CARERE

Cambodia Area Rehabilitation and Regeneration

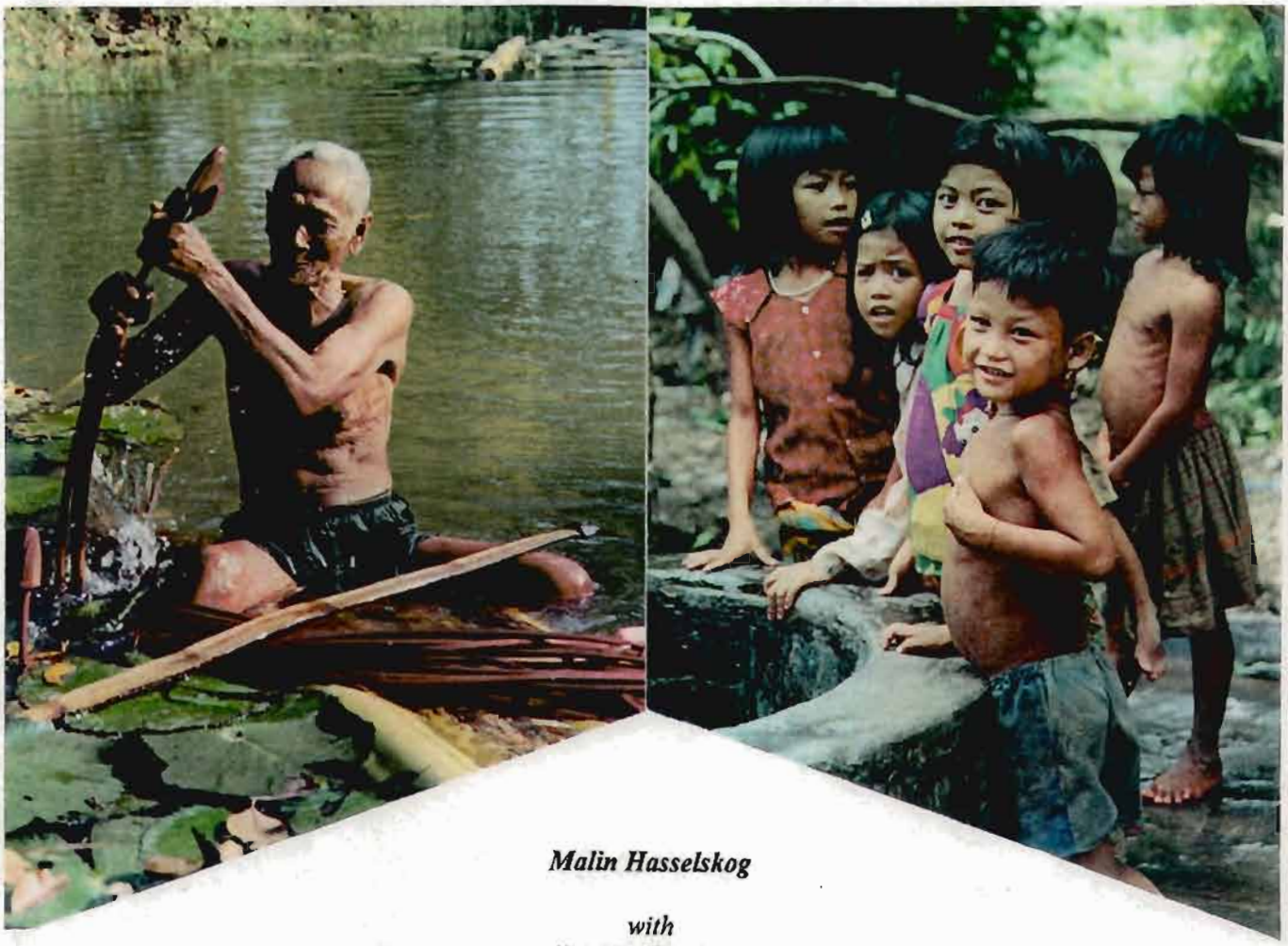
A UNDP Project in Support of
The Royal Government's SEILA Programme

UNDP/UNOPS

SEILA

Local Governance in Transition

Villagers' Perceptions and Seila's Impact



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Malin Hasselskog
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Executive Summary

Local Governance in Transition; Villagers' Perceptions and Seila's Impact is a study based on two village case studies in lowland Cambodia, one in Pursat and one in Battambang.

The objectives are to gain a better understanding of villagers' experiences and perceptions of local authorities; to draw conclusions about Seila's impact on local governance; and to discuss what impact on local governance it is realistic to expect from Seila.

Seila is a programme of the Royal Government of Cambodia, aiming at poverty alleviation and reconciliation through good decentralised governance, establishing the commune as the primary development agent.

The field research was conducted between June 1999 and April 2000 by a team of two Cambodian women and one expatriate woman, spending a total of two months in each of the case study villages.

The first part of the study – **Villagers' Perceptions of Local Governance** – shows that village governance is marked by local power relations, and that in one case there is a lack of clarity about mandates and sources of power. It also shows that villagers' comprehension of the commune is blurred in the notion of "higher levels" and that their relation to these higher levels is dominated by scarce knowledge and obedience.

The conclusions are that lack of clarity and reluctance to having a leadership role decrease village leaders' accountability and legitimacy, and that the tendency among villagers to accept whatever the authorities decide counteracts changes in local governance, while villagers sometimes are prepared to demand their rights.

The second part of the study – **Seila's Impact on Local Governance** – shows that in one case, Seila (and other development interventions) have resulted in more influence to the already powerful, while in the other case, a division of tasks has emerged. Villagers do not know the Village Development Committee (VDC) as a group and there is a strong reluctance to having a position in development work. Meetings and local contribution have not created any general sense of influence or ownership. Paradoxically, however, in one case, obvious mismanagement of development activities may make villagers take organised action against the village authorities. This part of the study also shows that villagers are not clear about the commune's role in development, and that there are other actors who they perceive as primary development agents.

The conclusions are that Seila's impact on local governance is largely determined by local power relations, that Seila's impact on villagers' inclination to exercise their rights comes mainly from exposure to actors outside the village and the emergence of new leaders, and that Seila's impact on villagers' relation to the commune is obstructed by the appearance of development organisations.

The concluding discussion – **What Impact on Local Governance is Realistic to Expect from Seila?** – argues that Seila can contribute to active citizenship if people are aware of their rights and responsibilities, that Seila can contribute to establishing accountable village representatives with a limited mandate, and that Seila can strengthen commune governance if other actors do not counteract that objective.

The report contains extensive descriptions of leadership roles and relations in the two case study villages. To enable the reader to get an overall view of the report and based on that decide which parts to read in full, the **Main Points in Summary** are provided on the following pages.

Main Points in Summary

Chapter Two: Villagers' Perceptions of Local Governance

Village

Role and Reputation of the Village Authorities

Chraeng: The Gentle Father and the Feared Strongman

- The Village chief is a soft and tired man who villagers generally like as a person; there is a paternalistic relation between him and the villagers;
- There is a tough Head of militiamen whom people fear and dislike; he dominates the atmosphere in the village because of his appearance and personality, and is more powerful than the Village chief because of his contacts with people on higher levels.

Kook Doung: The Gentle Chief and the Educated Deputy

- The village leadership is less personal and more professional than in Chraeng;
- The Village chief is a soft and honest, though somewhat passive, man whom villagers like very much;
- The Deputy village chief is more educated and active and also fairly well regarded;
- Returnees who live far from the original village do not know the Village chief, but they know the Deputy quite well.

Recent History of Village Leadership

Chraeng: Changes and Confusion – and Reluctance

- There have been several changes in the composition of village leadership during the last 20 years; it is in many cases unclear how and when these changes have happened and there is still confusion about the existence, the holder and the tasks of some positions;
- There is a widely expressed reluctance to holding an authority position;
- Monks, *aachaars* and old people are respected and valued informal leaders.

Kook Doung: Stability and Clarity – and Reluctance

- Village leadership has been more stable and is more clear than in Chraeng;
- As in Chraeng, there is a widely expressed reluctance to holding an authority position;
- Monks, *aachaars* and old people do not enjoy the same respect and leadership status as in Chraeng.

Contacts with the Village Authorities

Chraeng: One is Not There, the Other is Unfair and Expensive

- Villagers hesitate to consult the village authorities since the Village chief is not very accessible and the militiaman is not trusted and charges for his services;
- Conflict resolution is the main reason to consult the village authorities; another reason is to get a marriage certificate or a divorce;
- The militiaman is taking over the Village chief's tasks.

Kook Doung: One is Fair but Slow, the Other is Efficient but Expensive

- The village authorities are more accessible and trusted than in Chraeng, and villagers consult them more often; the returnees in the far off area, however, consult them much less than the old villagers;
- As in Chraeng, conflict resolution is the main reason to consult the village authorities and other reasons are to get a marriage certificate or a divorce;
- The Deputy village chief is more efficient, but the Village chief is more fair and does not charge for his services;

Commune

Comprehension of the Commune

Chraeng: Whatever They Say, We Do

- Villagers' comprehension of the commune is blurred in the idea of "higher levels";
- The face and name of officials at commune, district and province levels are known (on a decreasing scale) by villagers, but perceived (on an increasing scale) as remote and inaccessible;
- The Village and Commune chiefs are unfamiliar with and subordinated to authorities above them.

Kook Doung: I'm Only Low Level, I Listen to Them

- As in Chraeng, villagers do not usually distinguish the commune from "higher levels";
- Villagers are less familiar than in Chraeng with higher level officials personally, but more inclined to seek their assistance if needed;
- The Village chief is loyal but not very active in relation to higher authorities, while the Commune chief is hard working but often feels powerless.

The Commune and Higher Levels Come to the Village

Chraeng: They Come to Get Tax, But They also Take Lunch or Dinner

- Villagers do not know in advance when people from the authorities will come to see them;
- When people from the authorities come, villagers in general are not clear who they are, but obediently follow their instructions and pay the taxes and fees they ask for.

Kook Doung: It's a Daily Fee to Big People

- As in Chraeng, villagers obediently pay for family cards, though they are not clear what they are for and though they expect to have to pay for new ones soon;
- Shop owners pay daily fees, which the Commune chief claims he wants to, but cannot, stop.

Villagers Go to the Commune and Higher Levels

Chraeng: Go Through the Network

- Villagers sense that they cannot bypass the Village chief to go straight to higher levels;
- The main reason to consult authorities outside the village is conflict resolution; this, however, is expensive which stops most villagers;
- Wine producers in the village have participated in a reasonably successful protest against the authorities' ban of village wine production.

Kook Doung: No Reason to Go

- Villagers can go straight to higher levels without first consulting the Village chief; they rarely have a reason to go, though;
- Unlike in Chraeng, many villagers go to the commune to get a marriage certificate; conflicts, however, are seldom brought to higher levels;
- Most villagers have signed petitions to demand their right to fish in some lakes in the area, and a few have participated in a demonstration which seems to have been successful.

Conclusions

Local Power Relations

- Local power relations and personalities strongly affect village governance.
- Lack of clarity about mandates and sources of power makes it difficult to hold leaders accountable and decreases their legitimacy.

Reluctance

- Widespread reluctance to having a leadership role makes it difficult to demand effective services from the leaders.

Acceptance

- A strong tendency among villagers to accept whatever the authorities decide, in combination with unfamiliarity and lack of different expectations, counteract changes in local governance.

Protests

- Villagers are prepared to protest and demand their rights if it is important enough to them and if there are leaders with enough ideas and knowledge who take the initiative.

Chapter Three: Seila's Impact on Local Governance

Village

New Tasks and Positions

Chraeng: They Help the Village From Running Out of Things

- A number of positions related to development activities have been created, and filled either by appointment by the Village chief or voting by the villagers, sometimes it is unclear which;
- These positions are concentrated to a small group of people, where almost all the men have or have had an authority position, but also including four women;
- Most villagers do not know the Village Development Committee (VDC) as a group; individual members are known, however, for specific tasks such as building roads, running the rice bank or calling for meetings;
- Many of those who hold a development position claim that they do not want it, mainly because they think that other villagers do not like them; on the other hand, there is competition about going for trainings when allowance is provided.

Kook Doung: They Call for Meetings

- As in Chraeng, new positions related to development activities have been institutionalised either through election or appointment;
- These positions are concentrated to a small group of people, only two of whom have or have had an authority position and including four women;
- As in Chraeng, most villagers do not know the Village Development Committee (VDC) as a group; two men are well known for development activities, mainly the rice bank; all those who have a development position are mainly known for calling for meetings;
- Those who hold a development position claim to be very reluctant, mainly because it involves a lot of work but no payment; they feel obliged, though, to accept an appointment or election by the villagers.

Changing Power Structures

Chraeng: The Already Powerful Extend Their Control – and Become More Vulnerable

- Development interventions have made the two village leaders more powerful, while also more vulnerable;
- The Village chief/VDC leader dominates the VDC, and delegates more responsibilities to the men than to the women;
- There are a few VDC members and others who may be emerging as leaders alternative to the Village chief;
- Development interventions have affected the role of monks, partly taking over monks' activities, partly involving them in theirs.

Kook Doung: We Never Forget Each Other

- The institutionalisation of development positions, filled by others than the village authorities, has created a division of tasks that works well between the Village chief and the development leaders, and thus consolidated/created a solid village leadership structure;
- The role of the Group leaders continues to diminish as development actors take over their tasks;
- Two men have (re)gained status as recognised leaders in addition to the village authorities due to their involvement in development activities, and a third man is gaining recognition as an emerging leader partly due to his involvement in development activities;
- The concentration of work and responsibility to two men, however, risks hindering others, especially women, from developing leadership skills and recognition.

Emerging Opportunities and Responsibilities for Villagers

Chraeng: We Can Request, But They Decide

- Though villagers have got used to going for meetings and to requesting things from higher levels, there is no general sense of influence on decisions about development activities.
- Labour and cash local contribution has not created any general sense of ownership and responsibility among villagers.
- Mismanagement and injustices related to development activities may be making people angry and organised enough to bring a formal complaint about the village authorities.

Kook Doung: Villagers Want Work – With Payment

- The presence of a development leadership has not created any sense (or expectation or demand) of influence among villagers on decisions about development activities;
- As, in Chraeng, local contribution has not created any general sense of ownership and responsibility.

Commune

Changing Perceptions of and Relations to the Commune

Chraeng: The Commune Chief was Here when We Built the Road

- The Commune chief has become slightly more familiar to most villagers; they are, however, not clear about the commune's role in development activities, and still perceive the commune as remote and mainly dealing with security and conflict resolution;
- VDC members do not know the role of the Commune Development Committee (CDC) and have no sense of influence in the commune; only the VDC leader (who is also the Village chief) has contact with the commune;
- Villagers usually think of the commune as a minor part of the "higher levels"; the most significant impact on villagers' perceptions of and relation to these higher levels is the appearance of *angkaar*.

Kook Doung: I Go to have a Chat with the Commune Chief

- The Commune chief comes to the village more often than before; as in Chraeng, however, villagers are not clear about the commune's role in development activities;
- VDC members are more familiar with the commune than before; they are, however, not clear about who is in the Commune Development Committee (CDC), and what it is for; the current contacts with the commune are strongly concentrated to the VDC leader and the Village chief;
- As in Chraeng, villagers do not usually think of the commune separate from other "higher levels", and more significant than changes in villagers' relations to the commune is the appearance of *angkaar*.

Conclusions

Village Governance

- Seila's immediate impact on village governance is largely determined by local power relations; there is potential, however, for creating more room for alternative/additional leaders to emerge.

Villagers' Inclination to Exercise Their Rights

- The impact that Seila can have on villagers' inclination to exercise their rights, does not come from meetings or local contribution, but from exposure to actors and structures outside the village, and from the emergence of new leaders.

Villagers' Relation to the Commune

- Seila's impact on villagers' relation to the commune appears to be obstructed by the appearance of *angkaar*, and by the fact that others than commune staff are being paid to do development work.

Chapter Four: What Impact on Local Governance is Realistic to Expect from Seila?

Active Citizenship

- Seila can contribute to active citizenship, but only if people are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Village Representatives

- Seila can contribute to establishing accountable village representatives with a limited mandate; it is not realistic, though, to expect Seila to fundamentally change village governance in the short run.

Commune Governance

- Seila can strengthen accountable commune governance; however, Seila's impact will be limited as long as other actors such as development organisations and political parties behave in ways that do not support this objective.

Acronyms and Khmer Terms

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AS	Aphiwat Strei
CARERE 1	Cambodia Resettlement and Reintegration; 1992 – 1995
CARERE 2	Cambodia Area Rehabilitation and Regeneration; 1996 – 2000
CDC	Commune Development Committee
CFDS	Cambodia Family Development Services
CIAP	Cambodia-IRRI-Australia Project
CRC	Cambodian Red Cross
DCC	Danish Cambodian Consortium
DFT	District Facilitation Team
IDE	International Development Enterprises Programme in Cambodia
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IWDA	International Woman's Development Agency
LCB	Local Capacity Builder
LDF	Local Development Fund
LICADHO	Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights
LPP	Local Planning Process
LWS	Lutheran World Services
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PDRD	Provincial Department of Rural Development
PRDC	Provincial Rural Development Committee
RDS	Rural Development Structure
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
VDC	Village Development Committee
WFP	World Food Programme

aachaar	a male lay person, who is respected for his knowledge of Buddhism and Buddhist rites and considered to be a teacher of the Buddhist way of life, and who organises and conducts religious ceremonies.
angkaar	a word widely used by villagers; it usually translates to development organisations, but can also include authorities and politicians.
chamkaar	agriculture land used for other crops than rice.
kramaa	a scarf worn and used by women and men.
saen/saen koun	a quicker and less expensive marriage ceremony, usually practiced by couples who cannot afford a wedding or who are in a hurry to get married because they have been living together. In Kook Doung, villagers claim that nowadays *saen kouns* are more common than weddings.
tradaok	a piece of bamboo that people knock on to warn others for thieves or other problems.

Chapter One: Introduction

Getting Down From the Bulldozer

Halfway into this study, a new acquaintance with a huge amount of metaphors on store gave me one for what we were doing. He compared a development intervention to a bulldozer. It comes to a village, it passes through, and it leaves. Most development workers and researchers focus on that bulldozer. We sit on it, we may look right in front of it and right behind, and we may talk to villagers about it. But when the bulldozer is gone, so are most development workers and researchers.

The intention of our study is to get away from the bulldozer perspective. We wanted to get to know a couple of villages and people who live there, in order to view the world from there and try to understand what the bulldozers look like to them.

This report is an interim output of a study undertaken from June 1999 to June 2000. The report is based on a small amount of the material collected and on a preliminary analysis. The next stage will be to more thoroughly go through the extensive field material, to relate it to theories and other studies, and to determine how to proceed in order to develop it into a licentiate's and/or a doctoral dissertation.

The study is a study of the Seila programme, and partly of other development interventions in rural Cambodia. But the aim is to understand the interventions in their context and from the perspectives of villagers. The study thus looks at far wider topics than development activities, allowing for past and current conditions and changes and taking into consideration people's past experiences, prevailing perceptions and expectations for the future. The assumption is that a close look at two villages will help comprehend the meaning and relevance of development interventions, and inform a discussion of what impact Seila realistically can have.

Objectives

The objectives of the part of the study conveyed in this report are:

- *to gain a better understanding of villagers' experiences and perceptions of local authorities, including the authorities' role in development;*
- *to draw conclusions about Seila's impact on local governance;*
- *based on this understanding and these conclusions, to discuss what impact on local governance it is realistic to expect from Seila.*

The Seila Programme

Seila is a programme of the Royal Government of Cambodia with support from the UNDP/CARERE project, executed by UNOPS and funded by a number of multi- and bilateral donors. The long-term aim is poverty alleviation and reconciliation through decentralised good governance, and one way to achieve good local governance is through decentralised development funds.

A central part of Seila is a Rural Development Structure (RDS), linking villages to the national level. Another is a Local Planning Process (LPP), identifying local needs and determining the allocation of development resources managed by the commune. The LPP is facilitated by district and provincial government staff who receive salary

supplements from CARERE, and since this year also from the government, as well as training and back-up from CARERE staff. Seila also provides financial and capacity building support to sectors through the provincial departments.

Seila started in 1996, and has so far been a pilot programme with intensive and well-funded project support in parts of five provinces[1]. In the future, it will be a more government-managed programme with less well-funded assistance, supporting decentralisation in a gradually expanding area, eventually nationwide. A previously intensive involvement at the village level was during 1998 and 1999 replaced by a commune focus, aiming at establishing the commune as the primary development agent.

Issues and Methods

Starting Wide and Narrowing Down

The study is based on two case studies, each of a village in the Seila programme in lowland Cambodia (see maps on page 6 and 7). It was conducted by a team of two Cambodian women and an expatriate woman as team leader and author of this report. The Terms of Reference (appendix 2) state the task of analysing "*villagers' experiences and perceptions relevant to Seila/CARERE (and to other planned development interventions in rural Cambodia)*". The issues to study were thus not predefined. Instead, the ambition was to start out from villagers' views and concerns and gradually define and demarcate relevant issues.

After the first stay in the first village, we identified three key issues to explore further and to constitute a provisional analytical framework. The issues were *poverty*, *community* and *authority*[2]. During the first phase of the research (studying villagers' experiences and perceptions) we continued to gradually delimit and refine these issues, while also trying to be sensitive to and accommodate new ones that arose.

This wide framework and inductive approach gave us a good understanding of villagers' concerns and their experiences and perceptions on a range of topics, which prepared us for the next phase.

For the second phase (studying Seila's impact), however, we had to narrow the focus. By this time, the issue of *authority/local governance* had come to seem most pertinent. Considering the aim of the Seila programme – poverty alleviation through good decentralised governance – and considering current related government reform work including preparation for commune elections, the knowledge that we had gained about villagers' views of local authorities seemed most useful, and studying what impact Seila has had on local governance so far and discussing what further impact can be expected seemed most relevant.

Being There and Coming Back

In order to get down from the bulldozer, spending time in the villages was a crucial part of the research method. We wanted to get to know the place and the people, and let them get used to our presence.

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[1] Seila started in the five provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Pursat, Siem Reap and Ratanakiri. With the (re)creation of Oddar Meanchey (consisting of parts of former Banteay Meanchey, and Siem Reap), by the end of 2000, Seila will cover 220 communes in six provinces and the municipality of Pailin, representing 15 percent of the country's communes and 15 percent of the population.

[2] As this report deals mainly with the third issue, I do not here elaborate how and why the three issues emerged as relevant.

We visited each of the villages three times (one or both of the Cambodian team members also went for a brief extra visit), altogether spending about two months in the first village during June 1999 – March 2000, and two months in the second village during November 1999 – April 2000. This approach opened for informal talking as well as different forms of interviews and crosschecking. There were however differences in how it worked out in the two villages.

In Chraeng in Pursat, the atmosphere was very warm and welcoming from the start. Almost everybody seemed happy to talk to us, and the house where we stayed soon turned into a popular meeting place. Our hosts as well as others who came to see us became key informants with whom we could check and discuss our latest findings. This immediate warmth increased further when we came back for the second and third visits. Many people now seemed to regard us as reliable friends, and spoke even more openly about more sensitive issues.

In Kook Doung in Battambang, the atmosphere is far less pleasant. Many villagers were not at all as keen to talk to us, and during our first visit scarcely anybody came to visit in the evenings. Here, however, coming back made an even bigger difference. We stayed with another family, less rich and in a more central part of the village, and were not alone in the evenings anymore. We now made some wonderfully welcoming and sharing friends, who also became our very best informants and advisors. Though others remained less talkative and more suspicious than in the first village (we learned that one reason was that they thought we were there to control the widespread gambling in the village), most of them gradually opened up and talked with us in a less restrained way.

Our presence and questions obviously had an influence on what villagers were thinking and talking about, and the fact that some villagers actively sought our company, while others did not, obviously influenced what information we received. The different kinds of contacts however complemented each other, as spontaneous discussions during evenings usually deepened our understanding and exemplified information that we received from others during daytime interviews.

Crosschecking

Being there and coming back made it possible to continuously validate our findings and analysis. Informal chatting as well as increasingly confiding talks with those with whom we had established best relationships provided valuable opportunities to check our information and interpretations.

We crosschecked in more structured ways as well. In each village, we set up a ***Village advisory group***, consisting of seven to ten villagers. We consulted them at the beginning of each stay, presenting and discussing current research objectives, and at the end of each stay, presenting findings and getting feedback.

During the third visits, we organised ***exchange visits***[3] between the villages. Two women and two men from Kook Doung joined us in Chraeng, and later the Chraeng villagers who had hosted them came and stayed in their homes in Kook Doung. These exchanges enabled us to validate our comparative findings and increase villagers' contribution to the analysis. Both of these were in all ways successful innovations.

[3] A separate report on these exchange visits will be written by one of the Cambodian team members.

While the first visit in the first village was very exploratory and open-ended, the information gathering gradually became more structured and focused throughout the study. This had effects on the kind of knowledge we had about the two villages at different stages of the research. Our open minds (and the villagers' openness) soon gave us a wide understanding of the first village, while the emerging framework made it possible to gain more systematic information about the second village in a shorter time. In the end, however, I believe that we reached similar levels of knowledge about the two villages.

While the issues became more narrow and our questions more structured, most of the interviewing remained informal. Throughout the research, small group discussions often emerged as we sat down somewhere and people joined and left as they wished. This setting seemed to make people feel at ease, and most of the issues gained from discussions among a group. We also did more private interviews, though, with individuals who had expressed special concerns or who had special experiences – sometimes on quite sensitive issues – and with whom we had established good relationships. We also selected a few households to follow more closely, mapping their economic activities and social relations. A large share of the work also consisted of identifying and following up illustrative cases, such as people who had moved from being poor to better off, conflicts that had been taken to court and protests that had been organised.

Our only firm criteria for whom to talk to, was that they must want to talk to us. Some people, such as the most notorious gamblers in Kook Doung, therefore excluded themselves. Apart from this, we generally made sure to cover different geographical areas and different categories of people. The purpose was not to get statistically representative samples, but to listen to people with different backgrounds and different perceptions. In addition to general categories like age, sex, education and wealth, there were other more topic related ones such as "benefiting from the canal or not" and "being on the Village chief's side or not." Since women are usually less heard than men, we talked more to women. During the course of the research, we also developed relationships with the village authorities and Commune chiefs, meeting them for brief chats as well as structured interviews.

The third visits to both villages were by far the most structured ones, mainly because at that stage we focused on a much more narrow topic – development interventions and Seila's impact on local governance – which made the work much easier. These visits consisted of an early group discussion with the Village Development Committee (VDC), some days of interviewing villagers, followed by individual interviews with all VDC members and others with a position in development work and/or authority. This time, we also interviewed a Seila District facilitator (DFT) and a CARERE Local Capacity Builder (LCB) as well as a member of the Provincial Rural Development Committee Executive Committee (PRDC Excom) and the CARERE Provincial programme manager. Before the third visits, we had interviewed the CARERE Programme manager in Phnom Penh.

Outline of the Report

In the report, names of people have been left out or changed except for village and commune officials and a few development actors who even without their names would easily be identified because of their positions.

This **Introduction** ends with a presentation of the case study villages (with a fuller one in appendix 1). The second chapter – **Villagers' Perceptions of Local Governance** – provides an extensive description of leadership roles and relations in the two villages and communes, followed by some brief conclusions (page 42 – 46). Chapter three – **Seila's Impact on Local Governance** – is an account and analysis of changes that have occurred with the introduction of Seila and other development interventions, including conclusions (page 68 – 71). Chapter four provides a concluding discussion – **What Impact on Local Governance is Realistic to Expect from Seila?**

Every subsection starts with the main points in italics. To enable the reader to get an overview of the report and based on that decide which parts to read in full, these main points are presented in summary after the executive summary (page *iii - viii*).

Selection and Characteristics of Case Study Villages[4]

Selection of villages for the case studies was done in collaboration with CARERE provincial staff. The aim was not to find "typical" villages but illustrative cases.

The first village was to be a village where people have been living for several generations in order to try to understand how economic conditions and social relations have changed, and where Seila/CARERE have been working for several years in order to trace its impact.

The second case was to be a village of similar size and wealth, but where the population have been less stable in order to see how that affects social relations (which was an important issue in the emerging analytical framework), and where many different development organisations have been working while Seila/CARERE have started more recently, in order to study the influence they may have on each other. The first of these criteria was only partly met as most of the population in the village selected have been very stable with the exception of a group of 29 returnee families, most of whom had no links to the village when they settled there in 1992. We however decided to continue working in this village as it had turned out to be illustrative on other aspects, not least regarding village leadership and the commune's role in development.

The two villages thus selected are both the poorest and most remote ones in their communes. They are both old villages where most of the people have been living for generations, or married someone who has, and are therefore close or distant relatives of each other.

Chraeng (see maps on page 6) is one out of twelve villages in Svay Leung commune, Kandieng district, twelve kilometres from Pursat provincial town. There are 134 families and 655 people (364 women, 291 men) living there.

The village consists of six distinct parts, the farthest ones about three kilometres apart. Poor and better off villagers live to some extent separately. The population in one of the six parts is clearly better off, another part is clearly the poorest, while the biggest and most central part has a mixed population of poor and better off people.

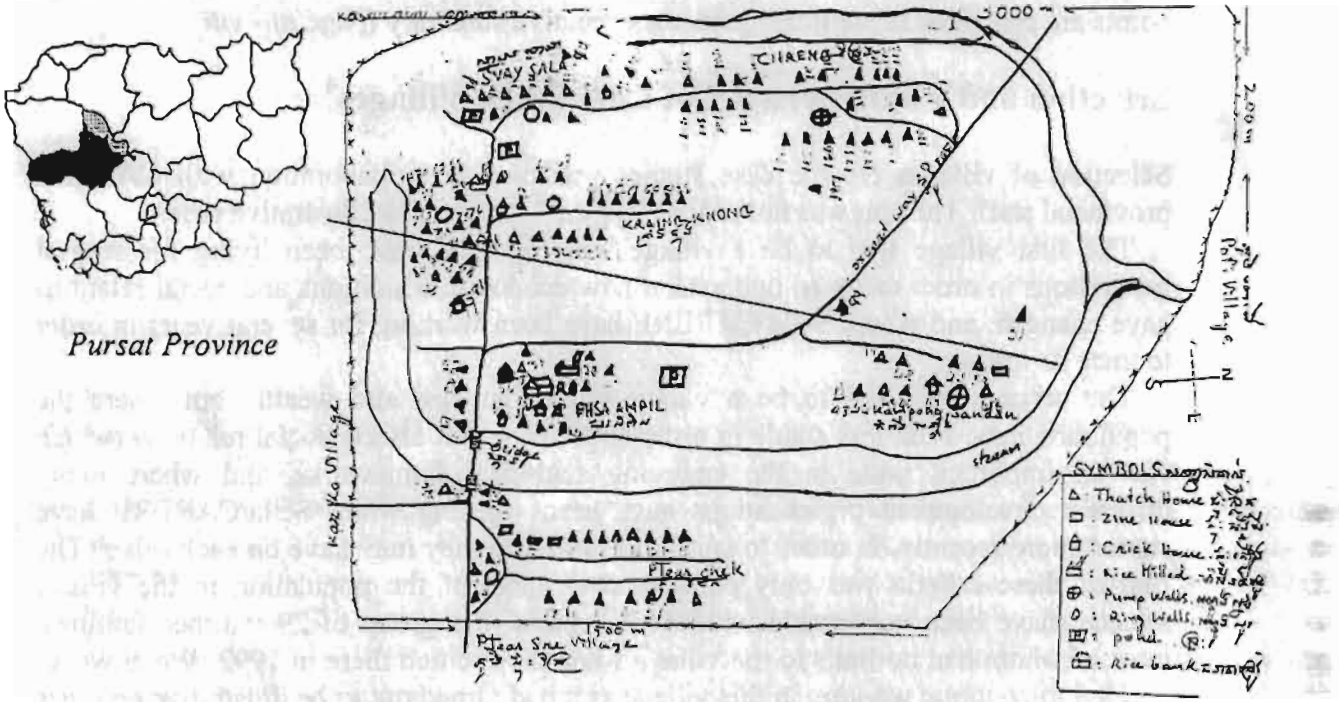
Villagers in Chraeng make a living mainly from wet season rice farming and extensive vegetable growing. They also go fishing, but almost exclusively for own consumption. Pig raising is an increasingly important income and the main way villagers perceive to become better off.

During the war in the early and mid-1970s, the village was at the frontline. At first, men kept fleeing and coming back in order to avoid being recruited as soldiers by either

[4] For a fuller presentation of the case study villages, see appendix 1.

the Lon Nol government or the Khmer Rouge. Later on, the whole village was evacuated. As the Khmer Rouge won, some villagers were told to go back to Chraeng, but most stayed and worked at different places around the province throughout the Pol Pot regime.

From 1979, people gradually came back to the village, at first just during the day since there were still Khmer Rouge soldiers in the area. From 1983, there were no more security problems and people settled permanently, though men continued to run away temporarily to avoid soldier and labour recruitment.



Pursat Province

Chraeng Village

CARERE 1[5] started to work in Chraeng in 1993. Together with the Australian Red Cross (ARC) they financed five ring wells, and together with World Food Programme (WFP) they organised food-for-work to dig three ponds and to set up a rice bank. There was also food-for-work to build 3,500 metres of road towards Pursat town.

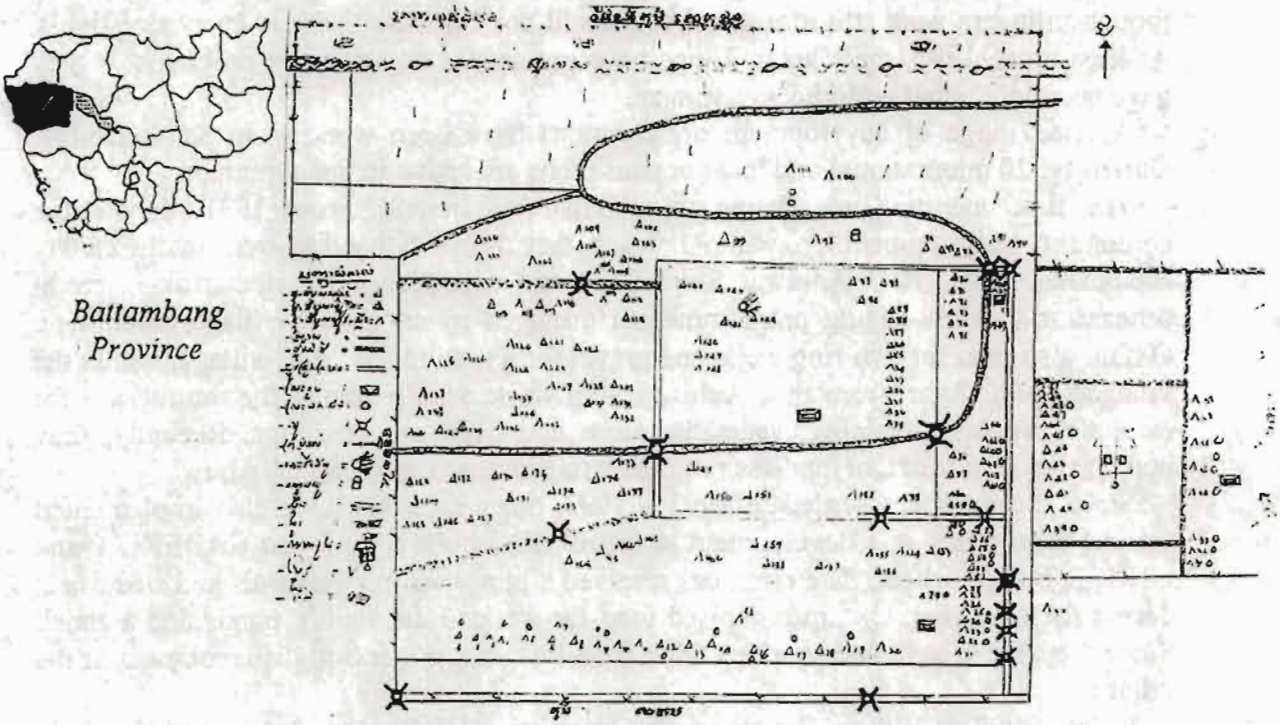
In 1996, the Seila programme was introduced and a Village Development Committee (VDC) elected. The Local Planning Process (LPP) resulted in a road towards the nearby pagoda the first year, two culverts along the same road the second year, and laterite on it the third year. The first year villagers were paid for unskilled labour, the second year they paid labour contribution, and the third year they should also pay cash contribution, though it has not yet been fully collected.

Only a few other development organisations have been working in Chraeng. In 1997, CARERE funded six months of literacy classes organized by the local NGO Samaki Toar, and in 1999 mental health training by the local NGO Transcultural Psychosocial

[5] The CARERE 1 (Cambodia Resettlement and Reintegration; 1992 – 1996) project's main purpose was to facilitate for returning refugees and internally displaced persons to integrate in the communities where they settled. After a few years of quick-impact, emergency-type interventions the approach gradually shifted towards more sustainable development and closer partnership with the Royal Government of Cambodia, which led to the Seila programme, supported by CARERE 2.

Organisation (TPO). This year, World Food Programme is funding a food-for-work road rehabilitation.

On two occasions, emergency relief has been provided in Chraeng. After the floods in 1995 – 1996, CARERE first helped to survey the situation, and after the floods in 1999, a provincial emergency committee (including CARERE) conducted the survey. World Food Programme and the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) then handed out food "vouchers" to 70 villagers in Chraeng, the international NGO Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) provided tents to 17 families, and the Cambodian Red Cross distributed sets of tools and household items.



Battambang Province

Kook Doung Village

Kook Doung is one out of eight villages in Peam Eik commune, Eik Phnom district, 15 kilometres north of Battambang provincial town. There are 171 families and 854 people (431 women, 423 men) living there.

Villagers talk about an "old" and a "new" village. When the returnees (originally 74 families) arrived in 1992, they received plots along the road, some as far as two kilometres from the original village and much closer to the neighbouring one. Since then, more and more non-returnees have bought plots and come to live in this area too. In the original village, better off people live in certain parts, while some poorer villagers live clearly separated from the more central area.

People make a living mainly by wet season rice growing and fishing. Lack of water makes it difficult to grow vegetables. Most people also collect beetles. A wide range of merchants frequently come to the village to buy fish, beetles, mats and other items. Many villagers go to work temporarily outside the village.

From 1972 there was heavy fighting in the area and villagers had to run away over night, though they could continue to live in the village. Kook Doung was within the government-controlled area and a few times the Khmer Rouge burnt down houses.

During the Pol Pot regime, most villagers stayed in the village (or at the surrounding rice fields), while a lot of people from Phnom Penh and other places were also relocated to live there.

In the early 1980s, there was frequent fighting. Khmer Rouge soldiers came to recruit soldiers and to ask for food and tobacco. On several occasions, houses were burnt down. First, villagers left to hide overnight. Later on, they stayed, but always had rice and tobacco ready for the Khmer Rouge soldiers. There was a station in the district for Vietnamese soldiers, who also came to ask for food. Apart from recruitment of soldiers and labour force, villagers had to go with the government soldiers to carry their weapons, ammunition and food.

From 1992, the Khmer Rouge soldiers did not come into the village any more, though villagers were still afraid and could still not cultivate their far away rice fields. At least since 1997, the Khmer Rouge have not caused any security problems as they have been integrated with the government.

A wide range of development organisations have been working in Kook Doung. Currently, 20 international and local organisations are active in the commune.

The first one in Kook Doung was Oxfam UK/Ireland. From 1991, they ran a community development programme which they in 1996 handed over to the newly established local NGO Aphiwat Strei. The main activities are a rice bank, a credit scheme and a cow-raising programme, all managed by an elected village committee. Oxfam also paid for two ring wells and gravel for a road in the "old" village, which the villagers built. Apart from this, Aphiwat Strei work mainly among the returnees – for example providing training, vegetable seeds and fruit tree seedlings. Recently, they bought rice land for eight landless returnee families to use and gradually buy.

Since the returnees settled in 1992 – 1993, other agencies have also implemented various emergency and development activities. ILO built a road and CARERE 1 and UNHCR built a school. The returnees received a plot, housing materials and rice to eat during the first year. Oxfam organised food-for-work to dig family ponds and a canal. Since then, there have been various other food-for-work projects in different parts of the village.

In late 1997, a Village Development Committee (VDC) was elected and the Seila programme introduced. The first year of the Local Planning Process (LPP) resulted in the rehabilitation of an irrigation canal. The VDC used the Local Development Fund (LDF) to pay villagers to do the job, while some of their labour was claimed as local contribution. The following two years, Kook Doung did not get anything from the LDF. Recently, however, a food-for-work road construction started, funded by World Food Programme in collaboration with Seila, and for the first time villagers will have to pay local contribution in unmilled rice.

CARERE have also through provincial departments funded latrines, fruit tree growing and rice demonstrations. Others have done literacy classes, human rights trainings, health education and mental health training, and a US based Cambodian from the commune recently funded the installation of nine treadle pump wells.

Various organisations have handed out a wide range of gifts at different occasions. Apart from houses and latrines, HelpAge have provided plates, pots, rice and money, and the Cambodia Family Development Services (CFDS) have distributed rice and school uniforms. After a storm in 1995, CFDS handed out blankets, mosquito nets, sarongs, rice and tents, while Lutheran World Services (LWS) provided vegetable seeds. Aphiwat Strei have distributed medicine and mosquito nets, and since 1996, they have celebrated International Women's Day with quizzes and gifts to those who can answer women related questions.

Chapter Two: Villagers' Perceptions of Local Governance

Village

Role and Reputation of the Village Authorities

Chraeng: *The Gentle Father and the Feared Strongman*

- *The Village chief is a soft and tired man who villagers generally like as a person; there is a paternalistic relation between him and the villagers;*
- *There is a tough Head of militiamen whom people fear and dislike; he dominates the atmosphere in the village because of his appearance and personality, and is more powerful than the Village chief because of his contacts with people on higher levels.*

In Chraeng, two people stand out as the unquestioned leaders: the Village chief and the chief of militiamen, who most people also refer to as the village policeman and Deputy village chief though it remains unclear what formal position he actually has (see Recent History of Village Leadership).

Villagers generally like their Village chief as a person. They regard him as soft and kind, rarely using hard words or forcing villagers to do anything. The relationship seems highly personal, villagers widely refer to the Village chief as their "father", and he sometimes talks about the villagers as his "children".

Though villagers in general claim that they can go to the Village chief when they have a problem, this paternalistic relationship seems to mainly imply that they do as he tells them. They generally describe the Village chief's job as to "govern" (*krob krong*). He receives plans from higher levels (*thnak leu*)[6] and calls people for meetings. He also reports to higher levels, mainly population statistics. He solves conflicts in the village, and he advises people who do something wrong.

> The Village chief's role is to tell villagers to not have conflicts with each other, to tell people to try hard to earn an income, to help poor people become better off. He solves conflicts in the village and he also protects the security, he tells villagers to have night guards, and he walks around to see the guards. (Group of young boys, October 1999)

> The Village chief is very good! He's honest, he's got a good heart. (---) The Village chief gives advice when someone makes mistakes. When Sokha[7] is drunk and others don't like it, he gives advice to her. (Group of poor women, October 1999)

Beside this soft and low profile Village chief, there is another person who strongly dominates the atmosphere in the village and villagers' perceptions of the village authorities. The chief of commune militia is feared and disliked by most villagers, though there is also a small group of people who support him. Villagers say that this man is in charge of local security, but also takes on other tasks such as conflict resolution. The main reason for the bad feelings is that he is "strong" and uses harsh words. The fact that he sometimes carries a gun and often drinks and becomes even more menacing and loud adds to people's fear.

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[6] People in both villages widely talk about higher levels (*thnak leu*) referring to all official matters beyond the village.

[7] Sokha is among the poorest in the village, she has no rice land and had at the time of this group discussion no house of her own but was staying at different people's houses. She was often drunk.

> People are afraid of the local authorities in the village – not the Village chief, but others, such as his Deputy. (VDC member (f) June 1999)

> He's very proud, he wants villagers to be afraid of him. Since the Village chief appointed him... he's become proud. Maybe he thinks that the law is in his body, but if he thinks so, he should be Hun Sen. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

The presence of this village "strongman" heavily influences the Village chief's role and reputation. Behind the liking of him as a person that villagers express at first instance, there is quite a lot of unhappiness, which seemed to increase and was more openly expressed as the research continued (June 1999 – March 2000). One concern is that the Village chief does not delegate anything to others, but does also not do the job himself.

> The Village chief is strong, he does everything. But he's also weak – he has many positions, but he's not active. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

Another main complaint is that the Village chief favours his relatives and friends while those who do not enjoy his sympathy become disaffected. A man who claims to be regularly intimidated by the Village chief as well as by the militiaman, was very concerned to tell the research team in private after our first meeting with the Village advisory group, in which he was a member (see Issues and Methods) that:

> Three of the people in the group were on the Village chief's side, so the others did not dare to talk. (Villager (m) October 1999)

Most of the complaints, however, refer to the Village chief's co-operation with the militiaman, or his failure to soften this man's behaviour. It is the militiaman who most of the villagers dislike and want to get rid of. But they are disappointed that the Village chief allows this man to dominate him and the village so much. The Village chief is aware of what villagers think. At the beginning of the research, when the two are actively working together, the Village chief denies that the militiaman is dominating and claims that it is he who delegates to the militiaman, presumably because he wants to seem strong and in control. Later on, however, as the relationship between the two deteriorates and villagers' complaints increase, the Village chief seems to largely agree with them. He does not have the determination or the power to reduce the militiaman's influence, though, and villagers therefore seem increasingly inclined to try to get rid of the Village chief as well.

> The Village chief gives a lot of responsibility to Houn [the militiaman], so the Village chief has become Deputy and the Deputy has become Village chief. (VDC member (f) October 1999)

> I've told the Village chief not to let that man do whatever he wants. People don't hate the Village chief, they only hate Houn. (VDC member (f) Village advisory group, March 2000)

> He [the militiaman] is responsible for security in the village. He doesn't get involved in conflict resolution or marriage certificates. People don't go to anyone else but me with conflicts. If I'm not here, I transfer the job to the Deputy. And if the Deputy can't solve it, I do it when I get back. (---) When I've been away, villagers report to me that he's taken money from them. But he seems to know nothing about the village, and I'm the one who obeys the law. (---) He's not the Deputy village chief, but villagers started to call him

> Deputy[8]. You'd better ask them why... He's working above his position. (---) Villagers tell me that the militiaman is becoming my boss, and there's always some truth in what the villagers say. But I just let him do it. My job is still my job. (Village chief (m) March 2000)

It is somewhat difficult to clear out where the militiaman gets his power from. The most common explanation of his superiority – given by villagers, the Village chief and the militiaman himself as well as the Commune chief– is his way of talking. Another source of power, and reason for villagers' fear, is the militiaman's close contacts with higher levels. The Village chief is reluctant to admit that higher levels back up the militiaman. But the militiaman knows people at province and national levels, who he claims like him and to whom he talks about his concerns in the village. District people often come to his house to eat and drink. And the Commune chief, who is also aware of villagers' complaints, is very clear about whom he supports. Several other commune officials spontaneously express their approval of Houn during an interview with the Commune chief, while another CDC member is becoming increasingly aware and concerned about the problems with the village authorities in Chraeng.

> Houn has power because he has much contact with commune and district people. He has money, and he spends his money for parties with high officials. Then they know him and when they come to the village, they go only to his house. They can see that he is good at talking and that he can control those who have positions in the village. The Deputy village chief was set up to do the Village chief's job. That's why he's stronger than the Village chief. (---) It's villagers' mistake too, if the Village chief transfers them to the Deputy village chief, they should go to the Commune chief instead. But the higher level supports him, they always listen to Houn. The Commune chief always strongly supports him. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) Individual interview and Village advisory group, March 2000)

> He's such a good person – brave and good at talking. The Village chief is too soft, people don't listen to him. But when Houn is there, they listen. (---) People say that, if I want to win the commune election, I need to get rid of him. But he hasn't done anything wrong, he's never injured anyone. So I hesitate to get rid of him. If I did, I'd miss him. (Commune Chief (m) March 2000).

> The Village chief in Chraeng and his Deputy drink together and have other women. The Village chief gives the right to Houn to do everything. When I came to Chraeng, Houn blamed me for belonging to another party and thought that he could demand money from me. The Commune chiefand he get along well because they both belong to CPP. The Commune chief knows very well what villagers think about Houn, and in which parts of Chraeng people dislike him, but doesn't mind what Houn does. Houn probably reports to him, that's why he knows so well. (CDC member from another village (f) March 2000)

> Villagers hate him [the militiaman]. Even the commune is afraid of him (Group leader (m) March 2000)

> I've got two friends, one at the provincial department and one is a soldier in Phnom Penh. They've both offered me jobs, but I have refused. (---) I know Lee Sok and Sao Viasna [provincial officials; their names have been changed]. We were struggling together during Pol Pot. We were in jail together. (Militiaman (m) October 1999 and March 2000)

[8] The Village chief himself also frequently talks about the "Deputy village chief". When once jokingly confronted with this, he was embarrassed and hurried to correct himself "no! I mean the chief of militiamen."

Kook Doung: ***The Gentle Chief and the Educated Deputy***

- *The village leadership is less personal and more professional than in Chraeng;*
- *The Village chief is a soft and honest, though somewhat passive, man whom villagers like very much;*
- *The Deputy village chief is more educated and active and also fairly well regarded;*
- *Returnees who live far from the original village do not know the Village chief, but they know the Deputy quite well.*

In Kook Doung too, people perceive the Village chief and his Deputy as the main leaders. There are, however, two other men – former Representatives of the Youth Association and currently members of the Aphiwat Strei and Village Development Committees – who many villagers also regard as part of the village leadership.

People in Kook Doung generally say that they like their Village chief very much. The relationship, however, seems less personal and more professional than in Chraeng in the sense that being a Village chief is a job, which involves certain tasks. The tasks that people mention are largely the same as in Chraeng, mainly receiving plans from higher levels and reporting to them, issuing marriage certificates, "guiding" people and mediating in quarrels between husbands and wives. Villagers appreciate the Village chief for being honest, fair and unselfish, but regret that he is not educated and seems a bit tired and passive.

> The Village chief goes to learn in the commune. He goes every four or five days, but I don't know what he learns. He also gathers people for meetings – about rice farming and about maintaining the road – and he tells villagers to not let their cows stay along the road. (Villager (m) November 1999)

> He receives plans from higher levels and announces to villagers. He asks them to work, for example to dig a canal or build a road. If villagers have a problem, they go to see him. They also go to see him about getting married. He never makes people disappointed. (---) He discusses with people before he decides anything. (Villager (f) January 2000)

> His role is to regulate people, to do population statistics and to solve problems. (---) He's a good Village chief. He never exploits any villagers. For example, he goes fishing by himself, and never asks for fish from anyone else. (VDC leader (m) November 1999)

The Deputy village chief, too, is quite highly regarded, but for different reasons. He is educated and efficient, and people, who usually refer to him as the village policeman, describe his role mainly as to solve conflicts, to approve and sign land transactions and to help villagers to write letters. He is often busy at the pagoda, and some villagers regard him as an *aachaar*. They appreciate his knowledge and skills but complain that he thinks too much about his private work and charges for everything he does.

> Kong is the village policeman. He works with the Village chief. His role is to solve conflicts and write landownership papers. Villagers seem to give more money to him than to the Village chief. (Villager (m) January 2000)

As the Village chief is getting old and tired, and the Deputy is more active and educated, the Deputy sometimes takes over and knows more about what happens in the village. This situation seems to suit both of them and they largely have a relationship and division of tasks that work well, though the Village chief denies that the Deputy is more active. Villagers like the Village chief better, but they need to consult his Deputy more often. During our last stay, in April 2000, however, villagers' unhappiness had

increased with the Deputy village chief, and with his wife, who they claim think mainly about private incomes. According to the villagers, the Deputy is well aware of this and has therefore largely "withdrawn" himself from village work and instead spends most of his time at the pagoda (where he gets paid for what he does).

> As Village chief, I know about villagers' difficulties and report to the commune. I report about vegetable and rice production, about rice plants that are destroyed. For conflicts, villagers come to see me or the Deputy, sometimes we discuss together. (---) The policeman [Deputy village chief] is in charge of social order, like gambling. (---) If I'm away, I give the responsibility to the Deputy, then he can go to the commune instead of me. (Village chief (m) January 2000)

> The Village chief is bigger than I am. District and commune people go to the Village chief, and then the Village chief informs me. But I'm the only one in the village who can write a report. As a Deputy village chief, I write reports about the soldier section, how many milita there are, how many quit, and reports about the rice yield, how much is destroyed by flooding etc. (---) People bring complaints to me rather than to the Village chief. He's not educated, he can't solve problems, so they come to me. If it's a big problem, I consult the Village chief, but with small stories I just go ahead. The Village chief doesn't mind, he wants me to solve the conflicts. When people go to him, he refers them to me. (Deputy village chief (m) November 1999)

> Neither is the stronger of the two. Villagers can go to either of them. But Kong [Deputy village chief] is educated. When they need to write a letter, they go to see him. Hean [Village chief] is not educated, he just knows to put his signature. (Village advisory group (f/m) February 2000)

> When you sell or buy land, you have to go to Kong, and you pay 100 baht. That's what I did when I bought this plot. (---) The Village chief and his wife are kind. But if you don't pay to Kong, his wife will come to your house to get the money. Hean knows that Kong charges money, but he just keeps quiet. The two of them work well together. (Villager (f) January 2000)

> Sometimes, Kong does things without informing the Village chief. (Small group of villagers (f/m) January 2000)

The returnees who live far from the original village have quite different experiences and perceptions of the village authorities than people in the original village. They scarcely know the Village chief at all, and he does not know them. Most of them refer to the Deputy as the Village chief, and they have no experience of having to pay for his assistance, apart from maybe a minimal fee for the paper he uses. Many of the returnees also regard one of the Apiwhat Strei and Village Development Committee members as one of the leaders in the village.

> I don't know who the Village chief is, he's never been to this area. (Returnee (m) November 1999)

> For selling and buying land, you need to go to Kong. You don't need to pay anything. (---) He also calls returnees for meetings. (Returnee (f) January 2000)

The Commune chief largely approves of the Village chief and recognises his popularity, while he is not at all as familiar with, or favourable of, the Deputy. He rather regards the two leading Aphiwat Strei and Village Development Committee members as "second leaders" in Kook Doung.

> Kook Doung has a good Village chief. Villagers love him. He's a good leader. He's not educated, but his Deputy helps him with lists. (---) People really should see the Village chief, but some like to see the Deputy instead. When people want to make a complaint, they go to the Deputy. He's more educated and he knows some work better than the Village chief. But the Village chief is more fair and more correct. (Commune chief (m) November 1999 and February 2000)

Recent History of Village Leadership

Chraeng: *Changes and Confusion – and Reluctance*

- *There have been several changes in the composition of village leadership during the last 20 years; it is in many cases unclear how and when these changes have happened and there is still confusion about the existence, the holder and the tasks of some positions;*
- *There is a widely expressed reluctance to holding an authority position;*
- *Monks, aachaars and old people are respected and valued informal leaders.*

In Chraeng, the composition and role of the village leadership have changed several times during the last 20 years. This continues to create confusion – among villagers as well as the leaders themselves – about who actually has what position and what tasks. For the current Village chief, there is no doubt since he has had his position since the early or mid-1980s. The previous one started sometime between 1979 and 1981. The two of them, as well as others, however state different dates and different reasons for the change, and also make contradictory statements about who else was part of the village leadership at different times.

Currently, the main confusion and concern is the role of the militiaman, and possibly Assistant or Deputy village chief. It remains unclear how he received his position, as the commune and Village chiefs firmly and repeatedly make contradictory statements about the appointment. Moreover, the former Deputy village chief seems to have continued to regard himself (and by many villagers be regarded) as such – until he suddenly, very embarrassed, changes his mind during an interview.

> Houn is a commune militiaman with a post in the village. The chief of district soldiers gave him a gun to protect the village. But he's not a district soldier! He holds the gun just in the name a of a commune militiaman. (---) When he wasn't elected in the VDC election, I was very disappointed and didn't want him to do nothing. So I asked him to be Assistant village chief. The Village chief is too soft and the village is remote. Houn has experience of dealing with enemies and thieves. That's why I asked him to be Assistant village chief. I appointed him on the election day last year[9]. (Commune chief (m) March 2000)

> In late 1996, it was determined that Chraeng is a remote area, so the Commune chief asked me to get a chief of militiamen in the village. When I chose a good one, the Commune chief agreed. But I could have chosen someone else and he would have accepted it. (Village chief (m) March 2000)

> No, no, no, I'm sorry, I'm not Deputy village chief now. I forgot! (---) I left my position by myself, because I knew that nobody cared about me. (---) Houn is the Deputy village chief. He's been that since 1994. The Village chief had a meeting with a few people. He said that he needed a Deputy and that he wanted Houn to be the one. I was there and I agreed, I thought that they were disappointed with me. (VDC member (m) October 1999)

[9] The second VDC election to which the Commune chief is referring was held in December 1998.

During the 1980s, there were about eight appointed Group leaders – all men – in the village. Their main tasks were to help with land distribution and recruitment of soldiers and labour force, and to collect money from villagers. As these tasks ceased, what remained was to spread information and call people for meetings. Nowadays, not even that is needed as announcements are made on loudspeakers. According to the Village chief and several Group leaders, the system of Group leaders was officially abolished in 1993, and some villagers claim that a new Group leader system was introduced in 1997, with partly the same people, partly new ones, holding the posts. There is thus currently confusion about whether there actually are any Group leaders in the village and, if so, who they are and what their job is.

> The Group leaders had to call people for meetings and recruit soldiers. At that time, nobody was brave to complain about any plans that came from the higher levels. Group leaders were active because it was a communist regime. Orders came from higher levels and lower levels had to follow. But now it's democracy so they are less active. (---) After UNTAC, they disliked the job, they could not mobilise people, so they stopped by themselves. (---) During the communist regime, it was serious work. Now the Village chief can do it alone, because it's not so serious. (Village advisory group (f/m) October 1999)

> When Houn [the militiaman] gets information from high level people, he uses the loudspeaker to tell villagers. I don't understand why he does that. When he does, there's no work for the Group leaders. So, why should there be Group leaders? In this village, only two people do everything, Houn and Honn. (Villager (m) March 2000)

During the 1980s, a few villagers – two at a time, three women and one man all together – were appointed to be Representatives of the Associations of Women and Youth respectively[10]. They reported to the commune, collected money and building materials from villagers, and led people to rehabilitate a couple of different dams. Since the UNTAC election, there are no more Representatives of Women or Youth.

Village positions have thus changed considerably, as have the tasks involved. A recurring theme, however, is that having a position entails implementing unpopular decisions from higher level authorities, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s, all those who have been part of the village authorities claim that they wanted to quit.

> It was hard at that time to be a Village chief. Land was distributed, there was recruitment and we had to collect money for the soldiers. The main responsibility was to get strong, young men to be soldiers and to go to K 5[11] to clear forest and chase away the Khmer Rouge. The district and commune could for example ask for five names. We gave them the names, but then nobody turned up. Then the commune or district would come to get those five men, but they ran away. (---) I also went away to be labour force. When I came back, they said that I was too old to be Village chief. I was happy to be dropped. (---) For Honn [current Village chief] it's easy. When he started, everything was already done, there was no more land distribution. Today it's not difficult to be Village chief. He goes for meetings and gets money, and he goes for trainings and gets money. (Villager (m) June 1999)

> I used to have a position in the village[12]. My responsibility was to recruit soldiers and people to clear forest. I went for meetings in the commune, and then came back and told the villagers to run away for a while. (---) The commune complained about that we couldn't recruit people. I gave my energy, but I got nothing back, so I stopped to spend my time on my own rice farming instead. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) June 1999 and March 2000)

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[10] In Chraeng, these seem to have been two separate associations, while in Kook Doung they seem to have been combined.

[11] K 5 was a fortified defence line along the Cambodian-Thai border.

[12] This man was Deputy village chief in the early 1980s.

> I was the Representative from 1983 to 1985. I had to go for meetings at the commune every day, meetings about all kinds of things. It was so hard to walk there, it was muddy and I had to go through water up to the chest. One day I thought I saw a crocodile in the water, I was so afraid. (---) They wanted me to collect palm leaves and money from the villagers. It was difficult. I didn't know what it was for, and sometimes I took my own money instead. I was afraid that they would recruit me or my son as a labourer or soldier, so I didn't dare to complain. But when they asked me to be a Representative again, I said no. I didn't want to do it anymore! Another woman replaced me, but she has left the village, so there is no Representative of Women anymore. Now there's only the Village chief, the Deputy and the Village Development Committee. (Villager (f) October 1999)

The current Village chief, too, initially firmly declares that he wants to quit, not because villagers scold him but because he has too much work to do. He claims, though, that the villagers will not let him.

Even the tough and strong militiaman claims that he was reluctant to accept the job, but that he has grown committed to it and is dedicated to solve problems of law and order in the village, which he thinks that the Village chief does not accomplish. Now he is disappointed with villagers' lack of appreciation.

> First, when I became Deputy village chief, I didn't want to do it. I didn't believe in myself. But the higher levels had already appointed me, so I wanted to try it. My role now is to make sure that Chraeng has good security. But I don't want to do it anymore. If I do something right, it's okay. But if I do something that doesn't satisfy people, they scold me. But I have a plan for the year 2000, I want to get rid of all robbery, violence and bad actions. After that, I want to continue, find another job, maybe as a police or a soldier or something in the commune. If there are no problems in 2000, someone might say that I'm not needed anymore. (Militiaman (m) October 1999)

Apart from the officials, in Chraeng there is also a well known, widely consulted and generally liked midwife in the village. She was also recently chosen by the School director to be leader of the parents-teachers association, and by the *aachaars* and monks to be leader of the plates and pots association[13].

Monks, *aachaars* and old people have strong leadership roles in Chraeng, since villagers deeply respect and value them. Monks from the nearby pagoda come to the village about once a week and most villagers then give them food or money. Four *aachaars* – all old men – who live in the village, and some of whom are members of the pagoda committee, are the links between the village and the pagoda. They collect money from villagers for ceremonies and they pass on information to the monks. Definitely well known and important, their role might still be slightly declining. Young people are less clear than adults about who the *aachaars* are and what they do, and several of the *aachaars* are getting less active as they are getting old, tired and sick. Other old people – women as well as men – are also well known and esteemed. A group of about 15 old women and men go to the pagoda almost every holy day, which is four times a month. Monks, *aachaars* and old people are all to varying degrees used and expected to lead villagers in various ceremonies, and also – but to a decreasing degree – to initiate and mobilise them to undertake communal work.

> After the monks, the *aachaars* are the respected people. They only think about the pagoda. If they go along the road and see that it's destroyed, they inform the monks. Then, the

[13] The purpose of the plates and pots association is that villagers have access to plates, dishes, pots and cutlery when there is a ceremony and a meal needs to be served to a large number of people. Most villagers have contributed utensils or money and everyone can use it with no charge.

monks bring the loudspeakers and the *aachaars* call people to help repair the road (Villager (f) June 1999)

When somebody is dying, the three *aachaars* must go there to pray until the person dies. Sometimes it takes a long time, some people take 15 days to die! The *aachaars* must stay all the time, they have no time to work, so nobody wants to be an *aachaar*. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) June 1999)

Kook Doung: *Stability and Clarity – and Reluctance*

- *Village leadership has been more stable and is more clear than in Chraeng;*
- *As in Chraeng, there is a widely expressed reluctance to holding an authority position;*
- *Monks, aachaars and old people do not enjoy the same respect and leadership status as in Chraeng.*

In Kook Doung, the village leadership has been much more stable than in Chraeng, and villagers – with the important exception of the returnees in the far off area – are more clear about who holds what position, and what tasks that involves.

Kook Doung is the only village in the commune where the Village chief and his Deputy have remained the same since 1979. Until two years ago, there was also a third member. They were selected in an election among appointed candidates, which both the Village chief and the Deputy claim to have won, which may reflect a desire from either of them to seem stronger than he actually is.

When the Vietnamese came, they asked the villagers to vote for a Village chief. I got most votes, but I didn't want to do it. I didn't accept the position, I transferred it to Hean. He was second in the election, and he's older than I am. It wouldn't be appropriate that the Village chief is younger than the Deputy. (Deputy village chief (m) November 1999)

During the 1980s, they were busy with land allocation, which almost all villagers firmly claim was correct and fair, and recruitment of soldiers and labour force, which was the main task for Group leaders and Representatives of the Women's and Youth Association (see below). Today they have other, easier, tasks.

During the 1980s, the Village chief's task was to lead villagers to grow rice, and to protect the village. I told the Group leaders to tell their members to protect their families. (---) Now, my responsibility as a Village chief is to govern and guide all villagers, and administration such as calling for meetings. The Village chief knows about villagers' difficulties and reports to commune. I report about vegetable and rice production, about rice plants that are destroyed. I can also for example receive a plan from the commune to find poor families who have nothing to eat. Then I write down the names and take it to the commune, and those families get gifts. (Village chief (m) January 2000)

The system of Group leaders seems to have been, and still be, better organised and known in Kook Doung than in Chraeng. During the 1980s there were eight Group leaders – all men – and here too their main task was to recruit soldiers and labour force. Today, the Group leaders have less work, but are still more well known and consulted than in Chraeng. Until 1993, there were also two Representatives of the Women's and Youth Association[14].

[14] In Kook Doung, this seems to have been one combined association as opposed to Chraeng, where there seems to have been one association for women and one for youth.

> During the 1980s, the Village chief and the Group leaders had a lot of work to do. They received instructions from the commune, such as recruiting soldiers and labour force, collecting money to give to soldiers and labourers. Now there's not much work, the Village chief can do it alone. When I'm angry, I let the Village chief collect the money himself. The Village chief gets a salary, 30,000 riel per month. I don't get a salary, but villagers blame me and hate me. (Group leader (m) January 2000)

> As a Representative of youth, my task was to encourage young people to volunteer to be soldiers. I made statistics for the commune, about how many were single, how many were under 20 years old, under 30 (---) When they knew that, it was easy for them to get soldiers. (---) My task was also to encourage people who were not soldiers to help the parents and wives of soldiers to grow rice. But they didn't help much. They only helped to plough the land once. (---) Apart from this, when there was a plan from the higher levels to dig a canal, I accompanied young people to build it according to the order from higher levels. And if a road needed to be repaired, I would lead the young to do it. They would put up a lamp and work at nighttime, maybe four or five nights. Young people were happy to do this work. People from other villages who came to visit also helped. (VDC leader (m) November 1999)

Recruitment seems to have been more serious but partly also easier than in Chraeng. Villagers were however very disappointed, and are still quite upset, that the families of the soldiers and labourers did not get the help that they had been promised. Those who could therefore paid bribes to try to avoid being recruited.

> Kook Doung was the best village, because people were ignorant. In villages where people were more educated, it was more difficult to recruit people. Recruitment stopped, because people know their rights, now it's difficult to force people to work. (Village advisory group (f/m) February 2000)

> My husband was a soldier when others' husbands went to K 5. The Village chief had promised to help me with the rice growing, but he didn't. Later on, my husband wanted to quit, and I had to pay for a soldier in the commune. I paid 300,000 riel, I sold my cow and unmilled rice to be able to pay it. It was all agreed in the commune office with thumbprints and sealed paper. But later, they still came to recruit my husband again. He had to flee until there was no more recruitment (Villager (f) November 1999)

As in Chraeng, most Group leaders and Representatives of the Women's and Youth Association seem to have been very reluctant to do their job. Recruitment and collection of money did not make them popular, and they frequently had to go as labour force themselves in order to set a good example. They all had the firm perception, though, that they could not refuse to accept the position.

> I didn't want to be a Group leader. But I was called for a meeting in the commune and could not refuse. As a Group leader I was not nasty, I was very kind. But villagers still scolded me. (---) I worked very hard to recruit soldiers and labour force. I always went myself. If someone was sick, I had to go. (---) Then, the Village chief wanted me to be a commune militiaman too. But I didn't want to. My relatives got very angry with me. They wanted me to be a big person. But I didn't want to, because I felt sorry for my wife and children, and if I became a big person, villagers would hate me. (---) Today, there's not as much work for a Group leader. Sometimes they call me to go to learn. The commune tells the Village chief and the Village chief tells the Group leaders "There's a training in the commune, two or three hours, and you must go." But I don't go. Sometimes people from the district come to have a meeting in the village, and then I must tell the group members to participate, and write their names in the list. (Group leader (m) November 1999)

Though their tasks too have got easier, the Village chief and the Deputy also both claim that they want to quit.

> He [the Village chief] wants to stop, but villagers won't let him. He thinks that he's old and that his eyes are not good, but villagers think that he is good. (Villager (f) January 2000)

> I wish that I could go and stay at the pagoda instead! I want to flee from this job, I don't want to do it. I'm bored with it. When there's a conflict, and I make a judgement, one side hates me. And sometimes when there's a plan from higher levels and I announce on the loudspeakers, people don't agree with what I say and get upset. Sometimes, I tell the villagers to drop me – if you don't agree, please withdraw me. But they won't agree to do that. (Deputy village chief (m) November 1999)

Among the returnees, for a while there was a special Interim or Deputy village chief to help the Village chief. However, he left the village. When the returnees settled, three or four new groups were also formed and Group leaders appointed. The Village chief, who easily remembers the eight Group leaders in the old village, does not, however, know the name of any of those among the returnees, and they also seem to have left or given up the position.

> Later on [after 1993] I did not manage it clearly, because they had a leader in that area. He ran away a few years ago, so now I'm the leader again, together with Aphiwat Strei. (---) Those groups also seem to have disappeared, because the newcomers have left to do business. (Village chief (m) November 1999 and January 2000)

> My husband was a Group leader. But he quit, because it was useless to be a Group leader. He got no salary, but other villagers scolded him, they accused him of getting rice from higher levels. So he quit, and nobody blames him for that. (Returnee (f) November 1999)

Monks, *aachaars* and old people do not play as important leadership roles in Kook Doung as they do in Chraeng. According to villagers, two monks from the nearby pagoda come to the village early every morning to collect food[15]. Only few people give them something, though. When there is a ceremony in the village, a couple of monks are asked to participate, but they are not involved in any other activities in the village.

There is a 36-year-old man, who has been an *aachaar* since he was 22. He talks of himself as a new generation and claims that there are no old people in the village who know the Buddhist ceremonies well enough to become *aachaars*. He is well known and liked, and in charge of the plates and pots association which he initiated two years ago. He does not go the pagoda on every holy day, though, since he is busy with his work. He also does not seem to enjoy the same kind of respect as the older *aachaars* in Chraeng.

Only four or five old people – women and men – go to the pagoda most holy days. They do not seem to play any role in mobilising villagers for ceremonies or work.

> Young people are in the fields, so they don't give anything. Only old people who can't walk far, prepare food for the monks. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) November 1999)

> The monks' only task is to come to the village to pray. (Village chief (m) November 1999)

[15] During our two months in the village, however, most of the time, they did not come, which villagers said was because they were busy at the pagoda.

Contacts with the Village Authorities

Chraeng: *One is Not There, the Other is Unfair and Expensive*

- *Villagers hesitate to consult the village authorities since the Village chief is not very accessible and the militiaman is not trusted and charges for his services;*
- *Conflict resolution is the main reason to consult the village authorities; another reason is to get a marriage certificate or a divorce;*
- *The militiaman is taking over the Village chief's tasks.*

The Village chief in Chraeng lives in the most remote part of the village. As a result, for very long periods many villagers do not see him at all. During our first visit, he claims that he walks around the whole village every night to guard against thieves. This is not really true at that time and during our last visit, ten months later, he seems to spend even less time in the parts of the village where he does not live. When he does come into the central village, he often asks somebody to provide food and drinks for him and the guests that he might bring.

The militiaman is more seen and heard around the village as he makes announcements on the loudspeakers, arranges various things or just walks around to control what happens or to see some friends, all of which often involves a lot of drinking.

Despite the description of the Village chief as a father to whom they can go when they have a problem, most villagers in Chraeng very rarely go to see him. The general perception is that the only reason to see the Village chief is if there is a conflict. And even then, they might hesitate, since he is regarded as not being interested in helping, but rather transfers matters to the militiaman. According to most villagers, they therefore try to solve their problems and conflicts among themselves, though the Village chief claims that they frequently consult him for conflict resolution.

> There are many different kinds of conflicts – buffaloes eat rice, pigs go in somebody's vegetable land, families cut palm trees, land disputes... (---) I solve conflicts according to the law. I have to go and see the reality, how much rice the buffalo ate. Then I can force the buffalo owner to pay. Last Sunday, some buffaloes had been eating rice plants on somebody's land. The landowner caught the buffaloes and brought them to me. I guarded them over the night. Then, the buffalo owner came to ask to get his buffaloes back. I called the landowner and discussed with both of them. The landowner demanded 50,000 riel. I asked the village policeman [militiaman] to measure the land where the buffaloes had eaten, it was four times four meter. The buffalo owner wanted to pay only 10,000 riel and I said "please, increase a little bit"... At last they agreed on 20,000 riel. (---) Conflict resolution in the village doesn't cost anything. I just get a package of cigarettes from the person who gets the compensation, and we all share the cigarettes. (Village chief (m) October 1999)

The militiaman is more accessible. He lives in the biggest and most central part of the village, he wants to know what is happening, and he likes to be consulted – though he himself claims to dislike resolving conflicts, since the losing party will not be happy. Most villagers still hesitate to consult him, though, since they do not like or trust him, and since he is widely known for charging for any kind of assistance.

> For conflicts, people go to Houn [the militiaman]. He is eager to bring conflict partners together. One party gives money to him. The Village chief doesn't want to take any money. (---) If villagers have a conflict, and go to see the Village chief, he transfers it to that man [the militiaman]. (VDC member (f) October 1999 and March 2000)

> Leaders should be faithful and just. they should take care of the poor and solve problems for villagers. They should not think about money, and they should say openly what they want – for example a package of cigarettes. Leaders should not take money from both sides in a conflict. The law says how much they should pay, but the leader doesn't follow the law. The one who pays most will win. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

Thieves, especially cow and buffalo thieves, are a major concern among villagers, and something that both the Village chief and the militiaman claim that they are strongly determined to do something about.

> Chickens and ducks used to be stolen every month. Now there are less thefts than before. I arrested a thief and gave him advice. There used to be four thieves, but now, they've given up that job, they've become good people after I gave them advice. We made a contract with thumbprints. They promised to stop their bad activities – "If I do bad things, please arrest me". In 1998, two people put their thumb-prints [on that kind of contracts] and in 1999 another two. (Village chief (m) October 1999)

Regarding domestic conflicts, which are also a major concern and the most common kind of conflicts, villagers rarely consult the Village chief or militiaman. Women whose husbands regularly beat them up, often hesitate to report it since they do not dare to risk a divorce. Neither do neighbours dare to intervene in domestic affairs.

To get married or divorced, villagers need the approval of both the Village chief and the Commune chief. The Village chief usually takes care of both, but some villagers do not bother about either. Even marriages, however, the militiaman is partly taking over. During our last visit, the father of a man in a neighbouring village who wanted to marry a young widow in Chraeng came to inform and ask the Village chief about this. As the Village chief was not at home, though, the man went on to the militiaman, who was more than happy to take care of the issue, spending the afternoon drinking with the bride's and bridegroom's relatives.

> When I arranged my daughter's wedding, I only went to see the Village chief and he worked for me. I had to pay 15,000 riel because he needed to see the Commune chief. Everybody has to pay 15,000. They don't care that some are poor, they say that if villagers are poor, they would not get marriage. If villagers have a *saen*, they only inform the Village chief. But if they go to see Houn, even then they have to pay. (Villager (f) March 2000)

Doung is old and landless and among the poorest in the village. She lives with her 17-year-old daughter and son-in-law. Her husband died ten years ago. Her recent encounters with the Village chief and the militiaman illustrate what others also have experienced:

As her daughter was getting married, Doung went to see the Village chief to inform him. After walking the two or three kilometres to his house three times, just to find that he was not there, she gave up.

Some time later, a neighbour accused her new son-in-law of having stolen rice from his rice store. This time Doung went to see the militiaman who lives nearby. But he refused to help her if she did not first give him 5,000 riel.

Kook Doung: ***One is Fair but Slow, the Other is Efficient but Expensive***

- *The village authorities are more accessible and trusted than in Chraeng, and villagers consult them more often; the returnees in the far off area, however, consult them much less than the old villagers.*
- *As in Chraeng, conflict resolution is the main reason to consult the village authorities and other reasons are to get a marriage certificate or a divorce;*
- *The Deputy village chief is more efficient, but the Village chief is more fair and does not charge for his services;*

The village authorities in Kook Doung are more accessible and trusted than in Chraeng. Most villagers – again, with the important exception of the returnees who live far from the original village – meet, or at least see, the Village chief and the Deputy quite frequently as they move around in, or in and out from, the village.

> I seldom come into the village, but I see the Village chief and Kong [the Deputy village chief] passing on their bicycles. (Villager (f) January 2000)

Some villagers would probably prefer that the authorities knew less about what is going on at various more or less hidden places in the village. Kook Doung has turned into something of a gambling centre where people come from neighbouring villages come to play, and the Village chief and the Deputy seem unable – or undetermined – to stop it.

> When the Village chief tells people to gamble less, they don't respect it. They tell him that it's not his business – they haven't asked him for money or food. (Group leader (m) January 2000)

> The Village chief and the Deputy get 4,000 or 5,000 riel per year from every player, and more from those who organise the gambling. (Village advisory group (f/m) February 2000)

As in Chraeng, the main sentiment is that having a conflict is the only reason to go to see the Village chief or his Deputy. As they are more accessible, more highly regarded and more able and willing to assist, they are much more consulted than in Chraeng, also concerning quite minor issues. Villagers have different opinions, though, about whom of the two it is best to go to. For land transactions, people normally see the Deputy village chief. To get help to solve a conflict or settle an agreement, they can see either of them. The Deputy is more efficient but less fair, and he charges more. The Village chief and the Deputy themselves claim to co-operate, maybe more than they actually do.

> When making a judgment, the Village chief doesn't make quick decisions like Kong [the Deputy village chief]. The Village chief is honest, he always talks about the law, and before he makes a decision, he uses the law to help him decide. Kong makes quicker decisions if either side gives him some money, then he can turn the person who is right into being wrong. (Group leader (m) January 2000)

> People who have a conflict bring a complaint to me or to the Village chief. The Village chief and I compromise. If it's right, I say it's right; if it's wrong, I say it's wrong. I give advice, for example if they have been drunk and scolding each other, I tell them that "what you do is against the law; we're like relatives in the village, you shouldn't scold each other." Most conflicts can be solved in the village. (Deputy village chief (m) November 1999)

As in Chraeng, a common cause of conflict among villagers is that somebody's cattle eat somebody else's crops. The Village chief's role is mainly to urge people to keep an eye on their animals and to make people forgive each other, though sometimes he or the Deputy also needs to settle an agreement about compensation.

> The Village chief announces on loudspeakers "don't let cows eat on the rice fields". When a landowner catches a cow that is eating his rice, he brings it to the committee's [the village chief's] house. He then announces "whose cow is this? Come and get it!" Then he gives advice to the owner – "don't let the cow do it again". But there is no payment, it's hard for the cow owner to pay, he knows his mistake, and won't do it again. (Villager (f) November 1999)

As in Chraeng, cattle thefts are a major concern, and sometimes thieves are made to sign a contract holding them responsible for future thefts.

Pre- and extramarital affairs are much more common in Kook Doung than in Chraeng, which adds to the issues that the village authorities need to deal with.

> I asked Kong [Deputy village chief] to solve the problem with my daughter and Sam. I brought a complaint to Kong, but I didn't want to make it too serious. I just wanted to know if he would agree to recognise that the baby in my daughter's stomach was his. When Kong called Sam to be questioned, he agreed to recognise the baby, and I asked him to pay 5,000 baht to raise the child, so that we would have finished the problem. I paid 100 baht to Kong for his help. (VDC member (f) January 2000)

Though, as in Chraeng, women hesitate to bring a complaint about their husband and neighbours hesitate to interfere, the Village chief and Deputy are more consulted about domestic conflicts than in Chraeng. Again, their role is mainly to try to make people forgive and come on good terms with each other.

The one reason to see the Village chief for those who do not have conflicts or sell/buy land is to inform him and get his approval when they or their children are getting married, or divorced. There are people, though probably fewer than in Chraeng, who do not go to see the Village chief even then, because they do not want to pay for a marriage certificate or because they simply cannot be bothered. Also when people come to get a divorce, the village authorities try to get them to come on good terms again.

> Whenever my husband hit me, I would run to see the Village chief and get help. Then, the Village chief would make a compromise. He warned him [the former husband] by making him put his thumbprint on a contract stating that he promised to not do it again. (---) But when he had beaten me, so that I had a miscarriage, the Village chief didn't try to make a compromise anymore, because my husband didn't keep his promises. (---) I asked help from the Village chief to get a divorce from my husband once and for all. (Villager (f) November 1999)

> They [another couple] have divorced many times. They stay together, then divorce again.... I've tried to give them advice, but they don't listen. The Village chief has tried to compromise, but they don't agree with him. They decide on their own to get a divorce, they've never gone to the Village or Commune chief, though they should get their approval. (Group leader (m) November 1999)

The returnees in the far off area have far less contact with and access to the Village chief and the Deputy than other villagers do. As has been noted, they are much more familiar with the Deputy than with the Village chief. They see him for land transactions, while conflicts they usually try to solve among themselves.

> The newcomers don't come often. They seldom have conflicts, and they are located far from the old villagers. So when they have a small conflict, they don't think it's necessary to come to me. (Deputy village chief (m) November 1999)

Commune

Comprehension of the Commune

Chraeng: *Whatever They Say, We Do*

- *Villagers' comprehension of the commune is blurred in the idea of "higher levels";*
- *The face and name of officials at commune, district and province levels are known (on a decreasing scale) by villagers, but perceived (on an increasing scale) as remote and inaccessible;*
- *The Village and Commune chiefs are unfamiliar with and subordinated to authorities above them.*

In Chraeng, most people are aware of what they call a "network" (*ksae bandaay*) – a number of levels of authority. Over the village is the commune, over the commune is the district, over the district is the province. Villagers perceive them all as remote and quite inaccessible, and people who come from there are all widely referred to as "big people". There is also Phnom Penh or Hun Sen, but that seems to be almost too far and too big to even think about.

Villagers seem to usually not distinguish between the various levels of authorities, but to regard them all as part of the wider and quite blurred idea of "the higher levels". The role and mandate of specific levels and officials remain unclear to most villagers, apart from "receiving plans" from above, "sending plans" downwards, and solving conflicts that cannot be solved at lower levels. People also do not seem to expect to know what authorities beyond the village do, or to understand why they do it. Even less do villagers expect to be able to influence higher levels. Though villagers usually do not show any obvious fear of authorities, the strongly dominating attitude is to not question anything that comes from "them", but to accept and obey.

> Whatever they say, we just let them do it. If they tell me to go to prison, I'll go. (Villager (f) October 1999)

> Higher levels are full of law. Lower don't dare to say anything. Most villagers don't dare to go near big people. They are afraid that they'll say something wrong and be punished. (Villager (f) October 1999)

> What the higher levels do is legal, for example if they want to build a road across the rice fields, it's okay. Higher levels are on the side of the law. (VDC member (m) October 1999)

> I know what happens in the village, but I don't know what higher levels do. Higher levels don't know what happens in the village. Lower levels report, lower levels don't know what higher levels do. Higher levels give instructions, for example to build a road, complete the white soil. There's a plan from higher levels, so that lower levels know when it will start. (---) For example, if someone wants to clear land for *chamkaar*, lower levels ask and higher levels decide. (VDC member (m) October 1999)

> The authorities don't understand about villagers' feelings. They use words that villagers don't understand. All villagers follow what the authorities say, even if they don't understand. (Villager (m) October 1999)

Though villagers do thus not usually separate the commune from other high levels, it is the least remote one. Most, but far from all, villagers in Chraeng know the Commune chief's name. He has worked in the commune since 1979 and been the Commune chief since 1986. Many villagers have also occasionally seen him in the village. Very few, however, can give any clear examples of what the commune or the Commune chief does. Again, the most common notions are sending plans and solving conflicts.

> We saw the Commune chief once, when he came to give a letter to the Village chief. (Village couple (f/m) March 2000)

Though villagers have very vague ideas of the district authorities, many of them know that there was recently a major shift of district chiefs between districts. The new one is already better known – and liked – than the previous one, as he visited the village when the road was built, and as he has been firm on stopping illegal cutting of trees and illegal fishing methods.

> The district chief is new, he was transferred from Kravanh district. I don't know why, maybe the old district chief didn't care about the forest, but just let people cut the trees. That's why he was transferred to another place. (---) The previous district chief, we never saw. But the new district chief once came for a meeting in the village before building a road. He told villagers his name and his age. And he told villagers to not cut trees because he is afraid that the forest might disappear. (---) The new district chief is friendly and simple. He doesn't think of whom he is, sometimes he wears a *kramaa* and walks as villagers, some people almost didn't recognise him. (Group of poor women, October 1999)

As could be predicted, villagers do not expect to be able to contact any provincial officials. The new governor too, however, has made a stronger impression than his predecessor. Most villagers have not seen him, but they know that he was the one who introduced the rule that every family must have a *tradaok* at home. The third Deputy governor has also recently become reasonably well known, as he came to the village with gifts after the flooding in late 1999. "Big people" in general are known for handing out gifts.

> We can't meet the provincial people. I don't know where they live. In Pursat, there are so many buildings, so we wouldn't find it. (Group of poor women, October 1999)

More surprising than villagers' vague ideas, is the Village chief's apparent lack of familiarity with higher levels. He does go for commune meetings (not very frequently, though, see Villagers Go to the Commune and Higher Levels) and people from district and provincial departments do come to see him at his house. He is very unclear about what happens in the commune, though, he does not remember the name of the provincial governor, and he seems to mainly wait for "big people" to come with information or instructions. The militiaman, on the other hand, is far more well-informed and familiar with higher levels.

> I don't know about the commune! I only know the village. (---) The Commune chief controls and governs all the Village chiefs. Every Wednesday, he goes to the district to get a plan, and every Monday he reports to the Village chiefs. Those meetings are the only contact I have with the commune. (---) I don't know what the district chief does. But I know him, I had a chat with him once. He comes from Kravanh district. There was a plan from the province, they want every district to progress, so they swapped the district chiefs. The district is only for authority affairs, such as fighting and robbery. (---) I don't know the province! They are too big!!! I don't know what the governor does. He's new, from

Battambang. Sometimes, province officials come to the commune, that's the only time I see province people. (Village chief (m) October 1999 and March 2000)

This sense of subordination does not prevail only in the village. The Commune chief seems to be quite uncomfortable and distressed with "big people". As the research team were having lunch at a CDC member's house, together with the Commune chief and the head of a provincial department, the Commune chief was clearly uneasy with the company and told one of the Cambodian team members that he did not want to go near "big people".

I'm under the supervision of the district. (---) The most difficult part of my job is authority, especially security. If I can't prevent robberies, I'm a weak Commune chief. If there are robberies, higher levels will blame me, so I have to be careful. (---) Some Commune chiefs have asked the District chief to be allowed to not be candidates in the commune elections. But the District chief doesn't accept that, he makes them be candidates. The District chief asked his district colleagues to do a survey about who the candidates should be. Commune chiefs are good candidates. So I don't dare to ask him, I don't know if I'll be a candidate or not. (---) I never talk directly with the Provincial Governor. When I went for a conference, I just saw him. The previous Governor, I went to report to him, I and the district, for example about flooding. But after the last flooding, we didn't see the Governor, because he's new. (Commune chief (m) March 2000)

Kook Doung: *I'm Only Low Level, I Listen to Them*

- *As in Chraeng, villagers do not usually distinguish the commune from "higher levels";*
- *Villagers are less familiar than in Chraeng with higher level officials personally, but more inclined to seek their assistance if needed;*
- *The Village chief is loyal but not very active in relation to higher authorities, while the Commune chief is hard working but often feels powerless.*

In Kook Doung too, villagers are aware of the levels of authority above the village. As in Chraeng, however, the ideas of what these "higher levels" do are vague, with the most common notions being "sending plans", "calling for meetings" and "solving conflicts", and the dominating attitude being to wait for and accept whatever comes from "them".

The Commune chief is less well known personally among the villagers than in Chraeng, as there have been several changes on the post. Most villagers know the story of how the previous one left with a new wife, and they do not yet know the current one, who has been in office since 1997, as well as his predecessor. They often see the Commune chief coming to the village on his motorbike, though. District and higher officials are also personally less seen and known than in the Pursat case – and maybe less than in the past. Today, not even the Village chief knows the name of the new District chief. Still, the commune seems more within reach in people's minds than in Chraeng – they could go there if they needed.

Whatever the higher levels want the Village chief to do, he has to do. The Group leaders are small, low level. Then it's the Village chief, then the commune, then the district, then the province – that's big. (---) I don't know what the commune does. I'm low level, I only listen to them. I don't know the new Commune chief. I knew the old one who ran away, because I used to go to learn. Now I don't go. I don't know about the district, if you want to know, you'll have to ask the Village chief. (Group leader (m) November 1999)

I don't know the Commune chief's name. I only see him drive on his motorbike along the road. (Villager (f) January 2000)

> Sometimes there's a letter from them, and sometimes they come here. I don't know who they are, people from higher levels. It's Mr This and Mr That. (Villager (f) November 1999)

> In the past, people got regular training. Even small children knew the Commune chief and the district chief. Now it's democracy, so people don't know the leaders. (Village advisory group (f/m) February 2000)

> When district people came to ask villagers to give up some of their land for the returnees, villagers said yes, because they thought that they couldn't say no to the district. They were scared. (Deputy village chief (m) November 1999)

The returnees have had more contact with the commune and higher levels than the old villagers, and are actually more familiar with the Commune chief than with the Village chief. This reflects the fact that the Village chief has never taken any strong interest in the returnees, while the new Commune chief is very concerned about them and has been trying to get rice land for them, while he does not have much pity with those among the old villagers who got land in the early 1980s but have sold it. Many of the returnees, however, are disappointed with higher levels as they claim to have been promised rice land, but not yet received any.

The Village chief is very familiar with the Commune chief who he sees frequently both at commune meetings and in the village. In relation to higher authorities, the Village chief is loyal and dutiful, but not very knowledgeable or outspoken.

> I live under the higher level authority. I go to the commune to receive plans. (---) Kook Doung is a remote area, so nobody is brave to run for the commune election. (---) I met the previous Governor quite often, Ung Samy. He came to the commune or the district to teach villagers to build roads etc, or to provide gifts to victims. Now, he's in Pursat. I've forgotten the name of the new one, he came from Siem Reap. He never comes [to the village], there are no gifts for victims. (Village chief (m) November 1999)

The Commune chief is young, committed and hard working. He wants villagers to know their rights and sees it as the commune's role to improve their living. He often finds himself powerless towards higher authorities, though.

> Now the commune doesn't have the right to do anything. We live under the district. (---) The commune has no way to contact the government. One reason is that the commune has no money, a second reason is that they've never had any contact with the government. I'm afraid that higher levels don't pay any attention. I'm only low level, they rarely pay attention to us. (Commune chief (m) November 1999 and February 2000)

The Commune and Higher Levels Come to the Village

Chraeng: *They Come to Get Tax, But They also Take Lunch or Dinner*

- *Villagers do not know in advance when people from the authorities will come to see them;*
- *When people from the authorities come, villagers in general are not clear who they are, but obediently follow their instructions and pay the taxes and fees they ask for.*

Apart from the Commune and District chiefs, who villagers have seen at meetings about the road, other people from higher levels also sometimes visit Chraeng. The School

director may receive other education officials at his house, but more often it is the militiaman who has commune and district people eating and drinking at his house.

People from higher level authorities also come to see villagers. Villagers seldom know in advance when they will come, but suddenly have to hurry to get access to the services they bring or pay the fees they ask for – or to run away.

District health staff sometimes come to give medicine and injections to children. They do it at the militiaman's house, and he is the one who informs the villagers. One day, a young man is relieved that his wife had been home at the right moment.

> Houn just passed on his bicycle and shouted "if you want your children to get an injection, you'd better go now!" My wife rushed there with our son. (Villager (m) March 2000)

Another day, villagers were quite upset that people from the district had suddenly come and told them to pay 10,000 riel for new family cards. People were not clear what the cards are for, but nobody wanted to risk being without it. Someone had seen on TV that a card should cost only 6,000 riel, but nobody even thought of asking or complaining. They were convinced that if they waited, the price would go up. So, those who could, hurried to get the money and pay the same day, some borrowing money, others using what they had kept for fertilisers.

> We got family cards around 1984, because the authorities needed to recruit soldiers. If a family tried to hide their sons, the authorities would know and they would take their rice land. (---) [Now] people try hard to find the money for it, they even borrow money. If they don't pay for the card now, next time it will be more expensive – next time they [district people] come to the village, maybe 15,000 riels, then, next time villagers will have to go to the commune and there it will cost 25,000 riels, then more and more. (VDC member (f) June 1999)

> If you don't have a card, you're not included in a group, in the village or in the commune. You live outside the society. (---) With the old governor, we needed one family card. With the new governor, we need a new card. With the next governor, maybe we'll need a new card again. (Small group of villagers (f/m) October 1999)

People also come to the village to collect taxes and fees. The two video shop owners pay tax, as do rice mill owners and rice wine producers. There seems to be no understanding of the purpose of taxes. Most villagers are not clear who the collectors are, and to them the amounts and rules seem to vary and change quite arbitrarily.

Rice mill owners, villagers say, pay 8,000 riel ($ 2) per month, while the initial fee to get a permission is $ 150 for a big mill and 200,000 ($ 53) for a small one. Villagers are eager to tell the research team how, soon after we left last time, people "from the Ministry" came to collect rice mill tax.

> Suddenly seven men arrived on four motorbikes. They were here from seven in the morning until six in the evening! They went from house to house of the rice mill owners. They know who has a mill, they can hear the sound. But even those who don't have any rice to mill have to pay. Villagers ran away to hide! (Small group of villagers (f/m) October 1999)

Other people come to collect tax from those who produce rice wine. Villagers claim that the amounts range from 15,000 to 25,000 riel ($ 4 – 6.5) per month, while an official from the Department of Industry states that the tax for small production is 5,000 or 6,000 riel ($ 1.3 – 1.6) per month.

One day, when three men came to collect the wine production tax, one of the major producers was not at home, and the following day she did not know that they had been

there. This woman has worked her way from poor to reasonably well off by raising pigs and producing rice wine. She is completely dependent on these incomes, but seems to accept whatever fees and rules are introduced.

> Before, the tax was 15,000 riel ($ 4) per year. Now it's 15,000 per month. The commune comes to collect tax every month. (---) Maybe they come from the province... or from the district... I don't know who they are. It started in August this year. Last time they were here was a month ago, so soon it's the date when they will come again. I'll pay 15,000 riel. (---) During the transplanting season, they came and told villagers not to produce rice wine. They said that they would come to check, and charge a 300,000 riel [$ 80] fine if somebody was still producing wine. I had no money to pay fines, so I stopped. Everybody stopped. But only for a week or so. Then, they changed their minds, and charged tax instead. They came back and said "please produce and pay tax." (---) There's a company in Pursat that produces rice wine. They don't get so much money from it, because the wine is not so nice, the wine from the villages is better. Nobody bought the wine from the factory, so then they let villagers produce wine again. (Villager (f) October 1999)

Five months later, this woman is expecting to also have to pay for a license. An official from the Department of Industry and Mines tells us that rice mill owners and rice wine producers will have to pay 180,000 riel ($ 50) to his department, and then they will get all the necessary signatures from commune, district and province levels. Every following year, they will have to pay 40,000 riel to renew the license. The woman above is not clear about these fees and rules.

> They came here a few days ago and told me that I need a license to produce rice wine. I don't know if they were from the commune or the district. They've been here twice now, but I only met them once. I didn't pay because I have no money. So, they might make trouble for me! I'll just wait and see. Maybe they'll come back to give me the license. They said that I'll have to pay 180,000 riel. Everything is money! I don't know if I'll have to pay every year or just once. I just do what they tell me. (Villager (f) March 2000)

There are a few people in the village though – educated and better off – who do not obey as readily as this woman. The by far most well educated person in the village who is also a big rice wine producer, is more clear about the rules. He still hesitates to pay for a license though and, unlike most villagers, he wants to check with better informed people before he does as the province people tell him. The most well-off couple in the village, who are also leading wine producers and mill owners, have heard that you can pay less to the Department of Industry and Mines, but then you will have to get the signatures yourself – for which you need money and contacts.

> On the 9th of March, there were new problems about the rice wine. Now they want people to get a license to produce wine. We'll have to pay 180,000 riel every year. I said no, but they'll come back on the 16th, and I'll have to pay. They come from the province, it's those who make laws for business. (---) I'm not yet clear, I need to ask some wine producers who live near the provincial town if they have paid for the license or not. If they have, I'll also pay. But I'm afraid that they might keep the money to themselves, and not give it to the state. (---) I already pay tax, 20,000 riel per month, but that's to different people, to people from the Tax department. (Villager (m) March 2000)

> You can either pay 180,000 riel to the Department of Industry and Mines and get the license from them. Or you can pay 80,000, but then you need to go to the District and Provincial Governors to get signatures, and pay for it. We couldn't do that because we don't know anyone there. (Village couple (f/m) March 2000)

We also meet a mill owner who claims that he has never paid any actual tax, since the commune lets the militiaman take care of some of it. The Commune chief, however, emphasises that the commune does not get any benefit from the tax or licenses, apart from for his signature.

> You need to have a permission to have a rice mill, and you need to pay to get the permission. Then, you also have to pay a regular fee. But I don't pay any tax, I never did. I just give some money to the village police, Houn [the militiaman]. The commune and the village police divide the right to charge tax between them. If for example the commune charges tax for eight mills, Houn charges for two. I pay less to Houn than I would if I paid to the commune. (---) The tax collectors who come to get tax from other mill owners, also take lunch or dinner, they kill chickens to eat. (Villager (m) February 2000)

> People pay tax for rice mills and rice wine production to the Provincial tax department. But the commune gets nothing. People get a license, that's the responsibility of the Department of Industry and Mines. They go to the villages to find out where there are rice mills and who owns them. Then, they give a paper to the owner to take to get signatures from the Commune chief and the District chief. Villagers come to the commune and pay between 5,000 and 10,000 riel for the signature, then they go to the district, and pay for the signature, then to the province, and pay for the signature. (---) During the State of Cambodia, the commune could charge rice for soldiers and labour force. But now, the commune never involves in taking white rice from the rice mill owners. (Commune chief (m) March 2000)

Kook Doung: *It's a Daily Fee to Big People*

- *As in Chraeng, villagers obediently pay for family cards, though they are not clear what they are for and though they expect to have to pay for new ones soon;*
- *Shop owners pay daily fees, which the Commune chief claims he wants to, but cannot, stop.*

In Kook Doung, two higher level officials are residents, one is Head of the district soldiers, one works for the provincial police. While, as mentioned, the Commune chief often comes to see the Village chief or the VDC leader, other officials come much less frequently. There are district medical staff who come to give medicine and vaccinations to children, and policemen who come to issue family cards and to collect various unofficial fees.

Villagers give varying reports about the family books and cards. They have obtained them at different occasions and paid different fees. Returnees generally have paid much less than the old villagers. As in Chraeng, the cost is thought to increase the longer you wait, and villagers also expect the authorities to keep introducing new cards. People are not clear about what the cards are for, but they do not want to risk being without it. Many landless feel cheated as they had got the impression that once they had a card they would receive rice land.

> The commune police came, Hean and Kong [Village chief and Deputy] called people to the meeting place, and there, villagers were told that they need family cards. I don't know what they are for. But to be sure, we got both [family book and yellow card]. At that time, I had money from making mats. We do whatever they ask us to do, and just keep it [the documents] because we live under their order (*banjchie kee*). Those who could not pay the first time, would have to pay more next time, maybe twice as much. Some still don't have a family card. They said that those who have a family book will get land, but we haven't got anything. (Returnee couple (f/m) January 2000)

I got it from Kong [Deputy village chief] for free because I was poor. It was before the election in 1998. If you don't have a family document, you won't have a chance to get rice land. (Returnee (f) January 2000)

The commune police went from house to house, and increased the price. I paid 8,000 for the family card, it had been 5,000 for those who paid at once. I don't know why they need family cards. But what the Village chief asks villagers to do, villagers follow, because the Village chief was told by the commune or the district. (Villager (f) January 2000)

The purpose of the family book and the yellow card is to know how many members there are in a family, and when children get married, you bring the card to show the Village chief and the Commune chief. When I got the book and the card, I was told that it would be valid for ten years, but I think that it can be used only for two or three years, then it will be changed as the previous ones. (Villager (m) January 2000)

In Kook Doung, only the video shop owner pays regular tax. The many shop owners, however, pay a daily fee to the market owner in the commune who comes – or sends two friends of his – sometimes every day, sometimes just once a week. Everybody knows about this and usually nobody objects.

The shop owners pay 100 riel a day. It's a daily fee to big people. In the past, only sellers at the market had to pay. (Small group of villagers (f) January 2000)

As Kook Doung has become something of a gambling centre, district people also come to get something from the gamblers.

Villagers who organise gambling pay 10,000 riel to the police every year. The police also come to get a chicken or some other gifts or maybe 5,000 riel from the gamblers. (Villager (m) January 2000)

Both the shop fees and the gambling are issues that the Commune chief says he wants to do something about, but claims that the commune cannot do anything since higher levels are behind it.

The market owner has bought [rents] the market from the district. He pays 5 million riel ($ 1,300) per year. But the commune never gets... the district just gives 500,000 riel for two years. (---) The market owner should not take daily fees from the shop owners. It's not legal. I called the market owner, and told him that he shouldn't take any daily fees. But he didn't listen. I tell the villagers "if he asks for 200 riel, give him only 100." If it becomes a responsibility of the commune, we'll reduce the price to 4 million, because it's hard for villagers to pay. But now, I can't do anything because the commune is under the district, and the district supports the market owner. They shouldn't love money more than people. (---) I don't want people to gamble. But I can't do anything, I can't stop it. Only when I have a meeting, I ask people to stop or reduce the gambling. It's not my fault. It's a fault from higher levels, it starts from the province. There's a lottery at the market, and the lottery owner uses telecom to inform about the results. (---) During the 1980s, officials could steal chickens etc. Now, people know about their rights, they won't let anyone steal from them. But when police or higher level people come to arrest the gamblers, people say "Please, take this..." (Commune chief (m) February 2000)

Villagers Go to the Commune and Higher Levels

Chraeng: *Go Through the Network*

- *Villagers sense that they cannot bypass the Village chief to go straight to higher levels;*
- *The main reason to consult authorities outside the village is conflict resolution; this, however, is expensive which stops most villagers;*
- *Wine producers in the village have participated in a reasonably successful protest against the authorities' ban of village wine production.*

The predominant sentiment in Chraeng is that villagers do not themselves go to see the commune or higher levels. Few people actually know where the commune office is[16]. Villagers generally state that they always "go through the network" (*ksae bandaay*) which means that they go to the Village chief, who goes to the commune, who goes to the district.

Conflict resolution is the mostly mentioned reason to consult higher levels, but for most villagers it remains something that they only hear about, partly because of the costs involved. To get married or divorced, and for various ceremonies, they need the commune's approval. Villagers seem to not even think of going themselves, though, but expect the Village chief to go on their behalf. This is also what the Commune chief prefers, but he also believes that villagers do not hesitate to come to see him if they have a problem.

> When somebody wants to get a marriage certificate, they need to see the Village chief and to pay 10,000 riel because he needs to go to the commune and it's faster than if they do it themselves. The Village chief knows where to go to get the marriage certificate signed. (Group leader (m) March 2000)

> If there's a conflict that I can't solve, I send the documents to the commune. Some people come to me first, others go directly to the commune. Those who come to see me first are always successful. But those who go directly meet danger. When the Commune chief sees that they don't have my signature, he sends them back to me. (Village chief (m) March 2000)

> People come to the commune to ask for permission to hold a ceremony. But they can't forget about the Village chief. It has to pass him first, otherwise I send them back to get his permission. (---) People dare to come to the commune now. If there's a problem with a Village chief, they come straight to me. (---) Now, the authorities can't do something wrong. People know very well about their rights. (Commune chief (m) March 2000)

Though villagers rely on the Village chief and believe that he has good access to higher levels, this does not seem to be the case. The Village chief claims to go for weekly meetings in the commune. However, it is obvious that he is frequently absent, and that he does in many cases not ask someone else to go instead of him. While he gave the research team various reasons for why he had not been for the meeting last Monday, or the week before, other villagers, including VDC members and the militiaman, believed that he had been there. As has been shown, the militiaman has better contacts with

[16] Some villagers were provided gifts at the commune office after the flooding in late 1999. For almost all of them this was the first time they were there, and they tend to say that they got the gifts at the commune kindergarten, which is located next to the new commune resource centre which has come to be used as commune office while the old office seems to be abandoned.

higher levels. He also frequently attends meetings in the commune as well as the district.

> The Village chief has no motorbike, so he needs that man's [the militiaman's] help to go to the commune meetings. All information from the meetings, he also knows. Sometimes he knows more than the Village chief. (Villager (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

As mentioned, the only reason that most villagers can think of to go to higher levels, is if there is a conflict that cannot be solved in the village. Everybody agrees that this implies high costs and most of the cases that have gone to higher levels involve a few richer and related families.

What follows is the case of Sophie's divorce and her former husband's remarriage – what seemed to have been settled in the village, but ended up as a case in the provincial court three years later. Sophie's parents are quite well off, as is her former husband. The case illustrates how a villager feels intimidated by village and higher authorities whose rules and procedures she does not understand, thus suspecting that the other party wins because he is paying and she is not. It also shows how lack of clarity in a simple divorce case complicates things later on.

- My married life lasted only one year.

Sophie was brought up in the richest part of Chraeng. When she was 24, she married a man from the same area. But when she a year later had a miscarriage and could not work, they decided to divorce.

- I don't know why he wanted a divorce, she says, maybe because I was sick. But I knew that he didn't care about me, so I agreed.

The man went to inform the Village chief, and the Village chief asked them to come to see him together the following day.

- Husband and wife came together on a bicycle, the Village chief recalls. I could see that they didn't have a conflict. The problem was that the mothers didn't like each other.

So, the Village chief tried to persuade Sophie and her husband to stay together. But the man's mother did not accept that.

- She told the Village chief to do anything he could to arrange a divorce, Sophie says. If he did that, she would give him 20,000 riel.

The Village chief called them a second time and a third time, when the mothers were also present. They still claimed that they wanted a divorce.

- I could not force them to stay together, so I agreed on a divorce, the Village chief says. The man and the woman and the two mothers all put their thumbprints. But I was not involved in the sharing of their belongings. I just went there to make a list of the things, which they signed.

Three years later, the man wanted to marry another woman, a relative of Sophie. Sophie did not at all like the idea.

- I didn't want him to marry someone who is my relative. And I wanted to make him ashamed. So I went to the commune and asked if there is any law if I wanted to stay with him. They said that there is a law – if the husband wants a divorce, but the wife doesn't, then the man must pay.

Sophie says that the militiaman encouraged her to complain about her husband getting married to another woman, because he expected to get some benefits out of a conflict case. At the commune, she claimed that she and her husband were not properly divorced. For that, both of them need to go to the commune and get a certificate, which she had not done. So, when the man came to the commune to get a permission to get married, the commune officials did not dare to give it to him.

- He gave money to the commune to get the permission, Sophie says. But they did still not dare to give it. The commune did not dare to say whether he should stay with me or if he should get the permission.

Instead, the man was called to the commune and asked to pay her compensation.
- But he preferred to pay to the commune, Sophie says. He gave money to the Commune chief to keep quiet. He gave money to the commune, and the commune changed their minds. Now they said that there is no law.
- We asked him to pay to make her happy, the Commune chief says. But he had no money, so we could not solve the case. If a couple don't agree, the commune can't decide on divorce.

So, the commune sent the case to the provincial court, attaching Sophie's request to stay with her husband and her former husband's request to marry another woman. They were called to the court three times. The first time, the man was asked to pay compensation to Sophie. He did not agree. The second time, she was asked to agree on a proper divorce. She did not agree. The third time, the Village chief was called too.
- She didn't tell me, but went straight to court, the Village chief says. She confused the court. But when I brought the divorce agreement with the thumbprints and the list of their belongings with their thumbprints, the court said "good".

Today the man is married to Sophie's relative, and Sophie claims that he won the case because of his money and because she did not realise what happened.
- First the Village chief said that I was right and "you have to do like this". The next time, he had changed his mind. I could have given him money too, and he would have changed his mind again. But I only brought a package of cigarettes when I went to see to the Village chief and the Commune chief. And the court cheated me. They wanted us to get a divorce, and said that if either of us didn't agree, please go to the court in Phnom Penh. I didn't agree and wanted to go to Phnom Penh. But they made me put my thumbprint on a paper. I thought that it was in order to get the case to Phnom Penh. But it was an agreement on divorce. It's difficult for me to understand, it's all in their hands.

The Village chief also tells about a land conflict, between two brothers in the richest part of the village, that he referred to the district:

Land conflicts, I can't solve in the village. A man had borrowed land from his elder brother, and built a rice store on it. Then the older brother wanted the land back, and asked the younger to remove the rice store. But the younger refused and instead built a fence around the store. So, the older brother came to see me and I called the younger to make a compromise.

The younger brother did not agree, however, so he made a case to send to the district justice. I wrote a letter to the district, and enclosed both sides' notes.

Then, a committee from the district came to see the reality. They were from the district police, district justice, district soldiers, and some topography people. They didn't say anything, just went back to the district office. Later, they called all those who had been here for a discussion. They decided that the younger brother was wrong, and asked him to move the rice store within 15 days. Otherwise district people would do it and he would have to pay them.

The younger brother has not removed the store, though, and the district people have not come back, so the store is still there.

The Village chief goes on to tell about the only case in the village that has gone to court in Phnom Penh. It happened about two years ago, and the same two brothers are involved:

The younger brother has been using an oxcart road that goes into his plot since 1979. Now, the older wouldn't allow him to use the entrance any more. I called both sides to make a compromise, but they didn't agree. So, I sent a report to the district justice. Again, district police and topography people came to see the reality. What they saw was that the older brother had blocked the entrance. After a week, they called both sides to make a compromise at the district centre. The district people asked the older brother to open the barrier. They agreed and put their thumbprints.

During the conflict, the older brother had dug a whole at the entrance and the younger had filled it again. Now, the older didn't open the barrier, as agreed, so the district people who had been here came to open it.

Then the older brother brought a complaint to the provincial court, and the provincial court called both parties three times. The first two times, they were called to make a compromise, but they didn't agree. The third time, they called me too, and I was asked to explain the issue. I told the truth, that the younger brother has been maintaining the entrance since 1979 and that the older came to the village later on. The court decided that the younger brother was right.

Then, the older brother brought the case to court in Phnom Penh. Both parties were called, but I wasn't. They sent the records to Phnom Penh and they saw the documents from the district and the province, from those who had been here to see the reality.

Phnom Penh also judged that the younger brother was right, and now the older accepted.

Though villagers in Chraeng normally accept what the authorities say and do, and though they normally do not even think of going to higher levels, there is an example of some villagers at least participating in a protest against a higher level decision. However, the protest was initiated by someone richer and more familiar with higher levels. It happened last year when the villagers were told that they must not produce rice wine anymore. Phiep is the most educated person in the village and one of the larger wine producers:

- A private company bought the rice wine factory in Pursat, Phiep says. And they didn't want anyone else to produce wine, so they paid $ 1,000 to the state for the production right.

There were about ten families in Chraeng who produced rice wine. Some of them stopped. But when they saw that others continued, they also started again.

Then one day, Phiep got a letter from a wine producer in Kandieng district centre. He sent a written protest against the banning of wine production and asked the wine producers in Chraeng to sign it. Phiep took it to the others, including his relative Saan who had stopped to make wine since she could not risk the 300,000 riel fine. Phiep got all their thumbprints on the protest letter.

- Phiep put my thumbprint and name instead of me, Saan says. I agreed to let him do it, because he helped me. If I can't produce rice wine, I've got no income.

Phiep took the letter back to the man in Kandieng, who had come to represent all village wine producers in the whole district, and who took it to the province.

- I'm not sure whom he took it to, Phiep says. But it was passed from the administration section to the third governor to the second governor to the first governor.

The protest was reasonably successful. The production ban was cancelled, but a heavy tax introduced, which made at least one woman in Chraeng stop producing rice wine.

- Villagers had suggested that they could pay some small tax, Phiep says. The state thought about it and realised that they could earn more than the $ 1,000 that they company paid.

Kook Doung: *No Reason to Go*

- *Villagers can go straight to higher levels without first consulting the Village chief; they rarely have a reason to go, though;*
- *Unlike in Chraeng, many villagers go to the commune to get a marriage certificate; conflicts, however, are seldom brought to higher levels;*
- *Most of the villagers have signed petitions to demand their right to fish in some lakes in the area, and a few have participated in a demonstration which seems to have been successful.*

In Kook Doung, villagers mainly state that they have no reason to go to the commune or higher levels. Still, more villagers than in Chraeng know where the commune office is and there is more awareness of where to go and more sense that they can actually go if they need. The fees at the commune level is not a major hindrance, but higher up they become a problem. Villagers can go to higher levels themselves and if they for some reason do not want to see the village authorities first, they can go straight. In practice, however, nowadays few villagers apart from the Village chief, the Deputy and the VDC leader usually go to the commune or higher levels.

> Before, the commune called villagers to come for meetings. Now they only call the Village chief. (Villager (f) January 2000)

The one occasion when people in Kook Doung consult the commune is when they, or rather their children, are getting married. Unlike in Chraeng, here most villagers go themselves though the Village chief will go for them if they ask him to.

> To get a marriage certificate for my child, I asked approval from the Village chief, the Commune chiefand the district. But it was the man in the commune who took the letter to get approval from the district. The commune people didn't charge me, but sometimes villagers give a packet of cigarettes to be kind. (Villager (f) November 1999)

According to the Commune chief, divorces should also be approved and signed by the commune, though that does not always happen. The young woman whose husband used to hit her, knew what she was doing when she finally decided to get a divorce. Another young couple, however, who are very poor and who have separated and moved back together several times, usually do not inform the authorities, which can create problems for the authorities as well as the villagers.

> I went to the Village chief, to the commune, and to the district, and got thumbprints. Because I don't want any problems in the future. (Villager (f) November 1999)

> When people want a divorce, they come to the commune. But when they want to live together again, they don't tell me. So I don't know and suddenly I'm surprised to hear that they have another child. (---) I want villagers to know their rights. Before, people who only had a *saen koun* didn't get a marriage certificate. That created problems when they wanted to get a divorce, since they had no paper to witness the marriage. Now, I've changed this practice. Even those who have a *saen koun*, I ask them to get a marriage certificate so that they can get a proper divorce. (Commune Chief (m) November 1999)

Land transactions too should, according to the Commune chief, be approved by the commune. In practice, however, in Kook Doung it is usually only the Deputy village chief who signs them, which the Commune chief claims creates problems.

> The commune is informed only about some land transactions. Most people don't inform the commune. Only people who know the law do. Then, there's a problem when they start measuring, they have no land titles and there are conflicts. (Commune chief (m) February 2000)

In Kook Doung, there are no major complaints about the informal fees at the commune office, and the commune officials are very open about the issue.

> I spend my brains and intelligence in the office. But I don't have enough time to work as a farmer and I can't go outside to do business. The Commune chief earns 30,000 riel ($ 8) a month and the Deputy 20,000 riel. But sometimes we don't get the salary on the 30th, but two or three months later. So how can commune people survive? When people come to get a marriage certificate, or to move out, or to transfer land, they always pay something, maybe 10,000 riel or 100 baht. There's no rule, and they are not asked to pay, they just give money by themselves. We take some for private spending, and keep some for office supplies. I see what we need in the shelves, someone doesn't have cigarettes, the Commune chief needs fuel for his motorbike... People get their certificates even without payment. But recently there was a man from the US, we knew that he's got money, so we asked him to pay a truck full of gravel. (Deputy Commune chief (m) November 1999)

Though villagers do not need to ask the Village chief to go to the commune for them, the Village chief in Kook Doung goes to the commune far more often than the Village chief in Chraeng. There are frequent meetings, which he seldom misses, while he rarely goes to any higher levels. If the Village chief cannot go for the commune meetings, it is usually the VDC leader who goes instead, while the Deputy village chief, who is also and *aachaar*, sees the commune mainly regarding issues related to the pagoda.

As in Chraeng, the most frequently mentioned reason to go to higher levels is conflict resolution, though villagers also point out that very few cases actually go above the village, mainly because "the higher you go, the more expensive it gets" – and because the Deputy village chief prefers to keep it within the village where he is the one who gets the money. The commune officials, too, do whatever they can to help with conflicts, but they are aware of their limitations and also let people go to court if needed.

> It's normal that conflicts go from village to commune to district and so on. But Kook Doung is special, no conflicts go to higher levels. The security man [the Deputy village chief] tries to compromise, otherwise he has to go with them to the commune and then he has no time to do private work. (Village couple (f/m) January 2000)

> The commune people are open-minded. We let villagers come with any kind of problems. There's always at least one person in the office to receive complaints from people. (---) Villagers can "jump", there's no need to see the Village chief first. They can even go straight to court. (---) The commune is not like a court, commune people give advice, but they cannot make judgements. A court should be independent. The commune can only make compromises, set up a contract with the person who has done something wrong, stating that "in the future, I won't do like this". (---) If the parties don't agree, the commune has to send it to court. We mustn't keep a case in the office more than 15 days. To bring a case to the court, people need to pay, not official fees, but both sides have to pay to people in the court. (Deputy Commune chief (m) November 1999)

In Kook Doung, land conflicts seem more common than in Chraeng. The following is a case between the members in a group who accused their Group leader of using their communal rice land for private use and claimed it back. It illustrates how villagers first hesitated to bring a complaint, and how then one person could mobilise most of them while others could scare some from participating. It also shows expectations that you

need money to have a chance to win, but that in fact the group members reached a result that they were happy with without paying.

In the 1980s, the Village chief allocated land to each of the nine groups in the village to use communally. Nary, the woman who later came to lead the protest against their Group leader, claims that they never grew the land together and that the Group leader soon started to use it for himself.

For many years, the eleven group members kept watching the Group leader. They were not clear about what actually happened to the land at different times. The leader might have swapped the 2.5 hectares to 1.8 hectares at a different place, he might have sold some and maybe rented it back, he might have given some to his two children as they got married[17]. In 1998, when the group members heard that he had sold some of the land, they wanted to protest. But first, they did not really dare to.

- I was not afraid, Nary says. I went straight to the Group leader and asked him who controls the communal land. He said that he doesn't know, that it depends on the Village chief, that he had handed over the land to him.

As they stood there, the Village chief came by, so Nary asked him, and he also claimed to not know.

- It seemed like the Village chief had a stake in it. Then, the Group leader said something to try to hurt me. He said "if you don't agree, go and make a complaint." He thought that, as he has money, he would get away with it.

The same day, Nary convinced all the group members to go with her with a complaint to the commune.

- First I said "the complaint is not correct, please do it again", the Commune chief recalls. Then they came back with the correct sheets, complaints and thumbprints.

The commune sent a letter to call the Group leader and the Village chief.

- Then, other Group leaders and villagers asked me not to do it, Nary says. They said that I don't have any money for bribes, but the Group leader has. They tried to persuade all members to not go, but only three listened.

So, the following day eight group members, the Group leader and the Village chief went to the commune.

- I asked the Village chief to tell the story about the communal land, the Commune chief says. And he told it very well.

The group members did not demand any compensation for the years that the Group leader had been using the rice land, they just wanted the land back. The Commune chief on his side thinks that the Group leader is a good man since he had not sold the rice land as other Group leaders had, and he therefore suggested that the eight families should get one hectare of the land and the Group leader should get the remaining 0.8 hectare.

- First, the Group leader didn't agree and we kept talking for hours, Nary says. I tried to think of something threatening, and said that if the Commune chief couldn't solve it, I'd ask him to write a complaint to the district, if the Group leader didn't agree, I'd demand a lot of money. The Commune chief also kept explaining that he couldn't get all, that communal land is for all the members. He kept begging him "please..." The Group leader was alone, the members were many. So, finally he decided to give the communal land back.

They also made a contract with the Group leader in the commune office, stating that if any group member faces any problem or danger, the Group leader will be held responsible. The eight members were happy with the settlement and are now waiting to sell the land and share the money.

-We didn't pay anything to the Commune chief, he's got his salary, Nary says. I don't know if the Group leader gave him any money.

[17] Giving the group's communal rice land to new families within the group was a common way of distributing it when the communal rice farming was abandoned.

Another conflict case illustrates how villagers in Kook Doung take what seems to be a minor conflict between neighbours to the village and higher authorities, how seriously it is dealt with there, and how the parties negotiate and agree on compensation.

Wii, who comes to stay with different people in Kook Doung every now and then, is widely regarded as a thief. When another woman, Laa, warned her and said "please don't steal from us. There are people from Battambang who want to arrest you", Wii got upset and told Vireak whom she was currently staying with. Vireak also got angry and scolded Laa for accusing Wii of being a thief. Laa replied and there was soon a big quarrel.

Afterwards, Laa brought a complaint against Vireak to the Deputy village chief, who called Vireak to his house.

- Through my observation and listening, I understood that Vireak had been scolding Laa first, the Deputy village chief says.

Laa asked for compensation, but Vireak did not agree to pay and when the Deputy village chief tried to persuade him, Vireak started to scold him, claiming that he was stupid and did not know the law.

- Then I told him to go home and that "from now on, we don't have any contact, the Deputy village chief says. You didn't listen to me, so now if you have a problem, you can't count on any help from here."

Laa still wanted compensation, though, and asked the Deputy village chief to take the case to the commune. The Deputy village chief wrote a letter, Laa put her thumbprint on it and went to the commune office where she also reported verbally.

- Laa should have won the case in the commune, the Deputy village chief says. But maybe Vireak had given some money because they seemed equal. So I asked the commune to "please, work correctly."

The Commune chief went to the village to look for witnesses and find out what had happened. Then the commune called Vireak and Laa one by one, then brought them together, then called the three witnesses.

This time Laa asked for much higher compensation, because Vireak had not agreed to pay in the village.

- The Commune chief suggested that she should not ask for any compensation at all, since they live in the same village and need to be good neighbours, the Deputy village chief says.

But Laa insisted and Vireak asked to pay less than what she demanded, so the Commune chief helped them to find a compromise and agree on an amount.

A third case, which involves parties from two different communes, further illustrates an intensive and prolonged negotiation about compensation, where the decisive reason to accept a lower amount is that continuing to higher levels would imply higher costs.

A boy from Kook Doung was riding his motorbike, and hit a boy from a neighbouring commune in another district so badly that his leg was broken. The injured boy's parents made a complaint in their commune, and all those involved were called. Vuen, who is a Group leader and a friend of the family of the boy who had been riding the bicycle, also went to help since the boy's father was not home. It took them three days to come to an agreement

- That was an appropriate time, Vuen says. If they had continued, it would have cost more.

The first day, the victim's side demanded 80,000 baht (8 million riel; $ 2,100) in compensation. But Vuen claimed that that was far too much – even if they tried the rest of their lives, they would not be able to save that much money. They said that they could pay only 10,000 baht, after all it was only a broken leg and 10,000 baht would be enough to cure it.

So, the victim's side reduced their claim to 65,000 baht, but Vuen still refused and

asked them to go back home and think about it.

The next claim was 25,000 baht, but the others maintained that they could not pay more than 10,000. So, the victim's side tried with 15,000 baht.

- I again insisted on 10,000 and added that if they didn't agree but wanted to bring the complaint to higher levels, like the district or the province, they could go ahead. I told them that if they did, they would get even less, because we would have to spend a lot of money, and only pay them what remained.

When the victim's side heard this, they agreed to accept 10,000 baht and to make a contract.

- They were afraid that they would lose money, Vuen says. If they had gone to higher levels, they would have got only 2,000 or 3,000 baht.

As has been shown, though people in Kook Doung usually see no reason to go to authorities above the village, they seem reasonably prepared to go if needed. This is confirmed by a recent strong protest among villagers from Kook Doung and several other villages, which included petitions to various levels of authorities and NGOs as well as a demonstration where hundreds of people participated and a man from a different village was injured by the police. As villagers point out, this would scarcely have happened ten or even five years ago.

> In the past, people feared the authorities. Now, people are aware of their rights. It's democracy and people are brave enough to make complaints, to put their thumbprints. (Village advisory group (f/m) February 2000)

This case of protest – where villagers, the Commune chief and a local NGO all claim that the initiative came completely from villagers – illustrates that those who did not know where to bring their complaints would probably have stopped or failed if there had not been others, with contacts and knowledge about higher instances, who helped and encouraged them. It also shows that once those leading persons were there, it was not difficult to get other villagers to participate, whether they had a direct personal interest in the issue or not.

Apart from rice farming, fishing and collecting beetles are the most important incomes in Kook Doung. For decades, businessmen have paid for the exclusive right to fish in a few of the lakes in the area. That was not a problem, though – there were other places where villagers could fish, they were allowed to fish when the businessmen had finished for the season, and they could also fish in secret. The problem emerged over the last few years as the allotted area gradually expanded and the businessmen hired armed guards to stop villagers from going there at any time of the year. When we first met them in November last year, a group of men in the village saw no way out of the problem.

- We have no right to fish in the lakes anymore because they have sold the lakes to a man in another village. If we try, they'll shoot us. They are big people.

Villagers are not clear who actually sells the fishing rights, but most blame the district who they claim are in league with the businessmen.

- First, district people sold some lakes, the Deputy village chief says. Then, the new provincial governor didn't think, he just put his signature to sell more. If they, the district, didn't do it, they would be able to solve the problem. You could just as well kill the villagers. Apart from rice farming, fishing is their most important income. If I had a lot of money, I'd gather the villagers to make a demonstration in front of the National Assembly.

Some of the guards have also told villagers that it is the district that have asked them to guard the lakes. The Commune chief also blames the district, but claims that it is the ministry that sells the fishing rights, and that there is nothing that the commune can do

about it.

- Before, the ministry sold five lakes. They just pointed on the map, without going there. Now they've sold all 48 lakes. From higher levels they talk about decentralisation. But they don't act according to that. If they want to sell the lakes, they do. Our job is to serve the villagers. But what can we do?

As access to the lakes got more and more restricted, people got more and more upset. At first they kept quiet and kept trying to go fishing. But the guards took their nets and threatened them with their guns.

The loss of access to the lakes affects villagers in the whole commune and other parts of the district. Preak Chdaor was the first village in the commune to protest. It is more than three times as big as Kook Doung and people are better off, but it is also nearer the lakes and people are even more dependent on fishing. So, a man from there wrote a petition and brought to the province.

In Kook Doung, Dara is one of those who gradually got involved in the protest.

- I also wanted to make a complaint, he says. But I didn't know what to do, and we were not sure that the higher levels would listen. In Preak Chdaor, people have relatives in the provincial court, so they know the way. Kook Doung learnt from them.

One day when Dara was at the commune, the Deputy Commune chief suggested that he should make a complaint.

- He said that if the Provincial Governor can't solve it, how can the commune?

Dara wrote a complaint, but kept it at home. He was not sure where to send it. He wanted to take it to the district, but he was afraid and busy. Then two people from Preak Chdaor came to see him and the Village chief.

- They asked the Village chief too, to write a complaint, but he's not educated so he asked me to do it. And they told me to go straight to the province.

Dara collected money for paper and pens from those who used to go fishing in the lakes, he wrote the letter, he asked villagers to put their thumbprints on it – almost all agreed, also those who do not go fishing – and he took it to the province.

Dara then kept writing letters, collecting thumbprints and taking them to the authorities and to human rights organisations.

- I gave a complaint to the commune too, but it was slow to get to the district, so I made a new one for the district.

Preak Chdaor remained the most active village. From there, people went to the district and the province over and over again, spending a lot of time and money for the travel. In all, many hundreds of villagers from the whole district put their thumbprints on petitions demanding to get their fishing rights back. The Commune chief emphasises that all of the initiative came from villagers, they just came to the commune to ask how to do.

- I encouraged them and said that they should bring a complaint to get those lakes back. Otherwise, in the future their children won't have anywhere to get fish. But the idea came from the villagers. There are others who accuse the commune for supporting the villagers... higher level people, some who work in the district office.

The local NGO Aphiwat Strei also encouraged villagers to write complaints, and one of their staff went with Dara to some human rights organisations with one of his letters. But that support too, was after the villagers had initiated the protest, and it was not crucial.

- Without their support, people would still have made the complaints, Dara says.

Nothing seemed to happen, though, and in mid-November, the Commune chief predicted what would follow.

- Villagers don't want to stay quiet in the villages. They have to force themselves to go fishing. If they stay at home they will die, if they go they may die. When they brought complaints, high levels didn't pay attention. If they go and there's violence, higher level people will pay attention. If the problem is not solved, villagers won't vote in the commune election next year, and not in the election for the National Assembly in 2003. They will stay at home, because they don't love anyone and they don't hate anyone.

Again, it was the man in Praek Chdaor village who took the lead in what turned into a massive demonstration. One morning in January this year, between 200 and 300 villagers went to fish in the deepest and best of the lakes. From Kook Doung three men participated. Nak was one of them.

- I heard that people were planning to go there. When people met at the rice fields, the message was spread from one person to another. We made an appointment. I thought that

if we don't go now, next year the lakes will be sold again. If people don't protest, the state will continue to sell the fishing right to the businessmen year after year

They all gathered at a place two kilometres from the lake, and walked together from there. At eight o'clock they arrived at the lake and started to fish. Two hours later, the man from Praek Chdaor was injured by the police and had to be carried from the place. The two guards who were at the lake had first asked people to stop fishing, but when they did not listen, another four policemen were called to the place. They took the villagers' nets and when the man from Praek Chdaor asked them not to, since the villagers had just come to fish to feed their families, one of the policemen shot three shots. One hit the Praek Chdaor man in the foot but nobody else was injured.

At 11 o'clock, they were all back at the place where they had gathered. People from the district, including the district chief were there, as were people from human rights organisations who interviewed villagers and took photos. According to Nak, the district people pretended to support the villagers. They also tried to make the demonstrators write down their names, some did, some didn't. But when they wanted to take the fishing tools, human rights people told them not to.

- Villagers knew that the district chief supports the businessmen, Nak says. So they stood up and scolded him. And left.

They following day, villagers continued to go fishing together, and the next, and the next.... Five days after the demonstration, His Excellency Sar Keng, who was in Battambang to close a workshop, came to a neighbouring commune to talk to people from the whole district about the fishing conflict. From Kook Doung, the Village chief and the Deputy were invited to join.

- The officials say that they have to sell the fishing rights, that they use the money to develop the country, the Deputy village chief says. That's what Sar Keng told the villagers too. But big people have to think about villagers' lives. If we can't fish, how can we make a living?

A month later, the conflict was not yet formally solved, as it had not been decided which lake belongs to whom. But since the demonstration, there are no armed guards any more, and nobody stops anyone from fishing. As in the past, there are only four or five lakes that villagers do not have access to.

- It was good that we did it, Nak says. Otherwise we'd still not have access to the lakes. But I'm afraid that the businessmen have just agreed to give up this year, and that next year, they'll have some tricks. Because businessmen have money.

Conclusions

Local Power Relations

- *Local power relations and personalities strongly affect village governance.*
- *Lack of clarity about mandates and sources of power makes it difficult to hold leaders accountable and decreases their legitimacy.*

The experiences and perceptions that villagers express illustrate how local power relations and personalities affect the role of village leaders and villagers' relation to them.

The paternalistic atmosphere in Chraeng, where the Village chief seems to be running a family rather than doing a job, does not make villagers inclined, or able, to hold him accountable for his actions, and does not render him any lasting legitimacy. His role as a "father" seems to allow him to do whatever he likes, in whatever way he likes, without informing or justifying it to anyone in the village. Together with his personality this also opens for favouritism – he widely uses his position to give benefits to relatives and friends. Though villagers so far accept this and do as he tells them, the lack of a clear mandate and mechanisms to hold him accountable both opens for arbitrariness from his side and makes the position as Village chief vulnerable.

In Kook Doung, on the other hand, being a Village chief seems to be regarded as a more professional role, involving more limited and specific tasks. The Village chief also does not seem inclined to expand his influence into other areas, or to use his position to get benefits for himself or his friends.

Informal sources of power add to the lack of clarity. In Chraeng, the militiaman can work far outside the mandate of his position because it is unclear what this position and this mandate actually are, because his personality makes villagers fear him, and because he has informal contacts with higher levels – though villagers are not clear what those contacts are. His influential contacts and threatening appearance seem to make him more powerful than the Village chief and it seems even more difficult for villagers to hold him accountable than the Village chief.

In Kook Doung, it is more clear what the Village chief does and what the Deputy does. Their degrees of activity and influence also have more to do with capacity than with informal contacts. The Deputy is younger and more educated and therefore does the things that the Village chief cannot or does not want to do.

The local political climate and personalities also affect how the leaders respond to unhappiness among villagers. As the Deputy village chief in Kook Doung is increasingly criticised for charging for his services, he responds by withdrawing himself from much of the work in the village and spending more time at the pagoda.

In Chraeng, on the other hand, the militiaman knows very well that villagers fear and dislike him. This does not stop him though, but he carries on in the way that makes him feared and disliked.

This difference probably also has to do with these two people's differing relation to the commune and the two Commune chief's differing values and needs. The Deputy village chief in Kook Doung does not enjoy any strong support from the Commune chief, who wants villagers to know their rights. The Commune chief in the Pursat case, on the other hand, clearly backs up the militiaman, praising him for being determined and strong in speech and action – as opposed to the soft Village chief – and probably appreciating to have this man helping to control the most remote village in the commune.

The fact that villagers in Kook Doung are used to getting, and expect to get, reasonably fair treatment and good advice from the authorities, make them go to see the Village chief or the Deputy, or even higher levels, when there is a reason.

In Chraeng, on the other hand, villagers' experiences do not make them expect fair and professional assistance from the authorities. So those who are not on the Village chief's or the militiaman's "side" do not seek their help, and they do not go straight to higher levels. The problem is that villagers, who do not want to consult the Village chief or the militiaman, have nowhere else to turn, which creates rumours and widespread dissatisfaction, but not (yet) any formal complaints or actions to change the situation.

This all points to a need of leaders and also indicates what kind of leaders appeal to villagers. Unsurprisingly, villagers value leaders who are soft, kind and caring – especially about the poorest – leaders who are accessible and fair, not receptive to bribes and not favouring themselves or their friends and relatives. Villagers do not like leaders who are tough and demanding, or who "stick out". Though villagers respect and obey "big people", what appeals to villagers in Chraeng about the new district chief is the fact that he is "simple" – he dresses and walks like ordinary people.

Reluctance

- *Widespread reluctance to having a leadership role makes it difficult to demand effective services from the leaders.*

Villagers' and village leaders' experiences and perceptions create reluctance in both villages to having a leadership role, but also a sense that they cannot refuse. This reluctance, as well as the perceived compulsion, are linked to the expectations on what such a role implies. In some cases, there may be reasons to suspect that the reluctance that leaders express is not completely sincere, but rather an attempt to seem humble. There are however also good reasons for actual reluctance.

The main reason that current and previous Village chiefs, Deputies, Group leaders and Representatives of women's and youth associations give for not wanting the position is that it takes time away from their private work and life, without rendering any salary or other benefits. Another reason is that village leaders sometimes find themselves in an unpleasant position between their fellow villagers and higher authorities.

In the past, having a position could give some status and some benefits in the form of extra rice land. But it could also make the leaders highly unpopular among other villagers as they had to implement unpopular decisions from above, mainly collecting rice and money and forcefully recruiting labour force and soldiers. At the same time, the village leaders were controlled from above, and for example had to pay themselves if they could not collect what they should and to provide labour force more often than others.

Similar tendencies are still there. The Village chiefs in this study are both soft, old and tired men who would probably prefer to spend time at their rice fields and with their grand children rather than at meetings or solving conflicts between villagers. One of the deputies wants to spend more time at the pagoda (where he also gets paid for what he does) while the other one is thinking about a professional career outside the village. Conflict resolution also still usually implies that at least one party is not completely happy with the outcome. And while there are signs and remarks indicating that villagers are getting more critical and less obedient, higher authorities are still controlling lower ones. If a village leader does something wrong, he is in trouble, while if he does something well, he does not get much in return.

As the role of lower authorities is also still perceived as mainly passively receiving instructions and sending reports, there does not seem to be much scope for becoming an active spokesperson who makes a difference for the village.

The thus quite comprehensible reluctance, plus the fact that many village leaders think that they have no other choice than to accept their position, may make it further difficult to hold them accountable, and may partly explain why villagers do not always expect effective services and fair treatment from their leaders. These people are spending their time, and sometimes their money, on something that neither they nor anybody else wants to do, and they are not getting paid for it. It might thus be difficult to blame them for not being very active and accessible, or for charging sometimes quite high fees for their assistance.

Acceptance

- *A strong tendency among villagers to accept whatever the authorities decide, in combination with unfamiliarity and lack of different expectations, counteract changes in local governance.*

Villagers' perceptions of commune and higher authorities as remote instances inhabited by "big people" – almost exclusively men – and largely unknown and inaccessible to ordinary villagers, and villagers' tendency to accept without questioning any instructions that come from these higher levels, do not seem to prepare the ground for any soon changes in the relation between villagers and authorities. This seems to go also for local authorities in relation to higher ones. Village chiefs do not question what the commune does and Commune chiefs accept whatever plans come from the district.

The main feature of villagers' attitudes towards higher authorities is the very scarce comprehension. The unfamiliarity and acceptance do however not seem to involve much fear. Villagers rather seem indifferent, not giving higher levels much thought, and not seeing what "they" do as of much relevance to themselves. In spite of past experiences of forced recruitment, the "*whatever they say, we do*" is not usually said with any fear or anger, but mainly with a tired sigh, which seems to imply that villagers have more important things to think about, and to be able to concentrate on that it is best to keep "them" happy – the sooner, the better.

There does thus not seem to be much expectation or desire among villagers to understand what the authorities do, even less so any expectations to be able to influence their decisions or create different relations. When instructions or actions come from above that do not seem reasonable and fair, villagers may complain among themselves. But in most cases it does not seem to occur to anybody that they could protest, or at least ask for more information, rather than obey.

This is of course partly due to experiences of a political environment where it paid best to keep quiet. The lack of expectations of something different is added to by villagers' unfamiliarity with higher levels, which in its turn is conserved by the fact that villagers usually have no reason to consult higher authorities. Also, the widely held expectation that if they do, they will have to pay – the higher, the more money – is obviously a strong incentive not to. Villagers thus rarely get to test the system. They do not get the experience and understanding – or the expectations – which they would need to be able and eager to influence and change it.

Protests

- *Villagers are prepared to protest and demand their rights if it is important enough to them and if there are leaders with enough ideas and knowledge who take the initiative.*

In spite of the above discussed unfamiliarity and acceptance, hundreds of people in Kook Doung and neighbouring villages firmly protested when their fishing rights were threatened, and in Chraeng, all rice wine producers put their thumbprints on a petition against the ban of village wine production.

This begs the question of what makes people protest. Again, the study points to the importance of leaders, and of knowledge about authorities and procedures.

In both cases, the initiative and most participants came from other villages. The initiators and leaders were people with both strong personal interest in the issue and better access to and knowledge of higher levels and proceedings than anyone in Kook

Doung or Chraeng. In both cases the most active person in the village was also someone with a personal interest in the issue, though in Kook Doung not stronger than anyone else's, as well as higher education and more experience of higher levels than almost all other villagers.

Without the external initiatives and people, the protests would not have happened in Kook Doung or Chraeng. There does so far not seem to be anyone in these villages with enough commitment, knowledge and trust among other villagers to be able and willing to start and lead similar protests. What created those personalities in the other villages, we do not know. But there were strong enough incentives and committed and trusted enough people in Kook Doung and Chraeng to follow the external initiatives, and to convince others to join.

As villagers in Kook Doung point out, the protest would scarcely have happened ten or even five years ago. It can probably be expected to happen more and more in the future, though. Some villagers are getting the experience of signing formal petitions to higher authorities, and in Kook Doung to mobilise in a demonstration. And all villagers see the partially successful outcomes. This might make some people start thinking about different actors' roles and responsibilities, and about how to deal strategically with the authorities. It is thus easy to imagine that next time when there is a reason, the idea to protest rather than obey will come easier to somebody's mind, and the knowledge of what to do and where to go, will make it more likely to happen.

As the reasons and need to protest may be growing, as for example land grabbing and commercial fishing and logging are increasing, villagers are thus gaining the experience that might prepare ground for future mobilisation to protest when their rights are being violated or authorities are abusing their power (see Emerging Opportunities and Responsibilities for Villagers; Chraeng).

Chapter Three: Seila's Impact on Local Governance

Village

New Tasks and Positions

Chraeng: ***They Help the Village From Running Out of Things***

- *A number of positions related to development activities have been created, and filled either by appointment by the Village chief or voting by the villagers, sometimes it is unclear which;*
- *These positions are concentrated to a small group of people, where almost all the men have or have had an authority position, but also including four women;*
- *Most villagers do not know the Village Development Committee (VDC) as a group; individual members are known, however, for specific tasks such as building roads, running the rice bank or calling for meetings;*
- *Many of those who hold a development position claim that they do not want it, mainly because they think that other villagers do not like them; on the other hand, there is competition about going for trainings when allowance is provided.*

Female/ Male	Development Positions	Authority Positions
M	VDC leader, Village vet, Mental health leader	Village chief
M	VDC finance, Mental health leader	Former Deputy village chief, Group leader
M	VDC deputy leader	Group leader
M	VDC member	Former Village chief
F	VDC member	
F	VDC member	
F	Village vet, Village health worker Mental health leader	
F	Village vet, Mental health leader	Former Representative of Women's Association
M	Village vet, Mental health leader	Militiaman
M	Village health worker	

In Chraeng, there is an elected Village Development Committee of six people (two women, four men; another woman has quit). A few years ago, the Village chief selected four people (two women, two men) to go for village vet training; only two of them are at all active. Last year, two village health workers (one woman, one man) were selected. There are conflicting reports about whether they were elected or appointed; the Village chief says that he appointed them. Since then, the health workers have only collected some basic population data and they are not known as health workers by other villagers. There is also a male Red Cross volunteer, which almost nobody is aware of. For the mental health training in 1999, the Village chief selected six people (three women, three men) to get training to be leaders; one of the women never worked as a leader.

The people who fill the positions related to development activities are partly the same people, and five of them also have or have had an authority position, including the Village chief. Two of the men in the VDC are Group leaders, another one is the former Deputy village chief. The other two are the Village chief and the former Village chief. Development interventions have given four women long or short-term formal positions in the village, two as VDC members, two as village vets and mental health leaders.

Most villagers are not aware of a Village Development Committee (VDC) or of a group of people with overall responsibility for development activities in the village. However, many of the individual VDC members are known for different and specific tasks or activities, and villagers sometimes refer to them as "workers" or "development workers". Strikingly, many mention the militiaman as one of these development workers, though he is not a VDC member and claims not to be involved in their work. The most known development activities are road building and the rice bank, which the VDC took over from a previous rice bank committee, and which has now been turned into fertiliser lending. Villagers associate the development workers mainly with meetings.

> Their [the development workers'] role is to have meetings among themselves. Then, they have a big meeting with the villagers, like a meeting about a road. (Group leader (m) March 2000)

> Villagers see the VDC when they need fertilisers. (---) It's good to have a VDC in the village, because the VDC can help from running out of something, to save the poor. For example, they lend fertilisers in the transplanting season and ask people to pay back after the harvest. (Villager (f) March 2000)

As among those who have or have had an authority position, most of those who have a development position claim that they do not want it, but that they have to accept it since the Village chief has selected or villagers have voted for them. Among the VDC members, the main reason for the reluctance is not that it is too much work, but that they think that other villagers dislike them and believe that they get benefits from their positions. The way the emergency relief from World Food Programme and the Red Cross was distributed after the flooding late last year did create a lot of unhappiness and bad feelings among villagers. Along with the reluctance, however, there is a certain competition among VDC members and non-members about going for trainings – and getting allowance.

> They scold us because they think that we get paid. (---) I will absolutely not be a candidate again. I'm working for people, but when I ask the villagers for something, or when they see me, they scold me. They say that I have gold to wear because of the road building. (VDC member (f) VDC group, March 2000)

> We were called for a meeting. Chhun Ly [CARERE LCB], the Commune chief, the DFT... big people were there. At that time, I didn't know that there was development in the village. When they came, they looked for twelve candidates, all were called to come together. They called educated people, the Village chief was also there. They called my name and people clapped their hands. The Village chief registered my name and mentioned the name of my son-in-law "is this name possible?" and villagers said "yes, put it!",. The candidates had no choice. (---) It's not much work, we don't do it alone. But we're afraid that people don't like us. For example, they provided gifts, I didn't know about this, and the other workers [VDC members] didn't know. Then, we were blamed. The VDC were not involved at all. But people who don't know keep using bad word about the workers. (---) They agree about the money contribution. But during the flooding, higher levels came to provide gifts. Those who didn't get any gifts got angry with those who work because they thought that we gave

the names. But it was provincial people who came directly. (VDC member (f) VDC group, March 2000)

Other reasons to not want to have a position may be that it is not clear what the tasks will be and people are not confident that they will be able to do it.

I only knew on the election day that my name was there [among the candidates]. I said to villagers that they shouldn't vote for me. I'm not knowledgeable. I didn't want to be a village health worker (*peet tralab*). But now, when people have voted for me, I have to do it. (---) The Village chief asked me to do this work [collecting population data from every family]. I don't know what it's for. When I went to every family, the house owners asked me "what's the census for again, dear?" and I answered "I don't know, I got this job from Him." I had to spend my own book, pen and energy, and I got nothing. Before, there was also a census in the village, but at that time the census people came to the village to do it themselves, and they wore census t-shirts and caps. At that time, the census people told me "if anyone asks you to do a census and you don't get a t-shirt, a cap, a pen, a book and ten dollars, please don't do it." This time, the Village chief asked me to do the census. But I got nothing. I will ask him about this. (---) I went only for a meeting. There hasn't been any real training yet. The teacher said that when we've worked for a long time, we'll get a paper that confirms that we are *peet tralab*. Then, when I come with someone to the clinic or the hospital with that paper, they won't charge. (---) I haven't taken anyone to hospital. If someone came to ask me to help, I wouldn't know what to do. Because I have no paper. (Village health worker (m) October 1999, March 2000)

Kook Doung: *They Call for Meetings*

- *As in Chraeng, new positions related to development activities have been institutionalised either through election or appointment;*
- *These positions are concentrated to a small group of people, only two of whom have or have had an authority position and including four women;*
- *As in Chraeng, most villagers do not know the Village Development Committee (VDC) as a group; two men are well known for development activities, mainly the rice bank; all those who have a development position are mainly known for calling for meetings;*
- *Those who hold a development position claim to be very reluctant, mainly because it involves a lot of work but no payment; they feel obliged, though, to accept an appointment or election by the villagers.*

Female/ Male	Development Positions	Authority Positions
M	VDC leader, Member of AS committee	Former Representative of youth association
M	VDC secretary, Leader of AS committee	Former Representative of youth association, Group leader
F	VDC member, Member of AS committee, Village health worker	
F	VDC deputy leader, Village health worker, Mental health leader	
F	VDC member, Village health worker, Red Cross Volunteer, Mental health leader	
M	VDC member, Village health worker	
M	VDC member	
F	Member of AS committee	
M	Village health worker, Mental health leader	
M	Mental health leader	Village Chief

In Kook Doung, there is an elected committee of four people (originally five; now two women and two men) who are responsible for the activities funded by the local NGO Aphiwat Strei, and there is a Village Development Committee (VDC) [18] of seven people (three women and four men). Five village health workers (three women and two men) were elected by the villagers in 1996, but only one woman remains active and widely acknowledged as such. One of the female health workers is also a Red Cross volunteer, which almost nobody is aware of. There have been some efforts to institutionalise village vets too, but nobody is currently known to be a vet.

[18] I here call the group of people who run the rice bank, the credit scheme and the cow-raising programme the Aphiwat Strei (AS) committee. The committee set up by PDRD, I call the VDC. Villagers usually refer to the AS committee as the "rice store people/workers", while members talk about the "community committee" (AS) and the "canal group" or "Seila group" (VDC).

Those who have a position related to development activities are largely the same people. Three of the four members of the AS committee are also VDC members. Four of the five village health workers are also members of the VDC, and one of these four also of the AS committee. When four villagers (two women and two men) were selected to be mental health leaders, three of them already had one or several of the above positions. However, only two of those who currently have a development position also have or have had an authority position; two men who are members of the AS committee as well as the VDC were both Representatives of youth until the early 1990s, one of them is also a Group leader. Development activities have given four women one or several formal positions in the village.

The VDC as a group is largely unknown (by old villagers as well as returnees). Villagers elected it in December 1997 from among twelve candidates, but since then, the only visible result has been the canal repair in 1998 – from which only a few families benefit. Some of the VDC members, however, are known for specific tasks, mainly related to Aphiwat Strei activities or health care. The two men mentioned above – the VDC leader/member of the AS committee and the leader of the AS committee/ VDC secretary – are the by far most active and well known development people in the village. The best known development activity is the rice bank. That is also what the two men are mainly known for, though some villagers mention that the first of them is also in charge of canals.

All other members of the two committees are far less known and active than these two men. The other two members of the AS committee are usually associated with the rice bank, while the other VDC members may be recognised as current or former health workers. Whether involved in rice or cash credit, cow-raising, road or canal building or health care, what villagers mainly know those who hold a development position for is "calling for meetings."

Those who have, or have had, a position related to development activities, claim to be very reluctant. The main reason is that it is too much work – unpaid – and several people talk about those with a development position as being "used." Not even the prospect of getting allowance when going for trainings seems to tempt people as it does in Chraeng. Like in Chraeng, though, people feel obliged to accept a position if asked. Especially if villagers have voted for you, you cannot refuse. And once you have started, you cannot quit until the work is finished. The only perceived way to avoid a position is thus to either convince the villagers to vote for someone else, or to leave the village during the election, which several people claim to have consciously done.

> Vunn [AS staff] and the Village chief asked me to be a candidate [for the VDC]. First I refused. I said that I already have two positions and I don't want any more. But they told me "just be a candidate, villagers won't vote for you because you already have two positions." Unfortunately villagers did vote for me. (VDC member, Member of AS committee, Village health worker (f) April 2000)

> The others want to quit. They want to flee. But they don't have a choice, because if there's an election, they'll be elected. The only way is to flee during the election. If we stay to be candidates, villagers will vote for us. (VDC member (m) April 2000)

> I also had my name to be a candidate [in the VDC election]. But [on the election day] I went to the field, because I didn't want to. Nobody wanted to, but villagers voted, so they had to. (---) I had a position from 1979, so it's easy to use me. But now I let others do it instead of me. (---) I was a village vet too. I gave injections to cows and chickens. But how could I do the job? I didn't get any salary, they only gave me money to buy medicine. In a whole evening, I could only finish three houses, because there were so many chickens. I got

no money, and I used my own cigarettes. (---) Let's say that I'm not a village vet anymore. If I am, I'll be used. (Group leader (m) April 2000)

There are however at least two men, both liked and respected, who have quit from former authority and/or development positions, and who were asked to stand as candidates in the VDC election, but who successfully claimed their right to say no. For one of them, however, his stepson was persuaded to replace a VDC member who had left – before his stepfather could stop it.

Talking about the second election for the AS committee:
I had number four. But I walked around and told people to vote for number six, and number six won.

Talking about the VDC election:
They wanted me to be a candidate, but I said no. I've got rights. Even Kang, they wanted him to be a candidate but he also refused.

Talking about his stepson who became a VDC member without him knowing it:
If I had known, I wouldn't have let him do it. He's easy to use. He's good, but he's stupid, he does what they [the Village chief and the two leading development people] tell him to do. They use him for everything. For example, when the Village chief didn't dare to tell the gamblers to not gamble when you are here, he asked my son to tell them instead. (Group leader (m) April 2000)

Changing Power Structures

Chraeng: *The Already Powerful Extend Their Control – and Become More Vulnerable*

- *Development interventions have made the two village leaders more powerful, while also more vulnerable;*
- *The Village chief/VDC leader dominates the VDC, and delegates more responsibilities to the men than to the women;*
- *There are a few VDC members and others who may be emerging as leaders alternative to the Village chief;*
- *Development interventions have affected the role of monks, partly taking over monks' activities, partly involving them in theirs.*

In Chraeng, the new development positions have largely been filled by people who already had an authority position, dominated by the Village chief and checked by the militiaman who have assumed control over activities and resources.

From listening to the villagers, at the time of the two VDC elections, it seems to have been out of the question that the Village chief would *not* also be the VDC leader. As has been shown, he is liked as a person and regarded as all villagers' father. Now, however, it seems increasingly unlikely that the Village chief will be elected next time there is an election.

People didn't think that it would be a problem. Before, he had only one position and people thought that he could do one more. But in reality... (Village health worker (m) Village advisory group (f/m) March 2000)

Though villagers did not vote for the militiaman in the VDC election, he still exercises control over development activities and actors and is usually the one who makes announcements on the loudspeakers.

> Though I've quit from development work, I still have the right to bring complaints about the development actors. I say "you're on the development side, but you stay under my authority. If anyone does something wrong, I have the right to complain because you live under me." (---) If there was no government work, it would be difficult for the development work to use labour. I must absolutely participate if any work is to be implemented. If there was a VDC meeting and I was not there, it wouldn't be possible. I participate in meetings with the VDC members because they invite me. The VDC leader must ask me to participate because any work in the village... if there was development alone and no government work, no authority work... I must absolutely join them to solve problems. (Militiaman (m) March 2000)

> He [the militiaman] involves some. He helps to announce, for example that villagers need to build a road. It's on the authority side. He isn't involved with the VDC, but with authority. He helps us too, like helping to see what's right and what's wrong. It means that the VDC doesn't do development alone, the local authority also helps to announce. (---) When a proposal has been raised, we contact the authorities to get people to work. So, the authority like Houn, my Deputy, definitely joins when people need to work. It means that Houn is involved with the committee, but he's never involved in a committee meeting like this. (VDC group (f/m) March 2000)

The Village chief uses his position to select candidates for elections and appoint people for positions, and also to distribute benefits pretty much as he likes. As has been mentioned, there is a certain competition for going for trainings – and get allowance – and the Village chief does not hesitate to reserve these opportunities to earn some extra money for himself or his friends. The literacy class in 1997 is a striking example. The Village chief appointed himself to be the teacher – which got him the monthly allowance, but not many students.

> I didn't attend the literacy class, because the teacher didn't seem to have more education than I. (Village health worker (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

Similarly, a VDC member, who is not on the Village chief's "side" started to go for village vet training.

> I was invited to go for the training, and went for several days. It was provincial people who decided that I should go, they know me through the commune. But then on the last day, when they would hand out the materials so that we could work as village vets, it was not my name... The Village chief asked the militiaman to go instead of me. He got needles and serum. (VDC member (m) October 1999)

In Chraeng, development interventions and resources have thus created temptations that the Village chief and the militiaman have not been able to resist, grabbing any opportunity to reap benefits for themselves. As their abuse of power has become increasingly obvious, they are increasingly subject to criticism. Their mismanagement and villagers' unhappiness seem to make the whole village leadership structure quite fragile.

The concentration of power to a leader who mainly thinks about personal benefits strongly discourages the other VDC members, as does the influence of the militiaman. The division of tasks within the VDC is quite unclear, as it seems to be up to the leader to decide and hand out tasks as he finds appropriate. The two women appear not to enjoy the leader's confidence, and get less responsible tasks than the men.

> The first reason [why I became leader of the VDC] was that I got most votes. The second reason was that the DFT and Chhun Ly (CARERE LCB) saw my characteristics. They decided that I should be the leader. In another village, the person who got most votes doesn't have good characteristics, so he was not asked to be the leader. (---) The VDC leader decides [who gets the other positions within the VDC]. He can see their characteristics. It doesn't depend on the votes. Chil is Deputy. (---) No! Chil is Finance, Vanny is Deputy. According to the votes, Chil should be Deputy, but Vanny couldn't be in charge of money, so I changed them. (Village chief, VDC leader (m) March 2000)

> If a person with a position wants to do something good, someone else [the militiaman] wants to do something else. (---) That guy always interferes. Others work very well, but he destroys for them. (VDC members (f/m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

> My role is to write lists, for example when we collect local contribution. But I never do, the commune committee let only Chil [VDC Deputy (m)] do it, for example the money for fertilisers. (VDC member (f) March 2000)

> No [a woman has never been in charge of finance]. The finance person must have education and ability. (Village Chief, VDC leader (m) March 2000)

The members are also dependent on the leader for information from higher levels, which he often does not receive or pass on. The dominance of and dependence on the leader thus partly prevent others from doing the kind of work that they want, and from getting the experience and knowledge that they would need in order to provide an alternative leadership. The Village chief's and militiaman's obvious mismanagement, however, adds to the need for other leaders, and despite the obstacles, some of the VDC members and a few others with no formal development position, seem to be gaining personal commitment as well as other villagers' trust. Though these potentially emerging leaders do not yet dare to take on a leadership role or any tasks outside their mandate, they may be gaining more determination and confidence (see Emerging Opportunities and Responsibilities for Villagers).

> Some come to tell me about conflicts. I tell them that I don't work with conflicts, only with wells and ponds and... Some report everything to me, they ask for my advice but I say that I don't have the skills. I don't dare to do things that don't belong to my position, like conflicts. (VDC member (m) March 2000)

> I would not vote for the old leaders, they are corrupt. But there are others. (Village health worker (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

Development interventions in Chraeng partly do what some monks, together with *aachaar*s and old people, used to do, mainly mobilising funds and people to build roads and bridges around the pagoda and in the villages. There are signs and testimonies that the monks have stopped doing some of this, leaving village activities to development organisations and concentrating their own efforts to the pagoda compound. There are also signs and testimonies, however, that monks are crucially involved in village development projects, especially in mobilising people to contribute labour and money. Due to development interventions the monks might thus in some aspects be "taking a break" while their status and mandate might also be preserved and widened because of their involvement.

> People found it so difficult to travel on the road, they walked through water and mud. So, they kept complaining about the road to the *aachaar* committee in the village. They said "please invite the monks to come and mobilise villagers to repair the road." So, it became a road. Now, there is *angkaar* and *angkaar* helps. If *angkaar* didn't help, it would still work, but we wouldn't have any laterite. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) March 2000)

> In the past, old people mobilised villagers to build roads without payment. Now, *angkaar* can use the Village chief, Chil, Bii and Vanny [VDC members f/m] to mobilise villagers to build roads, because *angkaar* has money to employ people. (Villager (f) March 2000)
>
> The monks are less involved in road building now, because *angkaar* provides payment for the villagers. (Villager (f) March 2000)
>
> *Aachaars* and monks helped to get the school and led young people and other villagers to build the road. They ran the generator and put up lights. If it's difficult to mobilise villagers for communal work, the *aachaars* come to do it, because they are honest and people like them. Villagers don't like people who have a position and drink and forget about their work when they get money. (VDC member (m) March 2000)

Kook Doung: *We Never Forget Each Other*

- *The institutionalisation of development positions, filled by others than the village authorities, has created a division of tasks that works well between the Village chief and the development leaders, and thus consolidated/created a solid village leadership structure;*
- *The role of the Group leaders continues to diminish as development actors take over their tasks;*
- *Two men have (re)gained status as recognised leaders in addition to the village authorities due to their involvement in development activities, and a third man is gaining recognition as an emerging leader partly due to his involvement in development activities;*
- *The concentration of work and responsibility to two men, however, risks hindering others, especially women, from developing leadership skills and recognition.*

In Kook Doung, development interventions have created tasks and responsibilities for people outside the authority structure. According to the policy followed in Battambang, the Village chief and Deputy must not run for the VDC, but the Village chief is automatically an "advisor" to the VDC. There are no clear guidelines for what this advisory role should imply, so how well it works probably depends on the people and personalities involved. In Kook Doung, it seems to work very well with a clear division of tasks between "authority" and "development." The Village chief is relieved that others are taking on responsibility for development work and also taking over some of his tasks, such as collecting village data. The development actors, on their side, appreciate the Village chief's approval and support. They always inform him, and when they need the power of authority behind their words, they get it. He signs every loan in the Aphiwat Strei credit scheme and when people do not pay back the rice or money that they have borrowed, he announces on the loudspeakers.

> If Puen and Muen [the two leading development people] want to do something, they discuss with each other. Then they ask advice from Hean [the Village chief]. Hean is the biggest in the village, under the commune. They work in different sectors. One side is the village committee, the other side is the *angkaar* committee. The village committee solve conflicts, like rice land conflicts. The *angkaar* committee do their own work. (Villager (f) April 2000)
>
> We never forget each other. In their work, they come to meet the Village chief. And when there's work related to the village, the Village chief asks the committee. I'm a consultant to the development group. For example, when building a road or a canal, if it affects villagers' rice land, they need the Village chief to facilitate. I ask permission from the landowner. Sometimes, people in the committee ask, but sometimes it's so serious so that they need

help from the Village chief. The development committee is under the authority, so they need the authority to witness and recognise what they do. (Village chief (m) April 2000)

The Village chief is like a referee, in between. When there's something that the development team can't do, they can go to the Village chief. We consider him as an old person, who we can get ideas from. (VDC member, Village health worker (f) April 2000)

As the development actors help the Village chief to collect population data and to call for meetings (and are getting known among villagers for doing so), the major remaining tasks of the Group leaders are taken away from them – which they scarcely regret. Most of the Group leaders thus agree that their role has largely ceased. Some of them help with various development activities, though, such as measuring for the new road building, not in their capacity as Group leaders but because they are trusted and interested people.

As mentioned, involvement in development activities has gained two men leadership status. Villagers often mention one or both of them as leaders along with the Village chief and the Deputy (the returnees mention one of them more than the other, and more than the Village chief). These two men were both Representatives of youth during the 1980s, and as such used to mobilise people to do communal work in the village. This is probably why they were chosen first for the Aphiwat Strei committee and later for the VDC, but their work in development during the last eight years have also strongly added to their capacity and commitment – and to villagers' trust and recognition of them.

There is also an unusually young *aachaar* whom villagers like and trust (people in the far off returnee area do not know him well, however). Though he is not a member of either of the development committees (he was not in the village during the VDC election), he seems to understand more about the different development programmes in the village than maybe anyone else. He is relatively well educated and relatively well off, and he claims to be committed to improving conditions in the village and willing to work for free. He thus seems likely to have good chances to be elected in future village elections.

The fact that the development work is strongly concentrated to two people creates a risk that the capacity of others, especially the women, is wasted and not developed. There are four women in development positions in Kook Doung. Especially one of them is well known and liked among the villagers. And especially another one seems committed and capable to take on more work and responsibility than she currently has. If participation in training and meetings and delegation of tasks were more evenly distributed among the development actors, these two women would probably have at least the same potential as the two leading men to become new leaders and representatives of the village.

Emerging Opportunities and Responsibilities for Villagers

Chraeng: *We Can Request, But They Decide*

- *Though villagers have got used to going for meetings and to requesting things from higher levels, there is no general sense of influence on decisions about development activities.*
- *Labour and cash local contribution has not created any general sense of ownership and responsibility among villagers.*
- *Mismanagement and injustices related to development activities may be making people angry and organised enough to bring a formal complaint about the village authorities.*

Villagers in Chraeng have got used to the village leaders calling for meetings about development activities. Generally, however, people say that they do not dare to speak in these meetings. A village meeting thus does not seem to be the occasion of any true exchange of ideas or actual decision-making. It rather seems to be about telling villagers something that has already been decided, or asking them to choose between a few different options. Though people are also getting used to the idea of "requesting" (*sneyr som*) things from higher levels, here too the perception is that decisions are made by others. Some villagers, however, learn to figure out what to ask for.

> We don't dare to have ideas in a meeting, because we're afraid that our ideas might be wrong. The district chief also came for a meeting and let villagers express their ideas, but we didn't. (Group of poor women, October 1999)

> For example road or health centre, which do villagers want? The two alternatives come from *angkaar*... from PDRD... from the district, the CDC. They ask me and I pick one of the two. Then I go to tell the villagers. (VDC member (m) October 1999)

> When the villagers needed a road, wells and ponds, they went to see the Village chief. The Village chief sent a request to the higher levels, and the higher levels made the decision. There are different *angkaars*, like road *angkaar*, well *angkaar* and pond *angkaar*. So, some people got their needs met and some didn't. People accept whatever is provided. (Small group of villagers (f/m) March 2000)

> The Village chief requests to commune and the commune requests to *angkaar* to build bridge, road or culverts. The Village chief decide where to build it. When it's been approved to build something, the Village chief and VDC have a meeting with the villagers. (Villager (m) March 2000)

> Some clever people in the village understood [what the *angkaar* wanted to provide] and they told the other villagers that they should say that they need this most, it would correspond with the ideas of the higher levels that came to have a meeting with us. What we can get depends on the ideas of *angkaar* who comes to have a meeting. [When someone says what they want to hear] they say "Oh, what this person says seems right. What you say is correct, you're right." (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) March 2000)

Villagers in Chraeng have experienced a change in road building from food-for-work, to payment for unskilled labour, to labour contribution, and finally to labour as well as cash contribution. The change seems to have gone reasonably well – though this year, they are back to food-for-work. The relative success is very much a result of monks' involvement. There is wide agreement that when there is no payment, the authorities cannot mobilise people to work the way they could before, neither can the VDC alone. But the monks can.

> They are respected and honest. They don't scold people, they don't use big words, and they don't use violence. You get good deeds if you work with the monks. (VDC member (f) Village advisory group, March 2000)

Villagers in Chraeng have paid local contribution in cash just once, for the 1999 laterite, and it has not yet been fully collected. The problem does not appear to be that villagers are not willing to pay. Most of them seem to have heard explanations to why they need to contribute, and accept it. The problem seems rather to be that those who collect the contribution are not firm enough, and that it was collected too late.

> All villagers are like bait – we need to get the fish here. (Village chief (m) Village meeting, October 1999)

> *Angkaar* and villagers help each other. Villagers gave money for laterite, between 5,000 and 10,000 riel. In reality, villagers paid only 2,000 or 3,000 riel, but they [those who collected the money] wrote 5,000 riel in the list. I haven't paid yet, because I spent my money to pay for the fertilisers from the fertiliser bank. (Village health worker (f) March 2000)

> When the laterite was there, some villagers thought that they had got it for free. They didn't trust those who collected the local contribution, and that spread among the villagers. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

The assumption behind asking for labour and cash contribution is that it will make people feel ownership and responsibility for what they have built and paid for. When asked, many villagers do say that the road belongs to everybody in the village, and if monks call, they do help to maintain it. In other cases, however, suspicions and unhappiness make people reluctant to pay contribution as well as to help with maintenance. There is a wooden bridge that has been left to gradually fall apart since there are rumours that there was enough money for a cement bridge, but instead the village received poor quality wood while those who had bought it kept the rest of the money for themselves.

Another assumption behind various forms of "participation" is that the experience will "empower" villagers, by contributing to capacity and confidence also in situations that are not directly linked to development activities. As has been shown, in Chraeng, villagers are getting increasingly unhappy with the village authorities. The main complaints concern how they reap benefits for themselves and their friends from development activities. The distribution of emergency relief last year strongly added to the bad feelings. It is not completely clear to us – or to the villagers – how the selection of beneficiaries was done, and this has created rumours and accusations also against people who were probably not involved, and negatively affected the Seila ideas of participation.

> Houn gave the names to *angkaar* of the villagers who would get gifts. He only gave names of his relatives. Only people in Phsaar Ampil [the part of the village where people went to register for donations] and development workers got gifts. (Group leader (m) March 2000)

> Only people who carry a gun got gifts. (Villager (m) March 2000)

> If there's any plan to repair the wooden bridge or the road, I won't participate and I won't pay any contribution. I'm angry about the gifts, about who got them. (Villager (f) February 2000)

An outcome of development interventions in Chraeng might be that obvious mismanagement, accumulated and widespread unhappiness and emergence of potential new leaders result in formal actions to get rid of the Village chief and the militiaman. The research team's questions, but mainly just bringing some of the angry people and potential leaders together, probably contributed to making this more likely to happen. People talked more and more openly about their unhappiness. During the last meeting with the Village advisory group, there was immediately a suggestion to write a formal complaint (*njaat*) to the commune, and the following discussion did not require much input from the research team. Some people still hesitate and worry that it will not work, but there are also people who seem willing to take the lead.

> They [villagers] know that Houn does wrong. But nobody dares to protest, because they think that he's got his friends at higher levels, and high level people only need money. Villagers are afraid of Houn's money power. (Village couple (f/m) March 2000)
>
> Houn and the Commune chief get along well with each other, so I don't expect the villagers to be able to win over Houn. (Villager (f) March 2000)
>
> Villagers have asked me to write a *njaat* to choose a new Village chief. Only a few villagers [have asked], but they are representatives of the villagers. I still don't dare to do it, because the villagers didn't come together, they came one-by-one. If they came all together, I would do it. (---) It's democracy now, and they regard villagers as big people. If villagers protest, they must listen. (Villager (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)
>
> Villagers want to withdraw the Village chief. We should have a meeting for all villagers, where all put their thumbprints to change the Village chief. (---) The Village chief is appointed, so there's no support from higher levels to withdraw him. The higher level supports the Village chief. But there will be commune elections, after that we can write a letter. (VDC member (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)
>
> We can send a *njaat* to the commune. In the 1980s, it was communism. From the 1990s, rights belong to the villagers. So, if all villagers agreed, I'd take the letter to the commune and the district to get their signatures. If the villagers want to withdraw the Village chief, they can, just as you pull out cabbage. (---). But if we wanted to do it, we should have done it last year or after the harvest, and it would have been quick. Now it's not possible yet because the Commune chief is preparing himself for the election. Maybe after the commune election, because now, the Commune chief thinks about whether he will win or fall. If we write a complaint now, he might not consider it, he might just keep it without doing anything about it. If the old Commune chief wins, we have to protest and he has to work for us. If a new Commune chief wins, he also needs to think about us. But now, if there are three or four candidates, villagers don't know who they should meet to ask for help. Now, when there's no agreement, nobody thinks about us, so the work stands still. But after the election, the issue will be solved, whether a new or the old Commune chief wins. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) March 2000)

Kook Doung: ***Villagers Want Work – With Payment***

- *The presence of a development leadership has not created any sense (or expectation or demand) of influence among villagers on decisions about development activities;*
- *As, in Chraeng, local contribution has not created any general sense of ownership and responsibility.*

As has been shown, in Kook Doung there is a solid and well cooperating leadership. Villagers, however, do not seem to use this to get influence. There is an atmosphere of disinterest and passivity among the villagers. At the day of the VDC election, most of them did not bother to wait for the results, but left before they knew who had been

elected. People now know that Puen [the leading development person] sometimes "asks for" a canal or a road. But they do not themselves go to see him or anyone else with suggestions.

Villagers are not used to request anything, but rather to receive. There are meetings, but they are perceived to be mainly for telling villagers something. When people from a development organisation ask what villagers need or want, villagers do not perceive it as a real choice. There have been so many organisations in the village, and each of them have their ideas of what they want to provide.

> *Angkaar* asked the villagers to go and sit at different places – if you want this, you sit there, if you want that, you sit there. Then, they whispered to somebody "if you ask for cows, you'll get it." (Group leader (m) Cross visit discussion, April 2000)

> Vunn [AS staff] came and asked what we need. I said that I've got everything already, I need a car. Then she got stuck. Later, she listed people who wanted a big water jar. I put down my name, but now I've waited for five years. (Villager (f) January 2000)

Villagers in general thus seldom express any ideas or opinions, but seem to passively wait for whatever is provided or decided by others – *angkaar*, or the higher levels, or the Village chief and Puen – with no expectation to influence, and no inclination to demand influence.

This lack of interest and expectations may be because people have been disappointed. There are frequent testimonies of how people go for meetings and how they are promised something, or think that they are promised, which then does not happen. And the reaction seems to be not anger, but resignation.

> They tell people to go for meetings. I sometimes go, sometimes not. It's meetings about poor people, but nothing happens, only meetings. (Returnee (f) April 2000)

> They said that they would repair the canal to the river. But now there's nothing, it seems to be delayed. The Village chief said that they would repair it. There's been discussions about repairing that canal every year. First there was a discussion between the two canals. They said that the other canal would be repaired next time. (Villager (f) April 2000)

> They say that there's a shortage of this and a shortage of that. *Angkaar* says that it will be built this year or that year. Then they say the budget is not enough. It's been going on for several years already. (Villager (f) April 2000)

> There was a plan to build a road. They said that it would be built in March. I had prepared my basket to go and carry soil. But nothing happened. (Group leader (m) April 2000)

In Kook Doung, there is wide agreement that villagers are currently not prepared to work without payment. They have never paid any cash local contribution. They did work for free in 1993 when Aphiwat Strei provided gravel for the road that runs through the old village. That road has also been well maintained as the Village chief, the leading development person or the *aachaar* has asked a group of villagers to repair parts of it when needed. Since then, however, villagers seem to have been more interested in the payment they get for building something than in what is being built. In the first LPP-cycle in 1998, when there was a village project to repair part of an old canal, the VDC used the LDF to pay villagers to do the job. Those who worked were paid for nine out of every ten meter they did. The rest was labelled local contribution.

The following year, villagers would no longer be paid for unskilled labour. The option was to get money for a village project to rent a machine for the job (again, canal rehabilitation) and to pay three percent cash contribution. Villagers said no. If they

would not be paid, they were not interested, and the VDC members did not dare to promise that they would be able to collect the contribution. They claim that villagers would be suspicious about those who collect it, thinking that *angkaar* has enough money to pay the full cost.

> Villagers were promised that they'd continue to dig the canal the following years, until it reaches the river. But they changed their plan. They said that if people dig, it's too slow. They wanted to rent a machine to do the work, and villagers would have to contribute money. But villagers didn't agree, because they didn't find it useful. They wouldn't get paid. (---) We didn't agree to rent the machine, and then the money was transferred to another village. (---) The Village chief and Puen [the leading development person] said that it's hard to get local contribution because people are poor. Then the Village chief and the seven members would have to pay with their own money. (Group leader (m) April 2000)

Villagers' contribution in labour or cash has thus not created any sense of ownership and responsibility. Maintenance of existing infrastructure works relatively well, though, thanks to a few individuals who initiate and mobilise a small group of people to do what needs to be done.

Some villagers now regret that they did not accept the offer in 1999, and talk about how good it would be to get the whole canal ready. Still, nobody believes that the Village chief or the VDC, or higher authorities, would be able to mobilise villagers to build it for free. Neither would the monks.

> Now it's hard to build something without payment... In the past, they did, like this road [through the old village]. Now it seems to be more free. In the past, it was communism, but now villagers wouldn't do it. Before, there was no *angkaar*, and villagers did it for free. Then *angkaar* came to help villagers and provided payment. Later on, villagers wouldn't work for free. *Angkaar* provided payment and people got addicted. (Villager (f) April 2000)

> During the King regime, a canal was built. They used the authority, and if villagers did not go, they used violence. Now, if higher levels asked the commune to ask villagers to work, they wouldn't do it. (---) I and the committee would not be able to mobilise people. When they work with monks, they think that they get good merit. [But monks could not mobilise villagers do build something in the village because] something that belongs to the monks or the pagoda, they would do. Things that belong to normal people, they wouldn't do. (Deputy village chief (m) April 2000)

During our last visit, in April 2000, villagers were hoping for a food-for-work project. There were differing reports on whether it would be a road or a canal, or both, and it did not seem to matter much. Villagers were mainly concerned about the prospects of paid work. When some staff from World Food Programme came to the village and the news spread that the road/canal work would finally start, villagers were disappointed that it was so late. Now, people were busy ploughing and only the landless had time to work.

> Villagers also complained that the canal [from1998] is not yet finished, so why start on a new road? But I said to them "keep quiet, don't complain, then we might not get anything. (Villager (f) April 2000)

Changing Perceptions of and Relations to the Commune

Chraeng: *The Commune Chief was Here when We Built the Road*

- *The Commune chief has become slightly more familiar to most villagers; they are, however, not clear about the commune's role in development activities, and still perceive the commune as remote and mainly dealing with security and conflict resolution;*
- *VDC members do not know the role of the Commune Development Committee (CDC) and have no sense of influence in the commune; only the VDC leader (who is also the Village chief) has contact with the commune;*
- *Villagers usually think of the commune as a minor part of the "higher levels"; the most significant impact on villagers' perceptions of and relation to these higher levels is the appearance of angkaar.*

The Commune chief claims that development activities have expanded the commune's area of work and that he is much busier now than before.

> Before, I was only responsible for authority. Now, with development programmes, I have more responsibilities. I need to be chief of the development agencies. For example, the female buffalo raising, I'm responsible for all villages. It adds to my work. Since Seila started in 1997, I've got more responsibilities. I pay attention to the needs of the villagers, for road construction etc. I'm most busy making proposals, the commune can get $ 25,000. (Commune Chief (m) March 2000)

For most villagers in Chraeng, the only change in their relation to the commune is that they have seen the Commune chief in the village a few times when there has been a meeting about development activities, or when they were working on the road. This has made many villagers slightly more familiar with the Commune chief than before, and also makes them associate the commune with development activities – without knowing or reflecting on what the commune's role is. This is true also for the district, since the district chief too came to the village when the road construction started.

> The Commune chief came for a meeting, he told villagers to build a road, so that they would have a better road to walk on. (Group of poor women, October 1999)

Villagers' main contacts with the commune (and higher levels), however, remain to be related to other issues than development, which a CARERE employee confirms.

> The authorities' main task is security, and what's related to political parties. At the district they have a schedule with different topics. Sometimes they talk about development, but not very often. Usually they talk about security. The Commune chiefs are busy with security. The district chief and deputies are not in charge of development. They go to the communes and villages to talk about the party, about security, and a little bit about development. They convince people to support their party. (---) When CARERE staff are in the villages with commune staff, they don't talk about party politics. But when CARERE staff leave, they do. (CARERE employee (m) October 1999)

More remarkable than most villagers' vague ideas, is that the VDC members too have a very weak understanding of the commune's role in development and very scarce contact

with the commune. When the VDC was new, they all went for meetings and trainings, and thus became more familiar with the commune officials. Since then, however, there is far less training, and only the Village chief and the militiaman go for meetings.

> Before, I never had any contact with the Commune chief, only since I work with development, I can know the Commune chief. I met him when I went for training. In the beginning, I went for training every month. (VDC member (f) March 2000)

> Only the leader goes for meetings in the commune every Monday. If the leader is busy, he hands it over to me. I went for a meeting once, but it was a long time ago. (VDC member (m) VDC group March 2000)

As has been shown, however, not even the Village chief goes regularly to the commune meetings. Chraeng thus does not have any active representation in the commune, and the VDC members do not seem to expect it. They have heard about a Commune Development Committee (CDC), but regard it as a small group of commune people. They are familiar with two female CDC members from the village where the commune centre is who are very active in development work, but seem to regard them as commune officials (which they are not). The VDC members are not aware of the development resources over which the CDC decide, or that Chraeng and every other village in the commune (theoretically) have their own representatives in this decision-making.

The Commune chief is also unclear about the CDC. He gives contradictory reports on whether the Village chiefs who are not VDC leaders are members of the CDC or not, and on whether the CDC have regular meetings or not. The reality seems to be that occasional development issues are dealt with at the weekly authority meetings, which means that the VDC leaders who are not Village chiefs may not attend.

Seila's impact on villagers' perceptions of and relation to the commune is affected by the fact that they usually do not separate the commune from "higher levels". While the commune has not become known as an important development actor, *angkaar*[19] has. With development interventions, villagers have developed a new understanding of this word. Villagers are not clear what or who *angkaar* is, but regard it as part of the higher levels and as the primary development agent, referring all development activities initiated from somewhere outside the village to *angkaar*. It thus usually translates to development organisations, but could also include authorities and politicians. When villagers in Chraeng, as has been mentioned, request something from above, the request is not mainly aimed at the commune. The perception is that the request travels from level to level, to where a decision is made – often by *angkaar*. While the commune is a low rung on the ladder, it is more difficult to place *angkaar*. It is somewhere at the top, or outside, or all over – but definitely with more power, and more money, than the commune.

Villagers in Chraeng are not very familiar with different development organisations, but struggle to remember the name of one or two. They rarely mention CARERE, but more often "DP" or something similar for UNDP. They know the face, and sometimes the name, of the CARERE LCB – "the guy with the big motorbike" – and one or two DFTs, though they mainly come to see the Village chief. VDC members rarely use the word Seila. They have heard it but are not able to distinguish Seila from development organisations.

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[19] The fact that the word *angkaar* during the Khmer Rouge regime was used for the quite enigmatic but feared state, does not appear to disturb villagers as most of them do not seem to even reflect on that it is the same word.

If the Commune chief doesn't have the capacity, or if he's busy, I can go straight to the district or CARERE. If the district chief is busy, I go straight to Chhun Ly [CARERE LCB]. (Village chief (m) March 2000)

Pithou [DFT; the name has been changed] has a close relationship with the Village chief in Chraeng. They drink together. Now, Narith [DFT; the name has been changed] often goes to the villages. But he doesn't drink, so he doesn't have any close relationship with the Village chief. (CDC member from another village (f) March 2000)

I don't know where *angkaar* comes from, but I don't think that the commune or district has any money for that kind of things [wells, ponds, road], only *angkaar* has money. *Angkaar* Seila means that it's done from small to big and go back and forth, like making a plan from the bottom to higher levels. But the higher levels still decide to do whatever they want to do. (---) To turn the rice bank into a fertiliser bank was an idea from higher levels. If high level people didn't suggest it, villagers would not dare to do it. (VDC member (m) March 2000)

I don't know if *angkaar* is part of the authorities. I only know that *angkaar* comes from higher levels. (VDC member (f) March 2000)

The Village chief is not good at contacting higher levels as Village chiefs in other villages are. *Angkaar* has given cows, buffaloes, pigs, chickens, ducks and materials like hoes, knives and axes to people in other villages. (Group leader (m) March 2000)

If villagers didn't request *angkaar* to build something, the Commune chief would never come. He comes to see the road building because he gets benefits from it. He never thinks of the well being of villagers. The government never thinks. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) Village advisory group, March 2000)

The commune people are more familiar than Chraeng villagers with Seila. They also work with development organisations. Though the Commune chief claims to be busy with Seila activities, there is a woman in the CDC who complains that he leaves all of the work to her and another woman, and that he is not even at the commune office anymore but at his house from where he runs a credit programme which renders him a large private income.

I'm also busy with NGOs that want to work in the commune. I have to spend time with them. (---) It's best if NGOs work directly with the villagers [not through the authorities]. Because NGOs have full skills, the authorities don't have the skills. But we still keep our eyes on the NGOs. (---) The commune is especially involved in Hathakasekor [a local NGO]. I'm the CD-worker. Hathakasekor appointed me to be director of the community. The borrowers come to my house to pay. (---) First they thought about percentage and we [he and the accountant] earned four or five dollars a month each. Later, the scheme increased and now we get $ 50 – 60 per month. (Commune chief (m) March 2000)

The Commune chief thinks only about the credit scheme because earns money from it. When Seila started, the Commune chief often went to the villages, but since Hathakasekor started to work in the commune, he never goes. (CDC member from other village (f) March 2000)

Kook Doung: *I Go to have a Chat with the Commune Chief*

- *The Commune chief comes to the village more often than before; as in Chraeng, however, villagers are not clear about the commune's role in development activities;*
- *VDC members are more familiar with the commune than before; they are, however, not clear about who is in the Commune Development Committee (CDC), and what it is for; the current contacts with the commune are strongly concentrated to the VDC leader and the Village chief;*
- *As in Chraeng, villagers do not usually think of the commune separate from other "higher levels", and more significant than changes in villagers' relations to the commune is the appearance of angkaar.*

Commune officials claim that the commune's role is considerably different from before, and that they are very busy with development, especially since Seila started.

> In the past we had to recruit labour force. Now, there's no war and we just need to think of how to make the commune prosper. We make people not worry, not be scared. (Deputy Commune Chief (m) November 1999)

> The previous Commune chief didn't know how to deal with development work and organisations like Aphiwat Strei and World Food Programme, so the commune had no contact with them. [When I was appointed] I didn't know if I would be dealing with development programmes or not. I had experience only with the "network" (*ksai bandaoy*), not with development. When the Seila programme came, I started to learn how to deal with development work. (Commune Chief (m) February 2000)

For villagers in Kook Doung, the major change in their relation to the commune is that they see the Commune chief more often in the village. He frequently comes to see the Village chief and the VDC leader, and he has participated in Aphiwat Strei's 8 March (International Women's Day) celebrations the last few years. These visits make villagers associate the commune with development activities, but they generally do not know what role the commune has in funding, decision-making and implementation of such activities. Villagers still perceive the commune as mainly dealing with marriage certificates and conflict resolution.

VDC members have become more familiar with the commune through their positions. Initially, they all went for a lot of training but since the first year's canal project, there have not been any more activities in Kook Doung and now the Commune chief only comes to see the leader, and only the leader goes to the commune. He claims that he sometimes goes just to have a chat with the Commune chief, since it is important to have a good relation with him.

> Before the Seila programme, we were ordinary villagers, and had no chance to meet the Commune chief. Only the Village chief could. Now we can make a request to meet him. (---) The Commune chief often comes, but he meets only the Village chief. We'd like to know what plan the Commune chief gives to the Village chief. (VDC group (f/m) November 1999)

> The Commune chief comes to the village whenever there's a plan and they need to have a meeting to tell the villagers, and he comes to see the canal building and the culverts. I have never had any contact with the commune apart from when I went to learn when the VDC was new. After that, Puen [the leading development person] and the Village chief often go for meetings. (VDC member, Village health worker, Mental health trainer (f) April 2000)

I just sit and have a chat with him over there [at the commune office]. It's unofficial, I just go to talk to him. Sometimes when I go to learn, I go to see him before office hours. Sometimes I go alone by bike to talk to him, to persuade him to ask for funds from World Food Programme. I try to satisfy him to make him ask again. I have a chat with him and say "dear, please help the villagers." I don't know if it helps. (---) I didn't meet the previous Commune chief often. I had a position already, but I only went when I was called. Now I can go any time, morning, evening... (---) The other members know him, but they are not brave to go to see him. I often go for trainings. (VDC leader, Member of AS committee (m) April 2000)

Villagers are not aware that there is a Commune Development Committee (CDC), which was confirmed by the Village advisory group, which largely consisted of the more knowledgeable people. VDC members too, including those who are members of the CDC, are very unclear about the CDC and the allocation of development resources. They are not sure who is in the CDC, and there seems to be no sense of village representation or influence. To those who have been present when the Local Development Fund (LDF) has been allocated, it seems to have been a mere calculation exercise on the whiteboard, done by others.

Village advisory group, April 2000:

- Even me, I didn't know that there's a commune development committee. Only Puen and Muen [the two leading development people] know. I only know the Commune chief. If people didn't vote for a commune development committee, how would they know? (Villager (m))
- Yes! The reason why villagers don't know about the commune development committee or the commune officials well, is that villagers didn't vote for them. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m))
- It's not good that villagers don't know that there's a commune development committee. The commune should have a meeting to tell people, one day in every village. Even myself, I didn't know, because we don't know who appointed them. (Group leader (m))
- I know that there's a commune development committee, but I don't know who's in it. (VDC member, Village health worker, Mental health trainer (f))

They say that every VDC leader is a member [of the CDC]. But I never attend the meetings. They never call. (---) Before, I often went for meetings. But now I've missed them for a long time. They have no meetings, because we have no plan, no activities. (---) I was there for such a meeting [when they decided between alternatives]. The first year, the whole commune got money and they shared, who got more and who got less depended on the population. Later on, they decided according to the number. I also agreed with them, because it was correct. (---) They did judgement, criteria, and different villages got it. The third year, they also did criteria, judgement, and other villages got it again. (---) The facilitators decide, but it depends on the numbers. (VDC leader, Member of AS committee (m) April 2000)

At CDC meetings, the DFT is always there too. They need me to facilitate. Otherwise it won't run smoothly (DFT (m) April 2000)

According to a chart on the wall in the commune office, Kook Doung has three CDC members – the Village chief, the VDC leader and a VDC member. This member is one of three special women representatives, who she claims were elected at the commune office from among 16 candidates, all VDC members. She seems intelligent and committed, and she is knowledgeable on various areas. When it comes to the commune, however, she is far from clear.

I'm on both sides – commune and village. On the commune side, I just have my name to go for training and meetings. I'm a normal member, so I have no serious [*tom dom*] work to do. When someone comes from Phnom Penh, I just go to welcome them. (---) I don't know

about the male members. I know only about the female members. The female members have no work to do. Maybe the commune development [committee] is for having men and women together. (---) Money comes from the province, drops to the commune, and the commune decides to give money. The Commune chief gives money to each project. The district side also comes to calculate the number. (---) Mostly they call the Village chief and the leader [for the meeting where they do the calculation]. I attended once, but I didn't participate in the decision-making. (VDC and CDC member, Village health worker, Mental health leader (f) April 2000)

As in Chraeng, the fact that the impact on villagers' relation to the commune is so limited, and even VDC members' understanding of the CDC so weak, may be because villagers usually do not separate the commune from the "higher levels", and that *angkaar* is perceived as a more significant part of these higher levels and the primary development agent.

People in Kook Doung know the names of a number of different organisations, and are more familiar with one or two people from Aphiwat Strei than with the commune officials. Villagers in general do not distinguish Seila from development organisations (only few have heard the word Seila). Villagers are not familiar with the district and province facilitators, but when they do pass on their motorbikes or appear in a meeting, they are perceived as people from *angkaar*. The VDC members, however, who are more familiar with them, refer to the DFTs as "district side". Some of the VDC members, as well as a few other villagers, do also perceive a difference between Seila and development organisations.

Seila and development organisations are the same, their only purpose is to develop. The Seila programme and canal building are the same thing. The Seila programme comes from higher levels. (VDC member (f) April 2000)

Seila asks for contribution, and they get ideas from the villagers. They need villagers to decide, our group [the VDC] doesn't decide by itself. (---) Non-governmental organisations never ask villagers to pay local contribution, but here, it's government work, and they ask for contribution. (VDC and CDC member, Village health worker, Mental health leader (f) April 2000)

World Food Programme is slow now because they work with the government. They follow the Seila procedure. Seila asks for contribution from the villagers, World Food Programme also asks for contribution from the villagers. *Angkaar* is faster. When they provide rice to the government structure, it takes a long time, because the government thinks about it in detail. (---) And they take some for their own pockets! (Two villagers (m/f) April 2000)

There are different programmes. That's why they set up different committees. One is *angkaar*, one is government programme, one is *angkaar*, one is Seila. (---) *Angkaar* Aphiwat Strei develop rice bank, credit, cows. Seila also do development, but only canal or road building. And they ask for local contribution, ten percent. (VDC leader, Member of AS committee (m) April 2000)

The rice bank, cows and money are non-governmental. The VDC is in harmony with the government. For example, if they plan to do something, it has to go from the village to commune to district to province, before it can be achieved. If it's outside the government, you just request to the staff and the staff take it to *angkaar*, that's it. (Villager, *Aachaar* (m) April 2000)

Conclusions

Village Governance

- *Seila's immediate impact on village governance is largely determined by local power relations; there is potential, however, for creating more room for alternative/additional leaders to emerge.*

The two cases in this study show that Seila (and other development interventions) can have an impact on village governance and power structures. The nature of the impact depends on existing relations and political climate – mainly status, attitudes and behaviour of the village authorities. In Chraeng, development interventions have added to the power of the already powerful, as the Village chief and the militiaman have used their positions to take control. Paradoxically, this has rendered them vulnerable and the whole leadership structure fragile. In Kook Doung, on the other hand, power has been shared as the village authorities have allowed and welcomed others to take on tasks and responsibilities, which has consolidated and broadened a solid leadership structure.

Though existing power relations thus largely determine the immediate result, and though this study illustrates very different situations and outcomes, in both cases development interventions have made alternative or additional leaders emerge. In Chraeng, a VDC member and a couple of other men are gaining determination and other villagers' trust in opposition to the village authorities. In Kook Doung, two men with development positions have gained leadership recognition alongside the Village chief.

There is however potential for doing more and better in terms of creating opportunities for people to develop leadership qualities and recognition. Among the shortcomings are the concentration of work to one or two (male) individuals, the failure to make use of and develop others' (women's) capacity and commitment, the reluctance to having a development position, the lack of clarity among those with a position about their mandate, and the fact that they and their mandate are not widely known among other villagers.

There is a tendency in Seila and other development interventions to focus attention on just one or a few individuals, usually the Village chief and/or the VDC leader. The reason is probably that it is easy to establish a relationship with one or two people who develop the necessary skills and on whom you can rely. The result, however, is often an unnecessarily heavy workload on these few people – who may or may not be able to shoulder it – while the potential capacity and commitment of others are wasted. Approaching mainly the Village chief in Chraeng impedes and slows down the work, since the Village chief is not very active and may not even pass on information or delegate tasks. In Kook Doung, the VDC leader and secretary work hard, so the job probably gets done. These two men also gain a lot of experience and recognition – and become indispensable. In both villages, there are several other people too (mainly women) who are knowledgeable and willing to work, but who do not get the same attention and thus no chance to learn, to gain experience and confidence, and to become known and gain others' trust.

Both the concentration on a few and the negligence of others with a development position contribute to the reluctance to having a position (though there are indeed other reasons for this reluctance as well). In both villages, there are a few capable and trusted people (men) who refuse to accept development positions since they know what kind of work and responsibilities they would face. And in both villages, there are people (women and men) with positions who are not clear about their mandates and therefore

not confident in their roles. The lack of clarity also gives rise to rumours among other villagers about benefits which creates bad feelings and adds to the reluctance.

The reasons are manifold why people with a development position are not clear about and confident in their roles, and why other villagers do not know them and their responsibilities. In some cases, the whole system is unclear – also those who come to the village to introduce new positions and procedures are not clear about the mandates and relations. Very often, sharing of information is not effective. Another reason is a tendency to create positions but then not fill them with activity. In Kook Doung, the VDC have not had any tangible tasks since the first year and village vets have been selected several times without ever actually starting to work. In Chraeng, more than seven months after the village health workers were selected, they still have not got any training, even less started to work.

Villagers' Inclination to Exercise Their Rights

- *The impact that Seila can have on villagers' inclination to exercise their rights does not come from meetings or local contribution, but from exposure to actors and structures outside the village, and from the emergence of new leaders.*

The study suggests that Seila also can have an impact on villagers' inclination to exercise their rights. People in the two villages do not have any sense of influence over decisions about development activities. Neither has participation in the form of meetings and labour or cash contribution created any strong or general sense of ownership and responsibility. Village meetings are not a forum for genuine discussion and decision-making. In Kook Doung, cash contribution has been avoided and the prospect of it even made villagers reject a project. Labour contribution has been paid once, but only by those who also got paid for part of their work, which disguised the contribution into lower payment. In Chraeng, villagers have accepted the idea of labour as well as cash contribution. But they do it as a concession to the rules of the game, as a way of dealing with the donor – *they set the rules, we'd better follow, otherwise we won't get anything* – and not as a way of taking control.

There are hence no signs that the current Seila practice of contribution makes people more inclined to take responsibility for what they have contributed to, or to sense a right to demand something in return, such as payment of taxes may do. However, development interventions *without* similar requirements on the villagers have created habits and expectations that may obstruct the Seila idea of involvement and ownership. Though receiving things for free runs against the prevailing norm – returnees in Kook Doung are blamed for being *"used to being fed"* – villagers have no desire to start paying for what they have got used to getting without charge.

Despite the failure to create immediate sense of influence, ownership and responsibility over certain development activities, villagers in both villages have recently protested – and may soon do so again – in ways that they would not have done before development interventions started. It is difficult to determine what share Seila and other development activities have in the explanation to why the protests took place, and may take place.

The importance of leaders is evident. There must be leaders with enough knowledge, commitment and confidence, and whom other villagers trust and listen to. As has been shown, such leaders have emerged partly as a result of their involvement in Seila and other development activities.

The importance of knowledge about the government structure is also unmistakable. People need to know where to go (at least where to go to ask where to go). Seila has contributed to making some people more familiar with the structure. In Chraeng, villagers have got used to the idea of sending requests upwards, and in both villages a few people have been actively exposed to "higher levels", dealing with commune officials as well as district and province facilitators.

A necessary requirement for people to exercise their rights, is that they are aware of these rights and that the rights are of relevance and concern. One reason why people are more inclined to claim their right to fish and to produce rice wine, than to decide about the use of the Local Development Fund (LDF), is that fishing and wine production is of more immediate importance to their personal livelihood. Another reason is that they are not aware of the existence of an LDF or of their right to participate in decisions about it. If villagers knew about the commune LDF and perceived it as belonging to those who live in that commune, they would start claiming control of it.

Villagers' Relation to the Commune

- *Seila's impact on villagers' relation to the commune appears to be obstructed by the appearance of angkaar, and by the fact that others than commune staff are being paid to do development work.*

The study reveals that Seila's impact on villagers' perceptions of and relation to the commune is very limited. Very far from the aim of establishing the commune as the primary development agent, villagers are not clear about the commune's role in development activities and even VDC members' understanding of the Commune Development Committee (CDC) is very weak.

The reason for this may be that villagers usually do not separate the commune from the wider and quite blurred idea of "higher levels", and that within these higher levels there is a far more significant development actor than the commune. A more noticeable impact of development interventions on villagers' perceptions of and relations to the higher levels, than any perceived changes in the role of the commune, is the appearance – in the villages and in people's minds – of *angkaar*. With development interventions, villagers have developed a new understanding of this word. They are not clear what or who *angkaar* is, but regard it as part of the higher levels and as the primary development agent, referring all development activities initiated from somewhere outside the village to *angkaar*. It thus usually translates to development organisations, but could also include authorities and politicians – though it seems that in villagers' mind it usually does not.

The presence of this influential – and rich – *angkaar* makes it difficult to establish the commune as the primary development agent. Experience makes people put their hopes and expectations to development organisations rather than to the commune. As has been shown, they learn how to please and deal with the organisations, since that seems easier and more rewarding than to turn to the commune.

The presence of development organisations and people who work for these organisations also in another way adds to villagers' sense that the commune is not a particularly important development actor. Perceived and actual control over development resources does not (yet) seem to be with the commune but with government officials and CARERE staff who are paid to do development work. Seila facilitators and CARERE LCBs still attend CDC meetings, and still lead the meetings when the allocation of the commune's LDF is determined. There is an obvious risk that

they dominate the meeting and decision-making; village as well as commune CDC members perceive the allocation as a mere calculation exercise done by the facilitator. The fact that there are others who get paid for doing development work is also not an incentive for commune officials and CDC members to take a lead in development activities.

Chapter Four: What Impact on Local Governance is Realistic to Expect from Seila?

There are limitations to what the Seila programme can achieve. Villagers' past experiences and prevailing perceptions largely determine the outcome of any intervention or the introduction of new ideas and practices. Existing conditions and ongoing changes, caused by other forces, also affect how development activities are received and accommodated.

Still, development interventions do have impacts, intended and unintended. Intervening with ideas and resources implies influencing local power relations, and influencing people's expectations on local and external actors as well as on their own role.

To create good local governance and a situation where all involved actors are able and willing to exercise their rights and responsibilities, requires legislation, regulation and institutional development, it requires access to information and it requires changes in relations and attitudes.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw lessons from the study, helping to inform a discussion about what impact on local governance it is realistic to expect from Seila. As stated in the introduction, so far Seila has been a pilot programme with intensive and well-funded project support in parts of five provinces, while in the future, it will be a more government managed programme with less well-funded assistance, supporting decentralisation in a gradually expanding area, eventually nationwide. In both cases, Seila provides the framework for long-term poverty alleviation through improved local governance, and for short-term improved local governance through decentralised development funds.

Active Citizenship

- *Seila can contribute to active citizenship, but only if people are aware of their rights and responsibilities.*

The study shows that in these two villages, people's participation in the form of meetings and local contribution does not create any sense of influence and ownership. Payment of contribution is neither perceived as a general responsibility with which comes certain rights, nor as a crucial endowment without which a project would not be possible. To villagers, paying contribution is rather an acceptance to pay some for a specific project because the donor has decided that they should, though they are convinced that the donor easily could pay the whole cost. With such an understanding, local contribution is not in any way empowering, as it is based on the idea that someone else has the money and thus the power to set the rules.

However, the study also shows that villagers are prepared to defend and demand what they perceive as their rights (access to fishing lakes in Kook Doung and permission to produce rice wine in Chraeng).

For Seila to contribute to active citizenship, it is thus crucial to make sure that people are aware of the existence of a development fund that belongs to those who live in the commune, of their right to suggest what it should be used for, and their right to be represented in the commune when decisions are made about its allocation. Since such a

message would undoubtedly be of interest, creating the awareness is mainly an issue of making it understandable and credible.

With such an awareness of who the development fund belongs to and of the fact that the resources are limited, paying local contribution can be perceived as a general and crucial responsibility for which you can expect something in return, and thus further add to the sense of right to influence its utilization. The achieve this, the commune citizens would have to pay contributions (possibly according to ability) before it has been decided what specific activities to use the money for.

In the long run, an awareness of commune resources to be used according to the citizens' priorities, and a habit of paying local contribution to add to these resources, can make villagers and officials start regarding access to certain services – depending on the commune's resources – as ***rights***. Villagers who regularly pay to the commune fund will expect the commune to provide services in accordance with its means. The contribution would thus turn into a local tax, different from the taxes that villagers currently pay in the sense that it would remain within the commune and be used for development activities on which villagers have influence.

Village Representatives

- *Seila can contribute to establishing accountable village representatives with a limited mandate; it is not realistic, though, to expect Seila to fundamentally change village governance in the short run.*

The study shows that local power relations largely determine the immediate outcome, and hence limits the intentional impact that a development intervention can have on village governance.

It also shows that VDCs and their role are not well known among people in these two villages. Neither of the VDCs is recognised as a group with overall responsibility for village development and neither of them, nor members of them, are known as village representatives in the commune. The VDC members, too, are not clear about their mandate and thus not confident in their role.

The study shows that, despite initial extensive and time-consuming training for all VDC members, only one or a few develop enough capacity and commitment. Concentration of attention and responsibilities to single individuals make them very hard working, while others do not get a chance to develop the same qualities.

The study, however, also shows that there is a demand for leaders in addition or as alternatives to the authorities, and that villagers are willing to entrust certain people with the responsibility of representing and speaking for the others.

There is thus potential for Seila to contribute to good village governance. It is crucial, though, to not assign more responsibility to anyone than she or he will be able to manage with the resources and support that Seila can provide. It does not seem realistic to expect the Seila programme to develop wide-ranging capacity and commitment of a whole group of villagers, who will soon be able and willing to form an additional or alternative leadership. Seila will not have enough resources to make a VDC in every village known for managing development activities in the village. And Seila will not have enough presence in the villages to intentionally and fundamentally intervene in local power relations in a responsible manner.

It seems more realistic and more appropriate for the Seila programme to give a few elected villagers (probably one woman and one man) the task to represent the village when decisions are made about the allocation of commune development resources. The

problem of concentration of work and responsibility – and power – to one or a few individuals (usually the VDC leader and/or the Village chief) would be avoided since these representatives' task would be very limited and specific. Short and clear instructions, rather than lengthy trainings, would be enough to make those who get the assignment able to handle it. And short and clear information would be enough to make their mandate known and understood by other villagers. Along with the necessary awareness of the LDF, awareness of these village representatives and their mandate, would make it possible for villagers to keep an eye on them and hold them accountable, if necessary to replace them.

In the long run, as villagers get used to the idea of accountable village representatives, they may start claiming accountability of other leaders as well, like what is happening in one of the villages in this study, where villagers are increasingly reacting against the village authorities' abuses and a few emerging and entrusted leaders may soon lead a formal complaint. Seila can thereby contribute to more fundamentally changing power structures and improving village governance.

Commune Governance

- *Seila can strengthen accountable commune governance; however, Seila's impact will be limited as long as other actors such as development organisations and political parties behave in ways that do not support this objective.*

The study shows that villagers are not clear about the commune's role in development, and that there are other actors who they perceive as primary development agents. However, it also shows that villagers are starting to associate certain commune officials with development activities.

For Seila to contribute to improved commune governance, it is crucial to give the commune a manageable, but significant and well known, role in development activities. It is not realistic to expect Seila to immediately and fundamentally change people's perceptions of and expectations on various actors, and to establish the commune as the primary development agent. There are development organisations as well as political parties that intentionally or unintentionally counteract Seila's purposes. Some of their approaches and activities, including pure handouts, make villagers used to merely receiving whatever is provided, with no sense of influence or responsibility. And the presence of organisations that have more money to spend than the commune, and that bypass the government structure, make villagers expect or hope for assistance from them rather than from the government.

With those experiences and expectations, and with those practices still going on, it is difficult to establish Seila as something different. Seila may actually have added to these perceptions and expectations. Seila's tangible village activities and working methods are similar to what many development organisations do – infrastructure projects and paid development workers coming to the village more or less regularly to see the Village chief or the VDC leader or to hold a village meeting.

With staff from organisations and higher level authorities who get paid to do development work, it may also be difficult to motivate commune officials, and village representatives, to do it for free. It is scarcely surprising that the Commune chief in the Pursat case prefers to invest his time in the NGO credit scheme, since that renders him an income.

In the short run, it is more realistic to expect Seila to establish a well known and accountable commune body[20] with the only but well known mandate to manage the utilization of the development fund. As with the village representatives, to achieve this requires mainly clear instructions to the members of this body and clear information to the people who live in the commune. It is however also important to ensure that the actual and perceived power to decide lies with the commune body and not with higher level programme (or project) staff.

A known commune body with a clear and manageable but significant task will give villagers positive experiences of – and gradually growing expectations on – the commune and the government. It will also give commune officials and village representatives positive experiences of, and expectations on, their role and capacity, including their strength in relation to higher levels.

In the long run, as villagers get used to an accountable commune body managing development resources, and themselves influencing the utilization, they will start expecting the commune to provide a wider range of services, and start claiming accountability from the commune (and higher levels of authority) regarding other issues as well.

Also, with increasing capacity and accountability of the commune body, the Seila structure is more likely to gain political support, and development organisations are more likely to channel their funds through it. And the more resources the commune is managing, the more it will be able to serve as the primary development agent.

[20] Currently, this body is the Commune Development Committee (CDC), while after the commune elections, the Commune Council is likely to take over the task. If there is no village representation guaranteed in the Commune Council, however, it will need to be provided for regarding allocation of commune development resources.

Appendices

Presentation of the Two Case Study Villages[1]

Chraeng

Location, Population and Private Standards

Chraeng is one out of twelve villages in Svay Leung Commune, Kandieng District, twelve kilometres from Pursat provincial town. There are 134 families and 655 people (364 women, 291 men). In 28 households there is no male head-of-household, and four families are returnees who settled in the village around 1992.

Chraeng consists of six distinct parts, the farthest ones about three kilometres apart. Poor and better off villagers also live somewhat separately. The population in one of the six parts is clearly better off (and largely labelled "Chinese" by other villagers), another part is clearly the poorest, while the biggest and most central part has a mixed population of poor and better off people.

About two thirds of the houses in the village are made of wood, and one third of bamboo. There are two big and clearly better standard houses, but nobody has got a latrine. Six families have their own well, seven have a black-and-white TV and about 100 have a radio. There are more than 120 bicycles and almost 20 motorbikes, but no cars.

History

The six separate parts, which currently form Chraeng used to be separate villages. The biggest and most central part, *Krang Knong*, is also the oldest one. People have probably lived there for more than 100 years. The name refers to a place "inside" where people went temporarily to herd their cattle, as opposed to the "outside" area, *Krang Krauw*.

During the French colony, villagers had enough land and they grew rice and vegetables as today. They paid tax in cash, and some worked on the main road that was being built, for which they got paid in French currency.

During a couple of years, the *Issarak*[2] troops created fear among the villagers, as they came into the village to recruit people to fight the French, and to capture young women to be dancers. Those who joined the *Issaraks* were armed, but there was no fighting in the village.

During the Sihanouk regime, people still had enough rice land. They also still paid taxes and were mobilised to dig a large dam and work on the road, now without payment. When the nearby dam was ready, the King came to inaugurate it, which old villagers still talk about.

During much of the Lon Nol regime, the village was empty. The government had a camp on one side, from where they came to recruit soldiers, and the Khmer Rouge soldiers were staying in the forest on the other side, from where they came to persuade people to join them. At first, only men kept away during the day, while women and children could stay and the men could come back at night. But as the village came to be right in the middle of the battlefield, people had to leave. Most of them went to the side

[1] The facts come from Village Data Books, Commune Inventory Data Bases and interviews with villagers.

[2] The *Issaraks* were a resistance movement fighting for Cambodian independence during the 1940s and 1950s.

of the village controlled by the government, others to the side controlled by Khmer Rouge.

As the Khmer Rouge won, some villagers were told to go back to Chraeng, but most stayed and worked at different places around the province throughout the Pol Pot regime.

As the Vietnamese came closer, the Khmer Rouge leaders forced villagers to leave with them. But from 1979, people slowly and gradually started to come back to the village. During the first few years, they only came during the day. It was too dangerous to stay over night because there were still Khmer Rouge soldiers in the area. The village had been completely destroyed, so people had to clear land to grow rice and vegetables. They also collected palm juice to make sugar.

From 1983, there were no more security problems and people came to stay permanently, first in small shelters and gradually as they could afford, in better houses. Those who had arrived first, had taken any land and buffaloes they wanted. During a year or two, people also did collective rice farming. But from 1983, the village chief distributed individual land holdings to all families.

Villagers' main worry during the 1980s was the forced soldier and labour recruitment. People were not motivated to fight the Khmer Rouge, so men got the habit of keeping away during daytime, and a few who were recruited got away from it by paying the recruiters. The village also had to send workers to clear forest in the mountain areas. At first, people volunteered, but then they got afraid of getting malaria and started to run away from that too.

Now, villagers in Chraeng seem to think that they have quite a happy and easy life – no fighting and no forced recruitment. Instead their main worries are water for the rice – will there be enough rain, but not too much or at the wrong time? – and cattle thieves.

Economic Resources and Livelihood Activities

In Chraeng, there are 105 hectares of rice land. It is all non-irrigated, but some villagers own rice land in another village where they can pump water from a canal (three of those families own a water pump). There are about 230 draught cattle and 140 non-draught, almost all of them buffaloes. In the dry season, villagers go to the flooded forest areas around the Tonle Sap to herd their cattle. There are about 100 oxcarts but no tractors or *koh yun* (a vehicle used for transport and ploughing), though one family has a *koh yun* which they use on their land far from the village. Villagers grow rice by transplanting. Nobody grows any dry season rice.

There are eleven hectares of land used for other crops than rice, and vegetable growing is a very important supplementary source of livelihood for most families. In the rainy season, people grow for example tomatoes, cabbage, eggplant, cucumber, winter melon, pumpkin, sweet potato and bitter melon. Fruit is another, though much less important, supplementary income. Palm sugar is an important income for several families. Some who do not have any palm trees rent from those who have.

Pig raising has become an increasingly important income, mainly for somewhat better off families. There are currently about 350 pigs in the village. Several of those who raise pigs also produce rice wine, as they can use the waste from it to feed the pigs, and thus combine two profitable activities. People also raise and sell chickens.

Mainly in the dry season, most families fish in some nearby lakes and in a river 17 kilometres away. Many also fish in the Tonle Sap area where they stay for a while herding their cattle. From December to May, villagers catch frogs since that is when they are most expensive. The fish is mainly for own consumption, but people also sell to

villagers who do not fish for themselves and sometimes at the district and province markets. Recently, a man who just moved to the village started going around the village on his motorbike to buy fish and frogs from other villagers and sell to a trader at the Pursat market.

There is also a merchant who buys earthworms from villagers and sells them to a trader at the Pursat market. But people rarely collect beetles or catch snails and crabs to sell since the price is low. They do catch snakes and turtles if they happen to come across them, but only for eating since there are no merchants who buy them. Villagers also catch birds by traps, for eating and because they destroy rice plants.

The nearest forest is less than a kilometre away. There, villagers can get enough firewood for themselves and some sell to others, especially to those who produce rice wine and need a lot. In the forest, people also get materials for fences and poor villagers collect wild potatoes to sell.

Around the lakes and in other nearby areas, people collect other wild crops such as morning glory, water lily and tamarind leaves. They collect palm leaves to make mats, which for a few poor women is the main income during parts of the year, and in some distant fields villagers get thatch to make roofs for themselves and to sell. They are worried, though, that there will soon not be enough thatch as people have started to clear those fields to grow rice.

Some villagers employ others for ploughing, pulling/transplanting and harvesting. During the busy seasons, a good worker can choose between the employers in Chraeng and neighbouring villages. But very few go out from the village to look for other kinds of employment. A few villagers make some extra money by driving motorcycle taxi. One woman sells Khmer noodles in the village. Two people run a video shop each. Only the teacher and the village chief have a regular salary.

Services in the Village and Outside

Chraeng is five kilometres from the commune centre and seven kilometres from the district centre. In the village, there are 2,200 metres of reasonably good paths.

There are eight communal ring wells and two pump wells, of which all except one or two provide clean water all year round, and three communal ponds.

For health care, villagers prefer to go to the nearest health centre, which is about three kilometres away, or to call for a health worker from there. To the district clinic it is about seven kilometres and to the provincial hospital twelve kilometres. There is a traditional midwife in the village who helps with almost all deliveries. Two or three villagers have got training in the commune to be village health workers, but they are not sure about their role and other villagers do not consult them. There are also a few village vets, but villagers do not consult them much. Two *Kru Khmer* (traditional healers) sometimes help with complicated deliveries, with snakebites, or to treat sick animals.

There is a primary school with six classrooms in the village. Four teachers teach about 150 students in grade one to four (70 in first grade, 27 in second, 30 in third and 23 in fourth). They learn only in the morning, and during the busy agriculture seasons, most children do not attend the classes. Five or six children go to a different primary school three kilometres away, where they can continue to grade six. The nearest secondary school is five kilometres away. One single boy in the village goes to high school, in the provincial town twelve kilometres away, currently in grade ten. There have been literacy classes in the village a few times, most recently for about 25 girls between 15 and 20 years old and a few men who were a little bit older.

There are about ten small rice mills and one larger in Chraeng. All villagers mill their rice in the village, either letting the mill owner keep the rice husk or paying a cash fee.

Five or six villagers have a small shop at their house with a very limited selection of mainly food items, and one woman sells Khmer noodles. The nearest market, where most villagers go, is three kilometres away. Sellers very rarely come to the village.

A villager runs a small bike/motorbike repairing shop, while it is three kilometres to the nearest blacksmith and twelve kilometres to the nearest carpenter. There is a tailor two kilometres away and a hairdresser three kilometres away. Before Khmer New Year, however, several hairdressers come to the village from the provincial town and one young man in the village recently started cutting other men's hair.

Two families run a video shop each, and at two other villagers' houses, people gather to gamble, mainly playing cards.

The nearest pagoda, where most villagers usually go, is two kilometres away and there is another one three kilometres away, where some people sometimes go.

Development Activities

CARERE 1 started to work in Chraeng in 1993. During the first few years, they helped villagers to construct five ring wells. The Australian Red Cross provided the material and the villagers did the job, without payment. Four of the wells provided clean drinking water all year round until the flooding at the end of 1999. Since then, the water in one of them is not clean.

In 1994 – 1995, CARERE together with World Food Programme (WFP) organised food-for-work to dig three ponds. Villagers did the job and got paid in rice from WFP and some money from CARERE. From one of the ponds, people still get drinking water, while the other two are only used for some vegetable and rice seedling irrigation.

In 1994, CARERE and WFP set up a village rice bank. CARERE provided fertilisers, WFP provided 25,000 kilos of white rice and villagers elected a committee of five members to be in charge of the rice bank. The first year, villagers could get fertilisers, half of which was a gift and half of which they had to pay back in unmilled rice. At the same time, CARERE's agriculture sector provided training on how to use fertilisers. Villagers could also borrow up to 200 kilo of rice per family, which they had to pay back with 20 percent interest. During the following three years, the total amount of rice that the borrowers paid back decreased from 20,000 kilos to 8,000 kilos to nothing. By then, the Village Development Committee (VDC; see below) had taken over, and in 1999 they decided to turn the rice bank into a fertiliser bank. They sold the remaining 3,000 kilos of rice and bought 50 sacks of fertilisers. Villagers who had land and who could pay a membership fee of 10,000 riel could borrow up to three sacks, which they would have to pay back with 20 percent interest. In March this year, only some had paid back.

In 1995, WFP organised food-for-work to build 3,500 metres of road towards Pursat town. The following year, the road was destroyed by floods, but can still be used by oxcarts.

In 1996, the Seila programme was introduced in the commune and a Village Development Committee (VDC) was elected in Chraeng. Four of the five members of the rice bank committee were among the first seven VDC members. Since then, one member has died, one has left for Phnom Penh and there has been a new election in which one member was replaced. Currently there are four men and two women in the VDC.

The first year of the Seila Local Planning Process (LPP) resulted in a village project to build two kilometres of road towards the pagoda. The villagers contributed labour at the value of 20 percent of the total cost, but no cash. Villagers who worked in addition to the labour contribution, got paid 2,000 riel per cubic meter.

The second LPP-cycle resulted in two culverts along the same road. Again, villagers contributed only labour, but this time there was no payment for unskilled labour.

The third year, the village got $ 4,450 from the Local Development Fund (LDF) for another culvert and laterite for the road. This time, 3 of the 20 percent local contribution (about $ 150) should be paid in cash. In March 2000, still only part of that amount had been collected.

In 1996, the Provincial Department of Agriculture trained some village vets and in 1999, the CARERE Health sector supported the Department of Health to train two village health workers.

In 1997, the CARERE Education sector funded six months of literacy classes organised by the local NGO Samaki Toar with the village chief as the teacher. In 1999, the Department of Education set up another literacy class and recruited a teacher from the commune. In early 2000, the Department of Education also provided building materials for a library in the village. VDC members were in charge of building it and one of them would then go for training in the province on how to use a library.

In 1999, CARERE funded a mental health training in the village organised by the local NGO Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO). Five villagers got training in the province and were then leading several groups of villagers (women and men separately) who met ten times to discuss domestic violence and other problems, and to get advice.

On two occasions, the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) and World Food Programme (WFP) have provided emergency relief in Chraeng. After the floods in 1995 – 1996, CARERE first helped to survey the situation and after the floods in 1999, an emergency committee (consisting of all NGOs in the province, CARERE and various provincial departments) co-operated to assess the needs and discuss who could provide what. WFP and CRC then came to Chraeng and handed out a "voucher" to 70 villagers, which they could take to the commune resource centre and get a package containing 20 kilos of rice, two bottles of soy sauce, two packages of biscuits and some canned fish. Later on, 17 villagers received a tent from the international NGO Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and in a third distribution, some families got a set of tools and household items from CRC.

Kook Doung

Location, Population and Living Standards

Kook Doung is one out of eight villages in Peam Eik Commune, Eik Phnom District, 15 kilometres north of Battambang provincial town. There are 171 families and 854 people (431 women, 423 men). In 78 households there is no male head-of-household, and 29 families are returnees, most of whom came to Kook Doung in 1992.

Villagers talk about an "old" and a "new" village, or an "inside" and an "outside" of it. When the returnees (originally 74 families) arrived, they received plots along the road that leads to the village, some of them as far as two kilometres from the original village and much closer to the neighbouring one. Since then, these plots have become attractive for people who do not have enough village land in the "old" village, so today more and more non-returnees live in the area far from the original village. Within the

"old" village, better off people live in certain parts, while some poorer villagers live clearly separated from the more central area.

Most houses are made of wood, about half of them with a thatch roof and half with a zinc roof. There are at least ten big and clearly better standard houses, while about 15 families live in bamboo shelters. 19 families have a latrine, two have a generator and at least 30 have a TV (three of them colour TVs). There is one truck, more than 20 motorbikes and 100 adult bicycles, while more and more of the better off children get their own mountain bikes.

History

> *"First it was the French, then it was the Thais, then it was the French again; after the French it was the Issaraks, then it was Khmer Rouge..." (old villager)*

Kook Doung village was created by three old women at least 100 years ago. The three women – Yiey Ieuw, Yiey Aow, and Yiey Aw – loved each other very much and decided to settle together with their families. At that time, the area was full of forest, which they had to clear for rice fields. The name Kook Doung refers to *kook*, which means to dry up and *andoung*, which means well. An old hand dug well is still the only reliable water source in the village.

Old villagers remember the time under French colonial rule as a good time. People made a living from growing rice and vegetables, fishing and collecting beetles. Some also worked on the main road and the railway that were being built across the province, and got paid for the job.

Then, during a few years, the area was governed by Thais. This too, seems to have been a good and peaceful time. There were Thais staying in the village and teaching villagers in Thai. But they left without fighting and the French came back

Then came the time of conflict between the French and the *Issaraks*, which villagers recall as a time of fear. *Issarak* troops were staying at the river some kilometres from Kook Doung. They came into the village to get food and to recruit followers. The French were also recruiting soldiers among the villagers. A few villagers joined each side, and both sides came to look for the enemy's supporters among them. Most villagers did not support either side, though. Sometimes there was fighting in or near the village, so people had to run away temporarily and when they went to the rice fields, they were afraid of being caught.

During the Sihanouk regime, life in the village seems to have been happy again. People talk about it as a period when it was peaceful and easy to make a living.

From 1972 there was strong fighting in the area and people had to run away over night. Throughout the Lon Nol regime, however, villagers could continue to live in the village. There was no actual fighting in the village, but in the fields five kilometres away. Both sides also came to recruit soldiers among the villagers. Three young men left the village to join the Khmer Rouge in the Tonle Sap area. But the village was within the government-controlled area with soldiers stationed in the village. A few villagers were also government soldiers in other parts of the country, others were militiamen who helped to protect the village from the Khmer Rouge and went temporarily to nearby areas to fight them. A couple of times the Khmer Rouge burnt houses in the village.

As the Khmer Rouge were winning, the villagers who had been Lon Nol soldiers or had other positions in the village had to leave for other places where nobody knew them. Throughout the Pol Pot regime, most villagers stayed in Kook Doung, while a lot

of people from Phnom Penh and other places also came to live there. Strong people worked in the far away fields, growing rice and digging canals, and came to the village to visit only every three or four months. Old and less strong people worked in the village.

As the Vietnamese came, there was no fighting between them and the Khmer Rouge in the area, and only few villagers were forced to go with the Khmer Rouge as they fled. Throughout the 1980s and far into the 1990s, there were Khmer Rouge soldiers in the area, and villagers were afraid to use their far away fields. If they wanted to use those fields, or if they wanted to collect beetles in far away lakes, they had to pay to the Khmer Rouge.

In the early 1980s, there was frequent fighting between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese. Houses were burnt and the Khmer Rouge came to recruit villagers – a few young people joined and went to stay with them at the Thai border. So, villagers got used to having dinner early, and then leave the village to hide over night. In 1986, again, a couple of houses were burnt and Khmer Rouge soldiers still frequently came into the village to ask for rice and tobacco. Villagers got used to this too, and were always prepared with two cans of rice and a package of tobacco for them.

In the early 1980s, villagers went to the camps at the Thai border. Some stayed, but most just went to get rice to take back home. Groups of 50 – 60 people from Kook Doung and neighbouring villages went together. The trip took them three days and nights by foot. A few villagers did the trip several times.

In the village, people grew rice collectively for a short while and had to provide rice to the government to feed the government troops. There was a station in the district for Vietnamese soldiers, and they also came into the village to ask for food.

Villagers also had to go with the government soldiers, to carry their weapons, ammunition and food. The villagers did not get involved in shooting – *"we let the soldiers do the fighting"*. But some were still killed when they could not flee fast enough. From 1983, there was also recruitment of soldiers and labour force. At first, it seems to have been quite easy to recruit volunteers in Kook Doung. People had strong experiences of the Khmer Rouge and were motivated to fight them. Later on, however, people got more reluctant and recruitment more compelling. For a while, most young men were gone from the village as soldiers, and it was hard for those who were left to do the rice farming. There are frequent stories of how the soldiers' families had been promised help with ploughing and harvesting, but did not get it, and also about how people tried to hide or paid the authorities to not have to go as soldiers, sometimes after having sold both rice and cattle.

The labour force went to the Thai border to cut forest and stone and to build roads as part of the national defence. Many came back with malaria, and during labour recruitment too, people tried to run away or pay themselves free.

In 1992, 74 families who came from the border camps settled in Kook Doung and thus largely increased the residential area as well as the population. As most, there were 210 families living in the village. From then, security also gradually became better. The Khmer Rouge did not come into the village any more, though people were still afraid because there was fighting further away, and they could still not grow their far away rice fields. But at least since 1997, the Khmer Rouge have not caused any security problems.

Economic Resources and Livelihood Activities

In Kook Doung, there are about 250 hectares of rice land. There is an irrigation canal of 1,200 meters, but only a few villagers can pump water to their fields from it. There are about 100 draught-animals, all cows except two buffaloes, and roughly another 150 cows, which cannot be used as draught-animals. About 40 families have an oxcart and a few have a trailer. There are no tractors or *koh yun*, but about ten better off families rent a tractor to plough one or two hectares each. Villagers grow rice mainly by scattering the seeds. Transplanting is done on just a few hectares in the whole village. Nobody grows dry season rice.

There are two hectares of land for other crops than rice, but lack of water makes it difficult to grow vegetables. In the rainy season, some villagers do grow some cabbage, cucumber, eggplant, pumpkin, winter melon and chilli, but almost only for own consumption.

There are fruit trees such as banana, mango, coconut and milk fruit, but some trees die in the dry season and the soil is not good enough for oranges and lemons as in other parts of the province and even in the same commune.

Raising animals is also problematic, as they tend to get sick and die. There are about 60 pigs, but chickens and ducks do not provide an important income for anyone.

Fishing, on the other hand, is a very important source of livelihood and income, especially during the months after harvest. The nearest river and lakes are about five kilometres away. Between 15 and 20 villagers have a wood or palm tree boat, but there are no motorboats. During the last few years, villagers' access to some of the fishing areas has been severely restricted as businessmen have bought the fishing rights and stopped villagers from going there.

Collecting beetles in the lakes is another main activity for most villagers during the dry season. Others collect frogs. Fish, beetles and frogs are all sold to a few merchants who are specialised on their respective commodity and who come to the village every day. When there are no more beetles nearby, the merchants take groups of villagers to some distant lakes where they stay for up to two weeks and the merchants come every or every second day to get the beetles.

Mainly poor women collect *kah* (a kind of grass that grows in water) to weave mats, which during parts of the year is their main occupation. As with fish, beetles and frogs, the mats are always sold to a few specialised merchants who come to the village.

There are also some wild water crops such as lotus, morning glory and water lily that mainly poor women collect to eat and to sell. A few villagers also catch snakes and during a couple of months in the dry season, some attract and catch birds, mainly water chickens, by imitating their sound. Sometimes police come to fine the villagers who catch snakes and birds, but there are also specialised merchants who buy them.

The nearest forests are about eight kilometres away. After harvest, those who have an oxcart go there every day to collect firewood for themselves and to sell to those who cannot go, and thus make a good daily income for several months. After harvest, villagers also collect thatch in the fields to make roofs, mainly for themselves but also for selling.

Better off villagers employ others mainly for harvesting. Poorer people sometimes also work for others to dig a small dam or canal, to fill up a village plot with earth, to build a house, or to carry water from the only well in the village that provides drinking water the whole year.

A few villagers work temporarily in the provincial town as construction workers or at the market. Many more, especially among the returnees, go to the Thai border to be

agriculture or factory workers. Some pay people to help them get there and get a job, and some never come back. Others go temporarily to for example Koh Kong or Kampot to work at sawmills.

A few men drive motorcycle taxi more or less regularly. At least 13 families have a shop in the village. One of them also run a video shop, a karaoke bar and a dancing place. One man makes a living mainly from buying and selling chickens, others make some extra money from occasionally buying and selling cows. There are between five and ten civil servants who have a regular salary. Three or four widows whose husbands were soldiers have the right to a monthly pension, but a better off family in the village have bought this right from all of them.

Services in the Village and Outside

Kook Doung is five kilometres from the commune centre and eight kilometres from the district centre. In the village, there are more than 3,000 metres of good paths.

Lack of domestic water is a major problem. There is an old hand dug well and a ring well, which do not dry up. The water from the ring well is not good for drinking, though. There are also four large communal ponds, but they all dry up during three or four months every year. In the returnee area, there are two pump wells that reportedly do not dry up. One has never been used, though, and the other one is only used for washing since the water is not good for drinking. When the family ponds in the returnee area dry up, people get water from a dam in front of the pagoda, which is nearer than the hand dug well in the old village.

There is a primary school with three classrooms. Four teachers teach 166 students. Two of them teach grade two and three (33 and 38 students respectively) in the morning and the other two teach grade one and four (70 and 25 students) in the afternoon. There is another primary school (grade 1 – 4) at the pagoda about three kilometres away, where about 20 children from Kook Doung go, especially from the returnee area, which is far from the village school. At the pagoda, UNESCO also runs a kindergarten, a primary school (grade 1 – 2) and vocational training such as literacy, sewing and weaving. About five children go to the nearest secondary school, five kilometres away, and one girl goes to high school, seven kilometres away (though there is a short cut, which makes it three kilometres).

There is a health centre in the commune, five kilometres away, but most villagers very rarely go to there. The district clinic is eight kilometres away and the nearest hospital is in the provincial town, 15 kilometres away. Health workers from the commune health centre come to the village to give vaccinations, and one women is active as a village health workers. There is one active traditional midwife and two *Kru Khmer* (traditional healers) who help with complicated deliveries, snakebites etc. There is no active village vet, vets from the district and province sometimes come to the village, but villagers are reluctant to have their cattle vaccinated.

There is one rice mill in the village. Most villagers, however, use it only for small amounts of rice and take most of their rice to a larger mill two kilometres away.

There are at least 13 shops, several of them with a wide range of food items, textiles and even radios. There is one Khmer noodle and porridge place and several women walk around the village selling cooked food. Sellers also frequently come to the village, selling clothes, bread, soybean juice, ice cream and other things. It is four kilometres to the nearest market, and seven kilometres to a bigger one.

A man runs a bike/motorbike repairing shop in the village, while the nearest blacksmith is 2.5 kilometres away, and the nearest carpenter 5.5 kilometres away. A

woman has set up a tailor shop, and in the neighbouring village, less than two kilometres away, there is a hairdresser while another one comes regularly to the village.

A family run a video shop, a karaoke bar and a dancing place, which attract people from other villages. There is an old boule course and currently at least five snooker tables where people tend to play throughout the night. There is organised gambling (card, dices, bingo etc) at several houses, also attracting people from other villages.

The nearest pagoda is about three kilometres away. There used to be two Christian churches in the village, but they are not used any more.

Development Activities

The first development organisation that worked in Kook Doung was Oxfam UK/Ireland. In 1991, they started a community development programme, and as the returnees settled in 1992 – 1993, other agencies also started various emergency and development activities.

In 1992, Oxfam set up a rice bank. They provided material for a store and World Food Programme (WFP) provided 9,200 kilo of white rice. Five villagers formed a committee to be in charge of the rice bank, and 81 families borrowed rice the first year. The first two years the interest was 50 percent and everybody paid back what they should. Then, during a couple of years, people could not pay back due to floods and then the interest was decreased to the current level of 30 percent. The rice bank is still running, and altogether 107 families, including three returnee families, have borrowed a total of 44,000 kilo.

Oxfam also constructed a new ring well and provided rings for an old one. The new one has never dried up, but the water is not good for drinking since there is lime in it. The older well does not function.

As the returnees arrived, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) built a laterite road that connects Kook Doung to the main road, and CARERE 1 in cooperation with UNHCR built a three-room primary school. The following year, the school was badly damaged by a storm and provincial authorities and some high rank officials from Phnom Penh helped to rebuild it.

Most of the returnees received a plot of village land and materials for a house when they arrived. The local authorities also provided some floating rice land, and UNHCR provided seeds, tractors and engaged old villagers to train the returnees to grow floating rice. The following year, however, there was no more support, and the returnees could not continue to grow rice. They no longer have access to the land.

During the first year, the returnees got rice to eat. Then Oxfam organised food-for-work. People received rice, canned fish etc for digging family ponds and a canal in front of their houses to stop them from being flooded. They used the earth to fill up the plots so that they could grow vegetables and fruit trees.

In 1993, Oxfam helped the villagers to build a road inside the "old" village together with the Danish Cambodian Consortium (DCC), which provided skills and gravel. The same year, Oxfam also organised food-for-work to dig a communal pond, while International Woman's Development Agency (IWDA) dug another two communal ponds.

In 1994, Oxfam started a cow-raising programme, intended for people (land owners as well as landless) who have no cows and mainly women headed households. They formed another committee of five villagers to be in charge of the programme. Oxfam provided a cow each to 26 families who got some training and then raised the cow until it got a calf, and then gave the cow away to another family. The committee sold old

cows and bought new ones for the programme. In order to get young cows into the programme, in 1998 four families also received two cows each that they raised until they had two calves, and then kept two calves and gave the other two away along with the two cows. The programme is still running and the cows still circulating.

In 1995, the local NGO Phteas Teuk Doung helped a woman in the village to build a house, gave her vocational training, and then lent her money to start a business. The woman does not live in the village any longer.

The following year, as the local NGO Aphiwat Strei was formed and Oxfam handed over their activities to them, they set up a credit scheme. Yet a committee of five villagers, this time including and led by returnees, was formed. Oxfam provided $ 1,700, and 67 families (19 returnees, 48 old villagers) borrowed in the first round. The scheme is still running.

In 1997, Aphiwat Strei set up a social relief fund to use for poor people in emergency situations. Members of the credit scheme pay a fee, which is put into this fund and paid to members when they meet difficulties such as a when a relative dies, someone is seriously ill or a house burns down. The fund is still running.

In April 1997, the three separate committees (for the rice bank, the cow-raising and the credit scheme) were merged into one committee with seven elected members managing all Aphiwat Strei activities in the village. In 1998, there was a new election, this time for only five members. Currently, there are four active members.

Aphiwat Strei failed to get the Provincial Department of Rural Development (PDRD) to recognise this committee as a Village Development Committee (VDC) and in December 1997, a separate VDC with seven members was elected by the villagers as the commune was included in the Seila programme.

The first year of the Seila Local Planning Process (LPP) resulted in $ 2,500 from the Local Development Fund (LDF) to rehabilitate 1,200 meter of an old irrigation canal. Villagers did the job, partly paid, partly as labour contribution. They paid no cash local contribution. Currently, only four or five Kook Doung families can use the canal, along with a few from a neighbouring village, since there is not enough water in it.

In the second LPP-cycle, Kook Doung did not get any money from the LDF as most of the commune's allocation was used for a water pump benefiting all villages except the two most remote ones, including Kook Doung.

In 1998, the Provincial Department of Rural Development (PDRD) supported 19 families to construct family latrines, funded by CARERE. The same year, PDRD and Oxfam organised various food-for-work to dig an irrigation canal, to build two roads in the "old" village and two communal ponds in the returnee area.

In 1998, Aphiwat Strei started an agriculture programme mainly in the returnee area but also for some in the "old" village. They organised food-for-work to dig small canals and ponds for household irrigation in the returnee area, and to fill up the plots to grow vegetables and fruit trees. Then they provided water jars to those who had been active to use for making composts for vegetable growing. CARERE has also trained people to grow fruit trees and supported the Department of Agriculture to do rice field demonstrations, at least one villager has attended agriculture training by CIAP Australia (Cambodia-IRRI-Australia Project) in the provincial town, and Ausaid has provided agriculture information at the nearby pagoda.

At the same pagoda, LICADHO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights) has provided human rights training for selected villagers, and in 1999 the outreach project of Cambodian Development of Human Rights conducted training in the village for some VDC members and other villagers. In 1998, the Department of Education organised a literacy class with support from UNESCO.

Aphiwat Strei do informal health education as they visit villagers or hold meetings. In the end of 1996, the Department of Health with support from CARERE trained some village health workers, but only one remains active. A midwife has also received training.

During 1998 and 1999, four villagers got training from the local NGO Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) and then held mental health classes for a group of ten men who drink too much and a group of ten women with psychological problems.

During 1999, Aphiwat Strei bought eight hectares of rice land in the village. The following year, they allocated it to eight returnee families who have taken part in their agriculture programme. The families will have to pay 500 – 1,000 riel per day during five years, and then the land will belong to them. There will also be the option of renting the land, but then it will remain "community property".

In February 2000, the International Development Enterprises Programme in Cambodia (IDE) came to install nine treadle pump wells in the village, paid for by a Cambodian from a neighbouring commune who lives in the US. In April, they were not yet ready.

Various organisations (as well as officials and politicians) have handed out a wide range of gifts at different occasions. In 1993 and 1994, Aphiwat Strei gave out medicine from the district health centre for diarrhoea, fevers, cold etc. From 1993 to 1996, Cambodia Family Development Services (CFDS) helped widows among the returnees who received a house, monthly provisions of rice, school uniforms for their children etc. After a storm in 1995, the same organisation provided blankets, mosquito nets, sarongs, rice and tents to some of the returnees while Lutheran World Services (LWS) provided vegetable seeds.

During 1994 and 1995, five old families/couples (two returnees, three old villagers) got a house from HelpAge as well as a latrine, plates, pots, rice and money.

At the end of 1998, Aphiwat Strei provided mosquito nets to families with small children to protect from them from dengue fever. Since 1996, they have celebrated International Women's Day. The first years they invited 15 – 20 of the poorer people (women and men) to the neighbouring village, where they had a quiz with women related questions and handed out gifts to the participants. In 1999 there were no funds, but this year 200 people from three villages gathered in Kook Doung. Children who could answer questions about health, received soap, tooth paste and tooth brushes, while adults who could answer questions about women received buckets, kettles and sarongs. Aphiwat Strei also visited poor families in the village, handing out washing bowls, blankets and noodles.

Study on Villagers' Experiences and Perceptions
9 June 1999 – 8 June 2000
Terms of Reference

Background

Seila is an innovative government reform programme supported by the UNDP/Carere project. With a strong emphasis on learning from and sharing of the experience, the project aims at *"Full documentation of the Seila experiment..."* (output 5.1 in the 1996 Project Document; output 4.1 in the 1998 Amendment).

Sida is supporting Seila/Carere with non-earmarked funds and an Advisory Team (AT). Since June 1997, Sida is also funding a Junior Professional Officer (JPO) assigned for documentation and learning. During her third year, the JPO will conduct a study on villagers' experiences and perceptions relevant to Seila/Carere.

Terms of Reference

The purpose of the research is to explore how Seila/Carere (as an illustrative and influential example of a planned development intervention) fits into the lives and minds of Cambodian villagers, by putting it in the context of people's experiences and perceptions and of past and current changes.

The JPO will

- develop analysis regarding villagers' experiences and perceptions relevant to Seila/Carere (and to other planned development interventions in rural Cambodia),
- draw conclusions with regard to Seila/Carere's role in and impact on villagers' lives and minds,
- discuss what realistically can be expected from a planned development intervention at village level in the rural Cambodian context.

The JPO is responsible for designing the research. This includes defining core issues, developing methodology and building the analysis.

The JPO is encouraged to seek input on research design and methodology from academics and others with relevant experience, but must get permission from Carere before discussing any findings outside of the project.

The JPO will submit a draft report to Carere and Sida before 1 May 2000, and a final report of approximately 30 pages, including a 2 pages executive summary, by 8 June 2000. It is expected that both Carere and Sida will provide comments within two weeks after the submission of the draft.

The JPO is not required to make specific recommendations to Seila/Carere, but if research findings suggest that it would be appropriate, she may do so.

The JPO is responsible for managing the budget allocated for the research, and for recruiting and managing staff in accordance with UNDP/UNOPS regulations.

The JPO reports to the Carere Deputy Programme Manager.