

“When Apsaras Smile”

Women and Development in Cambodia 1990-2000: Cultural Barriers to Change

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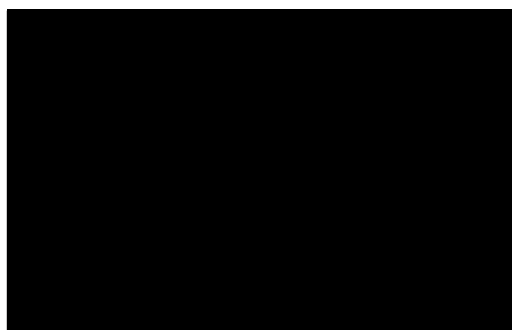
Thesis submitted for assessment for Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
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2005

Declaration

“I, Petre Ann Santry, declare that the PhD thesis entitled “*When Apsaras Smile*” *Women and Development in Cambodia 1990-2000: Cultural Barriers to Change* is no more than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of figures, photo pages, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.”

Signature



Date

23-3-05



The Smile of the Apsara

*The frozen smile of the Apsara is lit by the first dawn.
The silence in her heart replies to nature's calm.
In this primordial silence, where all is new,
 where all is pure, feeble language would create a senseless cacophony.
In this primordial silence, where all is new,
 where all is pure, I have long been silent.
Oh Nagaraja, shall we ever again see across the earth
these thousands of smiles now frozen?*

*These Bhodhisatvas, these Apsaras, these Kings
Are they dead? Will our people live again?
How can the smile of the Apsara be revived?
When will hatred cease to engender hate?
Hope, oh Lord, hope is in the smiles of our People.
The day the Apsara smiles our people will smile again.*

Son Soubert

*Former Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly
circa 1974 (translation from Khmer)*

ABSTRACT

Due to a range of historical reasons, relatively few academic studies of Cambodian society and culture in relation to women have been available to inform researchers and Western aid workers. To assist in filling this gap, this thesis analyses Western understandings of the application of Women and Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) policies in Cambodia against the backdrop of the reality of Cambodian culture and politics.

The first three chapters provide the historical and cultural context for understanding the fate of WID/GAD policies introduced in the 1990s. *Chapter One* provides a brief outline of the situation in Cambodia and the introduction of WID/GAD, following the opening up of the country to the international community at the start of the decade. *Chapter Two* reviews the growth of the internationally driven NGO community and the establishment of a Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs (SSWA) in Cambodia, and the obstacles it faced in introducing their WID/GAD policies aimed at gender-specific poverty-alleviation. *Chapter Three* reviews Cambodian history from the perspective of women, beginning with a discussion about the status accorded to women in pre-colonial times, before considering the effects of French colonisation and post-colonial independence on attitudes to education and to women. This is followed by a review of the effects of the Khmer Rouge rule and Vietnamese occupation to 1989.

Chapters Four and Five provide the personal context for the thesis, focussing on my role as a researcher and the sense I have made of Cambodian women's understanding of their own history and culture. *Chapter Four* provides a description of my acculturation into Cambodian society as an ethnographer through 'adoption' into a Cambodian family, and outlines the theoretical approaches and ethnographic procedures used in the collection and analysis of data. *Chapter Five* describes my understanding of how and why Cambodian women interpreted and adapted their culture and history in the way they did in the 1990s.

Against these historical, cultural and personal contexts, Chapters Six to Eight describe and analyse the WID/GAD development process during this same decade. *Chapter Six* focuses on the period 1990-1993, which saw the opening up of Cambodia to free trade and international assistance, and the formation of a plethora of women's NGOs and the SSWA. Although SSWA was to promote women's issues and oversee the NGOs, *Chapter Seven* describes how lack of government support and the inexperience of SSWA staff saw violence against women, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS and public denigration of women not only continue but accelerate in the period 1994-1997. The chapter concludes with the violent coup of 1997 and the surrender of the Khmer Rouge, which ended civil war and returned control of Cambodia to the Vietnamese-installed leader, Hun Sen. *Chapter Eight* covers the post-coup years 1998-2000, which saw the resumption of international aid and SSWA upgraded to a Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), headed by Western-educated Mu Sochua. However, as this chapter argues, despite Sochua's ability to work with GAD donors and NGOs and the formulation of a new policy for women, the situation for most Cambodian women remained bleak during this period. At the same time, several culturally sensitive local village-based development models were beginning to achieve sustainable and equitable results.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by drawing together the interconnecting threads of previous chapters. Its central argument is that Western concepts of gender equity remained alien to Cambodian culture in its specific historical manifestation in the 1990s. Given the combination of cultural barriers to change within both Cambodian society and the foreign aid community, the WID/GAD agenda introduced in the 1990s was destined to fail in its attempt to alleviate feminised poverty and empower Cambodian women. As the chapter describes, the agenda was largely pursued under the auspices of MOWA. However, government inability or unwillingness to prioritise the needs of its people combined with donor failure to monitor aid assistance and collaborate with local women in a culturally sensitive way inevitably meant that wealth and power increased at the top, while poverty and powerlessness increased at the bottom. But the chapter and the thesis overall conclude on a positive note, by considering the potential of a local community

development model based on trust-building and Cambodian understandings of gender equity centred on the Buddhist *wat*.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the time I started my research, I have been inspired and challenged by the commitment and dedication of Cambodian women to the welfare of their families and temple-community in the face of severe cultural, educational and financial constraints, and of being undervalued in all decision-making processes. For allowing me the chance to take up this project on Cambodian women, I am thankful to Stephen Duggan. I also wish to my son, Gavin Dufty, whose insight, encouragement and unfailing interest in my progress inspired me to persevere.

While these people provided me with the opportunity and inspiration to give Cambodian women a meaningful voice in the academic field, without a strong guide this task would not have been possible. For this reason, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Ron Adams, whose generosity, patience, and unswerving support enabled me to actualize the dream.

So many Cambodians have shared their stories and understandings with me, both male and female, that it would be difficult to acknowledge them all. But several people stand out as having significantly contributed to my understanding of their culture. Firstly and most importantly, I am deeply indebted to Lay Tek Hierk, my beloved foster-son, and his mother Neang Siv, who introduced me to their all-encompassing and generous understandings of obligation and devotion to family. I am indebted to Seng Sophalline who provided extraordinary levels of support and encouragement for my work through organizing interviews, translating and interpreting, and taking me to meet with the poor and disadvantaged on my initial field trip to Cambodia. I also wish to thank my excellent Cambodian teacher Nath In, who showed the same level of devotion in his teaching of the language and culture. Finally, I wish to thank Tala Him and Sophie Purvis for their kindness in assisting me in the translation of questionnaires and documents from Khmer into English.

ACRONYMS

ACHR	Asian Coalition for Housing Rights
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADHOC	Association pour les Droits de l'Homme et le Développement (Human Rights and Development Association)
APDC	Asia and Pacific Development Centre
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BLDP	Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party
BT	Bhutan Telecommunications Services
CARE	Care International
CCC	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia
CARERE	Cambodian Resettlement and Reintegration Programme
CATDG	Cambodian Appropriate Technology Development Group
CCIC	Canadian Council for International Co-operation
CDC	Council for the Development of Cambodia
CDRI	Cambodian Development Resource Institute
CEDAW	The Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIDSE	Cooperation International pour le Développement et la Solidarité (International Cooperation for Development)
CPP	Cambodian Peoples Party
CUSO	Canadian Organisation for Supporting Alliances for Social Justice
CWDA	Cambodia Women's Development Agency

DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
FAO	UN Food and Agricultural Organisation
FTUWKC	Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia
FUNCINPEC	Front Unit National Pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique, et Cooperatif (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia)
GAD	Gender and Development
GRIP	Sustainable Production and Consumption
GTE	Data Services
GTZ	Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation)
ICM	International Christian Mission
ICMC	International Management and Investment Consultants
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	International Development Program
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
KR	Khmer Rouge
KNP	Khmer Nation Party
KAWP	Krom Akphiwat Phum
KWVC	Khmer Women's Voice Center

LDC	Lower Developed Country
LDF	Local Development Fund
LICHADO	Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
MFN	Most favoured Nation
MOEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOP	Ministry of Planning
MOWA	(MOWVA) Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs
MP	Member of Parliament
MVU	Maharishi Vedic University
NGO	Non Government Organisation
OED	Operations Evaluation Development (World Bank)
OXFAM	Oxford Famine Relief
PACT	Private Agencies Collaborating Together
PADV	Project Against Domestic Violence
PASEC	Protection Against Sexual Exploitation of Children
PM	Prime Minister
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
QSA	Quaker Service Australia
RCG	Royal Government of Cambodia
Redd Barna	Norwegian Save the Children Fund
RUPP	Royal University of Phnom Penh
RWAC	Revolutionary Women's Association of Cambodia

SAWA	Dutch Foundation for Development
SEILA	Khmer for “Foundation Stone” (major decentralisation initiative)
SIDCA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SNC	Supreme National Council
SOC	State of Cambodia
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
SSWA	Secretary of State for Women’s Affairs
SUPF	Solidarity for Urban Development
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations AIDS
UNBRO	United Nations Border Relief Operation
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Habitat and Settlement
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRISID	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UPDF	Urban Poor Development Fund

URC	Urban Resource Centre
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VSO	Volunteer Services Overseas
WAC	Women's Association of Cambodia
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organisation
WID	Women in Development
WMC	Women's Media Center

GLOSSARY OF KHMER

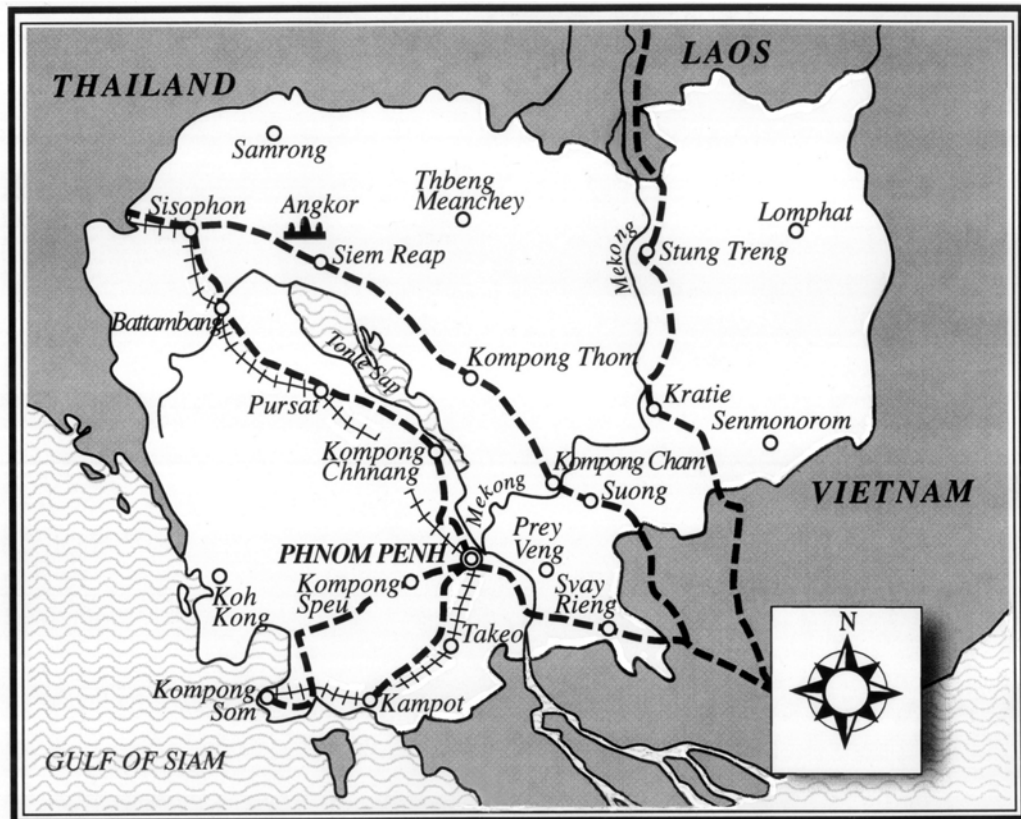
<i>achaa</i>	អាចារ្យ	religious authority for social action
<i>aanet</i>	អាណិត	pity
<i>Angka</i>	អង្គការ	the organization
<i>barang</i>	ចាតាំង	foreigner
<i>bong p'oun</i>	បងប្អូន	kinsman (relatives, brothers and sisters)
<i>bong p'oun chidonmuoy</i>	បងប្អូនជីដូនមួយ	cousins with one grandmother
<i>bong srei</i>	បងស្រី	older sister
<i>chbab</i>	ច្បាប់	Khmer rules for social harmony
<i>chbab kram</i>	ច្បាប់ក្រម	Khmer poetic book concerning rules of conduct
<i>chbab pros</i>	ច្បាប់ប្រុស	Khmer rules of conduct for men
<i>chbab rajaneti</i>	ច្បាប់រាជនីតិ	Khmer laws on social harmony by royal decree
<i>chbab srey</i>	ច្បាប់ស្រី	Khmer rules of conduct for women
<i>chol mlop</i>	ចូលម្តប់	putting into the shade (girls entering puberty stay at home to learn how to be a wife)
<i>dharma</i>	ធម្ម	right moral principles for living according to Buddhism

<i>kamma</i>	កម្ម	actions in a prior existence effecting a subsequent existence
<i>khnom</i>	ឃុំ	I (first person singular)
<i>krom sammarki</i>	ក្រុមសាមគ្គី	communist community groups
<i>kruu</i>	ឆ្កែ	traditional healer
<i>m'day daem</i>	ម្តាយដើម	spirit of mother from previous life (now a goddess)
<i>me</i>	ម៉ែ	mother
<i>mit</i>	មិត្ត	comrade
<i>Neary Rattanak</i>	នារីវរតនៈ	Women are Precious Gems
<i>p'oun</i>	ពូន	younger sibling
<i>Pchum Ben</i>	ភ្ជុំបិណ្ឌ	Khmer festival during which food is offered to Buddhist monks in the belief that the spirits of dead relatives will benefit
<i>phum</i>	ភូមិ	village
<i>salaa</i>	សាលា	meeting house at the temple
<i>sangha (preah sang)</i>	ស្រង្ឃ (ព្រះសង្ឃ)	Buddhist monastic order, group of monks
<i>sompot</i>	សំពត់	Cambodian sarong

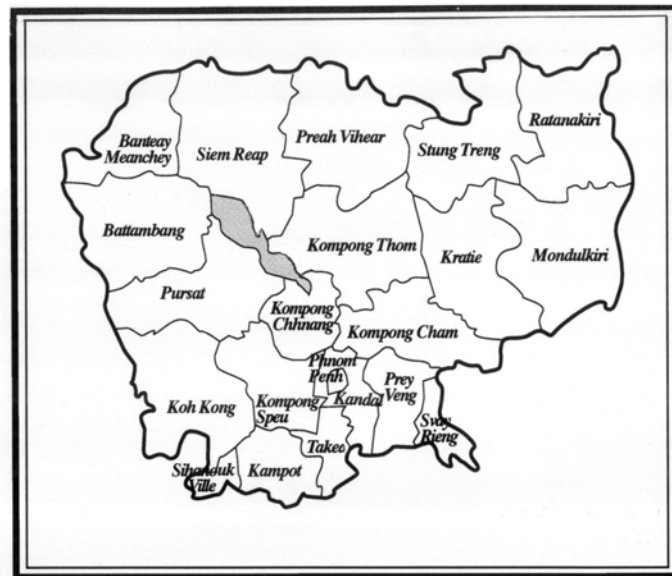
<i>sralanh</i>	ស្រលាញ់	love
<i>srok</i>	ស្រុក	district, subdivision of a province
<i>thmop</i>	ធ្មប់	sorcerer
<i>tontine</i>	កុងទីន	community banking system
<i>wat</i>	វត្ត	Buddhist temple
<i>yeay chee</i>	យាយដី	Buddhist nun
<i>yeung</i>	យើង	we (first person plural)

NB: This Glossary has been compiled with the assistance of Mr Nath In, Lecturer in Khmer Studies, School of Languages, Royal Australian Air Force, Point Cook.

Map of Cambodia



Provinces of Cambodia



PREFACE

My interest in the gender relationships of Cambodian people began when I first taught English to Cambodian refugees in the early 1980s. In 1987 I had my first opportunity to visit Cambodia and some refugee camps on the Thai border. At this time I was able to observe the suffering and insecurity of Cambodians at first hand. However, it was not until 1992 when I attended a program for upgrading primary school teachers in Phnom Penh, and visited several provinces, that I began to realise the extent of their social and political restrictions. One family meeting of a district leader in Kompong Cham revealed their most cherished hope for the 1993 democratic elections as “to gain freedom to speak”. Looking back, in 2004, I realise that this dream has yet to be realised, particularly for women. Observations, diaries and notes from these trips have subsequently been used to inform and contextualise this thesis, with the intention of ‘giving voice’ to those still denied the freedom to speak.

Knowing that the seemingly silent women of Cambodia not only made up the majority of the adult population, but were frequently the household heads responsible for nurturing children born in the post Pol Pot baby boom, in 1996 I accepted an offer to take up a PhD on the subject of Cambodian women. Subsequently, field trips and postings allowed me to gather data as I lived and worked in the country. My experiences led me to question why the majority of women were continuing to suffer, despite the amount of money and effort allocated to addressing their needs as perceived by international donors, NGOs and the Royal Cambodian Government.

Seeing that poverty levels in the countryside had not improved since the influx of foreign development experts and dollars following the opening up of the country in 1992, and hearing the tragic stories facing female rural dwellers, I began to wonder if Cambodian culture itself constituted a barrier to the empowerment of women. However, I soon realised that while the majority aspired to following the cultural practices of their ancestors and the country was attempting to operate according to the new democratic, egalitarian constitution, it was actually being controlled by a powerful communist-style dictatorship. Finding that much of the literature available in English on Cambodian culture was too narrowly focussed to understand these contradictory aspects, particularly

in relation to the 1990's international agenda focussing on gender and development (GAD), I set about working on a more holistic approach. This broad approach was subsequently affirmed through accessing the work of French anthropologist, Jacques Népote (1992), who argued that the popular monographic approach to anthropological research could not accommodate the complex nature of Cambodian society. His research confirmed my own discovery that there were many contradictions between the actions of the dominant patriarchal levels of society and widely held beliefs in the personal power of women. Thus, despite the constitution of the newly elected democratic government in Cambodia in 1993 including laws to end all forms of discrimination against women, and a strong national development agenda for women being supported by international funding bodies and numerous NGOs in the 1990s, the vast majority of women saw little change to their situation. The thesis that follows aims to give voice to these women, to these modern-day *Apsaras*, as they move into the twenty-first century. My hope – reflected in the example of the local community development model with which this thesis concludes – is that, in the words of Son Soubert's poem, the smile of the *Apsara* will be revived and the Cambodian people will live to smile again.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT IN CAMBODIA

In 1995 forty Cambodian women and 107 children were given seventeen acres of land on the remote Koh Kor Island in the Tonle Bassac River, some nineteen miles south of Phnom Penh. Most of these women were either widowed or abandoned by their violent husbands and without homes or food. A non-government organisation (NGO) named the Hagar Project (working with Cambodian street women and children since 1993) had found difficulty in integrating the women being treated at the Hagar shelter and decided to build a community exclusively of women and children. As Reuters described: “The section of the island inhabited by the women is finely manicured and dotted with wooden houses on stilts. ... Women work agricultural fields, tend livestock and feed ponds full of fish that are consumed on the island and sold to nearby villages.” These women also sew handicrafts for sale in the country and overseas. They hire men to do heavy lifting and ploughing; otherwise there are no men living on the island. The 42 year-old leader of Koh Kor told Reuters, “When our sisters here meet difficulties, the community helps them. Our people’s living conditions here are better when compared with previous conditions because the community encourages the women to earn money to feed themselves.” According to the project director, “These mothers are very happy to govern themselves. They actually don’t want to bring men on island.” He summed up: “The most striking characteristic we can see is that they’ve regained a desire to live ... a sense of the future, a hope, especially for their children. That’s very, very important.” (Gaffar Peang-Meth, 2000).

At the same time this unique project building on the capabilities of women was being established, the Cambodia I was experiencing stood in sharp contrast, with scant opportunities for women. Despite an official government policy of ‘gender equality’ in a country where the majority of the adult population was women, the 1997 Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) program I managed in Phnom Penh was taking enrolments that were 90 percent male. AusAID’s agreement to accept participants nominated by the government had left them with no choice other than to accept enrolments that overwhelmingly favoured males. The Cambodian cultural bias towards males holding positions of power meant that male government officials were

preferred choices to work in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and to study post-graduate courses in Australia. This ensured higher levels of education for the younger males expected to hold future positions of power and continuing male dominance in the government. Women had little hope of accessing future leadership positions. This lack of appreciation of women's capabilities contrasts sharply with the 'women's island' experience and highlights the need to look more deeply into the history of Cambodian culture to understand why women's potential contribution to the development of their country was being devalued.

1.1 Overview of thesis

This thesis is an attempt to meet some of this need. Its starting point is the opening up of a shattered and impoverished Cambodia to international aid and development in the early 1990s, promising a better future for the majority women and children. However, despite a heavily supported national development agenda promoting the alleviation of poverty and empowerment of women, and despite a few progressive examples in and near the urban centres, the Western-driven development process failed to address the needs of women, and the situation for the majority actually worsened in the 1990s. To understand the ways in which cultural and political aspects might account for the failure to alleviate widespread poverty and empower women in the Cambodian development process, it is important to understand the context of Cambodia's history. For this reason the thesis is chronologically arranged, beginning with an overview of the cultural developments that have taken place in over 1000 years of Cambodian history. Following this, I have analysed the ways in which these cultural changes have impacted on the lives of Cambodian women in the 1990s. These historically-based understandings of the culture provide the background and context for Cambodian women's experiences of Western-initiated gender and development (GAD) policies and practices designed to empower Cambodian women, introduced in the same period. The final chapter discusses the failure of the national government, supported by international funding agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs), to implement GAD policies and practices designed to alleviate 'feminised poverty' and women's disempowerment in the 1990s. Fundamentally, the thesis questions the appropriateness of applying Western gender models in the Cambodian context. In particular it considers the ways that cultural

understandings of power, patronage, and women's place in society have acted as barriers to the process of the development agenda for women in Cambodia.

1.2 Introducing gender awareness

At the beginning of the 1990s, adult women accounted for 64 percent of the population and headed 35 percent of households in Cambodia. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 1990) described the situation for the majority of women and children as desperate. In 1992 an advocacy group of women, including leaders from the 1980's Women's Association of Cambodia and returnees who had trained overseas or worked in positions of leadership in the refugee camps, was earmarked to undertake skills training from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) while a new, egalitarian constitution was being drafted. Group reports presented on the situation of women covered issues of family, health, education, the economy in rural areas, the economy and professional/state employees, the private sector, the community and the society, and women in difficult circumstances. These were to be used as the basis for forward planning of gender-balanced development projects.

With the advent of a democratically elected government and egalitarian constitution in 1993, an unprecedented 90 percent of eligible people turned out to vote. The international community was free to help rebuild Cambodia's shattered society and infrastructure, and assist in the process of empowering women. A widely publicised 'Women's Summit' was held in Phnom Penh on International Women's Day, and newspapers included features bearing such titles as "Women's Rights Movement Starts" and "Women Want Bigger Say in Post-War Society". Banners prepared by the Ministry of Culture displayed Khmer proverbs including "Strong as an ant, powerful as a spirit, dauntless as a woman", and "One father is worth 1,000 friends, one mother is worth 1,000 fathers". Over 100 women of diverse backgrounds from several provinces were brought together to discuss and prioritise issues of concern (Redd Barna, 1993).

Following the withdrawal of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) after the elections, the Cambodian Development Resource Institute and the Secretariat for Women's Affairs (1993) conducted workshops to promote awareness of

gender and development (GAD) issues, and a wide range of developmental needs, including village cooperation, literacy training, family health and birth spacing. However, while the international community was focussing on the stated main issues of *reconstruction and rehabilitation* (*Phnom Penh Post*, 1993), initial euphoria following the elections was marred by unease in the new coalition government comprised of two opposing parties, the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) royalist party, and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), predecessor of the 1980's Communist party. They were seen as becoming increasingly corrupt as they jockeyed for power, touting for international aid and organising structural readjustment to be eligible to join ASEAN.

Against this background, funding agencies and NGOs released reports outlining the development needs of women and children. In addition, a Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs (SSWA) was set up in consultation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1993, headed by a man, Secretary of State Keat Sokhun. In 1995, a dynamic, well-qualified returnee, Mrs Mu Sochua was appointed special advisor on women's affairs to the first prime minister (FUNCINPEC). After much negotiation and planning, in early 1997 SSWA joined with Veteran's Affairs to become a full government Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs (MOWVA, more commonly referred to as MOWA), remaining under the weak leadership of Keat Sokhun who remained strongly influenced by his conservative CPP undersecretary, Im Run. MOWA was to assist in setting up and coordinating women's projects, and negotiating conditions with leaders at local and district levels. MOWA was also to lobby for the advancement of laws protecting women's rights, and laws against the exploitation of women. These laws were to be based on provisions in the new constitution¹ while incorporating a more gender sensitive 'women's code' (SSWA, 1995a:72). SSWA asserted that continuing, armed conflict in Cambodia had resulted in:

- feminisation of poverty leading to urban migration, slavery and destitution
- shortage of farmland for rural women
- inability of a large number of women returnees to earn a living, thereby becoming targets of economic and sexual violation

¹ The constitution was in accordance with the 'Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women', adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 (<http://www.un.org>).

repeated displacement of many women and children

disability in families adding to the burden of women. (SSWA, 1995a:72)

Accordingly, the purpose of MOWA would be to work to improve the living conditions of women, ensure their full participation in all levels of planning and development, and safeguard women's rights and interests at all levels of government and society. MOWA's stated objectives were to:

enhance women's skills through equitable training and education

ensure full recognition and participation of women in decision making at all levels of national planning, reconstruction and development

create a network of women throughout the country with representatives to

safeguard their rights at all levels of government and society. (SSWA,1995a:74)

MOWA's purpose was to be achieved by establishing a focal point in every ministry and development institution to ensure the full representation and participation of women. This was to be achieved by providing policy and program guidelines to raise the living conditions of women, particularly women in the 90 percent rural majority. Objectives were also to be achieved by working closely with women in provincial development centres charged with the task of identifying needy families. MOWA was to be supported by UNICEF and several NGO programs concerned with family food production, credit, income generation, clean water, literacy and child-care. MOWA aimed to carry out research in order to understand the position of the women it intended to lobby for through the media. MOWA was to assist the Ministry of Health (MOH) by providing health education, and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) to ensure that girls attended and remained at school through providing scholarships to female teachers and conducting public awareness campaigns. MOWA's development policy aimed to:

ensure that the gender sensitive laws and laws concerning women's rights outlined in the women's code were adopted by parliament, and a legal framework for implementation was in place

inform women as to legal rights and sensitise the police force, the judiciary and those concerned with women victims of violence

undertake advocacy to gain full recognition of women's contribution in national reconstruction

provide women with equal access to facilities to promote equal opportunities programs. (SSWA, 1995a:75)

In 1998, Mrs Mu Sochua, was elected to head the newly set up MOWA, representing the less powerful, but leading party in the coalition, FUNCINPEC. Mu Sochua was strong, outspoken and educated, with a Master of Social Welfare from the United States of America. Her appointment gave new heart to the GAD-NGO community still reeling from a brutal coup in 1997. However, although Mu Sochua had won the hearts of women she had worked with in refugee camps for almost six years and was the most suitable candidate, many Cambodians treated her with suspicion, seeing her as an outsider who did not understand the needs of the poor within the country. She remained the Minister of Women's Affairs into the new millennium. However, although the mandate of MOWA was to assist in mainstreaming gender-sensitive policies within all government ministries, it was consistently sidelined. The other male-dominated ministries perceived 'women's affairs' as being the exclusive domain of MOWA, claiming that their ministries were already undertaking enough 'gender mainstreaming'. Added to this, large amounts of funding intended for MOWA and MOEYS were diverted into supporting the respective armies of the competing sides in the coalition government. Under Mu Sochua, MOWA continued to work with NGOs to promote women's rights and better support for women and, realising the need to address the pervading cultural bias against the respect and empowerment of women, in 1999 introduced a new policy promoting women entitled *Neary Rattanak* "Women are Precious Gems".²

Throughout the 1990s, international funding bodies in conjunction with MOWA persisted in assisting the numerous local and international NGOs to conduct the wide range of programs aimed at empowering women and improving their status through advocacy and human rights training, skills training, micro-credit and poverty alleviation. At the same time MOEYS was committed to improving education and encouraging girls to remain at school. However, even though MOWA, MOEYS and NGOs committed to

² This title was intended to replace the widely spread slogan 'Women are cloth and men are diamonds', meaning that women's moral stains cannot be removed whereas men are unable to be stained.

GAD had endeavoured to carry out their mandate to assist women and promote gender equity at all levels, by 1998 the situation had worsened. Mu Sochua complained that even though there were marginally more women in power than in 1994, the people continued to live in fear because of the followers of “a single man [PM Hun Sen] violating our human rights”. She said that because the gap between men and women was so wide MOWA faced an uphill battle to push for women’s rights (interview, 1999). Consequently, by the end of the decade, little of MOWA’s aims had been achieved, particularly in the rural sector.

1.3 Barriers to development

As this thesis argues, in addressing the failure to alleviate widespread poverty and lack of women’s rights in Cambodia, there have been two fundamental problems. The first problem has been the mismatch of Cambodian cultural understandings and Western concepts of women’s empowerment. The second, related problem has been the serious tardiness of the Cambodian government in fulfilling its obligations to the international funding agencies whose purpose was to assist in post-war rehabilitation and poverty alleviation and the empowerment of women.

In relation to the first problem, Cambodians see the place of women as keeper of household finances and central to the family and the home. Added to this, the majority of women are illiterate, and apart from facing a constant battle for survival, these women place enormous importance on maintaining impeccable personal behaviour that includes being quiet, submissive and accepting, and maintaining the family reputation at all times. The aims of development practitioners have been to mainstream women through ‘top down’ policies and programs, and empower women at the grass roots ‘bottom up’ level, articulating women’s needs and bringing pressure on the state to act on their behalf. However, practitioners failed to achieve their outcomes because many Cambodians perceived them as ‘patrons’ and reciprocated accordingly as dutiful ‘clients’ in accordance with traditional understandings. At the same time, the practitioners complained that the Cambodians were demonstrating a ‘handout’ mentality and refusing to ‘think for themselves’.

This cultural mismatch frequently resulted in unfortunate confrontations at the local level. Chandorovann Dy, Khmer interpreter for the International Red Cross in Cambodia in 1993, commented on the way Western aid workers frequently lost their patience with local women, calling them ‘stupid’ (interview, 1994). According to Dy, this occurred because Cambodian women were deeply concerned with Buddhist considerations of respect and maintaining ‘cosmic balance’ in their relationships with the aid workers. On the other hand aid workers were only interested in getting on with the job of treating the women and teaching them Western health and hygiene practices.

The second problem, the tardiness of the government to fulfil its agreements with international funding agencies, is to be explained in part by endemic patterns of patronage, nepotism, corruption, overloaded armies and political infighting. Although Cambodian law has been exemplary in its stated dedication to equality for its citizens, administration of that law has been one of the biggest problems facing the country throughout the 1990s. In their attempts to enrich themselves through accessing foreign aid and to remain in power at all costs, the ruling elite demonstrated a disregard for the international development agenda, and a total disinterest in attending to the needs of the poor, particularly women.

The lack of fit between Cambodian understandings of culture and Western understandings about the empowerment of women through WID and GAD policies is a key aspect largely missing in the literature informing policy. To begin to redress this problem, and to begin to understand the complexity of these cultural differences and the way they have affected the process of development, this thesis employs an ethnographic approach to the collection and interpretation of data. In broad terms, it adopts the ‘thick description’ approach of Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1993:89) who describes ‘culture’ as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life”. In this thesis, Geertz’s definition is used to argue that historically-inherited Cambodian cultural understandings and practices at all levels of society have been at odds with Western notions of mainstreaming gender equity and women’s rights, making the stated aims of MOWA and women’s NGOs difficult to fulfil. Although the 1990s promised democracy,

development and freedom of speech, increasing authoritarianism in the powerful, male-dominated government backed by a corrupt judiciary and police force led to worsening conditions for women in the majority poor. The same cultural aspects account for the paucity of government funding allocated to MOWA and MOEYS, the lack of government support to women's NGOs, and the inability of the women themselves to bring about change. One of the issues of key concern to funding agencies and the government, which this thesis addresses, is the extent to which the national development agenda promoting GAD in Cambodia has addressed women's socio-economic needs in a culturally sensitive way.

1.4 Significance of the project

This issue is not, of course, limited to Cambodia. Enloe (1989:14-16) reminds us that "women are at the bottom of most international hierarchies: women are routinely paid less than even the lowest-paid men in multi-national companies; women are two thirds of all refugees". She says that planning for substantial development in all poorer countries requires knowledge of the societal hierarchies and gender divisions of labour. But as Ramusak (1999:79) notes, before the 1990s there was very little research on women and gender issues in Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, due to an unbalanced population where women have carried a disproportionate share of the struggle for survival following more than twenty years of war, the need for such knowledge has been particularly acute. In the 1990s, Cambodian women's labour accounted for over 50 percent of all food produced, and they shouldered a totally disproportionate and unrecognised share of the burden of their country's survival. As in other developing countries, Cambodian women were more likely to engage in aspects of community life affecting the basic needs of their families, while men participated at regional and national political levels.

As outlined in the following chapters, a number of internationally funded projects in Cambodia have attempted to build on equitable community involvement of women. However, as this thesis argues, this strategy has typically been undermined by the inapplicability of Western feminist notions of women's empowerment and gender equity in the context of Cambodian cultural understandings of family, hierarchy and cosmic

order. Compounding the mismatch has been the assumption of many NGOs that they know best what Khmer women need, and then, for cultural reasons, find that they have unwittingly assumed positions of patronage and failed to connect with the people they had intended to empower. This helps to explain the failure of macro and micro-development initiatives focussing on the rights of women. In providing a deeper understanding of Khmer culture and the place and situation of women, this thesis aims to provide relevant information for government and non-governmental organisations in forward-planning for programs designed to increase the participation of women at all levels of planning and policy-making in Cambodia. In the light of criticisms of the World Bank and its failure to end discrimination against women in third world countries (Hutcheon, 1995:1), it also aims to question at a global level the applicability of Western notions of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) in a non-Western context.

1.5 WID and GAD in Cambodia

As a number of commentators have pointed out, until the 1990s the main approach to project policy-making and implementation of the upgrading of women in developing countries was WID, which focussed on projects for women. Even though results of this approach were proving to be ineffective, many development agencies maintained their WID focus in projects due to inflexibility in their stated policy directives, thereby limiting effective social change in the countries in which they worked (Rathgeber, 1995:206; Razavi & Miller, 1994; Staudt, 1994).³ In her chapter 'Gender and Development in Action', Rathgeber pointed out that a WID view assumes a 'women's voice' largely drawn from the experience of 'white middle class' women, and is largely inappropriate in the socio-cultural context of other countries. Whereas WID places emphasis on providing women with opportunities to participate in male-dominated social and economic structures through women's projects, a more 'gender fair' GAD approach sees the women themselves as the agents for change at a bottom-up level, leading to a fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions and a rethinking of

³ Boserup's ground-breaking studies of women in Africa in 1970 clearly showed that changes brought about by utilising modern Western notions in the colonial and post-colonial periods caused women's essential contribution to agricultural production to become invisible, eventuating in a male monopoly of

hierarchical gender relations within the society. Rathgeber (p.207) claims that this should ultimately lead to the loss of power of entrenched male elites at the top-down level, thus affecting both women and men. She explains that the more equitable GAD approach focuses on the *condition* of women, including their material state in terms of education, access to credit, technology, health status and legal status. And to alleviate the concrete disadvantages of women, a GAD perspective also focuses on the *position* of women, including the inherent social relations of gender and complex relations of power between men and women.

In her paper for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISID) and UNDP workshop 'Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives', outlining the difficulties of integrating GAD policies aimed at mainstreaming gender issues in developing countries including Cambodia, Staudt (1994:9) pointed out that obstacles to transformative mainstreaming of women through using a GAD approach continued to prevail. She warned that, unlike experiences encountered in implementing other new policy issues, the de-institutionalising of male dominance in institutional operations would remain an onerous challenge, and the nature of bureaucratic institutions further complicated this. At the same time Razavi & Miller (1994:27) highlighted the reality that women themselves frequently presented a hindrance to gender mainstreaming, preferring to sideline the issue and prioritise family and kinship gender relations in the trade-off between security and autonomy.

Gender workshops and NGO programs working with Cambodian women, to assist in designing strategies for the implementation of GAD policies aimed at mainstreaming women in leadership and development projects, have been funded by donor agencies and conducted under the auspices of the Cambodian government since the opening up of Cambodia in the early 1990s. However, despite their efforts and although the newly-implemented laws generously provided for gender fairness, this thesis suggests that Western concepts of 'gender equity' remained at odds with Cambodian understandings of the designated roles of males and females. Cambodians saw Western ideals of gender as advocated by Western women and Western-trained Cambodian women as a threat to

technology and agricultural economy. She claims that prior to the introduction of Western policies, these women had enjoyed relative equality to men in agricultural production.

Cambodian cultural understandings of women's supportive role. Added to this, Cambodian men in positions of power not only saw GAD as a threat to their culture but a threat to their own traditional power base. In this context of conflicting interests, this thesis argues that cross-cultural misunderstandings between Western-determined WID/GAD models and the prevailing socio-cultural setting in Cambodia rendered gender mainstreaming largely ineffective in the 1990s.

CHAPTER TWO

WHOSE AGENDA? THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THE 1990s

2.0 Introduction

UNIFEM (2003:20) figures for 1999-2000 reveal Cambodia as having the lowest levels of achievement in gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia. The human poverty index in the 1990s was second only to Bangladesh (Ministry of Planning, 2000:5). These figures are certainly disappointing considering the amount of foreign aid (an estimated two billion US\$, half of the national budget) that poured into the country in the 1990s. This began with the 1991 Paris Peace Accords bringing an end to the stalemate caused by international isolation.¹ This was followed by the arrival of UNTAC, enabling Cambodia to open up and move towards democratic elections and a free market economy. During this period, barriers to development in Cambodia occurred at all levels. These included poverty, trauma, lack of skills and education, ill health, a hierarchical and corrupt government, and - most importantly in terms of this thesis - a lack of understanding of the people and their culture by aid providers and practitioners at all levels. As the review of literature covered in this chapter shows, agendas based on Western understandings of development have largely failed to achieve sustainable project outcomes. This has been due to fundamental misunderstandings of Cambodian socio-cultural frameworks and practices, resulting in an inability to work with the people and meet their needs at grass-root levels.

In order to understand the needs of Cambodian women more clearly, in 1990-1991 UNIFEM (Hedman, 1991) investigated the statistical records held in Cambodian government departments. Finding these to be uncoordinated and patchy, Hedman established the need to undertake fresh gender specific statistics to enable forward planning for WID/GAD policies and programs. Following this, a report presented to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (Hartke, 1992) stressed the need for women to be represented within UNTAC, so that gender aware policies could be

¹ Eva Mysliwiec (1988) provides an excellent account of the suffering of Cambodians under isolation from the West in *Punishing the Poor: The International Isolation of Kampuchea*. The book grew out of the shared experience and concerns of NGOs working with Khmer people both in Kampuchea and on the Thai-Kampuchean border. It was commissioned by 32 participating organisations and published by Oxfam.

formed as a basis for the development of specialized programs. At the same time, numerous reports were being generated by UNICEF, QSA, Redd Barna, UNHCR, Oxfam, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, CARE, WFP, APDC and others (explanations of acronyms, p. XVI). These focussed on the situation facing returnees, and repatriation-reintegration needs of female heads of households and the situation of women and children in accordance with their unanimous recommendations to upgrade the position of women. UNIFEM, in agreement with UNTAC, conducted numerous gender-awareness and leadership training workshops aimed at empowering women interested and involved in government and leadership positions prior to the 1993 elections. However, the number of women represented in the Cambodian democratic parliament in fact fell from the 18 percent under the previous Heng Samrin Vietnamese communist occupation to a mere four percent (SSWA, 1995c:17). Despite enormous progress being made in the areas of establishing laws to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in accordance with the 1985 UN Declaration on Violence Against Women, and the formation of Cambodia's first Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1996 aimed at promoting the affairs and rights of women, as well as overseeing the formation of numerous NGO projects to assist in the empowerment of women, the pattern emerging in the 1990s showed little improvement. According to any of the accepted international benchmarks, very little was achieved in the empowerment of women in Cambodia in this period. In order to understand the blockages to successful implementation of gender and development in Cambodia, this chapter looks at the policies and practices of mainstream NGOs and aid providers, and the range of obstacles and cultural mismatches they failed to address.

2.1 Cambodian NGOs and Development

Cambodian NGOs have been active in Cambodia since 1991 and, supported by international donors, increased from twelve in 1992 to between 500 and 700 by the year 2000. There have also been around 150 international NGOs, mostly situated in urban centres. Added to this, an enormous number of surveys, studies and reports were generated throughout the 1990s. These outlined the situation facing women and described the projects aimed at empowering women. However, due to difficulties of access in many

parts of Cambodia, these were undertaken in or near urban centres, mainly Phnom Penh. During this period most NGOs adopted WID/GAD policies in line with donor recommendations, and it is widely acknowledged that many projects had the potential to contribute to the rebuilding of Cambodia and the development of civil society (Meas Nee and O'Leary, 2001:1). Organisations focusing on women attempted to redefine and expand the limited social, cultural and economic roles available to them through programs such as micro-credit, health and hygiene, literacy and vocational training, as well as assisting victims of HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, trafficking and forced prostitution. However, they faced many social and cultural obstacles in gaining public legitimacy and broader participation of the people.²

At the time UNTAC was preparing to withdraw from Cambodia, Mysliwiek (1993) warned that in a country as small as Cambodia the large scale of funding available for the support of local initiatives and organisations was of concern, especially if the availability of funding were to become the motivating factor for starting a local NGO. Later, Hushagen (1995) noted that potential funding and real salaries had very much become a motivating factor for starting such organisations in Cambodia. Through conducting on-site visits, interviews and questionnaires in 23 women's NGOs, she found a disturbing lack of understanding of their purpose, with the phrase most commonly used being simply 'to help women'. This was reflected in the often hastily written mission statements (probably assisted by uninformed expatriates) that had not been updated since registration in 1992. Most informants spoke of the vision for their organization in terms of "more money for the organization and the physical signs that go with it". Only a few spoke of aiming to have an enduring impact on their clients. Clearly, Cambodian perceptions of the purposes of Western funded NGOs were not understood in the same way the funding agencies imagined.

In her 1995 Oxfam review, Hushagen found 'disturbing results'. Based on a generic profile of an effective women's organisation, she concluded that tens of thousands of dollars of public money had been contributed to people within NGOs who had little to no

² Kumar (2000:16-19), in a working paper designed to attract funding from USAID, discussed the impact of women's organisations in Cambodia, outlining the ways international funding contributed to the empowerment of vulnerable women. They claimed that although only a small fraction of Cambodian

general experience in the programs they were trying to manage. “Too often the money came without training or support. These people are working under the guise of an NGO in spite of the fact that they have no members, no boards and it appears accountability to no one but the donor who seems to be quite anxious to spend money in Cambodia. It is not unusual to find organizational leaders that cannot describe in any detail what they do, how they do it, for whom they do it and how much it costs. It is not a pretty picture.” A 1995 report by Ahlers and Vlaar agrees with Hushagen’s findings. They found that despite donor agencies “rewarding quantifiable action and conceptual accountability”, the WID and GAD policy statements of most NGOs had not been operationalised. Ahlers and Vlaar did not find a single engendered project activity during their fieldwork, and noted a wide gap between theory and practice. These kinds of problems persisted in many women’s NGOs and GAD programs throughout the 1990s.

As late as 1999, Kumar (2000:17) found that women’s organisations operating under the internationally funded GAD program administered by MOWA had little institutional capacity for collecting the data needed for monitoring and evaluating their activities. Women’s organisations saw funding donors as constantly changing their objectives, leaving their organisations devastated. Kumar lists the major sources of tension facing cooperation between Cambodian women’s organisations and the international community as: declines in funding; poor accountability by the women’s organisations and the women’s organisations’ complaints of the short-term vision of donors; poor management style of women’s organisations due to lack of division of labour or capacity for strategic planning; and barriers of language and culture including resentment of vast disparities in educational background and salaries of those employed by the international community.

Many of the reports and papers generated by members of the international community were skewed to their own agenda in order to prove their need for funding, rather than digging deeper in order to understand the priorities of the women they served. The continuing determination of some funding agencies to continue following their own generic policies regardless of the specific needs of Cambodian women was apparent. For

women were able to access assistance, the real contribution lay in generating public awareness of women’s problems.

example, Reichenbach (2001) in a project appraisal report on the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) contribution to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for strengthening legal support for gender mainstreaming in Cambodia, proposed an all too simplistic analysis of why women had failed to gain equal rights in Cambodia in the 1990s. She believed that the major reason women did not enjoy equal rights was the ineffective legal system which was in need of reform and the little use made of the equal rights for women and girls as guaranteed in the constitution and laws. Although this comment was true, she hardly touched on the wider socio-cultural issues hindering a more just Cambodian society, and the need for agencies to listen to the people themselves.

Thun Saray, leader of a local NGO community (cited in Curtis 1998:140) explained the primary need to assist Cambodians in overcoming widespread mutual distrust (stemming from the Khmer Rouge era) and learning to build up trust between NGOs and the different sectors. He maintained that gaining experience and understanding is a long-term process, and some foreigners have difficulty in comprehending the complexity of the situation. They attempt to force cooperation when the Cambodians are politely slow in responding, rather than working together with them to clarify the situation and help bring about satisfactory outcomes. Other commentators such as Hugh Watkin (1998) pointed out that the international community had ‘largely unrealistic expectations’ of the democratisation process in this ‘feudal’ society where patronage defines the political culture. He maintained that expectations need to be realistic to the situation, and donors need to have longer term perspectives in their policies, allowing more time for working with the people to bring about democracy and equity at all levels.

2.2 Development Policies

In a UNRISID/UNDP workshop, Razavi and Miller (1994:4) trace the growth of Women in Development (WID) from its Washington beginnings in the early 1970s when a group of female development professionals challenged the prevailing ‘trickle down’ theories of development.³ They argued that modernization was impacting differently on

³ The United Nations claim to be the first to include ‘equal rights of men and women’ into their Charter in October, 1945. They also claim to be the first to integrate women into the development process by observing ‘International Women’s Year’ in 1975 (<http://www.un.org/Conferences/Women>).

men and women. Influenced by Danish economist Boserup (1990) who had undertaken research in Sub-Saharan Africa, development professionals realised that colonialist approaches focussing on women's roles as wives and mothers had facilitated men's monopoly over new technologies and undermined women's traditional roles in agriculture. As a result, WID gave primacy to women's productive roles and integration into the economy in developing countries through the introduction of income-generating projects. WID saw the need to increase women's economic independence believing that this would give them more access to prestige and key decision-making positions. However, Razavi and Miller (1994:4) pointed out that these efforts saw no major progress being made towards decreasing women's subordination.

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (1991:18,19) claimed that a key element in the failure to empower women was failure to understand the exercise of power. Most change strategies failed to take into account cultural differences in women's experience of subordination. Problems of power and subordination are complex and differ between class, race, sex orientation and age. As women and men are socialised differently, healthy societies appreciate and value the positive aspects of these differences using them for their betterment. Therefore, realising that WID had failed to understand women's subordination as the key problem, policy-makers in the mid-1980s shifted to Gender and Development (GAD) approaches. These aimed to examine all development initiatives to provide direction for future action through using 'social construction of gender' as their cornerstone (Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 1991). In her discussion on the implementation of GAD in our 'profoundly gendered' world, Pitman (1996:212-13) outlines the way gender relations are constructed as power relations through dichotomies within which both women and the feminine are inferiorised. She acknowledges the overwhelming difficulties involved in more recent attempts to empower women through mainstreaming gender as a way to implement women's rights in developing countries. However, Parpart (1995:240) insists that emancipatory development will only occur when development theorists and practitioners adopt a more inclusive approach to knowledge/expertise, a readiness and ability to 'hear' different voices/experiences, and the humility to recognise that established discourses and practices of development have often done more harm than good.

Apart from enormous difficulties in the implementation of women's rights in an international system that depends on states - often the worst offenders - to act, the world of international relations itself is largely a world without women. For example, Rathgeber (1995:210) points out that until the mid 1990s the World Bank did not have a gender policy but only a major focus on maternal health for women. The Bank rationalized that the associated decline in birth rates was essential to increasing women's economic efficiency and productivity, and distanced itself from such notions as 'equity' as being too value-laden to incorporate into their policies. Following an overhaul of their WID policies in 1993, a 1997 review of the Bank's gender policies, strategies, regional level social participation, gender action plans and more, reported continuing tardiness in addressing gender issues. In 1999 Moser reported that "World Bank policy documents on gender still lacked a common conceptual rationale, language, and underlying policy approach". Both reports advocated the need for clarity of aim, focussing on the mainstreaming of Gender and Development in the Bank to bring about greater levels of equity in development programs, in line with the majority of bilateral and multilateral development organisations.⁴ Both reports recommended that to achieve emancipation of women from subordination and achieve equality, equity and empowerment for women, the Bank needed to adopt the 1993 Moser model (see Figure 1) and mainstream gender into existing institutions, rather than establishing separate, gender-specific organisational structures. This was the kind of model adopted by the Cambodian Government following the formation of MOWA in 1996.

Certainly, the need for gender-sensitive policies has been a difficult issue on which to convince male-dominated organisations such as the World Bank, much less the entrenched Cambodian Government and its widely dependant clientele. Thus, within the context of this study, the Moser model begs the following questions. Firstly, can this fit-all model be used to implement a gender balance within the World Bank itself - and other international and national organisations including, in particular, the Cambodian government? And more important to the concerns of this thesis, is this model useful for dealing with problems women face at the grass roots village level in the cultural context

⁴ As late as 2001 Jan Piercy, one of only two Executive Directors of the World Bank (in 23 EDs representing 183 countries) stressed that "Until and unless women are 'at the table' in public life and elected leadership, gender concerns will not be adequately addressed" (OED Regional Gender Workshop, July 8, 2001).

of Cambodia? In this thesis, it is my contention that this kind of model where surveys and needs assessments are undertaken prior to the planning and implementation of gender processes has often not been sufficiently in tune with the needs identified when developers work *together* with the people themselves in efforts to address the issues of empowering women who are trapped in a cycle of poverty and oppression at grassroots level. Finding effective models for gender-sensitive program implementation suited to all levels of development in Cambodia has been problematic for aid workers needing to please the Western agencies funding their programs.

Defining a rationale and framework for GAD: “The Moser Methodology” of gender planning

The goal of gender planning is the emancipation of women from their subordination, and their achievement of equality, equity, and empowerment.

The knowledge base explored in recent feminist WID/GAD development debates provides the conceptual rationale for several key analytical principles, relating to gender roles and practical and strategic gender needs, as well as to control over resources and decision making in the household, civil society, and the state (that is, the recognition that because men and women have different positions in the household and different degrees of access to and control over resources, they not only play different and changing roles in society, but they also have different needs).

These principles translate into tools and techniques for a gender-planning process.

These tools demonstrate how the five different WID/GAD policy approaches (welfare, antipoverty, equity, efficiency, and empowerment) recognize different roles, meet different needs, and rely on varying participatory planning processes.

Gender planning is operationalised through a diversity of procedures at the policy, program, and project levels.

Equally, gender planning is mainstreamed into existing institutions, rather than establishing separate, gender-specific organizational structures.

Figure 1. The Moser Methodology (Moser, 1993).

The 1985 Canadian Organisation for Supporting Alliances for Social Justice (CUSO) policy example recommended in Lott and Sarann's widely available booklet 'Gender and Development' (1995) is worth examining, as it was used as the basis for numerous gender and development policy statements generated to gain registration for NGO status within Cambodia in the 1990s (see Appendix 1). Their policy example begins with a generic mission-statement about women in all societies doing most of the work, and men having greater access to power, wealth and time. It then outlines the ways in which males dominate two main areas of human life: recognition of men's work as productive and valued; and women's work in reproduction and caring for family and home as rarely valued or recognized. This is followed by a recognition of the source of women's subordination being due to the complex social patterns of gender, class, race, ethnicity and religion interlocking to form patriarchal controls, and the need to respond to this problem by ensuring 'economic and social advancement of the poor and powerless'.

The policy statement is that a gender perspective must be incorporated into the work done within all groups.

The policy outline envisions a sustainable and healthy society environmentally, culturally, economically and politically, with no group dominating or controlling another.

The policy objectives are that women should become active agents in ending their own subordination through supporting women's empowerment and transforming gender relations to end male domination and female subordination in households. This should be done through communities and involvement with increasingly interdependent global systems.

The policy aims are to use participatory, consultative and democratic processes that focus on gender and other power relations, not women in isolation.

The specific objectives aim to increase understandings of gender dynamics and reasons for the increasing subordination of women resulting from development efforts. These aim to involve men in transforming gender relations and strengthen women's involvement in the design, execution and evaluation of gender-balance in all aspects of programs.

The policy implementation is to be achieved through promoting organizational understanding and commitment among all staff, including those locally engaged, through the provision of training, through developing mechanisms to integrate

GAD in program planning and evaluation, and developing strategies to ensure gender balance in staffing. (Adapted from Lott and Sarann, 1995)

At first sight this policy exemplar appears to be on the right track, but as further studies indicate, it misses the mark and appears to address an audience situated in another time and another place, not Cambodia where the majority of women are illiterate, traumatised and struggling to survive in a hierarchical, hostile and dangerous environment.

Lott and Sarann (1995:109) also included a Gender and Development Survey of gender training projects and materials with respondents and interviewees from 63 international organisations and 18 national organisations in their widely circulated booklet. It outlined all gender-training consultation agencies, manuals, reports and publications available at libraries, NGOs and resource centres in Cambodia. Those interested in gaining NGO status (a necessary prerequisite to gaining international funding) were directed to the Canadian policy sample (above) that was available for collection in all resource centre libraries (mainly based in Phnom Penh). Very little of this booklet is in Khmer script and clearly highlights Western-centred concepts of women and development with several bizarre, full-page cartoons. One of these shows a mini-skirted woman looking into an English-style pram with a baby girl's clenched fist raised skyward; another shows a fat blonde woman in curlers talking to her hairdresser saying, "I really wanted to be a mechanic but there were no apprenticeships for women"; a third shows a crazed looking blonde woman with a skipping rope, legs sprawled and blithely skipping through a pile of enormous books; and a fourth shows another mini-skirted tough-looking blonde woman kicking in the screen of her TV. The messages these images portray are completely out of place in the Cambodian cultural context where women rarely own television sets, do not use prams, are largely illiterate, and expected to dress and behave modestly at all times.

However, in the push towards implementing GAD policies to raise the status of women in Cambodia, some more successful, less high-profile models were to be found. For example, in the early 1990s the Ford Foundation was able to more easily act as an advocate for the integration of women's issues into general development initiatives than either UNDP or the World Bank (Rathgeber, 1995:210). Ford attempted to mainstream all its WID activities into general development initiatives, periodically monitoring its

programs to ensure that women were, in fact, benefiting from these activities. Rathgeber also cites the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) as a good example of a bilateral agency with a strong commitment to integrating women's concerns into its programs. Although CIDA continued to use the term WID, she maintains that their programs encompassed a strong GAD approach. Widely differing in effectiveness, all WID/GAD programs implemented in Cambodia were envisioned to be under the coordinating umbrella of SSWA/MOWA. However, this partnership-approach experienced many difficulties and it was not until the late 1990s, under renewed funding from international donors, that MOWA was able to develop new directions aimed at effectively mainstreaming the empowerment of women.

After a somewhat shaky beginning in 1996, MOWA was not only criticised for incompetency and ineffectiveness, but for lack of cooperation with the NGOs it was supposed to support. In order to redeem their position with the funding NGOs, in the late 1990s it initiated a new five-year policy direction entitled *Neary Rattanak* (Women are Precious Gems), developed in close collaboration with the donors. This policy was aimed at expanding efforts to mainstream GAD (Frieson, 1998) and guide ministry choices of new project opportunities initiated by donors. Their six target areas included: *Gender and advocacy training* (to be funded by GRIP, BT, GTE, GTZ and others); *Health* (to be funded by UNFPA and UNAIDS); *Education* (to be funded by UNICEF); *Legal protection* (to be funded by GTZ); *Economic empowerment* (to be funded by GTZ, FAO, ILO and others; and *Institutional capacity building and strategies management* (to be funded by ADB and others). The policy aimed to strengthen MOWA and help address the weaknesses in GAD implementation that were seen to result from lack of coordination between projects, lack of accountability, and lack of funding from the government. The target areas were to be integrated into mainstream projects, and implemented in accordance with GAD principles at all levels of society.

2.3 Community-Based Projects and Micro-Credit Programs

MOWA was not the only ministry under pressure to implement GAD policies. In the mid 1990s the Royal Government of Cambodia in cooperation with UNICEF (1995-96a) released a new plan for the years 1996-2000, aimed at increasing people's access to

coordinated community-based systems and improving the situation of women and children through addressing the underlying dissonance within the society. Their goal was to enhance the capacity of communities focussing on the education, health and welfare of women and youth, through the implementation of multi-sectored programs. This was to be supported by national, provincial, district and commune structures. Participating ministries were to be MOWA for *Community Action for Social Development*, MOEYS for *education programs* including literacy for women, and MOH for *health* including nutrition, hygiene, and child care training for all those involved in child-care. Also, due to constraints on the development of village-based economic activities caused by lack of technology, technical and entrepreneurial skills, as well as infrastructure limitations including the lack of low cost transportation, market opportunities and marketing systems, MOWA also focussed on *credit programs* to improve employment and income. As a result of these initiatives, by the late 1990s some community-based development projects were seen to be moving in a more positive direction to reach those who had previously lacked access to development, particularly women and children.

Due to the high interest rates of money-lenders and extreme difficulties finding capital to set up small farms and businesses, micro-credit programs were being used to promote economic growth and stability. The typical pattern followed by these programs was to link an international NGO such as OXFAM, CARE or PACT with a local NGO to provide credit services at the community level. The international NGO serves as a source for funding and technical support, while the local NGO delivered the actual services. Rasmussen (2001:33-35) outlines the basic Cambodian models for micro-credit borrowing as being through the implementation of 'solidarity groups'. The Grameen model is one of the most rigid forms of micro-credit, where members are of 'like mind and similar economic level', taking vows to support each other and ensure that loans will be repaid. Grameen Bank (2001) states that the basic philosophy of the group model is that "shortcomings and weaknesses at the individual level are overcome by the collective responsibility and security afforded by the formation of a group of such individuals". These programs also include rice banks and a range of cow and livestock banks. Often, NGOs implementing these programs use group meetings as an opportunity to provide literacy training, health and nutrition education, and basic business training. Rasmussen (2001:36) found that the moral support of the group was especially important for

Cambodian women who were resisting pressure, such as from a husband wishing to take the loan for his personal use.

However, although micro-credit programs were extremely useful in helping alleviate poverty in some villages, the poorest of the poor did not benefit as they had nothing to offer as collateral. Rasmussen (2001:178) revealed a range of problems related to abuse of power by group leaders, late payments of loans and over-capitalizing on farm development projects where people were forced to sell their animals and land in order to repay their debts. As a result, some reported that their quality of life had worsened after joining a micro-credit program (p. 192-3). Added to this, with a majority of males in the programs, poor women were often found to be missing out on getting much-needed loans because they were uncomfortable speaking out in a group (p.178). They complained that credit leaders “only lend to their friends and family”, and wealthy people in charge of programs (seen as a ‘patrons’) were clearly biased to supporting the local middle-class women. Agency staff members were loath to encourage their more wealthy leaders to include the poor in programs.

Meas Nee and O’Leary (2001) found that cultural constraints resulting in poor levels of village-based community development were largely due to the lack of willingness of NGO practitioners to listen to the people and understand their needs. They maintained that development is about people being empowered to bring about positive change in their own lives, and about personal growth together with public action to challenge poverty, oppression and discrimination. They described numerous instances of practice that have changed people’s lives for the better, and believe that their approach amounts to an alternative view to development that questions many of the common assumptions and practices of the prevailing theories of development. To bring about sustainable development, practitioners need to let go of their own traditional behaviours related to believing they are benefactors of the needy, and gain the trust of those they wish to empower. Practitioners must learn to listen to people’s stories and slowly build up confidence and mutual trust before being able to work together to find solutions to development problems.

2.4 Problems Related to Donors

In the face of continuing difficulties in achieving the empowerment of women in Cambodia, a 2001 report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 2001:16) found that major obstacles included: the unwillingness of men at all levels to let go and share a little of their authority with women; competition for scarce resources in a country dependent on aid for a large proportion of its national budget; and women's lack of knowledge about their rights combined with an inability to think about how to change the unequal structures and attitudes at all levels of society. While this was certainly an accurate summary of the development constraints presented by the Cambodian culture, it does not address the barriers presented by the cultural mindsets of donors who presume that they really understand Cambodian culture but in fact confront their own projections that are rooted in Western development discourses. What has been lacking is the provision of sufficient cultural sensitivity and time to allow opportunities for Cambodians to articulate their own sense of culture and needs in the development process.

Aiha Ong (1988), expressing her concerns about the personal agendas of many Western-trained feminist development practitioners warned, "When feminists look overseas, they frequently seek to establish their authority on the backs of non-Western women, determining for them the meanings and goals of their lives". Clearly, not all aid workers are primarily interested in their own agendas, but it would be almost impossible for them not to bring their personal beliefs and assumptions with them, particularly those with Western training in development theory and practice. Ong said that in the context of Cambodian culture, such women are in danger of assuming superior understanding of the Cambodian society, with the Khmer people looking up to them as benefactors who can provide answers to their problems. However, these problems can only be solved when they become empowered to be involved in finding their own solutions. In a culture as hierarchical as Cambodia's, all aid workers are in danger of falling into a trap where they

find they are seen as the rich, superior benefactors, and Cambodians see themselves as the powerless poor.⁵

Another issue of concern highlighted by Tony Kevin (1999) has been the “high degree of foreign interventionism extending over at least the past three decades – while most other Southeast Asian countries were independently shaping their own societies”.⁶ Kevin believes “This pattern of interventionism has created a habit of mind and a tendency among some Cambodian politicians to look to the outside world rather than to their own fellow Cambodians for solutions to their problems”. In his lecture, Kevin reminded us of the increasing ‘readiness of some foreigners to advise, to judge, and even to intervene in this country’s affairs’. Clearly, intervention has been the source of many of Cambodia’s ills and donors need to be aware of the importance of finding ways to empower the people, not foster what they see as ‘a beggar mentality’. In this situation an important first step in reassessing standard Western-feminist understandings of women’s needs is to develop a sound knowledge of the way Cambodians understand their culture.

2.5 Understanding Cambodian Culture

In 1997 I accessed a translation of what appears to be the first attempt of a Cambodian to analyse their own society, a 1973 text entitled *The Ten Basic Roots of Khmer Mentality*. This analysis was written by the late Professor of Culture at Phnom Penh University, Sar Sarun. His analysis may seem shallow and sketchy by today’s understandings, but it includes a number of interesting observations, some of which were probably influenced by his French education. Sar Sarun pointed out that we must not overlook the basic roots of his culture as originating in agriculture. He maintained that the Khmer have hidden strengths and a tendency to self-praise due to an unconscious

⁵ Father Poncheau, a Catholic priest living in poverty with the people he served in Phnom Penh since the 1950s (except for the Khmer Rouge period) had come to realise he could never be totally accepted as one of them because he was a *barang* (white foreigner) and, no matter what he did, he would always be seen as ‘rich’ due to his inherited karma (interview, Phnom Penh, 1997).

⁶ Kevin was referring to the US-supported overthrow of the monarchy in 1970 and their saturation-bombings of the Eastern provinces drawing Cambodia into the Vietnam War - leading to socio-political breakdown under the KR regime. In the 1979-91 civil war Cambodia was a proxy combat zone for other nations. In hindsight the UNTAC period and 1993 post-election compromise had only represented an armistice rather than a true reconciliation. (Kevin, 1999)

strong pride in their ‘Golden Country’. Cambodians lack sensitivity to rules and tend towards conservatism and inactivity due to their inhospitable geographic conditions. He believed that these traits resulted in weakness in commitment combined with extremes in love and hate. He also referred to the Khmer ideals of virtue, originating in Hinduism. These ideals include purity and chastity of the body (especially in women), total commitment to keeping a promise (truth word), and a truly courageous mind. He said that Khmer people place more value on purity of the body than they do on quality of the heart.

Sar Sarun (1973) stressed the popularly held belief among Cambodians that the major root of Khmer society is ‘matriarchy’. He cited the ancient stories of Khmer princess Liv Yi who is seen as the matriarchal founder of the Khmer kingdom. Keo Men (1997:10-21) elaborates on this widely recorded story, referring to the use of the term *me* (mother) as a prefix to all words denoting leadership positions within the family, village, district and army to confirm earlier female supremacy in the culture. She explains that although ‘matriarchy’ did not exist in government institutions, it existed in everyday life, and cites several well-known proverbs and stories about the supremacy of ‘mother’ to confirm this. In agreement with Népote (communication, 2005) my informants confirmed that relationships between women control the men’s behaviour more than occurs in the reverse. They believed that connections of brothers-in-law through their respective wives, sisters and grandmothers are at the basis of the patronage system underlying survival in Cambodia, citing a proverb, “women are the roots that connect the soil to the tree”. To more fully appreciate the Cambodian belief in the historically central place of women in the society, I set out to find relevant historical records. Initially I researched the available literature, but found only a few references specific to women. These were limited to accounts of a few privileged women in the Angkorean period, and passing impressions of rural and trading Khmer women recorded by travellers. The earliest study of rural life mapping the positions of women was undertaken by anthropologist Mayko Ebihara (1971). This precise study was of a small village near Battambang in the pre-Khmer Rouge 1960s. Although this study could not be used to represent the situation in all villages in Cambodia, it was considered to be typical of many, and on return to her village in the late 1980s, Ebihara found that the life patterns of the people there had

remained virtually unchanged. No further studies involving rural women were undertaken until the 1990s. Ebihara (1971, 1990), Chandler (1993) and others agree that rural culture in Cambodia has changed minimally since the Angkorean period (9th to 14th centuries), with women and men working together at the village level in a harmonious way, with most farming tasks being interchangeable. However, following the gender imbalances caused by foreign influences and wars in more recent times, rural women have become particularly over-burdened and devalued.

Although much effort has been given to understanding the culture in relation to women in the numerous reports of NGOs and bilateral donors generated in the 1990s, it was not until working through the post-graduate writings of French academic Jacques Népote (1992) that I found a framework for understanding the contradictions existing in Khmer culture and the way women fit into their society. Népote provides a profoundly useful tool for understanding the mechanics of the culture. He demonstrates the enormous influence the concept of family has at every level of the society. Every person in a village is addressed as a family member of some sort and every member within a family is addressed according to their place, while the village head is referred to as mother of the village. Each person must fulfil the expectations of the role they inhabit in this multi-layered framework, and behave accordingly. In the same familial understanding, the king has traditionally been seen as the great benevolent father and his subjects seen as his children. 'Patrons' (see 2.6) are seen as uncles or aunts, and clients as nephews or nieces. Monks in the monasteries form another type of family in themselves. In this hierarchical, 'family' structured society it is not difficult to understand why aid workers unwittingly become the more powerful patrons, making it extremely difficult for them to transfer the concept of 'empowerment' to those who perceive themselves as the powerless clients. This acts as a barrier to the poorest of the poor who have nothing to offer as a client, and keep their distance. Through understanding these principles, WID/GAD aid workers may be able to move to being adopted older sisters (as did Ebihara when she lived and worked in her chosen village) rather than patrons, in order to work together with the people.

In understanding the levels of society, Népote (1992) illustrates the way in which the elite, aristocratic level at the pinnacle of the society is more Hindu than Buddhist, with the king served by Hindu priests. He points out that at this level men are highly

patriarchal and lineage of their progenies is maintained through marriages arranged with boys from the father's side of the family. Although the women are expected to bear children of royal blood and take their father's name, they often exhibit a range of behaviours that are outside the societal rules of 'commoners'. Népote illustrates an inverse set of societal norms at the rural level, where women are seen as the centre of the family, and marriages to cousins on the mother's side are common. He describes the connection of these two levels of society as being actuated through the functions of the male-centred *sangha* (Buddhist clergy). Traditionally, males at village level had access to higher bureaucratic levels of society through the legitimisation of serving time as a monk in the *wat* (village temple) and attaching themselves to an affiliated patron. Women also had access to higher levels, as the king included some beautiful women from the peasantry in his harem in order to connect with various sections of the countryside. In this way the people felt related to their father king. Népote (March 1990) warned French aid agencies that unless development workers truly understood the nature of the 'family' structures underlying the consciousness of Cambodian society at all levels, they would not succeed in reaching the needs of this broken people.

A year later, two expatriate American educated Khmer writers also pointed out the need for those working with Cambodian people to fully understand their socio-cultural basis. Abdul Gaffar Peang-Meth (1991:442-455) and Seanglim Bit (1991), discussed influences related to Hinduism. Peang-Meth maintained that "Cambodian society first and foremost represents an exaggerated hierarchy of socio-political control" where great importance is placed on a concentration of absolute power in the political authority, with hierarchy, oppression, and requisite conformity characterising the typical Cambodian experience. Both writers agree that we must begin by understanding that Khmer monarchs were traditionally invested with supreme authority, and privileges of the royal family, extended to relatives for more than five generations. The king frequently appointed family members to official positions of authority and administration, and financially benefited them through taxation and corvee exemptions.

The insights of Peang-Meth and Bit combined with Népote's analysis provide a fuller understanding of the present situation in Cambodia where political leaders have effectively usurped the power of the king. Their behaviours emulate the king who is

traditionally described as ‘consuming the people’, not ‘leading the people’ as one might expect. Leaders and their followers see themselves as holding elite positions that cannot be relinquished. Their positions are consolidated through marriages arranged between their children to make sure power remains in their families, and democracy is little understood. The rural poor are there for ‘consumption’, and the rural poor accept it. The large numbers of men employed in the army and police force to protect the powerful leading party, see themselves as connected to and protected by their patron leader. In the same way, the older generation see themselves as connected to and protected by their king. With a weakened *sangha* unable to connect the levels of society, the poor and women in particular have lost out.

In agreement with Peang-Meth (1991), Bit (1991:39-41) points out that both Hinduism and the philosophy of Brahmanism have combined with the belief system of Theravada Buddhism and greatly influenced Khmer culture and society. These contradictory influences have resulted in generalised Khmer characteristics and predispositions that have greatly contributed to the recent tragedies and continue to affect the contemporary situation as well. Although these writers have not focussed on women in particular, they discuss the conflicting racial memories in which the Hindu ‘tiger/warrior’ god-kings of Angkor emerge to overturn the tolerant, accepting, agreeable and understanding Buddhist ideologies at crucial moments in history. They describe how Brahmanistic concepts of class-consciousness conflict with Buddhist beliefs of peace and equality together with teachings of karmic rebirth being subject to one’s merit. Overt corruption is legitimised through Devaraja Hindu beliefs of complete allegiance to leaders and ‘the ends justifying the means’. In the Khmer context, Buddhist passivity and acceptance are acted out as polite agreement and avoidance of action with the agreement not necessarily indicating intention to fulfil that agreement. I have seen these behaviours being misunderstood by Westerners who believed that all their help was being appreciated and couldn’t work out why things ‘went wrong’, misinterpreting Khmer behaviour as laziness.⁷ Conversely, when the Khmer felt their well-being threatened,

⁷ An UNTAC handout (1992) prepared by Melbourne academic, Dr. Thel Thong, cautioned ‘In general don’t expect to engage Cambodians in a negotiation on which objectives are based. This Western concept is foreign to them.’

some even became aggressive, inflexible, argumentative and uncompromising.⁸ Peang-Meth claims that the contradictory beliefs and behaviours of Khmer people have contributed to the widening gap between Western-educated expatriates and poorly educated Cambodians. He maintains that these mismatches make stability and democracy very difficult to achieve.

2.6 Aspect of Patronage as Key to Cambodian Culture

Ramusak (1999:81) points out that in classical Theravada Buddhist countries such as Cambodia there was an “economy of redistribution; a state based on agriculture, in which control of labour was more crucial than control of land; a society where horizontal occupational classes coexisted within a vertical structure of patron-client relationships”. In Cambodia the traditional organisation has consisted of three classes, royalty, officials and peasants, with more recent additions of a very small middle-class during periods of urbanisation (Bit, 1991:54). This has been complicated by questions of divisions in political loyalty since the Khmer Rouge period. In present-day Cambodia, with a growing powerful middle class, associated issues of land control, environmental destruction and land seizure have been destroying the life chances of many of the peasant majority. Added to this, the emerging middle class is connected to the new NGO activities and entrepreneurs who have been capitalising on the open market system. Their patron-client cliques have created barriers to empowerment of the majority poor. Cambodian development specialist Meas Nee (interview, 1998) explained that there are three levels in which patronage operates within Cambodia: political (government); economic (business); and survival (village).

“The modern patron-client relationship is essentially an exchange between two parties of unequal status. The patron holds the superordinate position and provides protection, convenience, social connections, and at times, economic benefit to their subordinate client. The client is expected to reciprocate with loyalty, support and commitment to obligation” (Vichit-Vadakan, 1989:439). In Cambodia, the patron/client

⁸ This was clearly seen when a misguided American evangelist promised healing services to the rural people. These people brought their sick and lame to the city at great personal cost, some even selling their property, and when not healed as promised, they violently drove the evangelist out of town.

model of benevolent-protector/submissive-recipients extends throughout all levels of society. This model is personified in the king who still holds symbolic ‘God-King’ power among the conservative older generation. They see him as a benevolent patron ‘father’, taking care of his submissive and loyal ‘children’.

Rasmussen (2001:14) affirms, “For most Cambodians, the first source of assistance in times of difficulty is the patron”. Patrons are also called upon to help negotiate solutions in times of conflict. In Cambodia, Buddhist traditions of non-violence have led to extreme conflict avoidance, so people tend to be inactive in defending their rights when they face abuse or disagreement with a neighbour. In order to save face, both parties may call upon their respective patrons to resolve the problem for them. However, in post-war 1990s where there has been a widespread lack of trust, Khmer academic Dr Thel Thong warns that the use of patrons (NGOs) to mediate in conflict situations can lead to the disputing individuals feeling unfairly compromised because they have not worked out solutions that suit their true needs. These people can end up holding on to bitterness that erupts into violence at a later date (interview, 1999).

Rasmussen (2001) observes the patron-client model governing the national political system where the Prime Minister and his followers in local politics firmly hold the real political power. This system is also prevalent in the private sector, where those in a position to bestow favours and financial assistance assume patronage. Those who depend on these patrons are indebted to them through allegiance and respect. Rasmussen describes a multi-tiered system where clients are dependent on patrons for some things, while acting as patrons to others who have less opportunity. However, the system only exists as long as the patron is able to deliver benefits. As a result, during the 1990s, NGOs providing aid programs in villages have frequently usurped the traditional patrons (who still retain respect from the villagers) and become the new patrons, with power to accept or deny membership into credit, training or other programs. In agreement with Rasmussen, Meas Nee and O’Leary (2001:99) warn that “hierarchy, patronage and gender relations pervasively condition relationships in Cambodian society – with both parties in the relationship holding mutually reinforcing expectations ... Respectful, trusting relationships between people who are not equals in the social order are difficult

to envision, much less to achieve”. They found that many development practitioners have difficulties understanding the actual nature of their relationship with the villagers they wish to empower. If practitioners see the behaviour of recipient villagers as the norm, or do not understand the actual level of their engagement with them, they assume that their project activities are participatory and empowering, fostering interdependence and equality. However, their relationship with villagers has actually only become one of dependence, with a lack of engagement of villagers in the decision-making process and the behaviour of villagers reflecting feelings of indebtedness and gratitude. Meas Nee and O’Leary found that many villagers working on NGO projects expressed feelings of conflict with their own traditional beliefs and worried that their culture was being undermined, particularly in regard to gender issues (pp.92-93). I have found that although many writers touch on this subject, they do not elaborate on the activities of women as patrons, which my observations reveal as mainly occurring under the umbrella of their husbands’ positions. My interviews and observations reveal that this aspect of patronage is frequently linked to marriage choices where younger, less educated but more affluent women are matched with more educated and less financially secure young men. In this way a man effectively becomes a client of his wife’s family, while his younger wife uses his position to attract clients. Hence the popular saying: “When the husband is a captain, the wife is a general.” In order to understand the ways in which women in Cambodia have accessed their culture in the 1990s, it is necessary to further examine the cultural sources that dictate their behaviour and control their destiny.

2.7 Sources that Inform us about Cambodian Women

In describing gender meanings within Thai and Khmer Theravada Buddhist societies, Ledgerwood (1994:123) asserts that gender conceptions associate women with economics and ‘attached-ness’ in general, whereas men are associated more with withdrawal from the world, and correspondingly with religious-political power. Added to this, Esterik (1982:55) points out that in Southeast Asia Buddhist women cannot be ordained as monks, wherein lies the source of greatest merit, and appear to be inferior to men in both doctrine and practice. She argues (p.77) that in Buddhism, women are more rooted in this world. They are the caretakers within the society and are at the centre of household stability, seen as emotionally ‘attached’ to their children and not free to

become monks. For example, women not only care for their own children, but for individuals who are ill, orphaned, destitute or otherwise in need, and whose parents are dead or unable to care for them. These individuals are almost always taken in by a woman who is their closest mother-substitute, joining the household of an elder sister, mother's sister, grandmother or, as I witnessed on several occasions, an 'adopted' mother.

Stories read out in temples at religious festivals re-enforce the concept that women are "imbued with the ideology of gender grounded on biological determinism". These stories explain that women provide and represent 'matter' through their womb and menstrual discharge, whereas men provide "the form of the soul" to offspring through their semen. As the soul is more divine in its nature, it is more important than matter. Hence, men are more important than, and superior to, women (Boonsue, 1989). In agreement, Ebihara (1971) and Ledgerwood (1994) found that Cambodian men are inherently more highly valued than women, even though women can earn positions of 'relatively equal' status through playing out various roles within their family and society. For example, this occurs when a mother 'gives' her son to the religious order or, as Esterik (1982:70) noted, by contributing generously to religious causes. Ledgerwood points out further apparent contradictions where women are supposed to be soft, silent and sweet while at the same time act as hard-headed business women, and where a wife should never be seen interfering in her husband's affairs, yet be highly skilled at cleverly manoeuvring his career.

Although women are unequal in religion, Ebihara (1971, 1990a), Bit (1991:48) and others agree that in village life the respective traditional roles of Cambodian males and females have been virtually equal. Bit (1991) notes that the male is the head of the Khmer family with well-established legal rights over family matters, and females are expected to be loyal and submit to authority. However, on a practical level the position of females within the family is secure and well established with extensive authority to decide on household, financial, and other matters relating to the future of the children and the family budget. It is the female who is charged with maintaining a harmonious environment in the home and expected to take the initiative in resolving family conflicts. Numerous reports have pointed out that women also have rights to both own and inherit

real property, and have long been a major presence in commercial trading and market place activities. They maintain that women have the prime responsibility for maintaining the family budget and running the household in which they hold central place. However, I found that that Theravada Buddhist Cambodian men, unlike Chinese men, do not like handling money or involving themselves in conducting business activities. They do not want to be involved in these activities because they believe that any handling of money is adverse to earning spiritual merit. Although this factor assists in safeguarding household finances, women must handle the money because they are spiritually inferior. Western-trained development practitioners have misunderstood this fact and interpreted it as a sign of women holding the superior position in Cambodian homes.

In their work on hierarchical Buddhist societies, Ortner and Whitehead (1981:402) found that young soldiers in wartime place a high priority on maintaining ‘good’ girls as wives and virgins and in peacetime tend to occupy their free time either engaging in hyperactive non-reproductive sexuality, or monasticism. Added to this, Esterick (1982:203) points out that “Male aggressiveness and dominance [in pre-industrial warfare] are rewarded with sexual gratification and polygynous marriage, which requires that women be reared to be passive and submissive to men”. Cambodia is not new to these patterns of gendered behaviour. Historically, the chaos and confusion following the downfall of the Angkorian period (when women were reported to have high levels of gender egalitarianism), led to increasing levels of gender disparity (Keo Men, 1997:10-21). Keo Men describes the resulting disintegration of loyalty between royal families resulting in warring between Hindu Vishnuists and Buddhists. Hinayana Buddhism came to replace Vishnuism, and women were required to “purify their minds and to be perfectly virtuous women who were only responsible for running the house and looking after the children”.

Gender advisor to the government and academic Buddhist expatriate Dr. Hema Goonatilake (1996:17) also argues that the belief in women’s inferiority increased during the periods of warring and civil unrest following the downfall of Angkor. She explains that in this period Theravada Buddhism came to be the religion of the Khmer (usurping the harsher Hinayana Buddhism). During the sixteenth century the highly popularised *chbab srey* (rules for women) was disseminated throughout the population by the *sangha*. These rules personified the ideal model of women’s behaviour. They have continued until

the present time and are still disseminated through the home, education system, *sangha* and even the judiciary. They have been passed down orally and broadly transcribe as: “the husband is the master ... follow his advice, never ignore it. Follow your husband’s orders. Never act as if you are his equal because he is your master. If he insults you, never talk back or insult him. One virtue of a wife is to be a servant wife. Follow your husband’s commands for fear of being beaten. Do not be offended if your husband has another wife or lover”. Goonatilake points out that despite the belief that men and women are relatively equal in work in Cambodian village life and that women hold the prime responsibility of running the household and budget, these rules have remained the code of behaviour for women in spite of socio-economic changes where substantial numbers of women constitute household heads and the vast majority of women are income earners. In post-war Cambodia, the strong perception of Cambodian women being inferior to men has remained unchanged.

This unbalanced situation was exacerbated following the surrender of KR guerrillas in 1997 and subsequent downsizing of the ‘overloaded’ Cambodian army. These demobilised soldiers created additional post-war problems for women in Cambodia. Houn-Nam Ing (1999) reported a warning from the World Food Program (WFP) that hundreds of thousands of people living in previous war zones were now in dire poverty, with over fifty percent of children under five being stunted. Added to this, the rural population was endangered by landmines and unexploded ordnance, and lacked schools, health clinics and NGO support. He cites Ken Noah Davies, the WFP deputy director in Cambodia who warned, “these are the areas you don’t want to see become so frustrated that they go back to fighting”. So many years of war and poverty in which young men were wrenched from school and trained to use guns or drive tanks made them unsuited to civilian life and work. At the same time women were left to quietly go on and grow the food to somehow keep their families alive. As one woman described: “Poverty means working for more than 18 hours a day, but still not earning enough to feed myself, my husband, and two children” (cited in Narayam, 2000:39). Returning soldiers created an enormous social problem. Ousted Prince Sirivuth confessed that this issue was the single most serious question facing Cambodia at the time (interview, Melbourne, 1999). Houn-Nam Ing (1999) reported the difficulties involved in the demobilisation of twenty percent of Cambodia’s 148,000 soldiers, citing one soldier as saying, “I’m tired of guns, I’ve

done my duty for the nation. Now I just want to be a farmer”. Another complained, “I want to continue to be a soldier. If you go anywhere with a gun in your hand, you are respected and feared”. Other reports of shell-shocked, maimed and sick soldiers unable to work pointed to an ever-increasing burden for the women in the countryside, and the danger of increasing family violence.

The effects of demilitarisation following over twenty years of war led to a range of cultural distortions affecting Cambodian women. Keo Men (1997:20) pointed out that, added to the devastating devaluation of women through huge reductions of men in past times, negative gender patterns were further exacerbated by recent revolutions and civil war. She complained that this had led to widespread polygyny, domestic violence, trafficking and the increasingly lowered status of women. Added to this there was a further weakening of the culture through young adults brought up under the Khmer Rouge (KR) behaving in disrespectful and violent, ‘un-Cambodian’ ways. For example, instead of women controlling the family purse, many younger husbands were reported to be taking control of the money and squandering it on pleasure and prostitutes, especially in urban areas. As a result, drunkenness and family abuse was on the rise, with wives and children being further impoverished and malnourished. These problems also resulted in the spread of HIV/AIDS, which affected up to 50 percent of prostitutes in the mid 1990s. However, by 2003, half of new infections were being transmitted from husband to wife, and one-third from mother to child (*Bangkok Post*, 2003). In this situation, I observed the desperation of some women trying to cope with the shame of being beaten, infected with HIV, and expected to put up with every kind of deprivation and insult from their husbands. At the same time they took responsibility for it all in the belief that they must fulfil the Buddhist cultural role of ‘perfect’ womanhood, however unfair it may seem. These expectations were further consolidated by rises in ‘post-war nationalism’.

Enloe (1989:14-16) discusses the ways in which nationalism increases in periods following war, when male leaders become worried about their women abandoning traditional feminine roles. In synchrony, women help support these gendered ideals by reinforcing their own subservience, believing that such strategies will help oust all opposing cultural influences. This is clearly the case in Cambodia where there is a hegemony of societal control over women’s dress and behaviour that is strongly

reinforced by the post-war government. Added to this there is a widely held belief that it is more important to educate sons than daughters. It was not surprising to read reports such as the one entitled “Cambodia Seeks Pretty Face for ‘Social Development’” (*Agence France Presse*, 2000). The article begins, “With Cambodia’s women dogged by domestic violence and a flourishing sex trade, it may appear strange that the latest government initiative for women’s rights is a beauty contest”. Vann Phen, a culture ministry official on the all-male panel of judges explained this new venture looking to find ‘the ideal Khmer woman’ with the logic, “When we are talking about attracting tourists, it is not about flesh. We want to stress that there is more (to attract tourists) than the sex trade and Angkor Wat. That is why these women have to be intelligent as well”. The news report continues with one girl explaining, “I’d like to work in an office as a secretary, because it’s easy”, sparking a nod of approval from Mr. Vann Phen.

It seems it will be a long time before the effects of war on Cambodian society will be healed to the extent that it will be possible to create a just, gender-balanced society where women can participate equally in education and work. As Enloe (1993:26) reminds us, due to the long and difficult process of demilitarisation in Vietnam, twenty-five years down the track both women and men are still working out their gender roles, employment and personal relationships. Goonatilake (1996:20) rightly called on Cambodians to move away from the excess burdens placed on women that result from the old belief that one is born a woman because of demeritorious deeds in a past life. She admonished Cambodians to return to practising the Noble Eightfold Path, where women can experience an ‘approximation to equality’ through Buddhism in a way that is relevant to their present life circumstances. However, this task would need to be presented in a way that is relevant to contemporary Cambodian circumstances, and addressed through the roles of properly trained monks and nuns, and a more equitable and accessible education system.

2.8 Poor Education of Girls

The poor state of education in Cambodia has been one of the major obstacles to development. Although education is arguably the most important key to all aspects of development and gender equity in Cambodia, school participation levels remain the

lowest of the lower developed countries (LDCs), particularly for girls. This problem largely resulted from the KR policies in the 1970s, leading to the destruction of the education system and widespread systematic killings of educated people including monks (traditional educators) and teachers. In the mid-1990s, an Asian Development Bank (ADB) report (Fiske, 1995) revealed a massive undersupply of teachers for the almost six million children in a population of 10.7 million people. Duggan (1994b:14) explains that due to the poor educational levels of teachers, student repetition in year one was almost mandatory. In 1993-94, by age cohort, there should have been 260,000 children in year one, but due to repetition there were over 500,000, effectively blocking the system. Added to this, UNICEF (1995-96a:110) revealed that ten to 25 percent of the population had never attended school, and up to 20 percent of primary students were over-age. With a total education expenditure of only 7.6 percent of the recurrent public expenses (half the average allotted by the least developed countries), the situation was hardly likely to improve (ADB, 1995: 25).⁹ Overall school performance showed that only six percent of students entering primary school completed secondary school, and only four percent of these went on to pass their final examinations. Despite the huge amount of support being given by donors including ADB, IMF, UNDP, UNESCO, PASEC and others, there has been little change. My research shows that this has been due to several factors, including lack of support from the government, poverty of the people, and a rapidly expanding youth base resulting from the high birth rate in Cambodia since the early 1980s following the KR regime.

MOWA (1997:10) reports that “54 percent of women have not been educated in the previous era, nor in the present one”. Literacy rates in Cambodia were the lowest of the LDCs. “The majority [of women] are illiterate or know the alphabet but not clearly ... 42 percent have studied at primary schools”. Secondary school female enrolments also show the lowest female/male ratio in the LDCs. MOWA (February, 2001) reported the critical state of gender disparities reflected in the basic literacy gap, with adult females remaining at 61 percent and adult males at 82 percent.¹⁰ Young (1996:33) found that illiteracy and

⁹ Tragically, in a country with over 50 percent of children, education receives only 8 percent of the national budget, whereas the military is reported to receive 23.7 percent (NGO Forum, 2000).

¹⁰ The National Institute of Statistics's 1996 Demographic Survey found the self-reported literacy of women as 58 percent and males 82 percent. However, Duggan and Daroesman (1998:50) claimed that literacy in females was 50 percent nationally. The differences lie in the way literacy is measured. For example, ‘basic

low education levels were among the prime causes of unequal rights and violence against women, and the subordination of women within family and society. Kleinjans (1996:4) asserts that due to their low education and literacy levels, women have been the ‘silenced majority’ in Cambodia at a time when their professional and political participation is needed to increase the country’s ability to solve its social, economic and political problems.

Ayres (2000) points out an appalling lack of accountability in the government resulting in education funding being promised but rarely delivered, schools being built where they were not needed, plans being enthusiastically embraced but not implemented, and contracts and agreements being ignored almost immediately after they had been signed. Ayres stressed that the education system of the 1990s had not been updated to suit the needs of the rural majority and was not significantly different to the system established during the French colonial period, aimed at producing men with the basic clerical and administrative skills needed for working in the government. As a result, the few males fortunate enough to graduate from high school or university had no leadership training, were unable to think for themselves, and were afraid to analyse situations or use their initiative lest they became a threat to the status quo.¹¹ These findings are in agreement with my interviews with MOEYS officials who demonstrated a strong resistance to new styles of learning involving critical analysis. These education ‘experts’ stressed their preference for traditional French rote-learning methods at all levels. In this stagnant, conservative environment, women were severely disadvantaged in accessing higher levels of education, and badly under-represented in all decision-making levels of the workforce.

The SSWA (1995c:49) revealed that overall female participation rates in higher education had peaked at seventeen percent in 1989-90, and despite the government policy

literacy’ refers to being able to write your name and address and a short note, whereas ‘functional literacy’ refers to being able to write a letter, and read a book or newspaper.

¹¹ Although David Ayres (2000) does not discuss gender disparities in education in detail, he writes a compelling account of the reasons for ongoing disparity between Cambodia’s education system and the economic, political, and cultural environments it should serve. He explains how historical and cultural contexts have worked together to create an ‘educational crisis’ at all levels.

of equality for women backed by international funding, had fallen to a mere twelve percent by 1993-4. Research by Gray and Chenda (1997:9) showed that constraints to females entering and staying in higher education were due to 'Khmer tradition', and the expectation that females should marry between sixteen and twenty-two years of age. Added to this, in 1997 the government increased high school levels to include year 12, making it even more difficult for females to access tertiary levels (interview, Vin McNamara, 2001). In all areas of education where an increase in female role models is critical for encouraging the participation of girls, the increase in educational levels has created further barriers to the empowerment of women due to added educational costs and cultural pressures for the early marriage of girls. Further to this, according to my informants, unofficial admission payments to university of US\$2,000 to US\$5,000, depending on the course, further disadvantaged women and severely undermined the merit-drive of students, hindering academic performance.

2.9 Women and Health

Further to illiteracy and lack of education, trauma and exhaustion have arguably been major impediments to women achieving empowerment in Cambodia. A survey based on 700 in-depth interviews by the Transcultural Psycho-Social Organization found that up to 40 percent of Cambodians suffer from trauma-related mental illness and up to fifteen percent are virtually incapacitated by their condition (Sitha Hem, 1997). "Of all the people who have been shot at, terrorised, bombed, pushed from their homes, tortured and persecuted, ravaged by hunger and disease, seen loved ones brutalised, massacred and their families torn apart, it would be difficult to find a group who have suffered such persistent monstrous abuse than the Cambodians held between competing armies, oblivious of the harm they inflicted" (Niland, 1991:48). Emerson (1997) stresses that traumatised women are unable to act on their own behalf and often feel fatigued and numbed, with barely enough energy to do minimal chores and care for children. They need to be listened to if healing is to take place.¹²

¹² Participants on a Cambodian internet chatline discussed the animist concept of *proleung* Khmer (they described this complex concept as having 19 aspects that leave the body in deep sleep). *Proleung* embodies soul, life, consciousness, intellect, goodwill, health and prosperity, but basically means 'Right Khmer'. Participants lamented that their people had lost their *proleung* because they had lost everything dear and valuable to the survival of their Khmer nation, and all they had to replace it was overwhelming SHAME (camdisc@cambodia.org, 15 August, 1998).

Apart from psychological problems related to trauma, Cambodian women in the 1990s were suffering from domestic violence, anaemia, exhaustion, and a wide variety of other diseases including, most recently, HIV/AIDS. Chandara (1995:3-5) pointed out that the overall health status of women had improved little since the Vietnamese withdrawal of the late 1980s, with maternal and infant mortality rates remaining the highest in the region. In early 1995 the Cambodia birth-mortality rate was alarmingly high at 40 births per 1,000, and a fertility rate of 4.5 per woman. Maternal mortality was around 900 per 100,000 live births, one of the highest in the world, and the infant mortality rate 117 per 1,000 live births compared with a regional average of 42 per 1,000 live births. Chandara claimed that a major problem related to women's illness has been due to the combination of poor diet, lack of knowledge about personal hygiene, heavy workloads, and a lack of knowledge about family planning. Women's shyness was also a barrier to accessing information about health and hygiene, and poverty a barrier to affording birth control and access to health care. With hospitals mainly available only in the cities, more than 90 per cent of births in Cambodia were taking place at home, attended by traditional midwives. Chandara found that these women have unacceptably poor hygiene practices and little knowledge of potential complications, resulting in worsening mortality rates. She maintained that Western-trained health-care workers need to work together with these valuable women to help strengthen their knowledge and improve their practices.

Apart from the traditional midwives who hold enormous influence at village level, the *kruu* are traditional healers who assist in cases of illness. They use practices related to ancient animist and Hindu understandings in which supernatural forces are believed to be the cause of illness. Dr Maurice Eisenbruch (1992) explains that whereas Buddhist monks see the cause of diseases as karmic predestiny, the *kruu* see disease as interference by spirits and sorcerers. In his extensive fieldwork investigating the beliefs and practices of almost 1,000 traditional healers in Cambodia, Eisenbruch found that their practices are brought to life 'every day in every village of Cambodia'. In conversation with Eisenbruch (1997), he explained the need for Western-trained doctors to understand the status and influence that traditional healers have in Cambodian villages and, where possible, work together with their understandings of healing myth and ritual.

In agreement with Frieson (1998), Meas Nee and O'Leary (2001) and others, Emerson (1997) argues that the imported development models dominating many NGO activities throughout Cambodia have failed to respect the local culture or draw from local knowledge and experience. She points out that prevailing GAD principles were largely developed in relatively peaceful countries such as those in Latin America, and rest on assumptions not entirely inapplicable to Cambodia. However, they need to be modified and developed in a way that respects Cambodian culture if they are to help the society restore its self-esteem and dignity. In particular, Emerson (p.45) points out the need to recognise the importance of traditional Cambodian community support systems. She notes that the *sangha* is the only surviving politically neutral institution in Cambodia. She argues that the potential value of the *wat* (Buddhist temple) as a community support system should not be overlooked, as the *wat* underlies the solidarity of most villages and the *sangha* represents the largest and strongest institution in Cambodian civil society. The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates that the 1990s saw NGOs and donors largely attempting to introduce Western-based agendas, with very little or no attempt to strengthen the traditional bases of Cambodian society as their starting point for development. To more fully understand these bases, and to more fully understand the needs of contemporary Cambodian women, the following chapter reviews the effect of Cambodia's long history of wars and intervention on social organisation.

CHAPTER THREE

FORMATION AND FRAGMENTATION OF KHMER CULTURE

3.0 Introduction

As the previous chapter argued, development agencies failed to factor in the Cambodian culture as their basis for development projects and recognise the importance of the traditional community support system provided by the *wat*. One of the difficulties, as noted by the Undersecretary of State for Cults and Religions, H.E. Mr. Dok Narin (1997 interview), was partly due to the eradication of Buddhism under Pol Pot and the subsequent Vietnamese occupation. As a result, the knowledge level of Cambodian monks was virtually non-existent, making it a case of “the blind leading the blind”. In this case, according to Dok Narin, the *sangha* was in desperate need of support and instruction to enable the monks to resume their traditional place in the community and help develop Cambodia in a culturally sustainable way. However, as the following historical review suggests, this was a complex challenge: while the vast majority of Cambodians claimed to be Theravada Buddhist, many other influences from the past were to be identified. As a result, finding culturally compatible models for use in the planning of policies for poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment in sustainable community development would be highly problematic. As David Chandler has observed, (conversation, 1998), “Cambodian culture is more deeply rooted in its history than any other country I know”. So to understand the ways Cambodian women position themselves through choice from available historical models, it is necessary to consider the range of influences that gave rise to ‘Cambodian culture’ in the 1990s.

Current social frameworks in Cambodia reflect Khmer responses to a wide range of historical experiences including earlier models of wealth and power followed by periods of extreme hardship, wars, civil unrest, occupations and extreme communism. These experiences interpreted in stories, poems, songs and Buddhist laws, arguably resulted in a gradual weakening of women’s status. Historical occurrences recorded by travellers, politicians and historians have also contributed to Khmer understandings of themselves, particularly in the period of French occupation. Current social understandings are seen in the hierarchical power structures, gender understandings and religious beliefs that direct people’s everyday lives. In researching the origins of contemporary Khmer society,

historical documentation is patchy, with very few records referring to women, particularly rural women. Nevertheless, the available texts have been reviewed to find evidence for influences contributing to the formation of Cambodian culture as seen in the 1990s. This analysis reveals some of the historical role models given to both rural and urban women through literature studies and oral teachings at home, school, village *wats* and weddings. A chart showing the historical position of Cambodian women from the Funanese of the first century to the year 2,000 has also been compiled (see Appendix 2).

In making sense of historical records that appear at times conflicting, I have drawn liberally from the interpretative framework of David Chandler's *A History of Cambodia*. Key contributors for later periods have included Penny Edwards on the ways French imposed their cultural expectations on Khmer women, and Milton Osborne and David Steinberg for the Sihanouk period. Mayko Ebihara has provided insights into the lives of rural Khmer in the 1970s, and French academic Jacques Népote provides understandings of the basic structure of Khmer society. To complete my analysis of the 1980s, I have also drawn from French writer Mary Martin along with Seanglim Bit, Michael Vickery and others.

3.1 Khmer Cultural Heritage

Although the exact origins of the Khmer remain unclear, people who made clay pots using the same methods and patterns used today lived in north-western Cambodia over 6000 years ago. Chandler (1993:9) points out that recent findings suggest Southeast Asia was a comparatively sophisticated culture in the prehistoric era, with the first cultivation of rice and first bronze casting in the region. He believes it is likely that by the beginning of the first century, Cambodians were using languages similar to modern day Khmer, and that the lives of the rural majority have remained largely unchanged since that time.

I have found that many Cambodians adhere to the belief of matriarchal beginnings to their society, and although current Western academic opinion debates this¹, research

¹ Anthropologist and Khmer women's specialist Judy Ledgerwood (Northern Illinois University USA, communication 1999) claims that educated Khmer women argue Cambodia was originally a matriarchal

into family and language patterns certainly reveal evidence of a matrilineal basis within the society. The following story depicts the Khmer culture as originating with a strong, matriarchal queen. This version was widely used for instruction in final year high school in the 1990s. Translated from Keo Men's (1997) *Khmer History*, the story reinforces the way Cambodians perceive their beginnings, and was widely adopted as a role model by educated Cambodians and NGOs to encourage women in leadership in the 1990s.

In primitive society, Khmer people lived under the rule of a queen. One of the names given to her is Liv Yi. At that time the country was called Nokor Phnom. Kang Thai, the Chinese Ambassador who arrived in Nokor Phnom in 3 A.D., called this country Funon.

Under Princess Liv Yi's rule, people lived peacefully. The governing style was called a matriarchy in which a mother or woman is the leader. Later, people from India arrived in Nokor Phnom and defeated princess Liv Yi. One of them married Liv Yi and one of the names given to this man is Kaudin.

Although Kaudin came to live with Liv Yi, starting the first Khmer dynasty since the first century, he agreed to adapt himself to the customs of the landowner. This means that Kaudin totally accepted the matriarchy of Liv Yi. A Cham inscription in Mei Seun (658 A.D.) also confirms this. Matriarchy at that time was very strong.

This matriarchy existed from the grass roots level to the top level in the family and the society. In regards to positions in society, women played as important roles as men did. The wife of king Kaudin Jayavarman, kol Praphea Votey, wrote an inscription in the Southern part of Takeo. This inscription describes the building of a Vishnu-styled hermitage. This evidence shows that women in the Nokor Phnom period played an important part in the family as well as the society. This supremacy of women existed until later eras. (Translated from Keo Men, 1997)

In agreement with this story, important clues to the existence of a more elevated position of females in earlier times are to be seen in contemporary Khmer language usage. For example, the prefix *me* meaning 'mother', is used before words meaning

society because French orientalist constructed Cambodian history and systematically fed it to them in schools. Ledgerwood believes French researchers mirrored their own evolutionary models prevalent at the time they first worked in Cambodia and the matrilineal system used in determining lineage in ancient Cambodia should not be confused with matriarchy. Adhir Chakravati (1982:64) outlines the nature of matrilineal succession in *Royal Succession in Funan and Angkor*.

'leader', 'greatness', 'wealth', 'army', 'house', 'cook', and numerous other words (see Appendix 3). The term used for 'cousin' is *bong p'oun chidounmuey*, meaning 'of one grandmother'. However, Ledgerwood (1995) proposes that the prefix *me*, used to connote leadership, is related to the nurturing aspect of Khmer patron/client relationships rather than to women. However, this does not accord with my findings that Cambodians themselves believe the term refers to 'mother', even though women have been severely devalued through the long periods of war and difficulties. My informants pointed out that in some cases Cambodian women of today maintain formidable levels of power within the private sphere of their homes, particularly in wealthier families where women manage all the finances. They believed this aspect of the language is directly related to an earlier matrilineal culture and more elevated position of women.²

Apart from language use clearly relating to earlier times, ancient forms of animism were still widely practised. Chandler (1993:11) records a few of the more ancient elements apparent in contemporary Khmer life including ancestor spirits, stones, the calendar and the soil. Chandler does not elaborate on the animistic beliefs and practices of sorcery that are still widely practised as an adjunct to Buddhism throughout Cambodian villages, especially within ethnic minority groups. Nor does he discuss the traditional practices of midwives who are responsible for village birthing and childrearing throughout the countryside. But we know from the studies of Eisenbruch (1992) on the beliefs and practices of present-day *kruu* (traditional healers) who claim to pre-date Hinduisation in Cambodia, that animist beliefs continue to inform contemporary Khmer life.

Further evidence of the continuity of ancient customs relating to animism can be found in Cambodian wedding ceremonies, in which traditional, symbolic enactments take

² The durability of Khmer culture is clear in observing the small country of Meghalaya, an ancient colony in Northeast India. These people migrated from the region that is now Cambodia to trade and settled prior to the Indianisation of the Khmer. Their language and culture are visibly related to the Khmer in dress, habits, language and culture. Female Meghalayan journalist, Nēichu Angami (interview, 2003) revealed that her culture was matriarchal prior to Indian control. Currently, although male leaders have been installed by the Indian government her society remains strongly matrilineal. Women hold positions of power equal to men. Similar to traditional Cambodian practice, all properties are inherited by the youngest daughters, males come to live with their wife's family after marriage, and women control the family purse. However, unlike present day Cambodians, they have not adopted Hindu or Buddhist beliefs and are matriarchal. Their rulers practise animistic beliefs that appear to be the same as those still practised throughout Cambodia.

place. These rites reaffirm ancient myths of the founding of Cambodia, and indicate Khmer perceptions of complementary gender roles. One marriage rite that is usually played out by the bride and groom represents an ancient myth portraying the bride as a young wife and daughter who has been born of the land (represented as a snake) and the groom as a foreign prince born of the sky (represented as a bird). In this enactment, the bird prince is marooned in Cambodia and marries the snake girl. The bride's father symbolically gives his daughter the use of the land as her marriage dowry. Népote (1992:169) informs us that enactments of the original *nagi* (snake) who is the holder of the Khmer earth are acted out again and again throughout Cambodian history.

Besides these ancient practices related to animism in Khmer society, Hindu influences dating from Indianisation of the ninth to the fourteenth centuries are also evident in contemporary Cambodia. These include hierarchical beliefs and behaviours, local health and agricultural practices, and the enduring *Sanskrit* writing system. Chandler (1993:21-25) points out that Hindu additions to the Khmer language are related to Hindu religious practices and village customs, blended with beliefs in local spirits, the most enduring being that of the lingam (stone phallus) as the patron of local communities. This cult links ancestor spirits with the fertility of nearby soil for agricultural use.

Other aspects of Cambodian society can also be seen to draw from ancient, hierarchical understandings. In Anchorean times, Chinese Diplomat, Chu Ta-Kuan (translation, 1993) described a ruling class and non-mercantile middle class who owned large contingencies of various kinds of slaves who made up the majority of the population. Despite the French having banned slavery in the colonial era, an acceptance of master-slave behaviour remained in the culture. This was evident in the harsh slavery of the Khmer Rouge era and again in the open-market culture of the 1990s when the division between the rich ruling class and the rural poor widened. At this time practices related to slavery re-emerged in the form of widespread trafficking of people and exploitation of the poor. Links to post-Angkorean practices where rulers of the multitude of principalities saw themselves as rivals, each having absolute power over their particular realm, have also been hinted at in contemporary Cambodian political life.

Attitudes to women have been contradictory and ambiguous in the different stages of Cambodian history. This uncertainty was reflected in the understandings of Khmer university students I met in the 1990s who considered the Angkorean period as their main reason for national pride and potential to greatness. However, few were aware of the earlier strength of women. Although most were aware of Queen Indira Devi (consort of King Jayavarman VII, 1181-1219) as a teacher, none was aware that she was not only a great scholar and teacher in her own right, but hailed as the most ardent patron of art forms at the time the Khmer empire was at its zenith of power. Murray (1996) points out that inscriptions record Queen Indira Devi as the 'chief teacher of the king'. He also points out that women of her time held political posts, including serving as judges. Added to this, translations of Chou Ta Kuan's recordings of life in Anchorean times (1993:18) reveal Khmer women as physically very strong and with enormous personal freedom. When a girl was born, it was customary for her parents to express "may the future bring thee a hundred, a thousand husbands!"³ As occurred in other kingdoms of Southeast Asia (Ramusack, 1999), Chou Ta Kuan records (p.72) that the personal bodyguards chosen by the king were strong women armed with shields and lances, as women were assumed to be less likely to betray the king. Also recorded at this time was inheritance by women, particularly by sisters of the deceased, and although in a much diluted form, vestiges of this custom continued into the modern era. The great Anchorean empire peaked in the twelfth century under King Jayavarman VII. But due to continuing conflict with the Thai and exhaustion of the great irrigation systems, it eventually fell, and the Khmer shifted their centre to the present-day site of Phnom Penh to pursue maritime trading through the Mekong Delta. In cultural terms there was a corresponding shift from Hinduism to Buddhism and, influenced by prolonged warring and conflict, a hardening of attitudes towards women.

The fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, during which many of the present-day attitudes restricting the behaviour of Cambodian women originated, are the least documented in Cambodian history. Chandler (1993:77) points out that during this period the entire population shifted from beliefs in Vishnuism to Theravada Buddhism, though the latter was greatly influenced by ancient animistic and Hindu practices and beliefs.

³ Discussing this historical aspect of the culture with several educated Khmer men in the 1990s revealed their beliefs that harsh controls on women's behaviour later introduced under King Duang were an entirely justifiable reaction to this earlier freedom.

This form of Theravada Buddhism has remained the foundation of Khmer cultural identity to the present time, despite periods of denial under communism.⁴ The post-Anchorean period was extremely unsettled due to revolutions and constant warring between competing royals and officials, and between neighbours (Keo Men, 1997:16). This period saw a strengthening of Khmer fear and distrust of their neighbours, due to periods of annexation by both Thai and Vietnamese. These had resulted in such chaos, killing and severe shortages of men that the society neared extinction. Internally there were also religious conflicts between the Vishnuists and Buddhists, and famine and disease were prevalent. The large numbers of men occupying bonzehood (Buddhist monkhood), combined with loss of men through conflict, resulted in periods where there were drastic shortages of male labour. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that in this time of cruelty and disaster - which many Cambodians believe was worse than that suffered under Pol Pot - the great majority of anonymous rice-farmers holding the country together were women, as occurred following the KR in the late 1970s.

Due to the decrease in male population and the influence of their hegemonic neighbours, this period saw increasingly patriarchal attitudes and restrictive codes for women's behaviour in Cambodia, not dissimilar to those seen in the 1990s. Ebihara (1984:294) tells us that in this time Cambodian people at all levels of society were increasingly using the patron-client system, attaching themselves to the more powerful to gain access to resources beyond their control. Woodside (1984:319) explains that these patron-client relationships preserved hierarchical positions (both hereditary and non-hereditary) through adherence to the Cambodian Buddhist moral and legal 'laws' called the *chbab* that were introduced during this period. Behaviours related to the orally-transmitted *chbab* have broadly remained in practice throughout Cambodia. They were still taught in homes, schools and monasteries throughout the country in the 1990s, enjoining clients to be obedient, and teaching them the ethics of obedience to masters outside the family. Chandler (1993:90) reveals that the *chbab* described knowledge as static, with teachers and parents 'bestowing', 'transmitting' and 'commanding', while

⁴ Cambodian kings continued to have Hindu priests privately conduct rituals prior to the official Buddhist ceremonies into the 1990s (Népote, 1992).

wives, students and children ‘received’, ‘accepted’ and ‘obeyed’. As evidenced by the ideals of good behaviour I observed in the 1990s, Cambodians believed that proper hierarchical relationships and a shared Buddhist ideology were necessary for the cohesion of society. To maintain this cohesion, appropriate respectful behaviour, and proper language including the use of pronouns, nouns and verbs emphasising the status of the speaker in relationship to the person addressed, were adhered to. However, although these behaviours and associated language remained the ideal, I heard many older people complain that terms of respect and good behaviour of children had been severely undermined by the Khmer Rouge.

In contrast, sixteenth century Cambodia was ‘profoundly Buddhist’. With the shift to Theravada Buddhism, the king (who was still seen as a Hindu god), the nobles, and the *sangha* dominated society. Chandler (1993:87) cites a Portuguese trader of this time who expressed admiration for Cambodian solidarity and obedience to the king. Da Cruz claimed that the *sangha* contained about 100,000 monks who were worshipped as gods. He estimated that these men comprised about one third of the able-bodied male population, describing them as exceedingly proud and vain. All possessions, ranks, lands and positions in society were held only at the king's pleasure. All properties were returned to the king when the owner of a house died, causing widows and their children hiding what they could to establish a new life. Da Cruz described Cambodian women in this era as mere concubines and subservient supporters, marking a shift from the more liberal view of women as recorded in Anchorean times to mere ‘supporters of men’ as described by Hun Sen in the 1990s.

Much of Cambodia’s contemporary literary traditions also date to this era. Ayres (2000:14-17) describes the ways in which these traditions (including the *chbab* poems, *Reamker*, and tales of *Gatiloke*) contributed to the creation of a plethora of didactic Khmer proverbs that people were still using to direct their lives in the 1990s. He maintains that the central themes of these proverbs are totally compatible with the country’s hierarchical system and a pragmatic acceptance of the necessity for strict social regulation. Reflecting the “immense and admirable heroism and struggle” of women facing severe restriction in contemporary Cambodia, Mav Tannavy (1998:19) believes that models prescribing women’s behaviour have always been available in literature, in

either part of a story or the whole story (as in *Reamker*, *Yum Teav* and *Mea Yoeng*). In the teaching of literature and morals at all levels of Cambodian education in the 1990s, traditional understandings of correct gendered behaviour were reinforced through the oral teaching of Khmer Buddhist laws through poems dating from this period. These include the *chbab srei* (women's laws) and the *chbab pros* (men's laws). Ayres (2000:14) points out that these poems legitimise traditional relationships and dependencies through prescriptions for harmony, balance, regularity and conformity. The *chbab rajaneti* does not question social inequalities, but counsels participants in the ways that harmony can be maintained. The *chbab kram* emphasises that people need others to guide them, and that correct social relationship between the student and teacher is a means of maintaining civilised behaviour in society. Goonatilake (1996:17) explains that despite contemporary socio-economic changes through which the vast majority of women have become income earners, with substantial numbers constituting heads of households, the sixteenth century poems, the *chbab srei*, have remained the governing code of behaviour for women. Below are extracts from a typical version of the *chbab srei* which have been translated from the rendition of Madame Saverous Pou (1988)⁵:

“Always speak sweetly and accomplish your tasks with dexterity, weave and work with the iron and needle and finish each task forthwith ... you must grow old without a moment of distraction ... never turn your back to your husband when he sleeps and never touch his head without first bowing in his honour ... you must take care of your parents and never contradict them ... never tattle to your parents anything negative about your husband or this will cause the village to erupt ... never go strolling to visit others ... respect and fear the wishes of your husband and take his advice to heart ... if your husband gives an order, don't hesitate a moment in responding ... avoid posing yourself as an equal to your husband – and never above he who is your master; if he insults you, go to your room and reflect, never insult or talk back to him ... have patience, prove your patience, never responding to his excessive anger ... but using gentle language in response.” (Saverous Pou, cited in Zimmerman, 1994:24)

The following version of *Mea Yoeng* (Our Uncle), a folk tale from this era about “a woman with holes in her basket”, reinforces Buddhist ideals of the perfectly virtuous woman. This story continues to be used to direct young women in the kinds of strong behaviour expected of Khmer women:

⁵ As these codes of behaviour are orally transmitted, this French publication is unique. I found it to be rare, and only available in private collections.

In the time of a compassionate and illustrious king, there lived in great misery a poor fisherman and his wife. The woman carried fish her husband caught in a basket, but the basket was full of holes and many of the fish escaped. The woman was lazy and careless, and did not bother to repair the basket. One day a merchant vessel was passing along the river, and the wife of the chief of this vessel spied the fisherman's wife and called out to her, "Hey! Why don't you stop up the holes in your basket?"

The merchant was angry at his wife and also saw the remarkable beauty of the woman with holes in her basket. He demanded that the fisherman exchange wives with him. His wife, being a *srei kruap leakkh*, a perfectly virtuous woman, willingly followed her husband's orders; the woman with the holes in her basket was overjoyed at the prospect of being the rich man's wife and the poor fisherman was afraid to object, so the switch occurred.

The virtuous woman patched the basket and the catch increased significantly, so much so that she even suggested that he share some with their neighbours, who promptly decided that the fisherman had a fine new wife.

The fisherman came home from chopping wood one day. And his wife recognised one particular type of precious wood. She had him find more, which she marketed, and they became wealthy. Then she suggested that her husband take up running, and when he became accomplished, she arranged to have him introduced to the king. When the king's horse ran at full gallop on an outing in the woods, only Mea Yoeng kept up with him. Alone in the forest, the king ate a wonderful meal prepared by Mea Yoeng's virtuous wife. Then on three different occasions, Mea Yoeng saved the life of the king and became his most valued servant.

As for the new wife of the merchant, with her laziness and careless ways, she squandered away the wealth of the merchant. She had a baby by the chief of this boat. After the baby relieved himself, the unvirtuous woman wiped him with silk clothes, which she then threw away in the river. In time, all their wealth and the boat were lost, and they were reduced to begging from house to house. One day, they came to the home of their former spouses. The virtuous woman recognised them and pointed out that for their greed they now had nothing, while she who was tossed away had transformed a miserable person into a rich man. The couple were greatly ashamed, and left the mansion. (Translation cited in Ledgerwood, 1994)

Orally transmitted stories such as this re-enforce the qualities of the ideal Cambodian woman, and the ways in which she should behave. Women I spoke with agreed that in order to find a husband and maintain a marriage they not only needed to

honour their parents and be quiet and gentle, but also should be intelligent, advising and assisting their husband in his endeavours, as well as generous and obedient. They also needed to know how to cook delicious food, wash clothes and take care of babies. Most importantly, as this story shows, Cambodian women have a role as keepers of the family wealth. Fisher-Nguyen (1994:100) has pointed to this element in many orally transmitted Khmer proverbs dating from this period, including: “ If you do not listen to the advice of a woman, you’ll not have any rice seed next year”; “Wealth is there because the woman knows how to save and be frugal”; and “The rice seed draws the earth to it in clumps; the woman supports the man”. These proverbs further praise the qualities of the virtuous women. However, they also show the enormous burden of responsibility placed on a woman for the success of her family, often despite the behaviour of her husband. If her husband fails her, society dictates that she must shoulder the blame. Given the abiding influence of proverbs and literature noted by Thion (1983:11) in the 1980s, stressing the helplessness of the individual, the centrality of the king and the acceptance of prevailing power relationships, it is possible to discern more ancient cultural models in the social and political behaviours of the 1990s. (See Appendix 4 for other widely used proverbs related to women in the 1990s.)

Although much of contemporary oral ‘literature’ dates from these times, little was recorded of Cambodian life in the sixteenth century because of limited contact with outside traders. However, a return to being a maritime kingdom in the seventeenth century gave rise to prosperity and the emergence of numerous historical records. Chandler (1993:94) has summarised Cambodia at this time as “a variegated, conservative and hierarchically organised society, consisting of a few thousand privileged men and women, propped up by an almost invisible wall of rice farmers, in which great emphasis was placed on rank and privilege, and on behaviour thought to be appropriate to one's status”. Harsh times had led to the disappearance of the ‘non-mercantile middle class’ of the Anchorean period. Describing the social structure of this time, a Spanish missionary recorded only two classes, rich nobles and poor commoners (Chandler, p.87). All nobles had several wives, the number depending on their level of wealth. High-ranking women were white and beautiful, wearing silks and fine gauze, and traveling in groups carried on the shoulders of others. He described common people traveling by cart and buffalo as ‘brown’ and explained that the women worked the soil while their husbands made war. In

a striking parallel, following fifteen years under communist rule, the 1990s saw the return of a widened gap between rich and poor. While the elite did not openly have several wives, they were frequently promiscuous and beautiful women were expected to be white. Several women explained to me that Cambodians hated their natural brown skins, preferring to marry Chinese in order to be more 'white'. It is possible that this kind of preference helped give rise to the supportive role rich Chinese merchants offered the Cambodian elite in the 1990s.⁶

By the end of this period, the seventeenth century saw the region's trading centre shifting to Saigon, resulting in Phnom Penh becoming a backwater. Saveros Pou (cited in Chandler, 1993:250, ref.18) has traced a slow degradation of the gentler, traditional Khmer values from the seventeenth century onwards, partly caused by a strong Thai influence. According to Lim (1993), this was because Khmer kings were being educated in the extremely patriarchal Thai courts. This altered the collective acceptance of traditional Cambodian values. Buddhist notions of social order became enshrined in local stories and versions of the classics focussing on the restriction of female freedom and legitimising barbaric violence against women seen to be unfaithful in love. Such stories have continued to be popular to the present time. Added to this, as in contemporary Cambodia, men continued to obtain merit through becoming monks and shunning worldly activities such as trading, while women were encouraged to handle the family purse and run small businesses to supplement the family income.

The 'laws' articulated in these stories became severely restrictive, with women required to purify their minds and be perfectly virtuous. Women were confined to running the house and family budget while caring for the children. In the 1990s, they were again being memorised by all Cambodian children, and belief in their 'rightness' remained strong. The seventeenth century also saw the introduction of the tradition *chol mlop*, where girls reaching the age of puberty were condemned to stay at home to take care of their body and receive advice from their parents until marriage. Keo Men (1997:18) states that this custom prevented women from going to school and acquiring

⁶ I witnessed several cases of a prejudice against 'brown skinned' women. One of these was a prostitute who claimed that her price had to be much lower than her fairer-skinned Vietnamese (Chinese looking)

comprehensive knowledge of academic secular affairs and *dharma* (the Buddhist way to live). It also prevented them from contributing to social activities. Although the practice itself no longer existed in the 1990s, the associated restrictive attitudes towards the behaviour of young women remained. These attitudes are apparent in examples translated by Keo Men of insulting sayings originating from the seventeenth century and common throughout the 1990s. These include, "women cannot [do not have the ability to] go away from the kitchen" and "women urinate no further than their heels". Lyrics from a song of this period, when women vastly outnumbered men, include the words "a virgin costs 20 cents and ten skinny widows cost one seed of areca".⁷ A saying referring to the low value of women and still popular in contemporary times is, "what is scarce costs more and what is abundant costs less". Furthermore, in the harsh period of the Vietnamese protectorate and Thai invasions of the early nineteenth century, women were prevented from becoming literate or learning simple mathematics, reasoning that if they did, they may become clever enough to write love letters to boys. In this period even King Duang was quoted as saying "women are not important and only exist to serve men's sexual desire". Keo uses these examples to explain the devaluation of women and unacceptably high levels of family violence in the 1990s, stressing that traditions dating from this period have continued to strongly influence the thinking and behaviour of Cambodians.

By the nineteenth century, Cambodia had become so weakened after being repeatedly invaded and occupied by both Vietnam and Thailand, that the south-east had irreversibly fallen under the control of the culturally incompatible and much-dreaded Vietnamese. They attempted to colonise the Cambodians through controlling the adult male population (Chandler, 1993:117-127). They treated Cambodians with disdain, seeing them as a lazy, barbaric race badly in need of cultural and agricultural reform at every level. For Cambodians, this period encompassed the darkest part of the dark ages of Cambodian history, comparable with life under the horrific 1970s Khmer Rouge regime.

friend. Another case was of a wealthy young man who was in love with a beautiful, educated girl, but he said his parents would never accept the colour of her skin.

⁷ This is particularly insulting since the areca flower represents an ancient tradition symbolising a pure and virtuous woman in Cambodian marriage, pre-dating and including Buddhist marriage ceremonies. The flower represents the appreciation of the groom to those who have helped him find a pure woman. (Moeun Nhean, 2001:12-14).

An extract from an unpublished poem, written in 1856 and housed in Wat Srolauv, north-central Cambodia, describes the life of an elite Cambodian and his family in flight from the Vietnamese several years earlier. "Their misery was so great. There was no food at all, no fish, no rice ... to stave off their hunger; instead, they dug for lizards (together) ... without being guilty about it ... They hunted for roots ... it was hard to swallow the food; they sat silently beside the road, intensely poor, and miserable." (cited in Chandler, 1982:65)

Eventually, due to the strength of the Thai and the strong cultural and religious entanglement of the Thai and Cambodian courts, the Vietnamese withdrew. Chandler (1993:133) states that in 1841 the Thai released the impounded Khmer Prince Duang to be installed as the legitimate king of Cambodia. The Theravada Buddhism that had been destroyed by the Vietnamese was now restored. King Duang, however, was in control of an utterly weakened country, remaining subservient to the Thai to keep clear of the Vietnamese. Under his patriarchal rule, *chbab* teachings portraying women as the moral guardians of society became even more restrictive at all levels of society. In a story written by King Duang himself, he describes a certain Queen Kakei who was married to a king with hundreds of concubines. When the king found that his queen had a lover of her own, he was afraid people would laugh at him so he ordered his men to put her on a raft and abandon her to the sea. In discussing this story separately with two educated Cambodian men (interview, 1996), they recognised King Duang as an excellent king who was just and right to treat his queen in such a way, as they believed that women needed to be kept under control. However, Keo Men (1997:10) believed that this and other more extreme stories from this period that were still popular in the 1990s provided negative models and served to legitimise jealousy, vengeance and domestic violence against women as the social norm.

3.2 French Influence

Looking at early French records of Cambodia, we can see that the Khmer population is not unaccustomed to suffering, oppression, exploitation and human trafficking. In an official French expedition to explore the Mekong River as a trade route in 1866-68, Louise de Carné (1995:10,11) described Cambodia as a 'dismembered kingdom', victim to the greed and cunning of both Siam and Hué alike. He recorded that

the population of Cambodia was “hardly a million souls, including in this number forty thousand slaves, and twenty thousand (more or less independent) savages inhabiting the mountains”.⁸ He claims that the suppression by the Annamites (Vietnamese) was so great that Cambodian dislike towards them turned into ‘inextinguishable hatred’. The Annamites regarded the Cambodians with ‘profound contempt’, their emperor boasting that under his rule, “those barbarous manners which showed themselves in their cutting of hair, in wearing clothes not slit at the side, in covering their body round with a langouti, in eating with their fingers, and sitting squat on their heels”, were disappearing day by day. The Cochin-Chinese law went so far as to “punish with strangling any Annamite who married a Cambodian woman”. De Carné states that “the Annamite emperor’s clear intention was to conquer the whole kingdom”. Burchett (1981:49) reveals that a French bureaucrat of this time described Cambodian peasantry as suffering miserably. “The blows of fate catch him disarmed; sickness, death and calamities make him prey to the Chinese usurers. From then he struggles hard, working more and more land in the vain hope of wiping out a debt that usury is ceaselessly swelling. His harvests are automatically confiscated, his family goes into slavery, beginning with the youngest and the females, and the day comes when despite all his sacrifices, he is brutally dispossessed of his property by his creditors. There is nothing left for him to do but to go and live off a relative whom luck has made better off, or enter religious life.”

Turning to the culturally more compatible Thai court for protection against the cruel Vietnamese, King Duang enjoyed a period of peace and near normality through subservience. Realising the weakness inherent in such dependence, and facing imminent annexation by both countries, in 1853 he called on the French to declare a protectorate over Cambodia. As Osborne (1992) points out, while the French initially eliminated the threat of annexation by the feared and hated Vietnamese, they immediately began to

⁸ Louis de Carné (1995:82,83) recorded several classes of slavery including slaves for debt, slaves of the king, and slaves of the pagoda. Slaves for debt were held as debt interest only, providing the labour of those taken in war or those reduced to slavery by legal sentence. Slaves of the pagoda were held for crimes in the pagoda or were taking refuge from pursuit for delinquency. They became “a slave, or rather bonze, for life”. Other slaves could be purchased in Phnom Penh, Laos and Siam. Those most prized were taken from the forests where they had been trapped by ‘manhunters’. Price was determined by the degree of confidence a master could put in the slave’s ‘uprightness’. Consequently, Annamite slaves were the cheapest. Young, good-looking virgin girls were bought as mistresses by rich men for the same price as ‘pleasure elephants’.

encourage Vietnamese immigration into Cambodian areas, and systematically stripped the king of his traditional power. This fear of the Vietnamese helped fuel the Maoist Khmer Rouge and still persists in contemporary Cambodia.

As under the French, working as an official in the Cambodian government in the 1990s provided a network of status relationships giving access to power and money (Chandler, 1993:142-158). Peasants paid in rice, forest products and labour to support the bureaucrats, while they in turn paid the king. Their system was based on the support of entourages, the exploitation of labour, and the taxation of harvests (rather than land), for the benefit of the elite. Tully (2002:64) records that at the end of the 19th century the king was still seen as a god with around 500 wives and up to 100 children. He abducted beautiful young women from the countryside to add to his harem which absorbed the greatest part of the country's revenue. He points out that French bureaucrats interested in the development of Cambodia actually believed that their reforms (intended for the betterment of the majority) would be well received by the poor and exploited. Their 'orientalist, rationalist'⁹ view of life meant that the French – like the Western aid providers of the 1990s - were totally baffled by the different perceptions held by the Khmer, who believed their own, traditional ways were better.

Cambodians had not foreseen the cost of the French protection they had requested, including the changes that the French would seek to impose on their culture. Though neither masters nor slaves wanted it, the French abolished slavery. They effectively cut the king from his entourage, and the entourage from its followers (though servitude for debts remained widespread). In this way, the god-king was effectively reduced to mere puppet of the French. The elite could only gain poorly paid jobs in the public service, thus weakening the traditional social structure. The peasants were forced to pay taxes at the highest rates in Indochina. Added to this, the highly paid French officials enforced the hitherto unknown practice of 'land ownership' for tax exploitation, and bought up large amounts of property. France had clearly been guilty of exerting their paternal colonial superiority over a country they largely considered as a 'far away backwater' of scant

⁹ In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1979) described the ways in which western concepts falsely rationalised and oversimplified Asian cultures. Consequently they perceived 'the other' as childlike, savage and sensual.

importance within their huge empire (Tully, 2002:121). Although their archaeologists awakened Cambodian awareness of the greatness of Khmer history, the French shamelessly spent almost nothing on education or health improvements. Khmer Prince Yukanthor attempted to publicise the French injustice to Cambodia in France, proclaiming, “you have created poverty, and thus you have created the poor”, before fleeing in fear of reprisal to self-exile in Siam.

Although they have been criticised for making Cambodians disproportionately aware of their ‘glorious Anchorean past’, one of the enduring legacies of the French occupation was the restoration of Anchor Wat as the Khmer national icon. In the 1990s, apart from occupying central place on the national flag, this magnificent monument could be seen in paintings on the wall of every government ministry and home, and filling every art shop. However, as I discovered in discussions with Cambodian post-graduate students, the reality that Anchor Wat belonged to a long lost period of cultural renaissance and did not represent modern cultural realities eluded them. Edwards (1999:1), in her paper ‘Propagating Patriarchy: Marianne and Joan of Arc in French Propaganda and Colonial Nationalism’, has pointed out that France strongly embossed its paternalistic image onto colonised Cambodia through attempting to restore its Anchorean heritage as a parallel to the French Napoleonic era. She said they did this through “militarisation and maternity ward, costume and custom, exhibition and education”. Edwards maintains that under the French, Cambodian women were commonly idealised as symbols of their glorious ‘lost past’, which eluded present reality. Seeing Cambodian women as ‘dressed like men’, they attempted to impose their own Western ideals of femininity. For example, a visiting Englishman, Casey (1929, Chapter 6), saw Cambodian women’s faces as ‘hard and masculine’ attributing this to the “legendary days when the females of Cambodia turned the tide of battle against the Thais and gained the right to ape the dress and appearance of warriors”. He noted that Cambodian women were ‘strange’ with their with betel-stained teeth¹⁰ and close-cropped hair, and

¹⁰ Chewing betel is an excellent way to prevent tooth-decay.

distinguished only from men by their ‘superior grace of carriage’. Like the men, women wore the *sompot* in a diaper-like fashion between the legs and knotted at the belt.¹¹

Determined to ‘civilize’ the Khmer, the French imposed their conception of race, civilisation and tradition through the press and secular French schools, presenting a rupture with the abiding traditional Khmer society, particularly in urban areas. Without being invited into Cambodian homes (not a Cambodian custom), the French arrogantly judged Khmer women as not only dressing in an unfeminine way, but as being inferior wives and mothers. At the same time, they encouraged women to become better wives and mothers, through propagation of the popular French ‘cult of Joan of Arc’.¹² They recast Cambodian heroines, and strongly endorsed the *chbab srey* rules to encourage the feminisation of women. At the same time the French reinvented the exterior Cambodian male and female images through enforcing more covered and clearly gender-divided Western dress codes. Because women at that time could not be seen in public unless they were wearing acceptable clothing, many had to borrow clothes to venture outside their house and beautiful girls made themselves as ugly as possible so that French men would not trouble them (interview with elderly informants, 1997).

In order to endorse their idea of ‘civilised behaviour’, Edwards (1999:15) explained that the French introduced ‘secular girls’ schools’ in urban areas. Here Cambodian girls were provided with four years of schooling, including domestic work, dressmaking, maternal care, basic maths, Khmer and French. They were trained to become wives of civil servants and praised for their modernised dress styles, high heels and bobbed haircuts,¹³ while the boys were educated for the civil service. In 1918 almost 10,000 girls were being educated in these schools. This increased to 20,000 in 1927. At the same time,

¹¹ Casey (1929), also described his strong sense of unchanging ancient Khmer ancestry in the farmers who wore ‘negligible scraps of clothing’ as they transplanted rice shoots by hand, laboriously ploughing the fields with wooden ploughs and sieving rice in wicker baskets. He noted hundreds of priests journeying in bands, “trailing their yellow robes through the shaded streets”.

¹² Ironically, although the French tried to impose their colonial ideas of women as wives and mothers in Cambodia, it was the Cambodian women educated in the French ‘privileged’ schools for the elite (including the wife of ‘Pol Pot’) who participated in the nationalist overturning of colonial imagery.

¹³ My translator was French-educated. She was extremely outspoken, with a highly developed level of French etiquette and housekeeping methodology.

however, some were arguing for a modern, ungendered education system. According to Chandler (1993:160), the only contribution the French made to the wider Cambodian state education system was to sponsor the 5,000 existing *wat* schools (at very little cost), only introducing the first state secondary school in Phnom Penh as late as 1936. Traditional primary education in the *wat* schools (primarily for boys) remained under the control of the *sangha*. In agreement with Edwards (1999), Ayres (2000) argues that the 'education crisis' of the 1990s was a direct result of French policies and neglect of education for the agrarian majority. This in turn resulted in the contemporary, persisting ideal of boys being educated for an overloaded bureaucracy and girls being educated to fulfil domestic roles as wives for bureaucrats.

Onset of the Second World War and subsequent Japanese occupation provided impetus for the birth of Khmer nationalistic thinking and a strong will to be free of the repression of colonialism. This strengthened the Cambodian resolve to cling to their culture - though by this time 'Khmer culture' had incorporated a strong French overlay in urban areas, exacerbated by self-serving land ownership rights introduced under the French - encouraging huge increases in illegal land seizures and landlordism, exploitation, and Chinese usury. Consequently, as seen in the 1990s when much land was illegally confiscated by the powerful, by 1950 only 44 percent of the cultivated land was owned by peasantry who survived on less than two hectares of land per family. Over 50 percent of the land was owned by the wealthiest 20 percent of farmers and 20 percent of the rural workforce was classified as landless. They were living on rented land, share-cropping or working as hired labourers, and surviving however they could (Ebihara, 1971:51).

By 1949 Cambodia had proclaimed independence from France, although France maintained economic and military control until 1954. According to Ayres (2000:18), the cultural legacy of the French colonial period was permanent disruption with the harmony of the Khmer Buddhist social system. He points out that this period created an "irreconcilable fusion of conflicting cultural and political ideals", spawning the emergence of two ideologically opposed political cultures that have remained until the

present time – one was the traditionally harmonious Buddhism meaningfully connecting all levels of society; while the other had notions of modernity that largely ignored the peasantry, encouraging them to be loyal and acquiescent to the elite. Finally, in 1953 Cambodia gained independence under the previously French-installed puppet leader King Sihanouk, who, in the words of Osborne (1992:137), pursued a policy of neutrality for fifteen years of peace under ‘Buddhist Socialism’.

3.3 Independence: 1953-74

Cambodia under King Sihanouk was internationally viewed as ‘the jewel of Asia’, and this period of independence is still seen by many Cambodians as ‘idyllic’. The population of that time was estimated to be fewer than 5,000,000.¹⁴ Osborne (1992) recorded that, in line with his ancestors, Sihanouk saw both people and country as his personal possession, and the people widely supported him as their god king, believing him to be endowed with supernatural powers. As a ruler, he was energetic, eccentric, egotistic, shrewd and contradictory, achieving widespread changes for his country. These included the establishment of public health and education, and the creation of universities. He was also responsible for the creation of hydraulic works and tourism, and the beginnings of industrialisation. Sihanouk was famous for producing numerous romanticised movies promoting his culture, his country, and himself as its only suitable ruler. These movies served to perpetuate the prevailing stereotypes of women. Steinberg (1959) described Sihanouk's Cambodia as containing three main occupational segments: government bureaucracy, clergy and peasantry.

In his attempt to soften the extreme gaps between the urban and rural population and in line with his socialist policies, in 1965 Sihanouk gave women the right to vote. He also promoted a policy of education for both genders, although as Osborne (1992:269) has pointed out, the teachers were unskilled and provided deplorably low teaching levels. Unfortunately, Sihanouk did not foresee that students reaching tertiary levels would prefer the liberal arts and humanities in the hope of gaining employment in the

¹⁴ This of course, did not include the large number of Khmer living in the Mekong Delta area (known as Kampuchea Krom), annexed to Vietnam under the French.

bureaucracy, and reject the technical subjects that were more suited to their agrarian society (Ayres, 2000:53). As a result, the number of high school and university graduates in liberal arts and humanities far exceeded possibilities for employment in the civil service, and few were trained as technicians. Many of these unemployed disillusioned males and females were to drift into the communist movement that formed the basis of the destructive Khmer Rouge regime. This imbalance in education persisted into the 1990s because the highly conservative officials from MOEYS were predictably strongly supportive of the preferred ideals introduced under the French. Education suiting the predominantly agrarian society was yet to be formulated even though the agricultural sector of Cambodia remained dominant, with commercial aspects being handled primarily by the Chinese.

In economic terms, many of the conditions occurring under Sihanouk's independence returned to become the norm in the 1990s. Ebihara (1971) recorded that under Sihanouk, although 80 percent of all cultivated land was occupied by rice growing, the majority of rice farmers were only able to use their crops for family consumption due to the small size of their holdings. She maintains that those living beside the Tonle Sap Lake and along rivers or coastline were mostly professional Vietnamese fishermen. Fishing as a larger, organised activity was mainly controlled by the Chinese who leased fishing grounds in both the Tonle Sap and the sea. The large amounts of fish caught were sold fresh or dried. They were also made into fish-paste or oil, with up to one third being exported. In addition to this, large-scale producers from plantations of pepper and rubber were owned and operated by either the French or Chinese who utilised Vietnamese contract labour. Less significantly, timber and other forest products were exported. Hu Nim (1965) provided a detailed breakdown of the enormous exploitation of the poor peasants by rich peasants and landlords at that time.

The peasants are not only victims of natural calamities resulting from serious climatic defects and of the agrarian system inherited from the colonial era, but also of exploitation by landlords, usurers, merchants and comprador businessmen. Commercial capital, usury and land rent comprise an outdated system exploiting the masses of the peasantry. (Hu Nim, 1965 doctoral thesis cited in Kiernan and Boua, 1982:77-85)

In 1959-60, anthropologist Mayko Ebihara (1971) undertook a detailed study of a segment of Khmer peasant culture. Her study is significant because it provides the first

understanding of village life in a section of the hitherto largely invisible and unchanging agrarian population.¹⁵ Although it is now recognised that there is great variation in villages throughout Cambodia, in the absence of any other studies of the rural population prior to the 1990s, Ebihara's account has remained an important source of information on the agrarian sector. Ebihara (1971:63-65) revealed that the majority of rice farmers in her village produced barely enough for survival, so every Cambodian family fished in their paddy field or nearby waterholes and streams. Families along river-banks were able to grow vegetables, fruit and fibre crops. These included maize, beans, peanuts, sugar cane, soy-beans, bananas, coconuts, cotton, tobacco, ramie and kapok to sell in the markets. As occurred in the 1990s, Ebihara noted that in some instances entire villages devoted themselves to handicrafts such as weaving, basketry and mat making, pottery, metal work and woodwork. These were sold in both local and regional markets. Every agricultural community had a few individuals who were able to practise some craft or skill on a part time basis. Cattle breeding occurred in a few provinces, and individual Khmer families sometimes raised a few chickens or pigs to sell. Unfortunately, much of this skills base was lost in the Khmer Rouge era. Returning to her chosen village in 1989, Ebihara (1990a) found that although its size had diminished and the people had suffered deeply, many, although poorer, had returned to conduct their lives in much the same way as before.

In the village culture, although women and men worked equally in the fields, men held all formal positions of power within the community. Ebihara (1990a:21) noted that Buddhist temples served as the moral, social and educational centres in villages, and monks were accorded the highest respect. She observed that Theravada Buddhism was combined with folk beliefs and practices that revolved around a variety of animistic spirits. In her focus village, she found that no females over 18 were literate, but 75 percent of males were, due to boys having access to a traditional temple school where they served as monks for various periods of time (p.530). However, although under Sihanouk girls living in rural areas were given the opportunity to go to school for the first time in history, and even though villagers saw the advantages of both girls and boys receiving education, because females were responsible for governing the household,

¹⁵ Ebihara's fieldwork constituted the only anthropological studies on Khmer women until the 1990 study undertaken by Brigitte Sonnois (Redd Barna, Phnom Penh). Ebihara's work was widely used as a reference for WID planning in the 1990s.

raising the children and managing household finances, only one third of the enrolments were female. Although the government school system had superseded the temple in delivering education in the 1990s, much of the culture described by Ebihara re-emerged in the 1990s.

In relation to the importance of women's role in the family, Népote (1992) maintained that their social position was directed through an older brother. In keeping with tradition, women kept their maiden name after marriage. Népote pointed out that if a Khmer man wanted to assert his authority he had no choice but to assume the leadership of a family 'clan' in which no one dared act independently, or deprive the family of an opportunity to enrich itself or exert its power. In a French symposium on Khmer history, Thion (1993:16), in agreement with Népote, indicated that two abiding backbones of Khmer society have been kingship and kinship, of which no complete analysis has been undertaken. Both French academics maintained that although kingship is patrilineal, society at large inherits a degree of matrilineal orthodoxy; with the traditional model of 1960s Cambodian society being made up of two symmetrical halves divided into large matrilineal clans. These occupied territorial units known as *phum* or *srok*, constantly struggling against each other, and elements of these traditions have continued to strongly influence the society.

To ensure the continuing health and sustainability of the clans, suitability to marriage and choice of a suitable partner have always been central issues in the Khmer society. Under Sihanouk, traditional stories, proverbs and *chbab* rules to prepare girls for womanhood were strongly enforced in homes and schools throughout the kingdom. Girls were still 'put into the shade' (*chol mlop*) for up to six months at the onset of puberty, depending on the economic level of the family. They were given special foods to eat, taught household skills, and protected from all kinds of desire. Following this isolation at home, girls then underwent a ceremony and were eligible for marriage. Although *chol mlop* ceased under the Khmer Rouge, in the 1990s girls still remained closely chaperoned until marriage. As commonly seen in the 1990s, arranged introductions were organised in consultation with the parents, and when there was an agreement between all parties, an engagement ceremony was arranged. Steinberg (1959:84) points out that under Sihanouk young men took a vow of servitude to their future in-laws and embarked on a courtship

designed to test their qualities as a husband. This was done through labouring for them in agricultural and household tasks for up to two years. However, courtship has been less demanding in contemporary times. Poor behaviour, disrespect, complaints or infidelity could result in dismissal and an end to the engagement. However, as in the 1990s, if an engagement was dissolved, the girl's reputation was in greater tatters than the boy's. Martin (1994:25) points out that when a young man married, he moved to live with his wife's parents, who generally had a lineage superior to his own. Steinberg tells us that although these traditions were persistent and unchanging in the countryside, they were greatly modified in the cities due to Chinese, Vietnamese and European influences. Unattached men and women were severely disapproved of, so women were expected to marry, whereas men could choose between marriage and monkhood.

Ebihara (1971:113) found that although Buddhist doctrine assigned superiority to males, and the legal code provided a man with almost absolute power over his wife, in everyday village life, the relative positions of male and female were equal. She observed little division of labour and behaviour patterns between women and men under Sihanouk (p.190-96). Although certain activities such as women caring for the household and men ploughing the field were gendered, many activities were shared, and gendered activities could be reversed without fear of embarrassment. Ebihara noted that men were responsible for providing food, shelter and 'moral aid' to their wives, and had to obtain their consent before entering the monastery or taking a concubine. Women were responsible for caring for the children, overseeing and keeping the family budget, and respecting and obeying their husbands. Although these behaviours were seriously eroded under the intervening communist regimes, they have remained the ideal in the 1990s. As in contemporary Cambodia, women frequently undertook commercial ventures to earn money, and could own and dispose of property in their own right (p.355). Even though women enjoyed a considerable degree of voice and independence in village life, as well as great authority within the family, men enjoyed superior social status and more mobility and freedom of action. Wealth alone was not the basis for prestige under Sihanouk, although in the current market-based society this ideal has been seriously eroded.

In urban Phnom Penh in the Sihanouk period, according to Martin (1994:25), Cambodian women enjoyed both social and political importance even though formal political power belonged to men. The husband trusted his wife to care for the wealth of their family, and the wife exerted great influence over her husband, pleasing and charming him until she bent his will to her wishes. Thus, the Khmer husband was rarely in a position of strength in his home, while the wife had the potential to utilise her husband's societal position to build herself a 'clientele'. At the same time, as seen again in the 1990s, extreme male sexual promiscuity was considered as the norm (Vickery, 1984:176). When a woman's husband had a position of power, his wife's power could become enormous, with subordinate's wives and friends turning to her for favours that had to be paid for in one way or another. Hence the frequently quoted Khmer proverb: "If the husband is a colonel, his wife will be a general." This distribution of power was again clearly evident among the elite in the 1990s.

Although Sihanouk helped to restore traditional Khmer values and a sense of national pride, Chandler (1993:200-205) records that his popularity began to fade. Apart from a seeming unwillingness to deal with corruption in his government, Sihanouk closed private banks and nationalised the import-export sector to cripple the monopoly of Chinese business in Phnom Penh. However, most importantly, in late 1963 Sihanouk cut off the U.S. military aid program in order to stay out of the Vietnam War. This effectively lowered the national budget by 15 percent and lowered the morale of the armed forces, making Sihanouk more vulnerable to pressures from the left. Finally, during his absence from the country, an army coup overthrew Sihanouk and installed his pro-U.S. Prime Minister Lon Nol as leader of the country.

Although Lon Nol's coup was popular among the educated in Phnom Penh and in the army, rural Cambodians (traditionally loyal to the king) were unprepared for a republican leader. City people were complaining that traditional morality and family structure were being increasingly undermined because of the financial independence of women educated under Sihanouk, with, according to Vickery (1984:176-77), women increasingly demanding social and even sexual equality. In the eyes of the old traditionalists, the saying "too much education can turn women into whores" was being

vindicated.¹⁶ The Lon Nol Regime's overwhelming corruption and attempts to brutally crush all opposition, combined with the legitimisation of relentless U.S. carpet-bombing of large areas of Cambodian countryside, exhausted the agrarian population in the East, and hardened the will of the surviving Communist forces (Chandler, 1993:200).

Finally, in early 1975, communist 'Democratic Kampuchea' (DK) forces mined the approaches to Phnom Penh and prevented shipments of rice and ammunition from reaching the capital. The city swelled with up to two million refugees. After three months of virtual siege, Lon Nol fled the country, and Communists troops dressed in khaki uniforms and peasant clothes filed silently in to take control of Phnom Penh. These soldiers were mainly heavily armed child recruits under fifteen years of age. They believed that they could help return Prince Sihanouk to power and end civil war. Initially welcomed, they emptied the city to usher in a shocking new phase that Ben Kiernan has described as "the most totalitarian system in recorded history" (Monash-Asia Institute lecture, September, 1999).

3.4 Maoist Influence

The revolutionary regime, the Khmer Rouge (KR), believed that Cambodia's poor rural community, exploited and enslaved throughout history, could now rid their country of all Western influences, control their own lives and collectively become masters of their own destiny. In this way they could recapture the genius of the legendary Anchorean society. In fact, they introduced 'a system of absolute slavery' dominated by a totally despotic regime (interview, Khmer lecturer, 1998). Ayres (2000:103) points out that the aims of the regime were to rid Cambodia of everything Western. Agriculture, particularly rice production, was to become the basis of economic reconstruction and development. The Cambodian Genocide Program (Yale University) estimates that out of

¹⁶ A well-known example of this change was the beautiful and talented leading dancer of the royal ballet. French educated daughter of Sihanouk, Princess Bopha Devi (currently Minister of Culture and Fine Arts) openly emulated the behaviour of her male counterparts by choosing numerous handsome men of her own choice to liaise with, shocking the community and causing her father to call her a 'whore'.

a population of around eight million, close to 1.7 million Cambodians died due to murder, starvation or torture, in one of the worst human tragedies of the modern era. Educated people who had not fled the country were systematically killed. The people of this small country were left with their lives, families, knowledge, religious system, health, values, infrastructure, cities and countryside totally shattered. Children brought up in this society, the young adults of the 1990s, like their surviving parents remained traumatised. Although all historical periods have added to the current Khmer cultural heritage, it would be a grave error to underestimate the profound affect this social experiment dedicated to breaking down all aspects of the 'old' culture has had on contemporary Cambodian society.

Following their fateful entry into Phnom Penh on April 17th, 1975, the KR, predominantly manned by rifle-toting Maoist-trained teenagers from the countryside, mercilessly emptied the cities. They swept throughout the countryside bent on destroying family life, individualism, and all existing institutions. Their intent was to remove all impediments to their ideas of national autonomy and social justice. Personal accounts of the emptying of Phnom Penh revealed heart-rending callousness as the whole city, including hospitals, was simultaneously forcibly evacuated. "Children screamed, adults cried, the elderly followed miserably, and women gave birth on the sidewalks ... people were forced to abandon their possessions ... cadavers abounded ... there was an epidemic of cholera" (Martin 1994:170). Witnesses gave me accounts of wealthy people driving their Mercedes cars into the river, drowning their whole families rather than face what was to come (field notes, 1996). Although brutality is not new to Cambodia, my informants were convinced that the widespread normalisation of brutal acts in contemporary Cambodia originated from this time.

People were sent in all directions, and as a result, many families were irreparably divided and dislocated, the results of which remain to the present. Those who survived privation and execution were forced to resettle as 'new people' in assigned villages, working manually under harsh conditions, with very little food. The country was turned upside down, the rich killed and the educated demoted or killed, while the uneducated

were elevated to positions for which they were inexperienced and unqualified. There are differing accounts as to the severity of life in all regions, but in effect all were slaves who owed their allegiance to *Angkar*, under cruel conditions with appallingly little to eat. Recalling stories from literature and folk history originating in the dark ages of the eighteenth century, starvation and disease were the norm. Those who dared complain or were caught stealing food were killed. Women informants told me that all adult females ceased to menstruate, and sick people who were sent to primitive makeshift hospitals staffed by the newly appointed uneducated and inexperienced usually died. They said they only knew the name *Angkar* (the organisation), and did not hear the name of its leader, Pol Pot, until they came to Australia.

Chandler (1993:209) has detailed how under the KR, money, markets, formal education, Buddhism, books, private property, diverse clothing, styles, and freedom of movement were abolished. All personal property was confiscated, and 'collective marriages' of groups involving hundreds of mostly unwilling couples from different social and regional backgrounds were enforced (Martin 1994:172). I have known three such educated women who were subjected to these forced marriages to previously unknown 'brown-skinned' men. One bore two children and left her husband as soon as she could. The second also bore two children, but stayed with her husband because he was a 'good man', even though she did not love him. Both of these women were the family breadwinners. The last woman said she would have preferred to die than marry an unknown man, and ran away to avoid the KR punishment of death for refusing. Few such marriages have survived and many children of these unions are among the confused young adults of today. Cultural dislocation was exacerbated by the communalisation of all lands, tools and livestock and the enforcement of communal eating in order to control food distribution (Vickery, 1984:174). All organisations (cooperative, factory, mobile team) including agricultural, industrial, fishing and transport, were headed by a president and two vice presidents. Members were divided into military units (team, group, section, company, battalion, regiment and brigade). Female cadres and administrators were often only teenagers and could be just as tough as the males.¹⁷ As this kind of behaviour for

¹⁷ A Vietnamese refugee who was previously a soldier in the Vietnamese Liberation Army described the horror he felt on witnessing "the most beautiful girl I have ever seen" (a Khmer Rouge cadre) being tried and stoned to death for her particularly vicious killings of a large number of fellow villagers.

women was seen as 'un-Khmer', after liberation a return to more traditional behaviour was embraced.

The KR argued that education in the old regime was useless and failed to serve the needs of the people. Every man, woman and child was forced to take part in protracted 're-education sessions'. Here, already exhausted after a long day of hard labour, people had to silently and mindlessly endure meetings in which illiterate cadres recited propaganda and performed bizarre Maoist dances while shouting KR slogans. Everyone had to make endless 'confessions' about their anti-socialist behaviour and their previously self-centred lives. Ayres (2000:113-114) records that at this time the new mindless revolutionary songs replaced the traditional *chbab*. He points out that with no texts, inadequate writing materials and school infrastructure, unqualified and often illiterate teachers, and overworked and malnourished students, random attempts to provide education in basic literacy tended only to lead to negative developments in the children. Martin (1994:178) lamented the results of children's education under the Khmer Rouge, as "in terms of political education, there were no more familial values, critical thinking, or initiative. Too arrogant, for the children are aware of the future role that they will have in the country's reconstruction, intolerant of everything that represents weakness, pretentious, like their masters, the children are hungry for power". It is important to remember that children brought up in areas controlled by the KR until they surrendered in 1997 had known no other way of life. Conversely, many of those previously living under KR control lament that the corruption, crime and sexual promiscuity forbidden under the KR is rife in present day Cambodia.

Due to their wish to increase the revolutionary population, the KR did not want to destroy the nuclear family and forbade sexual relations outside marriage. Ebihara (1990b:30-34) points out that the communist family ideal did not include traditional extended families and parental authority, particularly over young adults, as this authority belonged to the state. Differences in status no longer existed, the concept of self was replaced with group identity by omitting *khnom* (I), and replacing it with *yeung* (we). Relations between husband and wife and parents and children were to be marked only by cordiality. A huge and enduring disruption of traditional society occurred due to the customary relationships between old and young being reversed, with children being

regarded as infants of *Angkar* (the organisation) youth regarded as respected bearers of the new revolutionary structure, and adults seen as survivors of the old, despised regime. Kinship terms of respect were altered, with, for example, all adults addressed as 'mum' or 'dad' and age peers addressed as *mit* (comrade). 'Senior comrade', 'junior comrade' and 'comrade child' were also used. According to many older people today, the behaviour of children brought up in this era retain many of these characteristics, showing no respect for their elders. At the same time, a new type of social unit was introduced, the association. These included associations for men, women, school children and young people. Of special significance was the Youth League which was used to indoctrinate and organise the young.

Kiernan and Boua (1982) found that although women worked in separate groups to men, all had to labour equally for *Angkar*. They were conscripted to long hours of digging and building canals, dams and reservoirs that were ill-planned and unsound. The 'new' people worked as rice farmers with the 'old', who were mostly already poor rice farmers. The latter experienced the least disruption of their lives. Some women were expected to spin, sew or cook for the communal kitchens. For example, my 'older sister' (*bong srei*), widowed in 1975 and mother to eleven children, was one of the 'older people' (deemed not an enemy) of Kompong Cham. All except for her youngest child were taken away, so she constantly battled with thoughts of suicide. On one occasion she was assigned to sewing the usual black clothes for a group of KR soldiers, and had to keep on working silently as they discussed the forty people they had brutally killed the night before. Everyone worked for *Angkar*. "Everybody in the village worked as hard as the next person ... However, the peasants definitely got more attention and food than the city people" (Kiernan & Boua, 1982:340). Women had to bob their hair and dress severely, being strictly segregated in work teams, associations and dining halls. Discipline was imposed on all levels of behaviour including correct modes of drinking, sleeping, walking and talking. Crimes punishable by death included laziness, resistance (even verbal) to policy or instructions, and boasting or pretension.

Vickery (1984:105,115,178) reported that married women and old people were often put to care for very small children whose mothers worked in the village. Unmarried women could be sent to work in the distant fields. Young children old enough to work

were only absent during the day and put to tasks including collecting natural fertiliser and planting and picking fruit, although others report harsher tasks being given to children. In 1977, all children over the age of eight years were separated from their parents and sent away to work. Some reported that in 1978 small children were separated from their parents and put into centres. Male and female unmarried youth were segregated into various mobile work teams and sent away to perform such tasks as clearing land and constructing buildings for *Angkar*. Buddhist pagodas were destroyed and monks were sent to labour in the fields. Although the disruption of traditional society seemed complete, in the 1990s people longed to rediscover the now glorified lost past of the 1970s.¹⁸ However, much irreparable damage has been done through the destruction of the educated class, of education, law and traditional family values, especially among the young.

Not only were the Khmer victims of the KR, but they were suffering ongoing illegal carpet bombing from the Americans backing South Vietnam. My Cambodian foster son told me that much of his childhood in Suong (near the Vietnam border) was spent running from bombs and yellow rain as the Americans illegally carpet bombed the area. From 1977-78, fighting along the border with the much feared and hated Vietnamese increased. Hanoi was now setting into place its plan to invade and 'liberate' its weakened and devastated neighbour under the excuse of constantly being attacked by them. Martin (1994:215) reminds us that conditions continued to deteriorate and, in a paranoia of eliminating 'enemies' of *Angkar*, more and more people including KR cadres themselves were being killed under an escalating program of torture and execution. Finally, on the 25th December 1978, the militarily superior Vietnamese launched a decisive assault and imposed a military occupation, causing thousands of refugees to flee across the borders into the jungles, hoping to reach Thailand.¹⁹ Many of these were to be accepted as

¹⁸ Post-graduate students in my 1997 AusAID class believed there were two great periods in Khmer history, the Anchorean and Sihanouk. They had not given any consideration to the vast differences in achievements and length of time in each period.

¹⁹ Commenting on this issue, Vickery (1984:279-81) made unfortunate comparisons with Yugoslavia (an ally of Cambodia), which shared similar structural backgrounds prior to communism. He clearly misunderstood the genuine, deep threat of unresolved historical conflicts and bitter memories of the earlier Vietnamese incursion. Mary Martin (1994), first published in French in 1989, showed a greater understanding and sensitivity towards the Khmer psyche and their deep fears, valid or misguided, of their consuming neighbours.

refugees in third countries, to find new models of living and the chance to gain education, before returning to their country as ‘foreigners’ in the 1990s.

3.5 Marxist-Vietnamese Influence

In 1979 during the months following the Vietnamese invasion and capture of Phnom Penh, almost everyone began moving. Exhausted and malnourished evacuees and refugees were criss-crossing their devastated country, either returning to their native villages in search of their families or hurriedly fleeing the country in fear of the newly installed regime. Chandler (1993:229-230) described rural society as a shambles. Villages had been abandoned or torn down; tools, seed and fertiliser were nonexistent, hundreds of thousands had emigrated or been killed, and in most areas survivors were suffering from malaria, shock and malnutrition. So many men had died or disappeared that over 60 percent of families were headed by widows.²⁰ The imbalance of the population was extreme. Although this period under the pro-Russian Vietnamese allowed relief from the genocidal Maoist regime and a chance to begin rebuilding the society, its influence has continued to dominate the socio-political and judicial life of the country in the 1990s.

My interviews with a range of Cambodians revealed widely differing views on the behaviour of the Vietnamese. Some gave accounts of rapes and killings of innocent Cambodians regardless of their political sensibilities, while others said that the behaviour of the Vietnamese was impeccable. Pilger (1986: 376-427) and Vickery (1984:219-30) preferred to praise the generous contributions made by Vietnam at a time of its own great need, to help offset the horrific conditions they found and to “protect themselves from the constant border attacks of the Khmer Rouge”. They disagreed with writers such as Shawcross, Heder and Ponchaud who tended to demonise the Vietnamese. Vickery maintains that, although the Vietnamese systematically pillaged the cities, there was no evidence to support any systematic mistreatment of the Khmers, who had initially welcomed them as liberators. However, I found that those living in areas of KR

²⁰ Shawcross (1984:37) recorded that his driver told him greetings had changed with each regime. Under Sihanouk, people would greet each other after a time of absence saying “How many children have you?”;

resistance profoundly disagree with Vickery's defence of the behaviour of the Vietnamese. They believe that he ignored their stories, as it was more politically expedient to be pro-government, and as a consequence, even in the 1990s, many were refusing to tell their stories to Westerners whom they felt would not find them credible.

Due to the chaos caused by the mass movement of people, rice crops were left untended and any stored grain consumed. Resulting food shortages were then worsened by a drought in which hundreds of thousands of Khmer had nothing to eat. According to Ea (1990:8-9), the 1979-80 drought was the most catastrophic in Cambodian history, causing a further 500,000 people to lose their lives. However, Vickery (1984:219) has claimed that in response to calls for aid from the west, large contributions of rice, foodstuffs, medicines and other necessities arriving from ICRC and UNICEF helped offset the threatened disaster of widespread drought.²¹ In 1980 I met several refugees who had fled the drought and been accepted as refugees to Australia. They had lost many family members and were still suffering from the oedema caused by starvation. This was not the only problem as fighting between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese in areas along the Thai border was causing more refugees to flee for their lives. Shawcross (1984:90) reported the famous incident where approximately 45,000 of these refugees were heartlessly robbed at the Thai border and many pushed down the cliffs of Preah Vihar by the Thai military. Without food or water they then faced a three-day trek through a large, heavily mined field. At the same time, the Thai allowed the Khmer Rouge to remain in well-hidden enclaves along their southern border. In a 1987 visit to the Khao I Dang refugee camp in Thailand (a non-KR camp), I witnessed the aggressive, suspicious and exploitive approach of Thai officials at all levels. Refugees related horrific descriptions of persistent military involvement in terrorising, raping, robbing and abusing them, and even desecrating their dead. Actions such as these resulted in

under Lon Nol, "Are you in good health?"; under the Khmer Rouge "How much food do you get in your cooperative"; and under Heng Samrin, "How many of your family are still alive?"

²¹ Other international organisations involved in Kampuchean Humanitarian Assistance Programs were: FAO, ICM, UNBRO, UNDP, UNHCR, WFP and WHO (UN, 1986). Although resources were extremely limited in Cambodia, Mysliwiec (1988:66) informs us there were 27 NGOs from Australia, Europe and USA with about 40 staff in Phnom Penh. Their projects included nutrition centres, hospital equipment, health education, artificial limbs, water supply, irrigation, rice research and veterinary assistance.

widespread resentment and mistrust among many Cambodians towards their more culturally compatible Thai neighbours.

In 1980, according to Vickery (1984:237), the population of Phnom Penh had grown to approximately 200,000, including 50,000 state employees, growing to over 600,000 in 1982. Martin (1986:217) reminds us that in Phnom Penh every member of the new People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government was assigned a Vietnamese 'adviser', and every document written by a Khmer official had to be undersigned by the Vietnamese authority assigned to their department. Also, the Vietnamese government had installed 180,000 soldiers throughout the country, which they maintained throughout most of their ten-year occupation. Martin observed that with Cambodians still reeling from the horrors of the KR, it was less than a year before it became apparent that the Vietnamese 'liberation' was in fact another 'occupation'. Cambodians not only had to endure a new form of communism, but the domination of their traditionally feared and hated Vietnamese neighbours. Many believed they were attempting to de-Khmerise the population. The situation caused a continuing exodus of the few surviving Khmer professionals including administrators, physicians, teachers and technicians, further depleting the country's scant resources.

By 1982, according to Boua (1983:61), industries in the city were being rehabilitated and smuggling across the borders was thriving. However, massive health care problems revealed by an FAO survey in 1983 described the health system as 'disastrous' and nearing deep crisis, with no Khmer doctors in any of the seven provinces visited (Shawcross, 1984:399-400). There was a lot of wastage of materials and equipment due to a lack of understanding of their use. Shawcross also noted increasing deterioration of the roads, severe lack of water, and threats of further food shortages, despite the inflow of aid. He found that Cambodians were resentful of the Vietnamese, complaining that hundreds of thousands of them were moving into their country and being granted civil rights superior to theirs. Added to this, large quantities of Cambodian fish were being exported to Vietnam, resulting in more resentment (p.417). Vickery (1984:240) noted that communication and travel outside Phnom Penh were extremely difficult, and the roads were in such an appalling state that transport of food and commodities was severely curtailed. Added to this, KR soldiers, officially recognised as

the legal rulers of the country by the UN, were busily laying mines on connecting roads each night. These had to be cleared the following morning, necessitating constant patrolling by Vietnamese troops. To encourage the people to produce enough food for themselves, and not be dependent on charity or loans from abroad, the new regime reorganised food production by setting up provincial and district administration centres. However, at the same time Vietnam was systematically moving their border eastward at several kilometres a year, and numerous reports revealed that 'yellow rain' was intermittently falling, particularly in KR-controlled areas. The Vietnamese were also using mycotoxins to poison the vegetables, particularly along the Thai border (Martin, 1986).

Marie Martin (1986:234-35) has argued that under the PRK, Vietnamisation was enforced at all levels. This included government-controlled entertainment, music, theatre, the arts, songs and choirs, cinema, television, books, clothing and museums. There was also free settlement of Vietnamese in all parts of Cambodia. They established a National Day of Hatred, and killing and torture places of the Khmer Rouge were turned into museums to remind people of the horrors of their previous regime. Television and movie houses showed news and political films, and the only books permitted were those dealing favourably with Stalinist communism and Vietnam. There was also strong encouragement of mixed marriages between Vietnamese and Khmer. Although Kiernan (Kiernan & Boua, 1982:368) claimed there was religious freedom in Phnom Penh in the 1980s, Martin (1994:237-39) pointed out that religion was in fact discouraged by the Vietnamese, revealing their official communist position as "religion is a poison, like opium; it is better to give money to help the soldiers fight". Pagodas were limited to one for each commune, with only one or two elderly men permitted to serve as monks. These monks were supervised and half the pagoda offerings were sent to support the local revolutionary committee. Cadres were taught that "religion and communism do not mix", so kept any beliefs they had towards spirits or occult powers to themselves.

Martin (1994:238) notes that shortened traditional weddings were now permitted, but permission had to be gained to allow dancing, resulting in the loss of their religious and socio-economic significance. In 1987, I found that a five o'clock curfew was being imposed in Phnom Penh. I witnessed a wedding at that time, where no-one was smiling.

Throughout the country clothing was standardised for government workers. Men were required to wear plain and sober attire, and women to wear black, brown or navy skirts with modest, loosely fitting blouses. No brightly coloured prints or western pants were permitted. People needed authorisation requiring several signatures to visit their relatives. “Daily life in its entirety as well as cultural practices were challenged ... Cambodians no longer lead a normal family life - fathers in the army, sons engaged in clearing operations, daughters in the militia, and mothers in the village production team ... travel was regulated (restricting friendships, family and business) ... marriages, formerly the occasion of get-togethers, were celebrated hastily. Traditional village life, with the pagoda as its religious, social, and economic axis, no longer existed.” (Martin, 1994:39)

As Chandler (1993:230) has pointed out, under the PRK lands and the means of agricultural production were state property, but the much-hated collectives and communes of the KR period were not reintroduced. Instead, a new system was introduced in which land tenure was allocated to administrative units, family lots and *krom sammaki* (solidarity groups). The *krom sammaki* were usually composed of ten to fifteen families using separate or communal paddy land averaging two hectares per family (Mysliwiec, 1988:28-29). Families pooled their labour, farm tools and animals. The system included all types of productive activities such as fishing and craft work. Returned people were allowed to occupy their former holdings within size constraints, and local officials helped resolve conflict and encourage fair distribution. In 1983, taxes or 'patriotic contributions' of about ten percent of the rice yield were introduced. Mysliwiec maintains that without these groups, up to one third of rural families would not have survived, due to lack of tools, draught animals and male workers. In agreement, Boua (1983:261) recorded a large number of peasant women claiming that, apart from providing a measure of protection from KR robbers, the *krom sammaki* offered security to vulnerable women and children. They also offered security to non-farming workers such as teachers and nurses, as well as to the handicapped, through shared labour and production.²² But according to Frings (1994:50), because the people had no guarantee of ownership, they hesitated to clear new land. This had a negative effect on the distribution of the labour force, and was not

²² Frings (1994) argued that in hindsight, the main aim of enforced collectivisation was not to boost agricultural production, but to rally popular support to compensate for unpopular measures such as the enforced conscription of young men.

economically productive. After suffering under both the KR and PRK, many people had developed hatred for organised communal farming, and in early 1989, after four years as prime minister, Hun Sen announced that solidarity groups were to “completely disappear in the near future”.

Although schools and education were being reintroduced in the late 1970s under the Heng Samrin PRK, with most of the teachers having been killed under the KR, teachers were poorly educated and often illiterate. Vickery (1984:230) points out that primary school books introduced in this era were similar to those used under Sihanouk, and *chbab* laws were gradually added to the school curriculum. However, two unpopular new subjects, Vietnamese language and politics (Viet-Lao-Khmer friendship) were also introduced.²³ Although Mysliwiec (1988:41) records that by 1986 there was virtually 100 percent enrolment in grades one to eight, Martin (1994:232) writes that children accessing eighth grade and above were almost exclusively the sons of officials. Further to this, she claims that children from eighth grade not attending school were given one of two choices, the army or clearing operations. I heard many stories of army recruitment drives where male students were forcibly taken from high school or off the street with no warning, to serve in the army. My driver in Phnom Penh was one of these conscripts, together with seven of his classmates. He was trained as a tank driver. His mother was financially ruined when she sacrificed everything she owned, trying unsuccessfully to buy him back from corrupt army officials. After five years, although he survived, all his friends had died, and he felt that his life had been ruined.

An ADB mission in 1992 (cited in Duggan, 1994b:26) found that under the Vietnamese about 6,500 teachers had been trained in short pre-service programs. Even so, by 1989 only 25 percent of primary teachers and 40 percent of secondary teachers had received any kind of formal training at all. Many had simply been ‘picked off the street and put into classrooms (Duggan, interview 1996). Duggan and Daroesman (1998:43)

²³ In 1992, Sylvia Reese (education adviser in charge of the upgrading of primary school teachers) assured me that the official education policy under the Vietnamese had consisted of only three parts. These included: firstly, communism; secondly, science which was Marxism and Leninism; and thirdly, the consolidation of both. She also explained that until 1989 the teaching of English and French was prohibited in Cambodia, while languages of the Soviet Bloc were encouraged.

revealed that in this period the Vietnamese introduced fourteen Technical, Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) colleges and units to train government staff in all ministries. Martin (1994:234) told of Vietnamese orphans being sent in truckloads of orphans to study in Hanoi while others were sent to learn skills under the tutelage of Vietnamese government departments. She claims that the most gifted children were sent to study in Vietnam and the others to Eastern Europe. In Hanoi, some were trained especially to take over leadership positions in the PRK. High schools and university subjects were reintroduced as teachers became available. However, the collapse of bilateral assistance from the Soviet Union and Vietnam in 1986 saw the trainers from these countries return home, and their units fall into disuse. People trained in this regime were to become the main source of government employees in the 1990s.

As many of the women active in politics and NGOs in the 1990s received their first experience in the Revolutionary Women's Association of Cambodia (RWAC), it is of interest to this thesis to outline their function in the 1980s. RWAC was the only women's organisation in the country, which according to Sonnois (1990:43) was created at the time of the Vietnamese liberation for the political purpose of explaining government policies to women to obtain their support and participation in implementation. All women above eighteen were supposed to be members, and theoretically numbers totalled around 1,800,000. Originally called RWAK, its name was changed to WAC in 1989 when the constitution was revised. RWAK was committed to promoting women's equal rights; to encouraging women to participate in all aspects of political, economic, social and cultural life; to increasing the educational level of women; and to improving the welfare of women and children.

Sonnois (1990:43) notes that RWAC was well structured at all levels, employing 100 cadres at central level, 10-15 at provincial, 5-8 at district, 3-4 at sub-district, two at village, and one at 'solidarity group' level, in both the countryside and towns. The four departments maintained at the central and provincial levels were Administration, Organisation, Propaganda and Education, and Protection of the Interests of Mothers and Children. RWAC also played an important role in promoting and mobilising the government-led literacy campaign from 1979-88. The salaries of all cadres down to sub-district levels were paid at the same low rates as all civil servants, while others were

volunteers. Many women were widows from the Pol Pot period or single women, and even though general training sessions were provided for cadres, there was a severe shortage of qualified or experienced personnel. Many of these women were unable to devote much time to their positions in RWAK, due to their need to undertake supplementary economic activities to provide for their children. Added to this, Ashton (1990) found that the differing levels of depression and trauma facing the leaders of women's groups impacted on regional variations to the success of their organisations. After 1985, due to the enormous needs of its members, there was a push from the women to shift from a policy of mobilisation to one of women's projects and welfare. This opened up the support of international aid agencies to implement development projects to benefit women. Ashton points out that RWAC was meant to provide input about women's needs into government policies; however, as occurred in the 1990s, there was little evidence of impact because of lack of support from government ministries due to negative perceptions of the status of women and the status of the organisation itself.

Despite lack of support for women by government ministries, Ebihara (1990b:38-39) notes a major development under the PRK in terms of the reuniting of families and networks to care for those in need. However, there were many instances of divorce rather than reunion, especially among those who had been forcibly married under the KR regime. Added to this, widespread premarital and extramarital activities were seen as departures from traditional culture, particularly in the city. This was a result of the decreased male population, combined with huge economic and psychological problems following the severity of the KR regime. Vickery (1984:240) estimates that 65 percent of the population were women in the early 1980s. Some interviewees assured me that in certain villages, particularly in the north-west region, there were no male survivors at all. Vickery saw many men with several wives as everyone was bravely trying to rebuild the country. Consequently, in this society where children are traditionally desired and treasured, there was a baby boom. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1995:7-8) reported government estimates of the population reaching eight million in the 1980's period. Two thirds of these (89% agrarian) were concentrated in the central plain, south of the Tonle Sap Lake. With nearly half of the population under sixteen (one third of these being under three years old), the economically active population was only around three million, placing a huge burden on

the women. The return of border camp refugees, the majority of whom were widows and children, added to the landless poor and further diminished the status of women in the 1990s. At the same time, as David Chandler pointed out (Monash University Series lecture, March 1999), refugees educated and experienced in assisting Western NGOs in border camps, were to form the basis of the much-derided NGOs of the 1990s.

Clearly, this period was subject to particularly conflicting reports. They varied according to the biases of those interviewed, and the interviewers themselves. For example, Rowley (1995:195), in his review of *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, criticised Martin for failing to recognise the reports of Vickery and others who acknowledged the extent of rebuilding rather than destruction under the Vietnamese 'protectorate'. In explanation, Hunt (1997:9) sensibly argued that differing accounts of this period written by Cambodian 'experts' such as Vickery, Boua and Martin were not wrong, but portrayed different parts of the truth. In my interviews with Cambodian women I was struck by their differing opinions. Some were desperate for 'freedom', while others were grateful to the Vietnamese, saying, "at least we have enough to eat now". However, by the time the Vietnamese withdrew in 1989 and the international community was beginning to focus on the situation facing the Cambodian population, a more coherent picture began to emerge, mainly in 'safe' areas not occupied by the KR. The Cambodian National Assembly attempted to re-establish an acceptable Khmer identity, remodelling the constitution and announcing a series of reforms making Buddhism the state religion. This allowed farmers to pass land titles on to their children, and householders to buy and sell land. The death penalty was abolished. Free markets and black markets began to flourish, and collectivism was dead. After fifteen years of personal, social and cultural decimation, the people were longing to return to freedom and to rebuild their lives.

In reconstituting their post-KR identity, Cambodians demonstrated a wide range of 'positionalities' within Khmer Buddhism that revealed enduring connections with their past history. The majority of women living in the hierarchical and often-corrupt male-dominated society of the 1990s cared and provided for their families in a dangerous environment. They followed their customs and beliefs, and accepted and endured all that came their way. As this chapter has signalled, women at all levels of society continued to be guided by handed-down stories, proverbs and rules describing the 'ideal woman'.

Women were conditioned to believe that they were the cause of failure when things didn't work out within their family. Although even the rich and more educated women had little power outside their home, some were able to achieve a level of autonomy. A few managed to achieve considerable levels of status and power, choosing to follow the more ancient Khmer models. But before dealing with how Cambodian women accessed the range of historically available cultural models to make meaning of their lives during the 1990s democratisation and WID/GAD development processes, I will provide an overview of the mix of methodologies I have employed to give voice to these women.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM CULTURE SATURATION TO THESIS FORMATION

4.0 Introduction

As suggested in the previous chapter analysing the available historical data, Cambodian women had a range of seemingly contradictory cultural models to draw from in the 1990s. In accordance with Stuart Hall's claim, "every identity is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history", that every statement "comes from somewhere, from somebody in particular" and "insists on specificity, on conjuncture" (Hall, 1986:46), the range of methods used in the data collection for this thesis have allowed for a complexity of perspectives. In the case of Cambodia, Dr Hema Goonatilake pointed out that positioning of identity particularly focuses on the construction of gender relations in Cambodian culture. She challenged researchers to think beyond the ideological constraints of Western sociological understandings to arrive at alternative, culturally compatible models as a basis for analysis (conversation, 1997). In agreement with Goonatilake's caution that Westerners often make harmfully misleading and confusing assumptions about the complex nature of Cambodian culture, the approach to data collection for this thesis began with my acculturation into a Cambodian family of agrarian descent. While my understandings remain linked to my own largely Anglo-Celtic background, the intention in this thesis is to add a perspective that has been largely lacking in the Western-generated literature.

Arriving at this perspective has been a profound personal experience. Before undertaking this study I had been accepted as member of an extended Cambodian family in Melbourne in the position of trusted 'foster mother' of one of its members, a talented young male student of mine who had only four years of education, but had been trained as an apprentice jeweller in Cambodia.¹ I assisted him to become a respected jeweller within the Melbourne community through introducing him to work and train with an established Greek jeweller. This experience confronted me with many opportunities to

¹ My first encounter with Cambodian refugees was as a migrant English teacher in the early 1980s. I met my 'foster son' in 1985 prior to visiting Cambodia and refugee camps on the Thai border.

experience the complexities of Khmer socio-cultural understandings. However, it was only later that I found it was my foster son's uncle (his deceased father's brother) who had initially encouraged him to turn to me for assistance in Australia, and realised that I had in a sense become his 'patron'. He in turn became my devoted 'client', presenting generous gifts of his work to my family (much to our amazement and embarrassment) and helping us in any way he could. In 1992 I accompanied him to Cambodia where I met his mother and stayed with various members of his family in Phnom Penh and village homes in Kompong Cham and Suong, near the Vietnam border. After returning to Australia I assisted him in the difficult task of bringing his younger brother and mother (who were hiding from another son who had become dangerously psychotic as a result of his experiences during the KR period) to safety in Australia. His mother, whom I was asked to address as *bong srei* (older sister) saw me as her son's 'best mother', but his younger brother, somewhat undisciplined due to missing out on any education and family life during the KR period, initially showed little of the polite behaviour exhibited by his older brother and relatives.

Even as an accepted family member, questions related to understanding family relationships were not welcomed. They were either politely avoided or more strongly rejected by my 'adopted son' who complained, "Why do you have to know everything?" Népote (1992:119) discusses the Khmer cultural phenomenon of 'family closure', where the closer you move to the family, the less they divulge. He claims that Cambodians are very protective about family space, making participant observation of prime importance. I noted this 'closure' occurring between family members of all ages, where 'right behaviour' according to position was paramount, and exchanges of feelings and personal information taboo. Shaffir (1999:676) warns that to maintain cultural sensitivity, the researcher should always be aware of being an outsider to the society, although perhaps an attached or instrumental member, as I had become. I found this to be true in my case, as when my foster son tragically died in 1995 (apparently due to a blood cancer associated with chemicals he was exposed to as a child) and his mother ceased to learn English. Although we remained friends, I found that the closeness we had previously enjoyed was somewhat diminished. Népote (1992:119) points out that within Cambodian families, unlike the 'raucous and open' Vietnamese and Chinese, members are taught to

be quiet and not raise their voices. They are conditioned to exert self-control and show modesty and decency, fully accepting their designated roles. The consequence of 'family closure' is particularly true in relation to women, who are seen as responsible for the moral well being of the family, meaning that Westerners simply can't ask questions related to their families.²

4.1 Working in Natural Settings in Cambodia

Between 1975 and 1990 there was almost no research conducted in Cambodia, much less research about women. Consequently, Westerners working in the areas of forward-planning in this traumatised and unbalanced society of the 1990s found it difficult to fully appreciate the needs of women. According to Moerman (1990:4), "Everything that matters socially - meanings, class, roles, emotions, guilt, aggression, and so forth and so on - is socially constructed." Thus, the task of 'giving voice' to help empower those in developing countries is not easy, requiring much time, patience and honesty, with certain cultural and behavioural changes occurring in both practitioners and the people themselves (Meas Ny and O'Leary, 2001). Initially, my experience of socialising and working with Khmer women in both Cambodia and Australia confirmed that many were shy and reticent when compared to their more assertive Thai and Vietnamese neighbours. Working in Cambodia, I found that Westerners frequently expressed frustration about the way Cambodian workers seemed to be detached and lacking in initiative, doing only as they were directed, and no more nor less. I noted many instances where Western workers (myself included) became frustrated and failed to keep calm during cross-cultural misunderstandings, while the Cambodians remained seemingly unruffled. Working as a person in a respected position, I found this very embarrassing, as Cambodians cannot respect people who show any sign of loss of control. Other things puzzled me including the way Khmer people seemed very friendly and gentle, but took such a long time to accept me as their friend. However, once accepted, I was not just seen as a friend, but as a family member. Just as puzzling were the inexplicable differences between appearances of gentle, calm acceptance and contrasting outbreaks of violence, and the differences between the elite and poor, with

² Researchers looking at genealogies of Khmer people need to understand that Cambodians only trace back their ancestors to the three generations within living memory (Népote, 1992).

apparent exploitation and lack of care by the former and passive acceptance and respect from the latter. Added to this I noted a wide range of behaviours between the more assertive educated women and the particularly shy and submissive uneducated women. I came to realise that if Westerners were to implement programs capable of empowering those most in need to think and plan for themselves, an ethnographic understanding of the Khmer people and the wide disparities within their culture and behaviour was essential. However, gaining access to relevant data in the 1990s was to present many obstacles.

Firstly, difficulties for researchers resulted from the fact that under the Khmer Rouge (1975-79) so many families were devastated, papers destroyed and names changed for various reasons including fear of possible reprisals, that keeping accurate population records was totally impossible. Consequently many Cambodians had no idea who they really were, when or where they were born, or who their parents were. Many women were afraid to speak their mind as they had not been allowed to form opinions. The number of people with mental illnesses related to past trauma was incalculable (Bit, 1991). The majority of the population was illiterate and forced to survive from season to season, fighting floods, drought, usury and land loss to unscrupulous people with power. It was impossible to gain access to research large areas of the country due to inaccessibility through lack of infrastructure, and unsafe areas under the control of Khmer Rouge rebels. Demographic census data gathered following the surrender of the Khmer Rouge rebels in 1997 also suffered high levels of inaccuracy due to the inadequate records kept by many inexperienced village chiefs responsible for recording data in their areas (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 1997:6). Added to this, the primary purpose for presenting surveys and various kinds of NGO situation and project reports in the 1990s was to convince relevant donors of the desperate need for them to support their projects. This meant that the focus was not necessarily on accuracy of information, but on gaining support from donors.

In the culturally complex society of Cambodia, many interpretations have resulted from Chinese, Fench, Vietnamese, and now Western influences, so exact understandings

of Khmer culture are elusive³. Due to their cultural differences, Westerners like myself have found it extremely difficult to accurately interpret the way Cambodian women perceive and understand themselves, their meanings, their world and their place in the social structure. Furthermore, there has been a danger that undertaking research work seemingly giving any favour to the upgrading of women would be a threat to the established male power-base when there was poverty and need at every level. In communication with Cambodian women, I noted that many were unwilling to be seen speaking to men. Thus, I wrongly assumed I would be limited to speaking to the women in order to understand their society. In fact, I found the reverse to be true. Contrary to my expectations, I found that many of my most helpful key informants on more complex socio-cultural questions were certain educated Cambodian men who felt free to share their observations with me, probably due to their respect for my educational levels and mature age. While I certainly maintained meaningful conversations with the more educated women in government and NGO positions, I found their views to be somewhat Westernised. Interaction with the less educated majority was largely limited to everyday life situations. This was possibly because I did not have enough time to build up trust as have others working in the field for long periods, and the Cambodians ‘closing up’ in the face of value laden open-ended questions. Thus, I found it necessary to constantly reconsider the relevance of my questions, as little could be achieved unless they were framed within the understandings and practices of the interviewees. In this situation, I placed great emphasis on cultural sensitivity and observation to understand Cambodian women and their perceptions of the development process. This was particularly necessary when facing the more difficult traumatised, hierarchical and patriarchal aspects of the society. Thus, as with Cambodians adopting a mix of competing cultural models to frame their world, I resorted to using competing cultural models to build my life as an ethnographer and researcher.

4.2 Theoretical Approaches Utilised

³ In fact, true ‘aboriginal’ Khmers do not consider it polite to discuss important matters with outsiders, meaning that informants to Western researchers are generally outsiders who do not truly represent the

Brown and Gonzo (1995:38) remind us that ethnographic research was originally developed for use in anthropology to describe the ‘ways of living’ of a social group. It is the study of people’s behaviour in naturally occurring, ongoing settings, with a focus on cultural interpretations. Fielding (1993:154-156) describes ethnographic research as qualitative, combining a range of methods including interviewing and participant observation. He points out that although elements of ethnography date back to antiquity,⁴ it was largely developed within the tradition of anthropology during the imperialistic colonial period of the British Empire (cf. Said, 1993; Kabbani, 1986). Ethnographic enquiry has always involved the study of behaviour in ‘natural settings’, committed to the idea that an adequate knowledge of social behaviour cannot be fully grasped until the researcher has understood the specific ‘symbolic world’ of the people being investigated. However, Jordan and Yeomans (1995:389) point out that in the past quarter-century the character and trajectory of ethnography has been less driven by one method than by a diverse and competing range of methodologies. Karp (1999:583) applauds ethnographic researchers who experiment with different models in their quest to convey both experiential uniqueness and identifiable social patterns. Shaffir (1999:677) maintains that flexibility is central to ethnographic research, claiming “There is no formula, scientific or otherwise, to follow to achieve the best results”.

My approach, in agreement with the GAD theories and research approaches outlined by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (1991), has been to reconceptualize the social situation of Cambodian women by researching both women and men, and using a sociology constructed from the position of the women. Added to this, in line with Leonardo (1993:276-81) and Marcus and Fischer (1986) who argue the need to include historical political-economic frames to make sense of feminist insights in gender analysis that are ‘adapting to the changing conditions of the world’, I have adopted a strongly historical approach. In this way, gendered realities are considered within the range of contexts that frame Cambodian women’s varying and opposing cultural, political and economic constructions and life experiences. Karp (1999:599), in

Khmer people (communication with Jaques Népote, 2005).

⁴ An excellent example of an early ethnographic research as participant observation can be seen in the translation of the Chinese diplomat Chou Ta-Kuan’s description of Cambodia in the 12th Century (1993).

agreement with Leonardo, adds that well done ethnographies committed to the notion of a grounded theory disciplined by data, give ‘voice’ to people who rarely get to speak. They also arouse the emotions of readers by taking them into unfamiliar worlds and giving them a deeper, visceral understanding of people they do not know. Thus, my primary intention in this thesis has been to provide a culturally sensitive analysis of the way Cambodian women have interpreted themselves and been interpreted within their culture in the 1990s development process. Furthermore, my intention has been to give voice to those who were being marginalized in the development process, by providing a basis for considering a deeper understanding of their socio-cultural needs to practitioners who work with them.

The Personal Narratives Group (1989:5,6) asserts that feminist understandings of the dynamics of socially-structured gender hierarchies need to consider both the individual agents’ lives and logics, and the complex social structure of their contexts. The first understanding should be of the system through generalisations taken from the point of the psychology and logic of individuals and their interpretation of events. The second should be to understand through systemic-level analysis, looking at the contexts of the unfolding of social actions including kinship systems, gender rules and the intersections of class and sex in the workplace. In approaching my understanding of Cambodian culture and gender disparities I have personally undergone considerable changes of viewpoint, with continual modification of methodologies to reconsider the 1990’s situation not only from a historical perspective, but also from the viewpoints of individual women and the socio-political frameworks governing their existence. My approach has been to immerse myself as far as possible in Cambodian culture and gender understandings through ongoing social interaction and ethnographic enquiry, both in Cambodia and Melbourne.⁵ In the process of this study I have studied the Khmer language,⁶ and endeavoured to remain culturally sensitive in my understanding of Khmer women despite my markedly different feminist perspective of gender equity. Their priority in fulfilling Khmer understandings of women’s more subservient role in a society where men have little interest in listening to women, has made my task of ‘giving voice’

⁵ At the time of writing, apart from having constant interaction with my Cambodian friends and key informants, I have been sharing my home with a young Cambodian woman who is studying in Melbourne.

to Cambodian women one that constantly challenged my own self-identity. It is unrealistic to expect that I could be entirely successful in my attempts to interpret the complexity of Cambodian culture, and for this reason I have not attempted to hide or deny my personal views and values throughout the text. Consequently, in order to 'work my way' through the diversity of social and cultural understandings inherent in this study, and in agreement with the feminist writers cited above, I have adopted a flexible ethnographic approach committed to a mix of qualitative methodologies and based on a grounded theory.

4.3 Research Procedure

Although I had already undertaken considerable research and observation of the Cambodian situation prior to officially beginning this study, the primary collection of field data was carried out during a 1996 field trip, and again in 1997 when I lived and worked in Cambodia. During this period I collected data on tape, and in diaries, field notes and questionnaires. Further to this, data was collected from contacts in the Cambodian community in Melbourne, and several follow-up field trips to Cambodia. Primary text-data was obtained from resource centres, newspapers, electronic sources and a wide range of academics and associated NGOs working in the field.

Before my initial data collection in March and April 1996, I piloted my questionnaires in English, using several English speaking Khmer women residing in Melbourne (see Appendix 5). These were discussed with the women who agreed on their cultural suitability of content. In-depth ethnographic interviews were also piloted, recording a small cross-section of Cambodian women who had recently emigrated or returned from a period of stay in Cambodia. These were analysed to establish directions for further investigation within Cambodia. At the same time I contacted relevant women's organizations and key organisations offering access to research data, publications and in-country information in Phnom Penh. I also notified personal contacts in Cambodia who organised accommodation with a local Khmer family. I then notified my intentions to the Cambodian Ambassador in Canberra who informed me of the

⁶ I have undertaken studies in spoken and written Khmer with a lecturer from the RAAF School of Languages, Point Cook, and am estimated to have achieved a proficiency of NAATI level 2.

appropriate procedures to follow in Phnom Penh. To comply with Victoria University's ethics requirements, I obtained an official letter of introduction to the Australian Embassy in Cambodia to indicate the bona fide nature of my project.⁷

On arrival in Phnom Penh the Australian Embassy introduced me to the director of the Secretariat of Women's Affairs, Mr Keat Sokhun. He agreed with the direction of my research and granted me official permission to go ahead. He also offered to prepare letters of introduction for me to present to heads of schools, encouraging them to help administer the questionnaires. He said I was free to find appropriate interpreters and conduct the research without government interference, and agreed that interviewees should only give verbal agreement and not be expected to sign consent forms in the sensitive Cambodian environment. Keat Sokhun suggested I make small donations of money to respondents who were very poor. I assured him that data resulting from interviews and questionnaires would be kept in my personal keeping, and destroyed seven years after completion of the project. His assistant director, Mrs Ek Virak agreed to support my chosen topic and offered me the services of the member for Social Action, Mrs Sath Salim, to assist in the translation and distribution of my questionnaires and establish a range of interviews. Salim accompanied me to visit her new weaving business providing skilled work and training for a small number of widows and disabled women as dyers, spinners and weavers of silk. However, her heavy work-schedule preparing exhibits for International Women's Day and supervising her new business (government workers needed separate incomes to supplement their low salaries) resulted in several broken appointments. As a result I sought alternative assistance.

My new assistant, Dr Seng Sophalline (Vice-President of the Khmer Student's Association), promptly translated my survey into Khmer and offered relevant cultural and language advice.⁸ For example, he explained the need to ascertain ages by deduction

⁷ Ethics procedures used in interviewing and sampling in Cambodia differ from those in Australia, although the principles of protecting people are the same. Participants were informed of the aims of the project and kinds of questions, and asked if they would be happy for the interview to be recorded. They were assured anonymity and their right not to answer questions at any time. They were not asked to sign a consent form, as they would certainly have refused such a risky action. Added to this, many were illiterate. Therefore, to comply with ethics procedures consent for both interviews and questionnaires was gained from the appropriate government official prior to data collection.

⁸Sophalline was a doctor trained at Phnom Penh University who for ethical reasons had preferred to devote his time to leadership of the non-political Khmer Student's Association. He suffered persecution from the government for refusing to take political sides.

rather than by dates of birth, as apart from the probability of respondents not knowing their exact age, they would provide false dates due to their belief that knowledge of these numbers could be used against them. He also checked finer points of meaning that could be altered by incorrect translation. Following this, he arranged interviews with a group of six female English-speaking Phnom Penh University undergraduates. He then accompanied me to a smaller university in Prey Veng province near the Vietnam border to act as interpreter during another group interview with nine females and two male university students from poor farming families.

Returning to Phnom Penh, Sophalline organised an interpreter to accompany me whilst interviewing a range of poor women and beggars camping along the Sap River bank. These people immediately warmed to us, and were keen to share their life experiences. After this, Sophalline took me on several trips to interview poverty stricken outworkers and women farmers, as well as escorting me to observe the plight of people stranded in flooded areas. He also interpreted for me during several women's conferences on birth-spacing and health issues. Here I was able to interview a range of women from 'unsafe' provinces who were in Phnom Penh for the special activities arranged for International Women's Day. Certainly, given the weak support from the SSWA, I owe a strong debt of gratitude for the generous support provided by this energetic and intelligent young man.

Concurrently with participant observations, ethnographic interviews and questionnaire distribution, I visited the documentation and text-data centres in various parts of Phnom Penh. Here it was possible to access an almost exhaustive range of survey results and reports. These were available on short loan for photocopying purposes in limited numbers, meaning it was necessary to travel to and from centres to photocopy-shops many times (by motodop taxi). I also established key contacts in the Department of Education to gain information on the participation of women in education. Documents collected from the various NGOs and government departments were scrutinised. Those suited to my interests were collected and copied when originals were not available, to bring back to Australia for further analysis.

Returning to Cambodia to live and work in late 1996 and in 1997 enabled me to build on my initial contacts and form deeper friendships with Khmer people in their family and work contexts. I was able to visit a wider range of development projects and NGOs, and further experience working and living with Cambodians in a range of natural settings. Here I observed the reactions of people to the harsher sides of their patriarchal government, before and during the July 1997 Hun Sen army coup. At first hand I observed the panic reactions and disbelief of an already traumatised people, and the terror as Hun Sen's soldiers ransacked houses. I also witnessed the displacement suffered by poor rural people in a time of severe flood, and the frantic efforts of Buddhist organisations and NGOs as they tried to distribute food to those in danger of starvation. Added to these experiences, in my day to day working circumstances of running an AusAID-funded program for preparing government officials to work in ASEAN, I observed the gender interactions of Khmer working staff in both classroom and government offices. Numerous interviews enabled me to further develop my understandings of the events surrounding me, as well as understand the interpretations the Khmer people gave me of these events.

Three short follow-up visits (1999, 2000 and 2004) enabled me to update my text-data and see how my contacts and friends were faring. These trips gave me the opportunity of seeing social changes that had occurred, and changes in attitudes since the election of Hun Sen as legitimate prime minister following the 1997 coup. I was able to discuss the changes of attitudes, circumstances and events which had occurred during my absence. Added to this, I was able to meet some of my work colleagues to get their frank opinions about more recent changes in the society and the situation for NGOs. Visiting Richard Woodd, editor of the *Phnom Penh Post*, I was given permission to search a large amount of photographic rejects, mainly of men, to glean just a few pertinent photographs of Cambodian women.

4.4 Methodologies Utilised

In the process of developing methodologies suited to investigating gender issues affecting women in development, in agreement with other feminist researchers (Kabeer 1994:13; Ebihara, Mortland and Ledgerwood 1994; Enloe 1993; Van Esterick 1982) I have preferred a qualitative approach. As Cambodia is a country with high levels of illiteracy, quantitative research is not only expensive, but results are difficult to validate due to low levels of accessibility and the need for interpreters, transcribers and translators.⁹ Therefore, in agreement with other researchers looking at the lives of Khmer women in particular (Sin, 1996; Rao, 1996; Klaassen, 1995; Sonnois, 1995; Martin 1994; Ebihara, 1990a), I have used a range of qualitative ethnographic methodologies. In this way I have been able to approach understandings of contemporary cultural attitudes, practices and norms in relation to the effectiveness of development policies and practice aimed at promoting women's empowerment in Cambodia.

In the collection of data I have endeavoured to 'saturate' myself in the culture and people as far as possible, and to use a wide range of interviews, discussion groups and questionnaires to establish direction, as well as analyse available relevant secondary sources of information. Fielding (1993:157-60), in agreement with Shaffir (1999:676), points out that ethnographic field workers entering natural settings to understand the hows, whens and whats of human behaviour, need to learn the language in use in order to establish the trust of their research subjects. Added to this, Reinharz (1992:532) and Gold (1997:391-96) advocate the importance of 'reality checks', particularly the need for researchers to establish trust with key informants in order to validate their findings. Although I have studied the Khmer language to a level that has been useful in breaking down barriers to trust in communication, I have of necessity used interpreters for more complex issues when interviewees did not speak English. Added to this, I have consistently worked with key informants to help clarify and validate assumptions about the meanings of field research findings, and to discuss conflicting aspects of the culture in depth. Fielding, Jordan and Yeomans (1995:389) insist that apart from a range of interviews and life histories, data sources may also include the content analysis of primary documents such as diaries, newspaper cuttings and photographs. The data collection for this thesis not only utilised qualitative ethnographic procedures including

⁹ The first national census in over 30 years was completed in the late 1990s, but even here information was incomplete due to the difficulties in accessing some areas and the unreliability of village chiefs in organising data collection.

participant observation, interviews, case-studies, focus-groups and sampling questionnaires, but also included a range of relevant secondary and primary text-data that was largely unavailable outside its immediate context, as well as newspaper and internet sources.

A major source of my understanding of Cambodian culture was through observation. This occurred through my day-to-day living of watching television, shopping, visiting friends, travelling around and working, as well as visiting NGOs, ministries and resource centres. I maximised my understanding of the people by living with Cambodian families rather than staying in hotels. My first opportunity to stay with a local family came in 1992 when I resided for several weeks with a wealthy Chinese-Cambodian family in their large city apartment-block. Here I was treated as a guest, not a member of the family as I was in the other homes. The husband was a businessman but it was clear his wife was stronger. The husband was presented as the leader of the family, but the wife was in fact the initiator and organiser of business arrangements and agreements. I have had an enduring contact with this family since first meeting them in Phnom Penh in 1987. Knowing this kind of ruthless Chinese-Cambodian businessperson who was openly conducting corrupt practices and profiting from illegal deforestation in Cambodia has been a formative experience for me. I regard the way they conduct their business activities and influence their children to view their fellow country-people with contempt, as counter-productive to the development of their country.

Later, in early 1996 and again in 1997, I spent several months living with a middle-class Cambodian couple, their small son and an 'adopted' maid (a poor teenage girl from the countryside), in a medium-sized, attached, modern Cambodian-style suburban apartment. The husband was a government-ministry employee and the wife had been trained in Vietnam in the early 1980s (as an orphan) to become a worker in the post office. She was the strongest member of the family, working within the post office and running three small businesses including exporting dried fish (through the post office), charging locals for the use of her landline telephone (obtained through the post office), and occasionally giving board to foreigners like myself. The wife spoke a little English which was useful, and I was able to practice my Khmer and observe family and neighbourhood interactions.

Thirdly, in 1997 I lived adjacent to my single-parent Chinese-Cambodian landlady, her two teenage sons and our housekeeper and cook (an ‘adopted’ poor widow from the countryside) in the Toul Kauk district of Phnom Penh for over six months. I was able to observe my landlady’s parenting and entrepreneurial abilities, as well as her communication with the darker skinned, estranged husband to whom she had been forcibly married under Pol Pot. My neighbour, French-educated in Phnom Penh prior to Pol Pot, prepared Khmer lessons for me and told me his life-history, focussing on the time he lived among the skeleton population remaining in Phnom Penh during the KR period when he was forced to work as a mechanical engineer. During my stay in Toul Kauk, special holidays and weddings gave me the opportunity to observe women’s participation in temple life and at parties. Owning a television also provided me with invaluable political and cultural insights on attitudes to women.

Added to these host families, on several occasions I stayed with my ‘adopted’ female-headed Cambodian family from Kompong Cham Province. I first stayed with *bong srei* in Kompong Cham for one week in 1992. She was a widowed grandmother living with her divorced daughter (19 years old) and baby, and her ‘adopted’ single housemaid. They survived in a small bamboo house on stumps on the edge of the Mekong River selling a variety of earthenware cooking pots. I also stayed with her older separated daughter and four children for several weeks in 1996 and 1999. They were living in a two-roomed apartment in Phnom Penh, supported by an absent husband working near the Vietnamese border. The wife sold gold at a tiny stall in the Central Market, not making any money, but ‘keeping up appearances’. Without adequate medical attention, this woman was victim to multiple attacks of epilepsy that made life for herself and her children extremely problematic.

Working in a managerial position for an AusAID-funded program providing English language and other skills to government officials provided me with opportunities to observe all ministries. In this way I had chances to discuss relevant issues (using skilled interpreters) and observe the participation of women in government employment, particularly in the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Added to this, I was not only able to observe the participation of women and gender

interactions in my classrooms, but was also able to organise class discussions and homework essays on gender issues

Living and working in the city and visiting several provinces, I observed a wide range of Cambodian women workers. These included women working in skills-training centres, poor women working from home as street-sellers or outworkers, women working in the government, schools, businesses, weaving and craft production, and women working in street-stalls, markets and night entertainment. Less fortunate women who were beggars, sex workers or beer girls were observed in streets, restaurants and market places in Phnom Penh. Furthermore I was able to observe a garment-factory sweat-shop, as well as skills-training and NGO projects for women and the disabled. These included Khemera, Tabitha, Don Bosco and several weaving and craft-generation communities.

Further to these, the annual International Women's Day celebrations (1996 and 1997) provided excellent opportunities to observe the wide range of NGO activities promoting skills training for women, as well as confer with representatives from the types of NGO represented. I was able follow up several of these organisations to discuss the relative success of management-training and income-generating programs designed for the upgrading of women, the obstacles they faced, and the expected short and long-term benefits of their activities (see Appendix 6). However, I found that some NGOs (IWDA for instance) would not discuss topics related to their interactions with the Khmer people, claiming a policy of confidentiality. Without people who were willing to confide their experiences and allow me to observe interactions in their workplace, it was difficult to understand the cross-cultural interactions occurring in Cambodian NGOs. However, NGO forum meetings, AusAID meetings, birth spacing workshops, HIV/AIDS workshops and several relevant Khmer academic conferences gave me the opportunity to meet people working in NGOs and discuss gender and development issues. Further to this, attending public meetings of both men and women, and observing political rallies on television, gave me the opportunity to observe gendered behaviours in public.

Apart from observations, I conducted a wide range of interview types and group discussions (see Appendix 6). These helped me to establish directions and a focus for the study. Organised interviews were recorded using sensitive, friendly key informants as

interpreters, and targeting a wide range of women. With the help of key informants from the SSWA, women selected for interviews were from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, city and country, rich and poor, government and non-government, and professional and unskilled. Many of these were unable to speak English, so it was often necessary to involve interpreters. Interviews were mainly conducted in Phnom Penh, due to the inaccessibility of parts of the Cambodian countryside at that time. However, I was able to interview some women in Kompong Cham and Prey Veng Provinces, as well as undertake focus group interviews with seven female undergraduates from the Royal Phnom Penh University (RUPP), with nine female undergraduates from the Maharishi Vedic University (MVU) in Prey Veng Province near the Vietnam border. Unlike RUPP, MVU catered for students from extremely underprivileged rural families and orphans. Group interviews with NGOs from the provinces helped me to understand the difficulties women were facing in family planning and sexually transmitted disease.

Key women in the SSWA and several key men working in the Cambodian government (see Appendix 6) were interviewed to discuss their views on: the state of Cambodian society and culture; women's work opportunities; the place and purpose of women in the government and the extent to which they were 'heard' by their colleagues; the extent to which their needs and the needs of the Cambodian women they represent were being heard and met by the government and NGOs; and the reasons some women were able to achieve positions of power. Added to this, several Khmer women working in education and development programs were interviewed to discuss their views on reasons for the relatively lower educational levels of women and the reasons for their own success. We discussed their programs and the difficulties they faced in their work. I was also able to arrange discussions and interviews with a wide range of academics and consultants in the field (see Appendix 6) to obtain their views on women and gender issues in Cambodia related to their areas of interest (education, health, media, mental health, culture and women).

Although some interviews were arranged by key informants (see Appendix 6), many were initiated by myself when the opportunity arose. For example, I was able to interview several rich and influential women and many more middle-class government workers, due to my work. Numerous opportunities also arose to interview poor women

and street women including small street-sellers of food, beggars and prostitutes, to find out their situations and life stories. Interviews with poor rural women were undertaken on visits to the provinces, or when they came to visit the capital to get work or to beg. I found that poor and less powerful women were open and eager to share their day-to-day difficulties when I was accompanied by a young, sensitive interpreter, but wealthy businesswomen were uncooperative, some hiding behind the facade of being 'mere housewives'. They may have felt threatened due to fears of the possibility of being subjected to stringent taxes the government was considering enforcing in the future.

In order to establish trends in attitudes and preferences of heads of household towards education and work in relation to the socio-economic status and relative household composition of respondents, 100 sampling questionnaires including qualitative, open-ended questions, were conducted in five accessible provinces and five areas of Phnom Penh. Reasons for respondent's choices were also included to help establish societal attitudes across the varying socio-economic range represented. These were intended to provide samples of current attitudinal trends to women's work and education in different areas of Cambodia, and help decide directions for further inquiry. The questionnaire contained four parts, one for the head of household, one for all adult members of the household, one for all members of the household under 18 attending school, and one for those under 18 not attending school (see Appendix 5).

As many people in Cambodia were illiterate, teachers were organised to help fill in the questionnaires by Mrs Sath Salim, member for Social Action in the SSWA.¹⁰ Unfortunately, it quickly became apparent that some of the teachers were filling in the forms themselves. They were keen to get the money I offered to pay for their time in administering the forms, but could not understand my need for genuine responses and could not be bothered to find the people to ask. To solve this problem I changed interviewers and gave the work to some recommended graduate students who were briefed to administer the questionnaires by trusted key informant Dr Seng Sophalline. These students were keen to gain research experience through taking part in the project.

¹⁰ Although Salim's director, Mr Keat Sokhun, promised she would assist me, it quickly became obvious she had more pressing obligations. These included organising International Women's Day celebrations and, because her government salary was insufficient to support her family, she also needed to attend to her newly set-up silk weaving business.

Naturally, they were paid for their time and transport. Although these students strove to make their random choices balanced, I recognise it would be difficult for them to be totally unbiased in their choice of respondents. Overall, however, they did an excellent job, selecting a range of households in accordance with my directions. One student was even able to join a helicopter to Rattanakiri province in far North-Eastern Cambodia to visit ethnic minority-groups living in the jungle. The results of these questionnaires were subsequently translated into English by myself, with the help of Mr Thala Him and Mrs Sophie Purvis, on my return to Melbourne. Translation of the hand-written responses was both difficult and time consuming, and a certain degree of accuracy was of necessity lost in the process.

As mentioned, the questionnaires were conducted in a total of 100 households, ten in each of five sectors of Phnom Penh and five rural provinces, with regard to both safety and accessibility for the administrators. As far as possible, the areas chosen for distribution aimed to represent different regional aspects of the population including the very poor, poor and not-so-poor, as well as ethnic minorities in a remote area. The household types aimed to represent a range of socio-economic levels and typical households in each area, for example very poor, not-so-poor and rich, perhaps as farmer, factory worker, teacher or business owner. As decisions related to 'household type' were made by the person administering the survey, some inconsistencies in selection would have occurred, but these approximations did not affect the usefulness of the content of the findings. However, as the majority of the population is poor, and eighty five percent live in rural areas, the questionnaire results were skewed in favour of the more privileged people. Nevertheless, opinions of the rich are important to the development of the country, as they are the ones who are more likely to influence change. Those administering the forms were usually responsible for reading the questions to the heads of households and writing down their answers, as many were illiterate or semi-literate.

Further to my questionnaires, primary text-data from research and reports undertaken by Cambodian government ministries (SSWA, MOWA and MOEYS), UNIFEM, UNDP, UNICEF, Human Rights NGOs and field researchers were accessed. However, as Chandler (2000:227) points out, the 1990s only provided a narrow range of

primary sources outlining the situation, and available unpublished reports and research papers about women were mainly being written by non-academic field workers. Research reports from both the government and NGOs relied on those working in the field. They used inexperienced local Khmer women under their supervision to provide descriptive surveys and qualitative research data on which to base GAD policies for projects. These documents were largely unavailable outside the context of their immediate application and were mainly in the areas of women's needs including health, education and work. As well as these, training and leadership programs and reports included some analysis of local culture and the portrayal of women in the media. These studies investigating the needs of specific groups of women (mainly rural), although somewhat fragmented, have been useful for this study. Added to this, the 1995 Socio-Economic Survey and the 1998 National Census (the first such reports in 40 years) were obtained through the Ministry of Planning. Although these two documents were limited due to the country situation described earlier, they were crucial to an understanding of the overall situation. I also regularly accessed articles and news items through electronic subscriptions to *Camnews* and the *Phnom Penh Post*.

Due to the enormous costs of employing professional translators, I kept the translation of documents to an absolute minimum. However, in the absence of text-data and mentors with the breadth of understanding I desired, I turned to the use of voluntary Khmer translators to not only verify my translations of the questionnaire results, but also to help me with other key documents not available in English (see Appendix 6). Added to this I worked together in a somewhat tutorial situation forming a dialogue with a professional French translator, taking notes from the post-graduate publication of Jacques Népote (1992). This work allowed me to access a conceptual framework for understanding the organisation of Cambodian culture that was only available in the French language. Issues I felt relevant to interpreting my own observations and interview results were then verified through further discussion with key informants. I have personally translated relevant portions of smaller French research reports as needed. As translations from French, and more particularly Khmer, are not word for word, interpretations are close approximations.

4.5 Analysis of Data

Gold (1997:398-99) explains that the process of obtaining data is the key factor in documenting results, not the number of interviews or respondents. He points out that the key to successful analysis lies in the investigator maximising observation and interview effects with a view to developing the kind of relationship with informants that facilitates the generation of desired data. Thus, when ethnographic fieldwork is finished, the principal findings are already in hand. In this thesis, results have been formed directly in relation to the findings generated by interactions of and with Cambodian people, and compared with secondary data accessed in related research documents. In agreement with Gold (1997) and Karp (1999:598,601), the methods outlined in this chapter have aimed to “combine close, careful observation and penetrating analyses”, demonstrating experiential uniqueness and identifiable social patterns in aspects of daily life and society, thus giving ‘voice’ to Cambodian women. Careful cross-analysis of the extensive field and text-data was undertaken, and observations and findings discussed with key Cambodian informants for verification. Although I have provided a list of informants in Appendix 6, as with many interviewees, to protect individuals, names have not been mentioned in the text. Names of government workers and academics have been supplied where appropriate, but names of other interviewees have been changed or not used, to provide anonymity. In writing up the thesis, secondary historical data outlining cultural modifications and changes impacting on the GAD process of the 1990s was searched. Primary text-data and ethnographic findings were then discussed in relation to the historical and contemporary data and presented sequentially in a narrative style punctuated with case-studies, using footnoting where necessary. A pictorial essay has been added to assist the reader in visualising the everyday lives and hopes of Cambodian women living in the 1990s. To provide a socio-cultural context for the following chapters dealing with Cambodia in the 1990s, Chapter Five begins with my analysis of findings on the place women occupy and the way they were managing to survive in the Cambodian culture and society during the same period.

CHAPTER FIVE

A RESTRICTIVE CULTURE

5.0 Introduction

Living in Prei Veng province, Yung is a 50-year-old widow who has brought up six children, now aged between 16 and 32. They all lived through 'Pol Pot time'. Her husband was arrested and killed with five other villagers by the Khmer Rouge forces in 1976 when her sixth child was only one month old. Soon after, her three eldest children were also taken away. She bravely raced to the warehouse where they were being held, and demanded that the Khmer Rouge kill her first if they were going to kill her children. As a result of her protest the children were later released.

Yung and her three younger sons now live in a shack built of palm leaves. Her previous and more substantial house, which had been built by her husband, was dismantled by Pol Pot's forces. A few years ago one of her sons joined the army and injured his right arm in a battle against the Khmer Rouge. Around the same time, her youngest son contracted measles and, lacking medicine, became blind. Her other son is in his teens and is at school. As the war goes on [fighting was still continuing in this region] she nervously enjoys his company and assistance around the house.

Rice farming has been Yung's main occupation. She explains that during the rice-growing season, "We are busy non-stop for four months. This includes three months of regulating the supply of water using a *rohat* (a hand-operated device). We wake up very early in the morning, cook rice and pack our lunch, walk for one hour to the field, and are ready to start work at six. We don't get home until five or six in the evening. Friends and relatives usually feed us."

Friends and relatives play an important role in Yung's life. They are the ones who help her with the heavy work such as ploughing the fields or repairing her house. But still, she has to do many other tasks herself, including patching the roof of her house, making axe and knife handles, raising dikes and driving an ox-cart.

Rice production has been insufficient for her family to live on, and each year she faces the same problems of not having enough fertilisers, insecticides, seeds, equipment or irrigation pumps to boost her production. To make ends meet Yung sells cakes, gathers firewood and tends her coconut, palm sugar and banana trees. (Chanthou Boua, 1992)

The story of Yung, recorded by Chantou Boua (1992), one of the few Khmer women writing on Cambodian gender issues, exemplifies the backbreaking reality of Cambodian women living and working in the countryside in the 1990s. It reminds us of Stuart Hall's observation that "Every statement comes from somewhere, from somebody in particular" (Hall, 1986:46). It further reminds us that when we speak of 'cultural barriers to change', we are speaking about the barriers confronted by real people. In terms of this thesis, it is important to remember that at the same time exhausted and ill-nourished women like Yung took on all the responsibilities necessary for the survival of their families, they were also expected to behave in a culturally appropriate manner. They were to be more softly spoken than males while doing far more work around the house than their husbands and brothers. I found that in the 1990s, most Cambodian women were subjugated to males and occupying a relatively low status, with many traditional ideas repressing their advancement. Although some women had power within their own family, the vast majority were disadvantaged at every level, suffering high levels of violence, sexual exploitation, low socio-economic status, and low representation in education, power and decision-making processes. Nevertheless, many women referred to themselves as "the spine of the family". They were the ones carrying on with the work basic to the survival of their family in situations of extreme difficulty. Their lower mental, spiritual and physical status was reflected in the media, popular songs, folk stories, proverbs and cultural laws perpetuated throughout the country. The situation confronted by women like Yung represents one side of the 'restrictive culture' with which this chapter deals. The other side is the restrictive culture confronted and constituted by those implementing Western models of GAD in Cambodia. To understand the obstacles facing both the Cambodian women and the aid providers this chapter provides an interpretative framework for the way culture affected women's everyday life in the 1990s. The framework draws from my acculturation into Cambodian society as described in the previous chapter and offers an account based on my experiences in and research about Cambodia. It focuses on my understanding of cultural beliefs and practices related to the status of Cambodian women and their position in the family, village and society, as well as such matters as Cambodian understandings about women's health issues and legal rights in this period.

5.1 Women in the Society

Setting out to understand the social framework which women such as Yung inhabit, I found it useful to consider five levels of organisation. These ranged from extended family groups to village, commune, district and province (see figure 2).

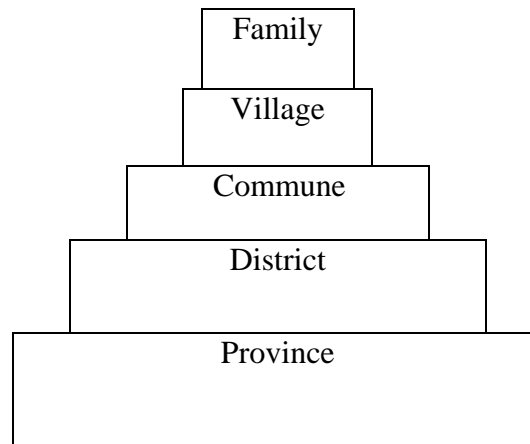


Figure 2: Levels of organisation within the 21 provinces

In Yung's hierarchical, patron-client world, it was village chiefs and leaders of districts, communes and provinces who held superior power and ownership in their respective territorial units. Many had been instated in the 1980s Vietnamese communist period, so owed their allegiance to Hun Sen's CPP. Leaders at all levels were appointed by the central government, and village leaders appointed by commune heads or central government. Power and ownership of this hierarchy was consolidated by arranged marriages in which girls were frequently both under-aged and under-educated. Although Cambodian society in rural areas had changed little throughout history, informants agreed that the position of rural women in the early 1990s was considerably worse than it was in the 1960s. This was primarily due to the destruction wrought under the Khmer Rouge, and much of the countryside being heavily mined and deforested during the Vietnamese occupation. Finding that the social structures, behaviours and beliefs outlined in this chapter had remained relatively unchanged throughout the 1990's, I have chosen to

discuss them in a generalised way, noting variations in the following chronologically ordered chapters.

In Cambodia, each village grouping has a male chief, unless there is a lack of suitable males, meaning that in rare cases a woman may be considered as the most suitable person to do the job. However, Népote (1992:156) found that any woman achieving a senior position is soon pulled down as a female elder is seen as bringing disorder to the society. Village chiefs usually have secretaries to help carry out the responsibilities of overseeing law, resolving conflicts, promoting order and protection in the village, and communicating with leaders at higher levels on behalf of their village members. In the 1990s, the commune level was administered by the district, which dealt with the more difficult cases of conflict resolution. Altogether there were about 1,621 communes, each consisting of around five to ten villages consisting of twenty or more families. Above commune level, provincial leaders directly connected to the nation leadership. Because the majority of leaders at these two levels had been instituted under the Vietnamese-installed government of the 1980s, they inherited patronage and protection of police and judiciary from the highest level, Hun Sen, who in turn was empowered by their allegiance to him. In accordance with their historical understandings of hierarchical order, leaders regarded their territories as personal ‘fiefdoms’, and women’s issues were seen to be of very limited, if any, importance.¹ During the 1990s, the *preah sang* (Buddhist clergy) were becoming increasingly politicised and frequently acted as advisors, particularly at commune level. Traditionally, they had acted as the binding force between all Cambodians but, as mentioned in Chapter Three, their position had been weakened under the KR regime.

The village is the smallest grouping of families within the society, and although a wide variety of family structures exist, I found that villages are usually comprised of

¹ In 1996 the head of a provincial university in Prey Veng Province informed me that the commune leader had insisted on being paid a stipend to keep the women’s dormitory open, but paying bribes was against the university’s policy so the local village leader closed the women’s dormitories. As few students lived near the university, this effectively eliminated all female students.

several close-knit, extended families that regard themselves as loosely related.² In a village of 50 families there are usually around five to ten family names, indicating the closeness of the group.³ Although there is a wide geographical and cultural diversity in Cambodia, due to personal and geographic constraints my observations and interviews in rural areas were limited to short visits to villages in accessible areas. These areas included Kandal, Kompong Cham, Prei Veng and Suong. I was able to attend engagements, funerals and weddings, as well as observe daily life events such as farming, fishing and household trading. I found that rural village women gained their primary support through friends, neighbours and relatives, and through contacts made during their farm work. Other contacts were made in the village market and through neighbourly celebrations and street gatherings. These occasions included watching street videos of locally held weddings, parties and pop concerts. Villagers usually operated as one big family, and even a much hated, dying old woman, was surrounded by willing carers in a way I have not seen in Australia.

In the village, neighbours are seen as extended family members, and young women regarded as younger aunts. Neighbours are normally invited to attend family functions and ceremonies such as shaving the baby's 'wild hair' to mark their entry into collective life. Indeed, I have seen neighbours who were left out of this kind of family gathering become very upset, causing a rift in the village community. As the chief concern of mothers is the survival and well-being of their children, it was of little surprise that the most respected women are the traditional, voluntary midwives known as Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). As the only socially acceptable option for women is marriage and

² Cambodians place great importance on identifying their village of origin when being introduced. Népote (1992) points out that this is a serious problem for Khmer who don't have a family and don't know where they came from due to disruption under the KR, resulting in their being *akosol* (a condemnable person).

³ "Theoretically, a Cambodian would recognise as a kinsman (*bong p'oun*) anyone who is known to share a lineal ancestor with him. In village practice however, no attention is paid to the remembrance or tracing of common ancestors or extended linkages ... genealogies of villagers generally have a narrow range that covers only one or two ... generations; most persons cannot remember their grandparents' names or the latter's siblings, much less more remote ancestors. Sometimes even parents' siblings are vague because 'They died when I was young', 'They lived far away', or 'It's too long ago to remember' ... On the personal generation, villagers become uncertain about the precise manner in which they are linked to others beyond the range of first cousins, and fall back on saying simply, "We are *bong p'oun* though I'm not sure exactly how." (Ebihara, 1971:153).

motherhood,⁴ unmarried women, widows, divorcees, remarried women, and deserted or childless women are regarded as second-rate citizens. As MP Tioulong Samura (interview 1999) commented, “Without a man, woman is nothing. Women are culturally, socially, economically dependent on their man. Men do not respect their wives. A man’s wife is just a piece of furniture. And, of course, he doesn’t mind having many pieces of furniture.” As widows are less vilified than other single women, there was a plethora of ‘widows’ in 1990s post-war Cambodia.⁵ Many of these women simply did not know the whereabouts of their husbands who were increasingly disappearing to the city or a neighbouring country to work, and occasionally just ‘turning up’, leaving them pregnant again.⁶ These female-headed households were usually among the poorest and most vulnerable, having neither recourse to the male support needed in heavier farm work, nor the male representative required for status in the society.

If villagers were lucky enough to have good leaders or a good local NGO, some could gain support. Although more populated areas had government offices representing MOWA, NGO support was rarely found in rural villages. Unfortunately, too often village leaders took every opportunity to use their authority to exploit vulnerable members of their community. For example, in a poor village in Prei Veng, I was told of a donor sinking a well. The village chief (who held all power at this level) instructed that it be dug next to his villa on the outskirts of the village. Later, a second well was donated, and the village chief demanded that this also be dug next to his villa. Subsequently, the poor women of the village had limited access, and many had to carry water to their homes on the other side of the village. In such cases women have no choice other than passive acceptance or gaining metaphysical support through turning to the monks for prayers and advice, and to *kruus* (traditional doctors) for magic to improve their fortune. In the 1990s,

⁴ “When a woman is married, people value that she has now completed her gratitude to her parents. Parents always worry about the marriage of their daughter. They will not feel shame if their daughter is married. So, women think that marriage is to show gratitude to her parents ... ” (Interview with Khmer teacher, 1996).

⁵ I found that the families of widowed or divorced women strongly discouraged them from remarrying.

⁶ My trusted housekeeper in Cambodia asked me to adopt her mute, four year old boy. She said her husband had gone to Thailand and never returned. She was worried about her son’s future, and felt that I might be able to afford the right medical help for him.

little could be done when neighbours became a problem to the poor and vulnerable, because the legal system was unavailable to them. This system favoured those with power and money to pay lawyers' fees and bribes. As women had nowhere to turn for help in difficult situations, they would either passively give up or move away to avoid conflict. With no recourse to legal assistance, the village presented numerous hazards for women, the most serious being losing either a teenage son through abduction into serving in various army factions during civil war, or a daughter stolen for trafficking into prostitution.

Strongly restrictive cultural traditions and lack of rule-of-law were not the only contexts governing the social behaviour of Cambodians. Due to a lack of education and wider experience, gossip and slander were major tools shaping social behaviour in Cambodian village society. As women were responsible for maintaining the family status, they were under enormous pressure to keep the 'family face' within a close community where everyone's personal life was of great interest. In this environment, gossip was frequently used as a tool for getting even, for keeping others who were feared or disliked in line, or cutting down those who were envied. This resulted in strong levels of pressure on family members to conform to cultural expectations, and led to high levels of personal secrecy. Women in particular had to conform to restrictive behavioural rules and endeavor to conceal perceived weaknesses of others within the family. Gossip often created wounds that were silently endured and hard to heal. Although this activity was largely regarded as the domain of women, I noted some men doing their fair share of gossiping and teasing, making unkind insinuations that added further wounds to hurt feelings. Much of this kind of negative behaviour was ascribed by villagers with whom I spoke to fear and distrust built up under the Khmer Rouge when monks were killed and village temple life destroyed.

5.2 The Village Temple

Lack of knowledge of traditional Cambodian-Buddhist teachings and culture resulting from the destruction of the religious, socio-cultural and educational systems

under the KR, saw Cambodian women turning to outsiders such as myself in order to understand just what it meant to be Khmer in the 1990s. During my time in Cambodia I witnessed a reinvention of culture with the legitimisation of a return to traditional ideals of the past.⁷ At the same time the coexistence of many seemingly contradictory cultural practices and beliefs were puzzling those working in NGO and development agencies. Many became frustrated with the apparent apathy and fatalism rooted in a strong belief in karma, especially among the poor and uneducated,⁸ but also among some who were well educated or wealthy. For example, rich people I communicated with attributed their ‘good luck’ to superior karmic status, accusing the poor of laziness. On reflection I realised it was easier for them to adopt this viewpoint than to face feelings of guilt and responsibility. Noting the number of Cambodians who simply and unreservedly accepted atrocities committed by the powerful, and exploitation by the wealthy, I found that both rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, adhered to the same attitudes of acceptance of the status quo, and an apathetic approach to the possibility of change.

Even though many temples destroyed under the KR had been restored under the Vietnamese, religious practice was discouraged in the 1980s. Thus, a resurgence of Buddhism in the 1990s was largely an attempt to reclaim the decimated Cambodian culture and religion. As people returned to their villages, many new temples were built in an effort to restore normalcy. Traditional practices of Animism and Hinduism also remained important to the people, blending with what Mu Sochua (Minister of MOWA) described as “an increasingly patriarchal and anti-feminist Buddhism, reflecting post

⁷ For example, all of forty students preparing to study postgraduate in Australia claimed to be Buddhist. However, they were embarrassed. When asked the difference between Vietnamese Buddhism (Mahayana) and their own Theravada Buddhism, the only thing they knew was that their monks were not supposed to wear shoes. They were extremely grateful when I gave them literature explaining the religious mix in Cambodia, and the nature of their Buddhism. They said they had wanted this kind of information for years, but had never been able to find it. After reading and discussing the precepts of their beliefs, some were profoundly moved to help the people in their country, saying, “at last we know who we are”.

⁸ I was initially surprised to find the way in which my Khmer sister believed in karma. She was convinced that all rich people had ‘good’ karma, no matter how they had come to possess money. She could not envisage that those involved in trafficking and other crimes could be bad if they were rich. I was also surprised when Cambodian woman academic Dr Pranee Rice expressed that a strong belief in karma is very useful as it helped the people accept their fate. However, she ignored my comment that it also stifles initiative and a sense of taking responsibility for your own behaviour.

communist political and social trends”. At the village level, temples were again becoming central to religious, cultural and social life, particularly in rural areas. The temples were increasingly being used as meeting places where numerous traditional religious ceremonies and social celebrations such as those occurring at Cambodian New Year took place. Although temple activities were not as popular in some parts of the country as they were in the 1960s and were seen by many to be politically-oriented, they were again functioning as an integral part of Cambodian culture. Special functions included performances of traditional sacred Hindu dance and music with foods for the enjoyment of people of all ages. This provided a common meeting place, and created opportunities for young adults to meet one another. For example, one newly married woman explained that her husband had initially spotted her on such an occasion when he re-visited his birth-village. They exchanged smiles, and he requested his family to find her parents and arrange a meeting to ask permission for their daughter to marry him.

Although there was a widespread return to the traditions of the past, many of the generation exposed to different norms in the 1970s were demonstrating ignorance of traditional ideals of respect, speech and good behaviour.⁹ Women were being portrayed as victims and sex objects in the print-media, and traditional proverbs and folk stories denigrating women were popularised. Speaking with older parents, I discovered a great sadness about the negative effects that living under communism had wrought on Buddhism and traditional respect systems.¹⁰ They believed that Khmer Rouge practices, including forcing children to spy on and disrespect their parents and giving children the power to abuse and control adults, were the cause of most of the anarchy and crime that touched every family. I witnessed one 26-year-old son who was totally out of control,

⁹ Craig Etcheson (1998), extrapolating from comments he'd heard wrote: "What is wrong with insulting my elders, and ignoring their words? The Khmer Rouge insulted elders in my village, and then killed them, but no punishment was ever meted out for that. What is wrong with threatening to kill a motor-dop in order to possess his bike? The Khmer Rouge stole every moto and everything else in the entire country, and no one was ever punished for that. The Khmer Rouge killed all their opponents, and a goodly number of their supporters ... They got away with it, so why shouldn't I?"

¹⁰ Monks took to the streets to bless organisers and marchers protesting against polling fraud and demanding missing bodies of demonstrators to be returned for cremation. Buddhist observers were appalled to see the monks being sacrilegiously beaten and stepped over by police. Corrupt senior CPP monk Un Sim denounced the monks for attending an 'illegal demonstration', while other monks called for justice and international intervention (Grainger and Chatmeau, 1998).

threatening his widowed mother and eight siblings and robbing them whenever he could, for gambling. He was charming and good-looking but unlike his siblings was particularly rude to his mother. As a result she was constantly on the move to hide from him. She attributed his behaviour to the influence of life under the KR regime. However, interviews with rural dwellers from Koh Kong in the late 1990s revealed that traditional forms of respect and harmony were returning in some areas. These people lamented that urban dwellers were losing Cambodian values because they were being strongly influenced by Thai movies. One of the by-products of cultural change was an unprecedented level of suicide among the young, which a number of informants ascribed to parents needing to 'loosen up' traditional expectations, especially in urban areas.

Although traditional culture had been greatly weakened, especially among the young, the Buddhist *wat* (temple) was returning to be the centre of spiritual and social life within most rural villages in the 1990s. The purpose of the *wat* is to unify the local family groups, as well as connect them with the broader community. In this village community centre, people are able to meet together for annual religious festivals such as *Pchum Ben*, where, it is believed, the souls of departed relatives return. They can also pray together, make offerings, receive blessings, and have their numbers read. The *wat* not only provides religious and moral guidance, but constitutes a sacred place where the community is united through prayer and paying service to ancestors, and a welfare centre where people can ask for help, guidance and prayers from the monks. Women have the task of preparing traditional dishes for the central function of providing food for offerings and religious ceremonies. Some of this is offered to the monks on behalf of the dead, and in this way women can earn merit. In keeping with tradition, the custom of young men gaining merit for themselves and their family through serving as a monk and receiving education and religious knowledge re-emerged in the 1990s. As the *wats* are supported by donations of money and fund-raising activities intended to bring merit and honour to deceased relatives, donors and fund raisers are patrons of the temple, and the

monks in turn support the donors.¹¹ Poor village families attending the temples benefit from the gifts of such patrons whom they see as rich and powerful, therefore ‘good’. For example, in 1996 following severe floods, Eng Marie (Prince Rannaridh’s wife) donated large amounts of rice for distribution through a major temple near the capital.¹² In this way temple patrons are able to assume status and credibility, without being questioned about how gifts of money were obtained, or the patron’s political affiliation. For this reason, I found some people complaining that, contrary to tradition, many monks (and pagodas) were taking political sides. Added to this, Hun Sen as supreme head of the government Poverty Alleviation Program and his wife Bun Rany as the official head of the Cambodian Red Cross had arguably undermined the traditional role of the temple by distributing rice and other goods from trucks in the street, making sure that the people recognised Hun Sen as their patron and donor.

Népote (1992) estimated that an average Cambodian temple represents about one thousand people, but as a result of KR policies Buddhism had become extremely weak. Nevertheless he found a positive relationship between the extent of Buddhism in a community and the harmony and cohesion experienced by the people. Traditionally, apart from unifying the people, a major function of the temple has been to serve as a meeting place for men. It has also served to launch young men into responsible adult life through a period of monkhood and guidance from a patron attached to the temple. The temple also has an important political function that is separate from the religious monastery, from which women are completely excluded. Men are unified through the *sala* (meeting house), situated in the temple precincts. Traditionally this has been the accepted place for male visitors and unattached men to find accommodation. It has also been the legitimate place for men to make important decisions about political concerns related to the people they represent, as well as discuss ways to raise money to support the temple. However, in many areas this aspect of the temple has been weakened in the highly political

¹¹ I found that Cambodians frequently plan to support the temple through fund-raising celebrations, or donations of land, buildings, frescoes, statues or items needed in the temple, to honour a deceased male relative. This is done at great personal cost, bringing merit and status to the donor and his family.

¹² Interestingly, I found it difficult to persuade work colleagues to pool donations to buy rice at this time. People in Cambodia favoured giving small bags of rice directly to the temple rather than risk losing merit or losing money to corruption.

environment of the 1990s with only a few men working for the temple (building and growing things) and meeting there. Even though men control the temple, older women have limited access to the decision-making processes through their male representatives and through discussing their opinions and suggestions with the monks who act as their intermediaries. Women have no meeting place equivalent to the *sala*, and spend most of their time working or at home.

In the 1990s, many women were gaining emotional and spiritual support through spending considerable periods of time in the *wat*. Women traumatised through sexual abuse, and even prostitution, were receiving special prayers and cleansing ceremonies to heal them and restore their self-esteem. The *wat* however, is not only a place for men and women to find spiritual, psychological and physical assistance; it is a place where all family members can ask monks for protection, receive counselling, and ask for advice on ways to achieve cosmic harmony. Traditionally, older widows are able to serve in the temple as *yeay chees* (nuns) and gain support. They can execute a great deal of influence through conferring with the monks and often act as their advisors. These women are seen as respected members of society who preserve their merit not only through advising and assisting the monks, but also through cooking for them and cleaning the temple grounds. I observed a situation in which several of these women were advisors to the local monks. Their dreams had revealed that unknown ancestor spirits had been disturbed when their new village temple was completed. In response to their concerns the monks performed special ceremonies to appease the spirits, thus safeguarding the community. However, in the desperate situation facing many widows in the 1990s, so many were turning to the temple for refuge that the monks were being forced to turn some away.

5.3 Marriage and Sexuality

In order to protect the family unity and bring benefit to participating family groups, the tradition of arranged marriages occurred widely throughout Cambodia as the norm in the 1990s. Marriages were usually arranged by mutual agreement between the parents of the prospective couple, after consultation with grandmothers. I found that parents

frequently admonished their sons that it was more merit-bearing to marry a girl they *aanet* (pitied), rather than the one they *sralanh* (loved). Following discussion, the young man's parents brought gifts to the prospective girl's family, and the girl's parents observed the young man's behaviour over a period of time before finally deciding (Women's Voice Centre, 1994:21). I saw several such cases where the young man's behaviour and competence was tested through work rendered to his future in-laws prior to marriage. For example, one interviewee told me how, as an eighteen-year-old in 1988, his widowed mother had sent him to become a live-in apprentice to a goldsmith in a rural province. He said he was surprised when the goldsmith's fourteen-year-old daughter came to sleep with him on the outside veranda (the correct place for male non-family members to reside). He said that although he held her, he refrained from having any sexual relations. Clearly, the girl's parents had sanctioned this as they believed that he was a good catch for their daughter. Although they begged him to stay and marry her, he chose to leave and go to a far province because he felt he was too young to settle down.

I found that 'more religious' parents would not make a final decision about proposed matches until they consulted their numerologists for compatibility of birth dates.¹³ Parents also considered age compatibility, as well as their future son-in-law's social level and competence. Ideally, he should be around three to seven years older than his wife, with as much education as possible, and certainly not less education than the girl. Although young men are often poorer than their bride's families, they should be gentle, have good manners and be generous. Népote (1992:140) says that ideally "men must graft themselves into their wife's family and become their social activator. In turn, wives are the guardian of the family and must nurture their husband in order for him to reach his full potential". Hence the proverb, "The seedlings are enriched by the quality of the earth, as a woman makes the qualities of a man blossom". Once the husband has joined the new family, he takes on the responsibility of bringing them merit through his selfless work within the community, and if his wife dies he remains part of her family,

¹³ From my observations, this can also be used as a way to politely refuse matches that are not welcome. Monks are usually consulted to check for numerologically propitious wedding dates.

perhaps marrying her younger sister.¹⁴ I was aware of these social ideals still being practised in the 1990s though, according to informants, they were somewhat diminished due to the social rupture of the KR period.

The practice of girls marrying older cousins on their mother's side of the family is accepted and widespread. My interviewees believed that this kind of marriage was common at all levels of society and was associated with a matrilineal past history. They believed it occurred more frequently in rich families where it was important to keep family wealth intact. I was told that the reason people married on their mother's side was because "the father's blood is too close", meaning that it is healthier to marry on the mother's side. Although I found it difficult to discuss the occurrence of arranged marriages in which the couple were related (marriages to close relatives are illegal in Cambodia), on several occasions I was interested to witness marriages in which the bride was the daughter of the sister of the groom's mother, and several years his junior¹⁵. In one case an Australian friend in Phnom Penh was courting a beautiful Cambodian girl who had broken off an arranged engagement with her cousin (on her mother's side), due to his bad behaviour. My friend was devastated when she told him she would marry her cousin after all, as it was her 'destiny' to do so. A key informant suggested that the practice of marrying cousins kept the families together, adding that this was the reason aunts loved their nieces and nephews the same as their own children.

In keeping with Khmer ideals of correct relationships between couples, the wife addresses her husband as *bong* (older brother) and the husband addresses his wife as *p'oun* (younger sister). In fact, marriage relationships are seen to be conducted as the

¹⁴ Népote (1992: 154) found that in the countryside a son-in-law is considered as 'won' by the maternal family, and polyandry prevents males from dispersing from the group. The term 'a nest of children' allows for the possibility of multiple fathers. However, he says there are no statistics on these practices. Although I noted that many poor 'widowed' women had young children, I found this subject a little too sensitive to pursue in depth.

¹⁵ Népote, (2005) maintains "women are the primary agents of matrilineal networks that hold the society in secret. One has to know that behind every man, it is necessary to mark his mother, his sister or his daughter and his own networks of matrilineal filiation ... it is [also] necessary to read the masculine political networks as hidden networks of 'brothers-in-law' or maternal cousins." (communication with Jacques Népote, 2005)

terms suggest. I noted that younger sons and older daughters sometimes seem to have more difficulty in fitting into these preferred marriage patterns. For example, a younger brother I know married a divorcee who was two years his senior. This relationship was not seen to be ideal, and in fact ended in another divorce. However, my informants believed that the royal family were outside the cultural norms and could do whatever they liked, explaining that Sihanouk had married his aunt on his father's side, and his daughter Bopha Devi had openly entertained many lovers, and had several husbands. Perhaps the Princess was rebelling against the patriarchy of the throne where her mother and grandmothers had been subjected to subservience and concubinage.¹⁶

In urban Cambodia, I noted that young unmarried men frequently joked together about their dreams of marrying a girl from a rich family. Rich parents push their daughters to marry men who are educated or come from high status families, as such men are able to obtain merit-making jobs (mainly working for the government). In this way their daughters can use their negotiating and entrepreneurial skills to promote their husbands into positions favourable to the family status and profit. Although men almost always have the final say on everything in the family (including purchases outside the family budget), wives from these families have access to the patronage system through offering 'gifts' to other well-positioned wives in return for favours from their husbands. I noted that the middle class graduates I met in both Australia and Cambodia had all married women from higher socio-economic levels. For example, I observed one male graduate who returned to Cambodia to find a wife. He decided on a beauty queen he had seen in a popular magazine and asked his family and friends to arrange an introduction to her father (a government official). Agreeing to the meeting, the girl's father declared that the young man's birth-date was not compatible with this daughter, and suggested her younger sister instead. Later the young man was shocked to learn that the beauty-queen sister had been given as a second wife to the prince, and his new father-in-law had suddenly become quite wealthy.

¹⁶ This example of the king marrying on his father's side is in agreement with Népote (1992), who points to the patriarchal marriage patterns in the royal family.

Dr Thel Thong, who conducts Khmer marriage ceremonies, explained that marriage vows confirming the relative positions of husband and wife are based on the *chbab* cultural ideals, clearly delineating the duties of wives and husbands. Although vows vary according to the celebrant, they commonly include promises from the new wife to keep an excellent family budget, and promises from the husband to buy gold jewellery for his wife.¹⁷ Clearly, as discussed in Chapter Two (p.37), although women were expected to be responsible for maintaining the household finances, the majority poor had little chance of aspiring to all these social ideals. Daughters of poor parents were seen to have less chance of being happily married, having little to offer.¹⁸ These women had to tolerate unacceptable behaviour from their husbands and although family violence occurred at all levels of society, they were more prone to be devalued and become victims. For example, I met one young woman who had been given in an arranged marriage to a man from a wealthy family. The young woman bore him a child, but because her family turned out to be less wealthy than they had previously appeared, her husband embarked on a cycle of violent behaviour to ‘get rid’ of her and try again. Although men who left their wives had no traditional rights to the family home, evictions of wives had become more common as a way for men to keep the family dwelling. In fact, in the early 1990s I was told of several highly suspicious cases in which accidental house fires caused by kerosene lamps had killed the house-owning wife, and the husband claimed the property. I also found that women who left their husbands were looked down upon as prostitutes.

Unlike boys, who are expected to be promiscuous, the virginity of unmarried girls is highly prized in Cambodia.¹⁹ Any sexual misdemeanour of a woman, whether it is her fault or not, not only causes her to be permanently stained with poor prospects for

¹⁷ Apart from being an adornment, gold is traditionally seen as the only stable currency, particularly in difficult times, rating ahead of the US\$. In Cambodia, it has been common to see women flaunting their jewellery in public. However, I was told that they borrow jewellery from each other to maximise the public show of wealth important to upholding family status. More recently however, many urban women prefer not to show their wealth in this way.

¹⁸ Népote (1992:129) found a lot more fluidity in marriage patterns in rural areas.

¹⁹ However, interviews with young women from wealthy, educated families revealed a softening of attitudes to this tradition in their level of society, particularly among those who had studied overseas.

marriage in the future, but is also seen as bringing ill-fortune to her family. Hence the widely known proverb, “Women are cloth and men are diamonds”. In social terms, this saying means that women must be chaste prior to marriage but young men cannot be stained by their sexual activities.²⁰ Confirming the popular proverb, “Ten rivers are not enough to fill one ocean”, a survey recorded in Brown (2000:132) found that 60-70 percent of Cambodian men visit prostitutes.²¹ My interviews with young female tertiary students from poor and middle-class families in Cambodia revealed they were taught that men have insatiable sexual needs, and celibacy for a man (even a monk) is unthinkable. They said that in Cambodia sex is a taboo subject and ‘good’ young women are given no sexual instruction prior to marriage. They believed they should have no desire of their own, even in marriage. They did not see a connection between love and sexual activity. They said that in their culture only ‘bad’ women have sexual desires, and they could not imagine enjoying sex themselves. They could not believe they would be able to satisfy their husbands’ sexual needs as they were too shy, and for this reason they could not stop them going to prostitutes. Yet others told me only ‘bad’ girls who could not be trusted would ever tell their fiancée they loved them. In conversation with a young Cambodian woman lucky enough to be engaged to the man of her choice, she laughed when I asked if she loved her fiancée. She assured me that no Cambodian girl would ever admit that she was in love until after marriage, if at all. These attitudes were confirmed by Brown (2000:143), who found that among 150 women taking part in focus-group discussions, only one believed that a woman’s sexual desires could be natural.

Married women and widows were less comfortable discussing the subject of sexuality with me, although some more educated women expressed their belief that the biggest problem facing Cambodian women was the sexual behaviour of men. Most Cambodian women, it would seem, have learnt to subvert their sexuality. I found that some urban women used sex to keep their husbands compliant to their material demands,

²⁰ In the mid-1990s it was common for young men migrating to the city to become clients of the cheap local brothels. One *moto-dop* (motorbike taxis) driver who was little more than a boy explained “Often we are lonely so we go to see the girls. Our families are not here and we don’t have girlfriends. When we go to the brothel we can have some beers and have a good time and forget about our troubles”.

²¹ In my Phnom Penh classes for government officials, several fathers openly stated that they had taken their young teenage sons to be initiated in the brothels, unaware of the high risk of STDs.

and although they would never accept the family budget being threatened through their husbands having a second wife or mistress, most accepted that their husbands would need to go to prostitutes. Men I spoke to believed that many young men with high ethical standards before marriage become corrupted by their wives' excessive material demands after marriage.²² I also found it was culturally accepted that during pregnancy and the first four months post-partum, women abstain from sex. As it was difficult for their men to comply, they commonly gave their husbands money to go to prostitutes, blaming themselves for being inadequate. One young woman working in a medical clinic in Phnom Penh told me it was usual for health workers to advise female patients to send their husbands to prostitutes when they were pregnant or otherwise unwell.

5.4 Family and Children

As Cambodian society is collective and family-based, it is not unusual for married women without children or with only one child to be denigrated and seen as somewhat tainted. Childless women are seen as having some sort of karmic disorder for which they are being sanctioned by angry ancestors. To correct this problem, many childless married women tried to prove their worthiness by seeking to adopt orphans or children from poor relatives. Added to this, orphaned individuals or those cutting ties with their family group, aligned themselves with another family, offering services and functions that 'suited' their new family. Due to a strong need to be identified within a family structure, and the huge legacy of broken families due to recent Cambodian history, the generous tradition of adopting homeless orphans or poor women to live under the protection of an established family structure is widespread. Several of the widows I stayed with had adopted people who were treated in the same way as a normal family member. Two of these had adopted teenage girls from poverty-stricken country backgrounds - a young woman who had been orphaned, and a deserted 'widow' and her small disabled son. Yet

²² My findings on women's sexual understandings are at variance with Népote (1992:151) who noted that men could be rejected by their wives if they failed to be good lovers. He commented on the lamentations of males who have sensuous wives whom they cannot satisfy. I do not see this as a contradiction, but as an indication of the high level of complexity and variation within the society. It could also be due to a different response to an older woman (myself) from other women, and a man (Népote) from other men.

another had adopted a single, orphaned, distantly related male. The two young women were helping with the running of the family home and business, while the young man was doing a wood-working apprenticeship with the father of the household.

Drawing on observations and interviews with Cambodian women and health workers, it became clear to me that there is an inordinate burden placed upon the shoulders of Cambodian females. MP Tioulong Samura informed me, “Men get a head-start in every area of life, right from birth”. For example, at birth the mother is seen as spiritually responsible for any physical abnormality of her child. Cultural beliefs and practices emanate from the preconception that responsibility for the health, well-being and ‘good’ behaviour of the family ultimately rests with the woman. As caring for the family is primarily the woman’s domain, teenage daughters are kept at home to help in the house and learn how to be future mothers, while boys are expected to help their fathers and to stay at school longer. Boys are encouraged to become educated and given great personal freedom, but girls are taught to be quiet, retiring and shy at all times. To this end, practices of breastfeeding boys much longer than girls, and giving girls less food than boys in order to keep them passive and subservient while encouraging boys to be strong and aggressive, have been widespread, especially in rural areas. With women preferring to give the best food to males and visitors, girls at home are both educationally and nutritionally disadvantaged.

My observation of family life was that child-rearing practices were more restrictive for girls than boys. These included expectations of extreme modesty in females, with girls’ bodies covered in long skirts from birth. Later they would be expected to dress modestly, and to move slowly, silently and quietly at all times. At the same time small boys will be seen running around naked and relatively free. It was not unusual to see young girls in long skirts carrying their naked baby brothers on their hips, pacifying them by gently playing with their genitals when they cried. I discussed this practice with some expatriate health workers who agreed that there appeared to be an openly penis-centred understanding of sexuality throughout the society. My Cambodian friends laughed and said that the penises of baby boys were a cause for great admiration, and openly

discussed among the women, especially in rural areas. As an outside observer, it struck me that this penis-centred consciousness might well reflect the ancient Hindu practice of worshipping the linga (symbol of Shiva) displayed in temples throughout the country.

Generally Cambodian babies, especially boys, are given a great deal of adoration and liberal affection by the extended family, especially the aunts, until they are about three years old. After that, they are expected to behave according to the social rules. But I noticed that there was a great lack of consistency in disciplining children in the home, with discipline seeming to depend more on the way the adults felt at the time rather than on any consistent plan of action. I saw little opportunity for the range of learning through playing games, drawing, singing and educational activities that I observed in families in neighbouring Vietnam. For example, in Vietnam children were constantly being stimulated with makeshift toys, songs in different languages, dances, and reading, writing and drawing at home, even when there was not enough food to eat. In contrast, in Cambodia I saw a seven-year-old boy silently observing everything that was happening at a family gathering. He astounded us when he translated the meaning of a sentence in English for his eighteen-year-old brother. When left alone with me the boy joyfully demonstrated Cambodian dancing. But when his mother returned, he became nervous and slipped and split his lip. He didn't cry and his mother smacked him for behaving in an unseemly way. After that, he avoided me and returned to observation mode. Cambodian pre-school children seemed to learn purely through observation, with no encouragement to interact with adults except as helping hands when requested. I noted that children were not reasoned with but had to be quiet, listen, accept and obey. Apart from the increasingly noisy and pushy young homeless beggars in the streets, Cambodian children and teenagers were unusually silent and respectful when faced with teachers or other adults.

In relation to girls, my observations confirm the findings of Sin (1996:57-60) that the main reason Cambodian girls lack the drive and initiative to stay at school are related to cultural traditions and financial constraints. Tradition put strong pressure on parents to constrain girls to accept their female status, and lack of money for writing materials,

clothing and bribes to pass tests means that preference is given to educating boys.²³ In areas without good access to schooling, parents with enough money would allow their boys to travel distances or stay in accommodation away from home, but not their daughters. Girls were also hindered in attending school due to the need for their help at home. Although girls outstripped boys in early primary school (MOEYS, 1998), girls' behavioural expectations and uncritical acceptance of their parent's wishes ensured that they were unable to compete with boys in secondary school. Rather than building their self-worth through striving to improve their own life, most were taught to depend on their future husband's education and status.

My focus group of female university students in Prei Veng Province revealed that strong social pressure against participation in tertiary education was putting huge emotional pressure on them and affecting their studies. They believed that boys would never accept marrying a 'clever' or more educated wife than themselves. They revealed that some more conservative boys were harassing them, calling them bad names and saying, "if you were good girls, you would stay at home and help your mothers". Some said they were thinking of giving up their studies. Even in cases where their fathers were encouraging them to stay at university, female relatives and friends were putting pressure on their mothers to bring them home to find a husband before they were too educated or too old to do so. However, although girls attending the university in Phnom Penh were worried about the same issues, they were under less pressure to quit than their poorer provincial sisters from rural backgrounds.

5.5 Health and Traditional Understandings

As with education, traditional understandings affected women's attitudes to health-care. According to NGOs involved in health care with whom I spoke, Cambodian understandings of the cosmos (including the physical body and its surrounding space) are

²³ The *Far Eastern Economic Review* (1999:37) reported that cash-strapped teachers in some schools were regularly extorting money from primary school students. One child told the 'Chakraval' newspaper, "I have to pay 40 riel (\$0.10) a day to my teacher otherwise I'll have a big problem. The money that mum gives me for a snack when I'm hungry, I have to share it with my teacher so I can join the class like everyone else".

at variance with modern Western understandings. For example, UNICEF medical trainers told me that even students in advanced medical school believed all bodily fluids were aspects of blood. This presented them with great difficulties in understanding HIV/AIDS. Suffering appalling levels of health problems, the majority of Cambodians living in poor rural areas had understandings vastly different from those of foreign aid-workers, and virtually no knowledge of hygiene. Added to this, problems such as physical disability or mental illness were seen as resulting from bad karma. For example, the older daughter of *bong srei* (featured in the case study below) was experiencing multiple stress-related epileptic attacks (not uncommon in Cambodia) because her husband was living far away on the border of Vietnam. The family suffered great shame due to this problem, and tried to keep the knowledge of her ill health from their neighbours. In the 1990s most Cambodians had little access to reliable Western medicine or safe drinking water. Due to the negative experiences of Cambodians who had purchased useless, out-of-date pharmaceutical goods dumped in the country by unscrupulous Western companies, and unable to read use-by dates and instructions in a foreign language, Western health-care was not trusted.²⁴ As the following story from my Phnom Penh field notes illustrates, NGOs experienced a range of problems when introducing rural Khmer women to Western medical understandings.

Bong srei is an elderly 68 year-old widow who lost her husband and several children in the Pol Pot time. She cannot speak English, nor can she read or write in her own language. She had recently moved from her home in Kompong Cham to live with her youngest son and brother-in-law with his extended family in Phnom Penh. I was shocked when she showed me the large ulcers hidden under her *sompot* as I had thought her overriding health concerns were painful arthritic knees. Some months earlier we had taken her to get some medication to relieve her knees, but she had not followed our instructions and had eaten all the tablets at once. When her son became angry at her mistake she replied “But I only wanted to get better more quickly!” As her ulcers looked serious I wasted no time in taking *bong srei* to a resident Western-trained doctor. He looked at her file and confirmed that she had been diagnosed with

²⁴ In the same way NGOs were totally frustrated with problems such as Malboro displaying prominent advertising signs (recently outlawed elsewhere) to market their cigarettes to malnourished men throughout the country.

diabetes eighteen months before. She said she did not know about this, and had been regularly eating every kind of food. The doctor explained to her that if she had not come to him within four more days, she would have needed hospitalisation. He instructed us to go to a nearby laboratory to initiate pathology tests, and then to a chemist to buy a list of things to treat her ulcers. He also instructed her to come back within the next three days for pathology results, and then again every two days for further check-ups. After providing samples to the pathologist for analysis, we went to a chemist to buy the dressings. He kindly interpreted my recap of all the procedures and instructions a second time to be sure she clearly understood.

Two days later I visited her home to attend a party celebrating the third week of survival for her grandson. This time all the women in the family had prepared elaborate foods for their guests. I was happy to see that *bong srei* had been dressing her ulcers as instructed, and reminded her about going back to discuss pathology results with her doctor the following day. She said she didn't know she was supposed to go back again. I couldn't understand how she could not have known when this had been clearly explained to her by two separate interpreters. Seeing her difficulty in accepting the serious nature of her problem (Cambodians apparently have very little understanding of the slow development and treatment time of some diseases), I used this opportunity to discuss her illness with her son. He knew nothing of his mother's diagnosis and was shocked to hear of the possibility of a leg amputation if she did not eat correctly to control her disease. By my supporting her son, he was able to support his mother by taking her to the doctor at the right times. Also, by separately informing each adult member of the extended family about the nature and seriousness of her illness, I was able to involve them in supporting her (it appeared that her traditional role not only involved cooking pleasing food for the family, but due to her responsibility as the oldest female, she had decided to accept her fate and not burden the others with a problem she did not fully understand). Most importantly, I explained *bong srei's* needs to her brother-in law, the highest authority in the family. In this way, he was able to oversee that everyone supported her to bring about healing.

It was difficult for *bong srei* to contemplate changes that could disrupt the habits of other family members and cause them inconvenience and concern. She had no understanding of health problems that are not directly apparent, as were her painful, swollen arthritic knees and ulcers. Added to this, it was entirely improper for her to divulge personal health problems to her younger son, and unthinkable to trouble her

in-laws. From the point of view of *bong srei*'s son, his responsibility was to work hard and bring home money to support his mother. It was difficult for him to do other than follow his mother's instructions, as advising her would be seen as a lack of respect. However, as a trusted outside member of the family group, I was able to wield power by crossing traditional boundaries and hierarchies of authority and not cause anyone 'loss of face'. The threat of *bong srei* ending up with an amputation and causing far more disruption than a mere change of menu would, the family was able to take the situation seriously. They commented that if I had not taken direct action no one would have understood their need to cooperate in changing her eating patterns, and she would not have been able to refuse the food they offered. As the popular Khmer proverb goes, "Starving people don't choose what they eat!" (Field notes, Phnom Penh, 1997)

In the case of *bong srei*, it was necessary to understand that Cambodians have complex perceptions of the nature of illness that include traditional cosmic explanations of the relationship between their causes and effects. Western concepts of *bong srei*'s illness being seen as an imbalance to be measured in a laboratory were too vague and difficult for her to understand, especially when the treatment required changing habits that were overwhelmingly central to her place of responsibility within the collective family. From her point of view, dressing the ulcers on her legs was a direct and logical treatment to her problem. More obscure treatments were too removed from her perceived problem, and too difficult to follow through. It was easier for her to forget her medical appointment and continue to play out the role she understood. Western practitioners were frequently frustrated with this kind of experience. Not understanding the cultural basis for the lack of compliance, many saw Cambodians as stubborn or stupid.

Another cause of confusion among NGOs was that, although Cambodians at all levels overwhelmingly assert their Buddhism,²⁵ in practice their beliefs constitute a blend of Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism. For example, I met people at all levels of society who consult with monks and female fortune-tellers to guide their future, and with male

²⁵ Even leading former Khmer Rouge figures such as Chea Sim made a great show of being Buddhist and attending the temple.

kruu for healing, dealing with troublesome spirits, or casting spells.²⁶ Professor Maurice Eisenbruch (1996) found that traditional healings performed by the highly respected *kruu* were widely practised, and often effective. These healers worked with traditional herbal medicines, connections with ancestral spirits, and ritual magic. Although *kruu* were revered more highly than monks for healing powers and magic, I met monks who practised traditional forms of healing. One of the results of the rise in beliefs and practices in magic and sorcery among the uneducated rural population in the 1990s was that some innocent people were blamed for using these powers to bring about illness and misfortune, before being killed by their accusers. Most people I spoke to believed strongly in the power of sorcery, and commented, “It is very dangerous when a *kruu Khmer* performs black magic”. Mothers also consulted with their greatly respected Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) for advice on dealing with ancestral spirits that could make claims on their children’s lives.

In her late 1990s study of TBAs in Cambodian villages, health professional Elizabeth Hoban (Monash Asia Conference, November, 2003) found that, contrary to widely held understandings among NGOs, many of these women learned their age-old skills and practices (stemming from ayurvedic and animist beliefs) from their mothers, while others attached themselves to practising TBAs as voluntary helpers to learn their skills. After building up their reputation through years of observation, these trainee-volunteer TBAs were invited by mothers to assist them in birthing. They were greatly respected as village grandmothers, responsible for the safe delivery of children, as well as being legal witnesses for the births.²⁷ Apart from these responsibilities, TBAs advised village mothers on suitable herbal medicines to use in post-parturition protocols. Although many Western health-workers witnessing village births reported lack of Western health knowledge and hygiene, and unusual practices during and after parturition, Hoban found that, apart from the unacceptable practice of pushing on the

²⁶ Cf. Professor Maurice Eisenbruch (1996) for a long-term study of traditional healers in all provinces. He interviewed 532 healers included monks, *kruus*, mediums and traditional birth attendants. He outlined the methods and logics used as they invoke the power of their deities or former masters. Sources of healing were found to be associated with a combination of Buddhist, Brahmanic and folk cosmologies, and adapted to recent social change.

²⁷ Men are not allowed to be present at births as they are considered to be private, women’s business.

mother's uterus to assist in birth, these women were useful. In fact, they were the only trusted support available to the majority of rural women. According to Hoban, even though many were old and illiterate, village women preferred to call their chosen TBA rather than leave their family and pay for transport to attend a birthing clinic when they barely had enough money for basic food. She estimated that it would be more than twenty years before there would be enough trained midwives to replace these women, and suggested that the international community stop vilifying TBAs and support them as the main providers of birthing support in rural areas.²⁸

Other women used in the traditional treatment of illness included female mediums. Népote (1992:169) indicates how these women were considered to be the only ones who could speak to troublesome ancestor spirits inhabiting the domestic space. On several occasions my Buddhist friends called mediums to exorcise their homes to dispel troublesome spirits. One young mother who had overdosed with the intention of killing herself claimed she had no memory of taking the tablets. I interpreted her problem as directly relating to stress resulting from fear of her schizophrenic brother who continually came to threaten and rob her family. Her uncle called a medium who explained that the young mother was under the influence of a malevolent spirit. She then ritually dispelled the spirit from the house. According to BBC consultant Dr Sophie Biacabe (January, 1993)²⁹, the health beliefs and practices of Cambodians are a combination of Buddhist and Brahmanist (ayurvedic) theories, combined with ancient folk cosmology and belief in spirits (animism). Biacabe notes that *thmop* (sorcerers) can be female or male. The female sorcerer is an old woman who has learned the love-charm. Her displeasure can act against women after childbirth, causing eclampsia in the mother. The male sorcerer is anti-religious and can make a spell to induce (such as putting corrosive things inside the belly) or cure illness. She also notes that Cambodian religious and magical/supernatural beliefs exist in symbiosis where illnesses could be caused either naturally or supernaturally. Naturally-caused illnesses such as those resulting from malnourishment, body imbalances, poisons, age or accidents could be cured, but supernatural illnesses

²⁸ Cf. Hoban (2002) to further understand the practices of Khmer midwives.

²⁹ Taken from notes kindly shared with me by UNICEF consultant, Brigitte Sonnois.

caused by ghosts or evil spirits could not be cured. She found that many Cambodians, particularly in rural areas, believed there were around fifteen kinds of spirits including a range of ancestral spirits (male and female) guarding their territory/village. These spirits can be malevolent, bringing illness to the family when a daughter acts sinfully. Jealous, evil female spirits of women who die in childbirth, or virgins who die a violent death, could even induce epidemics. They were particularly harmful for pregnant women and their babies. *M'day daem* (the spirit of the original mother from the baby's past life) could return to reclaim her child, causing fever and convulsions in the newly born baby. Cures consist of specific rituals and rice throwing, and wearing amulets could provide further protection.

Throughout the 1990s, Cambodians were frequently turning to spiritual advisors for advice. Hamilton (1993) reported numerous types of spiritual advisers and fortune-tellers reading palms and cards that were scattered around the alleys of Phnom Penh and in temple and village compounds. I was told that because people were scared of black magic, they didn't divulge their exact birth-date lest someone put a spell on them. If the enemy also possessed a personal item or photograph, the spell could be deadly. At all levels of the populace, traditional religious and cultural practices were blended and accepted as compatible with Buddhism. Monks commonly read numbers and performed traditional healings, and young women performed traditional Hindu and folk dances, both for sacred performance and cultural entertainment. Both educated and uneducated Cambodians frequented fortune-tellers and numerologists for propitious dates and guidance. Clearly, all the above cultural beliefs and practices strongly affected the development process in relation to health, as Westerners worked together with Cambodians in the post-war 1990s. However, the process was affected not only by misunderstandings of Cambodian practices, but by a widespread lack of cohesion and trust at all levels of the population.

5.6 Administration of Law and Women

Major systemic problems related to long periods of war and continuous social disruption in the 1990s resulted in increasingly widespread lawlessness and impunity in Cambodian society. According to FUNCINPEC Secretary of State for MOWA, Mu Sochua (one of only two female cabinet ministers in 1998), the situation was “very, very severe in terms of abuse to women”. She explained that the reason Cambodian women’s plight was considered the worst in Southeast Asia was not only due to grinding poverty, but physical abuse from males that cut across all social groups: “It is the custom and tradition that allows men to think that women can be beaten, sold or bought. It is ingrained not just in men, but women also believe that it is their destiny ... Cambodian women have paid a heavy price in two decades of war and genocide.” According to Mu Sochua, “If the rate of violence and women’s vulnerability are to be decreased, poverty and social attitudes must be tackled in tandem”, with women and men at all levels needing to work together to facilitate change for a peaceful society (interview, 2000).

As Cambodians who feel wronged prefer to avoid conflict and accept their fate, in order to save face during serious disputes village leaders are asked to act as intermediaries in conflict-resolution. However, according to community leader Thel Thong,³⁰ this kind of conflict-resolution is unworkable, as the conflicting parties have no part in working out compromise in a way that satisfies the needs of both. Instead, they must respectfully defer to whatever decision the patron has arbitrated for them. However, when conflicts have not been satisfactorily resolved, resentments and frustration build up to unbearable levels, resulting in unexplained eruptions of violence or people moving away. For example, I was told of a case where a man was constantly moving the fence dividing his property and his neighbour’s. The neighbour kept moving it back again. Tragically, the neighbour eventually lost patience, became violent and killed the offending man’s child. Thus, in situations of conflict, children and women in particular are severely disadvantaged. In the case of women, Cambodian customs require them not

³⁰ Dr Thel Thong is a highly respected community leader in Melbourne. He complained that, like it or not, because of his education and community respect, he is looked upon as a patron to the people.

only to be passive and quiet, but to defer to aggressors and blame themselves for problems that arise. I found that some were going to their female neighbours or other male members of the family to get support, as they rarely had direct access to help from powerful male patrons. Added to this, the majority had no access to the legal system.

One of the major problems hindering the development of a just society through the implementation of laws in the 1990s was related to a largely untrained judiciary, insufficient salaries in the civil service, corruption at all levels in the public and private sectors, and poor enforcement of existing just laws and regulations. Added to this was the growing level of distrust caused by the abuse of power among members of the police force and army, at times resulting in anarchic behaviour among the general population.³¹ Thus, in an environment where women have very little power, they increasingly became the victims of family violence and exploitation. Girls from the countryside were increasingly being tricked, stolen and sold to brothels where they were imprisoned as slaves. Corrupt police and government officials collected illegal taxes and payments from their keepers, thus ensuring freedom from prosecution for the perpetrators.

Poverty, ignorance and police corruption, as well as uneducated, underpaid judges and lawyers entrenched in a government-dependant legal system in the 1990s, rendered the newly-formed laws almost useless.³² MOWA (1999d:8-10) reports that the police did not see cases of domestic violence as criminal behaviour. Police only responded when there was a divorce case, but divorce was strongly discouraged and women didn't understand their legal rights. Lawyers were not interested in women who refused to accept lengthy and coercive reconciliation processes. However, legal conflicts rarely got past the first level of the village chief, who took pride in resolving problems before they got to

³¹ Népote (1993:22) describes the latent aggression and violence behind the perceived Khmer gentleness and patience. He cites several of the over 250 proverbs collected by Pannatier (1916), over half of which are based on the need to distrust others, and Meyer (1929) who points out the need for strong distrust of dependants.

³² A draft report to Members of the United Nations Committee, *Elimination of Violence against Women*, was supplied to me by Dr Ing Kantha Phavi of MOWA. The draft report carefully summarised the laws in place in the 1990s relating to women who were well protected and had equal rights to men in the word of Cambodian law.

higher levels. I was told that women were loath to go against their chief's advice for fear of earning his displeasure and making their life even more difficult. The following case study of a 42 year-old woman provides an example of the legal problems facing abused women in Cambodia. This woman was married in 1980 and had four children. She used to sell fried noodles from a push-cart.

"My husband always hit me. If I didn't give him money he would damage property, pour soup on my head, hit me with a threshing-pole, kick me and follow me around the village. When I worked late and could not prepare meals for him on time he would abuse me. When he went out until 2:00 am he would come back and force me to buy him wine. If I refused he would cut the string of the mosquito net, bother the children while they were sleeping and hit me. Three times I bought medicine in order to commit suicide, but the children stopped me. Each time my husband caused problems I would run to hide behind the banana tree but there was a dog that always bit me. I would run to the neighbour's house but they dared not help me because my husband would cause problems for them. I would run to my mother's house but my husband would come and talk sweetly to her and she would conciliate so that I would go home. In the end he would ask for money, take the soup pot and pour it over my head and hit me again when I didn't give him money. Nobody dared help; only one woman decided to help me. Finally I took my children and ran to my mother."
(MOWA, 1999d)

After fleeing with her children the abused woman went to file a divorce and the commune leader called for reconciliation. Her husband refused to accept divorce, saying he would only marry more women. Because he refused the police did not dare to get involved, claiming it was a domestic matter and responding with the adage that when couples fight in the morning, they get along in the afternoon.

"After a divorce was refused, I carried cake to sell in my mother's village and my husband drove the motor bike into me and made me fall on my face and sprain my hand. I dared not sell again. Five days later he came and chopped me twice with an axe and hit me with the butt of the axe. I fell unconscious. A neighbor shouted out to stop my husband. My husband was arrested and detained for two days, but he paid a bribe to the police and they released him. Two years ago I received help from an organisation and filed a divorce complaint. I received custody of the children and one third of the property but my husband sold the farm while I was away, kidnapped

the children from school and came after me to hit me and curse me. I am divorced but not divorced, because the court decision is not enforced. The court asked me for US\$300 to hire police and pay for gasoline in order to enforce the ruling. I offered US\$100 but the police would accept nothing less than US\$200. I have no money while I am waiting for enforcement. Now I have nothing. I always suffer from headaches because my husband hit me on my head. Recently my ex-husband followed me to harass me and accuse me of having other men. He has remarried and has come to live on our land again.” (MOWA, 1999d)

Instead of protecting women, the legal system was largely used to protect men and to provide profit for underpaid, poorly trained, corrupt officials in a position to demand bribes and allot favours at will and without hindrance. Although the *chbab* orally-transmitted cultural laws for women are not mentioned anywhere in the Cambodian legal code, judges indifferent to the plight of women frequently refer to article 13 stating that “Buddhism is the state religion” to justify using their own biased interpretations when it suits them (Siphana Sock and Denora Sarin, 1998:31).

The corrupt legal system was also instrumental in permitting an unchecked growth in the trafficking of young women from rural areas in the 1990s. The ‘Report on Human Rights in Cambodia, 2000’ (*Human Rights Watch Report*, 2001), revealed that powerful figures and their accomplices running the lucrative trafficking networks across the country were immune from prosecution. Many of these were government officials, soldiers, or police with mechanisms for protection reaching to the highest levels. As with police, courts were not seen as places where justice would be administered. Rather, they were seen as places guaranteeing the rich unhindered rights, thus protecting them against the rights of the poor majority. It was virtually impossible for poor women with no powerful connections or access to money to get a fair trial. Women married to powerful men did not get prosecuted for their crimes, and their victims were often demonized. Since the widely publicised case of Bun Rany (Hun Sen’s wife) allegedly having her husband’s mistress murdered failed to bring prosecution in the courts, several other widely reported cases involving poor women financially supported by volunteers making legal claims against the rich and powerful having similarly failed to bring prosecution.

Lack of legal representation was most severe for women confined to prison. A young American-trained Cambodian lawyer giving voluntary assistance to women in prisons described the ways in which unfairly imprisoned women were submitted to appalling conditions, wasting away with no money to pay for a lawyer to represent them. With only bars separating the men and women, one woman had both conceived and given birth in full view of inmates, with no privacy or doctor being provided. Unless someone was able to bring them food from outside the prisons, inmates frequently were not fed, with government money allotted for food being misappropriated along the poorly paid bureaucratic chain (interview, 1997).

In the absence of legal protection for the poor, loss of land also became a major problem in the 1990s. A 2001 Oxfam survey found that the government owned eighty percent of the land, but corrupt officials acted as though they owned it themselves, maintaining that the poor would be able to obtain rights to farming property if they had enough money to pay for land certificates as the rich do. Lack of legal protection also resulted in more than thirteen percent of Cambodians losing their ability to grow rice or to fish in their country's many rivers and streams, because they had lost their land through illegal appropriation, or been denied access to land they once held. As a result, groups of impoverished villagers were regularly turning up in front of the National Assembly to protest their evictions. Prime Minister Hun Sen accused local officials and military men of conspiring with rich people to rob villagers of their land and deprive them of their means of existence, but did nothing about it. Hok Loeun, a 52 year-old landless farmer protesting with 200 others camping on waste-land in the center of Phnom Penh, sobbed as she reported her story: "My son-in-law cleared the plot in 1991 when it was still a war zone. In some places there were three minefields sitting on top of each other. My daughter had just given birth a few days before. She was still recovering. We begged the police to let us stay a little longer. They threw us out and destroyed the house. My daughter died with her baby". Another land dispute in Kandal Province saw soldiers and police kicking, beating and arresting at least four residents as well as a human rights officer. The incident occurred when about 200 villagers in Sa'ang district gathered to protest against police efforts to prevent them from farming 77 hectares of disputed land

they had been given in 1983 (Rouen and Fontaine, 1997). Traditional systems of survival for the rural population were undermined by these new forms of illegal government-censured exploitation, forcing many families to wander from one place to another, each time losing everything they had built up. Kek Galabru from the human rights organisation LICHADO noted, “landlessness for the farmer is a death sentence”. MP Tioulong Samura informed me that other forms of extortion occurred when corrupt, underpaid government officials throughout the country extort ‘under the table’ illegal fees and taxes from those requiring any form of legal documentation such as land ownership or identification papers. She pointed out that this results in the poor becoming paperless citizens, marginalized and without any rights to legal status or property ownership.

Another cause of exploitation suffered by rural Cambodians is the practice of usury. The majority of these people are subsistence rice farmers who try to grow a few other crops to trade at the market for basic household and farming goods, but in bad seasons many of them need to buy rice for survival. In this case, rich Chinese-Cambodian villagers able to buy up rice in good years profit from buying and selling rice from their less fortunate and less business-oriented Theravada Buddhist neighbours. Thus, in times of famine, many farmers are forced to sell everything they own in order to buy rice to survive. Many poor farmers, forced to negotiate loans at interest rates ranging from 50 to 150 percent, have ended up losing their land and dwellings to pay their debts.³³ Chris Fontaine (1998) reported the way in which farmer Sok Iam was forced into a debt spiral, after an unsatisfactory crop yield forced him to borrow money from a loan shark to buy necessary supplies. After harvest he had to pay back the money plus 100 percent interest from what remained of his pest-ridden crop. Further to this, some of my interviewees complained they were further disadvantaged when they bought and sold goods at the market, as vendors were often dishonest, weighting their scales to increase profits.

³³ Every year about 100,00 new people are added to those exchanging their manual labour for food on local development projects (Fontaine, 1998).

In the absence of modern banks in rural areas, some of those fortunate enough to have saved a little money turned to variations of *ton tin* (traditional banking). This has traditionally been seen as a useful tool to those wishing to invest profits for a set term, or borrow money to build up their assets. In this kind of system, a group of eight or so villagers headed by a trusted person such as a village-chief pool equal amounts of money. The person offering the highest amount of interest has first choice of borrowing the money, and any remaining money is made available for others to borrow at lower rates. Lots can also be drawn to decide who gets first option. Those borrowing are given a certain time in which to repay the money with agreed interest to the lenders, allowing for further rounds where other members have the chance to borrow. As the number of bidders decline, the interest lowers. However, the system fails when a more powerful or dishonest borrower does not repay the money, or is unable to pay it back due to misfortune or robbery. Such situations can lead to inter-family feuds and vengeful paybacks. Micro-credit schemes introduced in the 1990s were intended to offer solutions to this kind of problem, but failed to reach many of the most needy in rural areas.

Related to these problems, Meas Ny (interview, 2004) has pointed out that Cambodian traditions of trust in the use of allocated development money have been at variance with Western conventions. He notes that Cambodians base their trust on kinship, nepotism and patron-client relationships where there are no two-way communications and no questions asked about the use of borrowed money. Recipients of loans do not challenge their patron, and patrons trust the recipient. Questioning behaviours are seen as lack of trust. Nee points out that concepts of Western honesty, “do what you say for this and this”, are at variance with the Khmer “say what you do”. However, the latter way provides more flexibility in direction and fulfilment of needs, because what is done at one stage may not suit another. Added to this, when the people experience blame for doing things their own way, they feel upset and alienated. As Nee observed, “When Cambodians move beyond their informal traditional networks, they are unable to trust. Their understandings are at variance with Western understandings, where meetings, accountability and information input are expected”. He pointed out “Success of the

traditional Cambodian system is limited to small groups, and when organisations want to ‘grow’ their projects to attract more money, they encounter many problems in moving beyond the capacity of these systems. Unfortunately, the Cambodian understandings of trust have been exploited at government level and severely constrained the progress of many development projects”.

Exploitation and lack of access to law particularly impacted on women who, as this chapter has argued, faced enormous obstacles as they struggled to ensure both survival of their families and the maintenance of what it meant culturally to be Cambodian in the 1990s. Within this framework of understanding the Cambodian culture in relation to women, the next three chapters outline the way Western and Cambodian cultures interacted in government and NGO attempts to deal with WID/GAD issues in the areas of education, health, media, violence against women, lawlessness, work exploitation and poverty. As these chapters demonstrate, although opening up the country brought much aid and knowledge to these areas of concern, locally entrenched cultural understandings and attitudes of self-preservation and greed among the powerful combined with the limited understandings of Western aid providers to hinder the development process. The analysis begins with the period of transition and preparations for democratic elections in the early 1990s.

CAMBODIAN WOMEN'S LIVES LINKING PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

A PICTORIAL ESSAY



“Lotus-flower offering” to Buddha symbolizes this mother's hope for her daughter's protection against malevolent spirits. With the great Tonle Sap Lake as the central feature, this painting depicts future hopes for women in Cambodia as including good maternal health care and schooling. They also include abundant harvests and safe transportation. Paid work is represented as weaving and factory employment.



THE WAT

The *wat* (temple) offers protection to elderly widows in Cambodia. As *yeay chi* (nuns) must not leave the temple at the start of the rainy season (1), relatives and friends pay respect by bringing them food (2). The annual celebration of *Pchum Ben* (feeding the hungry ghosts) assists the bereaved in healing past memories through bringing offerings to monks on behalf of deceased relatives (3). Other prayers and offerings for special purposes can occur at any time (4). Wat Rajabo is part of a large complex of temples and dwellings. Much destroyed under the Khmer Rouge has now been restored.

1) *Yeay chi* meeting in rainy season, Wat Rajabo



2) Paying respect to *yeay chi*



3) Offering food to the deceased



4) Praying in the temple



5) Wat Rajabo (main temple), Siem Riep



MARRIAGE



1) Village engagement

Marriages in Cambodia are usually arranged, and couples discouraged from going out unchaperoned until after their engagement (1). Young men go into enormous debt, hoping to recuperate through gifts of money from guests. The groom brings gifts such as flowers, fabric, lentils, nuts, fruit, tobacco, cakes, juices, and paper 'milk money' to thank the bride's mother for her daughter. Weddings necessitate many changes of clothing (usually hired), and are celebrated with ancient enactments, to bring the couple good luck and protection from malevolent spirits (4). Before the Khmer Rouge, weddings were very large and lasted several days. Under the Vietnamese, weddings became smaller (2), and in the 1990s, even small weddings added to poverty.



3) Wedding couple



2) Village wedding, 1987



4) Wedding couple with protective sword



EDUCATION



1) Village primary school, 1992



2) Provincial high school, 1992



3) University students, 1996



4) Post-graduate scholarship students, 1996

In the 1990s, many primary children in rural areas attended schools that were visibly ravaged by years of war (1). Unskilled teachers lacked materials and students spent their time learning by rote or copying from the black board.

As poor students from the provinces could not access extra tuition, I provided some lessons in English (3). However, their basic knowledge was low. Not one even knew how to read a road map.

(5%) in AusAID pre-departure programs for post-graduate students studying in Australia reflected the low percentage of females represented in universities (cf. P.192), level. (4).



1) Planting Rice



2) Selling in the market



4) Weaving

WORK

The vast majority of Cambodian women work as rice farmers (1). This is supplemented by growing other crops, and any surplus is sold in local markets (2). As crops are dependant on climatic conditions, women need to find other ways to supplement their income. The woman wearing old clothes donated by an NGO (3) is responsible for supporting six children. However, after fishing all day she has only caught one kilo. A few girls are able to receive skills-training from NGOs, such as the one with hands deformed from napalm (4). In such harsh conditions, others are lured to the city but fail to find suitable employment. One way to make money is to powder your face and sell oranges to men in parks in the evening (5). White skin is considered beautiful, and buying oranges gives customers rights to sexual favours.



3) Selling fish



5) Orange-seller



1) "Oppressed by war" by Sinh Siphawattee

OPPRESSED BY WAR

In the 1990s, many Cambodian women were forced to flee their homes to escape civil war or forcible land evictions (1). Together with their children, many faced homelessness, malnutrition and near-starvation (2). Due to inaccessibility in much of the country, only the fortunate ones were able to receive food relief (3). However, this temporary assistance did not solve their problem of finding enough safe, un-mined, fertile land to farm for their future subsistence (4).



2) Severe malnutrition



3) Food distribution



4) Waiting for repatriation



VIOLENCE



1) “Man as a Hunter” - serialised story in a popular Cambodian newspaper



2) Victim of an acid attack
Inspired by jealousy

Popular presentations in the press already constituted violence against women (1). Warring and lack of rule of law were exacerbated by a 'culture of violence' in the 1990s. Unexploded land mines and domestic violence resulted in high levels of injury and trauma, particularly affecting mothers with children. Jealous wives of wealthy army generals and others in power led to increasing violence against their husbands' girlfriends (2). These included shootings and permanently disfiguring acid-attacks, and perpetrators were never prosecuted. Images countering the violence (3) were presented at an exhibition of women's paintings held by the SSWA and sponsored by UNICEF and UNDP.



3) “Sisters facing problems” by Pao Phan Bun Heng



1) Buddhist peace march, 1994



2) Garment strikers shot by police



3) Demonstrations against corruption

DEMONSTRATIONS

“There is no Happiness Equal to Tranquility”. In 1994 following the first democratic elections, people were filled with hope as monks and nuns embarked on a long march through areas still at war (1). Hopes began to fade following the 1997 violent coup. Government-sanctioned violence resulted in vicious police shootings of legally demonstrating female garment-workers (2). Those hoping for an end to violent and corrupt government demonstrated for change. Young, forward-looking voters looked to the opposition to end corruption (3) while the more conservative looked to the royalist FUNCINPEC party for change (4).



4) Yeay chis campaigning for FUNCINPEC



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Apsara” Page iii (and above) photographed by Chandorovann Dy on a return visit to ***Banteay Srei*** (Women's Temple) in 1994. Her previous visit was in the 1960s with her primary school classmates - all killed in the Pol Pot regime. Since this was taken, the Apsara has been vandalized by thieves.

Plate 1: “Lotus Flower Offering”, painting courtesy of Amara, Federation of the Ponleu Khmer and SSWA.

Plate 2: “Praying in the temple” (2), courtesy, Richard Woodd, editor of Phnom Penh Post.

Plate 3: “Engagement in the village” (1) and “Wedding couple with protective sword” (4), courtesy, Chandorovann Dy.

Plate 5: “Planting rice” (1) and “Orange girl” (5), courtesy, Richard Woodd, editor of Phnom Penh Post.

“Selling fish” (3), courtesy, Saly Lor.

Plate 6: “Oppressed by War” (1), painting courtesy of Amara, Federation of the Ponleu Khmer and SSWA.

“Severe malnutrition” (2), “Food distribution” (3) and “Waiting for Repatriation” (4), courtesy, Richard Woodd, editor of Phnom Penh Post.

Plate 7: “Man as a Hunter” (1), courtesy, Women's Media Centre, Phnom Penh.

“Victim of acid attack” (2), courtesy of Richard Woodd, editor, Phnom Penh Post.

“Sisters Facing Problems” (3), painting courtesy of Amara, Federation of the Ponleu Khmer and SSWA.

Plate 8: “Buddhist Peace March, 1994” (1), courtesy, Chandorovann Dy.

“Garment strikers shot by police” (2), “Demonstrations against corruption” (3) and “Campaigning for FUNCINPEC” (4), courtesy, Richard Woodd, editor of Phnom Penh Post.

NB: The band of Apsaras across the top of plates 2-8 are from Anchor Wat (Bonheur and Poncar, 1995:52). All other photographs taken by the author, Petre Santry.



The Smile of the Apsara

*The frozen smile of the Apsara is lit by the first dawn.
The silence in her heart replies to nature's calm.
In this primordial silence, where all is new,
 where all is pure, feeble language would create a senseless cacophony.
In this primordial silence, where all is new,
 where all is pure, I have long been silent.
Oh Nagaraja, shall we ever again see across the earth
these thousands of smiles now frozen?*

*These Bhodhisatvas, these Apsaras, these Kings
Are they dead? Will our people live again?
How can the smile of the Apsara be revived?
When will hatred cease to engender hate?
Hope, oh Lord, hope is in the smiles of our People.
The day the Apsara smiles our people will smile again.*

Son Soubert

*Former Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly
circa 1974 (translation from Khmer)*

CHAPTER SIX

WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT 1990-1993

6.0 Introduction

Following a long period of international isolation, firstly under the Khmer Rouge Maoist regime and then a centrally controlled Stalinist-Vietnamese occupation, Cambodia's reintegration into the world community gathered pace after 1989. Although weapons were widespread within the community and much of the country was either under Khmer Rouge (KR) control or heavily mined, the United Nations (UN), in agreement with Thailand and Cambodia, signed the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements. Peacekeeping forces were despatched as part of a preparatory mission heralding the arrival of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to oversee democratic elections and allow Cambodia to become a member of the UN in 1993 (Martin, 1994:312-14). During this period of transition, increasing awareness of the plight facing women and children in Cambodia saw 'Women and Development' emerge as a priority issue for international agencies assisting in the urgent rehabilitation needs of the country. Although the period saw the formation of numerous women's non-government organisations (NGOs) and a Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs (SSWA), this chapter argues that these initiatives were hampered by lack of sensitivity to Cambodian cultural understandings of gender and the devolution of power combined with inaccessible and hostile country conditions. At the same time, continuing war was creating a nightmare in planning for the administration of international development programs, repatriation of returnees from border camps, and resettlement of displaced persons (Chandler, 1993:235-36). As this chapter describes, attempts by the international community to initiate Women in Development (WID) / Gender and Development (GAD) frameworks intended to address the poverty and lowered status of women were limited not only by women's severe social dislocation, low education, poor health and extreme poverty, but also by the mismatch in underlying cultural assumptions of Cambodians and their Western providers about gender and power.

6.1 Country Situation

Sharply reduced aid from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) meant that by 1990 the Vietnamese-installed government of Cambodia was left with almost no funds. Coinciding with this, the new market-based economy and the economic boom in Southeast Asia rapidly led to a 'black economy' forming in Cambodia. Public assets and natural resources including timber were being sold out, and gems, dried fish and other resources illicitly moved across the border as quickly as possible.¹ Thion (1993:186-188) notes that after two decades of austerity, rich property owners began to appear and people began to learn the previously illegal languages of English and French in place of Russian and Vietnamese. With the explosion in border trading consumption of luxuries was no longer hidden, and traders and civil servants began to buy cars. Seemingly all the used motorbikes in South-East Asia were being shipped to Cambodia as motorisation soared. Property rights given to tenants, ranging from civil servant assigned housing by the state to squatters who arrived later, caused intense real estate speculation. As foreigners started to pour in, the value of housing in the city climbed to irrational heights and many of those who could not prove ownership were evicted from their houses. Land misappropriation also started in the countryside. Within newly decreed laws farmers could claim the land they were tilling, but distribution was frequently organised by corrupt village headmen. As a result, social inequalities were fast developing, and the weakest elements were beginning to lose their land altogether (Grunewald, 1990:76).

Although it is known that agriculture accounted for nearly 45 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and over 85 per cent of the labour force, information outside Phnom Penh was difficult to obtain. However, the emerging picture was of a population that was poorer and more poorly served than at any time since the 1920s. Infrastructure and temples were in grave disrepair, and electricity, metal tools, medicine, piped water

¹ In 1992 I stayed in the household of a Chinese-Cambodian woman I had first met in 1987. The family had risen to become rich property owners with a large Mercedes Benz. The wife was clearly the business-head of the household and her son told me she owned a local cigarette company. At this home I was introduced to a Japanese man from Thailand, rich from illegal logging in Cambodia. I witnessed the wife arranging his introduction to the 'right' government official who could (illegally) 'sell' him the magnificent Cambodian Embassy in Tokyo for his personal residence.

and manufactured goods were almost nonexistent, even in the city (SSWA, 1995a:13). In 1992 ADB, IMF, UNDP and WB (explanation of acronyms, p.XVI) reported that only twelve per cent of rural and 20 per cent of the urban population had access to safe and reliable water. Living in central Phnom Penh in 1993, the old French apartment I was staying in experienced continual blackouts. All water had to be piped in from trucks. Drains were unusable, and rubbish collection in the city was very uneven. Martin (1994:268-274) describes the overwhelming poverty of the Cambodian people at this time as not only material, but also intellectual and moral. New laws allowing farmers to pass title to land on to their children, and householders to buy and sell real estate, were exploited by the rich, and in keeping with old traditions those with power or wealth openly displayed their good fortune, showing nothing but contempt for the weak and doing nothing to assist the most unfortunate. In agreement with Martin, I noted high-ranking officials beginning to live sumptuously on corrupt gains in their fortified villas, while normal government officials remained poor and exhausted. Their meagre wages were not even enough to buy rice for their families. They were unable to fulfil the requirements of their government positions because they needed to undertake other work to have enough money to survive. Some wives were able to make business by selling imported fabrics, while others became beauticians or hairdressers, earning far more than their husbands. Police engaged in racketeering, soldiers in pillage, and robbery and rape were on the increase. In the countryside, roads were almost impassable, guns and mines were widespread, and brigandry was common. I experienced this brigandry first hand in 1992 in the seaside town of Kampot when my Cambodian friends suddenly pushed me to the ground to avoid being shot at by a man hiding behind some bushes. A friend working in rural areas with the Red Cross related many frightening experiences with the KR terrorising the countryside and laying new mines along the roads at night.

Martin (1994:272) notes how children educated under the KR were now violent and disrespectful to their parents (if they had any), with an increase in delinquency. I found that two of my widowed friends in Phnom Penh had sons whom they could not trust. These young men, brought up under the KR terrorised other family members (including their mothers), regularly robbing them in order to gamble, drink, go to prostitutes and buy

themselves equipment ranging from new motorbikes and clothes to guns. The families tried to cope as well as they could, doing their best to keep their family problems from their neighbours, and afraid to involve corrupt police. Orphans, illegitimate and abandoned children, and victims of war or mines were given minimal state aid propped up by a plethora of private organisations. However, with no help from the government, widows and the disabled were facing destitution. In Phnom Penh I saw elderly people and children searching through piles of uncollected, rotting garbage for food. I also saw peasants from the countryside begging for money to buy rice. The shortage of men had resulted in a revival of polygamy, with several women often living in the same enclosure. One refugee I interviewed claimed that in his village in Battambang the situation was so bad that there were only three men to 26 women. According to SSWA (1995c) the gender imbalance in the early 1990s was 100 men for every 135 women over the age of 20. With women heading over 30 per cent of households, the average number of live births for each woman was estimated at five (Donelan, 1994:15). Almost half the population was under fifteen years of age, and with ill health and disability so widespread, a disproportionate burden was falling on women. As a result, the status of women was becoming greatly diminished, with men in a better position to bargain for wives, and to divorce and find new wives. Reports documented increased family violence and widespread abuse of women's rights.

Further abuse resulted from the unprecedented mobilisation of the rural population in the 1980s. The survival of many widows now depended on their ability to find and cultivate unoccupied land. Large areas of heavily mined land meant that many were risking their lives and losing limbs clearing it for use. Following the traditional view (based on climatic difficulties and rapid forest regrowth) that access to farming land obtained through individual farmers clearing the land and preparing it for use, rights of residency and exploitation of that land were believed to belong to those who developed it. However, due to the new laws related to buying and selling property, land ownership for farmers was becoming increasingly precarious, with the poor and displaced facing constant threat of land loss. In this situation the landless were joining the poorest of the poor. The added burden of internally displaced persons (through ongoing war with the

KR) meant that increasing numbers were in desperate need of food, water and shelter. Most of these were farmers who needed assistance to enable them to become agriculturally productive to help alleviate the high costs of emergency assistance (Leiper, 1991). Further to this, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1993) reported over 360,000 refugees and displaced persons, including many female-headed households, living along the Thai-Cambodian border in need of repatriation (Thorn, 1991 and Armstrong, 1993). With extreme insecurity and land-grabbing by the rich and powerful, together with an inflation rate peaking at 150 per cent (up from below 10 per cent in 1988), conditions for the rural majority in Cambodia in the early 1990s were the worst and poorest in the region (ADB et al., 1992).

In this situation of extreme insecurity in rural areas, many villagers tried to improve their lives by choosing to migrate to the city, resulting in a rapid rise of slum areas on the outskirts of the city, as well as in the grounds of some pagodas. Some young women were able to find work as beer girls in restaurants and nightclubs, and some as housekeepers or sellers in markets. Less fortunate women were tricked into prostitution, while others were ending up begging or scavenging in rubbish dumps. The following 1993 case study outlines the experiences of one such family.

Ray Heak had been raising her two sisters Vath (18 years) and Chea (14 years) and brother Krouch (13 years) since they became orphans in 1979. Until 1992 they had been living with distant relatives in their native village. One day, while Heak was working in her uncle's field, an acquaintance of their relative came along and offered Chea a job in Phnom Penh working as a housemaid. Chea thought it would be a good idea if she could help out with the family budget and bring in a little extra money. At least, she would receive food in the new job so her uncle would have one less mouth to feed. Without telling any of her family and thinking that she would later send them word of her good deed, Chea left with the man on the motorcycle. On learning what had happened, Heak feared the worst. She knew that in Phnom Penh bad things could happen to girls on their own, so she gathered her remaining siblings and set off with them walking to Phnom Penh in the hope of finding their lost sister. Exhausted, they finally located another distant relative in town and managed to beg a bowl of rice and a place to sleep.

Although they set about looking for Chea almost immediately, the search was fruitless. Many people told them that girls who came to town as their sister had done often end up as sex workers in the area known as Toul Kork. Heak and Vath walked up and down the 'Road of Little Flowers' looking for Chea, but they were spat upon and insulted by the many girls who saw them as competitors. After they heard that girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were usually locked inside by the brothel owners so they could not run away, they abandoned their search. Soon the relative with whom they had first lodged asked them to leave as he did not have enough for his own children to eat. Vath, the good looking one, managed to get a job as a waitress in one of the Chinese restaurants in town. With her money, the three of them rented a patch of roof space on top one of an old French-style apartment block with 16 other families. There was no water supply and no sanitation; garbage was not collected; there was no cleaning of the staircase or passages and flies were everywhere. Brother Krouch took to begging and got into bad company learning to help car thieves. When they managed to steal a motorcycle or an NGO jeep, he brought home a little extra money to his sisters. Heak did not see what she could possibly do as there was nowhere to go and no one else she could possibly turn to. Secretly she wondered whether perhaps her sister Chea might not have done the right thing, now in all probability being better off than the rest of them. (Case study edited from Taylor, 1994:10)

Associated with the poverty described in the above example, health and sanitation were serious problems. Studies commissioned by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (1993), the Asian Development Bank (ADB et al., 1992) and others established that the health situation facing the rural population was poorer than at any time since the 1920s, with birth and infant mortality rates among the highest in the world. According to the Secretariat of Women's Affairs (SSWA, 1995c:13), the child mortality rate, estimated at 25 percent, was due to lack of clean water and latrines. With no knowledge of, or ability to pay for birth spacing, women were unable to control the size of their families. Malnutrition and diarrhoeal and acute respiratory infections were endemic, followed by meningitis, typhoid, anaemia, septicaemia, malaria and a plethora of other diseases. The disability rate was appalling due to the many years of war and heavy mining programs in operation throughout the same period. Medicine and manufactured goods were rare, and the country was suffering a legacy of destruction and

poverty. In 1993 I visited the main Calmette hospital in Phnom Penh with a sick Khmer friend. Her only way to get there was by cyclo. Although the Khmer doctors were French-trained, their equipment was almost non-existent. The hospital had open windows and hygiene was appalling. Not only were they poorly equipped, but hospitals in provincial capitals were filled with people maimed by mines. Some had sold everything they owned in a desperate and often futile attempt to save the lives of loved ones. For others, their loss came through a series of misfortunes. Following is a case study illustrating the plight of a woman beggar named Mong whom I interviewed near the Sap River in Phnom Penh in 1992.

Mong said she was about 60 years old (she was not quite sure of her age, but looked considerably older). She lived in a tiny house in Kompong Speu with one of her daughters who had been disabled by a mine when gathering firewood for her mother. Mong said that she used to own 100 hectares of land that had been given to her by her parents when she married. However, after her husband died of ill health she could not afford the land tax of rice that the government expected. Added to this, the local authorities did not help so she had to go into debt, ending up losing her land. She said she was illiterate because her parents did not allow her to go to school when she was young. Mong came to Phnom Penh because she had to repay a debt of 2,500 riel (about \$2) borrowed from a friend to buy medicine when she had become ill, and that person had been anxiously waiting for her to return the money. Because she had no money to pay the taxi driver to travel to Phnom Penh, she had begged him for a seat. At the time of interview she was sleeping along the Sap River bank with another old lady. Mong said that she would return to her village as soon as she had begged enough money to repay her debt. (Personal interview, 1992)

Further to these problems related to health, the sudden increase in revenue due to the arrival of numerous UNTAC troops (largely unaware of sexual health issues), NGOs and business entrepreneurs, led to a huge increase in prostitution. In 1990 there were just 1,000 prostitutes in Phnom Penh, but this catapulted to over 20,000 prostitutes and sex slaves by 1992 (Mu Sochua, 2000b). This sector was mainly serviced by Vietnamese women (at this time Cambodian women were seen as ‘too shy’ for sex work), and seeded

an AIDS epidemic². Concerted efforts of health NGOs targeting education programs to the highly active sex-workers, and calls from Western doctors for an “immediate end to the exploitative trade in women”, were largely a failure (Davies, 1993:3). This was due to the widespread disbelief that a sexually transmitted disease could take years to manifest. I found that Cambodians believed that “sexual disease is spread through the women and takes only a few days to manifest”. Added to this, some UNTAC personnel were reported as showing disrespect for Cambodian women, whom they tended to treat as though they were prostitutes (probably due to their own familiarity with sex-workers). Eva Arnvig (1993) lamented that the culturally unacceptable behaviour displayed by many personnel clearly showed their ignorance of behavioural expectations towards Cambodian women within the general society. With the increased availability of cheap sex in 1993, a wide-ranging sample found that 58 percent of Cambodian men in Phnom Penh had been with two or more sexual partners in the two previous weeks (Davies, 1993:15).

Apart from the new threat of HIV/AIDS following the arrival of unprepared UNTAC personnel, there was an epidemic incidence of mental illness, physical disability and chronic illness. Fifty years of war and trauma had seriously disadvantaged the poor. Bit (1991:112-121) revealed depression as the single most common complaint of Cambodian patients lucky enough to receive mental health-care. Other symptoms included conversion disorders (including blindness, deafness, or the inability to walk any more to avoid facing more horror), post-traumatic stress disorder (including fear of those in power, fear of neighbours, fear of violence, anxiety, sleeplessness, nightmares, estrangement, memory impairment, guilt, shame and avoidance) and aggression (including family violence and acts of revenge). This dire situation was worsened by culturally based beliefs that chronic illness, physical disability and mental illness of any kind were a result of negative actions in past lives, or signs of ancestor disapproval. People losing parts of their body were seen as having lost parts of their mind. They, together with those who were mentally ill, were culturally rejected, becoming the butt of

² An alternative perspective on the origin of the AIDS epidemic, supported by a number of epidemiological studies in the mid-1990s, is that it was actually seeded by returnees from the Thai border camps. (Communication with David Ayres, 2005)

gossip and jokes, and bringing shame and loss of face to their families. Family attempts to conceal them from the outside world further increased their suffering.

6.2 International Support and UNTAC

The key activator shaping the development process in Cambodia in the early 1990s was UNTAC. With a force of 21,900 men, the Transitional Authority was operational by December 1992. Its entry into Cambodia was dramatic, with an inundation of well-equipped personnel driving heavy vehicles on the broken roads, and US\$ being freely spent in the capital. According to a United Nations report, this was largely stimulated by the US\$2-3 billion UN-Cambodia operation (Hansford, 1993:14). This temporarily boosted the GDP growth to peak at ten percent by the beginning of 1993, but slowed to three percent several months later after UNTAC withdrew (Sutter, 1994:8). UNTAC was not only responsible for educating voters and overseeing free and fair elections for a 120-member constituent assembly based on proportional representation in each province, but for cessation of all outside military assistance, confiscation of weapons, and the disarming and demobilisation of 70 per cent of Cambodian forces in various factions. The remaining 30 per cent of these forces were to be incorporated into a new national army following the elections³. Added to this, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was to arrange the voluntary, orderly and safe return of refugees and disabled persons located in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border (Sutter, 1994:2). UNTAC was to be responsible for working with the Supreme National Council (SNC) to oversee the key Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Interior in the interim period prior to elections, but this did not occur because Hun Sen would not concede⁴. Finally, UNTAC was to promote human rights to prevent any return to practices of the past, and to develop a human rights program. In this period the SNC was to draft and approve a constitution and create the new Cambodian government and the

³ However, because the Khmer Rouge faction would not surrender, UNTAC's mandate was only partially achieved and the country remained at war.

⁴ Although the withdrawal of Vietnamese advisors and troops officially occurred in 1989, my informants maintained that many just changed their names and/or uniforms and never left the country.

Transitional Authority was responsible for monitoring the situation after the elections until the new parliament was established.

The arrival of UNTAC meant that foreign personnel began arriving in large numbers, suddenly creating many well-paid jobs for locals, including interpreters, trainers, office staff and restaurant and hotel workers. Martin (1994:264) reported that Chinese businessmen from neighbouring countries were now moving back to their traditional neighbourhoods and investing considerable amounts of capital in certain sectors. She notes how although the Vietnamese had officially withdrawn from Cambodia, their civilian presence was noticeable. In the absence of skilled Cambodians (a legacy of their shattered past), the unpopular Vietnamese took advantage of their traditional trade skills. As a building boom took place, they were operating as electricians, mechanics, bricklayers, tailors, hairdressers and stallholders in the main markets. I found that this led to resentment among Cambodians, who complained that UNTAC was frequently giving jobs to the more assertive Vietnamese in preference to them. This was clearly inappropriate and divisive, adding to bitterness against the already unpopular Vietnamese presence. Further to this, the unsustainable boost of US\$ into the economy, particularly in Phnom Penh, contributed to a huge rise in business and rental costs. However, the economic situation for the rural majority remained the same.

Although UNHCR had been active in providing emergency assistance to refugees in border camps since 1980, it was not until 1990 that it was able to prepare for large-scale voluntary return programs. This began with the registration of some 370,000 refugees living in seven border camps. These people were to undertake voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity, prior to their participation in the elections scheduled in May 1993. The UNHCR called for scrupulous adherence to returnees' freedom of choice on the place they wished to return to, as many areas were inaccessible or unsafe. Most (75%) preferred to resettle in the northwest provinces and the remainder in southern provinces where they were able to begin the work of locating lost family members (UNHCR, 1993). This task was made extremely difficult because all family records had been destroyed under the KR. In this situation, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and

Children (1993), monitoring the UNHCR repatriation process, commented on the enormity of the immediate needs of Cambodians. The Women's Commission described the needs as being "so pressing that it may seem difficult to take stock of the next steps needed to help Cambodians achieve self-sufficiency or - one day - decent lives which include good health, education and the opportunity to work". The Commission recommended post-election and post-repatriation planning to monitor and review the physical safety and social and economic status of the most vulnerable, especially female heads of households. It insisted that the highest priority be given to developing and implementing income-generating projects for women at the village level, and significantly expanding credit programs for women.

According to repatriation volunteer Sister Joan Healy (1992), the situation for returnees, especially women, was desperate. She reported that many malnourished returnees had returned to poor, difficult-to-access, overcrowded villages, only to die of malnutrition and disease. They had no access to health-care, and many had to sleep under the trees waiting for the housing promised by UNHCR. According to Martin (1994:295), the excess of land mines meant that the UN was unable to secure safe farming relocations for the survival of refugees. They were only able to offer supplies and a small house. Healy noted how many families could not afford the transport to pick up their rice rations from UNHCR, and in a settlement of 400 families she saw only 100 remaining. Nobody knew what had happened to the others. The influx of people returning to participate in the coming elections made distribution unmanageable. Sister Healy said that numerous Cambodians had already returned to the Thai border. She warned that UNHCR operations alone could not provide them with a sustainable solution. Neither was there any assurance that a durable solution could be achieved for those still to come. According to the then UN assistant to refugees Son Soubert (acknowledging his own political position), Hun Sen saw returnees as a potential threat to his power base and consistently worked to cause them to become second-rate citizens. He said that although the UN promised to supply health centres wherever the returnees settled, Hun Sen flatly rejected its offers (interview, 2004).

With UNTAC troops overseeing the elections, many overseas-educated Cambodians who had previously fled the country to survive the KR and to avoid the Vietnamese now felt safe to return and support the development process. They did this both through allegiance to the royalist party - National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) and through forming alternative, opposing political parties challenging the Vietnamese-installed Cambodian People's Party (CPP). However, as the CPP held the main military power and was supported by a loyal countrywide network of Vietnamese-trained bureaucrats wishing to protect their inherited positions, the real situation was potentially dangerous. Added to this, interviews with rural villagers revealed that 'democracy' was a concept entirely foreign to them. As one village chief commented, "The only party I know is Hun Sen. You have to forgive me but I don't know much". Disseminating unbiased information about electoral options and processes to illiterate and fearful people through their local and provincial pro-Hun Sen leaders was a logistical nightmare. At the same time, Prince Rannaridh (leader of the major alternative party, FUNCINPEC) was displaying large photographs of his father King Sihanouk throughout the countryside, to appeal to those faithful to the king to vote for the main opposition. With only two apparent choices and little understanding of democracy, in an environment of fear, political murders and disappearance of many CPP opponents, the 1993 May 23-28 elections saw a miraculous voting turnout of 90 per cent of the 95 per cent registered female and male voters.⁵

Of the twenty parties registered to participate in the elections, the FUNCINPEC party of Prince Rannariddh won 45.56 percent of the vote and 58 seats in the assembly, and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) of Hun Sen 38.2 per cent of the vote and 51 seats. The Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) won ten seats and the KR boycotted the elections. However, despite a widely advertised UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) push to include women in government and 54 percent of the registered voting population being women, the ratio of women MPs elected at central

⁵ Prior to the elections, several soldiers and government workers privately expressed their greatest wish as gaining freedom of speech. They said Cambodians dared not think because they were too afraid to speak against the government in any way. Their women made no comment (interview, Kompong Cham, 1992).

level actually fell from the previous eighteen percent to a mere four percent. There was no evidence that women had participated in politics at the local level (Ledgerwood, 1992:14). Due to the superior power-base of Hun Sen (CPP), Rannaridh (FUNCINPEC) was forced to compromise and form an uneasy coalition with himself as First Prime Minister and Hun Sen as Second Prime Minister. Representatives from both sides were installed in each ministry. By the end of 1993, the much-revered King Sihanouk had returned to take up his position of Head of State in the new constitutional monarchy, with the official motto of the Kingdom of Cambodia being 'Nation, Religion, King'. His presence added to the hope of lasting peace within the country.

Much of the excitement of this time was because people believed that the international community would ensure freedom of speech and a prosperous future for all. However, with the resolution of election results and the formation of a new government UNTAC soon withdrew, leaving a 'cautiously optimistic' international presence in the form of bilateral and multilateral donors hoping for cooperation between NGOs and the government. Eva Mysliwiec of the Cambodian Development Resource Institute (CDRI) and Tim Williams of Care International (CARE) criticised UNTAC for claiming to involve Cambodians in all their preparations for withdrawal. Not only had UNTAC failed to involve them in the planning process, but it had also failed to provide any training to equip them for their new roles. An exasperated Williams (1993:8,15) commented, "This country is so deconstructed I don't think we realise it. There's a psychological element to reconstruction here: people can't work together in groups, they can't pull together. Dispute resolution for the last 20 years in Cambodia has been conducted by force; now they're supposed to sit down and talk things out?" Nevertheless, although UNTAC was criticised for its lack of planning and lost opportunities in working with Cambodians to oversee responsibilities being handed over as their personnel prepared to leave, Williams pointed out that UNTAC was praised for being "the only show in town to get Cambodia moving on with its business".

6.3 Formation of Women's NGOs and SSWA

Due to the destruction of much data and processing infrastructure needed for the planning of development needs in Cambodia, a 1990 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report stated, "Almost every current report on Cambodia points out that statistical data must be interpreted with caution" (p. xii). As available records were unreliable or unavailable, aid agencies and NGOs with limited 1980s experience in the country, such as UNICEF, Quaker Service Australia, Redd Barna and the Asian and Pacific Development Centre, were the only ones in a position to write generalised reports about the situation. They utilised surveys and case studies that had been conducted with some difficulty in 'safe' areas in and near the capital city. UNICEF provided an overview of the poor condition of the Cambodian economy, agriculture, health and nutrition, education, water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as the situation of children and women, and vulnerable people in refugee camps. At the same time, Scandinavian NGO Redd Barna, working with French consultant Sonnois (1990), provided a situational overview focussing on women surveyed in three villages in Phnom Penh and the neighbouring Kompong Speu province. Redd Barna (1993) also reviewed the Vietnamese-installed Women's Association of Cambodia (WAC) (cf. pp.83-84), which was used as the basis for setting up SSWA in the new government. Both reports suggested guidelines for future aid projects using a WID approach (as discussed in Chapter 1.2). By 1991 Cambodia had seen the opening up of 27 new aid agencies and NGOs. More than fifty were now in operation, with over 120 new expatriate staff, mainly operating in the areas of basic health and agriculture. Five of these focussed on programs to assist the income-generation and nutrition of poor women in Phnom Penh and the nearby provinces of Takeo and Kompong Chhnang (UNICEF, 1990:176). In July 1992 a delegation of international NGOs in Tokyo presented a list of immediate concerns at the Ministerial Conference on the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia. The delegation was concerned that the lack of a ceasefire due to non-compliance of the KR was obstructing their progress. It also maintained that uncontrolled private investors from neighbouring countries snapping up Cambodian resources needed to be curtailed. Added to this, a lack of capacity building and training at village level in preference for larger projects was

neglecting support of the poor and the thrust of funding to north-western areas was neglecting other poor areas in desperate need (NGO Statement, 1992).

At the same time, in preparation for a new market-economy with Buddhism as the state religion, new egalitarian proclamations were being drafted to form the Constitution. The government signed the 1991 international Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Subsequently, prior to the elections in 1993 the new Cambodian constitution was promulgated in consultation with UNTAC, stipulating the equal legal status of women.⁶ The constitution stated that from 1992, the government was to set up an Office of Secretary of State for Women's Affairs (SSWA) to promote women's rights and reduce family violence - to be upgraded to a ministry by 1996. Article 23 provided excellent laws for the equality of women in the home and workplace, as well as in divorce and division of property. Article 72 provided that health for the population must be guaranteed. Article 25 stated that Cambodian citizens have the same rights and freedoms, without discrimination, including right to free and fair elections. The constitution also guaranteed Cambodian citizens that there would be no distinction of race, colour, sex, religion, language, political views, social status, birth, property or any other status. Women were also given rights of equality before the law in both teaching and education (Article 66), and equality before the courts (Article 37). Both men and women had the same obligations with regard to the care and education of children (Article 47). However, although these laws recognised the need to upgrade women's position in the society and were intended to form a basis for the administration of justice and equality in the future, their implementation for the benefit of the majority of women in Cambodia would remain a distant dream throughout the 1990s. This was due to a range of problems including lack of media to disseminate knowledge, lack of experience in Western notions of justice for those with access to such knowledge, and systemic corruption in the CPP-aligned legal system. Donovan (1993:445) rightly predicted: "The conundrum is that, even should the laws be promulgated and the legal professionals educated, a fully functioning system of justice still may not take root in

⁶ A full translation of the 139 articles of the 1993 constitution was published in the *Phnom Penh Post*, October 1993.

Cambodia”. He explained that Cambodians have a dislike for adversarial dispute resolution, distrust of the state, and a strong tradition of turning to monks and patrons for resolution of disputes.

Although UN troops were unable to protect those in areas occupied by the KR, they provided an umbrella of safety for the return of expatriate refugees. Some of these were women who had been educated in overseas countries, and some had limited experience working with international NGOs in border camps. They were able to join those who had gained experience working in the 1980s WAC to either form or be employed in local NGO groups. The first such group, formed in 1991, was Khemera. It was headed by Mu Sochua (later to become Minister of Women’s Affairs), an American-educated woman with experience working for the UN in refugee camps on the Thai border. Korm Chantan, vice-president of Khemera (interview, 1996) explained that with a staff of ‘99 percent women’, Khemera’s philosophy was to promote the participation of women, focussing on building their leadership skills. Korm Chantan described how Khemera initiated group credit-programs at a low five percent interest, and an income-generating scheme, Women in Business. Programs extended to rural silkworm farming providing silk for a weaving project in their Russei Keo centre near Phnom Penh. Together with WAC and supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other international NGOs, Khemera brought together a working group of over 100 delegates in preparation for the 1993 elections. Together they facilitated the first Women’s Summit to highlight the needs of women and promote the celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8th. Mang Channo (1993:1,11) reported that, to open the summit, UNTAC chief Yasushi Akashi announced there were fourteen international and Khmer NGOs working to raise women’s living standards, concentrating efforts in areas such as food production, business training and health and education. However, Akashi said that these were only responding to 20 percent of the demand. UNIFEM’s representative, Martha Walsh, addressed the delegates with the declaration, “Our long term goal is to encourage women to participate in the decision-making process because women in this country have very special needs and special circumstances. Women need to be able to have a voice in how decisions are made because they [these decisions] have a major impact on women.”

However, among the influx of foreign aid-workers rushing to establish development programs in Cambodia, many displayed noticeable gaps in cultural sensitivity. Martin (1994:278) laments that the majority of aid ‘experts’ demonstrated ignorance of the Cambodian culture and the needs of the people: “The most visibly shocking behaviour is that of a number of NGOs who, without consideration for the Cambodian environment, crisscross the capital in off-road vehicles and live in luxurious villas ... some of the women wear miniskirts at the risk of offending the Khmers.” For these people, their own culture, material wealth and freedom of personal behaviour were all they understood. She noted that apart from contacting the Khmers working under their supervision as NGOs, these foreigners were largely unaware of the reality of Khmer family and social life. They lived in luxury separate from the indigenous community. Martin also noted that many of their contributions were prestige-bearing and competitive, ignoring the true needs of the country and running the risk of fostering corrupt practices while scarcely improving the daily lives of the people. Many NGOs were drawing up inappropriate plans and launching expensive projects without consulting the local people. She cites one example where the aid budget was being drained by inappropriate importation of heavy farming equipment for peasant farmers, whereas a simple restoration of the traditional Cambodian means of production in consultation with local needs would have helped feed those who still lacked basic rice. As one interviewee commented, “They [NGOs] reinvent the wheelbarrow, if necessary, several times during the same stay”. Added to this, a lack of consultation between competing donors resulted in undue wastage. For example, I observed one road in Phnom Penh where huge pot-holes were being filled and the road rebuilt. In the following weeks I saw the same newly surfaced road being ripped up to replace rotten sewerage pipes. My Cambodian friends assured me that this sort of problem was common due to lack of communication between competing donors, and the Khmer preferring to say ‘yes’ to all aid rather than risk missing out.

As the international community rushed to implement development programs (mainly in or near Phnom Penh), in October 1993, almost six months after the elections, the SSWA was set up. This organisation was formed in response to the demands of women associated with UNIFEM, to promote policies and programs for the advancement

of Cambodian women. At the same time, only eight months after his arrival in Phnom Penh from Australia following nineteen years absence from the country, BLDP representative Keat Sokhun was appointed as the first Secretary of State for the SSWA. The appointment of this expatriate male was much to the chagrin of the women working under him. In an interview with Donelan (1993:14), Keat Sokhun explained that the government had not given him a choice of ministerial appointment due to the small size of his party. Nevertheless, he believed he was well suited to the position, justifying himself with the logic, “I am well-schooled in gender equality by my wife who supported me while I obtained a degree in economics”. Using the networks and staff of the former Women’s Association of Cambodia which had been reduced from 56 in 1990 to only 20 in 1992, the SSWA immediately began providing workshops in administration, accounting, public relations and statistics for the benefit of all concerned. In order to build a base for supporting the enormous needs of women throughout Cambodia, the ‘well-schooled’ Keat Sokhun initiated visits to all provinces to recruit staff, with the intention of establishing integrated WID offices at district level by 1995. The SSWA was to review all existing legislation to assess the degree to which the new laws safeguarded women, and to expand into five areas: women’s rights; women’s health and welfare; women in development; research; and public relations (SSWA, 1995a & 1995b). However, low educational and skills levels of staff and a paucity of funding from the government meant that SSWA was ill-equipped to deal with the enormous social and cultural changes envisioned for a more just and equal society. Not only was the all-female staff lacking in education and experience, but salaries were totally insufficient to meet their basic survival needs, meaning that most undertook outside activities to supplement their incomes, leaving very little time to carry out SSWA work requirements. Moreover, although SSWA was to be responsible for overseeing the promotion of skills-training and literacy programs for women, it was the responsibility of the underpaid, unskilled and corrupt Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) to oversee quality improvement and accessibility for girls in mainstream education. Through empowering young baby boomers reaching womanhood in the near future, the international community saw education as the key to sustainable development.

6.4 The State of Education

As the level of women's empowerment is considered one of the core indicators of a country's development (Sen, 1999:197), education was seen as a major key. However, surveys and reports during the period revealed continuing high levels of illiteracy, extreme poverty of the country, lack of qualified teachers, lack of schools and books, lack of access to schools, and a cultural bias towards educating sons in preference to daughters. In 1991 the Asian Development Bank (ADB et al., 1992) estimated the adult literacy rate as only 35 per cent, claiming that this was in contradiction with the official State of Cambodia 1980's record of 93 percent. ADB claimed that even though the education system under the Vietnamese had expanded quantitatively, quality had remained poor, especially at the lower levels where teachers lacked training and very few books existed.⁷ Added to this, although the education system was based on five years compulsory and free general education, participation rates were the lowest in the region, particularly for girls and especially in the countryside. The following comments from village parents I met in Kandal revealed some of the problems they faced in the education of their children: "I need her at home as I have no one to help when I am out on business"; "My children go to school but they do not go regularly because we cannot afford it"; "My daughters cannot go to school because the school is too far away and they are needed at home"; "My eldest daughter who is fifteen, is obliged to stay home and help me with the chores and take care of her younger two siblings. In my village only two boys have reached secondary school".

Ledgerwood (1992:13) estimated in this period that at least half of the adult female population could not even read. Added to this, UNICEF (1990) reported that the ratio of female to male teachers was very low (70:40), indicating a lack of female role models in the system. Principals at rural primary and secondary schools I visited in Kompong Cham and Suong (Kompong Cham Province) in 1992 expressed concerns about lack of personal security and lack of cohesion between schools being major problems. I found that some

⁷ Following the Vietnamese invasion and the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in 1989, people with any education at all were pulled off the streets and put into classrooms to teach. Some were sent to Vietnam to train as teachers, but the majority remained untrained. (Discussion with Stephen Duggan, 1994)

heads of schools who had disagreed in previous years were refusing to communicate with each other at all. Teachers told me how their poverty due to low payment from the government forced them to do supplementary private teaching in order to survive (thus disadvantaging the students who could not pay). I found that some of the schools were in a pitiful state, with huge bomb holes in classroom walls and no toilets. Both teachers and students were bereft of any materials except a blackboard and chalk, and the students were rote-learning the lessons written on the board. With no adequate training and no materials except an old blackboard (teachers had to buy their own chalk), the teachers had little valid content to pass on to their students. Their main concern seemed to be to instil rigid classroom discipline, with little hope of the students learning how to think for themselves. Following the old French system of rote learning, the Cambodian education system only taught people how to answer questions, not formulate them. As Meas Ny pointed out (interview, 2004), “If the Cambodian educated are not empowered, they cannot empower others”.

Galasso (1990:8) estimated that overall primary school enrolment rates in 1990 varied from about 90 per cent in Phnom Penh to only 30 per cent in peripheral areas. There were very high repetition rates and only 40 per cent were completing primary school. In 1990 and 1992, Redd Barna (Sonnois) and UNICEF (Ledgerwood), released reports to assist in planning for the participation of women in development. They revealed that the actual participation levels of girls in education were not yet clear. Ledgerwood (1992:13) believed that the participation of girls appeared to be returning to pre-war 1960s patterns where young girls were stopping their education at or before puberty, even though education was theoretically available to all. She found that the reasons for this were mainly poverty, cultural expectations of girl’s labour being needed at home, travel distances from schools being too great for girls, and any available money being spent on buying books and pens for the education of boys. Her findings were broadly in agreement with my interviews and surveys of the poor and very poor. My 1996 survey of Heads Of Households (HOH) showed that the majority, (both male and female) preferred to educate their sons rather than their daughters for both practical and cultural reasons:

“Study doesn’t mean you have enough to eat! Girls don’t need to study either, because even if they go to school, they still haven’t got any money.” (Male HOH, farmer, 52, Kompong Speu)

“We don’t come from a public servant family – because of that, to read and write is enough. The children want to study and go to university but we’re poor and haven’t got a job, so we farm and don’t even get enough to live on for one year.” (Female HOH, farmer, 57, Kandal)

“ We burn the jungle to clear it for farming rice, we hunt animals and dig for gold. We don’t know what study is for.” (Male, Jarai ethnic minority, HOH, farmer and hunter, 37, Rattanakiri)

“Know how to read and write for girls is enough – because girls shouldn’t study too much.” (Female HOH, rice farmer, 37, mother of one boy and three girls, Kompong Speu)

“Girls should only have enough education to read and write, because a proverb says ‘Girls cannot drive too deeply and too far’.” (Male HOH, soldier, 29, father of two boys and two girls, Kompong Speu)

“We would like our son to go to university to help develop the country, but we believe that girls should stay at home and learn housework, because our custom is that girls should never go out.” (Male HOH, farmer, 46, Kompong Cham)
(Surveys, 1996)

Added to the problem of low participation of girls in education, the quality of education was very poor and there were few female teachers as role models. In his ADB review of primary education in Cambodia, Duggan (1994b:11) revealed the ongoing residual effect of the KR on education, teacher-training and administration within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS). To illustrate the way this affected the educational levels and quality of personnel available to MOEYS, he provided the following case study of one of the few women who was able to access education beyond primary school level during the time of Vietnamese occupation.

Nhil Vin was five years old when the Khmer Rouge occupied her home province of Takeo in 1975. She and her family were asked to walk to the province of Pursat where they were to remain for the next five years. As Nhil Vin spent her childhood assisting her mother work rice fields, the transfer from the toil of rural life to Pursat was not as traumatic as for those Khmers from the towns. Still, during her time in Pursat, her grandparents died. Her immediate family survived.

Nhil Vin received no formal education for the five years of the KR regime. She assisted her family on the rice farms and generally, living a demanding life. Late in 1979, the KR commander summoned all the children and asked who were prepared to leave with the KR. The commander suggested to the children that they leave their parents to hide and live in the nearby mountains where they would be schooled and trained in military tactics. Nhil Vin, then 10, agreed to leave with the KR. During her preparations for leaving, Nhil Vin's mother alerted to her daughter's decision, rushed to the camp and physically returned Nhil Vin to her family. It was a struggle and Nhil Vin was not happy with this lost opportunity. She learned later from the community, that the children who had departed with the KR were executed in the mountains.

Nhil Vin commenced formal schooling in Takeo twelve months later. She entered secondary school immediately, without any preparatory schooling. She completed years 6 to 10 and in 1986 entered university. After three years at the University of Phnom Penh she received a scholarship to attend a university in Eastern Europe. She attended with twenty-five Khmer colleagues (two women). With the demise of the former Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Technical assistance from Russia, East Germany and Vietnam, Nhil Vinh's overseas training came to an end. She returned to Cambodia. No employment was available. Effectively, what employment she would have entered such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Planning, held no additional employment opportunities. Some eighteen months later, she entered the MOEYS. The department she entered was virtually dysfunctional. Beyond the senior staff there was no line management and Nhil occupied an office desk for six months performing no functions. Twelve months onwards (1992-93) she was still holding the position, but not executing functions. In terms of qualifications Nhil Vin was classified as 11+5. (Stephen Duggan, 1994b:11)

In response to the problem of poorly trained teachers and lack of resources, in 1992 the government in consultation with UNICEF (Ledgerwood, 1992) provided three months of training and basic tools such as typewriters and reproduction equipment. They provided senior MOEYS staff and supervisors from the provinces with in-service training in Phnom Penh. This was aimed at assisting supervisory staff to become more proactive and capable of giving useful input to their areas of responsibility. Attending some of these workshops as an education advisor and observing the presentation and modelling of gender-sensitive educational approaches, I noted very few women. There was one educational trainer from the Philippines and two Western women representing educational NGOs. The all-male MOEYS staff seemed unimpressed by the non-sexist teaching practices that were being modelled for their further discussion. MOEYS staff showed an inability to absorb opinions that differed from their own, and some were dominating their colleagues. Dr Stephen Duggan informed me that in retrospect these workshops effected little change in the practices and beliefs of the education-sector participants. Returning to the provinces, participants found it easier to resume their previous understandings of teaching practice and share nothing with their staff. Duggan believed that the money would have been better spent on training young women and men rather than wasting time with older people who were set in their ways.⁸ Clearly a new, better-trained generation of teachers would be needed before the quality of education and status of women could be improved to form the more egalitarian Cambodian society envisaged in the constitution.

As this chapter has argued, despite an increasing awareness of the need to empower women, the international community was yet to grasp the need for more culturally sensitive, longer-term views to help bring about sustainable gender equity through poverty-reduction, health improvements and equitable access to land for women in Cambodia. The newly formed SSWA and numerous women's NGOs were struggling to find culturally acceptable ways to engender the higher levels of women's participation in

⁸ Duggan also revealed (interview, 1996) that although ADB had provided free primary school textbooks to be distributed through the Ministry of Education (MOEYS), the day after being publicly presented to the government many were seen for sale in the Phnom Penh central market. Added to this, he said books provided to local schools in rural areas usually ended up being carefully locked away in cupboards, because teachers did not have the skills to use them.

education and devolved power needed to bring about long-term gender equity in the development process. The following chapter, dealing with government and NGO attempts to mainstream gender and empower women in the period 1994-1997, describes how the prevailing male-dominated political environment in which both sides of the government were busy jostling for power and involved in continuing fighting with the KR, ensured that this would not be an easy task.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT 1994-97

7.0 Introduction

Although Cambodia was now open to international trade and assistance following the 1993 elections and subsequent withdrawal of UNTAC, the ruling coalition remained at war with the Khmer Rouge. This meant that the three major Cambodian armies (CPP and FUNCINPEC against the KR) were actively involved in continuing civil war, draining precious resources. As a result, much of the country continued to be dangerous to access, resources were being diverted to support the military, and stability was tenuous. Although new, democratic laws and systems were being put in place, much of the energy of the two opposing parties in the newly formed government was spent in jostling for patron-power advantage. Government staff was largely untrained and incompetent with little to do, concerned with finding ways to earn extra money to supplement totally inadequate salaries. Following an increase in civil servants under the new coalition, the government was under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and international funding agencies to halve its personnel and cut 80,000 from its civil service.¹ At the same time, international providers and non-government organisations (NGOs) were involved in ongoing repatriation of returnees and displaced persons, and providing emergency food distribution. This chapter demonstrates how the international providers built a knowledge base to assist in the forward-planning of Women in Development (WID) / Gender and Development (GAD) and poverty-alleviation programs, through generating numerous studies and reports on the main issues confronting women's NGOs and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs (SSWA) / Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), including: a gender-biased culture and media; poor health and hygiene; trafficking and increased prostitution; HIV/AIDS and police

¹ Government salaries were only US\$40 a month and not enough to live on, creating inefficiency and corruption as employees sought other ways to make money. For example, at this stage I was directing an AusAID program aimed at preparing government officials for working in ASEAN, but class attendances were very poor as many of the students had second jobs or had 'sold' their places to friends who rarely attended.

corruption; family violence; poor representation of women in law; loss of land and poverty; and poor education of women and girls. However, as this chapter argues, the international providers were hampered not only by the tenuous country situation, but also by their own short-term, outcome-oriented policies and a lack of willingness to 'listen to the people'. Added to this, SSWA lacked power because it barely registered on government-consciousness in terms of support, funding or relevance.

This chapter argues that NGOs under pressure from their funding agencies to produce positive WID/GAD outcomes, were becoming increasingly aware of the socio-cultural framework informing Cambodian responses to gender issues. SSWA was only a token organisation and women were sidelined. Headed by a man, Keat Sokhun (representing a minor political party), and a staff ignorant of Western concepts of democracy, human rights, gender equity and the purposes of women's empowerment, SSWA was powerless in fulfilling its mandate. At the same time, as early as 1994, a poor human rights performance and corruption in the police, army, judiciary and government confronted funding NGOs with the hard choice of boycotting the financing of a corrupt system, or explicitly encouraging the corruption by 'fitting in' in order to assist in the promotion of poverty-alleviation, health reform and gender equity among the struggling majority (Ogden, 1994). This chapter indicates that, despite the failure of international providers to implement sustainable gender-mainstreaming within the Cambodian socio-cultural context, several sustainable, gender-sensitive alternative development initiatives were emerging at local levels. These included women's projects and village level community-building projects focussing on re-contextualising the culture in a 'socially engaged' Buddhism based on trust building. Furthermore, women in the newly-emerging 'free trade' garment factories were demonstrating their wish for equitable labour standards in Cambodia. Encouraged by the political opposition, they presented a strong challenge to the hierarchical ruling class, as well as prevailing gender views by participating in legally organised strikes. However, this chapter demonstrates that these women were violently opposed by the CPP who further accelerated their aggression when threatened by FUNCINPEC attempts to gain more power, culminating in a violent coup

in 1997 which effectively cemented Hun Sen's control and put the international providers on hold.

7.1 Women and the Media

As the international community was pushing for reform to improve the situation of women and children in particular, disproportionate news coverage was being given to political propaganda supporting the more powerful Second Prime Minister, Hun Sen. He portrayed himself as a strong patron of the people, but a dangerous enemy to those who opposed him. He caused considerable consternation among women's NGOs when he called for a review of a draft liberal law prepared by SSWA (in line with international recommendations) outlawing sexual discrimination, harassment and domestic violence. He objected, declaring: "Women are always demanding rights, demanding rights, but gain nothing. I am tired of listening because I never treated women badly" (Special Correspondent, 1995). In these ways Hun Sen was presenting a conservative, paternalistic male role model, at centre-stage and in full control. Women appearing on television with Hun Sen as their representative appeared both restrictively dressed and quietly subservient. For example, broadcasts and news coverage of the 1996 International Women's Day address showed large numbers of traditionally-dressed women sitting separately from the men, with the official women bowing and offering flowers to the visiting male dignitaries occupying the main platform. 'Strong man' Hun Sen, relaxed and casually smoking, with his wife sitting silently and stiffly beside him, addressed the meeting through the microphone with the message, "I like women! Women are very good helpers for men! There is no family violence in Cambodia. Why sometimes I also need to slap my wife around a bit so as to keep her in order". In 1997 I observed Hun Sen again giving the Women's Day address saying, "My beautiful wife here was asked to give the address today - but she told me that I am the right one to do it - not her". Newspaper reports revealed women's acceptance of male dominance. For example, Heng Sok Chheng (1995) showed seven women MPs wearing the usual demure attire and stiff stance on the front page of the *Phnom Penh Post* (see Appendix 8). They were cited as saying: "As women we traditionally understand male psychology ... sometimes Khmer

men want to show themselves off and show themselves brave ... It's a psychology, men like to show their cleverness ... Hun Sen is my hero... women understand things differently." (Som Kim Sour, CPP); "The character of Khmer women is a gentle one." (Son Chhay, BLDP); "If we speak alone and no one supports us, there is no majority, so it may be better not to speak." (Som Kanita, FUNCINPEC). These comments clearly reflected the way Cambodian women were socialised to defer to men and to speak sweetly at all times.

What constitutes 'speaking sweetly' is, of course, a social construction. In the 1990s, linguistic comparisons of Australian women's voice pitch in pre-WW2 recordings, showed that women's voices had lowered considerably, possibly as a result of the empowerment of women through the women's movement. As a Westerner living in Cambodia in 1996-97, I noted that most television and many radio stations offered programs stereotyping "good" young women as having soft, childishly high, monotone voices that reinforced the *chbab srey*. This certainly disempowered women on the public front and was particularly noticeable in drama programs when older women and 'bad, common women' were given normally pitched voices, whereas 'good, virtuous girls' were given artificially high monotone voices. Even borrowed Thai and Chinese movies were skillfully dubbed with the same anomalous voices, using a high pitch for virtuous young women. I found that many perfectly healthy, robust young Cambodian women had been taught to speak this way, believing it to be the sign of a 'good upbringing'. However, most of the Cambodians I interviewed actively disliked this kind of voice being used, and only a few claimed to find it attractive. Some of my students told me that sex-workers used this kind of voice to attract customers. However, when they returned to the provinces to hand out money to their families, they reverted to normal pitch. Chea Sandanath, Director of Programs for the Khmer Women's Radio, told me that she believed a high-pitched voice made it impossible for young women to be taken seriously. When I asked her opinion about the reason for this 'stressed voice', she said she believed that this custom dated back to the old theatre when women played all the parts in royal court performances because they were seen as less threatening to the welfare of the king. I also noted that the males conducting traditional puppet-shows used falsetto voices to

portray young women. Sandanath felt that this had been compounded by the restrictive traditions passed down through the *chbab srey*. Explaining that one very talented woman was responsible for the dubbing of all characters in imported movies, where this tone made it easier for her to differentiate the characters, she said that she detested the custom as it encouraged women to remain weak, and refused to permit broadcasts with this kind of voice included.

Both ancient and modern Khmer life depicted in radio-scripts, television and novels largely disseminated stereotyped views of the Khmer culture and gender order. As a Westerner, these appeared over-melodramatic, sentimental, sexist and calamitous, primarily centering on family-life in stories that presented a stereotypical representation of the culture. Female characters included evil stepmothers, abused girls, simpering lovers and adoptive mothers with good hearts. Women were usually shown as uneducated, jealous and weak, as well as being both victims and perpetrators of violence. Families were seen to live in close proximity, their main focus being on attaining a state of harmony whatever the material conditions, in order to maintain 'free hearts'. Living in Cambodia from 1996-97 I found Khmer television highly informative in understanding the place of women in Cambodian culture. Drama productions were particularly interesting, with strong women portrayed as negative and less desirable than weak, subservient women. The main themes I observed were of heroines speaking in high monotonous tones, either as victims of undying love or of ferocious violence, usually both. In ancient as well as modern tales, desirable unmarried girls were portrayed as totally obedient and subservient, and strong, independent women as undesirable, mostly ending up as victims of violence. Good kings were portrayed as having many girlfriends and petty, gossiping wives who cheated and tricked each other. They were continually jealous concerning the future possibility of their sons becoming king.

To counter the negative implications of how women were being shown in the media, the Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMC) was formed in 1994. It was to assess coverage given to women in radio, television and newspapers. The first annual report of the Media Monitoring Group (MMG) distributed by the WMC (1997) found

that the coverage of women on television reinforced traditional culture. Social awareness programs, interviews, and quiz and talk shows predominantly showed women in traditional roles or as entertainers. Even the social awareness programs, campaigning for change in the status of women by providing education on the prevention of domestic violence, reduction of the trafficking of women, and the need to send girls to school, strongly advocated the importance of traditional roles for women. The popular program 'Profiles', in which famous people were interviewed, mainly showed glamorous singers and video stars who focussed on how they became famous, and the kind of husband they wanted. Popular karaoke programs (singing along with the video clips) also focussed on women as entertainers and traditional sweethearts (WMC, 1998b). Tive Sarayeth of the WMC explained that research by International Management and Investment Consultants (ICMC) revealed a growing significance of television as an agent for social change in Cambodia (interview, 1999). Audience responses from urban centres (as well as rural Kandal, adjacent to Phnom Penh) with access to television showed this as the most important source of information because literacy was low. According to Sarayeth, although only half the population in these areas owned a television set, another 30 percent watched television outside their homes, usually in neighbour's houses or local restaurants. She explained that although television shows had a great potential for social change to improve the contribution of women, they were limited to stereotyping women as the custodians of culture, tradition and physical beauty. She agreed that drama programs on both television and radio were overtly sexist, with women constantly seen as sources of entertainment and decoration. They showed no involvement of women in politics or leadership of any kind. Women were portrayed as troublesome, manipulative and dangerous, their main concern in life being to find and keep a husband. At the same time, Western movies and programs (including Thai and American) I saw in Cambodia portrayed women in a way that was completely at odds with Cambodian models.

Dubbed programs produced in the West appeared 'out of context' in Cambodia, as did some other programs designed for Khmer education. As director of the English Language for Government Officials (ELMO) program, in 1997 I was asked to review a TV series produced for the promotion of English language in Cambodia by the not-for-

profit organisation, International Development Program Australia (IDP). The series was not only to be televised, but was to be available as videos with accompanying booklets for sale in the market place. Seeing the profound need for culturally appropriate positive role models dealing with issues relevant to Cambodia, I was disappointed to find that, although English grammar sequencing and expressions were well introduced, the more important context of stories, situations and characters was totally unrelated to Cambodian needs. Turning a blind eye to the positive input this program could have offered in relation to concepts relevant to much-needed development in Cambodia, IDP preferred to present an idyllic, wealthy, soap-opera version of Australia. Clearly they were less interested in development in Cambodia than in enticing the wealthy to send their children to schools in Australia. When I asked the producer why she had not used this opportunity to produce something with stories providing models suited to Cambodian needs, she retorted, “Goodness, we didn’t have time to worry about things like that”, confirming that IDP was more interested in marketing than in development.

Discussing the problem of putting marketing before development needs, FUNCINPEC advisor to Women’s Affairs, Mu Sochua (1997 interview), strongly complained that the front pages of local newspapers in Phnom Penh were splashed with “lurid tales of rape and women being beaten and killed over seemingly trivial matters”. Tive Sandanath explained that models of behaviour promulgated by men able to access print media were particularly significant in shaping gender relations throughout Cambodia. She explained that the way women are portrayed in newspapers directs attitudes that affect women’s status. “While print is not the most popular mass medium in Cambodia, newspapers and magazines, nonetheless, hold much influence with decision-makers and opinion-formers” (WMC, 1998a). WMC’s 1997 newspaper research showed that the newspaper portrayal of women was limited and alarmingly negative. Although newspapers varied in their negative portrayal of women, general problems identified were insufficient allocation of space to women, pornography, and almost exclusively derogatory representation of women in illustrations. In 1997, there was an unexplained huge increase in the presentation of women as victims of violence or accident. These were mostly related to prostitutes being killed by their clients. In line with general

cultural understandings of women's moral responsibility, these stories implicitly blamed the woman for her own murder rather than the male perpetrator. Significantly, surveys conducted by the Media Monitoring Group (MMG) established that eighty percent of newspaper readers felt that pornography was a problem in Khmer-language newspapers. Many suggested a preference for 'more interesting stories about women'. Even though some newspaper editors complained that the MMG was too conservative, it received a large positive radio audience response from both sexes. When the group approached offending newspapers, the editors claimed that pornography was good for business and they were simply meeting a demand. These women then pointed out that the most popular newspaper *Rasmey Kampuchea* and *Popular* magazine did not need to publish pornography to sell well (WMC, 1998a). Tiv Sandanath reiterated that although it was only the minority literate, urban males who had access to the offending publications that denigrated women, they were the ones setting top-down gender examples for the country. As educated women did not read the same material as men they were largely unaware of the implications to gender-bias against women that such publications portrayed.

7.2 Women and Poverty

The low status of women was not only affected by negative male attitudes and gender-bias in Cambodian culture and media, but by widespread poverty. In attempting to understand the way poverty affected women's status, it is necessary to look at the rural situation. Although rural Cambodia had been accustomed to uncertain and precarious conditions throughout history, the more recent devastation of wars, deforestation and changing weather patterns had made it even more difficult. Added to this, mines, repatriation from warring zones, illegal land grabs forcing people off their land, and worsening floods and droughts² made life for an already traumatised population a nightmare. Due to insecurity and the majority of farmers living day-to-day for survival,

² In 1996 I was taken to the outskirts of Phnom Penh to witness the devastation of flooding. With the whole landscape under water, farmers had brought their pitiful livestock to the built-up road and were camping there, fishing and catching rats to eat. Their access to fire was minimal and the water was putrid. The next season drought ruined all the crops and the starving farmers were coming into the city to demonstrate outside the National Assembly.

traditional networks were weakened, and people lacked trust in each other. A 1994 Mekong Secretariat report reasoned that poverty was exacerbated by the absence of non-kinship based forms of association for women. Added to this, Ahlers and Vlaar (1995) found that in villages not producing enough rice to meet consumption needs, men were temporarily migrating to seek other income and leaving their women to run the farms. An ADHOC (1994) report on poor widows in rural areas found that some men from poverty-stricken rural families who went to find work in the city found new wives, leaving their destitute families to fend for themselves. Ahlers pointed out that even when water was not scarce, non-availability of male labour crucial to the implementation of irrigation strongly affected the well being of female-headed households. With villagers expressing a lack of confidence in collective cooperation and an aversion to meetings (a reaction to enforced meetings under communism), women with older children and nearby relatives were better off, and those with no support were losing out. In this situation the report stressed that because women “were not prepared to speak in a way which might be construed as running against official policy”, SSWA and other government service areas needed to collaborate with the women and base irrigation policies on their actual needs. The following case study of a rural widow I interviewed in 1996 gives an example of the kind of difficulties women faced in accessing water:

Kim Phon is a 62 year-old woman born in Kompot. She was widowed in 1976 when her husband died of an unknown illness. She had seven children, but three died and her oldest son is married and living in another part of the country. The three remaining children rely on her for their economic and emotional needs. Kim Phon and her three children left Kompot in 1993 because of poverty caused by their small plot of land needing resources to cultivate. Hearing that there was money in growing tobacco, they moved to another area to grow tobacco on the side of the hill. At first they were excited as their new venture was going well, but after one year some new people came and farmed the land above them, meaning that no water could reach their small plantation. Unable to negotiate with the newcomers, they tried to get a loan to buy a pump to bring water up the hill. As the expense would have been more than the yield was worth, they had to abandon their plantation. After this they rented a hectare of land to cultivate, but Kim Phon’s youngest son who had been logging in the mountains to earn extra money, became seriously ill. She had to sell everything

she owned to pay for his medical expenses, and their rice crop was destroyed by drought. They were now in debt for some of the medical expenses and facing an uncertain future (Kompong Cham interview, 1996).

Following the 1994 socio-economic survey, Prescott and Pradham (1997) put out a discussion paper outlining their poverty profile for Cambodia. This paper revealed a large disparity between Phnom Penh and the rural areas. With burgeoning capitalism in urban areas, consumption expenditure was more than twice as high in the capital as in the countryside. One third of the population was surviving on only 3,600 calories for a family of five (the poverty line index for food intake is 2,200 per person). With the infrastructure of the country severely restricting movement for the rural majority, ability to access markets was restricted. In response to this problem, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 1994) put forward a report to the government outlining rural development needs for improvement of roads and support in production including cropping (mainly rice), livestock for small farmers, fisheries and forestry. IFAD prioritised other needs as drilling wells, providing loans for farm animals and vaccinations for livestock. In 1996, ADB released a report (Ledgerwood, 1996) analysing the poor situation of WID in Cambodia. ADB renewed its policies to prioritise the mainstreaming of gender in the development process. Following this, UNICEF (1995-96b), in consultation with SSWA and associated NGOs, released a report outlining the needs of women in the family and community. This report prioritised nutrition and food security, water and sanitation, health and education, protection of vulnerable groups, and social mobilisation and communication. At the same time, the Cambodian Government released a 'National Policy for Women'. Its action plan provided a framework to improve co-ordination of government and NGO programs for the benefit of women (ADB, 1996a). These documents stressed the vulnerability and poverty facing women who traditionally remain in the village. They had no access to training and technology (as did men), particularly in rural areas where they comprised 75 percent of the workforce, with only 34 percent able to access the traditional help of men for heavy work. Excessive physical strain combined with undernourishment contributed to their exhaustion and vulnerability to ill-health.

7.3 Women and Health

In the mid 1990s the health of women remained a priority issue. Unless they lived in the city, most lacked access to knowledge about basic health and hygiene skills, and had little or no access to any kind of health-care or hospitals. For example, in 1996 I was invited to a weekend picnic on floating rafts in a lake where a large number of visitors were enjoying food. The water was unclean as it was also used as a toilet. As the visitors departed, I witnessed a young father come out to wash his baby in the contaminated water, splashing it and scooping the water into its mouth. A 1994 report on the National Symposium 'Women's Health and Women's Work in Cambodia' (Voeten and Adutt) revealed the need to educate women about health-care for their children in nutrition, family planning, pregnancy caring, child raising and hygiene. The report stressed the need to promote human rights for health-care in women, and provide health-care for women suffering from violence. It recommended that there should be good relations between NGOs and government; control of private health services; a health network committee; education for traditional birth assistance and disease transmission; a women's psychiatric centre; and dispersal of information promoting women's health. The report also recommended that health centres be established in each community.

However, despite excellent health laws and a new national health policy in 1994 aimed at re-establishing a comprehensive health system, the Ministry of Health (MOH) had a long way to go before their goals could be achieved (Chandara, 1995). I found that due to loss of family and networks and a breakdown in confidence of traditional health-care methods, many overworked and traumatised women were helpless in the areas of health and hygiene. Even in a middle-class family I stayed with in Phnom Penh, there was no concept of basic health-care in terms of diet and exercise, or even cleaning teeth. The children continually drank the widely advertised Coca-Cola, believing it was 'orange juice' and their teeth were clearly rotting away.³ Not only were Cambodians generally unaware of basic hygiene and health issues, but a 1996 survey based on 700 in-depth

³ Their mother would not send them to a dentist (even when I offered to pay) for fear the children might contract HIV/AIDS from unclean instruments. These were people who had the benefit of TV programs informing them on issues of health and hygiene.

interviews conducted by the Transcultural Psycho-Social Organisation in Phnom Penh, revealed that up to 40 percent of Cambodians were still suffering from trauma-related mental illness. Fifteen percent of them were incapacitated by their condition (Watkin, 1997). This was consistent with my observation that a high number of people were suffering from diseases related to stress and trauma. For example, the mother in the same middle-class family mentioned above was experiencing up to fourteen trauma-related epileptic fits a day. Unable to find a cure, her children (ages 7, 10, 13 and 15) were responsible for caring for her, as her husband was living and working on the border of Vietnam.

A major issue seriously affecting the health and status of women was their knowledge of and access to information about birth spacing. A 1995 report from the Ministry of Health revealed that 78 percent of married women had never used birth control while only 12.6 percent were currently doing so. However, my interviews revealed that promotion of hygiene and provision of access to family planning were highly effective in improving women's lives. Birth-spacing workshops in Phnom Penh (1996) gave me the opportunity to interview several female representatives from remote areas who had been sponsored to attend so that they could take information back to their provinces to empower other women. However, the participants' levels of understandings about birth control and hygiene were very inconsistent. Some did not even know the normal period of gestation. Even after having the principles of conception and the various methods of available birth control clearly explained to them, several women maintained they would be too afraid to use birth control themselves, much less recommend it to the other women in their communes. They believed that bearing children year after year was much safer, even though they could not afford to feed them. However, other women with greater knowledge and experience were able to share the huge health and economic advantages available to women and their families when they were able to control the number of children. They gave personal testimonies as to lowered mortality rates and work advantages villagers gained through having access to basic training in hygiene and birth control. One interviewee described how the women in her commune became convinced when they saw how much work she was able to undertake to help her family,

and how happy her previously worried husband had become, since she had used birth control.

A key problem related to health and hygiene was the spread of HIV/AIDS. Discussions with young men in Phnom Penh revealed that due to lack of availability of ‘good’ girls to befriend, peer pressure led them to frequent prostitutes. Added to this, the widespread lack of conviction about the necessity of using condoms made the practice of safe sex unpopular. In 1996 the National Aids Program described Cambodia’s HIV epidemic as the most severe in Southeast Asia and predicted the loss of 40,000 lives by the year 2000 (Watkin, 1996). In 1997 my preferred moto-dop taxi-driver, an educated, married young man, surprised me by asking, “Is it true that men need to wear condoms when visiting prostitutes? My friends insist that HIV is just a big scare introduced by the condom companies to sell more condoms”. As cigarette and medical companies were allowed to advertise and unload unsaleable products on the poor in Cambodia, this assumption was hardly surprising. My interviews with several young men revealed that, although it was widely known that over 50 percent of prostitutes were HIV positive, the majority either didn’t believe they would catch it, or didn’t care. Prostitutes were under pressure from their bosses to supply unprotected sex to customers, and wives were largely ignorant of the risks involved in their husband’s activities. Furthermore, people were confused by the wide range of HIV/AIDS preventions and cures available in supermarkets and chemists. Traditional *kruus* and monks were also offering cures to AIDS patients. I was informed that many doctors were loath to tell patients they were HIV positive or had AIDS, as some reacted badly, becoming violent or suicidal. In this context, many unsuspecting wives and their babies were being diagnosed with AIDS.

7.4 Trafficking and Prostitution

Although prostitution appeared to decline following the withdrawal of UNTAC, overwhelming poverty and greed in a climate of impunity resulted in a rise in the trafficking of young women throughout the country. This led to increased prostitution in urban centres. In 1995 US\$450,000 (mainly financed by WHO) was spent to coordinate a

national AIDS program concentrating on the highest risk groups of commercial sex workers and mobile men including the police, military and truck drivers. However, with so many competing needs in the development process they had limited success in curtailing the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS (Robinson, 1995). Outside the capital people did not know what a condom was. Women I spoke to believed the increase in prostitution was a reaction to the many years of sexual oppression under communism. In a freer society, Cambodians had quickly adjusted to the high levels of cheap, available sex provided by the increasing number of women being trafficked and sold, exacerbated by poverty and government corruption. Although Cambodians were initially blaming Vietnamese prostitutes and UNTAC for the rapid spread of HIV, it soon became clear that Cambodian men were overtly keen customers. I found that some fathers (among my students) were even bringing their fourteen-year-old sons to prostitutes to initiate them into adult life. A 1997 survey conducted by the Australian Red Cross found “more than forty percent of Cambodian men between 25 and 30 continue to visit prostitutes, and that nearly half of those men used condoms only ‘sometimes’ or never at all ... less than six percent of all men ... used condoms during intercourse with their wives.” (Agence-France-Presse, 1997a)

Adding to the supply of cheap sex-workers were corrupt officials protected by police. They turned a blind eye on increasing tricking and trafficking of young girls in Cambodia. In my street, a grief-stricken coconut-vendor told me her eleven-year-old daughter had disappeared on the way to school. As she could not afford to go to the Thai border to intercept the traffickers and buy her daughter back, she told neither the school nor the police. Many young women in failing rural areas were being lured into the cities with promises of jobs working in restaurants. They soon found out that they were actually to be employed by brewery companies to sell their products. As ‘beer girls’ they were expected to do ‘sexual favours’ for their customers and if they refused were in danger of losing their jobs. Brown (2000:89) found that around 50 percent of young women trafficked to brothels were sold by someone they knew: many were abducted and sold to traffickers by a friend or uncle for a small sum of money and told they were being sent to the city to get a job. Brown found that police were often involved in raping the girls

before they were sent to the brothels. She included a case study of a girl living in poverty with her deserted mother who sold porridge on the roadside. A richly dressed woman sometimes came to the village promising girls good jobs working as shop assistants. Selected girls were interviewed by two men, and the porridge seller's daughter was thrilled to be among those chosen. She was taken by taxi to Phnom Penh only to find that she and her friends were sent to different brothels. When they arrived they were put into a prison situation where they were unable to escape. They were given new, derogatory names, and treated as nonentities.

Horrific stories of young women being drugged and beaten into submission to serve as many as fifteen clients a day were common. Virgins, especially fair-skinned, ones won high prices, as Chinese businessmen believed they were not only HIV-free, but that they cured HIV and brought renewed youth and vitality to older men.⁴ Once these girls were 'seasoned', they were put to work with other girls where they no longer fetched high prices for their owners, and accepted their fate as a saleable commodity. Some older prostitutes regarded as having repaid the debt incurred by their purchase price (around US\$3000) were released from the brothels. However, they preferred to remain in their occupation, seeing little hope of finding an alternative way to survive. Their only dream was to help their families as much as possible by sending money home to the provinces. Although 86 percent of prostitutes had been tricked and sold into prostitution (Brown, 2000:89), some had voluntarily become sex workers due to a combination of abuse and extreme poverty. Two freelance sex workers I interviewed were close friends working in a French nightclub in Phnom Penh:

The first sex-worker was tall, slim and fair-skinned. She was dressed in a Western manner, wearing tight jeans and short, cropped hair. She said that because of her appearance she was able to demand high prices from Westerners. This young woman had become addicted to drugs, and needed the money to feed her addiction. Her regular boyfriend (a Romanian) was unaware of her occupation. She said she did not use condoms for men who 'loved her' (paid the top price), but

⁴ In Cambodia, fair skin is considered to be beautiful. One government official declared that he would not get HIV because he always looked for fair-skinned prostitutes with clean and healthy skin.

always used them for the customers who paid less. She insisted she was not afraid of becoming HIV positive because one client who 'loved her' had taught her how to clean herself after intercourse to avoid infection. This young woman's habits were clearly presenting a serious health hazard, not only to herself, but to her favoured clients and unknowing boyfriend.

In contrast, the second sex-worker was typically Khmer. She was a beautiful, brown skinned, short young woman with long, curly hair. She wept when as she told her story. She had previously worked in the market selling fruit in order to support herself and her elderly mother. One morning as she was carrying a basket of oranges on her head to the market place, she was attacked by a gang of five youths who raped her. She explained that because of this, she would never be able to marry, as no Cambodian would marry a girl who was not a virgin. She said that because she was brown-skinned and insisted on her clients wearing condoms, she could not get a high price from her customers. She hated being a prostitute, but knew that it was her only hope for survival. Her plan was to work in this way until she had saved up enough money to own her own market stall and be independent.

(Personal interviews, Phnom Penh 1996)

The brothel area of Toul Kauk near my villa on the northern outskirts of Phnom Penh was full of young, sad, badly nourished teenage girls by day. By night they were transformed into painted dolls, sitting and standing in rows along the street-side to attract customers. These girls had been sold to the brothel owners who paid illegal taxes to the local commune chief and bribes to the local police to be allowed to operate freely. The majority of the girls were being kept as prisoners, unable to refuse customers, or to run away without recapture and punishment. Local residents told me how, one day, several large NGO buses with outside police protection descended on the area to take the girls away for medical attention and offers of skills retraining. Most had been prostituted against their will, and welcomed the chance of a new way to survive, but a few who felt their lives had already been ruined, preferred to return to their occupation. The brothel area quickly recouped its losses of young women, and the corrupt Toul Kauk commune chief reclaimed ownership of the area and the illegal taxes he collected from the

numerous brothels. He made sure his area would not be raided again, this time gaining more vigilant protection from the local police and army customers.

7.5 Administration of Law and Women

The situation of sex workers vis-à-vis the law mirrored the situation of women more generally in Cambodia. Despite the legal safeguards enshrined in new laws, twenty-five years of war and continual social dislocation had resulted in unchecked lawlessness carried out with impunity being the norm in the 1990s. In the first thorough report on domestic violence in Cambodia, Cathy Zimmerman (1994) revealed ‘extraordinary’ levels of abuse. In a newspaper interview (*Cambodia Daily*, 1994), Zimmerman stated, “The degree of violence is beyond what I ever fathomed. It probably varies from any small amount of violence to weapons of war – including hand grenades, bamboo rods, electrical wire for whipping, and men setting the house on fire with the wife laying unconscious inside.⁵ It’s an ‘invisible’ problem that happens everywhere in the world. One difference here is that years of war have made it impossible to do anything about it”. Zimmerman found that the ‘batterers’ were generally unrepentant men with low self-esteem, dual behaviour (public and private), traditionalist ideas of male supremacy and pathological jealousy. She interpreted the increase in violence that had occurred since the Khmer Rouge and war as a ‘learned response’, leading to: family and social breakdown in a cycle of ‘violence’, ‘learned helplessness’, and ‘departure’. An interview with a female prisoner revealed the low level of intolerance to women retaliating against violence. For example, Naly was almost five months pregnant when she was brutally battered and in turn attacked her husband. The judge explained that because she had been tortured so badly and because she was ill and pregnant, her seven-year sentence would be reduced:

For many years, Naly’s husband raped and beat her regularly. Emotionally and psychologically shattered, feeling trapped and unable to escape, Naly finally exploded. After being raped hours before, Naly explained, “I woke up early. While I was sweeping the ground in front of the house, I couldn’t stop the memories of all the horrible things he had done to me for so long. I felt so upset

⁵ I personally knew of a case where a fire from an oil burner destroyed the house with the mother inside. The husband was chief suspect and claimed the land for himself.

and everything he had done stayed in my mind. I couldn't stop thinking about them. I felt so much pain in my heart. I went straight to the house with the axe to warn him. Finally he opened his eyes. I hit him. I only remember hitting him once, but in court I saw three cuts over his eye".

(Zimmerman, 1994:35)

According to Kerry Bader of the 1994 Human Rights Taskforce on Cambodia (Wallengren, 1994), "Up to 25 percent of families living in villages around the Cambodian capital are victims of violence and bigamy". At the same time, a report on a regional conference 'Determinants of Intra-Familial Violence and Strategies for its Elimination' (UNICEF, 1994) preceded a 'Cambodian National Declaration and Plan of Action Against Domestic Violence'. Both the Report and Declaration contributed to SSWA's renewed policies on the empowerment of women through the elimination of domestic violence (SSWA, 1995d). FUNCINPEC advisor on women's affairs Mu Sochua explained, "The situation is very, very severe in terms of abuse to women" (interview, 1997). She said the reason Cambodian women's plight was considered the worst in Southeast Asia was not only due to the grinding poverty faced by the majority, but also to the physical abuse from males that cut across all social groups. She explained, "it is the custom and tradition that allows men to think that women can be beaten, sold, can be bought. It is ingrained not just in men, but women also believe that it is their destiny ... I think that Cambodian women have paid a heavy price in two decades of war and genocide." As Mu Sochua recognized, if the rate of violence and women's vulnerability were to be decreased, poverty and social attitudes had to be tackled in tandem.

Lack of recourse to justice through the corrupt Cambodian police system in this period not only served to increase the power of the wealthy, but blocked development by increasing the powerlessness of the poor. Although laws formed after the 1992 elections were excellent in terms of human rights and equality for women, corrupt police and uneducated judges entrenched in a virtually closed legal system, as well as the poverty and ignorance of the people, rendered them almost useless. Added to this, government failure to bring the KR to justice and allow cremation of the bones of those they had killed (in accordance with Buddhism) was indicative of the Cambodian tendency to deny and refuse to deal with the root causes of problems (referred to in Népote, 1992),

strengthened the people's disbelief in justice. Factors acting against the development of a just society through implementation of just laws included corruption and nepotism at all levels in the public and private sectors, low salaries in the civil service, and poor enforcement of existing laws and regulations. As a result, the growing level of distrust caused by widespread abuse of power among members of the police force and army was reflected in anarchic behaviour within the general population. Illegal forms of group arbitration with people taking the law into their own hands became commonplace; and cases of people suspected of robbery being surrounded by angry mobs executing justice by beating them to death were frequently reported in the media.

Another problem related to the lack of justice in Cambodia was the misuse of law to sanction the illegal seizure of land that had been cleared of explosives for local farmers. As outlined by Tioulong Samura (interview, 1997), the country was the most heavily mined in the world, especially in the west, with less than half of the arable land free of mines. This meant that many returnees from border camps were not able to access their traditional villages. Those who tried to do so suffered loss from explosions. According to Tioulong, one in every 200 people was an amputee, the highest level in the world. The 1994 Report of the Asian Human Rights Commission estimated that there were from six to ten million active land mines in Cambodia, with around 300 people being killed every month due to inadvertently stepping on them. This represented a critical problem in the resettlement of the rural population. The joy of many returnees when land-clearing projects funded by overseas donors finally arrived to help was short-lived when corrupt military and civilian officials forcibly evicted them and illegally confiscated their newly cleared land. As a result, farmers were driven away from their legally occupied areas to precariously start out all over again in new, less fertile, unsafe areas that could not provide them with the means of survival.

In a similar way, landless farmers migrating from the countryside to become squatters on the outskirts of Phnom Penh were also evicted by corrupt police. Mang Channo (1995) reports: "Police tore down the flimsy houses of 57 squatter families in downtown Phnom Penh ... and the squatters ... said they have no idea where they will

live now.” In a separate development in the same week Channo notes that “The Ministry of Interior asked for the names of 240 families squatting outside Wat Prei Ouvong, tagging them to be sent as workers to a Chinese factory about to be built in Kompong Sila, on the Kompot / Koh Kong [provincial] border”. Militaristic operations such as these were continually taking place to herd the rural homeless seeking refuge in the city back into the provinces.

7.6 Education of Women and Girls

Given the kinds of cultural and institutional impediments to women’s development outlined above, improved education and literacy were widely seen as the key to empowering women to share in the development process. However, difficulties in accurately assessing literacy were related not only to inaccessibility in the countryside but to the way literacy is measured. For example, an SSWA (1995a) estimate of the overall adult literacy rate was 35.2 percent, with only 22 percent of women being functionally literate. Duggan and Daroesman (1998) disagreed with these estimates, claiming that overall literacy was 65 percent, with illiteracy in women and girls around 50 percent. The 1997 Cambodia-Socio-Economic survey put literacy rates for women at 57.7 percent and eighty percent for men, with extreme regional variations, the northeast of the country being as low as 26.4 percent. Related to these low levels of female literacy, the SSWA reported that almost 50 percent of women over 25 had never been to school, contrasting with 23 percent of men. Although 37 percent of women had received some primary schooling, only 2.5 percent had attended levels 10-12, a pitiful 0.6 percent had achieved any technical or vocational training, and less than one percent had achieved university levels.

Young (1996:33) has argued that illiteracy and low education levels were prime causes of the unequal rights and violence against women, and the subordination of women within the family and society. Kleinjans (1996:4) also believed that, due to their low education and literacy levels, women were the “silenced majority”, and that their professional and political participation was needed to increase the country’s ability to

solve its social, economic and political problems. In 1996 UNICEF (1995-96b:110) reported that 10-25 percent of the population had never attended school, and up to 20 percent of primary students were over-age.⁶ They revealed that with such under-supply of teachers (many with low levels of education) the government was supplying a mere 200 kindergartens, 4,700 primary schools, and only 350 lower secondary and 89 upper secondary schools. In the capital, tertiary-level studies were available at the University of Phnom Penh (six faculties), four professional schools and a small university for the poor in Prei Veng. Overall school performance showed that only six percent of students entering primary school were completing secondary school, and that only four percent of these were going on to pass their final examinations. Of these students, a 1994 attempt to eradicate corruption in university entrance exams by the education minister Ung Huot revealed that a mere four percent were in fact up to university entrance level (Ayres, 2000). With quality of education in such a parlous state, secondary school female enrolment showed the lowest male/female ratio among the Lower Developed Countries (SSWA, 1995a). In this situation, international providers interested in sustainable development and the empowerment of women naturally identified education as a key necessity. ADB (1995) estimated that there were almost six million children in a population of 10.7 million, meaning that almost 50 percent of the population were of school age. However, given the enormous training commitments necessary to achieve change and the fact that total education expenditures were only 7.6 percent of the recurrent public expenses (half the average allotted by LDCs), the situation was hardly likely to improve (ADB, 1995: 25).

Poverty, poor administration, seriously underqualified and underpaid teachers and short school hours had grave implications for the quality of education in Cambodia. Added to this, less than one percent of primary school teachers had finished grade eleven, and as Cambodia does not see teaching as a 'women's profession', women were averaging only 30 percent of the teaching force (concentrated at primary levels), resulting in a lack of female role models (UNICEF, 1995-96b:116). Contradictions in priorities for

⁶ Duggan (1994a:14) explains that due to the low skill level of teachers, repetition was almost mandatory in year one. For instance, in 1993-94, by age cohort, there should have been 260,000 children in year one, but due to repetition there were over 500,000.

female education were summed up in the actions of a high-ranking Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) official who, at the same time as promoting the empowerment of women through education, was openly visiting young women in local brothels every morning “for relaxation purposes”. Apart from these negative role models, another serious problem was short school hours. The school day was only four hours, and sometimes only two to three hours. Teachers with overloaded classes were only paid about US\$23 per month. In addition, they usually had to buy their own materials. Not only was this too little to live on, but it was frequently several months late. Because the curriculum was overloaded, class sizes too large, and the school day far too short to provide students with enough information, the government was sanctioning teachers to provide extra private, paid classes after-hours. In these classes more privileged students were given detailed explanations and extra practice exercises in key subject areas such as maths, science and English. At the same time, cash-strapped parents were expected to pay 2000 riels at the start of the year plus 500 riels a day for primary school, and 2000 riels a day for secondary school. In some cases, cash-strapped teachers were even reported as extorting pocket-money parents had given children to buy snacks when they were hungry (Far Eastern Economic Review, 1999). In this situation, many children were undernourished and unable to concentrate well, with sickness taking a toll on their attendance levels. Girls were more disadvantaged than boys in this system, with my questionnaires indicating that many parents, particularly the poor, prioritised formal education of their sons before their daughters for both practical and cultural reasons. Overall, despite the commitment of both government and the international community to upgrade teacher training and education to meet rapidly expanding student numbers, the situation did not improve in this period (Duggan, 1994a, ADB, 1995 and UNICEF, 1995-96b).

According to the Ministry of Planning (1999), the 1997 census data clearly showed access to schools as significantly worse in poorer villages than rich ones. I found that parents did not feel comfortable sending their daughters to educational institutions that were not near home, for fear their daughters may get a bad name or be in danger of abduction. A 1997 interview with education specialist Dr. Vin McNamara revealed

further that, for reasons of safety, parents did not want their girls to attend after-school classes, meaning that many girls were seriously lagging behind. In combination with widespread inability to pay for extra tuition, lack of accessibility resulted in high levels of repetition, particularly among females in rural areas. As my surveys consistently indicated, there was a clear correlation between poverty, accessibility and education. In Kompong Chhnang and Kandal, poor rural areas with access to primary and high schools but no university, some children had never attended school, preferring to supplement the meagre family income and help their siblings attend school by collecting wild honey and birds. In Prei Veng, an even poorer rural region close to nearby schools with the added incentive of a free Australian-funded university providing studies in agriculture, business studies and natural medicine, all the children of respondents were attending school, and several males and females were even attending university. By contrast, in the areas of the more remote Rattanakiri, no children attended school where there were no educational institutions, and in the areas with school access but no university, none chose to travel in order to attend university. My surveys (1996) revealed that many parents in rural areas believed it was more important for their children to learn a second language (English, French or Chinese) than go to school. As a result, only those with safe access were able to make it to tertiary levels, particularly females.

As noted by Gray and Chenda (1995), despite the government policy of equality for women, overall female university enrolments had fallen from 25 percent in 1990 to only 13 percent across all faculties, peaking in humanities in 1994. Of the few entries into university in 1994-95, only 16.6 percent across faculties in Phnom Penh University were women (Denham, 1997:65), with a mere 2.5 percent in Bachelor of Education. Already low female-enrolments in the Institute of Technology fell from 6.8 percent in 1990 to 1.5 percent in 1994. Of the females, only fifteen percent were from rural areas. The remainder were the daughters of businessmen and government employees living in urban areas (Gray and Chenda, 1995:57, 62). Gray and Chenda found that only one-third of female tertiary students were first-born, which they attributed to the custom of eldest daughters being responsible for caring for siblings rather than studying. Added to this, I was informed that unofficial admission payments of US\$2,000 to US\$5,000, depending

on the subject, severely undermined the merit-drive of students. This further disadvantaged the poor, particularly females. A 1997 government decision to increase high school levels to include year 12 made it even more difficult for females to access tertiary levels. My questionnaires and interviews undertaken in rural and urban Cambodia pointed to 'Khmer tradition' acting as a significant constraint on females entering and staying in higher education, with the expectation that females should marry between sixteen and twenty-two years of age.

As a result of the combination of factors outlined above, only a small number of women were able to achieve secondary levels of education and experience personal success that was not dependent on their husband's position. This was in contrast to those less-educated women married to men in public positions who were able to manipulate their husbands' positions to better their family. In an interview, Tioulong Samura (MP wife of opposition leader Sam Rainsy) insisted, "Women who are more educated are in the minority and must work twice as hard as they would need to in a more compatible environment." Tioulong Samura's stress on the need for women to be educated to improve their status is supported by the following two case studies illustrating the need for women to attain a minimum of high-school education or professional training to adequately support their families and participate in the development of Cambodia. The first case describes a privileged woman who achieved a high level of responsibility in the government:

This woman was the daughter of a wealthy general who insisted that his daughters be educated the same as their brothers. She was educated to year 12 prior to 1975, and lost her father when he was killed by the KR in 1976. Under the Pol Pot regime she was forced to marry an illiterate farmer whom she despised. After liberation, she left her husband and moved back to Phnom Penh with her mother in order to build up a family business. Here she married a man considerably younger than herself (unusual in Cambodia), and became involved in politics. Her connections with powerful people, and her strong belief in everything her father taught her, enabled her to achieve a high level in the government, with her husband as her devoted secretary. She believes her father's strong belief in her ability to be successful is her driving power. "My father believed in me without reservation. I

never had any reason to believe that I could not succeed in whatever I decided to do. Now I want to be an example to other women and encourage changes in attitudes that will help them achieve education and assist in the development of our country. I was lucky to have a family background that made me strong and allowed me to be educated. For women to participate in politics, they need education, determination, and courage. It is my duty to promote women to assist in the development of the country.” (Personal interview with Undersecretary of State, MOSA, 1997)

Case two (my landlady in 1996) was an intelligent, orphaned child with little schooling who grew up to achieve skills-training under the Vietnamese, equipping her for work in the Phnom Penh Post Office. More entrepreneurial than her government employed husband, she strongly believed in the need for education of women.

This woman was one of four sisters orphaned under the Khmer Rouge. Although she had only received three years primary school education before 1975, as a fourteen-year-old under the Vietnamese occupation she was sent for skills training in Ho Chi Minh City post office. Being an intelligent woman, she eventually acquired an excellent position in the Phnom Penh post office, where she was able to learn English. Her position opened up the opportunity for her to supplement her meager government salary by organizing a home (landline) telephone business where neighbours paid her for its use. It also gave her the chance to organize the small scale export of dried fish and other items precious to Cambodians abroad, and with the profits she made she was able to build a house big enough to provide rental accommodation for English-speaking visitors such as myself. “After the death of my parents the Vietnamese came and helped orphans like us. I am very grateful to have been lucky enough to be sent to Vietnam and receive some training that allowed me to get a job working in the government post office.” (Personal interview, 1996)

7.7 Poverty Alleviation Programs

With lack of education and poverty seen as the main barriers to development and women’s empowerment in post-war Cambodia, the international community strongly supported SSWA as the vehicle for promotion of gender equity. However, political

indifference and lack of education, training and resources combined with cultural impediments to grasping the concepts of gender and empowerment severely affected its performance. Because SSWA staff lacked the necessary skill and ministry funds were almost nonexistent, it received outside support from NGOs including UNICEF, CDRI, CIDSE and OXFAM, and UNIFEM (explanation of acronyms, p.XVI) to assist in preparing the Cambodian Women's Code (SSWA, 1994b). By incorporating SSWA staff into their own programs, these organisations were able to provide them with research and project training. However, because the government believed that there were no women suited to the position, SSWA was headed by a male member of the minority Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), H.E. Keat Sokhun. The choice was especially demeaning to SSWA staff, especially when Sokhun represented them at the Fourth World Conference for Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Although women I spoke to within SSWA deeply resented having a man with no experience of or commitment to gender representing them, it was in fact the conservative Vice-Minister, Ms Im Run, a staunch member of the more powerful CPP (strongly connected to its communist past) who made most of the decisions. In line with Hun Sen, Im Run believed a male leader for women's affairs was not a problem because there were no competent women available. The combination of the appointment of a male leader and a strongly conservative female undersecretary who denigrated women's capabilities neatly captures the prevailing Cambodian attitude to women's potential to contribute to the society. Chaumeau (1995) pointed out that FUNCINPEC Advisor to Women's Affairs Mu Sochua was clearly the most suitable person to head the new ministry. But as an overseas-educated expatriate slandered in the press for 'looking down' on Khmer women, there was, as Chaumeau foresaw, little chance of Sochua convincing the government of the importance of empowering women. Visiting the Secretariat in early 1996, I saw first hand how SSWA had inherited a clumsy, inefficient staff and system. The underpaid and under-trained staff of around 200 were only at work for a couple of hours a day as they needed to subsidise their low salaries with other work. When SSWA was upgraded to Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) in 1997, the traditional, hierarchical organisation remained structurally weak and politically dominated by the patriarchal CPP. Australian consultant, Kate Frieson (1998:43) reported that directly after the coup in 1997, with many

opposition MPs leaving the country in fear of their lives, SSWA/MOWA had deteriorated even further under the CPP interim minister, Ms Im Run.

As discussed in Chapter One, the responsibility of MOWA was to present the government with GAD policies, liaise with other ministries on gender mainstreaming, and oversee the programs of all women's NGOs. The most active of these was Khemera, whose programs included literacy training, community-based health services and family support. Other NGOs provided: temporary shelter to abused women; research, advocacy and public education about physical abuse; human rights and legal support; awareness of women's issues; and awareness of women in the media. As a distinguished representative of Cambodian women at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference of Women, in Beijing, Princess Norodom Sihanouk proposed clear directions for MOWA: to prioritise the education of women and girl children, and provide economic empowerment for women in order to gain ground amongst grassroots women and build their strength. However, as Kate Frieson (1998:41) pointed out, because the international push for women and gender equity was running independently to the national goals, MOWA was caught in a political backlash. Although MOWA had very little capacity to do anything in their own right, as the legal overseer of women's NGOs (where 'the lion's share' of international aid was going to Phnom Penh), it stated that critical areas of concern were to:

Enable women to break the vicious circle of poverty

Remove gender disparities in schools and provide equal opportunities for both sexes

Adopt integrated, adequately funded health-care services for women

Lobby for gender parity in peace negotiations and conflict resolution

Eliminate laws and regulations that discriminate against women in economic and work activities

Support inclusion of women's status and rights in all human rights planning, and

Increase the proportion of women in decision-making, planning and management in sustainable development and prevention of environmental degradation.

(UNDP, 2001b)

Under the auspices of MOWA a range of programs, mainly in the cities, was instituted to address the high level of need among disadvantaged women and the disabled in post-war Cambodia. Out of a population of approximately 10,200,000 people, 100,000 suffered impaired mobility, 100,000 were blind and 120,000 deaf. Severely disabled people constituted three percent of the population. Although there were no statistics for severe mental disabilities, these were estimated to be around 35,000 (Peebles, 1998). In 1996 I visited a range of income-generating programs in Phnom Penh providing disadvantaged women and the disabled with training in traditional and imported skills. These included Khemera, Tabitha, Don Bosco, Wat Than and several small commercial training-projects in Phnom Penh and Kandal. Trainees mainly produced souvenirs and goods that could be sold to tourists or exported, utilising weaving, sewing, leather-craft and basketry. In her 1997 examination of poverty reduction strategies for women and vulnerable groups in Cambodia, Peebles (ADB,1998) conducted interviews with the staff of forty skills-training programs, as well as a range of skills-training participants and graduates. She found that although some women had been taking part in agricultural and business vocational courses, the majority were concentrated in lower-earning traditional areas including sewing, services, handicrafts, and home economics. Most of these projects were only available in large urban centres.

Further to these programs, Duggan and Daroesman (1998:53) noted that new investors in urban areas, particularly in garment industries and service sub-sectors, had been providing a range of in-house technical training and education for their employees. The ILO was a key player in supporting these initiatives. SSWA (1995:42a) pointed out that new apprenticeships were also available for a fee in private shops, including tailoring and hairdressing. Added to this, I saw a few private typing and computing courses becoming available in Phnom Penh in 1997, but these were expensive and only about five percent of the students were women. In the civil service, job-training opportunities lasting several weeks were being offered, but few women were taking them up because they could not afford time away from their families. In the same way, skills-training opportunities for farmers in rural areas were taken up by the men, because women were expected to stay behind to run the farm and care for the children.

To address disadvantage in rural areas, the international community offered opportunities for poverty-alleviation through micro-credit programs and 'Grameen cow banks' (based on the principle that a farmer is given a cow but must return the first calf to the bank). However, only a very small percentage of the population had access and although these projects were meant to be 'gender sensitive' and important for assisting in women's income-generation they were not specifically 'women's projects'. Setting up micro-credit usually started with a self-selected group of five to fifteen mutually trusted individuals wishing to take out loans approaching a lending NGO. The NGO facilitated the program, usually using group meetings as an opportunity for literacy training, health and nutrition education, and basic business training. Members were encouraged to support each other and resolve differences in a group situation. However, in her 1997 research into micro-credit programs in rural Cambodia, Rasmussen (2001:52) reported inequity problems related to traditional cultural practices that blocked successful implementation of some programs. For example, in the case of a pig bank in a village in Kratie, the Cambodian tradition of only one man being allowed to own a boar and charge for impregnation of sows meant that he had the monopoly and could charge whatever he wanted. As this boar owner was also the local dealer to whom villagers directly sold their fattened pigs, without transport, they had little option but to continue to sell them to him at below market prices. With both power and money, this man was able to pay local police and the provincial government to protect him in maintaining his unfair practices. Other villagers attempting to break into the market were harassed by the police, so VSO (the supporting NGO) had to pressure the local government to cooperate in eliminating the corruption, enabling them to donate a boar to a villager involved in their pig bank program.

Rasmussen (2001:178) also reported the problem of abuse of power by some group leaders, and late repayment of loans. In one case a credit group leader absconded with all the savings of the group; in another a leader lent money to a member's relative in the member's name. Another program, 'Buddhism for Development', in the troubled area of Battambang, confronted different problems related to unsustainable policies in times of drought, leading to members not being able to repay their loans. Rasmussen found that instead of the lending programs being wound back when crops were failing, they were

increased. Due to NGOs pushing to give out loans, some farmers were persuaded to overcapitalise on development projects they could not afford to repay. Related to this, Barbaro of OXFAM found that micro-credit had become a revenue-spinner for competing NGOs who used it to mobilise people when they needed more funding (Green, 2002). Thus, without forward planning, participants in the micro-credit program were soon forced to sell their animals and even their land to repay their debts. In circumstances such as these, several members found that their quality of life had worsened since joining the program (Rasmussen, 2001:192-3).

A specific gender failure related to the implementation of micro-credit for rural poverty-alleviation in Cambodia was that many very poor women felt totally excluded. Rasmussen (2001:174) reported that these women simply did not have enough money to save any equity. They complained that the credit leaders “only lend to their friends and family”. Another problem appeared to be that some ‘blatantly wealthy’ women controlling programs were in a position of considerable economic and social power (therefore seen as a ‘patron’), and clearly biased to supporting local middle-class women. In Kompong Cham Province, I found that programs had a majority of males, with poor women missing out because they felt uncomfortable speaking up in a group. Some interviewees (1997) told me that, apart from general mistrust, there was also a certain amount of social stigma attached to accessing NGO programs, meaning that even if women had access to assistance, many were not availing themselves of the benefits offered. For example, my widowed friend who would really have benefited from these programs, refused to avail herself of the excellent training and credit assistance offered, fearing her family would ‘lose face’ if she was seen to be turning to an NGO for help. Her 18-year-old son told me, “I would never allow my mother to go to an NGO for help”. He said this even though the family was approaching destitution. It was more important to them to keep their family reputation (based on a more affluent past where the mother had been a gold-seller in the market) than to seek an alternative way to establish a stable financial future. Clearly, addressing these cultural impediments would be needed for effective and equitable development in Cambodia.

7.8 Trust Building Projects

A document prepared by the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC, 1995) revealed concerns about the ways divisions in the coalition government were affecting the morale of the people. The report argued that in order to transcend the old divisions and activate a majority to strive for peaceful prosperity and justice, the long and arduous task of developing meaningful partnerships between the government and intergovernmental agencies at all levels must be undertaken. The CCC were seeking alternative ways to tackle poverty-alleviation through “people centred development and government involvement” in the adoption of policies that were sensitive to local culture and knowledge. It promoted community solidarity and the involvement of local people in all decision-making processes, with the integration of disadvantaged groups into poverty-alleviation projects a priority. The CCC saw projects aimed at building trust and reciprocity at community level, and with access to support networking, as the most sustainable way to achieve development and women’s empowerment in the traumatised cultural environment.

Within the academic community, there was a similar push to ground progress and development within a Cambodian rather than an imported conceptual framework. At a 1996 seminar for Cambodian Social Science academics at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Dr Suzantha Goonatilake challenged Cambodians to stop seeing themselves in terms of Western understandings and begin to ‘rethink their position’ by analysing the analysers. What this challenge might mean for the traumatised, fearful, uneducated rural majority who have not been taught to question anything is of course a moot point, but it would certainly involve a process of trust-building and healing with NGOs, government and intergovernmental agencies identified by the CCC, listening to their stories and their understandings and ideas.

This philosophy underpinned the ‘Tabitha’ project, one of the most sensitive skills-training enterprise for women I researched in this period, and initiated by a Western woman. The project provided a highly successful program for destitute widows by

challenging them to respect themselves. Here the women were trained to make beautifully designed and embroidered highly marketable Western-style toys and household soft-goods. Profits were given back to the women who, as they improved in their skills were able to earn as much as US\$400 a month or more. In this way they were able to provide for their families and send their children to school, as well as receive support from their fellow workers. The program-manager told me the reason for the high success rate of Tabitha was that to be accepted into the program, the women had to have ‘a dream.’ To illustrate her point she told me the following story:

One extremely poor woman with a young daughter came to ask if she could join the program. The program manager asked, “What do you want? What would you like to have?” The poor woman said, “I don’t know”, so she was told she would not be eligible until she had a wish. The next day the poor woman returned and asked again if she could join the program. This time she got angry when the manager asked her to say what she wanted. The poor woman replied, “I don’t know - what do you think I’m worth?” The manager said, “I can’t tell you what you’re worth, only you know that”, so she went away again. The third day the poor woman came back and asked, “Am I worth a towel?” The reply was, “I don’t know – do you think you’re worth a towel?” Finally, the poor woman said, “I want to own a towel.” This time the program manager did not send her away but exclaimed, “Good, you have a dream to own a towel. Now you can join our program.” That day the poor woman moved in with the other women in the program, bringing her nine-year-old daughter with her. However, the next day the woman found that ‘Tabitha’ was not only a place to receive training, but a place for moral and physical support. A policeman came to the NGO quarters, demanding the woman’s daughter. She was terrified, but refused. The policeman kept returning day after day, harassing her for her daughter. The woman refused each time. Finally he came to threaten her with a gun, but all the women rallied around and protected the mother and daughter, so the policeman gave up and stopped bothering her any more. After that, the poor woman said that if she had not been with the other women, she would have had to give up her daughter. (Personal interview, Tabitha 1996)

This wise NGO understood the low self-esteem of this extremely poor woman, and knew that she would have no success in training her unless she had dealt with the basic issue of

deciding she was worth something, even if that something was only a towel, thus forcing her to change her mind-set and think of the future.

Another sustainable, culturally sensitive project initiated for skills-training for women (apart from the internationally sponsored NGOs such as Khemera) was one initiated by an educated Cambodian woman, Phaly Nuon (Solomon, 2000). The work of this woman earned her a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. Phaly Nuon's father was an educated government bureaucrat in the 1960s, and she had attended a privileged French-speaking school in Phnom Penh. Prior to the arrival of the Khmer Rouge she was employed as a skilled secretary in the Treasury and Chamber of Commerce and was married with three children. Under the Khmer Rouge she was separated from her husband and survived persecution by fleeing to the jungle for almost three and a half years. Her twelve-year-old daughter was raped and killed by soldiers, and her baby died of starvation. She and her second child managed to survive and after the Vietnamese invasion she was reunited with her now brain-damaged husband. This small family was placed in a border camp near Thailand where Phaly Nuon was struck by the dreadful state of many traumatised women, paralyzed and unable to care for their children. Here she was able to use her foreign-language skills to obtain as much traditional medicine and Western anti-depressants as possible, to help the women. After returning from the border camp in the late 1980s, Phaly went on to set up an orphanage and a centre for depressed women in Phnom Penh. Here she achieved astonishing success in resuscitating women whose mental afflictions were so severe that Western specialists believed they were beyond help. Phaly Nuon explained that in order to help each woman feel acknowledged, she initially spent about three hours listening to their stories:

“First, I teach them to forget. We have exercises we do each day, so that each day they can forget a little more of the things they can never forget entirely ... I try to distract them with music or with embroidery or weaving ... When their minds are cleared of what they have forgotten ... I teach them to work. Whatever kind of work they want to do, I will find a way to teach it to them ... when they have mastered work, at last, I teach them to love ... I take them there [to a steam bath] so that they can become clean, and I teach them how to give one another manicures and

pedicures and how to take care of their fingernails, because doing that makes them feel beautiful ... It rescues them from physical isolation ... they have learned how to make friends ... they begin to tell their stories to one another ... At the end ... I teach them that these three skills – forgetting, working and loving are part of one enormous whole ... when they come to understand this ... they are ready to go into the world again.” (Solomon, 2000:32-37)

The lessons to be derived from the above two examples of independent, trust-building women’s projects were repeated in a 1998 discussion about community-development with Pan Putheavy of the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA). Emphasising that sustainable development in Cambodia involved healing and trust-building, Putheavy spoke of conditions in Cambodia making community-development not only more necessary, but also more difficult. Putheavy had worked in 21 villages in six districts with IWDA since the mid-1980s, helping to carry out projects including: food and income security for poor rural women and their families; vegetable garden projects; and education in water supply and water use. IWDA projects supported human resource development by providing formal and informal project-management and community-development training among staff. Putheavy stressed that, apart from the basic issue of food security, the women were not only exhausted and traumatised, but they faced problems such as domestic violence and ill-health, and IWDA’s success reflected not only the strong network it had established with MOWA but also the good relationship based on trust it had built among village women.

Another notable example of a Cambodian based community-development project that was having some success in rebuilding trust and reciprocity among a highly traumatised rural community was Meas Nee’s ‘Krom Akphiwat Phum’ project. In a small book by Meas Nee (with sister Joan Healy as listener and scribe, 1994), this Buddhist Cambodian shared his personal story, explaining the pain, trauma and shame faced by himself and others, claiming that the first step to healing is to be heard and to listen to others. Nee maintained that the Krom Akphiwat Phum village development project was trying to build a way of working that was not copied from the way of any other country.

According to Nee, “The knowledge that is needed is in the village already and we know that the best way for us to learn is from the people there. They are teaching us the way” (p.57). Committed to personal, social and economic development at the village level and based on Cambodian understandings of social cohesion, this NGO was led by a gender-balanced core group of six men and six women and operated from a simple building in the grounds of Wat Kundung, a Buddhist temple close to the troubled area of Battambangville. From this centre the men and women of the core group travelled by motor-bike to the villages where they worked, staying with the people and becoming part of their village life. This was despite suffering regular terrorist attacks from the KR and other violent groups, and a serious lack of food.

Later in 1998, while completing his PhD at La Trobe University, Nee explained to me, “As trust gradually strengthens in the villages, scores of creative and highly practical projects come into existence – all of them generated by the initiatives of the local people.” Back in 1995, more than 21 villages and 3,500 groups had become involved in this community-development movement, and the project was being taken seriously by researchers such as Bridget Emerson (1997), who used their example to argue that it was unsuitable to apply models imported from other countries (mainly Latin America) in Cambodia. As Emerson recognised, accepted community-development theory rested on assumptions that were not necessarily inapplicable to Cambodia, but the short-term goal-oriented developments of so many funding NGOs were leaving little space for the necessary healing opportunities. According to Emerson, the cycle of trauma (including domestic violence, land-mines, broken relationships, inability to escape conflict zones, ill-health and economic hardship) needed be challenged because it impeded empowerment and lead to a return to poverty. What Emerson advocated was a return to traditional support systems based on a re-conceptualised “socially engaged Buddhism” (p.46), and a possible renewal of the *preah sang* (male Buddhist clergy). This would entail educating monks as well as *yeay chee* (Buddhist nuns) to become an integral part of a culturally suitable development where the majority of mature-aged people were women.

7.9 Women in Factories

Although a few NGOs had been fortunate enough to build up communities that were able to work together in a sustainable way and attract international funding, most were still struggling to survive. With free trade coming to Cambodia in the early 1990s, and Cambodia gaining Most Favoured Nation status (MFN), the negative impact of international companies investing in garment factories largely staffed by young female workers from rural areas,⁷ went largely unnoticed in the media. Working in these factories was taking young women away from their homes where they traditionally helped their mothers in rural work. They were being exposed to low pay, harsh working conditions and abuse. As exploitation of workers was revealed by the mid-1990s, increasing publicity pushed the National Assembly to draft a controversial new Labour Law (395 articles). In 1996 this brought Cambodian laws on trade unions and labour standards on par with international practices. Only five days after the formation of Cambodia's first trade union, the Free Trade Union of Khmer Workers, the media reported numerous stories on striking garment workers pushing for improved conditions. These initiatives were headed by Sam Rainsy, leader of the opposition Khmer Nation Party (KNP), which was to become the most feared and hated opposition party of the CPP. Four thousand Gennon Garment Factory workers rallied outside their factory west of Phnom Penh and walked five kilometres to protest outside the National Assembly. Following fifteen days of negotiations and a second five-day strike, the government intervened. The situation was resolved, with the workers securing their rightful US\$40 a month, sick and maternity leave, health-care coverage and pay for work-time lost during the strike (Johnson, 1996). During the negotiations, a worried delegation from the mother company in Hong Kong was hastily despatched to Cambodia, amid warnings that the company "may lose our competitiveness and investors will go to Vietnam, Laos or China".

⁷ A 1995 report from the Khmer Women's Voice Centre indicated that Cambodia had the highest percentage of women in the workplace at 55.7%, with women making up 75% of factory workers (Johnson, 1997).

As strikes demanding better conditions spread to other factories, the government, fearing a spread in unrest and a loss of investment within the country, sent police in fire-trucks to turn water-jets onto 500 predominantly female strikers (Decherd, 1997). This did not deter the opposition from encouraging the exploited workers, and three days later the police fired a “fuselage of bullets into the air” and beat up several KNP members “to prevent them from encouraging workers to resume their strike” (Agence France Presse, 1997b). At the same time, the continuing encouragement of KNP was also resulting in demonstrations by squatters and starving farmers who had been illegally evicted from their land.⁸ KNP were giving out the message, “Things can be different”. With a burning candle as its logo, intent on challenging apathy and traditional Buddhist acceptance, the KNP presented a clear challenge to the hegemony of the ruling elite. As political tensions accelerated, in June 1997 Hun Sen shocked the nation by stepping up the violence against garment workers demonstrating at a rally outside the National Assembly. He carefully orchestrated a multiple grenade attack, which narrowly missed Sam Rainsy and killed and wounded a number of female garment workers. Not many days after this, heavy bomb blasts were heard coming from the direction of the airport as electricity and phones were cut, and rumours rapidly spread that the airport had been bombed. I witnessed the terror of people reliving the day the KR marched into the city in 1975 as they rushed from work to find their children, resulting in mayhem and massive traffic jams. I believe this hoax was initiated to desensitise the people to shock due to the imminent CPP coup.

7.10 The 1997 Hun Sen Coup

Following these events I made a short trip to witness the spectacular, noisy celebrations of Prince Charles handing Hong Kong back to mainland China. Two days after I had returned to Phnom Penh I was issued a report from the Australian Embassy calling on all expatriate Australians to go home and wait for further instructions. Hun Sen

⁸ The KNP maintained that one in five Cambodian families had their land stolen in this period.

had begun an equally noisy, bloody coup⁹, to rid himself of the troublesome First Prime Minister and his FUNCINPEC party. Having been previously warned of the need to always have three days supply of food and water on hand, I went home to wait. Living in a Toul Kauk villa behind the Royal University of Phnom Penh in the north of the city, my short street, situated between the huge villas of opposing army generals, experienced ongoing missile exchange in daylight hours for the next two days. As an embassy warden, I was able to have direct radio-contact to hear what was going on. Tanks were being blown up (one in the street behind my house) and fires were burning in many parts of the city. My landlady and her family living at the back of my villa were terrified as the house behind us burned down, and our next-door neighbour piled up his furniture to barricade his front gate. On the third day I saw many people driving motor-bikes past my front door carrying family, household goods and even mattresses, rushing to who knows where. The embassy instructed me to get in my car, and gave strict directions so that I could take shelter in the embassy compound, but soldiers with missiles strapped to their backs refused to let me pass. Carrying a suitcase packed with a few clothes and my precious research material and computer, I found my way through back streets to take refuge in the protected Australian Embassy compound. Later I found that CPP soldiers, busily looting and hunting down FUNCINPEC party members to torture and murder, had bypassed my villa and looted the barricaded house of my next-door neighbour (who had already lived through the Pol Pot experience in Phnom Penh). My Khmer-Canadian friend and work-colleague was the first to be assassinated. As a part-time journalist he had naively ventured out to take photographs of soldiers looting a motor-bike shop on the Pochentong Boulevard near my home. The population went into shock as assassinations of FUNCINPEC members continued. At the same time, all members of opposition parties who could do so (including FUNCINPEC's Mu Sochua, and BLDP and KNP members) fled the country. With thousands of Vietnamese soldiers inside the country, the international community froze, taking stock of where to go next, and to the dismay of aid workers Germany and USAID suspended funding for projects including farm production

⁹ The 1997 coup was financed by Cambodia's richest businessmen, Teng Bunma, narco-trafficker and unofficial head of the Chinese community in Cambodia, in return for major timber concessions. (United States Congress, 1997)

and income-generation, as well as terminating human rights training and the strengthening of primary education (McAuliff, 1998).

Following the coup, Hun Sen was firmly in control. News sources revealed a complex situation where Rannaridh had inflamed Hun Sen by making secret peace deals with the KR. The sequence of actions and reactions that followed reflected the unresolved political power-struggle that had negatively affected the country's development process since the 1993 elections. Reports revealed that before the coup Rannaridh's supporters had uncovered large drug-exporting activities linked to Hun Sen. Furthermore, Rannaridh had been secretly negotiating a peace deal with the KR that included absorbing defectors to bolster his own army. To curtail these threats to CPP power, the coup legitimised ongoing assassinations of FUNCINPEC and opposition members, and encouraged KR defectors to join CPP. With Rannaridh out of the country, FUNCINPEC Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ung Huot, was invited to be interim first Prime Minister in place of Rannaridh until new elections were arranged. This move maintained stability and prevented the acceleration of violence. At the same time, a sham KR jungle-trial of Pol Pot took place. This was followed by his suspicious death and quick cremation, officially marking the end of the genocidal KR Regime. In this situation, although some international donors withdrew from the country, China quickly moved in to help fill the donor-gap. In MOWA, conservative CPP Undersecretary of State Im Run was now in charge. As a result, women's NGOs were facing the dilemma of breaking trust with their clients and leaving Cambodia, or staying on in a situation where they were not only struggling with no support from MOWA and divisions of loyalty between themselves, but with divisions between their funding organisations. It was now reduced to monitoring the progress of the coming elections and hoping for legitimisation of the government to open up the way to resume working towards the improved coordination of aid programs.

In the three years following the democratisation of Cambodia, in 1994 international providers had worked to alleviate poverty and improve the status of women through supporting a wide range of NGOs and SSWA/MOWA, as well as supporting the education of girls through MOEYS. However, as this chapter has argued, they had been

hampered not only by the volatile socio-political environment and systemic gender-bias against women, but also by their own short-term, product-oriented Western-based policies and cultural understandings. The unprecedented move of women striking to improve their work-conditions in the burgeoning garment factories, backed by the leader of the opposition, Sam Rainsy (KNP), were strenuously resisted by the CPP. Mounting levels of CPP violence further fuelled by Rannaridh (FUNCINPEC) aiming to strengthen his power base, precipitated Hun Sen's coup, bringing to a halt the donor aid programs for women. At the same time, several locally organised gender-sensitive, trust-building projects presenting a more sustainable approach to development at local levels were emerging to challenge the mainstream, Western-initiated projects. Although the donor community was beginning to gain a clearer understanding of the conservative socio-cultural issues hindering the implementation of equitable GAD policies in Cambodia, their position worsened with the Hun Sen coup, making it impossible for them to coordinate strategies to facilitate the changes in government needed to improve equitable development. The following chapter takes up the renewed push to implement sustainable gender mainstreaming in the period 1998-2000, with Cambodia struggling to regain credibility and rebuild itself in the aftermath of the coup and the end of civil war.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT 1998-2000

8.0 Introduction

In the politically troubled 1994-97 period, Western International NGOs had been working in a difficult environment to promote Gender and Development (GAD) and establish poverty-alleviation programs. Following the 1997 Hun Sen coup, fighting between FUNCINPEC and CPP continued on the border but civil war had ended and hitherto inaccessible areas of the country were opened up. Although the CCP and their supporters considered Cambodia as more politically stable following the coup, donors reacted negatively, delaying project funding, ‘narrowing the pipeline’ but not cutting it (Stephens, 1999). The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in response to the illegal logging which had helped both sides of the government fill their coffers and pay off compliant army generals, had already been withholding loans. Now, largely in protest at CPP inaction in solving the forty or more extra-judicial killings of FUNCINPEC party members and their supporters during and following the coup, the IMF withdrew funding altogether. However, as the *South China Morning Post* (1998) pointed out, withdrawing funding would adversely affect the most vulnerable, the majority women and children: “In handing out inflexible recipes for economic recovery, the World Bank and IMF are guilty of inflicting suffering on the most powerless sections of these communities.” With the region reeling from the ‘Asian Economic Crisis’ and Mu Sochua fleeing the country with other FUNCINPEC and opposition members, considerations of GAD were put on the back burner until elections were organised.

The July 1998 elections resulted in the return of many Members of Parliament ousted in the coup and a coalition of CPP and FUNCINPEC with Hun Sen as Prime Minister and Mu Sochua (FUNCINPEC) as Minister of Women’s Affairs. Initially the political climate during this period gave some cause for optimism, but despite efforts to legitimise CCP control and regain international credibility, sustainable economic and political reform continued to elude the country, and no catalysts for true change appeared

(Sorpong Peou, 1999:20). Donors were impatient with the ‘beggarly role’ the government was continuing to play: “They like to flaunt their sovereignty, but they are pretty quick to act poor and bring up the past when they want aid” (Cochrane, 1999). Although the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (supported by international donors) strengthened its policies following the installation of Mu Sochua, and the first national campaign against trafficking of women and children was launched, the government offered little support. Overall, the country remained in a state of uncertainty, with increasing inflation and economic growth dropping from seven to two percent due to the continuing reduction in aid at a time when Cambodia was facing increasing problems of food security.

Although there was increasing awareness among some NGOs and international providers as to the complexity of difficulties facing Cambodia, their inflexible, outcome-oriented policies remained a barrier to successful implementation of GAD. As this chapter will argue, the situation facing women and the poor majority was negatively affected by the increasingly hegemonic power structure of the ruling party, CPP. As discussed in Chapter Two (p.15), despite WID/GAD policies and projects of MOWA and the international providers, Cambodia’s achievement in gender equality and women’s empowerment remained the lowest in Asia (UNIFEM, 2003:20), with a human poverty index second only to Bangladesh (Ministry of Planning, 2000:5). This chapter demonstrates that corruption, illegal land seizures and worsening weather conditions exacerbated by illegal logging, were resulting in increasing levels of poverty and ill-health in rural areas. Although access to education and health-care were seen as the key to improving the status of women, rural health services remained almost non-existent and girls’ participation in education was now only 50 percent of boys’. Similarly, women’s salaries were averaging only 50 percent of those earned by men. Added to this, corruption and lawlessness meant that increasing family violence remained unchallenged and poor women were unprotected against abuse of the rich and powerful. At the same time, however, the growth of an internationally supported labour union representing the largely female garment-sector workforce was challenging the government and attracting further violent police reprisals. But, as this chapter argues, the period 1998-2000 also saw the development of several new, integrated community-development projects implemented at

local levels, building trust among the people and encouraging input from the poorest women at grass-roots level.

In this period the parlous situation of women was exacerbated by the mass repatriation of almost 40,000 refugees from three border camps in Thailand following the surrender of the Khmer Rouge and formation of the new coalition government, and an undetermined number of internally displaced persons returning to their original home areas. As a result, reintegration, food security and land mines remained intractable problems for the immediate future (DFAT, 1999) and international press reports pointed to food shortages and starvation, increasing poverty, political violence and violations of human rights, and child malnutrition rates ten points higher than those in North Korea. With a GDP per capita of around US\$300, the country remained amongst the poorest in the world, with social indicators among the worst in Asia. According to AusAID (2002), the majority of rural Cambodians remained desperately poor, with the most disadvantaged groups being internally displaced persons, returned refugees and war widows.

8.1 Declining Situation of Women

Despite the two billion US\$ in foreign aid that had been poured into Cambodia since 1991, Cambodia remained one of the world's poorest countries in 1998. A report in 1998 found that 40 percent of the population was living below the poverty line (Matthews, 1998) and Women's Affairs Minister, Mu Sochua (2000b), citing a World Food Program (WFP) survey, accepted that the reason for the extreme poverty of widows in particular was due to their lack of assets, lack of power and lack of knowledge. The Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2002) found that the primary concerns of people living in poverty were being hungry and having no assets. The 1998 Cambodia Human Development Report (Ministry of Planning), focussing on the situation of women and gender inequality, revealed "very high levels of deprivation", especially among women living in rural areas. Further characteristics of their poverty included: too many children; ill health; lack of kinship support; remoteness; lack of micro-credit; lack of drinkable

water; lack of irrigation systems; and lack of confidence in local and provincial administration (AusAID, 2002). Clearly, there was a growing gap between the country's rich and poor, with the top 20 percent of the largely urban wealthy consuming 2.5 times more than the bottom, mostly rural-dwelling, 20 percent. The report showed that women were faring the worst in Southeast Asia with the highest female share of the labour force earning up to 50 percent less than men in the same occupation. Added to this, up to 50 percent of families were being cared for by a single female. The 1998 population census revealed that among the 30-59 year-old population, 95 percent of males were married, compared with only 76 percent of women. Moreover, according to field worker and academic, Liz Hoban (discussion, 2003), the increasing migration of men to the city and elsewhere to find work was worsening the problem for women. Commenting on the Human Development Report, Minister of Women's Affairs Mu Sochua (1998a) noted, "Men spend more on entertainment – bars and brothels – but women will generally consider the welfare of their children before anything else". In the absence of men, women not only put the welfare of their children as a priority, but they were also having fewer children. As a result, even though women earned less, in female-headed households where women were over 39 years of age, a 1998 UNDP report found that they actually fared better than male-headed households.

The inequitable situation facing women at home had parallels in other domains. The 1998 Human Development Report (MOP) pointed out that, following the elections, the number of women with ministerial rank had fallen from seven to two among a total of 122 legislators (see Figure 3 below). Women were faring a little better in managerial and professional positions at 13 percent, although this was still very low in relation to their high representation in the labour force. A 1999 study on the low participation of women in leadership positions in Cambodia conducted by seven Khmer women in anticipation of the forthcoming first commune elections, revealed that although 33 percent of women in Khmer families were earning more income than their husbands, low participation of women in government leadership prevailed at every level (Women's Media Centre of Cambodia, 2000).

Institutions	Number of Women	Total
Senate members	12	122 members
Parliament members	8	62 members
Ministers	2	27 ministers
Provincial/Municipal governors	0	23 leaders

(Source, H.E. Maen Saman, 1999)

Figure 3. Women in Government

The Women's Media Centre study (2000:14) was based on interviews with 48 government leaders, and 90 questionnaires administered to a wide range of people within the community (including monks, housewives, students, motodop drivers, civil servants, teachers, police and others). Results showed that changes of economic management from a planned to a free-market system, inequality of power sharing, poverty, lack of necessary services and lack of resources, as well as a lack of strong determination in raising funds to support women's development, all contributed to Khmer women encountering the following problems:

- increasing lack of jobs
- increasing rates of prostitution and HIV/AIDS
- decreasing agricultural incomes
- poor health and a high maternal death rate
- high rate of illiteracy
- increasing shortage of land
- increasing abuses of women's rights
- decreasing employment in government work.

The majority of respondents "voiced support for electing women", and women respondents believed that the areas of health, family crisis and education all required women's participation. They also believed there would be benefits from women's participation in Commune Leadership (Women's Media Centre of Cambodia, 2000:27-29). My experience with Cambodian women was that they have enormous work

endurance and survival capabilities. Many have excellent business know-how, and those lucky enough to become educated could balance that knowledge with prevailing cultural understandings of gender. Meas Nee and Healy cite a case in point:

Sokun has been working as a head of the Department of Women's Affairs in a provincial office. She is married and has two children. Her husband is an army general. At work she is quite active in teaching gender and development. During an interview she elaborated her belief that all women must have rights, not only basic human rights but also the right to join in politics. She also argued strongly that gender equality should be promoted in development. At home however, she admitted that being a housewife she should 'make herself to be a virtuous woman', meaning that she had to serve her husband, following the culture of Cambodian women. She further stressed that in the family a woman should fulfill her role even though it is restrictive. She says this has nothing to do with gender equality. "It is our tradition of being a good woman".
(Meas Nee and Healy, 2003:13)

At a formal level, the right of women to 'join in politics' was evident in the Prime Minister's encouragement of more women to stand for election. But the enduring lack of will of the government to encourage women's participation was clearly reflected in his rejection of donor pressure to make a quota for women in government¹. More importantly, as the list of problems enumerated by the Women's Media Centre shows, for many women the overriding concern was not with political empowerment but with the physical survival of their families.

The situation varied markedly between different parts of the country. The NGO Forum (1999) reported large disparities in poverty across villages, with 70 percent of the population described as poor in the poorest 20 percent of villages, compared with just four percent in the richest 20 percent of villages. Similar disparities occurred between regions, ranging from 22 percent living in poverty in coastal and mountainous regions,

¹ According to David Ayres, a similar issue was raised in relation to the 2002 commune elections. In this instance, the highest levels of government actually approved the quota, before it was deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council on the grounds that the constitution provides for equality between men and women, and that specifying quotas would contravene that equality (personal correspondence, 2005).

compared with 38 percent in the Tonle Sap region. In a 1998 interview conducted in Melbourne, MP Tioulong Samura (wife of opposition leader Sam Rainsy) said that not only was Cambodia one of the most heavily land-mined areas in the world, but just three in ten people had access to safe drinking-water. Over half the children under the age of five were suffering from malnutrition. She laughed when I suggested that women were achieving some improvement in their status, and lamented that with 36 percent of Cambodians living below the poverty line the situation was acute among women living in rural villages. She said that rural dwellers were particularly vulnerable to the worsening weather conditions exacerbated by widespread, illegal deforestation.

With the poorest 30 percent of households owning just twelve percent of the land (AusAID, 2002), in mid-1998 drought and pests resulted in losses of up to 75 percent of rice crops in some areas. By October, the government was being forced to take action to improve rice distribution in the countryside to help alleviate serious pockets of death and disease due to malnutrition. Sarouen (1998) reports that some rural dwellers were being driven to “desperate measures to survive, including selling their children, eating poisonous plants, becoming indebted with usurious interest rates and, in one reported case, the murder of the entire family by the mother”. The following year, August floods were reported to have forced thousands from their homes. Then, in October 2000, Postlewaite (2000) reported rain-laden typhoons affecting almost three million Cambodians as the government desperately called for international food relief. The destruction of rice paddies, irrigation projects, roads, schools and medical centres was enormous, and 252 Cambodians were reported dead, with 1.3 million in need of food, shelter and medicine. In this worsening environment, the average life expectancy of Cambodians in the late 1990s was reported to be 50 years.

In this precarious environment, women’s health was particularly affected by poor nutrition and high fertility rates. Although access to contraception had increased from seven percent in 1995 to twenty percent in 1999, the vast majority of poor women were missing out, with poor access to contraception in rural areas resulting in births being too close together and a weakening of women. This problem combined with poor access to

maternal health services contributed to the deaths of many women. The 1998 Human Development Report (MOP) revealed Cambodia as having maternal mortality rates of 500 to 100,000 live births, the highest in the Asia and Pacific region. The vast majority of rural women was preferring to use traditional birth attendants (TBAs) as they could not afford to take time out to leave their families and visit clinics. As consultant to Cambodian birthing practices, Liz Hoban explained that it would be twenty years before there would be enough trained midwives to service the Cambodian population, so the situation was not going to change rapidly. According to Hoban, Ministry of Health (MOH) policies were mistakenly excluding TBAs from national health-service delivery in response to demands from the major donors, adding to the worsening of women's overall health situation (Monash Asia lecture, November, 2003).

“Cambodia ranks in the world's lowest tier of nations in its achievements on health, nutrition and other measures of social progress” (UNICEF, 1999). Fearing the discontinuation of funding from donors, the MOH suppressed the negative results of the year 2000 Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey (funded by UNFPA, USAID & UNICEF). This survey, covering 15,000 respondents in 23 provinces, revealed that with virtually no health clinics in rural areas the overall health of Cambodians was as bad or worse than it was in the late 1980s. According to Bainbridge (2001), after more than a decade of assistance from 109 health-sector NGOs and US\$6 million of funding for annual vaccinations, this comprehensive report revealed findings that were ‘embarrassing’ to the MOH. Women were dying from common health problems including hepatitis, typhoid and uterine infections. The young were dying in greater numbers (one in eight children were dying before their fifth birthday) than they were only two years before and, with rural health services in a critical condition, “Cambodians are dying from very treatable illnesses and injuries on a daily basis and have been for decades. Poorly equipped hospitals with woefully trained staff are still the norm in every province, with the hospitals of our ... capital city also being very scary places to seek critically needed care” (Jacobson, 2002). My experiences with the MOH at this time showed that jostling for power between competing ministers resulted in loss of efficiency in the system. For example, prior to the elections, offers for specialised training and

assistance by the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne (already well established in Vietnam) had been welcomed by the then Minister for Health,² but a change of leadership following the elections meant that the project was scrapped. My informants explained that rivalry between political parties often resulted in this kind of wastage.

Poor access to health facilities due to different government funding priorities, meant there was little support to deal with the continuing high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. A MOWA discussion paper (2001a) pointed out that women bore primary responsibility for caring for family members with HIV/AIDS. As of 1998, almost forty percent of victims were married women. Furthermore, 2.4 percent of pregnant women, 42.6 percent of commercial sex-workers and 19.1 percent of indirect commercial sex workers were found to have contracted HIV. Although AIDS prevention programs had seen some improvement in the situation, the dismantling of KR strongholds in late 1997 and early 1998 saw the emergence of brothels in towns throughout the country. O'Connel and Bou Saroeun (2000) reported that by the end of the decade up to 170,000 people were HIV positive - one in 70 or 4.4 percent of the population. The number of women infected was 71,000, and children 5,400, giving the country the potential of becoming one of the worst affected in the world. As I had heard in 1996-97, many men were still frequenting brothels, only using condoms if the girl looked 'sick'. There were also increasing rates of infection among wives with infected husbands. As a result of the subsequent increasing costs to the nation (including 12,000 HIV infected orphans and work losses in industry, police and military), the government piloted a "100 percent condom use" program in brothels; though according to Dr Tia Phalla (2000), Secretary General of the National AIDS Authority, the government had few strategies to combat the problem of men not taking responsibility for the welfare of their wives and children, as women are too shy to ask their husbands to wear condoms and intervention among couples is very difficult. Following a national conference organised by the Ministry of Cults and Religions, it was apparent that Cambodian Buddhist beliefs in *kamma* (karma) were being misused to

² I initiated the visit of a representative of the Royal Children's hospital to Cambodia with Dr Peter Annear as facilitator and interpreter. The Minister of Health and director of the leading children's hospital in Phnom Penh were very excited about the offer.

avoid addressing the problem, even among some monks. The Bhikku Aggadhiro Khy Sovanratana (Aggadhiro, 2000) explained the true teachings of Buddha and pointed out that too many Cambodians were still upholding remnants of Brahmanism. According to the Bhikku, many people were unable to differentiate between the two and used fatalistic beliefs in *kamma* to ignore the problem, compounded by Cambodian leaders taking maximum advantage of these false understandings to excuse their incompetence and shortcomings in securing the health of the people in peace and economic prosperity. Those who had broken morality and become affected with HIV or AIDS as a result were wrong, the Bhikku pointed out, but women and children who had contracted the disease through no fault of their own were innocent. He called for Cambodians to “stop pointing the finger at one another” and care for all victims with gentleness.

8.2 Law of Force rather than Force of Law

The same Brahmanistic interpretations of Buddhism were also contributing to popular beliefs in the superior rights of powerful leaders to exploit the country. From 1998 to 2000, Hun Sen had total control over the country's resources, with little or no accountability. For example, in 1998 the World Bank financed a scheme to demobilise about half of Cambodia's overstuffed armed forces, and even when it became clear that millions of pounds had disappeared nothing was done (Aglionby, 2003). In controlling the radio and TV, little access was provided to other parties, even prior to the elections. United Nations monitor Grainger (1998) revealed that prior to the elections, CPP officials had appeared 448 times, second Prime Minister Hun Sen alone featuring 170 times, and King Norodom Sihanouk appeared only 35 times. Puppet first prime minister Ung Huot was given 91 appearances to advertise his newly-formed Reastr Nyum party, and leaders of the oppositions FUNCINPEC and Sam Rainsy Party appeared a total of only 14 times. I found that urban dwellers fortunate enough to have access to television and newspapers witnessed ‘strong man’ Hun Sen presenting himself as patriarchal father and ruler of his nation, and gentle, contrite husband at home. Conversely, whenever his wife Bun Rany was seen in public, she made a great show of being a demure, traditionally dressed, silent figure, always deferring to her husband. Hun Sen's assertion that his wife held absolute

power within the home seemed to be vindicated when Bun Rany had her husband's mistress, Cambodia's most revered cultural icon, the beautiful, gentle, traditionally trained performer Piseth Pelika, publicly shot in the market place (Chea Sotheacheath, 1999). Although Pelika's family, who fled to France in fear following her murder, claim to have indisputable evidence that Bun Rany is guilty (Phnom Penh Post Staff, 1999), she has never been charged. In discussion with informants, they agreed that people were grieved and angry, but as the culture does not permit them to discuss their feelings, "nowadays, most people just turn off their television whenever they see Bun Rany". With the judicial system under CPP control and impunity on the increase, lack of prosecution of the powerful meant that courts were increasingly regarded as places where justice would not be administered. Rather, they were seen as places guaranteeing the rich unhindered rights, protecting them against the poor majority. It was virtually impossible for poor women with no powerful connections or access to money to get a fair trial. Following Bun Rany's example, the Cambodian League for the Promotion of Human Rights (LICHADE) documented over twenty such jealousy attacks the following year. Although legal volunteers supported the victims in challenging the rich and powerful perpetrators, they failed to bring prosecution (Khemerajati News, 2001). Consequently, women married to powerful men were never prosecuted for their crimes, and their victims were often demonized.³

Apart from these highly publicised examples of CPP disdain for the rights of poor women, this period also saw less publicised government-sanctioned 'city clean ups' of beggars and squatters who had fled severely affected drought areas. Chea Sotheacheath and Wikfalk (1998) reported that at least three 'shadowy detention centres' had been re-opened after the elections by the Ministry of Social Welfare, to deter desperate, malnourished people from coming to the city to find work. One centre, only 23 metres long and 9 metres wide, was reported to be holding 90 poor rural people who were only allowed out at 3pm to take a bath. Escapees alleged they were being beaten, electrocuted

³ In the well publicised 1999 case of Som Rasmey, victim of an acid attack, and kidnapping of her infant daughter, the assailant was convicted but received only a two-year suspended sentence because the judge argued that the assailant was jealous and "only wanted to disfigure Rasmey's face". In this case, the assailant was the wife of a Military Intelligence Colonel who was having an affair with the victim. The victim was permanently disfigured and her baby has not been seen since. (Kumar, 2001)

and interrogated, and some women raped or forced to give sexual favours in exchange for their release. They said the centre was fenced off and patrolled by guards with dogs. There was little food, and detainees had to squat over holes in the floor to relieve themselves. Most of the prisoners were from areas so poor and food-strapped that their villages had been meeting together for several months to select able-bodied representatives to go to the capital to try to make some money to help. The concept 'abuse of human rights' was unknown in the Cambodian language.

While it was true that the Cambodian language does not have a phrase for the concept of 'abuse of human rights', within the home environment women's rights were understood in areas with access to NGO assistance and training. One such NGO, Partners Against Domestic Violence (PADV, January 1, 2001), found an increasing number of women were willing to report domestic violence. PADV registered one in five married women as victims. Half of these women sustained injuries, 50 percent of which were head injuries. However, research undertaken by the Institute of Statistics for the Ministry of Planning just a few months later found the number was as high as one in four. PADV found that although an increasing number of women were willing to report sexual abuse including repeated rape and injuries, social expectations of women to accept violent behaviour, an unwillingness of others to get involved, and a lack of support from police and judiciary, were all contributing to a worsening of the problem. According to Rudder (1999), cultural attitudes toward women had remained unchanged: while the majority of men frequented prostitutes, 80 percent would only marry virgins. Although the restrictive *chbab srei* was now officially excluded from the school curriculum, the ethic had not been excised from the society. According to Rudder, restrictive cultural expectations caused women to keep their problems from others, and fear of court corruption and intimidation combined with familial and social pressure kept them from seeking divorce. Watmough (1999), conducting research for PADV and MOWA, found that although Cambodian women held the popular view that domestic violence was caused by poverty, lack of education and alcohol, perceptions of traditional roles and responsibilities of the man within the family were equal contributors. The following extracts from comments by

health workers illustrate the way men ‘rely on’ or ‘depend on’ their powers as ‘head of household’.

“The wife asked him not to go out drinking as there was not enough money remaining for food. He got angry and beat her because she has no right to tell him what to do.” (Nurse)

“The wife asked her husband to use a condom as he often goes to drinking bars and has other women – he beat her and forced her to have sexual intercourse with him because she dared to question his actions.” (Doctor)

“The man is not accountable to anyone in the family.” (Health Centre Director)

“The wife cannot question what the man does – even the violence.” (Nurse)

“Some men do not have [a sense of] family responsibilities, they think only of their right to do what they want ... sometimes their actions, for example going out for pleasure [drink, gamble] are to remind their wife of this.” (Hospital Director)

“The husband took the food money to gamble ... he came home and there was no dinner and he beat his wife for leaving him hungry.” (Medical Assistant)

“She worked hard to sell enough cakes to buy food for the family but her husband beat her for not being in the house when he got home.” (Midwife)
(Watmough, 1999:12-13)

Married women were not the only ones being victimised by such violence. The late 1990s saw an increase in rape, especially of younger women, attributable to a number of reasons, including fear of AIDS in prostitutes. Chantol Ong of the Women’s Crisis Centre (O’Connell, S. and Yin Soeum, 2000) explained, “Victims don’t speak out because in Cambodian culture virginity is most important. No man wants to marry a woman who is not a virgin, and often the woman’s family will blame the woman for allowing the rape”. For this reason, it was common in villages for the families of rape victims to encourage the girl to marry the man who had raped her if she didn’t already

have a boyfriend. Ong said that in the three years she had worked for the Centre her staff had counselled over 300 rape victims. Only seven of these had seen their attackers tried in court, and only one had seen her rapist convicted. Because virginity remained so important for a woman wishing to marry, rape victims denied the option of marriage often turned to prostitution as a solution.

Although many women were driven to prostitution because of rape or poverty, the majority had been coerced, tricked, forced or sold by parents, relatives, neighbours or boyfriends into bonded sex slavery. According to Johnson and Kola (2000), a 2000 Licadho Human Rights report claimed that in the late 1990s about one in 60 persons in Phnom Penh were sex slaves, one third of these being children. Brothels, mostly servicing police and military, were “probably the fastest-growing forum for torture in Cambodia”. A Report on Human Rights in Cambodia (Phnom Penh Post Staff, 2001) revealed that “Cambodia continued to be plagued by trafficking of people from rural areas ... Powerful figures running trafficking networks, and their accomplices – many of them government officials, soldiers or police – were usually immune from prosecution”. Khmer aid worker and academic Seda Douglas explained that 80 percent of customers were Khmer men. She said that the government estimated the number of women being trafficked each year at around 10,000 (interview, 2000). Trafficking to Thailand and elsewhere was increasing. According to Douglas, following abduction, women were forcefully deflowered and sold to a brothel, where they were drugged, raped and tortured into compliance. She indicated the victims were not kept for more than three months in one place in case they made friends or accomplices who could help them. In this way they became totally dependent on their exploiters for survival, and frequently didn’t use condoms for fear of being accused of having AIDS. Official estimates of returns on the so-called sex industry in Cambodia were as high as US\$1.1 billion a year. Louise Brown (2000) has highlighted the cultural aspects contributing to sex slavery in Cambodia, where men are seen to have insatiable desires that no one woman can satisfy, and ‘good women’ do not normally care for sex. As discussed in Chapter 5.3, in a system where most marriages are arranged and marriageable women should be virgins, most people consider it quite normal for men to go to prostitutes, and wives dare not complain,

quoting the Cambodian proverb, “Ten rivers are not enough for one ocean”. As most women have been conditioned to be somewhat shy and passive, men use this as an excuse to frequent prostitutes. In terms of this cultural conditioning, girls stolen, lured and sold into bonded sex slavery suffer greatly because they are shy and reticent, with the result that their period of ‘seasoning’, when they are beaten into submission and acceptance of their work obligations, is drawn out. Brown (p.117) reports that she was shocked to realise that these girls, even though they were resistant to their sex work requirements, accepted what they believed they were, just commodities to be traded, Baker (2002) comments:

There is an attitude in this society that women and children can be spared, can be bought, can be brutalized, and it doesn’t matter ... Some of the parents see their kids as chattel and don’t give a stuff ... Others are in a situation of desperation and crisis and are prepared to sacrifice one child so that the rest of the family can eat. The government has made almost no impact at all in controlling the trafficking of women and children. There is no control or monitoring of brothels and what is going on inside ... the market just gets bigger ... people are questioning the commitment of the government. (Baker, 2002:16)

As Baker implies, the illegal exploitation of women as a lucrative business option was related to a culture of passivity and acceptance, and extreme poverty. It was driven by the greed of the rich and powerful and backed by a corrupt legal system.

An important context for these injustices was the impunity with which rich local officials and military men were robbing poor families of their land. News reports in 1999 and 2,000 revealed an increase in powerful, rich administrators and the military forcibly evicting the poor at gunpoint in rural areas, thereby depriving them of their means of subsistence. This contributed to the unemployment rate and aggravation of poverty. Legal Aid of Cambodia reported that they had a case-load of around 6,000 families, with the vast majority of the conflicts involving military commanders or provincial and local officials (Human Rights Watch Report, 2001). AusAID (2002) revealed that the land-grabbing had resulted in 40 percent of households living off just twelve percent of the land. The evictors of these poor people exploited the weak legal system and lack of implementation of the 1993 land laws, resulting in only 14 percent of land being

registered. Although moves to improve the land laws by including clauses to ensure equality between men and women were under way in the late 1990s (Leisher, 1999), more than a change in the law would be necessary to bring about equity.

Similar problems were occurring as government-sanctioned international and local logging companies illegally deforested the country. For example, Bou Saroeun (2000) reported that even though Article 17 of Cambodia's forest law states that felling trees for resin is strictly forbidden, in the Sandan District of Kompong Thom Province alone, in 1999 more than 46,000 resin trees were illegally cut, and another 146,000 tagged for harvesting in the year 2,000. With rice crops able to supply only four to six months of food for the local resin tappers, earnings derived from the sale of resin were an essential stopgap against hunger. One of the results was an increase in fear among villagers in the face of a rise in banditry resulting from people having their traditional means of survival removed. The following example is indicative of the many cases of land seizure by officials that have included trickery and fraud.

In the Ratanakiri Province in 1997, General Nuon Phea of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces tricked 900 remote illiterate tribes-people from three villages, into thumb printing documents that transferred 1,250 hectares of their ancestral forest land to him. He had told them that their thumb-prints were necessary to grant eligibility for government assistance including roads, a new well, and perhaps a school. These women and men had lived on this land for generations, using it communally for their customary agriculture and means of survival. The General took their land, and gave each family two kilos of rice. Legal Aid of Cambodia had been representing the villagers' case under several laws including fraud and forgery of public documents.

However, the Ratanakiri Provincial Court ruled against the tribes-people after Nuon Phea paid a bribe of US \$35,000 to local district officials. According to Ting Teng from Chrong village, his people intend to continue their legal fight. "We are poor. If they let us live, we live. If we don't get the land back, we die".

(Bou Saroeun, 2000)

8.3 NGOs, MOWA and the GAD Agenda

Ting Teng's lament in the above example highlights the lack of coordination, cooperation and mutual trust at all levels of Cambodian society that was retarding the development process. According to field worker and academic Meas Nee (interview, 2004), the cash-strapped government had no social policy or resources to support social reconstruction - just rhetoric - and international donors did not trust the government because of their high levels of corruption and nepotism. Meas Nee noted that the authoritarian government did not trust international donors, fearing their motives were political and aimed at undermining their power base. Added to this, the international donors were seen as robbing the government of many of their best people, offering them salaries far superior to those accorded by the government, resulting in a 'brain drain'. He further noted that, in relation to their support of local NGOs, international donors lacked long-term commitment to projects and did not trust the local NGOs' integrity, honesty and transparency. In the same way, they did not trust the government, which they saw as corrupt and nepotistic. In turn, local NGOs did not trust the donors' long term commitment or sensitivity to local needs, because in order to obtain and keep funding they were obliged to sign contracts that suited the donor's policies rather than the local people's needs. Moreover, according to Nee, donors expected local NGOs to compete with each other for funding, thus encouraging a breakdown of much-needed trust and cooperation between them. This damaged the cohesion and mutual trust and support needed among the NGOs, and among the people at village level. A debilitating consequence was that many villagers tended to see local NGOs as corrupt and nepotistic, following Western policies aimed at empowering individuals rather than supporting the needy. In all this, donor agencies were often at a loss to know how to empower the people (basic to the aims of Western NGOs) when they saw the culture as hierarchical and the people as passive. Meas Nee pointed to further dysfunction because International NGOs preferred to operate in safe, accessible areas, resulting in an overload of services in and near the cities, with very little in the provinces. So often apparently oblivious to the point that survival is the prime concern of the people, Nee concludes that very little

development will take effect until this problem is resolved, particularly in rural areas where the needs of the people are manifold.

Meas Nee's analysis of generalised mistrust is also applicable to MOWA. Compounding the breakdown of trust between FUNCINPEC and CPP and lack of support from the government (in 2000, national defence and security amounted to 41 percent of national expenditure compared to 0.76% for MOWA), MOWA was seen as promulgating Western notions of independent women. MOWA also suffered from a lack of trust by donors and NGOs, who saw them as weak and inefficient. Added to this, as official coordinator of women's projects, MOWA was subject to the shifting policies of the funding donors. By 1998, following the newly-revised World Bank GAD policy aimed at promoting the mainstreaming of women into government and development projects (Murphy, 1997), the Asian Development Bank shifted the focus of their development policy from 'economic efficiency' to 'women's empowerment' (ADB, 1998:15-16). This was to be done through supporting measures to empower women in the setting of development agendas, and to challenge the socio-economic systems that placed them at a relative disadvantage to men. ADB's belief was that the development process itself needed gendering through facilitating strategic, broad-based, multifaceted solutions to gender inequality. However, these policies lost momentum when a food crisis faced Cambodia. As a result, as late as 2000 the NGO Forum on Cambodia (funded by UNDP) prioritised a National Poverty Reduction Strategy in line with international funding policies that barely mentioned women. The NGO Forum stated that it "had not developed clear articulation on how the particular needs of women and children could be integrated into development efforts contributing to poverty reduction". In the same paragraph it also noted that the Strategy had "no concrete solutions in terms of legislation, or relevant policy measures to address the specific problems of women".

The lack of priority given to women's empowerment at this time was not limited to NGOs. Visiting MOWA in early 1998 prior to the elections, Australian academic Kate Frieson (1998:45) found an extraordinary level of apathy towards women's affairs. Questioning newly appointed Inspector General of MOWA Ms Ek Virak (CPP), Frieson

found that her queries about MOWA's success in bringing women's issues to the government's attention were considered irrelevant and outside the scope of the ministry's mandate. Further to this, when asked to give a brief summary of gender concerns in health, education and civil service staffing, CPP Minister of MOWA Im Run replied that such information had to be obtained from the relevant ministries as she had no such references in MOWA's library. According to Im Run, "Some people do not even want to have a Women's Affairs Ministry because in each ministry there is a gender component. So we don't consider knowing such information as you asked about a priority, to know statistics about gender issues in health and education for example, this is not our concern and if you want such information you should go to other ministries for it".⁴

Under CPP Im Run, a weak MOWA was not competent to work with NGOs on a sectoral basis (such as Education or Health) so it had to work directly with other relevant ministries (Frieson, 1998:46). For example, as United States Aid (USAID) representative coordinating women's NGOs in Cambodia, Frieson found that NGOs for 'homeless women' were now bypassing MOWA and dealing with the Ministry of Social Affairs. She observed that none of MOWA's departments seemed to be particularly hard at work and noticed a general attitude of resentment towards NGOs who were able to attract more generous funding support. As a result, many NGOs were viewing MOWA as inherently problematic. Finding there was little they could do but try and cooperate, NGOs were endeavouring to develop good working relationships with individual members who were more capable, flexible and committed to supporting their programs.

However, following the 1998 election of the more dynamic Mu Sochua as Minister of Women's Affairs, directions began to change. Setting an example to other women leaders, she wrote an open email to all her supporters and news disseminators roundly condemning the CPP leadership. She bravely defended the 20,000 pro-democracy students, monks and moto-taxi drivers who had taken to the streets in protest to the police killings of monks demonstrating against the reinstatement of Hun Sen as

⁴ I interviewed Im Run in 1996 when she was undersecretary for SSWA, and found her only too willing to hand me on to someone else.

their leader. They believed the election was rigged and had been chanting “Democracy, peace, down with Hun Sen”. Sochua bravely denounced the Prime Minister, pointing out his brutality and religious hypocrisy (building pagodas and schools and reminding his people of the time he spent in the pagoda as a boy, throughout the election campaign). She wrote:

It is hard to be living in fear and to have my human rights violated by a single man. I dream of the day we can all design together Cambodia’s future ... We have 10 women in the next assembly and FUNCINPEC has five of the 10. We [women] have worked very hard to get women to run as candidates and to keep them at the top of the list. Please write to your representatives about the police use of force and the danger of keeping Hun Sen in power. (Mu Sochua, 1998b)

Following negotiations between CPP and FUNCINPEC in December 1998 and the appointment of the more cooperative Mu Sochua to head MOWA, a new five-year strategic plan, mainly funded, guided and supported by United Nations’ organisations and working in collaboration with other NGOs dedicated to empowering women, was released in February, 1999. This policy boldly challenged the cultural assumptions embedded in the famous proverb, “Women are cloth and men are diamonds”, replacing it with a new version, *Neary Rattanak*, ‘Women are Precious Gems’. In line with international GAD policies aimed at mainstreaming women’s issues, this policy was adapted from the Beijing Platform of Action. MOWA considered their highest priorities in reform to be to:

Develop the human resources of MOWA to equip them as the national machinery for the promotion of the status of women

Proactively assess the needs of women at the grass-roots, and plan and implement multi-sector poverty-alleviation programs with women’s groups, NGOs and local governments by fully utilising their extensive structure, reaching to district level

Establish and develop effective planning and coordination mechanisms with focal point officers in line ministries, NGOs and the international community, and

Collect and collate data and research papers on the situation of women in Cambodia, and, based on these, guide a national investment plan for the promotion of the status of women.

(MOWA, 1999a)

Two months after the release of this policy, women from the two major political parties met together for the first time, hoping to demonstrate how women could take the lead in politics that go beyond rivalries. Both sides expressed hope that the forum, focussing on a social agenda, could be a starting point for a new way of looking at politics (Moorthy and Stephens, 1999). Following this new direction in cooperation, in September 1999 the First National Conference on Gender and Development was held in the Le Royal Hotel, Phnom Penh, 'Looking Back: Moving Forward'. Its aim was to provide a platform to bring forward the critical issues facing women and to "review the gains that have been made since the 1995 Beijing Forum and to devise a platform for action to protect and further those gains in the coming years". It brought together 38 Cambodian women speakers representing 13 areas of development, including: MOWA and *Neary Rattanak*; Agriculture and Food Security; Environment and Natural Resources Management; Sustaining the Women's Movement; Women's Health; Women and Girls in Education; Labour and the Economy; Gender and Disability; Gender Mainstreaming; Violence Against Women; Prostitution and Trafficking; Women in Enterprise and Management; and Women in Politics and Governance. The following month, MOWA launched a report on Cambodia's first campaign against the abuse of women, 'Prevention of all forms of Trafficking in Women and Children' (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2000), corresponding with International Women's Day. This was intended as a nationwide project aimed at educating families about the dangers of sex trafficking, and training officials to combat the trade. However, Hun Sen as main speaker at the launch demonstrated his lack of commitment to change when asked if he would forbid his ministers from practices such as buying virgins and frequenting brothels. He replied, "I control them [the officials] only eight hours a day. After that, they take care of themselves" (Johnson and Khieu Kola, 2000). This served as a strong reminder of the lack of support provided by the CPP ruling party, not only cementing cultural barriers facing a newly determined MOWA, but undermining women's NGOs already under pressure from their increasingly wary funding agencies.

In a report for USAID, Kumar (2000) revealed that women's NGOs were experiencing many difficulties with their donors. She identified as the main areas of tension between Cambodian women's organisations and the international community:

Diminished funding following the coup

Time-wasting accountability exercises imposed on NGOs and short term vision of donors

Management style with a lack of division of labour and organizational structure resulting from lack of capacity for strategic planning, absence of written rules and dominance of the founder. These issues were frustrating donors who wanted to initiate changes and NGOs were resenting donor interference in 'their business'

Barriers of language and culture making it difficult for the NGOs to find ways to express themselves clearly, and donors' frustration at not getting the information they were wanting.

(Kumar, 2000:20-21)

As Western concepts of development were unfamiliar in the Cambodian culture, NGOs confronted many problems relating to: nepotism; inability to delegate due to hierarchical understandings at all levels; petty competition among the women leaders; and frustration because donors were 'out of touch' with the people's needs. Frieson's (1998) interviews with NGO workers found that many women elected to office had not used their position to try to advance gender issues or influence their party's stance to being more proactive on issues such as pay equity, criminalizing trafficking of women and children, or increasing the number of women in politics. She found that women's organisations had identified three main areas of concern for Cambodian women: women's disadvantaged economic position vis-a-vis men, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of women-headed households in rural and urban areas; gender bias in schooling resulting in girls being vastly under-represented at all levels; and domestic violence against women and trafficking of women and children. Frieson's study overviewed some fourteen NGOs promoting gender issues including education, rice production and agriculture, literacy, gender awareness, family support, domestic violence, health and birth spacing, as well as training in HIV, trafficking, human rights,

leadership and political empowerment (see Appendix 7 for full list of Women's Organizations in 1998), whose projects were variously funded by UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, USAID (America), AusAID (Australia), OXFAM (Great Britain), CIDSE (France), CIDA (Canada) and others (explanations of acronyms, p. XVI). Although many NGOs were making an impact at local levels (mainly concentrated in or near urban areas), they were not only hampered by differing Cambodian cultural understandings, but also by their own inflexible policies.⁵

Expatriates working with Cambodian NGOs promoting gender issues expressed frustration with the bilateral donors and their negative impacts on the development process in Cambodia. One Danish worker commented on the huge wastage of money (*Bangkok Post*, 2000), claiming that the World Bank, for example, knew nothing about the high levels of corruption in the government, preferring to turn a blind eye, and accept government figures without question. As a result, efforts to empower women and reduce poverty were being weakened. "They are not interested in scrutinising these projects as heavily as other NGOs because they are dealing in such huge sums of money, and their approach is often more political than developmental." Ung Bun An of the Australian branch of the Sam Rainsy opposition party agreed, contending that the World Bank ignores issues of performance review, accountability, and responsibility to recipient countries:

Donor attitudes towards development assistance have not changed much in the past four decades, despite worn-out rhetoric on poverty reduction ... the main objective of foreign aid is really for something else other than genuine benefits to recipient countries ... Any real success in poverty reduction would make the business of World Bank irrelevant. (Ung Bun An, 2001)

Ngoy (1999), Special Advisor on Investment, Council of Ministers in Cambodia, concurs that donor agencies have done little to understand, much less help combat the corruption issues in the government that hinder development through misdirection of funds. According to Ngoy, "the acceptance and defacto encouragement of official

⁵ Ray Zepp, field worker in Battambang, pointed out the priority some NGOs had to put into producing glossy brochures presenting 'happy' news to please the donors back home. He says this was contributing to corruption because the entire system begs local NGOs to cheat, and forces donors to pretend that corruption does not exist. (Zepp, 2000)

corruption in ‘overly bureaucratic’ countries has been a basic tenet of Western economic orthodoxy for decades”. This factor resulted in much of the finances being misallocated to other areas preferred by the government, with uncoordinated projects resulting in loss of revenue, concentrated development in and near more wealthy urban centres, and poor distribution in rural areas.

8.4 Community Development

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the 1999 Cambodia Human Development Report (MOP, 1999) revealed that a few rural areas were well supplied with development projects in agriculture, water and sanitation, health, education, environment and credit (p.53). However, the vast majority of villages in Cambodia had no ongoing development project or intervention. Only 27 percent of the poorest villages received either government or NGO support (p.52). Many poor Cambodian villages were seriously lacking economic and social infrastructure, and the absence of this infrastructure was keeping villages in poverty, and in the period 1998-2000 the need to re-distribute power from central bureaucrats to village councils was increasingly being seen as the way to promote sustainable development at grass-roots level. The 1999 Cambodia Human Development Report (MOP, p.46) stated that, “the recent debate over the importance of community solidarity in Khmer culture is relevant”. Although previous assessments of Cambodian village culture pointed to a basic lack of social cohesion and community solidarity in Cambodian villages, more recent research challenged this hypothesis, arguing that it was possible to find social cohesion and solidarity in Khmer society, “if one looks in the right places.” The report points out that one such place is the Buddhist pagoda and the Buddhist religious order.

In looking to traditional Buddhist mechanisms for social cohesion, the *achaa*, the religious authorities traditionally dedicated to social action in villages, received attention. They fulfil an important moral leadership role and occasionally engage in dispute-resolution and mediation. They can be seen as the religious, moral equivalent of the political village leader. Added to this, many community events, such as religious and

wedding celebrations are organised in the village and are typically associated with the *wat* (temple) (Oveson et al., 1996:49). Although these activities were stopped under the KR, they were slowly returning in the 1990s, with a new emphasis in pagoda-community events on welfare, such as raising funds for much-needed infrastructure project building. Oveson points out that social cohesion and community organisation were also emerging in rural areas, often organised by international agencies and self-help groups. However, women were generally found to have a very limited role in village planning discussions, with concepts of promoting gender equity little understood and women perceived as illiterate with little to contribute.

Meas Nee and O’Leary (2001:v), community builders in poor villages in Battambang, have pointed to difficulties Cambodian development practitioners have in understanding and adapting Western concepts of gender equity, empowerment, participation and social justice. They note that the social order of Cambodian society, reinforced by Cambodian understandings of Buddhism, depends on everyone respecting the hierarchical order and keeping their place in it (cf.5.3). As discussed in Chapter Three, from childhood people are taught to obey and respect those in authority. Challenging, questioning and expressing dissenting views are discouraged. Conflict is seen as bad, and loss of face is to be strongly avoided. Cambodian values of conformity, respect and obedience, harmony and social stability, are important both individually and collectively. Working in accordance with Cambodian values as a basis for collaboration and change, O’Leary and Meas Nee formulated egalitarian, gender-balanced policy and administration, based on mutual trust in community-building projects and associations using the *wat* as the umbrella organization for Krom Akphiwat Phum (KAWP). For example, KAWP has incorporated the *salaa* (house of men) as the centre of administration for village projects (Meas Nee interview, 2004). O’Leary and Meas Nee believe their approach represents a new contribution to community development that questions many of the common assumptions and practices of prevailing theories of development. Defining the basis of their approach, they maintain that development is about women and men becoming empowered through personal growth and public action to challenge poverty, oppression and discrimination. Their first steps towards achieving

these goals for transformation are to create hope, building from the inside first, before receiving help from the outside. Meas Nee explained that, firstly, Cambodians and development practitioners need to connect to each other ‘heart-to-heart’. “First shake hands and smile, then sit down and share thoughts. After that, share heart-to-heart.” Referring to the GAD agenda in Cambodia, he commented: “No-one ever asked Cambodians what their concept of gender is. When Westerners talk as a feminist – how can that be developed in Cambodia?” He saw Western feminist interpretations of GAD as conflicting with the basic concept of ‘gender’ as he understood it. Rural Cambodian men and women expressed confusion and distrust of such concepts (interview, Siem Riep, 2004). Working on a report for this project, Saly Lor found that KAWP was remarkably strong, egalitarian and gender-balanced. However, he also noted that the founders were exceptional individuals which meant that others aiming to replicate their project had failed to succeed (interview, Phnom Penh, 2004).

In line with understandings of development practice, the 1999 Cambodia Human Development Report (MOP) found that some development agencies and NGOs were trying alternative ways of working at the community level, using existing institutions such as pagoda committees for designing and implementing their projects (pp.55-56). Pagoda committees assisted in the communication process through workshops to identify needs and priorities for development. These committees were usually aided by the provincial officer-in-charge of rural development. In this approach, the traditional role of monks supporting the community was emphasised. These projects were seen to be not only sustainable, but advantageous to the community, serving as an asset to the pagoda in gaining the support of the neighbourhood in other activities as well.

Another approach to community development (MOP, 1999) might be broadly described as promotion of decentralised good governance and decentralisation of development funds to work towards poverty reduction through promoting job-creation projects and reconciliation. The CAREERE/Seila project set up in 1996 was established as a partnership between the Cambodian Resettlement and Reintegration Program (CAREERE) and a new government program, Seila (Pali word for ‘foundation stone’),

supported by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). This project was described as “an experiment in decentralised planning and financing of participatory rural development” (UNDP 2001a), attempting to bypass corrupt government misdirection of funds. By 2000 this project was providing fifteen percent of rural areas with around six times the resources provided through the government budget (The Associated Press, 2000). The project focussed on decentralised development starting at the village level, with a bottom-up/top-down relationship between local governance and provincial government, promoting rural infrastructure sub-projects made possible through donor money implemented through the Local Development Fund (LDF). Seila was to gradually expand to larger areas, with the intention of eventually becoming self-supporting and nationwide.

The CAREERE/Seila project developed a rural development structure with bottom-up planning process beginning with articulation of development needs and priorities at village level. In 1996 Seila was intensively involved at the village level where local planning was facilitated by district staff in agreement with provincial government. Allocation of funds and resources was managed by the commune (Kusabe and Chim, 1999). After establishing the project at local levels, primary responsibility moved to the commune for the next phase (1998-99). However, by 2001 “tangible poverty alleviation – understood as income poverty alleviation – on a national (or local) scale was not detectable” (CDRI, 2003). According to Meas Nee, as Seila expanded, instead of building trust among participants, too much emphasis was placed on attracting large NGO contributions. Because Seila had failed to develop a culturally sustainable community basis, the program experienced many difficulties in trust and allocation of funds, severely hindering their expansion (Meas Nee, interview 2004). As a result, by 2000, an ADB report found that Seila’s efficiency was being eroded at both community and provincial levels by the same corruption and nepotism that was prevalent in the national government. Efficiency was further eroded by the poor administrative skills of government officials, particularly those who had been posted to administer rural areas (The Associated Press, 2000). According to the Cambodian Development Resource Institute (CDRI, 2003) the Seila poverty-alleviation program was stuck between

macroeconomic growth with little effect on poverty, and targeted interventions that were unsustainable.

The CARERE/Seila program included gender-sensitivity training. A 1999 evaluation survey of Seila ex-gender awareness trainees from community development programs and MOWA, focussing on knowledge, attitude, and performance on gender issues, showed improved attitudes in respondents. Kusabe and Chim (1999) identified that the more training these women received, the more gender-sensitive and confident they became. However, many respondents reported that a lack of support from their managers had made it impossible for them to initiate change in their projects, and many facilitating teams had significantly cut their female staff. Because of a lack of concrete strategies to effect women's participation, it was difficult for ex-trainees to promote gender-sensitivity within their uninitiated workplaces, highlighting the need for culturally based planning to underpin the gender-awareness programs as seen in the O'Leary and Nee approaches.

Although these community-development projects were in rural, village-based areas, a few have begun with disadvantaged people migrating to the city. Saroeun (1998) describes how some rural dwellers have ended up as city-squatters in the hope of finding work. These people, many of them landless widows, formed unsightly squatters' settlements in and around the urban centres. Although these squatters were normally sent back to the countryside, in 1997 one settlement was deemed eligible to receive resettlement assistance through a project organised by the Phnom Penh Municipality "to clean up the city", together with a group of NGOs. The city-based organisations called on to help 'save' this destitute community included the United Nations Centre for Habitat and Settlement (UNCHS), the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), the Solidarity for Urban Development (SUPF), the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF), the Urban Resource Centre (URC) and SAWA engineering consultants. Added to this, UNCHS provided infrastructure funds with technical assistance from SAWA for landfill, toilets and wells, and URC and the Cambodian Appropriate Technology Development Group (CATDG) provided appropriate housing designs that cost between US\$723-749 to

build. The UPDF provided housing loans repayable over five years at 0.66 percent interest to the new settlers. The local municipality provided legal licenses for the new housing, and the Phnom Penh Education Department helped to allocate children from these families to schools to help them achieve better life chances. This case is remarkable because it illustrates the ways funding agencies can cooperate when they decide a project is feasible and worthwhile. It must be stressed, however, that the vast majority of poverty-stricken landless trying their luck in the city not only received no help, but faced forced repatriation to the countryside where there was little chance of assistance. Furthermore, with the government allocating only nine percent of its budget to education, the majority of the poor had great difficulty in providing any schooling for their children, particularly girls, to assist them in escaping the poverty trap.

8.5 Education and Work

A baseline survey undertaken by UNICEF and WFP (1999) stressed that educating girls [in Cambodia] is the single most effective tool for raising economic productivity, lowering infant and maternal mortality rates, improving nutrition and health, and reducing poverty and the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, the 1998 Cambodia Human Development Report (MOP, 1998) revealed continuing gender inequalities in Cambodia. Despite over 80,000 teachers being trained and the primary and secondary curricula redesigned, overall literacy was only 55 percent for females and 79 percent for males (AusAID and CARE, 1998:10). As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has noted, “The literacy gap is in many ways among the most unjust of all, for it has an impact on our ability to bridge all other inequalities – between men and women; between rich and poor; between the have and have-nots; and between those who stand to gain from globalisation and those who are excluded from its benefits” (Kofi Annan, 2002). However, in Cambodian school education, MOWA (2001a) revealed that by the end of the 1990s the gender gap had widened further. Two-thirds of the unenrolled at primary level were girls. Added to this, their lowered retention-rates due to high repetition and dropouts had resulted in a 50 percent greater male-enrolment by age fifteen. As a result, only five percent of girls were making it to upper secondary levels. Overall male enrolments for

primary, secondary and tertiary levels were 50 percent higher than females. This occurred in spite of the strategies put in place to increase incentives for the enrolment and retention of girls and to assure access to both sexes through multiple delivery strategies.

Because the government had not kept up with growing population needs, by the end of the decade overall school enrolments had dropped from 34 percent to only twenty percent (Ung Bun Ang, 2004), with girls entering the labour market disadvantaged by less education and skills than boys. In this situation, even though women accounted for 53 percent of the labour force, almost 80 percent worked in agriculture. The majority of these were unsalaried workers, almost half were self-employed, and only ten percent of the female labour-force were hired, salaried workers (MOP, 1999). The small percentage of women accessing paid employment suffered from wage discrimination as men earned over 50 percent more than women, and women with the same levels of experience earned 33 percent less than men (Beaufils, 2000).

This situation was unlikely to change. According to Beaufils (2000:24), gender surveys in the late 1990s revealed that the overwhelming majority of Cambodian girls were effectively excluded from any lasting participation in formal education, even though education and literacy were decisive factors influencing both their health and status. She noted that with an average of only three years of schooling, many Cambodian women were unable to achieve basic literacy. Beaufils also found that 42 percent of Cambodian women over the age of 15 years had never attended school, compared with 21 percent of men. As these ratios did not vary across social and economic levels, the figures suggest that female illiteracy in Cambodia was not entirely related to poverty, but that there was also an important cultural dimension involved, except when both parents were educated (cf. my 1996 survey results). As discussed in Chapter Seven, although the legal minimum age for girls to marry was 18 (boys 20), culturally the marriageable age for girls was considered to be between 16 and 22, with girls as young as 14 being married, especially among the rich. Also, it remained widely unacceptable for girls to be more educated or intelligent than their husbands. Added to this, education advisor to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Dr Vin McNamara (discussion, 2001) revealed that the

burgeoning garment industry seriously impacted on girl's enrolments in Phnom Penh and the surrounding provinces. As soon as they can, the girls rush to find work to help their families. Partly due to cultural and economic reasons and partly due to an increase in student numbers, the situation of education did not improve in the 1990s, despite the enormous amount of international funding and rhetoric about the need to improve access to education, particularly for girls.

Cambodian Education academic and consultant David Ayres (correspondence, 1999) has pointed out that, although there had been dramatic improvements in educational infrastructure with many classrooms having the resources they lacked in the mid 1990s, the lack of qualified teachers remained. According to Ayres, this was due to the work of several NGOs and Hun Sen's politically-motivated building of schools, many of which had no teachers. Added to this, because the new schools had not been built to enhance development (being outside the Ministry of Education), many were inappropriately located. The majority of schools remained without qualified teachers, and the majority of teachers were still forced, due to unacceptably low levels of pay, to rely on corruption for their survival. Ayres also voiced his concern about NGOs decentralising their aid to avoid government corruption,⁶ claiming that although this new trend allocated more dollars to the countryside where they were most needed, directing education aid away from the central ministry would not do anything towards the long-term sustainability of education. With the ministry not learning to run things effectively, according to Ayres a vacuum of expertise and skills could develop once the aid dollars dried up. In this case MOEYS programs to improve the education of girls would suffer further, as would the hope of more girls escaping poverty through accessing skilled employment in the future.

⁶ One informant working in MOEYS (interview, 1997) revealed that a 1996 audit to check a gross shortfall in education funding was farcical. The auditor found that after much re-examination of accounts and receipts, MOEYS staff were able to account for all the funding. The auditor presumed that they were just untrained and incompetent in book-keeping. However, the informant said that, in fact, the reverse was true. He said that the MOEYS staff were very clever and deliberately kept their accounts in a state of disarray so that they could bluff their way out of being exposed for corruption when under scrutiny.

A UNDP/WFP (1999) baseline survey of rural communities found that although rice farming was an important source of income for 85 percent of households, without education these people lacked strategies to promote food security. Even though 80 percent of respondents indicated multiple sources of income, there was a strong dependence on one crop for their livelihood. After the harvest, 40 percent were using some of their rice to pay back loans, with only 13 percent able to sell rice for income. The survey indicated an urgent need to improve the education of women in particular, in order to assist in facilitating comprehensive approaches to improving food security, health and sanitation, and to avoid crippling debt spirals (MOP, 1999). Added to this, Beaufils (2000:31) has pointed to the need for females to be educated, as many young women were entering the new labour market unskilled. Gender-stereotyped work choices (p.32) not needing skills and education were found in the service sector where young women served as waitresses or beer girls, often being subjected to male harassment. The survey also found that informal sector workers accounted for 9.5 percent of the female workforce, and included women working in stalls on the roadside, in markets, and in shops. These women suffered from working long hours and were subject to police harassment and authorities demanding regular payment of bribes (Gorman, 1999:41). Further to this, the growth of the labour-intensive garment and tobacco-manufacturing sector resulting in new wage opportunities for unskilled workers in the industries meant that poorly-educated women were making up the vast majority of the vulnerable, unskilled employees in the workforce. Most significantly, due to Cambodia gaining Most Favoured Nation status (until 2005), the rapidly growing garment manufacturing industry became the largest foreign-currency earner in the Cambodian economy in the late 1990s, hiring nearly 100,000 mostly young and single Cambodian women. However, in this sector most workers were paid low wages (average US\$40 a month), and suffered poor working conditions. Some were even held against their will to live in cramped rooms with small fans and no mosquito nets, and little water to bathe with or drink (*Cambodia Daily*, 2000). Beaufils found that these young women lacked confidence, self-esteem, knowledge of the labour laws and skills for collective action. Their opportunities for promotion were hampered by a lack of basic schooling and skills-training in the trade, leading to severe exploitation and the need for leadership to undertake collective action.

While these new, market-based factories had been opened up in agreement with international labour standard requirements, in response to exploitation of these young, uneducated rural women, in June 1998 opposition leader Sam Rainsy met with representatives from twelve garment factories. Under the umbrella of Cambodia's first free trade union, FTUWKC (Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia), the women had complained of severe work violations. Some female workers complained of being locked in the factories and paid as little as US\$10 a month, despite the legal minimum monthly wage being US\$40. One worker complained that her salary had been cut by US\$5 because she had gone to the toilet for more than five minutes. Added to this, some factories had been firing workers who refused to work on Sundays and public holidays (FTUWKC, 1998). Following much industrial dispute, the president of the union, Ou Mary, hoping to gain the attention of Prime Minister Hun Sen, wrote him several open letters pleading for government recognition of their legally instituted union. She also wanted fair media coverage explaining workers' rights, instead of only presenting the side of factory owners. However, these letters were ignored (Kim Chea, 1998). As employment increased and conditions worsened, in their rush to rekindle economic growth and promote exports the Cambodian government continued to overlook serious labour and human rights abuses (Richardson, 1999). Ou Mary reported that when inspectors arrived from mother-companies such as the U.S. company Gap, workers were told to slow down. Young workers were told to stay in the toilet while others were instructed not to mention that their wages were under the legal level and that they were being forced to work 13 to 14 hours a day, even when they were sick (Moorthy and Pok Sokundara, 1999). In response to this illegal exploitation, FTUWKC organised a series of strikes that continued until mid-1999. Increasing levels of intimidation were carried out as bosses and security guards opened fire on workers protesting for more pay (Phnom Penh Post Staff, 2000). Desperate to keep their jobs in the face of threat of instant dismissal, workers began to refuse to lodge their complaints with the unions, bullied into silence in a culture unfamiliar with concepts of democratically organised groups challenging the rich and powerful.

As this chapter has shown, despite the country being free from war and wealth visibly increasing in the cities, the conditions facing the least powerful majority, particularly women, were not improving by the end of the decade. Women's empowerment and poverty-alleviation had been effectively sidelined. Although NGO projects aimed at empowering women had benefited some, and a more determined MOWA was pushing to turn entrenched negative gender attitudes around, overall the implementation of the 1990s WID/GAD agenda had failed. Due in part to Cambodian socio-political culture, it was also due to mistrust between all parties and the inability of providers to listen to the needs of the people and collaborate with them as advisors in development. Compounding the failure was donor inability/unwillingness to monitor aid and tackle the increasing lawlessness and corruption within the country. Within Cambodia, the government was unwilling to prioritise women's issues of education and health, focussing instead on unsustainable economic growth based on the exploitation of cheap female labour. At the same time, as this chapter has shown, pockets of constructive development in the form of a few locally-based, culturally sustainable community programs were emerging to challenge both the Cambodian community and the international providers. In sharp contrast to practices at government level, women in these programs were being empowered within the context of their culture and the needs of their communities as a whole. But, on balance, as the following chapter will argue, these positive initiatives – while providing potentially viable models for a way forward – could not redress the failure of the 1990s' development agenda to address the needs of Cambodian women.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION: FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT GAD IN CAMBODIA

9.0 Introduction

Emancipatory development will only occur when development theorists and practitioners adopt a more inclusive approach to knowledge/expertise, a readiness and ability to 'hear' different voices/experiences and the humility to recognise that established discourses and practices of development have often done more harm than good (Parpart, 1995:240).

The success story in Chapter One describing forty Cambodian women with 107 children building a sustainable community in the absence of men is emblematic of the potential of Cambodian women to contribute to their society. This case study reminds us of Khmer women's more powerful position in society in the time of Queen Liv Yi (cf. 3.1). However, as revealed in later chapters (Six, Seven and Eight), this unique example stands in sharp contrast to the mainstream reality for women in Cambodia in the 1990s. With much of the country inaccessible, the majority of women were struggling to survive under the shadow of poverty and a male-dominated society. Widows were particularly disadvantaged, being four times poorer than the rest of the population due to loss of land (cf. p.139), lack of assets, labour, power and knowledge (cf. 8.1). Cambodian women continued to be sidelined, devalued, abused and, in many cases reduced to a commodity to be sold into sex slavery (cf. 7.4). Even after UNTAC opened up the country to development aid and an internationally driven GAD agenda, and the end of civil war in 1997, Cambodia continued to experience the lowest levels of achievement in gender equity and women's empowerment in Asia (cf. p.208). With 40 percent of households living off only twelve percent of the land, the gap between rich and poor had significantly widened (cf. 8.1). By 2000 the infant mortality rate had increased from 115 per 1000 to 138 per thousand (World Bank, 2004). By the end of the decade, despite two billion US\$ of international aid - amounting to around 50 percent of the national budget - tied to policies promoting poverty alleviation and gender equity (cf. p.16), only 0.76 percent was

being allotted to MOWA, most of which was spent on veteran's affairs.¹ This compared with a massive 41 percent for national defence and security (cf. p.224). In this period the government received 50 percent of its national budget through international aid (cf. p.14), but at the time of writing up this research in 2004, poverty had risen from 38 percent in 1992 to 43 percent. Cambodia remained one of the poorest countries in the world and maintained among the lowest social indicators in Asia (cf. p.208). In this final chapter I analyse the reasons for the failure to implement poverty alleviation and gender equity in the 1990s. Drawing from the evidence in the previous chapters, I suggest that this failure is directly related to the failure of the international community to understand the Cambodian people, their culture and their needs, which in turn has intersected with the failure of a hierarchical and arguably corrupt government to adequately prioritise the needs of their people.

As outlined in Chapter Two, the purpose of the international community entering Cambodia in the early 1990s was to rebuild a broken society and implement culturally sustainable long-term poverty alleviation and GAD policies. Many overseas trained Cambodians returned to contribute to their country's development, but local attitudes of suspicion and resentment among the largely uneducated population minimised their effectiveness. Although Western agencies revealed the true situation facing women through surveys and reports, and brought many reforms to Cambodia (cf. 6.3), these did not take root because they did not come from the initiatives of the people. Starting with UNTAC, the international community was insensitive to the specific needs of the country. Agencies failed to set in place sustainable training and processes for equitable allocation and distribution of donor funds and resources or suitable accountability mechanisms, in their handover of country responsibility to the government (cf. p.155). Low salaries of government employees meant that donors were able to attract some of the more talented Cambodians to work with them, adding to mutual mistrust between the government and donors (p. 223). Furthermore, donor agencies mainly worked directly with the cash-strapped government and not the people, meaning that the needs of the poor

¹ In this thesis, I have generally referred to MOWVA (Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs) as MOWA.

majority were often not recognised, much less met. Donors failed to work together with the people to rebuild their country, failed to collaborate with Cambodians as knowledge brokers. In a social environment where cultural denigration of women had resulted in the women unwittingly contributing to their own weak position, SSWA/MOWA and women's NGOs (supported by Western agencies), failed to achieve their proposed improvements. At best they achieved a minimal level of gender awareness in targeted areas (cf. pp.232-233). As a result, throughout the 1990s, the government, preoccupied with maintaining power and building up wealth for its supporters, had neither a comprehensive policy nor the resources to support the level of social reconstruction necessary to achieve development goals.

As outlined in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, the Cambodian government failed to act in a socially responsible way to build sustainable development through promoting cohesion among the people. Instead, it supported a wealthy, powerful hegemony, in keeping with historical understandings of rulers' privileges (cf. p.62). The government neglected key areas of GAD mainstreaming in poverty reduction, health and education. Perhaps reflecting self-interest, the government also failed to implement an equitable legal system, preferring to keep a politically-aligned army and police, supported by a corrupt judiciary (cf. 8.2). Traditional understandings of power and patronage resulted in widespread misdirection of resources, with social change remaining mostly at the level of rhetoric rather than positive action. The male-dominated political system projected a social model in which violence and devaluation of women was seen as the norm. Hun Sen provided a negative male role-model through his discriminatory comments on women's rights (cf. pp.169 & 227). Nepotism and a prevailing system of patronage in the government resulted in neglect of fulfilling donor conditions calling for accountability and an end to systemic corruption (cf. pp.207-209). At the same time, uncoordinated donor policies (cf. p.229) resulted in widespread misdirection of government funding and waste of much-needed resources. Although roads and infrastructure in the city improved, much of the country remained inaccessible (cf. p.209), limiting development in rural areas. By exploiting the differing understandings, priorities and agendas of widely disparate donor organisations (including those from communist China and Vietnam,

Japan, the EU and Australia), the government was able to avoid addressing problems of illegal logging and misappropriation of money and land (cf. p.222). Hun Sen used donor divisions to profit as much as he could, and programs for poverty-alleviation and GAD suffered accordingly. As occurred under the French (cf. p.65), the rural majority, particularly women, not only suffered from increasing poverty and landlessness, but from land degradation, flooding and drought (cf. p.213). With historically based understandings of power and hierarchy, rulers' privilege and women's place in society negatively affecting the internationally-driven development process, prospects for sustainable development remained bleak.

9.1 Cultural Barriers to Development

As noted throughout this thesis, underpinning Cambodian culture are strongly hierarchical, Hindu/Buddhist understandings. These have permitted a high tolerance of exploitation by the powerful, and acceptance of such exploitation by the powerless at all levels of society (cf. 5.1). Added to this, cultural fragmentation, systemic violence and lack of trust following a history of war and foreign intervention (cf. Chapter Three) resulted in endemic corruption and high levels of abuse of the powerless, particularly women. In this system, the growing middle-class, mainly centred in urban areas, became rapidly richer, and the poor rural majority, poorer (cf. pp.144-145). The Brahmanistic 'Warrior-King' aspect of Cambodian Buddhism (cf. p.32) strengthened the Vietnamese-installed leadership, and maintained powerlessness at the bottom levels of society (cf. p.234-235). Strong beliefs in Karma resulted in passive desperation and resignation among the powerless, poverty-stricken majority, particularly uneducated women. Carefully orchestrated intermarriage of the children of the entrenched ruling elite ensured maintenance of their stronghold in the future, further hindering prospects for change (cf. pp.36 & 122). In agreement with Népote (1992), this thesis has argued that the main hindrance to cultural healing and social development in the Cambodian context has been an enduring resistance to change, combined with a predisposition towards denial and suppression of the root causes of problems. In the 1990s, this could be observed in the continuing failure of the government to bring the genocidal Khmer Rouge criminals to

justice. Added to this, in violation of the Khmer culture, the government continued to refuse cremation of the bones of those who had died under the KR. Instead, it preferred to neglect opportunities for cultural healing and instead maintain the memory of its own legitimacy to power (cf. p.184). Policies such as these made it impossible to address issues of political bullying and lawlessness. Without basic issues of reconciliation being resolved, opponents of the government feared for their lives, and the judiciary, army and police safeguarded the government's position and stifled the development of an egalitarian society. Corruption and unchecked violence continued unabated as a cultural norm, severely affecting women at all levels of society.

Although earlier Angkorian culture offered Cambodians more positive models for understanding women (cf. pp.49-50), the prevailing cultural system of the 1990's reflected not only Cambodia's hierarchical Hindu/Brahmanistic past, but also long periods of war, and French, Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese influences (cf. 3.2 - 3.5). For example, under the French protectorate established in the 1800s, as in the 1990s, Cambodia was a country emerging from war and civil unrest, living in fear of being annexed by its neighbours. Women were already living under restrictive Buddhist laws and facing desperate poverty. After a long period of occupation and exploitation by the French, who established a strongly bureaucratic system of control supported by the army, judiciary and police, Sihanouk finally gained independence in the 1950s. Although Sihanouk endeavoured to improve the status of women through granting them the power to vote and encouraging girls to go to school, his corrupt, hierarchical government mirrored a French bureaucratic model. Its overthrow by the corrupt, hierarchical republican opposition in 1975 gave way to an extreme communism that originated in French universities (cf. pp.3.3). Supported by China, this highly-centralised and arguably genocidal form of communism reduced the population to virtual slavery (cf. 3.4). Following the devastation of Pol Pot and subsequent Vietnamese occupation (cf. 3.5), a French-style bureaucracy and education system returned, and Cambodia returned to fear and distrust, dependent on patronage and luck for mere survival. Suppression of the powerless re-emerged in the 1990s as society faced increasing levels of violence against women and human trafficking. As under the French, Independence, Maoist Khmer

Rouge, and then Stalinist Vietnamese occupiers, Cambodians, particularly women, were unable to speak freely (cf. p.186) and with a strongly bureaucratic government control opponents to the ruling party lived in fear (cf. p.207).

In the 1990s, as during the period of French colonial rule, Cambodian men regarded working as a government bureaucrat as a strong symbol of status and power (cf. p.63). In accordance with Theravada Buddhist beliefs of merit-bearing (cf. pp.37 & 122), and supported by the education curriculum (cf. pp.43 & 218), Cambodian men continued to aspire to work in the government and to gain social capital and wealth through accessing the traditional patron-client system (cf. 2.6). This hierarchical, patron-client model was widely endorsed through religious teachings, *chbab* laws, popular sayings and stories (cf. pp.54 & 109). Although government salaries were extremely low (US\$40 a month), those accessing this system could amass wealth through corruption and even brute force, empowered by their network of clients (cf. p.111). The benefits from this kind of work resulted in a chronic oversupply of government bureaucrats, army and police, with many accessing networks to misappropriate government funds (cf. pp.122 & 207). Wives of powerful men had access to the network through their husbands, but the vast majority of women had no such access and lacked economic and political power (cf. pp.211 & 236). This model of social capital affected all levels of society, with many in positions of power demonstrating contempt for the human rights of others, particularly the poor who were struggling for survival (cf. p.109). The very poor and dispossessed usually missed out, having no ability to access the system because they had nothing to offer in return (cf. p.196).

These restrictive socio-cultural understandings of hierarchy and power, reinforced in popular stories and the media, help to explain why women remained the most poorly represented in the region at all levels of government, work and education. Even in the 1990s, although Western influences and popular Thai movies in middle-class and wealthy urban areas resulted in more freedom among the young, change remained at a superficial level (cf. 7.1). Cultural understandings confined women's power to the domestic sphere (cf. p.37), and traditional understandings of the place of women in Cambodian society

were maintained and even strengthened in the face of opposition. Restrictive traditions devaluing women dating from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries (cf. 3.1) were reinterpreted in the 1990s, with media messages portraying women as entertainers or objects, particularly in the press where they were also shown as victims of violent behaviour (cf. 7.1). This reinterpretation contained expectations that to be marriageable, 'ideal' women must speak with high, childlike voices (cf. p.170) and behave in restricted ways according to the *chbab* (cf. p.38 & 55). Mothers encouraged their daughters to comply (cf. p.126). Mothers chose their daughters' husbands and taught girls to be 'helpers of men', and not show initiative but obey. Buddhist ideals that 'pity' brings higher merit to a man than 'love' in his choice of marriage partner, and that women who profess love are not trustworthy, added to their disempowerment (cf. p.124). In marriage, young men were obliged to 'leave' their birth-family and become part of their wives' families (cf. p.120), while wives were expected to hold total responsibility for the harmony and good reputation of their family and condone their husbands' visits to prostitutes (cf. 5.3). Such traditions placed women in a complex position. On the one hand they needed to behave as a physically weak, virgin 'younger sister', only able to earn merit through men, while on the other hand they were responsible for handling all the household money as well as the survival of their family (cf. p.38). In this situation, women bore all responsibility for their husbands' misdemeanours and abuse, even carrying the blame for such aberrations as deformed children (cf. p.126). The cultural model of females as simultaneously helpless victim/child and saviour/woman was similarly reflected in the psyche of many men. No longer bearing responsibility for their family of birth, they were able to absolve themselves from responsibility, with increasing violence towards their wives and access to young prostitutes in the hope of avoiding HIV/AIDS culturally condoned.

Perhaps the most extreme form of social denigration of women in Cambodia has been in the trafficking of increasingly younger women as prostitutes (cf. p.219). Re-interpretations of Cambodian traditions of slavery, where slaves were seen as 'property' in the same way as cattle (cf. pp.51 & 135), led to increased levels of trafficking among poor rural young women and girls, from both Cambodia and nearby Vietnam. In the

1990s, fuelled by the sexual demands of UNTAC personnel demonstrating little respect for Cambodian women and their culture (cf. p.150), they were bought, stolen and sold, and beaten into submission to serve as imprisoned prostitutes (cf. p.221). Up to half of these unwilling captives whose lives had been shattered and shortened became the source of an HIV/AIDS epidemic (cf. p.215). They had little choice of ever marrying or being socially accepted, and many of those rescued from this exploitation were reviled by society. In this case, their only hope of having any personal power was through returning to their occupation, many developing skills of overt sexual charm to attract and control their clients (cf. p.182). Ironically, many of these clients were the young men who had been 'shanghaied' into military service from streets and schools to serve in the various army factions during civil war. Their power had become identified with uniforms and guns, and their lives, already shortened through war, were being further shortened through AIDS. In a society where people were not taught to question their position, those taken in both sexual and military slavery perceived their lot as resulting from (bad) karma (cf. p.221). They were disposed to accept whatever their 'masters' required, without question. In the same way that many prostitutes were unable to find alternative ways to survive, demobilisation of large numbers of excess soldiers in the late 1990s was enormously problematic. The dependence, depression and violence of these frustrated men (many disabled), with little hope of finding gainful employment, added heavily to the social and economic burden carried by women (cf. 8.1). In turn this added to women's disempowerment and made the implementation of GAD policies even more difficult.

9.2 Failure to Implement GAD Policies

Factors limiting the GAD agenda and women's empowerment in the traumatised population of the 1990s included a lack of trust between people, high illiteracy and lack of education, lack of positive role models, and a mistrust of anything Western. The prevailing culture stifled women's empowerment and discouraged them from accessing education and positions of leadership and decision-making power. As a result, barriers to implementing Western-initiated GAD policies occurred at all levels including

government, donor agencies, local NGOs and MOWA. Both international organisations and local NGOs were often unwilling to collaborate with Cambodians (cf. 2.4 & 8.3). As with the French, many donors and NGOs failed to prioritise the need to understand the Cambodian culture and collaborate with the people as brokers of knowledge (cf. 6.2, 7.5; 8.3). This was due to self-imposed time constraints, and to donor pressure to adhere to generic policies aimed to 'fit all countries' (cf. pp.18 & 201). For example, they failed to recognise the need to understand the complex 'internal rules' of Cambodian culture in regard to understanding the place women inhabit as the basis for collaboration and sustainable development (cf. Chapter 5). They also failed to recognise that, according to Cambodian cultural models, they were seen as patrons, making 'empowerment' a misnomer (cf. p.35). In this poorly educated society only recently introduced to Western concepts of sustainability and where corruption, gender inequity and domestic violence prevailed as the norm, implementation of GAD programs was always going to be problematic (cf. p.13). As a result, commitment to change in power relationships would not only require attitudinal changes in the deeply-ingrained gender roles of Cambodian men and women, but in the donors and NGOs as well (cf. 8.4). Without clearly understanding the restraining factors to development issues, many local NGOs did not have clear project goals, and gender relations were rarely taken into account (cf. pp.175). This was compounded by male decision-making supervisors not wishing to relinquish any authority to allow for the equal participation of women (cf. 8.3). Thus, even though GAD policies were included in almost every donor and NGO mission statement, few demonstrated effective application, follow-up activities or monitoring systems. The time needed for genuine conflict-resolution, democratisation, poverty-alleviation and 'rolling out' of GAD policies to empower women exceeded the timetables set by impatient, out-of-touch donors, some of whom were more interested in marketing opportunities than in development (cf. p.172). Understanding between funding agencies and local NGOs was minimal, leading to lack of cohesion and common purpose.

Added to lack of cohesion between donors and NGOs, a major obstacle to implementing GAD policies was the fierce competition for prioritisation of scarce resources when setting government budget allocations. Local Cambodian NGOs were

weak and donor-dependent, unwilling or unable to speak out when confronted with unsuitable or unsustainable policies for fear of losing out. Underlying this, there was little trust or cooperation between them due to deep divisions stemming from the KR times (cf. p.223). As a result, donor intentions of building up a strong NGO network to counter-balance the power of the government were not fulfilled (cf. 8.3). In their frustration, many expatriate development workers tried to force cooperation between local NGOs, ignoring that collaboration is a slow process (cf. 7.8). While trust building should have been the main priority, donor policies of encouraging competition for funds had the negative effect of creating further division and breakdown of trust between local NGOs. For example, some micro-credit programs intended to assist in poverty-reduction and empowerment of women failed to meet their objectives due to unwise use of funds and lack of equitable allocation among competing NGOs (cf. p.223). Competition for funding among some lending NGOs encouraged them to give out loans to those who could not repay. Consequently, recipients fell into serious debt, with the burden falling most heavily on women, as Cambodian culture dictates that they are responsible for managing the household finances (cf. pp.37 & 122). Added to this, with no assets, the poor, particularly women, were unable to access micro-credit at all (cf. p.196). Ignoring the need to encourage grass-roots collaboration to meet the people's needs in a sustainable way, it was almost inevitable that these NGO programs would fail to meet their objectives.

Similarly, the weak relationship between international donors, the government and NGOs had a major impact on the performance of SSWA/MOWA, whose role was to mainstream GAD and oversee women's projects. Not only did the male-dominated government provide it with little funding (cf. p.224), but other male-dominated ministries showed little interest in working with it to mainstream gender. They largely sidelined the issue of women's empowerment as irrelevant (cf. pp.224-225). Added to this, the management structure of MOWA itself was based on traditional notions of hierarchy, patron/client relationships and nepotism, and staffed by strongly conservative CPP-aligned personnel, many of whom were not competent to work with NGOs (cf. 7.7). Situated in a leaky old building with poor facilities, MOWA was the official supervisor

of all women's projects in Cambodia, creating a nightmare for the NGOs who had little choice but to try to cooperate and seek out the staff members who were more helpful. Although MOWA had a mandate to address the gender imbalance in Cambodian society affecting women's disadvantaged economic position, domestic violence and trafficking of women, it achieved little in the way of consciousness-raising on gender issues (cf. 8.3). Although it placed particular emphasis on meeting the needs of female-headed households in the 1990s, MOWA's performance was severely hampered by its poorly-trained, underpaid staff (cf. p.193).² It was also hampered by a poorly-educated Cambodian population (cf. 7.6), and by a negative portrayal of women in the government-controlled media (cf. 7.1). This situation confronting MOWA worsened following the 1997 coup, when donors became even more cautious and reticent about trusting the government (cf. p.207).

With Cambodians still reeling from the coup, the 1998 elections saw the installation of the strongly committed Mu Sochua as Minister for Women's Affairs (cf. p.207). This outspoken woman brought new hope to the international and local NGO community (cf. 8.3). Against the backdrop of renewed mistrust and reassessment, with international support MOWA was able to launch a much-needed new policy-direction aimed at strengthening its capacity to collaborate with other ministries. MOWA aspired to alter Cambodian perceptions of women and to work proactively with women at grass-roots level, introducing a policy of *Neary Rattanack* (Women are precious jewels). This directly challenged the popular saying 'Women are cloth and men are diamonds' - implying that women are irreversibly stained by their wrong actions but men cannot be stained no matter what they do (cf. p.226). However, at the time of writing (July 2004), it is apparent that this ambitious new direction for MOWA did not take root due to the indifference of the corrupt and hegemonic CPP government, and increasing levels of poverty and violence.

² On my return visit to MOWA in 2004, I found that this situation had not improved (cf. Postscript).

9.3 Failure of Rule of Law

Although MOWA recognised domestic violence and people-trafficking as abuses of human rights that severely hindered the empowerment of women (cf. p.227), failure of rule of law meant that little could be achieved. Such abuse continued unchecked, despite a constitution with excellent laws to protect human rights and equality for women (cf. pp.156-157). Further flouting of the law occurred when the government brutally cracked down on the legally organised, peaceful demonstrations of exploited garment workers, underpaid teachers and starving farmers (cf. 7.9). Ongoing political killings of talented opposition members increased general mistrust of the government, judiciary and police. Added to this, traditional exploitation of the poor by the powerful meant that increased illegal land confiscation and logging by military and government officials went unchallenged by their CPP patrons. Land confiscation resulted in the poorest 40 percent of households owning just twelve percent of the land (cf. pp.213 & 221) and unchecked deforestation led to increasing floods and droughts, further affecting the poor and particularly disadvantaging women (cf. pp.174-175 & 213). Without rule of law, the powerless lacked protection of their basic human rights (cf. p.217), and the anticipated boost to development through adherence to democratic principles and a free market remained superficial and useless to basic development within the society.

Corrupt police and uneducated judges entrenched in a legal system aligned to the CPP disregarded women's rights and protected the powerful. This was clearly demonstrated in 1997 when Hun Sen's bodyguards were implicated in hand-grenade attacks that killed legally demonstrating female garment-workers (cf. p.203). It was also seen in 1999 when the Prime Minister's wife was implicated in having her husband's mistress, the widely-loved star Piseth Pelica, publicly murdered in the market-place (cf. p.217). Because such cases were never brought to justice, they promoted negative role models that added to increasing lawlessness among the powerful (cf. pp.220-222). In this environment, perpetrators of crime bribed corrupt police and judiciary to act in their favour. The judiciary, far from protecting the victims, saw their role as protecting wealthy patrons against prosecution (cf. 8.2). Similarly, abuse of young women was perpetrated

as widespread human trafficking accelerated, operating as a huge money-spinner for wealthy, powerful criminals and officials at the highest levels (cf. p.220). The legal system ignored human suffering and was deaf to challenges from the international community, NGOs and MOWA. In keeping with this disregard for women's rights in particular, increasing domestic violence further victimised females who were unable to afford to bribe judges to rule in their favour (cf. pp.137 & 217). Indeed, as Cambodian culture normally dictated that abused women 'must have deserved it', judges even turned to *chbab* cultural laws to justify such behaviour and exempt men from prosecution, especially in cases where women sought divorce (cf. pp.136-137).

Davies (1994) asserts that violence against women is an extreme expression of male dominance and "one of the most intractable violations of women's human rights." At a deeper level, this kind of violence is related to social structures that maintain unequal socio-economic relations between men and women (Narayam, 2000). With no legal protection in an unequal society that condoned the abuse of women and protected the irresponsible behaviour of men, the main issue of concern for women at all social levels was men's violent and unchecked sexual behaviour (cf. pp.124 & 215). The widespread belief that men's sexual needs were far greater than women's led to problems related to men's promiscuity and HIV/AIDS. This was further exacerbated by traditional beliefs encouraging men to abstain from sexual activity with their wives during pregnancy and the first four months post-parturition, putting an enormous strain on marital relations. Even health-care workers advised pregnant women to send their husbands to prostitutes, providing legitimacy for them to seek out other women, preferably prostitutes who did not threaten the family purse in the same way as keeping a mistress (cf. pp.124-125). As the culture demanded that young women marry, they were living in constant fear of the potential consequences of family violence and HIV/AIDS affecting the mental and physical health and wellbeing of themselves and their children.

9.4 Failure of the Health System

In this context, one of the main areas of need for the empowerment of women in Cambodia was in health-education and delivery. However, by the end of the 1990s, the health situation facing women had worsened (cf. p.213). With a life expectancy of 50 and maternal mortality among the highest in the region, a population growth rate of 2.6 percent further strained the already impoverished health system (cf. pp.213-214). Despite excellent health laws and a national health policy, the Cambodian Ministry of Health (MOH) had completely failed to achieve its objectives. Lack of clean water and malnutrition meant that women were dying from treatable common illnesses and injuries. In the late 1990s, maternal mortality rates in Cambodia were the highest in the Asia-Pacific region (cf. p.213). When mothers became sick, the whole family suffered. However, as outlined in Chapter Eight, a lack of funding and trained personnel prevented much-needed improvements for women's health. With an overload of ill and disabled people throughout the country unable to access assistance, in the late 1990s the health sector was only being offered around 4.5 percent of the national budget. In this situation the donor community was pushing for privatisation of health, and the poor rural majority were being sidelined (cf. 8.1). As the vast majority (90%) of doctors, health-care workers and health facilities were expensive and concentrated in urban areas, 85 percent of the population had little health support. At the same time, the Ministry of Health, unable to offer affordable, culturally sustainable alternatives, was refusing to support the main providers of maternal health-care - traditional birth attendants (cf. p.214). With the government neglecting to prioritise health-care and education, and the international community failing to support the women in a culturally sustainable way, living conditions of the rural majority worsened.

In this situation, 33 percent of the population remained undernourished, with rural-workers surviving on half the minimum calorie intake required for people in developed countries (cf. p.176). In accordance with the tradition of women shouldering the responsibility of bearing the children and caring for the family, many Cambodian women neglected themselves by giving the best nutrition to others, particularly husbands and

guests. Due to overwork many of these women not only suffered from exhaustion and loss of ability to concentrate, but also from physical depletion caused by bearing and nurturing children. Consequently both women and children (particularly girls) were more likely to suffer from malnutrition (cf. p.126). At the same time many were suffering from psychological trauma (cf. p.150) resulting from the unresolved legacy of brutality stemming from the Khmer Rouge era (cf. 3.4). Adding to their psychological stress was the social disruption caused by men suffering from unresolved trauma and lack of belief in justice, wanting to 'live for today' through turning to alcohol and hypersexual activities culminating in aggressive and dangerous behaviour. Increasingly, women became victims of rape and violence, further affecting their mental health (cf. 8.2).

Due to culturally sanctioned male sexual behaviour, particularly among mobile men such as police, military, truck drivers and men working away from home, HIV/AIDS became the major health issue facing Cambodians. Although this problem was only introduced in the early 1990s (cf. p.149), poverty and the cultural understandings of men's sexual needs combined with a widespread mistrust of health warnings from Western sources (cf. p.179) led to an explosion of the problem. By the end of the decade HIV/AIDS had reached the highest rate in Southeast-Asia, with 4.4 percent of the population infected. Married women accounted for almost 40 percent of victims, meaning that many babies were being born HIV positive (cf. p.215). This situation was further exacerbated by the uncontrolled propaganda of some local Chinese doctors and Khmer *kruus* claiming to be able to cure HIV/AIDS, and then making a great deal of money out of treating people (cf. p.179). Due to women's primary responsibility of family care, further burdens were placed on those caring for infected victims.

Apart from HIV/AIDS and other problems related to health, continuous child-bearing severely affected poorly-nourished women in Cambodia. Although there was a significant increase in women having access to contraception (from 7% in 1995 to 20% in 1999), the majority of poor women were missing out (cf. pp.178 & 213). This was due to both lack of knowledge and availability, with the result that unsafe abortions were prevalent. This was exacerbated by women's shyness related to traditional cultural

understandings of the body and women's role and behaviour (cf. 5.3 & 5.4). These understandings included fear of artificial birth control, not wishing to discuss their bodies with male health carers, and fear of asking their husbands to use condoms at home (cf. pp.125 & 215). However, as there were virtually no health-clinics at commune or village levels (cf. p.214), the vast majority of women lacked not only access to Western health-care, but also much-needed health and birth control education. As discussed in Chapter Six, with many women having large families to care for, by 1999 those seeking health-care were the main victims of debt among the rural and urban poor, thus adding to their vulnerability (cf. 6.1). Without education and knowledge, women remained ignorant victims of their situation, and the whole family suffered.

9.5 Education, Work and Leadership

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the household is the fundamental building block of Cambodian society. In Cambodia, apart from the school and temple, the home is the single most important influence on the way culture is disseminated and perpetuated (cf. 5.4). However, due to social, political and economic dislocation, Cambodian men were collapsing into abuse, violence and even abandonment of their household, leaving many women struggling to support their families alone (cf. p.210). With many girls being exposed to dysfunctional family and gender models, they were disadvantaged by the informal education provided within the home. At the same time, for a range of reasons including poverty and poor access to schools (cf. 6.4), uneducated mothers were expecting their daughters to fulfil their traditional roles of working at home and marrying young (cf. p.128). This resulted in two-thirds of unenrolled school-aged children being girls (cf. p.235). In the home, as in schools and temples, the abiding influence of proverbs, literature and the *chbab srey* (cf. pp.55 & 122) reinforced the traditions of women's place in the household, society and work. Consequently, although women made up the majority of the labour force, without adequate education or professional experience they lacked opportunities for paid employment. Women in leadership positions only existed among the minority of more educated families (cf. pp.190-191), and were generally seen as an aberration to the culture through bringing 'disorder' to the

society (cf. pp.111 & 128). In this Theravada-Buddhist society, teaching and especially politics were seen as men's work. With few female role models and continuing high levels of illiteracy (cf. p.186), change would inevitably be a slow process.

As in the home and temple, school education remained outdated and biased against women's empowerment (cf. 7.6 & 8.5). In the 1990s, almost half of the women in Cambodia remained illiterate (cf. p.239). Donors recognised education as the key to empowering them to step outside their traditional cultural models of self-denigration and ignorance, and to overcoming their limited capacity to work due to having no control over the size of their families. They also saw education as the single-most effective tool for lowering infant and maternal mortality rates, reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS, improving nutrition and health, raising economic productivity and reducing poverty (cf. 8.3). However, due to a lack of teachers trained to provide adequate education for an increasing population, and a ministry staff with little ability to administer effectively, the education system failed to improve in the 1990s (cf. p.236). Added to this, decision-making and problem-solving skills needed to implement development in the country were almost non-existent in the culture and education curriculum (cf. pp.161 & 231). As with other ministries (MOH and MOWA) crucial to improving the situation of women, MOEYS suffered from severe and chronic under-funding. Stifled by a poorly-paid administration that was highly centralised, hierarchical and inflexible (cf. p.187), the education system in Cambodia remained tied to its French and Communist past (cf. 3.2, 3.4 & 3.5) and resistant to the implementation of change.

Despite MOEYS' stated commitment to modernisation and development (cf. pp.7, 25 & 159), management practices reflected culturally entrenched notions of hierarchy and power, and the system of patronage and clientship that had sustained pre-colonial Cambodia (cf. 2.6 & 3.2). To please their donors, in 1997 the male-dominated MOEYS had given lip-service to commitment to a new plan aimed at improving the situation of women through increasing school participation of girls and female teachers. At the same time, a high-profile education minister was seen to be visiting young women in brothels every morning (cf. p.188). Negative role models such as these were sharp reminders that

girls were in fact being increasingly disadvantaged. By the end of the 1990s, negative cultural models, combined with inadequate funding to MOEYS, an outdated education system and parents' enduring preference to educating their sons, meant that the situation for girls had worsened. Overall enrolments had fallen from 34 percent to twenty percent and male enrolments were double that of females (cf. 8.5). Although the number of girls entering primary school had climbed to 80 percent by 2000, their drop-out rates were high, and less than half were completing primary school. As a result, only one in twenty Cambodian girls were making it to upper secondary school (cf. p.235).

Lack of education in a culture already adhering to restrictive understandings of women's place in society meant that leadership of women at all levels remained weak (cf. p.210). After ten years of WID/GAD rhetoric, in a population which was 53 percent female, few women held leadership positions. Mu Sochua was one of only two female ministers (cf. 8.1). Without education and recognition of worth, 85 percent of Cambodian women continued to work for a pittance in agriculture (cf. p.237). Of these women, 45 percent were unsalaried workers, 45 percent were self-employed, and only ten percent were hired, salaried workers (cf. 8.5). Despite women accounting for over 50 percent of the labour force (cf. p.236) their average earnings in paid work were less than two-thirds that of men (cf. 8.5). In this situation, the late 1990s saw increasing numbers of young rural women seeking paid employment in urban areas. But many had been lured away from rural poverty only to work in substandard, underpaid conditions in the newly burgeoning garment-industry (cf. 7.9).

With the opening up of free trade, the Cambodian government strongly supported the garment-industry as offering a major contribution to the economy (cf. 7.9 & 8.5). Seeing this kind of work as a way to help their families out of poverty, young women were the main employees. New factory owners exploited them as nothing more than a cheap labour source, giving rise to abuse of their human rights. Supported by the international labour standards adopted by the Cambodian government, the poor treatment of these factory workers gave rise to an unprecedented mobilisation of the labour force (cf. p.239). With the formation of legal trade-unions and strikes for human rights and

better conditions, by 1997 these women had unwittingly become leaders in civil action. However they were seen as a threat to business interests and the economy, and were violently discouraged (cf. p.203). Tellingly, this new example of young women's power moving onto the streets did not come from MOWA or the GAD agenda, but through the encouragement of the leader of the Sam Rainsy opposition party (cf. p.202). These women led the way for others including underpaid teachers and starving farmers to demonstrate for better conditions and, not surprisingly, such civil action was repeatedly discouraged by the government (cf. p.239). At the same time the future of these young women remained precarious as they were standing to lose their jobs when Most Favoured Nation protection was removed in 2005 (cf. p.238). Basic socio-cultural changes were needed at all levels if sustainable equity for the poor and empowerment of women were to be achieved.

9.6 Need for Change

As this thesis has demonstrated, in the promotion of gender mainstreaming in the 1990s, MOWA and women's NGOs were seen as the main vehicles for change. They were expected to challenge the male-based authoritarian power structures that kept women subservient in Cambodia. However, with the wide range of WID/GAD programs aimed at empowering women through advocacy and skills-training projects mainly operating in the urban areas (cf. pp.193-194), MOWA was unable to break through to challenge the culturally-entrenched male-dominated system affecting the great majority of rural women (cf. p.8.4). Although MOWA claimed to have achieved an unspecified level of gender awareness, it was unable to achieve gender mainstreaming in a culture where men strongly resisted being sensitised to women's position (cf. 8.3). Without strong leadership in MOWA and the NGOs (cf. p.192), the vast majority of women did not understand issues of equity, and were afraid to challenge the status quo. In this situation, even though it was officially agreed that gender mainstreaming should underpin the design of all development projects, without firm commitment and support from the government (cf. p.224) such implementation rarely occurred.

Government lack of commitment to GAD in the 1990s stemmed from strongly developed collective socio-cultural understandings of women's place in family and society (cf. 5.1, 5.3 & 5.4). These understandings were at odds with Western concepts of development issues, including gender equity and women's empowerment (cf. pp.228 & 231). Furthermore, ongoing war, dislocation and poverty had resulted in the perpetuation of high levels of illiteracy, lack of basic education and skills and increased denigration of females (cf. 8.1). Added to this, a sparse production of Khmer text material foreshadowed that literacy would remain a low priority (cf. 8.5). Other issues of concern were that educating girls in particular was seen as draining family resources (cf. 6.4), and that the more complex Khmer script (cf. p.51) limited potential for future access to knowledge in a global economy. People preferred to learn to speak other languages (English, French and Chinese) rather than to read and write Khmer (cf. p.189). Many poor, illiterate parents, particularly mothers, could not understand how education of their children, particularly girls, could lead to improvements in their standard of living (cf. pp.162-163). In this situation, developing culturally sustainable education models to promote a gender equity suited to the Cambodian context required long-term planning. As Meas Nee found (interview, 2004), literacy-training as a means to education in its broadest sense is motivated when adults are actively engaged in other problem-solving activities. The implication of this is that development programs in the 1990s should have focussed more strongly on dissemination of culturally appropriate practical knowledge and skills in areas such as health, hygiene and family planning, as well as agricultural productivity and poverty-reduction. To challenge poor practice donors should have developed more culturally sensitive, concrete role models to challenge poor practice through introducing practical knowledge in programs and media presentations (cf. 7.1), as well as disseminating non-text education through monks, nuns, village chiefs and traditional forms of entertainment.

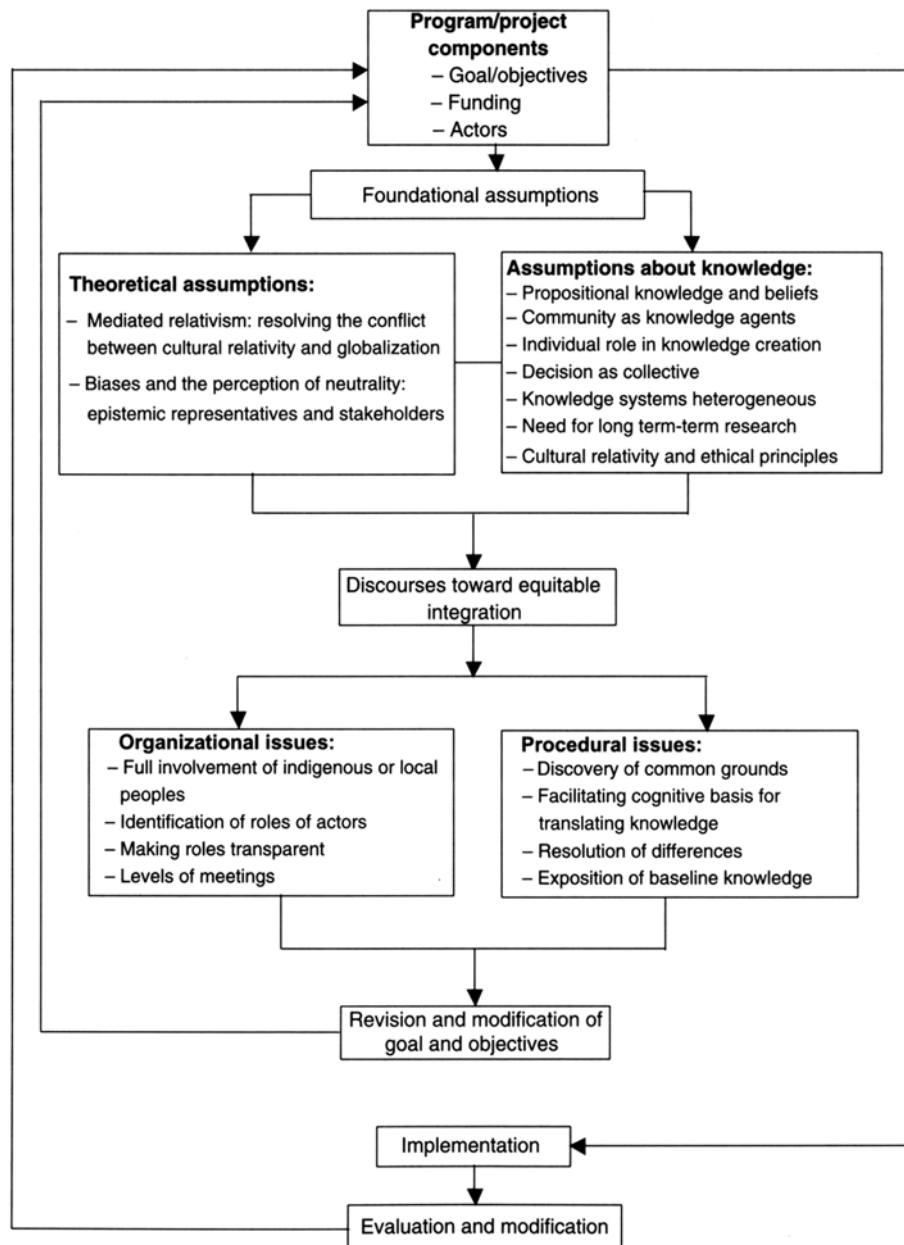


Figure 4: Process of knowledge integration (Purcell and Onjoro, 2002:170)

As with education and skills-dissemination for improvements in women's health and poverty reduction, the implementation of sustainable GAD programs requires long-term planning and donor collaboration with all stakeholders. Instead of ignoring traditional structures, NGOs should have been more open to building on their integrative potential. Purcell and Onjoro (2002:163-185) provide an argument for the

implementation of culturally sustainable development through “the intervention of friendly outside knowledge brokers, as suppliers of information and material resources, and as co-interpreters of knowledge – indeed as real collaborators”. In agreement with Purcell and Onjoro, this thesis has argued that such alternative understandings of development can occur only through valuing and maintaining the integrity of the diverse knowledges that exist. However, in the case of Cambodia, it could be argued that neither the donors nor the Cambodians have maintained this integrity. The Western donor community attempted to impose its understandings of gender equity on a little-understood cultural system while it had not yet fully addressed the problem of gender inequity within its own cultures and organisations (cf. p.21). They implemented short-term and narrowly conceived goal-oriented programs that allowed little space for healing opportunities and collaboration with the people. At the same time, too poor to refuse whatever was offered, Cambodians struggled to come to grips with understanding their own identity in the 1990s. Purcell and Onjoro’s collaborative model (see Figure 4 above) could well be adapted to the Cambodian context. Their model for the design of program/project components illustrates a process in which “knowledges raise questions and suggest answers in the form of alternative modes of existence. They do not exist as purely technical formations, but as part of entire cultural heritages”.

Although Purcell and Onjoro’s model addresses the factors basic to real collaboration between NGOs and the Cambodian community, it fails to address the need for trust-building that is fundamental to building relationships between the Cambodians themselves and between Cambodians and their donor knowledge-brokers. Due to the high mobility of returnees and internally displaced persons, resulting in severe lack of cohesion in Cambodia in the 1990s, development models need to include assistance in rediscovery of the fractured culture and reintegration of the people (cf. pp.20 & 230-232). Therefore, in adapting this model to the Cambodian situation, the need for psychological healing and trust-building should be understood and emphasised at every level, particularly before moving on to “discourses towards equitable integration”. The Purcell and Onjoro model also fails to emphasise the need for collaboration and consistency between NGOs and members of the donor community.

Acknowledging the need for collaboration in development, and aware of the limitations of outside knowledge-brokers, Susantha Goonatilake (1996) challenged Cambodian academics to think for themselves. Gaining understanding of Western concepts and their origins would enable them to rethink the world from their own perspectives and create a ‘think tank’ for Cambodian directions in development (cf. p.197). He believed this would put them in a position where they could take and modify what they found useful to their own situation and produce sustainable, culturally compatible Buddhist alternatives. As the Buddha upheld equality and respect between humans, democratic values including human rights and gender equity are theoretically possible. In agreement with Goonatilake’s framework, Emerson (1997) saw monks and nuns as having the potential to offer healing and counsel to aggrieved people (cf. pp.299-200) and Meas Ny used the Buddhist *sala* (cf. 8.4) as a meeting place for administration of development projects. Ceremonies such as the annual Khmer Buddhist *Pchum Ben* (ceremony giving honour to dead ancestors) offers healing for those who have lost loved ones (cf. p117). However, to implement culturally sustainable Buddhist models as a basis for sustainable GAD in Cambodia, the participation of educated members of both sexes would be needed. Again, an appropriate time frame needs to be factored in to educate more women to participate in discussion, and to educate the Buddhist hierarchy to promote gender equity and other human rights (cf. p.202).

9.7 Working for Equitable Development

This thesis has argued overall that MOWA and international NGOs failed in their efforts to promote sustainable gender mainstreaming (GAD) in Cambodia in the 1990s. At the same time, the thesis has pointed to a number of isolated culturally sensitive trust-building WID projects (cf. 7.8), and has contrasted CARERE/Seila and KAWP (two community-based development projects) to exemplify the limitations and potential for mainstreaming the empowerment of women in accordance with the Purcell and Onjoro model for culturally sustainable development (Figure 4), and Goonatilake’s advice to Cambodians to actively participate in conceptualising their models of development. Both

projects included women's empowerment, but with differing outcomes (cf. 7.8 & 8.4). The Cambodian CARERE/Seila program was a UNDP-funded government program aimed at alleviating poverty through a range of job-creation projects and expanding throughout the country to eventually become self-sufficient. Seila planned to build sustainable, gender-balanced communities through reconciliation, decentralisation of funds and good governance (cf. p.232-233). Initially it focussed on intensive involvement at village level, using bottom-up local planning processes to determine needs and help villagers generate sustainable income. However, due to the mistaken belief that generating and attracting money was the main key to sustainable development, as the program expanded the organisation experienced problems that were arguably related to traditional, hierarchical patron-client practices (cf. 2.6). By building a complicated structure to attract donor money, Seila ignored the need to engage more critically within the hierarchical, patron-client Cambodian cultural context, where trust and finances are limited to village level. In this context, gender-sensitive training for women lacked support from managers, and cuts in female staff made it difficult for participating women to initiate changes in gender attitudes (cf. p.234).

At the same time, a less-known development project, KAWP, situated in poverty-stricken areas of Battambang, was slowly building a unique community of trust, confidence building, gender-equity and poverty-alleviation. This project was centred in a Buddhist pagoda and based on a socially responsible version of Buddhism. Through a process of incorporating a non-hierarchical, gender-balanced leadership, KAWP was able to demonstrate gender-equity and egalitarianism in action (cf. p.201). It understood that advancing civil society through assisting both leaders and villagers to develop their own consciousness of the process of social development is a lengthy task whose pace cannot be forced. It looked to strengthen traditional mechanisms for social cohesion through leadership-collaboration and friendship with the people, the village leaders, the *wat*, the *sangha*, the *yeay chi* and the *achaa* (cf. 8.4). Inclusion of communes in the program was at a slower rate than in Seila. However, according to Slocomb et al. (2004), it was achieving greater levels of social cohesion through a deepening knowledge of the surrounding socio-cultural structure. It also extended gender-balanced leadership

capabilities through ongoing collaboration with all concerned, and interchange committed to the alleviation of poverty. KAWP prioritised support of the poorest in villages, assisting them to develop their own associations and providing material input to relieve the pressure of their poverty (cf. pp.231). As established communes approached a level of self-sufficiency, material inputs were focussed into the more recent, evolving communes. All committee members were well-trained to understand the concepts of social development and accept them as core democratic principles. Unlike Seila, the KAWP management believed that an organisation such as theirs would reach an optimum size limited to around ten communes. Due to its success, other NGOs came to study the KAWP model, but none succeeded in replicating it (cf. 8.4). They did not possess the necessary level of dedicated leadership that allowed for the implementation of long-term approaches to healing, trust-building and true collaboration.

Both programs pointed to the importance of allowing sufficient time for developing deeper understandings and changes in the attitudes of all players in development. Both indicated that this approach would lead to the greater cooperation and collaboration at all levels needed for sustainable poverty alleviation and GAD in Cambodia. However, despite the unique success of KAWP as an exemplary model of sustainable development, it is the Seila program that reflects the central argument of this thesis: that during the 1990s, despite providing enormous amounts of funding to promote gender-equity and poverty-alleviation in Cambodia, the international community failed to implement culturally sustainable long-term policies. It did not work with the people at all levels, particularly women, as collaborators and knowledge-brokers. It failed to implement systems that provided guidelines and checks to ensure equitable and rational allocation of the generous resources it provided. It failed to recognise the need to train poorly educated local leaders to promote equitable community development, and to educate the *sangha* to gainfully use the pagoda as a culturally-sustainable centre for the promotion of social cohesion.

The failure of Seila to implement sustainable GAD in its communities reflects the broader failure of the Cambodian government itself to act in a socially responsible way

by supporting key development areas and GAD policies. The lack-of-fit between Cambodian cultural understandings and Western understandings of empowerment of women through WID/GAD policies left the government's historically based, hierarchical political practices unchecked, and failed to achieve more than a token level of gender-consciousness. In the face of a growing population, key areas critical to sustainable GAD, which included a just legal system, equitable health and education, gender mainstreaming and poverty-reduction, remained virtually unchanged in the 1990s. Out-of-touch, uncoordinated donors failed to address the widespread misdirection of resources and alleviate poverty, and failed to address the prevailing negative cultural models of women's place in the Cambodian society. As this thesis has shown, despite the high hopes and rhetoric of funding agencies and women's NGOs in the early 1990s, the majority of women were forced to endure worsening levels of inequity, poverty and abuse, and failed to gain adequate access to education, health and legal services, particularly in rural areas. By the end of the decade, although donor-investment for development projects, the majority of which had a GAD component, was estimated at two billion US\$, traditional understandings of power and patronage remained as barriers to sustainable, equitable development at grass-roots level. The result was that women's issues continued to be sidelined and social change remained largely at the level of rhetoric rather than positive action. Right up to 2004, at the time of writing this thesis, prospects for sustainable GAD in Cambodia remained overwhelmingly bleak.

POSTSCRIPT: JULY 2004

Returning to Cambodia in July 2004, I was struck both by things that had visibly changed and by underlying cultural issues that remained unchanged. A short visit to MOWA established that Mu Sochua had been replaced by her less outspoken colleague, Dr Ing Kanta Phavi. Dr Ing was away visiting women's centres in the countryside, but I spoke with five women project workers who protested that the situation for women in Cambodia had not improved since the early 1990s. They expressed disappointment that the underlying gender issues in their culture remained unresolved, citing current delays in the ratification of new laws aimed at prosecuting men who physically abuse their wives. They lamented that these laws were being held up due to certain ministers arguing in favour of adding a provisional clause "unless the husband was teaching his wife a lesson". A twenty percent rise in poverty, unchecked people-trafficking, increasing levels of HIV/AIDS among married women and growing levels of family violence were all contributing to a worsening situation for women, despite a visible growth in wealth in urban areas.

Revisiting my old work-colleagues at the newly updated venue for IDP education in Phnom Penh, I was struck by the now well-fed and prosperous-looking Khmer staff¹. This prosperity was reflected in greatly improved roads, and a huge new private university dominating several centrally located city blocks. However, despite such examples of urban development for the wealthy, continuing absence of donor strategies to ensure equitable aid distribution meant that the situation for the poor was worsening. The rich and new middle classes were accessing the benefits of improved infrastructure and increased business opportunities, while the rural areas remained stagnant. The new 400 percent tax on petrol and utilities to help finance the cash-strapped government further disproportionately affected the poor. At the same time a political crisis was looming. Strong-arm bullying of Hun Sen had forced through new, unconstitutional laws for 'open show of hands' voting in parliament (aimed at pin-pointing non-conformists).

¹ For example, the ex-tank driver (mentioned in Chapter 3), previously a gateman, had now become a responsible administrator who was part way through his Master of Administration by correspondence.

However, although top-down administration in Cambodia was performing true to form, a handful of positive new developments was emerging at grass-roots level.

One such development was the 11th Asia Pacific Youth Conference held in Siem Riep, which was my main purpose in revisiting Cambodia. “Be the Change You Want to See in the World” was held in the grounds of the Buddhist pagoda of Wat Rajabo, which still bore the scars of destruction under the Khmer Rouge. Although there were many young monks attending this pagoda, in 1975 all the monks there had been slaughtered. With a new building to accommodate meetings, the pagoda offered a poignantly apposite venue for a conference committed to self-discovery and healing. The conference was instigated, organised and hosted by a group of Cambodian tertiary students who were members of an internationally connected organisation, Initiatives for Change (IC). They had skillfully organised safe food, transport and accommodation for all participants on an extremely modest budget. In addition they had organised excellent key speakers and a program to facilitate the inclusion of a wide range of meaningful, thought-provoking activities and Cambodian cultural performances. As an academic, I found that this intensive, ten-day conference presented a real departure from others I have attended. In addition to individual self-discovery and healing, the focus was on building collaborative networks for change in the region. The 230 participants were from 27 different countries, but most were from Asia: 86 were students from Cambodia - 54 males and 32 females. The main purpose of plenary sessions was to find ways for a new generation to look at identity and reconciliation, and address corruption and conflict in Cambodia. According to Rob Wood, chief collaborator with the students in organizing the conference, the most significant outcome was a spontaneous opening up of dialogue between the Cambodian and Vietnamese students. Traditionally, these groups have been enemies, but here their purpose was to establish trust and continuing exchange to bridge communication gaps created by their predecessors. The 22 Vietnamese students - 7 male and 15 female - and many of the Cambodian students decided to meet each day to build understanding as a basis for future collaboration.

Participants shared strategies for bridging gaps between city and country, and between rich and poor. Although most of the speakers were young, several distinguished, more senior Cambodians were invited to share their experience and commitment. All focused on bridge-building, carefully avoiding direct political criticisms. Community builder, Dr Meas Nee pointed out that, although young people are the future leaders of the country, they have been excluded from development. He asked the students to consider: “Should Cambodians use the youth to develop the community - or use the community to develop youth?” He stressed that youth, women, farmers and others traditionally excluded from decision-making, need to form groups and to network to create movements that peacefully challenge the government. He stressed that international funding agencies need to see the importance of youth in the development process, and develop long-term strategies and a shared vision for their inclusion. Nee explained that Cambodians, conditioned by their culture not to question, have been poisoned by a legacy of imported ideas from France, Vietnam, China and the West. For example, with respect to GAD, enormous harm has been done by NGOs trying to force feminism (rather than gender equity) on Cambodians. Meas Nee explained that youth need to understand the issues. He warned them that Cambodia has a successful strategy for keeping people uninformed, with the result that, as in the case of Cambodia joining the WTO, the burden tends to fall most heavily on the poorest in the society. With lack of information and lack of awareness, they can do nothing.

Chea Vannath (Center for Social Development) spoke of her work in combating corruption in Cambodia (estimated to be worth one billion dollars per year, which is more than the national budget). One initiative has been to introduce into the entire school system a curriculum stressing honesty, integrity and accountability. Another speaker at the conference, Son Soubert (Centre for Cultural Studies), outlined some of the barriers to development in Cambodia. He pointed out that top-level corruption within the international funding agencies was blocking them from revealing the truth about misappropriation of development funds in Cambodia. This meant that while aid continued, root problems of inequitable distribution were not addressed. Meanwhile, the effects of increasingly ‘culturally normal’ behaviours of post-war bullying and violence

were eroding the situation for the poor, particularly women. Soubert commented that the disadvantaged have well-learned their lessons on day-to-day survival in a dangerous environment by passively accepting whatever comes their way without asking questions. All speakers challenged the students to find new, culturally appropriate ways to rebuild their country through healing, reconciliation, networking and collaboration.

Through sharing and story telling, individual students made choices to confront corruption at a personal level. As a result, some decided that they would go back to their teachers and apologise for cheating in exams. Others wanted to apologise for the corrupt behaviours of their families. Confronted with the expanding problem of family violence and breakdown in Cambodia, several students formulated strategies to address such problems within their own families. In one plenary session a group of twelve students spoke briefly about a simple initiative they had taken towards reconciliation within their family, school, workplace and community. The initiatives did not finish at the end of the conference. Enthused students continued to make plans for building bridges between country and city, and rich and poor, as well as liaise with the Vietnamese to build trust and plan future projects. One group of Cambodian students immediately embarked on a project distributing food to the poor in Phnom Penh, beginning with a three-course meal for 200 people outside a city hospital. At the same time another group embarked on providing weekly meals to poor patients in the hospital, as well as initiating a bridge-building project in a poor village near Phnom Penh. In this way, not only the challenging content of the conference, but also the confidence and skills-development gained in the process of actuating such challenges, were giving birth to a range of personally significant initiatives for the Cambodian youth. This brought them much needed hope, and inspiration to find their own ways to build new directions for their future. With such an encouraging number of female students (some from poor, rural backgrounds) prepared to actively participate in the conference and follow-up projects, willing to assert their own agency, I discerned a glimmer of hope for the strengthening of gender equity in the future.

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APPENDIX 1

CUSO'S DRAFT GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

1. THE POLICY

Statement of the Problem

As we move toward the 21st century, women remain subordinated in both capitalist and socialist societies. Subordination of women is visible in different forms in different cultures. However, the world over, men's and women's roles and the values placed on these roles are set by societies. In these socially set gender roles, women do more of the work and men have greater access to and control over resources and benefits -- power, wealth, and time.

Sources of women's subordination must be identified and work towards their elimination must be an integral part of our development work. Without clearly identifying the root causes of the problem, CUSO's solutions will not only fail, they may make women's lives worse and the potential of women's visions and contributions will not be realized.

The domination of women by men occurs in two main areas of human life. One is the area of work considered productive and valued, often called "men's work". The other is in the area of work associated with child-bearing, the home, and the maintenance of human life which is rarely valued or recognized, and often called "women's work" or reproductive work.

The word patriarchy is often used to describe the structures and systems that set and maintain these dominant-subordinate relations between men and women.

Patriarchal control has existed in association with different systems, such as feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Recently, effective challenges to patriarchy have begun to emerge, mainly through social forces identified with women's movements. The relationships between these social forces and development are generally unclear, and evolving, yet offer potential for vital social transformation.

CUSO's Response to the Problem

CUSO is committed to "the economic and social advancement of the poor and powerless." The subordinate relations of women to men mean that within the category of "poor and powerless," women have different needs from those of their larger social groups. Women's situations must be considered to ensure positive changes in those situations.

This CUSO Gender and Development policy recognizes that patriarchal control is the source of women's subordination and that this must be changed. We recognize that work to end the subordinate-dominant nature of women's and men's relations is part of a complex social agenda. Women struggle in broader contexts in which gender, class, race, ethnicity, and religion interlock. Because of women's subordinate position in these broader contexts, a focus on gender is required to ensure that women's needs do not continue to be ignored.

To ensure that women's needs are not ignored, a gender perspective must be incorporated into the work we do with all groups. A focus on gender relations, rather than on women, locates the need and responsibility for change with both men and women. It acknowledges that development affects men and women differently, and that development has an impact on relations between men and women. A gender focus also acknowledges that while women and their contributions may be "locked out" of patriarchal structures and systems, men are "locked in," and that the transformation of these structures and systems is in our collective human interests.

CUSO acknowledges that women's subordination exists across all classes, races, and religions. Therefore, the work of transforming gender relations has the potential to create alliances across these divisions. Such alliances can assist us in our goal of supporting development from the perspective of poor, marginalised women and men. CUSO's aim, to "support the transformation of people's lives for the better, as they define it -- at their own pace, and under their own control," can only be realized if gender relations are also transformed.

CUSO Mission Statement, December 1985

CUSO DEVELOPMENT POLICY STATEMENT, October, 1985, Amended.

The Vision

We have a long-term vision of a sustainable and healthy society environmentally, culturally, economically, and politically. In this new society, no one group will dominate and control another. The transformation of gender relations will enable women to participate fully as actors and agents in social transformation. Women and men will be able to live satisfying, empowered lives and reach their full human potential in supportive and mutually respectful relationships.

General Objective

CUSO is committed to working to end the subordination of women by supporting empowerment. Women will be active agents in transforming themselves and their relations with men and society.

Such empowerment is critical for the related goal of transformation of the patriarchal structures and systems that maintain domination of men and subordination of women -- from households through communities to increasingly interdependent global systems. This transformation is essential for the realization of our vision.

We will use development processes that are participatory, consultative, and democratic, and which focus on women not in isolation but in gender and other power relations.

Specific Objectives

- * To increase our understanding of the dynamics of gender relation, particularly women's subordination to men and women's deteriorating situation as a result of development efforts.
- * To involve men in the transformation of gender relation in society.
- * To work to ensure that no activities are undertaken that worsen the condition of women or negatively affect their position in relation to men.
- * To ensure that CUSO's analysis and activities start from and are grounded in the experience of the women with and for whom we work.

- * To develop and implement participatory methodologies that ensure CUSO's capacity to promote programs that are gender sensitive and strengthen women's involvement in and control of such programs.
- * To ensure that women participate actively in the design, execution, and evaluation of all activities supported and undertaken by CUSO with the aim of achieving gender balance in all aspects of our work.

2. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Gender and Development operational objectives provide direction for the development of participatory mechanisms and systems and systems to support the implementation of the Gender and Development policy. These objectives have implications for CUSO's work in the areas of training, program planning, monitoring, human resources, and communication.

Understanding the Policy

- * To promote organizational understanding and commitment to the Gender and Development policy by organizing participatory consultations with the various CUSO constituencies -- board, staff, and volunteers - to review, adapt, and implement the policy.
- * To ensure that all CUSO co-operants and new staff, including locally engaged staff, are familiar with the Gender and Development policy and its implications for their work, as part of the orientation process and ongoing co-operant and staff support.

Training

- * To develop explicit plans to provide appropriate training to enable CUSO co-operants, board members, and staff to implement the policy.
- * To provide training as developed in training plans to familiarize CUSO staff, board, and volunteers with program planning tools that will assist CUSO to achieve the general objective and to support development of skill in use and adaptation of such tools.

Mechanisms for Monitoring the Policy

- * To develop mechanisms to integrate Gender and Development into planning and evaluation systems in a measurable and reviewable way that includes both accountability systems and support mechanisms.

Program Planning

- * To develop country and regional plans that explicitly address and integrate issues of gender relations through:
 - * Women-specific activities.
 - * The involvement of women in all aspects of CUSO's programs, and the ongoing analysis of programs, projects, and placements for their impact on women.

Human Resources

- * To develop specific strategies to ensure the equal representation and participation of women at all levels in CUSO staff and volunteer structures.
- * To develop tests, and implement gender and development requirements for all CUSO staff, consultants and co-operants, to be incorporated into job descriptions, work plans, selection interviews, and performance reviews.

Communications

- * To develop communication strategies that eliminate gender bias and stereotypes in both language and image, and that contribute to the realization of the Gender and Development objectives.

Source: Cited in Lott and Sarann, 1995

APPENDIX 2

PERIOD	POLITICS	GEOGRAPHY	RELIGION	CAPITAL	SOCIETY
1 st -7 th Cent. Funan	-Kindom of fiefdoms	-Situating in what is now Sth East Cambodia and Sth Vietnam	-Stone phallus cult, belief in ancestor and other spirits -Introduction of Indian pantheon -Buddhism among elite -Merit concept	-Rice – one harvest enough for 3 years -Root growing -Forest goods -Slavery trade -Main trading centre near Oc-Eo seaport -Introduction of irrigation	-Khmer language -Small states -Majority of population ‘slaves’ -Indian hierarchy among elite -Predominantly agrarian -Hunting and gathering
7 th -9 th Cent. Chen La	-Changing power centres -Politics move further inland	-Inland and along the Dangrek Escarpment	-As for Funan above	-Wet-rice growing -Mobilisation of man power	-Introduction of Khmer and Sanskrit
9 th -14 th Cent. Angkorean	-Khmer united under universal god king Jayavarman II through military campaigns and alliances -Great dynasty peaking in 12 th century under Jayavarman VII -Invasions and warring -Defeated by Thailand	-Situating north of Tonle Sap Lake -Extending to Thailand, Laos, Gulf of Thailand, Sth Vietnam and beyond	-God kings and elite adopt Indian beliefs -Each local god king builds a temple mountain to house his golden phallus -Animism and ancestor worship -13 th cent. shifts in Buddhism and Hinduism among elite and -Populace turns to Theravada Buddhism	-Military power -Slavery -Magnificent temple buildings centred around Angkor Wat -Complex system of water storage, canals -Wet-rice surplus, 3 to 4 harvests yearly -Fish from Tonle Sap -Commercial expansion of trading in forest goods, land, rice, buffalo and slaves exchanged for cloth, porcelain and other goods	-King and court seen as patrons -God kings above all priests -New concept of nationhood -Sporadic warfare -Pali language introduced -Unprecedented architectural, cultural, social and literary development -Complex system of slavery -Predominantly agrarian
14 th -19 th Cent. Middle Ages	-Hinduised god king still holds absolute power and owns all properties, but declining in popularity -Entanglement of Thai and Khmer courts -Warring btwn elite Vishnuists and Buddhists -Shifting loyalties, wars btwn Thai and Vietnam (V/N) -Isolated from 17 th -19 th cent. -Vietnamisation, usurping delta and Khmer population -Many areas ungoverned	-Least recorded era -Centre moved from Angkor, south to Phnom Penh -Shifting and shrinking borders -Mekong Delta usurped by Vietnamese	-Theravada Buddhism now Popular religion, de-emphasising things of this world, removing legitimacy of deification of kings -Vishnuism and Buddhism Among elite	-Major shifts in economy -Shift to maritime trading with Chinese, Malay and Indonesians through Mekong Delta -Trade in rice, forest goods, rough pottery, dried fish and fish sauce -Late 17 th century trade declined as Mekong Delta was Blocked off by V/N and Chinese Traders -No roads and poor communications	-Major shifts in values, language -Thai influence -Extremely hierarchical -Large proportions of population are monks and slaves -Predominantly agrarian -Introduction of restrictive <i>chhab</i> buddhist social laws -Pagoda schools for boys -Population decline -Extreme suffering, poverty and chaos -Sinking to near annihilation with population of less than 1 million -Fear and hatred of Vietnamese

<p>1863-1940</p> <p>French Colonial</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cambodia still governed as in Anchorean era -Under threat of annexation by Thai and V/N, King Duang called to French for protectorate -In 1863, his successor Norodom, signed a treaty with the French trading protection for timber and mineral rights -French bring bureaucracy and education for elite - Unpopular abolishment of slavery by French -French tighten control, enforce taxes, quell rebellions -Position of king weakens, French buy up land -More V/N than Khmer in govt -First Khmer newspaper -Birth of Khmer nationalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -French colonisation of V/N and Cambodia -Thailand returns annexed areas to Cambodia -Borders not clearly defined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Theravada Buddhism and folk beliefs -Failed attempts to introduce Catholicism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Subsistence rice-growing economy, primitive farming methods, irrigation a rarity -Chinese minority mainly doing the marketing and trading -Malay Muslim minority weaving, cattle trading and fisheries -French introduce gravelled roads and railways enforcing corvée labour -Massive increase in Chinese dominating rural economy and practising usury -French finance activities through fees on all govt services as well as taxing rice and crops and a wide range of goods. Also taxing exports and imports incl. Rice and rubber -French imposed highest tax per capita in Indochina -Modernisation of city including running water and electricity -Almost nothing spent on education or health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -As since Anchor, Khmer mainly rice farmers and monks -Literacy in hands of monks -Pagoda schools for boys -A few new schools introduced by French -Informally stratified village and family structure -Village people offer homage for protection, urban people attach themselves to patrons for survival in widespread forms of slavery -Provincial Khmer maintain habits of patronage, dependence, violence, fatalism, corruption, sorcery and belief in the king as a god -Frequent famines and epidemics -Khmer angry at French preference for employing V/N -Low pay to Khmer civil servants
<p>1940-1952</p> <p>Japanese Occupation and French Departure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Japanese occupation -French ally to Japan, so given day to day control of Cambodia -French install Sihanouk as King -Birth of Khmer political parties and growth of the left, many drawn from the Khmer men and women educated in France 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Borders not clearly defined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Buddhism and folk beliefs -Failed attempts to introduce Catholicism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -French increase Cambodian participation in govt administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Continuing as above, but increase in nationalism as French control Weakening

<p>1953-1970 Independence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Independence and democracy under socialist King Sihanouk -Turned to China for support -Policy of neutrality and popular style -Military autonomy -French bureaucrats replaced by self-interested elite Khmer -Sympathisers to Viet Minh flee to Nth V/N -Obsessed with making movies, Sihanouk monopolises politics, killing opponents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cambodian borders defined by French prior to withdrawal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Buddhism and folk beliefs -Failed attempts to introduce Catholicism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sihanouk ceased aid to USA, losing 15% of national budget -Closure of private banks -Nationalisation of import-export sector to cripple Chinese business elite -Development of education to 20% national budget -Development of public health and universities -Cambodia prospers and is internationally known -Huge infrastructural and social imbalance -Sihanouk's mismanagement and extravagance leads to a faltering economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unpopular French tax system continued -Situation in countryside unchanged with 80% of land occupying rice growing -Increase in education for boys and girls -Women given right to vote -Old people still see Sihanouk as a deity -Social unrest\ -University and high school graduates angry because not enough well-paid employment
<p>1970-1975 Republican</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In 1970 a pro-US coup ousts Sihanouk placing weak, corrupt, Lon Nol as prime Minister of Khmer Republic -Sihanouk takes command of a united front govt allied to Nth V/N -Pro-Sihanouk riots in east Cambodia and Lon Nol killing of V/N citizens -Sth V/N and US invade east Cambodia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Borders as defined by French, but still disputed in areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Buddhism and folk beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Widespread corruption under weak Lon Nol govt -Extreme hardship in war torn countryside 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lon Nol popular in Phnom Penh, but rural people unprepared -US carpet bombing Khmer countryside -Much of the countryside under anti-V/N Khmer Rouge communist Control -Khmer Rouge areas experiment with programs of collectivisation -Refugees flock to Phnom Penh to flee War
<p>1975-1979 Khmer Rouge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Khmer Rouge lay siege to Phnom Penh, for 3 months before invading and emptying the city -Democratic Kampuchea to 'liberate' the poor under a totalitarian regime under 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Borders disputed in areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maoist communism -All religion abolished -Monks killed or put to work in fields -People forced to attend self-criticism and indoctrination meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Year zero destruction of infrastructure and skilled people -Goal to increase rice production -Money and markets abolished -Private property abolished -Education practically abolished -Unskilled take care of sick in draconian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2 million forced out of cities to help farmers suffered discrimination -People forcefully moved and families split -Forced group marriages -Population forced to live collectively -Men, women and children assigned

	<p>French Educated Pol Pot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sihanouk under arrest -Descent into worst genocide of the century -Due to ongoing border attacks, V/N invades Cambodia and Overthrows Khmer Rouge 			<p>conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Population reduced to long hours of forced labour, malnutrition and bare survival -Famine 	<p>to work separately in groups, supervised by uneducated, armed cadre, many under 15 years of age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Constant fear of death from torture, murder, sickness or starvation
<p>1979-1989 Vietnamese Occupation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vietnamese liberation army largely controls Cambodia as People's Republic of Kampuchea -Cambodians installed in govt but undersigned by V/Nadvisers -DK resistance continues -300,000 refugees at Thai border -Sihanouk leads resistance from border -V/N want out after Soviet aid ceases -V/N intr State of Cambodia under pro-V/N Hun Sen -V/N withdraw 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cambodia and its borders in dispute between three warring factions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -State controlled Buddhism -All forms of religion highly discouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -International isolation freezes aid to PRK -Donations of food and medicine delayed as Thai support KR -Communications difficult due to state of roads and transport -improved food production -Schools and universities reopened but very few trained teachers -Land tenure to administrative units -All agricultural production for state -Aid agencies assisting in rural development -Border refugees receiving limited international assistance -Overseas training for privileged -Random conscription for others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vietnamese army shocked by what they encountered -Famine as people abandon communes and farming to search for lost relatives -Traumatized, sick population now facing starvation -over 100,000 V/N troops remained in Cambodia -Khmer grateful for liberation from KR but soon resent V/N control -Widespread apathy and fatalism -People noticing changes in the language and culture in relation to hierarchy and respect
<p>1989-1993 Transition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia takes control of key ministries in preparation for free democratic elections -22,000 UNTAC personnel arrive in Phnom Penh -Ongoing guerilla warfare of KR rebels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Borders and KR controlled areas in dispute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -SOC proclaims Buddhism as the state religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reforms under SOC include ownership of land and free market system -Rush to buy property -Increase in skilled employment -UNTAC US\$ inflates economy -Sudden motorisation of cities -Massive increase in aid and NGOs -Assessments of country situation reveal grim situation to international community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Guerilla warfare and mines laid by KR and others continue to devastate rural areas -Attempts to resettle refugees -Large adult gender imbalance and over 50% children -Increase in V/N skilled workers and prostitutes -Increase in corruption and nepotism

1993-2000 Democratic Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rannaridh's FUNCINPEC wins election, compromise to form coalition with Hun Sen -Sihanouk reinstated as king -Rannaridh agrees CPP has V/N trained administrators and controls the army -Disagreement and distrust in every ministry due to rivalries in coalition -Bombing of legal meeting of garment workers organised by opposition outside Nat Assembly -Rannaridh, 1st prime minister negotiates with KR to surrender and join him -Hun Sen reacts to threat with coup, ousting Rannaridh -FUNCINPEC flee country fearing mass assassinations -Hun Sen calls puppet Ung Huot, replacing Rannaridh until 1998 elections -Hun Sen wins elections and confirms hegemonic control of country -Corruption and impunity in all ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Borders and -KR controlled areas in dispute -KR surrender so Cambodia now one country -Thai and Vietnamese borders in dispute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Theravada Buddhism and freedom of religion -Folk beliefs -Monks ignorant due to long term disruption of all religious beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Massive increase in foreign aid and NGO support -Skills training, health, education, and development projects -Increase in education at all levels, but hampered by poorly trained teachers and corruption -Illiteracy higher than in 1960s -Increases in flooding and environmental destruction due to deforestation -Increase in human trafficking and prostitution -HIV AIDS highest levels in SE Asia -Untrained, underpaid police force leads to widespread impunity -High levels of corruption and political unrest make international donors wary, further limiting development -Many donors wary of support due to unrest -Increase in overseas factory development to exploit cheap labour -Faltering increase in tourism, especially to Seam Reap temples -Illegal land grabs by corrupt generals who oust farmers after mines are cleared -Demobilisation of factionalised army creates further imbalance of society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Health, education, sanitation, nutrition and infrastructure in appalling state -Unbalanced gender ratio with women outnumbering men -Old culture re-emerging -Widespread nepotism, patron-client relationships and corruption -Widespread abuse of human rights -Lowest literacy and education rates, particularly among women -Highest infant mortality rates in the region -New social developments as opposition organise unions and push for improvements in human rights -Displaced farmers protest outside National Assembly -Rural population poorer, less healthy and more poorly served than at any time since 1920s -Chronic problems of displaced people
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CHART 1: Historical Overview of Khmer

NB. The primary source for this selection of relevant historical is David Chandler (1993). Other points are from available literature sources, newspaper readings and general knowledge.

APPENDIX 3

FAMILIAL PRONOUNS

In the 1950s the late Professor Sar Sarun of the Royal University of Phnom Penh (1997:1-2, *The Ten Basic Roots of Khmer Mentality*, translated by Kua Cham, Khmer Aphiwath group) maintained that the Cambodian linguistic system strongly defers to the female. He pointed out “the major root of Khmer mentality resides in the fact that Khmer people value the practice of matriarchy”. He defined this as “the acceptance of female persons as leaders or decision-makers at all levels ... ranging from family life to the governing of the whole society”, inferring that women strongly possess psychological supremacy as ‘mother’ in the Khmer psyche, stemming from ancient times. Sarun’s account of the linguistic and social practices biased towards women are as follows:

In the family, Khmer people place a female prefix before:

Father, grandpa, dad and uncle

In the armed forces:

Mother of the army = chief of the army

Mother of the command = deputy commander

Deputy mother of the command = deputy commander

In administrative systems:

Mother of the county = county governor

Mother of the town = mayor

Mother of the district = district councillor

Mother of the block = representative of a block of ten households

(Sar, 1997: <http://www.khmernet.com/books/khmer.mentality.html>)

Sar maintained that the concept of ‘family’ as the traditional organising cog of Khmer social organisation is clearly seen in the language use at all levels. Except for the royal family which is organised on patrilineal lines, the overall family organisation in Cambodia is based on matrilineal descendancy, and defines itself in relation to the female. He stressed that the Khmer language has a very rich vocabulary with applications suited to all

combinations of sociological groupings within the overlapping networks of family models filling the social space.

Népote (1992:120) points out that seven degrees of parenthood are indicated within the Khmer language and complex degrees of family relations adapted to circumstances, consequences and principals are inferred. At the bottom levels of society, the lower class has a limited register, but the higher the levels rise, the more complex the degrees of family relationship registers become. Saverous Pou (cited in Népote 1992:8) discusses the ways in which social levels and familial respect systems built into the language are closely linked to the behaviour of the people. Népote (1992:129) also points out that there are varying registers of parental discourse that are subject to the influence of neighbours in every community. These traditionally provided socially accepted norms that contribute to the harmony of the neighbourhood.

Népote stresses the significance of the practice of people addressing each other as family members when meeting for the first time. They are also expected to assume the accompanying obligations, rights and duties of that role. All groups of people (including religious groups) reform themselves into closed family models under parental authority. Loss in death of a particular member of this linguistically connected group results in mourning that is equal to a real family member, creating a need to establish a new balance. These parental themes are also built into the language of the political organisations in which authentic biological connections are common.

According to Népote the fundamental Cambodian social values are built into the language and hierarchy, sexual orientation and matrimonial choices must fit the language determiners. Patterns of patronage are also formed through hierarchical exchanges used in the language. For example, brotherhoods may be formed with those at equal levels, and older uncles may form rapport with nephews and become their patrons. The nephews become their clients, with respect based on hierarchical exchanges. Népote maintains that marriages are intrinsically unequal partnerships, as married behaviour is pre-determined in the language as that of an older brother and younger sister.

APPENDIX 4

SOME PROVERBS ON WOMEN AND THE CULTURE

Women must be chaste

Manooh proh doch meas duk dop, sittrei doch krornat saw.

Men are like pure gold, women are like white cloth. (If a woman does anything to earn herself a bad reputation, she is permanently stained, but a man's reputation can always be restored)

Women support men

Samnap yuong day srei yuong proh.

The seedling supports the soil and the woman supports the man. (A husband is only credible if he has a good wife)

Samnat yung dei srey yung pros

Women are the roots that connect the soil to the tree. (Women control the survival of men)

Samnap yong dey srey yong pros.

Women are expected to support and help their husbands. *

Women belong at home

Sittrei merl tae chonkran mun chuom.

Women cannot even go around the stove in the kitchen. (No need for her to go out and do other things)

Troap kuang thet srey cheh samchai tuk

Phteah thum sranok thet leabbh srey chea.

Wealth is there because the women knows how to save and be frugal; a house is comfortable and happy because the wife has a good character. *

Mothers are more important than fathers

Sauv slap ba kom aoey slap me

Slau luang teuk kantat tonle

kom aoey phloeng chheh pteah.

It's better to lose a father than a mother; it's better to lose your possessions when the boat sinks in the middle of the river, than to lose your possessions when the house burns down.

Men should listen to women

Min cheua peak srey as sraw pouch.

If you do not listen to the advice of a woman, you'll not have any rice seed next year. *

You must follow the customs

Joule stung taem bot. Joule srok taem proteih.

If you want to go along the river, you have to follow the bends of the river. If you want to enter the district, you have to follow the country. (Customs)

Kom bos san touch rom long phnom.

Don't throw the fishing line over the mountain. (You must follow the correct way according to the hierarchical structures)

Kluon teah kom tong, dai klay khley komchhoung sra va oop phnom.

Short people should not try to pick up something high, and a short hand should not try to grasp the mountain. (Poor people should not attempt to go above their station in life)

Damrey chuh thom kom tam damrey.

The faeces of the elephant is big – you cannot make your faeces as big as the elephant's. (The rich and powerful can do whatever they want – a small person cannot emulate them. You should behave appropriately for your status level)

Kom yolk pong muan tow chul nung thmor.

Don't hit a stone with an egg. (Small people cannot go against the powerful)

Neak toch tweu, neak thom banchea, peil neak toch torva neak thom thak.

Small people do the work, the big give the orders; when the small challenge, then the big will kick.

New proverb reinforcing status quo

Kone neak krur tweu kang torp, kone neak mean tweu police, kone rotmuntrey tow rien now borroteih.

The poor children are the soldiers, the children of the rich are the police, the children of the ministers study abroad.

Don't trust anyone

Kom chuea maek, kom chuea pakai, kom chuea madai, kom chuea propon.

Don't trust the clouds, don't trust the stars, don't trust your mother, and don't trust your wife.

Khmer people are hard to convince on new knowledge

Ondaet via chum vin srok kern away teang oh dia via merl. Haoy via trolop deu samot dambey prap trei pontai trei min chua via tay.

The turtle wandered around the land looking at all he saw, then he returned to the sea to tell the fish, but the fish did not believe him. (Khmer people bar virtual knowledge- Dr. Thel Thong)

* These proverbs from Karen Fisher-Nguyen (1994), *Khmer Proverbs: Images and Rules*, in *Cambodian Culture since 1975: Homeland and Exile*, Ebihara et al. (eds.), Cornell University, USA.

APPENDIX 5

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

(Translation)

Confidential Questionnaire

February 1996

SECTION I

(TO BE COMPLETED BY THE ACTING HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD)

1. HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION: People normally living in the household :

a - Overview of Age and Gender :

- Number of adult males (18 years and over)
- Number of adult females (18 years and over)
- Number of male children 13 - 17 years old
- Number of female children 13 -17 years old
- Number of male children 5-12 years old and under
- Number of female children 5-12 years old and under
- Number of male children 4 years old and under
- Number of female children 4 years old and under

b - Main Language Spoken in Household :

KhmerChinese.....Other (please specify)

2. HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD :

a - Position in Family :

Father.....Mother.....Other (please specify)

b - Age.....

3. ASPIRATIONS TO EDUCATION FOR BOYS :

a - Aspirations of the head(s) of the household towards :

- Level of education for males.....
- Preferred higher education subject(s) for males.....

b - Reasons for preferences.....

.....

c - Preferred language studied: English French Chinese

4. ASPIRATIONS TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS :

a - Aspirations of the head(s) of the household towards :

- Level of education for females.....
- Preferred higher education subject(s) for females.....
-
- b - Reasons for preferences
-
- c - If you want your children to learn another language, which language would you prefer ? Chinese.....English.....French.....

5. ACCESS TO EDUCATION :

- Is there an accessible primary school in your area?
Yes.....No.....
How many kilometers from your home to primary school?.....
- Is there an accessible high school in your area?
Yes.....No.....
How many kilometers from your home to high school?.....
- Is there an accessible college or university in your area?
Yes.....No.....
How many kilometers from your home to college or university?.....
- If higher education is accessible in your area - what subjects are included in the curriculum? If you know - please indicate the subjects.....
-
- Is there accessible work training in your area?
YesNo.....
If work training is accessible, please describe.....
-

6. COMMENTS ON THIS SURVEY :

If you would like to comment on the questions asked in this survey, or add any further information about your household that may be relevant to this study, please explain here

.....

.....

SECTION II

(TO BE COMPLETED FOR EACH ADULT MEMBER OF THE HOUSEHOLD)

HOUSEHOLD MEMBER OVER 18 AND NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL :

Please indicate position in the household, e.g. father, mother, aunt, foster child etc.

..... Age

1. HISTORY OF EDUCATION :

a - Primary school : Please indicate years studying

Please specify subjects

.....

b - Secondary school : Please indicate years studying

Please specify subjects.....

.....

c - University or other training : Please specify.....

Please indicate years studying.....

Please specify hours per week

Please specify subjects

.....

d - Current occupation : Please describe.....

.....

.....

2. HISTORY OF PAID WORK SINCE 1994:

a - Present main work : Please specify.....

How many days per week

How many hours per day

How many years doing this work.....

Income of this work

b - Present supplementary work : please specify.....

.....

.....

Work days per week

Work hours per day

Years doing this work

Income of this work

3. PRESENT UNPAID WORK :

- Any kind of work that you do without payment : At home and elsewhere.....

.....

.....

- Average hours of unpaid work that you do every day

4. MAIN WORK FROM 1979-1993

- With payment.....

.....

.....

- Without payment.....

.....

.....

5. MAIN WORK PRIOR TO 1975

- With payment.....

.....

- Without payment.....

.....

SECTION III

(TO BE COMPLETED FOR EACH HOUSEHOLD MEMBER STUDYING)

PERSON ATTENDING SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

- Male.....Female.....
- Age
- Primary school.....High school.....University.....
- Year of education
- Subjects studied
.....
- Job with payment.....
- Hours of work and wage a week
- Weekly income of this work
- Work without payment
- Hours of work without payment

SECTION IV

(TO BE COMPLETED FOR EACH HOUSEHOLD MEMBER NOT STUDYING)

CHILDREN 17 YEARS AND UNDER NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL

- Male.....Female.....
- Age
- Job with payment work
- Work hours a week and wage.....
- Weekly income of this work
- Unpaid work.....
- If you are not studying or working, please explain the reason
-

សាកលវិទ្យាល័យបច្ចេកវិទ្យា វិចិត្រយ៉ា

ផ្សេត សាន់ទ្រី

ការស្ទង់មតិទៅលើការងារបេឡៈ

បញ្ជីសំណួរសំងាត់

មិនា ១៩៩៦

សេចក្តីណែនាំខ្លះៗចំពោះអ្នកដែលធ្វើការស្ទង់មតិនេះ

១_ ចូរបំពេញការស្ទង់មតិនេះពី ៨ ទៅ ១០ គ្រួសារសិន ហើយជ្រើសរើសយកគ្រួសារណាមួយ ដែលអាចតំណាងអោយគ្រួសារទាំងអស់ នៅត្រង់ផ្នែកនៅក្នុងតំបន់នោះ ដូចជា៖ អ្នកក្របំផុត អ្នកមិនសូវក្រ អ្នកមាន អ្នកជំនួញ អ្នកធ្វើការក្នុងរោងចក្រ អ្នកបង្រៀន កសិករ ។ល។

២_ នៅក្នុងការស្ទង់មតិនេះ ផ្នែកទី ១ ត្រូវបំពេញដោយមនុស្សដែលជាមេគ្រួសារ ។ ផ្នែកទី ២ ត្រូវបំពេញដោយសមាជិកនៅក្នុងគ្រួសារទាំងឡាយណាដែលមានអាយុ ១៨ ឆ្នាំឡើងទៅ ហើយត្រូវជាអ្នក មានការងារធ្វើ និងមានប្រាក់ចំណូល ។ ផ្នែកទី ៣ ត្រូវបំពេញដោយសមាជិកនៅក្នុងគ្រួសារទាំងឡាយ ណាដែលកំពុងនៅរៀននៅឡើយ នៅសាលា នៅមហាវិទ្យាល័យ ឬសាកលវិទ្យាល័យ ។ ហើយផ្នែកទី ៤ ត្រូវបំពេញដោយភ្នេងៗ ទាំងឡាយណាដែលមានអាយុក្រោម ១៧ឆ្នាំ ហើយមិនរៀននៅសាលារៀនទេ ។

៣_ គោលបំណងនៃការស្ទង់មតិនេះ គឺជួយធ្វើនិស្សន្ទសមាភាពទាំងឡាយណាដែលជាការងារ នៅក្នុង គ្រួសារខ្មែរ ។ ការងារនេះនឹងជួយអោយយើងយល់ដល់តម្លៃស្ត្រីខ្មែរចំពោះការងារទាំងឡាយទោះ បីបានទទួលប្រាក់កំរៃ ឬមិនបានទទួលប្រាក់កំរៃ ។ ហើយវាក៏នឹងជួយអោយយើងបានយល់ដឹងផងដែរ ចំពោះបំណងប្រាថ្នាផ្សេងៗដែលថាជនកម្ពុជាបានគិតគូរទៅដល់ការរៀនសូត្រ និងទៅដល់ការងារទាំងឡាយ សំរាប់ស្ត្រីខ្មែរ និងកូនស្រីរបស់គេនៅពេលអនាគត ។

៤_ លក្ខណៈសំគាល់នៃការសហប្រតិបត្តិការនេះនឹងនៅតែមានលក្ខណៈជាអនាមិកក្នុងដែន ហើយនឹង មិនមានឈ្មោះមនុស្សណាម្នាក់ ឬក៏ភូមិណាមួយនឹងត្រូវបានប្រើប្រាស់នៅក្នុងលទ្ធផលនៃការធ្វើការស្ទង់មតិនេះ ឡើយ ។ ព័ត៌មានពីការស្ទង់មតិនេះនឹងត្រូវបានប្រើប្រាស់នៅក្នុងនិក្ខេបទមួយដែលមានចំណងជើងថា " ស្ត្រី និងការងាររួមចំណែកនៅក្នុងប្រទេសកម្ពុជា " ហើយត្រូវបានរៀបចំចែករំលែកឡើងដោយអ្នកស្ត្រីច្រើន សាន់ទ្រី នៃសាកលវិទ្យាល័យបច្ចេកវិទ្យា វិចិត្រីយ៉ា នៃប្រទេសអូស្ត្រាលី ។

ផ្នែកទី ១

ផ្នែកទី ១ នេះត្រូវបំពេញដោយមេគ្រួសារ

១. សមាសភាពនៅក្នុងគ្រួសារ៖ ជាធម្មតាគឺមនុស្សដែលរស់នៅ នៅក្នុងផ្ទះ

ក. អាយុ និងភេទ :

- ចំនួនមនុស្សប្រុសពេញវ័យ : អាយុ ១៨ ឆ្នាំឡើងទៅ
- ចំនួនមនុស្សស្រីពេញវ័យ : អាយុ ១៨ ឆ្នាំឡើងទៅ
- ចំនួនក្មេងជំទង់ប្រុស : អាយុ ១៣ - ១៧ ឆ្នាំ
- ចំនួនក្មេងជំទង់ស្រី : អាយុ ១៣ - ១៧ ឆ្នាំ
- ចំនួនក្មេងប្រុស : អាយុរវាង ៥ - ១២ ឆ្នាំ ឬអាយុក្រោមពីនេះ
- ចំនួនក្មេងស្រី : អាយុរវាង ៥ - ១២ ឆ្នាំ ឬអាយុក្រោមពីនេះ
- ចំនួនកូនក្មេងប្រុសអាយុ ៤ ឆ្នាំ និងអាយុក្រោមពីនេះ
- ចំនួនកូនក្មេងស្រីអាយុ ៤ ឆ្នាំ និងអាយុក្រោមពីនេះ

ខ. ភាសាដែលប្រើប្រាស់នៅផ្ទះ :

ខ្មែរ ----- ចិន ----- ភាសាផ្សេងទៀត ប្រសិនបើមាន -----

២. អំពីមេគ្រួសារ :

ក. តួនាទីនៅក្នុងគ្រួសារ :

ឪពុក ----- ម្តាយ ----- អ្នកផ្សេង ប្រសិនបើមាន -----

ខ. អាយុ : -----

៣. បំណងប្រាថ្នាសំរាប់អោយក្មេងប្រុសស្រីនស្រុត :

ក. បូរវប្បធម៌អំពីបំណងប្រាថ្នារបស់មេគ្រួសារចំពោះ :

- កំរិតនៃការរៀនសូត្រសំរាប់បុរស -----
- ចំណង់ចំណូលចិត្តនៃវិជ្ជាជីវៈក្នុងសំរាប់បុរស -----

ខ. បូរវប្បធម៌យុត្តិធម៌លទ្ធផលនៃសេចក្តីប្រាថ្នាខាងលើនេះ -----

គ. ប្រសិនបើមានបំណងអោយកូនរៀនភាសាបរទេស

តើភាសាណាមួយដែលអ្នកមានទំនងអោយកូនប្រុសអ្នករៀន ? អង់គ្លេស ___ បារាំង ___ ចិន ___

៤. បំណងប្រាថ្នាសំរាប់អោយក្មេងស្រីរៀនសូត្រ :

ក. បូរវប្បធម៌អំពីបំណងប្រាថ្នារបស់មេគ្រួសារចំពោះ :

- កំរិតនៃការសិក្សារៀនសូត្រសំរាប់មនុស្សស្រី -----

- ចំណង់ចំណូលចិត្តនៃវិជ្ជាជីវៈក្នុងសំណុំមនុស្សស្រី -----

ខ- ចូរអធិប្បាយពីមូលហេតុនៃសេចក្តីប្រាថ្នាខាងលើនេះ -----

គ- ប្រសិនបើមានចំណងអោយកូនរៀនភាសាបរទេស

តើភាសាណាមួយដែលអ្នកមានចង់អោយកូនប្រុសអ្នករៀន ? អង់គ្លេស ___ បារាំង ___ ចិន ___

៥- ការវាយតម្លៃលើការសិក្សាអប់រំ :

- តើមានសាលាបឋមសិក្សានៅក្នុងតំបន់ដែលលោក_អ្នកកំពុងរស់នៅទេ ?

មាន ----- គ្មាន -----

ពិផ្ទះទៅដល់សាលាបឋមសិក្សា តើមានចំងាយប្រហែលប៉ុន្មានដែរ ?

- តើមានសាលាមធ្យមសិក្សាកិត១ កិត២ នៅក្នុងតំបន់ដែលលោក_អ្នករស់នៅទេ ?

មាន ----- គ្មាន -----

ពិផ្ទះទៅដល់សាលាមធ្យមសិក្សាកិត១ មធ្យមសិក្សាកិត២ តើមានចំងាយប្រហែលប៉ុន្មានដែរ ?

- តើមានមហាវិទ្យាល័យ ឬសាកលវិទ្យាល័យនៅក្នុងតំបន់ដែលលោក_អ្នករស់នៅទេ ?

មាន ----- គ្មាន -----

ពិផ្ទះទៅដល់មហាវិទ្យាល័យ ឬសាកលវិទ្យាល័យមានចំងាយប្រហែលប៉ុន្មានដែរ ?

- ប្រសិនបើមានសាលារៀនថ្នាក់ឧត្តមសិក្សានៅក្នុងតំបន់ដែលលោក_អ្នករស់នៅ តើមានមុខវិជ្ជា
អ្វីខ្លះដែលមាននៅក្នុងកម្មវិធីសិក្សានោះ ? ប្រសិនបើអ្វីមួយបញ្ជាក់ពីមុខវិជ្ជាទាំងនោះ -----

- តើមានកម្មវិធីការងារហ្វឹកហ្វឺននៅក្នុងតំបន់ដែលលោក_អ្នករស់នៅទេ ?

មាន ----- គ្មាន -----

ប្រសិនបើមាន ចូរធ្វើការពណ៌នា -----

៦- ចូរអធិប្បាយលើការស្ទង់មតិនេះ :

ប្រសិនបើលោក_អ្នកមានចំណងធ្វើអធិប្បាយទៅលើសំណួរទាំងឡាយដែលបានសួរក្នុងការស្ទង់មតិនេះ
ឬក៏ចង់បន្ថែមព័ត៌មានផ្សេងទៀតអំពីការងារមេផ្ទះ ហើយដែលអាចមានការទាក់ទងទៅនឹងការងារស្ទង់មតិ នេះ
ក៏សូមអញ្ជើញអធិប្បាយទៅចុះ -----

ផ្នែកទី ២

ផ្នែកនេះត្រូវបំពេញជាប់ផ្នែកកម្រិតមេគ្រួសារ ដោយសមាជិកជំនុំរៀងៗខ្លួន

សមាជិកគ្រួសារដែលមានអាយុលើសពី ១៨ ឆ្នាំទៅ ហើយដែលមិនបានចូលរៀននៅសាលា

ចូរបញ្ជាក់អំពីឥរិយាបថនៅក្នុងគ្រួសារ ឧទាហរណ៍ : ម្តាយ មីង កូនធម៌ : -----

១. ប្រភេទនៃការសិក្សារបស់ :

ក. សាលាបឋមសិក្សា : សូមប្រាប់ឆ្នាំដែលបានរៀន : -----

សូមប្រាប់មុខវិជ្ជាដែលបានរៀន : -----

ខ. សាលាមធ្យមសិក្សា : សូមប្រាប់ឆ្នាំដែលបានរៀន : -----

សូមប្រាប់មុខវិជ្ជាដែលបានរៀន : -----

គ. សាកលវិទ្យាល័យ ឬវគ្គហ្វឹកហ្វឺនណាមួយ : សូមបញ្ជាក់ : -----

សូមបញ្ជាក់ឆ្នាំដែលបានរៀន : -----

ចំនួនម៉ោងរៀនក្នុងមួយសប្តាហ៍ : -----

សូមប្រាប់មុខវិជ្ជាដែលបានរៀន : -----

ឃ. ការងារសព្វថ្ងៃនេះ : ចូរពណ៌នា : -----

២. ប្រភេទនៃការទទួលបានប្រាក់កម្រៃការងារកំរិតទី១ ១៩៩៤ :

ក. ការងារសំខាន់ពេលបច្ចុប្បន្ន : សូមបញ្ជាក់ : -----

ចំនួនថ្ងៃដែលធ្វើការក្នុង១សប្តាហ៍ : -----

ចំនួនម៉ោងដែលធ្វើការក្នុងមួយថ្ងៃ : -----

ចំនួនឆ្នាំដែលបានធ្វើកិច្ចការទាំងនេះ : -----

ប្រាក់ចំណូលសំរាប់ការងារនេះ : -----

ខ. ការងារបន្ទាប់បន្សំ : សូមបញ្ជាក់ : -----

ចំនួនថ្ងៃដែលធ្វើការក្នុងសប្តាហ៍ : -----

ចំនួនម៉ោងដែលធ្វើការក្នុងមួយថ្ងៃ : -----

ចំនួនឆ្នាំដែលបានធ្វើកិច្ចការទាំងនេះ : -----

ប្រាក់ចំណូលសរុបការងារនេះ : -----

៣. ការងារបច្ចុប្បន្នដែលមិនទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ :

- សូមបញ្ជាក់នូវរាល់ការងារទាំងឡាយដែលមិនទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ : ទោះបីនៅក្នុងផ្ទះពី ឬនៅ
ទំណាក់ដោយ : -----

- សូមបញ្ជាក់ពីចំនួនម៉ោងការងារជាមធ្យមដែលធ្វើក្នុងថ្ងៃហើយមិនទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ: -----

៤. ការងារសំខាន់ៗដែលធ្វើចាប់ពីឆ្នាំ ១៩៧៩ ~ ១៩៩៣ :

- បានទទួលប្រាក់កំរៃ : -----

- មិនទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ : -----

៥. ការងារសំខាន់ៗដែលបានធ្វើនៅមុនឆ្នាំ ១៩៧៩ :

- បានទទួលប្រាក់កំរៃ : -----

- មិនទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ : -----

ផ្នែកទី ៣

ផ្នែកទី ៣ នេះត្រូវបំពេញដោយសមាជិកនីមួយៗនៅក្នុងគ្រួសារ ដែលកំពុងរៀននៅឡើយ

ចំពោះអ្នកដែលរៀននៅសាលារៀន នៅមហាវិទ្យាល័យ ឬក៏នៅសាកលវិទ្យាល័យ

- ប្រុស : _____ ស្រី : _____
 - អាយុ : _____
 - សាលាបឋមសិក្សា:_____ មធ្យមសិក្សា:_____ សាកលវិទ្យាល័យ: _____
 - ឆ្នាំសិក្សា : _____
 - មុខវិជ្ជាសិក្សា : _____
 -
 - ការងារដែលទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ: សូមបញ្ជាក់: -- _____ -
- ចំនួនម៉ោងដែលធ្វើការនិងទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃក្នុងមួយសប្តាហ៍: _____
- ប្រាក់ចំនូលក្នុងមួយសប្តាហ៍សំរាប់ការងារនេះ: _____
 - ការងារដែលមិនបានទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ: សូមបញ្ជាក់: _____
 - ចំនួនម៉ោងដែលធ្វើការហើយមិនបានទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃក្នុង១សប្តាហ៍: _____

ផ្នែកទី ៤

ផ្នែកនេះត្រូវបានបំពេញដោយសមាជិកគ្រួសារនីមួយៗ ដែលមិនរៀន

ក្មេងអាយុ ១៧ឆ្នាំ និងក្រោមពីនេះដែលមិនរៀននៅសាលា

- ប្រុស : ----- ស្រី : -----
- អាយុ : -----
- ការងារដែលទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ: សូមបញ្ជាក់: -----
- ចំនួនម៉ោងដែលធ្វើការ និងទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃក្នុងមួយសប្តាហ៍: -----
- ប្រាក់ចំនូលក្នុងមួយសប្តាហ៍សំរាប់ការងារនេះ: -----
- ការងារដែលមិនបានទទួលបានប្រាក់កំរៃ: សូមបញ្ជាក់: -----
- ប្រសិនបើឈាត_អ្នកមិនរៀន ឬមិនធ្វើការទេ សូមបញ្ជាក់ពីមូលហេតុ: -----
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APPENDIX 6

INTERVIEWEES, INFORMANTS AND ORGANIZATIONS VISITED

The following lists of informants (people I was able to confer with over time) and interviewees does not include the names of the sixteen female university students who made up my two focus groups, and the numerous other students I observed and interviewed in my process of data collection. It also does not include my Khmer friends, and the women I met and informally interviewed including farmers (9), labourers (6), sex workers (6) and beggars (6), as well as members of the five Khmer households in which I resided, and their neighbours (some requiring the use of interpreters).

Translators

Ms Catherine Cardinet	French-English translator, Melbourne
Mr Thala Him	Khmer-English translator
Mrs Sophie Purvis	Khmer-English translator

People valued for their comments and support (1996-2000)

Women and society:

Mr Sokha Cchor	Rural society and gender issues, Melbourne
Mr Thala Him	Poor rural people, film maker, Melbourne
Ms Bopha Lim	Khmer academic and teacher, Melbourne
Ms Sophie Purvis	Urban women, child care worker, Melbourne
Ms Muntha Uch	SBS radio, Melbourne

Education and women:

Dr Stephen Duggan	Women, education and social issues, Victoria University, ADB consultant to education in Cambodia
Mr Nath In	Interpreter and Khmer language specialist, RAAF School of Languages, Point Cook
Ms Vanthida Lao	Education and culture, Victoria University
Ms Hema Nhong	Education and women, visiting scholar from Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), Melbourne
Mr Mike Thomson	CEO, Australian Aid for Cambodia, Melbourne

Women and health:

Ms Chandorovann Dy	Khmer women's health research, Latrobe University and International Red Cross, Cambodia 1994-95
Prof Dr Maurice Eisenbruch	Indigenous health and culture, Sorbonne University and University of NSW

Key informants in Cambodia (1996-1997)

Women and social issues:

Ms Phally Chun	Lecturer in Linguistics, Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)
Mr Cchaya Hang	Map-maker for the Ministry of Environment, Phnom Penh
Ms Leaksmeay Action (MOSA)	Khmer language teacher and member of Ministry of Social
Ms Borany Nhem	Lecturer in Biology, RUPP
Dr Seng Sopphalline	Vice-President of the Khmer Student's Association (KSA)
Mr Thearith Taing	Accounts Manager, Sony Shop, Phnom Penh

Women and education:

Dr Geoffrey Coin	IDP education consultant
Dr Vinh McNamara	Adviser to MOEYS and UNESCO
Mr Bradley Bessire	Asia Foundation, USAID
Ms Catherine Beacham	Girls' education consultant, ADB
Ms Karin Hawkins	Educational consultant to MOEYS

Women and health:

Dr Peter Annear	AusAID adviser to health renovation in Cambodia
Ms Margaret Dawson	Rural health worker and lecturer, Maharishi Vedic University (MVU)
Ms Sandy Hudd	Manager of Kompong Cham medical program
Mr Chandarith Neak	Ministry of Health (MOH)
Ms Valerie Tatan	Human rights consultant, UN Human Rights

Women's work generation projects:

Mr Lee Ree Kun	Women's work generation programs, UNDP
Ms Diana Peebles	Work training projects, AusAID consultant
Ms Korm Chantan	Vice-president, Khmera
Ms Pol Rithy	Women's projects, Khemera
Ms Kiri Schultz	Women's work generation – crafts, UNESCO
Ms Melanie Theidelman	Khmer studies academic, Monash University
Ms Gigi Warne	Manager of training school for Khmer cooks working for Westerners in Cambodia

Women in journalism:

Ms Claudia Chassigneux	Information officer, UNDP
Ms Chea Sandanath	Director, Khmer Women's Association

Women and politics:

Mr Hierk Menghour	Adviser to the first Prime Minister, FUNCINPEC
HE Ms Pok Marina	Under-Secretary of State for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

Buddhism and conflict resolution:

Dr. Thel Thong	UNESCO and RUPP (Phnom Penh), Cambodian Community Leader
Dr. Peter Gyally-Pap	Centre of Advanced Study, Phnom Penh

History and environment:

Mr Komar Kuon	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Phnom Penh
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Interviewees not requiring interpreters***Women and social issues:***

Ms Sue Aitken	Project worker, UNESCO (21/3/96)
Dr Seanglim Bit	Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) (7/3/97)
Ms Seda Douglas	Khmer academic, ABC radio Australia (4/3/02)
Dr Hema Goonatilake	Project Adviser, Heinrich Boell Foundation Buddhist Institution and GTZ German aid program (1/11/96)

Dr. Susantha Goonatilake	Phnom Penh University (12/10/97)
HE Dr Ing Kantha Pavi	Minister for Women's Affairs, MOWA (10/11/2000)
Ms Im Run	Director of Women's Projects, SSWA (19/2/96 & 27/5/96)
Mr Vichit Ith	Chairman, Royal Air Cambodia, Phnom Penh (12/6/97)
Ms Margaret Payne	Program Coordinator, Agricultural School of Prekleas (12/1/97)
Mr Meas Samphon	Director of staff, Royal Place, Phnom Penh (5/6/97)
HE Mr Sam Rainsy	Leader of the opposition in Cambodia (6/7/2003)
Ms Sath Salim	Member for social action, SSWA, Phnom Penh (15/2/96, 19/2/96 & 21/2/96)
Mrs Keth Samath	General-Director of Programs for Women's Affairs, MOWA (3/6/97)
MP Ms Tioulong Saumura	Elected opposition MP, Phnom Penh (8/11/98 & 6/7/2003)
Ms Mu Sochua	Women's adviser to Prince Rannaridh, SSWA & Minister for Women's Affairs (16/2/96, 11/6/97 & 9/11/2000)
H.E. Keat Sokhun	Secretary of State, SSWA (12/2/96 & 25/7/04)
Ms Brigitte Sonnois	Adviser to UNICEF, Phnom Penh (14/2/96)
Ms Valerie Tatan	United Nations Human Rights (15/1/93)
HE Ms Ek Virak	Under-Secretary of State, SSWA (14/2/96)

Education:

Mr Bun Sok	Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, MOEYS (19/5/97)
Ms Margaret Bywater	Library Resources Adviser, Phnom Penh Library (10/4/97)
Mr Hiet Tuong	Pre-service teacher trainer, Phnom Penh (29/1/93)
Mr Huot Nun	Chief of service in education, Kompong Cham (19/1/93)
Mr Keah Sahan	Head of teacher education, Phnom Penh (30/1/93)
Mr Saly Lor	High school teacher and academic (5/12/03 & 30/8/04)
Dr Vin McNamara	Education advisor to MOEYS (12/2/96, 15/4/97 & 2/3/2001)
Mr Ouk Rong	Deputy chief of education, Kompong Cham (22/1/93)
Dr Ratnaike	Educational psychologist, UNICEF (26/2/96)
Ms Sylvia Rees	Teacher development, UNICEF (8/2/93)
Ms Victoria Shadlow	Quaker Service Australia (SCFA) (30/1/93)

Women and Community Development:

Miss Kien Serei Pal	Cambodian Women's Development Agency (CWDA) (6/12/96)
Mr Lee Ree Kun	Women's work development programs (UNDP) (6/3/97)
Mrs Puthavy Pan	Cambodia Women's Development Agency (CWDA) Battambang (12/9/99 & 10/5/2002)
Ms Nanda Pok	Director, Women for Prosperity (WFP) (9/12/96)
Mrs Pol Rithy	Coordinator of vocational training, Khemara (4/10/96)
Ms Suong Leang	Office worker in SSWA (28/11/96)
Miss Vipu	Coordinator of Community Development, Redd Barna, Phnom Penh (28/1/93)

Women in radio:

Ms Chea Sun Darith	Portrayal of women, Khmer women's radio program Coordinator (13/1/97)
Ms Tive Sarayeth	Women's Media Centre (20/2/97)

Health issues:

Dr. Meas Nee	Khmer academic, Latrobe University, and development worker, Krom Akphiwat Phum, Battambang (2/11/98 & 25/7/2004)
Mr Nit Sri On	HIV issues, COERR coordinator for AIDS education (20/3/96)

Development issues:

Mr Lonh Hay	Deputy director, National Bank of Cambodia (12/2/93)
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Interviewees requiring interpreters***Women and society:***

Ms Kay Changmady	WID Centre, Kompong Cchnang (16/3/96)
Mrs Nghin Buntha	Wife of provincial leader, Kompong Cham (21/1/93)
Mrs Pala Hang	Small street-stall operator, Phnom Penh (19/3/96)
Ms Pok Oun	Director, Phnom Penh Orphanage (5/12/96)

Mrs Siv Moi	Small gold selling business, Central Market, Phnom Penh (14/1/93 & 20/3/96)
Ms Siv Neang	Rural widow, Kompong Cham Province (21/3/93 & 25/6/94)
Mrs Sok Nguon	Wealthy businesswoman, Central Phnom Penh (12/1/93)
Ms Sok Siep	Urban widow, small business owner, Phnom Penh (18/3/96)

Education and apprenticeships:

Mr Prum Seth	Principal, primary school in Kompong Cham Province (22/1/93)
Mrs Pin Yan	Wife of silversmith training apprentices, Kandal (23/1/93)

Development issues:

Mr Thai Hong	Road safety and infrastructure, motor-bike importer (24/1/93)
HE Mr Kheu Muth	Director-General, Ministry of Environment, (MOE) (2/4/97)
HE Koy Kim Sea	Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MOPT) (13/2/97)
Mr Leng Tek Seng	Trade and Rubber Institute (13/3/97)
Mr Meas Samut	Unde-Secretary of State, Ministry of Forestry and Water (MOFWT) (12/2/97)
HE Mr Sin Niny	Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, (MOA) (9/6/97)
HE Mr Top Sam	Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce (MOC) (10/6/97)

Women's health:

Ms Cha Pou	Government worker, Ministry of Health (MOH) (10/6/97)
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Women in politics:

HE Nuon Sua Kia	Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Social Action (MOSA) (17/5/97)
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Buddhism and culture:

HE Mr Dok Narin	Under-Secretary for Ministry of Cults and Religions (MOCR) (7/3/97)
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Women casually interviewed at work from 1996-1997

Beer girls (3)
Beggars (5)
Clay potter (1)
Cook (1)
De-miner (1)
Dressmakers (2)
Factory workers (3)
Government workers (7)
Housekeeper (1)
Market sellers (5)
Office workers (4)
Outworkers (2)
Police woman (1)
Real estate sellers (3)
Rice farmers (6)
Road worker (1)
School teachers (5)
Sex workers (4)
Street sellers (4)
Tobacco farmers (2)
University lecturers (7)
Wealthy business woman (1)
Weavers (3)
Woman lawyer (1)

ORGANISATIONS VISITED

These organisations were visited for the purpose of collecting a wide range of text data including copies of surveys, reports and other available documents contributing to understanding the overall situation in Cambodia.

Cambodian Government Departments:

State Secretariat for Women's Affairs (SSWA) (12/2/96, 11/6/97)
Ministry of Commerce (MOC) (10/6/97)
Ministry of Cults and Religions (MOCR) (7/3/97)
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) (19/5/97)
Ministry of Environment (MOE) (2/4/97)
Ministry of Interior (MOI) (3/8/2004)
Ministry of Justice (MOJ) (5/3/97)
Ministry of Planning (MOP) and Bureau of National Statistics (13/6/97)
Ministry of Social Action (MOSA) (17/5/97)
Ministry of Tourism (MOT)
Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs (MOWVA) (2/8/2004)

Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), 1996-1997:

Anthropology Department
English Department
Psychology Department

Maharishi Vedic University (MVU), Prei Veng Province, March, 1996:

Library
School of Agriculture
School of Business
School of Medicine

Teacher Training College:

Kompong Cham Teacher Training College (7/3/96)

Schools:

Kompong Cham High School (22/1/93)

Kompong Cham Primary School (19/1/93)

Suong Primary School (21/1/93)

Resource Centres, 1996-1997:

Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC)

Cambodian Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

Centre of Advanced Study, Research and Training Institute, Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh Library

Non Government and Provincial Organisations:

Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA)
(26/3/97)

Cambodian Women's Development Agency (CWDA) (16/12/97)

CARE International in Cambodia (15/4/97)

Don Bosco Vocational School for Girls (14/4/97)

Khemera (First women's NGO) (4/10/96 & 12/6/97)

Khmer Women's Voice Centre (KWVC) (20/6/97)

Phnom Penh Post (3/2/2004)

Private Agencies Collaborating Together-Cambodian Community Outreach (PACT)
(17/6/97)

Redd Barna (Norwegian Save the Children) (28/1/93)

Tabitha (women's work generation project) (22/6/97)

Wat Than weaving workshop (UNESCO) (21/6/97)

Women for Prosperity (25/3/97)

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (12/3/97)

Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMCC) (25/2/97)

Women in Development (WID) Centre, Kompong Cchnang (27/2/96)

International Women's Day, 7th – 10th March, 1996:

This celebration was organised by Khemera in conjunction with the SSWA in a large park outside the National Museum, Phnom Penh, in 1996. I spent three days interviewing the presenters of 32

displays promoting the empowerment of women through contributions of government, women's NGOs, and private businesses. Some contributors were helping raise women's standard of living through skills-training to produce a wide range of income-generating products. These included hand-woven silks, hand painted silk, woven cotton, baskets, mats, coconut husk and wooden carvings (fans, spoons etc.), ceramics, china, hand made silver products, hand made cards, paper handicrafts, crocheting, patchwork, embroidery, fine leather goods, flowering plants, and fruit and vegetable produce. These organisations were as follows:

Apsara (leather workshop for 55 disabled people)

ASFARDE (workshops with Indonesian teachers in Takeo, Pursat, Kompong Cchnang, Siem Riep and Battambang)

Khemera (workshops in and around Phnom Penh)

RAJANA (private shop in Phnom Penh)

Ruomprathana Project (Human Rights organisation, Takeo, working with a village of 60 people)

Tabitha (workshops in Phnom Penh for widows, orphans and disabled)

Wat Than Fine Arts Association (workshop in Phnom Penh)

WOSO (private shop in Phnom Penh, 'Les Broderies du Mekong')

Other organisations were promoting their contribution to the empowerment of women in Cambodia and included:

Cambodian Association of the Elderly (booklets and Khmer food sampling)

Can Do (Khmer women volunteers from the USA)

International Human Rights (information on human rights for women)

Ministry of Women's Affairs (information and promotion)

Khmer Women's Voice Centre (promotion of their publications)

Khmer Writer's Association (promoting women's contribution to writing)

PSI – birth spacing (promotion of successful training in birth control)

Women for Prosperity (information on women's leadership training)

World Vision (information on development projects)

Apart from these stalls, the Women's Secretariat provided a band-stand for musical items, and a large pavilion to show videos on women's rights, women's contribution to Cambodian society, and caring for the environment.

APPENDIX 7

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN CAMBODIA

Name	Location	Activities	Established
Arun Reah	P	vocational training, microcredit	1994
Association Lumière des Femmes Rural	P	vocational training	1997
Battambang Women's AIDS Project	P	HIV/AIDS education, research	1993
Cambodia Community Building	C	microcredit, health	1995
Cambodia Migration and Development Committee	C	vocational training, women trafficking, prostitution, human rights	1997
Cambodian Women Crisis Center	C	domestic violence, women trafficking, prostitution	
Cambodian Women's Development Agency	C	literacy, human rights, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, prostitution	1993
Help the Widows	C	microcredit	
Indradevi Association	C	human rights, HIV/AIDS, women advocacy	1994
International Friendship Organization for Development	C	vocational training	1996
Khemara	C	community development, vocational training, microcredit, domestic violence	1991
Khmer Women's Voice Centre	C	democracy, women's advocacy, human rights	1993
Kompong Thom Cambodian Association Support of Women	P	microcredit, domestic violence, economic development	1993
Project Against Domestic Violence	C	domestic violence	1995
Silaka	P	management training	
Women for Prosperity	C	Political participation, women's advocacy	1994
Women Organization for Modern Economy and Nursing (WOMEN)	C	HIV/AIDS	1993
Women's Media Center of Cambodia	C	women advocacy, mass media	1993
<p><i>Sources:</i> Directory of Cambodian NGOs, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia.</p> <p><i>Notes:</i> A few organizations that were listed but not active were eliminated; a few that were not listed but operational were added.</p> <p>P=province, C=capital city (Phnom Penh).</p>			

Source: Cited in Krishna Kumar, 2000

SEVEN WOMEN MPs

Phnom Penh Post

Volume 4 Number 14

Phnom Penh, July 14 - 27, 1995

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Lawyer hits out at Scott case "farce"

By JASON BARBER

A foreign lawyer trying to represent Gavin Scott says the British doctor's prosecution has become a "political tug of war" with little prospect of a fair trial.

"I'm not sure I'm prepared to legitimize what is a farce by trying to give this guy a defense," said Robert Carlin on July 10, after repeatedly being denied official approval to represent Scott.

At press time, Scott — charged with raping boys — had been in T3 Prison for three weeks without a defender to represent him.

Carlin said Khmer defenders were "running like mice before a tomat" from taking Scott's case, but he doubted whether any lawyer would be able to do much anyway.

"I don't know that if Jesus Christ were his lawyer, it would change the outcome. That doesn't mean that he is going to lose, but that the final decision will be made from high up.

"I don't want to be the blush on the rotten apple," said Carlin, who was debating whether to drop the case.

Carlin alleged that Scott had consistently been denied access to a lawyer — violating his rights under UNTAC law — in police custody and later in prison.

He said that was enough to warrant Scott's immediate release from prison under the law — but Scott had no lawyer to apply for his release.

Carlin said he had three times asked the Phnom Penh Municipal Court for approval to jointly represent Scott with a Khmer defender but had been rebuffed.

He said he had twice been turned away from T3 Prison when trying to see Scott. He had got inside, with other visitors to Scott, on two occasions.

These were not "lawyer-client" private meetings because other people had been present.

The only other time he saw Scott was when the doctor first

appeared in court on June 23, and was charged with rape.

The charge followed a complaint to police — relating to child prostitution, not rape — by NGOs which had testimonies from five children, aged 14 and 15, against him.

Whether Carlin can represent Scott is unclear. A recent law bars foreigners from representing criminal defendants, though they can advise Khmer lawyers.

Carlin, an English-born former US public defender who arrived in Cambodia a month ago, was asked by a friend of Scott to represent the doctor. He has been trying, unsuccessfully, to find a Khmer defender to help represent Scott.

Both the Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP) and the Cambodian Defenders Association (CADEAS) have refused his requests for help.

CDP interim director Karen Tse told the Post that its refusal

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Concern over safety of children

By JASON BARBER

THE repercussions of investigations into suspected pedophiles have turned ugly, with the kidnapping of a child and harassment of NGO staff.

Three children — including the one abducted, who later escaped — are in safe houses.

One NGO sent an investigator and his family into hiding, and arranged for police officers to stand guard at its offices, last week.

Complaints have been made to the police and government authorities to help ensure the safety of the NGOs and the children.

A Khmer "pimp", alleged to have been involved in procuring children for pedophiles, is believed to be behind the intimidation.

The kidnapped boy, like the other two in hiding, is a complainant against British doctor Gavin Scott, under investigation for rape.

There is no suggestion that Scott, in T3 prison at the time, had any knowledge of the kidnapping.

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BLDP ruptures; expulsions expected

By MATTHEW GRAINGER AND KER MUNTHIT

THE BLDP party has fallen apart, with the usurped faction claiming that "Cambodia is not ready for democracy" and wondering aloud what the United Nations intends to do about it.

Prime Minister Hun Sen supported Ieng Mouly's bid for the BLDP leadership, which left Cambodia without effective opposition, said Son Soubert, who was elected party vice president in May.

Mouly himself, at a disputed, parallel party congress he called on July 9, said: "We have to opt whether we have to stay in the opposition or within the government."

"I'm a minister in the government, so I cannot be in the opposition. Our party is... one of the partners in the government," said Mouly, the present Minister of Information.

Soubert, his father, party founder Son Sann (presently in Paris recuperating from an eye operation), and MPs Keat Sokhum, Kem Sokha, Pol Ham and Koy Chhacum were all included in a vote of no confidence during Mouly's congress.

Soubert was — at press time — awaiting the reaction of Funcinpec leader Prince Norodom Ranariddh to claims that the congress was irregular and illegal and should not be legitimized.

Soubert said Hun Sen — "but maybe not the CPP in totality" — has already recognized and supported Mouly's leadership.

If Ranariddh accepted Mouly as leader "despite the illegalities" then Soubert — presently the Deputy Vice President of the National Assembly — said he fully expected to be expelled from Parliament along with his five colleagues who appear even now to be in the wilderness.

"We don't know the real position of Prince Ranariddh... maybe he maintains a grudge against us because we were outspoken in support of [former Siem Reap MP Sam] Rainsy," Soubert said.

"If Funcinpec recognizes Mouly's congress then its political, there is no question about legality."

"Funcinpec have already created a precedent" with their expulsion of Rainsy, he said.

Expulsions would also be expected among BLDP provincial officials loyal to the Son Sann clique, Soubert said.

Mouly said that if his rivals did

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Women MPs content to let "boys be boys"

By HENG SOK CHHENG

THE "women's touch" in Cambodia's National Assembly — by their own admission — is a very gentle one.

Sometimes, the reason is just to let the men show off.

"As women we traditionally understand male psychology," said Som Kim Suor, CPP's woman MP from Kampot. "... sometimes Khmer men want to show off and... and show [themselves] brave."

There are seven elected women MPs, three from the CPP and four from Funcinpec. They are not seekers of headlines, nor do they speak up much during public debate, and generally prefer following the Party line.

BLDP MP Son Chhay said of his women peers: "The character of Khmer women is a gentle one."

"That is not to say it is bad but in political affairs sometimes [that tradition] is too nice, too gentle and they cannot fulfill their duty." Traditionally, Chhay said, Khmer women's shyness could seem to show a "lack of confidence."

"I believe when they increase their confidence, they will work more effectively and seriously than men MPs," he said.

Kim Suor, 42, a member of the Commission on Human Rights and Reception of Complaints — who incidentally cited Prime Min-



Photo: Paulo Vescia

THE FEMALE TOUCH

From left: Som Kim Suor, (CPP Kampot). Men Sam An, (CPP Svay Rieng). Kong Sophat, (Funcinpec Kratie). Som Kanitha, (Funcinpec Phnom Penh). Nin Saphon, (CPP Takao). Ky Lum Ang, (Funcinpec Battambang). Prak Chantha, (Funcinpec Phnom Penh).

ister Hun Sen as her "hero", said. "It's a psychology, men like to show their cleverness."

"We know some Khmer men want to show that they are brilliant," said the Editor-in-Chief of

the official CPP newspaper and mother of two children.

"We give them the chance to speak. Sometimes women exchange ideas with men and also explain to foreign experts who help

the Assembly's work because we understand things differently," Kim Suor said.

"Sometimes when we speak [the men] think it shows weakness

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