global agenda of sustainable development envisioned in the Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future* presents an '*alternative concept of development*' and not simply a modification of traditional development strategies. Sustainable development, according to Raco (2005) has emerged to '*challenge neoliberal inspired growth agendas and modes of regulation*' while promoting '*a variety of actors to engage directly in the politics of development, not just those in powerful positions from the private sector*' (p330-331). Sustainable development's policy idealism offers an alternative to the mainstream.

For Fernando (2003b) to deny an alternative rationality and abandon sustainable development as a neoliberal western hegemony, is '*to tacitly accept unsustainability*'. What is required, claims Fernando, is a rethinking to reclaim a '*new and more powerful political space for sustainable development*' and provide a counterhegemonic ideology that can free sustainable development from the chains of capitalism. Such an ideology, argues Fernando requires a '*radical reconfiguration of power*' and the democratisation of political, social and economic institutions to create an alternative aligned to a social justice perspective (2003a, 2003b). Social justice is critical to a counterhegemonic ideology and Fernando (2003b) outlines four reasons for this: 1) it explicitly links inequality and capitalism; 2) it allows us to look critically at existing strategies of sustainable development; 3) it brings together coalitions of different equity concerns through a '*universal paradigm*'; and 4) it gives emphasis to class relations and moves away from a domination of conservation and green concerns.

A rationality based on social justice relates then to ideals of equality and concern for people, or classes, whose identities and livelihoods are being marginalised. Moreover, it is linked to a focus on rights, not only the rights for equity between the 'haves' and 'have nots' of current generations, but also the rights of future generations. The emphasis on equity is not just as a social goal, it is understood as a necessary requirement for sustainability. For as Agyeman and others argue, sustainability requires such a degree of altruism in the interests of the future and '*unseen others*', that it will be impossible to change behaviour '*if there is not some measure of perceived equality in terms of sharing common futures and fates*' (2003a, p2). Rights to equality include equitable consumption, equitable access to environmental quality for health and well-being, as well as equitable access to information and the right to participate effectively.

They also extend beyond anthropocentric views and advocate equal concern for the human and non-human world, supporting the intrinsic values of nature (Agyeman et al 2003b). In searching for these ideals of equality, social justice abandons assumptions that Southern countries desire Northern levels of wealth, consumption and well-being generated from an '*Anglo-Saxon cultural model of business, markets, indicators and aspirations*', or that higher wealth and consumption lead directly to greater well-being and quality of life (McLaren 2003). Moreover, McLaren (2003) claims, it challenges patterns of consumption dictated by the North, or Southern elites, and contests the legitimacy of continued environmental exploitation supporting export-led development. Thus, sustainable development confronts the '*vested interests in the system*', it counters the hegemony of neoliberalism.

The concerns of social justice arguably run through the policy idealism of *Our Common Future*, the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. However, it is within the *Earth Charter*<sup>1</sup> that such a vision of sustainable development really crystallises as something alternative. For while the intergovernmental policy documents provide a utilitarian view of nature, tied to economic growth for poverty reduction, the *Earth Charter* presents quite a different outlook. Nature and the environment gain a value beyond utility, with greater emphasis on the intrinsic value of '*every form of life*', extending to a recognition of animal welfare and the need to '*treat all living beings with respect and consideration*' (Earth Charter 2000). The dominance of continued economic growth is lost and instead the focus shifts to the guarantee of human rights and promotion of social and economic justice. Concern with economic development then turns to issues of equitable distribution of wealth, relief of international debt for developing countries, progressive labour standards, and transparency and accountability of multinational corporations and international finance organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> In parallel and connected to the intergovernmental policy making that was taking place during Rio and Johannesburg, was a significant civil society movement. One outcome of this movement has been the Earth Charter, a statement '*on ethics and values for a sustainable future*'. The Earth Charter was originally intended to provide an ethical foundation for Agenda 21 and other United Nations agreements and was prepared as part of the intergovernmental negotiations. However, an agreement could not be reached and instead it became part of the 1992 Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Global Forum held in parallel to the Rio Earth Summit. From its drafting in 1992 and the establishment of the Earth Charter Initiative in 1994, until its official launch in 2000, a series of national, regional and international consultations took place to develop the Earth Charter, overseen by the Earth Charter Commission and national Earth Charter committees. The final statement which resulted is presented as a vision for a sustainable society based on principles of respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and peace (Earth Charter 2000). And though the Earth Charter was not formally recognised at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, it has been endorsed by nearly 5000 organisations around the world (see <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Endorse.html> for a list) and was recognised in a resolution at the UNESCO General Conference in 2003 as an ethical framework for sustainable development (Vilela 2005).

Beyond policy rhetoric, social justice has also motivated many different strands of alternative or radical development thinking. Reviewing the varied genealogy of development, Hickey and Mohan (2004) trace similar notions back to emancipatory participation and liberation theology approaches of the 1960s and 70s and ideas of popular participation in development of the 1980s. As Escobar (1995) notes, since the 1980s there has been a trend of *'highlighting the role of grassroots movements, local knowledge and popular power in transforming development'* (p215). A trend which has focused on the poor and powerless, giving them a voice in development. Thus it addresses the failures of 'top-down' centralised development by turning to development driven from the 'bottom-up'. A key proponent of this popular movement for participatory development was Chambers, who popularised ideas of *'putting the last first'* (Chambers 1983) and called for development professionals to disempower themselves while facilitating the empowerment of the poor. According to Chambers (1997), the relatively well-off, literate, mostly urban-based and male development professionals were able to see only the *'simplified shadows'* of the diversity which actually exists among the rural poor. They had been conditioned into a 'normal' professionalism which *'inculcates an arrogance in which superior knowledge and superior status are assumed'* such that they not only do not *'know the rural reality; worse, they do not know that they do not know'* (Chambers 1983 p6). What was called for to counter the failure of a development misled by powerful outsiders, was a bottom-up development grounded in local struggles and based on ideas of empowering the marginalised to challenge the status quo. This would require changes within development professionals to learn from those at the periphery and to straddle between cultures of academic analysis and practical experience (Chambers 1983).

This was an alternative development which in theory was free from the hegemony of normative and externally-led ideals and 'expert' knowledge, determined instead by local, non-Western knowledge. For, as Martinez-Alier (1995) highlights, it is only by understanding the perspectives of the poor that preoccupations of post-materialism, suggesting environmentalism is an outcome of economic growth, might be exposed to reveal the *'environmentalism of the poor'*. Thus, through an alternative 'bottom-up' development space is made for the *'empty-belly'* environmentalism of the South, as well as the *'full-stomach'* environmentalism of the North. This is a locally determined environmentalism arising out of social conflict in response to environmental destruction, which threatens the livelihoods of the poor (Guha & Martinez-Alier 1997).

For Escobar (1995), it is among the grassroots, or popular local groups of the third world where radical alternatives emerge as a means of resisting dominant interventions. Rather than search for development alternatives, however, these groups search for '*alternatives to development*' in a new era of post-developmentalism. Such resistances do not form a single grand alternative, but a multitude of local practices, which can only be found by learning to '*read with new senses, tools and theories*' and to hear the voices of the subaltern, without appropriating and consuming them for the needs of dominant agendas. What is required is a process of '*unmaking development*', which is not simply a matter of making gestures towards the ethics of participation and empowerment, but a collective practice of '*restructuring of existing political economies of truth*' and making room for unconventional non-Western ways of knowing. As popular groups in the third world search for alternative pathways, Escobar claims they are guided by a sense of defending cultural difference and the local and finding value for economic needs beyond the market place in a self-critical collective engagement which opposes modernizing development. Thus post-development finds alternatives linked to localities, place and place-based consciousness and counter-hegemonic social movements (Escobar 2001, 2004).

From rationalities of social justice to the populism of participatory development and the more radical post-developmentalism, there is a promise of an alternative, localised and more relevant sustainability which goes beyond the hegemony of capitalism or neoliberalism. For Krueger and Agyeman (2004) these alternatives are found beneath global policy idealism or national Agenda 21 initiatives, residing instead within actual local practices and places. Moreover, these '*actual existing sustainabilities*' emerge unexpectedly and even within what might otherwise be branded as capitalist places. They are akin to Bebbington's (1997) '*islands of sustainability*', localities which have found an alternative future within '*seas of unsustainability*'. Significantly, however, Bebbington's '*islands of sustainability*' are based on a renegotiation of relations with dominant institutions that have historically marginalised the rural poor. They are repositioned but remain part of and dependent on markets and global economies.

Thus, an alternative rationality to sustainable development is at once local and place-based and at the same time translocal, transnational and global. Moreover, it is simultaneously counter-hegemonic and part of the mainstream development. For grassroots, or social movements are '*not against the idea of development, they are part of it*' and represent the tensions and unevenness existing in development itself (Rangan

2004). As such, alternative movements are not essentially anti-modern, but may be tied to ideas of modernisation as a means of material improvement to livelihoods, or even as a sign of liberation from past domination (Bebbington 2004). Indeed, though radical rationalities and especially post-developmentalism, have been criticised for romanticising the local and essentialising it as a site of an anti-capitalist, anti-global development (e.g. Simon 1997, Watts 1999), this critique is arguably misplaced. For as Escobar (2001) argues alternative development may be place-based, but it is not place-bound. What then is at stake is:

*‘to learn to see place-based cultural, ecological and economic practices as important sources of alternative visions and strategies for reconstructing local and regional worlds, no matter how produced by “the global” they might also be’* (Escobar 2001, p165-166).

Moreover, Gibson-Graham (2005 p6) claim the *‘postdevelopment agenda is not, as we see it, anti-development’*, rather the challenge is to move beyond a critique of development and to *‘imagine and practice development differently’*. Such an imagining is not a single counter-narrative, but *‘a true multiplicity, where trajectories are multiple and can lead to multiple states’* (Escobar 2004 p225). Thus, sustainable development as a radical alternative moves to a position where we accept the co-existence of diverse and multiple interpretations and practices. It is a position, which Simon (1997, p193) describes as *‘a rich tapestry of cross-cutting continuity and change, of old, new and hybrid identities, of reason and reaction, of gender and power relations, of the preservation versus transcendence of categories, and of how and by whom they are negotiated, defined and safeguarded’*. A viewpoint which challenges orthodoxy and diversifies our basis of knowing to allow for multiple and dynamic explanations (Forsyth 2003). It is both a critique and an appeal to alternative knowledges and not an abandonment of science, but a re-reasoning of reason (Watts & Peet 1996).

Critically, this is a view of sustainable development which is no longer governed by the binary rationality of hegemonic and counterhegemonic, dominant versus alternative, local versus global, North versus South. For while these conflicting trends in thinking have served their purpose and exposed some part of the contested sustainable development discourse, they are ultimately limited in realising the complexity of sustainable development policy in practice. It is to this complexity that I now turn in the

final section of the chapter and to present an understanding of sustainable development as messy processes.

### ***Sustainable development as messy processes***

To understand the contested realm of sustainable development as messy processes begins with the recognition that reality does not fit neatly into the binary categories of domination and resistance. Indeed, the perverse complexity of our reality defies *'dualistic or oppositional ways of thinking ... requiring instead (a) more subtle and dynamic articulation'* (Braidotti 1999). Rather, domination and resistance are understood as relational, operating unevenly over space, as identities take on multiple positions depending on the social markers of difference which influence the way people live and relate (Radcliffe 1999a). Aware of these multiple positionalities, there is acceptance of a diversity of view points and development trajectories, which operate in the context of historical legacies and networks of public, private and civil society institutions working across multiple scales (Radcliffe 1999b). Thus, sustainable development is not centred within a single orthodoxy or practice, but rather multiple meanings coexist and overlap and are negotiated, contested and change over time depending on the context (Simon 1997). Moreover, these multiple meanings depend on what Watts and Peet (1996, p263) call an *'environmental imaginary'* a situated knowledge *'expressed and developed through regional discursive formations, which take as central themes the history of social relations to a particular natural environment'*. Thus environmental imaginaries are both social constructions and constructed by nature, constantly being built, rebuilt, redesigned and accumulating and changing through practice.

Situated, multiple and often contradictory constructions of development are evident. For example, in Bebbington's (2004) study of indigenous peasant federations and NGOs in highland provinces of the Central Andes of Ecuador. Here grassroots, or social movements are encountered expressing apparently contradictory demands for recognition both of traditional values of an Indian identity and rights as citizens to be integrated into Ecuador's development process. These are social movements with increasing political influence within government, complicating ideas of their being a straightforward resistance movement against the state, or even that the state has co-opted the movement for its own ends. It is also a movement receiving funding from

multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, indicating even more tensions between the incongruity of *'social movements that oppose neoliberalism managing a World Bank loan; (or) market-oriented and infrastructure investments as a primary instrument for an ostensible "indigenous" development'* (Bebbington 2004, p415).

If sustainability is made up of such a variety of contradictory meanings, then Becker et al (1999) claim, it *'cannot be considered as a general norm'*. For to claim that there is a general norm *'denies that different social actors may have a plurality of meaningful relations to the common elements of the material base of development'* (Acselrad 1999). Accepting that development cannot be simplified into singular ideologies, sustainable development must then be recognised as messy. Messy because it is constituted by diverse and competing meanings arising from multiple, overlapping and contradictory interests and values. Moreover, if there is not a singular deterministic trajectory or even a binary of ideologies, then sustainable development should be understood as a collection of processes *'which refer to the interactions between societies and their natural environment, including the mutual interference of different societal processes among themselves and with ecological processes'* (Becker et al 1999, p7). Similarly, Ratner (2004), suggests that sustainability *'is not a fixed end, but a dialogue of values among competing actors'* interacting across multiple scales. A conversation which *'gives rise to an emergent, co-produced understanding of possibilities'* (Robinson 2004). Rather than impose a common definition and goal, sustainable development may be conceived as a de-centered, incremental, pluralistic and piecemeal experiment in social learning (Drysek 1997). No longer reduced to an abstract ideal, or to a dualism between conflicting ideologies, sustainable development is a social and subjective practice (Braidotti 1999), which is inescapably *'experimental, and experiential'* in nature (Robinson 2004).

Conceived as a process, the essence of sustainability becomes elusive making room for new possibilities (Drysek 1997). It is a process whose outcome is *'open and relatively unpredictable'* (Tovey 2008). Thus there is no hegemonic order in place, rather sustainable development is a struggle of representations, of competing and conflicting claims to legitimise different social practices and social formations as being good or bad (Acselrad 1999). Hegemonic and marginal views interact and simultaneously constrain and enable through a dynamic web of interconnections within and between society and the environment. Thus while the messy reality goes beyond the binary of hegemonic and alternative views, it does not deny their existence. Nor does it necessarily privilege

or mark clear boundaries between the dominant and 'other', accepting that both marginal and dominant perspectives may incorporate something of the other in often contradictory hybrid knowledges, practices and institutions that emerge through the ongoing histories of social relations.

Sustainable development is thus a set of messy processes, where messiness is encountered both in the coexistence or hybridisation of conflicting ideologies and in the complexities of realities and practices which reinforce, contradict and transform ideology. Messiness occurs both horizontally through multiple rationalities and vertically through the diverse outcomes of policy as it articulates in practice with the intricacies of different realities on the ground. Yet, as Law (2004, p2) makes plain, messiness is a concept which does not invite straightforward definitions, *'simple clear descriptions don't work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent. The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess'*. And in spite of this there remains a tendency to 'smooth' or 'explain away' difference. There is still a struggle to search for, or establish, a 'middle ground' a singular intersection of the different dimensions of messiness. As Zimmerer (2004) illustrates in his study of soil erosion in Bolivia, spaces of dialogue can build awareness and engagement between differing perspectives allowing a 'middle ground' to emerge. Yet, these may only represent transitory and *'partially commensurate realms of meaning'*. Moreover, these *'small semblances of a "middle ground" do not of course grant an arena in which sustainability can be easily attained'* (p120). For even where there may be a common issue that motivates concern and action, it may have the effect to divide as much as it may unite. Moreover, these diverse perspectives are embedded within historical and present-day influences, emanating from public and private sectors and society itself, which shape and in turn are shaped by the negotiations for an elusive middle ground.

So to make sense of sustainable development as messy processes, appeals to an understanding of the everyday practices and relations of networks of actors situated by *'environmental imaginaries'* and mediated by a variety of formal and informal institutions. Sustainability is no longer understood simply as a *'struggle between 'capitalism' and 'sustainability'* but also *'as it actually exists in local places as a set of evolving practices'* (Krueger & Agyeman 2005, p416). It is by attending to different locations, or the sites of practice where realities are continually crafted or enacted that multiplicity may be discovered (Law 2004). This is an analysis which is not restricted in scale, but considers the connections across multiple layers from local to global. Above

all, it is a critical analysis which adopts a differentiated view that questions the essentialist social categories of actors and makes room for multiple and contradictory realities. To understand sustainable development in this way becomes, as Bebbington (2004) highlights, *'a conversation between the strategies of rural social movements and the analytical categories of those who write about them'* (p394). It is about telling *'development stories'* which can build bridges between messy processes and the rhetoric of policy agendas, shedding light on *'"liberatory" possibilities'*. So it is in this context that this thesis sets about exploring sustainable development policy as it articulates through the diverse life worlds of rural Cambodia.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I set out to establish a conceptualisation of sustainable development as a collection of messy processes. Thus, I began by presenting the way in which sustainable development policy uncritically asserts itself as a globally unifying and normative agenda of environmentally-friendly and poverty-focussed economic growth. An idealistic agenda of cooperation and collective action, built on a sense of *'common purpose'* shared by all sectors of society. Yet this was also a policy idealism based on ambiguity and ridden with contradictions and controversy arising from diverse and conflicting perspectives and values. Sustainable development must then be understood not as a universal consensus but a contested discourse.

Examining sustainable development's contested discourse, I focussed on the dichotomy of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, or alternative, rationalities. The pragmatic or reformist perspective of sustainable development as a hegemonic discourse is as Escobar argued multi-faceted. It positions sustainable development within the mainstream agenda of an *'inclusive'* neoliberalism. This is an agenda which is dominated by priorities of economic growth and market-led development, supported by instrumental practices of participation and empowerment and implemented by the neoliberal agents of the non-governmental sector. It is represented as a global agenda, through which supposedly expert views informed by Western science and Northern environmental imperialism impose their order. Thus, sustainable development subjugates the South; colonising indigenous knowledges and violating local livelihoods through top-down strategies of participatory governance.

Yet in spite of this damning critique, sustainable development is simultaneously positioned as an alternative and even radical policy. A policy which challenges dominant development ideologies, while promoting an alternative counter-hegemony. This is a rationality based around social justice and ideals of equality and human rights. Ideals which have crystallised within the *Earth Charter* and which are motivated by many different strands of alternative or radical development thinking. Thus, sustainable development becomes aligned with popular movements for participatory development, as well as post-development's counter-hegemonic social movements. For it is here that promises of an alternative, localised and more relevant sustainability is encountered. This is a viewpoint which accepts the co-existence of multiple and diverse interpretations and practices. It is at once local and place-based and at the same time translocal, transnational and global. Moreover, it is simultaneously counter-hegemonic and part of mainstream development. Critically, this is an understanding of sustainable development which is no longer governed by the binary rationality of hegemonic and counterhegemonic. Freed from a single orthodoxy or practice, it is a conceptualisation which is situated, multiple and contradictory.

Lacking a single deterministic trajectory, sustainable development must then be understood as a collection of processes. This is sustainability '*as it actually exists in local places as a set of evolving practices*' (Krueger and Agyeman 2005). An understanding where hegemonic and marginal views interact and simultaneously constrain and enable through a dynamic web of interconnections within and between society and the environment. Where there are no clear boundaries between the dominant and 'other', accepting that both marginal and dominant perspectives incorporate something of the other in often contradictory hybrid knowledges, practices and institutions, emerging through ongoing histories of social relations.

From this conceptual beginning I continue in the next chapter to examine how an understanding of contemporary development thinking may offer a means of dealing with the messiness of sustainable development policy in practice.

# Chapter 3

## Actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches to development

### ***Understanding messiness: implications and insights from contemporary development thinking***

The aim of this chapter is to explore how different modes of contemporary development thinking might provide insights for analysing the messy processes of sustainable development policy. In particular, I wish to focus on two people-centred approaches to development research and practice; firstly, actor-orientated development sociology; and secondly the livelihoods approach. My purpose then is to consider the relevancy of each approach and what they offer in terms of dealing with messiness.

I begin here by briefly reviewing the implications for understanding sustainable development as a collection of messy processes. I then outline a case for considering actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches as a means of interpreting sustainable development. Thus I highlight both approaches' concern for understanding the diversities of development experience. This is a critical concern, signifying a rejection of grand ideologies and explanatory models and an affiliation to postmodern or critical development thinking; thinking which similarly inspires notions of messiness.

For, as I set out in the previous chapter, messy processes represent a move away from defining sustainable development as a single optimal goal, normative consensus, or even a binary of hegemonic and counterhegemonic rationalities. Informed by alternative or radical post-development thinking, sustainable development is recognised as messy; as being constituted by multiple, coexisting and conflicting meanings. Moreover, it is understood as a collection of messy *processes* because it arises not simply from multiple beliefs, but from the diverse histories and practices of people in particular places which shape and are shaped by these beliefs. It is not simply a '*struggle between 'capitalism' and 'sustainability'*' but also sustainability '*as it actually exists in local places as a set of evolving practices*' (Krueger & Agyeman 2005, p416).

To discover the messy processes which make up sustainable development then implies attention to the different locations, or sites of practice where realities are continually crafted or enacted (Law 2004). It means getting to know the diversity of people

involved in development, their everyday practices and their relations with their environment which give rise to a diversity of environmental imaginaries. These are imaginaries shaped through history by the constraints and opportunities emanating from formal and informal institutions, and mediated by people's own knowledge and capacities and their interactions with the natural world around them. Thus, understanding messy processes is grounded in local experience, but at the same time situates the local within a wider historical, social, political and economic context. It is an understanding based around the empirical which attempts to look at both a micro-sociology of people's everyday and how this interconnects with a macro-sociology of structural constraints and opportunities. It makes space for marginal views from below while also being aware of the presence and continued authority of dominant discourses from above. At the same time, it avoids simplistic and essentialist categories of dominant and resistant, local and global or south and north, allowing for hybridity, contradiction and uncertainties. This is a dynamic understanding which is constantly critiquing assumed truths. It recognises the multiple and ongoing social constructions of reality taking place within the contexts of a diversity of historical relations with the natural environment.

The implication of such an understanding is that it is sensitive to diversity, to the particularities and differences of development experience across multiple scales, and to the contingencies inherent in our attempts to understand. It is to this diversity that actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches speak; to reveal diversity from the perspectives of those people engaged in, or affected by development. These are approaches which are similarly inspired by a move away from grand theories of development; theories criticised for ignoring variation in development experiences and failing to respond to practice (Booth 1985). Indeed, according to Booth (1994, p5) the major theories in development sociology were '*grand simplifications that were either simply wrong (untenable empirically, conceptually unstable or redundant) or else pitched at a level of generality that made them irrelevant to the most important practical issues facing developing countries*'.

In place of the generalised structuralism of development theory, diversity had come to represent the new problematic (Booth 1994). Central to explaining diversity is an understanding of both the role of agency or action and the structural context in which action takes place. Though different schools of thought contested the relative importance of a micro understanding of agency and a macro understanding of structure,

Booth (1994, p20) argues for ‘*a style of analysis that moves back and forth between the macro and the micro*’, where both perspectives are mutually indispensable. What is required is an analysis grounded in empiricism, which links the micro and macro; engaging with day-to-day dilemmas through a nuanced and disaggregated understanding of existing lives, while incorporating wider influences of the state, or relationships with markets (Bebbington & Bebbington 2001).

It is the unpacking of this tension between agency and structure, which becomes central to discovering the diversities or messiness of development and which also lies at the heart of both actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches. Though distinct in substance and affiliated differently to academic, practice and policy thinking, both approaches seek to uncover the agencies, or practices and everyday experiences of networks of actors or local people and their interactions with structural constraints and opportunities. Thus they are open to messiness, as it is enacted through practice and as it is situated within wider social structures and ideologies. Superficially, at least, this presents a case for drawing on both approaches for the purpose of this thesis, and the analysis of sustainable development as it articulates through rural fisheries-based livelihoods in Cambodia. What I set out to do throughout the rest of the chapter, is to examine this case in more detail; to consider in what ways each approach helps in understanding messiness. Thus, in turn I outline the origins and key elements of actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches and reflect on the way in which they address the multiplicities of sustainable development policy in practice.

### **The actor-orientated approach**

For Long (1984), one of the principle advocates of the actor-orientated approach in development sociology, an actor-orientation was a move against the generic structural theories of development and their determinism, linearity and institutional hegemony. Such theories appeared to Long to be ‘*tainted with a dreadful sense of fatalism*’ which subsumed the Third World peasantry within a Orwellian Big Brother Society emanating from central powers of the state (Long 1984 p169). An interventionist ideology led development practice, where external ‘*packages*’ of material or organisation inputs were delivered to a local situation, deemed to be inadequate, or in need of change to match a superior external reality (Long & van der Ploeg 1989). Development consisted of the promotion of normative standards, a ‘*kind of ‘trade in images*’’, which sought to

*'redefine the nature of state-peasant relations'* according to a dominant external image (1989, p231). Interventions were asserted as the key to rural development when in fact, Long and van der Ploeg (1989) argue, they are part of the problem of development itself, limiting the dynamic potentials of local initiatives through external control.

Thus the actor-orientated approach represented a critical element in the reorientation of rural development research; providing an *'antidote to the excesses of structuralist and culturalist types of explanation'* (Long 2001, p2). Through an actor-orientation, the hegemony of development theories were countered with the conviction that it was insufficient to base understanding of social change around a largely peopleless and external determination. For *'all forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-worlds of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way are mediated and transformed by these same actors and local structures'* (Long and van der Ploeg 1994, p64). What was required then was an approach which focused on the interrelationships and *'mutual determination of external and internal factors'* (Long 1984, p171) and the central role of social actors and agency. It is an approach then which offers a means of seeing beneath the hegemonic faces of sustainable development, revealing the role of people in transforming development outcomes.

Accordingly, to explain the diversity of development outcomes, it is necessary to orientate thinking towards the perspectives of the different actors who are actually engaged directly and indirectly in the *'series of intertwined battles over resources, meanings and institutional legitimacy and control'* (Long 2001, p1). Following Giddens, actors are understood as being in possession of agency, or the *'knowledgeability'* and *'capability'* which enables them to process and cope with life's experiences; to act and make a difference even if they do so in positions of extreme subordination. Thus, agency is not simply a characteristic of an individual but embedded within social relations, and effective through networks of relations which channel flows of goods, technology, claims, orders or information. And yet there is also no universal interpretation of agency, rather it is culturally defined and shaped by *'various cross-cutting discourses, institutional constraints and processes of objectification'* (Long 2001, p4).

Ideas of actors and agency are socially constructed and situated by cultural practices. Moreover, they may relate not just to individuals but also to coalitions of actors, who at times may share similar perspectives and who are able to agree explicitly or implicitly

to a common action. These collective actors *'may be informally or formally constituted and spontaneously or strategically organised'* (Long 2001, p56), with open and balanced patterns of relations, or with uneven relations, where a centralised authority claims to represent the collective. Following ideas of *'heterogeneous actor-networks'* (Callon & Law 1995, Latour 1994 cited in Long 2001), it is also possible to understand the collective actor as something not limited to people, but also including the 'things', or materials, texts and technologies, which play an important role in constituting social action. A key aspect of actor-orientation is to understand actors and agency as rooted in social practice; avoiding essentialised social categories and seeking to understand collective actions based on studying *'how specific actors deal with the problematic situations they encounter'* (Long 2001, p57).

An actor-orientated analysis which understands both actors and their agency as being socially constructed, allows for multiple realities and frames of knowing, as knowledge is understood as being constructed through the situated social encounters and relations of networks of actors. This understanding breaks down dichotomous representations of knowledge as expert versus local, or modern versus traditional. Knowledge is not understood in the abstract, but in *'relation to the everyday contingencies and struggles that constitute social life.....an outcome of the interactions, negotiations, interfaces and accommodations that take place between different actors and their lifeworlds'* (Long 2001, p170). Knowledge is a dynamic process embedded in and emerging from social processes which *'imply aspects of power, authority and legitimation'* (p183). This does not deny the power of external hegemonic discourses, though neither does it see these hegemonic ideas as oppressing *'passive victims'*. Rather it encourages us to explore how actors create a space for themselves to carry out their own projects, while recognising this space for change may be restricted (Long 1984).

Rural development research is then concerned with understanding the extent to which, given certain circumstances, *'people acquire power to keep, ignore, subvert, resist or change the prevailing social order'* (Arce et al 1994). How do external development interventions enter and become part of the life worlds and ways of knowing of different actors? And how through this struggle are dominant discourses endorsed, challenged or transformed through the practices of networks of actors? Such questions are clearly pertinent to an analysis of the messy processes of sustainable development policy as it intervenes in practice. They are based on an openness to the diversity of perspectives and actions which constitute messiness. Moreover, they are receptive to the messy interplay

between the interrelated actions of actors and the wider social structures in which those actors are situated.

Indeed, it is through understanding the interactional and interpretive processes of networks of social actors that the broader structural context is revealed. An actor-orientation provides the micro-foundations of the macro-framework. Yet this is not suggesting that the macro-framework may be understood as a simple aggregation or reduction of its micro-foundations. Rather it is understood '*in the disentangling of the invariably complex web of unintended consequences and feedback effects that form the link between action and structure*' (Booth 1994, p19). Structure is understood as situated through agency, thus:

*'local practices include macro representations and are shaped by distant time-space arenas, but that these macro phenomena are only intelligible in situated contexts. That is, they are grounded in the meanings accorded them through the ongoing life-experiences and dilemmas of men and women'* (Long & Long 1992, p7).

An actor-orientated approach attempts to link the local world of actors with wider frames of meaning and so it is combined with a historical analysis which considers the conditions under which practices, strategies and rationalities of different actors arise. In practice such an approach involves not just a detailed empirical study of social life but also a wider sociological analysis and an attempt to understand the articulation processes which link small interactional fields into larger scale systems (Long 1984). This is a critical point, for actor-orientated approaches are often accused of neglecting the context of action, privileging agency from their position of anti-structuralism. However, this is not their intention. They are anti-structural in rejecting the idea that structure provides the explanatory premise for social change, but they do not reject structure altogether. Instead structure is understood as a '*fluid set of emergent properties*' (Long 2001, p62), that are both produced by actors' projects and at the same time constrain and enable the further elaboration of these projects. As Long (p2) explains, what is of concern are emergent processes, which are:

*'complex, often ambivalent and highly contingent upon the evolving conditions of different social arenas. They also entail networks of relations, resources and meanings at different scales of organisations. These range from small-scale interactional contexts, institutional domains in which actions, expectations and values are framed*

*and contested, to more global scenarios that shape human choices and potentialities at a distance, but which are themselves the products of the extended chains and repercussions of social action and their impacts on both human and non-human components’.*

Structure arises through messy processes; through the multiple interrelated sites of practice. The focus of any analysis is then via the concept of an ‘*interface*’, or the ‘*critical points of intersection between different levels of social order where conflicts of value and social interest are most likely to occur*’ (Long 1984, p177). These are the meeting points of different lifeworlds, where social actors with different interests, knowledge and capability, interact, negotiate and transform meaning around an issue or problematic situation. It is at the interface where knowledge processes occur, where actors struggle ‘*cognitively, emotionally and organisationally*’ and which over time becomes an ‘*entity of interlocking relationships and intentionalities*’ (Long 2001, p69). Though actors are tied to the interface through a shared issue, this does not suggest there necessarily exists a common interest, or that a single understanding evolves. Social interfaces are sites of contradiction and conflict, where multiple realities interact and transform, blend or segregate. These are sites where the hegemonies of sustainable development policy actually work out in practice. The concept of social interface thus offers a window into messiness, exposing multiplicity and its incoherences in practice.

Analysing a social interface involves understanding situated social action to reveal practices and meanings. Central to this is an understanding of ‘*lifeworld*’, or the everyday experiences of actors bound up with their relationships with others. It is about how individuals and groups make a living; attempting to ‘*meet their consumption necessities, cope with adversities and uncertainties, engage with new opportunities, protect existing or pursue new lifestyles and cultural identifications, and fulfil their social obligations*’ (Long 2001, p241). The focus is both on material and economic dimensions of everyday life and also the less tangible dimensions concerned with perceptions, beliefs, skills and the management of relationships. Understanding lifeworlds is not fixed to any conventional social unit, but is understood both in individual terms and as jointly constructed. Thus, lifeworlds represent patterns or networks of interdependent relationships which may exist within households, or between groups of households, and which may stretch across rural and urban contexts and national boundaries. Lifeworlds consider the way actors develop social strategies to cope with their situations. They are concerned with the way relationships are built to

solve problems or sustain particular processes and how choices and strategies change over life times.

Based in this way on an understanding of the everyday experiences, or lifeworlds of social actors, the actor-orientated approach is able to look at the actual practices of development and attempt to deconstruct or '*demythologize planned intervention*' (Long and van der Ploeg 1989). It avoids essentialised analytical categories of orthodox sociology and instead relies on the lived experiences, the accounts and observations of people's own lives. Through a focus on people, an actor-orientated approach offers a means to challenge the normative discourses of sustainable development. Making use of actor-orientated thinking researchers have already attempted to uncover messiness beneath the simplifications or singularisations associated with sustainable development policies. Thus, the actor-orientated approach has been used to examine what is actually going on behind the official models of local organisation associated with principles of modernisation or political empowerment (Nuijten 1992), or behind institutional agendas of good governance (de Vries 2005), or the policies of devolution of natural resource management (Southwold-Llewellyn 2006). It has also been used as a way of challenging universal discourses of human rights, offering an approach which transcends normative parameters and provides a situated pluralistic approach to rights (Nyamu-Musembi 2002).

This is research which questions conventional abstractions and replaces them with nuanced actor-defined conceptions. Diversity is explained through a focus on the '*actual workings, as distinct from the formal objectives or abstract representation, of key development processes*', exposing the limitations of development sociology and the official ideologies of planning and modernisation (Booth 1994, p11). Significantly, it is also a perspective on research which has distanced itself from participatory or action research approaches.

*'..it is important to stress that an actor-orientated approach is not action research, but rather a theoretical and methodological approach to the understanding of social processes. It is concerned primarily with social analysis, not with the design or management of new intervention programmes'* (Long & van der Ploeg 1994, p82).

Critically, it should not be translated as a '*methodology for increasing the claim-making capacities of local groups*' (p82). It should not be used as means of supporting populist

ideologies of empowerment or neoliberal economic discourses, but should be focused on revealing the simplistic assumptions underlying these ideas and the fragmentary and partial nature of development processes. It is a perspective that has attempted to stand back from development discourse, while at the same time recognise how everything is simultaneously subsumed by those discourses.

As such, Arce (2003, p849) acknowledges that the actor-orientated approach has '*contributed to realising the significance of unintended outcomes in planned intervention*'. It has exposed the incoherence lying beneath normative interventionist development ideologies. Particularly, it has shed light on the role of people's agency, actions, and relations in shaping the diversities of development experience. However, Arce (2003, p849) is at the same time critical of the approach and its tendency '*to compress the existence of the biophysical and social worlds into an organising process of everyday life, in which the portrayal of interactions between human consciousness and material life remained hazy and rather abstract*'. Moreover, the approach may have drawn attention to actors '*room to manoeuvre*'; the space actors create as they make sense of, engage with and transform external interventions. But it has failed to distinguish the notion of a '*negative room for manoeuvre*'; situations where actors are constrained by the dominance of structuring influences and a lack of resources, or capabilities. Situations which give rise to '*negative social consequences*'; where actors contest, interfere or resist structural boundaries through '*internalising*' the development interventions which dominate them. And in doing so generate new collective representations which may conflict with our own.

Thus, while offering a means to reveal some of the diversity beneath sustainable development interventions, the actor-orientated approach does not reveal all. It demythologises the hegemonic faces of development, exposing multiple realities and the interactive processes around critical interfaces, where knowledge is transformed and hybridised. Yet it does not fully acknowledge situations of '*negative room to manoeuvre*', or the countertendencies which arise through the continued circulation of development's hegemonies. Through a focus on positive human action it has obscured the remaking of structural constraints through unintentional, or non-strategic human action. Through the enactment of an actor-orientated approach, understanding the messy tensions between structure and agency is partial; exposing the particular complexities arising from actors agency, yet hiding the internalising effects of dominating structures.

## The livelihoods approach

The second development approach I choose to examine as a means of interpreting the messy processes of sustainable development, is the livelihoods approach. What I refer to specifically is perhaps more accurately understood not as a single approach, but a collection of approaches. Approaches to understanding and working with developing-world rural livelihoods, which expand upon Long's notion of lifeworld and which have been particularly influenced by Sen's thinking on poverty. They are approaches which gained momentum through the 1980s and 1990s in the UK within different academic and research institutions (e.g. Institute of Development Studies, University of East Anglia Overseas Development Group, Overseas Development Institute, International Institute for Environment and Development) and among some of the major international NGOs (e.g. Oxfam, CARE, Actionaid). Significantly, at the same time they also emerged as part of the UK government's aid policy, adopted by the Department for International Development (DFID) in the form of the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Indeed, from 1997-2001 the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* was the 'official' paradigm for UK development, resulting in a multimillion pound investment in research and policy (Batterbury 2008). Moreover, it was not restricted solely to DFID, but was also promoted by United Nations development agencies, such as FAO and UNDP.

In this way, livelihoods approaches were, unlike the actor-orientated approach, unambiguously tied to development practice. More than an approach for analysis, work associated with the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*, was also a means to identify development priorities and to direct the course of development efforts. Yet, like the actor-orientated perspective, livelihoods approaches had their roots in a tradition of 'studying people-in-place and the material and non-material dimensions of constructing a life' (Batterbury 2008 p12). It was based around a recognition of the role of people, or local actors, in shaping development and so represented a clear move away from structural, or externally led interventionist models of development (de Haan & Zoomers 2005). Livelihoods approaches were a way of looking at development which put people at the centre and focused on their active role in exploring opportunities and coping with change (de Haan & Zoomers 2003). This provided a positive move away from the pessimism of household studies, which though orientated towards people as active actors in development had ended up focusing on the structural constraints which were increasingly marginalising poor households (de Haan and Zoomers 2005). Significantly,

this was also a move away from the perceived pessimism and conservatism of conventional ways of analysing poverty (Chambers & Conway 1991) and became a means of addressing the complexity of poverty more meaningfully (Farrington et al 1999).

For livelihoods approaches confronted the reductionism and '*industrialised country imprint*' which had dominated analyses and responses to poverty (Chambers and Conway 1991). Conventional thinking on production, employment and poverty-lines were singled out as the culprits of our failure to understand and address '*the plural priorities of the rural poor and their many and varied strategies to obtain a living*' (p3). Chambers and Conway saw these as concepts which had been centrally designed and rigidly applied from the top-down to provide single scale indicators of well-being, which had become particularly resistant to change. Indeed, conventional thinking had led to a belief in a series of fallacies; simplified realities that obscured alternative interpretations. Thus, problems of hunger were reduced to issues of production, failing to acknowledge problems of access to food. Likewise, full employment and the provision of jobs was promoted as the key to addressing poverty, failing to recognise that the poor often sustain a living through a diversity of activities. And similarly, poverty was condensed to single measures of cash income or consumption, failing to recognise the multiple dimensions of poverty beyond material or economic measures. In spite of the diversity of poor people's experiences, poverty or deprivation was being stereotyped and uniformed by a conservatism of concepts, values, attitudes, methods and behaviours (Chambers 1995, Chambers & Conway 1991).

However, during the 1980s there was a move away from the conservatism of such perspectives, towards an analysis which embraced the complexity of poverty and well-being, and which had a significant influence on livelihoods thinking. Among those expanding conceptualisations of poverty was the economist Sen, whose work was an important stimulus to livelihoods approaches. Sen's work pushed thinking beyond economic statistical descriptions of poverty and towards a more comprehensive understanding which included social factors, as well as people's own views of their situation (Sen 1999). Attention was given to human capability '*the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have*', providing a view of development processes as expanding human capabilities, or freedoms, as opposed to simply being concerned with the accumulation

of human capital, or the knowledge and skills, for increasing commodity production (Sen 1997, p1959).

Poverty was then to be understood as '*deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely lowness of income*' (Sen 1999, p87). This view did not deny that low income is a major cause of poverty, or that increasing income is instrumental in generating capabilities. But critically it provided space for factors other than income and went beyond the narrow view of human capital, or the '*human qualities that can be employed as "capital"*' (Sen 1997, p1959). It incorporated elements that are not directly productive, but enable people to lead the lives they value, such as being free and informed to choose, or being listened to by others. At the same time, it revealed the interconnections between instrumentally productive qualities, or human capitals, and human capabilities. It also highlighted that the connection between low income and low capability is '*contingent and conditional*' (Sen 1999, p88). In other words, it exposed the diversity of experiences of poverty and how they are influenced by who you are, your relationships with others and the society in which you live.

Sen's concept of capability provided a means of addressing diversity, it had '*diverse specific meanings for different people in different places*' (Chambers and Conway 1991, p4). It also connected well with attempts to understand local people's own meanings of well-being that was revealing a diversity of criteria which similarly extended narrow economic views (e.g. Jodha 1988 cited in Chambers 1995). To understand poverty it was clear that the '*multidimensionality of deprivation and disadvantage as poor people experience them*' needed to be addressed (Chambers 1995, p18). For Chambers, deprivation had many different elements, including a lack of material necessities, or assets, but also inferior social status, physical weakness, isolation, lack of influence and self-respect and importantly vulnerability. Ideas of vulnerability broadened definitions of poverty to include not just '*lack or want, but exposure and defenselessness*' (p20). This included exposure to externally generated shocks, stresses and risks and also the inability to cope without enduring physical, economic, social or psychological loss. Understanding vulnerability situated local experiences within a wider framework of influences emanating from social, political, economic or environmental trends and crises. It also encompassed seasonal dimensions of vulnerability and deprivation which are particularly acute in tropical rural areas.

The importance of situating poverty was also expanded upon by Sen's work on the causes of famine (Sen 1981). This was significant in highlighting the importance of people's ability to access food, which may lead to starvation even though there is enough food around. A key aspect of famine then *'is not the total food supply in the economy but the "entitlement" that each person enjoys.....People suffer from hunger when they cannot establish their entitlement over an adequate amount of food'* (Sen 1999, p162). Entitlements represent the commodities over which people have been able to establish ownership or control. A person's ability to generate entitlements, or access commodities, depends on what resources they already own or control, or their *'endowments'*, which may be transformed into entitlements. The poor, for example, are often *'endowed'* with the power of their own labour which they transform through work to generate food entitlements, which in turn provides the capability of being nourished and free from hunger. A key concern then is to understand *'how different people gain entitlements from their endowments and so improve their well-being or capabilities'* (Leach et al 1999, p232). Using an entitlement approach encourages us to understand the different factors which influence people's access to the things they need to make a living. Inspired by this thinking, Sen's original idea was extended to consider the many formal and informal institutions interconnecting across scales, which might influence people's endowments, entitlements and capabilities over time (Leach et al 1999). It has led to an emphasis on the issue of access, which has become a key part of the conceptualisation of livelihoods of the poor (de Haan and Zoomers 2005, p32).

These original strands of thinking about the lives of the poor were moving beyond reductionist conceptions of poverty and towards a more holistic view which recognised livelihoods as multidimensional, covering not only economic, but also political, cultural, social and ecological aspects (de Haan and Zoomers 2003). This was an understanding receptive to the complexities of people's everyday realities; their multiple and changing and situated positionalities. This was a way of thinking about development which opened out and challenged dominant orderings of rural life and poverty.

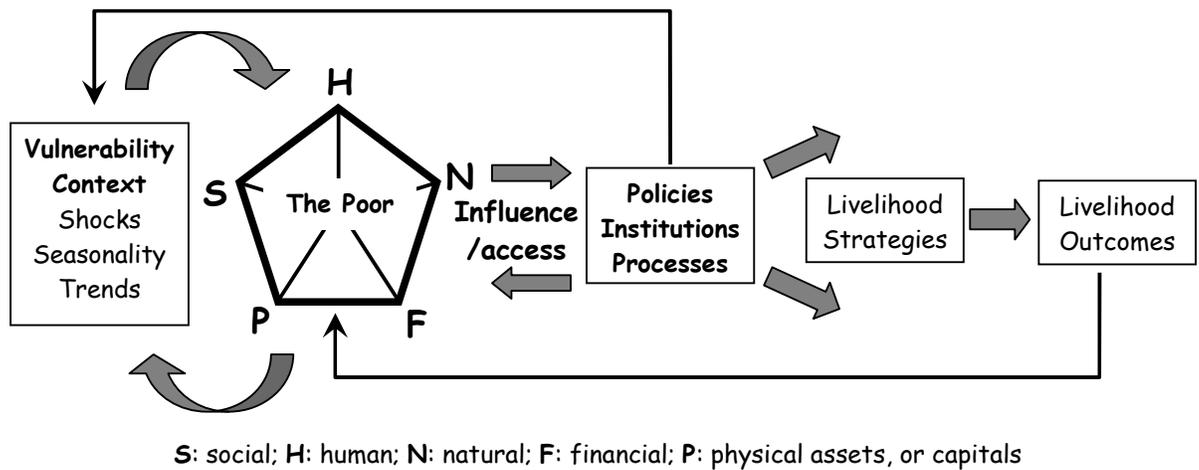
But it was not just changing ideas about poverty which influenced contemporary livelihoods thinking, there was also a significant momentum from the debates surrounding sustainable development. For Chambers and Conway (1991, p5&6) sustainability was fundamental to the concept of livelihoods, together with ideas of

capability and equity. Critically, sustainability in the context of livelihoods was understood as:

*‘life styles which touch the earth lightly’ or ‘the ability to maintain and improve livelihoods while maintaining or enhancing the local and global assets and capabilities on which livelihoods depend’.*

*A ‘sustainable livelihood’ was one ‘which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generations; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term’.*

Faced with the challenge of how an increasing population could gain and sustain a decent living and emerging from a legacy of failing top-down development, ‘sustainable livelihoods’ represented a concept which provided an ‘*overlap where their (the poor) realities and aspirations can give rise to practical concepts which we (the development professionals) can then use to help empower them*’ (Chambers 1995, p22). Assessing the outcomes of ‘sustainable livelihoods’, involved attention not only to concerns of work, employment, poverty reduction and well-being, but also to ideas of livelihood vulnerability and resilience and the sustainability of natural resources on which livelihoods depend (Scoones 1998). These criteria are critical, for they clearly establish the ‘sustainable livelihoods’ as a normative concept. Indeed, it was this particular take on livelihoods, which was to become the foundation of the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*, guiding DFID’s approach to sustainable development, and forming the basis of DFID’s conceptual framework below (Figure 1). As such it was a formulation of sustainable development, which attempted to address not only the structural components of development, but how these articulate and are transformed through the actions and agency of individuals; it was an attempt to capture the messy tension between structure and agency.



**Figure 1: The Department for International Development (DFID UK) Sustainable Livelihood Framework**

As an analytical device DFID’s livelihood framework has perhaps been the most widely disseminated and used. However, a variety of other frameworks exist, each emphasising different aspects of livelihoods thinking and reflecting the different contexts in which they are developed (see Carney et al 1999, Hussein 2002 for comparisons of different livelihood frameworks and approaches). According to Farrington et al (1999), livelihoods frameworks are not meant to rigidly depict reality, but instead are an attempt to provide a systematic but flexible structure to help build an understanding of the complexity of livelihoods. Thus DFID’s framework attempted to illustrate how the poor make use of a range of tangible and intangible livelihood assets, or capitals, to engage in a diversity of activities. It showed how these are determined not only by the aspirations of the poor, but also by the vulnerability context in which they live and by the various different institutions, policies and social processes which condition access to assets and activities, and which are themselves influenced by the different strategies adopted by the poor. Though the framework appears as a static picture, it is crucially concerned with the dynamic nature of livelihoods and how livelihood strategies change over time, providing a diversity of outcomes or capabilities (Farrington et al 1999).

For Bebbington (1999), a framework for analysing rural livelihoods and poverty needs to avoid affinities with sectoral concerns of agriculture and natural resources and encompass a wider understanding. It was significant, therefore, that the framework considered more than just the conventional economic, physical and natural assets, and included both human assets and the less tangible social assets. It was also important that it did not just focus on the materiality of assets and people's lives, but considered how assets '*also give **meaning** to the person's world*', how assets are '*vehicles for instrumental action (making a living), hermeneutic action (making living meaningful) and emancipatory action (challenging the structure under which one makes a living)*'. Assets were clearly linked to Sen's notions of capability, highlighting that assets '*are not simply **resources** that people **use** in building livelihoods: they are assets that give them the **capability** to be and to act*' (Bebbington 1999, p2022).

Understanding the issue of access was critical to this broader conception of livelihoods, not only in terms of access to assets but also to activities and opportunities. Interconnections between different assets, how people combine different types of assets and convert one asset for another became an important concern (de Haan and Zoomers 2005). The inclusion of social assets, borrowing from thinking on social capital, was also key in this respect, highlighting the role of social relations. This captured the positive role of trust and reciprocity, or the cooperative relations connecting groups and networks in enhancing access. It was also balanced by negative notions of social relations, whereby certain people or groups are excluded from access, or are in conflict over access with others. Thus, '*access depends on the performance of social relations and these are sometimes far from harmonious*' (de Haan and Zoomers 2005, p34).

Analysing the performance of social relations exposed their contingency, subject to a diversity of mediating influences. Influences which may emanate from formal and informal institutions at micro, meso and macro levels, as highlighted by Leach and others (1999) in their extension of Sen's entitlement approach. According to Ellis (2000) different mediating influences arise from the social positioning of individuals or households within society, to the influence of formal and informal institutions governing behaviour, and of organisations, or groups of people bound by a common purpose. These social contextual influences might again be differentiated from the external changes or events, or the vulnerability context, over which people may have relatively limited control, but which also affect the performance of social relations. For

Bebbington (1999) it is useful to consider different mediating institutions simply in terms of the logics of the state, market and civil society.

However, the significance of livelihoods thinking is not to get lost within particular categorisations of mediating influences. Rather, it is to understand how access and action are shaped by different mediating influences and, at the same time, how these influences are *'repeatedly confirmed and reshaped by livelihoods'* (de Haan and Zoomers 2005, p35). It is through this conceptualisation of access, that livelihoods approaches provide insights into structuration; the active making and remaking of structure through action (Giddens 1979). Thus, livelihoods thinking prevents *'the structure-agency view of becoming either voluntaristic or deterministic: everyday life provides both the context for people's actions and is recreated by those actions'* (Johnston 1993 cited in de Haan and Zoomers 2003 p351-352). As with the actor-orientated approach, livelihoods approaches addresses *'agency and structure in tension'* (Batterbury 2008 p10). Indeed, it is through the analytical lens of the livelihoods framework, that particular sites of tension are exposed and examined. Thus, livelihoods approaches help move beyond the privileging of agency sometimes associated with the actor-orientated approach; bringing into focus the context of action.

Moreover, the attention to access is linked to an understanding of livelihood strategies, or the processes which emerge through the performance of social relations and the continual interplay of agency and structure. This reveals the diversity of strategies which may be combined within a single household and how these vary over time. It also exposes diversification as an ongoing strategy or process in response to different constraints and opportunities, which often represent an important capability contributing to the sustainability of poorer households (Ellis 2000). As a capability, diversification is understood as a balance between both intentional and unintentional strategies, relating to the relative influence of structural factors and the degree of choice available. So de Haan and Zoomers (2005) caution against interpreting strategies simply as the positive action of people responding to and shaping change. Rather, there needs to be an awareness of the continued role of structural factors, such as location, or the pervasive influences of seductive discourses, which lead to unintentional behaviour that may not be consciously strategic. This is an awareness which creates space for negative actions which might arise from the internalising effects of dominating structures. Thus, it helps expand upon an actor-orientated perspective emphasis on positive, strategic and intentional actions.

Acknowledging diversification also enables livelihood approaches to better capture the complex reality hidden by reductionist employment thinking of past approaches to poverty (Chambers 1995). It recognises the cross-sectoral and multi-occupational diversity of livelihoods, allowing a *'new paradigm of rural development'* to emerge, which removes preferences to agriculture, seeing farming alongside *'a host of other actual and potential rural and non-rural activities that are important to the construction of viable rural livelihoods'* (Ellis & Biggs 2001, p445). In this way, livelihood diversification encompasses multiple activities and also their multiple locations, with rural and urban households exploiting opportunities in both places often through networks of social relations. These are networks which may extend transnationally and involve flows of income or remittances, information and food (de Haan and Zoomers 2003). Thus, de Haan and Zoomers (2003) show through livelihood approaches how we may start to tackle issues of local development in globalisation, or how global forces are articulated within local contexts. By emphasising the diversity and multiple locations of livelihood activities linked by flows of assets and mediated by social relations and institutional processes that are part of transnational networks and structures, we can begin to understand how rural people are connected to global processes. Focusing on livelihoods enables us to think through linkages across scales, it *'emerges as a key concept for thinking about the ways in which people "work" and "jump" scales'* and allows us to *'ground otherwise vague discussions of networks'* (Bebbington & Batterbury 2001, p374).

Livelihoods is a concept central to analysing scale, network and place (Batterbury 2008) and thus it is an approach open to the multiple interconnected locations, or sites of practice, which constitute messiness. As a framework for research, livelihoods approaches have contributed to understanding the complex realities and processes of everyday life. They have provided a lens for examining the linkages between global and local and how transnational networks are experienced, expressed and reformed through people's lives. In this way it has also been shown to have potential in understanding social inclusion and exclusion in *'the era of globalisation'* (de Haan 2000). It has been used to better realise the multidimensional and diverse nature of poverty (e.g. Ellis & Bahigwa 2003, Ellis et al 2003, Freeman et al 2004, Hulme & Shepherd 2003, Marzano 2002) and of vulnerability (e.g. Korf 2004). It has also been used to analyse the realities of rural livelihoods and processes of livelihood diversification (e.g. Ellis 1998, 2000), the dynamics of rural-urban linkages (e.g. Tacoli 1998), and the importance of

biodiversity for livelihoods (e.g. Koziell 1998). Though primarily applied to situations in the South, livelihood analyses have more recently been considered in the north as a means of exploring the complexities of rural life and to counter tendencies of conceptualising the rural simply as a site of agricultural production (Korf & Oughton 2005).

This is grounded research, where problems are understood as '*rooted in place, orbiting and extending out into networks*' (Batterbury 2008 p13). It is work which exposes the particularities of people's lives as they are situated within wider framings of policy and institutions. Thus it reveals some part of the messiness of rural life and development. Yet, at the same time, much of this research, particularly that under the banner of the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*, is also related explicitly to practice and policy, with the intention of providing information to inform and direct decision-making. Thus, a better understanding of poverty has been applied to developing more effective poverty reduction strategies (e.g. Ellis and Bahigwa 2003; Ellis, et al. 2003; Freeman, et al. 2004). Likewise, understanding issues of natural resources access and linkages between poverty and the environment, or livelihoods and conservation, has been applied to developing more effective strategies for conservation and development, or natural resource management (e.g. Allison & Ellis 2001, Allison & Horemans 2006, Baumann 2002, Boyd et al 1999, Grimble & Laidlaw 2002, Salafsky & Wollenberg 2000). In this way, livelihood approaches have been applied to project and programme design, impact assessment and monitoring (see Farrington et al 1999 for examples) and to community level planning, disaster response and sectoral reform activities (Carney 2001).

However, as a guide to policy and practice the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* stands accused of being '*simply another knowledge model*' which '*carries the danger of rendering invisible the way people themselves assign meaning to, for example, sustainability, livelihood, and disasters*' (Arce 2003, p855). As such people's actions and relations to institutions of the state, market, or community are simply understood as functions of a livelihood analysis, but fail to be problematised. Thus, the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* simply provides information to defend a neoliberal economic development agenda, '*avoiding addressing political problems and contradictions*' (p 855). For Arce (2003) this is particularly to do with the approach's focus on the '*economic metaphor*' of capital assets, more than the normative outcomes of sustainability, which as Batterbury (2008) points out, have received relatively little attention. Yet it is also in part an outcome of the context in which *Sustainable*

*Livelihoods Approach* has been used. For embedded in the agendas of development agencies, the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* arguably lost its critical distance to questions of power; failing to address issues of power and rights (Ashley & Carney 1999, Carney 2001) or to ‘*get to grips with power relations*’ (de Haan and Zoomers 2005, p36). As a normative framework guiding policy, the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* extended hegemonic development discourses, rather than critically unpack them.

In spite of this criticism, however, Batterbury (2008, p13) concludes that the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* has ‘*generally been positive for good development interventions because their focus was at the right scale for the job, and practitioners were concerned with the key issues facing rural households*’. Indeed, sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation remain important concerns of development agencies and government initiatives; continuing to guide the practical development work of international NGOs such as Oxfam and CARE. Moreover, livelihoods thinking continues to motivate research work, particularly around issues of livelihood diversification (Batterbury 2008). And yet sometime between 2001-5 the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* disappeared from the policy agenda of DFID, as its concerns shifted towards the Millennium Development Goals and issues of institution-building, governance and climate change. Arguably it was ‘*too difficult*’ to assist in the complex material realities which livelihoods approaches exposed; it was easier to focus on ‘*peddling normative models of good governance*’ (Batterbury 2008, p4).

Despite the demise of *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* within DFID, livelihoods approaches continue to provide a means to examine the diverse realities of people’s lives; to address the complexity of everyday practices, revealing the ongoing processes which shape meaning. As such they represent a way of understanding something of the messiness of sustainable development policy; in particular a means of exposing the intricacies of structuration. Yet, like the actor-orientated approach, while livelihoods thinking offers insights to messiness, it also obscures it, through the simplifications inherent in the framework’s categorisations of reality. Moreover, as it has become widely subsumed within sustainable development policy in the guise of the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*, it appears to have lost its critical capacity to expose alternatives from the principles which guide it.

## ***Conclusion***

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce two approaches to development research and practice and consider what they offer in terms of this thesis and its concern with understanding the realities of sustainable development policy. My intention was to work out what my own examination of sustainable development might draw upon from these people-centred approaches, in order to illuminate something of the messy processes of policy as it articulates in practice.

At the most basic level what both approaches offer is a means of looking beneath the simplifications of ideology, through which sustainable development is cast as a binary of hegemonic or counterhegemonic ideals. By attending to people and the situated particularities of their relations and practices, each approach provides a window onto the tension between structure and agency, which constitute the multiplicities or messiness of development. More specifically, what the actor-orientated approach presents is a critical method for exploring how planned interventions of sustainable development policy enter, become part of and are transformed through the multiple lifeworlds and practices of networks of actors. Messiness is thus exposed not only through an understanding of the diverse realities of actors, but also by examining the interactive processes of social interfaces, where actors with different interests, knowledge and capabilities converge and struggle to negotiate the meanings of sustainable development.

Likewise, livelihoods approaches present a way of understanding the diverse realities of people's lives. It is through an analysis of livelihoods that we begin to deal with the complexity of everyday practices, revealing the intricacies of structuration, or the ongoing and multiple processes which shape and are shaped by sustainable development policy. In this way, livelihood approaches offer a means to expand on the partiality of an actor-orientated perspective of messiness and its concentration on positive human actions. Through the analytical lens of the livelihoods framework the ongoing interplay between agency and structure is clearly brought into focus. The dynamic complexity of different actor's struggles to survive is captured, both in terms of positive, or strategic action and non-strategic or unintentional action arising from the continued hegemony of structural influences.

Similarly, an actor-orientated approach has potential to address particular weaknesses of livelihood approaches. For while livelihood approaches have in many cases become

uncritically subsumed by practice with its implicit ideologies, actor-orientated perspectives might provide a critical distance from practice. Adopting an actor-orientation to livelihood analysis presents the possibility of a more critical engagement with the assumptions underlying livelihood approaches. Issues of politics and power will no longer remain silent but have a central place. The analysis will be open to contradictions and countertendencies, which have so far been hidden by a model of knowledge which privileges particular ways of knowing. This will be a critical engagement which constantly challenges livelihood's conceptual framework with the realities of people's lives as they are encountered in different situations and at different times.

It is then through a combination of actor-orientated and livelihoods perspectives that I propose to explore and expose the messy processes of sustainable development in practice. Yet I end with a note of caution, a get-out clause. For in spite of the possibilities both approaches offer, it is necessary to acknowledge that they produce or construct only partial realities of a world whose complexities '*exceed our capacity to know them*' (Law 2004, p6).

# Chapter 4

## A research context: Cambodia fishery policies and places

As I have set out in the previous two chapters, my thesis is based on a conceptualisation of sustainable development not simply as an opposition between hegemonic orders, or radical alternatives, but rather a collection of messy processes in which dominant and subaltern orders coexist. Moreover I have proposed that actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches present a means to reveal this messiness, by attending to the diversities and contradictions of development experiences. So my thesis aims to unravel the claims of sustainable development policy and to consider how it is articulated through the multiple realities of networks of actors and their complex livelihoods. My intention is to open sustainable development to the situated complexities of people's lives and lifeworlds and to consider how these work to re-shape policy in practice.

What I will present in this chapter is the empirical context in which this thesis is situated; an expanded scene which has inspired the particular questions this thesis sets out to address and provides the foreground in which my research journey takes place. This is a scene set amidst the policies of Cambodia's fishery sector and two particular places where these policies are being implemented. Thus, in setting this scene, I aim firstly to provide some background to Cambodia's fishery sector and policies, as I have come to comprehend them through working in Cambodia<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, I highlight aspects of this policy context which had become of interest to me and which influenced the direction of this thesis and its research questions. Secondly, I aim to give a sense of two different locations where these policies are being put into practice; in the northeast province of Stung Treng and the southwest province of Koh Kong. In other words, I characterise something of the locations where two community fishery projects are working; projects which, as I explain in Chapter 5, provided the focus of two research case studies.

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<sup>1</sup> As I outline below and in the next chapter, I began working on projects related to Cambodia's fishery sector in 2003.

By presenting the wider context in which the thesis is positioned, I aim to provide a critical foreground for my account of the research journey which follows in Chapter 5 and for my empirical interpretations of the field in Chapters 6-8.

### ***Cambodia's fishery sector***

The fisheries sector in Cambodia was and still is undergoing significant changes in policy and institutional arrangements. This is not only changing the way in which fishery resources are governed, but also the way in which the sector is positioned in relation to wider development policies and practices. Through my own encounters working in Cambodia, I was beginning to gain an understanding of these changes, which provided an important context to my research. I introduce now something of the fisheries sector and the changes taking place, as I had come to comprehend them, reflecting on particular aspects which were to influence my research.

Reference to fisheries in Cambodia is frequently associated with the Khmer proverb “*where there is water there is fish*”. This is a statement which in a country dominated by the freshwaters of the Mekong River Basin speaks of the significance of fish and fishing to its people. Statistics also reveal some part of the scale of fisheries in Cambodia, both in terms of the country's economy and the lives of its people (see Box 1). Until relatively recently, fishery resources were largely governed as a source of revenue for the government. This functioned primarily through a system of fishing lots<sup>2</sup>, which allocated areas to be leased out through public auctions to private ‘lot owners’, who then gained exclusive rights over the fishing area for two years. Fishing lots generally occupied the most productive freshwater fishing areas and though they represented a lucrative source of revenue, during the late 1990s they were also the source of increasing conflicts between those benefiting from the lot system and the surrounding rural communities who were excluded sometimes by violent means (Degen et al 2000, FACT/EJF 2002). It was in this context that in October 2000 the Prime Minister Hun Sen announced the release of some fishing lots for local communities to use and manage. It was this announcement, made in response to the increasingly serious social conflicts taking place, that signalled the beginning of reforms to fisheries in Cambodia,

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<sup>2</sup> Fishing lots are thought to have originated during the reign of King Norodom in the late nineteenth century as a means to pay the French for their protection against the Siamese. They were subsequently changed and formalised by the French Protectorate at the beginning of the twentieth century, continuing to function after independence and until 1973 and subsequently revived again at the end of the 1980s (Kurien et al 2006).

changing the way fishery resources were to be governed, as well as the relationship between the sector and wider development policies and agendas in the country.

The fisheries sector was now no longer concerned solely with managing fishery resources as a source of revenue. Fisheries management was widening its remit to address concerns such as livelihood sustainability, poverty reduction, environmental protection and good governance. Such a reform was recognised as being a strategic part of the government's "Rectangular Strategy" for the promotion of sustainable development and poverty reduction (see Figure 2), as well as other associated development policies and plans. A relationship which was clearly expressed in the Prime Minister's statement on the national fisheries sector policy:

*"One side of the Rectangular Strategy is devoted to fisheries reforms which aim is law enforcement, making action plans, and strengthening all relevant institutions to achieve the national goals of environmental fisheries protection, conservation of biodiversity, socioeconomic development, good governance and poverty alleviation. These goals are clearly mentioned in the Royal Government's political program on the Fisheries Sector, as well as in the Socioeconomic Development Plan, the Preliminary Strategy of Poverty Alleviation, and the Good Governance Action Plans" (RGC 2005).*

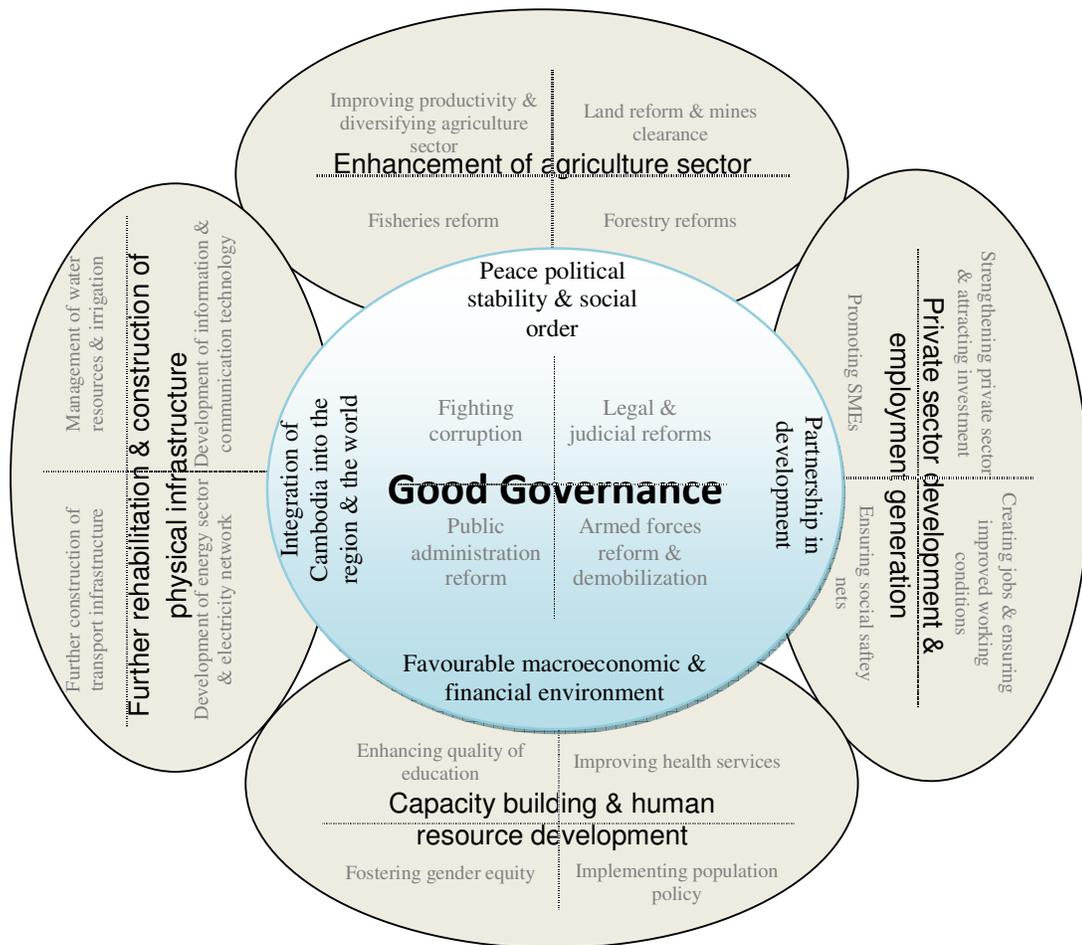
#### **Box 1: Cambodian fisheries: facts and figures**

- Cambodia's fishery is home to significant biodiversity, with 847 species recorded, including 477 freshwater fish species (Baran 2005).
- It is estimated that up to 500,000 tonnes of fish are caught annually, worth between \$200-300 million (RGC 2005).
- The majority of the fish catch originates from the freshwater fishery, which is among the largest in the world. Two thirds of the recorded freshwater catch in 2006 was caught by fishers using small scale gear in the lakes, rivers, floodplains and rice fields (MAFF 2007).
- Though difficult to estimate it is thought that fisheries contributed between 8 and 12% of the country's GDP between 2000-2004 (Kurien et al 2006).
- It is estimated that at least 4 million people or 29% of the population find employment from fisheries related activities (Kurien et al 2006).
- In rural Cambodia, fish and fish products are estimated to contribute 40-60% of animal protein in the diet, through some think this figure may be as high as 75% in some cases (Keskinen 2003 in Baran 2005).
- Over 30kg of fish and other aquatic animals are consumed on average per person per year (Sverdrup-Jensen 2002) compared to only 15.2kg which is consumed per person per year in the United Kingdom (Baran 2005).

This shift in emphasis was also part of wider trends in thinking about fisheries development, conservation and governance, which had been gathering momentum at the end of the last millennium. Trends which were increasingly recognising the over-exploited state of the world's fisheries, the failure of existing production-orientated management approaches, the persistent poverty and growing vulnerability of many people dependent on fishing and the need to incorporate concerns relating to human and ecosystem well-being (FAO 2002). Worldwide, fishery departments were being encouraged to integrate their policies with wider development plans and poverty reduction strategies, as a means of achieving balanced goals of sustainable fisheries management (Thorpe et al 2005). At the same time, governments of most developing countries around the world were also being encouraged by lending agencies and donors, to engage in governance reforms; instituting processes of decentralisation as a means of increasing the equity, efficiency and effectiveness of public policy (Cornwall & Coelho 2007). For many countries, this involved decentralising some aspect of natural resource management through a scaling up of community-based approaches (Ribot 2002). Already popularised<sup>3</sup> through donor and NGO-led projects as a panacea to failed government-led management regimes and as a means of addressing sustainable development's conservation and development concerns (Leach et al 1997), community-based natural resource management had become a standard component of governance reforms in fisheries, as well as other natural resource sectors.

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<sup>3</sup> As highlighted in chapter 2 and explored by Blaikie (2006) the popularity of community-based approaches to natural resource management rely on a number of influential ideas. These begin with an assumption of 'community' and its inherent solidarity and suitability for the task of sustainable resource management. They also assume a diversity of benefits, ranging from environmental conservation and sustainable resource use, to poverty reduction, and empowerment and the development of political confidence.



*“.. the Rectangular Strategy may be depicted as an integrated structure of interlocking rectangles that represent sustainability and stability in the same way as a strong table or chair firmly stands on four pillars. Indeed, the successful implementation of the Rectangular Strategy shall ensure national stability and sustainable development in Cambodia” (RGC 2004a).*

**Figure 2: The “Rectangular Strategy” for growth, employment, equity and efficiency in Cambodia**

Thus, reforms to the fishery sector in Cambodia were a reflection, not only of growing inequalities and social conflicts occurring in Cambodia itself, but also of wider agendas of change taking place around the world, driven by the concerns and ideals of multi-lateral agencies and international donors. Indeed, three years after the Prime Minister’s famous announcement, when I first arrived in Cambodia to work with the Department of Fisheries, I was part of this external drive to reform fisheries. Initially, I worked to assist on a project to understand the impacts of the fishery reforms and subsequently on projects concerned with poverty and livelihoods in the sector. The biggest of these projects was a post-harvest fisheries research project funded by a Department for

International Development (DFID) research programme, set up to apply programme outputs generated around the world to Cambodia. My part in this was to help the Department of Fisheries generate a better understanding of poverty in the fisheries post-harvest sector, by applying a livelihoods-based research approach developed in Ghana. The work was intended to help improve the way fisheries policy addressed poverty and poverty reduction. It was concerned with shifting the emphasis of the sector towards social concerns and introducing DFID's *Sustainable Livelihood Approach* as a means of understanding and responding to people, in particular the poor, whose livelihoods depended on fishing.

Through these different projects, I was to work with staff from the Community Fisheries Development Office within the Department of Fisheries. This was a new office, established at the beginning of 2001 as part of the reforms to support community-based management of fishery resources (CFDO 2004). It was a busy office, attracting considerable attention from international donors keen to further community fisheries as a central part of the fishery reforms and as a key strategy for realigning fisheries management towards a more participatory and decentralised governance and towards social as well as ecological goals. For the Community Fishery Development Office, community fisheries were to contribute towards the sustainable improvement of fisheries dependent livelihoods (CFDO 2004) and were to be established in all the fishing areas which had now been released from the fishing lot system (amounting to over 56% of the total fishing lot area), as well as other fishing areas outside of the lot system. To achieve this, they were responsible for establishing the official framework in which community fisheries could operate. Following a period of consultation in each province a sub-decree on community fisheries was drafted and eventually approved by the government in 2004. This set out the objectives, duties, rights and means of establishing community fisheries (as outlined in Box 2). To accompany the sub-decree the Community Fishery Development Office also produced official guidelines, which detailed the basic practices for organising and managing each community fishery. A new Fisheries Law, to replace the existing Fisheries Law of 1987 was also prepared by the Department of Fisheries and finally approved by 2006, providing the legal provisions for community fisheries. And by 2006 there were already 506 officially recognised community fisheries around the country (MAFF 2007).

What particularly interested me in all this, was the way in which the fisheries sector was being influenced by externally generated discourses of sustainable and participatory development, introduced by an international community of donors, NGOs and multilateral agencies. But what was also striking was the speed with which these discourses were changing the face of fisheries governance in the country, as they were translated into new policies, legislation and practice. It would appear on the surface that the fishery reforms had successfully integrated social development concerns into the sector and instituted a new era of decentralised governance through community fisheries. What I began to wonder was how these significant changes might actually be working out in practice? How does the meaning of sustainable and participatory development become transformed across the interface between policy and fisheries dependent livelihoods? What are the implications for fisheries dependent livelihoods? And what becomes of sustainable development's goals and its principles of participation when faced with the complexities of people's lives?

Given this policy context and following negotiations with research partners in Cambodia (as described in Chapter 5), the research came to focus on exploring how policy works out through the practices of two case study projects, and aimed to address three key questions<sup>4</sup>: 1) What are the agendas of sustainable development as they are interpreted by two community fishery projects? 2) How are these agendas articulated through people's livelihoods? 3) What are the outcomes of this process for sustainable development policy and practice?

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<sup>4</sup> In Cambodia the research questions were expressed differently in order to explicitly address community fisheries and what was being asked of projects in the field. Thus four key research questions were highlighted: 1) What are fisheries-based livelihoods currently like and how have they changed? 2) How are different people involved in community fisheries? 3) What interests and expectations do different people have about community fisheries? 4) What impact has community fisheries had on people's livelihoods?

### **Box 2: The Sub-decree on Community Fisheries Management (RGC 2004b)**

The sub-decree on community fisheries management recognises five objectives: 1) to manage inland fisheries areas where fishing lots have been cancelled as well as other fishing areas; 2) to manage fisheries resources sustainably and equitably; 3) to increase understanding and recognition of the benefits and importance of fisheries resources through participation in protection and management; 4) to provide a legal framework to establish community fisheries; 5) to improve the standard of living and contribute to poverty reduction.

According to the sub-decree, community fishery areas are considered the property of the state and must be defined and proclaimed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Community fisheries can be established by any group of Khmer citizens living in or near a fishing area, who voluntarily take the initiative to work towards the objectives of the sub-decree and do so in cooperation with the national and provincial Departments of Fisheries, provincial Department of Agriculture and local authorities or commune councils.

The duties of a community fishery are to:

- Participate in managing and conserving fisheries resources;
- Respect instructions from the Department of Fisheries and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries;
- Participate in establishing conservation areas within the community fishery area;
- Guarantee equal rights in sustainable resource use to all members of the community fishery;
- Implement by-laws and formulate a community fishing area management plan;
- Enter into community fishing area agreements with the Department of Fisheries;
- Keep all documentation related to the community fishery.

Community fisheries have the rights to:

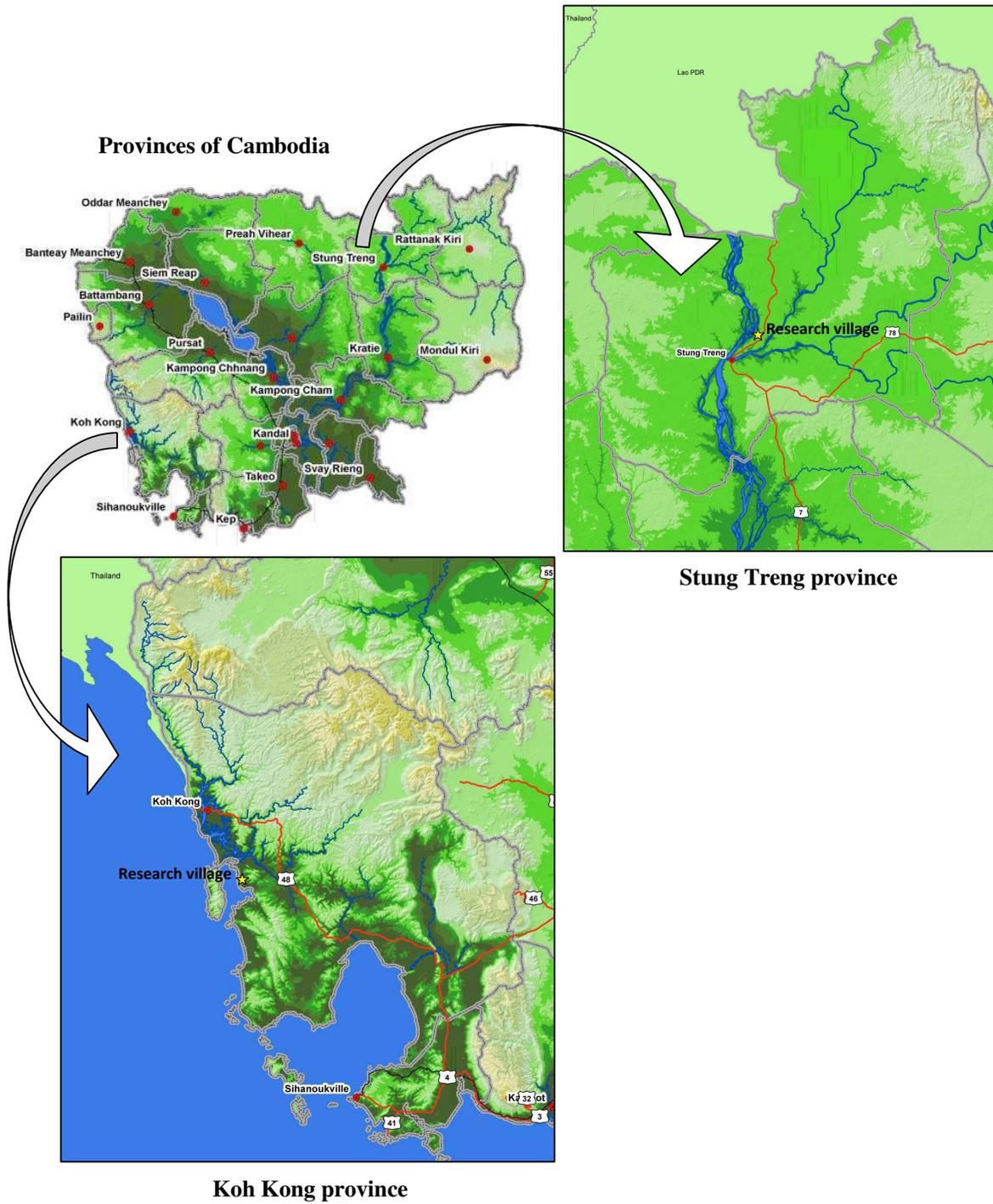
- Organise fishing activities in compliance with the law and other regulations;
- Cooperate with competent authorities to suppress fisheries violations, including the seizure of evidence of fisheries violation and detainment of offender to be sent to competent fishery officer;
- Communicate with other community fisheries, individuals or legal entities for benefit of the community fisheries in compliance with the law;
- Fish, do aquaculture, harvest, sell, use and manage all fisheries resources in accordance with the community fishing area agreement and management plan.

Community fisheries have no rights to:

- Transact the community fishery area in any manner;
- Erect any structure in the community fishery area without approval from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and permission of the Department of Fisheries;
- Partition or establish private ownership in the community fishery area;
- Enter into any agreement with any individual or legal entity, even for scientific research.

Each community fishery is led by a community fishery committee which is selected through elections by the community fishery members. The committee has a five-year term and is responsible for leading and managing the community fishery in compliance with the sub-decree and according to guidelines issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, which outline the structure of community fishery by-laws, community fishery area agreements and management plans, as well as the basic practices of community organising.

The Department of Fisheries must approve community fishery area agreements for each community fishery, which are valid for up to three years. Area agreements may be terminated or not renewed by the Department of Fisheries for the following reasons: a written agreement of all parties; an agreement of the community fishery committee and two-thirds of its members; failure to implement, or violation of, conditions of the area agreement and other regulations which threaten the sustainability of the fishery resources; judgement by the government that another purpose provides a higher public and social benefit to the country.



*Figure 3: Maps showing two research locations in Stung Treng & Koh Kong province*

## ***Two research locations***

The research was concerned with how policy works out in practice through two case study projects taking place in two different locations in Cambodia. I want now to give a sense of the different places where each project is working to implement fisheries policy; one in the northeast province of Stung Treng, the other in the southwest province of Koh Kong (Figures 3, 4 and 5).

Both Stung Treng and Koh Kong provinces are of a similar size and are characterised by their remoteness from Phnom Penh and relatively sparse populations<sup>5</sup> living in landscapes dominated by forests<sup>6</sup>. In Koh Kong large areas of mangrove forest are found along the coastline, while inland tropical forests extend across the Cardamom and Elephant mountain ranges which stretch across the province. Different types of forests are also found covering Stung Treng and bordering the Mekong river as it runs from north to south through the centre of the province. Among these are forests on sandy and rocky islands on the Mekong river which become seasonally flooded with the rising monsoon waters and which are considered important fish habitats and feeding grounds.

The abundance of forest and the natural environments associated with the Mekong river in Stung Treng and coastal areas and mountains in Koh Kong have attracted significant attention from environmental and conservation concerns. In Koh Kong nearly half of the forest area is protected through national parks, protected forests, wildlife sanctuaries and multiple use areas. This includes a large area of coastal mangrove forest protected within the Peam Krasaob Wildlife Sanctuary (PKWS)<sup>7</sup> and the Koh Kapit Ramsar reserve<sup>8</sup>, which together with surrounding areas has been recommended for nomination as a Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme. In Stung Treng, a national park extends into the northeast of the province protecting upland forest habitats, while the upper Mekong river is considered a protected fish spawning ground

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<sup>5</sup> According to the 2004 intercensal survey, 1% and 0.7% of the country's population live in Koh Kong and Stung Treng provinces respectively, while population densities recorded during the 1998 census indicated population densities 5 and 9 times less than the national average in Koh Kong and Stung Treng respectively.

<sup>6</sup> In Koh Kong forest land was estimated in 2002 to cover 80% of the province (National Coastal Steering Committee 2005), in Stung Treng 84% of the province was classified as forest land in 2003 (Provincial Department of Planning 2003 in Try and Chambers 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The Peam Krasaob Wildlife Sanctuary was designated as a protected area by the Ministry of Environment in 1997.

<sup>8</sup> The Koh Kapit Ramsar reserve was designated as a wetland of international importance in June 1999 and represents the 998<sup>th</sup> reserve created under the international Ramsar Convention.

by the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, with a 37km stretch (just north of Stung Treng town and south of the Lao border) designated as a Ramsar reserve<sup>9</sup>.

However, the rich natural resources in Koh Kong and Stung Treng provinces are not only attractive to environmentalists, they hold significant appeal to immigrants from elsewhere in the country seeking new opportunities. Indeed, migration to Stung Treng and Koh Kong was positively encouraged by different government programmes since independence from France in the 1950s and following the fall of the Khmer Rouge during the 1980s, in an effort to secure the border areas and assimilate ethnic minorities into a Khmer dominated society. Large proportions of the populations of each province are therefore migrants, mostly from other provinces within Cambodia with smaller numbers from outside Cambodia. But alongside the relatively recently settled population, there are also minority peoples who have had a much longer association with these areas, some who are related to peoples from bordering Laos and Thailand. Notable among these are the Laotian peoples living along the Mekong river in Stung Treng and the Thai *Kong Kang* (mangrove Thais) living in the coastal areas in Koh Kong.

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<sup>9</sup> The Stung Treng Ramsar reserve was designated as a wetland of international importance in June 1999 and represents the 999<sup>th</sup> reserve created under the international Ramsar Convention.



*Figure 4: Landscapes and people of Stung Treng province*



*Figure 5: Landscapes and people of Koh Kong province*

Immigration to Koh Kong and Stung Treng continues and combined with natural population increases, the projections for population growth in both provinces are high<sup>10</sup>. Currently the majority of people in both provinces live in rural areas, predominantly along the Mekong river in Stung Treng and along the coast in Koh Kong. For most of these people life goes on without the amenities of safe drinking water, toilets or electricity<sup>11</sup>. And as is the case in most of rural Cambodia, this lack of sanitation combined with limited access to health services means incidence of disease and infant mortality are high. Access to formal education is also limited and most rural people in both provinces are poorly educated, with low levels of literacy particularly among females and older age groups. For the majority of the rural people their lives are dependent on the natural resources which they exploit for their subsistence and to generate income by selling to local and more distant markets of neighbouring countries. This is particularly the case in Koh Kong, where demands from Thai markets are significant drivers for the exploitation of the fishery, forest and wildlife resources. To a lesser extent markets in Lao and Vietnam also present opportunities for generating income in Stung Treng. However, in both provinces cross-border trade is frequently associated with the illegal exploitation of resources, or in the case of fish export to Lao, the trade itself has been considered illegal since 2004. While exploitation of fishery, forest and wildlife resources are key to the livelihoods of people in both provinces, rice and crop farming are also important activities. This is particularly so in Stung Treng, where forest is routinely cleared along the Mekong river for farm land, despite environmental restrictions. Along the coast of Koh Kong opportunities to clear forest for farm land are also exploited wherever possible. However, land access is generally limited, either physically or through environmental protection measures which are better funded and enforced with greater efficacy compared to Stung Treng.

Forests in both provinces are also an important source of foreign investment. Large areas of forest in Koh Kong and Stung Treng have been awarded as logging concessions to private companies, who often come into conflict with local communities accessing the same resources. Though some of the original concessions are now no longer economically viable and others have been cancelled following a forestry sector reform

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<sup>10</sup> According to population projections by the National Institute of Statistics, Koh Kong's population is expected to quadruple by 2020, while Stung Treng's population is expected to increase by five times in the same period.

<sup>11</sup> According to an intercensal survey in 2004, 37% and 51% of the population live without any amenities in Koh Kong and Stung Treng respectively.

in 2002, considerable areas of forest in both provinces remain assigned as logging concessions. External investment is also encouraged in line with policies of economic development through international trade. A range of agreements and joint development plans<sup>12</sup> link Cambodia to its neighbouring countries, promoting cooperation to develop trade and exchange. A key part of these plans involves the development of infrastructure and transport links connecting major cities along ‘economic corridors’. For the border provinces of Koh Kong and Stung Treng this means the construction of highways by external investors from Thailand and China respectively<sup>13</sup>. And with improved access to these areas the potential for developing agro-industry, fisheries and tourism and so encouraging further trade has also been identified as an important opportunity.

So despite the relative remoteness of both provinces and their historic isolation from economic development this situation has been rapidly changing since the 1990s. At the same time, the abundant natural resources in the provinces, which have been a key driver for many of the changes which have taken place, are widely perceived to be under threat and in decline from growing populations and from economic development promoted through national and regional economic development strategies.

### ***Chapter summary***

Through this chapter a scene has been set. A scene which contextualises the thesis and the direction it took in the field; foregrounding my research journey and empirical understandings presented in the chapters to follow. I have presented my understanding of Cambodia’s fishery sector in which the thesis is situated. This is a sector undergoing significant changes through a process of reform, which is not only changing the way in which fishery resources are governed, but also the way in which the sector is positioned in relation to wider development policies and practices. I have asserted that the reform may be understood as an outcome of growing inequalities and social conflicts in the sector in Cambodia, but also as part of wider trends in fisheries development and governance promoted by an international community of NGOs, donors and multilateral

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<sup>12</sup> For example: the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation between Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Yunnan Province of the People’s Republic of China; the Mekong River Commission of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam; the Development Triangle Masterplan between Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos; the Thai-Cambodia Joint Development for Economic Cooperation which is part of the Southern Economic Corridor Flagship Initiative of the Greater Mekong Subregion.

<sup>13</sup> These highways were under construction during my research in the field in 2006. Particularly in Koh Kong, the road was dramatically changing access to the province; converting a dirt road with only small ferry river crossings to a surfaced road with large bridges crossing the four rivers.

agencies. These are trends which have seen fisheries sectors realign their policies towards social and ecological concerns of sustainable development and poverty reduction, through a paradigm of decentralised and participatory governance. Thus, Cambodia's fishery policy has shifted in line with national development policies, and new legislation has been adopted, formalising and instituting practices of community fisheries as a means of addressing sustainable development's conservation and development concerns.

With new policies, legislations and institutions in place it might appear superficially that Cambodia has successfully integrated social development concerns into the fisheries sector and instituted a new era of decentralised governance through community fisheries. Yet, what is not clear, is how these changes might actually be working out in practice; how the policy ideals of sustainable and participatory development have become transformed across the interface between policy and fisheries dependent livelihoods. So it is that my research came to focus on exploring how policy works in practice, looking through the lens of fisheries policies and in particular the practices of community fisheries implemented through two case study projects.

These are two projects taking place in opposite corners of Cambodia; one in the northeast province of Stung Treng on the border with Laos and the banks of the Mekong river, the other in the southwest province of Koh Kong on the border with Thailand and the shores of the Gulf of Thailand. Thus the research was situated in the distinct environments of upland and coastal Cambodia. And yet, as the chapter has set the scene in these two provinces, it emerges that they also share many features in common. Both are remote and historically isolated from economic development in the rest of the country, with an abundance of forestry and fishery resources. And at the same time, as a result of their rich natural resources as well as their strategic position on the country's borders, both are undergoing rapid changes with growing populations and economic expansion supported through national and regional development strategies.

Within this context of policies and places the research took place.

# Chapter 5

## A journey through the field

This chapter aims to reflect on how the research came into being, how I attempted to address my theoretical insights and research questions within the context of my own life and evolving relationships with other people and places. In this way I recognise research as an enactment, or performance, a situated process rather than a collection of techniques delivering a product. So I present here the context and shape of this enactment as a research journey; how it began and developed, and what eventually took place along the way. To do this I organise the chapter around different stages of my journey through the field<sup>1</sup>. Stages which are largely chronological, but which also slip about in between, failing to stick within neat periods of time.

I begin the chapter by considering the basis on which the field might be known given the research's conceptual beginnings and aims. I then continue to introduce a developing field and the circumstances through which my research journey began. I outline here my own motivations for undertaking the research and how these were negotiated with others. Moving into the field, I reflect on the research as it was designed and how it worked out in practice, through the evolving positionalities of a research team and a wider research network. From in the field, I continue to consider the process involved in writing the field, addressing issues of interpretation and representation. And finally, I wish to briefly look at my journey beyond the field, thinking of the research's wider commitments to a field of action and practice beyond the thesis. Through this account I aim to give a sense of how the research developed through theory and into practice, and how that enactment frames, and is framed by, the realities I go on to present in the rest of the thesis.

### ***Knowing the field***

The intention of my thesis was to explore the claims of sustainable development policy and how they are articulated through the multiple realities of networks of actors and

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<sup>1</sup> My choice of this term is potentially problematic if taken in the narrowest sense, in this context I use it to refer to an 'expanded field of research' (Cloe et al 2004) shaped through interconnections between different locations, people, identities, meanings and relations.

their complex livelihoods. I hoped to unpack and expose some part of the messiness of sustainable development. But on what basis am I asserting that this can be known? I wish to start this chapter by addressing this fundamental question and establishing what is the nature of knowing messiness and how can it come to be understood.

In part the question has already been answered in preceding chapters; through the discussion of debates surrounding sustainable development in Chapter 2 and the overview of actor-orientated and livelihoods approaches to development in Chapter 3. But in order to make sense of what took place in the field I need to revisit and expand on this here. Two important points emerge from Chapters 2 and 3. The first concerns the notion of messiness and a belief in multiplicities. Sustainable development cannot, I argued, be simply ordered into hegemonic or counterhegemonic categorisations, it is inherently more complex and multiple. It is then better understood as a collection of messy processes, a struggle of diverse and situated view points and trajectories simultaneously contradicting and overlapping. Conceptualised in this way, I acknowledged multiplicity; the coexistence of different but also partially connecting orderings or realities, which impose different silences and expose different simplifications (Law 2004). Moreover, we learn from Law (2004) that it is by attending to practice that multiplicity may be discovered. For it is through practice that realities are continually crafted or enacted. And so it is by looking at different locations or sites of practice that different perspectives or orderings might be exposed. The second point that surfaced then relates to the locations where practice might be understood, and the suggestion that it is among the different actors involved in any development intervention where we might uncover the complexities beneath and emerging from sustainable development. Different actors situated within complex and changing lifeworlds, with multiple identities, histories, relations and practices, thus act to produce different realities, generating the messiness of sustainable development. It is perhaps the fact that sustainable development attempts to draw together such a range of disparate actors situated within such different and often conflicting lifeworlds, that sustainable development is particularly complex and contradictory.

Yet if the multiple realities of sustainable development are produced by and contingent on the practices of different actors, then it follows that there is no single interpretation waiting to be captured by research. Rather knowledge of the messiness of sustainable

development is itself multiple and produced through the research practices which set out to know it. As Law (2004, p143) again clarifies:

*“Method is not, I have argued a more or less successful set of procedures for reporting on a given reality. Rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities.”*

Moreover, the production of realities through method is done so through a *“bundled hinterland ... (which) stretches through skills, instruments and statements ... into a ramifying and indefinite set of relations, places and assumptions that disappear from view”* (p45). In other words, knowledge is a product of a research process which is itself a complex and dynamic space of subjectivities and intersubjectivities situated by particular histories and geographies. This implies that any attempts to address and assert a knowledge of multiplicity needs to attend to a number of important matters, not least the contingencies of process, but also the indefiniteness, or uncertainties of the knowledge produced.

If this is the nature of knowing messiness, then to come to know it not only demands an openness to ways of knowing, or *‘modes of crafting’*, which can help to encounter multiple perspectives. It also calls for a reflexive method which attempts to uncover the research process and how it produces reality. It requires an approach to method which casts away expectations of ‘accuracy’ or definitive answers based on assumptions of correct/incorrect procedures. It accepts instead that there will always be absences, contradictions, uncertainties. There will always be another knowing.

There is already considerable momentum for such methods; for adopting reflexive strategies to examine and act on understandings of positionality and the inevitable sources of uncertainty throughout the research journey. Focusing on the researchers and research networks, or as Pile (1991) terms it the *‘research alliance’*, reflexive strategies involve examining intersubjective spaces; the differences within them, the associated feelings and emotions provoked by them and how these factors may be shaping the process. This critical self-reflection is about making sense of research experiences, or events, from the personal perspective of researchers and from the combined perspective of different members of a research team. It also goes beyond self-reflection, encompassing a wider analysis of context to develop a scenic understanding, or

historical and geographical imagination (Fielding 2000, Pile 1991). This is about the macro processes, the role of history and institutional relationships, in the widest sense of the term (i.e. formal and informal, public, civic and private) and how these shape the research encounters in the different localities where research takes place. Pile (1991) highlights three dimensions to this scenic understanding, including: semantic scenes, or the use of language; behavioural or socio-spatial scenes within and outside research relationships; and the socio-historical scenes or social structures influencing identities and relationships. For cross-cultural research, this becomes further complicated by the overlap and connections between the researcher's geographical identity and that of the researched, in particular how historic colonial relationships, as well as present post-colonial relationships influence their scenic understandings (e.g. see Skelton 2001). It then demands a questioning of moral or ethical assumptions, as well as the meanings of underlying concepts and terminology (Herod 1999).

But in adopting such reflexive strategies, there is also a need for caution in assuming that the research process can be fully known. Indeed, the notion of a 'transparent reflexivity', which makes all visible and knowable, is arguably impossible, not only in practice, but also theoretically in its assertion of an 'objective truth' of situatedness (Rose 1997). Accepting these limitations of reflexivity, however, does not deny its importance in research. Rather, it adds salience to the partiality, the uncertainties and gaps, in reflexive understanding. Recognising, acknowledging and exploring the fallibilities and absences in research practice then becomes imperative.

Alongside this move towards reflexive methodologies recognising researchers' positions and privilege and acknowledging their role in the production of knowledge, there is also another aligned momentum to make room for other less privileged voices in research (Radcliffe 1994). This is research which demands an ethical positionality, which is aware of its transformative outcomes (for both the researched and researcher) and adopts an activist commitment to social change, with political and ethical consequences (Kobayashi 2001). The method becomes an explicitly political process, a 'moral geography' (Cloke et al 2004), not just responsible for describing differences, but also morally obliged to help secure social justice. There is then an intention, or hope "*to interfere, to make some realities realer, others less so*" (Law 2004, p67).

In the context of my research, what this means, as the following chapter reveals, is that it is reflective journey. And it is also one which aspires to be what Kobayashi (2001) calls an ‘activist scholarship’, which sets out to unsettle the orders or simplifications of policy, to reveal multiplicities, and even perhaps to contribute to a dialogue about difference, which gives space to so far excluded or marginalised realities.

### ***Developing the field***

Without going too far back in time, it is still relevant here to say that my research journey began some time before I became enrolled as a student at Exeter University. My motivations for embarking on the particular research journey I recount here, originate in part from my own educational background and working experiences<sup>2</sup>. These had led me to become interested in the relationships and tensions between people and the environment and between interests of conservation and development. But I was also acutely aware of my lack of appreciation for the theories underpinning these areas of interest, not least my lack of understanding of social theory. And so I was seeking to become educated, to go back to study and learn beyond what could be gleaned during research as a consultant. At the same time, and perhaps as a consequence of having spent time living and working abroad in collaboration with people and agencies in other locations, I was conscious that I did not want to simply engage in an extractive research degree for my benefit alone. I felt committed to continuing learning through research, as long as that research might also have some value beyond the academic, to the context, the people and places through which it would be produced.

This says something of my initial motivations to consider making this research journey. Turning now to the immediate circumstances in which the journey began to unfold, I was from 2003-2005, working as a consultant with a small UK company<sup>3</sup> on three different research projects in Cambodia. All three were funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) (as mentioned in Chapter 4) and were focussed on issues within the fisheries sector. Two were also being carried out through a

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<sup>2</sup> I am, or was, by virtue of my first degree a Zoologist, who subsequently evolved through a masters degree into a Tropical Coastal Manager and then, through work in South Asia, West Africa and latterly Cambodia, a Development Consultant, or as I was officially labelled a ‘Livelihoods Specialist’.

<sup>3</sup> Known as IMM Ltd (<http://imm.uk.com/>) based in the Innovation Centre on the Exeter University campus.

partnership with the then Department of Fisheries<sup>4</sup> in Cambodia, and one also involved a Cambodian Non-Government Organisation, the Community-Based Natural Resource Management Learning Institute<sup>5</sup>, as well as a project within the Ministry of Environment, known as the Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) project. Through this work, I was beginning to get to know Cambodia, to understand something of the fisheries sector and to make connections with different people working there. I was starting to think how I might link a research degree into the work I was already involved in, or how I might develop a new field of research related to the fisheries sector, which I had come to know.

During the first year of my thesis, as I began to develop a direction for my research, I continued to work part-time on projects in Cambodia. So I was in the fortunate position of being able to discuss and develop ideas, not only with my colleagues at the consultancy, but also with staff at the Learning Institute in Cambodia, who I was working with at the time. The Learning Institute is a relatively new NGO in Cambodia<sup>6</sup> and one with a focus, as its name suggests, on understanding and improving community-based approaches to natural resource management<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 6). In this way they<sup>8</sup> explicitly support such approaches based on an underlying belief in the benefits they will bring for the environment and development. However, through their work they had also begun to recognise that people's interpretations of community-based natural resource management and associated concepts such as participation, empowerment or sustainable livelihoods, varied widely, as did their experiences of it in practice. Early conversations with programme advisors and the programme coordinator at the Learning Institute suggested that they were interested in looking in more detail at different experiences in practice. Indeed, they were already involved in discussions with

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<sup>4</sup> The Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, has since 2006 become the Fisheries Administration with a whole new administrative structure.

<sup>5</sup> From now on I will refer to the Community-Based Natural Resource Management Learning Institute, simply as the 'Learning Institute'.

<sup>6</sup> The Learning Institute was officially recognised as an NGO in April 2005.

<sup>7</sup> In this capacity it positions itself as a research, training and networking organisation. Playing a role in knowledge building and sharing, as a means to contribute to institutional and policy support through improved understanding, research skills development and building links between different institutions involved in natural resource management (CBNRM LI 2008). Critically, it is committed in this work to participatory action orientated learning or research, and emphasises the importance of locally-led approaches and the empowerment of local communities in managing natural resources. Significantly for me the Learning Institute is also committed to supporting student research.

<sup>8</sup> I am frequently referring throughout this section to the Learning Institute as a homogenous entity with a single voice. I recognise that this of course is not the case and in most instances I am actually referring to the views of my main contact within the organisation, acknowledging at the same time that he would have normally discussed many of these issues with others in the Learning Institute before finalising any decision with me.

other NGOs to develop a research programme which might begin to look at understanding local people's experiences of community forestry. There was a general feeling that research which might address these concerns with respect to the fisheries sector could fit in well with the current interests of the organisation.



*Figure 6: Logo of the CBNRM Learning Institute, Cambodia*

As I have introduced in Chapter 4, community-based approaches to natural resource management had, through the guise of community fisheries, become a key part of on-going reforms to Cambodia's fishery sector, linking the sector to wider development policies of sustainable development. In this way, community fisheries provided a window on how sustainable development works out in practice. So exploring different experiences, or 'perceptions' of community fisheries presented an opportunity to understand the multiplicities of sustainable development in practice. I drafted a proposal.

Given my own commitment to engage in research which might have some value beyond my own education, as well as the Learning Institute's orientation towards participatory action research, the proposal was framed as an 'action-research project'<sup>9</sup>. It was to be implemented through a partnership between myself, the Learning Institute and their relevant partner agencies within government and the NGO sector. At this stage it ambitiously set out "*to contribute towards effective decentralised community-based*

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<sup>9</sup> In this context 'action-research' referred to the explicit link being made between learning, reflection and action within the research project. The project might even be framed within a 'participatory action research' paradigm, recognising the collaborative nature of the research process and its commitment to engagement with co-researchers and to affecting constructive change (Kindon et al 2007). However, positioned in this way it is important to acknowledge the very different types or levels of participation within the project in relation to the different groups of people participating. Relative to any continuum of participation (Kindon et al 2007, p16) the project was explicitly collaborating with practioners (from NGOs and government) implementing policy as participants in a co-learning, interactive or cooperative level of participation. However, it was also engaging with people affected by policy as participants, but in this case participating in a consultative and compliant way and in positions of significantly less power over the research process.

*natural resource management through a process of learning and reflection informing a wider strategy of capacity building and communication for change*” (Whittingham & LI 2005). It aimed firstly to develop the capacity of research partners to undertake the research together. It then proposed to carry out a period of in-depth learning and reflection, which would attempt to understand how different people make sense of community fisheries, what factors influence their perceptions and what impact it has on their livelihoods and the overall goals of sustainable development. It was intended that this understanding would go on to inform a wider process of dialogue, reflection and action aimed at *“raising awareness of the variety of perceptions associated with community-based natural resource management and building the capacity to negotiate and respond to the diversity of interests and aspirations”*. The exact nature of the wider strategy of awareness raising and capacity building was largely unspecified in the proposal, with the intention that it would develop as the project progressed together with partner agencies.

The proposal was well received by my original contacts within the Learning Institute. And though there was some unease expressed by the Executive Director (which I was to discover much later) about supporting an international student and the risk of the research being a purely extractive process, with limited benefit to the Learning Institute or beyond, they agreed to support and collaborate in the project<sup>10</sup>. In practice this meant a small grant to support myself and Learning Institute staff in carrying out the project. We also agreed that we would set up the project as a collaboration with staff from the Community Fishery Development Office of the Department of Fisheries, a relationship which, it was thought, might ensure acceptance of the research within government and possibly give it a greater chance of influencing government thinking.

Following some negotiations, it was decided that the research would focus on two case-studies of community fisheries, a choice which represented something of a compromise and change of thinking for the Learning Institute. For it was at least half of the number of case studies they originally proposed, thinking that the research would provide a representative view of experiences relating to the different fishery areas of the country.

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<sup>10</sup> The reservations of the Executive Director, and possibly others within the Learning Institute, were assuaged by one of the Programme Advisors, who turned out to be my main contact point within the Senior Management Team at the Learning Institute and who was largely responsible for championing the research proposal and eventual project within the organisation.

This was an expectation based on a largely positivist orientation to knowledge and familiarity with quantitative methodologies. However, they were also not unfamiliar with qualitative approaches and were willing to accept an alternative view to understanding what they had already recognised were complex situations with multiple interpretations. Yet at the same time they wanted the research to speak of some of the differences which existed in the country; differences that might relate to the nature of the fishery area and associated livelihoods, or the organisation of the community fishery itself. What I felt comfortable with were case-studies which would not claim to represent a larger picture, but instead would attempt to highlight specific situations, that would provide what Law and Mol (2006) suggest might be '*ways of describing the world while keeping it open, ways of paying tribute to complexities*' and in doing so not offer generalisations, but instead '*suggest ways of thinking about and tackling other specificities*'. I agreed to consider two case studies. Case studies which would provide a means of exploring some part of the diversity of experiences of community fisheries and how they are shaped by two distinct projects practicing in the context of differing livelihoods situations.

The Learning Institute already had links with a number of agencies (NGOs and government departments) involved in implementing community fishery projects around the country. Most research in fisheries had tended to focus on the large inland fishery of the Tonle Sap Lake, while relatively less attention was given to upland and marine fishery areas. The case studies were selected from projects operating in these areas, as a way of contributing to these comparatively under-researched fisheries, which at the same time represented distinct livelihood contexts (as outlined in Chapter 4). Together with two staff from the Learning Institute I went to visit four different projects; two in the northeast upland province of Stung Treng on the border with Laos, and two in the southwest coastal province of Koh Kong on the border with Thailand. The aim of the trip was to begin to get to know these two different areas, to learn something of the community fishery projects taking place as well as the particular contexts in which they work, and ultimately to select two case studies. A number of criteria guided this selection; the projects should have been in existence for at least two years in order that some level of experience had developed; they should be willing to take part in the research, which might somehow contribute to their on-going work; they should be available, or accessible during the times we were likely to be in the field.

Following this short field trip and by the end of 2005, I was able, in consultation with the Learning Institute and the different projects, to choose two case studies as the focus of the research; the community fishery project of the Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA) in Stung Treng province, and the Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) project of the Ministry of Environment in Koh Kong province. Together with myself, the Learning Institute and the Community Fisheries Development Office, the two case study projects formed a partnership<sup>11</sup> in the research, now known in Cambodia as the *Community-Based Natural Resources Management Perceptions Research Project*<sup>12</sup>. So the field had considerably expanded beyond myself and my doctoral research. I was now leading a research team, which was to vary in size from four to six people originating from the four partner agencies. A team with multiple positions with respect to community fisheries, the research, each other and the wider research networks which developed at each site, which I explore in more depth below.

### ***In the field***

I have set up the personal and wider context in which my research journey began and developed, I turn now to reflect on how this worked out in practice. I refer to my journey ‘in the field’, which took place over a period of nine months from March until December 2006 (see Table 1 below), during which time I worked with the research team (mostly directly, but also at times indirectly<sup>13</sup>) to gather or generate information concerning the two case study projects. This was a journey which was about both a Learning Institute project and my own thesis. It was both a collaborative and personal process, the boundaries of which were not always clear. But what I attempt to focus on here is my own journey to produce a thesis, which both directed and emerged out of a collaboration. Thus, I present first the research process in the field as it was designed and then reflect on its ultimate practice through the evolving positionalities of a research team and a wider research network.

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<sup>11</sup> This partnership was formalised through a signed Letter of Agreement between the Learning Institute and the three other agencies.

<sup>12</sup> See [http://www.cbnrml.org/english/index.php?page=cbnrm\\_perception](http://www.cbnrml.org/english/index.php?page=cbnrm_perception)

<sup>13</sup> For 2 months from May until June 2006 I returned to the UK, continuing for part of that time to work with the research team at a distance (see Table 1)

**Table 1: Activities in the 'field' from March to December 2006**

March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	In the field
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> Interview for Learning Institute research assistants; run research orientation workshop for research team
										<b>In Stung Treng:</b> Meet CEPA provincial staff; select research village; visit research village to introduce research & request permission; village walk & observations
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> Translations – interpretations from field trip; work on checklists; Cambodia New Year holiday
										<b>In Stung Treng:</b> Provincial interviews; village mapping; elder focus groups; village & commune interviews; household interviews
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> National interviews
										<b>In UK / Phnom Penh:</b> Translations – interpretations; holiday
										<b>In Stung Treng</b> (Learning Institute and CEPA research assistants only): Observe provincial & village community fishery meetings; household interviews
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> National interviews; prepare for research partners reflection workshop
										<b>In Kampong Thom:</b> Research partners reflection workshop
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> Translations – interpretations
										<b>In Stung Treng:</b> Provincial interviews; village & commune interviews; household interviews
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> Translation – interpretations; <i>Phcum Ben</i> holiday
										<b>In Koh Kong:</b> Meet PMCR provincial staff; introduce research to village; village walk & observations; provincial interviews; village mapping; elder focus groups; village, commune & district interviews; household interviews
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> Water festival holiday; translations - interpretations
										<b>In Koh Kong:</b> Provincial interviews; village & commune interviews; household interviews
										<b>In Phnom Penh:</b> Translations – interpretations; national interviews; research partners debriefing meeting

Based on what knowing the field might entail, the research process was informed by what Pile (1991) terms an '*interpretative geography*' which is conscious of the context and relationships which produce and are produced through the research process and which frame our attempts to know. Within this broad epistemological position, the research was designed around an interpretivist ethnographic approach. An approach, which Mason (2002) explains, shifts the traditional emphasis of ethnography away from immersion in and observation of cultural settings as the principle data source, towards an understanding of '*people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings*'. While participant observations remain an important part of an interpretive ethnography it "*does not have to rely on 'total immersion in a setting'*". Instead, people's interpretations and the meanings they attribute to texts or objects become a principle source of understanding, and interview methods become an important accompaniment to observations.

Thus, the research process was based on two key methods, or modes of knowing; interviews and observations. The interview method was what Mason (2002) refers to as '*qualitative interviewing*', or semi-structured interviews, which encourage an '*interactional exchange of dialogue*' through which meanings and understandings are created in a co-production between the researcher and researched. It is an interview method which '*encourages respondents to talk on topics about which they have most to say*' and consequently may be less intimidating than a formal interview (Devereux & Hoddinott 1993). Moreover, the open conversational style of semi-structured interviews allows an in-depth understanding to develop and perhaps unexpected issues to emerge. It is thus identified as a good way to engage with marginalised groups whose perspectives often remain untold (Esterberg 2002). However, the relative informality of semi-structured interviews does not mean they are without design or order, rather they have been aptly termed '*conversations with a purpose*' (Burgess 1984 in Mason 2002). To achieve such a conversation requires considerable preparation to identify a sequence of relevant topics or themes, as well as an appropriate style or manner of questioning, which addresses both the research concerns and the circumstances or experiences of the researched (Mason 2002).

Accompanying interviews, the research process also made use of observations. Observations may involve different degrees of participation and have varying focuses of

concern depending on the research interests and the setting. Thus, by living in a culture and participating in the lives of the people being researched, observations may take the form of what traditional ethnography labels participant observation (Fetterman 1998). The main purpose of such observations is to learn about the everyday experiences of people's lives and in doing so provide a depth of understanding which can add to and inform other methods. But as Dowler (2001) and Punch (2001) both highlight, participant observation is also a method which can be significant in developing empathy and trust with those being researched, helping to overcome differences and create a better atmosphere for the research process. In this way participant observations can be an important compliment to the interview method; contrasting with and expanding on knowledge generated through interviews, while also providing a reflexive understanding of the interview and wider research process, and in some instances contributing to more conducive relationships with those being researched. Observations of particular events, in which the researcher engages in 'less' participation, though still influencing the research setting through his/her presence, is another means of using observation methods (Esterberg 2002). In this case, the intent may be to compare what people do with what they say, to consider how the unfolding of particular events as observed, compares with retrospective interpretations of the same or similar events.

In the context of this research, qualitative interviews together with observations were focussed within each case study project on the people, or actors, associated with the project's implementation in general and its practice in a particular place. A diversity of actors were then the principle source of information, as well as the settings or situations in which they worked and lived and the project events through which they came together.

**Table 2: A list of actors interviewed in each case study**

<b>PMCR case study actors</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>	<b>CEPA case study actors</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>
<b>Phnom Penh</b>			
PMCR national coordinator	1	CEPA Director	3
		Oxfam GB Fisheries Programme Coordinator	2
<b>Provinces</b>			
PMCR Koh Kong coordinator	1	CEPA Stung Treng coordinator	1
PMCR / Department of Women's Affairs staff	1	CEPA Community Fisheries Project Manager	2
PMCR / Provincial Fisheries Office staff	2	CEPA Community Fisheries Project Assistant	2
Provincial Fisheries Office vice chief	2	Provincial Fisheries Office chief	1
Coastal Zone Management Project Koh Kong coordinator	1	Provincial Fisheries Office vice chief	2
SEILA Technical Advisor	1	Stung Treng Department of Environment vice chief	2
<b>District/communes</b>			
District Vice chief	1	Commune council chief	1
Commune Council chief	1	Commune council vice chief	2
<b>Villages</b>			
Key local institutional actors (focus group)	1	Key local institutional actors focus group	1
Key local institutional actors & households (focus group)	1	Key local institutional actors & households (focus group)	1
Village elders (focus group)	1	Village elders (focus group)	1
Village chief	1	Village chief	4
Botom Sakor National Park Environmental Rangers	1	Village development committee chief	1
Village Management Committee chief	3	Community fishery committee chief	5
Village Management Committee member	2	Community fishery committee member	2
<b>Households</b>			
Households	71 (23 repeats)	Households	41 (21 repeats)

As listed in Table 2 above, these actors included government, NGOs and donor staff working directly and indirectly with each project in Phnom Penh and the provinces of Koh Kong and Stung Treng. They also included actors from local authorities and community fishery committees associated with a village where each project was working<sup>14</sup> and people from households in each village. A sampling strategy was used to guide the selection of households that were invited to participate in the research, and to

<sup>14</sup> Villages were selected to be part of the research following discussions with the project staff to identify a village where they were working on community fisheries, which would be accessible during the period of the research, and where people were likely to be willing to be involved in the research. Further discussions were then held with the village authorities and community fishery committees in the selected village to explain about the research and ask their permission to work with them.

attempt to capture a range of perspectives that might exist in each village. This identified membership status in the community fishery as the principle characteristic for the household sample, which then included both those households who had officially registered with the community fishery, as well as those who had not (community fishery members and non-members) in the proportion they were known to exist in the village as a whole<sup>15</sup>. Given that each village was spread out over a large area<sup>16</sup> the sample was also designed to invite households living in all parts of the village. In the end 20% of households in the village in Stung Treng and 15% of households in the village in Koh Kong were involved in the research, these including 60% and 65% of community fishery members respectively.



***Figure 7: Interviews and conversations***

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<sup>15</sup> In practice it was often difficult to establish membership in the community fishery based on the records which existed.

<sup>16</sup> In Koh Kong the 'village' which the community fishery committee (known through the PMCR project as the village management committee) represented incorporated six geographically distinct settlements within a single commune. In Stung Treng the village was spread out along the banks of the Mekong river and on an adjacent island in the river.

Qualitative interviews took place mainly with individuals (Figure 7), though with households the numbers varied depending on who was available and interested to participate. Three focus group interviews (see Table #) were also carried out initially in each village as a means of introducing the research and the research team and gaining ‘informal’ consent for the research as well as developing a general understanding of the village environment. Of these groups, it was intended that the first would involve key institutional actors representing the village and involved in the community fishery, while the second would involve a broader mix of key actors and households, and the third would focus on village elders. This was broadly the case, however, ultimately the selection of participants was determined by a key actor in the village, who was the main contact for the research and in this case also its gatekeeper<sup>17</sup>.

As a means of helping to engage people during focus groups and household interviews, a number of active and participatory diagramming methods were combined with qualitative interviews (see Box 3). As Kindon et al (2007) point out: “*one of the most important features of these types of method is their ‘hands-on’ nature, and their ability to enable people to generate information and share knowledge on their own terms*” (p17). Pain and Francis (2003) also highlight their strength in making group work more inclusive. While Kesby (2000) points among other things, to the benefit of the visual and tactile nature of participatory diagramming, which provides opportunities for ‘*less dominant personalities ... to express their ‘voice’ without necessarily requiring them to ‘speak’*’. It is also through their initial emphasis on doing, or creating something that more tacit knowledges, which tend to be practiced, rather than spoken about become accessible. Moreover, the immediately visible information allows for further analysis and refinement of understandings with participants. For as Ley and Mountz (2001) point out these are often tools which ‘*pose questions rather than resolve them*’, and so it is through this joint analysis that participants as well as researchers may learn from the research process.

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<sup>17</sup> Gatekeepers may be defined as people who ‘have the power to withhold access to people or situations for the purposes of research’, whose informal consent may be needed in order to gain wider support for the research and whose interests may at times conflict or disrupt the research process (Scheyvens and Storey 2003).

**Box 3: Using participatory techniques in the field**



While acknowledging such techniques inevitably face drawbacks<sup>18</sup> as well as benefits, I felt that they were particularly appropriate for engaging rural households and local institutional actors. For it is probably not an unjustified generalisation to say that for most rural Cambodians their experience, if any, of interacting with researchers is to respond to a rigid questionnaire. For many rural households, they will have had no experience of research and their only interaction with people from the ‘outside’ (be it from the provincial capital, Phnom Penh or overseas) is to receive advice or instructions. Moreover, it is frequent to encounter attitudes among ‘outsiders’ that rural people do not actually have knowledge to share, instead they should listen to others with expertise. Given this context, rural people often lack confidence to speak about their lives and experiences to ‘outsiders’ in a more semi-structured, conversational way. They may have rarely spoken about or analysed what they do, they simply experience it. Participatory diagramming techniques then offer a means to address some of these challenges, by creating something together and generating a visual reference about which to talk and analyse. So for these reasons a number of different methods were used alongside interviews as a means of better understanding the local environment, as well as changes in activities or experiences through time and space. These included village mapping, village walks and time lines with focus groups of villagers, as well as seasonal calendars, trend matrices, ranking and scoring, daily activity and life history diagramming with households.

Over the course of the research, many individuals were interviewed multiple times (see Table 2 and Annexes 1 & 2). Among local institutional actors and households this often involved returning with participatory diagrams<sup>19</sup> in order to continue discussion, but also involved using different diagramming techniques on consecutive visits. Such repeat encounters were opportunistic to a certain extent, relying on the availability as well as willingness of actors to continue their participation. However, they were also an important part of the research design, helping to develop a deeper understanding than was often possible through a single encounter. It also provided, as Fetterman (1998) notes, an important chance to check understanding and consistency, though at the same time allowing for the inevitable non-coherences of people’s realities. In order to guide

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<sup>18</sup> Kesby (2000) and Pain and Francis (2003) also emphasise a number of important limitations to participatory diagramming, not least the fact that they demand skillful facilitation as well as careful planning.

<sup>19</sup> The original diagrams or copies of the diagrams produced during participatory diagramming were as far as possible left or given back to research participants.

follow up interviews, as well as the initial interviews, checklists of key topics relating to the research questions and particular groups of actors were developed. These were designed at the outset of the research and initially required translation both in terms of the language and the style which would be appropriate with different actors and in different settings. As Fetterman (1998) again highlights, checklists evolve through the research process as understanding develops and new ideas emerge. This was particularly the case for the checklists which guided follow up interviews, which were developed to check and deepen understanding, as well as address uncertainties and gaps identified from initial interviews.

Throughout the whole research process a total of 160 individual interviews (71 in Stung Treng and 89 in Koh Kong) and 6 focus groups (3 in each case study) were carried out (Table 2). In addition, it was possible in Stung Treng to make observations of particular project events (provincial and village level community fishery meetings), which provided an important contrast to individual accounts of such events generated during interviews. By living in the provinces and villages on and off during the research it was also possible to engage in participant observations, which helped develop a general understanding of people's lives and contributed to the interview process.

It was also through ongoing observations of the research process itself that a broader reflexive strategy was carried out, as shown in Figure 8. This was a strategy designed to contribute both to the research in terms of my own thesis, and also to the commitments of the research as part of an action learning project. In this way, the cycle of reflection, learning and action was an important part of the research project in its wider sense, as a means of providing spaces in which a reflective awareness might begin to develop among both the research team involved in generating information in the field, and the wider research partnership. This was a reflective awareness, which was intended to expose personal perspectives on community-based natural resource management and the assumptions on which these are based, and also to allow space for alternative viewpoints, for notions of multiplicity and messiness. Moreover, it was anticipated that this might provide a basis on which future dialogue could develop, as part of the overall goal of the research project.



**Figure 8: My reflexive research strategy**

It was also the case that the reflexive strategy contributed directly to the research and my own thesis. Primarily, it was a means of contextualizing the research process and introducing what many recognise as an important source of rigour (e.g. Ley & Mountz 2001, Mullings 1999). But it was also an important strategy for me to better understand and maintain some control over the research process and the variable actions and influences of the research team. Moreover, it was a critical part of the ongoing translation and interpretation of knowledges generated through the research, which both informed the iterative interview process and ultimately the writing of the field, as discussed in the following section. So it was then, that through my own on-going personal reflections, as well as joint reflective activities with the research team and partners, it was possible to consider the research process as it took place in practice and so attempt to develop what Pile (1991) termed a '*scenic understanding*'. This was about understanding what Law (2004) refers to as the complex and only partly coherent '*hinterland*': a myriad of interrelated issues associated with identities, motivations and relations within the research team, and how these shape relations with research participants and ultimately the overall research process and understanding. Issues which were constantly shifting through the on-going research experience, as the changing

research team collectively and differently encountered people, places and events in the varied locations of each case study.

As shown in Figure 8 above, this took place in part through a reflective workshop<sup>20</sup> (Figure 9) which aimed to explore the multiplicity of perspectives and practices of the research partners' experiences of community-based natural resource management. In doing so the workshop provided an understanding of the history and institutional relations which framed each project and how these might in turn shape the positionalities of the research teams and their relationships with the wider research network. Through subsequent work in the field, reflections continued to consider the research process as it took place, involving on-going personal and group reflections among different members of the research team. This was an essential part of the research, helping to reveal uncertainties and challenges within the research process and how that might be affecting the knowledge produced. It was through this understanding that the research process was not only contextualised but also developed. For by exposing different uncertainties or influences it was at times possible to find ways of addressing and overcoming them, by evolving checklists and repeating interviews, or by attempting as far as possible (Mullings 1999) to manage research relationships and reduce excessive influences. I turn now to consider these reflections as they emerged during the research and through the evolving positionalities of a research team and a wider research network.

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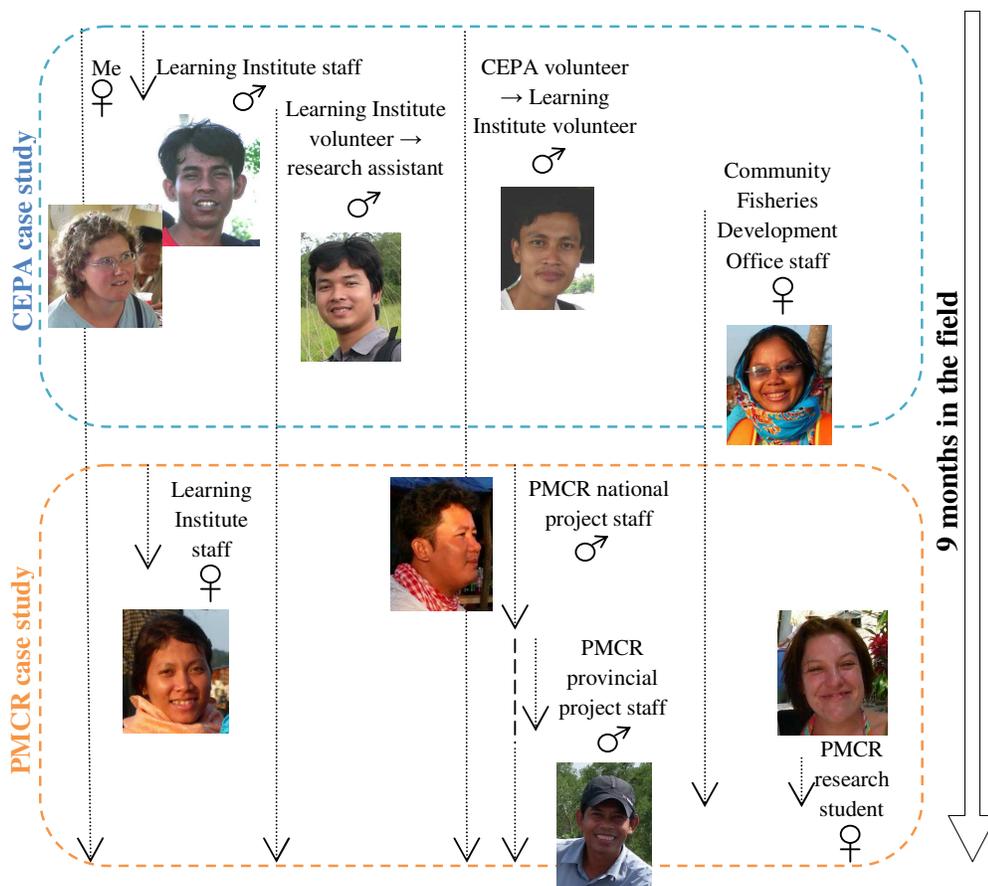
<sup>20</sup> This was a 4-day workshop which took place 1-4 August 2006 and involved the wider research partnership, including myself, the Learning Institute, Community Fisheries Development Office, PMCR project, CEPA and AFSC (American Friends Service Committee) another Cambodian NGO involved in community fisheries, who had been consulted during the case study selection.



**Figure 9: Participating in the CBNRM Reflection Workshop, August 2006**

We were a research team of diverse and changing identities, as Figure 10 highlights. At the core there was myself and two young Cambodian men; one of whom was taken on by the Learning Institute initially as a volunteer and subsequently as a research assistant, the other who started as a volunteer for CEPA and ended up a volunteer with the Learning Institute. In addition to this, we were joined around half way through the CEPA case study in Stung Treng by a member of staff from the government’s Community Fishery Development Office, a woman of similar age to myself, whom I had known and worked with for a number of years. This team of four then grew in different ways and at different times during the PMCR case study in Koh Kong, joined by a younger female staff from the Learning Institute, as well as a number of different staff from the PMCR project, including for a short time, a Canadian research student.

We represented a varying composition of age, gender, professional affiliations, interests and personalities. To add to this we were all in different ways ‘outsiders’ to the field; myself and the Canadian research student at the most extreme being white western women with limited Khmer language abilities and varying prior exposure to Cambodian life and culture<sup>21</sup>, while others, though Cambodian, were predominantly from Phnom Penh with different experiences of rural life and of the two case study provinces. And at the same time, we were also inevitably linked with the projects we had come to research, and to those villagers associated with the project who were to act as our hosts in both villages, and who in Stung Treng guided us to different parts of the village.



**Figure 10: The changing research team**

<sup>21</sup> This was the Canadian research student’s first visit to Cambodia and to Koh Kong province.

Being a foreigner, or as I was commonly referred to in Khmer; a “*baarung*”<sup>22</sup>, I was the obvious ‘outsider’, attracting attention especially in the villages where we lived. So while undertaking participant observations, I was myself also the subject of considerable observation and constant speculation: how old was I; was I married; did I have children; would I and could I eat Khmer food? I wondered how much I should reveal about myself, would it not just underline difference and distance me from others, would it not be better to just attempt to fit in? But as Mullings (1999) points out, self-representation in the field is often out of a researcher’s control. Hiding aspects of my identity, while revealing others, in order to ‘fit-in’ was not really an option. Already as a woman alone from her family in a foreign country, I was considered unusual by others in the research team. And judged against Cambodian standards, my size, age, unmarried and then childless state led villagers in Stung Treng to give me the nickname of “*yey map*”, meaning fat old woman! Despite my efforts I found myself to be standing out and even breaking social conventions without realising it, as the example below illustrates.

*.... before lunch I was standing by one of the village management committee – an older lady – and I had one hand on my hip. She made a comment to Sothea, who translated it to me – she was commenting on the fact that my hand was on my hip, which in Cambodia is considered a rude posture in front of someone older. Sothea also said that to say ‘mmm’ in recognition or agreement instead of saying ‘chaa’ (meaning yes) in front of an older person is also considered rude – and I am always saying ‘mmm’ as people talk during interviews!*  
Field notes, Chroy Pros village, Koh Kong 16<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

Being the ‘outsider’ was also not a surprise, after all it could hardly be avoided. Perhaps what was the greater revelation were the feelings among others in the research team of being in part ‘outsiders’. Feelings of awkwardness when attempting to engage households in discussion, in particular households facing extremes of poverty. Feelings of frustration at not being able to find the words to make sense of questions, or encourage people to talk who may have never been asked to contribute their knowledge in this way before. These were all arising in part because they were also ‘outsiders’, clearly different from villagers. They were after all comparatively well educated Cambodians with professional jobs largely dissociated from rural life and extremes of poverty. For the younger team members, who had relatively limited research experience, the effects of these differences were unexpected and they initially lacked the confidence and skills to overcome them. In contrast, for another team member, these

<sup>22</sup> “*Baarung*” literally means French, but is used to refer to any western foreigner.

differences were important markers of status that could be reinforced during an interview, for example by choosing not to enter a house and requesting the household bring chairs, or at the very least a mat for their distinguished visitors to sit on during the interview!

But in different ways mine and the research team's feelings of difference, of being 'outsiders' were not fixed. As Mullings (1999) again highlights: *'the 'insider/outsider' binary in reality is a boundary that is not only highly unstable but also one that ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space'*. So as the research went on, as we participated in life in the provinces and villages and got to know people and they got to know us, some of the distinctions seemed to become less obtrusive in the research process. Moreover, it was also possible to evolve aspects of the method in an attempt to partially overcome the obvious affects of our 'outsider' or 'otherness'. So it was that the style of language and manner of introducing topics evolved to help better engage with particularly hesitant individuals, often from the most marginal households. And I was able to remind team members of the need to adopt greater humility in working with such individuals or households and to avoid making demands for hospitality.

It was also the case, that my own position shifted through the research in particular as the research team composition changed and another female joined the team half way through the work in Stung Treng. As with the experiences of Cupples and Kindon (2003), this change produced a dynamic which facilitated greater access to certain aspects of the field which had up until then been harder to reach. In a small way her presence helped to overcome some of the barriers of my 'outsider' status. Indeed, she took it upon herself to look after me while we were together<sup>23</sup>, demonstrating the etiquettes of public bathing and toileting. She was, compared to the younger male team members, more sensitive to the people around her, taking greater interest in them. So it was through her that I was able to gain access to women and their worlds, which so far had been relatively hard to reach, as male researchers tended to defer to male members of the household, while women were often shyer to talk through male translation.

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<sup>23</sup> At the same time she also relied on me to look out for her, as a condition of her joining the research was that she would not have to sleep alone, for her fear of spirits, which meant we were always to share a room, or in the village a sleeping mat or bed.

*She (female research team member) can get more involved in the women's world. She is right now in the kitchen with the others (members of the household where we were living) shining the torch, this is somewhere that the other (male) team members avoid going – unless they want to get something to eat. In the evenings in the 'room' that we share with Nary it also makes a difference having her there as she can translate for me with Nary. It has always felt so limited otherwise. And she seems to spend a lot more time there chatting to Nary. Field notes, Khei village, Stung Treng 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2006.*

However, my inability to speak Khmer<sup>24</sup> was a constant frustration, limiting my understanding of on-going events and my ability to develop relationships. While I was in a position to observe and make interpretations of the goings on around me, it was through the research team that my understanding was ultimately produced. I relied on their individual and often combined interpretations. Multiple layers of translation were at work, filtering the research topics and questions, as well as the knowledge produced through interviews and conversations. It was then only through my own on-going reflections as well as the reflective discussions within the team that I was able to gain some sense of meaning. Indeed, I spent considerable time with the team discussing the meaning of the unfolding research process and of the language as it moved back and forth between English and Khmer (Figure 11). And as I explore further below, in an attempt to make up for my lack of Khmer language and gain some control over the research process, I took on the role of interrogator<sup>25</sup> constantly challenging interpretations and meanings.

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<sup>24</sup> I was learning Khmer during my time in the field, which allowed the barrier of language to fall, though it was never removed as I was only able to reach a level of very basic exchanges.

<sup>25</sup> Quite often I think my eagerness to interrogate meanings became quite exhausting for the rest of the research team!



*Figure 11: Producing and reproducing field notes*

It was through a reflexive research strategy that questions as to the validity of my research and understanding, as an ‘outsider’ and non-Khmer speaker, might in part be addressed. But it is also significant to acknowledge, as Herod (1999) does, that an assumption that the validity of research reflects the degree to which a researcher is an ‘insider’ to the culture being studied has a number of critical shortcomings. For it assumes that there is a more accurate, correct or ‘true’ knowledge existing outside of the research encounter which an ‘insider’ has access to, but which is hidden to an ‘outsider’. It fails to recognise knowledge as a product of research shaped by those involved, whether they be ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’, such that there is ‘*little sense to assume that one version of this knowledge is necessarily “truer” in some absolute and “objective” sense*’ (Herod 1999). It is better then to recognise my understanding simply

as a version of possible truths, grounded by a recognition of the limitations of knowledge and the existence of multiple truths (Mohammed 2001).

Yet at the same time, there were also instances, in which being an 'outsider' lacking shared experience and understanding can be recognised as working to the advantage of the research process. I was more likely to question, to ask about things which appeared too obvious to the research team, who assumed to know the answer. Indeed their confidence in their own interpretations of what appeared familiar, often led to a struggle to convince them the question was worth asking, and sometimes to the realisation of alternative perspectives. But not only was I able to question the obvious, I also had access to questions that other team members felt unable to raise on their own. Compared to others, especially the younger team members, I was less bound by social conventions, which made them hesitant to ask certain questions, or to delve too deeply into particular issues with people who were older and perhaps of higher status than themselves.

The ability to question and to generate knowledge beyond the superficial varied also with personalities among the research team and their interests and motivations in relation to the research. Some team members simply had more empathy towards and interest in different perspectives, they were patient and willing to listen. While others were more impatient, unconcerned with detail, preferring to talk and instruct rather than listen. In part this related to different motivations for doing the research, whether it was simply another job they had been assigned to, a necessary stage along their career path, or an opportunity for learning something of value. It related also to their own positions in relation to the projects, or policies in question, and whether they felt it was their responsibility to inform others, or to maintain particular perspectives.

These varying positions affected how critical or reflective individuals were through the research process and about the knowledge being produced. So as the example below suggests, for one of the research team responsible to a case study project, there was a tendency to add to what had been said by a research participant and even show clear support of particular views, reinforcing his own perspective of the project. At other times, there were moments when members of the research team seemed reluctant to follow up on questions and probe more deeply, wanting to get the work over and done with, and relying on me to pick up on issues to follow up another time.

*I notice that he (research team member) tends to add into the translation his own knowledge of events, trying to make something make more sense – but not really reflecting what the person actually knows. A few times I have had to ask – is that what they have said, or what you added? .... Another thing I've noticed is that when he likes an answer – because it fits with his views of what should be done – he says 'good' (in English) as they speak and even raises his thumb to support what they say. Field Notes, Chroy Pros, Koh Kong 24<sup>th</sup> November 2006.*

Once again, it was by pursuing a reflexive engagement that certain aspects of the team's positionalities and research relationships were partially managed. So it created opportunities to respond to the situation illustrated above, by contesting the knowledge produced and attempting to minimise the tendency to assert professional or personal interests into the research encounter. It also prompted me to encourage the team to manage the profile of villagers associated with project<sup>26</sup> who were helping us, to explain repeatedly the purpose of our research and the value of understanding different perspectives, and to provide different opportunities for villagers to ask us about the research. It reminded the team of the need to listen and to question and not assume to know the answer, to probe more deeply with questions in order to get beyond initial superficiality.

As this selection of reflections demonstrates, the research as it took place in the field was a complex and often uncertain process. This was and is inevitable. It foregrounds and is intrinsically part of the knowledge which was produced in the field. And yet the production of knowledge does not simply stop in the field, it continues on through writing.

### ***Writing the field***

I want to consider now how the research enacted in the field between a research team and multiple research participants, ended up written here in this thesis. I turn to the processes of writing the field, of interpretation and representation, of capturing, selecting, tidying and telling. Processes which took place individually and jointly, together and at great distances, extending the field back and forth from the rural remotenesses of village life in Stung Treng and Koh Kong, to the busy offices of Phnom

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<sup>26</sup> In Stung Treng we requested our host and guide, who was also a member of the community fishery committee, not to sit in on interviews as she initially had a tendency to do.

Penh, through the ether of the internet, to the Geography Department and my home in Exeter. I refer then to writing which began scribbled in note books in Khmer and English and which ended up trapped inside computers, emerging on screens through different software packages. This has been a long journey, involving layers of interpretation and cycles of production, ending with a thesis, though not quite concluding there (as I mention below).

Writing the field began in note books<sup>27</sup>, in English, but mostly Khmer, some diligently crafted by a single hand, others scrawled in or neatly arranged by changing hands as the book was passed between different members of the research team. These books captured conversations, interviews, observations and reflections. They represented multiple knowings of the field, created with varying attention to detail. What was written in Khmer was all to be translated, typed up in English and eventually compiled into two NVivo projects. Initially this was done as a group together in the provinces or in Phnom Penh, but it continued on at a distance once I had returned to the UK through emails and long conversations on Skype. Through this process knowledge was reproduced, as English words and phrases were selected and crafted in an attempt to partially replicate what had been written and what remained in memories. It was a negotiation between what we each thought was the ‘right’ or ‘better’ choice of words, based our understanding and preferences of language and judged against recollections of the original context in which it was produced.

*Sometimes (during translation) he (research team member) seems to be using complicated (English) words and I ask him what did the person really say – sometimes he immediately converts it to a much more straightforward sentence, other times he refuses to accept that there might be another English word that could be used instead .... it seems difficult to persuade him that there are different words that mean the same thing and that the use depends on the context. It seems that in Khmer there may be only one word and not alternatives, so he thinks this way about English .... Of course I am also defining what words sound ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ – but perhaps what I think sounds ‘right’ for a fisher to say (in English) does not really reflect how it sounded in Khmer. I guess what I am trying to avoid mostly are words that seem to me too technical or educated for the context. I also question words that suggest a particular meaning which seems odd to me, or doesn’t fit with the rest of what is said. Field notes, Chroy Pros, Koh Kong 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006.*

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<sup>27</sup> Tape recorders were used on a few occasions, mainly during English spoken interviews in Phnom Penh, where the interviewee had confidence in the research process and did not mind the use of a recorder. In Khmer spoken interviews in the provinces and villages, where interviewees were more likely to be suspicious and fearful of being recorded we chose instead to take notes.

Once translated a vast and intimidating quantity of text had accumulated along with numerous photos, all awash in a mix of impressions and memories. Faced with this mass of information I struggled to know how to write it, to find a path, or an order through so many texts and possible narratives. To do so was a process of simplification, of closing down and silencing certain stories, while choosing to enact others (Law and Mol 2006). And if this was so, then I wondered how could such a process represent the diversities of experiences encountered and speak to the notion of messiness? But perhaps representing messiness was a chimera and what anyway would be the purpose? For though the research had sought out messiness and multiplicity, it had done so with a particular purpose of exposing both the dominant and hidden perspectives and the contradictions in between. Writing was then required to extract out narratives that spoke of these extremes and of their incoherences. This was the direction, or order, my writing would attempt to follow.

As the research team returned to their jobs, or took on new work, it was I who assumed responsibility for writing, for making a sense of it all; organising, sorting and selecting out. I became the authority over the knowledge which would be produced, I decided the storyline, chose the reality. This was in part inevitable, after all this is *my* thesis. But it also makes me uncomfortable. It fills me with an anxiety shared by many others (Ley and Mountz 2001), the anxiety of asserting my interpretation of the ‘other’ and leaving no room for alternative versions. However, as Ley and Mountz (2001) also point out, this is also an unavoidable aspect of knowledge creation, one which may only be partially resolved ‘*through an acknowledgement of the tentativeness of an interpretation, and a rigorous process of self-criticism to exorcise the demons of bias*’. In part I have attempted to do this by situating the thesis within the reflections of my journey in the field. And in taking authority to write the field, I also do not deny that there are many other possible accounts to tell. But they do not appear here. Rather I hope that they may find expression beyond the field.

### ***Beyond the field***

In ending this account of my research journey, I wish to briefly attend to the wider commitments of the research as it was set up as an action research project within the Learning Institute. Commitments which I have increasingly felt distanced from, the longer I have spent in the UK focussed on my academic obligations and the production

of this thesis<sup>28</sup>. Indeed, in writing the field as a thesis I am conscious of producing knowledge which, as Jazeel and McFarlane (2007) highlight, is necessarily contingent on the demands of an academy and which is largely inaccessible to others to whom the research is also responsible. By taking authority to write the field, I have not only dominated the way in which it is represented, but also appropriated knowledge production away from the research partners who collaborated in its initial enactment.

Yet as I have made clear my thesis was not all this research was meant to be about. It was after all also a research project with ambitions of participation and action, with intentions of informing and inspiring a wider dialogue among the actors involved in community fishery practice. Following Burawoy's (2005) '*division of sociological labour*', it was research intended for different publics as well as the profession, or academy, research which was instrumentally fulfilling an academic pathway, but also intending to reflexively initiate and feed a public debate. Knowledge production was then concerned with the question raised by Jazeel and McFarlane (2007) of '*how to present to, or how to "become with", differently situated audiences*'. A question which to an extent had already begun to be addressed through the reflexive strategy of the research process. But it also continues beyond the field through different forms of writing, telling, or engaging many of which have begun and others which will continue after the thesis has moved onto a shelf<sup>29</sup>.

### **Chapter summary**

Through this chapter I have attempted to reflect on how the research became, through theory and into practice within the context of my own life and evolving relationships with other people and places, as well as the traditional and evolving conventions of research method. In this way the chapter represents a critical foregrounding for the empirical understandings which follow in chapters six, seven and eight. It sets out the intention of the research to unravel sustainable development policy and to expose the messy processes at work through the practices of networks of actors and their complex lifeworlds. It reinforces the assertion of previous chapters, that it is through

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<sup>28</sup> As well as the birth of my son Bryn and his first year!

<sup>29</sup> So far this has mainly focussed on discussing research findings with research partners at a one-day workshop in Cambodia (December 2007), producing short briefing papers on the research in Khmer and English and presenting papers in English and Khmer to a number of different learning symposia in Cambodia, which are now compiled in Khmer and English as two chapters in a book (CBNRM LI 2009; see Annex 3 for copies of these outputs). There are also plans for the future (subject to funding) to initiate dialogues on key themes from the research through posters and role-play inspired discussions that might engage with provincial and local government, as well as local people.

understanding such practices that multiplicities are exposed. And yet it also asserts that any understanding of practice, is itself a product of practice – research practice. Thus, to accept notions of messiness, the research must also be reflexive to its own multiplicities and indefiniteness.

Given these conceptual beginnings, the chapter reflects on how the research took shape in practice through an interpretivist ethnographic method embedded within a reflexive strategy. A strategy which aimed to create spaces in which a reflexive awareness and engagement with multiple perspectives might develop, while also contextualising and attending to the processes taking place in the enactment of knowledge. This was a strategy which formed part of an action research project negotiated within the context of my own interests and experiences, as well as those of a Cambodian NGO (the Learning Institute), alongside the government's Fishery Department and two case study projects. But it was also a strategy which was critical for establishing rigour and for asserting control over the research as my thesis.

Thus the research undertook to explore the messiness of sustainable development as it was practiced through two case study projects of community fisheries. It undertook this journey through the multiple and only partially coherent positions of a research team and an inevitably messy and uncertain research process. And though I had accepted this indefiniteness, at moments I also found myself resisting it, seeking certainty, wishing to be rid of contradictions and unknowns by collecting more, reflecting more, and yet also realising the impossibility of 'truth' and the inappropriateness of its demands. At the same time, the uncertainties and multiplicities of practice and of knowing began to be ordered and simplified through writing. Writing which began by many hands and which has ended up by only one, mine. So it is my storyline which appears in the following chapters, I have taken authority in writing the field, of selecting out and crafting a reality. A single reality which attempts to expose dominant and hidden perspectives and the contradictions in between. And so it should be read with caution, with the knowledge that there are many more ways to tell it, some of which have and will be told beyond the field and beyond this thesis.

## Chapter 6

### **Two projects' agendas for sustainable development**

This chapter is the first of three which set out to explore empirical material and to reveal an understanding of the multiplicities, or messy processes, which represent sustainable development as it is performed through two different projects in Cambodia: the first, the community fishery project of the Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA); and the second, the Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) project of the Ministry of Environment. Specifically, this is a study of sustainable development as it is interpreted through the bounded practices of projects implementing community fisheries; where community fisheries has come to represent the principle mechanism for addressing wider sustainable development policies within the fisheries sector. Thus, each project represents an example, or case study, of a particular situation where community fisheries is practiced and so a means of telling something of the specificities of sustainable development in different contexts.

As I asserted in preceding chapters, messiness is encountered here by considering the multiple sites of practice where different perspectives or orderings of sustainable development emerge. Situations where a diversity of interrelated actors struggle to make sense of sustainable development as it is addressed by each project and as it confronts the varied lifeworlds of different people. It is found then within the particularities of each project and the varied knowledges, relations, actions and livelihoods of networks of actors. Through the next three analysis chapters I consider three such sites of messiness. Thus I begin in the following chapter by considering the perspectives and practices of different actors associated with implementing each project. I then continue in Chapter 7 by turning to the diverse livelihoods of people living in two villages where each project attempts to intervene. And finally in Chapter 8, I consider the intermediary spaces mediated by meso-level actors, who negotiate meanings at the interface between projects and local people.

My intention in this chapter is to introduce sustainable development as it is variously interpreted through the interactions of different institutional actors responsible for implementing two community fishery projects. Introducing each project in turn, I

explore how sustainable development is understood within particular institutional contexts and through the projects' agendas for community fisheries. I next consider how each project's rationale came into being and was shaped by situated histories of relations with natural resources. And finally, I turn to the networks of actors associated with each project and reflect on how their various relations and knowledges act to further mold meanings in practice. Throughout this analysis I seek to reveal multiple orders of sustainable development produced as different actors struggle to assert their knowledge and interests within the particular experiences of each project. I uncover something of the details of sustainable development's messiness as it takes place in two distinct situations and so expose an understanding of the complexities inherent in practice. Yet at the same time, as I conclude in the chapter's summary, I highlight commonalities between each situation, suggesting the existence of a dominating order structuring each case's multiplicities.

### ***CEPA's community fishery project***

The first case study encountered during the research was the community fishery project of the Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA) in Stung Treng province. This is a project run by a Cambodian non-governmental organisation (NGO) CEPA, who also emphasise their non-political and non-profit status<sup>1</sup>. CEPA was first established as a NGO in 1995 by four Cambodian university graduates and social and environmental activists who, according to the organisation's website, were "*committed to preserving their natural resources. Realizing and believing that the issues of natural resource management were first and foremost the most important problems facing the country*" (CEPA, no date). Their concern was not only to protect Cambodia's natural environment, but also, as their name suggests, to preserve its culture, with a vision for Cambodia to become:

*"An independent society that preserves its culture and protects its environment while collaborating with partners, government agencies, researchers and international communities to meet its needs without compromising its abilities to meet the needs of*

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<sup>1</sup> See an outline of CEPA's history on their website <http://www.cepa-cambodia.org/>

*future generation in terms of their environmental, social and economic stability and security”*(CEPA No date).

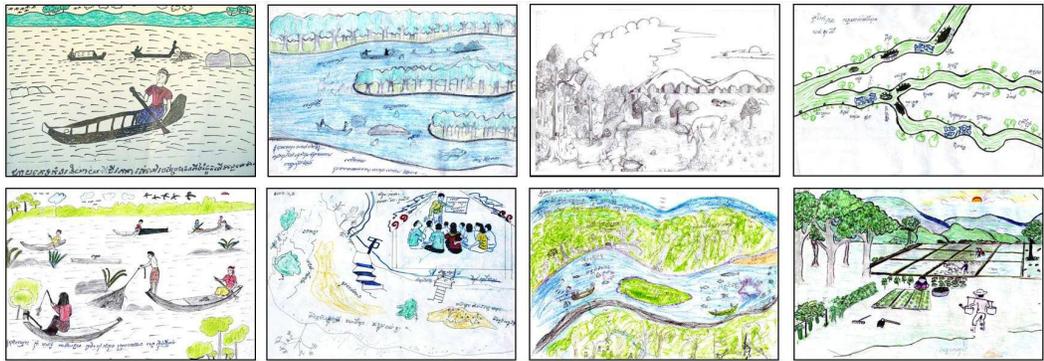
This is a vision of sustainable development echoing the infamous Bruntland definition, though emphasizing preservation, protection, stability and security as opposed to ideas of technological change and economic growth. It is a normative understanding of sustainable development concerned with the interlinked goals of environmental protection and cultural preservation. In the context of CEPA’s work among the different communities in Stung Treng; made up of ethnically diverse populations with distinct cultural backgrounds (see Chapter 4), it is difficult to be certain what exactly is meant by ‘culture’. Indeed, CEPA variously link culture to the specific interests of ‘indigenous peoples’ and ‘ethnic minorities’ and with society as a whole. What is emphasised throughout is a link with ‘tradition’ and the notion of a ‘traditional’ rural livelihood; a generic and utopian subsistence livelihood which is dependent on the surrounding environment, but also in a harmonious balance with it. This is illustrated in CEPA’s poster (Figure 12), showing three idyllic scenes<sup>2</sup> in which natural resources abound; harvested by local communities and captured on camera by canoe travelling visitors. For CEPA sustainable development is about sustaining tradition, or culture in balance with the environment; sustaining the ‘*Happy Community*’ (Figure 12). At the same time they also concede that culture, must be “*accepting (of) development through the practice of sustainable methods to conserve their natural resources*” (CEPA, no date); in other words, environmental protection has precedence over cultural preservation.

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<sup>2</sup> Referring to the three scenes enclosed in circles on the right-hand side of the poster.



**ការផ្តល់សិទ្ធិ និងការចូលរួមសំរេចចិត្តរបស់សហគមន៍មូលដ្ឋានក្នុងការអភិរក្ស អតិថិជ្ជន៍ និងការគ្រប់គ្រងធនធានធម្មជាតិ នាំឱ្យមានសមភាព សមធម៌ និងយុត្តិធម៌សង្គម**



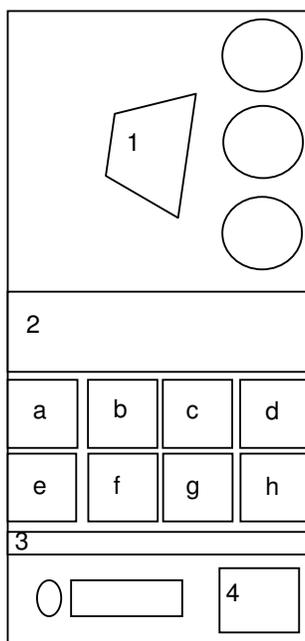
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**សហគមន៍បរិស្ថាន និងបច្ចេកវិទ្យា**  
**CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION**  
 ©2007

eKaledArbs'smaKmEfrkBabrisSan  
 nigvb,Fm'  
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Figure 12: A poster raising awareness of CEPA's work

**Poster Translation:**



- 1 Happy Community
  - The use of participatory management and planning for natural resources use
  - Participatory development
  - Gender equity and equality
  - Sustainable livelihoods
- 2 Giving rights and participatory decision making to local communities in conservation, development and natural resource management provides equality, equity and social justice
- 3 The pictures show the importance of natural resources to the survival of the community. Drawn by local communities in Stung Treng province
- 4 The goal of CEPA: to ensure the conservation and protection of the environment and the equal and equitable use of natural resources in the Kingdom of Cambodia towards balanced development between environment, society and economy

Significantly, CEPA’s understanding of sustainable development is also based around ideals of participatory governance where diverse local people and a range of external agencies or institutions collaborate to achieve a collective vision. As it appears in CEPA’s poster, a ‘*Happy Community*’ will be facilitated by external actors who will bring together a varied community of men and women from different ethnic backgrounds along with their Buddhist leaders. The scene painted and repeated in one of the pictures drawn by local people (see f, Figure 12), suggests that the process is a form of open-air classroom, where local people are being ‘taught’ about the things that matter in achieving their future happiness, things like; participation, gender equality and sustainable livelihoods. As implied in the poster’s text, CEPA’s work is about ‘giving’ local communities their rights, specifically their rights to participate in decisions concerning development, conservation and natural resource management. It is through participation that ideals of equality and social justice are met which underpin the ‘*Happy Community*’ and CEPA’s vision of preserving ‘traditional’ livelihoods and the environment.

Created by the organisation's founders, CEPA's agenda of sustainable development is a vision for the whole country and yet at the same it is a vision aligned to the interests of local people and their traditional livelihoods. It is then an agenda which resonates with alternative and in part with hegemonic notions of development. It is alternative in positioning itself as an agenda to help local people assert their rights to preserve their 'traditional' way of life, or culture and the environment this depends on. And yet at the same it is time hegemonic; concerned with ideals determined by CEPA and given, or taught to local people. This coexistence of seemingly contradictory interpretations of sustainable development is replicated further within the context of CEPA's community fishery project.

The community fishery project is just one of a number of different projects through which CEPA operationalise their vision of sustainable development. Together with a community forestry project, the community fishery project forms part of a sustainable livelihoods programme. It is a predominantly field-based project run by two staff based in CEPA's Stung Treng office and operating in 17 villages along the Mekong River, within the Stung Treng Ramsar reserve. According to CEPA's website the objectives of its community fishery project are focussed on:

*"Establishing community fishery along the Mekong River; building capacity of leaders and fishery communities in fishery resource management; and empowering women in decision- making and providing income generating activities"* (CEPA, no date)<sup>3</sup>.

And in turn, these are intended to contribute towards the goal of CEPA's sustainable livelihoods programme, to:

*"Improve individual and group capacities of people to use and manage fishery, forestry and land resources characterized by equality, equity and sustainability"* (CEPA, no date).

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<sup>3</sup> In some ways these objectives are slightly surprising, particularly the objective for women's empowerment and income generating activities, which I gained no awareness of during my time working with the project. And interestingly they are quite different from those listed by project staff as: "1) the community fishery know how to use natural resources sustainably; 2) people know how to maintain natural resources and have increased skills through training; 3) community fishery bylaws are recognised by the government".

Through the practical objectives of the community fishery project, CEPA's vision of sustainable development is linked to the sustainable use and management of fishery resources, to be achieved by empowering local people to assert their rights. These are rights which, according to the assistant manager of the community fishery project, exist apart from the project, as fundamental and universal rights, and which are also given, or established, by the project. They include the traditional rights of people to access fishery resources, or their *'environmental rights ... concerned with the right for people to access natural resources to feed their livelihoods ... linked to their human rights to exist'*. They also include the right to manage fishery resources instituted through the establishment of a community fishery. Critically, the project is based on the assumption that by gaining rights to manage the fishery resources, local people will be able to protect their existing entitlements to access the fishery resource and therefore to sustain their livelihood.

Central to CEPA's concern for local rights is empowerment, which is interpreted in a number of different ways. On the one hand, empowerment is presented as a means to an end; a means of enabling people to access rights to fishery management, to protect, or conserve fishery resources. As CEPA's director highlights: *"if no empowerment, no conservation either ... because the principle of conservation is encouraging people to have ownership of a specific area (of natural resources)"*. In other words, CEPA assume that goals of environmental protection or conservation will be achieved when local people are empowered with a sense of responsibility for the management of natural resources. Critically, CEPA's director also argues that conservation is not simply CEPA's vision, but one shared and initiated by local people: *"the purpose of the people is conservation ... the conservation is in their mind, but the problem is there that they have no power to do, to make decision on the process of conservation"*.

Moreover, CEPA's director also asserts that empowerment for conservation will also lead to economic empowerment: *"by empowering local people to access their rights to control natural resources ... the fish stock can increase and they can get more money from this to improve livelihoods"*. Or as the project's assistant manager explains: *"when the community fishery goes well there is sustainability and people can catch fish to eat and sell and they don't have to spend money buying fish from outside"*. Thus, CEPA

assume that conserving fish through local management, will lead to increasing fish stocks, a sustainable fishery and as a result livelihood sustainability and improvement.

On the other hand, CEPA also interpret processes of empowerment in community fisheries as an end in themselves. In this way, empowerment is not confined to outcomes of natural resource management, conservation or economic development, but affects local people's sense of freedom within society more generally. As CEPA's director highlights, below, empowerment is concerned with freeing people from prevailing cultures of 'fear', enabling them to "hold the government to account" and so contribute to "developing a civil democracy":

*"... if people are empowered by the community fishery it can also help them to be empowered to tackle other problems. If people understand and have access to information they can participate to solve problems and help society and development. Empowerment is linked to wider social development ... If the people have enough power ... people can move forward, to you know sustainable development ... if the people have no rights and power then you cannot have sustainability as well because in some areas people are still living in what we call an atmosphere of fear ... CEPA tries to empower stakeholders to escape from fear and if this can happen society can progress".*

Both as a means to an end and an end in itself, empowerment through community fisheries represents a crucial mechanism of CEPA's sustainable development agenda. Overwhelmingly this emerges in support of an alternative agenda, establishing and supporting local people's rights to protect their natural resources and so bring about their political, social and economic freedom. Thus, according to CEPA they are empowering local people to achieve what they already desire; the community fishery project is a reflection, or response to local people's interests and not a dominating order established, given or taught, by CEPA, as the images depicted in their poster (Figure 12) seemed to suggest.

### **Project rationale: a natural resource imaginary**

To further understand this rationalization of the community fishery project it helps to place it within the context of the particular histories of relations with the environment

from which it came about, to understand the project's 'natural resource imaginaries'<sup>4</sup>. This moves beyond CEPA's formal and static statements, revealing an interpretation of the project's agenda based on the situated and dynamic circumstances in which it was produced. From its beginning the project has been based within the Stung Treng Ramsar reserve, a stretch of the Mekong river and riverbank officially recognised by the international Ramsar Convention and by the Ministry of Environment for its significance in terms of wetland habitat and biodiversity and for its importance in providing natural resources which benefit the local communities<sup>5</sup>. In addition the Ramsar area is also valued as a productive fishery and is protected from large-scale commercial fishing by the Fisheries Law, which only permits medium and small-scale fishing to take place (see Box 4). However, despite the area's designation and protection, the fishery resources within the reserve are widely perceived to be under threat and in decline. The principal cause of this decline as explained by CEPA's provincial office manager is attributed to the use of illegal fishing gear, resulting in over-fishing:

*"The issues in that area was the use of dynamite fishing and blocking the streams. During the flood time the fish go upstream but during the falling water they block the stream. People were also using the gill net to enclose the area where they fish ... sometimes the community see that the illegal activities catch more fish so the local people also want to improve their life, so they do the illegal activity"*.

Many of the illegal fishing methods were tied to the interests of traders, or 'middlemen' who provided fishing gear and support to fishers in order to access fish for export to Laos. In addition, the provincial, district and local authorities, provincial fisheries office and armed forces were also implicated in the illegal fishing; providing rights and protection to traders in exchange for 'benefits'. According to the project's assistant

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<sup>4</sup> Here I make use of the concept of 'environmental imaginaries' introduced in Chapter 2, referring to Watts and Peet's (1996) theory of liberation ecology and the idea of a situated environmental knowledge constructed through "*the history of social relations to a particular environment*" (p263). A concept, which is perhaps more aptly labelled 'natural resource imaginaries' given the emphasis here on the environment as a livelihood resource. It is then a concept which is concerned with the way in which the project is positioned and shaped by changing natural resources as well as people's relations to those resources.

<sup>5</sup> According to Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme the wetland area provides benefits such as: "*wood as fuel for cooking and heating; plants and wildlife as food and traditional medicines, timber for housing, furniture and ornaments; and basic foods such as rice, fish, meat, fruit and vegetables*". Moreover, "*many of these resources also provide the only opportunity for villagers to obtain a cash income*" (Try and Chambers 2006).

manager, the use of illegal large scale bamboo fences to block river channels was a right that traders were paying the provincial fisheries office to access, as he explains:

*“The provincial fisheries office rented a river channel to a trader and the trader blocked the channel with a bamboo fence and the people could not catch fish. This created a dispute between the community and the trader and the provincial fisheries office. If the provincial fisheries office opened the channel they would lose money from the trader. The provincial fisheries office rent channels in Stung Treng because there are no fishing lots. Now the channel is not blocked, since the reform of the fishery”.*

While illegal fishing methods were viewed as a popular way to catch a lot of fish and improve people’s livelihoods, particular types of illegal fishing were also seen by local people as a threat to their livelihoods, resulting in conflicts between local fishers, traders and the fishery authority. So it was that CEPA’s community fishery project emerged in 1997; before the fishery sector reform and mainstreaming of community fisheries (see Chapter 4). It came about then in response to the perceived fishery decline due to illegal fishing, and in response to the conflict that had arisen. In some ways the conflict appears to have been an entry point for the project, an opportunity to empower local people to protect their rights to use the fishery and force the provincial fishery office and traders to stop illegally obstructing access to fishery resources. But the project was not limited to addressing the large scale channel blocking activities, it aimed to empower local people to stop all types of illegal fishing in order to reverse the perceived decline in the fishery. This included the use of illegal gears which CEPA also recognised had become popular among some local people as a means to improve their livelihoods, but which CEPA considered remained a threat to the fishery resource.

The project’s rationale or ‘natural resource imaginary’ reveals an agenda set within global and national concerns for the environment and wetland biodiversity and at the same time tied to the notion of empowering local people to protect their rights to access the fishery and sustain their livelihood. It connects once more with ideals of protecting ‘traditional’ livelihoods; based on the premise that legal fishing gears are ‘traditional’ and therefore sustainable, while illegal fishing gears are non-traditional, modern, destructive and unsustainable, causing the fishery to decline and ‘traditional’ livelihoods to become impoverished. In this way, sustainability is defined by the legality of material

fishing practices (as defined by the Fisheries Law (Box 4)), which assumes that sustainability of the fishery and therefore people's livelihoods is dependent on stopping illegal fishing. Empowering local rights to sustain 'traditional' livelihoods is then tied to a legal agenda determined by the state, such that local people are empowered, or given the right to help enforce the law. Sustainable development is a mainstream agenda of the state, yet in the context of a failed governance regime, it is also an alternative agenda supporting local interests and empowering local people to stand up to government corruption.

From the perspective of CEPA's community fishery project objectives and rationale, sustainable development is primarily a local agenda. It emerges as a means of supporting the assumed common interests and rights of local people; their desire for conservation, as well as their desire and right to stop illegal, or non-traditional, fishing practices, to protect their access to the fishery and secure and improve their 'traditional' livelihoods. Sustainable development is a process of asserting local interests in the context of degrading natural resources and a corrupt government, which is both failing to manage those resources and obstructing local access to them. At the same time, it is also a process of aligning local interests with a legal framework as set out by the government. A framework dictating the legality of material fishing practices and defining the parameters of sustainability. Empowerment as a mechanism for achieving sustainability is then both a means to confront the government's failure and to ensure law enforcement in support of local livelihoods. This is a perspective, or ordering of sustainable development which is clearly based on a number of critical simplifications, not least relating to the causes of fishery decline, the parameters of sustainability and the consensus of local interests. An ordering where illegal fishing is foregrounded as the principle cause of declining access to the fishery, while legal fishing is presented as traditional and therefore the basis for a sustainable fisheries and sustainable livelihoods. At the same time, alternative causes of the fishery decline<sup>6</sup> and the acknowledged popularity of illegal fishing methods as a means of improving livelihoods are silenced.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Chief and Vice Chief of the Provincial Fisheries Department in Stung Treng, the data relating to fish stocks makes it hard to definitively say whether the fishery resources are in decline, through they do acknowledge that it is likely that access to the fishery has reduced. However, they also assert that this is not simply a result of illegal fishing, but may also be attributed to increasing numbers of people fishing, as well as natural changes in flooding in the Mekong river and changing water levels due to dam construction upstream. They also suggest that in the future negative impacts on the fishery as a result of dams and the possibility of increasing pollution from industrial development, are likely to increase.

#### Box 4: Fishing gear and the Fisheries Law

According to the Fisheries Law (Fisheries Administration 2007), fishing practice in Cambodia is classified into three types of fishing gears:

- 1) Small-scale fishing gears – also known as family-scale fishing gears, these are for subsistence purposes only and do not require a license.
- 2) Middle-scale fishing gears – these require a license to be operated.
- 3) Large-scale (industrial) fishing gears – these also require a license to be operated.

The use of each type of fishing gear is restricted to particular areas and periods of the year, with levels of control increasing as the scale of gear increases. However, the distinction made between small and medium-scale gear is not always clear as fish abundance has changed and increasing amounts of gear are required to support subsistence levels of fishing. In addition to the restrictions applied to the three categories of fishing gears, the following fishing gears are absolutely prohibited according to Article 20 of the Fisheries Law (Fisheries Administration 2007):

- 1) Electrocuting devices, explosive stuffs, or all kinds of poisons.
- 2) All means of pumping, bailing, drying any part of fishery domain, which causes disaster to the fishery resources.
- 3) Brush park, *Samras*<sup>a</sup> or other devices to attract fish and other aquatic animals.
- 4) Spear fishing gears, *Chhbok*<sup>b</sup>, *Sang*<sup>b</sup>, *Snor*<sup>b</sup> with projected lamp.
- 5) Fixed net or all kind of *boa*<sup>c</sup> nets.
- 6) Net or all kind of seine with mesh size of less than 1.5 centimeters in inland fishery domain.
- 7) All kind of net with mesh size bigger than 15 centimeters in inland fishery domain.
- 8) Pair trawler or encircling net with attractive illuminated lamp for fish concentration.
- 9) Fishing gears made of mosquito net in inland fisheries.
- 10) All kind of trawling in the freshwater, and mechanized push net (*Chhip Yun*).
- 11) All kind of bamboo fence with mesh size of less than 1.5 centimeters.
- 12) All kind of transversal string and any measure which make fish escape.
- 13) Dam with all kind of fishing gears.
- 14) All kind of modern fishing gears; newly invented fishing gears or fishing practices leading to the destruction of fish, fishery resources and fishery eco-system, or which are not listed in the proclamation of the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Restrictions to fishing gear are applied where the gear is considered to be destructive to the fishery resources and therefore unsustainable. Fishing gears which are permitted are those considered sustainable, which are also typically viewed as ‘traditional’ gears.

Restrictions to fishing gears as outlined in the Fisheries Law apply to the whole country and all fishing areas. But for each community fishery it is necessary to separately list which fishing gears are legal and which are prohibited in the by-laws for the community fishing area for the fishery to be sustainable. This process of creating separate community fishery by-laws is often represented as being led by the community themselves, allowing the community to select the ‘traditional’ fishing gears which they know to be sustainable. However, community fishery by-laws must ultimately reflect the Fisheries Law and any deviation will not gain approval from the Provincial Fisheries Department, as the vice chief of the provincial fisheries office in Stung Treng explains:

*“We discuss with the community fishery members for ideas of the fishing gears that they are allowed or not allowed to use. But if people suggest using gear that is different from the Fishery Law we don’t allow them to use this. People demand too much, they want to use 100 metres of set net and 300 fishing hooks, but the law does not allow this. The fishing gear and mesh size that fishers are allowed to use depends on the Fisheries Law”*

<sup>a</sup> *Samras* are defined as stumps, trunks and branches of a tree and other equipment which fishers use in order to form a habitat to attract fish.

<sup>b</sup> *Chhbok* is a three-pronged harpoon, *Sang* is a fork harpoon, *Snor* is a simple spear.

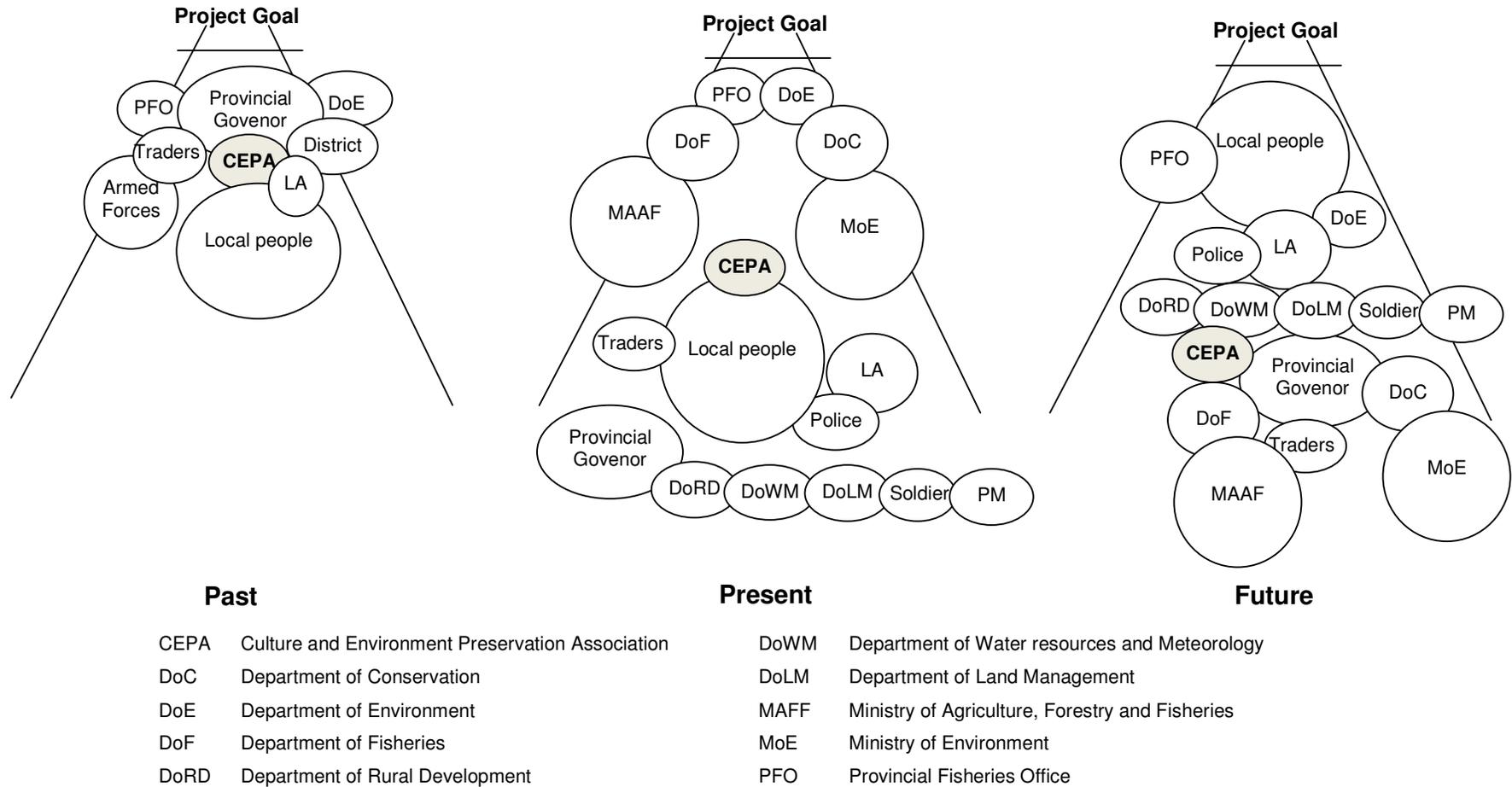
<sup>c</sup> *Boa* is a type of fish

### **Project relations and practices: a wider actor network**

In practice CEPA's interpretation of sustainable development is not located or produced singularly through its own vision and project objectives, or 'natural resource imaginary', but also through relations and practices within a wider network of actors. CEPA staff represented these different relations surrounding the community fishery project in the following diagrams, or institutional maps (Figure 13), indicating different actor's influence on CEPA's vision since the project began, as well as what influence they might have in the future. As expected, CEPA<sup>7</sup> clearly locate themselves linked to local people, both in the past and present, emphasising their support for an alternative and locally centred vision of sustainable development and their role in empowering local people to achieve this goal. Reflecting CEPA's ideals of empowerment, local people are also positioned as playing a central role in controlling the project's agenda in the future, while CEPA and other actors withdraw from their positions of influence. However, in spite of this vision for the future, CEPA staff also recognise government institutions as having the most influence over the project's agenda in the past and present. In the past, as described above, this influence was principally an obstruction to CEPA's ideals of sustainable development, and yet at the same time government legislation formed the basis for defining sustainability. In the present, as a result of the fishery sector reform the government has an official mandate to support sustainable development through community fisheries. Thus, it not only defines the legality of sustainability, but also the framework which structures local rights to access and manage the fishery resources.

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<sup>7</sup> Reference to CEPA here, does not intend to assign agency to the organisation as a whole, but refers to the views of the two CEPA staff who participated in the reflection workshop (see Chapter 5) and who articulated their ideas through the production, presentation and discussion of the institutional maps shown in Figure 13.



**Figure 13: Mapping the changing influences and relations of actors involved in CEPA’s community fishery project<sup>8</sup>**

<sup>8</sup> The diagrams were created during a reflection workshop (see Chapter 5) by two staff from CEPA’s Stung Treng and Phnom Penh offices, who were asked based on their practical experiences of implementing the community fishery project, to map out their joint perspective on the past, present and possible future relations between CEPA and other actors involved in the project and the relative influence of different actors on the projects’ overall goal. In each case, the size of each group of actors is intended to represent the relative numbers of people involved, while the distance between groups represents the relative closeness of the relationship, and the distance to the top of the triangle represents the relative influence on achieving the project goal.

It is through the government's legal framework, set out in the community fishery subdecree (see Box 2, Chapter 4) and fisheries law, that the government has the ultimate authority to approve community fishery activities, providing them with timebound official sanction, which is subject to renewal at the government's discretion. CEPA must now seek official recognition from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the provincial fisheries office for the 17 community fisheries it has established through the project. Moreover, the community fishery subdecree and more recently issued government guidelines<sup>9</sup> also specify the rights and duties, internal regulations and by-laws of the local committees, clearly delineating the practices and relations of community fishery committees with government. For local people their rights are then confined to informing people about fishery laws, patrolling their community fishery area and stopping illegal fishers in collaboration with the authorities<sup>10</sup>.

CEPA's community fishery project and broader ideals of sustainable development through social and political empowerment are clearly contained within the government's legislative order. And yet the government states that the community fishery is also concerned with "*empowering local communities ...(to) participate directly, actively and equitably in fishery plans, programs and management*" (RGC 2004b). However, in practice its interpretations of empowerment are quite different from CEPA's. Indeed, staff of CEPA's community fishery project acknowledge that empowerment is not a concept which provincial government actors are happy with, explaining:

*"Empowerment, the word has a big impact, it is a sensitive word among the government people. In Khmer empowerment is a sensitive word related to power, if we transfer power to other people then they can do anything and the government will not be able to go to their area, they will not listen to the government anymore"*.

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<sup>9</sup> The government guidelines for community fisheries remained in a consultation phase during my research, but were finally completed and approved during 2007

<sup>10</sup> Local committees have rights in the law to stop illegal fishers, however, it is the local authorities who must take the evidence and detain the offender, while only a fisheries officer has the right to actually deal with the offense in accordance with the law.

For the government, the idea of empowerment is associated with a loss of authority and control, undermining their position. When asked directly provincial government actors confirmed this unease, one saying:

*“... the government cannot provide power to them (the community fishery) because they are not the government officials, the government is afraid that the community will use the power in the wrong way, because they don't understand about the law well”.*

A view confirmed by another, stating:

*“To say empowerment is not right. Empowerment should be that the people implement the power that is provided in the law. It means people respect the bylaws ... So the local people have been given power by the government ... but these rights have not been provided absolutely to the people ... the people can't do anything they want freely”.*

The government's interpretation of empowerment spares no room for CEPA's ideals of social or political freedom. Empowerment is clearly seen as a means to an end, where both means and end are defined by government through the law. Aware of the government's sensitivity and conscious of its ultimate authority over community fishery practice, CEPA staff in Stung Treng limit their reference to broader agendas of empowerment: *“we only say that we provide legal rights in natural resource management, we cannot say that we empower because this has a strong meaning, it is a sensitive word for the government”.* Moreover, they also highlight that one of the functions of the community fishery project is to work for the government, to help the government enforce its legal framework, conforming to government interpretations, as explained by the assistant project manager:

*“The community fishery is important for the provincial fishery office because they only have a few staff and they cannot monitor or see everywhere, so by establishing the community fishery the community can be the eyes and the nose of the provincial fishery office”.*

But though CEPA's provincial staff appear to concede to the influence of government and their restricted notions of empowerment, at a national level CEPA's director

attempts to overcome such conformity, disliking the controlling influence of high level officials. Instead, the director attempts to confront those in authority, often making use of people in superior positions, or “*bringing in*” people with influence to induce changes in the hierarchy beneath them. As the example below illustrates, frustrated with interference from the provincial governor’s office, CEPA’s director attempts to change the situation by drawing on the external influence of the Swedish embassy during a trip to Stung Treng:

*“In Stung Treng the provincial governor want the commune council to inform them of every activity and ask for permission. The governor also wants CEPA to operate in this way ....I will be going to Stung Treng with the Swedish embassy to address this issue because the governor is wanting to control everything. The governor office is not happy with CEPA because we keep bringing up the issues to wider attention”.*

At the same time, CEPA’s provincial staff also encourage local people themselves to speak out against the government’s influence, resulting in a demonstration against the provincial fishery office in Stung Treng, which, as described by the project staff, the government suspected CEPA had set up:

*“CEPA has orientated people to understand who they can go to complain and to get help when they have problems about accessing natural resources. Now community fishery members understand a lot about their rights. This understanding made them have a demonstration about natural resource abuse to the provincial fishery office. Then the provincial fishery office called CEPA about the fishery demonstration to clarify whether CEPA is behind the demonstration”.*

CEPA’s relations with government tell of a tense coexistence of different interpretations of empowerment as a strategy for sustainable development. A tension between notions of empowerment as an end in itself and as a means to assert alternative ideals of sustainable development led by local interests and rights and yet simultaneously defined through government legislation, ultimately becoming an instrumental process of gaining local support for the government’s agenda. In practice, CEPA concedes to the government’s influence; relying on the government’s legal framework to define sustainability and local people’s rights. Yet at the same time, CEPA recognise that the

government frustrates wider ideals of empowerment, as the director states: “*all the rules are set by the government and the community has to follow*”, thus the “*balance of power*” remains with the fishery department and not with local people. And so CEPA also attempt to resist government influences using pressure from above and below to assert its own autonomy and its own ideals.

Relations with government play an important part in influencing the agenda of sustainable development as it is implemented through the practices of CEPA’s community fishery project. However, they are not the only institutional actors affecting project practices. Indeed, the project’s donor, who is conspicuously absent from CEPA’s representations of project relations (Figure 13)<sup>11</sup> also plays a significant role. For without donor funding the project would not exist. Indeed, all of CEPA’s work relies on external donor funding mainly from international donors<sup>12</sup>, including Oxfam Great Britain<sup>13</sup> who is the principal funder of the community fishery project. Though Oxfam GB are not involved in the everyday running of the project, they still maintain a “*semi-operational*” engagement, providing funds and technical support. The community fishery project is part of Oxfam GB’s fisheries programme, which in turn is part of a wider livelihoods programme with specific goals, objectives and outcomes (Box 5). As the fisheries programme manager at Oxfam GB explains “*the fisheries programme needs to demonstrate that it contributes to wider strategies of Oxfam GB*” decided on by “*higher levels*” in Cambodia and the UK<sup>14</sup>. CEPA’s project therefore must contribute to agendas established by Oxfam GB beyond those of the fisheries programme, and beyond its offices in Cambodia.

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<sup>11</sup> It may be that their absence relates to the particular experiences of the staff creating the diagrams. However, it is also likely to be a reflection of the nature of relations between CEPA and Oxfam GB.

<sup>12</sup> International donors supporting CEPA’s work include: Forum Syd; Mcknight Foundation; Oxfam America, Oxfam Great Britain; and Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.

<sup>13</sup> In Cambodia Oxfam International is represented by a number of separate country offices, including Oxfam GB, Oxfam US, Oxfam Australia, Oxfam Netherlands, Oxfam Hong Kong.

<sup>14</sup> While it is acknowledged that Oxfam GB’s wider strategic objectives have an influence in structuring the projects which they choose to fund, the detail of Oxfam GB’s interests beyond the fisheries programme based in its office in Phnom Penh were not the focus of this research.

In many ways, the specifics of Oxfam GB’s project and programmes (Box 5) are similar to CEPA’s. It focuses, like CEPA, on empowering local people to assert their entitlement to a sustainable livelihood by establishing their rights to manage fishery resources, emphasising, in Oxfam GB’s case, the rights of women and the poor. Similarly, it interprets such empowerment as a means of improving fish catches and therefore livelihoods, framed within the structures of government legislation for community fisheries. On paper Oxfam GB’s interests reinforce CEPA’s alternative local agenda for sustainable development. Yet in practice it appears to be less straightforward.

In practice, during the early stages of CEPA’s community fishery project, before the government’s legal framework for community fisheries had been instituted, CEPA followed guidelines produced by Oxfam GB to establish each of its 17 community fisheries<sup>15</sup>. This involved a six stage process, which began with a participatory assessment, to identify the problems relating to the local natural resources, and was followed by an awareness raising campaign, aiming to provide information from the research, highlighting issues affecting natural resources and encouraging local people to support the project. As the project staff explain, through awareness raising

the project wanted “*to raise commitment about joining the community fishery. By explaining about why the natural resources are declining and by showing videos and posters they can raise concern and villagers worry about the situation*”. Once the

**Box 5: Oxfam GB programme goals, objectives and outcomes**

*Sustainable Livelihoods Project goal:*  
Poor communities, especially women exercise their rights to a sustainable livelihood by achieving food and income security.

*Fisheries Programme objectives:*

- 1) Community fisheries facilitated by Oxfam partners are empowered and get official recognition from Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
- 2) Poor fishers sustainably increase their catch and are able to add value through processing

*Expected outcomes of community fisheries:*

- 1) Community fishery members, including men and women, are empowered to claim their rights
- 2) At least 10 community fisheries get official recognition from Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and communities are able to manage fishery resources
- 3) Poor fishers have increased their fish catch in sustainable ways
- 4) Poor fishers are able to process fish and aquatic resources to add more value to their products

(Oxfam GB 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Since the community fishery project began, CEPA have established community fisheries in 17 villages along the Mekong River. Of these 9 were established in 1997 as pilot community fishery, while the remaining 8 were established in 2000. They were all established before, or at the outset of the fishery sector reform and before the government’s community fishery subdecree was developed or formerly approved.

project gained the villagers support, CEPA then set about organising the community fishery in a manner not unlike the process currently outlined in the government's legal framework.

So in practice, guided by Oxfam GB, it appears that CEPA's community fishery project is far from being a process of responding to and empowering existing local interests in conservation, as CEPA's director had suggested. Instead it is as CEPA's poster (Figure 12) illustrates; a process of teaching, or persuading local people of the importance of natural resources and conservation, of co-opting local people on a predetermined six stage pathway to community fisheries. It is an instrumental process determined by an external donor and implemented by CEPA. Quite a contradiction to the alternative locally initiated ideals presented by CEPA.

Oxfam GB's influence over the practical implementation of CEPA's community fishery project has not just been limited to guiding their establishment. Indeed, Oxfam GB's fisheries programme manager frequently expressed his desire to see particular interests manifest within CEPA's project, as well as the other partner projects within the fisheries programme:

*".. we are promoting for the community fishery to co-operate closely with the village chief and the commune council and the commune police ... we are trying to get the community fisheries to identify conservation areas ... we try to mainstream gender in all activities and programmes ... we try to get women involved in community fisheries and in savings groups<sup>16</sup> ... we have encouraged community fishery committee families to engage in the savings groups ... in the future I hope to see businesses develop in the community fishery villages, I am interested in developing cooperative stores selling supplies".*

For Oxfam GB's fisheries programme manager, achieving sustainable development through community fisheries depends on more than empowering local people to enforce government legislation, it demands additional development activities. As such,

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<sup>16</sup> Savings groups are small local groups facilitated by NGOs but ultimately run by members of the group which enable members to make small savings and give them the opportunity to access small loans. There are many different types of savings groups and though it was not clear what type of group Oxfam GB's fishery programme manager was referring to, such groups had been set up with other NGO partners as part of the fisheries programme.

sustainable development cannot be based solely on a legal definition of sustainability, or on the simplification that sustainable livelihoods will be an outcome of a sustainable fishery. Rather, Oxfam GB's fisheries programme manager acknowledges that legal, or 'traditional' fishing gears, which require more effort and catch less fish than illegal or 'modern' gear, have limited potential to support sustainable livelihoods. Thus, while the legality of sustainability is not totally abandoned, Oxfam GB have introduced a new ordering of sustainable development; one which foregrounds, "*integrated livelihood development*", or development activities which might provide an alternative to fishing (e.g. through savings groups, as mentioned above), or might add value to existing fishing activities (e.g. through enhancing post-harvest fish processing, as stated in Oxfam GB's expected outcomes (Box 5)). In part this emphasis also emerges within CEPA's understanding, as one objective of the community fishery project is to "*provide income generating activities*". However, in practice this agenda remains in the background with little evidence that anything has been done to promote it. Arguably it has been CEPA's lack of attention to this aspect of Oxfam GB's agenda which has jeopardised the project's funding, as Oxfam GB have temporarily<sup>17</sup> ceased supporting the project; reorienting its fisheries programme around integrated livelihood development and away from a focus on sustainability as defined through the legalities of community fisheries (Yos 2008 personal communication). Thus, Oxfam GB clearly demonstrate the practical limitations of CEPA's alternative local agenda for sustainable development, which is ultimately controlled by an external donor and its own priorities.

As I have introduced CEPA and its community fishery project, what has become apparent is the coexistence of overlapping and also contradicting interpretations of sustainable development. Multiple orderings which are produced through CEPA's overall vision, but also through the formal objectives of the community fishery project and how this is shaped in different ways through a historically situated 'natural resource imaginary' and through the perspectives of CEPA staff and their relations and practices within a wider network of actors. What surfaces from these different locations are interpretations of sustainable development which are simultaneously alternative and instrumental.

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<sup>17</sup> At the time of writing, Oxfam GB's funding to CEPA's community fishery project had ceased and the project staff in CEPA had left their posts. There was some indication that funding would be available again in January 2009, however this would focus on self help groups and not the community fishery per se.

From CEPA's perspective, reinforced by Oxfam GB, sustainable development is an alternative agenda, associated with ideals of empowering local people's rights to control or manage their fishery resources in support of their desire for, and entitlement to, sustain a 'traditional' livelihood. This is an agenda which is tied to the specific context of an area recognised internationally for its importance in terms of biodiversity and where natural resources are also acknowledged to be a critical asset for local people's livelihoods. Moreover, it has emerged from the widespread opinion that fishery resources in these areas are declining and under threat, as a result of destructive, unsustainable and illegal fishing practices. And it has taken shape in response to a situation of conflict between local people, a corrupt government and failed fisheries management regime. So it is through this 'natural resource imaginary' that CEPA's vision of sustainable development was established in support of the local and against the dominance of government and their obstruction of people's rights. This is a vision which relies on critical assumptions, or simplifications; that stopping illegal fishing will lead to a sustainable fishery and therefore sustainable livelihoods, that local people want to protect the fishery resources and their 'traditional' and sustainable fishery practices, and that they want to assume responsibility for doing so.

However, this alternative veneer of CEPA's ideals are disrupted once relations surrounding CEPA's community fishery project are examined; exposing instrumental practices. These are practices of establishing community fisheries by teaching, or persuading local people to value fishery protection through 'traditional' livelihoods, as opposed to responding to their own interests. They are also practices of empowering local rights to sustainability, where sustainability is based on the legality of fishing practices, as defined by the government; where rights have become strictly structured through the government's fishery sector reforms. Thus they are practices ultimately determined by the priorities of an external donor. So it is that alternative agendas of sustainable development coexist and partially connect with a contradictory reality where the government regulate CEPA's emancipatory ideals of empowerment and the donor controls the agenda's very existence.

## ***The Ministry of Environment's PMCR project***

In contrast to CEPA's community fishery project, the Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) project in Koh Kong is based within the government, operating as a project within the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and its Departments of Environmental Education and Dissemination, and Nature Conservation and Protection. MoE is a relatively young government ministry, having only been established since the end of 1993 following the United Nations sponsored elections in the same year. According to its strategic plan (2004-2008) the MoE is responsible for "*promoting environmental protection and conservation of natural resources throughout the Kingdom, thus contributing to improving environmental quality, public welfare, national culture and the economy*" (RGC 2003, p13).

For the MoE, the goal of environmental sustainability is presented as a critical part of the government's wider mandates of poverty reduction and economic development. Moreover, according to the Minister "*Cambodian people want to live in a better environment*" (RGC 2003, p4) which contributes to their health, welfare and security. The importance of the environment is recognized not only in terms of its direct utilitarian value to livelihoods and the national economy, but also in terms of its significance as a symbol of national identity<sup>18</sup>, in contributing to indirect values of ecosystem services<sup>19</sup> and the intrinsic values of regionally and globally significant habitats and biodiversity, recognized by international treaties and conventions<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, the ministry highlights the escalating threats to these environmental values due to increasing demands from a growing population and the impacts of economic development, which are both rapidly extracting and converting the countries natural resources, resulting in their degradation. The ministry also recognises poverty as an "*unavoidable*" driver of environmental degradation, as the poor are forced to overexploit the natural resources and simultaneously suffer the consequences of a degraded environment (RGC 2003).

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<sup>18</sup> In the government's first National Environmental Action Plan, the Tonle Sap lake is presented as an important symbol of national identity supported by the Minister of Environment Dr. Mok Mareth, who described the lake as the "*heart and soul of the people of Cambodia*" (RGC1998, p15).

<sup>19</sup> For example, the role of mangrove forest ecosystems as a fish nursery habitat supporting coastal fisheries

<sup>20</sup> The MoE draws attention to its success in terms of bringing the country into membership of a number of international environmental conventions, including; Biodiversity Convention, Climate Change Convention, Desertification Convention, Stockholm Convention, RAMSAR Convention, and CITES Convention.

The role of MoE is then to promote the sustainable management of the country's natural resources, through the "*development and implementation of policies, plans and legal instruments*" (RGC 2003, p13). In line with the government's decentralization agenda, this means encouraging public participation and creating institutional arrangements for local people to engage in natural resource management. It also means the ministry is responsible for raising awareness of environmental values and the need for environmental protection and management, and coordinating its work with national and international institutions from public and private sectors and civil society.

MoE's vision is clearly positioned within a conventional policy framework and though linked with a general notion of sustainable development, its focus is with the more confined ideals of environmental sustainability and concepts of sustainable natural resource management. In common with CEPA, it is a vision which revolves around strategies of participatory governance. Yet unlike CEPA this is not conceptualised within notions of local rights, but instead as part of wider decentralisation policies. It is an instrumental vision of participation rather than an alternative vision associated with ideas of empowerment. It is an agenda, which in contrast to CEPA's, does not declare itself as alternative or locally driven. Rather it is quite plainly positioned within mainstream government policies and values which MoE is responsible for proselytizing in the interests, it is claimed, not only of local livelihoods and Cambodian society, but also of global environmental concerns.

The PMCR project shares similar ideals; focusing on environmental sustainability and particularly on the protection, management and sustainable use of the coastal ecosystems of mangroves and seagrass habitats and coastal fisheries. Following MoE's commitment to the government's agenda of decentralisation, the project also links its environmentally centered goals to a participatory governance framework. Project objectives from different stages of PMCR's existence<sup>21</sup> reveal a concern to engage local people in collaboration with government in a community-based management approach, as reinforced by the project's national coordinator: "*my overall goal I want all the*

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<sup>21</sup> In 2004, a review of the project highlighted "*objectives of development of sustainable livelihood concepts, participatory mangrove resource management planning, coastal community resource management formulation, coastal environmental education and human resource development*" (Nong and PMMR 2004, p7). In a more recent document, seven objectives were listed dealing with strengthening and developing community-based natural resource management in coastal areas, focussing on: knowledge and capacities of local institutions as well as practitioners and government in general; integration into decentralisation structures; and participatory research and management planning (PMMR 2005).

*stakeholders involved in that area to have strong cooperation, working together ... to help to make more sustainable use of natural resources*". Achieving environmental sustainability is then based on a collective, or cooperative, response in which local people participate alongside government. It is based on the premise that people have, or will develop through participation, a shared interest in environmental sustainability. Indeed, PMCR's national coordinator believes that *"most people, Cambodian people they want to take care of our country's nature. But in reality sometimes the people don't have much connection to work together"*. So this is what PMCR aims to provide; the opportunity to participate and work together to achieve the collective goal of environmental sustainability. The project's agenda is then both structured by national policies and at the same time is set up as being responsive to local interests; it is presented as a shared agenda ordered both from the top-down and the bottom-up.

Conceptualising environmental sustainability through the paradigm of community-based management, the project also makes explicit a number of important social goals; those of equality, livelihood security, livelihood sustainability and enhancement, and poverty reduction. As project staff from Koh Kong explain, *"the purpose is for the people to be able to fish forever and to improve the people's livelihood following the poverty reduction policy of the government"*. These are social goals constructed as a product of environmental sustainability. They are based on the assumption that the coastal environment will be protected through community participation and collaboration with government. They also assume that community-based approaches will ensure equitable access to protected resources now and in the future, and that together this will improve people's lives and reduce poverty. So it is through community-based natural resource management that the project intends to address the government's development policy and what might otherwise be interpreted as the environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainable development. Yet while the project remains firmly embedded within mainstream policy, it is also transformed through the ideals and assumptions of a community-based approach into something with potential for a more local orientation. Through concepts of participation and goals of equality and livelihood sustainability, the project's objectives suggest that despite conforming to the government's vision of development there is at the same time room for alternative notions. Indeed, alternative locally driven development is now subsumed

into conventional policy. Top-down and bottom-up development are presented as complementary and reinforcing, there is no contradiction at least not in theory.

### **Project rationale: a natural resource imaginary**

To further understand the reality of these interpretations in practice it is instructive to consider the natural resource imaginary in which the project's agenda is situated. Similar to CEPA's community fishery project, PMCR has focused its activities within nationally and internationally recognised protected areas, in this case the Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary and the Koh Kapit Ramsar reserve, expanding more recently to encompass the neighbouring coastal area and communities of Chrouy Pros Bay (see Figure 3 Chapter 4). The prevailing conservation concern has been the coastal mangrove habitat, variously described in project related documents as: "*some of the best remaining examples of mangrove forests in the Gulf of Thailand*" (Nong 2000); recognised for its "*unique, relatively primitive status*", with the "*most pristine, beautiful, tallest mangroves*" (Nong et al 2001). Yet in spite of this recognition and their protected status, the mangrove forests were being destroyed.

*"The area (Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary) is now a clear-cut example of what was once an area abundant with wildlife and fish. Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary was established because of its unique ecosystem, yet its mangroves have been destroyed in recent years because of market demand for charcoal and logs in Thailand"* (Nong et al 2001, p68).

The opening of markets to Thailand in 1990 heralded a new era of natural resource exploitation in Koh Kong, not only of the timber and charcoal products from the mangrove forests, but also of the fishery resources. What had been an isolated and unpopulated province during the recent period of conflict in Cambodia was now an attractive destination for internally displaced peoples and economic migrants. With improved security, abundant natural resources and marketing opportunities, the population in Koh Kong rapidly expanded (Nong 2000). At the same time, mangrove cutting for charcoal production increased dramatically, while modern and efficient fishing gears were also introduced, shifting fishing away from a predominantly subsistence activity (Marshcke & Nong 2002).

The coastal environment of Koh Kong, in particular the protected mangrove forest, was under threat. Moreover, much of the exploitation which threatened the coastal environment was considered illegal. Laws prohibited cutting mangroves for charcoal production, they also prohibited many of the modern fishing gears, either completely as with the use of cyanide and dynamite, or, in the case of trawling and push nets, within shallow inshore areas (see Box 4 above and Box 6 below). However, these illegal activities had powerful support, from rich business people, the police and navy, while technical government departments responsible for managing the natural resources had limited funding or influence (Nong 2000; Marshcke & Nong 2002). According to Marshcke and Nong (2002), Koh Kong at that time was known as the “*wild-west*” because of the “*frontier feel and abundance of illegal activities*”. Law enforcement was weak, corruption was rife and local people were beginning to report declining fish catches and increasing conflicts in accessing coastal resources (Nong 2000; Marshcke & Nong 2002).

With a focus on the protected wildlife sanctuary and Ramsar site, the PMCR project, originally known as the Participatory Management of Mangrove Resources project, concentrated on the situation facing the mangrove forests. But mangrove protection was not simply framed in terms of its environmental significance as mentioned above, critically it was linked to declining fish catches. So as project staff from Koh Kong explained:

*“when they have the (mangrove) forest the living standard can increase and if they have mangrove forests the crab and fish will increase. So we created the Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary and we replanted the mangrove”.*

The destruction of the mangrove forests was perceived to be having a direct impact on the fishery resources. Protecting mangrove forests was then in the interests of local people, helping to sustain the fishery on which they depended and to improve people’s living standards. However, it was clear that mangrove forests were only part of the story. As the coastal population continued to grow and as people stopped charcoal production and turned to fishing, competition for fishery resources increased. Combined with the widespread use of illegal fishing gears this was viewed as causing declines in fish catches. Fishers using small-scale legal gear, such as crab traps and nets, commonly

considered ‘traditional’ gear<sup>22</sup>, blamed those fishers using modern illegal gears for the fall in their catches. Modern and traditional gears were in competition for the same resources in the same areas, frequently coming into direct conflict, as traps or nets are caught up and destroyed by trawls or push nets being used illegally in shallow coastal waters.

These issues saw the project expand its concerns from protecting the mangrove forests to the coastal environment more generally. Not only did it aim to stop illegal logging of mangrove areas, it also aimed to stop illegal fishing activities. Again PMCR staff in Koh Kong related this both to a desire to help improve local livelihoods and to ensure sustainability of the fishery:

*“(We) want to raise the living standard of community and don’t want them to lack resources to eat because of the illegal fishing gear. We want to keep the fish species in the fishing area sustainably and forever”.*

In more recent years the project agenda has also incorporated particular concern for the coastal seagrass habitats, which have been recognised as an important area for small fish and crab, and vulnerable to destruction by illegal fishing gears. It is also in these shallow coastal habitats where many of the conflicts take place between small scale fishers using ‘traditional’ and legal gears and those illegally using modern gear. And so it was argued that protecting areas of seagrass would not only protect important fisheries habitat from destruction, it would also help prevent, or reduce, the conflicts occurring between ‘traditional’ and modern fishing gears. As with CEPA’s community fishery project, it is the small scale or ‘traditional’ fishery-based livelihood that requires protection, similarly based on the assumption that such a livelihood is sustainable. Moreover, like CEPA, protecting the fishery and seagrass habitats and the dependent ‘traditional’ fishery were presented by PMCR as being the desire of local people. As PMCR staff in Koh Kong explain: *“all the people decide to protect the seagrass ..... actually the people in Chrouy Pros know by themselves about the advantage of the seagrass, they know more than us”*. From the perspective of the project, their agenda is

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<sup>22</sup> Though small-scale fishing gear is often considered ‘traditional’ it has also adopted more modern technologies, for example crab traps which in the past were woven from natural materials are now constructed from metal frames with nylon netting, often with smaller mesh size than legal limits allow.

clearly not just an extension of the policies of the Ministry of Environment, it is a response to local demands. As they highlight in a review of the project:

*“.. in 2001, the fisher folk in this (Chrouy Pros) commune requested the project team to help them in organizing the community for ensuring sustainable use of fishery resources in Chrouy Pros Bay” (Nong & PMMR 2004, p44).*

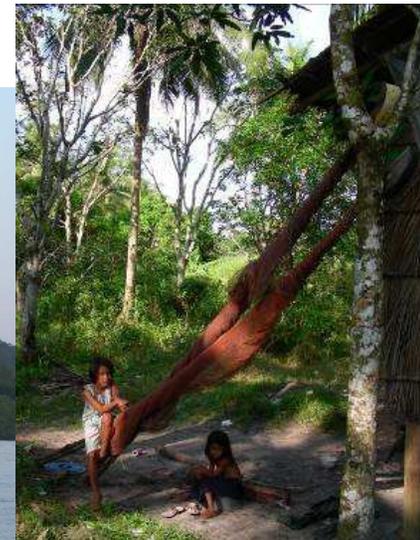
What has materialised in practice is a community fishery, which in the same way as CEPA's project is structured through the government's legal framework focussing predominantly on stopping illegal fishing. However, in PMCR's case the project has gone beyond transferring responsibility to local people to help enforce the fisheries law through informing and patrolling activities. It has also involved support for deploying concrete poles into the seagrass habitats of Chrouy Pros Bay in order to physically prevent illegal fishers from using their gear in these areas. In addition, it has included activities quite outside of the fishery, activities concerned with basic needs of sanitation, access to water and education, and the provision of income sources as an alternative to fishing. Thus, for PMCR sustainable livelihoods are not, as in the case of CEPA, restricted to the sustainability of the fishery as defined by the legality of fishing practices. Significantly, sustainable livelihoods also include the development of people's lives outside of the fishery, a view in common with that of Oxfam GB's concern with integrated livelihood development.

### Box 6: Illegal Fishing in Koh Kong

In addition to the general list of prohibited fishing gears, which include gears used in freshwater and marine fisheries (see box 4 above), the Fisheries Law also includes a number of specific regulations relating to the marine fishery. These include:

- All types of fishing shall require a license unless they are subsistence (small-scale) fishing
- Trawling in inshore fishing areas (within 20 metres of the shoreline) is forbidden
- Fishing with damages, or disturbs the growth of seagrass shall be prohibited (MAFF 2007)

The illegal gears most frequently encountered in the areas where the PMCR project work, and particularly in Chroy Pros Bay adjacent to the village where I undertook my research, included: trawls (*uorn uos*); coastal drag nets (*uorn khuov*); motorised push nets (*chhup yun*, or *dun*); hand held push nets (*chhup*, or *dun dai*); and crab traps with mesh sizes smaller than the legal limit. At the mouth of the bay it was also common to find light fishing trawlers sheltering on Koh Kong island. These different illegal gears are considered destructive to the coastal environment and therefore unsustainable.



*Prohibited fishing in Chrouy Pros Bay, Koh Kong*

(From left: drag net; motorised push net; hand push net)

PMCR's complex natural resource imaginary based around changing conditions and relations to mangrove, seagrass and coastal fisheries, situates the project within a dynamic arena of interests. An arena, much like that of CEPA's community fishery project, set within the context of internationally and nationally recognised ecosystems facing decline. It is a situation which has similarly led to conflicts within the fishery; between those using illegal fishing gears, considered modern and destructive, and those using legal fishing gears, considered 'traditional' and sustainable. And so like CEPA's community fishery project, PMCR is represented as a response to local demands to protect both the environment and traditional livelihoods. And once again, it is based on the assumption that stopping illegal exploitation will allow natural resources and dependent 'traditional' livelihoods to be sustained and improve, ignoring other factors implicated in environmental decline. So in the same way as CEPA, sustainability is defined by the legality of resource extraction. However, unlike CEPA, for PMCR sustainability is more than the legitimacy of fishing practices. It also encompasses a concern for aspects of livelihoods beyond fishing. And in contrast to CEPA, the project does not position itself as an advocate of local rights holding the government to account for its ineffective and corrupt management of natural resources. Rather for PMCR, located within government, the project wishes to reinforce the government's policy agendas which are presented not simply as a product of external ideals, but also a response to local people; their awareness of the importance of the environment for their livelihoods and desire to see it protected. The complementarity of top-down and bottom-up perspectives are once more justified through the project's natural resource imaginary.

### **Project relations and practices: a wider actor network**

As with CEPA's community fishery project, PMCR's interpretations of sustainable development are not located solely through the visions of policy and project objectives, or the natural resource imaginary through which the project was formed. Meanings are also constructed through the relations and practices of a network of actors associated with the project. A representation of these relations was created by PMCR staff in Figure 14 below, showing different actor's influence on PMCR's vision since the project began, as well as what influence they might have in the future. Unlike CEPA, PMCR<sup>23</sup>

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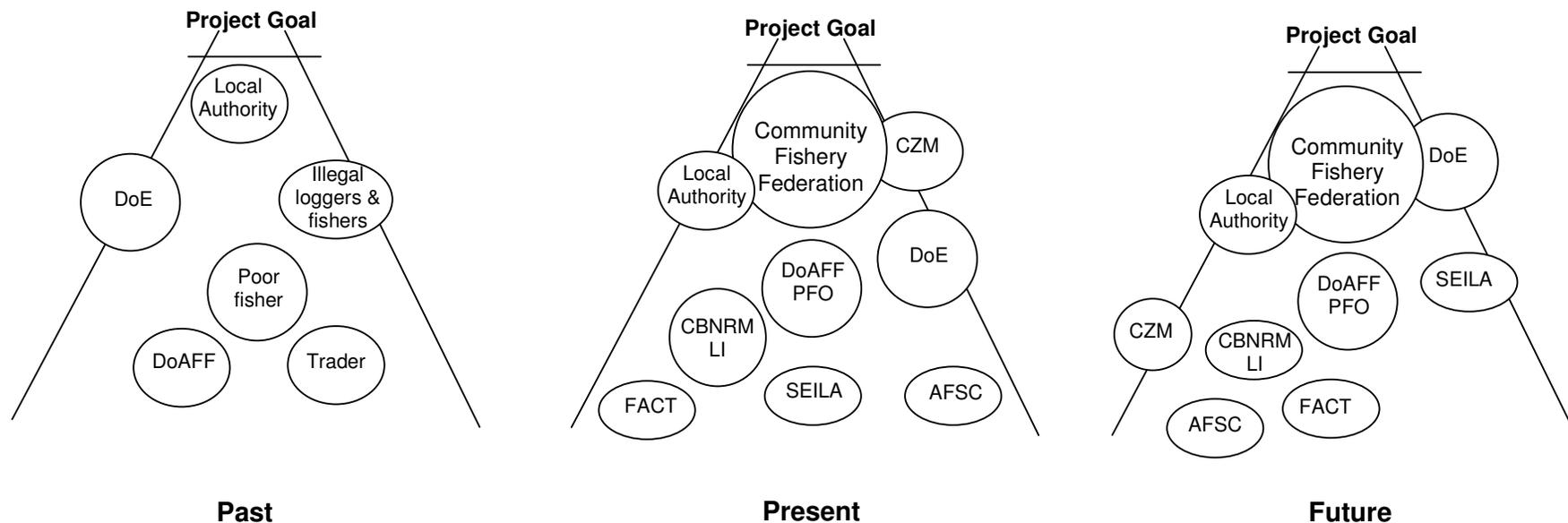
<sup>23</sup> As in the case of CEPA above, reference to PMCR here does not intend to assign agency to the project, but refers to the views of the two staff from PMCR's Phnom Penh office who participated in the reflection workshop (see

chose not to represent the project as a group of actors, showing instead just two of the provincial government departments working with the project<sup>24</sup> (the departments of environment and of agriculture, forestry and fisheries). When asked about PMCR's absence, the staff explained that it is PMCR and the Ministry of Environment who own the project and work to produce the institutional arrangements, suggesting that they have a central position relating to and coordinating all the other actors involved. This interpretation was reinforced in a separate diagram produced by PMCR's national coordinator shown in the next Figure 15. Here PMCR is presented as a central hub equidistant and connecting all other actors, suggesting a neutral facilitating position, providing a critical link between different actors. It is in this position of facilitator that PMCR represent the project in the changing institutional maps (Figure 14) as gaining the support of government authorities and bringing together the interests of local people and 'poor fishers' into a 'community fishery federation' to address the influence of illegal loggers and traders. So the project agenda has become a collective goal controlled through a federation which supposedly represents the 'community', and which is supported by government and other actors.

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Chapter 5) and who articulated their ideas through the production, presentation and discussion of the institutional maps shown in Figure 14.

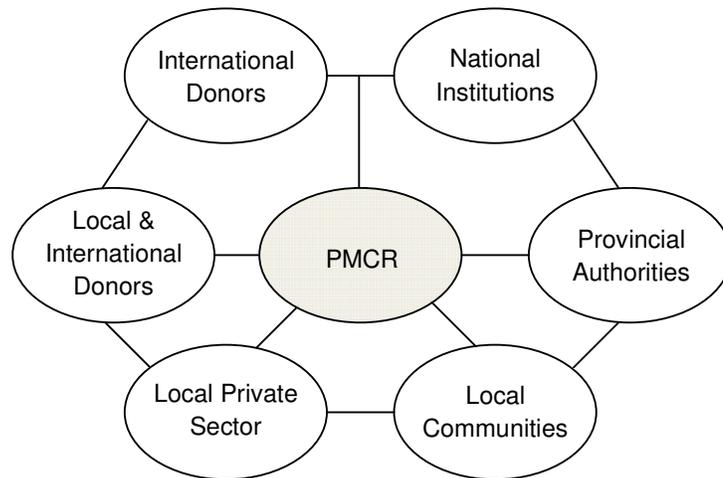
<sup>24</sup> The PMCR project team working in Koh Kong are drawn from four different government departments, including the Departments of Environment (DoE), Rural Development (DRD), Agriculture Forestry and Fishery (DAFF) and Women's Affairs (DoWA).



AFSC	American Friends Service Committee and international NGO	DoE	Department of Environment
CBNRM LI	Community-based Natural Resource Management Learning Institute a Cambodian NGO	FACT	Fisheries Action Coalition Team a Cambodian NGO
CZM	Coastal Zone Management Project funded by the Danish government	PFO	Provincial Fisheries Office
DoAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries	SEILA	Government Decentralisation Programme

**Figure 14: Mapping the changing influences and relations of actors involved in the Ministry of Environment's PMCR project<sup>25</sup>**

<sup>25</sup> The diagrams were created by two staff from PMCR's Phnom Penh offices who were asked to map out their joint perspective on the past, present and possible future relations between PMCR and other actors involved in the community fishery project, and the relative influence of different actors on the projects' overall goal. In each case, the size of each group of actors is intended to represent the relative numbers of people involved, while the distance between groups represents the relative closeness of the relationship, and the distance to the top of the triangle represents the relative influence on achieving the project goal.



*Figure 15: PMCR's relations with other actors<sup>26</sup>*

Yet in practice relations are not as idealistic as the different diagrams suggest. In practice tensions emerge within the project's supposed neutrality and the assumption of a collective goal. Located within government institutions the project staff in Koh Kong province are not simply impartial facilitators, enabling different actors to collaborate towards a shared ideal. As government officers they are law enforcers responsible for implementing the government's legal interpretation of sustainability and stopping illegal logging and fishing. As the Koh Kong project co-ordinator acknowledges enforcing sustainability does not always combine well with the project's ideal position:

*"I work for the Department of Environment and PMCR, so I have to be careful. My role in the Department of Environment is to protect the natural resources in that area ... sometimes I use my role as an Environmental Officer to crack down on the illegal activities ... but when I enforce the law, I order my staff to do it, I don't do it on my own ... as for PMCR, we don't crack down, we use a peaceful way by facilitation and looking at people's own situation".*

Moreover, despite the project's claims of responding to local demands for environmental protection, it appears that in practice it has been necessary to generate environmental awareness, to persuade people of the value of natural resources and the importance of conservation and community-based natural resource management. As the

<sup>26</sup> Redrawn from Nong & PMMR 2004

project coordinator in Koh Kong explains, at the outset of the project this focussed on raising awareness of the importance of mangrove forests and of stopping illegal logging and charcoal production:

*“The training was about the value of mangrove forests ... the knowledge that people get is about the advantages of the mangrove, we ask ‘if the mangrove forest remains what resources do people gain?’ ... We ask the people ‘what should we do to increase the natural resources, to make the mangrove forest increase?’. Then we only facilitate them to answer the question ... then we continue having workshops on the same topic, asking the same question, and people start to think about the charcoal kiln, they think they should stop the illegal charcoal kiln”.*

The project’s idealism of neutrally facilitating the collective interests of local people might be better interpreted as training or persuading local people to engage in government policy. Similarly, project actors have also found themselves in the position of persuading government actors to support the project’s agenda, in particular the ideals of local participation. For though the government is committed on paper to participation, initially there was much skepticism towards the idea of ‘community-based’ natural resources management. Even to the extent that the term was avoided altogether, as the project’s national coordinator describes:

*“... when we wrote the project we called it community-based mangrove management in Cambodia. But after that, I was just thinking about if we put community-base mangrove management in Cambodia this title maybe not so much adapted in translation to the Cambodia context. Because the word community has a lot of challenge, like during the Khmer Rouge we use the word community .... and if translated, the meaning of this title people just think the community are involved with the mangrove protection. So it may be difficult for me to convince the government staff or may be the local authority to be involved”.*

The PMCR national coordinator found himself confronting entrenched attitudes of government staff: *“the government people they say to me ‘(local) people cannot do anything because they need our knowledge ... they don’t have skills, so the (local) people can’t manage natural resources”*. Government actors simply did not believe

local people had the knowledge and ability to participate in natural resource management. Instead they demanded respect and compliance from local people on account of their official status and ‘expert’ knowledge. According to the project’s national coordinator, this was tied up not only with an assumed superiority, but also because government officials were “*afraid of the local people*” and remained influenced by a history of centrally led communist politics, as he explains:

*“they still use the communist theory or communist philosophy, with the communist philosophy the leader always gives the direction to the ground, you know, they give (directions) from the centre. So this kind of management is still followed up until now, in terms of what we call a top down approach to management”.*

Government actors were not just unwilling to accept agendas of local participation. Among provincial government institutions, or the local authorities highlighted in PMCR’s institutional maps, there were also those who were not supportive of ideals of environmental protection, choosing to support illegal logging and fishing activities. Thus, like CEPA’s director, PMCR’s national coordinator made strategic use of relationships with officials in high positions to leverage support for the project’s agenda. So, as the national coordinator describes below, PMCR organised well-publicised field visits for high level officials to see the local situation, the natural resources and the destruction taking place, and to interact with local people who, through PMCR’s training demonstrated knowledge of the environment and commitment to management:

*“during 2000, the project organised one big trip for the high level of government to see what the people do in Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary ... this is like the high ranker of the government sector, they learn a lot about the community work. The community they informed to the high government officer about all they do ... so more people feel ‘ok the community organising is very important, this is the one type of power of the group that can help the government to protect the natural resources”.*

The national coordinator also sought to persuade government actors to support the project by arguing that involving local people would be an efficient cost-effective way for the government to enforce environmental protection measures, as he states:

*“... these local people, they find the income from that area ... so when the people are involved it's very strong enforcement to protect all natural resources .... if the people are willing to be involved with the natural resources so the government (will) not have to spend more money for them”.*

In this way, local participation was being framed as a means to an end, a way of achieving the government's agenda for environmental protection. Echoing the views of government actors in Stung Treng, local participation was seen as an instrument and extension of government. A position which was made clear by provincial government staff of the PMCR project team in Koh Kong, as follows:

*“I think that it is very important that the community get power from government to protect the natural resource following the by-law, it is not another power it's only what's in the by-law not more than this ... the local power was established for the community group but that power is not like the government power ... the community will help to achieve the government work , so the government can depend on the community to help ... the community can't put their hands into (interfere with) the government work, the community power has already been stated in the by-law”.*

Yet in spite of these views, the project's national coordinator also reveals a desire for local participation to go beyond the instrumental, to empower local people, claiming that the project has already empowered people to challenge government:

*“the (local) people ... they have a strong voice to talk with the government sector and they can complain with the police, they can complain with the provincial technical departments ... you know they have the ability to talk and to complain to the power institutions or the power people”.*

And at the same time, he also admits that attitudes among government institutions are not easily changed:

*“most of the government people are still like ‘I’m the boss, I’ve learnt a lot, I know everything, you (local people) don’t know everything’... (and) when they work with the poor people they just tell them ‘you do this you do that’”.*

In practice project relations reveal an agenda for sustainability which appears to be neither the ideal of local people, nor of government. It is not a shared goal demanded by local people and supported by government, rather it is the project’s vision of community-based natural resource management which it must persuade and coopt other actors to engage in. Given that the project is itself located within government, it is perhaps then not a surprise that the ideal of a community-based approach was originally introduced by the project’s donor, Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC). From PMCR’s inception, IDRC advisors have worked alongside project staff to guide the project’s focus and to introduce and train staff in the concepts and ways of working of interest to IDRC and their goal of supporting local research and specifically of developing concepts of community-based natural resource management through participatory research. According to the project’s national coordinator, PMCR was established *“to learn how to do community based coastal resource management in Cambodia”*, or as IDRC states: *“(PMCR) will develop and test models for integrating coastal communities into coastal resource management involving various levels of government”* (IDRC 2006). The project agenda is not simply the collective vision of local people and government, but an externally driven research agenda and strategy for mainstreaming community-based natural resource management throughout the country.

In this respect IDRC’s influence has been significant, establishing the fundamental values and assumptions on which the project’s interpretations of sustainability are based, which at the time the project began were completely new concepts to PMCR’s staff and within Cambodia generally. And though project staff have increasingly taken a greater role in shaping the project’s direction, the project remains framed as an ‘IDRC project’, with IDRC advisors continuing to work directly with the PMCR team to

develop particular agendas in line with their organisation's programmes and strategies<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, the project's future is determined by IDRC and whether and what they will continue to fund, leaving the project's national coordinator with a sense of uncertainty and unease as each funding phase of the project draws to a close, as he explains:

*"... sometimes IDRC is not clear ... like they say, ok now the phase one is finished, so will they give some support to phase two or not? They say we need to provide proposal and need to have community meetings, they don't know, if they like it maybe they will approve the second phase, if they don't like it maybe they finish....there is no clarity .... so this is sometimes very hard for me"*.

Thus, in the same way as Oxfam GB's relationship with CEPA, IDRC have ultimate control over the project's existence through the financial support they provide; sustainable development as a community-based approach to natural resource management is not locally, but externally directed.

As I have presented the Ministry of Environment's PMCR project, it is apparent, as with CEPA's community fishery project, that sustainable development has multiple and contradictory interpretations. Interpretations which appear through the perspective of MoE to be wedded to mainstream government policies of environmental sustainability proselytised via its agenda for decentralisation. Yet at the same time these are also interpretations which make claims through the PMCR project to be inclusive of a locally driven and potentially empowering agenda, inspired by local people's concerns for their environment and livelihoods. Thus, the ideals of environmental sustainability are linked to social and economic development goals and are not just of global and national concern, but are also valued and desired by local people in the interests of their current and future livelihoods. From the perspective of the project's objectives, there is no contradiction between the ideals of policy and those of local people. Moreover, on this basis it is also asserted that local and government actors share a collective will to collaborate together.

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<sup>27</sup> PMCR currently falls within a rural poverty and environment programme initiative under IDRC's environment and natural resource management theme. It is acknowledged that IDRC's wider strategic objectives have an influence in structuring the PMCR project, however, the detail of IDRC's interests was not the focus of this research.

However, in practice, as in CEPA's case, this idealistic vision is quickly disrupted once the relations between PMCR and other actors are examined. Relations which reveal an agenda introduced and controlled by the project's international donor and its priorities for mainstreaming community-based approaches to natural resource management. This is an agenda where ideals of environmental protection are taught to local people. It is an agenda where values of local participation and collaboration are resisted by government actors' whose preference is for policies dictated by official expertise and legislation, where local actors are simply an instrument of government. Thus instead of an agenda led by local demands and supported by government policy, what appears to exist, as in the case of CEPA, is one where sustainability is defined by the government's legal framework for fisheries, based on the simplification that legality equates with 'traditional' and therefore sustainable livelihoods. Once again, fishing practices are foregrounded as the principle factor determining environmental sustainability, ignoring other influences recognised as causing environmental decline. However, unlike CEPA, PMCR does not restrict its understanding of sustainability to the state of the fishery resource alone. In contrast, much like Oxfam GB's re-focus on integrated livelihood development, PMCR expand notions of sustainability to address human and social dimensions of livelihoods. Yet in spite of this broader focus and the project's empathy towards local agendas emphasised through community-based approaches, there is an overriding sense of instrumentality in the way sustainability is dominated by the priorities of its donor and the policies and practices of government.

### ***Chapter summary***

My aim in this chapter was to uncover something of the complexities of sustainable development as it unfolds through the practices of two different projects concerned with community fisheries. What has emerged from this analysis are examples of the multiple, overlapping and often contradictory interpretations of sustainable development; interpretations which appear at once alternative and instrumental, and which ultimately prove to be structured by dominating interests external to each project.

In common with each other, it is the ideal of environmental sustainability through participatory governance which is promoted in both cases as the foundation for

sustainable development, through which wider social and economic concerns are driven. This is a goal which has come about through projects similarly located within protected areas perceived to be under threat principally as a result of illegal and destructive exploitation practices, combined with weak and corrupt management regimes. It is based on simplifications that assume environmental sustainability depends on the cessation of illegal exploitation and the protection of 'traditional' livelihoods, which are considered legal and therefore sustainable. Moreover, it also assumes that this corresponds to the needs and aspirations of local people and thus can be achieved through willing local participation.

However, despite these similarities, each project is distinctly positioned in relation to participatory governance as a mechanism for achieving sustainable development. For CEPA's community fishery project, environmental sustainability through participatory governance is understood as a fundamental right; the right for people to protect and manage fishery resources in order to sustain and improve a traditional and therefore sustainable livelihood. Thus, the project is concerned with empowering people to assert their rights and through empowerment achieve not only environmental, but also economic sustainability and social and political freedom. Participatory governance is primarily a local agenda, supporting local interests and rights in the context of a corrupt management regime. It is a means of holding the government to account, it speaks to an alternative agenda, one advocated by CEPA on behalf of local people, in its position as a NGO outside of government.

Contrastingly, the PMCR project, located within government, connects participatory governance to decentralisation policies and to community-based natural resource management approaches, envisioning local people collaborating with the state towards the shared ideals of environmental sustainability. Moreover, it is claimed that through a community-based approach, goals of equality, livelihood sustainability and poverty reduction will also be addressed, thereby combining the environmental with the social and economic ideals of sustainable development. The project clearly resonates with mainstream policies, yet at the same time through participatory governance and community-based approaches it appears responsive to local interests. It is at once an instrumental policy goal and a potentially locally driven agenda, as local or alternative ideals are subsumed within conventional policy, while any differences or contradictions

are smoothed away via a participatory governance regime. Thus, PMCR presents itself as a facilitator enabling local people to collaborate with government towards a shared ideal ordered from the top-down and the bottom-up.

Yet in spite of both project's appeals to potentially alternative or local agendas, in practice project relations reveal instrumental realities. These are realities where values of environmental sustainability in both cases appear to be taught to local people, co-opting their collaboration as opposed to responding to their interests. Thus, CEPA's intent to empower local rights to sustainability in practice is based on the legality of fishing practices as defined by the government; where rights have become strictly structured through the government's fishery sector reforms and their restricted interpretations of empowerment. Meanwhile, PMCR's ideals of local participation and collaboration are resisted by government actors' whose preference is for policies dictated by official expertise and legislation; where local actors are simply an instrument of government. Moreover, in practice relations reveal agendas whose very existence is determined by both project's donors.

If this is how sustainable development ideals are shaped through the perspectives and practices of different institutional actors, what I have yet to consider is how these ideals articulate within the local worlds into which each project intervenes. I turn in the next chapter to present something of the complex agencies of livelihoods and to consider how people relate and respond to each project's agenda in practice.

## Chapter 7

### Complex realities of local livelihoods

The aim of this chapter is to explore the diverse local livelihoods, or life worlds of people living in two rural villages in Cambodia. I seek here to reveal something of the complexity of livelihoods and to show how people's lives articulate with the two different projects and their visions of sustainable development. As I outlined in the previous chapter, these are visions of sustainable development guided by ideals of environmental sustainability through participatory governance; visions to intervene in rural livelihoods based on the unproblematic assumption that environmental sustainability is a collective goal which will improve lives. A goal that is simply achieved by stopping modern and illegal exploitation practices and preserving 'traditional' and therefore sustainable livelihoods. These are visions which imagine people as homogeneously receptive and malleable to the projects' agendas, on the basis of common aspirations for sustainability and shared motivations and capabilities to participate. Such utopian visions are clearly based on significant simplifications of people's livelihoods. They fail to acknowledge diversity or complexity. They fail to recognise that people may be differentially positioned in terms of their access to natural resources, their aspirations for the future and their capabilities to change. They ignore the multiple and overlapping influences stretching across space and time which mediate people's lives and the unequal freedoms people have to manoeuvre, to make intentional choices, in response to change and the projects' agendas for sustainable development.

Thus, it is to the complexity of livelihoods that this chapter aims to attend; to the specificities of people's lives in two villages in Stung Treng and Koh Kong (see Figure 3, Chapter 4), physically removed from the institutional actors associated with each project and yet still influenced by their agendas. I want to consider what people's lives are like and how they are positioned in relation to each project and their agendas for sustainable development. I set out then firstly to understand the varied nature of livelihoods in each location where the two projects operate and then to reflect on how different livelihoods shape people's perspectives on each project in practice. To do this I make use of livelihood thinking introduced in Chapter 3; attempting to understand people's lives across multiple dimensions and through the dynamic tensions between

structure and agency. It is an understanding open to messiness and the situated particularities of people's relations and actions, which shape and in turn are shaped by wider structural influences. This is thinking that makes space for a holistic understanding, which goes beyond sectoral concerns of fisheries or natural resources. It is about understanding people's varying capabilities, assets and means of making a living over time and within the context of wider institutional, economic, political, social and natural processes. Moreover, it presents a means to consider the ongoing intricacies of people's life worlds and to generate a differentiated understanding of people who otherwise are understood as a homogenised 'community'.

Guided by livelihoods thinking, I aim in this chapter to explore how people access resources and capabilities to make a living and how this is influenced by social position and relations, as well as past and on-going experiences of change. Specifically, I want to tell how different people's varied livelihoods shape their relations with both projects' agendas for sustainable development and particularly their experiences of participating in these agendas in practice. Thus I aim to show how different livelihood positions and practices sometimes reinforce, but often unsettle and challenge the different projects' ideals of environmental sustainability through participatory governance.

To do this I organise the chapter around examples of different livelihoods, firstly from Stung Treng and then from Koh Kong. These are examples gathered from different households, which I have selected to illustrate contrasting positions and perspectives and so to reveal some of the diversity of local experiences and the complexity of relations with both projects. They represent a selection from the many lives I encountered in two villages<sup>1</sup>, which I have chosen to help bring to life different livelihood situations and highlight the commonalities and differences which exist but are not limited to these households alone. In exploring these examples, I make use of the metaphor of 'freedom to manoeuvre' as a device to compare different people's lives; the relative freedom they have to make intentional choices and to respond and cope with the structural influences, or changes which shape their lives<sup>2</sup>. I make use of these ideas to help understand how

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<sup>1</sup> The full extent of encounters with households in two villages is outlined in Annex 1. Details of encounters with the households selected as examples in this chapter are outlined in Annex 2.

<sup>2</sup> Here I am informed by actor-orientated notions of 'room to manoeuvre', referring to the space created by actors as they exercise their own agency and make sense of and engage with external interventions. I am also influenced by Arce's (2003) later attention to the term and his emphasis on situations of 'negative freedom' (introduced in Chapter 3). Situations where actors are constrained by structuring influences and their lack of capabilities and may be forced to contest, interfere or resist external interventions.

people are differentially situated and how this influences their relations with both the fishery resources and the project agendas and practices. I also move beyond the metaphor to consider how other factors, or concerns mediate relations with the projects, exploring the effects of social position and relations and the structuring influence of social hierarchies. It is through this selection of examples and analysis that I aim to provide an understanding of the diversities and complexities of livelihoods and to show how these varied perspectives act to further complicate and contest two projects' ideals for sustainable development.

### ***Livelihoods in Stung Treng***

I begin in Stung Treng where CEPA's community fishery project operates in different villages along the Mekong river. From one of these villages I present examples of different livelihoods, illustrating different degrees of freedom to manoeuvre. I start then with examples of people in positions of relative security; with access to choice and the capabilities to cope with change. I then move to consider those whose lives, in comparison, are increasingly vulnerable; who lack access to choice or the capabilities to cope with change. From these different livelihood perspectives I explore relationships with the project ideals of environmental sustainability and participatory governance, showing how people's relative freedom as well as their social position and connections within the village influences their engagement with the project agendas.

*Sela and his family live in a large wooden house on the banks of the Mekong river. His household is busy, fourteen family members live together, including his wife and nine children, his son-in-law and two grandchildren. Chickens run around beneath the house and pigs sleep and snort in a thatch roof pen nearby adjacent to a low bamboo and thatch building where his wife and daughters cook the family meals. Fruit trees grow close by to the house and buildings, but it is the surrounding farmland, originally owned by Sela's wife's family and expanded as Sela cleared adjacent forest areas, that is the main focus of their lives. Here the whole family works each day in the morning and afternoon, clearing the fields with machetes, ploughing the land with buffalo and planting and harvesting by hand. Sela and his wife farm the land following the ways taught to them by their parents and which they pass on to their children. During the rainy season, farming activities focus on growing rice, their staple food, as well as other crops which can be sold in Stung Treng market. In the dry season after harvesting*

*the rice, the land is prepared for more crops to sell, including tobacco which Sela says can fetch good prices. With their large area of fertile floodplain farmland and the buffalo and family to help, they are able to grow enough rice to support them for a whole year. They have also been able to save some of the money earned from selling crops. These are savings which can be used to pay for health treatment and reduce the risks of malaria, which has so worried them since first moving to the village when their two youngest children died from the disease. They have also used their savings to buy more buffalo to help with farming and to buy a generator and rice mill, for milling their rice crop and their neighbours in exchange for rice bran, which they feed to their pigs and chickens.*

*Though not as important as farming for the family's subsistence, Sela and his family also fish throughout the year. Since they were young Sela's children have gone with their father to fish, learning how to use different fishing gears depending on the season. During the rainy season there isn't much time to spare from farming and the high water and currents on the Mekong make it difficult to fish there. But occasionally fish might be caught using hooks and lines in the nearby seasonal streams, which run across their land. Once the rice is harvested in the dry season, then fishing is a more regular activity; each evening nets are set in the low waters of the Mekong to be pulled up again early the following morning. The quiet waters of the dry season also give opportunities for Sela's children to fish at dusk with the family's boat and cast net. And some afternoons they may even go searching for shellfish along the banks of the river. Most fish the family catch is to eat, but during the dry season they can catch enough to eat and sell. Occasionally they may even catch a big fish which sells for a good price in the market in Stung Treng. But over the years Sela has noticed that despite using more fishing gear, they are unable to catch as much fish as before and big fish are rarely caught. Though they don't depend on fishing for their subsistence, it remains an important part of their life and Sela hopes that the fish catches will increase again to make life easier both for his family and for future generations.*



*Figure 16: Farming along the Mekong river*

The story of Sela and his family is a story of a livelihood in a position of positive freedom to manoeuvre. A livelihood which has reached this position with support from family relations, who provided access to land, buffalo and knowledge of farming, and with the labour of his own large and growing family. It is through access to the resources of land, knowledge, livestock and labour that Sela's family has overcome seasonal shortages of rice, which affect so many others in the village. Freed from the seasonal expense of buying rice for his family and with access to a growing market for farm crops, Sela's family also have access to savings, allowing them to cope with the threat of malaria. Moreover, Sela's family do not have to rely on creditors, or moneylenders on whom other households find themselves dependent. And they have even had the choice to invest in the luxuries of a generator, a television and karaoke machine to enjoy evenings singing with neighbours. The relative importance of rice and crop farming for the family's livelihood is significant, for not only does it provide

resilience against seasonal vulnerabilities, it also means they are less reliant on fishing. So it is that Sela's family are able to make use of small scale legal fishing gears and still cope with declining fish catches. And yet it is also the combination of farming, fishing and livestock rearing throughout the year, which provides a critical diversity of food and income sources and an added security from the risks and uncertainties inherently part of rural life. Thus, while Sela recognises that his family does not have to rely as much on fishing as those without rice fields, he still emphasises the value of fishing for their life.

*Makara and his wife Savy both in their 60s live together in a old run down house set back from the banks of the Mekong river at the northern end of the village. They have lived in that place for over 10 years, moving when Makara realised the government owned land he had been farming before might be taken away. At that time the area was covered with forest as few people were interested in clearing it. So he bought a small plot of forest on credit, cleared it and planted a crop of cucumber, repaying his loan after selling the crop forty days later. After that Makara continued to expand his farmland using money from selling crops in Stung Treng market. He divided the land amongst his children and on his own land he and his wife continued to work, farming different crops in the dry season to sell in Stung Treng and farming enough rice in the rainy season to support them through the full year. There were also fruit trees growing wild on the land and using his technical farming skills, learnt while working for the Department of Agriculture during the era of Vietnamese occupation in the 1980s, Makara propagated the trees, selling fruit in the dry season and cuttings to others who were interested. Makara and his wife also used different fishing gears to catch fish throughout the year, mainly for eating but on occasions when catches were big enough they took them to Stung Treng to sell. They also kept pigs, chickens and ducks to sell in Stung Treng, or to exchange for kerosene to light the lamps at night. The land was fertile and Makara had fourteen buffalos, which he had bred from two given to him by his parents, to help with the work. So it seemed that life was improving, it was possible to buy seasoning and oil for cooking and medicine when they got ill. Indeed, even the constant threat of wild animals from the nearby forest destroying their crops did not deter Makara, who kept them at bay using snares, as he had learnt from his elders when a young boy.*

*But then a few years ago most of their buffalo, pigs and chickens died suddenly of a disease. With no access to help from veterinary services Makara only had his knowledge of traditional medicine for treating the animals, but his efforts failed. Without their buffalo they were unable to plant rice and so instead they leased their land to others in exchange for rice. They also bought rice using income from their crops and in exchange for processed fish, and some of their children helped them too, donating rice from their harvests. However, their troubles were not over, illness and old age were beginning to make it difficult for Makara and his wife to keep up with their many activities. For Makara fishing was especially difficult, requiring increasing effort for smaller catches, as he saw illegal fishers catch all the fish. So they began to fish only for eating and started to hire people they knew and trusted to help them as farm labourers. They also decided to focus on growing fruit which could grow near to the house, needing less effort and providing a good income. Already they had some fruit trees, then Makara bought some guava seeds in Thailand while visiting his son there and began growing guava too. Through another son's in-laws they were also able to get some banana plants. So now their rainy season days are spent caring for their fruit trees, returning to crop farming in the dry season with the help of labourers. With Makara's knowledge he is able to minimise insect attacks on the guava trees and knows when to fertilise the other fruit to make sure they get good yields. Makara also hopes that in the future he might be able to buy a pump to help access water from the river and that he might have more buffalo to farm rice again. But old age remains a worry, he and his wife feel they lack the energy to continue working and with their children no longer living with them to help, they worry that they will not be able improve their lives further.*

In different ways and in spite of on-going stresses, Makara and Sava's lives are also ones of a livelihood in a position to overcome the seasonal variabilities and the unpredictable risks of farming. With land to rent, crops and fish to sell and exchange, family support and Makara's knowledge, they have the capability to cope, to innovate and overcome the constraints and vulnerability of old age. Significantly, for both Sela and Makara, their positions of positive freedom gained through access to resources for farming, shape their relations with the fishery resources. For though still reliant on fish for eating, they are neither dependent on fishing for income, and so they are both able to cope with declining fish catches. Yet fishery resources remain important for their lives

and both express concern for their decline and a desire for them to increase for their own lives and for future generations. These values favour CEPA interpretation of environmental sustainability as a local interest or agenda. Yet for Makara it is also an issue of importance beyond his own livelihood, indeed he claims the fishery resources represent the “*cultural property of the Khmer people*” and a source of prosperity for the nation. It is not simply a concern associated with rural livelihoods, but with the traditions and well being of Cambodia as a whole.



***Figure 17: Life at the far end of the village***

Like CEPA, both Sela and Makara also identify illegal fishing as the principal threat to the fishery’s sustainability, expressing disdain towards illegal fishers who have caused their fish catches to decline. For Sela illegal fishers are associated with “*rough people*” who are dishonest and “*abuse the rights of other people*”, while for Makara illegal fishers are those with money and connections to high officials, who protect them from law enforcement and who don’t care about the natural resources. In this way, both also

support the project's assumption that banning illegal fishing will allow the fishery to improve and lead to its sustainability. Moreover, with livelihoods dependent more on farming than fishing, enforcing a sustainable fishery simply reinforces their current use of legal fishing gear.

However, in spite of their common relations to the fishery resources and shared interest in a sustainable fishery, their engagement with the project's ideals of participatory governance are quite different. On the one hand Sela regularly attends the village community fishery meetings and is keen to disseminate information to other villagers and encourage them to join. In contrast, Makara has never attended a community fishery meeting and knows little of what the community fishery does. This difference in engagement is significant and appears to relate primarily to Sela and Makara's varying social positions and relations with others in the village. For though both men have been living in the village for roughly the same amount of time and are both of a respectful age to be considered as elders<sup>3</sup>, of the two it is only Sela who holds this position in the village. Indeed, Sela is not only an elder of the village, he also proudly holds official positions as the chief of the Village Parents' Association and vice chief of the Commune School Network. Within the village he is well connected and well positioned within the local social hierarchy. Consequently, Sela is invited to many meetings and will always participate, feeling he has a duty as an elder to make recommendations to other villagers, even in the community fishery meetings where he holds no official position and has yet to become an official member. In contrast and despite various connections with high officials who have helped him in the past<sup>4</sup>, Makara has no clear position in the village and few connections with others. Apart from their immediate family they have no other relatives in the village and live far away from others, rarely hearing news of what is going on. Moreover, they have never registered in the village<sup>5</sup> and so are not considered as residents to be informed of official village activities. Rather, they are still invited to events in the village where they used to live near Stung Treng town and

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<sup>3</sup> In Cambodian society elders are respected within hierarchical networks of obligation which accord status primarily as a function of age, but also as determined by a variety of other social markers such as gender, wealth, knowledge, family reputation, political position, employment and religious piety (Nee and Healy 2003; Ovesen et al 1996). Accordingly, children are taught to *'humble themselves and show respect towards superiors and elders by stooping over whenever they walk near them'* (Fisher-Nguyen 1994, p93)

<sup>4</sup> Through his life Makara has had the fortune of having connections with high officials helping him in various ways, e.g. in the 1980s to gain a government position and go to Vietnam for agricultural training, and a few years ago to secure his release from prison when he was arrested for owning a gun.

<sup>5</sup> It was not clear why Makara and his wife had never registered in the village, though they had lived there for almost as long as Sela.

remain registered, and where Makara continues to attend meetings. So in contrast to Sela, Makara and his wife feel excluded from the village and community. Indeed, Savy reveals her distress in tears that other villagers do not visit their house, or acknowledge them at the market in Stung Treng, while Makara was clearly sceptical about the village authorities and community fishery committee<sup>6</sup>.



*Figure 18: A village elder and his wife*

So it appears that while positive freedoms to manouvre have similarly shaped both Sela and Makara's relations with the fishery resource and ideals of environmental sustainability, their distinct social position within the village differentially place them with respect to notions of participatory governance. Thus it is that Sela, with a respected social position and strong relations within the village, who participates actively;

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<sup>6</sup> During the first of three visits to Makara and Savy's house, Makara initially made it clear that they were not happy talking in front of the community fishery committee member who had accompanied us there. Indeed they were both suspicious that what they said would be reported and so we requested for the committee member to leave us for some time and we made our subsequent visits unaccompanied.

regularly attending and contributing to community fishery meetings, and generally cooperating with the project practice. On the contrary, Makara who lacks position or connections within the village, does not participate in project practices, failing to attend the community fishery meetings, or cooperate in any other way. Moreover, Makara and his wife have no sense of belonging to the ‘community’ which the project assumes to represent, instead they feel excluded and suspicious of village authorities and the community fishery committee. So it seems that social position and relations locally mediate access to participate in the project practice; to attend meetings, to speak and be listened to, providing Sela with access, while limiting Makara’s access. And while it provides access, it equally obliges participation as a duty of one’s social position; an obligation of position, which may in different situations conflict with other interests, as the example of Vibol and his family below illustrates.

*The elder Vibol and his family were one of the first families to move to the area and are well connected and respected. Given his position, Vibol explains “for meetings the village chief never skips me” and equally he “never misses even one meeting”, feeling a strong duty to participate, to express his opinions and to share information with his family and others in the village. Indeed, he tells the community fishery meetings that all illegal fishing should be stopped, he also tells his family and neighbours that they should stop illegal fishers and instructs his children to report illegal fishers to the community fishery when they see them. And he continues to do this even though he admits people hate him for doing it, blaming him when they are arrested. Moreover, he continues despite angering his wife’s relatives, who use illegal fishing gear and who refuse to listen to Vibol and his wife, or to visit their house any longer.*

*Vibol supports the community fishery and the ban on illegal fishing, to the extent that he himself gave up illegally using bombs to fish and encouraged his son-in-law to stop using illegal electro-fishing gear. The family instead now depend on legal fishing gears, even though he acknowledges that illegal fishing gears catch more fish and earn more money. Moreover, he believes that it is because of illegal fishing that catches with legal gear have declined, so that now his family “catch less fish so we have to take income from crop farming to buy pork in the market”. Significantly for Vibol and his family this shortage of fish is experienced alongside an annual shortage of rice, further constraining their ability to cope with seasonal vulnerabilities. For Vibol and his family*

*lack sufficient fertile land to grow enough rice for the year, relying on income from crop farming to purchase extra rice each year. For this reason, the shortage of fish places an additional burden on the family's income. Yet, as Vibol explains, this does not encourage him to return to illegal fishing: "if we had ideas like others (illegal fishers), I would not lack fish to eat. But ideas like others will destroy the fishery and it will impact the next generation. If they are wrong and we follow them together it means we are also wrong together".*

Vibol's commitment to support the community fishery challenges his relations with his family and neighbours, yet as an elder he feels obligated to speak out and defend what he believes to be right. For like Sela and Makara, Vibol is in favour of environmental sustainability, valuing the fishery resources for providing food for his family both now and for future generations. Like Makara, he also emphasises the significance of fishery resources beyond his own livelihood, highlighting their importance for the nation's food security, saying, "*it's the Khmer people that depend on the fish in the river ... so if we don't conserve the fish here, where can the Khmer people get fish to eat?*". So in spite of the family's relative lack of freedom, Vibol has a sense of responsibility and commitment to support the community fishery, motivated by a shared interest in a sustainable fishery and obligated to participate as a result of his social position. Like Sela, Vibol actively engages in the project, not only attending meetings, but also changing his own fishing practice and attempting to change others in spite of their resistance. Thus, his livelihood reinforces the CEPA's community fishery project agenda.

However, compared to others in the village Vibol and his family remain in a position of relatively positive freedom. For despite the seasonal vulnerabilities they face, they still have access to enough land and labour and have been able to enjoy some savings from their crop farming, enough even to purchase a "machine cow" or hand-held tractor to replace their buffalo. But for other families, such as Bopha's family described below, such opportunities remain a far off vision, as they are overcome by their struggle to make a living with limited choices to cope with change.



**Figure 19: River fishing and fishing gear**

*Bopha is 45 years old, married for the second time and head of her household of nine. The family rely on Bopha to support them and make decisions and their life is a struggle. At 77 years old Bopha's husband lacks strength to help much in the family's activities. Seven years ago her eldest son became blind and with only two other children over 15 years old, the family have limited labour. So despite owning land it is difficult for them to keep up with their rice and crop farming and though Bopha's eldest son continues to fish for the family it is not easy and he depends on his younger siblings to help.*

*Bopha considers growing rice is the most important of their many activities. However, they are often unable to grow enough rice to support the family through the year and so must find other ways to find rice to eat. For this they depend on a variety of other activities depending on the season. Most important is the dry season bean crop which they can sell, using the income to buy rice. Pumpkin and cucumber crops are also harvested in the dry season and used to exchange for rice, requiring Bopha to travel far from the village in search of people willing to exchange their rice. During the rainy*

*season Bopha also exchanges fish, which they have processed into prahok or paork, for rice. Indeed, it is fishing, accessible throughout the year, which Bopha considers as the next most important activity for the family after the bean crop. For not only does it provide fish to process and use in exchange for rice, it also provides a daily source of food for the family. If they are lucky, they may even catch enough fish to sell fresh to traders passing by the house, or at the market in Stung Treng, so providing a source of income.*

*But Bopha's eldest son who is responsible for the fishing, finds it increasingly hard to catch fish. Not only is he constrained by his lack of sight, he is also troubled by the lack of fish in the river. While before one fishing line caught a lot of fish, now three or four lines cannot catch as much and he struggles to catch enough for the family to eat, let alone to sell. Instead he catches only enough for processing, saving the fish one by one. This decline in fish is not easy for the family, they no longer have fresh fish to eat and sell and with only processed fish remaining to eat they feel they lack power to work.*

*When they compare themselves to others in the village, the family feel their lives have got worse, while others' lives improve. But they still hope to better their situation, to find a way to save money from the crop farming and buy a buffalo and boat to help with their work. Yet these future aspirations depend on Bopha and her eldest son worries "if my mother says 'oh I'm tired' so my hope is broken, because I am blind".*



*Figure 20: A village house and rice farmer*

Bopha's life is one absorbed by the demands of basic survival, to feed and clothe her family and support them if they become ill. Deprived of strong labour or buffalo the family are unable to farm as productively as others and so their livelihood is structured by the seasonal shortage of rice. Moreover, with limited access to farming their dependence on fishing is high, exposing them to the vulnerabilities of declining fish catches. However, in spite of the critical part fishing plays in their lives, the ideals of environmental sustainability, of protecting fish for future generations and for society as a whole are not articulated by Bopha or her family, as they are by others. Rather their concerns for the future are focussed on material improvements to their own lives and are overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness, as they confront the uncertainties of poor health, with few opportunities to save to improve their situation. Given their limited freedom to manoeuvre, it is perhaps not a surprise that Bopha appears to be indifferent to the long term goal of a sustainable fishery; their livelihood simply lacks the capability to move beyond the demands of immediate survival.

It is also the case that the family have limited engagement with the project ideals of participatory governance. For though they comply with their duties as villagers and attend meetings if invited by the village chief, such invitations often fail to reach where they live on an island in the Mekong river. Moreover, even when they do attend meetings they do not speak, rather they go to listen to those with official positions (the village chief, teacher and elders). And even though they listen, it is difficult for them to understand, for Bopha's family is of Laos ethnic origin; they prefer to speak Laotian

and Bopha and her husband are both illiterate in Khmer. Thus they lack the capability, as well as social position to speak out and actively contribute to project meetings. Isolated geographically and marginalised ethnically, they, like Makara and Savy, have a limited sense of being part of the 'community'. Thus their participation in the project is merely a passive and indifferent one, neither supporting it, or resisting it, or even making any sense of it. This is a situation exacerbated further by their overwhelming struggle to survive, which mean her family rarely have time to visit neighbours or attend village ceremonies and build up their relations with other villagers.

Bopha's family is not alone in their limited and inactive engagement in the practices of participatory governance. Indeed, participation in the community fishery is widely interpreted within the village as simply attending meetings, obediently following invitations from local authorities, and listening to what those in official positions have to say. Participation is generally passive and submissive, it does not include speaking or sharing opinions, as one villager explains of their participation in community fishery meetings: "*we are ordinary people and anyway we don't know how to say, so we keep the comments for the people with the official jobs*". Participatory governance appears to be mediated by social position and the accepted norms of behaviour associated with social hierarchies. These are accepted norms which also mediate women's position and involvement; with men often seeing it as their role to attend meetings on behalf of the family and as the head of the household, while women are frequently considered to be too busy with household work to attend. And even when women do attend meetings, they are rarely in a position to speak, even if their husband has such a position, as the elder Vibol describes: "*my wife she's involved in a lot of meetings, but she doesn't like to talk, so she informs me so that I can talk*". These social conventions which determine a person's legitimacy in speaking out during meetings, are also reinforced within the village more widely by a belief in spirits and the risk of being cursed if you speak out against another<sup>7</sup>. So as a villager states: "*outside my family I don't dare to inform (about illegal fishing) because I'm afraid they don't understand and then they will be angry with me ... I'm afraid that they will have ill will<sup>8</sup> in secret*". Silence and passivity is again the accepted behaviour. Irrespective of how a family, or individual, values and

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<sup>7</sup> We were told by the CEPA project staff of another village where they work, where it was believed that the village chief in choosing to support the project had been cursed by the illegal fishers causing his belly to grow and eventually leading to his death.

<sup>8</sup> The translation of 'ill will' here referred to the action of spirits.

relates to the fishery resource and its sustainability, participation in the project appears to revolve around social position and status, gender, ethnicity, and connectedness with other villagers, as well as the norms and beliefs which govern relations. Thus, participation is far from the socially or politically empowering practice that CEPA intends, rather it is beholden to and reinforces existing differences or inequalities.



*Figure 21: Setting and emptying fish nets in the dry season*

And yet all this is also disrupted, in situations where a family, or individual, is involved, or suspected of being involved, in illegal fishing. For illegal fishers are popularly considered the enemy of the community fishery, jeopardizing the goals of sustainability; of people's rights to access the fishery now and in the future. Regardless of social

position or relations, illegal fishers find themselves decisively outside of community fishery relations, only gaining access by denouncing their illegal actions. And for this reason illegal fishers avoid participating in the project practice; they do not attend any meetings and are reluctant to listen to information about the community fishery. They choose to continue using their illegal fishing gear, risking being caught by the community fishery patrol, instead engaging in a resistance against the project's agenda for sustainability.

So it is that following accusations of illegal fishing, Sopheak and his family find themselves labelled as opponents of the 'community', despite the fact that he was originally a member and publicly maintains his support for the community fishery because his "life depends on fishing".

*Sopheak and his family are more dependent on fishing than most others in the village. With limited access to land for farming, fishing provides their main source of income throughout the year, helping the family buy rice and clothes, send their children to school and access health services. With only a limited seasonal corn crop providing an alternative source of income, the family have little means to cope with declining fish catches, as Sopheak explains: "the decline in fish has affected our family we have no money and we can't do anything about this, we just have less money". But as Sopheak loses hope in the fishery to support his life, it also still offers perhaps his only accessible source of income to invest in land for farming, which he, like most others in the village, bases his future hopes on. Perhaps his only choice then is to use illegal fishing gear, which Sopheak admits catches more fish and earns more money than legal gear, presenting the only real opportunity for people lacking food or money. At the same time, however, Sopheak also blames illegal fishing for his declining catches, supporting the community fishery to stop illegal fishing so that fish catches will increase again. Such is the social disgrace associated with using illegal fishing and the risk of being caught and fined, that Sopheak is unlikely to speak otherwise. Indeed he explains that people still using illegal fishing must do so in secret.*

There is little doubt that Sopheak and his family, like others in the village, value the fishery resource and the ideal of sustaining it for their future. However, sustainability as defined through the legislation of fishing practices ultimately conflicts with their

livelihood and aspirations for a better future for themselves and their children. Thus, their livelihood positions them against the project's interpretations of sustainability and moreover excludes them from participating in the project. Indeed, Sopheak's experience along with others associated with illegal fishing are never articulated within the project, there is no space for their contrary perspectives. So it is that the project's restricted interpretation of sustainability remains unchallenged, save for the resistance of those illegal fishers who excluded from the project, continue in secret with their illegal activities.

Sopheak's experience along with the four other examples of livelihoods along the Mekong river begin to reveal some part of the diversity of local livelihoods as well as the complexity of relations with the fishery resource and the project agendas for sustainability through participatory governance. They show how people's livelihoods are differentially positioned to cope with seasonal and ongoing changes and to shape their future. How this in part relates to people's access to land and labour for farming and their relative dependence on the fishery resources. And how this also influences their relation to the project ideal of environmental sustainability as it is interpreted through the legality of fishing practices. So it appears that those in support of environmental sustainability are those in positions of freedom to manoeuvre; with the capabilities to deal with change and to improve their lives as a result of good access to farming and limited dependence on fishing. For most of these people, their fishing activities are already legal, or 'traditional', yet there is little suggestion that it is the particular fishing practices of a 'traditional' livelihood that people wish to sustain. Rather their support for sustainability is simply to secure access to fishery resources and to maintain, or even improve their livelihood security now and in the future. For some this is even a concern which surpasses their own interests; it is not simply a local agenda but one with national significance.

In contrast, however, those who lack capabilities to cope with change, with poor access to farming and greater dependence on fishing, have livelihoods overwhelmed by the immediate struggles to survive, with little space for the notion of long term sustainability. Indeed, in such cases people's aspirations may be more concerned with their desire for personal material improvements than with the future state of the environment. Moreover, where people face such restricted freedom that they use illegal fishing gear, their livelihoods come into conflict with legal interpretations of

sustainability. Indeed, they are excluded from participating in community fishery practice even if they value the ideal of a sustainable fishery, and are forced instead to resist the project, continuing to fish illegally in secret. So it is that different livelihood perspectives simultaneously reinforce and contest CEPA's assumption of a common desire to preserve 'traditional' and legal livelihoods in order to sustain the environment.

Likewise, people are variously positioned in relation to CEPA's assertion of participatory governance as a fundamental right which it must empower people to claim. For rather than a universal right, participation appears to be both a privilege and a social duty. In part it is determined by a person's relative freedom to manoeuvre, specifically the legality of their fishing practices. So it is that those with freedom to rely only on legal fishing gear and to imagine a future beyond their family's short term survival are privileged to participate actively in the project, while others lacking freedom may be excluded altogether, or participate indifferently. At the same time, people's engagement in the project is also influenced by social norms and beliefs which oblige participation in order to conform to village hierarchies and the duties of social position, as well as deference to the powers of a spirit world. These are duties which position some villagers against illegal fishers, whose action threaten the project's notion of a sustainable fishery, even to the extent that family relations are undermined. For many others, participation is merely a passive respect of social duties with no engagement in the ideals of sustainability as they are interpreted through the fishery laws. And for those lacking social connections in the village and with no sense of belonging, or obligation, to the project's 'community', participation in the project practice may be only nominal or absent altogether, as their position marginalises them from involvement. There is then no sense of a collective desire among local people to participate in governing natural resources and as CEPA's director asserts; hold the government to account in its commitment to sustainable development through community fisheries. Indeed, there is little evidence that participatory governance is the empowering practice that CEPA intends. Instead it appears to be a privilege and an obligation or duty to higher authorities, a practice of reinforcing or following externally driven agendas, as opposed to asserting local interests. It is a practice accessible to those whose livelihoods do not challenge existing interpretations of sustainability, silencing and excluding marginal perspectives which may be alternative or contrary. A practice

which perpetuates the existing social inequalities or hierarchies within the village, failing to provide the ideals of “equality, equity and social justice” as CEPA intends.

### ***Livelihoods in Koh Kong***

Turning to examples of livelihoods in Koh Kong, where the Ministry of Environment’s PMCR project operates, a situation is revealed which reinforces experiences encountered in Stung Treng, but also exposes further diversity and complexity. From one of the four villages where PMCR operate, I present examples of livelihoods to illustrate varying degrees of freedom to manoeuvre and which represent relations with the fishery resources distinct from those encountered in Stung Treng. From these different livelihood perspectives relationships with PMCR’s ideals of environmental sustainability and participatory governance are shaped. So it becomes clear how people’s relative freedom as well as their social position within the village influence their engagement with the project’s agenda and practice.

*Ratana has been living in the village for over 20 years, originally migrating there as part of a government sponsored programme, which assisted Khmer families to settle in Koh Kong in an attempt to rebalance the population and reduce the ethnic Thai majority. Though Ratana grew up in a family of farmers, nowadays he and his large family in Koh Kong are fishers. Indeed, the family have no rice fields, no longer having access to the land they were given by the government when they first settled in Koh Kong<sup>9</sup>, and their livelihood now depends on fishing. With a small boat, traps and nets Ratana along with his sons and hired labour spend most of their time catching crabs and fish in Chrouy Pros Bay. They are most busy during the dry season, when crab and fish are abundant and conditions make it easy to access the sea. During this time it is catching crabs in baited traps which is currently their most important activity, with catches so big that the family must hire extra labour to help Ratana’s wife and daughters boil and peel the crabs before selling.*

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<sup>9</sup> Though Ratana did not explain why his family had lost the land given them by the government as part of the migration scheme in the 1980s, it is likely that, like other families, they had abandoned their land to concentrate on fishing activities and now find that their land has been taken over by another family. In such cases there is little chance that the land can be reclaimed, as it is unlikely that there would have been any official papers to prove ownership.

*But it hasn't always been this way. In the past the family mainly used shrimp nets, then they changed to fish nets only using a few hundred crab traps, and now they use only a few fish nets and close to a thousand crab traps. As Ratana explains, there are different reasons for these changes, most recently he has found it too costly to buy new materials for mending his fish nets, which no longer catch as many fish as before. At the same time, though more crab traps are needed to catch enough crab, the price of crab meat has increased while the price of fish has fallen. So it is that he now depends mainly on the crab fishery during the dry season, while in the rainy season there is little to catch and often only enough to eat.*

*Besides fishing the family have few other activities. They keep some chickens during the dry season when the risks of disease are less, raising them around the house and selling them locally. And recently they have acquired a small amount of land to plant a few fruit trees, which they hope will provide an income in future years. So for Ratana, it is the abundance of the fishery resources in Chrouy Pros Bay that supports his family and that determines their living standard along with most others in the village. Yet since he first moved to Koh Kong he has observed the initially abundant resources decline, linking this to the increasing numbers of people living around the Bay using increasing amounts of fishing gear to exploit its resources. And he also blames the fishers who have begun to use gear which is illegal in the shallow waters of the Bay, rather than use it legally in the open sea. When he thinks of the future, he is sure that he and his family will stay in Koh Kong forever and not return to their homeland in Takeo province. He hopes that the fishery resources will increase and bring his family further benefit. This may be possible, he believes, if all the villagers work together and are aided by the local authorities to stop the illegal fishers. However, sometimes he feels his spirit is broken as illegal fishing continues and the community fishery lacks full support from the authorities.*



*Figure 22: Sorting nets and peeling crab*

In contrast to lives in Stung Treng, Ratana's livelihood has minimal connection to the land, revolving instead around seasonal access to the fishery and the continuing struggle to make a living with declining catches and changing markets and fishing technologies. It is a life structured by seasonal and on-going vulnerabilities and yet with access to labour, a boat and fishing gears, and with knowledge of the fishery and markets, Ratana's family manage to find ways to adjust and cope with these changes. In comparison, life is not so resilient for Oudom and Sreyleak:

*For Oudom and Sreyleak's family access to the seasonal crab fishery is controlled by a Thao Kei or local trader, who five years ago lent the family money to buy their boat and traps. Before that time the family had mainly relied on cutting the coastal mangrove forest for charcoal production, however, with the strict enforcement of mangrove protection<sup>10</sup> this no longer remained an option. So it was with the help of the Thao Kei that the family were able to start fishing. Yet it is also to the Thao Kei that they remain indebted, committed to selling him/her their catch at lower prices. And their ability to repay their debts is further constrained, as Sreyleak reveals; Oudom often chooses to drink wine rather than fish, while costly periods of ill health have also stopped them from fishing. To make matters worse they recently lost some of their crab traps, for which they blame the illegal fishers in the Bay. So now they are afraid to fish during the night time when they fear illegal fishers may destroy their remaining traps, and they are limited instead to fishing during daylight. Moreover, it is only in the dry season that the family can earn money from fishing and from the few fruit trees and vegetables they grow, while in the rainy season it is a struggle even to have food for the family.*

*It is hard for Sreyleak to think of the future. She longs for the day when they will have enough money to repay the Thao Kei, then they can sleep and eat well. But until then their life is ladden with debt and they feel their future is full of uncertainty as growing numbers of fishers compete to catch crabs, while illegal fishers destroy their fishing gear and the fishery itself.*

Like Ratana's family, Oudom and Sreyleak's lives are dependent almost entirely on fishing, with little access to land for farming activities beyond growing a few fruit trees and vegetables. However, as a result of a combination of influences and events inside and outside the family, their lives in comparison are more vulnerable, lacking the freedom of Ratana's family. And yet, fishing is critical for both families' survival and in the same way it is the seasonal and on-going changes in access to fishery resources which shape their lives. For this reason, it is not a surprise that both families also have a direct interest in PMCR's agenda of environmental sustainability. Their future is

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<sup>10</sup> Through the earlier phases of the PMCR project, the backing of high officials and support from external funding for enforcement, mangrove protection has been strictly enforced in Koh Kong by the provincial Department of Environment. In comparison, protection of the fishery under the jurisdiction of the provincial Department of Fisheries together with local authorities and PMCR's community fishery is less well enforced due in part to the variable support from high officials and local authorities as well as limited funding beyond that for the activities of the community fishery.

dependent on the sustainability of the fishery and is threatened both in the short and long term by the actions of illegal fishers. For it is illegal fishers, who both families hold responsible for their declining catches and the destruction of the fishery resources in the Bay. It is also illegal fishers who the families blame for destroying their own legal fishing gear when it gets caught up in illegal nets<sup>11</sup>, as happened for Oudom and Sreyleak. So it is that sustainability as interpreted through the legality of fishing practices is reinforced by both families' livelihood experiences and expectations. Moreover, Ratana claims that it was originally his own idea to ban the illegal fishers from the Bay and to establish a community fishery area, which the people could protect themselves. From Ratana's perspective PMCR is responding to local people's interests and through the community fishery is allowing them to achieve their vision of sustainability, for which they are responsible as custodians of the natural resources, as he explains:

*“We are the owners of the natural resources and the protectors ... If we try to protect we will keep the resources for the next generation. For my family I think it is very very important because before they never allow us to protect by ourselves, so now when they allow us to protect and cooperate with the local authority, I will protect well and get equal benefit from the natural resources. I think that it will be better in the future”.*

Critically, Ratana also supports PMCR's notion of environmental sustainability through participatory governance, where local people collaborate with the authorities to manage the natural resources. Ratana's sense of duty to participate in sustainability is further reinforced by his own position as an elder, a well connected long term resident of the village, and as the first chief of the project's village management committee and the current leader of the patrol group for the community fishery area. So, as in Stung Treng, participation in practice is supported by Ratana's social position and relations, which give him a right to speak and sense of responsibility to share his experience and help solve problems in the village. And it also motivates him to patrol and stop illegal fishers, in spite of the time he admits losing from his own fishing and the threats and on occasion violence he experiences from people using illegal fishing gear. Like those with position in Stung Treng, Ratana actively participates in the project practice, seeing

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<sup>11</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 6, crab traps and nets are frequently caught up and destroyed in trawls and motorised push nets being used illegally in Chrouy Pros Bay, resulting in conflicts between fishers using the small-scale gears and those using the large scale illegal gears.

it as his responsibility to reinforce and extend the project's ideals of environmental sustainability.

In contrast, despite the fact that Oudum and Sreyleak's livelihoods support the project's notion of sustainability, their participation in the community fishery is limited. Like many others in the village, they are confined within social hierarchies, which reserves the right to speak at meetings to those with official status. As confirmed by another villager "*I only listened in the meeting because I had no role to talk ... we joined the meeting only to be witness to hear what they (those in position) discussed, such as they want to establish the community to protect the natural resource*". Thus, their participation in the project is passive and submissive; attending meetings when invited and listening without making comments. As in Stung Treng, participation appears to perpetuate social inequalities, rather than bring about equality as the project intends.

More often Oudom and Sreyleak fail to participate at all, finding themselves too busy with fishing, or crab peeling. They even doubt whether engaging in the community fishery can help their situation, claiming "*participation doesn't give me any benefit at all, I only get benefit from going to fish using crab traps*". So though their livelihood confirms the ideals of sustainability, it in part conflicts with those of participatory governance. For in practice Oudom and Sreyleak's lack of freedom to manoeuvre and their immediate demands to make a living take priority over engaging actively in natural resource management.



*Figure 23: Villagers around Chrouy Pros*

Similar tensions between the project's concern for participatory governance and people's immediate livelihood demands were encountered elsewhere. Specifically, they were encountered among families, who on the one hand were in favour of ideals for sustainability, which reinforced their own legal fishing activities, but who also complained of being too busy making a living to engage in the project, which in practice seemed to bring no direct benefit. Their livelihoods simply lack the freedom: the immediate capability and time to take part in implementing ideals, which might only bring benefits in the long term. For other families, however, there is a more critical contradiction between their livelihoods and the ideals of sustainability. These are the families who depend on illegal fishing activities.

*Thida and her family left their life of rice farming in Takeo province over 10 years ago and moved to Koh Kong where Thida's relatives had told her of the many opportunities to make a better living. And so step by step and year by year Thida and her family have managed to improve their life. They have paid off the loan from the Thao Kei, or trader, who initially supported them with a boat and fishing gear and they have even had some savings to buy new materials. But still life is not always easy and they must work hard to earn enough income to support the family during the rainy seasons; when fishing is scarce and bad weather means few people want to use their ferry service to the provincial town. So they fish for crabs with traps in the dry season, but it's not easy as they lack knowledge of the best fishing grounds and find it difficult to make a good profit. They also continue their ferry service in the dry season, which with the calm weather brings good returns. However, it is the illegal "khouv" net which they consider their most important activity, earning the most income by catching bait fish for the crab trap fishery, for which there is high demand within the village.*

*But having invested in the "khouv" net which will last many years, the family learnt that it has been banned by the community fishery. As a member of the community fishery, Thida's husband Sovan understands why the community want to stop the "khouv" net, realising that its fine mesh catches many of the young crabs and fish, threatening the future of the fishery. Indeed, the family are supportive of the community fishery believing that if the village wants to develop and people want their living standards to improve, then they must help to protect the fishery resources so that people can earn more from fishing in the future. Yet in spite of this they protest against the community banning the "khouv" net. They argue that the "khouv" net has less impact than the larger scale illegal gears, and request that the community should let them continue using it. They wonder how the community can claim they want to reduce poverty and at the same time stop them from doing the job that they rely on? For how would they get enough to eat without the "khouv" net? But though the local authorities recognise their difficulty they also explain that there is no choice and people will have to stop. And even though Thida admits that in the end their "khouv" net will "break*

*their cooking jar<sup>12</sup>” they, along with others in the village, still use it against the regulations because this is what they know and rely on.*



**Figure 24: Living on the edge of the sea**

So it is that Thida and Sovan’s dependence on illegal fishing puts their lives in opposition with environmental sustainability as it is interpreted through the legality of fishing practices. Yet they do not reject the ideals of protecting and sustaining the fishery to improve their lives in the future. Indeed, the importance of these values for their lives encouraged them to support the community fishery. Yet it also led them to question the coherence between these apparently appealing ideals and the contradictory reality of the community fishery’s practice. For their dependence on illegal gear is critical in coping with seasonal shortage and to stop risks losing the little freedom the family have gained from seasonal vulnerabilities. Moreover, though the “*khouv*” net is considered a threat to the fishery, there is also a demand for the bait fish it supplies for the legal crab trap fishers. So while illegal fishing continues to provide an important

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<sup>12</sup> The reference to “*cooking jar*” here refers to the fishery which is seen as the source of food and therefore of survival.

source of income and with few viable alternatives, Thida and Sovan persist in its use; resisting the law and openly protesting against the community fishery. Yet looking to the future, Thida and Sovan are resigned to the fact that they will eventually have to comply with the law and stop using the “*khouv*” net, they will be forced to concede to the legal interpretation of sustainability, even though this presents a far from sustainable prospect for their lives. For other families, however, a future without the illegal fishing gear on which they depend appears hopeless.

*Dany was widowed 6 years ago when her husband died while fishing. Now she lives with her daughter Reaksmey, who has been left by her own husband to raise two young children. Dany finds life is a struggle and she often feels desparate with worry, for she suffers with poor health and eyesight and it is difficult to get enough for the small family to eat. Throughout the year they work hard on many different jobs. They work as labourers for rice farmers planting and harvesting rice in exchange for rice to eat, they also make thatch to sell to other villagers, along with fruit and lemongrass which grows around their house. In the rainy season a local Thao Kei, or trader hires them both to collect shellfish by hand from the mangrove forests and in the dry season Reaksmey works for the Thao Kei to push a hand net in waters often as high as her neck, harvesting small Grouper fingerlings, or “Gecko” fish. Reaksmey might also peel crabs for other fishers in the dry season when the “Gecko” fish are scarce, but she finds it hard to peel as much as others.*

*Despite these many jobs they earn very little income and Dany feels angry because people in the village refuse her credit to help her buy rice, saying she has no provider, as she is a widow. She is also angry at the village management committee when they suggested that the hand net, on which she and her daughter depend, should be banned along with other illegal fishing gears. Indeed, together with other villagers she and her daughter protested at the village meeting, asking “what should we eat if the hand net is stopped?”. And she accuses the village management committee of only thinking of themselves, never considering that she has no rice to eat, resolving that “if the community does not think about me I won’t think about the community”.*

*Of the many activities that fill Dany and Reaksmey’s time, it is using the illegal hand net which they value most. Indeed, using the hand net provides the family with most of their income and they consider it the most important of their many activities. For it gives*

*good income even though catches are sometimes unreliable, and even though they depend on the Thao Kei to provide access to a boat to reach the fishing grounds and to whom they must sell all their catch, often at low prices.*



***Figure 25: Using a hand push net in Chrouy Pros Bay***

Dany and Reaksmey's life is one deprived of the advantages accessible to Thida's family; of strong labour and independence from the *Thao Kei*. Such is their restricted freedom to manoeuvre that they live on the edge of survival, excluded from others help and trapped in a seemingly unending and desperate toil. Like Thida and Sovan, it is illegal fishing which provides their most important source of income and which places their livelihoods in conflict with the project's ideals of environmental sustainability. But such is the absence of freedom faced by Dany and Reaksmey they can hardly comprehend their life in the absence of the illegal hand net. And so despite the obvious importance of the fishery resource for their lives, Dany feels unable to even consider any value in the project's ideals of environmental sustainability, rejecting them as only relevant to other people.

Yet, at the same time, Dany has felt obliged to join the community fishery and attend its meetings because having been asked she felt a duty to follow others, to fit in and not to be different. Following accepted social norms which demand deference to authority, Dany remains silent during meetings, listening to those in official positions who are

considered to have the knowledge to speak. As Dany states: “*in the meeting, I only listen ... I did not say anything because I didn’t know how to say*”. Moreover, she admits to feeling too distracted with worries to remember any of the information that the project provides. Participating in managing the fishery is in reality far from Dany’s interests, rather it is merely a social duty Dany is compelled to fulfill.

However, in spite of initially complying and participating passively in project meetings Dany and Reaksmey are ultimately forced to break with social conventions. Joining Thida’s family and other illegal fishers they instead speak out in protest against the community fishery and contest the prohibition of hand nets. And such are the constraints within their own livelihood, they have no choice but to resist the project practice; continuing to use their hand net illegally. For others in the village, however, the sense of duty to obey authority and to submit to the project practices eventually overcomes their protest. This is the case of Tola, who felt an obligation not only to join the community fishery but also to stop using his illegal “*khouv*” net.

*Like others using illegal fishing gear, Tola initially complained of the difficulties of stopping fishing with his illegal “khouv” net, for what would they eat with the loss of their most important source of income? Tola even benefited from relations with the district governor, who pitied him and allowed him to continue illegal fishing. But ultimately he chose to stop illegal fishing, afraid to break the law and to oppose the government. Instead Tola attempted to do other jobs; working as a fishing and farm labourer, or as a construction labourer for different projects managed by the village management committee. However, he found it difficult to earn enough money to support his family and he struggled to make a living. He lamented the fact that he had no land for farming and no influence to bypass the strict regulations which protected the nearby forest and stopped him from clearing it for farmland. Perhaps his only option was to return to his homeland, or even start to use his illegal “khouv” net further away from the community fishery area. For Tola understood the purpose of the community fishery and agreed that it was important to help protect the natural resources on which people rely. But he also began to feel that the community only provided help to their relatives and friends and that their’s was an agenda for the future, which brought little benefits for him now.*



*Figure 26: A villager, Chrouy Pros*

As with Dany and Reaksmeay, participation in environmental sustainability was for Tola about fitting in with others, because “*everyone joins with them and if I don’t I will stand alone*”. It was about being part of the ‘community’ the project was constructed to represent. For Tola this sense of commitment to participate was further reinforced by his membership in the Cambodian People’s Party who dominate the village management committee and local authority. Thus, participation was a political expectation as well as a social one. So it was that Tola eventually stopped using his illegal fishing gear despite the fact that it had been critical for his family’s survival and he had access to limited alternatives. But compliance with the legal practice of sustainability did not bring with it the assumed livelihood benefits. Indeed, Tola’s vulnerabilities seemed to intensify when he stopped illegal fishing, making him, like others, question the relevance of environmental sustainability as it is implemented through the law, though he had supported the ideal in theory.

Similar dilemmas are faced by many others, who despite being supportive of environmental sustainability as a means of improving their lives, struggle to comply

with its implementation in practice. This situation is particularly acute given the village's position adjacent to Botum Sakor national park<sup>13</sup>, which severely limits access to land and so to alternative farming activities. It is also made worse for those whose lack the capabilities or freedom to adapt and change and who face increasing hardship in the absence of illegal fishing gear. Such is the case of Sambath, as described below, for whom sustainability and the community fishery has become synonymous with the tiger preventing access to the natural resources on which his livelihood depends.

*As an ethnic Thai the village is Sambath's homeland and where his family used to farm. However, their land was lost during the period of government supported migration when it was distributed to Khmer immigrants. At that time, lacking buffalo or cattle for farming the loss of land seemed unproblematic. But now as he finds his "ous" net prohibited and looks for alternatives, it is his lack of access to land which he most regrets. This dilemma is further exacerbated by his lack of money to buy legal crab traps, or even to buy a water pump which might help him improve his bean crop around his house. He is also no longer able to use his "trey kavav"<sup>14</sup> fishing net, which was damaged by the cement blocks and poles used by the project and others<sup>15</sup> to protect the seagrass and stop illegal fishing in the Bay. And he only owns a small boat, which makes the option of fishing legally with his "ous" net in the open sea a dangerous one, especially in the rough seas of the rainy season. For Sambath, the constraints he faces make his life feel hopeless, as he puts it: "now it's so difficult I feel I can't do anything, as the old word says 'go to water there is the crocodile and go to the mountain and there is the tiger'<sup>16</sup>". Indeed, he feels as though the community have no interest in his situation, saying: "the community just has the plan to conserve the resources but they don't care about people's lives". So while Sambath has chosen to comply with the community and give up his illegal fishing, the difficulties he faces as a result have weakened his support such that he admits finally "we cannot follow the law, we will*

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<sup>13</sup> Botum Sakor national park is strictly protected and enforced through the support of the US charity Wild Aid who provide finance and training to the provincial department of environment giving them the capacity to protect the forest with the help of helicopters and global positioning systems to identify areas of logging, as well as machine guns to arm environmental rangers and allow them to apprehend illegal loggers.

<sup>14</sup> "Trey kavav" is a type of fish.

<sup>15</sup> The PMCR project, Provincial Fisheries Department and the SEILA programme have all independently placed cement blocks and poles on different areas of the seabed in Chrouy Pros Bay in an effort to prevent illegal fishing gears from using these areas and to create protected seagrass habitats.

<sup>16</sup> Sambath uses this proverb to refer to the community fishery protecting the fish in the water and the environmental rangers protecting the forest in the mountains.

*even do these activities (illegal fishing) and we will be punished but we are not afraid because we have nothing to eat”.*



***Figure 27: Processing the fish catch***

Sambath's livelihood like other illegal fishers is clearly in conflict with environmental sustainability and with little freedom to manoeuvre he is forced finally to resist the project and the law. Moreover, Sambath's sense of duty, or social obligation, to participate in the community fishery is further challenged by his experiences of marginalisation as an ethnic Thai. For in many ways the ethnic Thai live apart from the majority Khmer population; mainly living in an area distant from the centre of the village, mostly speaking Thai as their first language, and with stronger social and economic connections among themselves and with Thailand than with the neighbouring

Khmer people. Among the ethnic Thai people, it is often only Sambath who attends meetings of the Khmer dominated village management committee, motivated by a desire to find out what they are doing and how the community fishery will affect him and other ethnic Thais. But he also complains that he is often not invited to meetings, or fully informed of the project's activities. Moreover, the ethnic Thai are frequently thought of as illegal fishers by the Khmer people in the village and blamed for declining fish catches. At the same time, Sambath maintains that the 'ous' net that he and other ethnic Thais use is not as destructive as other illegal gears, including the 'khouv' net used by Khmer people in the village. And he feels unwilling to stop using his 'ous' net, while Khmer fishers continue using their 'khouv' nets. Sambath's relations with the project are strained by the social and geographic distance between Khmer and ethnic Thai peoples. His experience challenges the assumption underlying the project's ideals of participatory governance, of the existence of a 'community' with a shared interest in the fishery resources and willingness to collective action.

Through these examples of lives in Koh Kong further layers of livelihood diversity are revealed, which in turn uncover a complexity of relations with PMCR's agenda for environmental sustainability through participatory governance. As in Stung Treng different families find themselves differentially positioned to cope with seasonal and ongoing changes and to determine their futures. However, unlike Stung Treng, for most families in Koh Kong this relates primarily to their capability to access the fishery resource, as determined by their access to healthy labour, knowledge, boats, fishing gears and markets, which in turn is often dependent on relations with local traders, or the *Thao Kei* and levels of indebtedness. And though access to fishery resources has provided an initial source of freedom for many migrants to Koh Kong, it also appears that people's dependence on fishery resources increasingly represents a constraint; as competition to access the fishery has increased, fish catches have declined, the use of certain fishing gears has become prohibited, and forest protection strictly restricts land access and opportunities for farming. Consequently, there is an overall sense that people face greater uncertainties and vulnerabilities in Koh Kong, while simultaneously the value of sustaining the fishery and improving fish catches in the future is more critical for people's survival.

Such is the dependence on fishery resources in Koh Kong, that the ideal of environmental sustainability as a means of sustaining and improving people's lives

appears to be almost universally supported in its promise for a better future. Yet the simplification of this ideal to the legality of fishing means that it is both supported and contested in practice. Indeed, the widespread use of illegal fishing gears position many in Koh Kong in conflict with sustainability; as participating in sustainability by stopping illegal fishing threatens their survival and intensifies their vulnerability. For with an absence of viable alternatives and in some cases limited capabilities to adapt and change, illegal fishers in Koh Kong face extreme constraints to their freedom to manoeuvre. These are perspectives which leave many with little option but to resist sustainability in practice and to contest the project's assumption that environmental sustainability will bring about livelihood enhancement and even poverty reduction.

So it is that participation in governing natural resources appears to be far from the collective concern of a 'community' as the PMCR project assumes. For in reality the community fishery appears to be representative only of those who depend on legal fishing gear and is the domain of the Khmer majority, while ethnic Thais are marginalised. Moreover, motivations to participate in the 'community' are not always apparent even for those whom the 'community' does represent. Rather it is a function of the relative urgency of living, or freedom to manoeuvre and people's capability to give time to participate in exchange for the promise of future benefits, given their immediate livelihood demands. For many, participation is driven, as in Stung Treng, less by a concern to collaborate in managing the fishery and more by obligations to conform to social and in some cases political expectations. Such is the sense of duty to authority and desire to fit in, even illegal fishers feel compelled to attend community fishery meetings. And yet, the obligation to participate also creates an opportunity for illegal fishers to protest against the project, to counter the authority of the 'community' and the expectations of social norms and contest the restricted implementation of sustainability. So in Koh Kong, unlike in Stung Treng, illegal fishers' resistance finds a voice, leading them to openly challenge the coherence between the universal appeal of sustainability and the reality of their own experiences.

### ***Chapter summary***

Through the chapter I have explored the diverse life worlds of people living in two remote villages where each project attempts to intervene. Making use of a selection of

examples of local livelihoods, I have revealed in each location some part of the complexity of people's lives and how people are differently positioned in relation to each project's agenda for environmental sustainability through participatory governance. Illustrating livelihoods with varying degrees of freedom to manoeuvre, the examples have shown how people's freedom to choose and respond to change is determined to an extent by their changing capabilities to access natural resources, in particular for farming in Stung Treng and for fishing in Koh Kong. So it is that those lacking capabilities face limited freedom to manoeuvre and ongoing vulnerability and hardship; a situation exacerbated by the seasonality of natural resource access as well as declining access to fishery resources. It is also a situation made particularly acute where people have access to few alternatives to fishing, as in Koh Kong where strict forest protection means the availability of land for farming is severely limited. Moreover, it is in such positions of negative freedom that illegal fishing frequently plays a critical part in people's immediate survival.

Among these different livelihood perspectives the ideal of environmental sustainability as a promise of protecting the fishery on which people depend and of bringing about a better future had near universal appeal. This was predominantly so in Koh Kong where so many people depended almost exclusively on the fishery resources to make a living. Yet, in practice the simplification of sustainability to the legality of fishing practices was clearly unable to accommodate different livelihood experiences. Indeed, in practice livelihoods in Stung Treng and Koh Kong simultaneously reinforced, disregarded and contested sustainability as implemented through community fisheries. Thus, people in positions of positive freedom, often already relying on legal fishing gear, had livelihoods which supported legal interpretations of sustainability. Indeed, they also saw illegal fishing as the principle threat to sustainability, particularly in Koh Kong where direct conflicts between legal and illegal fishing gear were common. But at the same time, there were also instances in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong, where people lacking freedom and sometimes in positions of extreme vulnerability appeared unable to consider the long term future of the fishery; they disregarded sustainability, concerned instead with their immediate survival and with material improvements to their own lives. Moreover, for many of these people, especially in Koh Kong, a dependence on illegal fishing positioned their livelihoods in conflict with sustainability. Indeed, sustainability appeared to bring about greater vulnerability and hardship among illegal

fishers in Koh Kong who had attempted to give up using their illegal fishing gear. Thus, interpretations of environmental sustainability through the law and community fisheries appeared to be reinforced only by the capable and those in positions of freedom, while it was both disregarded and contested through the experiences of the less capable or those lacking freedom.

These varying positions in relation to sustainability also challenged ideals of participatory governance, interpreted by CEPA as a right and means of economic, social and political empowerment, or by PMCR as a mechanism for enabling collaborative action between local people's interests and government policy. For in the absence of a 'community' with a shared perspective on sustainability, the assumption by both projects of a collective desire to participate in community fisheries was clearly undermined. Rather participation was only in the interests of those whose livelihoods already reinforced the ideals of sustainability, who had the capability and time to participate and the freedom to imagine a future beyond their immediate survival. Moreover, in practice motivations to participate appeared to be driven less by concern for sustainability and more by social and in some instances political hierarchies and expectations. Obligated to attend meetings, participation was for many a matter of publicly submitting to the views of those with authority. Alternatively, it was, for those already in positions of authority, such as elders, a matter of fulfilling a duty to extend or reiterate the 'official' project interpretations. And for those on the margins of social hierarchies, as a result of their ethnicity or simply their lack of social relations within the village, participation was often indifferent or absent altogether.

Thus, rather than empower or enable local interests, mechanisms of participatory governance instead perpetuated social hierarchies and inequalities. It functioned to extend the projects' agendas for environmental sustainability, silencing alternative or contrary perspectives and leaving little room for any local transformation. So it was that the experiences of the less capable, those lacking freedom and those using illegal fishing gear, appeared to be largely hidden, emerging only as a resistance to the community fishery. This was a resistance which played out in secret in Stung Treng, but which found a voice in protest and open defiance of the fishery law in Koh Kong, where extreme limitations to people's freedom to manoeuvre and their reliance on illegal fishing led many to challenge the coherence and relevancy of environmental sustainability.

The diversities and complexities of local livelihoods give rise to different relations with each project which reinforce but also unsettle and challenge their agendas for sustainable development. However, these local experiences or sites of practice are at the same time mediated by a group of intermediary actors from local or meso-level institutions. These are actors who live alongside the villagers described in this chapter. But critically, they are also simultaneously elected or appointed to represent local people and at the same time they are responsible for supporting both projects implement their agendas. It is through their relations and actions at the interface between projects and local people, that ideals of sustainable development are further re-ordered, as I consider in the next and final analysis chapter.

## Chapter 8

### Negotiating sustainable development at the interface

The purpose of this final analysis chapter is to explore the negotiations of meaning which take place at an interface between institutional orderings of sustainable development and the complex realities of people's livelihoods. What I wish to consider is a middle ground; a field of action, where "*policy and social life become muddled together*" (Arce 2003). This is an interface between external and local perspectives, where multiple actors and interests come together and ideas are circulated, contested and transformed. It is a field of action distinct from what has come before in Chapters 6 and 7. For this is a middle ground mediated by a particular group of actors caught in the inbetween. The actors I refer to here are from a meso-level; representatives of local institutions who are simultaneously elected or appointed to represent local people and responsible for supporting projects implement their agendas. These are actors acting within pre-defined structures of authority, whose actions are accountable both upwards and downwards. Yet at the same time, they are local residents of the same villages encountered in Chapter 7; they are then also neighbours, friends, relatives and in some cases patrons to the same villagers. Moreover, they are also farmers and fishers just like other villagers. Thus, their actions take place in the context of tensions between their structured responsibilities and their own interests and individual agency.

In the context of each community fishery project, this is a field of action concerned primarily with the struggle to deal with illegality; a struggle between the authority of legal orderings of sustainability, which dominate both projects' agendas, and the realities of local livelihoods and individual interests. What I seek, then, to examine through this chapter are the perspectives and actions of different meso-level actors as they make sense of their position and as they navigate the conflicts surrounding illegal fishing. I begin the chapter by briefly introducing the actors who represent the meso-level, who they are and how I encountered them in Stung Treng and Koh Kong. In the remainder of the chapter my focus then turns to their experiences in negotiating the middle ground. Specifically, I explore their actions in the context of their various and multiple positions as appointed authority, elected representative and local resident; or the overlapping and often competing influences of structures and agency. Thus I

organise material into three sections, dealing firstly with negotiations through relations of authority, that structure meso-level actions into a hierarchical top-down process. Secondly, I consider meso-level actions in relation to their responsibilities as elected representatives accountable to the interests of local people; focussing on the influence of local resistances to community fisheries. Thirdly, I deal with influences from within, or the personal values, interests or agency of individual actors, which reinforces, but also often opposes their structured roles, in particular their duty to promote the collective good assigned to sustainability. In each case, I explore the positions and practices of meso-level actors, showing how they simultaneously defend and disrupt illegality and the project ideals of environmental sustainability through participatory governance.

### ***Encountering the meso-level in Stung Treng and Koh Kong***

I consider the meso-level as being those actors who have been elected or appointed to represent local people and who are at the same time responsible in different ways for supporting the interventions of both projects. The meso-level of relevance to my analysis include actors within local government, such as the village chief and commune council members<sup>1</sup>, as well as members of the local community fishery committees established by each project<sup>2</sup>. In all cases these are local institutions responsible for serving, or representing local people. Indeed, local people elect their commune councils and local community fishery committees (see Box 2, Chapter 4), who are in theory directly accountable to them. The exception is the village chief, who is elected by the commune council, acting as its village extension and in this way indirectly accountable to local interests.

Alongside duties to local people, these meso-level actors are also responsible for serving the interests of external institutions, which require them to support the implementation of each project. For local government actors, they are responsible for representing the interests of government and extending its administrative functions. So it is that the village chief and commune council are accountable both to local people and

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<sup>1</sup> Other local government actors, such as village group leaders, commune police and village development committees, also variously play a role in supporting the project, however, my principle focus here is my own encounters with members of the commune council and the village chiefs.

<sup>2</sup> Local community committees are referred to in Stung Treng as the community fishery committees, while in Koh Kong they are known as village management committees.

to a hierarchy of authority, starting with district and provincial government and ending with the Ministry of Interior. Responsibilities upwards include specific duties relevant to the projects and identified in the law<sup>3</sup>; requiring them to support general economic and social development and environmental protection, as well as the establishment and management of community fisheries. Likewise, the local community fishery committees established by each project are also responsible both to local people and to government, with specific duties to implement community fisheries management specified in the law, as mentioned in Box 2, Chapter 4. And at the same time they are also answerable to the interests of the projects who worked to establish them and continue to support them with technical and financial assistance.

I turn now to consider what lies beneath the official positions and duties of these actors, to introduce the particular characters from these groups as I encountered them in relation to the community fishery projects in Stung Treng and Koh Kong. Beginning, as I did, in Stung Treng, one of the first meso-level actors who I came to know was the village chief. A man of considerable influence, he was one of the early residents in the village, arriving in the province during the Pol Pot regime, working as a tractor driver and by the end of the regime as a Khmer Rouge soldier fighting the invading Vietnamese army. Like others in the village he also farms and fishes with his family, and during rice planting and harvesting is often away working his rice fields on the outskirts of the village. On top of livelihood demands he spends much time attending to his duties as village chief. He is proud of his ability as a leader, stating that he “*has always been the leader*”, acting as a group chief<sup>4</sup> before he became the village chief. However, with the initial stages of a re-election taking place, his current position was uncertain and unsure of the outcome he admitted that he felt he was losing commitment. Even so, he remains an important figure in the village, whose authority is relied upon to ensure people participate in village meetings, where he is also expected to be a source of advice. As village chief, he also supported the community fishery committee, informing villagers of meetings and of the bylaws and the importance of stopping illegal fishing. But at the same time he was frustrated that the community fishery committee did not

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<sup>3</sup> In this case the Law on the Administrative Management of the Communes/Sangkats (2001) and the Sub-Decree on Community Fisheries Management (2004) both identify responsibilities of local government relevant to the project agendas and practices.

<sup>4</sup> Group chiefs work beneath the village chief and were a feature of the Khmer Rouge and subsequent Vietnamese-led communist government. They are now officially obsolete, though they do remain in use in some places and were apparent as part of the village administration in both of the research villages.

always follow the hierarchical structure of local administration, saying: “*so far, the community fishery committee work has not followed the structure, they never send their monthly reports to me for verification*”. From the village chief’s perspective he should oversee all collective activities in the village, including the community fishery. Autonomous acts of the relatively newly formed community fishery committee are a source of tension with the village chief, as they appear to undermine or bypass his long-standing authority in the village.

Unlike the village chief, the chief of community fishery committee was not among the early residents of the village, having migrated from another province only 10 years before. Moreover, he had also never been in an official position before being elected into his role. But even though his duties were entirely new and required that he receive training from CEPA, he was passionate and committed to his role, as he expressed:

*“I am a chief of the community fishery and I feel that I devote all my spiritual and physical strength for protecting the natural resources... before I was an ordinary person in Khei village ... before joining the community fishery committee I didn’t know anything about community fisheries, but after being elected<sup>5</sup> CEPA gave more training ... I learnt about managing the community, I learnt about how to inform people ... they also trained about how to write reports, like meeting minutes, and how to arrest illegal fishers”.*

Other community fishery committee members were less dedicated. Indeed, the only female committee member, though generally supportive of the chief, was also anxious to leave her position, feeling stressed by the responsibilities the role demanded and the tensions it created with other villagers. Nonetheless, the committee did organise patrols of their community fishery area and had even been involved in the arrest of a number of illegal fishers. Yet, the committee had never held a village meeting, until the period the research took place<sup>6</sup>, even though the chief initially claimed they took place every few months.

In spite of underlying tensions in the relative authority of the village chief and community fishery chief, both were visible from the outset of the research and appeared

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<sup>5</sup> As outlined in Box 2 Chapter 4, community fishery committees are elected by local people

<sup>6</sup> Arguably the meeting only took place because of our requests to observe a village meeting, having been told that they took place each month. However, once at the meeting it was quickly clear that this was the first village level meeting that had taken place.

on the surface to be cooperating together. In contrast, it took some time to encounter the commune council, although they are present in the village, with one of the vice chiefs living there with his family. Indeed, he is the councillor responsible for security and the environment, including the regulation of illegal activities, and in this role has occasionally joined the community fishery patrols with the committee. However, most of his time is spent with other commune council members at the commune offices some distance away from the village, such that the commune's presence and influence in the village on a daily basis was less obvious. Moreover, though the commune council are officially supposed to arrange for the commune police to join community fishery patrols, in most cases this failed to materialise. Indeed, the community fishery committee complained of the lack of cooperation from the commune council, accusing it of supporting illegal fishers (as will become clearer below). Consequently, the community fishery committee often bypassed the commune altogether, seeking support directly from the provincial fishery office or CEPA, or from another commune via a neighbouring community fishery committee.

Meso-level actors in Koh Kong are very different. Here the commune council is a highly visible institution, with its members mostly living in close proximity to one another<sup>7</sup> and holding influential positions within the village. One female councillor was a prominent local trader, or *Thao Kei*, while another councillor was a retired health worker, running a small pharmacy and acting as a local doctor. A number of these same councillors are also key members of the village management committee; the local doctor was chief of the committee, while the *Thao Kei* was a committee member. Indeed, though the committee was elected by villagers, it was PMCR who worked strategically to identify and build the capacity of particular influential villagers for nomination. As the project's national co-ordinator explains, these were individuals who as a result of their position and wealth were considered to have time to be involved and could be convinced of the benefits of the project's agenda:

*“our strategy we try to work with the rich people especially with the middle person and the rich ... one thing we didn't spend money for them, second they have more time to work with us and third, may be they can understand because they get benefit from the poor people who fish ... if they involve with the community group to work with the*

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<sup>7</sup> The villages of Chrouy Pros commune, where the research took place in Koh Kong, are located nearby one another, in some cases running into each other with no obvious boundary inbetween.

*project to help to manage that area, they say 'ok if they protect the mangrove ... all the small fisher that borrow his money they can get fish and they can pay back to them' ... so I convince the rich people and middle person in the village to support the community based mangrove management in that area ... most of these middle person they are part of the village management committee”.*

Once key villagers were in place, the committee itself also identified additional members, who were recognised not just for of their financial influence, but also for their dedication to collective activities in the village. So, as one such committee member recalls:

*“When the village management committee chief took my name, I didn't realize myself because I am busy participating in the workshop on health ... actually I was part of a voluntary dissemination network related to health prior to village management committee ..... besides this, I am a (member of the) pagoda committee who help to look after and organise food for the monks .... I think that he (the village management committee chief) perhaps found that I have devoted a lot of time for the community without thinking of tiring”.*

This strategy appears in part to have been successful. For unlike in Stung Treng, the village management committee does hold regular monthly meetings and frequently convenes when external officials come to the village to discuss conservation or development activities. They also coordinate regular patrols of their community fishery area and, supported by the commune police, have arrested a number of illegal fishers. In addition, the PMCR project have organised that they join together with committees from other villages where the project works, forming a community fishery federation (see Figure 14 Chapter 6) to address illegal fishing issues involving fishers from different locations.

In comparison to the prominence of the commune council and village management committee, the village chief was considerably less visible in Koh Kong. Even though I had regularly encountered the village chief<sup>8</sup>, it was some time before I realised that she held that position. Indeed, she had only very recently been elected and seemed surprised at her new role, having limited prior community experience. She admitted that she did

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<sup>8</sup> I had often met the village chief and her husband on visits to buy sugar cane juice from their stall near the village management committee chief's house.

not yet know what the village chief should do, relying on the commune chief to give her guidance, while continuing to work selling sugar cane and peeling crabs for other households. Similarly, she felt unclear about the work of the village management committee, having only just become a member of the community fishery. Quite unlike the village chief in Stung Treng and the other meso-level actors in Koh Kong, she appeared to hold little influence on her own. Her position in the middle ground was clearly aligned and subordinate to higher authorities with little evidence of a responsibility to local people. Indeed, she expressed a willingness to follow instructions from the commune and village management committee and in particular to pass on information to villagers, as she explains:

*“The community fishery calls the village chiefs to tell about illegal fishing prohibition in order to get the village chiefs to pass on the message to their villagers, so I have to take that information to disseminate to my villagers. Besides listening in the meeting, I expect to take the explanation of community fishery chief to disseminate to people not to do illegal fishing which impacts on the resource ... the community have invited me to join and listen to the information that the NGO<sup>9</sup> bring to disseminate”.*

The different local institutions in Stung Treng and Koh Kong represent a varied meso-level. A meso-level which is multiply positioned as elected representative, appointed authority and local resident, acting in the middle ground between the interests of local people and projects. This is a level of authority with official roles and responsibilities in relation to the project agendas for sustainable development. They are in part responsible for enforcing legal interpretations of sustainability through community fisheries. They are also the principle agents for each project in the villages. For local people who rarely meet project staff they are the face of the community fishery and the external agendas of sustainable development, as interpreted through the fisheries law. Yet they are also in various ways representatives of local people’s interests and are clearly embedded within particular configurations of influence and relations in the villages where they live and work. Situated at the critical interface between external projects and local lives meso-level actors are confronted with a complexity of interests. Thus, as I examine in the follow sections, they struggle to make sense of and practically engage with sustainable

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<sup>9</sup> In this case, she is probably referring to the PMCR and CZM projects, neither of which are actually NGOs.

development in the context of overlapping and often competing influences from relations of authority, local resistances and their own personal interests and values.

### ***Negotiating sustainable development through relations of authority***

Pervading relationships throughout the network of actors associated with each project is the influence of hierarchical social orders. Orders shaped both by social norms, or expectations and by legal frameworks, which together structure an individual's authority in relation to others. Already these have emerged among the institutional actors introduced in Chapter 6 and the networks of relations within villages discussed in Chapter 7. I refer then to the way in which relations are confined by the formal tiers of government administration and the associated legal frameworks which legitimise their relative authority. These are the traditional orders of government, which in Chapter 6 appeared resistant to notions of local participation and empowerment. But I refer also to the way in which relations are ordered by the informal and commonly held values or norms which demand deference, or obedience to those with status. These are social expectations informed in multiple ways and in part by religious beliefs, Khmer folklore, language and by histories of relations shaped by individual and collective experiences, not least by past conflicts and authoritarian regimes<sup>10</sup>. Thus, social relations are structured according to a hierarchy primarily ordered in terms of age, but also as a function of other factors, such as gender, wealth, education, reputation, employment, political position (Ovesen et al 1996). Particular reverence extends to parents, elders, ancestors and teachers; people who are respected for their position and knowledge or wisdom. This is a social order which permeates relations and which is reinforced through Khmer folklore and proverbs which teach the importance of behaving according to one's position: "*a small boat shouldn't try to be like a large boat*"<sup>11</sup>, and not protesting against a superior: "*don't hit a stone with an egg*" (Fisher-Nguyen 1994, p94 & 99). It is a hierarchy which is emphasised in the Khmer language which orders communication with others according to their age and position relative to oneself. For

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<sup>10</sup> My focus on religion, language and experiences of political history is based on my own experiences of Cambodian life and interpretations of this through discussions with Cambodian colleagues. Religion and folklore are also identified in the literature as important sources of moral values in Khmer society (for example see Fisher-Nguyen 1994; Ovesen et al 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Alternatively: "*the elephant has a huge shit don't try to shit like the elephant*" (Fisher-Nguyen 1994, p94)!

those Cambodians who have lived through the Khmer Rouge regime and Vietnamese led communist government, deference to authority was also the product of brutal authoritarianism. Authorities should be followed and not challenged. Failure to show obedience and ensure harmonious relations with authorities risked survival for an individual and their family. While today the penalties of challenging authority are certainly less severe, there remains a perceived and sometimes real risk in going against the political mainstream. Thus the assumptions of respect for those in position remain a strong influence on social relations and at least on the surface acceptance of this hierarchy remains strong.

It is through these relations of authority that meso-level actors negotiate meanings with external and local actors, as well as among themselves. These are relations which ultimately structure negotiations into a top-down and instrumental process, requiring local institutions to recirculate the ideals dictated by higher authorities. Thus, in spite of claims made by both CEPA and PMCR, as mentioned in Chapter 6, that their agendas are not external ones, but represent the existing interests of local people, my encounters with meso-level actors suggested the opposite. Indeed, in practice both projects have strategically raised awareness and trained local committees to be responsive to and reinforce *their* agendas. So it was perhaps not a surprise when I asked actors in Stung Treng whose idea it was to initiate the project and how it had begun, that they<sup>12</sup> unanimously responded it was CEPA who introduced the project and organised to establish the community fishery. As the village chief explained:

*“At the beginning CEPA came to inform me to make an appointment with people in the village to have a meeting, then CEPA explained about the causes of the fish decline and asked people whether they want the fish to increase or keep declining ... realizing that no one conserves the fish resources, CEPA organized to establish the community fishery in order to undertake it”.*

For the village chief, sustaining natural resources was clearly associated with international environmental agendas, introduced by foreign NGOs, as he reveals in the following statement:

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<sup>12</sup> ‘They’ being the community fishery committee chief and committee member, the village chief, the village development committee chief, the commune council chief, and the commune council vice chief.

*“Sustainability of natural resource is important based on the dissemination of the wetland NGO and Global Witness, because some countries have lost all their natural resources, but in Cambodia the natural resources remain. The foreigners try to come and help Cambodia’s natural resources. Good natural resources mean that the climate is not too hot or not too cool, so it means that the fishery resources both in the water and in the land<sup>13</sup> can live easily. If all the natural resources are lost there will be a disaster that will destroy human beings”.*

In contrast, in Koh Kong, responses to the same questions were less straightforward. Here the chief of the commune council supported the project’s claim that it was local people who had requested for the community fishery, though their request was an appeal for external authorities to intervene:

*“In the beginning people were really angry with the illegal fishers but they couldn’t deal with them. We got the information from Koh Sralao that the community fishery can help to protect natural resources and deal with illegal fishing. In the beginning we made the thumbprint<sup>14</sup> of about 170 families to support proposing the project to establish community fisheries”.*

However, though local people in Koh Kong petitioned for the project, once it was initiated it was often external knowledge provided by the project which appeared to shape its direction. This was not always immediately evident. When, for example, I first asked the village management committee chief about who initiated different components of the project, his first response was often that it was the people’s idea, or the committee’s idea. However, when asked why the people or committee thought it was important, this often led back to knowledge introduced by the project, as the following example illustrates:

*“The people who request for seagrass conservation are the community fishery members ... people know because they have learnt when we invite them to join the meeting, in the meeting we have told them that fish, crab, and shrimp can go to lay the eggs on those seagrasses and they can grow up in the seagrass area ... the village management committee know about the advantage of seagrass through PMCR, they invited us to go*

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<sup>13</sup> Fishery resources in the land refers to the fish, frogs, snails and other aquatic life which are seasonally harvested from rice fields.

<sup>14</sup> As illiteracy is common place, thumbprints are the main means of collecting signatures.

*to study ... the study tour was about the advantage of seagrass. We have brought the information to pass to all committee members as well as community fishery members”.*

Indeed, as a village management committee member expressed, she felt a need to learn from outside about the function of the community fishery so that she could better explain it to local people:

*“I feel that people don’t understand so much about the community (fishery) so I want to go to learn from outside, from other places and then I can disseminate some knowledge related to the community and society for people to understand”.*

For the meso-level actors in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong, project agendas are externally defined, based on knowledge brought in from outside which they are required to disseminate and to instruct local people. Working within their official mandates and cultures of respect for higher officials and external experts, meso-level actors are obligated to fulfill a role as messenger and reinforcer of project ideals. Moreover, they themselves make use of relations of authority to further extend these agendas and gain compliance from local people. As highlighted in Chapter 7, local people in Stung Treng and Koh Kong are often compelled to attend community fishery meetings through deference to those with official status. Indeed, meso-level actors recognise the power of their own or higher authority to help ensure at least superficial participation. As the community fishery chief in Stung Treng states, *“villagers will come to meetings if the village chief invites them”*, or, as he continues to explain, local support can be elicited by drawing on the influence of the country’s premier:

*“We can tell them when we disseminate that the community fishery is supported even by the prime minister and the high ranking officer even lose their rank because of illegal fishing, so this makes the illegal fishers afraid to continue”.*

Likewise, in Koh Kong the commune council chief in Koh Kong suggests it simply requires the commune council’s presence and local people will follow:

*“But for people when we (the commune council) are with them they follow us but when we are not with them they will stop following us”.*

In such positions of influence, it then becomes the responsibility of meso-level actors to act as experts, instructing local people about what they can and cannot do, as the commune council member in Stung Treng explains:

*“We have meetings with the local community to tell them what they do wrong and when they know they are doing wrong activities they can correct them themselves ... we have to provide knowledge to the people about the closed season<sup>15</sup> and about using family scale gear to avoid impacting on the natural resources and the fish. We train people that they shouldn't catch the fish to extinction”.*

These instrumental processes of negotiation not only direct local people in the legalities of environmental sustainability, they also extend to them the responsibilities of law enforcement. Through the projects' commitments to participatory governance, formalised through the community fishery committees and the government's community fishery subdecree, obligations for enforcing environmental sustainability have spread beyond the traditional administrative structures. The new community fishery committees, empowered from above to implement an externally dictated agenda, represent at the same time a means to challenge corruption among higher officials who fail to enforce ideals of environmental sustainability. As the district vice chief in Koh Kong asserts:

*“Empowering the community fishery means all of the people join and work together. We cannot depend on the provincial fishery office or the high-ranking officers to protect (the natural resources) for us. But we can depend on all of the people who are the eyes and nose and protect in this area”.*

Likewise the village chief in Stung Treng suggests that perhaps the community fishery committee is in a position of power, a position which challenges those in authority and threatens their accountability:

*“... but the commune council or the district council are afraid of the community when the community is strong ... now the community fishery is independent so don't talk about the power men, because if the illegal fisher is arrested and if the power men come to*

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<sup>15</sup> According to the Fisheries Law, the inland fishery is closed for medium scale fishing gears during annual fish spawning and breeding seasons.

*solve for the illegal fisher, so that power men has to be responsible for themselves, so those power men have to be afraid’.*

Legitimised from the top-down, these new institutions of participatory governance represent a means of confronting relations of authority from the bottom-up. But in doing so they also disrupt the conventional relations of power. Like their superiors in provincial government (as revealed in Chapter 6), local government actors are reluctant to concede authority to community fishery committees. As the commune council vice chief in Stung Treng explains:

*“Strengthening power of the community fishery seems to be out of the hierarchy because the community fishery have no power”.*

Rather the commune council chief in Koh Kong preferred to represent committees as being an extension of the commune council:

*“..community fishery is also the responsibility of the commune council because the community fishery also belong to the commune not others. For all activities of the community fishery I am always invited, the community never do it alone”.*

Similarly, in Stung Treng the commune council vice chief explains that it is the commune council that *“provides power to the community fishery”*. And while he also recognises that *“people give the community fishery committee a role and value through the elections”* the committee’s role remains to *“cooperate with people in power”*. Legitimised by the Ministry of Interior the commune council are keen to assert their authority over the village committees and maintain what they view as the official hierarchy and their own positions in it.

There are clear tensions between conventional structures of power and the new orders of participatory governance. And while the community fishery committees might contest relations of authority which undermine the projects’ ideals, they also remain at the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy and ultimately dependent on support from higher levels to fulfill their responsibilities. So despite the fact that the village management committee members in Koh Kong are themselves influential village actors and members of the commune council, they remain constrained by upper levels, as the committee chief states:

*“... the work will be achieved as long as there is participation from people and local authorities, but if the upper level don't allow arresting, we can't do”.*

Moreover, attempts to use new orders of participatory governance as a means of petitioning against corruption may be met with hostility. Such was the experience of a village management committee member in Koh Kong whose attempt to petition against a Chinese company gaining logging concessions near the village was not encouraged by the commune council:

*“I walked around to houses to ask people for thumb print to make a petition to send to prime minister, Hun Sen, in order to prevent the company coming to cut Smach trees. The commune chief was not happy with this and said that when you do the protest without telling the commune, you should be careful you may lose your body<sup>16</sup>”.*

As meso-level actors attempt to negotiate meaning, relations of authority are clearly a dominating influence. An influence which acts both to support the continued circulation of the projects' external agendas and at the same time to disrupt them. For it is through relations of authority that meso-level actors are obligated to conform to external project agendas and gain compliance from local people in environmental sustainability. Thus they become the instrumental messenger of project ideals and enforcer of the law which dictates those ideals. Actors within the new community fishery committees have particular responsibility in this regard. Instituted through each project and legitimized through the law, these committees represent new orders of participatory governance structured from the top-down. Moreover, their representatives are charged not only with gaining local people's support, but also challenging corrupted relations of authority which undermine environmental sustainability. Yet such is the influence of those in positions of power and the strength of conventional structures of administration, the authority of these new orders of participatory governance remains constrained. And so it is that the structuring influence of relations of authority result in practices which both instate and disrupt ideals of environmental sustainability through participatory governance.

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<sup>16</sup> According to the research team, “losing your body” was a threat against the committee member's life.

## ***Negotiating sustainable development through local resistances***

Negotiating the middle-ground is not only shaped from the top-down through hierarchical relations of authority, it is also structured from below. Here I refer to the democratic obligations of meso-level actors to represent the interests of local people, the electorate, who brought them into office and to whom they are ultimately accountable. Specifically, I am concerned with how meso-level actors make sense of this responsibility in the face of local people's resistances to sustainability.

As revealed in detail through the examples of different livelihoods in Chapter 7, such resistance arise in different ways as local people find their livelihoods in conflict with sustainability and confront its simplification to the legality of fishing practices. These are resistances which undermine and also directly challenge relations of authority used to implement project agendas in practice. In Stung Treng there was resistance to the project among those using illegal fishing gear, who avoided going to community meetings and continued in secret to fish illegally. Meanwhile in Koh Kong, resistance appeared more active, as local people chose to vocally protest against the illegal fishing ban at community meetings and openly use illegal fishing gear. What was not told through the livelihood examples in Chapter 7, but which emerges through the experiences of particular actors, are the threats and in some cases physical violence directed against meso-level actors, as they attempt to support project practices. So in Stung Treng, while livelihoods revealed only a hidden resistance to the project, more overt resistance also takes place; as a committee member described:

*"... I was also threatened directly by the son of a household in the village and the nephew of the Deputy Provincial Governor, who is the teacher at Khei. They both threatened me together and said 'don't be strict with the patrol and stop the illegal fishing' and they said a proverb 'don't touch the stone with a chicken's egg', which means I am like an egg and they are the stone, if I come to stop them with the patrol, they will be angry and might hurt me. They said this to me at the well ... when we met at the well, the men didn't say anything at first, then I spoke to them about illegal fishing, I tried to say that illegal fishers should stop and say generally about the community fishery ... after this he (the teacher) said the threat to me. So I stopped talking and went back home. I told the community fishery chief and others in the village and the project manager from CEPA. They didn't do anything".*

In Koh Kong as well as the open resistance described by households violent resistance was also experienced, as a member of the committee recounted:

*“There was one event when the same people (illegal fishers) were arrested, then the illegal fishers invited our patrolling group to drink wine together and then they said ‘please wait a minute, while we get crab to eat with the wine’. When they went to get the crab they started their (boat) engine to escape instead. Then our group chased after them, when they trapped them, the others turned their boat to crash with our boat. At that time, there was dispute between each other and they threw the wood at each other and then one of our patrolman was hurt on the head”.*

Given these experiences, it is no surprise to encounter expressions of fear and intimidation among the local committees, as mentioned above and repeated by others, such as the committee chief in Stung Treng who admitted that he felt “...*very nervous about my work ... I know that people hate me*”. And a committee member in Koh Kong, who faced “*many difficult problems when I do dissemination and group organization ... for me is not so serious, but for the village management committee chief, he was cursed more than me*”.

When attempting to make sense of local resistances, actors suggested a diversity of local realities at odds with project ideals and practices, echoing the livelihoods encountered in Chapter 7. These are realities which meant, local people in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong failed to participate because they lived too far away from the community meeting places, or were too busy making a living. Unable to attend community meetings, local institutions explained that some people had also not received any information and so did not understand about the purpose of the projects, or the laws controlling access to the fishery. It was also suggested, in both places, that people’s lack of participation was due to their illiteracy or lack of education, meaning they were unable to understand. But also, as suggested by the village management committee chief in Koh Kong, that they do not think the community meetings are important:

*“... there are also some Khmer people that don’t understand because of illiteracy like when we asked them to join the meeting they didn’t come because they were busy with crab peeling and playing cards”.*

Moreover, according to the commune council chief in Stung Treng, local people's failure to understand or participate, was not only a function of their illiteracy, but also of a weak democratic system, meaning local people were unaware of their rights to participate:

*“The people that do not yet understand about the natural resources are illiterate and they don't know how to listen and read ... (they) don't want to join the meetings and don't want to listen to other people. They don't want to join and listen because democracy is still weak, so they don't yet understand about their rights of participation or how to implement their rights”.*

Local realities of poverty<sup>17</sup> were also often invoked to make sense of resistances to the projects. Poverty was used to explain why people had no time to participate in the community fishery, because they were too busy making their living, and why they failed to understand, because they have low education. It was also poverty which was used to explain why local people were unable to stop using illegal fishing gear, because, they depend on it for food and income and have no other choice. Thus, the community fishery committee member in Stung Treng admitted that:

*“People need to do the electro-fishing to have fish to sell. If they don't sell the fish they'll have no money. I don't know why they stop illegal fishing if they need the money”.*

However, in Stung Treng actors were not always convinced that poverty explained away illegal fishing. Indeed, the village chief claims that *“they can find land for crop farming or rice farming to stay alive”*, and *“even if they lose income”*, the community fishery chief points out, at least *“they still can catch fish like other people ... at least they catch it without fear ... they have no fear about the law and they can sleep well”*. Similarly, in Koh Kong the village management committee chief suggests that while local people may be poor, they could still avoid illegal fishing by *“catching crab and fish in the rice fields to support their family”*. The reason presented to explain why some local people resist the community fisheries, was not because they are unable to, but because they do not want to participate and change. Rather they are fishers, who the

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<sup>17</sup> Reference to poverty here is not to any standard, or conventional, measure of poverty. It is instead to a situated notion of poverty in place, related to different aspects of people's livelihoods, including (among other factors) their sources and security of income and food, their health, material belongings and social status.

village chief in Stung Treng claims “*want to be rich quickly*”, or who, the committee chief in Stung Treng explains, use illegal fishing gear because “*they can catch a lot of fish*” and moreover demand from foreign markets provides opportunities to do so. At the same time, the committee chief in Koh Kong also suggests that perhaps the illegal fishers are simply “*obstinate*” or perhaps, as suggested by the commune council vice chief in Stung Treng, “*they don’t love natural resources and fish*” and “*don’t understand or respect the law*”. Moreover, in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong, illegal fishers are thought to avoid the community fishery, because as the commune council vice chief in Stung Treng explains they are “*afraid that everyone knows their face*”. Illegal fishers are thus simultaneously willing to break the law and ashamed of doing so. He also suggests that illegal fishers resistance affects others, who “*don’t want to devote their time because they are afraid of the illegal fishers threatening them*”, a feeling confirmed by local people in Stung Treng.

Attempts by meso-level actors to reinforce project ideals are then not a straightforward matter. For the local committee chief in Stung Treng, responding to local resistance is clearly a struggle:

*“I share my experience with people in the village, but it is impossible to do this and to educate people ... somehow I can’t change people”.*

Reiterating the feelings of the community fishery committee expressed above, the commune council’s vice chief in Stung Treng reveals there is also a sympathy towards local people and an awareness that the project practices can make life more difficult:

*“... I always implore to the illegal fisher to stop doing more because if they are arrested they will be fined a lot of money and it will be difficult for their wives. We pity their children and wives”.*

Yet in spite of their sympathy, the response of actors in Stung Treng appears to simply fall back on reinforcing project ideals and practices in order to suppress or convert local resistance. Indeed, the local committee chief hopes he could eventually change people if only he had “*a video that will talk about the problems of illegal activities and about the bylaws and natural resource management, or a loudspeaker for disseminating through the village by bicycle*”. While at the same time, the committee member hopes that people’s fear of law enforcement will force them to change: “*besides this information*

*we have to encourage them to help the community fishery and make each other afraid so they will stop illegal fishing*". Dominated by their responsibilities to the project, there appears to be little room to represent local resistances upwards.

Similarly, in Koh Kong actors admit to frustration at being unable to respond to people's lack of interest and illegality, as the commune council chief says:

*"It's difficult to protect the natural resources because people are not interested and we can't deal with illegal fishers"*.

Likewise actors admit that the community fishery is a constraint to some people's lives and are in part sympathetic to people's resistance. Indeed, encouraged by the district governor, the village management committee chose to overlook the use of illegal fishing gear in cases where they were concerned that local people would suffer:

*"Members of the community fishery don't all use the legal gear, some of them use illegal gear, but this is our pity that we don't stop them and also we have the suggestion from the District governor saying that it's not the time to stop them yet ... so just let them keep do it (use illegal fishing gear) because the illegal fisher here are few and they don't have other gears to use, so if we stop them they will die because they have not enough money to change the gear"*.

As well as this initial accommodation, actors in Koh Kong also recognise the lack of alternative livelihood activities for illegal fishers and have been involved in expanding practices of sustainability to incorporate the development of people's lives beyond fishing. Through links with other projects, they encourage people to change their livelihoods and take up alternative jobs in farming, as the village management committee chief explains:

*"... in order to stop the illegal fishing activities and to reduce over-fishing. We alter the people's jobs from fishing to farming, we provide them with buffalo to farm"*.

Yet this seemingly uncomplicated response hides the reality exposed in Chapter 7; of the limited availability of land for farming, confronting many in the village. Nor does it reveal that the support offered to assist families in farming has so far been selectively provided to those who already have land and are involved in farming. So in spite of the intention, it is a response which has yet to impact upon many of the illegal fishers, who

lacking access to land for farming find themselves in conflict with the community fishery. Moreover, despite expressions of sympathy and superficial accommodation to local resistances, the committee chief ultimately gives way to a continued commitment to upholding sustainability through law enforcement:

*“... we give them sometime to change to other job and then we’ll stop them (fishing illegally) in December ... in December we’ll stop them, so they have to absolutely change ... we can’t help them when the deadline arrives we have to stop them because illegal fishing causes damage (to the fishery)”.*

Negotiating through the influence of local resistances is both complicated and also uneasy. Local resistances manifesting at times as threatening and violent confrontations plainly reveal the conflict between the projects’ limited interpretations of sustainability and the complexities of people’s livelihoods. Caught at the interface, meso-level actors appear vulnerable; ultimately accountable to implement changes which are not uniformly supported. They are aware and at times sympathetic to local perspectives, but at other times they are also frustrated, intimidated and afraid. This may lead, as in Koh Kong, to attempts to accommodate and assist local people, recognising they have little choice but to resist. But at the same time, meso-level actors’ obligations and commitment to support project agendas continue to dominate. Thus they persist in attempts to counteract and control local perspectives, closing down opportunities for local transformation and reinforcing the circulation of externally directed ideals of sustainability.

### ***Negotiating sustainable development through personal interests***

While actions in the middle ground are structured through the pre-defined institutional responsibilities of the meso-level, it is often the agency or personal interests of individual meso-level actors which ultimately direct negotiations at the interface. I refer here to the way in which actions are influenced by the desires to maintain or enhance individual positions, or to favour personal values, informed by individual circumstances and interests, as well as political affiliations and shared social norms and beliefs. This is the agency of meso-level actors in their capacity as individuals and as local residents;

neighbours, friends, relatives and sometimes patrons to local people, as well as users of the same natural resources<sup>18</sup>. These are personal interests which simultaneously affirm and oppose the common good that project ideals and associated legal orderings of sustainability promise. For behind the issue of illegality lies the assumption that environmental sustainability through the regulation of fishing practices represents a good for all society. Indeed, sustainability through legal or 'traditional' livelihoods is promoted as the route to reducing poverty and securing society's well being. As a common good, it is then supposed that there is a unified willingness to collective action; to participate in natural resource management in order to protect fishery resources and sustain 'traditional' livelihoods. As such, it is supported by meso-level actors simply because acting in support of the common good is considered the 'right' thing to do. Such sentiments were expressed by a member of the community fishery committee in Stung Treng:

*"I feel committed to the community fishery because I want fish and natural resources to increase ... fish is very important for human life, for every family, for food ... I have heard people say the community fishery will make the fish and natural resources sustainable ... all these people are good people because they want to increase the fish for the future ... they must protect the natural resources because they should keep the natural resources for the children in the future. If natural resources decline so the children in the future will be poor and won't have everything like we have now"*.

Doing the 'right' thing is also reinforced by Buddhist beliefs of reciprocity where being 'good' leads to 'receiving good' and ultimately being born with better fortunes in the life to follow. Indeed, the PMCR project staff suggest that such beliefs have motivated support for the project as *"people now believe that through taking care of the environment ... the environment will help to take care of their household and livelihood"* (Nong & PMMR 2004, p32). So it is that upholding the common good of environmental sustainability rewards individuals through Buddhist principles of karma. Moreover, this is not just an investment for the future. Crucially, actors are convinced that the legal regulation of fishing practices has already brought material benefits; as the commune council vice chief in Stung Treng claims:

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<sup>18</sup> As outlined in the first section of the chapter, many meso-level actors were themselves also farmers and fishers, or were connected to these activities through networks of trade and consumption.

*“The community fishery has provided knowledge and the fish have increased and the people benefit from the community fishery because when the fish increase it’s easy to catch fish and their livelihoods also improve”.*

In other words, beyond any common good, environmental sustainability promises private goods both now and in the future. These are personal benefits which motivate actors to support project ideals not as altruistic acts for society, but to promote individual interests. Such personal gains are also presented as a significant incentive to encourage local people’s involvement. As the village management committee chief in Koh Kong stated, local people collaborate *“in order to protect their own benefit because they think that community fishery is theirs and the community fishery serve and protect for their benefit”*. Yet, in spite of the frequent assertion that both projects had directly enhanced livelihood security or even livelihood development, there was no clear evidence of such rewards. Indeed, such claims were made in the face of local resistances, as discussed above, which as actors themselves admit, reveal quite the opposite outcome of sustainability’s legalisation.

It also became apparent that beyond the individual benefits promised as a direct outcome of environmental sustainability, actors hoped to profit in other ways. As the district vice chief in Koh Kong revealed, another reason to be involved in the project is for the *“honour ... reputation ... votes ... if they have achievement”*. A sentiment echoed by the commune council vice chief in Stung Treng:

*“The first reason (to protect the natural resources) is related to the living standard of the people we want their living standard to be better. The second reason is, if people’s lives get better then the leader of the district will be famous throughout the country”.*

Quite aside from personal interests of good karma, livelihoods improved through environmental sustainability also have the future potential to enhance public status and popularity of actors. Moreover, actors also recognise more immediate incentives for supporting the projects; from fines raised from illegal fishers, allowances and free travel for attending meetings or training workshops outside of the village, or refreshments provided during village meetings and community fishery patrols. Though they appear small, according to the village chief in Stung Treng they have been important enough to encourage participation:

*“In 2005 community fishery members participate a lot because there is an incentive programme ... such as providing gasoline for patrolling and providing half of the fines from catching illegal fishers ... for every patrol CEPA also provide one packet of drinking water and one box of biscuits, so the community fishery committee can attract other members to join in the patrolling”.*

But while such benefits motivate support, they may also be a source of jealousy when they appear to be unfairly distributed, as in the case of the village management committee in Koh Kong:

*“... working in the village management committee is difficult ... we have ten members but all of them don't join together to discuss or solve any problem. Some people (in the village management committee) are jealous that they have never gone to study or gone on a study tour anywhere and they say that the others who have gone should be doing the work”.*

Moreover, these are individual benefits which ultimately distort actors' engagement away from promoting sustainability as a common good. Indeed, in different circumstances actors pursuit of personal benefits is in direct conflict with sustainability. So it is that they may choose not to support, or even oppose the projects when there is no direct profit to be made, or when private interests are threatened. In Stung Treng the village chief suggests that the commune council and commune police do not participate because *“participating in the community fishery does not bring them any money”*. Moreover, the commune council vice chief in Stung Treng suggests that if *“power men”* were to support the project's position on illegal fishing, they would lose benefits, or bribes:

*“If power men need a case of beer, so the illegal fisher provides. But if the power men adheres to the law so they won't have something to eat. So we can say they are taking bribes. Power men don't care about natural resources ... sometimes when their friend goes to fish illegally and the community fishery committee or another wants to go and arrest them, the power man informs them in advance to let them escape because they get benefits from the illegal fishers in advance”.*

Maintaining the profits of patronage clearly override the common good of environmental sustainability. Indeed, they also corrupt respect for the relations of

authority which institute project ideals through the rule of law. In other cases negotiating project values relating to illegal fishing was found to confront political interests. Thus, in the months leading up to the commune council elections in early 2007, it was not in the interests of the dominant Cambodian People's Party (CPP) for local institutions to stop illegal fishers. For irrespective of the votes that might be won by those disadvantaged by illegal fishing, it was the belief that the votes lost from illegal fishers was more critical. And since in Koh Kong the CPP dominated the commune council, who were also members of the village management committee, all law enforcement relating to illegal fishing was stopped, as the village management committee chief revealed:

*“The village management committee can’t stop (the illegal fishers) because the election nearly arrives so they (CPP) don’t allow me to stop .... the political problem is difficult because the upper level (CPP) should not do the work of stopping the illegal fishing and mix it with the political work of the election ..... I regret so much that I can’t stop the illegal fishing activity following the people’s purpose because they (CPP) don’t allow me to arrest the illegal fisher .... because they need the election vote”.*

Implementing project ideals relating to illegal fishing were also contested by personal commitments, or obligations to family. In Stung Treng, for example, the village chief revealed how legal measures are delayed, or avoided altogether when confronted with family obligations:

*“The commune level go to patrol with the community fishery committee and then the illegal fisher is his nephew and so the commune level feels committed to him. But at that time if we had enough evidence we would arrest that one to make a thumbprint ... the community fishery has a family obligation with the illegal fisher, for example if we arrest them the first time we educate them rather than send them to prison”.*

Personal values of kinship conflict with the common good of environmental sustainability, especially when that means arresting a relative for using illegal fishing gear. However, this was not always the case. Indeed, members of the community fishery committee in Stung Treng appeared proud that they did not uphold such obligations. Referring to the same event mentioned by the village chief, the community fishery committee member, expressed her disappointment at not arresting the illegal fisher,

maintaining she would “*stop people even if I know them, or they are my relatives*”. But choosing to favour environmental sustainability over obligations to family, or even to friends and neighbours, goes against local expectations, as the community fishery chief in Stung Treng recounts:

*“... his (the illegal fisher’s) father blamed me saying ‘why you do like that? Because we are neighbours’, then I said that ‘I do this fairly, if my relatives commit illegal activities I will also crack down, if I don’t crack down on them, so “Om”<sup>19</sup> make a complaint against me”*”.

Acting in support of illegality risks losing the benefits that social networks bring. Moreover, as discussed above, it exposes meso-level actors to the often threatening side of local resistances. So despite asserting that she shared the project’s ideals of environmental sustainability, over and above values of kinship, the community fishery committee member in Stung Treng also expressed her fear of acting in support of the project:

*“I feel afraid patrolling, but I have to try to stop illegal fishing. I try to be committed and not fear (illegal fishers), but actually I still fear. If I act afraid, how will the other members (of the community fishery) trust me? ... I worry about the (patrol) boat sinking in the water and about people coming to destroy my house and about my safety going around the village, maybe people will kill me”*.

To act altruistically in favour of the project’s assertion of environmental sustainability as a common good is clearly a threat to others personal interests as well as one’s own. Indeed, it is the realities of personal interests, or agency, which appear to dominate meso-level actions at the interface between projects and local people. Notions of environmental sustainability’s common good are thus re-ordered in the middle ground, giving primacy to private goods. For it is the prospect of individual benefits now and in the future which motivates meso-level actors to reinforce project ideals and to gain support from local people. Conversely, it is the threat to individual interests which leads meso-level actors to contest project ideals and to challenge legal orderings of sustainability.

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<sup>19</sup> *Om* is used in Khmer to refer to an older person, older than your parents.

## ***Chapter summary***

In this final analysis chapter, my aim has been to explore a middle ground between project agendas and people's livelihoods; a field of action where sustainable development policy and people's lives are muddled together. This is a critical interface, concerned primarily with the struggle to deal with illegality. Moreover, it is an interface where meanings and practices are mediated by meso-level actors within local institutions; variously and multiply positioned as appointed authority, elected representative and local resident. As such, their actions are caught between the pre-defined structures of authority, whose actions are accountable both upwards and downwards, and their own personal interests and values, or individual agency.

Navigating through these influences from above, below and within, meso-level actors act both to recirculate and to disrupt illegality and the projects' representations of environmental sustainability. Thus, meso-level actors reinforce illegality through deference to the structures of top-down hierarchies and in the pursuit of personal benefits. At the same time, illegality is also contested when new orders of participatory governance interfere with conventional structures of power, or when personal interests are threatened. It would appear that actions in the middle ground are overwhelmingly shaped by meso-level actors desire to maintain, or enhance their own positions. As such, environmental sustainability has become disassociated from the projects' idealisms of common good and collective action. Rather it is private goods and individual action which underpin negotiations of sustainability through the middle ground. In this field of action dominated by meso-level actors own interests, the realities and resistances of local people assert little influence. Indeed, in spite of sympathy towards local resistances, there is ultimately little room for any transformations of sustainability from the bottom-up.

## Chapter 9

### A thesis closing: critical reflections and conclusions

The purpose of this final chapter is to draw out the main conclusions from my thesis journey so far and to suggest what these insights offer to wider sustainable development debates and practices. This is a chapter which moves beyond the dense realities of two empirical cases, intending to shed light on ‘*“liberatory” possibilities*’ bridging practice and policy (Bebbington 2004).

I begin here with a brief review of my thesis project; restating my overall aim, the research questions I set out to address and the context in which these were framed and subsequently tackled. I then introduce the decisive points which emerge from this project, which form the basis for my deliberations in the remainder of the chapter.

My intention through this thesis has been to understand sustainable development policy as it actually takes place in specific places; to explore the intricacies, tensions, contradictions and incoherences of sustainable development policy as it articulates in the real world. My aim was to reveal something of the complexities beneath the simplifying rhetoric of sustainable development policy. I wanted to speak to sustainable development as messy processes arising from the diverse histories and practices of people in particular places; to understand how it is constituted, how it can be known and what this says about sustainable development policy and practice.

This is a project which has taken shape within the particular context of my own life and connections with actors and events in Cambodia and its fishery sector; a sector, which I had come to know at a time of policy reform. Cambodia’s fishery policy was rapidly being repositioned within wider agendas for sustainable development and decentralised and participatory governance. Significantly, community fisheries had become instituted as the principle mechanism for addressing these changes. Yet, what was not clear was how these policy reforms were actually working out in practice; how the policy ideals of sustainable development were being transformed across the interface between community fisheries and fisheries dependent livelihoods. Thus I came to focus on the

practices of two community fisheries projects as a window onto the workings of sustainable development policy. In particular, I set out to address the following research questions:

1. What are the agendas of sustainable development as they are interpreted by two community fishery projects?
2. How are these agendas articulated through people's livelihoods?
3. What are the outcomes of this process for sustainable development policy and practice?

Grounded in the empirical realities of two community fishery projects, I searched for an understanding from the situated perspectives of networks of actors; their knowledge, actions and lifeworlds. Through Chapters 6 to 8, I presented the substantive findings of my research; attending to different sites of practice where diverse actors are in the business of enacting sustainable development. Critically reflecting on this work I identify the following key conclusions:

- Sustainable development as it articulates through two community fishery projects is a top-down instrumental practice composed of a collision of multiple, overlapping and interlinked simplifications and assumptions, which employ the notion of livelihoods as a device to superficially localise and legalise external ideals of environmental sustainability and participatory governance, while simultaneously suppressing the complexities of local realities.
- While the multiple hegemonies of sustainable development attempt to dominate and regulate different realities, these same hegemonies produce alternatives through the politicization of livelihood practices and creation of participatory spaces for the expression of difference from the bottom-up.
- The complexities of sustainable development are produced not only through multiplicities of meanings, but also through multiple sites of practice distinguished in different ways by geographies, institutional contexts and cultural expectations. In this regard, the meso-level, caught in a middle ground

between policy and local lives, emerged as a critical site of practice rich in contradiction and incoherence.

- Combining an actor-orientated and livelihoods approach to understanding the realities of sustainable development practice proved particularly useful in exposing the intricacies of practice and revealing both the production and suppression of multiplicities.

I continue through the rest of this chapter to consider these concluding points in more detail, closing with a discussion of some implications for sustainable development policy and practice.

### ***A multiplicity of top-down and instrumental meanings***

Through both cases of community fisheries a series of simplifications, or orderings, and assumptions were encountered to rationalise a sustainable development agenda based on ideals of environmental sustainability through participatory governance. Central to these various orderings was the notion of livelihoods, referring specifically to the idea of a ‘traditional’ livelihood; a sustainable livelihood in balance with the environment as a result of ‘traditional’ natural resource use. In spite of the complexities captured within contemporary livelihoods thinking, here livelihoods represented a simplified and static vision of a utopian subsistence life, reduced to the materiality of a particular set of supposedly ‘traditional’ practices. This simplification was significant. It acted as a device, which as Escobar (2001, p161) puts it, ‘*attempts to negotiate the production of locality*’, in this case in favour of each projects’ ideals. Thus, externally produced goals for environmental sustainability, associated with international concerns for biodiversity and the protection of wetland habitats, were tied to local places and people, whose ‘traditional’ livelihoods depended on these same natural resources. Rationalised in this way, environmental sustainability superficially became a local agenda supporting local lives. It linked environmental sustainability to goals of social and economic development and to local empowerment. Critically, it became the basis for the assumption that local people wanted to participate in environmental governance.

While the link between a simplified 'traditional' livelihood and environmental sustainability localised sustainable development, it also acted to legalise it. For the assumption of sustainability tied to 'traditional' practices was also the basis for a regulatory framework governing natural resource use. Moreover, this legal framework presented the principal mechanism for implementing environmental sustainability; confining the practice of sustainable development to the regulation of material practices.

The effect of these multiple simplifications and assumptions was instrumental. They acted to suppress difference and the inherent complexities of livelihoods and environmental change. Critically, they concealed top-down strategies beneath a veneer of localisation; justifying practices of cooptation, regulation and exclusion. These were multiple hegemonies of meaning rationalising multiple hegemonies of practice.

### ***Alternatives produced through hegemonies***

Through the instrumental implementation of an assembly of simplifications and orderings, sustainable development policy gained a superficial stability. There was a sense of an internally self-justifying logic, keeping the multiple hegemonies in play. Yet in each case, this was a stability which ultimately undermined itself; destabilised by the same complexities it sought to silence.

Indeed, both projects' localisation of sustainable development was so reductive, it did, again as Escobar (2001 p161) puts it, '*inevitably induce a delocalising effect*'. Environmental sustainability rooted in the utopian simplicity of a 'traditional' livelihood and imposed through the law, had no room for people's actual realities. Moreover, it was in conflict with those realities; excluding the practices upon which people's survival depended, or regulating against aspirations for modernity or affluence. This was a conflict which revealed the blunt hegemony of sustainable development as a legalised practice; exposing the diverse entanglements of livelihoods in particular places.

Not only did the conflicts and contestations of illegality uncover difference, they also politicized these differences. Local livelihood practices had become political. The choice of fishing gear was a political act. Thus, the continued use of illegal fishing gear

became an expression of bottom-up resistance against a top-down agenda for environmental sustainability. This was an articulation of difference, of alternative livelihoods. Critically, it found a voice, not only in continued illegality, but also within the same instrumental spaces of participatory governance established to suppress it. Thus, sustainable development's multiple hegemonies suppress and simultaneously reveal and politicize difference, producing bottom-up resistances.

This is significant, for these are not simply counterhegemonies, neither are they simply alternatives existing *within* dominant spaces, but alternatives *produced through* them. Moreover, these are not the alternatives of Escobar's social movements (1995, 2001); collectively defending place, culture and the environment, nor are they Bebbington's (1997) '*islands of sustainability*'. Rather, they are alternatives in defence of the survival, security and materialism of individual livelihoods. In part they resonate with ideals of economic growth, undermining goals of environmental sustainability. Yet at the same time, they speak to concerns of social justice and equality; to the demands and rights of marginal and vulnerable livelihoods.

### ***Multiple sites of practice and the critical meso-level***

The incoherences of sustainable development are not limited to multiple hegemonies of meaning. They were also encountered through differences inherent to specific locations, sites of practice, or fields of action; differences linked to geographies, institutional contexts and cultural expectations. Of these various dimensions of complexity, certain elements emerged as being particularly critical. Thus, the geography of natural resource access was in each case significant. I refer here to the relative access to land, or to fishery and forest resources, as the result of physical variations in each location, as well as variations in the management of those resources. In each case this played a large part in determining differences in people's relative freedom to manoeuvre, or their ability to cope with changing access to fishery resources. Critically, it shaped their ability to negotiate illegality and influenced the intensity of local resistance. In this way, situations of limited access to natural resources, specifically access to land for farming, reduced people's freedom to manoeuvre and in turn their ability to negotiate illegality, leading to widespread and intense resistance to sustainability.

The institutional contexts of different sites of practice was also a source of inconsistency or variability. It was significant in the articulation of participatory governance or empowerment and how these ideals were positioned in relation to conventional structures of power. Thus it emerged as a source of contradiction and tension when actors from different institutional contexts of government and non-government sectors came together in practice. Permeating different institutions and across all sites of practice were different cultural expectations, or norms, which were another important source of incoherence. Deference to social or political hierarchies had a particularly noticeable influence in this regard; simultaneously re-circulating and disrupting policy agendas and practice.

Complications arising from institutional and cultural dimensions also surfaced within the context of the meso-level; a field of action associated with local institutions responsible for implementing policy and representing local interests. It was here that meso-level actors were caught not only within their structured institutional accountabilities upwards and downwards, but also within the perspective of their own lives and interests as individuals and as local residents. Thus, this was a site of practice rich in tension and inconsistency. It is also a site of practice which can pass unaddressed, with focus attending to policy makers and the direct articulation and transformation of policy within people's lives. Yet, in each case it was a critical field of action, mediating meanings and practices in the relative absence of any direct interaction between policy makers and livelihoods on the ground.

### ***Actors, livelihoods and sustainable development policy***

I set out on a search for sustainable development's messy processes and proposed that a combination of actor-orientated sociology and livelihoods approaches were well suited for this job. What I found has confirmed this initial claim; used together both approaches proved effective at understanding diverse realities, exposing complications and revealing both the production and suppression of complexities. There are of course particular reasons for asserting this, reflecting the specific ways in which each approach was used and combined.

Firstly, in my attention to livelihoods I purposively chose to avoid rigidly applying a livelihoods framework with its compartmentalisation or abstraction of lives to discrete elements. Instead I chose to remain closer to the narratives and biographies through which different lives were told. I think this was significant<sup>1</sup>, for it foregrounded lives as they are lived and in this way helped reveal the intricate complexities of living. Critically it exposed the numerous interconnections and overlaps between livelihood elements, which otherwise fall between the boxes of some conventional livelihood analyses. I also borrowed the metaphor of freedom to manoeuvre from actor-orientated sociology, as a means of thinking through livelihood strategies. This was an insightful device which allowed me to emphasise situations of both positive and negative freedom, as a means to illustrate the tensions between agency and structure. Moreover, it shed light on local resistances and the realities through which they are produced.

Secondly, in making use of actor-orientated sociology I was able to attend to the actions of networks of institutional actors who implement policy in practice. As the approach intends, this worked to demystify the rhetoric of policy statements and project objectives. In particular, it helped to bring the sometimes elusive structures within livelihoods thinking to life. It unpacked what DFID labelled the PIP box, or policies, institutions and processes. It exposed the entanglements involved as policy enters and negotiates with life worlds, through the positions, actions and relations of particular sets of actors. It revealed the spaces inbetween policy and people's lives; spaces which are otherwise difficult to interpret simply from a view of livelihoods upwards.

Thirdly and finally, my use of both approaches was set within a reflective research strategy. This was significant in the wider context of the project as a piece of action research. But here I refer to it for what it contributed in setting the tone of the methods; for establishing an insistent critique, emphasising the uncertainties of knowledge production. This explicit attention to reflexivity was then important in making the method alive to complexities; to contradictions, tensions and incoherences.

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<sup>1</sup> It was for me a significant departure from the way in which I had dealt with livelihoods in the past, in which the framework was a dominant device for analysis.

### ***Implications for sustainable development policy and practice***

As the concluding points above have demonstrated, a view of sustainable development policy as it is enacted in specific places and by different people, reveals a complicated tangle of meanings and practices. So this thesis has worked to deconstruct the grand collective visions of sustainable development policy. It has made visible policy as it actually takes place; exposing multiple simplifications, as well as diverse realities. It has revealed sustainable development policy not as a common good, but as a web of decisive orderings and actions; asserting particular choices rather than others. It has then shed light on the inevitable violence of such simplifications and the marginal realities they attempt to suppress, but simultaneously make political. It has exposed the disorder silenced and at the same time revealed and generated through order.

Yet in closing this thesis, I want to move beyond interpreting the complexities of policy; beyond simply denouncing the hegemonies of policy simplicities and exposing the contradictions of resistances made through them. I wish to address the implications of this understanding for sustainable development policy and practice; to *'suggest ways of thinking about and tackling other specificities'* (Law & Mol 2006, p15). Moreover, I wish to do this in the context of my own trajectory within development practice; to consider how this project connects with my own experiences. I offer, then, the following four comments as a way of ending the thesis:

1. Working with sustainable development policy in practice must start with an acknowledgement of the simplifications and political choices within policy, which favour particular realities. This demands that practice be grounded in reflexivity; challenging the assumptions underlying policy rhetoric and questioning sustainable development's frequent claims of collective visions and common good. A practitioner's role should, then, not be concerned with providing interpretations of policy, but evolving the meaning of policy through the context of different sites of practice.

Though this point is part of the original problematic the thesis set out to address, it remains salient to reiterate here. For what the thesis exposed at different moments was a critical absence of reflexivity, not just among practitioners but also among the research team. There was a tendency not to openly question policy ideals and

practice and the concepts and assumptions on which these were based. Indeed, it was more common to encounter, at least initially, an endorsement of policy; it was a good thing and was bringing great benefits to everyone. This, as I have discussed in the thesis, had a lot to do with cultural norms and the expectation that the existing order should not be openly questioned. Yet beneath this superficial veneer, it did not take long to encounter experiences which spoke to realities beyond the simplifications of policy. What was needed was an openness to alternative perspectives and to contradictions. In this regard, my own role became and perhaps remains, a cultivator of reflexivity, or disconcertment (Law & Lin 2009).

2. If policy is recognised as an inevitable simplification, it is also the case that practice must be acknowledged as unavoidably messy. Moreover, practice must endeavor to attend to this complexity; in the first instance, by recognising and attempting to understand it. In this regard, the thesis pointed to three specific sites of practice, as being particularly illuminating: 1) the meso-level, where the multiple positions and interests of institutional actors collide at the interface between policy and social life; 2) the livelihoods policy intends to change, where a diversity of relationships with natural resources and freedom to manoeuvre in response to change are encountered; and 3) the sites of conflict and resistance, where realities silenced by policy's orderings are exposed.

This point is again tied to the thesis' beginnings and yet it also remains relevant here at its close. For while the thesis contributes an understanding of particular sites of practice inclined to complexity, it equally reveals the many ways practice works to hide, silence or regulate away this complexity. Indeed, as the demise of the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* within DFID attests, the seemingly smoothest route in practice is to avoid dealing with the entanglements of realities. To address mess takes time. Moreover it risks failure to deliver policy ideals, or donor targets. For these reasons practitioners choose the route of least resistance; choose the sites and actors most likely to comply. The choice of influential actors for village management committees and initial avoidance of the very 'poor' is just one example of this. Yet it is these same attempts to sidestep, or dominate complexity, which have the effect of revealing difference and ultimately creating disorder.

3. If sustainable development is a process of contradiction rather than consensus, then in practice its overriding concern must be with the disorders, tensions, conflicts and illegalities which work to destabilise its simplicities. These are the unintended consequences of policy. Yet they should not be interpreted negatively; as an invitation for further regulation and suppression. Rather, they offer opportunities for policy and practice to evolve in place. Significantly they provide the means to address the interests of those who are routinely marginalized.

A common reaction encountered in response to the difficult realities of illegality, was a call for ever more dissemination and law enforcement; then people would protect the environment for the collective good of society. The positions and interests of illegal fishers were consistently overlooked. There was an incompatible reality which had one future; to be regulated out of existence. Yet in uncovering something of the complicated tensions which constitute illegality, this thesis offers an alternative perspective. Moreover, this represents a perspective which if framed differently has the potential to move sustainability beyond legalisation.

4. While spaces of participatory governance were instrumentally instituted through policy and characterised by uneven relations of power, they also offered a critical space for the expression of difference; or the realisation of alternatives through hegemony. Given how constrained many actors' participation was; how confined it was by social hierarchies and formal modes of practice, it would be easy to overlook the emancipatory possibility of participation and to condemn it as another hegemony of development practice. But as Kesby (2005, p2) states '*because I take seriously the claim that power cannot be avoided, I suggest that it must be worked with. I propose that resisting agents must draw on technologies such as participation in order to outmaneuver more domineering forms of power*'. In this way, participation is an important mechanism to realise diversity, creating spaces in which practice can engage with complications, disorders, conflicts. Moreover, through participatory spaces, alternative realities can work to challenge and ultimately expand policy simplifications and choices.

Yet, this ultimately depends on practitioners taking the ‘*tyrannies*’ of participation (see Cooke & Kothari 2001) seriously. More often in my experience it has remained too comfortable to continue existing ways of working. So critical reflection is avoided and the routine participatory tools continue to be abused for the sake of expediency. Thus, what I take away from this for my own practice, is the need to engage more critically with participation; to attempt a more ‘*deliberative*’ participation (IIRR 2005) that is conscious and creatively makes use of the politics of practice.

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## Annex 1

### Household encounters in Stung Treng and Koh Kong

<b>Interview details</b>	<b>Stung Treng</b>	<b>Koh Kong</b>
Number of households interviewed	20	57
Proportion of total number of households in the village (%)	20	15
Proportion of households interviewed who are members of community fishery (%)	60	65
Number of semi-structured interviews with seasonal calendar	20	48
Number of follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	11	19
Number of in-depth semi-structured interview with daily activity diagramming	4	-
Number of in-depth semi -structured interview with life history diagramming	6	4
Total number of household interviews	41	71

## Annex 2

### Background details from example livelihoods

#### *Livelihoods in Stung Treng*

#### Example 1: Sela

*Table 3: Details of interviews undertaken with Sela and his household*

Date	Method	Research team roles
28/04/06	Household recording sheet	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS note taker
28/04/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS note taker
15/08/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS note taker
22/08/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with daily activity diagramming	EW facilitator, notetaker; TC translator, notetaker
22/08/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with life history diagramming	KS facilitator; HP notetaker

*Table 4: Sela's household profile*

#### A: Details of household head-

<b>Name:</b>	Sela	<b>Age:</b>	49	<b>Gender:</b>	M
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 4	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Buddhism		

#### B: Household members -

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
47	F	Wife	Grade 2
27	F	Daughter	None
24	F	Daughter	None
21	F	Daughter	Grade 6
18	M	Son	Grade 9
15	F	Daughter	Grade 6
12	M	Son	Grade 5
9	M	Son	Grade 3
6	M	Son	Grade 3
3	F	Daughter	Grade 2
3	F	Grand daughter	None
1	M	Grand son	None

#### C: Family history -

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	For about Ten years
<b>Where did you live before?</b>	Koh Sneng and before my husband stay at Kratie
<b>Why did you move?</b>	Follow husband and husband follow parent

**Table 5: Sela's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Rainy season	Dry season	Score of relative importance for the household	Members of household involved
Corn	X	X	3	All the family except Sela's wife
Cucumber	X	X	2	
Bean	X		4	
Pumpkin		X	2	
Rice	X		5	
Tobacco		X	6	
Set net fishing	X	X	3	Children and Sela
Cast net fishing	X	X		Children and Sela
Chicken and pig	X	X	2	The whole family

**Table 6: Scoring perceptions of change to household fish catch and the incidence of illegal fishing**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Fish catch	3	4	5	6	7
Incidence of illegal fishing	10	9	5	3	2

**Figure 28: Sela's household daily activity diagram**

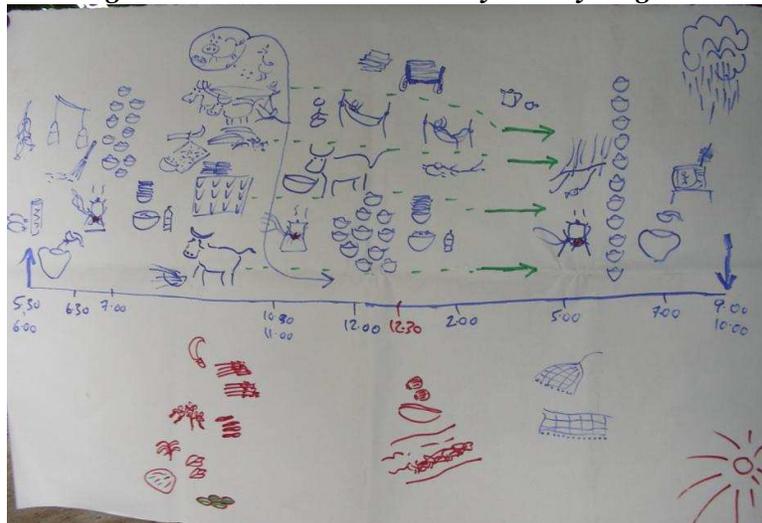
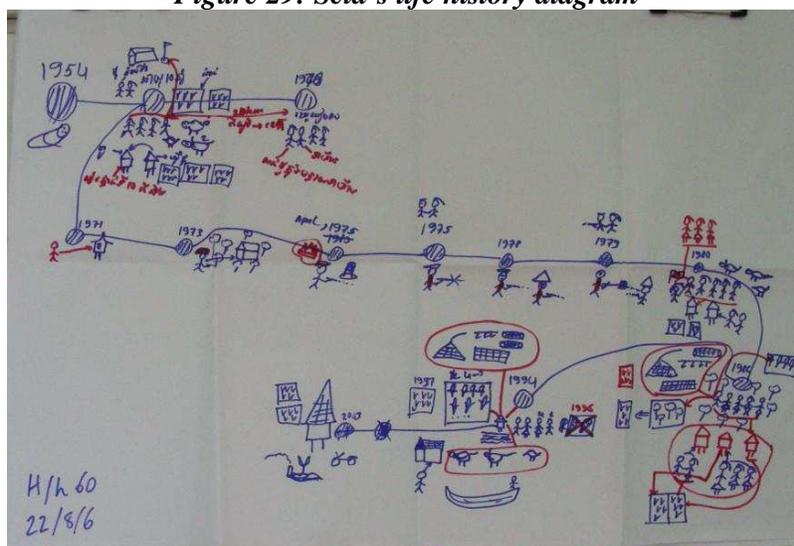


Figure 29: Sela's life history diagram



## Example 2: Makara and Savy

Table 7: Details of interviews undertaken with Makara and Savy

Date	Method	Research team roles
29/05/06	Household recording sheet	TC facilitator; KS notetaker
29/05/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	TC facilitator; KS notetaker
18/08/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS notetaker
24/08/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with daily activity diagramming	EW facilitator & notetaker; HP translator
24/08/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with life history diagramming	EW facilitator; KS translator; TC & HP notetaker

Table 8: Makara and Savy's Household Profile

### A: Details of household head

<b>Name:</b>	Makara	<b>Age:</b>	60	<b>Gender:</b>	M
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / Married / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 8 (Before 1970)	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Buddhism		

### B: Household members -

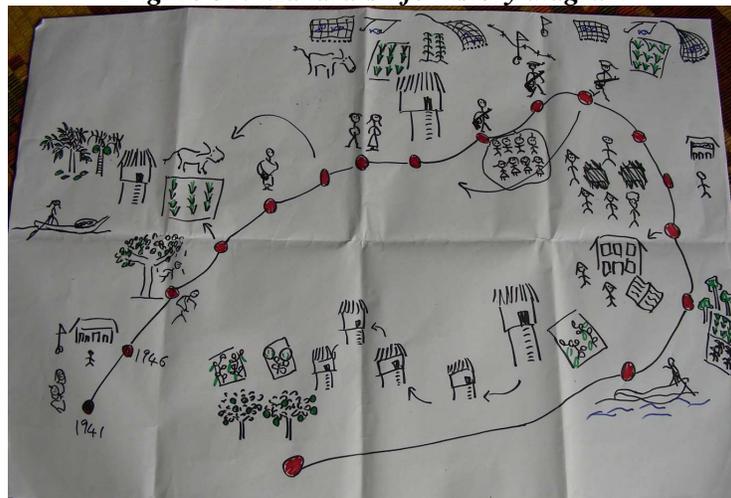
Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
62	F	Wife	Grade 8 (Before 1970)

### C: Family history -

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	<i>I have moved here 12 years ago</i>
<b>Where did you live before?</b>	<i>Soldier base Stung Treng province</i>



**Figure 31: Makara's life history diagram**



**Example 3: Vibol**

**Table 11: Details of interviews undertaken with Vibol and his household**

Date	Method	Research team roles
02/05/06	Household recording sheet	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS notetaker
02/05/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS notetaker
16/08/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS notetaker
27/08/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with daily activity diagramming	EW facilitator & notetaker; TC translator & notetaker
27/08/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with life history diagramming	HP facilitator; KS notetaker

**Table 12: Vibol's Household Profile:**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Vibol	<b>Age:</b>	51	<b>Gender:</b>	M
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 10 (old system)	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Buddhism		

**B: Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
64	F	Mother in law	None
48	F	Wife	None
23	M	Son	Grade 2
14	M	Son	Grade 5
12	M	Son	Grade 5
26	M	Young brother	Grade 5
37	F	Sister in law	Grade 3

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
19	F	Niece	Grade 3
17	F	Niece	Grade 7
14	F	Niece	Grade 5
12	M	Nephew	Grade 3
10	F	Niece	Grade 3
6	F	Niece	Grade 2
3	M	Nephew	None

**C: Family history -**

<i>How long have you lived in the village?</i>	<i>Since 1983</i>
<i>Where did you live before?</i>	<i>At Killo Pram Bey</i>
<i>Why did you move?</i>	<i>Because at Killo Pram Bey has no land farming, so I move to Khei to get forest land to do farming.</i>

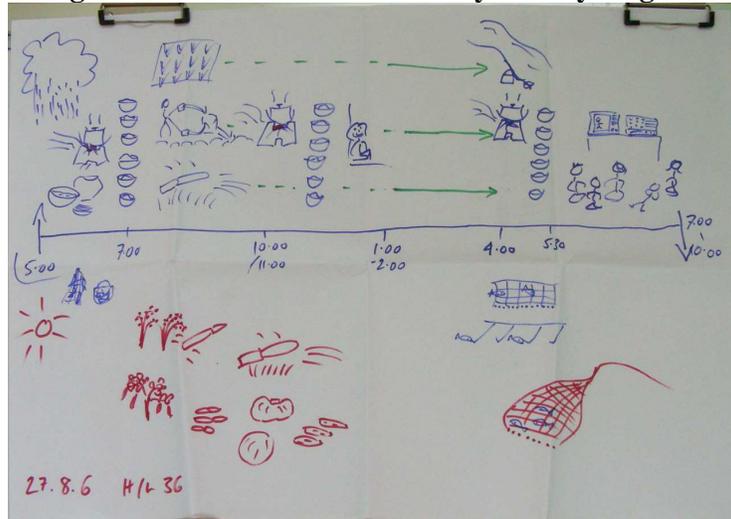
**Table 13: Vibol's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Raining season	Dry season	Score of relative importance for the household	Members of household involved
Rice	X		10	Wife and children
Corn	X	X	9	
Bean		X	11	
Pumpkin		X	7	
Winter melon		X	7	
Eggplant		X	7	
Set net	X	X	6	Sons
Cast net		X	6	
Fishing line	X	X	6	
Fishing trap (Lorb)	X		6	
Chicken	X	X	8	Whole family

**Table 14: Scoring perceptions of change to household fish catch and the incidence of illegal fishing**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Fish catch</b>	6	4	3	2	2
<b>Incidence of illegal fishing</b>	1	4	3	2	1

**Figure 32 : Vibol's household daily activity diagram**



### Example 4: Bopha

**Table 15: Details of interviews undertaken with Bopha and her household**

Date	Method	Research team roles
28/05/06	Household recording sheet	TC facilitator; KS notetaker
28/05/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	TC facilitator; KS notetaker
21/08/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	EW facilitator; TC translator; HP & KS notetaker

**Table 16: Bopha's Household Profile**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Bopha	<b>Age:</b>	45	<b>Gender:</b>	F
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 2	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Buddhism		

**B: Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
77	M	Husband (2 <sup>nd</sup> husband)	None
26	M	Son (blind)	Grade 3
21	M	Son	None
19	M	Son	Grade 6
15	F	Daughter	Grade 4
11	M	Son	Grade 3
8	F	Daughter	Grade 1
6	M	Son	None

**C: Family history -**

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	<i>I have moved here about 15 years</i>
------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------

<b>Where did you live before?</b>	<i>Hang Savart, Sarm Khouy Commune Stung Treng province</i>
<b>Why did you move?</b>	<i>My livelihood was very terrible and my first husband also died.</i>

**Table 17: Bopha's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Raining season	Dry season	Score of relative importance for the household	Members of household involved
Rice	X		12	Whole family
Bean		X	9	Bopha and children
Pumpkin		X	3	Husband and children
Cucumber		X	2	
Sweet potato	X	X	1	Bopha and children
Mango	X	X	3	Wife
Orange	X	X	4	
Fishing line	X	X	5	Daughter and blind son
Set net	X	X	4	

**Table 18: Scoring perceptions of change to household fish catch and the incidence of illegal fishing**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Fish catch</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Incidence of illegal fishing</b>	?	?	?	?	?

### Example 5: Sopheak

**Table 19: Details of interviews undertaken with Sopheak and his household**

Date	Method	Research team roles
28/05/06	Household recording sheet	TC facilitator; KS notetaker
28/05/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	TC facilitator; KS notetaker
21/08/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	EW facilitator & notetaker; TC translator & notetaker

**Table 20: Sopheak's Household Profile:**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Sopheak	<b>Age:</b>	40	<b>Gender:</b>	M
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 2	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Buddhism		

**B: Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
-----	--------	--------------------------	-----------

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
37	F	Wife	Grade 3
19	F	Daughter	Grade 4
17	F	Daughter	Grade 4
14	M	Son	Grade 5
8	F	Daughter	Grade 2

**C: Family history -**

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	<i>Since 1998</i>
<b>Where did you live before?</b>	<i>Koh Samroung</i>
<b>Why did you move?</b>	<i>Because I was afraid the river bank will brake – the island where he lived before was a small island and the river bank was eroding and he was afraid he would lose his house and his life</i>

**Table 21: Sopheak’s household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Raining season	Dry season	Score of relative importance for the household	Members of household involved
Rice	X		5	Whole family
Corn	X	X	3	Whole family
Bean		X	1	Whole family
Fishing trap ( <i>Chan</i> )	X		2	Sopheak
Set net	X	X	5	Sopheak
Chicken, duck and pig	X	X	3	Whole family

**Table 22: Scoring perceptions of change to household fish catch and the incidence of illegal fishing**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Fish catch</b>	10	8	6	5	3
<b>Incidence of illegal fishing</b>	1	3	6	7	4

**Livelihoods in Koh Kong**

**Example 1: Ratana**

**Table 23: Details of interviews undertaken with Ratana and his household**

Date	Method	Research team roles
17/10/06	Household recording sheet	EW facilitator; KR translator; HP notetaker
17/10/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	EW facilitator; KR translator; HP notetaker
23/11/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	HP facilitator; KS notetaker
28/11/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with life history diagramming	EW facilitator notetaker; KR translator

**Table 24: Ratana's Household Profile:**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Ratana	<b>Age:</b>	50	<b>Gender:</b>	M
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 8	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Khmer Buddhist		

**B: Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
49	F	Wife	None
27	M	Son	Grade 3
22	M	Son	Grade 6
20	F	Daughter	Grade 6
17	M	Son	Grade 6
16	F	Daughter	Grade 7
14	F	Daughter	Grade 5
10	M	Son	Grade 3
17	M	<i>Kaun Dai</i> worker	None

**C: Family history -**

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	20 years
<b>Where did you live before?</b>	<i>Baties</i> District, Takeo province
<b>Why did you move?</b>	They volunteered for the government programme, because before in this area there were a lot of Thai people and the government chose me to live here around 1985.

**Table 25: Ratana's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Score of relative importance for the household		Members of household involved
	Raining season	Dry season	
Crab trap fishing ( <i>lorb</i> )	3 -----	7 -----	Husband, son & labourer
Fishing net ( <i>mong</i> )	2 -----	3 -----	Husband, son & labourer
Jack fruit	-----	3 -----	Whole family
Chicken raising	1 -----	2 -----	Whole family



**Table 28: Oudom and Sreyleak's Household Profile:**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Oudom	<b>Age:</b>	44	<b>Gender:</b>	Male
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 6	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Khmer and Buddhism		

**B: Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
43	F	Wife	None
23	M	Son	Grade 3
20	M	Son	Grade 3
17	M	Son	Grade 3
9	F	Daughter	Grade 2
8	M	Son	Grade 1
6	F	Daughter	None
3	M	Son	None

**C: Family history -**

<i>How long have you lived in the village?</i>	11 years
<i>Where did you live before?</i>	Kampong Soum City
<i>Why did you move?</i>	At Stung Hau, Kampong Soum, the people were stopped from cutting the forest and then I had nothing for making a living, so I decided to move here by asking the Village/Commune authorities for land. My house at Kampong Soum was sold to someone else.

**Table 29: Oudom and Sreyleak's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Score of relative importance for the household		Participant
	Raining season	Dry season	
Crab lorb	3	5	Oudom and one son
Peeling own crab		1	Sreyleak and Labourer
<i>Koun Dai</i> - fishing labourer		1	Son
Morning glory and <i>Pti</i> – kind of leaf & stem vegetable growing as a bush of different sizes		1	Oudom and Sreyleak
Coconut	1	1	Wife and husband
Jack fruit		2	Children

Guava	1	1	Children
Mango		1	Children

**Table 30: Scoring perceptions of change to household crab catch**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Crab catch</b>	3	2	1	2	1

### Example 3: Thida

**Table 31: Details of interviews undertaken with Thida and her household**

Date	Method	Research team roles
28/10/06	Household recording sheet	HP facilitator; KS notetaker
28/10/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	HP facilitator; KS notetaker
24/11/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	KS facilitator; TC notetaker

**Table 32: Thida's Household Profile:**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Thida	<b>Age:</b>	43	<b>Gender:</b>	Female
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 7	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Khmer and Christian		

**B: Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
45	M	Husband	Grade 6
37	M	Nephew	Grade 5
20	M	Son	None
17	M	Son	Grade 7
13	F	Daughter	Grade 5
10	M	Son	Grade 2

**C: Family history -**

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	Since 1993 (there were a lot of crab and shrimp)
<b>Where did you live before?</b>	Bati District, Takeo Province
<b>Why did you move?</b>	Because I had nothing to do besides doing rice farming, so I decided to move here to fish, after I had heard from my younger sibling that this area is favourable for making a living. When I firstly arrived, the rich man gave me crab net, shrimp net and boat for fishing, but we had to sell the fishing harvest to him. If we sold to the fishing harvest to someone else, we got higher price than him, but the rich man would blame us and take the boat and net back if we sold to someone else. I leaved my house and rice farming land for my younger sister to look after.

**Table 33: Thida's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Score of relative importance for the household		Participant
	Raining season	Dry season	
Boat passenger service – Chroy Pros to Dong Tung	2 —————	4 —————	Husband, Thida and labour who is a nephew
Crab <i>lorb</i>	-----	1 —————	Huband and labour. When labour gets sick, wife goes.
<b>Mong Kouv</b>		6 —————	Husband and labour
Peeling own crab		1 —————	Husband help to boil crab and Thida peels
Collecting crab from Chroy Pros to sell at Dong Tung.	4 —————	-----	Thida

**Table 34: Scoring perceptions of change to household crab and fish catch and the incidence of illegal fishing**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Crab catch</b>	-	5	4	3	?
<b>Fish catch</b>	6	5	5	3	?
<b>Incidence of illegal fishing</b>	7	7	5	5	5

### Example 4: Dany

**Table 35: Details of interviews undertaken with Dany and her household**

Date	Method	Research team roles
27/10/06	Household recording sheet	EW facilitator; KS translator; CD notetaker
27/10/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	EW facilitator; KS translator; CD notetaker
21/11/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	EW facilitator; KR translator; KS notetaker

**Table 36: Dany's Household Profile**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Dany	<b>Age:</b>	54	<b>Gender:</b>	F
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / Married / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 6	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Khmer and no religion		

**B:Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
23	F	Daughter	None
6	F	grand daughter	Grade 1
2	M	Grandson	None

**C:Family history -**

<i>How long have you lived in the village?</i>	About 8 years
<i>Where did you live before?</i>	Kandal Province
<i>Why did you move?</i>	I visited my younger sibling and then lived here.

*Table 37: Dany's household seasonal calendar*

Activity	Score of relative importance for the household		Participant
	Raining season	Dry season	
Mango	1	1	Mother
Jack fruit	3	3	Mother
Cassava	1	1	Mother
lemon grass	1	1	Mother
Hand <i>dun</i>		4	Daughter
Thatch making	1	2	Mother & daughter
Crab peeling		1	Mother & daughter
Collecting shellfish	1		Mother & daughter
Labouring to harvest & plant rice			Mother

*Table 38: Scoring perceptions of change to household fish catch and the incidence of illegal fishing*

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Fish catch (Hand push net)	1	2	3	3	2	1
Incidence of illegal fishing ( <i>Dun</i> and <i>Mong Couv</i> )	3	3	2	2	1	1

## Example 5: Tola

**Table 39: Details of interviews undertaken with Tola and his household**

Date	Method	Research team roles
18/10/06	Household recording sheet	EW facilitator; KR translator; HP notetaker
18/10/06	Semi-structured interview with seasonal calendar	EW facilitator; KR translator; HP notetaker
22/11/06	Follow-up semi-structured interview with changes matrix	HP facilitator; KS notetaker
01/12/06	In-depth semi-structured interview with life history diagramming	EW facilitator; TC translator; KS notetaker

**Table 40: Tola's Household Profile**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Tola	<b>Age:</b>	57	<b>Gender:</b>	M
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	Grade 8 (old system)	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Khmer and buddhist		

**B: Details of household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
57	M	Husband	grade 8 (old system)
51	F	Wife	None
29	M	son	7
16	F	daughter	5
15	F	daughter	3
12	M	Son	1

**C: Family history -**

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	I came here around 1992-1993
<b>Where did you live before?</b>	I lived at Phnom Penh
<b>Why did you move?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I had my relative live here</li> <li>- My purpose came here for fishing</li> </ul>

**Table 41: Tola's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Score of relative importance for the household		Participant
	Raining season	Dry season	
Labouring for fish and crab fishing	-----3-----	-----6-----	Father
Labouring for farming	-----3-----		Father
Buy coconut & fish for selling	-----1-----	-----2-----	Wife
Vegetable growing	-----1-----	-----2-----	All the family



	changes matrix	translator
29/11/06	In-depth semi -structured interview with life history diagramming	EW facilitator; KR translator; KS notetaker

**Table 44: Sambath's Household Profile:**

**A: Details of household head-**

<b>Name:</b>	Sambath	<b>Age:</b>	49	<b>Gender:</b>	M
<b>Marital status:</b>	Single / <u>Married</u> / Divorced / Separated / Widowed				
<b>Education:</b>	12 old	<b>Ethnicity/ Religion:</b>	Ethnic Thai/Buddhist		

**B: Household members -**

Age	Gender	Relationship to H/h head	Education
38	F	Wife	None
18	F	Daughter	None
12	F	Daughter	4
4	M	Son	None
24	M	Son-In-Law	4 at Thailand

**C: Family history -**

<b>How long have you lived in the village?</b>	<i>I was born in 1957 in Chroy Pros, 1974 run away to Thailand because of Khmer Rouge, 1979 2 January come back to join soldier to fight against the Khmer Rouge.</i>
<b>Where did you live before?</b>	<i>Chroy Pros is his homeland</i>
<b>Why did you move?</b>	<i>N/A</i>

**Table 45: Sambath's household seasonal calendar**

Activity	Score of relative importance for the household		Participant
	Raining season	Dry season	
Pull net – <i>ous</i> boat	7		Before Sambath & wife, but now Sambath and son-in-law.
Bananas and jack fruit	2	2	Whole family – whoever has the time
Mango	1		
Head torch fishing with hand net for crab	½		Son-in-law on his own
Fishing net	X	X	
Chicken raising	2	-----	Whole family
Long beans		-----½-----	Daughter

## **Annex 3**

### **Productions beyond the thesis**

*CBNRM Learning Institute briefing papers*

## Community fishery outcomes

**Declining illegal fishing:** in both case studies we commonly encountered the perception that illegal fishing had declined as a result of the community fishery. However, as mentioned above, illegal fishing still continues. Moreover stopping illegal fishing is a source of conflict and tension and in some cases is clearly neither in the interest of those using illegal fishing gear, nor those responsible for enforcing its prohibition.

**Variable impacts on fishery resources:** through the majority of people perceived the fishery to have been in decline, there were also some people who perceived increases in the fishery resources in recent years, which they related to the community fishery activities and the decline in illegal fishing. Interestingly, those people responsible for

implementing the community fishery at different levels consistently reported the fishery to have increased since the community fishery was established. However, among households using the fishery on a daily basis, we found no consistency in perceptions of change in the fishery resource.

Overall people's perceptions of the outcomes of the community fishery were variable and contradictory. Perhaps, in both cases, it is simply too early for people to detect the impacts of community fishery interventions. Given the complexity both of people's livelihoods and the reality of practicing community fisheries, detecting clear impacts of community fishery practices on the fishery, livelihoods and poverty is likely to remain a challenge.

## RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS & FOLLOW UP

Our understandings of the practical realities of community fisheries suggest a number of critical issues:

- Implementing community fisheries represents a significant social change. It is a process which is complex and challenging and which cannot be assumed to be in everyone's best interest.
- People's experiences of any single community fishery practice are clearly multiple and diverse. These different experiences are simultaneously reinforcing, contradicting and transforming of the positive goals associated with community fisheries. Thus, experiences of declining access to fishery resources reinforce ideals of natural resource protection, while daily livelihood demands also challenge them and the ideals of long term sustainability. At the same time, strategies of participation and collaboration are complicated by personal and political interests and the constraints of social hierarchies.
- What we encountered in our case studies of community fisheries revealed practices which are frequently driven from the top-down; defined by national legal frameworks, dependent on external funding, and reliant on a downward flow of information, where local people are merely the obedient recipients of knowledge and followers of outside ideas. Yet in spite of this, it was also the case that the community fishery was creating an important space for practices of participation and ideals of collaboration and empowerment to take shape. So it is that community fisheries are providing a space for relationships to develop between households, village representatives and local and provincial authorities. It is also in these spaces that on occasion individuals who would normally not participate, or participate only passively, find a voice - even if sometimes that voice is to protest against the community fishery.

Acknowledging and understanding the multiple realities of community fisheries must be a critical part of the complex process of transition to a community fishery. Our research has attempted to start this process of understanding. We hope that this may form the basis of further dialogue and understanding between the many people involved in community fisheries, both in the case study projects and elsewhere.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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# CBNRM PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH – SHARING KEY FINDINGS

The Key Findings Brief aims to highlight some of the learning we think is significant from the CBNRM Perceptions Research.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Research Project aimed to understand how different people make sense of CBNRM and what impact CBNRM has on local livelihoods, focusing on community fisheries and addressed the following key questions:

- What are fisheries-based livelihoods currently like and how have they changed?
- How are different people involved in community fisheries?
- What interests and expectations do different people have about community fisheries?
- What impact has community fisheries had on people's livelihoods?

The research was carried out by the CBNRM Learning Institute in partnership with Emma Whittingham, student from Exeter University UK, staff from the Community Fisheries Development Office of the Fisheries Administration, and from the Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA) and the Ministry of Environment's (MoE)'s Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) Project.



Photo by: CBNRM Perceptions Team, CBNRM Learning Institute - 2006

## BACKGROUND

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) is a relatively new approach to natural resources management and development, which has expanded rapidly in Cambodia over the last decade. In practice it is often assumed that there is a shared understanding both of what CBNRM and its underlying concepts mean, and of the importance of collectively participating in its implementation. In reality people's interpretations and interests to participate may be very different and even opposing. Acknowledging that the reality of CBNRM practice is likely to be much more complex than we may at first assume, the research sought to better understand the complexity through the different perceptions of the many people involved.

We chose to address the research questions using a qualitative case study approach, focused on two projects: 1) CEPA's community fishery project in Stung Treng; and 2) MoE's PMCR project in Koh Kong. This allowed us to gain a rigorous and in-depth understanding relating to two different biogeographical areas of the country and from two projects with distinct institutional arrangements (one project NGO-based and the other government-based). Associated with each case study project, we were able to gain a detailed understanding from a range of different people involved, including; national, provincial, district, commune, village authorities, committees and households which were both members and non-members of the community fishery.

By working qualitatively with a small case study sample, we do not claim to provide a statistically representative understanding of perceptions relating to community fisheries in Cambodia. But what we can and will do is provide you with some interesting and important insights about two particular projects and the varied perceptions of the many people involved in these projects. We believe that this understanding raises some critical issues relevant to wider debates about community-based natural resource management policy and practice in Cambodia.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Livelihoods in two research villages

**Depending on natural resources:** people living in the case study research villages in both Koh Kong and Stung Treng provinces are well aware that their livelihoods depend on natural resources in a variety of ways. Access to natural resources was the reason many households migrated to the village, providing important livelihood assets; to use, convert, exchange or sell. Households recognised the value of natural resources for improving their lives both now and in the future. Some also considered the wider importance of natural resources, as part of the country's heritage and future.

*"Fish is national property, so if we help to maintain it ... our nation will also progress" (Household Stung Treng)*

**Varying dependence on fishing and farming:** for most households in Stung Treng rice and crop farming are the most important activity for generating income and food, while fishing was only considered more important when households had less land for farming. In contrast, the majority of households in Koh Kong were highly dependent on fishing as the main source of income and food. Farming in Koh Kong was generally less important, as land availability is restricted by the neighbouring national park of Botom Sakor, and market access for farm products is also limited. For those

### Community fishery expectations

**Mutually reinforcing and positive expectations:** for those implementing community fisheries, there was a positive expectation that the projects will deliver both social and environmental goals; empowering local people to protect the natural resources, thereby sustaining livelihoods and reducing poverty.

Two key strategies were generally considered necessary to achieve these goals: 1) participation; and 2) prohibiting illegal fishing. There was also growing recognition of the need to provide alternative livelihoods as a positive incentive for participation and for stopping illegal fishing. Moreover, strategies of alternative livelihoods acknowledged the limited potential for livelihood improvement based on a sustainable fishery, relying on the use of traditional fishing gear.

Many households and members of the community fishery identified with these positive expectations, which they had

households in Koh Kong lacking land, fishing boats or gear, there were many opportunities for labouring jobs; in fishing, timber extraction, construction and farming, both locally and in Thailand. It was also more common in Koh Kong, to find households engaged in non-farm and non-fishing activities, all of which depended on the seasonal profits from the fishery.

**Changing access to natural resources and changing living standards:** we found a general perception among households in both villages that access to fishery, forest and wildlife resources were declining due to illegal exploitation and increasing market demands. In Koh Kong villagers also connected declining access to the increasing population and to legal restrictions, prohibiting certain fishing gear and prohibiting access to forest areas for wood and for conversion to farm land. This was perceived by some to be making life more difficult. In Stung Treng, however, the ability to access land for crop farming was the main way most households improved their living standards.

*"...now it's so difficult I feel I can't do anything - as the old word says, 'go to water there is the crocodile and go to the mountain there is the tiger'" (Household Koh Kong)*

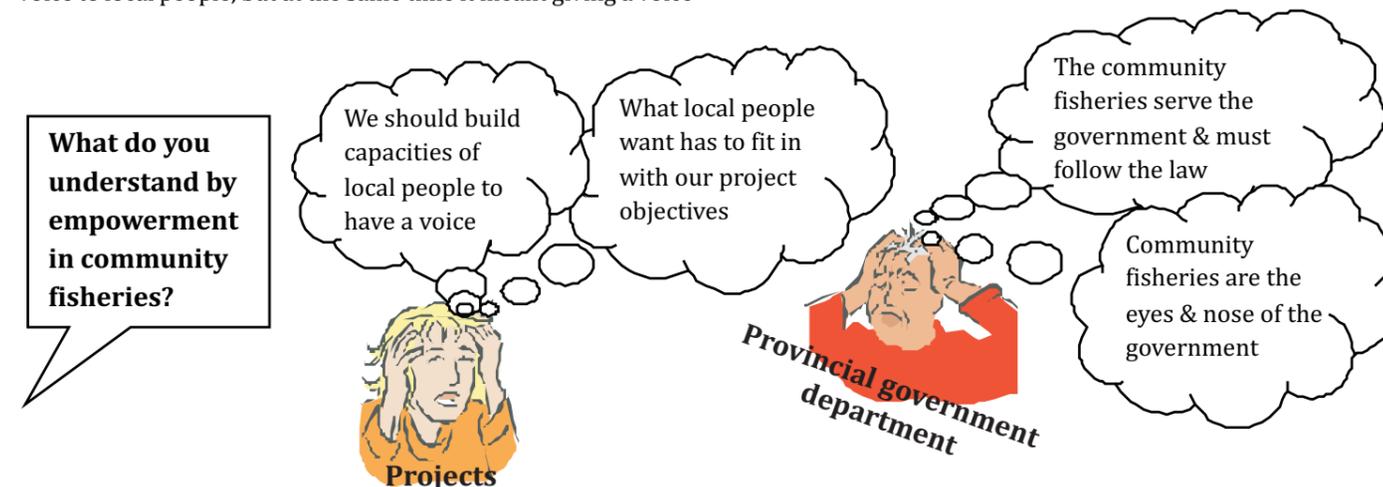
learnt from the projects. They hoped to protect the fishery resources for themselves and their children, they hoped fish would increase and their livelihoods would improve. In Koh Kong there was also the expectation that the community fishery would help stop conflicts between fishers using illegal and legal gears. Stopping illegal fishing was generally understood to be the only way to fulfil these expectations. A strategy which many households and committee members recognised needs everyone to collaborate together.

**Variable and conflicting interests:** while many people held positive expectations for the community fishery, based on an interest in protecting natural resources and sustaining and improving livelihoods, it was also clear that these interests were not unanimously shared, or commonly understood. In both Stung Treng and Koh Kong there were many households who did not understand, or were uncertain of, the purpose of the community fishery. In both cases it also became clear to us that those responsible for implementing community

fisheries had sometimes very different interpretations of the goal of empowerment.

For project, donor and national government staff empowerment was an important goal of the community fishery, it meant giving a voice to local people, but at the same time it meant giving a voice

which supported natural resource protection and sustainable livelihoods. For staff from the provincial government and commune councils, empowerment was a difficult and often disliked concept, that could only be understood through legal frameworks.



It was also acknowledged by some that in reality the goals for community fisheries were often in conflict; as policies of environmental protection were undermined by the interests of economic development and livelihood improvement, and as the wish expressed by many households to protect the fish for the next generations, was confronted with the daily demands to fish for food and income.

### Practical realities of implementing community fisheries

In reality we found that the practice of implementing community fisheries was much more complex than many people's positive expectations suggested.

**Complexities of participation:** participation in both Koh Kong and Stung Treng was very often an uneven process; some people participated actively, others only passively, and some people did not participate at all. Most often active participants were male and

*"During the meetings I do nothing, we are simple people, we don't really have an opinion" (Household Stung Treng).*

with positions of status within social hierarchies, fulfilling their formal responsibilities. For the majority of households, participation was passive, they attended meetings because they had been asked to and they went to listen and receive information, not to speak. Other households did not participate because they were too busy, or lived too far from the meeting place. Differing political interests, involvement in illegal fishing, as well as fear of threats from illegal fishers were also reasons not to participate. Of course there were also exceptions, when, for example, the normally silent illegal fishers decided to protest against the community fishery in Koh Kong, or the usually quiet widow chose to speak out during the informal break of a village community fishery meeting in Stung Treng.

**Complexities of stopping illegal fishing:** stopping illegal fishing is not a simple task, some people stop, but many also choose to continue fishing illegally. People give many reasons to explain the situation, here are some of the most common:

Why do people choose to stop illegal fishing?	Why do people choose to continue illegal fishing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People understand &amp; believe it's the 'right' thing to do</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Authorities enforce the law &amp; people are afraid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Illegal fishing is more productive than traditional fishing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demand for fish is high</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People have no choice - they only own and know how to use illegal gear, they can't afford to change - there are no viable alternatives</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People don't understand why stopping is important</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People don't care - they are only thinking of themselves and of tomorrow, not of the future</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People use money &amp; relationships to avoid law enforcement</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Law enforcement is weak</li> </ul>

## How are people involved in the community fishery?

**Types of participation** - findings suggest that formal meetings are the main fora for participation. The ability to join these meetings often depends on how well invitations are disseminated, whether people live close by or far away from the meeting place and how demanding people's livelihood activities are at the time. Within meetings levels of participation also vary –households lacking in status often attend meetings just to listen, while those with position typically dominate participation. Exceptions to this were found in informal settings outside of meetings, when people found it easier to share their experiences.

Besides formal meetings more active participation involves patrolling for illegal fishing, which was often viewed by households

as the responsibility of the community fishery committee and not its members. Patrolling is also perceived to be a difficult activity and a source of tension as well as conflict between the patrollers and other members of the village. In some cases people expressed a lack of confidence in the community fishery's ability catch and deal with illegal fishers.

In general, illegal fishers are marginal to the community fishery process, although there are exceptions - such as the illegal fishers in Koh Kong who report that they protested against the banning of their fishing gears during community fishery meetings.

**Learning and information sharing** – in general ideas about the community fishery

(about the importance of natural resources, natural resource protection and management) are introduced to local by outsiders (people from provincial and national levels) and outsiders often perceived it to be their role to inform or 'educate' local people.

Learning opportunities focus mainly on the Community Fishery Committees or Village Management Committees, who then share this information with local people. On the whole, committees transferred information and ideas downwards from provincial and national levels and it appeared that they primarily represented the community fishery project rather than the people, looking to people from provincial and national levels to solve any problems at the local level.

## What are people's interests and expectations?

The existing legal framework shapes people's expectations for the community fishery - people expect what they've been told to expect! At the same time, interpretations of the purpose of the community fishery vary from those people who

think the purpose of community fishery is just to stop illegal fishing, to those who think it will improve livelihoods by increasing the fishery resources, and those who have no or very limited understanding. There are also people

who may understand the concepts of community fishery but this opposes with their own personal interests to gain benefit through using, or supporting the use of, illegal fishing gear.

## What impact is the community fishery having on livelihoods?

Perceptions of the impact of community fisheries varied significantly, from positive impacts of increased fish catches and incomes, to no impact at all, to negative impacts of declining living standards. Interestingly, most households reported neutral or negative impacts.

It is clear that community fisheries require significant changes in values, behaviour, relationships and livelihood activities – e.g. to prioritise values of conservation of fisheries for future generations, to alter behaviour and relationships to engage in collective decision-

making and action, and to change activities by stopping illegal fishing. Noteworthy changes have already taken place in terms of forming and strengthening relationships between community fishery committees, local authorities, NGOs and government line

departments. However, the incentives and willingness to support many of the changes required is unclear. Current incentives rely overwhelmingly on legal frameworks, rather than positive incentives and opportunities, while livelihood demands and political influences significantly weaken people's willingness to change.



Fishers emptying their nets - Koh Kong province



Different stages of rice cropping in Khei village - Stung Treng province

## NEXT STEPS

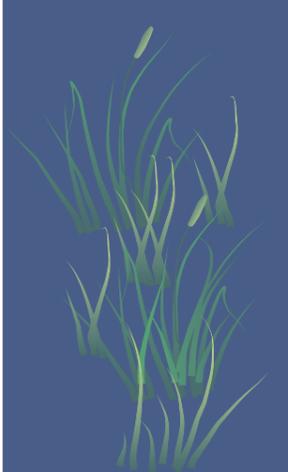
It is hoped that by May-June 2007 in-depth analysis of the fieldwork findings will be completed, after which follow up activities to share the learning and support dialogue and negotiation between different interest groups will take place. Preparation and planning for follow up activities will begin in June 2007.



CBNRM  
LEARNING INSTITUTE

The Emerging Lessons & Learning Summary Report aims to present an overview of the CBNRM Perceptions Research Project. The report provides an outline of the type of research that was conducted during the project, a summary of some of the initial lessons and learning which have emerged, as well as an indication of the project's next steps.

The report is published as a precursor to a detailed research report and only a month after field research has been completed. Thus the emerging lessons and learning presented here are based on preliminary and basic analyses of the data and represent only a taste of things to come!



Research was supported by an UK Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Slawson Award and a CBNRM Learning Institute Research Grant. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the funders.

## CBNRM PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH PROJECT EMERGING LESSONS AND LEARNING SUMMARY REPORT

### BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) is a relatively new approach to natural resources management and development, which has expanded rapidly in Cambodia over the last 7 years. In practice it is often assumed that there is a shared understanding of what CBNRM and its underlying concepts mean. In reality interpretations may be disparate and even opposing. Different people's interpretations may vary depending on who they are, their interest in natural resources and the impact of management on their livelihoods. Failure to acknowledge and address these differences may seriously compromise the outcome of the CBNRM process and its impact on livelihoods and development. This is significant given the increasingly important role of CBNRM in development and poverty reduction in rural Cambodia, where high dependence on a declining natural resource base is increasingly leading to conflicts and under-employment.

The CBNRM Perceptions Research Project aims to understand how different people make sense of CBNRM and what impact CBNRM has on local livelihoods. The research has focused on community fisheries and addresses the following key questions:

- What are fisheries-based livelihoods currently like and how have they changed?
- How are different people involved in community fisheries?
- What interests and expectations do different people have about community fisheries?
- What impact has community fisheries had on people's livelihoods?

The CBNRM Perceptions Research Project conducted case study research over a period of 9 months from March – December 2006 in association with two community fishery interventions: the Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA) Community Fisheries Project in Stung Treng province; and the Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) Project in Koh Kong province. Research was carried out through a partnership between the CBNRM Learning Institute,

#### What do we mean by perception?

- Perceptions are people's ideas, views and opinions or judgements
- People's perceptions form through their own experiences
- So different people will have different views, ideas and opinions depending on their experience and their abilities to interpret their experience.
- Perceptions are SUBJECTIVE –they are formed within the mind of each person and influenced by personal opinion.

Emma Whittingham of Exeter University UK, the community fishery projects at the case study sites and staff from the Community Fisheries Development Office of the Fisheries Administration (formerly Department of Fisheries).



Fishes in Khei village - Stung Treng province



Peeling crabs - Koh Kong province

## THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The CBNRM Perceptions Research Project used a qualitative approach to research based on a view of knowledge where there are many ways of seeing and interpreting things - it depends on who is looking! This means that the research is based on the premise that there is

no 'right' answer.

To carry out this type of research requires that the researcher has an attitude of open-mindedness and is non-judgemental –we are not interested in whether something is 'right' or

'wrong', but why a person has the perceptions or opinions they do.



**A semi-structured interview in Khei village, Stung Treng province**

### Four Characteristics of Qualitative Research

1. Qualitative research makes use of less structured research tools (e.g. semi-structure interviews instead of questionnaires).
2. Qualitative research makes use of open questions giving an in-depth understanding.
3. Qualitative research is often interested in people's behaviour, attitudes and motivations (e.g. what people think and why?).
4. Qualitative research is generally based on a small sample size, which is not statistically representative.

## THE RESEARCH METHOD

In-depth research was carried out at two case study locations and involved a range of stakeholders from national, provincial, commune, village and household levels. A single village was selected for in-depth research. Households representing both members and non-members of the community

fishery (who both have an interest in the fishery resource) were interviewed.

The principle research method was the semi-structured interview, with the use of some participatory research tools at village and household levels (e.g. seasonal calendars,

time lines with ranking, life histories and daily activity diagrams). Repeated interviews were carried out with selected stakeholders to gain a more in-depth understanding. Observations of community fishery activities and livelihood practices were carried out alongside the interviews.

## THE CASE STUDIES

### Stung Treng Province

Case study research in Stung Treng took place between April and August 2006 and involved a total of 8 weeks of field research spread over 4 separate visits to Stung Treng. The research village was selected together with CEPA staff.

The main criteria for selection were the villagers' willingness to participate in the research and their availability during the fieldwork period. Interviews were carried out with national, provincial, commune and village

level stakeholders in the CEPA Community Fishery Project and with approximately 20% of the households in the research village.

### The CEPA Community Fisheries (CF) Project

- Community Fisheries have been set up in 17 villages in 2 districts and 4 communes along the Mekong River
- 9 villages established their community fisheries as pilots in 1997. The community fishery then expanded to 8 more villages in 2000
- The CF Project is supported by Oxfam and implemented by CEPA staff with collaboration from the Provincial Fisheries Office (PFO) and Department of Environment

### Koh Kong Province

Case study research in Koh Kong took place during October and November 2006 and involved a total of 5 weeks of field research during 2 visits to Koh Kong. The research village was selected with PMCR staff. The main criteria for selection were the villagers' willingness to participate in the research and

the need to avoid locations that had previously been part of in-depth livelihoods research. Interviews were carried out with national, provincial, district, commune and village level stakeholders in the PMCR Project and with approximately 15% of the households in the research village (less than in Stung Treng due

to the large number of households and limited time available).



**A semi-structured interview in Khei village, Stung Treng province**

### The Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) Project

- The PMCR Project has been working in Koh Kong since 1997 and was formerly known as PMMR (Participatory Management of Mangrove Resources)
- Community organising forming Village Management Committees has taken place in 4 villages – 3 within the Peam Krasob Wildlife Sanctuary (PKWS) and 1 outside The project supported by IDRC and implemented by a Ministry of Environment project team with partners from PFO and the Department of Women's Affairs

## EMERGING LESSONS - REFLECTIONS ON THE FIELDWORK PROCESS

Undertaking a process of qualitative research, which accepts that knowledge is subjective and variable, also recognize that the research findings are a result of the research process. So to interpret the research findings it is important to have a critical awareness of the research process – to reflect upon the research activities and people involved and how they interact and influence the research practice. Some emerging lessons of this reflection include:

**In-depth research requires an ability to probe** – the ability to probe varies with age and status of the researchers. Probing also requires the researcher to actively listen and think critically about the information they are receiving during interviews.

**In-depth research requires trust** – building trust between the researchers and those being researched helped to develop in-depth

understanding and was built through repeated follow-up interviews. At the same time, repeated interviews demanded more time than many people had available so sometimes repeated interviews were impossible.

**In-depth research takes time & patience** – to probe in-depth, to gather detailed notes and reflect upon them, to carry out follow-up interviews and to translate the full meaning of notes from Khmer to English reflecting fully on the meaning.

**Observations add value to learning** – helping to understand livelihoods more deeply and to compare what people say and what people do!

**Perceptions are variable** - from one interview to the next a person's opinions may change completely depending on relationships between the research team and the respondent

and also on local politics and relationships between the respondent and local authorities.

These emerging lessons highlight the many challenges that this type of qualitative research creates for the researchers. It also highlights the many sources of uncertainty that accompany qualitative research and the importance of presenting findings in context, with an honest assessment of the limitations of the results.

### The Meaning of Probing

- To delve into or investigate - a searching investigation - a follow-up technique for getting complete responses to open-ended questions by asking further in-depth questions focusing on the use of what, where, when, who, how and why questions.

## EMERGING LEARNING - REFLECTIONS ON THE FIELDWORK FINDINGS

The reflection of the fieldwork findings should be read with the understanding that further in-depth analysis will take place to reveal the full detail of these early insights and offer additional learning we are not yet able to provide here. However, though the full analysis has not yet been completed, it is possible to highlight some emerging learning having completed 9 months of fieldwork and reflection. These are provided here based on the four research questions.



**Chouy Pras village - Koh Kong province**



**Mekong river running through Khei village - Stung Treng province**

### What are current livelihoods like?

#### Koh Kong

- Access to natural resources & social connections motivate migration to the research village
- Livelihoods are a combination of fishing, livestock raising, small-scale fruit or crop farming, small scale services (e.g. money-lending, boat transport, wine making, selling grocery), labouring (e.g. peeling crabs, fishing labour, rice harvest labour) and thatch making and selling. Cage culture of Grouper fish was also common in one part of the village.
- Rice farming is practiced by some households with access to land
- Overall the dependence on fishing activities is high
- Access to forest wood and land is limited by the presence of Botom Sakor national park
- Fishery resources are thought to be declining and increasing by different households
- Many think that livelihoods have recently declined
- Limited access to land and markets limits opportunities to change livelihoods.

#### Stung Treng

- Access to land for farming motivates current migration to the research village
- Livelihoods are mainly a combination of fishing & farming (rice & crops) & livestock raising
- Dependence on fishing varies depending on importance of crop farming
- Natural resources thought by many households to be in decline
- Fisheries resources thought to be both declining and increasing by different households
- Many think that livelihoods have improved
- Livelihood improvement is linked to access to land and crop farming



***Book Chapters (CBNRM LI 2009)***

# Chapter 27

## Understanding the complex realities of CBNRM: multiple perceptions of community fisheries practice

**By: Emma Whittingham<sup>1</sup>, Meng Kimsan<sup>2</sup>, Tep Chansothea<sup>3</sup>**

*Using a case study from Stung Treng and one from Koh Kong, this paper attempts to further understand the complex realities of CBNRM using multiple perceptions of various stakeholders involved. The research intends to not only contribute to increasing the dialogue and learning among CBNRM partners but to also increase awareness and recognition of the diversity of interests and interpretations. The research findings uncover critical issues relevant to the wider debates about CBNRM policy and practice in Cambodia and explore these perceptions through three issues: (1) diversity of local livelihoods, (2) tension between personal and social values, and (3) influence of hierarchical relations.*

### BACKGROUND

Over the last decade community based natural resource management (CBNRM) has become a popular and widespread approach in Cambodia. It is supported by a range of government policies, including fisheries and forestry reforms, the government's rectangular strategy and decentralisation agendas, and is implemented by a number of different public and civil agencies. Following a National Workshop in 2002, a common definition of CBNRM in the context of Cambodia was agreed as:

*“ A diversity of co-management approaches that strive to empower local communities to actively participate in the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources through different strategies including community forestry, community fisheries, participatory land use planning, and community protected area management*

*(CBNRM Learning Institute 2003, cited in Ken Seroy Rotha 2005) ”*

<sup>1</sup> Emma Whittingham, PhD. Student from Exeter University UK; Research Fellowship with the CBNRM Learning Institute

<sup>2</sup> Meng Kimsan, Research Assistant of the CBNRM Learning Institute

<sup>3</sup> Tep Chansothea, Research Officer of the CBNRM Learning Institute

Therefore CBNRM represents an approach to co-management linked to a number of core concepts, including: community, conservation, sustainability, participation, and empowerment. As Leach et al (1997a) conclude, these concepts are generally underpinned by a number of fundamental and related assumptions: that, (1) there exist homogenous communities with shared values or interests in the environment and its conservation, and (2) a collective willingness and capability to be empowered and participate in its management. Yet a growing literature documenting CBNRM experiences suggests that such assumptions may have little basis in reality (see Leach et al 1997b for a collection of examples). Instead we are encouraged to recognize (as illustrated in Box 1) that CBNRM works within communities of varied and often conflicting interests and motivations (Agrawal and Gibson 1999). This occurs because of a diversity of identities, histories and capabilities which give rise to distinct and changing relations to the environment (Leach et al 1997a; Bonini-Feyerabend et al 2004). Moreover, the diversity of people often results in different levels of access, of participation and influence in the direction of CBNRM such that CBNRM may come to represent a place of exclusion as well as inclusion. Indeed, critics have suggested that participation in CBNRM is most commonly used to gain local support for preconceived conservation priorities and strategies rather than as a means to empower local people to identify their own priorities (Campbell and Vaio-Mattila 2003).

### Box 1: Recognising the diversity of perspectives associated with CBNRM

In the Philippines, the ‘Linking People to Policy’ project recognised that:

*“Community Forestry seems to be like beauty, very much in the eye of the beholder; to a forester it may be about trees and techniques, for an environmentalist it may be about biodiversity and protection, for an NGO worker it may be about community organising and awareness raising, for community members it may be about secure use rights”.*

Significantly, the project was also aware that certain people’s perspectives may be more powerful in influencing policy than others. Indeed, it was often the opinions of community members which were never truly heard in conventional participatory projects, where the agendas and objectives had already been decided by external professionals.

(IIRR 2005)

Given the diversity of interests associated with CBNRM, it is not surprising that Thay So many (2002) revealed confusion, lack of clarity and limited understanding among fishers, technical institutions and associations at local levels about the meaning of CBNRM in Cambodia. Similarly, Van Acker (2004) suggests that among line ministries and projects there are differing and contested views of CBNRM. It is noted that local communities' needs and roles in decision making are often marginalised by government stakeholders who view local people as deficient of technical expertise and capacity (ibid.). Indeed, a survey conducted on knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs on good governance indicates there remains confusion and limited understanding of key concepts such as participation among different level government officials and communities (Holloway, Chom Sok 2004).

What becomes clear is that while there are often assumptions of shared values and consensus towards collective action underlying CBNRM, in reality the situation is much more complex. Indeed, in reality, people's interests in natural resources and CBNRM are very different and even opposing, while their ability to be involved and influence CBNRM are often unequal. These differences seriously compromise the process and outcomes of CBNRM, undermining its ability and the goals of sustainability, conservation and empowerment it seeks to deliver. This is a significant implication considering the strategic role of CBNRM in development and poverty reduction in rural Cambodia, where high dependence on a declining natural resources base is increasingly leading to conflicts and underemployment.

It is based on this background understanding that the following research was carried out to further understand the complex realities of CBNRM through the different perceptions of the many people involved. It was hoped that such an understanding would not only contribute to dialogue and learning among CBNRM partners, but would also strengthen the transparency of the CBNRM process as a whole, increasing awareness and recognition of the diversity of interests and interpretations and the ways in which they are negotiated.

## OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research aimed to understand how different people perceive (Box 2) CBNRM and what impact CBNRM has on local livelihoods. Within the context of Community Fisheries (CFI), the following key questions were addressed:

- What are fisheries-based livelihoods currently like and how have they changed?
- How are different people involved in CFI?
- What interests and expectations do different people have about CFI?
- What impact have CFI had on people's livelihoods?

### Box 2: What do we mean by perceptions?

- *Perceptions are simply our own ideas, views and opinions or judgments - they are not 'right' or 'wrong'*
- *Our perceptions form through our own experiences and relationships with the world around us*
- *We have multiple perceptions that change overtime, occur in different places and depend on who we are talking to*
- *The research was interested in different people's perceptions about the value of natural resources, the purpose of Community Fisheries and their experiences in practice*

## METHODOLOGIES

The research was based on a qualitative case study approach. As highlighted in Box 3, such an approach allowed us to obtain an in-depth understanding of the diversity of people's experiences and interpretations. This method was chosen to decrease the challenges that would have accompanied a more traditional quantitative methodology.

### Box 3: Characteristics of qualitative research

- Qualitative research makes use of less structured research tools (e.g. semi-structured interviews instead of questionnaires).
- Qualitative research makes use of open questions giving an in-depth understanding.
- Qualitative research is often interested in people's behaviour, attitudes and motivations (e.g. what people think and why).
- Qualitative research is generally based on a small sample size, which is not statistically representative, but gives a deeper understanding.

The research focused on two case studies of CFI: 1) Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA) Community Fishery project in Stung Treng; and 2) Ministry of Environment's Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) project in Koh Kong. At each study site in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a wide range of people who were involved in, or affected by, each project at national, provincial, local, and village levels. This also included a sample of households from two research villages involving both CFI members and non-members. An indication of the numbers of different stakeholders interviewed at each case study site is shown in Table 1 below. For many of the national, provincial, local and sample households, initial interviews were followed up with additional interviews and informal conversation. This allowed for the development of



Household interview by the research team at Stung Treng  
Photo by: CBNRM Learning Institute

trust between the research team and those being researched and also allowed for a greater depth of understanding to be developed as initial open questions were followed up with probing questions to expand, clarify and make initial analysis of issues with the interviewees<sup>4</sup>.

For local level interviews a number of different participatory tools (eg seasonal calendars, time lines, daily activity diagrams, etc) were used to encourage a greater level of engagement with the interviewees. Observations were also carried out by all members of the research team during interviews and during the period in the field. The focus of observations was on the general livelihood status, assets and activities of householders, as well impressions of the disposition, atmosphere and behaviour of the interviewees, which were the subject of on-going reflection among the research team. This was viewed as an important strategy not only for gaining a more detailed understanding of local livelihoods, but also to compare between what people say and what they do. This strategy also allowed for interviewees, to reflect on the influences of the research process itself regarding the information collected during interviews.



Seasonal calendar tool used for data collection  
Photo by: CBNRM Learning Institute

**Table 1:** An indication of the interview sampling strategy at two study sites

Case study stakeholders	Numbers of stakeholders interviewed	
	CEPA's Community Fishery Project, Stung Treng	PMCR project, Koh Kong
National level institutions	3	1
Provincial level institutions	6	6
Local authorities and village community fishery committees	6	6
Households	20 (20 percent of households)	48 (15 percent of households)

<sup>4</sup> In this way repeated and flexible questioning of qualitative approaches allows the researcher to gain greater insights that the more rigid and closed questioning formats of qualitative approaches do not permit.

Interview and observation notes were translated from Khmer into English through a lengthy process involving detailed discussion within the research team to establish the ‘best’ interpretation of information collected. A qualitative software package known as NVivo7 was then used to sort the information within English interview transcripts into key themes relating to the research questions and to aid in the identification of patterns of similarity and difference in stakeholders’ perceptions.

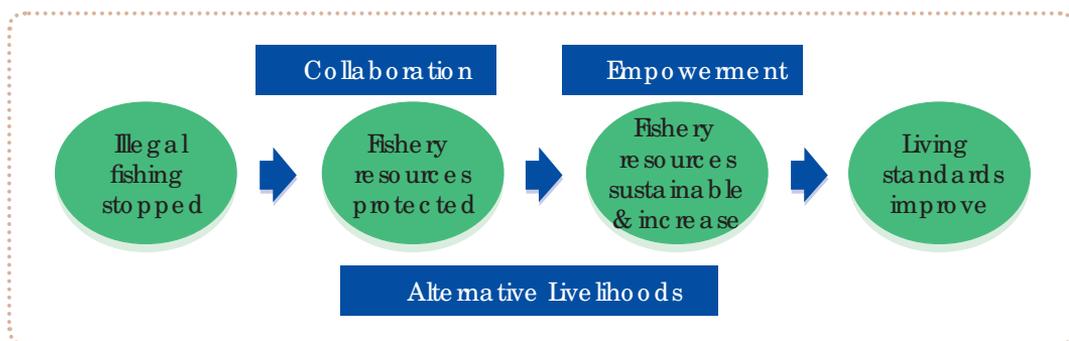
## MAJOR FINDINGS

The research revealed some interesting and important insights about two case studies and the varied perceptions of the many people involved, raising some critical issues relevant to wider debates about CBNRM policy and practice in Cambodia. In the following section, we begin by reviewing the research’s main findings in relation to people’s diverse perceptions of the purpose and practices of CFI, showing how CFI are sometimes supported, but often contested. We relate this complex reality to what appear to be three critical and interrelated issues: firstly, the diversity of local livelihoods; secondly the tension between personal and societal values; and thirdly, the pervasive influence of hierarchical relations of authority.

### Community Fishery expectations

When different stakeholders were asked to consider what the purpose of the CFI are, or what they expect the CFI will achieve in the future, many stakeholders expressed a series of positive and mutually reinforcing expectations as shown in the figure below. These positive and reinforcing expectations typically followed a logical sequence whereby stopping illegal fishing would protect the fishery resources, such that it might increase and be sustained into the future resulting in people’s living standards improving.

*Figure 1. Positive and reinforcing expectations of CFI*



Institutional stakeholders such as project and government fishery staff, local authorities and CFI committees involved in implementing CFI, and many local people envisioned that the CFI would protect fishery resources; they expected that this would be achieved by stopping illegal fishing activities. They also hoped that once the fishery resources were protected from illegal fishing, the number of fish would increase, the standard of living would improve, and that this would occur for now and for the future. In Koh Kong there was also the expectation that the CFI would help stop conflicts between fishers using illegal and legal gear. However, while many people held positive expectations for the CFI, based on an interest in protecting the fishery and improving livelihoods, it was also clear that these interests were not unanimously shared, or commonly understood. Indeed, in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong there were many households who did not understand, or were uncertain of, the purpose of the CFI therefore having no clear expectations.

*“The work will be achieved as long as there is participation from people and local authorities... One chopstick is broken down but one bundle of chopsticks is not broken down.”*

*Village management committee chief, Koh Kong* 》



Signal board for illegal fishing activities prohibition

“ ... if people are empowered by the CFI it can also help them to be empowered to tackle other problems. If people understand and have access to information they can participate to solve problems and help society and development. Empowerment is linked to wider social development.

CEPA Director, Phnom Penh ”

For project stakeholders, the CFI was also expected to empower local people both by supporting access to their rights to participate and manage natural resources, and by generating economic improvements in their livelihoods. This was particularly emphasised by CEPA who envisioned the CFI contributing to local people’s sense of freedom within society. However, perceptions from provincial and local government in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong differed; they expected the CFI to follow the roles provided by the government and which were set out in the law. For government stakeholders, empowerment goes outside of the official hierarchy of power and is not a popular goal. Moreover, as the district vice chief in Koh Kong expressed, the CFI was considered as the government’s “eyes and nose” to manage natural resources. In other words the CFI is an extension of the government, serving their interests.

“ To say empowerment is not right. Empowerment should be that the people implement the power that is provided in the law.

Provincial government officer, Stung Treng ”

### Perceptions of Community Fishery practice

In spite of many people’s positive expectations for the CFI, when we considered how different people perceived the CFI in practice, what emerged was a much more complex picture. In practice, achieving collaboration in the CFI and stopping illegal fishing in particular was perceived as unclear and not straightforward. Participation in the CFI in both Koh Kong and Stung Treng was very often an uneven process; some people participated actively, others only passively, and some people did not participate at all. Furthermore, while some people attempted to stop illegal fishing others continued to fish this way even when they were aware of the law and of the impact on the fishery. Despite most stakeholders agreeing that illegal fishing had declined, there was no consensus as to whether the fishery had improved, or whether living standards had improved. Most institutional stakeholders perceived that the fishery had

improved and consequently living standards had also improved as a result of the establishment of the CFI and decline in illegal fishing. However, in comparison, among local people using the fishery resources on a daily basis there was no consensus on how the fishery had changed; some people thought it had increased, others that it continued to decline, or that there had been no change at all.

“ *Even I know that the Khouv net will break my cooking jar but I still do it because I always use it and my job is only like this. It means that although they realize Khouv net destroys fisheries resources they rely on every day, they still use it as they have no choice.* ”

*Household, Koh Kong* ”

Local people also expressed varied perceptions of changes to their living standards. In Stung Treng the majority of households perceived that their living standards had improved, but this was linked primarily to the ability to gain access to land for rice and crop farming. In contrast, the perceived improvements to living standards expressed in Koh Kong were less widespread; many households said that they had experienced a decline in their standard of living often as the result of increasing restrictions to natural resource access. Indeed, for some households a decline in living standards was associated with declining access to the fishery. This relationship was linked to an increase in the number of people fishing, the impact of illegal fishing on the fishery resources, and for some households the fact that they had stopped using more productive illegal gear. Moreover, restricted access to land and forest resources resulting from the strict protection of the adjacent Botum Sakor National Park was also perceived to be negatively affecting living standards by limiting the opportunities for alternative farming activities. For some households the combined restrictions on fishing and farming left a very bleak future.

“ *... now it's so difficult I feel I can't do anything, as the old word says 'go to water there is the crocodile and go to the mountain and there is the tiger.* ”

*Household, Koh Kong* ”

### Understanding the complex reality

Stakeholders' perceptions of the expectations and practices of CFI reveal a diversity of experiences. Certain perceptions are shared among different stakeholders, but many more opinions differ and even conflict. In attempting to make sense of this complex reality, we consider the effect of three critical and interrelated issues:

#### ***The diversity of local livelihoods:***

The complex reality of CFI in both case studies is related to the wide diversity of local livelihoods and capabilities to support the positive expectations of the CFI. Some households have the choice and capability within their livelihood to support the CFI – for example, they have the advantages of a large and healthy family to provide adequate labor, combined with access to land and productive equipment to engage in a range of farming and fishing activities, such that they have the choice to stop illegal fishing activities and concentrate on other activities, as well as the time for a household member to attend CFI meetings. For other households, however, their choice and capability to participate in the CFI is constrained. For these households, participation in the CFI was often not an option simply because they were too busy making their living, too busy with rice farming and fishing, or other jobs. From the perspective of these households, it was more important to concentrate on the immediate demands of living than to spend time involved in the CFI, which as highlighted in Box 4 may be perceived to only bring benefits for the future. Thus, in spite of being aware of the CFI's objectives, some households felt no incentive to participate because they did not perceive any immediate or direct benefit and were unable or unwilling to commit to the promise of potential longer term benefits.



*Rice farming activity in addition to fishing at Stung Teng*  
Photobly: CBNRM Learning Institute

In other cases, households chose not to participate because their livelihoods currently benefited from using illegal fishing gear and they lacked either the incentive, or the capability to stop. From the perspective of many institutional stakeholders, the households who chose to continue using illegal fishing gear simply did not understand or care about the importance of sustainably extracting natural resources. Rather they are fishers, who the village chief in



*Illegal fishing gear (pushing net) often used in Chrouy Pras, Koh Kong  
Photoby: CBNRM Learning Institute*

Stung Treng claims, “*want to be rich quickly*”, or who, the CFI committee chief in Stung Treng explains, use illegal fishing gear because “they can catch a lot of fish”. This problem is exacerbated by the demand from foreign markets which provides incentive to continue this practice. The village management committee chief in Koh Kong also suggests that the illegal fishers are simply “obstinate” or perhaps, as suggested by members of the commune council in Stung Treng, “*don’t love natural resources and fish*” and “*don’t understand or respect the law*”, because they are “*illiterate and they don’t know how to listen and read ... (they) don’t want to join the meetings and don’t want to listen to other people*”.

“*People need to do the electro-fishing to have fish to sell. If they don’t sell the fish they’ll have no money. I don’t know why they would stop illegal fishing if they need the money.*”

*CFI committee member, Stung Treng* ”

At the same time, local realities of poverty were also frequently invoked by local institutional stakeholders to explain why some people continued to fish illegally. Poverty was used to explain why local people were unable to stop using illegal fishing gear, because they depend on the activity for food and income and often have no other choice. In this way, realities of poverty were understood variously as lack of income and food security, as well as the lack of capability, or freedom, to choose alternatives as a result of the absence of critical assets, such as healthy labour, land or productive equipment.

Illegal fishing gear was widely recognised as being more productive than traditional legal gear. It caught more fish and required less time and effort. It was observed that in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong there is a high market demand for fish, so that selling prices were high, leaving fishers with little incentive to find an alternative job to fishing. Similarly, because of the

#### **Box 4: The complex reality of stopping the use of illegal fishing gear**

*Like others using illegal fishing gear, Tola initially complained of the difficulties of stopping fishing with his illegal “khou” net, questioning what would they eat with the loss of their most important source of income? Tola even benefited from relations with the district governor, who pitied him and allowed him to continue illegal fishing. But ultimately he chose to stop illegal fishing, afraid to break the law and to oppose the government. Instead Tola attempted to do other jobs; working as a fishing and farm labourer, or as a construction labourer for different projects managed by the village management committee. But he found it difficult to earn enough money to support his family and he struggled to make a living. He lamented the fact that he had no land for farming and no influence to bypass the strict regulations which protected the nearby forest and stopped him from clearing it for farmland. Perhaps his only option was to return to his homeland, or even start to use his illegal “khou” net further away from the CF area. For Tola understood the purpose of the CF and agreed that it was important to help protect the natural resources on which people depend. But he also began to feel that the community only provided help to their relatives and friends and that the agenda for the future brought little benefits for him now.*

*(Household, Koh Kong)*

effectiveness of illegal gear, and no compromise or subsidy in place, there was no logical reason for fishers to reduce their catch by switching to traditional and legal gears. But as the story in Box 4 illustrates, it was common that some households simply had limited access to alternatives, lacking access to land or in other cases lacking the financial resources needed to buy legal gear to replace their illegal gear. Such constraints were encountered most frequently in Koh Kong, leading some households to feel they had no choice but to break the law and continue the only job they knew and had access to. This perception was observed more than once - as a household Koh Kong expressed “...we cannot follow the law, we will even do these activities (illegal fishing) and we will be punished but we are not afraid because we have nothing to eat”.

### **The tension between personal and societal values:**

Another important and associated aspect of the complexities surrounding CFI concerns the tension which exists between personal and societal values, the extent to which these reinforce the interests of the CFI.

In general, there was universal support for an improved fishery; everyone would like to see fish become more abundant, like they were in the past. Moreover, an abundant and sustainable fishery was recognized as being important not only in bringing benefits to individuals and society today, but for people’s children and future generations. Some people also believed that protecting the fishery was important for the development of Cambodian society as a whole, and because it was an important part of the country’s national heritage.

“ Fish is national property, so if we help to maintain it ... our nation will also progress.

House hold, Stung Treng ”

For these reasons, it was common for people to consider that CFI were the ‘right’ thing to do for the environment and for society. In addition, those people supporting the CFI were often considered ‘good’, by local institutional stakeholders, while others who did not give their support and continued to fish illegally were considered ‘bad’ and lacking care for the environment or society. As the CFI committee in Stung Treng commented: “I have heard people say the CFI will make the fish and natural resources sustainable ... all these people are good people because they want to increase the fish for the future”.

“ *The CFI has provided knowledge and the fish have increased and the people benefit from the CFI because when the fish increase it’s easy to catch fish and their livelihoods also improve.*

*Commune council, Stung Treng* ”

However, the CFI was not supported just because it was regarded as important for society. It was also supported because it directly benefited personal interests. As previously mentioned, local institutions in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong were convinced that people’s livelihoods had already benefited from the CFI. In contrast, among households there was considerably more uncertainty, and it was common instead for local people to highlight the benefit of having access to information and knowing what was going on with respect to the fishery.

What also became clear was that many institutional stakeholders hoped to benefit personally in other ways, beyond the explicit intentions of the CFI. So as the district authority in Koh Kong revealed, another reason to be involved in the project is for the “*honour... reputation... votes... if they have a achievement*”. This attitude was echoed by the commune council in Stung Treng: “*The first reason (to protect the natural resources) is related to the living standard of the people, we want their living standard to be better. The second reason is that if people’s lives get better then the leader of the district will be famous throughout the country*”. Thus, if the project expectations are realized, this may



*Crab peeling by a woman, Chrouy Prus*  
Photo by: CBNRM Learning Institute



*Fish emptied from gill net by a girl, Stung Treng*  
Photo by: CBNRM Learning Institute

improve the public status and popularity of local institutional stakeholders, a prospect which clearly motivates their support. Local institutional stakeholders also recognize that there are direct incentives for supporting the projects including fines raised from illegal fishers which are partly reinvested into the CFI, allowances and free travel for attending meetings or training workshops outside of the village, or refreshments provided during village meetings and CFI patrols.

But at the same time, it also appeared that CFI conflicted with what people believed to be important for them as individuals, or their personal values. Therefore for some households (as described in Box 4), the CFI was for the future, it could not help them now. Likewise, for others the Community was about the natural environment not about their lives. And while there were perceived to be no immediate, or uncertain, benefits, it was more important to focus the demands of living, of finding enough food and income to support the family, even if this involved using illegal fishing gear.

Among institutional stakeholders, it was also recognized that supporting the collective expectations might even threaten personal interests, leading to a lack of support, or even opposition. In Stung Treng, for example, the village chief suggested that the commune council and commune police do not participate because “participating in the CFI does not bring them any money”. Moreover, the commune council in Stung Treng suggested that if “powermen” were to adhere to the project expectations of stopping illegal fishing, they would lose benefits, or bribes.

*“ We should protect the fish to keep them for the next generation.  
But now we also need fish to eat.*

*House hold, Stung Treng ”*

In other cases, enforcing the ban on illegal fishing confronts political interests. In the months leading up to the commune council elections in early 2007 in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong, it was not in the interests of the dominant political party for local institutions to stop illegal fishers as this could potentially lose votes. This was particularly problematic in Koh Kong where many of the members of the village management committee were also part of the party that dominated the commune council. This overlap meant that law enforcement relating to illegal fishing virtually ceased.

“ The village management committee can’t stop (the illegal fishers) because the election nearly arrives so they don’t allow me to stop ... the political problem is difficult because the upper level should not do the work of stopping the illegal fishing and mix it with the political work of the election ... I regret so much that I can’t stop the illegal fishing activity following the people’s purpose because they don’t allow me to arrest the illegal fisher.... because they need the election vote .

*Village management committee, Koh Kong* ”

But enforcing the ban on illegal fishing was not just contested by political commitments; it was also challenged by personal obligations to family, especially when that meant arresting a relative for using illegal fishing gear. In Stung Treng, for example, the village chief revealed how legal measures are sometimes delayed or avoided altogether when they come into conflict with family obligations, “(when) the CFI member has a family obligation with the illegal fisher, then if we arrest them the first time we educate them rather than send them to prison”. However, this is not always the case. Indeed, some members of the CFI committee in Stung Treng were proud to assert that they did not uphold such obligations. This mentality of favoring the CFI over kinship obligations or dedication to friends and neighbors highly contrasts with the expectations of the local people. It risks losing the benefits that those social networks bring and what is more, it may even expose institutional stakeholders to threats or acts of violence from local people. So despite asserting a commitment to stop illegal fishers, CFI committee members in Stung Treng also expressed fear of acting in support of these values.

“ I will stop people (from illegal fishing) even if I know them, or they are my relatives .

*I feel afraid patrolling, but I have to try to stop illegal fishing. I try to be committed and not fear (illegal fishers), but actually I still fear ... I worry about the (patrol) boat sinking in the water and about people coming to destroy my house and about my safety going around the village, maybe people will kill me .*

*Community Fishery committee, Stung Treng* ”

### The influence of hierarchical relations:

A third characteristic of the complexity of CFI relates to the influence of hierarchical relations. In other words, people's perceptions of their own capabilities are influenced by their position in society. We refer here then to the way in which people conduct themselves in society and how this is ordered by cultural norms which demand deference, or obedience, to those with status. These are social expectations informed in multiple ways and in part by religious beliefs, language, by histories of relations shaped by individual and collective experiences in addition to past conflicts and authoritarian regimes. These factors have a strong influence on what people perceive their capabilities to be, which in some cases works to support, but in others to undermine or disrupt, the positive expectations of CFI as outlined in Table 2.

*Table 1: The influence of hierarchical relations on CFI expectations*

Hierarchies supporting CFI expectations	Hierarchies undermining CFI expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oblige people to join out of duty to follow and listen to authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent people from speaking because of feelings of lack of status and knowledge</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oblige people to join out of duty as elder or expert</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce authority of local levels because depend on support and 'expertise' of higher levels</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oblige people to support out of fear of high ranking officers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent enforcement of illegal fishing because of protection by higher levels</li> </ul>

In both Stung Treng and Koh Kong, local people are often compelled to participate in the CFI out of respect and a sense of duty to those above them in the social hierarchy and to those with official status within local institutions. Indeed, local institutions recognise the power of their own, or higher authority to help ensure participation. As the CFI chief in Stung Treng states, "villagers will come to meetings if the village chief invites them", or if higher authorities are seen to support the CFI. Similarly, in Koh Kong the commune council suggests it simply requires the commune council's presence and local people will follow.

*“ We can tell them when we disseminate that the CFI is supported even by the prime minister and the high ranking officer even lose their rank because of illegal fishing, so this makes the illegal fishers afraid to continue .*

*Community Fishery chief, Stung Treng* ”

Meanwhile, for those people in positions of respect, such as members of the local authority, or village elders, there is a sense that their position obliges them to participate in the CFI and provide their 'expert' advice, or recommendations. Conversely, as previously mentioned, for many local people lacking position or status in the village this prevents them from having confidence to engage actively during CFI meetings.

It is also the case that the absence of authority in relation to other sources of power constrains CFI committees. In spite of the fact that village management committee members in Koh Kong are themselves influential villagers and members of the commune council, they remain constrained by upper levels, as the committee chief explains: "... *the work will be achieved as long as there is participation from people and local authorities, but if the upper level don't allow a meeting, we can't do*". As already highlighted, in some cases upper levels are unwilling to provide their support when it means it could jeopardize losing the personal benefits they obtain. In addition, there is also reluctance among higher levels of authority to concede power to village committees, which as the commune council in Stung Treng has noted, "*seems to be out of the hierarchy*".

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What we hope the research has been able to indicate is that CFI intervention projects are not simple; they contain a diverse range of perspectives and multiple perceptions on any given aspect of the project. The recognition of this complexity and diverse range of perceptions is derived from different interests and experiences of local people which are simultaneously both reinforcing and contradicting the positive goals associated with CFI. So it is that while experiences of declining access to fishery resources reinforce hopes of fisheries protection and sustainability, these same expectations are at the same time challenged by the realities of daily livelihood demands of many households. Similarly, while personal interests and hierarchical relations may support participation and collaboration, they also complicate and undermine them. Therefore, despite the positive expectations often associated with CFI, in practice the reality is much more complex, as expectations are disrupted by diverse local interests, by the conflicts of personal and societal values and hierarchical relations. By accepting this complexity it may become more realistic to consider CFI and CBNRM as a process of conflict and opposition

rather than a process of consensus and collaboration. Such an outlook is not to remove the potential for consensus or collaboration as an ultimate goal of CFI or CBNRM, but rather to acknowledge and provide space for the diversity of interests which exist in practice, and to emphasise the need to manage and even resolve those interests.

Two key recommendations emerge from this understanding:

1. Practitioners of CBNRM should not assume that CBNRM represents a shared interest, or provides a common benefit. Rather it is important to acknowledge, better understand and respond to the many differences which exist between different stakeholders in terms of their interests, incentives and capabilities to get involved in CBNRM in practice.
2. If we are to realise the full potential of CBNRM then a greater emphasis should be placed on supporting a better dialogue between the diverse interests that exist in order to better address the many conflicts which characterise CBNRM in practice. Such an emphasis demands a more central role for processes of conflict management, or deliberative participation.

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# Chapter 28

## The future of CBNRM:

### creating spaces of critical engagement

**By: Emma Whittingham<sup>1</sup>, Tep Chansothea<sup>2</sup> and Meng Kim San<sup>3</sup>**

*Despite the current perceptions of citizen engagement in Cambodia, this paper argues that the new spaces of citizen engagement are often characterized by inequalities in participation, where marginal groups in society may be excluded, silenced, or co-opted through processes which reinforce existing power relations and the interests of those with the greatest influence. This observation led the research to focus on (1) what are the spaces of engagement associated with CBNRM actually like in practice, and (2) how are spaces of engagement contributing to local empowerment through participatory governance? With the use of two case studies of community fisheries, three main factors limiting participation were identified including the legal current legal framework, cultural norms and dispositions, and the realities of poverty. This paper would also suggest that conflict, though an unintended consequence, should not necessarily be interpreted negatively but rather seen as an opportunity to expand existing spaces of critical engagement.*

## INTRODUCTION

As part of Cambodia's decentralization reforms, community-based approaches represent a key strategy for reconfiguring responsibilities and powers towards local levels in natural resource management. Initially introduced through donor and NGO led projects, CBNRM has subsequently been mainstreamed through the early phases of the government's decentralization programme (Sovanna 2004) and has since been supported through a range of legislative reforms across different sectors (Obendorf 2004). Through these changes a new era of participatory governance has been institutionalized, giving rise to new spaces of citizen engagement, or new opportunities for local involvement in natural resource management decision making.

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The following paper seeks to explore what the spaces of citizen engagement associated with CBNRM in Cambodia are actually like in practice. In particular we wish to consider how such spaces are currently contributing to a new era of participatory governance, whereby local people are empowered to engage in decision making, and how this might be enhanced in the future.

## BACKGROUND

Cambodia has not been alone in instituting governance reforms and the decentralization of natural resources management. Since the 1990s governments of most developing countries around the world have been encouraged by lending agencies and donors to undertake processes of decentralization (Comwall and Coelho 2007). For many, this has involved decentralizing some aspect of natural resource management through the scaling up of project-based CBNRM efforts (Ribot 2002). As a result a “profusion of new spaces for citizen engagement” have emerged, spaces in which citizens are directly involved in processes of governance (Comwall and Coelho 2007; see Box 1).

### Box 1: Spaces for citizen engagement

*In the new era of participatory governance, a “profusion of new spaces for citizen engagement” have emerged. These spaces exist “at the interface between the state and society”. In many cases they have been set up by the state and are supported through legal frameworks. The state may even think of these spaces as “their space into which citizens and their representatives are invited”. Equally they may be thought of as spaces created by civil society through their demands for inclusion in decision making.*

*But above all, they are spaces where a diversity of people with varying interests and interpretations of participation come together to negotiate and exchange information relating to public policy and how it should work in practice. They are then spaces of both “contestation as well as collaboration”.*

*From Comwall and Coelho 2007*

The generally accepted justification underpinning such widespread reforms is that decentralization will increase the equity, efficiency and effectiveness of public policy, as participatory governance leads to greater responsiveness and accountability of the state to its citizens. For this to be achieved, Ribot (2002) highlights a number of critical factors. Firstly, that local institutions acting within new decentralized frameworks should be both representative of and accountable to the needs and interests of citizens. Secondly, that the devolution of powers to local institutions should be secure and sustainable, giving legitimacy through the transfer of rights, as opposed to delegated privileges. Fundamentally, decentralization reforms depend on citizens being able and willing to participate, while the state is prepared to listen and respond. Moreover, in the context of decentralized natural resource management, as practiced through CBNRM, citizens and representative local institutions should collectively desire and be able to deliver sustainable natural resource management.

In practice, however, experiences of decentralization and CBNRM from around the world suggest that despite the commitments of governments and civil society to deliver the many benefits associated with a new participatory governance, the outcomes are variable and often disappointing (eg Ribot 2002; Ribot 2004; Blaikie 2006; Ribot et al 2006). Indeed, Comwall and Coelho (2007) highlight that many everyday experiences of participatory governance do not support its positive expectations. Instead, the new spaces of citizen engagement are often characterized by inequalities in participation, where the marginal groups in society may be excluded, silenced, or co-opted, through processes which reinforce existing power relations and the interests of those with the greatest influence. Furthermore, these spaces are often constrained by central governments, who in spite of their rhetoric supporting decentralization, limit the transfer of powers to lower levels, such that local institutions lack legitimacy and security, and are more accountable to the centre than to local populations (Ribot et al 2006).

Similarly, in Cambodia different reports suggest variable outcomes of the on-going decentralization reforms and CBNRM efforts, highlighting a number of important limitations. Thus, while Rusten et al (2004) reveal a number of important achievements of Cambodia's decentralization process, including the successful institutionalization of participatory processes, they also draw attention to a number of significant challenges. These include an imbalance

of the communes' accountability, which favours upward accountability to political parties over downward accountability to local people. Commune councils are also reported to be lacking in capacity and resources to effectively fulfill their responsibilities, while participation more generally is contingent on local politics and culture. Turning to decentralized natural resource management, Van Acker (2004) points to the fragmented nature of multiple and often overlapping legislative structures, which typically delegate privileges on terms defined by central ministries, rather than provide legitimate decision making rights to lower levels. In addition, San (2006) reports that spaces of engagement provided through community protected areas (CPA) often limit participation of the poor due to insufficient facilitation and an absence of clear incentives for the community. This limited participation of the poor is exacerbated by the lack of capabilities to participate among the poor themselves.

Provided this context, the following paper attempts to further explore experiences of CBNRM in Cambodia and to critically consider how the new spaces of citizen engagement in CBNRM contribute to the wider expectations of participatory governance.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The paper seeks to address two key questions:

1. What are the spaces of engagement associated with CBNRM actually like in practice?
2. How are spaces of engagement contributing to local empowerment through participatory governance?

These questions emerged out of a research project which sought to understand how different people make sense of CBNRM and what impact CBNRM has on local livelihoods in the context of Community Fisheries (CF). The research was based on a qualitative approach, which looked at two case studies of CF in depth: 1) Culture and Environment Preservation Association CF project in Stung Treng; and 2) Ministry of Environment's Participatory Management of Coastal Resources project in Koh Kong. Case studies were selected to highlight specific situations, illustrating CF practice in relation to distinct institutional arrangements (one an NGO led project, the other a government led project) taking place within different livelihood contexts. Such an approach does not

claim to be representative and does not offer generalizations. Rather it intends to explore some part of the diversity of experiences and in doing so expose particular insights, which can suggest ways of thinking about and dealing with other situations.

With each case study we carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews with a range of people involved, or affected by, each CFI project at national, provincial, local and village levels, including a sample of households from two research villages involving both CFI members and non-members. An indication of the numbers of different stakeholders interviewed at each case study site is shown in Table 1 below. For many of the national, provincial, local, village and sample household's, initial interviews were followed up with additional interviews and informal conversation. This allowed for the development of trust between the research team and those being researched and also allowed for a greater depth of understanding to be developed as initial open questions were followed up with probing questions to expand, clarify and analyse issues with interviewees<sup>4</sup>.

For local level interviews a number of different participatory tools (e.g. seasonal calendars, time lines, daily activity diagrams, etc.) were used to encourage greater level of engagement with the interviewees. Observations were also carried out by all members of the research team during interviews and during the period in the field. The focus of observations were on the general livelihood status, assets and activities of households, as well impressions of the disposition, atmosphere and behaviour of the interviewees, which were then the subject of on-going reflection among the research team. This was viewed as an important strategy not only for gaining a more detailed understanding of local livelihoods, but also to compare between what people say and what they do. This strategy also allowed the research team to reflect on the influences of the research process itself regarding the information collected during interviews.

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<sup>4</sup> *In this way repeated and flexible questioning of qualitative approaches allows the research to gain greater insights which the more rigid and closed questioning formats of quantitative approaches do not permit.*

**Table 1:** An indication of the interview sampling strategy at two study sites

Case study stakeholders	Numbers of stakeholders interviewed	
	CEPA's Community Fishery Project, Stung Treng	PMCR project, Koh Kong
National level institutions	3	1
Provincial level institutions	6	6
Local authorities & village community fishery committees	6	6
Households	20 (20% of households)	48 (15% of households)

Interview and observation notes were translated from Khmer into English through a lengthy process involving detailed discussion within the research team to establish the 'best' interpretation of information collected. A qualitative software package known as NVivo7 was then used to sort the information within English interview transcripts into key themes relating to the research questions and to aid in the identification of patterns of similarity and difference in stakeholder perceptions.

## MAJOR FINDING

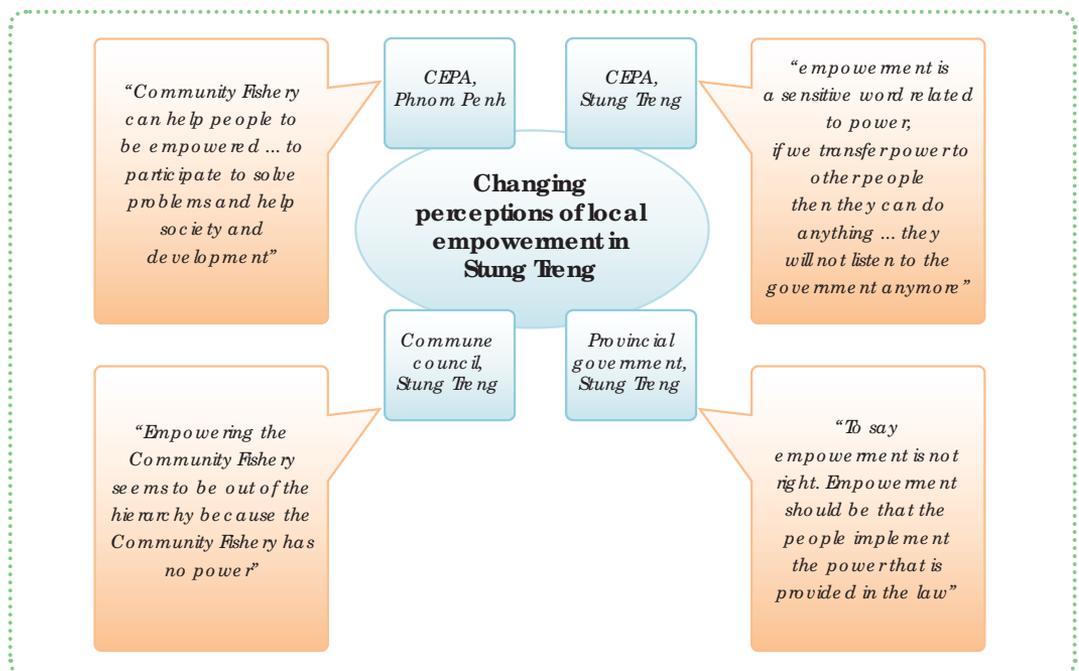
The research highlighted a number of important findings in relation to different people's perceptions of CBNRM and their experiences of the spaces of engagement produced by each case study project. For the purposes of this paper, we first focus on how different people interpreted agendas of decentralization and participatory governance, in particular their perceptions of local empowerment. Secondly, we explore perceptions of participation, or involvement in CFI among local authorities responsible for implementing CFI and households who are, in theory, represented by these authorities. From these key findings we draw attention to a number of critical factors which appear to be limiting people's engagement in CFI. Finally we consider evidence of more critical engagements in CFI; moments when constraints to participation appear to be overcome, often with unintended consequences.

## Perceptions of local empowerment

Among the different people responsible for implementing CFI, at national, provincial and commune levels, there existed a range of distinct and sometimes conflicting perceptions, or interpretations of local empowerment in relation to CFI.

These differences were illustrated most clearly in the case study in Stung Treng, as shown in the four quotes in Figure 1 below. Thus, at a national level Cultural and Environmental Preservation Association (CEPA) perceived its CFI project to be an important means of promoting local empowerment, by increasing access to information and providing rights and opportunities to participate in decision making. At the same time, the national level of CEPA also believed that CFI was an important way of helping people to become economically empowered by improving their access to fishery resources and income from these resources. Moreover these expectations of empowerment were not just associated with social and economic concerns, indeed at a national level CEPA also highlighted the importance of empowerment for conservation: “if no empowerment, no conservation either ... because the principle of conservation is encouraging people to have ownership of a specific area (of

**Figure 1:** Changing perceptions of local empowerment in Stung Treng



natural resources)". In other words, giving people rights to conserve and the authority to manage an area of the fishery is essential for conservation. Not only will local participation in fisheries management lead to socially and economically empowered citizens, it will also lead to fishery conservation.

In practice, however, CEPA staff working at the provincial level found such interpretations of empowerment problematic and difficult to work with. They suggested that the CFI was perhaps supporting local people to do what they wanted and to stop listening to government. These concerns were confirmed by provincial government actors, who disliked the notion of empowerment, preferring the focus be on what power the government provides the people through the law. These perceptions were also echoed at the commune level, where the commune council did not recognize the CFI as having any power, rather the Community Fisheries' role was to "cooperate with people in power".

So for CEPA's provincial staff, implementing CFI in practice was less about empowering local people to participate in society and development, but more about engaging local people to help the government do its work. Instead of saying 'empowerment' CEPA's provincial staff chose to say only that the CFI "*provides legal rights in natural resource management*", recognizing that in practice the CFI was important in acting as the "*eyes and nose*" of the provincial fishery office.



Participating in a Community Fishery meeting in Stung Treng  
Photo by: Research Team, CBNRM Learning Institute - 2006

These multiple perspectives on local empowerment suggest uneasiness with the agendas of decentralization and participatory governance as they might apply to CFI. Among provincial and local government, there is a clear reluctance to recognize the CFI as an autonomous local institution, rather it is perceived to be simply an extension of existing government structures that retain authority. This perspective is at odds with CEPA's interpretation of empowerment, but ultimately dominates the way in which CEPA engage with CFI in practice.

### Experiences of participation

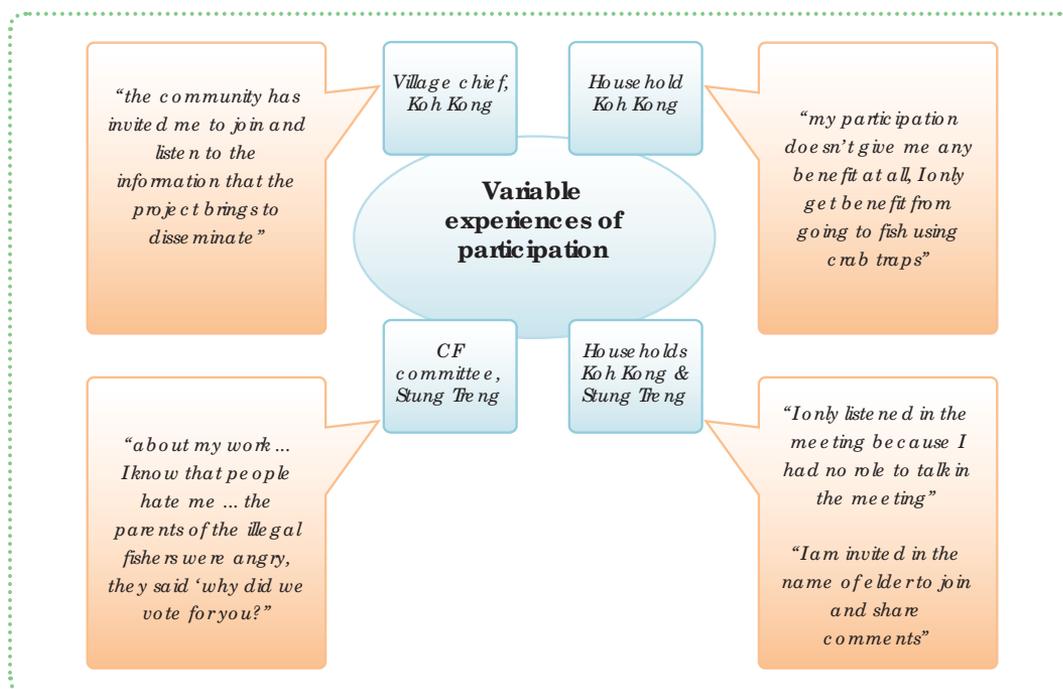
Among village and household levels, there was also a range of experiences of participation in CFI, as illustrated by the quotes in Figure 2 below. For local authorities in both case studies their participation was interpreted as part of their official functions and in response to the external expectations of the projects and government. Thus when different local institutional actors<sup>5</sup> in Stung Treng were asked how the CFI project had begun, they unanimously responded it was CEPA who introduced the project and organized the establishment of the CFI. As the village chief explained:

*“At the beginning CEPA came to inform me to make an appointment with people in the village to have a meeting, then CEPA explained about the causes of the fish decline and asked people whether they want the fish to increase or keep declining ... realizing that no one conserves the fish resources, CEPA organized to establish the CFI in order to undertake it”.*

In contrast, in Koh Kong, responses to the same questions were less straightforward. Here it was acknowledged that local authorities had lobbied for a CFI in response to local people's requests. However, once the project was initiated it was external knowledge and agendas provided by the project which shaped local authorities engagement. Indeed, it was common in both case studies for local authorities to focus their participation on transferring information from the outside to local people; informing them about the CFI by-laws, or illegal fishing, as the village chief in Koh Kong suggests below (Figure 2). In this way, local authorities appeared to be responsive and accountable

<sup>5</sup> Local institutional actors referred to here included the community fishery committee chief and committee member, the village chief, the village development committee chief, the commune council chief, and the commune council vice chief

Figure 2: Variable experiences of participation



to agendas established externally, as opposed to representing the interests of local people. However, this upward accountability was a significant responsibility and not without difficulties. As the CFI committee chief in Stung Treng reveals (Figure 2), stopping local people from illegal fishing was a cause of tension with other villagers and a source of intimidation and fear—an experience shared by other committee members in Stung Treng and Koh Kong.

Among different households in both Stung Treng and Koh Kong, their experiences of participation complemented those expressed by local authorities. Therefore, for many villagers their experience was going to meetings to listen to what those in official positions had to tell them; participating in order to receive information from higher authorities. For some households participation also involved sharing this information with their family and neighbours. However, it was also the case for other households that this was avoided because of the fear of conflict, as a villager in Stung Treng explained: "outside my family I don't dare to inform (about illegal fishing) because I'm afraid they don't understand and then they will be angry with me ... I'm afraid that they will have ill will in secret".

Though many households perceived participation to be about listening and not speaking during meetings, feeling they lacked knowledge or position to speak, there were also certain villagers who did experience a more active engagement in the projects. In particular these were people that were considered elders in the village, who had lived there for a long time, and who had good connections with the village authorities and community committee. Therefore, they had a position and role that allowed them to participate more fully. However, at the same time there were households in both Koh Kong and Stung Treng that did not participate at all. There were many households who felt obligated to attend meetings because it was their duty to respond to

### Box 2: A household's perspective on illegal fishing

*Dany finds life is a struggle and she often feels desperate with worry, for though she and her daughter, Reaksmei, work hard to make their living they earn very little income and it is difficult to get enough for the small family to eat. Dany feels angry because people in the village refuse her credit to help her buy rice, saying she has no provider, as she is a widow. She is also angry at the village management committee when they suggested that the hand net, on which she and her daughter depend, should be banned along with other illegal fishing gears. Indeed, together with other villagers she and her daughter protested at the village meeting, asking "what should we eat if the hand net is stopped?". And she accuses the village management committee of only thinking of the mussels, never considering that she has no rice to eat, resolving that "if the community does not think about me I won't think about the community".*

*For among the many activities that fill Dany and Reaksmei's time, it is using the illegal hand net which they value most. In the dry season, Reaksmei pushes the hand net in front of her through waters often as high as her neck, in search of small grouper fingerlings, or "gecko" fish. For this activity they rely on a thao kei, or trader, who provides access to a boat to reach the fishing grounds and to whom they must sell all their catch, often at low prices. However, using the hand net still provides the family with good income and they consider it the most important of their many activities, providing most of their income even though catches are some times unreliable.*

*(Household, Koh Kong)*

invitations from village authorities, but they did not get involved in any other activities of the CFI. For some people this was because they were unable to find time when they were busy making their living, others felt that they did not get any immediate benefit from participating (see Figure 2), while some simply felt it was not relevant for their lives, as they were mostly concerned with farming and not fishing.

In both case studies, there were also households who chose not to participate and continued to use illegal fishing gear. There were many reasons used to explain why this was the case<sup>6</sup>. Among the households we encountered, who were open with this position, the choice to continue illegal fishing was generally justified as their only option to make a living. They had no other gear to use, not enough money to change, or they might depend heavily on illegal fishing having no land for farming and no other alternatives (see Box 2). Such situations were particularly widespread in Koh Kong where the use of illegal fishing gear was more common and the lack of access to land for farming severely restricted alternatives.

In practice, participation in the CFI was variable and depended on an individual's position and status and a household's livelihood situation. However, overall it appeared to be a process which tended to be responsive and



Villagers using hand nets in Chroy Pros Bay, Koh Kong  
Photo by: Research Team, CBNRM Learning Institute - 2006

<sup>6</sup> We present here the perspectives of those households we encountered during the research. However, there were also different perspectives among those not openly engaging in illegal fishing and particularly among the local authorities which conflicted with the household accounts, suggesting that people continued illegal fishing simply because they wanted to make a lot of money quickly, they did not caring about others, or the natural resources and were willing to use connections with higher officials to avoid being arrested or fined.

accountable to the external agendas of CFI, as opposed to the interests of local households. Thus, households were expected to listen and respond, while local authorities disseminated and instructed. However, this process was often difficult and sometimes confrontational, leading to tensions between households and between local authorities and the people, who according to the rhetoric of decentralization, the local authorities were meant to represent.

### Factors limiting engagement

These findings, in relation to people's perceptions of local empowerment and of participation, begin to suggest that the spaces of engagement produced through two case studies of CFI are subject to a number of critical constraints, which limit people's engagement. Three factors appear to be particularly important: 1) the legal framework; 2) cultural norms or dispositions; and 3) the realities of poverty.

Legal frameworks surrounding CFI are without doubt an essential part of legitimizing the decentralization of fisheries management to communities and securing the sustainability of CFI institutions. In this way they have been significant in ensuring that the new spaces of engagement associated with CFI are recognized. Yet at the same time, it appears that this same legislation also limits these spaces of engagement; claiming them as 'government' spaces which local institutions and people are invited to follow delegated privileges. There is little room for alternative notions of empowerment in which local people have greater involvement in decision making. Rather, local people are required to listen and follow external agendas passed to them by upwardly accountable local authorities.

Spaces of engagement are also structured by the cultural norms, or everyday dispositions which influence the way in which different people relate to one another. Therefore participation is infused with the hierarchies which govern relations within society, in particular, those which structure relations between levels of government which dictate the way local people relate to authority. Such embedded hierarchies oblige many people to join meetings simply because they have been invited by those in authority, but these hierarchies also have the ability to devalue and silence the voices of 'ordinary' people without position or status. At the same time they give power to those in authority reinforcing the value of external agendas, expertise, and the need to seek legitimacy from above.

Finally it appears that realities of poverty, or the vulnerability of different people's livelihoods, are also critical in limiting engagement in CFI. Not only does poverty reduce a household's status within the social order, but it also has the ability to marginalize their knowledge or experience confining them to listen to others with position. It also limits their choices and abilities to participate, to join meetings or stop illegal fishing.

These three critical factors frame and shape the spaces of engagement associated with CFI. They create a space constrained by political agendas and cultural dispositions and by the inequalities of people's livelihoods. Moreover, such limitations challenge the fundamental logic on which ideals of decentralization and decentralized natural resource management is based; that citizens are equally able and willing to participate and the government is prepared to listen and respond.

### Moments of critical engagement

Despite these different factors which appear to be limiting people's engagement in the CFI, we also encountered moments when it seemed that these were overcome. We refer to these as 'moments of critical engagement'. Moments when people who would otherwise have been silent, or not involved in the CFI, did find a voice. Moments when people overcame their positions as passive recipients and chose to assert their interests.

Evidence of these types of moments of critical engagement was particularly apparent in Koh Kong. They were encountered when illegal fishers chose to protest at CFI meetings, complaining about the prohibition of the illegal fishing gear that they relied on. They protested even though they lacked position and would normally only listen during meetings. So they overcame the constraints of social hierarchies and cultural norms and they found a space to actively engage in the CFI. These moments were also encountered when the same people who protested against the ban of illegal fishing chose to openly continue their use of illegal fishing gear, defying authority and the legal framework. In Stung Treng, however, such moments of open critical engagement by illegal fishers were not encountered. Rather, critical engagement was observed at a different level among CFI committee members who chose to speak out during a provincial meeting and

challenge government representatives about the enforcement of illegal fishing regulations. They did so in spite of their lower position, overcoming the social hierarchies which would normally limit their engagement.

Although quite different, in each case these moments clearly challenged the constraints which govern participation, expanding the spaces of engagement to include otherwise marginalized voices. Moreover, in Koh Kong, where the marginalized voices were those of illegal fishers, there were also moments of conflict in which the agenda of the CFI and its effort to protect the natural resources were contested.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

We have sought through this paper to better understand what the spaces of engagement associated with CBNRM are actually like in practice and how they are contributing to local empowerment through participatory governance. Our findings from two case studies of CFI suggest that the spaces of engagement are constrained, such that the ideals of local empowerment through participatory governance are undermined. However, at the same time there are exceptions, moments of critical engagement when people who may normally be silent find a voice and a space to express their experience. These critical engagements not only challenge the factors which constrain participation, they may even conflict with the ideals of the CFI itself. Yet we would suggest that such moments of conflict, though an unintended consequence, should not necessarily be interpreted negatively. Rather, they may offer the opportunity to expand existing spaces of engagement and to address and respond to the concerns of those whose interests are routinely marginalized.

We propose that critical engagement should be understood as a space of possibility. A space which may offer opportunities for dialogue and better understanding between the diverse interests associated with the fishery resources. Yet, as Cornwall and Coelho (2007) emphasize, if these moments of conflict are to be accepted positively, much depends on the willingness of those in authority to listen and respond to the inequalities which currently constrain participation and limit citizen engagement.

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