Leadership in Local Politics of Cambodia: A Study of Leaders in Three Communes of Three Provinces

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Abstract

Using the state-society gap as its assumption and point of departure, the study seeks to identify different kinds of local leaders (including women leaders) and their associated characteristics and elements of legitimacy in order to see whether and how they can help bridge this gap, in the midst of the decentralisation and deconcentration reform.

Findings reveal that, for voters, significant leaders are village chiefs, commune councils, elders and *achar* and economic leaders. Knowledge leaders and community-based organisations are virtually absent and not relevant from their point of view. Village committees and commune councils have an average education lower than needed to carry out their specifically increased mandates and responsibilities; and the majority are aged 49 and above. Women leaders on average have higher education than their male counterparts and are younger, but they are relatively new to leadership roles and so face many challenges, including support from family. Administrative leaders have to be associated with a political party if they want to be legitimate because they are dependent upon backing and financing from political parties to carry out commune development, since the Commune/*Sangkat* Fund is meagre. Economic leaders are usually more educated and have the wealth to contribute to commune development, and so are becoming increasingly powerful and influential in local and national politics. They have networks that link to national levels, which give them the benefits of bypassing local authorities, of monopolies and of running their businesses, including illegal activities, smoothly. Elders and *achar* especially help bridge the gap between authorities and the people via their important roles in mobilising labour and contributions for projects, including religious activities, in helping solve minor domestic conflicts and in commune planning with local authorities. They get along with virtually every actor in their villages and communes. Knowledge leaders emerge only when their possessions are among the resources being threatened, while development assistance leaders usually only provide material assistance and function in a very sporadic manner. They are usually not based in the communes.

It was found that, as a result of D&D reform, the gap between state and society has been bridged, albeit very slowly, unevenly and narrowly. To assist the reform and promote democracy, the study suggests several policy implications:

- Functions and power to carry out their stated mandate and the right to collect taxes should be fully devolved to commune councils. Careful implementation of the organic law will help this.
- The Commune/*Sangkat* Fund should be reconsidered to help curb the distortions party politics and party financing have created on commune councils' accountability and responsiveness.
- Better (coordinated and coherent), not necessarily more, training is needed to help commune councils understand their roles and accountability.
- An enabling working environment, including a better pay system, should be created to attract more candidates and reduce petty corruption among commune councillors.
- Natural resource management could be improved if central planning for it were linked to local planning, which is currently not the case.
- Gender promotion should also include adequate attention to promotion of women's livelihoods and not just to counting and training women leaders.

Acknowledgements

List of Acronyms

CAS	Centre for Advanced Study
CBOs	Community-based organisations
CDP	Commune Development Plan
CDRI	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CSF	Commune/*Sangkat* Fund
D&D	Decentralisation and deconcentration
DFID	Department for International Development
FUNCINPEC	French Acronym for United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia
LAMC	Law on the Administration and Management of the Communes
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-government organisation
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

Some scholars have argued that Cambodia still remains in its post-conflict phase, characterised by instability, weak state institutions, immense poverty, an unconsolidated democratic regime and other unfortunate historical legacies. Others argue that Cambodia has overcome the many immediate challenges of the post-conflict era because it is politically stable and is heading towards greater political and economic transformations, including both national and local multi-party elections, a free market economy, integration into the world economy and financial and structural reforms. Some scholars have labelled Cambodia a hybrid state, in which reforms are carried out with weak implementation and institutions to enforce them, where economic growth and wide economic integration have not achieved satisfactory effects on poverty due to weak governance and corruption and where supposedly democratic elections occur within a non-democratic atmosphere. A main feature of such a system is that informal and traditional practices dominate formal structures within state institutions.

In addition to lacking trust in state institutions, Cambodian citizens are not used to expressing their demands. They do not yet see themselves as rights-bearing citizens who can impose demands on leaders and are still reluctant to engage with authorities (Kim and Öjendal 2006; Kim, 2010). The legacy of centralised and authoritative leadership and coercive rules coupled with pervasive poverty, lack of trust in state institutions and reluctance to put demands on authorities reflect a gap between state and society that is poorly mediated by participatory institutions and results in weak governance.

Civil society is a crucial intermediary to help promote better governance. A strong, effective and assertive civil society, as pointed out by different studies (e.g. Justice for the Poor) does not yet exist throughout Cambodia. Many civil society organisations or associations remain weak, especially in terms of providing representation. This has not helped to ameliorate the coercive nature of state-society relations.

To promote participation, ownership, accountability, responsiveness and representation as effective means of promoting democracy and poverty alleviation throughout the country, the government embarked on its decentralisation and deconcentration reform, which began with the first commune council elections in 2002. The reform empowers local authorities through elections and devolution of authority over commune issues and resources. This is intended to promote accountability, responsiveness and representation, as well as to encourage increased participation and a sense of ownership among the people. Commune/*sangkat* elections translate into increased importance of local leaders, who will have a significant role in representing the people to the state. By its design and nature, the reform is meant to bring people closer to the state. However, with the remaining distance between the people and authorities, assertive leaders or individuals from civil society or among the people are also needed as representatives to push for increased demands and a rebalancing of relations between the elected and the electorate.

This study rests on the assumption that the relationship between state and society still remains hierarchical and coercive despite recent reforms and that therefore the activities of local leaders and the presence and input of assertive individuals are important in popular empowerment. Using this as its point of departure, the study seeks to establish the different types of leader that

exist from Cambodian villagers' point of view, and to model the different ways that leadership is understood and practised in selected settings.

Leadership has classically been associated with two quite distinct schools of thought in political science, those broadly associated with elitism and democracy (Bachrach 1980). Elitist approaches to leadership, associated with Hegel and Carlyle, regard leadership as a charismatic capacity belonging to individuals. Leaders are called forth by historical circumstance, to effect significant change. This idea is implicit in many studies of leadership that take the form of biographies of particular leaders in unusual circumstances. The commonly held connection between leadership and greatness is expressed by Jean Blondel in his study of the subject: "if leadership is to have an effect, most people feel, it has to be in the hands of strong men" (Blondel 1980: 47).

The idea of leaders as charismatic individuals focuses on leadership as an ability to change the established order and to get others to follow the vision of the leader. A leader has the power to define and determine the preferences of his or her followers, often through inspirational rhetoric. Such a leader possesses what Max Weber called "charismatic legitimacy", the ability to persuade others on the basis of inherent personal traits. Weber writes:

> ... charisma does not know any "legitimacy" other than that flowing from personal strength, that is, one which is constantly being proved… The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life. (Weber 1948)

This begs the question of what makes a person strong. Strength in leadership may be the result of innate or exceptional qualities; however, in reality, it is more likely to come from relationships. The strength of leaders may be a function of the strength of their followers, or of the powers invested by law in the office they hold, or of their ability to draw upon crucial resources such as money, land, votes or information. To put it another way, political, economic and social capital may award a leader strength. Focus on these kinds of resources can explain how leaders may be strong in one issue area, but not in another (Jones 1989: 7).

These objections reflect a second approach to the study of leadership, associated with a more democratic perspective, which regards leaders as thrown up by economic, social, cultural, historical and political circumstance, and as operating in conditions of constraints imposed by the expectations of followers. Leadership, from this perspective, is not so much a matter of who leaders are and what they do, as of the circumstances in which they operate and the constraints that the context imposes on what they can envisage doing.

Focus on leaders as operating in conditions of constraint suggests that leadership is not a question of mobilising followers behind a particular vision, but of representing and coordinating existing interests. In this view, the leader articulates, promotes or enacts policies that reflect the views of others; but he or she does not particularly seek to influence or change that view. In the context of grass-roots organisations, this kind of leader may simply be a delegate elected from among a group to represent that group's position in a particular forum. In the context of a leader imposed from the top, this would, at the extreme, be leadership as lackeydom—leaders who rule in accordance with the wishes of external backers. In reality, however, such leaders are likely to mediate between the interests of their group and representatives of other groups. Local government leaders, for example, mediate between the interests of constituents and the constraints imposed by higher levels of government. Similarly, leaders of community-based organisations represent the interests of their group, but must also accommodate external actors. Such leaders often help to persuade their own followers of the need to compromise, passing

information to the group about reactions to their proposals, likely conflicts of interest with other groups and the nature of external constraints.

The kinds of legitimacy associated with this sort of leader are quite different from those associated with the charismatic leader. As an ideal type, these leaders do not emerge as a result of their personal qualities, but as a result of pre-existing structures. In Weber's terminology, they would be characterised by either legal-rational legitimacy or traditional legitimacy. Leaders with legal-rational legitimacy are legitimised by the office they hold, and they gain office by virtue of their qualifications. This may be either an appointed or elected office, but its legitimacy is ultimately dependent upon rules, processes and laws. A lawfully appointed judge or a member of parliament elected via free and fair elections has this sort of legitimacy. The nature of leadership in this case—what the leader is able to do and not able to do—is determined by the institutional structures of the office. Leaders with traditional legitimacy also perform a limited function, in the context of a wider social and cultural structure of expectations and sanctions. However, this function is determined by cultural norms based upon myths and memories, rather than institutional norms emerging from written rules. According to Weber, different types of legitimacy permit different types of action by leaders. Charismatic leaders are able to overturn the existing order; traditional leaders must reproduce it; legal-rational leaders can implement limited reform.

There are different methodological implications associated with these different approaches to leadership. The charismatic leadership approach focuses on agency—on the creativity and decision making of individuals. The constrained leadership approach focuses on structures—institutions, norms and expectations to which individuals' actions are required to conform. The first suggests a psychological approach to the study of leaders, while the second suggests a broader socio-economic, political institutional or cultural analysis. However, similar questions apply across both approaches. A key consideration in both cases requiring structural analysis is accountability: to what extent can followers exercise constraint over a leader? Can they recall leaders if they cease to represent followers' interests? Or are followers' own perceptions of their interests determined by the leader in the first place? Accountability might be expected to be greater among leaders constrained by institutions or traditions than in the case of charismatic leaders, who would be expected to mobilise followers and persuade them to embrace a particular vision.

At the same time, the personal characteristics approach has applications to constrained leadership. It is worth asking whether, in situations of legal-rational or traditional leadership, leadership in itself has any kind of explanatory power with respect to outcomes. Does the nature of the individual occupying the leadership post alter the outcomes at all, or would any person in the same position do just as well?

In reality, of course, leaders are likely to combine different elements of legitimacy and different forms of leadership in varying contexts. The most charismatic of leaders generally require some kind of institutional basis for their legitimacy, and social norms and traditions determine what we regard as charismatic, while appointed or elected leaders are likely to have some inherent leadership qualities, valued by society, that made it more likely that they would be appointed or elected.

One more strand of research into leadership has emerged more recently, which regards it as a mediating position rather than either transformative or representative. The idea of leaders as entrepreneurs, who seek opportunities to manipulate situations in a manner that serves their interests, has become prominent in social science recently. This is associated in particular with recent approaches to understanding conflict which focus on the "greed" of individual

leaders, rather than the "grievances" of societal groups (Reno 2000: 54–55). Such leaders are able to coordinate or organise existing interests in a community, and manage them in a way that renders them more forceful than they would otherwise be. An example is the claim that "conflict entrepreneurs" are able, through manipulation of offices, events and resources, to inflame slight tensions into violent passions. Sometimes, such entrepreneurs are themselves viewed as charismatic—as instilling in followers a vision that did not initially exist and using this to overturn an existing order. However, there are more positive dimensions to this form of leadership. For example, Sydney Tarrow's account of the "new transnational activism" suggests that in civil society, particular leaders, whom he calls "rooted cosmopolitans", can not only mobilise a domestic constituency at home, but project the interests of that constituency onto a wider stage (Tarrow 2005). These are leaders who represent existing interests, but who also, at the same time, add value to them, by virtue of their own facility with different sets of resources, forums for debate or styles of political organisation—facilities that would not be available to their followers.

Under the current "hybrid" system and in the context of the many recent reforms, this study regards leaders as empowered primarily by their interactions with social, political and economic networks, which link them to their constituents, on the one hand, and the state, on the other. A key purpose of the study is therefore to examine the networks that imbue individuals with the kind of authority necessary for leadership. The study will also analyse the extent to which leaders occupy key positions simultaneously in different but intersecting social, political and economic networks—particularly informal patronage networks vis-à-vis institutional hierarchies and local networks with followers and voters—and will examine whether tensions arise from the constraints imposed by these different social, political and economic networks. Do these tensions have an impact on the policy objectives of democratic and participatory government?

This study also proceeds from the assumption that particular types of individuals may be more likely to have a key position in the most important networks, and therefore it is hypothesised that certain personal characteristics may be necessary but not sufficient for an individual to attain a leadership position. These characteristics will be explored, with a particular emphasis on the extent to which gender is important: has the concept of gender equality penetrated into local leadership? What are the opportunities and constraints for women participating in local leadership?

1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

The study seeks to identify local leaders and the significant factors associated with them to see whether and how they can represent the people and help bridge the gap between state and society. To do this we will:

1. identify local formal and informal leaders in three rural communes in Cambodia;
2. examine the leaders' roles and activities, representation and constraints upon this;
3. explore the different bases of legitimacy of leaders and how they can transform authority into action;
4. identify the leaders' characteristics that are perceived as significant by the people in these communes;
5. explore how gender in politics is changing and the opportunities and challenges women leaders encounter.

The research questions are as follow:
1. What kinds of leaders are there?
2. What mixture of elements is their legitimacy based on?

3. How do they transform authority into action? What are the constraints they face?
4. How and how far is leadership gendered in Cambodia?

The first question asks who become leaders and why. Because the identification of these leaders is based on villagers' perceptions rather than their official titles, the second and third questions ask how these different types of leader are perceived by villagers: to what extent is leadership attributed to personal characteristics, to what extent to political arrangements imbuing them with authority and to what extent to their effectiveness in particular activities? In the midst of transitions such as democratisation, marketisation and especially decentralisation, it is interesting to examine people's and leaders' perceptions of leadership and leadership roles, and the extent to which leaders as individuals have changed and how remaining leaders can conform to village ideals.

The last question investigates whether there are opportunities or barriers for women aspiring to local leadership positions and at the same time seeks to identify the factors that might empower them to become leaders. Assuming that women still face more difficulty and constraints, we would also be interested to see how they are able to gain access to power and resources relative to male leaders and what other pressures they feel.

1.3. Policy Implications

The findings of this study can contribute to government policy in four key ways:

1. identifying tensions between different dimensions of leadership;
2. identifying potential and actual contributions of local leaders to democratisation;
3. identifying potential and actual contributions of local leaders to political legitimacy   ;
4. identifying issues surrounding the promotion of women as leaders.

1.4. Methodology and Case Selection

Qualitative methodology was used for this study. Therefore findings are indicative rather than representative. Fieldwork was conducted in three communes of three provinces whose selection was based on the following criteria:
1. a balance of geographical locations of the three provinces;
2. a balance of commune resources—natural, farming and market;
3. CDRI's previous studies and established rapport with local authorities;
4. a balance between political party affiliations—one commune is headed by an SRP chief and the other two by CPP chiefs;
5. different mixtures of gender in the commune councils—one commune is headed by a woman chief who has been in the position a long time, another is headed by a newly elected woman chief, and the last is headed by an all-male council.

The purpose of selection was to gain diverse case studies. There is no attempt to claim generalisability of findings, nor to make causal inferences on the basis of comparison. Rather the intention is to provide a thick description of leadership arrangements in three diverse communes, as a means to investigate in detail some of the social and political attitudes and institutional dynamics at work. Further research is needed to ascertain whether the findings presented here are relevant more widely in Cambodia.

The study was divided into two phases:

1. A small-scale survey using stratified sampling methods to identify the voters' leaders. Roughly 20 percent of households were selected for interviews. Villagers were chosen to balance between well-off, moderately rich and poor (including destitute) households; between different ethnic groups; between farming households and households relying on enterprise; between different age groups; between men and women; and between male- and female-headed households.

2. In-depth interviews with identified individual leaders.

During the survey phase we asked villagers to identify leaders in the village and commune. This was difficult, because of the rich variety of terms in Khmer translatable as "leader". The different terms are described in Chapter 3. In the survey, we asked villagers to identify leaders using a variety of Khmer terms, in order to identify as many types of leadership as possible.

In the interviews, we asked leaders questions relating to six topics: their background, their motivations and networks, their range of leadership activities and the kinds of constraints they faced in pursuing these activities, and their perspectives on gender in leadership. Questions were broad and open-ended, to encourage leaders to articulate their ideas in their own words, in order to gain an insight into how they understood their own position, duties and challenges. Interviews with village leaders tended to be conducted in their homes; interviews with commune leaders tended to be conducted in the commune office.

For practical research purposes, quotations are used throughout the paper, but for ethical reasons the names of the leader respondents have been changed and coding is used to protect villagers' identities. We also intentionally conceal the names of the communes and provinces in which the study was conducted since some issues raised in are sensitive and could have unintentional effects on respondents and local leaders.

1.5. Scope and Limitations of the Study

Findings of the study are indicative rather than representative because it was conducted in a few selected communes as case studies. Also, interviews with leaders could not cover what they did before and during the Khmer Rouge regime because information was not volunteered. In cases where information was volunteered, the researchers tried to make use of it so as to track the experiences and changes of roles and activities of leaders.

1.6. Structure of the Paper

This paper comprises six chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, discusses the technicalities of the study, which include rationale, aims and objectives, research questions, research methodology and scope. The second chapter offers a detailed literature review that helps conceptualise and provide a relevant framework for the whole study with a look at Cambodia's recent D&D reform; the concepts of power, authority and legitimacy; patron-client networks; traditional leadership in Cambodia and how it has changed as result of war and recent transformations; and gender in leadership. The third chapter provides definitions and explanations for the different terms used to refer to leaders among Cambodians while the fourth chapter discusses empirical findings from the three studied communes, looking at what kinds of leaders there are; the leader' education, age, experience and sex; their motivation; networks. Chapter 5 explores leaders' activities and the constraints they face. Strong efforts were made to explore gender throughout these mentioned themes. Chapter 6 concludes by pointing out important findings from the study and presenting areas that could better engage policies to ensure better outcomes.

Chapter 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is leadership? How does it constitute and shape local politics? How is leadership understood and practised in the local context? Do changes in the institutions of local government affect the way leadership is perceived, understood and practised? Do they bring demands for different ways and styles of leadership and perhaps different leaders? How is leadership gendered and is this changing?

This chapter aims to provide a relevant framework within which to discuss the empirical data relating to these questions. It begins by discussing important concepts that shape leadership—power, authority and legitimacy—as explained and defined in international literature, including classic social science. From a look at these concepts, we would be able to identify who has power, what kinds of power they have and who exactly has the power to influence the agenda; how those in power exercise their authority, whether they have the necessary legitimacy to do so, and what kinds of legitimacy they have and need.

Since cultural context has a far-reaching effect on the functioning of power and authority, and therefore also leadership, the chapter then discusses particular cultural forms in south-east Asia. In particular, we discuss how patron-client networks influence political leadership in south-east Asia and shape how leadership and governance are practised and perceived in these countries; and how such practice and understanding of political leadership have changed or transformed amidst political and economic transformations as a result of globalisation and a trend towards more democratic rule. In reviewing local leadership in Cambodia, different domains of power and their relevance to Cambodia's current political context, especially under decentralisation and deconcentration, are discussed before looking at general and specific literatures on gender in leadership.

Chart 1. The Framework of the Literature Review
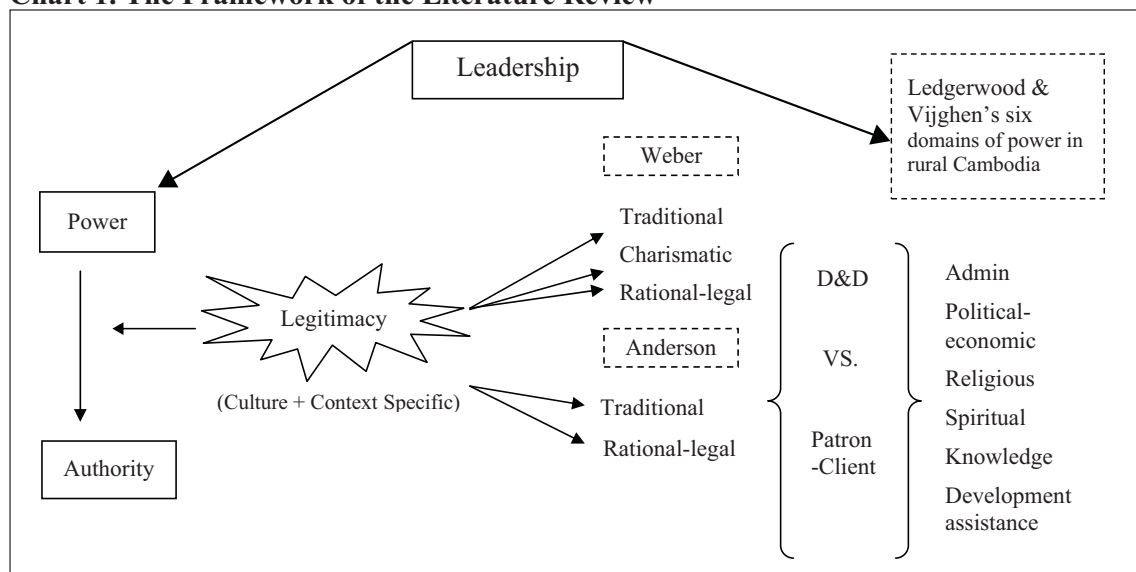
Overall, the aim of the literature review is to show how legitimacy transforms coercive power into respected authority. It explores different types of legitimacy, and then investigates how these different types of legitimacy emerge from both formal—in the shape of decentralised governance reforms—and informal—in the shape of patrimonial networks—institutions of governance, and how these operate across different domains of power in Cambodia.

2.1. Power, Authority and Legitimacy

Leadership is an abstract term that refers to both formal and informal functions. The word refers not only to the leading entities but also to their skills and styles of leading. What decides who becomes a leader? Is it because of the power they possess or the legitimacy they have gained, and in what form? To help us unwrap aspects related to leadership, it is important to study the closely related concepts of power, authority and legitimacy.

Power

Power is a highly contested concept. Scholars have long debated its definitions and how to identify powerful actors. This study chose the explanations and definitions of a selected group of scholars as discussed below.

Max Weber defined power as the probability that someone can get what he wants despite resistance from others (cited in Lukes 1974). Wright Mills interpreted power as the means that power-holders use to get what they want by preventing another group, whom he called the "outs", from getting what they want (cited in Lukes 1974). Steven Lukes' *Power: A Radical View* (1974) provides a comprehensive account of power in which he discusses three dimensions, elaborating on previous work of Robert Dahl and Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz.

Dahl suggests that in order to understand who has power (decision-making power) , one should study observable concrete behaviour during times of open conflict. Power is exercised when A participates in decision making that affects B (cited in Lukes 1974).

Bachrach and Baratz argued that there exists not only the kind of power that prevails in conflicts but also power to set agendas (non-decision-making power). Power, according to them, involves both decision making and non-decision making. Their power formula is that A not only makes decisions that affect B, but also makes decisions that "reinforce preconceived social and political values and institutional practices that limited or narrowed the scope of debate". This prevents B from raising issues affecting B that could be destructive for A *(ibid.)*.

According to Lukes, however, real power may lie behind what is concrete and observable. There is a hidden form of power that determines and shapes an accepted belief or belief system which might have deterred potential or possible grievances from being felt as grievances or from being expressed as such because power has caused people to accept things the way they are or to see that there are no alternatives (ideological power). In this kind of power, "A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping, or determining his very wants" (Lukes 1974: 27). This suggests that power can be concrete and observable as well as abstract and subtle.

Authority

Power is commonly seen as involving force and coercion, but many recent sociological studies suggest that the use of power need not involve coercion. Definitions of power

provided by Weber and Mills above would indicate a more coercive measure in which power is used. Other scholars would disagree. Talcott Parsons (cited in Lukes 1974), for example, conceptualises power as something attached to authority. He suggested that what determines the ability of a person to use power involves a process that transforms power into authority— the process of legitimisation of power. As discussed above, power is the ability of A to get B to do something that A desires but which B would not otherwise have done. Authority would then mean that B does what A desires because B respects or accepts A's moral right to decide (Parsons 1957, cited in Lukes 1974). This involves A's power being perceived as legitimate by B. If we are talking about leaders, it means that their authority is seen as legitimate by their followers or constituents. It implies that power is itself not necessarily legitimate; if one is to transform his/her power into authority then some kind of legitimacy is required.

Legitimacy

According to Weber, legitimacy exists when people believe power to be just. Expanding Weber's definition, Muthiah Alagappa (1995) defined legitimacy as the belief among citizens that the state has the right and authority to issue commands, which are obeyed out of these beliefs rather than out of fear or self-interest. What shapes these beliefs and what kinds of authority are believed to be legitimate?

Weber classified legitimate authority into three different regimes—legal-rational, traditional and charismatic. Leaders with **legal-rational authority** are legitimised by the elected or appointed office they hold, and their leadership is dependent upon and constrained by rules, processes and laws. This type of legitimacy is today often understood to mean democratic legitimacy. Examples of people with this type of legitimacy are elected politicians. **Traditional authority** is tied to tradition and custom. Leaders "inherit" their positions and legitimacy according to traditional rules or status. They become leaders because "it has always been so". These may include, for example, kings and the royal families, who by birth possess some kind of authority. **Charismatic leaders** derive their legitimacy from their personal strengths and inner quality or innate ability. Leaders with this type of authority have the power to define and determine their followers' preferences and are able to change their followers' vision and views. Examples of people with charisma include influential public speakers. It is not practical, though, to define clearly which individual or leader has which kind of legitimacy because in reality, as Weber admitted and many agreed, they tend to combine the different elements of legitimacy and use different forms of leadership in varying contexts.

In Cambodia, it is questionable whether charismatic legitimacy is still a useful category. It is almost impossible to distinguish between traditional and charismatic legitimacy since in south-east Asia they tend to overlap, charisma often being embedded in traditional figures (Anderson 1990). Hence this study will examine the local interaction of two types of legitimate authority: traditional and rational-legal.

These terms are particularly useful since our study takes place in the midst of ongoing decentralisation reform. This is formalising and democratising the position of local authorities, and therefore we can hypothesise that legal-rational authority might be becoming more important. This could engender clashes with more traditional types of legitimacy, or it may be that one type of legitimacy is co-opting another into a set of ingredients for leadership.

The above discussion provides insight into how a leader may gain power, authority and the type of legitimacy he may possess, which can determine how effective he is as a leader. A look at the legitimacy of a state, however, reveals that even though an elite may have some

form of legitimacy, once he or she abuses the position to exploit resources and deny them to common citizens, state legitimacy is harmed. Within such a state, the gap between state and society remains wide.

According to Roberts (2008), democratic legitimacy may not be enough to link the state with society. Insertion of modern institutions would only create external legitimacy, so such things as elections are not enough to win local recognition of leaders. There is a need for performance to win internal legitimacy. In doing this, leaders as well as the state should focus on responding to citizens' needs rather than conforming to international norms. This can be done through effective service delivery through local institutions, for example state-delivered health care or water and sanitation. Roberts argued that only when these services are provided effectively by local state institutions is state legitimacy enhanced.

2.2. Power and Authority in South-East Asia

Our discussion of the literature on power indicates that power operates to constitute belief systems and is also legitimised with reference to belief systems. Consequently cultural context is crucial to the exercise of power (Hughes and Öjendal 2006). Conversely, Lucian Pye (1985) takes a culturalist approach to the study of power. Pye conceptualises political development in Asia as a product of cultural attitudes towards power and authority.

In his attempts to distinguish the different types of power and power relations in Asia, Pye concluded that power in Asia is closely associated with ideas of respect, dignity, pride, symbolic matters and the prestige of the collective. Pye regards Asian cultures as group-oriented. They are respectful of authority. He argues that it is not common in Asian cultures to challenge existing order or established authority; although this is partly a result of coercion and forces experienced under authoritarian leadership, it is also partly a product of belief systems. Leadership in this context is about performing rituals in order to accumulate power, as power is deemed to be produced, not only by society, but also by external factors: it is divine and intangible (Pye 1985; Anderson 1990; Geertz 1980). Within this context, the concept of responsibility towards the ruled is disassociated from the concept of power (Pye 1985). Leaders can exploit their positions for their own benefit as long as it benefits people at lower levels and as long as it is perceived that they are responsible leaders. Their line of responsibility and accountability lies within their network of immediate clients or patrons (Anderson 1990; Pye 1985; Scott 1972). We can draw a conclusion then that a key component of the exercise of power in south-east Asia is networks of patron-clientelism.

Patron-Clientelism in South-East Asia and Cambodia

Patron-client ties are an important structural determinant of politics in south-east Asia. Several prominent scholars have proposed that patron-client relationships constitute the heart of power and authority dynamics there, both locally and nationally (Scott 1972; Hanks 1975, Neher 1981, cited in Pak *et al.* 2007). The concept of patronage/patrimonialism was first elaborated by Weber to describe what he called "traditional patrimonial governance"; this is a regime in which patrons personalise their power and dispense favours and resources to clients, who act as sub-patrons within their own domains (Weber 1965, Weber 1978, cited in Pak *et al.* 2007). Describing it as a form of exchange relationship, Scott (1972) defined patron-client relationship as

> … a special case of dyadic (two person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client)

who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patrons.

Patron-client relationships are about inequalities and informal exchanges between those with lower status (inferiors) and those with higher (superiors). This kind of bond persists in a society of inequalities (of wealth, status, power) and of weak formal structures that are compromised by informal reciprocal relationships. Although it enforces and reinforces inequalities and weak governance, it is argued that this kind of arrangement could offer considerable security and stable power structures in societies characterised by inequality and hierarchy (Pye 1985).

When traditional patrimonialism meets formal bureaucracy, a hybrid system of neo-patrimonialism is produced. In such a system, formal structures operate in combination with informal structures. Public institutions may become an instrument for private enrichment; those with wealth, especially high-profile businessmen, can buy administrative jobs including elected positions, influencing politicians and policy-makers,[1] and extracting rents from these opportunities (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, cited in Pak *et al.* 2007). Rent-seeking eventually pervades. This reinforces inequality and the patronage system.

Implications for Legitimacy

Via patron-client networks and rational administrative authority, national patrons gain and maintain power and influence by combining political, military, economic and administrative power through an "interlocking of pyramids of patron-client networks" (Heder 1995, cited in Pak *et al.* 2007: 58). Patron-client networks can combine traditional and democratic legitimacy through combining traditional relationships and values of loyalty, gratitude or obligation and status with elections and development assistance. Politicians gain their legitimacy then not through policy outcomes, but through their personal distribution of material gifts such as clothes, food and donations for religious ceremonies, as well as the construction of physical infrastructure, which creates a sense of "personal" gratitude among villagers who in return cast their votes for these individuals; votes and political donations are inextricably linked in neo-patrimonial politics.

We have seen that the common characteristics of countries in south-east Asia (though perhaps less so in Singapore and Vietnam) are oligarchy and the importance of informal connections. The structure consists of and is ruled by a small number of groups. The link to local strongmen is much more important than formal titles or positions. The word of local strongmen is more influential in policies than the voice of the majority. These all reinforce the use of kinship and patronage systems, and attempts to strengthen the formal structure of governance will meet with great difficulties and resistance if they challenge or threaten the informal.

2.3. Leadership in Cambodia

Like many post-colonial countries in south-east Asia, one of the features of Cambodia's politics is centralised rule and centralised planning (Mabbett and Chandler 1995; Rusten and Öjendal 2003). Cambodia has a very long history as a neo-patrimonial society. This has contributed to

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1   In his article "*Ittiphon* and *Amnat*: An informal aspect of Thai politics", Tamada (1991) made a clear distinction between *amnat* (power) and *ittiphon* (influence), which determines and elucidates where real power and authority lie. He suggests that normally *amnat* would be associated with leaders or politicians, but that one should give attention as to whether these really do have authority or *influence*. According to him, it is often rich business patrons who have the real authority and influence over those seemingly in power (politicians).

a strong tradition in which leaders have absolute power and so the concepts of power sharing, loyal opposition and elections are all unfamiliar (Pat *et al.* 2007).

Along with its neo-patrimonial features, Cambodian society contains strict social hierarchies, kinship, patronage and informal personal relations (Ebihara 1968, cited in Pak *et al.* 2007; Oliver Walters, May Ebihara, David Chandler, Judy Ledgerwood, Caroline Hughes, Joakim Öjendal and others, cited in Kim (2010). Ledgerwood and Vijghen (2002) emphasised that kinship and patronage are the "main threads" of Cambodian society. Authority and loyalty work between persons rather than between offices (Mabbett and Chandler 1995).

May Ebihara's early study of Svay village (1968) emphasised a lack of institutionalisation of local leadership. The personal qualities and dynamism of particular individuals were regarded as more important than rules or norms regarding officials. District administrators were visited infrequently by villagers, largely because, being appointed by the central government, they were considered impersonal, aloof and socially superior.

This is the only account of local leadership from the pre-war era. In the post-war era, the few studies conducted suggest that the moral capacities of commune and village officials are less important than the institutional setting in determining their relationships with villagers. Evan Gottesman (2003) described the appointment of village and commune authorities in the 1980s as entrenching patronage systems of particular party leaders, although he also pointed out that these authorities were not particularly disciplined in following the orders of their patrons. Collins' (1998) examination of the role of commune chiefs in the 1990s concurred with Ebihara's account in regarding them as crucial links between the local level and the threatening sphere of the state. However, his work suggested that the reluctance of villagers to deal with state officials higher than the commune disempowered villagers who might otherwise be more forthright in challenging commune officials' authority. A further study, by Kim Sedara and Joakim Öjendal (2009), regarded the commune elections of 2002 as ushering in a new relationship between villagers and commune officials, in which fear is less important than respect. CDRI's study of decentralisation suggested that commune councillors tend to look upwards rather than downwards for advice and instructions (Rusten *et al.* 2004). Conversely, other studies of the impact of the Seila programme have suggested that commune and village chiefs have become more accustomed to consulting villagers and listening to their views.

With regard to civil society leaders, a recent study (World Bank 2006) on the emergence of social movements of the poor in rural Cambodia suggests a role for the morally influential individuals Ebihara describes in the non-governmental sphere. The study describes opinion leaders in Cambodian villages who are able to mobilise the community over particular issues.

These studies suggest that the status of village and commune chiefs is contested between political and state masters and local constituents, and is probably changing rapidly in the context of decentralisation, creating different opportunities and constraints for leaders, different relationships with outsiders and perhaps different types of leader with different personal qualities. This suggests not only that there are different domains of power and influence within villages but that these domains might be contested and changing as well.

Domains of Power in Cambodia

Ledgerwood and Vijghen (2002) categorised the different sources of power and influence of patrons in local Cambodia into six domains. First is the **administrative domain,** which consists of administrative officials or official leaders such as commune councillors and village chiefs. The second domain, the **religious,** comprises mostly elders who are involved in religious

affairs—*achar* (religious laymen), nuns, monks, local *wat* committees. The **knowledge domain** is the third source of power; it consists of those with education and professional positions such as health workers and teachers. Fourth is the **spiritual domain**, consisting of people such as traditional healers. The **economic-political domain**, the fifth source of power, consists of the rich and powerful, who, according to Ledgerwood and Vijghen, are "probably the most crucial actors in village affairs". These patrons are known as the "powermen" who in Cambodian rural settings are mainly known as *thauke* (economic boss) since most are involved in some form of business and grow to be influential over local and national politics. The last domain, the **development assistance domain**, is probably the newest. This includes development workers, NGO activists and foreign personnel.

Since Ledgerwood and Vijghen defined the six sources of power, many changes have taken place, particularly the D&D reform. An objective of this study is to examine the evolution of these six sources in the context of D&D. Which domains are becoming more important and which less important? The literature on patron-client networks suggests that in countries where the ruling party, business and the state are closely intertwined, this may produce oligarchic rule, with significant implications for the power, functions and legitimacy of local leaders.

In addition to the different sources of power, different contexts, situations and preferences might cause leaders to impose different forms or styles of leadership. On the one hand, as discussed above, power in Cambodia in the 1980s and 1990s was seen as something that involved coercion and force, which means that leaders practised a more authoritarian form of power in which they gave commands and ruled their followers through authority enforced from higher up. These sub-patrons ruled on behalf of their patrons, the higher authorities, from whom they gained their legitimacy. On the other hand, leaders can use a softer kind of power and be more representative, which is arguably a more democratic form of power. Rather than enforcing rules from higher up, they are there to represent their followers, serving the interests of these clients, from whom they gain their legitimacy. Or in a more typical scenario, leaders would perform both of these roles and remain somewhere in between. It is crucial for this study to see where Cambodian local leaders stand when exercising their authority.

2.4. Cambodia's Decentralisation Reform

In 2001 Cambodia embarked on decentralisation with the enactment of two laws—the Law on the Administration and Management of Communes (LAMC) and the Law on Commune Elections. The country has since held commune/*sangkat* council elections in 2002 and 2007.[2]

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2   There is a minor controversy over the status of the 2002 election. It should be noted that there is a small controversy over the commune election in 2002. While some describe it as Cambodia's first ever official local election and attempt at decentralisation, others disagree. According to Rusten and Öjendal (2003), decentralisation in Cambodia has its roots as far back as the early 1900s. Local elections took place in the 1950s and 1960s, but candidates for commune councils had to be approved by the district governor (Sreang 2003, cited in Rusten and Öjendal 2003). Another election of commune councils took place in 1981, but the appointment of commune chiefs involved Vietnamese troops more than the central government or the party headquarters in Phnom Penh (Slocomb 2004). So decentralisation has been attempted before in Cambodia, but the current reform involves less central appointment and more multi-party competition and negotiations and hence is more democratic.

Local Governments in Cambodia Following D&D

According to the Ministry of the Interior (MoI), there are currently 1621 commune councils, with 11,353 councillors, 1661 of whom (about 14.6 percent) are women. An average commune consists of between eight and 15 villages (Rusten *et al.* 2004). Each council has between five and 11 councillors, depending on the population. Ninety-eight percent of commune chiefs are from the ruling CPP, and the remaining two percent from the Sam Rainsy and FUNCINPEC parties.

A commune council comprises a chief, first deputy, second deputy and members. Three political parties have elected commune representatives; all councils have representatives from at least two of the three parties, and some have representatives from all three.[3] One commune clerk is employed by the MoI for each council to help with paperwork. Since 2007, a gender focal person (usually a woman) has been employed for each commune to take up issues related to women and children. They are often selected by the commune councils from among ordinary villagers or village committees.

Commune/*sangkat* councils receive annual government funding called the Commune/*Sangkat* Fund (CSF). At the time of the study, the CSF was around USD8000 per commune, although the amount varies slightly according to the size of the commune. Overall, the total CSF is around 2.7 or 2.8 percent of GDP. One-third of the CSF is expected to be used for administration and the remaining for development activities.

Roles of Local Governments Following D&D

Decentralised local governments in Cambodia, as in any other country, play a double role (Rusten *et al.* 2004). They are both elected institutions that represent the interests of local people, whose power derives from the people, and also government agents who are part of the public sector and whose authority derives from the central government. Their unique position between the people and the state makes them efficient agents for service delivery and promoting participatory democracy. Local elections award more bargaining power to villagers because they can remove leaders whose performance they are dissatisfied with (Scott 1972). This could translate into increased responsiveness, accountability, participation and transparency among elected leaders, accelerating the efforts and pace of poverty alleviation, although this depends on the quality of implementation of decentralisation reform and the context within which it is implemented.

Commune Councils

Structure and Roles: During the 1980s and 1990s, the key role of commune authorities was to control, regulate and record the affairs of the communes (Prum Sokha speech of 31 August 2000, cited in Slocomb 2004). Now, by contrast, commune authorities play an important role in administrative work, including planning, budgeting and implementation of development projects in order to promote and enhance a culture of democracy and economic growth for poverty reduction. Commune councillors are assigned to be in charge of different committees of the commune, including agriculture, economics, public works, social order and security and women's and children's issues. The clerk's role is to assist the commune's work and to enhance the smooth functioning and sustainability of its administration. This entails maintaining files, conducting voter and civil registration and assisting with other office activities. The monthly salary of commune councillors is USD17.50 for members, USD20 for deputies and USD25 for

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3   See Rusten *et al.* 2004 for a description of how the positions of commune chief and deputies are decided.

a chief. The clerk, being employed by the MoI, is paid USD31.75, while the commune gender focal person receives a supplement of USD12.50.

Characteristics: According to a recent survey by Pact Cambodia (2008), most elected commune representatives (80 percent) are aged above 49. The same survey found that 94 percent of councillors are literate, defined as having sufficient education to be able to read and write some Khmer. Although the rate may look high, a CDRI study in 2004 found that almost all of a sample of 15 commune chiefs interviewed had only some primary education (Rusten *et al.* 2004). Relatively, clerks tend to be young and reasonably well educated: all have either completed high school or have a first degree. However, because they are directly employed by the MoI, they are more accountable to it rather than to councils *(ibid.)*.

Chart 2. Commune Structure
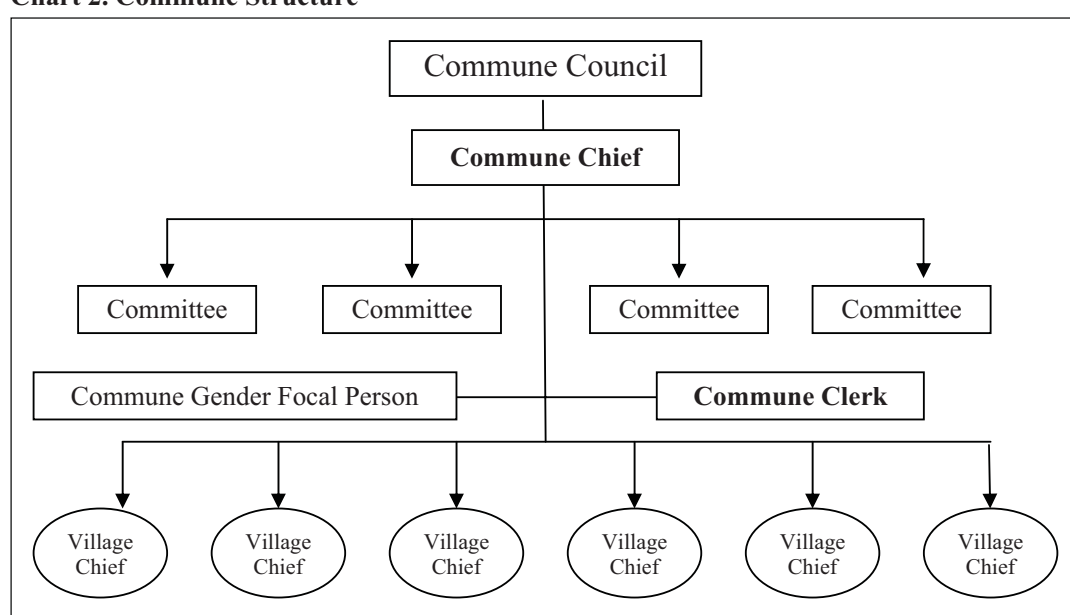
Village Committees

Roles and Structure: Commune councils' work is assisted by village chiefs and village committees, which are the lowest grass-roots administrative authority of the government (Rusten *et al.* 2004). Village chiefs' positions and lines of reporting have not changed with decentralisation, their main roles being to collect the mandatory contributions of local villagers to development projects, disseminating information and most importantly serving as direct secretaries to the commune authority (see Rusten *et al.* 2004).

As an official policy of the MoI, implemented since mid-2006, a village committee consists of a village chief, a deputy and one assistant (usually village gender focal person or village member). Virtually every village committee has a woman member; women now make up 30 percent of village committee members (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2008). Village leaders are not paid a salary, but are given supplementary funds from the Commune/*Sangkat* Fund.

Characteristics: The selection of village chiefs in the 1980s was reportedly based on respect and trust among villagers (Slocomb 2004), and many of these still remain in position.

D&D and Local Leadership Challenges

Decentralisation has had some impact on communes, specifically in terms of infrastructure and some other material outputs (Kim, 2010). Kim also found that commune councillors have changed their attitudes and styles of leadership, adopting a "softer" style to fit better with the principles of decentralisation and democracy.

However, there still exist constraints; these include lack of experience with and knowledge of the new decentralised regime, low salaries and unclear roles and responsibilities. While these are of concern, the literature also points to larger constraints, which include lateness in the supporting deconcentration reform, reluctance among the people to impose demands on local authorities and weak civil society organisations (Kim, 2010; Kim and Öjendal 2007).

The changes in roles and the contested status of leaders mean that the understanding of leadership and power might also change. Considering the challenges recent reforms and changes have raised for leaders, there is a need for a rigorous look at how these terms are defined and understood both internationally and locally before we discuss other aspects of Cambodian leadership.

D&D and State-Society Relations

Cambodia's political culture and history have helped to maintain the distance between rulers and ruled. The concept of democracy in which people genuinely choose and keep eyes on the authorities and impose their needs on them, while authorities are there to serve the people, is still very new. Rulers previously had to use a combination of elements to win power and gain legitimacy, and it is still widely perceived that traditional and charismatic legitimacy is prevalent. Öjendal and Kim (2006) showed that the real source of power for Cambodian rulers has never been popular votes.

Öjendal and Kim (2006) argued that D&D has to an extent changed this attitude because in one of their studies they found that rational authority is dominant in today's politics and people are less fearful (*klach*) of authorities and are more respectful of (*korob*) and admiring (*kaud*) of them instead.

However, Kim (2010) also found that, almost two decades after Cambodia embraced democratisation and after seven years of decentralisation, people are still reluctant to pose demands on or challenge authorities. State-society relations are still hierarchical and coercive. According to Rusten and Öjendal (2003), among the people there is a broad sense of fear of the state and lack of trust in government institutions, especially the police and judicial system, which are deemed corrupt. Voters tend to stay far from their leaders (Ledgerwood 2002; Kim, 2010; Öjendal and Kim 2006, 2008; Rusten *et al.* 2004). Even the commune authorities, who are perceived to be closest to the people, are viewed as fairly distant. The culture of public checking on authorities (transparency) is not a pervasive feature in Cambodia's political life, especially in rural areas (Rusten and Öjendal 2003). Most communication and information sharing in Cambodia occurs within families and among relatives, rather than more widely in the context of a public sphere (Rusten and Öjendal 2003). Caroline Hughes believes that this legacy will continue to pose challenges for efforts to promote participation and trust (Hughes 2000, cited in Rusten and Öjendal 2003).

It is therefore important to explore whether there have been changes to the source of legitimacy among leaders and the extent to which state-society relations are becoming more democratic. This will suggest whether the supposedly significant mediators of state-society relations—local leaders—are able to fill this role and, if not, why not.

Moreover, leadership in Cambodia and historically elsewhere has been gender-biased, and the many efforts to include women in leadership make it important to see how far this has progressed and the remaining obstacles.

2.5. General Literature: Gender and Leadership

Studies have repeatedly confirmed the shortage of women in political and decision-making positions around the globe. Historically, culturally and socially, women, power and leadership have rarely combined (Duerst-Lahit and Rita 1996). Many efforts have been made by civil society organisations, institutions and governments and by women themselves to empower women and promote their participation in decision making. Much progress has been made, but it has been slow and unsteady (Peterson and Runyan 1999). Sometimes much work and achievements can be easily overridden by a change of regime or policy because these gender efforts are not embedded and integrated in the minds of the people and the social structures of an institution or country *(ibid.)*.

Gender discrimination positively correlates with poverty. According to UNDP (2002), gender discrimination is one of the main sources of endemic poverty, inequitable and low economic growth, high HIV prevalence and inadequate governance. Many agree that countries with more gender inequality tend to have more poverty, and as poverty deepens, gender discrimination is widened (UNDP 2002; World Bank 2008). It has been suggested that gender mainstreaming would be meaningful and credible only when vulnerable and disadvantaged women actually benefit from poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, HIV reduction, decentralised and democratic governance, conflict prevention or recovery, access to information and communication technology (UNDP 2002).

Full participation of women is a prerequisite for truly democratic governance. Mona Lilja (2007) shares the same view that equality of political representation of different groups, and hence the inclusion of women in politics, is critical for democracy and stability. Diversity of representation is significant to prevent alienation and social unrest caused by lack of representation of a group, promote better decision making and allow for policies that better affect the lives of the people. In general, there are promising signs of increased representation of women in leadership positions and decision making in many countries and institutions. The number of countries reported to have gender activities and the scope of activities have significantly increased over the past decade (UNDP 2002).

However, despite overall increases, women's representation is still low. A 1992 study by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women suggested a need for a 30 to 35 percent representation by women in order for women's needs and priorities to be confidently brought forward and taken into policy (Peterson and Runyan 1999). The *Human Development Report 2007/2008* shows, however, that the number of seats in parliament held by women reached 30 percent or above in only 17 countries out of 177. Only Sweden, Rwanda and Finland have parliaments that are more than 40 percent female. This figure has increased since 2002, when women's representation in parliament was above 25 percent in only 16 countries (UNDP 2002). At the moment, of the 192 members of the United Nations, two independent states outside the UN, a few de facto independent states and many self-ruling dependencies, 23 have female leaders, including reigning queens. Although this figure is increasing, progress is slow. With few decision-making powers, women leaders are isolated and women in general continue to be "invisible" because issues that affect them are not brought into the policy arena (Peterson and Runyan 1999; Kabeer 1994).

Quota systems are not enough; an increase of numbers may not translate into increased power. Many empirical studies have suggested that proportional representation and quotas are the most suitable approaches to increase and empower women in politics. But an increase in number, according to recent studies, has not much changed power relations between men and women (Peterson & Runyan 1999; World Bank 2008; UNESCAP 2007). A quota system cannot be effective without enforcement, when women leaders have no constituency of their own and are appointed or selected by political parties (this applies to men as well) and when women who make it into leadership positions are given responsibilities suited only to their stereotyped traditional roles, which reinforces gender discrimination (UNESCAP 2007; Miranda 2005). Policies to increase the number of women in politics are not adequate so long as the general society does not embrace the concept of equality. Popular demand and a developed system of accountability in public office are two critical conditions to addressing this issue (Miranda 2005).

Many factors undermine women's participation. While they tend to have more representation in "alternative" structures such as NGOs and grass-roots organisations, women find it hard to insert themselves into political circles due to several historical and social reasons. Top positions are usually given to prior officeholders rather than newcomers, while the correlation between the military and access to leadership reduces the chances of women, who are not seen as strong enough militarily or have not had military experience (Peterson and Runyan 1999). Because of the need to conform to gender stereotyping to avoid being perceived as a threat to men and the status quo, and because challenging it is not a positive option, women leaders opt to "become like men" and take up general policy rather than fighting for inclusion of new issues such as gender (Peterson and Runyan 1999; Duerst-Lahti and Rita 1996).

A main initial constraint on women's participation and empowerment has been gender discrimination in education. Of the nearly 1 billion adults in the world who cannot read, two-thirds are women (UNDP 2002). Such an education gap brings enormous economic and social costs, a lack of autonomy and decision making among the disadvantaged and a great intergenerational gap (UNESCAP 2007). The fact that female education positively correlates with economic growth is widely perceived and accepted, but access to education and gender discrimination in it still remain a barrier for many women, especially in developing and less developed countries.

Traditional and cultural expectations and assigned roles socialise boys and girls into distinct characters with separate roles. Women's internalised values and behaviours are not traits associated with leadership, such as aggressive, assertive and authoritarian behaviour (Peterson and Runyan 1999). One of the major barriers is men's cultural attitude of dismissal or non-cooperation with women colleagues, while women leaders have to act according to masculine norms (Peterson and Runyan 1999; Duerst-Lahti and Rita 1996; UNESCAP 2007). In addition, women who make it into administrative or leadership positions are often given stereotyped responsibilities, limiting their influence in overall concerns of the nation and reinforcing their lack of power and voice (UNESCAP 2007; Peterson and Runyan 1999).

Sex-role stereotyping also assigns different roles to men and women within families; women are expected to take care of the home and children, whereas men are expected to work outside the home. This brings about two major pressures. First, women who wish to become leaders have to face a "double workday" as their taking on work outside the home does not change the deeply rooted expectation of their taking care of the home and children. Second, for husbands, their expected role of working outside the home means that there is huge social cost if they

agree to renegotiate roles with their wives, and so many do not agree to do so, or do not support their wives in becoming leaders or taking important positions in politics. Since renegotiation is virtually always impossible, women leaders are pressured to take up a "double workday" in which they perform their jobs full time and take care of the households full time. Given no other options, women leaders often have to pursue their aspirations without the support of a husband. According to Peterson and Runyan's study, "women who seek high-level administrative and political careers are more likely than men to remain unmarried, to be divorced, or to enter politics at a later age, when mothering responsibilities have diminished" (Peterson and Runyan, 1999: 86).

Women are not homogenous. While policy makers often make decisions based on what they think women need, they are already treating women as objects who do not know what they need and are universalising women's interests (Kabeer 1994). The above discussions also talk about women as if they were one group with the same interests, socio-economic class, race, religion, ethnicity, aspirations and needs. Women who become leaders do not necessarily have the same abilities, policies or agendas, and they can be gender-aware and gender-responsive (Miranda 2005). The nature of their involvement should be investigated to understand their political agendas because there is a high probability that women who make it into the political mainstream come from the elite class and may not be inclined to challenge the interests of their class. Hence, the factors that propelled them to public office will be considered in analysing and evaluating the contributions women leaders can make. Did they become leaders because of familial connections to politicians or other male leaders? Were they included only as a result of quotas? Did they rise through the ranks of their party on merit? Did they join because they had gained the trust and confidence of their constituencies? This emphasises again the need for a critical mass of women in decision-making bodies and popular demand for their inclusion.

2.6. Gender and Leadership in Cambodia

Leadership in Cambodia has been predominantly male. As Frieson (2001) and McGrew *et al.* (2004) point out, Khmer women, although not publicly active or participatory and although submissive to male hierarchy, have historically played an important role in the building of patronage networks for their husbands and behind the scenes, intruding or interfering in their husbands' political affairs for their own interests. This suggests that wives of leaders possess quite a strong informal power.

Women's roles have been changing with political and economic reforms, specifically the implementation of a quota system and decentralisation. With more representation in civil society, women have contributed to forging cross-party ties, monitoring accountability and promoting non-violence (McGrew *et al.* 2004). Women's representation in local politics has increased. Women commune councillors increased from 8.5 percent in 2002 to 14.6 percent in 2007, and as a result of article 22 of sub-decree 22 on commune/*sangkat* councils, which states that one in three village leaders must be a woman, women now make up 30 percent of village administration.

Women's overall national, provincial and district representation remains very low, with the exception of representation within the Ministry of Women's Affairs and its departments (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2008). A local increase without a parallel national increase cripples women's ability to influence the agenda since important decisions are also made nationally.

Although the number of female candidates and those put at the top of party lists for the 2007 commune election increased, more needs to be done and at a faster pace. Women are only 4 percent of all commune chiefs from the ruling party, which won 70 percent of all seats in councils. That is not enough to influence policy agendas. One reason parties give for this low representation is that their female candidates lack proper knowledge and experience to handle the work. Whether it is the ability of women or confidence in their ability that is to blame is unclear, but it is clear that more needs to be done to increase men's confidence in women and women's confidence in themselves.

According to Lilja (2007), several other factors contribute to undermining women's participation and influence in politics: the emphasis on the connection between war, security and politics, patronage relations and their connection to voting behaviour; the division of spheres of influence in which females are more accustomed and "assigned" to being in the informal sphere; the strong sense of family-oriented political participation, which blurs the distinction between public and private spheres even further. The above factors explain why women play such significant roles in the economy, especially the informal one, but their status in politics is low. They also generally explain the low representation and participation of women and the resistance among men. This suggests that popular demand from society and support from men for women's leadership and increased participation in general are still weak.

Chapter 3:

KHMER TERMS FOR 'LEADERSHIP'

In models of representative democracy, leadership is regarded as implying representation, responsibility and responsiveness, and as something that functions both formally and informally. For democracy to function, people need to understand who their leader-representatives are and what they are there for. However, In Cambodia's hybrid political system, characterised by hierarchies of loyalty and obligation, rather than shifting constituencies of interest as envisaged in the liberal model, leadership might have different connotations. With the informal context playing a significant role in its system and everyday functions, there is no exact translation of the word, and even if there were, it would not make sense to use it alone since it would not be able to connote everything. In order to identify most, if not all, potential "leaders" significant for our study, we used different terms and tried to cover different contexts as agreed in many survey team discussions. Ledgerwood and Vijghen (2002) provided a model that helped us understand the different domains in which leaders may be situated, through their categorisation of the six domains or sources of power: administrative, political and economic, religious, spiritual, knowledge and development assistance.

In our survey we asked:

1. Who are the local authorities in the village? commune?
2. Who else besides these is active in this village? commune?
3. Are there any women leaders in this village? commune?
4. When you need help (conflict, ceremonies, contribution, meeting) who do you go to?
5. Who represents the people in raising problems to higher authorities?
6. Who do villagers listen to the most in this village? commune?
7. Who is effective in mobilising people and resources in this village? commune?
8. Has anyone from outside of the village/commune helped or been active?
9. Are there any *wats* in this village? commune? Who organises religious ceremonies?
10. Are there any NGOs or community-based organisations (CBOs) in this village? commune? Has anyone from these institutions been helpful and effective?

In order to explain how these questions were translated into Khmer, it is necessary to describe some of the different Khmer terms for "leader".

Terms

Achnhathor អាជ្ញាធរ (authority). The term is used for formal leaders in both the village and the commune. People mostly refer to village chiefs and commune chiefs and councils as *achnhathor phum* and *achnhathor khum* respectively. They are recognised by the people as having formal power and authority. Our survey suggested that these leaders have become increasingly significant since the formalisation of commune and village authorities through decentralisation. This word is used in more formal settings and implies distance between

villagers and leaders. When it is used, there is a mixed sentiment of respect, fear and distance.

Angkar អង្គការ (organisation). The direct translation of *angkar* is "organisation". During the Khmer Rouge period, *angkar* was widely used to refer to the official administration. Today it is usually understood to mean NGOs and other development assistance institutions; however, this understanding may not be shared by people in rural areas, especially those with little or no education or access to media. Some people use the word to refer to someone who represents an institution or someone who is a *sabboraschun* (a benefactor). They deem anyone who helps them, in one form or another, to be an *angkar*. During our fieldwork, some even referred to Prime Minister Hun Sen as *angkar* because they had received gifts from him.

Achar អាចារ្យ (layman who helps monks with religious functions). These religious leaders are very important in spiritual uplift and guiding towards good karma. They as well as monks receive great respect from the people. They are entrusted with pagoda funds and seeking and collecting donations from *sabboraschun*.

Chas tum ចាស់ទុំ (elders). They are respected and trusted by villagers, who may or may not be related to them. The sense of hierarchy is strong, and so people still listen to and seek advice from village elders. They go to elders for help especially when there are small family conflicts or issues. Elders are sought after for their skills of peaceful compromise and their calm approach to problems.

Euv / euv mae ឪ / ឪម៉ែ (father/parents). *Euv* and *mae* are informal words referring to parents and are more often used in rural areas. They are also widely used to refer to leaders, associating them with parental qualities and suggesting that they have to look after their "children" (villagers) and love them as they would their own children. When associated with these words, leaders are also expected to be responsible for the well-being of their "children".

Krom proek-sa khum ក្រុមប្រឹក្សាឃុំ (commune council). This is the official term to refer to commune councils and councillors.

Khsè ខ្សែ (line). This refers to the networks and backing of a person. Because patronage is one of the features of Cambodian political cultural life, it is widely understood that it is important for a leader or villager to have networks of patrons and clients. To understand who villagers refer to as their leader, it is also important to seek and understand their patronage networks.

Mé មេ (boss). This refer to a boss or someone who is in charge. It can be applied to many kinds of leaders and situations, for example, *me kruosar* (household head), *me phum* (village chief).

Mé khum មេឃុំ (commune chief). Used more often in everyday conversations to refer to commune chiefs and sometimes to deputies and members, the term is less formal and implies closer ties with people than *achnhathor*.

Mé kyal មេខ្យល់ (opinion leaders. Translated literally, this term refers to the wind, meaning those who initiate ideas or opinions and try to manipulate them among the people to serve a particular purpose. This type of leader usually possesses charisma and often exists to change villagers' views on certain things rather than to get things done.

Mé krom មេក្រុម (group leader). These are assistants to village chiefs. Each village committee has several group leaders, depending on its size and the chief's decision. Each group leader takes care of a number of households and is responsible for calling them to meetings, sharing information with them, collecting contributions and listening to and forwarding their issues to the village chief. Although this is a former arrangement made by many village chiefs throughout Cambodia, some villages still retain this organisation, while in others, deputy village chiefs and village assistants have largely replaced group leaders. These are not paid positions.

Mé kumnit មេគំនិត (idea-bearer). These are like *me kyal* in that they are opinion leaders. *Mé kumnit* might have both positive and negative connotations depending on the context. Sometimes, when a road is constructed, and villagers refer to the village chief as the *mé kumnit*, they are implying that the idea and initiative came from the village chief.

Mé phum មេភូមិ (village chief). Villagers use this word to refer to deputy village chiefs as well. While this study was being conducted, there were no female village chiefs. Since the new law was implemented, village committees now consist of three members, up from two. It is now required that there be one woman for every village committee, acting as either deputy village chief or member (assistant).

Neak doek noam អ្នកដឹកនាំ (leader). If people were asked who their *neak doek noam* were, they would hesitate and were not sure what sphere or domain we were referring to. Villagers would immediately ask for clarification.

Neak mean omnach អ្នកមានអំណាច (powerful people). This refers to someone with power but not necessarily authority. The word *omnach* (power) usually refers to coercive and authoritarian types of power. *Neak mean omnach* could include police, rich peasants or businessmen who are simply known as having guns and money.

Neak mean etthipol អ្នកមានឥទ្ធិពល (influential people). Influential people include local patrons who have influence over both villagers and local leaders. Villagers listen to or are fearful of them because of their power and influence, which they often gain from supporting village projects or responding to villagers' requests for help.

Neak mean toek moat prai អ្នកមានទឹកមាត់ប្រៃ (people with salty spit). "People with salty spit are those who are listened to and trusted by the people", as a Khmer saying goes. However, during our survey, when we asked who had salty spit, villagers would refer to only two types of people—police and *oknha* or very rich patrons. They said that police have salty spit because they have raw power and guns that can scare people easily. Conflicts or youth gang fights would stop at the sight of police. Police have the power to arrest and use violence. Police would also demand payment or fines from people.

Neak puke អ្នកពូកែ (clever people). This refers to those who are more knowledgeable than ordinary villagers and are effective at mobilising resources or initiating ideas, and villagers listen to them.

Neak tveu kar អ្នកធ្វើការ (professionals). To some villagers, those who work with NGOs, state institutions, teachers or other professional workers are admirable. They understand that these people have more knowledge than they do and so will listen to them or seek their advice and help.

Oknha ឧកញ៉ា This is an official title given to a benefactor who has donated USD100,000 or more to state projects. Some rich patrons, mostly businessmen, officially earn or "buy" the title in order to upgrade their status, to increase their reputation, to have space to expand their businesses (especially illegal ones) or to evade taxes. Others, although they have not officially earned the title, are called *oknha* by villagers. One reason is because of their wealth and status. Another is because villagers are not sure whether these people had been given the title or not, or because villagers are not sure what constitutes an *oknha*. Having this position gives a person a large space to distance themselves and their activities from villagers. People become fearful of them. *Oknha* do not respect or seek permission from the local authorities in many cases. Even local authorities would not want to have problems with them.

Thauke ថៅកែ (boss). This is an owner of a business. The word tends to imply Chinese ethnicity since historically it has mostly been those of Chinese descent who are business entrepreneurs. Some of them are middlemen in the villages, buying produce from villagers and selling it to outsiders and vice versa. Local *thauke* are in a sense patrons of villages since people are dependent on them to buy their produce, to employ them or to lend them money.

Chapter 4:

WHAT MAKES A LOCAL LEADER?

This chapter explores the emerging leaders identified by the villagers by scrutinising the key elements constituting their legitimacy and authority: characteristics (education, experience, age and sex), networks and motivation. The chapter also blends relevant gender aspects into the discussion. It will begin by presenting the small survey using stratified sampling methods to show who the voters' leaders are in order of significance.

4.1. Villagers' Attitudes toward Leaders

The citizen survey on leadership in the three communes indicates that the leaders villagers most commonly approached, in order of frequency and significance, are: village chiefs, commune chiefs and councillors, *chas tum* (elders) and *achar*, economic-political leaders and leaders from the development and knowledge domain. The survey found that different attitudes to leaders correlate with villagers' wealth and education. A larger study is needed to confirm this. It is challenging to categorise the villagers into distinct groups; the classification is done simply to indicate the varying perceptions depending on economic and social status, education and ethnicity. It should be noted, however, that there may be other correlations not found in this study—for example, in the age of respondents. For this study, it was not possible to group and analyse different attitudes towards local leadership by age. For each village, we selected roughly 15 percent of total households as respondents. Selection was targeted in order to gain responses across a range of selected categories, namely economic and social status, education (which may be related to economic and social status) and ethnicity. We were unable to obtain a balance of age ranges, since during our fieldwork, most of the young people were working outside the village. A lack of responses from young people represents a significant limitation of this research.

Perceptions of Educated and Better Off Families

We surveyed a number of respondents from the well-educated and well-off families in each commune. They tended to be professionals such as teachers or owners of small businesses such as distilleries and grocery stores. They were well informed and curious about local politics. They held clear opinions about local leaders, which they were happy to share with us.

> The village chief is not capable and educated enough to carry out his duties effectively and impartially; he cannot manage even to measure correctly the land surface, so how can he resolve land conflicts? He is biased toward the side which bribes him. We do not trust him. (Villager A15, commune A, response to survey, 21/5/2008)

> The commune chief is good but the divergence of ideas and fragmentation within the multi-party system does not allow her to work effectively. Also I notice that she gets nervous in public settings and cannot control her temper when dealing with conflicts. (Villager A20, commune A, response to survey, 21/5/2008)

The comments of these people suggested that they were observant, did not take the village/ commune activities for granted, have participated in different settings with those officials,

have clear ideas of how a good leader should behave and are ready to share their opinion as to whether the current system improves or retards local leadership.

Perceptions of the Poor (the Majority)

The majority of families in each of the three communes fell into the category of poor. These families relied on a mixture of livelihoods, including labouring, exploitation of natural resources and farming their own fields. Although they are poor, most of the time they are not desperately so. Most members of this category have little education, in line with the findings of a recent survey by UNESCO and UNDP that found 64 per cent of Cambodian adults illiterate or semi-literate (NIS 2006: 104). Of course, there are important gradations of wealth and status within this category; however, we grouped this category on the hypothesis that they have similar opportunities and constraints in engaging with local politics. They had a less critical perspective on the local political atmosphere, although some had learned who the village chiefs and commune chiefs were.

Many respondents from this group avoided authority figures, although they have good ideas about which officials have been good to them and which have not.

Perceptions of the Vulnerable

The third economic category was the poorest or most vulnerable groups, who put almost all of their attention on their survival because they barely make ends meet. They possess almost no land and often sell their labour for food. When there is no work, they get together in groups, playing cards, chatting or drinking alcohol. This group knows only the village chief and has extremely little knowledge about the commune council. In one of the two studied villages, 12 families were found to be very vulnerable yet were basically unnoticed.

> As you see, we are very poor and we need help. Sometimes we do not bathe for a week because we do not have a well and the neighbours discriminate against us because we are too poor and dirty. No NGO has come to assist us, and we do not know where and who to seek help from. It is extremely hard for us. (Villager, commune B, 12-family group conversation with researchers, 5/6/2008)

The councils tend to ignore such groups and do not want information about them to be leaked to outsiders. While councils cannot do much to improve this situation given the meagre CSF, they appeared to be fearful that knowledge of such miserable conditions would harm their reputation and legitimacy with their parties and outsiders. In the initial meeting with our research team, the commune chief was defensive, stating that the well-being of the people is generally acceptable and not mentioning the case of the 12 families. "In this commune, only a few families in each village are quite poor; the majority are broadly living in appropriate conditions" (commune chief, commune B, interview, 5/6/2008).

Perceptions of Ethnic Chinese and Other Minorities

A look into the ethnic Chinese poses some sharp contrasts to the destitute group above. In our sample, ethnic Chinese tended to ignore the local political issues.

> We live happily here, and there is no problem with our lives. The village and commune chiefs are just OK. We have never had any conflicts, so we never make any contact with them. (Chinese family, A9, commune A, response to survey, 20/3/2008)

However, there were some frustrations among another group. These were people who had been abandoned socially, mainly because they had joined the opposition party. Such families are

kept uninformed about local meetings and development by the village committee. One family in the survey, feeling abandoned and isolated, went as far as converting from Buddhism to Christianity.[4]

The snapshot presented above expresses the variation of perceptions of citizens based on classified social strata and ethnicity. It also shows that there is still little interaction between villagers and local authorities because villagers seek authorities only when there are problems. It is not yet common for them to seek authorities to express demands.

4.2. Who Do Villagers Perceive as Leaders?

Starting from Ledgerwood and Vijghen's (2002) six categories of rural power holders and using surveyed villagers' perspectives, the study discusses and groups rural leaders into four legitimate types: administrative, social/spiritual/religious, economic/political and knowledge and development assistance. Villagers mainly identified these four types when asked to identify those who are able to help, represent, mobilise resources and labour, solve different issues and the like.

4.2.1. Administrative Leaders

During our interviews, we found that villagers used different terms to address their leaders depending on their relationship with them. The most important distinction was between paternalistic leaders and impersonal leaders. The villagers were found to share an idealised image of paternalistic leaders, but this is rarely found in contemporary Cambodia.

"When we encounter any problems, we go to *achnhathor*, who are like our *mae euv*" (villagers, communes A, B and C, responses to survey, various dates). This is a typical statement made by villagers in the three cases. *Achnhathor* are defined as officials who represent state institutions' power and legitimacy, laws and regulations. Villagers normally expect their authorities to act in a way that make them feel warm and cared for, as a parent would their children. They relate authorities to the notion of *mae euv*, a form of traditional figure using love, care, protection and equal (or preferential) treatment in leadership. Villagers in the studied areas imply different meanings when they refer to administrative leaders as *mae euv* and when they refer to them as *achnhathor*. Where villagers regard *achnhathor* as *mae euv*, this implies that the people show a mixture of fear, respect and love. It also implies that the leaders possess both traditional and legal-rational legitimacy. When leaders are regarded as just *achnhathor*, this tells us that the villagers do not like the leaders or are not happy with and do not feel close to them.

> *Achnhathor* and *rod omnach*[5] always squeeze us for money, especially poor villagers. The commune chief doesn't care about us so we don't have respect for her. (Villager C1, commune C, response to survey, 8/4/08).

> When there are issues, we dare approach only those [authorities] we feel warm towards and who treat us well. We know their hearts. If not, we don't go to them or interact with them because we don't trust they will treat us fairly like their children. (Villager C17, commune C, response to survey, 21/3/08).

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4 Part of the reason for this was that many village meetings are held at pagodas and because the family was often not invited, they resolved to seek company with another institution. However, this was a rare case.

5 Also means authorities but sometimes people use this term to include the police as well.

This reflects the importance of personal relationships. It was discussed in the literature review that historically Cambodian villagers are reluctant to interact with authorities because of a mixture of fear and feelings of strict hierarchy. We found that if people were to interact with or trust leaders, they were less hesitant to do so with those whom they were familiar with, in other words those who possessed some kind of traditional legitimacy. The people expect these leaders to conform to the parent-child form of leadership and felt isolated with distant, impersonal leadership (which is actually more a liberal model than an authoritarian one).

Such importance of kinship in translated into the ways villagers refer to their leaders. While they generally expect their leaders to act as *mae-euv*, villagers use a wide range of "family titles" for their leaders to show their different levels of respect for age and/or authority. Oftentimes, leaders are not called by their names alone but are labelled as *ta* (grandpa), *pou* (uncle), *ming* (aunt), etc. Being called Pou X or Pou Y is generally only to show and respect the age difference but for leaders, sometimes even those who are at the same age refers to them as pou or ming. This demonstrates a respect for their authority and it also helps villagers feel closer to their leaders.

Me Phum (Village Chief)

The surveys found that villagers access their village chiefs the most because they perceive them to be more accessible than others such as councillors and that they possess some authority to help with problems such as minor domestic violence, boundary conflicts and signing of paperwork or raising issues to councils. It was also found that villagers access deputy village chiefs and village assistants less often; however, it often happens that villagers refer to any of these three committee members simply as village chiefs.

Villagers are usually not fearful of the village chiefs. In some conflicts, they understand that they cannot expect solutions from the village chiefs but at least feel better when they have their cases heard. In this case the village chiefs are important for the villagers to feel that somebody in authority who is supposed to take care of them is informed about their resentment.

> When we have problems, we do not go anywhere but the *phum* for help because they are the *achnhathor.* If we do not get problems solved, we go up to the commune. (Villager B10, commune B, response to survey, 27/5/2008)

> When we have problems, we just go to the village chiefs. They are like our *mae euv.* (Villager C5, commune C, response to survey, 8/4/2008)

Usually village chiefs are identified as *achnhathor phum* (village authority) or *me phum* (village chief) and sometimes also as *euv*. *Euv* is a term that children traditionally use for their father and which implies love, genuine respect, honesty and also leadership.[6] When referring to village chiefs as *euv,* villagers also see the chief as a senior person with regard to experience and clean reputation. This implies that while the general views of the villagers on village chiefs are positive, their perceptions of different village chiefs may vary according to the leaders' characteristics, personality and responsiveness.

Another term that the people sometimes use for village chiefs is *ta* (grandfather). This word might imply the villagers' respect for the person as an elder who has gained a lot of experience in his work; on the other hand, it might be used only because they are quite old.

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6   *Euv,* besides the generally accepted notion of a father, traditionally means breadwinner or family leader.

During our fieldwork, we found varying types of village chiefs. In the two villages of commune A, the villagers regarded the two chiefs, who had held the position for over 20 years and who are old, as *achnhathor phum* and *ta* (because of their age), but not *euv.* The village chiefs here have not done much during their long leadership, and so people go to them more due to procedural requirements than because of trust or positive expectations.

In commune B, both of the current chiefs had held village leadership positions in the early 1980s but fled to other provinces because of the K5 conscription. They returned only recently and have again taken up village leadership positions. According to the people, one of them was persuaded to resume the position for his past good work, while the other did so because he is the uncle of the current commune chief. As in commune A, the chiefs are called *achnhathor* but not *euv* by the villagers; but it is more meaningful to analyse the chiefs separately. The first takes care of his community well, is transparent and not greedy. Here, the term *ta* to refer to him can be equated with respect of seniority, good work and characteristics. The chief of another village has sold 21 hectares of communal land within just over a year of his new leadership. He is largely disliked and disrespected by the citizens, including his own relatives who were victims of his action, and he is referred to as a bad *achnhathor*.

> "Although we're his niece and nephew, we dislike him because he is a bad *achnhathor* who talks about Buddhist karma but does not care about villagers. He only thinks about land, land, land. Especially these past two years when land prices were going up, he grabbed and sold land and now has about 20 hectares left for his own children. We're [villagers] not his children?" (Villagers, husband and wife, B3, commune B, response to survey, 28/5/2008).

In commune C, the two chiefs differ greatly. One is benevolent—the people call him *euv*; he is a quiet but nice old man. What he says is usually well listened to by the citizens. A good example is he is able to negotiate with people to donate small parts of their rice fields and cut down trees to make way for path construction. The other village chief, who has held the post longer, is an alcoholic. The people refer to him as someone who is there in the authorised position; they show little respect for him.

To conclude, the villagers in all the cases approach their village chiefs mainly because they are *achnhathor* who are closest to them. The implication is that villagers strongly prefer their village chiefs to lean to the informal domain, in which love and care and equal treatment are given in exchange for respect and the acceptance of authority.

Commune Chiefs and Councillors

If villagers fail to have their problems solved at the village level, they usually resort to the commune for help. As at the village level, it is the procedure to do so. The fieldwork shows that villagers refer to councillors as *achnhathor khum* (commune authorities), khum (commune), *krom pruksa khum* (commune councillors), or *me khum*[7] (commune chief). Different terminology which shows different attitudes is used for them as well; while the majority refer to them as *achnhathor*, some describe them as *mae euv*.

Villagers view commune councillors as having more authority and being able to solve more serious problems than village leaders. At the same time, the distance between the people and the commune authorities tends to be greater, for two reasons. Firstly the *achnhathor phum* are

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7   Some villagers refer to any of the commune councillors (sometimes even the clerks) as *me khum.* This could initially be confusing for interviewers.

physically very close to their villages since they reside in the village, whereas the *achnhathor* khum, who have to represent the whole commune, keep more aloof. Also, not all villages have commune representatives. Secondly, village chiefs are more similar to other villagers in wealth and education, while commune councillors are relatively better off and more educated. The lesser familiarity and contact with commune authorities mean that the villagers are more fearful of them than they are of *achnhathor phum*.

> We know the village chief better; he lives in the same village with us. We know the commune chief. He's our uncle. But he lives far from us. He's very rich. We don't feel comfortable going to him. We feel more comfortable seeking the village chief and deputy. We will not go to the commune chief if the village chief can solve the problem. (Villager B4, commune B, response to survey, 28/5/2008)

> If I have a problem I really do not know from whom I can seek help. I only go to the village chief, who is close. (Villager B1, commune B, response to survey, 27/5/2008

> I'm poor. I don't have much knowledge. I'm scared [of commune councillors]. (Villager A5, commune A, response to survey, 20/5/2008)

In the three communes studied, with their varying contexts, different commune leaders and different types of leadership were observed, and these were found to have affected the perceptions of villagers—some feared, others hated, while others loved and respected the authorities in their communes.

In commune A, the transition from a commune led by the CPP to one led by the SRP has brought some changes of perceptions and interaction between the villagers and councillors. Many of the villagers are more familiar with the former chief and so find themselves in an uncomfortable position when they contact the new chief. The new chief, according to the people, is not as active as the former and has not managed to become very close to the villagers (villagers blame this partly on her being a woman).

Constrained by a lack of experience and familiarity with the villagers (because most of the villagers are CPP supporters) and the division among councillors who are affiliated to different political parties, the new chief tends to be quite isolated. To the majority of the villagers, the chief lacks the status of being *mae euv* and is only *achnhathor*. The villagers are reluctant to access the chief, and often resort to the leaders they know better. These include a former commune chief, and former and current councillors they might know.

> Here when we need help, we just go to who we know. We are not familiar with the new commune chief. So we either go to Ming Ngee [a businesswoman and councillor], or one former councillor who's in our village. (Villager A17, commune A, response to survey, 21/3/08)

This implies that while *achnhathor* are important and necessary to get things done, the people still lean towards those they know, who are approachable. However, she has been increasingly approached at her home by poor villagers since she does not charge them fees or high rents for her services. The great efforts made by her to avoid corruption show promise for new faces or women who wish to gain legitimacy and trust.

In commune B, villagers reported that they were happy with the stable commune leadership for both mandates until a serious land grabbing issue by their chief and his clique boiled up. The case is summarised in Box 1.

Box 1: Legitimacy Crisis: Land Grabbing in Commune

Back in the late 1980s, the district authorities assigned the commune authorities to distribute what was formerly communal land to the villagers to make it private property so that people could make productive use of it. The responsibility to distribute land within each village was given to village chiefs. In one of our studied villages, the then chief told the people to wait while the decision was being made on how to distribute the 25 hectares to 105 families within this village. While waiting, villagers used the common land for feeding cows.

Secretly there was a plan to share the land among only a small group of village and commune leader cliques—the above chief, another village chief who replaced him, a former commune chief (now deputy commune chief), the current commune chief and some others working for the village and commune then. In the end, a total of eight families received around three hectares of land each.

As for the villagers, everything was still quiet after years of waiting. However, as enclosures started to be made, they realised what was going on. In 2004, 86 families got together and brought the case to district and provincial levels while another 10 or 11 families kept quiet (since they are closely related to the eight families). The higher authorities were not helpful. They claimed that it would affect them politically if they acted against the village and commune authorities. The villagers were told to drop the case.

However, with the advice of a current councillor from the SRP, villagers brought the case to NGOs and other independent institutions. These were not in a position to help solve this conflict, but villagers were advised that having this group of institutions as witnesses would pressure authorities to take some action.

Two years passed and villagers had given up hope until they decided to make use of a network they had with politicians in Phnom Penh. Several of the villagers were blood relatives of two powerful politicians from the CPP. Following the intervention of these powerful individuals, the district CPP office asked the commune authorities to do something to deal with this issue. As a result, in 2007, a total of 6.5 of the 25 hectares of land was given back to the villagers while each of the eight families still had about 1.5 to two hectares. The 6.5 hectares, however, were bits in different places and were situated furthest from the village roads. People could not really make any use of it, so they decided to sell it and share the money. Because of the location and situation of their land, however, they have not been able to sell it. In the back of their minds, villagers were still disappointed and frustrated with the "resolution" of the case, but they ended the case (or were told to end it) because they knew there was no more they could do.

Although the above case involved a number of actors, the villagers directed their hatred mostly towards the current commune chief. The villagers had voted for him and expected better treatment. They expressed their disillusionment in terms of the ideal of *mae euv*:

> The villagers these days are helpless; it is hopeless to talk about the commune. They do not take care of the people; how can they act as our parents? (Villager B8, commune B, response to survey, 4/6/2008).

The feelings of being cheated and treated unfairly created enormous hatred and distrust towards leaders. And although they received some help from the SRP councillor, they did not trust him

either, nor did they go to him and other councillors, for two main reasons. One is that people are accustomed to going to the commune chief and expect more from the chief than from councillors. Second, in this commune, councillors are involved in land dealing, as a result of rising land prices within the time of study. They have been convincing people to sell their land so that they could get a commission. Such activity instils further distrust.

> Councillors and the clerk are so corrupt. Now, even the two from other parties cannot be trusted. We can no longer go to them. All they do now is act as land brokers. A councillor from FUNCINPEC even continues to convince people to sell their land. We cannot live without land. He knows that! (Villager B1, commune B, response to survey, 27/5/2008).

A related point from the case is that leaders in the knowledge domain—opinion leaders (who in this case were teachers and some older and more knowledgeable villagers)—emerge only when their interests are affected. They function in a very sporadic manner (similar findings were shown in the Justice for the Poor study, World Bank 2006).

The case of commune C is rather different from the other two. The dominance of a CPP patron indirectly shapes the commune leadership in a way that makes the villagers feel safe and satisfied with the status quo. From our analysis, however, the roles of local leaders were limited and quite restricted due to the dominance of the patron, who is a top official working in areas related to agriculture. His interest in this commune stems not only from his official roles. Like political patrons in the other two communes, he has family background and connections with the commune or the district or province he is put in charge of. Perhaps this interest made him, even without official appointment, "look after" the province or commune and choose to take on informal responsibility to ensure votes for the CPP. The only difference he has from other patrons in the two other communes is that he contributes more to commune development and takes better care of the villagers, while other patrons contribute more to village/commune destruction for their personal interests.

In this particular commune, the patron warns all the councillors from his party not to displease the people and to ensure security; he closely watches his councillors' performance.

> Here, we have to listen to and please the people; we are told [by our party patron] to do so. (Ta Deng, village chief, commune C, conversation between village committee and researchers, 7/4/2008).

> When villagers refuse to contribute money to local projects, we cannot say anything to them; H.E. [patron] wouldn't be happy. But he also mentioned that we can always request from him the amount of money we couldn't collect from villagers. (Ming Yet, deputy village chief, commune C, conversation between village committee and researchers, 7/4/2008).

The patron keeps very close contact with the villagers and often visits the area during his free time and at weekends. The assistance he provides to the commune causes villagers to view him and the councillors very positively. Villagers consider him as an indirect patron and are proud and confident that they can seek his help when necessary. An interesting point is that the villagers do not point out any outstanding individuals among commune councillors but view them all as acceptable.

A key issue is the sustainability of such assistance. Although this particular patron has both formal and personal interests in promoting agriculture and livelihoods of people in this commune, such assistance is still mainly driven by the ruling party to consolidate its power by keeping villagers and authorities dependent. Such informal, off-budget party support may be promising in the short term and as a response to immediate needs of the poor and needy, but it comes with great costs, especially for the poor.

To sum up, for the villagers, good *achnhathor* are like their *mae euv* and should the *achnhathor* fail to fulfil such expectations, that causes distrust and disappointment. Moreover, villagers in general fear change and it takes quite a time and effort for new leaders to prove themselves and be accepted. People prefer to go to those they are familiar with or trust. But at the same time, if these familiar faces are involved in malicious acts, then relations between the people and authorities become even worse than between the people and new leaders. This is not just a problem of lack of familiarity and reluctance to engage; it is also a relationship characterised by hatred and frustration from being deceived. In such cases, people prefer new faces and the promise of better leadership (this is clearly shown in commune A, where people voted against the hated top candidate from the CPP and for a new face from the SRP who promised to be on the villagers' side in a conflict with a concession company).

In addition, in the case of old faces, although generally people are happy (as in commune C) under patronage control, the role, independence and function of councillors are undermined.

4.2.2. Religious, Social and Spiritual Leaders

The survey revealed that two kinds of leaders dominate traditional local leadership—*chas tum* and *achar*. It is hard to distinguish one from another because their roles and work overlap. In all cases, the respected *chas tum* are Buddhists, and the majority of them were educated in pagodas. Most of the time they are affiliated with a *wat*.[8] At the same time, the religious leaders or *achar* are also *chas tum* as they are often elders in a village. Some of them are able to perform magic rituals to treat sick children. With such overlaps of status and roles and because they contribute to solving problems, this study decided to place them in one group.

As discussed above, many village chiefs also belong in the elders category. The *chas tum* side helps them be effective in leading because they are listened to by the people. But at the same time, from observations of this study, it also restricts what they can do because the capacity and experience of many of them are limited.

The role and importance of *achar* and especially *chas tum* were found to vary with setting.

In commune A, which in recent years has experienced dramatic forest extraction and attracted a lot of migrants, elders were eclipsed.[9] However, a national politician with serious interest in the commune is influential and provides big contributions to the commune pagoda. As a result, one *achar* is becoming famous among villagers because he was able to mobilise enormous resources for the building of a local temple within four years. However, the *achar* largely focuses on pagoda development, with little or no attention ever given to the public sphere.

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8 A difference between *achar* or *chas tum* and monks should be noted (Kim 2006). In accordance with Buddhist principle, the worshippers together with the elders and *achar* offer materials or various contributions to the *wat* with the expectation of gaining merit in return, while the monks are the vehicle to distribute contributions and return merit to the contributors.

9 Cambodian villages were marked by strong kinship but with migrants and fierce competition for resource extraction, the bond of kinship fades. This makes elders unimportant since those not within their kin do not wish to listen to them.

In communes B and C, the picture is different. With little migration, both *chas tum* and *achar* are quite significant. Their significance is partly attributed to strong kinship ties within the villages. They view development in the public sphere as equally important as in the religious one and are quite active in mobilising and leading works for pagodas and community development.

> In this commune, you know, we listen to *chas tum* very much. For example, when Ta Art and his team raised the idea of paving the local paths, we all participated. They are also good role models because they are old but they work with us in paving the roads. They do not just speak. Their family members also join. So in this commune, we can do many works fast and effectively. (Villager C4, commune C, response to survey, 8/4/2008)

In these villages, elders are often sought out not only by villagers but very often by village and especially commune authorities with regard to historical facts on commune boundaries and geography. Commune authorities need the information to solve conflicts as well as for development planning.

These traditional leaders play humble but significant roles. First of all, they play a complementary developmental role to councillors. Second, they are a social buffer for political, administrative and economic changes. Their advice and opinions are sought by ordinary villagers and leaders. They also create confidence and a form of spiritual support for the villagers. Therefore, in one way or another, they help stabilise the community. An essential point is that such traditional leaders are significant only in kin-knit communities. It can be concluded that patronage, kinship and hierarchy are embedded in the people's perceptions and are part of their lives.

4.2.3. Economic-Political Leaders

The survey and interviews elucidate two broad types of business leaders—one category are extremely rich business people who keep a distance between themselves and the community, and the other are local big men who blend at the grass roots with ordinary villagers.

The Aloof Type

These leaders generally distance themselves from common citizens and local authorities. They are usually the richest in their communities and have beautiful houses or villas and own luxurious cars, large plots of land and multiple businesses. These people are called *oknha* or *thauke* by the villagers. The study found some prominent *thauke* in all communes but the one in commune B, the owner of an irrigation business, was situated in a village not included in the study's sample and was not considered a leader by villagers. Likewise, one of those in commune C, a construction company owner, who was closely related to the commune chief and higher ranking officials and received preferential treatments in his business, was also not considered a leader since he not only kept aloof but also did not contribute to local development projects or provide assistance to the commune and villages.

In commune A, an *oknha* called *Thauke Tou* was mentioned very often by villagers. Villagers were very fond of him, especially for his large contributions to commune road building and to pagodas and other projects. He dominates local development and political settings. He owns about 1000 hectares of rubber plantation and has a big road construction business which owns a number of big and expensive machines. His logging and rubber plantation business contributes remarkably to commune resource destruction and to denying villagers access to common resources, but because of the generous contributions and assistance he usually provides to the commune, he is viewed positively.

From the villagers' side, they are often afraid to come close to such economically powerful people. These leaders from time to time provide financial and material assistance to village development or religious activities when asked, but they tend to be quiet and let their money do the talking.

> *Thauke Tou* is a very quiet and humble person. He just walks alone and does his work, but you see this road in front of us? It was renovated by him, everybody knows that. (Villager A1, commune A, response to survey, 20/3/2008)

In a different case, as a result of rising land prices in recent years, one rich individual in commune B bought many plots of land and produced some infrastructure such as good roads leading to his land, but these achievements are not appreciated by the villagers. It was a one-off contribution, and he had left the commune to become a politician in Phnom Penh, so the people saw him as a person only interested in self-enrichment rather than a leader. Similarly, a Chinese company exporting monkeys also helped construct some local roads for its transportation needs but was hated by villagers, both for the nature of its business and for not contributing in any other form to local development.

In commune C there is a dominant gas seller who, although he does not project himself as as strong as the *oknha* in commune A, puts himself above village and commune authorities. He rarely comes into contact with them but stays well connected with higher authorities in order to seek favours from them for his business. He is appreciated by villagers, who consider him their economic leader since he contributes money to local development projects. Another gas seller was mentioned by some villagers, but negatively because he didn't contribute to local development. People here are much more appreciative of the ruling party national patron, who takes care of them and contributes to both hard and soft infrastructure of the commune.

> H.E. is our leader from outside the commune. He often visits our villages to provide gifts and other assistance in the name of his party. (Villager C1, commune C, response to survey, 8/4/2008).
>
> H.E. helps us a lot on road building, training, dams. (Villager C4, commune C, response to survey, 8/4/2008)

The finding is consistent with a Khmer saying, "The rich who take care of the poor are like the sarong that surrounds a body". This implies that it is socially compulsory for the rich to take care of the poor, particularly financially; if they do not fulfil that obligation, they will be socially shamed. The implication for rural Cambodian leadership is that a leader does not have to lead people, but as long as s/he acts generously to the people, will be viewed as a leader.

These economic leaders are most influential. They are able to exert influence from villagers to local and higher authorities without much trouble. One villager in commune A describes the local oknha: "This leader's spit is very salty. His spit is not just made of salt; it is mixed with *prahok.*"[10]

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10 *Prahok* is made from fermented fish and is extremely salty.

Box 2: Life Story of Oknha Tou in Commune A

Thauke Tou is now known more widely as *Oknha* Tou to villagers after the government gave him the new title. He is now one of province A's biggest names and may be the most powerful in the forestry and rubber business.

Oknha Tou was born in commune A. He and his five siblings were raised here until their parents died. Now two of his sisters live in the USA and three remain in the home village. The family is the wealthiest in the commune, with the most prominent houses and large pieces of land. They are of Chinese descent and engage in various business activities. The family is also well educated compared to typical families in the commune. *Oknha* Tou finished high school.

After the Khmer Rouge, in late 1982, *Oknha* Tou started to work at the provincial Department of Transportation. He was assigned to manage a large passenger boat that could accommodate 400–500 people, which also enabled him to trade in petrol and gas from the border.

A new opportunity came in 1989, when he was contracted to be a representative and a stakeholder in a forestry venture between a concession company and the government. He resigned from his official position to participate in this business. The concession owns 120,000 hectares of land and provides raw timber to many countries, including China. The land spreads across five communes of province A. The concession deal ended in 1997, but recently he received 15,000 hectares as an economic land concession. He said about 1000 hectares of that land belongs to him. He has now started to work on the land and turn it into rubber plantation, although this has brought him into conflict with villagers since the concession covers areas that have traditionally been used as common resources. This conflict arose when he fenced the area to keep villagers out. In our interview, he described villagers as "thieves stealing my land".

Oknha Tou's current project is related to national road rehabilitation. At the time of our fieldwork, he had won a bid to construct a national road, and we observed that the work had started. This is not new to him. He had previously renovated many kilometres of road in the commune and across several communes within the province that cost him not less than USD150,000, which was why he was awarded the title of oknha. More specifically, he claimed to have built a 25-kilometre road, built a junior high school office and to be planning to construct a 22-metre bridge. To build this bridge, *Oknha* Tou will fill in some land which costs about USD50,000 and donate steel, while other expenses will be covered by the provincial Department of Public Works. Commune councils were informed about the bridge plan but were not engaged in the planning.

He and his family are also active in local *wat* activities. They are seen as generous and have contributed financially to religious ceremonies both from his personal finances and from his network, including the national patron in charge of this province. Some years back, his family donated an old house to the local pagoda, which is now used as a meal hall. He is always approached by elders and *achar* for contributions and is resourceful in mobilising his network and requesting money from those big men for the *wat*. We were also told that he often hosts provincial and national politicians who come to the area.

Politically, *Oknha* Tou has developed close relationships with provincial and national figures although he wants to avoid official duties. In the 2002 commune election, he lobbied the CPP to have his older brother (who is also his business partner) listed as top candidate. His brother was elected, but was removed from the 2007 list because *Oknha* Tou challenged the district governor for ownership of a road that the district wanted to claim. Other factors as well (land conflicts and weak new candidates) caused the CPP to lose the election in 2007. We were told that the district governor was later fired. *Oknha* Tou himself mentioned that although he was not interested in politics then, he might consider a governorship in the future.

Oknha Tou now mainly devotes his time and attention to his many business ventures, including those in his children's names. His children own construction and household utensil companies. *Oknha* Tou sees himself and acts as a businessman who refers to and make connections with his peers and central officials rather than to people and activities in the commune.

Grass-Roots Local Leaders

Another type of business leader is those who are closer to their community; they are not as rich as the above type but are better off than most villagers (possessing more land and farming equipment, running businesses). After recent co-option into local politics, many have official status. Such leaders stay mingled with the people and have "salty spit" in their villages.

In commune A, a female leader was found to be outstanding among the other leaders mentioned by the villagers. Although a widow, she became richer than her neighbours and has built a big house and owns some ceremonial equipment for hire. She is also a moneylender and is often counted on by her neighbours. Her status and popularity as an economic patron have won her attention from the CPP, and she was recently co-opted to join the party and was elected to be a councillor in 2007.

Similarly, in commune B, a rich farmer, popular among villagers, was in 2002 co-opted into the CPP and eventually the commune council. He is very knowledgeable and very active in representing and mobilising villagers in conflicts, for example in an upstream-downstream water conflict and in a case of land grabbing by a former (now deputy) commune chief. He still remains active and popular, heading many village and commune community organisations, but no longer mobilises people against corrupt acts.

The significance of economic-political leaders can be drawn from the above discussion. First, the aloof types tend to emerge in rich natural resource settings and, second, their influence on local politics is substantial, causing the marginalisation of local administrative leaders. Another issue arising is that decentralisation is co-opting the villagers' respected grass-roots economic leaders, regardless of their sex, into local politics. Once they have formal status, these leaders could become more influential as seen in commune A. However, their sphere of influence and ability to mobilise villagers against, for example, corrupt action by local authorities, is at the same time undermined and eventually quashed.

4.2.4. Knowledge and Development Assistance

Generally, although they give them respect, people do not consider those with high knowledge such as teachers and civil servants as their leaders.

NGOs and CBOs appear insignificant from the villagers' perspective. People look to NGOs only as sources of finance and material assistance rather than as those they can resort to when they have problems. They say that they have lost trust in these NGOs, particularly human rights NGOs, which have not managed to solve their problems. Villagers also see CBOs as not having appropriate power to deal with their problems.

> In this village, we have received wells and latrines from *angkar* (NGOs). *Angkar* have helped set up saving associations. They are important, but when the commune chief took our communal land, human rights NGOs came but could not help. (Villager B9, commune B, response to survey, 4/6/2008)

One CBO is established in commune A, a fishery community. Within the management team, a deputy village chief serves as the secretary on a voluntary basis. Only a few people recognise the existence of this inactive CBO, and they see it as largely irrelevant to their daily activities.

In this commune a former village nurse trained during the Khmer Rouge period had been volunteering with the Cambodian Red Cross. Her basic medical experience has helped her to achieve relatively good status in the community. In 2007, co-opted into local politics, she stood

in the commune election; although she failed to win a seat, she has been offered the position of village assistant.

A few NGOs provide assistance to commune B in the form of infrastructure such as wells and latrines. The people appreciate the achievements brought into their community, but they barely know the NGOs' staff and leaders and do not resort to them for help.

Second to the big national patron, one NGO (Cambodian Centre for Study and Development in Agriculture) dominates the assistance provided in commune C. It assists with soft infrastructure such as training villagers in new techniques of growing rice, mechanical skills and sewing. Similarly to those in commune B, the villagers find the technical support useful and complementary to their traditional skills but do not consider any of the staff working with the project, from either outside or inside the commune, as their leaders.

In short, although NGOs and CBOs are seen as playing a key role in the provision of material and technical assistance, they are of little importance when it comes to representing the people or finding solutions to their social problems. However, in some cases there is a grey area between administrative leaders and those within this domain. For instance, in one case, a former NGO worker has been co-opted into local politics, and in another some local (especially village) administrative leaders are also CBO leaders.

4.2.5. Female Leaders

This study found some active and significant female leaders, but it also found that the number of women is still small and there are barriers limiting their potential contribution to local leadership.

In all three communes, the gender focal persons, who are supposed to work alongside the councils to promote work related to women and children, were never in their offices during the time of our fieldwork. It was found from the study that they were appointed by councils based on kinship or sympathy rather than proven performance or ability. Moreover, there were no gender projects raised or implemented by councils and so there were actually no real works for the gender focal persons to carry out.

In commune A, villagers identified one outstanding female councillor, one active village assistant (nurse) and the female commune chief as their leaders. Both of the female commune leaders are divorced.

> I sent her name to the commune council because she was related to me, and since she was a widow and poor, it would help her get a salary. She is not effective, is slow and not smart, but I just let her do petty work. Other work I still do and let her have time to do small business to feed her children. I chose her because she listens to me and is easy to use. (Pou Chin, village chief, commune B, interview, 30/5/2008).

> She [the above village assistant] assists the village chief, collecting local contributions, passing on information. But her role is limited. She is active but is stupid. She listens to everything the village chief says or orders her to do. She doesn't know how to explain information to people. (Villager, B1, commune B, response to survey, 27/5/2008).

In terms of legitimacy, while the chief was co-opted into the opposition party because of her knowledge and background as a teacher, ambitious personality and passion to join politics with the opposition party, the councillor was identified by the ruling party because of her bravery

and popularity among the people as an economic grass-roots leader, indicating different criteria and opportunities for women among different parties. The stories also depict the lack of support for women in politics from men and the consequent social problems that affect women's social standing.

Commune B does not have any female commune leaders. Moreover, the female village leaders chosen by the village chiefs with the approval of the commune chief and the female focal person chosen by the commune councillors were not selected based on relevant capacity, popularity, performance or ambition.

Box 3: Life Story of the Chief of Commune A

The 46-year-old divorced commune chief, with three children under her supervision, was born and grew up in the studied province and took up her primary teaching job between 1985 and 1995. In 1996, with her strong nationalistic will, she joined the SRP as the head of the women's movement for the province and as a member of the party's provincial council.

She was actively involved in mobilising village activists for the party and assisted in setting up party commune, district and provincial structures. Her involvement in the public and political spheres did not gain support from her husband; he was often jealous, insisting she stay at home. The relationship went sour and they were divorced so that she could have the freedom to pursue her political life. However, she noted that although an enthusiastic and motivated party activist, she did not want to be a councillor but wanted to act behind the scenes; however, since her party found nobody appropriate to stand for election, she was persuaded to take the responsibility.

Her commune leadership work suffers in many aspects, sitting between fires. First, as noted in the analytical section, the opposition won the election by chance; the majority of local citizens are not opposition supporters. Running the commune without having won the people's hearts poses great challenges. Secondly, the CPP councillors do not cooperate well with her. Third, compared with her male counterparts who have extensive experience in commune and village work, she lacks practical know-how in managing commune work. Fourth, the powerful economic land concession company (supported by the local oknha) does not inform the commune about the boundaries of the concession and the housing areas, creating confusion and conflicts between the people and the concessionaire. Given the commune's limited power, she does not manage to resolve most land conflicts, leaving the villagers with a poor image of her. Fifth, she receives little financial or technical support from her poor political party. Lastly, the people's lack of familiarity with her as a new commune chief and the fact that she is a woman (who cannot mingle well with the villagers and stay late at night as the previous commune chief did) provide her little room to gain trust from the people, at least in the short run.

A small note is that she is praised for not being corrupt; however, this exacerbates the poor collaboration with her CPP counterparts, who are used to practising petty corruption.

Box 4: Life Story of the Woman Councillor

The 52-year-old female councillor is a widow with five dependent children. The ethnically Chinese descendant, who reached seventh grade before the war, was elected a councillor in 2007 and is currently a member of the local *wat* committee. The widow makes her living out of leasing utensils and equipment for Khmer ceremonies and by lending money and farming her 1.7 hectares of land. Her relatively high economic status allows her to support her children with ease, and she has time to be involved in local affairs such as resolving minor conflicts and collecting contributions for *wat* development and activities.

She is known as a strong, outspoken woman, who has the courage to deal with the local violent men who beat their wives and who challenged CPP district officials over the nomination of a 2007 commune council candidate who should not have been selected to stand for chief position. Her reputation, her economic power and the good networks she has built with commune councillors paved the way for her to be selected as deputy village chief in 2007 and subsequently elected as commune councillor in the same year

As a councillor, she is assigned to take charge of gender issues, which involves disseminating information and conducting gender training. She works hard to represent her village in competing with other villages to get dams and other development projects (school and pagoda building). Her idea is for her village to "be ahead of others". She engages with the local police to charge smaller fees from the people and challenges police who take bribes from offenders.

She thinks she has salty spit and that villagers respect and listen to her because she is honest. "If we are bad, we cannot retain trust from the people, not for more than two years", she said. She feels that she is caring and dares to advocate good things for her commune and village. She suffered a lot in her married life; her husband did not take care of her well but had a mistress, which led to the divorce that gave her room to pursue her social goals, especially rescuing women victims.

We recruited the current commune gender focal person because she used to be involved in commune work in the former regime and the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs had got to know her. In fact her capacity is limited; she is not active and she is often sick. We pity her; otherwise we would recruit another person. (Pou Nov, commune chief, commune B, interview, 30/5/2008)

Such conduct undermines women leaders, causing them to be seen as lacking the knowledge and capacity to lead and as not worth considering for top positions.

In commune C, the current female commune chief and two extremely outspoken village committee members were identified by villagers as their leaders. Of these, the first is a widow, another is single, and the last one is the wife of a commune councillor.

What we can see here is the gradual acceptance of women not only in the commune but also in the village. That can be translated into increased gender awareness in the local arena, and their involvement is likely to bear more fruit in the foreseeable future despite the challenges inherent in Khmer tradition and culture. However, in the current phase, there is still a scarcity of women in politics and local leadership. The major trend is that women leaders are divorced, single or

relieved from family burdens. These function as adverse selection criteria. At the same time, it is more difficult to retain women leaders due to the constraints and barriers posed for them.

4.2.6. Conclusion

There are different types of leaders in different domains as perceived by villagers. Villagers prefer to contact administrative leaders more often than other types because they believe that these leaders possess the official authority to resolve their problems. These authorities are expected to bend themselves to fit the local context because villagers prefer those they feel close to and more comfortable with. For advice and consultation, they access traditional leaders while NGO and CBOs are virtually non-functional as leaders, according to the interviewed villagers. Economic-political leaders are important in providing financial and material support that villagers and authorities alike depend on. Moreover, national patrons exist in every commune studied. They watch over the commune and influence its politics, but not all are appreciated or considered leaders. The different leaders above are important in helping villagers in one way or another. However, for some, the help comes with costs that might greatly exceed benefits even though villagers may not admit or recognise it.

We have seen increased co-option and representation of leaders from different domains. As women leaders are being increasingly included in local leadership, we also see co-option of traditional leaders such as elders, *achar* and other popular grass-roots leaders into politics, via participating in local administration or via party support and financing. More discussion of the reasons and implications of this is included below.

4.3. Characteristics of Leaders

This section addresses the characteristics of leaders, including their education, age and experience and gender. Do Cambodian leaders share a particular profile? Do any or all of these characteristics determine an individual's chances of becoming a leader? Each section will look at the varying characteristics across different strata of leaders. Eventually we will blend all four factors so that specific conclusions can be drawn.

4.3.1. Education

Is education an important prerequisite for attaining local official positions? Is it significant for state leaders in gaining legitimacy? What types of leaders tend to have more education?

4.3.1.1. Administrative Leaders

The LAMC stipulates that Khmer citizens who are able to read and write Khmer script are eligible to stand for the commune/*sangkat* elections—meaning that a minimum primary education is sufficient. In this study, it was found that 40 percent of the councillors in the three communes have primary education, while the other 60 percent have attended (although not necessarily finished) either junior or senior high school. Village leaders' level of education is lower than councillors'; 71 percent of interviewed leaders have primary education and only 29 percent have attended either junior or senior high school.

Our survey indicated that from the people's perspective, education of councillors, especially the chief, is quite an important factor to gain legitimacy and trust.

> The commune chief is a former teacher, an educated person. It is important for such a leader to have good education. (Villager A21, commune A, response to survey, 21/5/2008)

> The commune leaders are not knowledgeable. How can they initiate [activities] or lead the commune? (A local rich villager, C6, commune C, interview, 8/4/2008)

While other characteristics besides education count in people's views of good leaders, these quotes indicates that villagers give at least some value to leaders' education.

4.3.1.2. Religious, Spiritual and Social Leaders

The picture is a bit different for traditional leaders. The majority of them were trained in pagodas, which, in addition to literacy, focus on ethics and are religion-based. Some of the elders have joined the monkhood, which usually equips them with even more religious education. Their knowledge qualifies them to give advice on life issues, and for this reason they tend to possess more traditional authoritative legitimacy than administrative leaders.

4.3.1.3. Economic-Political Leaders

The *oknha* in commune A was one of two leaders within the three studied communes who had the highest education. This reflects the cycle of the rich: with wealth they can get good education, and good education returns wealth. Less rich economic leaders, the grass-roots economic leaders, have an educational level similar to that of administrative leaders. In this case, characteristics other than education are given more weight.

4.3.1.4. Conclusion

The three surveys indicated that education is important, especially, for administrative leaders, to gain position and legitimacy. The villagers give value to leaders who are educated, used to be teachers or have joined the monkhood (particularly for traditional leaders). Education is necessary but not sufficient. Many administrative leaders find themselves using Buddhist principles to solve issues, for instance villagers' refusal to pay local contributions. or in conflicts.

> I cannot use the law alone to solve conflicts. I have to use some law and some non-law strategies such as conscience. One of the most effective strategies is to use Buddhist principles and the law of karma to explain to them [villagers in conflict]. (Pou Van, second deputy chief, commune A, 25/4/2008)

While grass-roots economic leaders have varied levels of education, this shows that the economic and administrative leaders gained their legitimacy among villagers and political parties more from their informal status than from their outstanding education. Aloof economic leaders tend to have much better education than other leaders, and they have wider /networks to get important information. This allows them not to respect councils and occasionally to bypass them.

4.3.2. Age and Experience

The LAMC specifies that Khmer citizens who are at least 25 years of age are eligible to stand for election. In reality, councillors tend to be much older than the required minimum. Among the leaders identified in the three communes, 76 percent are aged 50 years or more. The finding is consistent with a survey from PACT (2008) which showed that 77 percent of the 390 councillors studied were above 49 years of age. An age difference was also observed between councillors from different political parties, those affiliated with the ruling party being older than others. Broadly, women leaders (councillors and village committee members) are younger; around half of them were aged below 49.

Chas tum and *achar*, given their title and status, are on average older than most administrative leaders even though some of the administrative leaders also belong in this age group. The majority of *chas tum* and *achar* are 60 years old or above.

Economic leaders tend to be younger than their administrative counterparts; they are seen to be newly emerging leaders. While the study is not representative, the two prominent economic leaders we studied are younger than the administrative leaders.

What needs to be discussed in terms of experience is the issue of "old wine in new bottles". Most of the current administrative leaders are those who have held some position in the public domain since 1979—village chief, deputy village chief, teachers, militiamen, group leaders, local association leaders, civil servants. Others even held leadership roles during the Khmer Rouge period; for example, a current village chief in commune C was selected by the Khmer Rouge to be chief of the same village, while an *achar* in commune B was a prison head. It was found that this was truer for leaders affiliated with the ruling party than others. Leaders from other parties were younger and had less historical involvement in village or commune leadership during former regimes. They came more from a knowledge domain or ordinary villager background.

Women leaders, although lacking prior experience working for villages and communes, have similar traits of involvement before becoming local authorities. Of the two commune chiefs and one councillor in the three communes, one had worked for the commune since 1979, another was a business woman and the other was a teacher. Two had spent some time serving their party up to 2007, when they started to work for the commune. The majority of women village committee members had not worked for the village prior to 2007, although some had been involved with NGO work and others were related to current or previous leaders.

The table depicts the common administrative experience of leaders in commune A (which was similar to other communes studied), especially of men leaders, which helps them gain leadership positions and legitimacy from the parties and people. Women leaders in this commune have only started to be involved in administrative work since 2000. The positions of village chiefs in particular have remained remarkably stable since 1979 or the early 1980s.

It is observed to be an advantage for leaders to have been leaders for some time, since they obtain knowledge about the history of the commune, including land distribution and tenure, overall characteristics and the nature of commune and village administrative work. New faces have difficulty dealing with some aspects of commune work and land and other conflicts because they are not familiar with local history. The new commune chief occasionally resorts to other councillors, former councillors or elders for information.

Traditional leaders' knowledge about commune or village history is important for legitimacy as respected elders since sometimes the current state leaders approach them for information when conflicts occur or to identify priorities for development planning.

> I used to be a village militiaman and was deeply involved in land distribution with the concerned officials; hence I am fully aware of the surface area of the village, the lakes, the rice fields and the forest areas. A couple of months ago, at the commune chief's request, I provided him with land boundary information useful for resolving land conflicts. (*Achar*, commune B, interview, 29/5/2008)

Table 1. History of Leaders in Commune A

No.	Name	Position	Age	Work History		
1	Keang	Former commune chief	69	1979–2001: commune chief	2002–07: first deputy commune chief	Present: farmer
2	Seth	Former councillor	57	Deputy village chief; 3rd deputy commune chief	2002–07: councillor	Present: natural resource management adviser to commune council
3	Suon	Former council chief	58	1983–87: group leader	2002–07: council chief	2007-present: plantation owner
4	Rany (F)	Commune chief	46	1986–95: primary school teacher	1996–2006: SRP advocate	2007-present: commune chief
5	Chun	1st deputy commune chief	62	Up to 2005: head of District Department of Education	2005-2006: deputy village chief	2007-present: 1st deputy commune chief
6	Ngee (F)	Councillor	52	Early 2000: deputy village chief	2007-present: councillor	
7	Van	2nd deputy commune chief	54	Village militia	Commune chief of commerce	2007–present: 2nd deputy commune chief
8	Sum	Chief of village A1	62	1979–present: village chief		
9	Soeun	Chief of village A2	59	1985–present: village chief		
10	Mao	Deputy chief of village A2	53		2004–present: head of a fisheries community	2007–present: deputy village chief
11	Bopha (F)	Deputy chief of village A1	49	Up to 2003: group leader	2007–present: deputy village chief	
12	Yan (F)	Village nurse/ village assistant	51	1994–present: volunteer for NGOs		2007–present: village focal person
13	Tou	*Oknha* / businessman		1982–89: provincial Department of Transportation	1990–present: businessman	
14	Phou	Achar	81	During the KR time: carpenter	1979: farmer	*Achar* for 17 years
15	Visoth	Elder	72	Group leader and village chief (he didn't remember the time)	Elder	

> In planning, we invite village committees and villager representatives such as elders to attend and we get their ideas and opinions before we introduce a project in a location because they have lots of experience and knowledge about farm land and the villages. (Pou Chhan, first deputy commune chief, FUNCINPEC, commune B, interview, 29/05/2008).

Economic leaders had business experience that had won them good connections and rapport with many different actors. Interviews with the aloof *oknha* indicated that he had worked with a provincial department before becoming the biggest and perhaps richest businessman in his commune. Many grass-roots economic leaders, however, do not have much prior experience with administrative work. Their co-option can be a win-win strategy for the grass-roots leaders and the political party. For the leaders it is an opportunity to be involved in something new with perhaps better status, and for some an opportunity to build good networks for their business. For the party, these people's popularity and wide recognition help boost legitimacy. However, the result is ambiguous for villagers because it depends on the co-opted leaders' views and whether or not they wish to shape the agenda to benefit the people.

The discussion on leaders' age and experience revealed that age and experience mingle quite well together. From field data and observation we know that older and experienced people are not selected by accident. Although the law sets a minimum age requirement of 25 for standing for commune election, the majority of councillors surveyed were aged double the minimum. One reason for this is that younger villagers are not attracted to the pay package. During our fieldwork, most young villagers were not present because they were working elsewhere. The political parties, particularly the CPP, prioritise middle-aged people who have gone through the former regimes (1980s and 1990s). While younger villagers are unconvinced they should enter local politics, the older ones claimed that they feel grateful to the CPP for rescuing them from the Khmer Rouge. In addition, they feel they are also experienced in various administrative issues and knowledgeable about their locality. Seniority is also a vital feature for gaining trust and respect from the people. Interviews with villagers indicated that they prefer to be led by people they are familiar with.

Change can be positive while continuity can be bad. Our field data reveal that in a commune where the same people ruled for both commune mandates (some have been ruling since 1979), power abuse and use of absolute power started to take place specifically in the last two years. More than this, the villagers often accused the commune chief and the clerk of taking some work home, particularly when it relates to land deals, so that they do not have to share the rent with other councillors (each reportedly earns USD50 per land sale). In another commune, the situation looks different. The new chief, who is from the SRP and had never worked for the commune prior to 2002, strives to be on villagers' side against a logging company, and the people appreciate that her leadership does not allow any corrupt action.

The sharp contrast here elucidates that while the villagers in general prefer the same leaders, where there is a change of leaders there appears to be less antagonism than where the leaders are not changed, engendering unfair and corrupt activities. While villagers prefer old faces, they expect good leadership as well. New faces brought in by decentralisation could, with time and performance, gain legitimacy and acceptance. It might just be a matter of time and testing.

4.3.3. Gender

Leadership in Cambodia has historically been male-dominant. Recently, there has been an increase in the percentage of women in commune councils and in village committees, in which women make up one-third of the leadership. Interviews with villagers and current leaders show that some villagers and leaders alike are increasingly supporting women in leadership as long as they are equipped with appropriate capacity.

Despite these positive signs, local leadership is still currently largely male, while many villagers and local leaders still feel unaccustomed to and unconvinced about women in politics.

> Villagers do not much appreciate having a woman as leader because they don't know her much and she has not built any previous achievement. Problems happen day and night. A commune chief has to be able to go and solve or intervene, but a woman chief cannot go at night. A woman cannot be the chief overseeing all aspects of the commune because she cannot always be there for villagers, so they don't feel warm. She is OK being a councillor but not a chief. (Pou Keang, former commune chief and councillor, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008).

Although this quote might show a degree of jealousy towards the commune chief for taking over the office and being from a different party, it still reveals a real view on women leaders.

From the three communes, of a total of 15 councillors, only three are women. Although this percentage is consistent with the increase of women councillors country-wide, it indicates that more needs to be done for true representation. Among chas tum, there was only one woman identified, and she was recognised only for her help in solving a land conflict with local authorities because she was related to a high official in Phnom Penh, not for her outstanding activities within the village, including assistance at the local *wat*. Since Khmer women play a crucial role in economic activities, it might be expected that more economic leaders would be women. On the contrary, we found only one woman economic leader who was recently co-opted into politics. While men economic leaders are identified by villagers as *thauke* (boss), she was identified by a word generally used to refer to a Chinese businesswoman.

4.3.4. Conclusion

It was found that part of a leader's legitimacy lies in education or knowledge of the commune and of Buddhist ethics, which can be used to help in tasks such as filling out forms, giving advice on administrative issues and solving conflicts. Overall, traditional characteristics of leaders such as their age remain an important determinant of legitimacy, however. In addition, political parties, especially the ruling party, rather than promoting legal-rational legitimacy, are co-opting leaders with traditional legitimacy into local politics to boost their legitimacy.

Traditionally, leaders in commune C are older men, with a thorough Buddhist education and some formal secular education too, whose authority was respected by virtue of their age, wisdom and experience. In such traditional leadership, authority inheres in the person rather than the office. Legal-rational authority, by contrast, inheres in the office rather than the person. In our case studies we found that the two forms have become fused. As the young leaders appointed in the early 1980s have aged, and as voting has softened the coercive practices of the past, these leaders came to resemble traditional leaders more closely.

As local leaders are starting to look more traditional, it may increase their legitimacy. However, this is not so where there are big conflicts (e.g. councillors are hated in commune B, and in

commune C the older CPP candidate working with the district Higher Education Department was voted out in favour of a woman).

Still, a range of constraints makes it difficult for non-traditional leaders to get into leadership positions. Family burdens for women and ideas about restrictions on women's movements and opportunities for networking are a particular problem for women getting into these positions.

4.4. Networks

This section explores the significance of leaders' networks—how they contribute to leaders' getting positions and legitimising themselves. It then looks at the variation from one type of leader to another—how the importance and necessity of networks differ from one category to another. Overall this study found that the ruling party networks tightly and reaches all aspects of village life. It is associated with almost all actors within each commune and village and acts as the centre of village life.

4.4.1. Administrative Leaders

The patronage system is found to be pervasive. Most councillors and all the village committee members studied were CPP-affiliated. The complexity of their alliances and networks allows some local CPP members an advantage in getting commune positions—which prevents some potentially good leaders from rising and opens the way for less benevolent local figures to take up positions. The networks of administrative leaders are discussed below, by commune.

Box 5 implies that while candidates may possess relevant leader characteristics and legitimacy among the people, they need to attach themselves to the right network to get positions and have a chance to seek legitimacy. Networks are necessary to squeeze into politics, but our findings in this commune are that leaders should also possess good characteristics (traditional legitimacy) to win villagers' trust.

This commune also experienced the co-option of a popular grass-roots economic leader into the ruling party and eventually the commune council. Ming Ngee, a popular businesswoman, did not have or strive to build networks, but she was identified and suggested to the party by CPP leaders within the commune. As a woman of strong character, she has debated with her chief and councillors, including from the same political party, for her villagers' sake and has pushed strongly for and raised projects for her village. Such co-option might be able to bring positive changes if the co-opted individual has the will and space to represent and serve villagers.

Most village chiefs in this commune are in their position simply because they have been village chiefs since 1979. As required, there were two women as a deputy village chief and a village assistant in the two studied villages. With some networks, albeit not strong, these two were selected because they have been active in village as well as party affairs. One worked for the Cambodian Red Cross.

The former commune chief in commune B, Pou Nov, who had ruled the commune since 1979, became a councillor from 2002, while a former village chief, Pou Ma, who had built good connections with upper CPP patrons, used the superior alliance to have his name manipulated to the top rank and became the chief in 2002. What is different in this commune is the land grabbing by him and his leader clique discussed earlier (Box 1). He not only managed to stay in power for both mandates but also to win most of the disputed land despite the complaints of the villagers.

Box 5: Patronage vs Representation: the Electoral Fall-Out

Keang, 69, a farmer in commune A, was appointed commune chief by the Vietnamese in 1979, and subsequently confirmed in that position by the 1982 local elections. He served in this position for the next 20 years, until the first postwar commune elections were held in 2002. In 2002, he was placed in second position on the CPP list. The first place on the list was given to Suon, a local landowner and the brother of a wealthy and powerful businessman, *Oknha Tou*, who lives in the commune, and who does businesses in logging, rubber plantations and petrol importing. Tou sponsored his brother to gain first place on the list, and he was duly elected commune chief, while Keang took the first deputy's position.

According to Suon and Keang, they worked well together during the first mandate from 2002 to 2007; Keang was able to use his long-standing knowledge of the local context to resolve villagers' problems, and claims that today villagers still come to him for advice and assistance, even though he is out of power. Suon says that he used his party and business connections to bring considerable development to the village: he sponsored festivals and infrastructure development, including a new road, pagoda development and a new school. Suon argues that these activities made him well loved in the village.

However, during this period, Suon's brother Tou had a conflict with the district governor over ownership of a road development, and this led to Suon being dropped from the party list for the 2007 elections, and a new external candidate put in his place. The CPP lost the election, and a SRP commune chief took over; subsequently, the district governor was fired from his job, opening the way for Suon to stand for office again next time.

Some informants attributed the CPP's 2007 election loss to the change in the party list and the presentation of unpopular candidates. Others argued that the commune had suffered from the various land conflicts arising from *Oknha Tou*'s land concession, which had caused a great deal of tension and had not been satisfactorily resolved; this could also have taken its toll on the party's electoral performance. Either way, it is clear that these two leaders were constrained in their ability to maintain support in the commune by the pressures coming from three directions: the relationship with Tou as brother of the commune chief and a key development patron; the need to retain the political backing of the district party office; and the need to respond to demands for representation and development from villagers. These different pressures hamstrung the two leaders once the various interests came into conflict with one another. The commune leaders did not have sufficient autonomy from either business or the party to act authoritatively in support of the villagers.

Co-option also occurred in this commune. As mentioned earlier, a popular informal leader, Pou Sey, who had successfully mobilised people against corrupt acts of land grabbing by the former commune chief, was in 2002 co-opted into local politics and has been a CPP councillor since then. Although he remains quite active, he can no longer do much against corrupt acts by his current chief and fellow councillors. Such co-option of popular leaders, in addition to building and extending patron-client ties, can also block potential mass demonstrations against malicious acts of local leaders of the same party.

One of the two studied village chiefs in this commune, Pou Chin, was an uncle of the current commune chief. He is another well-connected land grabber since he also grabs land within his own village. The other village chief, Ta Mut, was a benevolent older man who gained his

village chief position because the previous chief left for NGO work and because he used to be a village chief. Another reason was that the commune chief saw that he would not join in the land grabbing to demand a share but would be quiet about his actions.

Similar to the commune chief, when a village assistant was required, Pou Chin chose a distant relative, a quiet and humble single mother who lacks confidence and knowledge. She is assigned only petty work such as collecting money from villagers. She listens to his orders and will not say anything against his bad acts, although she knows about them and does not approve of such behaviour, because she is grateful to him for giving her the job.

The current CPP female chief of commune C is also well connected, supported and trusted by the party (she has been appointed the chief of CPP women councillors in the district). Because this commune links well with the national patron who takes care of the villages and commune, the legitimacy of councillors is strong.

Most village committee members here are related to former or current leaders by either kinship or marriage. One of them, though, recently gained the position after the previous chief passed away, because of his age and previous experience of village leadership (in the Khmer Rouge regime).

Some significant differences among the three cases are worth highlighting. In commune A, the network is more about the oknha's manipulation of local politics. Money dominates local politics. And while the co-option of a grass-roots leader into local politics was meant to increase votes, it has also brought positive results for villagers. In contrast, in commune B the ruling party alliances eclipse local politics. While the ruling party co-opts outspoken leaders to silence them, local leaders choose subordinates who can keep silent about their corrupt acts. For some co-opted leaders, the will is there but there is no space for them to represent villagers. Decentralisation here works opposite to its intended purpose.

> They closed us down. They are corrupt and money-minded. If this goes on, we will all be dead, having no land and nothing left. We are shut down in the dark. (Villager B1, commune B, response to survey, 27/5/2008)

> We feel isolated and very distant from authorities, especially the corrupt commune councillors. We feel hopeless. (Villagers from female-headed household, B12, commune B, response to survey, 4/6/2008)

In commune C, local politics is heavily influenced by a powerful patron. The ruling party networks of B and C show a sharp contrast in that those in B pay little attention to the villagers; they abuse the people and at the same time maintain their networks, whereas in C the alliances run on a people-centred basis. The analysis indicates the distinct types of local networking arrangements that centre on the ruling party. An inference can be drawn that the C arrangement may be the most prevalent among the three arrangements within decentralisation. However, an inference can also be drawn that such arrangements can help prevent councils becoming independent.

Another aspect is rising women leaders. In commune A, while the SRP chief gained legitimacy with her party through her status as a teacher, she won the election only because villagers felt strongly antagonistic to the top CPP candidate. She has not been able to network much with any actors since the election because she is new and from the opposition party. This has eclipsed her contribution to commune work. Aside from this chief, many women leaders

here have gained legitimacy mainly through their networks in the private sphere, unlike men leaders, most of whom continue to lead because they have had previous leadership experience and status and have built important administrative networks.

4.4.2. Social, Religious and Spiritual Leaders

These leaders have established strong horizontal relationships among their peers and with the villagers. It was observed that village and commune leaders have good interactions and relationships with them and are often seeking their cooperation. These *chas tum* and *achar* often have good connections with almost every actor, including those from higher levels, especially politicians. As pagodas now need networks to attract contributions, *achar* have been playing an increasing role in networking. Strong *achar* are able to seek resources from district and provincial officials, high government officials, business people and even people overseas.

> That excellency is very close to me. I usually go to his house and seek some financial contribution to build the temple. I also know all the district and provincial officials and the local oknha. I request their contributions for the annual religious ceremonies and other activities. The officials are very supportive to developments in the religious domain. (*Achar*, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008).

They also create networks with other *wat* committees (of different regions) to raise funds for such things as funeral ceremonies of the abbots.

The striking point of their networking, in particular for religious leaders, is how they can forge links with the ruling party's patrons. As Cambodia has adopted a democratic path, which automatically makes elections important tools for political parties to gain legitimacy, pagodas are often seen as good grounds for political campaigning. With the increased financial inflow of recent years, *achar* become important bridges linking people, through their pagodas, to ruling party patrons. This form of newly emerging modern fund raising allowed many pagodas to beautify themselves. It is clear what the CPP expects to receive from those religious leaders. The fieldwork shows that in exchange for gifts, they are to perform certain tasks indirectly pressed by the party patrons.

> I am more than informed about what His Excellency wants—votes—but I have to keep my mouth shut and do not act against him. (*Achar*, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

> I am often told by the excellency to inform the local elders to vote for his party if we wish to get more support for the temple construction. (*Achar*, commune B, interview, 30/5/2008)

From what they say, *achar* need to comply with the indirect orders of party patrons; if they do not, they risk losing the golden opportunity to attract funding for their pagodas. The prominent *achar* of commune A proudly tells us that he is probably the only *achar* in Cambodia who is able to build a temple within four years. While it is true that he is capable of completing the work within a short period, without the party's policy to favour pagoda development, he would not be able to be such a competent network builder.

The outstanding issue of *achar* networks thus centres mostly on the ruling party and its important politicians because they are the main source of supply for local pagoda development. Another point worth noting is that *achar* tend to have good relations with the local authorities and the villagers at large.

4.4.3. Political-Economic Leaders

The aloof leaders build networks with key district, provincial and national officials, rich and central party patrons and other business individuals and even with pagoda committees. However, their interactions with the different parties vary. At the higher level, these leaders often build networks with high-profile politicians for business favouritism. At the district and commune, they tend to be accessed by local administrative leaders seeking donations for development. They might also sponsor local leaders, as seen in commune A.

The grass-roots type link well with village and commune authorities, other business individuals, villagers and *wat* committees. As many business individuals are of Chinese ethnicity, these leaders also have good connections with their respective ethnic groups. Importantly, they are often associated with the ruling party.

Two distinct trends are observed for economic leaders. Large-scale economic leaders' relationships with their rich peers are extremely strong, and they also link well to ruling party patrons. The combined force of their wealth and strong ties give them power to eclipse local, and sometimes national, politics. A different tendency is that local economic grass-roots leaders, albeit sometimes being able to influence, are usually influenced by local party politics.

4.4.4. Conclusion

The discussion above illustrates a number of important factors around the networking of the administrative leaders—party affiliation and patronage network. The nature of networks varies from one place to another, however. Women leaders' nepotism appears to be less than that of their male counterparts because their numbers are small and the demands are very high; however, they depend on political party affiliation, and an in-depth look at their background reveals a strong family-oriented participation among women in politics.

Although the networks that traditional leaders build among their peers are significant and sustainable, the crucial ties are those to a political party that they can count on for development assistance. The aloof type of economic-political leaders' alliances run from the middle (district) to top (national). Usually, the economic-political leaders' allies are intertwined and very strong, presenting a big challenge for local political development. The grass-roots type relate to the necessary and important stakeholders within their immediate contacts such as commune councillors, village chiefs and *wat* committees . All in all, the most dominant local network is party alliances, and this network has proven to be the key to leaders' positions and legitimacy. Networking is the survival feature for all kinds of leaders.

4.5. Motivation

4.5.1. Administrative Leaders

Besides the official salary, which is meagre, interviews with administrative leaders revealed a number of factors constituting common patterns of motivation: status, pride, kinship, personal and group benefits, gratitude to the party, nationalism and protection.

In the Cambodian mind-set, following in the footsteps of preceding leaders means gaining social pride. As the chief in commune A put it: "Because the father was a commune chief, the son is also a commune chief". Besides, being a leader carries social pride and status. Some local leaders do not get material benefits out of leadership but see the status and pride as important. For example, one village chief in commune B mentioned that he was proud that the commune chief and district governor asked him to work.

> In fact, I did not want to get involved in village leadership; it consumes a lot of time and energy. But the commune chief and even the district governor placed their trust in me and "begged" me to work, so I could not say no. (Ta Mut, village chief, commune B, interview, 30/5/2008)

Another motivation is the extraction of substantial benefits from the party network. Local leaders can easily seek scholarships for their children's university education; otherwise, given their economic status, the fees pose enormous constraints. Councillors, especially the chiefs, derive tangible benefits, especially when land prices are soaring, from signing paperwork and selling common land. They can also receive informal rents for signing paperwork.

Some leaders' family members use the leaders' power to make money; for instance, the wife of an SRP council member in the above province managed to act as a middleperson for land deals because her husband's work helped her know more about the village and commune land situation, and his status helped her win trust from outside speculators.

Another common leadership motivation is gratitude to the ruling party, which they say has saved their lives. To the Khmer, gratitude to a person who has offered assistance is socially necessary and valued. Not returning gratitude to a giver is socially unacceptable and shameful. A receiver is often afraid of getting into trouble in their life if they don't repay the gratitude they owe (see more in Kim 2001).

> Without that liberation day [7 January 1979], we would not have today. That gratitude is a big one, and we owe that and we have to pay it back. Even receiving a meal means we owe gratitude. Based on our culture, not returning gratitude is not acceptable. (Ming Nan, deputy village chief, commune B, interview, 28/5/2008)

Lastly, a few leaders told us that they are nationalistic and willing to serve their community; however, such commitment is unlikely to be sustainable since they claimed to be working for nationalistic reasons but at the same time complained about the meagre salary and showed little commitment to stay.

While the above benefits hold true for most state leaders, women leaders tend to care more about face and pride. They are proud to be leaders and breadwinners. They tend to derive fewer direct economic benefits than their male counterparts but are motivated more by family orientation. One female commune chief let us know that she did not extract much benefit from her position, but her children were able to escape conscription during the 1980s.

4.5.2. Social, Religious and Spiritual Leaders

The general enthusiasm of these leaders is developing the community, continuing the leadership status of their predecessors and building merit or good karma, which is important for both this and the next life.

Social, religious and spiritual leaders have usually lived in their villages for most of their lives and have a strong attachment to their locality. Further, most of them have anchored their lives to the religious sphere (a common pattern for Khmer elders) and are enthusiastic about serving this area as well as the younger generation of villagers. However, some distinctions were found between *chas tum* and *achar*. The elders mainly work to serve and help villagers and the pagoda from enthusiasm to build their community and to live up to their status as respected elders and models. *Achar* may have similar motivations, but for some it is also about competition and reputation. Some other possible motivations, unmentioned by *achar* interviewees, were also

identified based on interviews regarding their life histories and villagers' responses. Some *achar* might have joined the religious sphere in the hope of offsetting bad karma they had accumulated in the past, specifically during the Khmer Rouge regime. There are also *achar* who are active because the more contributions to pagodas they find, the more they can for extract themselves, as many villagers pointed out. But these *achar* are not much respected nor identified as leaders.

In commune A, the outstanding *achar* was inspired by kinship status and accumulating merits

> My father is a big *achar* [big *achar* manage each pagoda], and so were my grandfather and uncle. All are big *achar*, not the junior ones; and all of them lived very long, including myself too. Aside from this, my efforts to build the local temple give me a lot of merit for the next life. (*Achar*, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

This *achar* has been very successful and effective in finding large funds for the pagoda, but his passion for the community is focused purely on religion.

In commune B, there was a consensus among religious leaders that their assistance to their community was equally important with their contribution to the religious domain. They initiated and contributed their labour to various village activities, including building roads. They often said that the merit from such a deed is enormous and will allow them to live in heaven in the next life. Similar to the *achar* in commune A, they attached the importance of their current leadership and assistance to their fathers and grandfathers who were leaders.

> You know, nowadays people are mostly inclined to develop only the pagodas and ignore the high demand in the public sphere. In fact, promoting public infrastructure such as roads, bridges and others brings a lot of merit for the contributors. From Buddhist principles, the creases on the monks' yellow robes represent the irrigation system. So I am more in favour of building bridges and constructing local paths. (*Achar*, commune B, interview, 30/5/2008)

What could be surprising was that one of the most active and respected *achar* in this commune was a prison guard during the Khmer Rouge regime. Villagers told us that he was a tough and mean guard who turned into a good and active *achar*.

Commune C was where elders were found to be most significant. Elders here were inspired by the national patron and kinship with their villagers, by the respect and trust villagers place in them. They and *achar* are also very motivated by the fact that a good road is good for daily travel, and by religious ideals. Because elders here cooperate and assist well in religious affairs, the *achar* also return help and assistance to community development.

4.5.3. Political-Economic Leaders

For the aloof economic leaders, two main motives lie behind their leadership and assistance. One is that as patrons they feel socially obligated to offer assistance to their locality and would feel embarrassed if they did not meet such cultural expectations. They give money to build roads and pagodas so that they are seen as caring by the people, complying with villagers' expectations. The other likely motive is that this type of patronage allows leaders to be recognised and legitimised by the villagers and to enhance their status. However, as mentioned earlier, there is a strong underlying motivation, albeit not mentioned by them, to gain power and preferential treatment in their businesses.

Grass-roots leaders, before becoming administrative leaders, had contributed informally to their community in one way or another, which shows that helping the community is one of their motivations. This brought room for them to engage with local politics, which many of them grasped at, showing that they are also interested in officially serving local politics. Another possible motivation, especially for female leaders, is to serve or assist women.

As previously noted, the *oknha* in commune A spent up to USD150,000 on local infrastructure. This brought him the *oknha* title and allowed him to stand against others, including the former district governor. Especially in recent years, he had gained bountiful economic benefits from his businesses. Similarly, the humble gas seller in commune C also provides contributions to help his village, and at the same time the money acts as a rent provided to authorities for his business. The woman grass-roots leader in commune A had divorced a drunken and violent husband, and so she strongly wants to campaign against domestic violence.

4.5.4. Conclusion

Leaders are differently inspired. They are in positions by both design and choice. Administrative leaders find status, kinship, pride, personal and group benefits and gratitude to the party important. Traditional leaders put merit at the top of the agenda and helping the community as second. Political and economic leaders' two main rationales are their personal obligations and the benefits to be extracted from assistance. Female leaders wish to help women villagers and also to climb the social ladder by gaining an official position (legal-rational authority).

Chapter 5:

ACTIVITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF LOCAL LEADERS

This chapter looks closely at the activities of different types of commune and village leaders and the problems they face, in order to understand the local leadership environment after recent political, economic and social changes. It starts by discussing the roles and activities of administrative leaders, followed by other types of leaders, to see how local administrative leaders are fulfilling their legal mandate and how other leaders are contributing to commune development and/or mediating between local authorities and the people. Activities found to hamper decentralisation and development are also laid out. Also explored are the constraints that different leaders encounter in their daily activities.

5.1. Activities

5.1.1. Administrative Leaders

Understanding administrative leaders' roles in their formal mandate is a prerequisite to a sensible discussion of their activities. This section examines the two types of local administrative leaders—village committees and commune councillors. Discussion of each will begin with a look at their institutional mandate. Activities of these leaders can fall under a broad discussion and so this study chooses to focus mainly on their conflict resolution, local contribution collection and mobilisation of villagers to participate in development planning.

Village Committees

Village committees and particularly the chiefs are the lowest and closest officials to the villagers for various needs. Villagers view the role of village chiefs as mainly related to mobilising villagers for meetings and collecting contributions for commune projects.

The interviews in this study showed that village and commune are not two separate bodies even though villagers know there are two levels and that they need to approach the village before going to the commune. Many villagers are not convinced that their village leaders can really bring and defend their needs to the commune. This is to be expected since the current institutional structure and mandate are not based on a decentralised vision. Also, because village leaders are elected by commune councils and paid from councils' funds, they need to be accountable and responsive to the commune rather than directly to the villagers. Furthermore, village leaders do not have the arm's length relationship with councils or councillors that could allow them to challenge commune decisions. They are rather old friends of or even related to councillors. Village leaders act as extra eyes and arms assisting the communes.

Village functions and mandates were delineated in MoI decision #004 on 17 March 2006. The village committee has an extended administrative functions, broadly defined to include:

- ensuring safety and security;
- being part of development activities of the village;
- monitoring the activities of the village;
- assisting commune councils to gather people, to collect commune data, to raise contribution and in other affairs;
- meeting with villagers weekly at the village meeting place.

The broad mandate reinforces the tendency for village chiefs to act as assistants to the commune. The mandates do not prescribe particular working procedures to the village committees and do not impose sanctions for poor performance. Village committees tend to respond to instructions from above, according to their individual capacity.

Although village committees are not formally representative of villagers, we learned that meetings are held in the village, and villagers' suggestions and proposals, although often informal, are sometimes raised to councils through the village chiefs.

Interviewed village committee members reported their actual activities, which included:

- reporting to the commune council at weekly meetings on security and development activities of the village;
- disseminating information and instructions from higher levels to villagers;
- mobilising villagers for meetings and collecting contributions for village activities and commune projects;
- providing some administrative certificates to villagers such as land transactions, cow movement, residency;
- participating in minor conflict resolution;
- monitoring voter registration and managing party group leaders in the villages;
- facilitating ID cards for villagers and party IDs, especially in election years.

Engaging in commune development planning is a new experience in the village. Like the commune councils, they say their role has changed a lot since the election of 2002. The village committee used to focus on ensuring security and social order, which required them to be tough and physically strong and commanding.

> I was once a village chief. I was like a military commander. I had to be strong and powerful in controlling my village and my militia. (Pou Thuch, former village chief and current commune councillor, commune C, interview, 11/4/2008)

At present village roles are mandated by law and understood by village leaders themselves as serving and providing development needs to the people. It is also more possible now for a variety of individuals to do the village jobs. However, they fear there are limited support and means. Being a village chief now is hard, they complain.

> A village chief today has to serve people. Do good, they praise; do bad, they scold. A village chief must be below the people. I had to beg my villagers to help in renovating a road … It is hard work … but I want to keep my name. (Ta Deng, a village chief, commune C, interview, 10/4/2008)

> I cannot do just what I want because there are three of us and then the commune council. We need consensus. My former deputy village chief was removed from office because he acted on his own will. (Pou Soeun, a village chief, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

Village committees perceive their mandate to be less powerful in getting villagers to follow them, particularly to participate in meetings and in resource contributions. There are a number of reasons for this. First, chiefs feel that they cannot coerce people to do something because villagers do not fear them so much as previously, when village chiefs had guns and controlled militias. Second, some chiefs and councillors say that educated and well-off villagers do not respect local authority; they do not participate in meetings. They are often very busy and

constantly challenging local authorities' work. Third, villagers do not have much confidence that their participation or engagement can bring about a change. As an alternative strategy, some village chiefs have cultivated relationships with powerful patrons whom they can approach for village projects.

> It is very difficult to get villagers to participate in meetings and contribute money. I have to visit their houses a few times and induce them with material gains to be given at the meeting. (Ming Yan, female village assistant, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

> One of the villages in this commune has many educated and well-off families. These people don't come to meetings and are very difficult to persuade. (Pou Van, 2nd deputy commune chief, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

> I and others directly approached national secretaries for funds to help us build a local temple and meeting hall. (Pou Chin, village chief, commune B, interview, 30/5/2008)

> I don't need anything from village chiefs and I don't think they could help me if asked. What do they have to give to us? That is why I don't participate or ask anything from them. (Villager C6, commune C, response to survey, 8/4/2008)

Thus village leaders have to find other elements of legitimacy. As shown in the previous chapter, they often bring in their traditional or informal roles to complement their weak institutional authority. Because chiefs are older respected individuals and part of some *wat* activities, they use personal charisma and persuasion to get villagers to follow them. They talk about karma and merit from Buddhist teaching. Some lead villagers by example. This strategy requires enormous individual quality and reputation.

That strategy does not always work for village chiefs. Mostly it works in cases that can easily be justified like collection of money for social or *wat* activities and village road renovations. But it does not work when it involves rich and powerful figures or when used to cover up bad conduct by village chiefs.

In addition, village committees are busy with resolution of minor conflicts and domestic violence. As microfinance institutions increasingly reach Cambodian villages, village committees are asked by micro-credit institutions to certify whether villagers' loan requests should be granted. In land conflicts, village chiefs are asked to confirm land history and certify boundaries or act as witnesses. Village chiefs and their deputies are also involved in resolving or mediating spousal conflicts. They provide some education and advice to couples and help reconcile them. If they cannot reconcile a couple's dispute, it is brought to the commune council. In severe cases involving violence, however, police or a court has to be brought in. It is difficult for village committees to play this mediating role because they do not have the institutional authority or capacity or support to do so.

Commune Councils

Since commune councils are elected, they might be expected to have democratic legitimacy. They also have a legally defined mandate to demand cooperation from villagers in various policy areas. Our study aimed to establish how councillors translate their formal, legal and democratic mandates into the authority to achieve council goals in everyday life. Therefore we interviewed councillors and villagers to understand how effectively councillors are able to act in three key areas of governance: mobilisation of villagers to participate in development planning, collection of local contributions and dispute resolution.

Commune council mandates are provided in the LAMC and the Sub-decree on Decentralisation of Roles, Duties and Functions to the Commune. Both outline very broad and general duties of councils. For instance, the LAMC defines their duties as follows (Article 43):

- Maintain security and public order.
- Arrange necessary public services and be responsible for the good conduct of these affairs.
- Encourage the contentment and well-being of the citizens.
- Promote social and economic development and improve the living standards of the citizens.
- Protect and conserve the environment, natural resources and national cultural heritage.
- Reconcile citizens to have mutual understanding and tolerance.
- Perform general affairs to meet the needs of citizens.

The mandate provides a vision of what the councils are expected to perform over time and clearly shows increasing expectations imposed by different actors and agencies.

Our study confirms existing literature in demonstrating that commune councils are unable to fulfil their legal mandate because it is much too broad, and councillors do not have sufficient knowledge in all these areas. Consequently we focused on two areas that are central to local governance and relatively well established as within the remit of local leaders: mobilisation of villagers for development planning and dispute resolution.

We found that commune councillors also face problems in these areas. One reason is that Cambodia has changed dramatically over recent decades. Local economy is more diversified, offering more opportunities to a greater variety of people. This creates unprecedented new and heightened expectations; it also brings greater potential for conflict between a greater variety of actors. For example, the rising price of land has increased land conflicts, and the growing influence of business people in local development requires a new and different set of roles and capabilities to be managed effectively.

Activities that the commune councils surveyed remember and actually performed include:

- preparation, adoption and implementation of commune development and investment plans;
- civil and other administrative registration;
- voter registration;
- maintenance of records, provision of necessary information in the commune and village;
- disseminating information and visiting villages regarding development and other advocacy activities from the government to the people;
- informal dispute resolution;
- representation of community needs and mobilisation of community and outsider support for development projects.

As this list illustrates, councillors spend a lot of time on administration and development. However, although not mentioned, some of the official time is also spent on party work.[11] The main contact between villagers and councils is directly with commune chiefs. Major contact points are requests for administrative papers and attending commune or village meetings. It is

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11 During our observation of a commune meeting and conflict resolution in commune A, the commune chief was actually engrossed in party documents rather than focusing on what was going on.

clear from our survey that information about decentralisation and the structure and function of commune councils is still new to villagers. Very few were aware of the CSF available to councils, as another study also showed (Biddulph 2004). This shows that decentralisation has a long way to go before councils can be transformed into accountable and responsive local institutions. In this section, we will analyse the ways in which commune councillors deal with participatory development activities and conflict resolution.

Commune councils are understood by national officials to have an important role in promoting government policy through engagement in development planning, processing civil and administrative papers and gate-keeping of information flowing downward and upward. Participatory local planning is new. It was initiated as part of decentralisation following the successful experience of a series of programmes conducted from the early 1990s to early 2000s and has become a critical element of local democratisation. It has been widely implemented and successful in fostering participation in development planning, as Horng and Craig (2008) found; yet its sustainability is as yet unclear.

Our study found that this planning is very challenging for local leaders. In all the case studies, councillors uniformly commented that planning was new and unfamiliar, and that it was hard to organise village meetings in which people could share their ideas, because villagers are busy and are not convinced of the utility of the process. Some councillors said that villagers do not see participatory development planning as a mechanism for meeting their needs, but rather as a piece of theatre, unrelated to everyday life. Some councillors told us villagers want to voice their opinions in these meeting but are scared, and so frequently only the chair of the meeting talks. Because of this, councils tend to consult informally and privately with village chiefs and some respected old people to prepare the plan, and the organisation of formal village planning meetings has become less and less common over time. In one commune, participation has been reduced to the hiring of loudspeakers to broadcast information.

However, commune councillors and villagers say informal small meetings are more successful in getting people to participate and talk because in a small group people know each other and have some trust in the process and the organisers. Each person can voice an opinion and feel that it is seriously considered. The problem is that some villagers or groups are invited while some are purposely excluded. Such meetings are more problematic for women's participation.

In all the communes studied, more women than men attended village meetings. One village chief even argued that women are more knowledgeable and eloquent than men, but that they do not have much chance to speak in a formal meeting. Therefore, informal meetings become a mechanism to provide proper voice to local decision making. This is a serious issue, and not necessarily a merely transitional problem: if political interests desire to keep the status quo, it is unclear how the problem can be tackled.

Councils also act as conduits connecting communes to higher levels of government and outsiders with their Commune Development Plan (CDP). So far councils have had limited success in this task. The CDP is prepared and adopted, and then councils look for support. The CSF is limited, so councils have to look elsewhere for funding for the bulk of their projects. The district and provincial line departments can prioritise and support CDP projects, but so far experience has been that this support is limited (Eng and Craig 2009; Kim and Öjendal 2009; Rohdewohld and Porter, 2006; RGC 2005). This is one of the weakest areas of the current system: the downward accountability of commune councils is undermined by the lack of accountability and responsiveness of higher levels.

A common strategy for resource mobilisation used by councils is for chiefs or sometimes councillors to have good relations with powerful or high-ranking officials and rich individuals from whom they can seek help. Through such party networks, including the commune economic leaders, they are able to receive material assistance. Councillors or chiefs who do not have such networks find it very hard to get local projects sponsored. Commune C had the luxury of enormous support and resources from a national patron, who is a leading government minister. The commune faces the same difficulty as others in attracting state funding:

> Our CDP gets minimal support from higher levels. With our CSF we can implement one project per year and often renovate a road. (Pou Von, councillor, commune C, interview,10/4/2008)

However, the availability of funding from the national patron means that councillors are motivated to spend time on development planning:

> I visit villagers every day and collect their needs that I then refer to His Excellency [the patron] for help. He comes and helps us on many development projects in the commune, from roads to dams to providing fingerlings. It has been easy for the council to access him because we know him. One of my sons works for him in Phnom Penh too. (Pou Von, councillor, commune C, interview, 10/4/2008)

In commune B, the council faces more difficulties in addition to that of obtaining money from state institutions. The commune is hard pressed to collect contributions from villagers. The council is strongly divided along personal interest and party lines, and there is also some competition between councillors to profit from land deals. Because of this, they are less effective and attentive to commune needs. Our interviews suggested that the villagers distrust the councillors and the commune chief, but are afraid of them and have no way to protest. In this context, mobilising voluntary contributions from villagers is very difficult:

> Collecting money from villagers is extremely difficult. I apply karma and merit making from Buddha to help me pave my way in my activities. (Pou Sey, CPP councillor, commune B, interview, 5/6/2008)

There are also problems in using external links to fund the CDP. Lots of outsiders invest in land in the area, but this is purely for speculative purposes: they show no interest in developing the commune. Links to outsiders are used to make deals for personal profit, rather than to benefit the commune, with one or two exceptions:

> I do not have a network that I can ask to help my village. So far I request my uncle who lives in America to contribute money to build and renovate a bridge, pagoda and school. (Pou Chhan, 1st deputy chief, commune B, interview, 29/5/2008)

Across all our case studies, in view of the tensions and weaknesses of their formal mandates and the formal support structures available to them, councillors tended to rely on party patronage and traditional forms of authority to get things done. They used this to recreate their legitimacy in particular areas; but this also imposes constraints on what they can deliver for their electorates, because they have to bow to the interests of their backers, which often directly conflict with those of villagers.

Such a conflict between patronage and representation is demonstrated by the situation in commune A. In this commune, there was a change of leadership in 2007, as the CPP lost its majority to the Sam Rainsy Party.

In this commune, the council lost control of economic development, because of the encroachment on and enclosure of common property by concessionaires whose power was decided by the central government. The council was fragile and divided along party lines: the incoming SRP chief found it very difficult to exercise power over the council, and has no influence on the many private business people active in the commune. Even more problematically, this commune chief was a woman and an outsider who had not been living in the commune for very long. She had little familiarity with the people on the village committees—all of whom had been appointed by the previous CPP commune chief—and she found herself excluded from many local activities and information initiated by CPP councillors and rich businessmen. As a woman, an opposition party member and an outsider, the SRP chief found it difficult to exercise authority because she lacked both local networks and external backing, and without these her institutional position was extremely weak.

The difference between the resources available to the CPP and the SRP commune chiefs was described by them:

> Because of my brother, I could borrow money and spent my own money to implement commune projects on time and as needed. Then I mobilised resources to pay back, often a large sum from politicians and governors. (Pou Suon, former chief, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

> I want to help my commune and have ideas for initiatives, but I don't know who I can ask for help besides NGOs. In addition, I am being excluded from what other councillors in the other party are doing in the commune even though I am the chief. (Ming Rina, SRP commune chief, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

The other key activity for councils is providing security and mediating conflicts. This has been a key role for local authorities since the early 1980s. During the civil war, commune councils had primary responsibility for ensuring that insurgents did not enter their territory, and they mobilised armed militias to help with this task. After the end of the war in 1998, these militias were disbanded. Some long-standing councillors told us that previously they were mainly busy providing security and protection and had less time for dealing directly with villagers, but now they are spending more time on land conflicts and providing counselling on new types of conflict such as domestic relationships. Three main types of conflict or security issues were identified by the councillors we interviewed: domestic conflict, youth gangs and land conflicts.

Domestic violence and youth gangs appear to be increasing, although trends are difficult to identify with confidence because of changes in reporting. Councillors in all three communes identified domestic violence as an important issue, and in all studied communes—more intensely in one—the violence of a youth gang based in the adjacent commune was also a problem.

The willingness of commune councillors to acknowledge domestic violence as a problem they should involve themselves with, and their willingness to threaten to call the police, is perhaps a step forward for women's rights. A CDRI study of poverty in nine rural villages in 2004–05 found that domestic violence and youth gangs were prominent issues raised in both male and female focus group discussions (Fitzgerald and So 2007). The same study also found that the victims (often women) feel helpless and neglected (p.184). It also showed that current interventions on domestic violence and initiatives on gender mainstreaming in training and educational programmes have helped curb the problem to a limited extent. Commune councils are charged by the law to manage and solve these issues. However, councillors in our interviews felt they lacked the institutional support and knowledge to do the job. Often they

deal with the issues by using their traditional authority along with Buddhist principles and/or personal threats.

They acknowledged that they had difficulty finding appropriate solutions. Often they cannot resolve problems but refer conflicts to higher levels or police.

> I spend a lot of time both day and night in conflict resolution. Most conflicts that come to me are domestic violence and debt problems. I call my villagers to a meeting in order to discuss the problem. If they don't come, I tell them that I will delete their name from the commune population statistics. I use tricks, law, fines and the threat of prison to make wrongdoers follow me. (Ming Rina, commune chief, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

> I use oaths to help heal wife and husband conflict. I often ask wife and husband to vow in front of Buddha in order to resolve their conflict. (Ming Rina, commune chief, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

> I have to mediate many domestic violence cases. I often help the couples talk and share their anger a few days after the event. I have been successful because so far only three cases ended in divorce. (Ming San, commune chief, commune C, interview, 10/4/2008)

> Usually men get drunk and beat their wives or destroy household facilities or steal money from their wives or bar their children from going to school etc. But when they are called for training or meetings, they do not attend. In this case, I am effective in directly facing the offenders when catching them red-handed. I try to explain. If it doesn't work, I scold them and try to stop them. I use threats of bringing them to the police. This has been notably effective. (Ming Ngee, CPP woman councillor, commune A, interview, 24/2/2008)

Although some interviewees claimed that threatening police action was effective, many other commune chiefs and councillors admitted that they were unsuccessful in a significant number of cases, suggesting that the shift in the nature of "security" issues is very problematic for councillors. When they met a case that was beyond their authority or capacity, they either referred the cases to other authorities or just closed their eyes and ears.

> Villagers are so afraid of youth gangs that they stop sending their children to school. But we, local authorities, don't know what to do. (Ming Yan, village assistant, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

> Both commune chiefs have very little administrative experience, so they often seek my advice in resolving land and domestic conflicts. Some cases I can help but some cases I cannot and have to refer to police and court. (Pou Keang, former chief, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

Economic transformation has brought higher land prices and widening economic concessions for large companies. Councillors' time has thus been largely taken up by certifying land deals, acting as middlemen to land businesses, resolving or mediating land conflicts—sometimes between villagers, other times between villagers and concessionaire or outside speculators and sometimes involving councillors themselves.

It was found that councillors are quite successful when dealing with small land conflicts that involve villagers. Success in these cases means mediation and calming potential fights rather than pointing out exact boundaries. This is especially the case in commune A, where both local authorities and villagers are unclear about the boundary between their private land and the land

of the concession and so villagers encroach on, sell and buy those lands. Conflicts brought to the chief end up being resolved by the parties finding a compromise.

Box 6: Villagers vs Economic Land Concession

In commune A, many land disputes arose between villagers and a company operating an economic land concession, under the management of the former commune chief's brother, *Oknha Tou*. The present commune chief said there had been many disputes. Local authorities and the villagers had not been given any information by the provincial or national government about the concession or its purpose.

A clear map and boundary were never provided to the authorities. The concession area encroached upon former common resources, which made it difficult for villagers to make a living. Villagers no longer understood which land was theirs and which belonged to the company.

The commune chief has to deal with villagers' complaints and difficulties when they are prevented from going into the forest to find products or to work on their farms in the concession areas (it was a must to find other land to work since the farm land of the commune comprises only 500 hectares and there are more than 5000 people to feed).

Often the chief has to call someone in the company and beg them to release villagers who have been captured by security guards, and ask them to allow villagers to farm and to go into the forest. The issue has been a source of rising tension within the last few years, and at one point the current SRP commune chief and villagers decided to complain directly to the prime minister during his visit to the province, but to little avail. At present nothing has been clarified or resolved. At the time we interviewed *Oknha Tou*, he stated his intention to put a fence around his concession to keep out villagers. Although *Oknha Tou*'s interests have clearly threatened the livelihoods and traditional coping strategies of families in the village, he has also employed a number of villagers in his businesses.

Box 6 reflects the difficulties faced by councils attempting to deal with large economic concessions. These are awarded centrally, and are under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in Phnom Penh. The council has no legal mandate to renegotiate the boundaries of concessions, and is not consulted regarding a concession's likely impact on the commune. This directly undermines participatory development planning, and the failure to provide mechanisms by which councillors can raise grievances with concessionaires or with the government undermines their ability to safeguard the security of villagers mistreated by guards. The electoral defeat of the CPP in this commune may be a sign that this significantly detracts from the legitimacy of the council.

The communes are mandated agency functions like voter registration and managing civil registration. This requires a considerable amount of time from commune chiefs and clerks. Administering certifications and responding to local conflicts provide some extra income for councils. Some councils that have many land transactions can earn a lot since a signature on a land sale by the commune chief can earn him/her USD50. Processing administrative papers takes most of the chief's and clerk's time, and this also means that both of them benefit most from cash villagers give them for this. This is part of their livelihood in addition to their meagre salary from the council. A CDRI study in 2003–04 in 15 communes found that of an average

130 working hours per month, councils spent 7 percent on own business activities (Rusten *et al.* 2004: 76). A number of studies on Cambodian governance have confirmed that corruption is a norm and may not be easily eliminated (Hughes and Conway 2004; Hughes and Un 2007; Eng and Craig 2009; Pak and Craig 2008). Petty corruption is needed for rank and file officials' survival. They engage in informal rent seeking and political activities that are not part of their state duties in order to make up for the meagre pay. This creates loyalty and dependency of state officials on party and personal networks for survival and advancement. A large number of commune councillors and village chiefs as well as villagers repeatedly voiced frustration over low salaries and widespread corruption locally and at higher levels.

> Commune council is corrupted and so is the party. That is why I was not on top of the party candidate list for the commune election. (Pou Keang, former chief, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

> Council is corrupt. They take villagers' money. They motivate villagers to sell land to outsiders so that they can earn commissions. (Villager B10, commune B, response to survey, 27/5/2008)

The other big activity was mobilising support for the political party, especially as this was an election year. Time spent on commune affairs and visits to villages could also serve the party and elites' gift-giving visits , while the commune and villages played crucial roles in setting the scene and mobilising the people. They claim that they do this activity only during weekends and evenings. There is a legal restriction on state officials and councils from spending their official time doing personal and party work, but obviously it is not enforced. Many state and elected (national, provincial and commune) officials say state and party work are the same because they both serve the people (Pak *et al.* 200; Eng and Craig 2009). This phenomenon is made possible and can be justified by the fact that the CPP structures itself parallel to the administrative structure of the state. Provincial governors are chairs of CPP provincial committees; district governors are chairs of CPP district working groups; commune chiefs are heads of CPP commune working groups; village chiefs are village party representatives who supervise group leaders. A recent study commissioned by DFID of district potential for democratisation reforms surveyed 18 districts and found that half of interviewees said they perform party and state work simultaneously and that they are open to discuss their party work with others just as they would their state work (Kim and Öjendal 2009).

In interviews, we found that female village assistants or deputies were more likely to emphasise the importance of their institutional and personal qualities, rather than traditional leadership ideas, as helping them to progress in their work and to interact with villagers. Female leaders tended to talk more about rules and regulations, about new systems of working with popular participation and about a need to change villagers' attitudes and thinking. Despite this, villagers were not enthusiastic about and did not talk highly of female village assistants or deputies, while a less qualified village chief was acceptable. Villagers had doubts about what the female candidates could do for them, perhaps because all of them were new to the job.

> I explain to my villagers that they need to come to meetings and voice their needs, and that they need to contribute their money because it is required by law and to make sure they own the projects. Male commune chiefs visit people regularly while female commune chiefs visit people only when there is work. (Ming Yet, village assistant, commune C, interview, 10/4/2008)

> He is the village chief but he is always drunk so I am the one who takes care of the village activities. I meet with outsiders regarding projects; I mobilise villagers to participate and

contribute; I represent the village as focal person; and I speak and report at the council meeting. (Ming Koeun, deputy village chief, commune C, interview, 11/4/2008)

In conclusion, then, decentralisation has imposed a new structure and mandate upon the existing local administrative elite. This has caused some changes: the number of administrative positions has increased, and more women have been inducted into local authorities. The militias have been disbanded and security concerns about insurgent activity have disappeared; this focus has been replaced by new expectations that the authorities will promote participatory development planning. Local authorities are also expected to engage in conflict resolution and provide authorisation and administrative support for activities such as land deals.

In other respects, local authorities are quite similar to the past. The people in the leading positions are largely the same individuals who have held administrative positions in either state or party since the early 1980s. Although the roles and responsibilities require a new leadership style, the same leaders translate into similar ways of leading. This makes it difficult for them to adjust to new roles and the demands put on them. While the mandate is broad, local authorities continue to carry out activities they are familiar with and have knowledge or experience in.

5.1.2. Social, Religious and Spiritual Leaders

The survey found that there are a number of significant elders and *achar* whom the villagers identified as their leaders. Elders are older respected individuals who are engaged in various village activities, especially in mobilising resources to maintain assets like roads, schools or canals, and in mediating or solving minor domestic issues or conflicts. These *chas tum* are also often accessed by local authorities for facts or opinions to help them solve conflicts or prepare commune development plans. *Achar* have a position in the pagoda and often relate to pagoda construction activities and religious ceremonies. *Achar* also raise money for repairing temples. Elders and *achar* receive more recognition for their activities than commune councils and village committees because many *chas tum* belong to *wat* committees while some *achar* are approached by villagers and sometimes local authorities for advice and help on domestic issues. Sometimes these leaders overlap since many village chiefs are elderly, and their legitimacy derives from their age more than from their legal-rational position.

Elders and *achar* often work together and complement each other in pagoda or village projects. For small projects that require mostly labour or a small amount of money, elders and *achar* can mobilise local labour and resources. However, if the projects are large, like renovating a main road or constructing or renovating a temple, requiring more than several million riels, they will seek support both from rich local strongmen and from those outside the village, particularly powerful politicians. According to our interviews with elders and *achar*, major groups that provide donations to their pagoda or infrastructure projects are rich businessmen, overseas Khmer and provincial and national politicians.

External donation to pagoda and infrastructure development in rural Cambodia is quite a recent phenomenon. More and more funds from political parties and politicians are flowing into this type of development at a time when Buddhism has begun to revitalise with the mushrooming of thousands of pagodas all over the country.

Millions of dollars go to pagoda activities, and this has created a new role for elders and specifically *achar*. On the surface, it looks as if elders and *achar* function independently from the authorities and influential persons, but our case studies show that they are quite dependent on them for financial support and back-up of their projects. This is a key function they have in bringing their village or community closer to outsiders.

Funding from politicians shows how pagodas are being politicised just as civil servants are politicised by party politics and neo-patrimonialism. The result is that monks or pagodas that are supporting or receiving funds from different parties or politicians are under pressure and a pagoda gets tagged as pro-CPP or pro-FUNCIPEC or labelled with this or that person's name, which excludes from the pagoda others who are not in the same party. During the study we interviewed a female villager who is an SRP member and who is excluded from major social and community activities (both official and traditional). She then converted to Christianity because this provided her a new network and support.

> We initiate an idea and then we need to go around and identify who can help us realise the idea. Often they are the influential and big people from both the local community and outside. (A group of *achar*, commune A, group talk with researchers, 21/3/2008)

> I have travelled far beyond the village and even go to houses of big people in Phnom Penh in order to persuade and ask for help. I have to be thick-skinned and use my mouth as a bridge. (*Achar*, commune A, interview, 24/04/2008)

> Often they come to ask us to join them before they organise any fund-raising ceremony because if we are busy and cannot attend, they will not get the resources needed for the project. We can help them make the idea concrete. (Gasoline businessman 1, commune C, interview, 9/4/2008)

> I am indirectly influenced by the party funders to lobby the people to vote for the CPP. (*Achar*, commune B, interview, 17/5/2008)

Besides involvement in *wat* activities, some *achar* but more specifically elders are also involved in other local groups such as the "emergency help group" and "funeral help group", where they, along with village chiefs, mobilise labour and funds for these groups. It will be recalled that elders and *achar* also serve as village historians who are often asked about the geographical history or act as witnesses in land and boundary conflicts. In communes B and C, where elders are significant to villagers and local authorities, commune chiefs and councillors occasionally invite traditional leaders to participate in commune planning meetings and provide information as representatives of the villagers. Such roles are crucial when strong local institutions are absent because they can substitute for the missing functions of the formal institutions.

Some traditional leaders are also consulted by villagers on family issues, such as decisions about marriage for daughters or sons or about conflicts with relatives, where elders play the role of facilitator. Other times they are asked to reconcile spousal conflicts.

Occasionally, *achar* and traditional leaders are asked to help bridge between villagers and higher power holders when villagers are not familiar and are afraid to approach state leaders directly. The matters could include minor misbehaviour, paper processing requests, employment or scholarships, where they act as guarantor on behalf of the family.

Support to and through local traditional leaders is critical for electoral politics because villagers vote according to their leaders' opinion or direction (Chandler 2003; also Scott 1972 on patron-client ties in south-east Asia). The more a party can co-opt local leaders, the more likely it is to get support from the villagers. On the other hand, commune development allocations are very minimal, including all the newly decentralised funds (CSF and Provincial Investment Fund), compared with the flow of resources through benefactors and political parties. Anecdotal information tells us that CPP funds alone spent in a commune are five times the commune's CSF allocation.

I approached all the big people, not just those from the CPP or SRP or Kem Sokha for resource support for my commune. But the only one who responded and helped was the CPP. (Ta Dam, C1, commune C, interview, 11/4/2008)

Thus it is within the interest of both parties since the authorities as well as traditional leaders, and perhaps villagers, are grateful for the support of politicians who help boost their legitimacy while the politicians wish to keep villages dependent on their support.

In summary, elders and *achar* have to negotiate less with villagers and external actors in performing their roles; their legitimacy is largely unquestioned because it is based upon strong traditional norms. Conformity to idealised models is perhaps easier for elders because the realm in which they operate—spirituality and ritual—is relatively uncontested. Although they sometimes assist villagers in the secular realm, they are not exposed to great expectations in this area. Consequently, they can play a complementary role to state leaders in community development and in providing psychological support. The study also illustrates how significant and widespread party funding is for pagodas and local infrastructure development and the level of politicisation the situation creates.

5.1.3. Economic-Political Leaders

The rising influence of rich business people has become both a blessing and a curse for Cambodian politics in recent years. These leaders have been able to extract lucrative benefits from recent economic transformations under weak state institutions. They have forged good links and relationships with various important actors to shape and influence political agendas for self-enrichment. Attachments they have with state officials and politicians are critical for business success of these thauke. They are the major funding support to provincial and national politicians; they accompany politicians during election campaigns and visits to local electoral bases. Similar stories are found in neighbouring countries. Thailand is an example; in Rayong province, "political influence is needed to make wealth and protect wealth. Wealth is needed to gain influence" (Praditsil and Thinbangtieo 2008: 189). The stories in this and other articles (Tamada 1991) clearly show how political and economic leaders depend on and serve one another in a way that makes it difficult to differentiate who has power over whom.

On a daily basis it is very hard to find a *thauke* unoccupied at his house or business. They move around the area and across provinces for their businesses. They are extremely busy individuals who are often involved in not a few projects, and sometimes not only in one commune but across provinces, including Phnom Penh.

Mainly they gain legitimacy from their family standing and background in the community, contribution to community needs, individual influence of either charisma or wealth and their official and informal networks. However, the weight of these elements applies differently for each thauke, and so does their significance and influence. In this section we will be discussing the activities of the aloof and grass-roots economic leaders within the three communes.

It will be recalled from section 2.3 that the *oknha* in commune A, through his business, provides employment to the villagers and also provides villagers and local authorities material assistance when asked. He is recognised by villagers as generous even though his businesses have hampered the local economy in many ways and his influence has helped keep NGOs from reaching the commune.

The gasoline business owner in commune C distributes to smaller sellers in the community. He also owns bulldozers and heavy equipment that villagers can hire. He provides both cash

and materials to national politicians' projects in the community while at the same time he is good friends with district and provincial officials. He occasionally buys land from villagers to grow fruit trees, and villagers often see him as their "helper" when they need money and wish to sell their land. More than that, he provides money to commune councils, elders or *achar* for community infrastructure. Villagers appreciate him over other *thauke* in the commune who do not contribute and hence are not considered leaders. Similarly, many big *thauke* in other communes were not mentioned by villagers or were mentioned negatively because they have not helped to finance commune projects or have contributed less than they should.

> I am happy to contribute money when asked by officials and village or commune chiefs. Higher officials ask me to finance and contribute my bulldozers on various occasions, and I always help them. I am also financing a number of [fund-raising ceremonies]. But I do not want to have my name known. I just want to focus on my business. (Gasoline businessman 2, commune C, interview, 10/4/2008)

The aloof economic leaders, in summary, mainly interact with people through their businesses and with local authorities through provision of rent or other formal and informal contributions to projects as well as with traditional leaders through the financing of religious activities. They do so for peace in their businesses and as part of pressure or obligation to serve a political party since they wish to build networks with higher officials. Many of them started their business on a small scale and continue to expand as capital and networks are accumulated. Some "buy" local or national authorities indirectly; some do so more directly, for example by having their relatives or clique involved in politics or by forging significant ties with powerful politicians. Many do not want to be involved in local politics because they do not see it as significant for their business or influence. They do not even follow or have to follow commune planning should they decide to do a project, for example renovating or building roads.

These business people are not under the same pressure or expectation from villagers as the commune council or village committee to serve the people since they are quite remote and do not have a formal accountability. In Cambodian culture there is an expectation that strong and well-off people will help weaker and poor people, but the pressure from political parties is actually stronger.

Of great importance and interest is the paradox that while villagers feel anger and grief over concessions and how their livelihoods suffer from them, they appreciate and admire the leaders directly involved as kind and generous when they provide assistance to villages or the commune. In such cases, the people in these three communes had quite low expectations of leaders and were not resentful of the power of these individuals or the quite limited assistance they gave to villages.

Some smaller business people remained mingled with villagers through their businesses and informal interactions. Aside from operating local businesses, they also lend money to villagers. They are usually outspoken individuals who have "salty spit" and help villagers solve minor issues including domestic violence and unjust acts, including by the police. They also mobilise villagers for local contributions, for labour, or against corrupt acts. Most of them also mobilise local contributions for pagodas and are helpful to *wat* committees. Some of them head or belong to the steering committees of local CBOs.

Due to their activity and popularity, these leaders are becoming increasingly attractive to political parties. They have good relationships with villagers and groups within their villages and commune. Secondly, they are listened to by villagers and have quite good influence over

them. They are often involved in many religious activities within their communes. Thirdly, these more local and smaller business people are more likely than the aloof type to involve themselves in local politics and more likely to listen to their parties. For these reasons, co-opting this group appears a promising strategy.

As described in the previous sections, some of these economic-administrative leaders continue to promote their causes after they become councillors or village committee members. For example, the female councillor in commune A continued to help her villagers solve domestic issues and used her official title to push for projects for her village.

> I was active in helping my villagers because we didn't have councillors from our village. So I wanted to stand for election. I was elected in 2007 and I am now very active in helping to resolve domestic violence as a gender person in the commune. (Ming Ngee, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

She also occasionally debated with her chief and other councillors on behalf of villagers. But it was observed that she was able to do so partly because the chief is from a different party. When the chief is from the same party, it might be difficult to do this, as is seen in commune B, where the active individual was no longer able to do much after becoming a councillor. He especially could not do anything to help villagers solve the land grabbing case by the chief and his clique, while previously he could. Because he had differences with the chief and some other councillors, he was kept uninformed of many issues and work, so he decided to focus mainly on his farming business and to appear at work only very infrequently.

While it was seen that aloof economic leaders tend to let their money do the talking and stay distant from villagers and local authorities, economic grass-roots leaders stay more active and involved in village and religious activities. Thus they are not expected to provide financial or material assistance but to be more engaged and to help solve villagers' problems and represent them during conflicts. These leaders could become a bridge linking people to various authorities, but the question is whether they will still have the will to do so after being elected and whether they will be given the space and opportunity.

Knowledge Assistance Domain

From discussion about NGOs and CBOs, their activities and villagers' perceptions of them in the previous section, we can see that, within the communes studied, NGOs and CBOs play crucial roles in contributing to both soft and hard infrastructure. However, villagers do not identify these groups as their leaders although they are more familiar with the "organic" type of CBOs than the "mandated" ones. NGOs and knowledge leaders function in a sporadic manner and are disengaged from other village and commune issues, so they often cannot be counted on in times of need. Moreover, NGOs are usually not based inside the communes; they go to the villages at set times and dates to carry out their projects and then leave.

There are several reasons villagers do not perceive CBOs as leaders. One is that a number of CBOs are not really functioning and doing what they are supposed to do. For example, a study of farmer water user communities showed that they are not working because they have too broad a mandate, with little or no funds or structure to carry out their work, and do not have the authority to enforce their decisions and policies (Chea, forthcoming). Second, because most CBO leaders also have other titles or traditional roles in the community, their CBO titles may be new and not well known. Finally, there is little or no collaboration from authorities to make CBOs' activities effective. On the contrary, CBOs are often obstructed by police or authorities due to lack of trust and communication. Kim and Öjendal (2007) showed that there are many

reasons why civil society fails in Cambodia, but their main conclusion is that civil society here is a very new idea that needs time to evolve and assimilate into rural communities.

Oftentimes, when faced with higher powers, local authorities are at a loss and resolve not to interfere in a matter. For example, in one of the communes studied, commune councillors complained about their lack of authority to deal with a company exporting monkeys. The company claims to have networks with the centre that have approved the business and its power not to let anyone into its territory. Local authorities could not check on the secretive activities of the company. And even though it mainly transports monkeys out of the commune at night, no one dares to check on the business during the day. A commune councillor once tried to enter and check on the company, but was prevented and threatened by the security. Another example from the same commune is related to villagers' fishing activities. Friendly family fishing has become "illegal" since some powerful fishermen (who use illegal fishing devices) paid the district police and authorities to protect them. Villagers are often caught and fined by these policemen. The councillors are well aware of the fact but they do not dare interfere since their lack of power and authority limits them from doing so.

5.2. Constraints on Leaders

Administrative leaders face more constraints than other leaders. Decentralisation has imposed a new structure and mandate upon existing elites, while the environment in which they work has also changed as a result of economic and subsequent social transformations. Administrative leaders face challenges in both the formal and informal spheres. This section discusses the different constraints and what leaders have done to overcome them.

5.2.1. Administrative Leaders

Structural Constraints

Commune councils lack their own revenue sources and autonomy in resource allocation, the administrative and human resources to fulfil their tasks and the institutional and social structure to support their new roles. The councils perform their roles as required by national regulations. They also undertake tasks according to their work plan and the capacity development plan supported and provided by district and provincial facilitator teams under Project Support to Democratic Development. These teams work with the commune on an almost daily basis, guiding and monitoring the work plan of the council (Rusten *et al.* 2004). However, our study suggests that this support is inadequate to overcome the problems, and many councillors feel out of their depth in handling modern administrative mechanisms and contending interests.

While they already feel that their institutional authority is weak, it is increasingly being challenged and undermined by unfinished or absent institutional reforms and the growing political and economic interest of central patrons and business people in controlling resources, although this varies between communes. In two of our case studies, the elected councils operated as little more than a janitor for the commune.

One of the reasons for weak institutional authority is that there is little political will to devolve functions and funds to councils. Councils have little power of decision making. The centre wants to hold on to its power. It was observed that politicians keep a close grip on councils through their financing of commune projects, gifts and providing links and networks for building legitimacy. Business people ensure their influence by financing either councils or politicians. Councils thus are still widely dictated to by political parties and have to be accountable to them and abide by party guidelines; otherwise they would not have a chance to build and retain legitimacy.

> Here we cannot help the villagers much when land conflicts arise, for we do not have authority to resolve natural resource conflicts. The company is powerful and does not provide us the boundary information. So we do not know which parts belong to the company and which to the villagers. (Ming Rina, commune chief, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

Councils' lack of power is even more strongly demonstrated in the resource-rich communes, where political and economic interests overwhelm them. Politicians and their networks' close control over councils blurs the lines between public and private domains and fosters the latter's dominance over the former. Such constraints provide little room for councils to be accountable and responsive to voters—they are trapped between fires.

In our case studies, it was seen that the resource-rich communes A and B both suffer from higher authorities' decisions about natural resource use and allocation, which bypass and ignore the councils' role. In this case, villagers feel that they do not have leadership in their communes and cannot depend on their councils to represent them. Councillors in both communes are desperate and out of their depth. They cannot depend on their institutional power, and they cannot ask for help from a higher level.

> Sometimes I try my best to resolve local conflicts, but there is still little I can do, so I push it up to a higher level [district], but involving higher levels takes lots of time and they won't help, so eventually my councillors and I are blamed. The district has become unhelpful; they tend to say things like, "You communes now have decentralisation and your own money, so take care of your own work and don't come to us". (Pou Nov, commune chief, commune B, interview, 30/5/2008)

> I have many ideas about what the council should do to help develop the commune. But I feel I am not in control of what is going on in my commune, and most of the time I am the last person to know any news. (Ming Rina, commune chief, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

Commune C is quite distinct from the other two in that much respect is given to the councillors for their achievements due to the assistance provided by the party patron. There are the fewest natural resource conflicts in this commune. However, the party still clearly dictates to councillors, who have to look to the patron or higher authorities for decisions.

The three communes offer insight into local leaders' institutional constraints and how much or little room they have to claim legitimacy and exercise authority. The three communes have different enabling and constraining factors and a variety of leadership styles developed in each. In commune C, fewer land and resource conflicts and a rather conducive and supportive political climate put the leaders in a strong position to exercise authority and carry out their role, and villagers' comments about their leadership were more favourable than in communes A and B. The latter suffer from an uncontrollable environment tangled with a complex mix of actors and a resource crunch, where money and politics take over the authority of the elected councils, which have no capacity or have already given up standing for their villagers. Fitzgerald and So (2007: 144) similarly found that in resource-reliant communes, authorities basically have no institutional power or capacity to respond to the challenges they face. Instead of being blessed, communes and villages with rich resources suffer.

The village administrations are employed by the MoI. Practically, they have to assist the commune authorities, and in theory they are to serve the people. Such different directions tear them apart when it comes to understanding their accountability. Moreover, because they

are like extra arms and legs of the commune, they are subject to the same constraints of party politics and dependency.

Pressure from Workload

It is indisputable that decentralisation has offered different roles and responsibilities for councils and subsequently for village chiefs. And while the composition of commune and village leadership has not changed much, there was inadequate preparation and support for leaders to handle the new tasks. Moreover, at the time of study, D&D was an unfinished reform in which deconcentration lagged behind decentralisation, placing councils in the midst of unclear mandates and roles that are not structurally supported. These bring overwhelming responsibilities that cost much time and energy to handle, especially when villagers' expectations increase. Aside from that, councils need to invest some of their official and unofficial time in party work, as noted earlier.

> A commune chief is extremely busy. The people always come to us when they need help, whether it is a weekday or holiday, lunch time or nap time. (Pou Keang, former chief, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

On top of that, the emergence of business patrons overpowers local authorities by bringing in issues and conflicts beyond their capacity or authority to deal with. For example, the economic forest and land concession in commune A caused the virtually complete elimination of trees whose leaves villagers have depended upon for their livelihoods and led to illegal logging by villagers and subsequent conflicts and a dramatic increase in the number of imprisoned villagers. Local authorities have tried to contact and clarify the issues with the district and higher authorities, and tried to bring the case to the prime minister as well. Most of the local authorities' time has been taken up calling the company begging it to let villagers in for small harvests, or solving mounting conflicts that arise among villagers. Inadequate support and lack of power put councils in the position of not being able to find real solutions to problems but spending lots of time calming villagers and finding compromises to avoid further chaos.

Pressure from Family

Taking time off from farming or running small businesses, administrative leaders become dependent upon their meagre salaries to support their families (most of them being breadwinners). While village chiefs receive smaller salaries than councillors, they also have more time to spend on farming. For them, time spent on administrative work is secondary since their roles are limited. Councillors have bigger roles and responsibilities and have to spend more time on them than on personal businesses. This causes their families to put pressure on them either to find more money or to quit their job. So, for some councillors, petty corruption is inevitable if they are to continue working, while for those who stick to a non-corrupt agenda, the sustained motivation and work incentive become questionable, as they suffer even more from the meagre salary; this was found to be the case more among leaders from the opposition in all three communes.

> Before I started working as a village chief, I did not need to raise cows, but now I have to. (Ta Mut, village chief, commune B, interview, 5/6/2008)

> The government should allocate more administrative funds to us. The salary is too low, and we suffer since we are not corrupt. (Ming Rina, commune chief, commune A, interview, 24/4/2008)

However, some councillors ' positions create opportunities for their wives' business or for their wives to accept bribes, which relieves pressures on them. But for women councillors in our

study, family pressures have led to divorce or remaining single or to entering politics only after they are divorced or relieved from family burdens. A village assistant in commune C is being nagged at daily by her councillor husband to quit her work.

Pressure from Political Parties

Party pressures do not come only from different parties; pressures within the party may sometimes be even stronger than external pressures. Aside from performing their tasks, many leaders are expected to spend a good amount of time on meetings and other party activities to ensure the party agenda makes headway in the commune. Some councillors become marginalised by their own righteousness and wish to act on the people's behalf, like the wealthy farmer-turned-councillor in commune B; he is isolated from his fellow councillors from the same party and from the clerk.

Same-party pressure might also come from the jealousy of others who, not having made it to a councillor position, seek out any faults of the current councillor in order to have him fall off the top of the candidate list.

> Actually, I did not want this position, but people in my party liked me and wanted me to be listed because they liked my work. Still, some other persons in my party (FUNCINPEC) envy me and try to note my mistakes in order to withdraw me from the top of the party list. (Pou Van, second deputy chief, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

On top of that, councillors from a different party, especially the opposition, face bitter challenges as their popularity and reputation are built or increased—they are continuously being co-opted (or sometimes gotten rid of through co-option) by the ruling party through money or indirect intimidation, although some voluntarily choose to join the ruling party.

> Being a local opposition leader is not easy. During the election campaign, the police often intimidate me. High-ranking CPP officials try to buy me. My wife often wants me to stop being involved in politics; she is scared. (Pou Yana, second deputy chief, commune B, interview, 5/6/2008)

And while their jealous fellow party members search for their faults in, leaders from the minority party are also often isolated and examined for faults by leaders from the majority party. They are often subject to blame.

> Working alone is not easy. I do not have anyone to consult with; I'm often treated as an outsider and the majority [from the ruling party] often find my faults but not their peers'. (Pou Chhan, first deputy chief, commune B, interview, 29/5/2008)

Pressure from Villagers

Reforms and development coupled with an increased number of civil society organisations breed better understanding of roles and rights among citizens, albeit not all and not yet widely among rural and less educated people. Villagers are seen to monitor their leaders more than before, sometimes pressing demands on them. Expectations of leaders have begun to change. So councillors no longer experience pressures only from above, but also from below, which is a sign of progress. But councillors' responsiveness remains limited.

One of the reasons for low responsiveness is leaders' inability to address demands. Because the leadership has remained quite stable since the 1980s, behaviour change is difficult. Councillors need to adapt to new working styles and to take up new and different responsibilities, but their previous leadership experience is not relevant. Moreover, for those, including village chiefs,

who have been leading the commune since the 1980s, villagers feel some hatred (often they have forgiven but not forgotten) due to former styles of leadership and specifically the conscription of villagers into K5. This makes it awkward for them when they have to implement a softer form of leadership and in theory have to serve and please villagers.

> I used to be involved with conscription activities and K5 recruitment in the 1980s. Some of the villagers' sons and husbands died or are now handicapped. These days, I try to meet and help the victims' families by advocating for pensions and other forms of assistance; still, some villagers scold and hate me. It is painful. (Ming San, commune chief, commune C, interview, 10/4/2008)

This also brings difficulties when leaders try to get people to participate in meetings and projects and especially to pay local contributions. Some leaders even used the word "beg" to describe their collecting of local contributions. So some villagers, still only a small group, monitor the activities of councillors and express their demands. At the same time, they do not participate widely or pay local contributions, or they do so hesitantly and infrequently. Leaders then are functioning under an unbalanced, or non-existent, social contract.

Such imbalance can also be seen in the case studies, particularly in the villagers' grievances over leaders' unfair treatment of gifts. Often it is village chiefs and sometimes councillors who decide which households to invite to attend meetings and receive gifts. The leaders say that the number of participants is often limited, so they choose either the poorer villagers or those they can contact easily within time constraints. But villagers are not convinced because some households have never been invited or given gifts. They feel that there is a rigid strategy of preferential treatment.

> A few villagers accuse me of giving out gifts unfairly. But it is very difficult for me when it comes to selecting villagers to receive party gifts. In fact, there are more demands than gifts. I never keep one for my family, but I am still criticised. (Ming San, commune chief, commune C, interview, 10/4/2008)

> Leaders in my village do not love villagers equally. When someone comes to give a gift, they call only their relatives or those they like, but not me. (Villager A14, commune A, response to survey, 21/3/2008)

Some positive signs have emerged as a result of decentralisation. They include, although not yet widely, changes in villagers' attitudes towards and perceptions of leaders—they are monitoring leaders' activities and expressing limited demands—and changes in the form and styles of leadership. These have put pressures on leaders who are not yet capable or supported enough to respond, but pressure is also felt when villagers' participation has changed little, despite their changed expectations.

Constraints on Women Leaders

Women leaders in the case studies were found to face constraints of culture and tradition, family pressure and a double workload and other barriers.

Cultural and traditional constraints have caused women leaders not to receive the support and cooperation they need from their colleagues (sometimes including other women leaders) or from other family members. As mentioned in previous sections, some women have faced divorce as a result of participating in politics while others remained single and or chose to become involved in politics after being relieved from family burdens.

For women who choose to participate in politics when they are still handling most of the household tasks, there is the pressure of a double workload. They need to strike a balance between two jobs. The interviews found only a minority of women (two out of eight) who entered politics while they were married and handling family burdens. Of the other six, two were divorced, two were widows, one was single and one was married but mostly relieved from family burdens. Of the two married women leaders, one fell sick after one year in the administration and has done very little work since then. The other faces family frustration, specifically from the husband, over the reduced time and attention she gives to family tasks.

> If I had known my wife would be so committed and too busy with her work as a village assistant, and would rarely do her housework any more, I would not have let her be involved in this job. I first inspired my wife to take this role because I felt bad that she had a very high education [higher than his] but could not use it. (Pou Von, commune councillor, commune C, interview, 10/April/2008).

There are other physical constraints for women, at least according to some villagers and leaders, including women leaders. Local leaders are expected not only during work hours. Quite often their interventions are needed during weekends and especially at night, when parties are held and conflicts or gang fights break out. Although it is more the responsibility of the police to intervene in such events, villagers still expect their leaders to appear first and to prevent fights or witness what is going on. Women leaders find it hard to intervene in such circumstances, firstly because it is unsafe for them to drive a motorcycle around at night and secondly because they are not physically strong enough to stop a fight in which knives and sticks are often used.

Another constraint is that a good leader is someone who can mingle well with villagers. As a Khmer saying goes: *Chol stung tam bat, chol srok tam tes*[12], an equivalent of the English "When in Rome, do as the Romans do". A leader, in order to be trusted and to get to know villagers well, has to mingle with those who drink, those who gamble, those who sing, those who work. When they are not able to mingle, they are not trusted or welcomed.

It is often argued that women lack the confidence and capacity to serve as top local leaders. This sentiment was observed to be shared by many villagers and some leaders, again including women leaders. Such a view means that women leaders have to work harder than men to prove themselves. This would not be a big issue if equal opportunities were given to them, but the lack of trust in their capacity has led many women to be given inferior roles and fewer responsibilities. Lack of self-confidence has led many women to accept inferior treatment, further undermining their potential to gain trust from villagers and from other leaders.

5.2.2. Spiritual, Social and Religious Leaders

Often elders and *achar* no longer have heavy family burdens. With age, they have become models or teacher of social values to guide younger generations on the right social paths. Their involvement in social activities is driven by a feeling of social obligation and a search for merit for their next lives. These leaders find joy in serving and leading the local people.

One *achar* complained to us, however, about poor living standards, and we observed during field visits that many elders and *achar* are not among the well off in their communities, especially since the absence of a welfare system makes them dependent on their children's support and continued farming.

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12 *Chol* = enter; *stung* = stream; *tam* = through; *bat* = meanders; *srok* = country; *tes* = native

> We live in a small house, and I have to farm to support the family. I do not join the monkhood because of that. Being an *achar*, I can work and grow rice, generating some income to support the family. If I were a monk, my family would starve. (*Achar*, commune A, interview, 25/4/2008)

However, their low living standards do not prevent them from leading the local community in projects and activities.

One major constraint these leaders have recently been encountering is political parties' pressure on them to indoctrinate worshippers to vote for the party of the gift giver in exchange for material assistance for pagodas and other small community projects. Co-option of these leaders into politics bring opportunities for them as well as villagers. Given the trust they have earned from villagers, these leaders could serve as links between villagers and politicians or the state. Co-opting also allows more financial support to flow into villages. However, in the long run, the genuine trust and respect among the people for these leaders and the *wat* institution might become blurred as these leaders shift to favour a particular political party.

5.2.3. Economic Leaders

Big economic leaders do not mind contributing to the community and providing rents to (local and higher) politicians. This brings them opportunities and benefits that far exceed the amount they give. Their major pressures are mainly to avoid conflicts with higher authorities and to please politicians through rents, networking and sponsoring of political activities.

Grass-roots leaders, who should increasingly be known as economic and administrative leaders, are being co-opted into politics for their popularity and their economic standing and personalities. Like elders, they find this opportunity rewarding, but for those who do not join of their own free will the opportunity stunts their potential to serve the people and their former outspokenness against illegal or inappropriate acts of local authorities.

5.2.4. Knowledge and Development Assistance Leaders

It has been noted throughout this paper that knowledge leaders function only very sporadically and often act as opinion leaders. They are not significant in villagers' view, and even if they wanted to, they would find it hard to lead villagers in general situations. For formal CBOs, a great absence of activities and hence reputation is caused by broad and vague mandates and a lack of finance and support. They are undermined by a lack of power to deal with illegal acts that are claimed to have the permission of higher authorities—especially natural resource extraction. There is a lack of cooperation between local authorities and CBOs. Leaders of CBOs lose the incentive to work and represent the people. There are quite a number of functioning CBOs, but most are small and informal, such as funeral help groups. These CBOs, often led by village authorities, have been traditional for generations. They do not produce significant leadership or offer relevant representation.

Chapter 6:

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The paper has explored different types of leaders identified by villagers from different domains within three study communes, looking at who they are and at their characteristics, networks, motivations, activities and constraints.

This chapter summarises the main findings in terms of power, authority, legitimacy, patronage politics and gender. It then revisits the immediate contexts in which these lessons are relevant and should be applied.

6.1. Findings

Decentralisation has, to an extent, brought in wider leadership, including more women and experienced and motivated leaders who are contributing to stabilising local communities. Local leaders are also doing a good job of linking the state and localities and are quite effective in mobilising resources. For this reason, they are listened to by the government and state officials. Decentralisation is working to that extent. To a different extent, it was found that continuing hierarchical arrangements and patrimonial influences ensure limited progress. Specific factors listed below were found to reinforce the issue.

Local administrative leaders lack real decision-making power and are increasingly undermined by the power and influence of political and economic patrons. In response to our first question—Who are the village and commune leaders?—it was found that villagers mostly refer to their village and commune administrators as those they go to for help and of whom they have increased expectations. While other types of leaders are also mentioned by villagers, they are more active and sought after in informal and situation-based circumstances. This suggests that, to an extent, villagers trust and understand that administrative leaders have the authority and power to solve their problems and serve them. They are seen to be engaged in village and commune events and are "there" for villagers to approach.

The study indicates that the leaders possess what Lukes (1974) refers to as the "first dimension" of power—a form that is concrete and observable during times of conflicts. But the evidence suggests that these leaders suffer from a lack of power (specifically in natural resource management) and resources. This leads them to depend on support and informal financing from politicians and big business people, who have more decision-making power than local administrative leaders and whose power to shape and influence political agendas is also obvious (what Lukes refer to as the "second" and "third dimensions" of power). These individuals are also respected by villagers for their assistance to the community. Villagers were found largely to disregard the illegal business activities of these leaders or the agenda behind their assistance. Thus it is not difficult for them to gain power and influence over the communes. The intrusion and bad influence of these economic patrons could overwhelm and undermine local politics. Representation and accountability could be greatly affected.

Local administrative leaders' institutional authority is further weakened and challenged by development prospects and rising business people. Their accountability still leans towards central powers and political parties because their CSF is meagre. The assistance and

networks provided by party patrons and business people help build legitimacy (both local and party) for leaders when they are able to produce outcomes for commune development, according to Pye (1985). Leaders with party backup were found to be more confident and successful than leaders without or with weak networks. The meagre CSF allows party politics to maintain the status quo and build legitimacy and win votes.

National patrons of the ruling party existed in every commune visited. They might have both formal responsibilities and informal interests in the commune. First, they could belong to the provincial governorship; second, they have informal assignments from the party to "take care" of the province or district and commune to ensure legitimacy and votes. This assignment is usually given to those who have family backgrounds from the particular district or commune. Their existence has varying impacts on different communes as discussed in previous chapters, but the one common point is keeping councils dependent on party backing and support. The concept of reciprocity is ill used to keep villagers dependent so that they vote for those who provide assistance. This has increased the patrimonial and politicised aspects of the relationships between local authorities and the outside world, decreasing the potential for local authorities to have a representative function. Downward accountability is thus not a visible line, as intended by the reform. This also distorts the efforts towards a checks-and-balance political system and limits the possibility of the commune being an independent institution that can represent people's needs.

Villagers' preference for leaders with traditional legitimacy reinforces patrimonial features and makes it difficult for new entrants. The study found that leadership groups have remained quite stable since the 1980s. As a result many village and commune leaders are much older than average villagers and much older than the minimum age. Considering that seniority and hierarchy are culturally valued, these leaders find it easier than younger and newer faces to gain legitimacy. Traditional legitimacy definitely plays a role among villagers, especially because it was also found that education was not as significant as expected.

In addition to lacking financial resources, these leaders were found to lack the experience and capacity adequately to adjust and respond to the new demands and responsibilities of decentralisation and wider democratic reforms. But because they are more easily accepted by villagers, they are expected to play a more informal and traditional role, and villagers are content when the community is stable and they are treated in a parent-child-like relationship.

Similarly, elders are pointed out as important leaders for villagers. Although serving in the more social aspects such as giving advice on life issues and involvement in religious activities, they are important in mobilising labour for village projects and are also important "advisers" to commune councils in their development plans. Recently these leaders have been increasingly co-opted into politics. Their leadership has since been somehow made to accord with the party's agenda, which helps bridge the gap between poor villagers and the state but also undermines the promise of intermediary representation.

In addition to indirect co-option of elders and *achar* into party politics, the co-option of other popular grass-roots leaders into commune councils is increasingly common. This has helped increase representation among different groups of villagers but has also forestalled outspoken individuals from speaking up and leading villagers against corrupt or bad acts of local authorities. Although co-option has increased representation of socio-economic groups, it functions more as the ruling party's "catch all" approach for vote maximisation.

A preference for leaders with traditional legitimacy is common in patronage politics. According to Pye (1985), in patronage politics leaders legitimise themselves via religious and symbolic rituals, not through delivery of services. Our study indicates that Cambodian leaders now have to conform to both standards because people's expectations have gradually altered as a result of decentralisation, although the former standard remains dominant. Concurring with Pye, Kent (2003) reiterates that development and democratisation are fighting with Khmer culture. Kent sees Khmer Buddhism as being reinvented. She makes it clear that politicians who realise the importance and necessity of traditional legitimacy are patronising temples in order to gather divine power and moral legitimacy. Our empirical findings validate Kent's contention that the reform process is threatening to the values and unity of the Khmer world view and the autonomy of peasants. However, we see that it is not the reform per se that is the threat, but how those in power fit it into their patronage politics.

The activities of local leaders are still limited to administrative work and conflict resolution. Commune planning, quite a new task for local authorities, does not have wide participation from the people and maintains a top-down approach. This study confirmed Öjendal and Kim's (2006) study, which showed that villagers are less fearful of local authorities; however, it also found that villagers are still reluctant to engage with their authorities, especially if they do not have an informal relationship or rapport with the individuals. They partly understand the procedure and what help they can ask local authorities for, although they are still largely unclear about council mandates. Yet some are still not comfortable going to authorities, and virtually no one approaches authorities to express concerns or demands over community development. They mainly access authorities in times of conflicts. The underlying causes to an extent centre on the fact that democracy is still shallow, and so, like other transitional states, according to Roberts (2008), the Cambodian state is struggling to gain legitimacy, so the failure of the state to be accountable to citizens and reluctance among the people, in addition to the lack of channels to interact with the state, provide little room for positive engagement between local administrative leaders and the voters.

Most interactions between local leaders and villagers take place between villagers and the chiefs or the clerk (who handles paperwork) or between villagers and those they have built personal or informal relationships with. Moreover, during meetings, villagers do not express their opinions but attend to listen. Local development planning is regarded sceptically by villagers, who are unwilling to attend or make contributions, and this puts village and commune authorities under considerable pressure. This is perhaps why participation is low and decreasing and most commune planning is now done by councils consulting elders and village committees. In some villages, the committees meet the people informally to discuss their needs; otherwise they would not be able to receive genuine opinions from villagers because most formal meetings are a one-man show in which the audience remains passive.

With their mandates unclear, deconcentration not yet implemented at the time of study and a lack of support and human and financial resources, councils' work mainly revolves around administration and resolving disputes. Other roles set forth in their mandates are either too broad, vague or out of reach for them. Moreover, they are not familiar with those roles, an area which needs systematic support.

Donor and NGO projects are mainly short-term and focus on quantifiable results. Their many projects have introduced fragmentation, with little attention given to representation. Villagers do not identify those from this domain as people they can seek out for advice or help or representation. Many donor projects were found, but they largely had a short-term and issue-

specific focus. While villagers appreciated these projects, they were not significant in any other areas besides provision of material assistance and training. Better coordination and cooperation are needed for an approach more based on long-term and sustained systemic outcomes. More interaction and cooperation with local people and authorities are also required.

The gender concept introduced by the reforms seems to have been planted in infertile political-cultural ground. Women leaders still struggle to find and maintain legitimacy among villagers and other leaders as well as from their political parties. While commune councillors still face a shortage of devolved power, women leaders face it even more. Women leaders and the solution of gender issues are still hampered in conditions marked by isolation from male colleagues and a lack of cooperation. To enhance their acceptance and legitimacy, women leaders tend to work harder than their male counterparts. The literature review showed that women contribute a lot to forging cross-party ties and building civil society partnerships with the government (McGrew *et al.* 2004). However, we found that local women leaders are more or less the same as men in these activities.

While one result of the reform is the co-option of more women leaders into local politics, women's issues and gender-related work have not been included in commune project planning, aside from domestic conflict resolution and occasional gender training.

Public awareness and appreciation of the roles of women outside the home are still limited. Recent research on the informal economy in Kompong Cham (CCC 2008) found that 97 percent of informal vendors were female, but this significant role has not been recognised or promoted by the population in general or by specific policies. The promotion of gender has so far focused mainly on its inclusion in politics and addressing domestic violence, but there has not been enough focus on improving rural women's lives with regard to hygiene, informal household economy, health care and child care. These are all areas that could boost confidence among women, which would lead to their empowerment. It is thus up to the government, civil society and NGOs to decide on strategies to improve the currently non-existent or extremely few gender-related commune projects and activities and to focus on women's livelihoods.

6.2. Policy Implications

The above findings indicate the need for deconcentration reform and for government reforms to take into account the nature and functions of neo-patrimonialism. Ignoring it or dismissing it as wrong or irrelevant will only continue to render great efforts ineffective. At the time of writing, elections of district and provincial councils are about to take place. Many different people anxiously await the result of this long-awaited reform, which it is hoped will ease and clarify the roles and functions of commune councils. This reform could also strengthen horizontal and vertical accountability and weaken the clientelism.

Looking at the three case studies, we can draw specific implications for natural resource management and the internal control system of, especially, the party in power.

Commune Natural Resource Management

As evidenced in commune A, it is believed that natural resource management will continue to be a big source of grievances, conflicts and frustrations for local leaders and villagers as well as concession companies and other authorities. Therefore there should be a mechanism or strategy to link central planning with commune planning. Since agro-industries usually involve land that stretches beyond one commune and sometimes beyond one district, the planning and decision making are beyond one commune's authority. This should not mean, however, that the

centre makes decisions without consulting or informing affected communes, as is currently the case. Communes should be consulted and informed of the intended purpose, size, boundaries and potential impacts of concessions.

A livelihoods impact study should be conducted to assess the potential impact of concessions before a consensus decision is reached on the size of a concession and the conditions required of the concession company. This should be done by the communes with support from the district. A working party could be established including the district and/or province, with representation from the communes.

Then, a more practical tax mechanism can be developed and enforced by the communes involved, on how and how much to tax the concession land that falls within each commune. This could help offset the impacts of the concession on people's livelihoods. It could also reduce the overwhelming influence of the local *oknha* and other big economic patrons who would no longer have to support the commune through off-budget private funding but would have to pay out of obligation. *Oknhas* would then have a regular schedule of how much to pay and not have to spend time being sought after and approving projects and never knowing what will be expected or asked of them next.

For the benefit of the companies, an economic land concession committee could be established to discuss issues such as water, land, bridge building, conflicts and security, to reduce future overlaps by working together to find solutions to common issues. The committee could be chaired by a representative from the district with company representatives acting as members.

Internal Party Control System

In commune B, while it was obvious that more democratisation was needed in terms of increased choices of candidates on the party list, the internal party structure should also be altered to allow people to file complaints when they are not satisfied or are victimised by local leadership. The growing unpopularity of the chief and the mounting grievances felt by the people could mean that the party does not have long before it loses its image in this commune. Therefore, this commune can be a spur for the ruling party to reconsider its internal policies by looking at its own best practices in other communes, such as commune C, in which patronage is working well, and trying to improve its internal discipline. This could apply to all parties.

Policy implications can also be drawn in a more general form to address overall local leadership issues.

Enhance Capacity of Local Leaders through Better Training and Increased Cooperation

Leadership was stable and villagers preferred leaders with traditional legitimacy. Therefore many leaders are older and find it difficult to adjust to new approaches in the current state of transition. It is thus important that more be done to improve the capacity of current village and commune administrations. Training is crucial. Many forms of training are provided to help leaders boost their confidence and raise their capacity and familiarity with new forms and roles. They were found to be of value but inadequate in quality, regularity and length of focus. Coherence, effectiveness, relevance and practicality should be stressed. Increased cooperation between trainees and training institutions is needed to make this possible.

Internship of younger generations with commune councils could be implemented as part of training support. This could also ease the workload of commune councillors while the

interns learn. A small financial incentive, paid either from council revenues or by NGOs, could be provided as motivation. With increased council revenue sources, this would not be impossible.

Improve Councils' Accountability through Financial Autonomy and Increased Funding

The meagre CSF, which is mainly used for infrastructure development and administration, is currently the only source of commune funding. According to the LAMC, the commune is entitled to other sources of revenue, including tax collection. Rusten *et al.* (2004) indicated that taxes could be a significant source of revenue for communes but that this could not be sustained unless there was improved capacity for collection among councils. A tax law has not been fully developed or adopted. Currently, communes are collecting taxes and other fees, but mostly informally. New fees and taxes are not necessary; what is necessary is a formalisation of current tax and fee collections to ensure these become a source of revenue for communes, not for individual pockets.

While off-budget party finance promotes responsiveness of commune leaders, it undermines local leaders' formal mandate and shifts their accountability. To increase accountability to the people, commune councils should be granted the autonomy to seek their own revenues. Increased financial resources would increase the effectiveness and will of local administrative leaders to respond and be accountable to citizens. It would mean that their salaries could be increased, which could improve motivation. Second, if local leaders can enforce taxes on businesses and natural resource extraction, especially big ones, it will build the concept of a social contract between the rulers and the ruled, which is currently virtually absent. This would also ease the complicated and highly sensitive issue of commune natural resource management. Local leaders would have more power to deal with natural resource exploitation. Third, councils' independence would be enhanced and so their reliance on party funding would decrease over time, loosening the grip of party politics and neo-patrimonialism.

Coordination and Cooperation between NGOs, CBOs, Villagers and Local Authorities

NGOs and CBOs need to improve coordination with each other and increase cooperation and involvement with village and commune leaders and with villagers. More and better coordination and cooperation are needed to improve village and commune training and other types of assistance. Projects should be more systematic, with a long-term focus. Villagers and leaders should be consulted to identify real needs, and there should be more rapport building and interaction between NGOs and villagers so that the work is not just a provision of material assistance. CBOs require wide support if they are to work at all.

The Organic Law

The currently ambiguous and broad mandates of councils, the lack of resources and support, the absence of accountability from districts and provinces to communes and the currently weak or absent horizontal accountability could be eased through careful implementation of the organic law since it will delegate functions to provincial and district councils and clarify roles between the different councils. Therefore the future of decentralisation will depend partly on the implementation of the organic law (deconcentration) but will also depend on the will of the ruling party and government ministries to devolve power, functions and resources.

The transfer of specific sectoral functions and the resources to implement them can help overcome the current lack of clarity about which functions commune councils may or may not implement. Also, district councils will help the communes in their roles of conflict resolution

and tax collection and will help arrange capacity development for councillors. This could be a starting point for cooperation and support from district authorities.

According to the government, reviewing which sectoral functions should be transferred to which council levels and which should remain with line ministries and their sub-national units may take even longer than 10 years. Some civil servants are still quite reluctant to devolve power and authority.

Furthermore, given the dominance of the ruling party in the communes, there is no doubt that district and province councils will be made up of CPP councillors. Party politics might thus be further enhanced. It all depends on the will of the CPP to follow liberal democratic representation and accountability whether true democracy is to develop and the above issues are to be eased.

Women Need More Support

Currently, women and women leaders suffer from a lack of power, support and opportunities. Women need more support in terms of empowerment, improved capability and livelihood knowledge, peer networking and compensation for and recognition of their contribution. Promotion of gender should start with awareness and recognition of women's practical roles and by focusing on improving rural women's lives in basic areas, not only on the inclusion of women in politics and on addressing domestic violence.

More gender workshops are not necessarily needed, but more and better coordination and cooperation between different training-related institutions. Different institutions can work together to establish their common areas of expertise and perhaps reduce the amount of redundancy and overlap in training.

Provide Additional Financial Support and Incentives to Women Leaders

As there is not much chance of renegotiating women's household roles, one support for women leaders could be paying them extra or having a separate pay scheme to compensate for the unpaid work they do at home. The small compensation could ease family frustration at losing some of their household work or pay for someone to help them with housekeeping.

A woman assistant could be hired among local junior or high school students. This could expose them early to commune work and help build an interest and a career path for them after school.

Peer Networking and Public Awareness Programmes for Women Leaders

Peer networking would increase women leaders' confidence and effectiveness. Women councillors and village committees and perhaps men of like mind in nearby communes can get together to discuss issues and strategies to deal with them. Support should be provided to help them form a committee and to meet regularly and develop a clear mentoring and training scheme. There is a similar committee of women commune councillors at the district level, but it is strictly for those from the same political party. Our recommendation refers to a committee for women and men leaders of like mind on gender promotion, not a party-based one.

Public awareness should be raised in support of women and their participation in politics. Television interviews of strong and potential women leaders can be one mode of doing this. Presenting women in positive and sympathetic ways can over time make public views more accepting of women leaders while encouraging other women to follow similar paths.

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