



Development and Partnership in Action



THE CULTURE AND  
TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY  
OF INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLES AND  
THE DEVELOPMENT  
PARADIGM

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study has been commissioned by DPA to reflect on the culture, traditional practices and traditional authorities of indigenous peoples in areas of Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri where DPA works. The DPA program supports integrated community development and is active on a wide range of fronts, supporting community livelihoods, social development, natural resource management and community organising and engagement with local government.

This study is a qualitative study that has sought perceptions from community members and DPA staff on the role of culture and traditional authorities in the community, the changes communities are experiencing, and the role of development organisations. Village discussions were held in 7 villages<sup>1</sup>, with Bunong, Jarai, Kreung and Tampuan communities, facilitated by indigenous elders and youth researchers. These were complimented by an elders validation workshop in Ratanakiri and workshops with DPA staff. This report attempts to capture the issues and considerations that have arisen during the study, with the aim of contributing practically to DPA's reflection on the approaches and strategies employed by their program.

The culture of indigenous peoples in Cambodia is under threat. The environment in which indigenous communities live is changing rapidly and this is having a profound impact within the community itself. Historically, cultural practices and traditional authorities are forces maintaining the collective identity, solidarity and cohesion of indigenous communities and, importantly, protecting communal rights and assets such as land and natural resources. Working with cultural practices and traditional authorities must therefore be central to community led development.

Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia have cultural identities shared across each ethnic group, but they also have significant variations in each village as demonstrated by village histories and myths, diets and taboos. Traditional Authorities also have some variation across different communities but generally are composed of a chief elder (mé kântreanh) who derives his authority in the villagers' eyes from the fact through ceremonies he derives his authority from the local village spirits. The mé kântreanh advises on customs, ceremonies and sacrifices,

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<sup>1</sup>In Ratanakiri: La-in and Tuen villages in Tuen Commune, Loam and Kate villages in malik commune and Koy village in Poy commune. In Mondulkiri: Gate and Ochra village in Poy commune

and sub-elders who lead dispute resolution cases based on their knowledge of customary law and their reputation. Village consultation and decision making has traditionally been led by these authorities. Elders in these traditional roles often do not speak Khmer and their roles have diminished as local authorities, village development committees and the influence of private individuals has increased. Appropriate strategies to reverse the marginalisation of traditional authorities are needed. This is particularly challenging given that the modern influences including the involvement of outsiders in indigenous communities has generally contributed to this marginalisation.

Social transformations within indigenous communities are proceeding rapidly with their increased exposure and inter-dependence with external political, economic, social and cultural forces. While there are many potential benefits to be had such as increased access to services and opportunities for new knowledge and relationships, there are also many risks associated such as communities being ill-equipped to manage new influences and pressures that threaten to irreversibly change their way of life, including their ability to control and sustainably develop their land and natural resources. There is already a wealth of research on the external challenges faced by indigenous communities, such as legal and illegal logging, land sales and land alienation and the prospect of extensive economic land concessions, the impact of hydro-electric dams and potential risks associated with increased mining. This study has, therefore, attempted to focus on community led analysis of the internal dynamics of the community, the changes occurring and the factors influencing this, in order to attempt to stimulate community articulation of what development approaches they want from supporting actors such as DPA who are implementing programs in their villages.

New influences are creating a culture of individualism in the community which undermines collective interests and collective resource management. New influences include the monetisation of the household economy which has led to less sharing within the community, encouraged individual interests over communal ones, and devalued traditional cultural artefacts, clothes, jewellery, gongs, etc. Exposure of youth to modern media and Khmer culture has contributed to their lessening interest in maintaining their cultural history. Furthermore, a reduction of communal farming plots and swidden (shifting) agriculture, and the shrinking of important forests (for spirit worship, burials, and hunting and collection of non-timber forest products) has contributed to the weakening relevance and authority of customary practice and traditional leadership. These influences can be identified and addressed creatively by

communities with appropriate support, but this requires a careful understanding from development NGO practitioners about their role in the community and exactly what change they are attempting to support.

Newly influential actors in the community, often with knowledge of Khmer language, money and/or access to outsiders, can undermine and challenge the authority of traditional actors whose influence is based on community respect, the perception that they derive authority from village spirits, their traditional knowledge and ability to control and sustainably manage community resources. Many youth for example feel their modern knowledge is more useful than the traditional knowledge of elders. Young women in particular feel that traditional gender roles are exploitative. These relationships between actors in the community should be a focus of community development work led by communities themselves. Cultural practices everywhere in the world since the beginning of time have evolved as they have encountered new influences. During the study, elders were quick to point out that they recognise that there are harmful aspects to some traditional cultural practices and they are keen to update practice, adjust customs, and address economic disincentives and gender inequities in order to make traditional practices attractive and valued by the younger generation. The widening generation gap needs to be addressed with creative strategies to keep youth aware, interested and valuing of culture and the knowledge and role of elders.

*Land is the most important to conserve – because everything comes from the land: laws, beliefs, traditional practices, community solidarity. All major cultural offerings and prayers are directed towards the land, farms forests and streams. Land creates community and family life’*

*Lon/Tampuan elder*

The issue of the ongoing loss of collective lands remains a pressing priority for communities. Land sales have been fuelled by many factors discussed in more detail in later sections. Ongoing land sales and illegal logging occurs in part because many individuals within the community no longer respect their own leaders and don't respect the laws/regulations which have been developed to control activities. Some leaders and community NRM committee members have been involved in illegal activities themselves and have no credibility. Traditional law is now respected less, partly because it has proved ineffective in dealing with outsiders. The authority of *traditional* community leaders has become less of a threat to individuals who collude with land speculators or illegal loggers.

While social and economic development initiatives have promoted positive changes in communities, and support should continue, land and natural resource protection remain an over-riding priority. There is a strong demand from communities for support from outside organisations, particularly where outside organisations can help them address the power imbalances that perpetuate land sales and illegal logging.

Although new influences are in many ways weakening and fragmenting IP communities, there also is an increasing realisation in the community that action is needed to preserve culture and that traditional community leadership, knowledge and collective decision making processes, based on a growing realisation that these are valuable community assets that will be lost irrecoverably and that traditional leadership generally acts as the most reliable guardian of long-term village interests. This rise in community demand for empowerment activities, and recognition of their own central role in managing development, advocacy agendas, networks and social transformation within the community (including cultural preservation) should be supported. Despite community initiative being often unpredictable and sometimes apparently absent, it is crucial for the DPA program to be focussed on stimulating, identifying and encouraging community lead organisation and initiative. Without a major investment in this, the program is unlikely to have been empowering and have had sustainable impact in the long term.

The change process in Indigenous communities complex, as is the challenge of working for integrated community development where there are multiple community priorities. But despite the pressure to act, it is more important for external organisations to take time to reflect on approaches in order to do no harm. In this case, to be sure to re-enforce not undermine important community systems. For development organisations working with IP communities it is important to consider carefully the role they play and approaches they employ. What may be fairly straightforward for a national Cambodian organisation in other parts of Cambodia will require a deeper level of reflection in IP areas, as the organisation, program and staff are challenged to understand development from the perspective of indigenous peoples. For this to be possible, a strong self awareness about the inherent limits of ones own knowledge and understanding is a priority, as is an awareness that one's own presence and values, attitudes, and behaviours affects interaction with indigenous community representatives.

The ICD program has been applauded for insisting on an integrated approach to community development, something other organisations have often been

criticised for ignoring. Nonetheless, in order for DPA to be empowering of indigenous communities in a holistic and sustainable way, a strategy for cultural affirmation and recognition of traditional structures, processes and authorities is needed. This strategy cannot be an add-on to existing projects but must be transformational, encompassing all. This is explored in chapter 4, with an emphasis on how existing strategies (for community development and organising, and community capacity building and rights based advocacy) could be enhanced. It is hoped that this study's findings about the role of IP culture and traditional authority in community development can help guide DPAs strategic planning in focussing program efforts, approaches, and resources. A set of guiding principles are suggested to ensure Indigenous peoples perspectives are constantly sought and lead the program's evolution. These principles have a number of implications for the DPA program's approach and management, explored in the recommendations chapter.

#### **Indigenous People's under Cambodian Law and civil society networks**

While diversity amongst Indigenous peoples within Cambodia and across the world makes generalisation problematic, connection to the land, spirituality and experiences of colonisation, exploitation and denial of sovereignty are universally shared. In the International arena the term Indigenous creates the opportunity to come together, transcending their own contexts in order to learn, share, plan, organise, strategise and struggle collectively for self-determination on both the global and local stage.

Cambodia has acceded the main international human rights treaties which guarantee basic human rights for all people, including indigenous peoples right to equality, education, health, and to an adequate standard of living. However complaints of Human rights violations prevail. In 1999, the Human Rights Committee asked for the rights of Cambodia's indigenous people to enjoy their cultural traditions, including their agricultural activities, to be respected. These recommendations however have yet to be realised.

In 2001 Cambodian Land Law recognised Indigenous collective title. However the relevant sub-decree and other important sub-decrees to implement Land Law have yet to be adopted.

Most recently Cambodia has acceded the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007. It affords Indigenous Peoples not only...



...fundamental rights to equality (article 1) but also the special protection if they are unable to practise their culture (articles 4, 6, 8, 9, & 12-14) including their particular association with land (articles 10 & 25) and to exercise their right to self-determination (article 3). Self-determination in this declaration affords Indigenous peoples the freedom to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development on their own terms. They have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while simultaneously retaining the choice to participate fully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the state. While the declaration is not legally binding it represents dynamic development of the international legal norms that recognises indigenous collective self-determination. Rights in the declaration imply new approaches to global issues, such as development, decentralisation and multicultural democracy. It requires Cambodia to pursue participatory approaches when working with indigenous peoples that involve meaningful consultations and the building of partnerships.

Currently the NGO forum is working to facilitate civil society and Indigenous community leaders participation on public consultations of the draft sub decree on procedures of registration of land of Indigenous Communities. DPA could involve itself in this process and facilitate the key Indigenous community leaders to participate fully. There are also activities organised by the NGO forum and CIYA, (such as the Indigenous Peoples National Forum on “Good Governance and Securing Their Rights to Land” in December 2007) which DPA could support IP leaders to engage with.

## **2. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

Development and Partnership in Action (DPA) was formed as a Cambodian Organisation in 2005, taking over from CIDSE, the network of Catholic Agencies operating in the sub-region. DPA has worked in Ratanakiri since 1994 and in Monduliri since 2003 implementing Integrated Community Development (ICD) Programs. In both of these provinces huge changes have taken place over the last 10 years as the areas have become more accessible and as patterns of deforestation and land sales have become ever more pronounced. The ICD program has attempted first by shifting first from traditional sector-based service delivery to an integrated community development program. From 2001 DPA added work on natural resource management and land rights of indigenous peoples, including work on community forestry, and community land titling.

In the last five years, indigenous people have been facing issues such as: i) land grabbing and encroachment, and economic land concessions granted to Cambodian and foreign companies for rubber and cassava plantations or mining exploration; ii) legal and illegal logging and forestry concessions; iii) demographic pressure from increasing settlement by ethnic Khmer from outside provinces into Monduliri and Ratanakiri places further constraints on such traditional practices. The government seems interested in giving preference to investors rather than the needs of indigenous peoples to conserve and protect their long-term practices which are closely related to natural resources.

DPA has commissioned this study in an attempt to deepen program knowledge on indigenous people's livelihood strategies, culture and rights to inform appropriate approaches, interventions and strategies that respond to the needs of indigenous people and protect their culture, rights and natural resources more effectively. DPA is currently in the process of shifting to a rights based approach that includes supporting community organising<sup>2</sup> and advocacy which requires reflection on the role DPA plays and the strategies used to generate community empowerment and ownership in regions where the program supports Indigenous peoples (IPs).

**The terms of reference for this study outlined 6 objectives. To understand:**

- How IP communities preserve and/or maintain their cultural practices, customary laws, and rights within the context of social transformations;
- Cultural practices, indigenous structure and governance linked to development activities implemented by DPA and other NGOs and the advantages and disadvantages for basing development activities on the culture of the local groups;
- Issues related to natural resource management affecting the IP cultural practices and structures;

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<sup>2</sup> *ICD strat plan: In the period 2006–08, the new approach of DPA ICD will emphasise a rights-based approach and community organising. The RB approach will raise people's awareness of their basic rights and how to use them properly to improve their quality of life and situation. The community-organising approach will strengthen the community by forming people's associations and handing over the management of project activities to them. [...The ICDD will take up the challenge of finding ways of fostering collaboration and coordination between target beneficiaries, village development actors and other community stakeholders, and commune councils. The ICDD will also use this opportunity to build advocacy networks with other concerned institutions through the Development Education and Advocacy Project to respond to NRM issues,*

- Changing power relations and social interactions in the context of the livelihoods of IP communities in terms of access to, control of and responsibility for natural resources;
- If and how IP communities are redefining and revitalizing their traditional practices and social networks in their everyday lives as a response to development processes.
- The relevance of the cultural practices of IPs for improved development interventions.
- A clear process and recommendations to change the way ICD programme in RTK and MDK implements development interventions through strengthened traditional governance and cultural processes.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri through a number of stages:

- Literature review of social anthropology, NGO research papers and ICD program documents. A design phase based on interviews with relevant NGOs, DPA field staff, community elders and youth, and training youth and elder research teams (Bunong, Kreung, Jarai and Tampuan)<sup>3</sup>.
- Village discussions in indigenous languages in 7 villages (Kate and Ochra in Mondulkiri, and Lain, Tuen, Keres, Gate and Loam in Ratanakiri), facilitated by the local research teams, followed by interviews with elders and youth,
- An elders validation workshop in Ratanakiri where more detail on key findings was discussed, facilitated by Jeremy Ironside. Reflection with DPA staff on the implications of findings for the DPA program

The study has emphasised stimulating debate by stakeholders themselves on the role and value of cultural practices and traditional authorities, the range of influences acting in and on the community, and the nature of community cohesion and development. Simple research questions were designed for the village discussions which looked at cultural practices, the role of traditional authorities, community natural resource management, social and economic development. Communities were asked to consider the changes that had taken place, their cause and effect, the positive and negative aspects of these changes and were encouraged to give an analysis on the role of externals.

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<sup>3</sup>*in collaboration with two indigenous organisations: the Highlander Association and IYDP in Ratanakiri, both of which have extensive experience of mobilising indigenous researchers from the elders and youth to lead research groups at the village level, and stimulating community lead*

## **Literature Review**

The literature review undertaken started with a review of select works of social anthropologists and recent studies led by NGOs and UNDP on the role of TAs. Among these documents the Care study on TAs was most useful as it provided a detailed review of previous literature, followed by the UNDP study looking specifically at the role of TAs in dispute resolution and publications by CFI, NGO forum and others exploring the challenges of IP communities in securing land and forest rights. CIDSE/DPA supported studies were also reviewed in particular the studies of John McAndrews and Jeremy Ironside on land and natural resource management strategies. Information from these sources has informed the design of field interviews and thus has fed into the remainder of this chapter.

Following this a review was conducted of the ICD program's proposals, reports and evaluations. Among these documents the ICD program evaluation of 1999 raised important considerations for the program approach that remain relevant to date, supplemented by some analysis in the 2003 and 2006 ICD evaluations. An important reference document is also the report of the 2001 conference on 'Partnership and Natural Resource Management' held in Ratanakiri and supported by NGOs with CIDSE funding this and acting as the main organiser. This document contributes recommendations from IP representatives about how they wish development organisations to support them, and is referenced in the chapter on development paradigm. Also useful here was the report of an NGO workshop held in Ratanakiri in 2004 titled 'Building community ownership of development' which has been referenced in the Chapter on development Paradigm

A study by Anna Olmerts in 2005 on culture and development also contributed ideas that continue to be relevant to the program and are referenced in the recommendations section. It is also important to note that there is a wealth of local documentation that has been carried out in Khmer and in Indigenous languages by the provincial departments of arts and culture and by communities themselves with support from organisations such as the IYDP program of NTFP, the cultural documentation program of the highlanders association and the literacy publications produced by the INGOs ICC and Care.

## **3. FINDINGS**

### **3.a .Village discussions and interviews**

During the course of this study interviews were held with elders and youth from

the communities of Bunong in Mondulkiri and the Jarai, Keung and Tampuan in Ratanakiri. Interviews were also conducted with DPA ICD staff and counterparts in the local ministry for arts and culture. Information from the literature review was used to guide the design of interviews and village discussions. Seven village discussions were then facilitated by IP community Annex 6 “Report from Village Teams”. The findings of this community analysis are summarised below. The aim has been to attempt to access IP perspectives of the world, the changes in their communities and roles of external actors.

### **i) Culture and the role of traditional authorities in IP communities**

IP cultural practices bind the community together and maintain a collective identity. Beliefs in spirits are important as they protect the health of the village and its natural resources (including rivers and forests). Ceremonies for clearing farms, planting and harvesting crops are important events in the annual calendar and ceremonies for funerals and house and village cleansing are important for the health of the village. Traditional music, using traditional instruments and songs (and use of IP languages) are important for community identity as have been the style of using local products for local production such as weaving clothes, baskets, building houses. IP communities have a cultural identity shared across each ethnic group, but with significant variations in each village as demonstrated by village histories, myths and food taboos (such as chickens or tortoises). Each village its own history with stories of how diets have been established. These cultural aspects of Indigenous communities have traditional served to both give meaning to community life and to protect the community from losing its collective identity and help communities protect communal pride, rights, assets, and knowledge. Processes serve as a means of transferring the cultural heritage of the community to the younger generation.

Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia have historically played an important role in the history of the country, for example s assisting relations between the Khmer and Cham kingdoms. The devastation caused by the Khmer Rouge severely affected indigenous communities, who were moved to work on lowland rice schemes. During the 1980s, communities steadily returned to their homelands to re-establish their traditional practices and from the 1990s found themselves adjusting to the increasing influence of local government<sup>4</sup>, and the development interventions of NGOs which promoted new forms of village leadership.

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<sup>4</sup> Important documentation for the ICD program includes the work of Anthropologists such as Frederick Bourdier, CFI's various publications, Care's study on traditional authorities and the UNDP Study on dispute resolution as well as large volumes of community cultural documentation produced by ICC and IYDP, HA

In the 1980's three-person village committees were established consisting of a chairman (village chief), a vice-chairman (deputy chief) and a member, elected or selected in various ways. Bourdier notes that 'by the mid 1990s chiefs were selected by the provincial authorities but then approved by a majority show of hands in the village'. Since commune councils were first elected in 2003, village chiefs selection is supposed to be done by them, followed by a village meeting to get consensus – rather than through majority voting.

The weakening of traditional authorities comes from a number of factors discussed in this study:

- The traditional legal system cannot address new challenges involving outsiders who don't recognize the authority of TAs
- An inability to address external challenges loses TAs the respect of the youth
- NGOs have promoted democratization of 'village development actors' that is empowering of more community members but does not build on traditional cultural knowledge and role of TA

Indigenous Peoples collective rights to land and use of forest resources have received growing recognition in Cambodian legislation since 2000, but this has not translated into the level of practical protection needed. Traditional networks between villages and communities are relatively weak, due in part the wide dispersal of communities in the forests and a reluctance to 'interfere' in each others' affairs.

While the selection, composition, role and approach of TAs have various differences between the 4 communities studied, the Traditional Authorities in a village are generally led by a chief elder (mé kântreanh), who is a spirit medium and advises on sacrifices, and 2 or more sub-elders who lead on dispute resolution cases. Traditional Authorities have lead community consultation and decision making on issues of village decisions, land management, NRM, spiritual ceremonies and dispute resolution. They are selected by the community based on their knowledge of customs and their fairness. TAs can play an important role in enabling communities to resist external pressures and incentives for land sales. For example belief in spirits and forests has also traditionally been an important sanction against their violation. They often do not speak Khmer and are often not involved / consulted by local government and development NGOs. It is important to differentiate between these traditional authorities and the broader Khmer term for elders ('Jatom') which may include TAs but also includes other older villagers who may hold government positions or sit on project committees.

The UNDP and Care studies have found that Traditional Authorities continue to play a key role in dispute resolution for local village land conflicts, robbery, theft, domestic violence, neighbour disputes, allocation of property, debt, engagement and divorce, while more serious crimes are referred via village chiefs to commune, commune police and the district authorities. Traditional

authorities aim to restore village solidarity and harmony. Mediation by an elder intermediary, selected by one of the parties is usually the first step in the conflict resolution process. Depending at what stage the case is resolved, mediation is followed by hearings by elders, and advice from the *mé kântreanh*, and a proposed compensation to be paid to the victim (the case may be appealed but involves paying heavier and heavier fines).

TAs derive their authority primarily from the consensus of the community who recognise their integrity and leadership based on their reputation for speaking well, fairness, objectivity, knowledge of customary rules and punishments. They are not acting independently, but are governing by consent, an agent of the community in the community. As CFI note ‘traditional leaders still exist, but they rarely speak fluent Khmer, rarely read and write, and operate in a non-hierarchical, non-formal manner. This puts them at a grave disadvantage when trying to interact with mainstream culture, when new laws and policies are drafted, and when development projects are implemented. But, the traditional systems are the ones which hold communities together.’



*Phao village, Ta Veng Krom commune, Ta Veng district, Ratanakiri province*

In addition to dispute resolution and organising ceremonies, traditional authorities identify village boundaries, decide on village movements and take care of community activities such as building the village hall. *Traditional organising* at the community level is also led by TAs. It is they who manage communal land, communal crop-planting, storage of crops for rituals and ceremonies and give permission for clearing of forest areas for new farms and oversee groups of dancers, drummers, singers and servers for ceremonies. Government and NGOs often seek TA support to mobilize villagers. The strength of TAs in a village may assist the community to resist pressures to sell land. Forces generally beyond the capacity of TAs and elders to control (corrupt police and officials) may be mitigated where communities respect communal decision making as led by TAs. TAs in Gate village, Malik commune have negotiated important the resolution of inter-village disputes over land at village boundaries. Such disputes are likely to increase as land becomes scarcer, common resources depleted and families live in greater proximity.

***Importance of the natural environment to beliefs, customs, culture and identity and the role of TA***

Protection of land and natural resources is fundamental for IP cultural survival. Key beliefs, customs and ceremonies are linked to natural resource use and protection. A Tampuan elder returning from Kate village commented that ‘Land is the most important to conserve – because everything comes from the land: laws, beliefs, traditional practices, community solidarity. All major cultural offerings and prayers are directed towards the land, farms forests and streams. Land creates community and family life.’ However, communities are noting that as the notion of collective ownership of village land and collective responsibility for the village weakens and the role of TAs becomes less central to the community, important community resources and collective rights are harder to protect.

Protecting natural resources, the role of traditional authority and the cultural identity of IP communities are inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing objectives: to support community strength, solidarity and cohesion. Strengthening the role of traditional authorities requires constant recognition of them by all actors, not least development NGOs who are working for change in the community. It is community management of the process of change that will determine what traditional culture and leadership survives, and whether it survives as a living process, invested in by the younger generation.



Indigenous communities have for centuries relied on shifting 'swidden' agriculture which involves communal ownership of land and sustainable clearing of forest plots in a manner that allows forests and soils to regenerate. Traditional Authorities have managed this process ensuring that communities are food secure and that forests and soils are protected for future generations. With increasing land sales, community management of forests decreases while deforestation and erosion increase. At the same time, the roles of traditional authorities, based on their traditional knowledge rooted in the spiritual and delicate environmental management practices of generations, become devalued and their influence in protecting community interests weakened. This is why land and natural resource protection and 'cultural preservation' are inseparable objectives and priorities in protecting the resources, rights and livelihoods of indigenous peoples.

## **ii) Changes in the environment and within the community**

### ***Changes in economical, social, political, cultural spheres and new actors inside the community***

Political developments have brought major changes in the economic life of these provinces, though IP communities have not been well prepared to manage and benefit from these changes. Continued investment, land speculation and protection of IP land provided for in the 2001 land law. Limited land and diversification of crops leads people to settle and rotate crops, giving up on traditional Swidden (slash and burn) agriculture. The range and scale of new influences on and IP communities is formidable and becomes reflected in the new actors within the community. These new actors alter the dynamic within the community, challenging the authority of traditional actors whose influence is based on community respect, traditional knowledge and control over community resources. New actors in the community include Khmer literate youth, entrepreneurs with capital or connections, individuals connected to government or NGOs and others all of whom derive their influence and power within the community from a combination of language, money and access to externals. (during the study community members were ironically described as clever when self-serving and ignorant when working for the collective)

### ***The cash economy: individualism v the collective and community fragmentation***

Monetisation of the economic life of IP communities has reduced the

inter-dependence of community members, and collective ownership and sharing of resources is being eroded. For example, when game is caught in the forest, hunters prefer to sell excess meat rather than share it. Community members acting on individual interests and exploiting shared resources (colluding with land speculators or illegal loggers) are less afraid of the authority of TAs. Uncertainty has fuelled community land sales, as a perceived threat, reinforced by land dealers, that the land may be given by government to a business concession has encouraged people to sell and buy tangible assets (motorbikes, modern Khmer-style wooden houses, etc). Monetisation also devalues traditional cultural artefacts such as jewellery and gongs. Families plant cashew trees and fruit trees on their land and still claim this land after they have shifted their rice cultivation to new areas. Thus there is less and less community land available. The family economy is also more linked to the market as cash crops are produced.

***New aspirations and influences: the widening generation gap***

The generation gap is conceptually widening and youth researches involved in this study reported that many of their peers feel that their own knowledge is more useful than that of traditional elders. New cultural influences such as Khmer music and dance attract youth away from traditional music. Elders complain that some youth wish to sell land for motorbikes, and that most are most interested in cash and status-generating assets. Elders are also frustrated that spirits are no longer respected with sacrifices. Young women feel that traditional gender roles are exploitative, such as carrying water and fire wood, living alone during childbirth, and committing years of service to in-laws following marriage. There are also serious contradictions between the penalties imposed by modern laws and those handed down by TAs in rape cases for example. Even elders sometimes find customary practices disagreeable (one commented that an all-night Kreung ceremony led by the Arak ‘exhausts villages who don’t work the next day and involves expensive sacrifices’). Elders generally recognise the need to integrate traditional culture with modern practices and tastes: ‘we cannot protect young from modern influences but we can still promote language and culture.’

***Differences between traditional Authorities and Government or NGO encouraged structures?***

The DPA 1999 ICD evaluation notes that ‘in some villages Village Development’ membership resembled the previous Elder Council structure, but also that the VDC can be perceived by villagers to be a body installed by the government or NGOs, and lead by village elites, which can ‘cause an imbalance

in terms of popular decision-making’, with community members feeling ‘that they are less accountable towards their fellow villagers.’ It was further observed by the care study that ‘Village Development Actors are often Khmer literate and able to travel for meetings, are often younger people and usually receive some monetary benefit for their work when they travel. While the decision making is ‘expanded over a larger group of people, making the process more transparent and democratic,’ traditional authority is nonetheless undermined as this re-enforces a perception that Elders are no longer the most wise and knowledgeable persons in the village.

**iii) Emerging community responses to change *Managing change – the communities’ control***

Cultural change is not necessarily a negative development; cultures everywhere are changing all the time. The question is what control the communities in question have over their own cultural change and adaptation. It is important that the community itself decides what must be preserved, what can adapt, what should change. Some changes are actively chosen by the community, ‘combining the old and the new in ways that maintain and enhance their identity while



*Kres village, Chan commune, O’Chum district, Ratanakiri province*

improving their quality of life." (Care) Cultural changes in the case of IP communities in Cambodia are perhaps, most disadvantageous when they affect a community's ability to act collectively in response to new pressures (to sell land or to invest in protecting a common resource by, for example, protecting a spirit forest)

***Revitalisation of respect for traditional leadership***

Traditional practices and social networks are to some extent being redefined and revitalized in response to the ongoing crisis of continuing land sales and natural resource depletion. While Traditional Authorities and elders have been weakened by ongoing deforestation, land sales and community fragmentation, some also argue that their integrity and their role as guardians of village interests has been increasingly recognised and valued by the majority of community members themselves, especially in villages in crisis where communities have directly experienced the negative impacts of resource depletion and community disintegration (limited land left agriculture, lands fenced off and obstructing animal grazing, disputes with neighbours)

***Renegotiating respect and understanding between elders and youth***

In some villages, communities are engaging in processes aiming to re-negotiate respect between elders and youth. Organisations such as HA and NTFP/IYDP



*PhakNam village, Koh Peak commune, Veunsai district, Ratanakiri province*

have piloted work on building youth networks, sending students back into communities to listen to elders and value roots, promoting youth participation in ceremonies, writing new songs about community history, land and culture, and supporting drama and music groups and cultural centres. These activities aimed at bridging the widening gap between elders and youth aim to revitalise cultural pride and heritage, simultaneously accessing and stimulating community led analysis of development. Community led research on culture and tradition can also help strengthen solidarity in villages and validate knowledge and role of TAs. Such activities aim to stimulate cultural history, strengthen social bonds and generate social and personal rewards to youth for taking an interest in culture. Elders have expressed interest in updating practice, adjusting customs addressing economic disincentives and gender inequities in order to make traditional practices attractive and valued by the younger generation. The widening generation gap needs to be addressed with creative strategies to keep youth aware, interested and valuing of culture and the knowledge and role of elders. Some villages mentioned that some traditional healers, or head elders were not being replaced.



*Traditional elder in Ratanakiri province*

***Rising consciousness, community voice, organising and networking and roles played by externals***

The pace of change and crisis over land and natural resources has led to a more concerted effort by communities to be informed of their rights and take action to raise the profile of their situation in the public consciousness and to seek redress and networks are emerging between villages and across communes and districts. While many of the outspoken elders met during the course of the study have benefited from involvement in DPA projects over the past 14 years, and DPA has supported village advocates to bring cases to the relevant authorities and engage with pilot titling processes, much of the work to actually strengthen indigenous networks and organisations has been done by other organisations.

DPA commissioned this study to also assist in reflecting on its approach (the development paradigm) and this requires reflection on what role DPA should play in supporting IP organisations and networks. Traditional community leadership, knowledge and collective decision making processes are valuable

community assets. To be ‘empowering’ and support sustainable community initiative it is important for external organisations to be careful to re-enforce and not undermine these community systems. As the DPA ICD program plans for phasing out and handing over, and moving to a rights-based and community organising approach, this should be a central concern.

### **3.b Elders validation workshop in Ratanakiri**

At a meeting coordinated by the highlanders Association and facilitated by Jeremy Ironside in January 2008, elders met to review the findings of the survey so far and to make comments and additions.

The community still cannot defend their land and natural resources from ongoing land selling and illegal logging, even forest land with large trees is being sold. Some villages now have no or little land and there is a fear that the end result will be violence. Many individuals within the community no longer respect their own leaders and don't respect the laws/regulations which have been developed to control activities. Some leaders and community committee members have been involved in illegal activities themselves and have no credibility. People now respect traditional law less, partly because it is ineffective in dealing with outsiders. While formal legal channels are difficult for many reasons, including that authorities have often already signed and authorized an illegal land sale.



*Villager in Kameng village, Chan commune, O'Chom district, Ratanakiri province*

(DPA are respected for intervening in the Kon Mum district chief case which was not easy for staff and has resulted in less collaboration from the district in DPA activities). There have been cases where staff of an NGO have asked if there is any land for sale when they are working in the village and some 'community organisers' are involved in contacting with outsiders to sell land and conducting other illegal activities. However, several villages represented in this meeting said that no land sales had yet taken place in their villages (including all the villages in Poey Commune, Malick village, Tus Village in Ta Ang Commune, and also some villages in Teun Commune) which shows that there is still both community solidarity and functioning village governance in many villages.

Communities rely on outside organizations to help them address these power imbalances and in many cases the outside person has more weight in convincing community members. The elders recognize the benefits DPA has brought to their community. The 3 important priorities for the future of their communities was land, forest and culture. Without land (and forest) there was no culture and no community solidarity. A further 'lesser priority' was also agriculture as people argued you have to do something with the land to protect it and for community livelihoods. Communities want to take over their own development work but are worried that they don't have the capacity or the financial resources. However many development activities in their villages are functioning well and largely managed by community committees, and could be handed over. Different village committees associated with the different organizations should meet together every month and plan what development activities they want in their village and on what day they want these. This could then be communicated to the different organizations.

**Community leaders request support for:**

- Hiring indigenous staff so they can hold village meetings in local languages including strengthened dialogue with the village traditional authorities.
- Processes to improve communication and understanding between elders and youth to build respect, solidarity, cooperation and understanding between village youth and elders.
- Cultural performances, developing and filming community theatre to raise awareness on problems of land loss, make CDs of traditional music and training young people to record and film activities.
- Legal Education, help to create, train and strengthen youth groups - i.e. assist with getting IYDP students to come and help facilitate new village youth groups

- Support communities to improve law enforcement with both traditional and national law, agreeing on definite village boundaries, and prevent recognizing, signing or stamping documents which allow the selling of community land without the community hearing about and agreeing to such sales.
- Assist in contacting the police, military police, the military, district, provincial and national authorities to help control illegal activities and support follow up when communities prepare a complaint explaining to authorities about the law.
- Assist with explaining to villages about controlling land and forest problems, as village committee members are not listened to much.
- Assist with village community forestry (CF) and land management activities, starting by reviewing the existing CF and land management committees that are not working well.
- Help low-profile working groups to monitor and follow up on illegal activities and on the people who are conducting these activities, and reporting to the Provincial level. Support this monitoring with materials such as books, pens and paper, cameras and transportation costs.
- Cooperate with law organizations to solve land disputes as DPA did with PILAP in Teun Village.
- Support community advocacy: DPA and other organizations should open the road to the national level and support indigenous representatives to go to Phnom Penh to meet high officials and the king. Support transportation so there can be exchanges and communication between villages.
- Strengthening development activities: Develop a good communication system between DPA and the COs in the villages, dismiss and promote good COs to become DPA staff.
- Improve coordination between civil society organizations especially to build on good practice in land, natural resource and cultural protection work.
- Develop agricultural activities as a secondary priority (different crops such as fruit trees, dry season vegetables, animal raising, rice growing and long term commercial crops).

#### **4. CONSIDERING THE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM**

A development paradigm refers to the objectives and assumptions of a development approach. A paradigm shift will occur when it is widely recognised that previous approaches are not working, that the logic of their objectives and assumptions was flawed. For example it is now widely



- Growth of a country's economy does not necessarily relieve relative poverty among the poorest.
- Providing charitable services will not in itself address poverty in the long term
- Activities to increase investment may have serious negative social and environmental impacts

These may seem obvious statements, but these perspectives have only gained recognition over time, and 20-30 years ago were not necessarily widely acknowledged by many development practitioners as valid. Thus it is important to be aware that the current knowledge we have, objectives we set ourselves and assumptions we make may well appear insufficient in the future. Assumptions underlying the above examples include that:

- A trickle down effect will occur – and the growth of gross domestic product will benefit all.
- Relieving the immediate effects of poverty may be sustainable without addressing structural causes
- Social and environmental consequences are worth the overall gains of big development projects

Reflecting on objectives, assumptions and the role of development organisations has become an important principle of development work.

The ICD program made a paradigm shift when it moved away from humanitarian relief to support for capacity building for social services, and then again when it moved from a traditional sector-based service delivery work to the integrated community development program. The current emphasis on



*Phao village, Ta Veng Krom commune, Ta Veng district, Ratanakiri province*

### **Example: Agricultural Development Paradigms**

Many approaches to development have been tried over time and have had to be modified because the assumptions which they were based on were wrong and the development approaches didn't succeed in improving the lives of local populations. For example, some of the incorrect assumptions which development approaches have been based on in the past include;

1. That improving agricultural production in a poor country is just a matter of transferring 'advanced' technology from a rich country,
2. That small farmers are ignorant and backward and there is nothing to learn from their farming systems, it is just a matter of replacing these systems and peoples lives will improve,
3. Men are always the farmers and men control the farm land. To improve agriculture it is necessary to work with the men.

All these assumptions of early agricultural development work have been found to have failed. Many farming communities were actually worse off after agricultural development activities had been implemented. Over time these basic assumptions about agricultural development work have had to be radically changed. There is now a much greater focus on realising that local farmers (men and women) are the experts of their area and it is necessary to work with and build on their local knowledge.



*Rice field during dry season in Trapang Ches commune, Koun Mom district, Ratanakiri province*

The development paradigm refers to what the program is aiming at in a community<sup>6</sup>. For the ICD program it has evolved from relief to specific social services, to a holistic support for community development and capacity building, and most recently to an empowerment paradigm where communities use their knowledge of rights and ability to organise in order to rely on their own capacities and demand government accountability for sustainable development<sup>7</sup>.

Achieving empowerment is complex and challenging, especially where communities have limited capacities, are in a weak institutional environment and are accustomed to receiving NGO support with limited responsibility themselves for management. Thus is made more complex when the communities in question are indigenous peoples engaged by an organisation staffed by a majority ethnic-cultural group.

Many development concepts can seem abstract and theoretical and it is important for organisations to reflect on and articulate what development concepts mean in practice to them in their everyday work. This helps clarify

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<sup>6</sup> *The Development Paradigm refers to what is seen and understood by the development worker, their valuing of existing capacities, approach to identifying an agenda for change, and vision for the future (understanding of what efforts are contributing to. [Behind a rights-based and community organising approaches is the idea that sustainable development can only be achieved if communities are aware of their rights, and are organised enough to lead on their own development and advocate effectively. The management and leadership by various community actors is known as empowerment. The concept of community ownership is also important, as it is believed this is most likely to lead to the sustainability of a project, initiative, local organisation or network. The greater the external driving force, in design or management, the less chance of local demand, commitment, and ownership].*

<sup>7</sup> *ICD staff explained that empowerment: (Gaa Podol Om Nai) is about encouraging people to make decisions and solve problems by themselves, with CDF staff facilitating analysis and experience sharing, not imposing ideas. They further described ownership as the community's 'self-management and accountability in completing role and tasks and making own decisions'. Capacity building was described as 'knowledge, skills and experience for sustainability of ownership and project management' and ICD staff further explained that Participation ('Ga Cho Room') is demonstrated by the community contributing materials, ideas, money, labour, local resources, time for meetings, workshops, planning and initiatives. It has reduced significantly in the last 10 years due to both external cultural influences, and a decrease in direct service delivery which required community contributions.*

*The concept of Community ownership was used by the Khmer Rouge regime as "Machas Kar", Meas Nee notes 'which means that people must work independently, not depend on outsiders for help and unfortunately this destroyed the concept. The same concept was generally used by NGOs to build project management and leadership capacities to manage projects introduced by the NGOs where people are 'asked to own', rather than to be empowered to take the initiatives in their own hands, exacerbated by an action plan-logframe culture which cannot wait for community initiatives to emerge'*

the 'logic' of how the organisation will apply them, meaning how we can expect to see these concepts at work in the understanding and behaviour of staff and in program approaches. Applying community organising and rights based approaches to build empowerment and ownership in the ICD program will necessarily over-time affect the way DPA focuses its program, how decisions are made, how indigenous community members are involved as partners and staff, and how local initiatives and organisations are directly supported.

It is possible for well-intentioned use of new concepts (such as community organising and ownership) to yet not result in significant differences in how programs work at the community level. In other words, the way in which they are applied can result in them not significantly transforming the program's approach. Identifying the respective roles played by community leaders and the staff of development organisations workers as well as the source of ideas and initiative that shape the program is an important way to analyse whether empowerment is really occurring. For example:

- If community organising is driven by outsiders, re-organising the community as they think most effective with structures they design, the process will not re-enforce community initiative.<sup>8</sup>
- If communities are invited to have responsibility for existing projects introduced by an NGO, this does not necessarily mean they will feel ownership of the project, as the original design was heavily influenced by outsiders.
- If existing community roles (i.e. through traditional authorities and customary practices) are ignored, new initiatives for community development may be viewed as imposed by outsiders
- If outsiders don't start by valuing the dignity, traditions and everyday life of the community (traditional knowledge, beliefs and values) they may assume they have superior knowledge.

Empowerment and ownership require space and time, locally driven analysis and problem solving and an ever reducing smaller role for outsiders.

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<sup>8</sup> *The concept of Community ownership was used by the Khmer Rouge regime as "Machas Kar", Meas Nee notes 'which means that people must work independently, not depend on outsiders for help and unfortunately this destroyed the concept. The same concept was generally used by NGOs to build project management and leadership capacities to manage projects introduced by the NGOs where people are 'asked to own', rather than to be empowered to take the initiatives in their own hands, exacerbated by an action plan-logframe culture which cannot wait for community initiatives to emerge'*

### Moving to a development paradigm aiming at empowerment

Service delivery with limited participation	Empowerment through CO and RBA
Service delivery for basic needs	Promotes community analysis and problem solving – building Community awareness on rights, for organising and advocacy
Externals decide what technical knowledge is important for the community, see themselves as educators, bringing more valuable knowledge skills and ‘ideas’	Recognises and respects complex knowledge, skills, systems of community, and values culture and creative potential of communities.
People as beneficiaries, and priorities set by NGO based on its existing skills, staff and funding.	People as rights-holders and the primary ‘development actor / change agent’ in the development process, and priorities set by communities based on their defined needs/values
traditional ‘participation’ where communities were simply invited to be involved in a program designed and implemented by an NGO.	‘participatory approaches’ understood to mean that the agenda set and role played by the community should determine how external programs work with the community.

Communities may participate but big decisions already made, assuming a correct vision of development already known by dev NGO	Responsive to community values/ vision and prioritise and responding flexibly to community initiatives, encourage their development,
Advocacy activities ‘play safe’ to avoid antagonising authorities, speaking on behalf of target group Capacity building ends with awareness of rights issues	Engaging with authorities, promoting community voice. Capacity building aiming to bring out full potential and enable action of community leaders
Capacity building and training focussed on project management and sustainability plans focussed on continuing projects and funding	Capacity building focuses on leadership and initiative and sustainability measured in terms of community capacities to deal with change, continue positive social transformations and act on their own priorities.
Accountability and transparency to donors but not community	Accountability and transparency to communities
Organisational identity does not need to include target group – as they are beneficiaries	Target communities should be represented in organisation, especially if a marginalised minority

**Applying an empowerment paradigm to work in IP areas, considering culture, customary practice and traditional authorities.**

Throughout the study, communities articulated how they were trying to manage the competing forces for conservation and modernisation in their villages. This included for example, developing strategies to make traditional music more appealing by allowing more modern dancing at ceremonies, encouraging community members to buy land from each other to avoid selling to outsiders (which could compromising future collective title), adjusting the expectations from elders for contributions for ceremonies or for services from newly married

couples. This process of re-negotiation of customary practice, roles and responsibilities in the village, in order to chart a course between cultural preservation and assimilation, takes place in almost all spheres of community life, and is itself a development process undertaken by different stakeholders in the community.

**Supporting communities to manage the competing forces for conservation and modernisation.**

<b>Conservation</b>	<b>Modernisation</b>
Collective rights and identity, traditional, conservative	Individual rights and identity, modern, liberal, market oriented
Communal rights, interests and responsibilities	Individual rights, interests
Common land and food security	Individual land ownership and rights to sell
Collective respect for forests: spiritual, cultural and livelihoods, traditional economy, traditional status and social roles	Profiteering, influence based on language, money and contacts with outsiders.
Traditional ceremony, music, dance and dress	New musical influences, materials, Khmer and western culture
Isolation, protection and preservation of culture	Assimilation

Genuine empowerment of indigenous peoples means outsiders must be careful to ensure IP communities are well informed and able to decide themselves on their own cultural adaptation and strategies for managing these competing forces. Recognising the powerful influence of outsiders is a necessary first step. Next it is important to think about the possibly different visions for the development of the village held by different stakeholders (ie will communities be settled or still control enough land to practice swidden cultivation, how are the role of different authorities changing and what factors influence this, etc, what processes seem to most safeguard community resources (including here cultural practices).

The ICD program has shifted focus from the general promotion of IP profile and rights in the late 1990s towards a more specific focus on community forestry and land rights following the 2001 conference on partnership and natural resources. It is worth revisiting the recommendations of the 1999 ICD Ratanakiri evaluation:

- Promote local and national policies to guarantee rights of ethnic groups in the province,
- Ensure a cultural sensitivity and socio-cultural understanding among staff: learning the local languages, studying customs, habits and ritual practices to a basic level to deal with ethnic groups on their own terms, to remain respectful for people's culture and see themselves as servants.
- Activities to encourage ethnic pride or conserve and increase the still significant traditional cohesion
- Socio-cultural data on the ethnic groups would help ensure appropriateness of development models
- Development of policies requiring political engagement, (e.g. on land rights) which may place constraints on the presently very good relationship with local and central government
- Put activities strategically under the 'roof' of empowerment of the communities to deal with its problems independently.

It is also worth revisiting the recommendations of the CIDSE/DPA supported conference on Partnership and Natural Resource Management held in Ratanakiri in 2001. This meeting had high levels of IP presentations and emphasised among its recommendations;

- Promoting integrated community development into which all organisations are contributing. building capacity of IP communities to understand development issues and report NRM abuses,
- Forming cultural advisory groups to advise on cultural and social impacts of development activities, and recognising the role of traditional authorities and incorporating traditional conflict resolution,
- Working in indigenous languages through translation is need be, slower pace of activities to allow full IP understanding and agreement,
- Increasing employment of IPs in government and NGOs, more prominence to culture in development interventions, cultural orientation and language training to existing NGO staff,
- Supporting community initiatives, beyond narrow range of traditional NGO activities, roads, (buffalo banks, etc), educate donors to accept community driven projects which may take longer to implement, hold





The DPA ICD program in 1999 and 2001 was already aware of the importance of adjusting program approaches to be empowering of indigenous peoples' culture and traditional authorities. The current shift to a community organising and rights based approach offers an important opportunity to revive and apply these recommendations, in order that the ICD program can maximise its contribution to empowerment.

### **The complexities of being empowering in the context of Ratanakiri and Mondulhiri**

Empowering indigenous communities is a complex process, and development practitioners themselves are part of this complexity.

In interviews during the course of the study it was observed that the different worldview, values, beliefs and systems introduced by development practitioners can inadvertently undermine objectives of community empowerment. Barang and Khmer practitioners need to start taking themselves out of the picture if sustainable empowerment is to be achieved. It is a real challenge to do this given the relatively small pool of IP leaders, who are over-committed to multiple processes and projects. But strategies must be developed to promote legitimate IP community leaders, organisations and networks. It is also important to develop a deeper awareness of what happens when the social orders of western

culture, Khmer culture and Indigenous cultures interact. For example, it is often the least educated villagers who will have least involvement in development processes and project committees, but many of these have important traditional knowledge or play important traditional roles. It was also observed that it is easy to feed into a ‘poverty mentality’ at the community level, where communities may be expecting NGO staff to assume the role of patron and protector. Collaboration between different organisations is often also weak, due in part to a concern about ‘overlapping’ that seems to be out of date.

A 2004 workshop in Ratankiri on building community ownership of development in IP areas<sup>9</sup> explored the challenges of building community ownership of development. Specifically it found that:

- Traditional leaders’ roles have been impoverished by the reorganization of the community.
- Strategies to address fragmentation and loss of cohesion in communities include: 1) building up the relationship within community members, 2) mobilizing community networks.
- Understanding the natural evolution of a community assists an NGO to develop strategies to work with the community, understand their own definition of obstacles, and identify appropriate technology and interventions within the community.

The ICD program, aiming to improve living conditions of IP communities, needs to carefully address the increasingly individualistic patterns in the community, and to reconsider its activities, impact and influence. A basic paradigm which assumes IP communities need to be trained or organised by outsiders to do anything well will not be empowering. It is crucial to always be self aware of Barang or Khmer view of the world and what assumptions lie in this view about what is good for other people. Strengthening cultural identity and the role of traditional authorities requires a support to indigenous processes and affirmation of existing community traditions (which are in fact existing capacities for managing resources and social harmony).

### **Current considerations for DPA**

#### ***Plans for phasing out and handing over***

During the study community leaders suggested they would be keen to take over

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<sup>9</sup> This meeting was attended by many NGOs: CFI, CARE, ICC, NTFP, HA, SRP Network, PLG and HU, but not by DPA

more project management themselves for straightforward projects, though they still need backstopping from DPA. Such a handover of certain types of project could free up more DPA support for the more intractable issues of advocacy, stimulation of community initiatives, and for help ensuring that sensitive land and forestry protection initiatives are led by credible community leaders. It was also suggested that if some of these smaller projects did not survive, this would not reflect badly on DPA. Either there will be sufficient community demand to maintain the project, or the project will disappear. If the communities come to regret the disappearance of the project the demand side will be rekindled and they can re-establish the project themselves, (with a lower level of DPA input and responsibility next time).

### ***Vision for community structures***

In discussions on community organising, ICD staff described community based organisations as ‘self-planning local organisations that continue from CIDSE or from another NGO to manage project development of the village by themselves’<sup>10</sup>, who are nurtured into maturity and have decisions are delegated to them. It is important for the ICD program not to limit its understanding of community organising and community based organisations to the continuation of specific projects introduced by DPA. Just as DPA has moved away from seeing itself as primarily an expert provider of technical services in a sectoral service delivery program in the late 1990s, it is important to now move away from the idea that the role of facilitator and capacity builder (for community strength, organisation, advocacy and networking) should be limited to the continuation of sectoral projects (management, funding, committees etc). The potential role DPA can play in empowering communities is much greater than this, and may only be effective if a clearer definition of empowerment objectives and expected results are articulated. Promotion of community networks is also an area that needs an explicit strategy. DPA has built the leadership capacity of community leaders, some of whom are undertaking effective community led advocacy, but DPA does not engage consistently with community based networks (which often reach across areas beyond DPA’s target villages). Contributing to empowering these nascent networks is an important part of an empowerment paradigm, and a sustainability strategy for ‘housing’ the capacities built in the community. To ensure that DPA support does not distort the evolution of these networks, DPA should work through organisations such as the Highlanders Association,

<sup>10</sup> While NGOs were described as bigger organisations than a CBO, with more staff who are not living in the project localities, and are from other areas, these staff undertake activities in the villages, whereas CBO staff are directly made up of community from the village. NGOs spend a lot of money, have higher knowledge, and are ‘like mother/father to CBOs

which is made up primarily of Indigenous practitioners and selected community elders.

***Vision of capacity building role and IP representation***

Empowering approaches can be advanced by making changes that place IP communities in the driving seat of the program. This requires increased respect for culture and traditional authorities at the personal and programmatic levels (not limited to the colourful characteristic of cultural practices but including respect for traditional capacities for self management, dispute resolution, and natural resource protection). It is important to consider here DPA's identity as an inclusive Cambodian organisation. Most staff believe it is normal that NGOs should be staffed by people from outside of the community, but in order to represent these stakeholders their inclusion as staff is important. All other organisations have deliberately increased IP staff to ensure the organisation understands the community, respects IP culture, builds IP capacity and promotes IP influence on programs and approaches. Employing and building capacity of IPs as equal members of DPA staff is important for overall IP ownership of DPA programs, the depth of program analysis and relationships with the community. Of course it crucial to employ trustworthy individuals (as with any staff) and monitor the program carefully. Years of capacity building through ICD program has effectively built up capacities of community leaders and DPA 'community organisers' who have then moved on into government and better paying NGO jobs, which staff rightly view as a contribution to capacity in the wider environment. But the fact that there was no space for these people to be promoted within the DPA program, means the program has lost out from their potential contribution.

***Program focus***

Some observers argue that attempts to focus the ICD program on land and NRM have been diluted as DPA has expanded projects with traditional service oriented activities across a wide range of ICD activities. Others explain that services are important for the community and highly demanded by them, that ongoing land and NRM problems ( such as ongoing land sales) cannot be attributed to DPA action or inaction, and communities need urgently alternative livelihoods. DPA needs to reflect and articulate what impact it thinks it can have on Land and NRM, which are difficult but important issues to work on and at the same time to consider what role DPA should play in service delivery after so many years of work in the community. While the 'integrated' approach to development is important and valued by all, especially the community, programmatically the huge number of ICD activities and limited number of ICD staff makes for a very

busy team that is activity focussed<sup>11</sup>. Sustainable impact will be compromised by DPA attempting to be responsible for everything everywhere and requires a prioritisation process (adding on activities is not a solution and is not strategic) and a realistic plan for phasing out including a focus for capacity building that does not assume communities need to operate like organisations and receive and manage funds to maintain existing projects. In addition to ‘maintaining the ship’ it is important to keep asking ‘where the program is going and why.’

### **Advocacy**

DPA is adjusting due to demand from community for advocacy and empowerment but still has a relatively low profile on advocacy. There are a range of perspectives among staff about how DPA should engage in advocacy, from the cautious to the more determined. Staff may have joined the program for a range of reasons and some advocacy work may be beyond staff competency or comfort zone. However, a shift to CO and RB approaches requires a clear and consistent approach to advocacy, and DPA has an opportunity to use good relations to try to changing attitudes of powerful authorities. While productive relations with all authorities is important, some advocacy work will mean less support from certain government officials and perhaps their reduced participation in some activities. Staff should not be worried that this constitutes some kind of failure, it is a risk associated with standing firm on certain issues. Perhaps Indicators to measure empowerment of the community and advocacy initiatives could be spelt out further in the program strategic plan. This would also shift the focus away from successful completion of activities, and towards outcome level indicators measuring empowerment (towards deciding on the kind of situation communities and DPA would like to see at the end of their advocacy and deciding how this should be measured). In the evaluation of community organising, new signs of community assertiveness and confidence were noted (INSERT QUOTE). It is important that these changes in community behaviour and role, become an overarching objective of the program, not an anecdotal result to add to other activity results.

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<sup>11</sup> *With each successive shift in the focus of DPA's activities it has also been necessary to continue with the previous programmes in the communities. This means DPA has been developing and updating its programme but this has also resulted in the staff having to implement parts of the old programme with new activities from the new programme. This has increased the staff's workload and the new directions of the programme have not been clear in the villages.*

*It should concern the program that the regional government sometimes praises DPA whilst simultaneously criticising other NGOs who are speaking out.*

### ***Clarity with donors, other NGOs and the Partnership development program***

DPA is in a very strong position. It has good relations with authorities, and has a group of committed donors who can be more flexible than many other donors as they have private funds and are often not back-donor dependent. These donors are very likely to respond positively to any proposals from DPA to promote innovation and flexibility in order to realise empowerment objectives. Moreover many organisations in Ratanakiri and Mondulhiri are very interested in Collaboration with DPA, and have a lot of experience to be learnt from<sup>13</sup>. The DPA program could benefit greatly from a convergence of efforts by the ICD and Partnership Development program - investing in grass-roots capacity building alongside grants to community based organisations and networks. This should not be considered *overlapping*, rather it is *complementary* and can contribute to the phasing out of long-running activities.

### ***Design of cultural preservation projects***

In 2005 Anna Olmerts, seconded from CIDSE's donor BD, undertook a study with DPA on culture and development which recommended that DPA ensure culture plays a more central role in the conception and implementation of ICD programs, and specifically that DPA should:

- Use culture as a tool of community strengthening by enabling villagers to become full participants in defining their own cultural past and futures, with a focus on youth and creative capacities
- Use the NGO's network to discuss culture and exchange methodologies
- Promote natural resources for local products and as sources of creativity
- Support cultural boards at village level, involving villagers to document their own culture and stimulating people's creativity (story telling, music, painting, ...)
- invite artists to work in the villages and find masters of the old techniques to train the younger generations in local handicraft

The current ICD work-plan has a number of activities scheduled under the cultural preservation component including building cultural centres (in Keres and Tuen), documenting information and gathering cultural items (to show outsiders and to generate interest from the younger generation) and projects to support music and weaving groups to produce large looms, and traditional instruments and revive their use. These are valuable projects, but could be many times more

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<sup>13</sup> such as HA and NTFP/IYDP on elder

<sup>13</sup> such as HA s and youth networks, as well as with ICC and Care on for existing cultural documentation

sustainable if linked into the ongoing momentum of work done by other organisations to support community cultural documentation, convene cultural festivals, promote handicraft and music and build youth-elder collaboration. This requires more strategy and less project implementation. For example a small support grant to the highlanders association cultural festival planned for February 2008 would contribute to documentation, youth networking, cultural affirmation objectives with little extra effort. Much could be learnt from the event and the process of collaborating with an Indigenous led network. Such opportunities should not be missed. Similarly ICC are very eager to contribute for free the many materials collected on Bunong culture for the Mondullkiri cultural centre project. UNDP are also documenting customary practice among 5 communities. Such collaborations are not only efficient, they are opportunities for community led initiative to develop, and to learn from others about what approaches they use and are therefore important investments for future program development.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The study identified a number of challenges to achieving empowerment of IP communities faced by the ICD program. In response some guiding principles were suggested that could be used to reflect on whether approaches could and should be adjusted.

### ***Suggested draft guiding principles for working in empowering ways in IP areas***

In addition to the existing CIDSE/DPA core values, this research proposes the following guiding principles for working in IP areas:

- Respect and value culture, custom and traditional leadership
- Ensure communities lead and decide on their own cultural change and adaptation.
- Keep as close to the community as possible, with development work in local languages,
- Facilitate IPs to represent themselves, maximise their voice, network creatively at different levels
- Ongoing dialogue with the village traditional authorities, build on traditional leadership and work with traditional (less formal) structures and processes
- Respond to communities own initiatives and agenda and support IP led organisations and networks
- Actively collaborate to build on experiences of others
- Promote IP capacity development and representation within DPA

***Applying these principles to the ICD program***

It is important then to consider carefully what such guiding principle would mean for ICD program development. Program staff should consider the following suggestions, and where they are deemed unsuitable or inappropriate, articulate the rationale for why this is so:

- Allow more time for community discussion and analysis in local languages
- Employ IP staff and invest in external training for them and all community development facilitators
- Promote consultation with TAs and initiatives that value their role as community leaders (as well as increasing understanding of traditional structures and how these are being undermined).
- Avoid 're-structuring' or 're-organising' traditional authorities, rather carefully support them through existing IP initiatives (i.e. Highlanders Association, village elders consultation groups)
- Stimulate community initiative and ongoing program reflection on best approaches for this
- Increasing amount of budget available for unplanned activities
- Reduce local proposal format to not more than 6-8 pages, and assist local groups to fulfil requirements
- Use the PD program strategically to give grants in ICD areas to IP organisations,
- Work closely with partners and learn from their access to the community in IP languages
- Conduct regular program learning workshops on development of approaches at the field level
- Consider carefully impact of money introduced to the community, including payments of per-diems.
- Discuss with donors program approaches and seek support for innovation and flexibility.

***The ICD program team noted challenges to enhancing work with IP communities.***

DPA staff listed the challenges they feel they face in their work with Indigenous communities:

- Indigenous languages make it difficult for staff to understand deeply
- IPs have a lower level of knowledge and education than Khmer people
- IP communities seemed to appreciate DPA more when receiving



- ICD program staff notice self-interest spreading in IP societies: villagers now pursue income from their natural resources and are pursuing this, (ie selling land to buy a vehicle to have a taxi business).
- Community initiatives are sometimes not suggested by the community – it can be a difficult process to ‘stimulate’ them.

It is important to continually re-examine these challenges and explore how the program can respond.

### **Specific recommendations from this study:**

#### **A. Invest in indigenous knowledge, analysis and decision-making processes**

A1. The program could make more use of indigenous knowledge, analysis and decision-making. This involves gaining an ever deeper team understanding of community culture and indigenous community social dynamics, and the promotion of the role and influence of traditional authorities. The worldview of indigenous peoples, especially their interconnectedness with nature is something to be tapped into to improve the quality of development work. Traditional knowledge and practice can form a greater part of development activities (integrating language, cultural references, and traditional approaches). A sustained effort is required to re-enforce traditional processes and amplify community voice from traditional actors.

A2. Ensure planned cultural preservation projects build on other organisations interests in collaboration and sharing best practices and materials (esp. ICC, NTFP/IYDP, HA, CANDO, UNDP, ICSO), and are linked to emerging networks (of cultural centres, craft networks, music and cultural events)

#### **B. Invest in staff reflection on their role in the community**

B1. Continuous facilitation is needed to assist staff to think about personal values, thought patterns, assumptions, perceptions and attitudes and the relations between themselves and the community, including the impact behaviours and actions may have on the communities. It is important to continually review the program’s approach to engaging with IPs, to enhance an organisational culture of listening to communities, internalizing values and concepts that are empowering and exploring implications for the ICD program.

B2. Make time for more reflection and strategising by the team for mobilising around emerging issues, to avoid changes happening at the community level overtaking the program,

### **C. Move towards greater facilitation of community initiatives**

C1. Support the ICD team to switch to a facilitator role that encourages and responds to communities' own initiatives, which may be fewer but will be more locally owned. This does not mean applying a minimalist CO and RBA approach to the current ICD program but thinking creatively about the role of DPA in IP areas in the future.

C2. Orient program objectives towards 'supporting communities to maintain solidarity and support indigenous initiatives and forms of organisation to re-enforce empowerment and vibrant cultural identity.

C.3 Pay close attention to re-enforcing community leadership as part of a phase out strategy as well as supporting community identified advocacy etc.

C.4 Encourage traditional IP character of discussions which are often dynamic and loud and inter-active and less like a formal meeting with speeches and presentations.

C.5 participate in the new Promotion of Empowering Participatory Approaches (PEPA) program funded by the Heinrich Boell Foundation, which aims to look in details at methodologies and approaches to empowering indigenous people in the Cambodian context.

### **D. Articulate a vision for building partnerships, phasing out, handing over**

D1. Hand over some activities in a much shorter time frame to free up time and money for innovation. Most community members do not perceive any great difficulty in managing many of the longer running small projects.

D2. Re-assess what model of civil society to support and what capacities to build. It is important that communities articulate a vision for their village on their own terms, which can be complicated by the expectation that DPA might guiding them towards a model that DPA will fund. Plans for structures in villages need to be revisited and revised so they can build on traditional processes, recognise indigenous structures (by and large informal) and avoid the dangers of rigid community structuring.

D3. Articulate a vision for future partnerships: including whether DPA foresees partnering with advocacy groups, informal coalitions, community networks and evolving relations with the Partnership development program.

D4. Give pilot grants and technical support to community networks and emerging grass-roots civil society groups, reviewing the current slow phase-out process where local CBOs are built from DPA project committees, DPA can

continue to monitor and mentor projects but needs to release responsibility each and every activity

D5. Consider measuring sustainability in terms of community capacity to deal with change, rather than the continuation of specific projects and flow of resources. Consider program indicators for measuring what makes a community strengthening process effective, or how community leadership has been strengthened. (building on CO evaluation)

D6. Plans for an IP conference in mid 2008 could be adapted to rather focus on reviewing how DPA will work with IPs in future and avenues for collaboration, partnering and new approaches, or would be better implemented in partnership with indigenous organisations, demonstrating DPAs support for them.

D7. Understand community organising to be about promoting community leaders effectiveness in networking and advocacy – looking at their influence beyond only DPA project areas.

#### **E. Consider ways to make program management as responsive as possible.**

E1. Simplify the ICD logframe and indicator format and aim fewer initiatives at more empowerment-oriented outcomes – including increasing funds for unplanned local initiatives (such as the cultural festival which is exactly the sort of locally driven initiative requiring a decentralised response from the DPA provincial office)

E2. Being more creative and responsive will require support from the finance department (modalities for requesting funds for new activities are in place but not often used).

E3. Increase local program work in indigenous languages through recruitment of IP staff to ensure that IP perspective drives the program, and re-assess the rationale which is preventing this.

E4. Ask donors to consider restrictions of program implementation plans, to improve local responsiveness through flexibility of resource use.

E5. Consider bringing together ICD and PD support, by funding indigenous organisations in ICD areas, and understand this as an opportunity for lesson learning, and mutually re-enforcing, not an overlap.

## **F. Enhance program focus, collaborations with other organisations and advocacy**

F1. Given the ongoing erosion of culture, land tenure and Natural resources in target villages and the fact that culture and community strength of IPs is linked to land and NRM, this study recommends the program's focus should lie here, with a phase out, handing over of services oriented activities. While the 'Integrated' approach to community development is very valuable and should not be lost, it is important that DPA focus its program areas, allocation of staff, resources and advocacy energies in order to provide new dynamic programming and added value to local development efforts. This demands that exit strategies are found for the service delivery areas of current work (which require permanent presence and funds and must be led in the future by local authorities, local communities and local civil society groups themselves). These exit strategies can include networking and collaboration initiatives and PD program alignment.

### ***Some dos and don'ts suggested at the Workshop on Community Ownership in Ratanakiri, 2004***

Avoid: imposing visions/world views, expecting quick results, paying per diems for community work, using only Cambodian language in the villages, doing activities which the community can do themselves, solving the problem that they can solve, building new power structures out of proportion to old one; implementing different activities at the same time; putting values of Cambodian and Western culture over indigenous culture; putting national laws over community rights, play the role of representative of the community; allowing and accepting illegal land sales, buying land illegally; disregard the community culture; blaming community if they make little mistakes. Channeling funds through non-traditional structures e.g. through youth without consultation and monitoring by elders, creating new, non-traditional administrative structures to "develop" community ownership, insisting on Cambodian language without translation for community representation.

Emphasize: informal meetings, adapting to the time schedule of the community's life, use of local language to empower non-Cambodian speakers and value community language.

F2. Develop advocacy plans that promote community voice and include traditional authorities, as well as using good relations with provincial authorities, and stakeholder trust to link provincial networks, officials, companies, law enforcement agencies, etc. DPA can add value to community initiatives by

utilising its existing linkages at the national level, its longer term funding, and its ability to pilot and be innovative.

F3. Enhance collaboration with other organisations is (ICC, HA, NTFP, ICSO, etc) to maximise opportunities to expand impact of work in specific villages, across a wider geographical area and to higher levels. The Work of DPA coordinating with NTFP in Poy commune (for many years) and with HA and NTFP/IYDP on this study are good examples and should be continued but with a greater emphasis on learning.

F.4 Build on Inter-village meetings on advocacy issues e.g. land titling forum and explore how DPA can organise and collaborate with other organisations to involve more villages and include traditional elders.

F.5 Currently the NGO forum is working to facilitate civil society and Indigenous community leaders participation on public consultations of the draft sub decree on procedures of registration of land of Indigenous Communities. DPA should involve itself in this process and facilitate the key Indigenous community leaders to participate fully.

#### **G. Enhance the cultural preservation component of the ICD program**

##### ***Some dos and don'ts suggested at the Workshop on Community Ownership in Ratanakiri, 2004***

Avoid: imposing visions/world views, expecting quick results, paying per diems for community work, using only Cambodian language in the villages, doing activities which the community can do themselves, solving the problem that they can solve, building new power structures out of proportion to old one; implementing different activities at the same time; putting values of Cambodian and Western culture over indigenous culture; putting national laws over community rights, play the role of representative of the community; allowing and accepting illegal land sales, buying land illegally; disregard the community culture; blaming community if they make little mistakes. Channeling funds through non-traditional structures e.g. through youth without consultation and monitoring by elders, creating new, non-traditional administrative structures to “develop” community ownership, insisting on Cambodian language without translation for community representation.

Emphasize: informal meetings, adapting to the time schedule of the community's life, use of local language to empower non-Cambodian speakers and value community language.

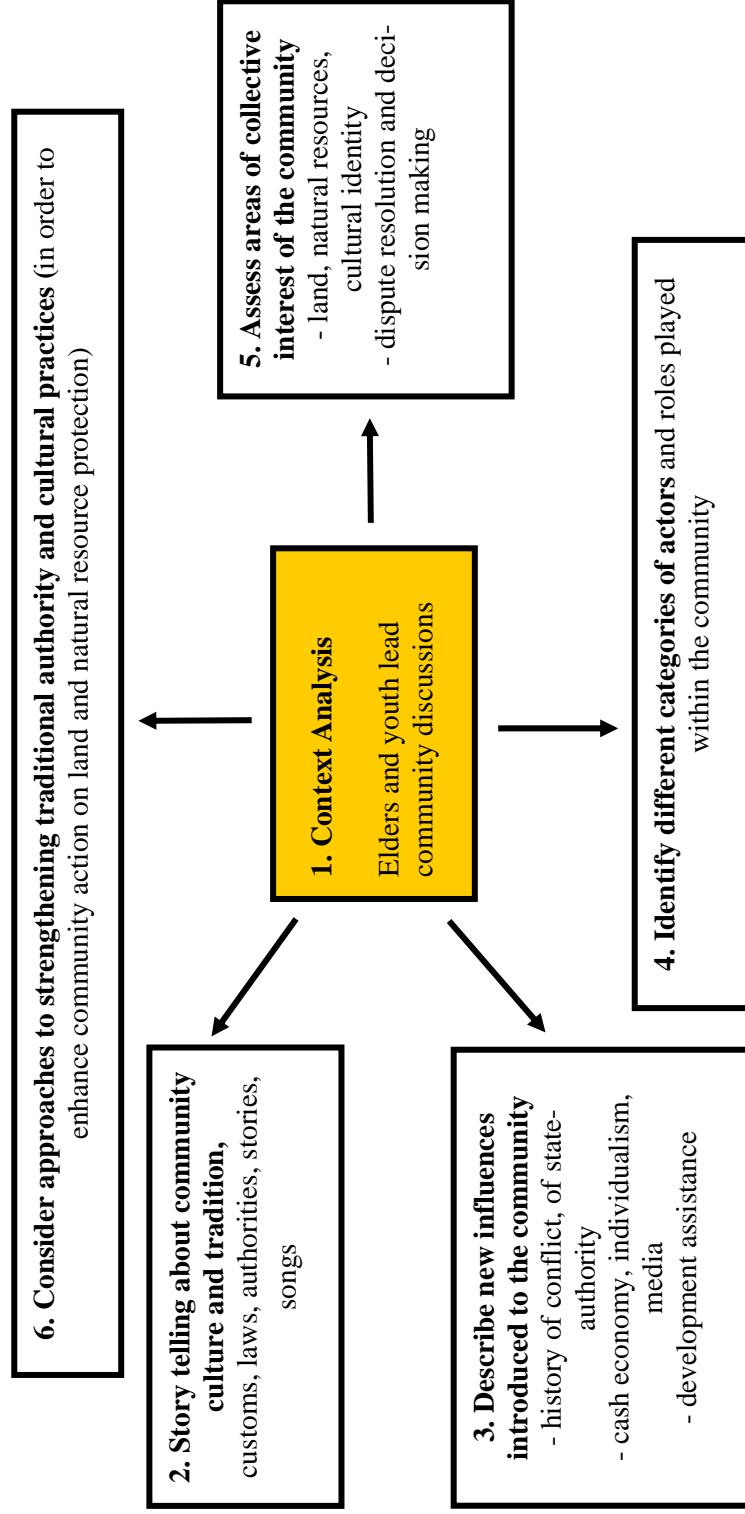
G1. ICD staff have a series of projects underway which can help strengthen solidarity in the villages. These include Cultural documentation (compiling information on IP traditional stories, language, dress, house style, writing, religion and beliefs, living style, use of local materials, income generation, traditional agricultural techniques and traditional conflict resolution), construction of cultural centres where information can be displayed, and re-establishment of weaving groups and music groups to keep the practice of handicraft and traditional music alive. An emphasis on women is important given that they play an important role in holding culture together.

G.2 It is suggested that specific cultural projects will have most impact when they engage the whole community and are enjoyable. Supporting communities to build cultural centres, document village histories, support youth groups and elders networks are all good activities if community owned and led, and focussed on keeping cultural events alive, rather than simply documenting practices that are falling out of use. Cultural 'affirmation' activities may be more appealing than 'cultural preservation.' For example the Highlanders Association are planning a cultural festival in February 2008 where emphasis is on what is stimulating and enjoyable (story telling, chanting competitions, IP sports, pounding rice competition).

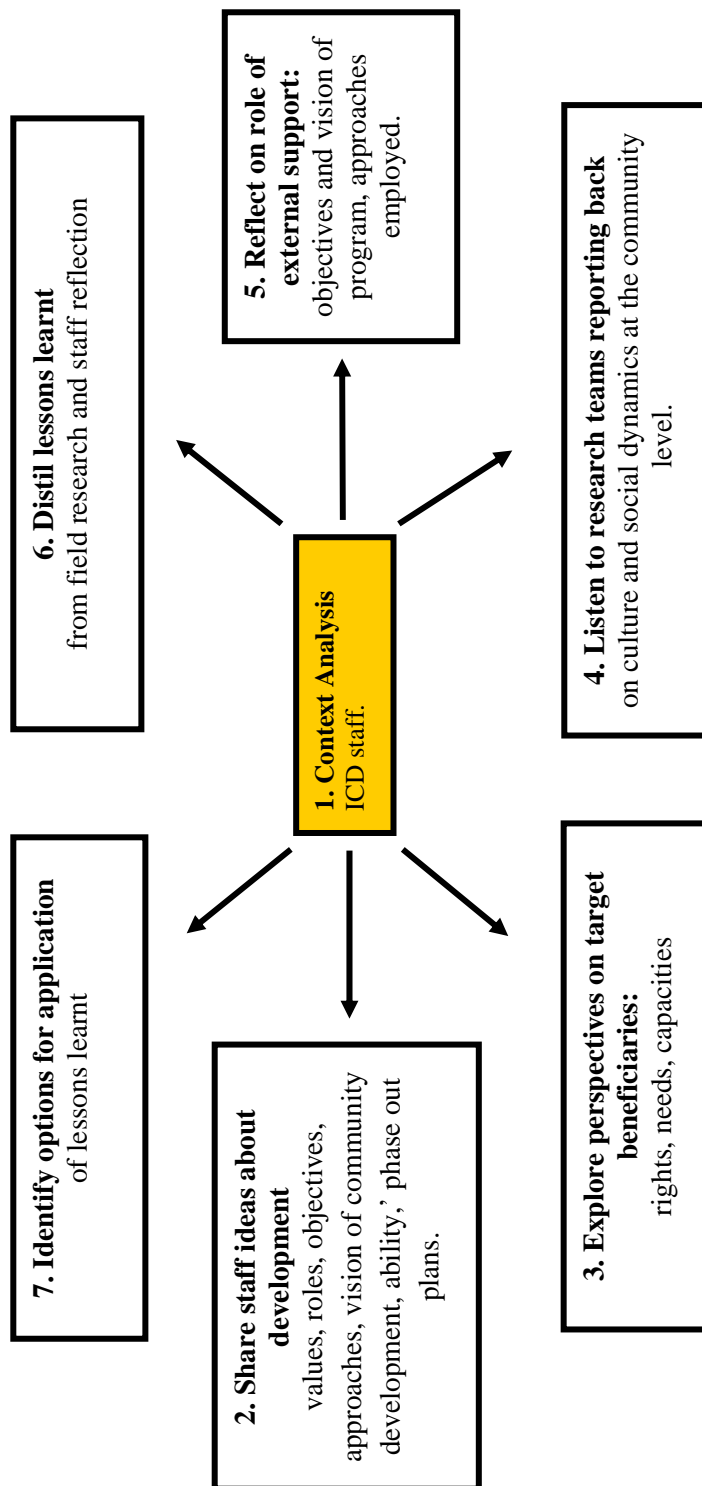
G3. It was emphasised during the study that cultural documentation is a process for re-invigorating social dynamics, as the process of remembering stories, re-enforces sense of identity and pride. It is important to pay close attention to the quality of this process, as it can build understanding between elders and youth, re-building communal responsibility for common resources, and promote enjoyable celebrations of indigenous identity.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Field research: Guideline to assist the flow of stakeholder analysis at village level



**Annex 2: ICD workshops: guideline for reflection on development practices by DPA - ICD staff**





**Annex 3: Key informant interviews undertaken:**

Ratanakiri Arts and Culture department  
Gordon Paterson, NTFP/HA  
Heng Sokhom, CAS  
Meas Nee, VFI  
Ann Thy, NTFP/IYDP  
Lindsay, NTFP  
Dam Chanti, HA  
Caroline Mcausland, Concern ex HU  
Patty Curren  
John Mc Andrews, CCC, ex CIDSE  
Samal, Care  
Megan McGines – NGO Forum Land advisor.  
Graeme Brown CFI/ICSO  
Jan Noorlander - Care  
Jojo Pastores, WV, ex-VBNK, DPA board  
ICC: Jaqueline  
ICSO Mr. Long Serey:

#### **Annex 4: Literature review**

- *DPA ICD documents*
- DPA strategic plan 2006-8
- DPA Ratanakiri ICD evaluation June 2006, Olivet Obedencio-Visda
- DPA Ratanakiri ICD proposal 2007-9
- DPA Ratanakiri ICD reports: 1) May04-Dec06 2) Jan-Dec06 3) Jan-Jun07
- DPA Mondulkiri ICD evaluation 2006, Alex Marcelino
- DPA Mondulkiri ICD proposal 2007-9
- DPA Mondulkiri ICD reports: 1) May04-Dec06 2) Jan-Dec06 3) Jan-Jun07
- CIDSE: Workshop on Partnership and Natural resources 2001, Ratanakiri

#### ***Consultant reports for CIDSE/DPA***

- Jeremy Ironside, *Regenerating the Forest and Restoring the Wildlife – Teun Commune Mapping Consultancy Report, Kon Mum District, Ratanakiri Province.* CIDSE Ratanakiri, Sept. 2001
- Jeremy Ironside *'La-in Village Land Use Planning and Teun Community Forest Mapping Report.'* Kon Mum District, Ratanakiri Province, March 2002 – Jan 2003', CIDSE Ratanakiri, Jan. 2003.
- Jeremy Ironside *'CIDSE Ratanakiri – NRM Consultancy report for the period March – July 2004'* CIDSE, Phnom Penh, Aug. 2004.
- Jeremy Ironside *'Report of 2004 NRM Activities for CIDSE-Mondulkiri in Pou Kong and O Chrar villages Srei Preah Commune, Keo Seima District, Mondulkiri Province.'* CIDSE, Phnom Penh, March, 2005.
- Jeremy Ironside, *An overview of Mapping Issues and Processes for implementing Indigenous Communal Land Titling in Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia.* March 2004, Seila/PLG Project,
- John P. McAndrew - *Indigenous Adaptation to a Rapidly Changing Economy - The Experience of Two Tampuan Villages in Northeast Cambodia,* CIDSE, December 2001
- John P. McAndrew and Mam Sambath - *Indigenous Adaptation to a Decline in Natural Resources - The Experience of Two Phnong Communes in Northeast Cambodia,* CIDSE Cambodia, September 2003
- Ann Olaerts - *The Elephant and the Turtle - reflections on culture and development,* CIDSE April 2005

**Other**

- Jeremy Ironside, *Indigenous Land and Forest Management in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri Provinces, Northeast Cambodia*. February 2007
- Maria Backstrom, Jeremy Ironside, Gordon Paterson, Jonathan Padwe, Ian G. Baird - *A Case Study of Indigenous Traditional Legal Systems and Conflict Resolution in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri Provinces, Cambodia*. UNDP/Ministry of Justice Legal and Judicial Reform Programme, August 2006
- Meas Nee: *Community Organising Workshop report on 2004 in Ratanakiri*: Unpublished
- CARE: *study on traditional leadership and conflict resolution*: Unpublished
- CFI, Various publications – downloadable from website.
- Frederick Bourdier, *Ratanakiri, Mountain of Precious Stones, Selected essays in Social Anthropology*, 2006
- Maria Backstrom and Jeremy Ironside, *Summary of A Case Study of Indigenous Traditional Legal Systems and Conflict Resolution in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri Provinces, Cambodia*, February 2007
- Jeremy Ironside, *The Role of Women in Traditional Systems of Conflict Resolution and Leadership in Indigenous Communities in Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia*. Action Aid March 2007
- CLEC, *Indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources*
- Sovathana Seng - *the Transformation of Northeastern Cambodia: The Politics of Development in an Ethnic Minority Community of Yak Kaol, O'Chum District*, Undated
- Dennis McMahon, *Social impact assessment of Recent Land-Use and Land Tenure Changes In Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia*, Community Forestry International, May, 2007
- Stephan Erhart - *The theory of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in Cambodia*, unpublished

## **Annex 5: Guiding questions for village discussions and ICD staff workshops (later simplified)**

### **Guiding questions for Village discussions**

#### **A.1 Story telling about community culture and traditional authority**

- What are the strongest **cultural practices** in use by the community?
  - ◊ What ceremonies are most important?
  - ◊ What stories are most famous in the village? – what is their meaning?
  - ◊ Which cultural practices have most value? – Why?
  - ◊ How has cultural practice changed compared to 10 years ago?
  - ◊ Which cultural practices are community members losing interest in?
  - ◊ How do young people, women, older people feel about the changes?
- How would you describe the **traditional authorities** of your village?
  - ◊ What are the main roles they play in village life?
  - ◊ What kind of problems does the community face? (i.e.: domestic violence, theft, communal land/forest)
  - ◊ Who do you go to help solve each of these problems? And why do you go to these people?
  - ◊ Do traditional authorities meet with other villages to resolve inter-village disputes? Or for inter-village ceremonies? (*is this changing, what potential for networking*)

#### **B.1 Description of characters influencing community life (Identify different categories of actors)**

- Can you describe the different types of villagers in your community ('lazy' 'clever', 'ignorant', 'powerful', etc)
- What factors make different community members influential (fairness, respect of community, status, control of money, access to government, education, knowledge of customs)?
  - ◊ Who apart from Chiefs and elders influences the community (educated youth, businessmen, etc) why?

- *How would you describe the relative influence of Local government, Traditional authorities and NGO development workers?*

## **B.2 What changes has the community experienced in the last 10-20 years (Categorise new influences)**

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- What do you think is good/useful about cultural practices and traditional authority? – why?
  - ◊ Ceremonies
  - ◊ Customary law
  - ◊ Stories and history
  - ◊ Religion and spirituality
  - ◊ Language,
  - ◊ Music, dance, drama and clothes?
- What do you think is bad/useless about these cultural practices and traditional authority – Why?
- *What factors encourage or discourage different community members to follow these practices/authorities (economic, social, spiritual)?*
- How have cultural practices adapted to remain relevant to community members? (what potential to further adjust?)

## **B.3. Assess collective interests and options for strengthening collective action**

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- What are the main concerns of the community? (Land, NRM, economic development, services, culture, etc)
- How do you plan to address them?
- What do you hope will most change in your village over the next 10 years? - what do you hope will change least?
- What activities keep the community together, what activities divides it?
- How can **community solidarity/identity** be built up and maintained?
  - ◊ How could traditional authorities be strengthened?
  - ◊ How could cultural practices be revitalised?

## **B.4: Discussion on external support / DPA activities in villages. - DRAFT**

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- Please discuss the development activities in your village? – are they important for you? – why?
- Please discuss how are **NGO development activities** implemented?
  - ◊ Who exactly decides which type of activities are implemented, how and when? Please explain
  - ◊ Are traditional authorities involved? - if so how?
  - ◊ How would you describe the role of:
    - \* project committees?
    - \* volunteer specialists?
    - \* the VDC?
    - \* the community organisers
  - ◊ Do you think the above groups work for the community or for DPA?
- Please discuss **how community decisions are made**, if this has changed and impact on traditional authorities and cultural practices?
  - ◊ What decisions are made by traditional Authorities?
  - ◊ What decisions are made by the VDC?
  - ◊ What decisions are made by project committees / other interest groups?
  - ◊ Have there been any misunderstandings in the community in community decision making?
- Please discuss what has been the (positive and negative) **impacts of development activities** on traditional authorities and cultural practices?
  - ◊ Have the implementation of project activities and the establishment of village development Actors (VDC, projects committees and volunteer specialists) had an impact on traditional structures / leaders?
  - ◊ Have these projects and committees had an impact on cultural practices?
  - ◊ Have there been misunderstanding between elders and VDAs and local authorities? – please discuss and give examples (NRM, forest committees, land decisions etc)
  - ◊ Has the role of elders and women changed?
  - ◊ Have there been misunderstandings created in the communities in implementing development projects?
- How do the **actions and behaviour of NGO** staff impact on
  - ◊ Cultural practices
  - ◊ Role of traditional authorities

- ◊ Behaviour of community members
- ◊ Decision making and local leadership at the community level
- Please discuss what is the **most significant change** in your village from NGO activities?
- Are **NGOs well coordinated**? – please give examples?
- What **suggestions for improving approaches** would you make to NGOs and their staff?

### **Guiding questions for ICD staff workshops**

#### **A.1 Share staff ideas about integrated community development**

##### **Program objectives**

- What is the ICD program trying to achieve? How has this changed over the years?
- What are the different types of projects? Where have they been most / least successful – why do you think this is?
- Can you describe the changes you have seen in the villages where you work?
- Can you describe how the DPA program has expanded work to areas of NRM and land and cultural preservation?
- What are the greatest challenges in working with communities on these issues?

##### **Approaches**

- What values drive DPA's program? – how do the approaches you use put these into practice?
- Please describe what you understand by the following concepts with examples from your projects:
  - ◊ capacity building
  - ◊ empowerment
  - ◊ sustainability (of what impacts/change – finances/org structures?)
  - ◊ rights based approach
  - ◊ cultural rights
- What is the reason the program is now starting to work on cultural preservation?

## **Values**

- What do you understand by DPA's values... please describe
- How are they used when implementing programs
- What do you believe are the most important values in staff behaviours in order of importance?
- Can you give examples of how you put these values into practice in your community work?

## **A.2 Explore perspectives on target beneficiaries:**

### **Accountability**

- Who do you think DPA is working for - donors, government/national development, communities?
- What is the role of community development facilitators?
- What is the role of the community organisers?
- How do you think DPA's role is understood by the community? Have you ever specifically asked them?
- What does being accountable to community beneficiaries mean in your work?

### **Decision making**

- Please describe the DPA management and programme decision making structure and processes?
- Do you feel you have influenced management decision making in DPA. Please rank from 1-10 your satisfaction
- When did you notice that levels of community participation started to decline, why are they declining?
- What opportunities are created for IPs to voice their concerns and priorities?
- How much do you think local communities can influence DPA decision making. Please rank / how changed?
- Have 'community-led' development initiatives been identified and supported? What change over 10 years?

### **Capacity building**

- What capacities do you think community members have?
- What capacities are you building and why?
- What is your vision for a
  - ◊ Strong community
  - ◊ Community based organisation (local association / community group)
  - ◊ What role do traditional authorities play?



### **Impact on culture and traditional authority**

- What impact have projects / staff had on the cultural practices and influence of traditional authorities? Examples?
- Are there any tensions between the establishment of development structures and traditional structures? Examples?
- Do you think any changes should be made to ways of working? – if so what?

### **Role in promoting community advocacy and protection of human rights and community rights**

- What do you think DPA should do to support community advocacy – when should DPA itself speak out- to who?
- What types of actions and activities can the program staff undertake to support communities effectively-Examples?

### **B. Listen to research teams reporting back**

#### **C.1 Reflect on community presentations**

- What are existing organising and decision making processes in community?
- What changes to village life were the main concern of village discussions?
- What are the influences (categorize) driving social change in the community?
- How have communities taken action on land and NRM issues?
- What do you think may be effective ways you can support?
  - ◇ Traditional authority
  - ◇ Cultural practices
  - ◇ Positive social change
  - ◇ Community solidarity
  - ◇ Community resources and social capital
- What do you observe about the differences in the communities participating in the study?

#### **C.2 Reflect on role of external support:**

- How does the program currently?
  - ◇ involve traditional authorities
  - ◇ support cultural activities
- What more could be done to strengthen community cohesion and action on NRM?
- Can we rank external impacts on community cohesion both positive and negative? - what can we observe about the interaction of Khmer and IP

- What should we consider when promoting ‘development structures’ in village (committees - traditional authorities)
- At the village level what is current status of
  - ◊ coordination/integration of development activities - NGOs or communities
  - ◊ coordination between different NGOs

### **C.3 Distil lessons learnt**

- What can we say about?
  - ◊ building a culture of listening to communities and promoting their voice
  - ◊ community organising
  - ◊ project sustainability
  - ◊ approaches to capacity building
  - ◊ supporting community led adaptation
  - ◊ challenges and opportunities for collaboration and coordination with other NGOs
  - ◊ plans for phasing out – nature of future DPA presence?
  - ◊ role staff can play in changing attitudes of powerful authorities?
  - ◊ utilising existing resources (including knowledge and skills) and villager’s time
  - ◊ values needed to be empowering?
  - ◊ impact of staff behaviour on culture and community dynamics
  - ◊ investments in structuring: processes - committees
  - ◊ strategies to support community analysis, initiatives, advocacy and networking

### **C.4 Identify options for application**

- How can the increased understanding of culture and traditional authority gained so far help DPA:
  - ◊ influence program objectives and approaches?
  - ◊ build on potential networks
  - ◊ respond to community demands
  - ◊ enhance capacity building
  - ◊ ensure appropriate staffing
  - ◊ strengthen NGO coordination
  - ◊ internalise key concepts and values
  - ◊ address risks of entering village as ‘patron-protector’ rather than partner
  - ◊ articulate a phase out strategy

## **Annex 6: Reports from village teams (note more information came from debriefings)**

### **Summary of Village level discussions**

The HA/IYDP Research teams facilitated and documented each village discussion in Ratanakiri and elders with the indigenous DPA staff did this in the two Mondulkiri villages. For some of the researchers it was their first research experience, though others had participated in a number of research projects. Village discussions were village-led and guided by the researchers using a short set of questions. The following is a summary of the documentation of the village discussions based on the researchers reports. It should be noted that detailed debriefing of the research teams, and interviews with key elders and youth led to additional information and analysis included in the main body of the report above.

The villages are:

- Teun village, Tuen Commune, Ratanakiri
- La-in village, Tuen Commune, Ratanakiri
- Loam village, Malik Commune, Ratanakiri
- Kate village, Malik Commune, Ratanakiri
- Koy village, Poy Commune, Ratanakiri
- Gate village, Kau Semar Commune, Mondulkiri
- Ochra village, Kau Semar Commune, Mondulkiri

### ***TEUN Village, Tuen Commune, Ratanakiri – Krueng community***

Tuen villagers also appreciated improvements in social and economic developments such as through NGO activities for sanitation; gender; non-formal education; diversified crop techniques; rice milling machine; rice bank and the village borehole. Also improvements in roads increased the village's access to health services, public school and the market for selling goods. They suggested that DPA provide crop seeds and technical support on how to plant crops in dry season and assist in introducing tourism in their village to increase income. The villagers of Tuen viewed the cash economy and Khmer culture as factors affecting their community's traditional natural resource management culture and solidarity. Despite assistance from outsiders, traditional culture and natural resource management continued to weaken. 'If we have land, people will keep their style of community giving and all cultural will continue to happen automatically, but if we lose our land our culture will automatically be lost.' Despite being identified as one of the most important factors to preserve, ceremonial dances and musical instruments (especially the Gong) and traditional looms pots for storage are no longer

practiced or utilised. Khmer style clothing and wooden houses are now the norm; and beer is becoming a competing alternative to traditional rice wine. Youth resent certain traditional practices which they view as outdated and undermining their ability to generate income. 'Some feel they are more clever than the elders because they have some formal education'. For example young women resent the traditional practice of newlyweds serving their parents or of women of marrying age living in traditional houses and receiving suitors. Participants were concerned about land management changing from collective to individual plots affecting community solidarity. They were also concerned about outsiders clearing forests and also villagers themselves demonstrating a decline in food security and decrease in available forests. When traditional authorities, in their role as spiritual guardians of the forest object, they are ignored and villagers continue to clear the forest. The reduction of forest further undermines the role of traditional Authorities who rely on the villager's respect for the spirits of the forests. However elders still have the power to fine violators of traditional practice. The Role of traditional authority or elders in solving land issues/ conflict and other traditional practices were seen as extremely important to villagers. Shifting agriculture and traditional access to forest product including timber was also a priority. Participants suggested DPA to establish community forestry as well as a cultural centre in their village. (34 families out of 273 are reported to have sold up to 100 HA and 73 HA were also grabbed by outsiders in a case currently being contested).

***Kate village, Malik Commune, Ratanakiri, Krueng community***

Kate participants saw the importance in preserving all kinds of traditional culture, identity, belief and practice and emphasised the interdependence of traditional natural resource management with keeping these practices alive. 'Land is the most important to conserve – because everything comes from the land: laws, beliefs, traditional practices, community solidarity. For example, all major cultural offerings and prayers are directed towards the land, farms forests and streams. Land creates community and family life'. One example is the ceremonies that take place to gain permission from forest spirits to begin clearing new land for farming. Villagers mentioned that Traditional authorities manage a collective farm that produces food for such ceremonies. They suggested that the ability of Traditional Authorities to use these resources for ceremonies has helped villagers participate- as if the elders had to request contributions from private farms they may gradually receive less and less of the resources needed for e=ceremonies. The elders also assign youth to various roles in the ceremonies and most youth still respect elders. Kate villages discussed how the influence of modern Khmer culture has contributed to a decline in

traditional practices such as use of musical instruments (gong, drum, and gourd guitar), weaving and wearing of traditional dress, and construction of traditional houses. Also at risk was the passing down of folk-lore and community history within the household. However, some traditional blankets, and bags are still made. Villages felt that while some argue that time and resources are saved by not following traditional practices, there is over-riding risk that the young generation abandoning their traditional practices and beliefs means they would ultimately lose their traditional identity. Participants saw social and economic development activities having a positive effect on the community such as an increased understanding of water, sanitation and gender issues, and while they are happy maintaining shifting rice cultivation they have diversified other crops for the dry season which has also had a positive effect on community livelihoods. Respect for elders has been maintained in Kate and traditional authority is fairly effective in managing natural resources. For example some neighbouring communities have sold their land and are putting pressure on Kate's borders and at one stage occupied Kate land. Elders and chiefs of each side met together at the border and agreed to forgive the past but would not tolerate any further violations of the border. The villagers were concerned that people from lowland areas are cutting down trees within the village and leaving freely while villages get arrested for the same actions. The community continues to maintain and jointly manage community owned farming land, which has been strongly protected due to its proximity to a sacred forest near the sacred mountain. The village elders network of Malik commune is also a good model and is respected by communities and local authorities. The example of elders leading a traditional process of boundary demarcation on Malik's borders with Canna village is also a good example of traditional authorities playing a key role in community leadership.

***La-in village, Tuen Commune, Ratanakiri, Tampuan community***

Villagers from La-in have been facilitated by DPA to undertake a cultural documentation process lasting a year, in support of their application as a pilot village for communal land title. They reported that they still firmly practice their traditional culture. They felt the most important cultural aspects to preserve were the Gong, traditional pot, village hall, and all kinds of praying (for farming land, forest, bathing place, etc). They suggested DPA to support the maintenance of culture by providing materials and equipment for traditional weaving and handicraft (mat, scarf, blanket, etc) They also felt villagers still respected elders as leaders in organising traditional ceremonies and as moderators to solve conflict. However they suggested DPA to provide awareness to village elders, traditional leader and other influential people of the importance of their

traditional roles and to establish male and female youth groups to maintain cultural heritage and strengthen traditional authority. However the community has gone through some major changes. In the past they were able to survive off the forest and land however the loss in natural resources mainly from villagers selling land to outsiders has greatly impacted their livelihoods. Villagers felt it was important Preserve and protect forest land, forest and community land for our next generation. If anyone sells land they will be fined or punished according to traditional rule and government law. It is now difficult for villagers to farm off the land and collect vegetable and fruits in the forests. Villagers in Lain have halted all land sales and asked DPA to assist in maintaining their existing land and provide capacity building in agricultural techniques such as agro-industrial, vegetable and long-term fruit trees crops as well as they seeds in order to improve living standard. They felt however more needed to be done to reduce domestic violence and a continued focus should be placed on education, health, and food security. There have been some social and economic improvements. They felt they have an increased understanding of why giving opportunity to children to access education develops their own future and can contribute to reducing poverty in their own families. Other progress includes access to a health centre, knowledge of women's rights, the introduction of the village rice mill, cow/buffalo/rice bank, hand-pump well, and school. Before the community only farmed rice however now they plant diversity of crops such as cashew and other subsidiary crops and learn how to improve soil for farming. (Lain village has a forestry committee and IP committee lead by the Me Kontrin).

***Loam village, Malik Commune, Ratanakiri, Jarai Community***

Loam village discussed the loss of traditional culture most importantly the loss of; Gongs, traditional pots for water and wine (important for luck and protection and as coming from ancestors), the ways of praying and making offerings to the water and forest spirits, houses, the bathing place and village hall for peace and safety. In Loam Traditional Authorities are the symbols of community solidarity – their role as dispute mediators and management of traditional ceremonies and events is central. They can give licenses for villagers who wish to move to other villages. However it was commented that some young people are ‘very selfish’ and act with no regard or respect for elders and tradition. Many youth are now going to school however elders advise them to continue to respect elders with traditional knowledge and not to be proud. Most newly influential people still respect and consult with the elders. Laom villagers compared the past when the community was rich in natural resources such as land, forests and wild animals to the present where resources are decreasing and almost completely gone in some areas. Wild fruit and vegetables are difficult to find. Participants felt the

root causes for deforestation was outsiders and some local people and the effect was the change from shifting agriculture on communal land to individual ownership and settled farming and increasingly hot climate with less regular rainfall easily damaging upland crops. Shifting agriculture is no longer practiced; though with the assistance of DPA however villagers use crop rotation and diversification and have also learnt how to raise fish to support their livelihoods in the dry season. Villages felt DPA's support was important in terms of education as their children are better able to build knowledge for a better living for their families, the Health Centre and the village road as the community can easily transport products and travel a long way. Cow/buffalo/rice banks, water wells and rice milling machines had relieved the time spent by women on gathering water and pounding rice. However they had many suggestions for DPA to provide awareness on traditional culture particularly the roles of traditional authority; assist the community in having a target group for cultural preservation; support awareness of boundaries between neighbouring villages to prevent conflicts; support the community to encourage poor/poorest children to go to school with focus on female children; promote women participation in meeting and literacy class; continue to provide training on agricultural techniques for crop, vegetable and rice planting in dry and rainy season; and provide good seeds to community. Culturally it is important to preserve the weaving mats, scarves, peungs (small piece of cloth as traditional dress mostly for men) and clay pots (for cooking rice). While villages reported during the meetings that community members are forbidden to sell land to outsiders, though they may sell to other villages, reports of land sales in Loam to outsiders were received towards the end of this study and should be carefully investigated by DPA (a report of 15 families out of 58 families have sold land, including 3-4 villages reported to have done so during the study).

***Koy village, Poy Commune, Ratanakiri***

The villages of Koy/Keres noted that they have benefited from hand pumps, wooden houses, diversified crops and improved hygiene and sanitation. But they are losing traditional dances and music and funeral rituals and use of traditional pots and gongs, many of which were stolen or sold. The youth do not know how to play the traditional gongs, and are losing knowledge of traditional songs and are losing respect for elders, especially as more and more have Khmer literacy. People now think that traditional Authorities have a low understanding and outdated knowledge, Other community leaders are becoming proud when they have 'power of money.' More and more people are learning to plant crops and learn farming techniques for dry season crops, accessing schools and basic health care. It is important to preserve rituals, prayers, community offerings for

farmland, bathing areas and forests, the use of gongs and pots and traditional looms for weaving, and traditional tools for clearing forests. It is important also to strengthen youth education to appreciate traditional music and customs. NTFP have been working on community capacities for land and NRM management in Poy commune including activities on arts and traditional music - and so far only 1 village has sold land to outsiders. Koy may be affected by village sales in one village where a large forest may also be affected. The NRM committee in Poy commune may also be a good model as it functions well. In neighbouring Laok village, communities sold 100HA of land (including farming land, abandoned land and forests ) after following the encouragement from district and commune authorities and the village leader, and having been encouraged by land traders. Traditional elders feel the role of TAs has in some way increased as community members no longer trust government officials and recognise that TA's have consistently tried to protect village interests.

***Gate village, Kau Semar Commune, Mondulkiri, Bunong community***

The villagers of Gate village noted the external influences on local culture have caused the young generation to prefer modern materials and new living styles (cycles, motorcycle, cassette players, radios, cloth) while traditional materials are being lost (gong, pots, three kinds of traditional songs – ambreu, yuon yer, tetawav). The villagers stated their desire to preserve their traditional culture as before – in particular beliefs in spirits of the forest and land that protect from illness. They plan to document fairytales, the way of praying and other traditional practices for the next generation. The community is losing forest due to an increase demand for local use and trading, and losing land to being sold and livelihoods are also affected by the nearby mining exploration. There have been land conflicts, deforestation caused by outsiders and losing fishing products due to illegal activities. Local people cannot clear land for farming in the area of bio-diversity conservation protected areas, but their rice yields are decreasing and traditionally they would normally have moved to new land by now, in keeping with traditional swidden practices that keep the community moving and land and forests regenerating. Traditional authorities of the village advise children and community members, encourage solidarity and mutual problem solving, and leads the practice of praying to spirit forest for rain. Traditional culture is lost from day to day this is a lot to do with the damage left by civil war. Elders were killed during Pol Pot's time and therefore a lot of the traditional knowledge was not passed down to the next generation. There is now a lack of respect for traditional practice such as cutting spiritual forests and other spiritual places. The role of traditional authority remains important. Positive changes include that the community now has health education, village health volunteers



on malaria, traditional birth attendants, a local health post. Before when people got sick they practiced animism and traditional herb and many children died, now people access health services first and then practice traditional beliefs. Before school was far away but now many of them have access to school in the village and some received support in terms of school stationary, uniform and rice. Female children also have opportunity to go to school in the village particularly higher education even if it is far. More and more people can read and write. Now villagers receive education on gender. Men and women respect each other and domestic violence has reduced. More and more men assist women in housework. Women also involve in VDAs and village members (work with village chief). Villagers now engage in business on market place, selling their agricultural products and buying food and materials unavailable locally.

*Ochra village, Kau Semar Commune, Mondulkiri*

## **Annex 7: Full report of Elders Validation workshop**

### **Results from a Consultation with Highlanders Association and DPA Elders DPA Offices, Ban Lung, Ratanakiri, 23-24 Jan 2008 Jeremy Ironside**

#### **1. Introduction**

This meeting was called to feedback to some indigenous elders the results of recent research carried out by DPA looking at how culture and traditions can be more strongly incorporated/integrated into DPA's community development activities<sup>14</sup>. This research was carried out in conjunction with the Highlanders Association and the Indigenous Youth Development Programme (IYDP).

The participants in the meeting were mainly elders from 15 DPA villages in 4 Communes - Teun and Ta ong (Kon Mum District), Peoy (O Chum District), Malick (Andoung Meas District). These elders who are also active in the Highlanders' Association (HA) network in these villages and were invited/selected by HA as 'cultural advisors'<sup>15</sup>. In total there were 16 elders (including 3 women), a younger woman and 1 youth (See Appendix 1 - Participants List). The meeting included 3 village chiefs, 1 assistant village chief and a woman commune councillor.

The ethnicity of the participants was 13 Kreung and 5 Tampuen. Unfortunately no HA Working Group staff were able to join in the meeting as they 3 of them were called to Phnom Penh to sign a funding contract. On the last afternoon of the meeting Sareth, the DPA Provincial Manager, attended a feedback session in which the ideas of the elders were presented for comment (2 other DPA staff also attended for brief periods).

The author facilitated the meeting and was assisted by 2 women indigenous students from IYDP. The meeting was conducted in Khmer as the common language, with large parts of the discussion in Kreung and to a lesser extent Tampuen languages. One of the IYDP students assisted with translation from Kreung to Tampuen and vice versa.

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<sup>14</sup>DPA works in indigenous minority villages in Ratanakiri, Mondolkiri and Stung Treng.

<sup>15</sup>The Highlanders' Association is a network operating in 85 villages in Ratanakiri Province working to strengthen indigenous culture and protect community land and forests. Indigenous Youth Development Programme is part of the Non Timber Forest Products Project. IYDP seeks to support indigenous youth to plan, facilitate and manage development activities in their communities. A key focus of the activities is cultural strengthening and raising awareness of issues affecting indigenous youth.

## 2. Discussion/Problem Statement

A summary with explanation of the results of the field research were presented to the elders (See Appendix 2). The issue which dominated the discussion was the inability of community people to deal with people with power. People said the dog can't bite the elephant. Because of this power imbalance the community is unable to defend their interests in the face of ongoing land selling and illegal logging. These are complex problems but a significant portion of the discussions was about the problem of controlling/stopping the local authorities (village and commune chiefs, the chief of the commune police posts, the commune police, the district authorities, etc) from signing/authorizing land sales documents and allowing ongoing illegal logging.

The power imbalance is also demonstrated by who possesses a gun. Participants said people with guns like the commune police are afraid of no-one and largely can do what they want. Also they said many outsiders come and say that either the higher levels authorized their activities or they are (or are working for) relatives of powerful people such as Hun Sen. Outsiders also come and tell community people that the resources belong to the state and communities have no rights to protest when the state needs these resources. However participants said that ordinary people are also part of the state.

A lasting quote which perhaps sums up this discussion was that many local authorities do not think about ordinary people they only think about their personal gain. Participants said the local authorities talk about protecting land and forest and then they do the opposite. People said they need methods to deal with more powerful people as they rely on the authorities but the authorities don't listen to them. Participants said they would like to see the commune working properly as it is difficult to go above them. However they said they don't do their work.

This is why communities rely on outside organizations to help them address the power imbalances they face. Because the community leadership cannot address the issues the community faces this leads to a breakdown of authority in the community. Now many community members don't believe their own leaders, and they don't listen to their village chief. Many people also don't believe or listen to the community forestry and land management committee members which have been created to protect the community resources, and they don't respect the laws/regulations which have been developed to control activities. In many cases participants said the outside person has more weight in convincing community members. A further factor in the breakdown of

community authority is that some leaders and community committee members have been involved in illegal activities themselves and have no credibility. Another problem mentioned was people now respect traditional law less than they did in the past. This is partly because this law is unable to stop destructive illegal activities and this weakens the respect and faith people have in their own methods. Not only is traditional law ineffective in dealing with outsiders, community people also don't know about the national laws. It is difficult to take cases through the formal legal channels for many reasons, including the fact that authorities have often already signed and authorized an illegal land sale and legally people feel there is nothing they can do about it.

One of the interesting results from the DPA research in villages discussed was that community people who sell their communities' land and trees were considered *chalart* (smart) and people who didn't take these opportunities and defend their community's property were considered *lgnoung* (not smart). People are seen as smart for getting benefits, before the others. This is a difficult situation to address. Participants said people sell land because they don't see anyone getting punished for it, in jail, etc. People have the courage to go against the community because they said the local authorities are prepared to authorize/sign land sales documents. Now anyone can sell land they said and the community doesn't know about it.

This it seems is the real tragedy of the commons, where those acting in the community's interest loose out to those only thinking about their personal gain. Participants felt that in exceptional cases where there were problems in the family - illnesses for example, selling some land could be justified. One example given was if a family has 5 ha of cashew nuts it could be ok for them to sell 1 ha. Participants however felt that the community land should really be kept for the next generations. They are very worried that younger people growing up today will have no land.

A Teun Commune councillor said that in 2007 the commune chief used to disseminate information about not selling land and protecting the community forests. Lately he hasn't done this and there are increasing land and forest problems. One problem recounted was that the Kon Mum district chief borrowed 18ha land from Teun Commune to plant cassava. Now this year he has kept this land and planted rubber on it. Teun Commune never gave any authorization for this and a complaint about this has been lodged with Adhoc. DPA are also assisting to follow this case up but Sareth explained that this is causing problems with the district chief. He said the district chief is very unhappy with a DPA

staff member and does not respond to DPA invitations to attend meetings. The Teun village chief explained that he has not heard anything about the complaint which was lodged and now wonders if anything will come of it.

Participants said people are even selling forest land with big trees on it. The district chief actually inspected a piece of forested land which had been sold. This land has now been cleared of trees. In another case in Teun Commune (but typical of situations in other communes) was that the chief of the commune police post was accepting 300,000 riels for each truck load of logs which were being transported out of the commune. The commune police post was described as opening the road for loggers to the community's trees. In total 1,200,000 riels has so far been paid but none of this money was given to the commune council for use in development activities. The logging of valuable logs is ongoing and in many cases logs are being transported in broad daylight showing the impunity that now exists.

During the discussion it was also revealed that even some NGO staff ask if there is any land for sale when they are working in the village. No NGOs were named but this was considered as particularly riling by the participants as the NGO staff come and talk about helping the community and ask the community members to work for the community good. Then after the meeting is finished they ask if there is any land for sale. Participants said some DPA COs are also involved in contacting with outsiders to sell land and conducting other illegal activities. This obviously reflects badly on DPA.

Participants talked about villages which now have no or little land. Patang Village in Patang Commune apparently has little land for burying their dead and they have to bury people vertically. There were no representatives from La'in village (Teun Commune) but people said that village has sold a lot of land even their lowland rice fields.

The participants were worried that the end result of a general lack of governance is that people will start fighting each other and there will be violence. People that sell land have to find new areas to farm and this is causing fighting with people who also claim these areas but who have not sold any land. Even village elders are selling land, in one case mentioned to build a house.

It was confirmed that the elders recognize the benefits DPA has bought to their community. One elder said that there is no failure of any of DPA activities in his village, all activities are continuing. Another surprising revelation was that several villages represented in this meeting said that no land sales had yet taken

place in their villages. This included all the villages in Poey Commune, Malick village, Tus Village in Taong Commune, and also some villages in Teun Commune. This shows that there is still both community solidarity and functioning village governance in many villages. The problem however as an elder from Malick village explained was that the population continues to grow while the villages land base stays the same and in many cases is shrinking. He said Malick village used to have 30 families and now there are over 100.

The result of this discussion was that participants felt the 3 important priorities for the future of their communities was land, forest and culture. People said without land (and forest) there was no culture and no community solidarity. A further 'lesser priority' was also agriculture as people argued you have to do something with the land to protect it and for community livelihoods.

### **3. Results**

After this discussion participants were asked to split into 2 groups. One group was asked to look at what the community themselves can do to strengthen their culture and traditions and the other group was asked to look at what DPA and other organizations can do to assist communities in this work. Groups were also asked to think and make recommendations about how communities can take over development activities themselves in their villages. Because of the overriding problems described above, it was necessary and important to look at how to address these problems through strengthening community traditional governance.

In discussion about communities taking over their own development work participants said they want to do this but they were worried that they don't have the capacity or the financial resources. However, participants said that many development activities in their villages are functioning well and largely managed by community committees. They said they could take over many of these activities.

Strategies for dealing with more powerful people included reporting incidents to the commune and getting many people together to force the commune to do something about it. They felt this would make it possible to make joint decisions which everyone can agree with. Other strategies included developing clear and precise contracts with outsiders and closely monitoring these. Participants felt however that they still had to rely on assistance from organizations to deal with powerful people. They mentioned the case in Teun village where DPA cooperated with PILAP to get land back from a Forestry Administration official. This support they said also included cement posts for boundary demarcation.

Participants also said they wanted to do what they did in the late 1990s to protest about logging and go and see the king and other important government people. Representatives from Poey Commune felt this helped stop the logging and the Hero logging company in the 1990s. Two out of the 3 people who meet with the king then were participants in this workshop.

Participants asked for organizations to support them to go to Phnom Penh and meet these people. They said if organization staff go they don't know about the situation in the villages. They want to ask if it is really these higher up people who are authorizing these illegal activities. If this is not true then they want to get land back from people who have lied to them. People also asked for financial and technical support to take cases to court.

In the presentation to DPA staff some points made included that the community first have to help themselves. A CDF staff said DPA had assisted with materials to build a cultural centre in Teun Village but it was still not built. In reply the Teun village chief said the village leaders were busy with their work, attending meetings, etc and there hadn't been anyone to organize the work. Sareth also mentioned the issue of community participation. He said where he worked in Prey Veng people participated strongly but in Ratanakiri community participation was falling off. He said he sometimes wonders whether it is worth continuing working in Ratanakiri. It was mentioned however that traditional village authorities have largely not been incorporated in development activities and therefore could not assist with encouraging village participation. One conclusion was that it is important in the future for development organizations to consult with and maintain an ongoing dialogue with the village traditional leaders.

Sareth also said even people in the workshop had sold land. In reply one elder said this was true but he said in one case he was forced to sell because his land was surrounded by private land owners. The land owners said that there was no road to get into the surrounded land. Sareth also mentioned the difficulty in getting the authorities to listen mentioning the protest that was broken up by the authorities with water in Ban Lung recently. He also said that he has seen that poor people as a rule sell land cheaply and rich people sell it expensively.

Sareth also said he recognized that there were problems with the system of COs and he is working on this. As for employing indigenous staff he said that this can be difficult as it is important to get the best people for the job. He said however that some organizations have a lot of indigenous staff and he will look more into this. He explained that there

is 1 more year to go of this present funding round and many of these issues can be looked at when preparing the proposal for activities from 2009 - 2011. During the workshop participants said they were hoping that cultural activities could begin in 2008.

One representative pointed out that he feels sorry for the waste of money when DPA tries to implement activities and they are not effective because of the difficult problems described above. He said he would like to see the money available for community development being effectively used.

The issue of coordination between organizations was also discussed with participants saying there are many organizations working in one village now. They asked for better coordination of activities. The idea of the village authorities coordinating development activities in their villages was also discussed. It was suggested that the different village committees associated with the different organizations could meet together perhaps every month and plan what development activities they want in their village and on what day they want these. This could then be communicated to the different organizations. The details of this village based planning would need to be further worked out.

Finally participants felt that if the issues described above are not dealt with it would be the same as letting people die. People said they need to fight to preserve the base of their livelihoods. If there is no resolution to these problems there is a strong likelihood of violence.

#### **4. Recommendations**

Recommendations can be summarized as;

##### **1. Community activities**

- Strengthening Culture and community solidarity,
- Improving communication and understanding between elders and youth,
- Law enforcement with both traditional and national law.

##### **2. Requests to DPA**

- Strengthening links with indigenous culture,
- Education - of laws, training youth, etc,
- Support community enforcement activities,
- Support community advocacy,
- Strengthening development activities.

##### **3. Improving coordination between development organisations**



## **1, What can communities do themselves to preserve culture and traditions.**

### **Strengthening culture and community solidarity**

We want to look after and strengthen again our own cultural traditions which are being lost. We want the traditions like our ceremonies and rituals, our traditional practices, sharing and protecting land and forest and our religious beliefs in the spirits to be strong again like they were in the past.

We want to do extension of the importance of preserving indigenous traditions and culture in our villages.

We need to create songs about protecting cultural traditions, forest and land.

### **Improving communication and understanding between elders and youth**

We need to find ways to get the youth to respect the village elders.

We want to start culture groups to build solidarity, cooperation and understanding between village youth and elders. One group per commune would be good.

### **Law enforcement with both traditional and national law**

We want to agree between villages on definite village boundaries to make it easier to manage the village land area and so there are no disputes or confusion between villages.

We want to get the village elders and committees, the village and commune chiefs, the chief of commune police, and commune clerk to stop recognizing, signing or stamping documents which allow the selling of community land without the community hearing about and agreeing to such sales.

## **2, How can DPA and other organizations assist to preserve culture and traditions.**

### **Strengthening links with indigenous culture**

Request DPA to strengthen cooperation and partnership with the village traditional authorities.

Request DPA to hire indigenous staff so they can go to the village and hold meetings in local languages. Would like DPA staff to know local languages.

Request support from DPA for putting on cultural performances.

Request DPA to support making of CDs of traditional music and training young people to record and film cultural activities.

Request DPA to assist with developing and filming community theatre and stories to show to villagers the problems of what happens when people have no more land left. We would like to show that when we lose forest and land we also lose our cultural traditions, because the community loses its solidarity and unity.

### **Education - of laws, training youth, etc.**

Request DPA to help to create, train and strengthen youth groups so that there is respect and solidarity between youth and the village elders and so that the youth learn to look after their own culture. Request financial support to the community to support the youth groups and encourage the village youth. For example assist with getting IYDP students to come and help facilitate new village youth groups.

Request DPA to assist and support extension activities in the villages about the importance of keeping cultural traditions.

Request organizations or relevant authorities to assist with education and assist to develop laws and regulations to stop and control different illegal activities such as the selling of community land and the destruction of the natural resources.

Request organizations to help to strengthen traditional law and assist in training and implementation of the national law. We would like the traditional and the national laws to go together.

### **Support community enforcement activities**

Request DPA to go to the village to assist in;

- resolving land problems,
- controlling the loss of forest,
- respecting traditions
- strengthen youth groups to respect elders
- developing agricultural activities - support is required in different crops such as fruit trees, dry season vegetables, animal raising, rice growing and long term commercial crops.

Request DPA to assist in contacting the police, military police, the military, district, provincial and national authorities to help control illegal activities.

Especially when lower level officials are found to be involved in illegal activities we would like this to be reported to their superiors.

Request DPA to assist and support with follow up etc. when communities prepare a complaint.

Request DPA to follow up on village, commune and district chiefs who sign and authorize illegal land selling and forest destruction. Would like DPA to assist in explaining to these authorities (also including the chief of the commune police post) about the law.

Would like DPA to go to the village and assist with explaining about controlling land and forest problems so that people understand, as village committee members are not listened to much. Request DPA to assist in monitoring so that there is no land selling and the natural resources are looked after.

Request DPA to assist with village community forestry (CF) and land management activities. However the existing CF and land management committees in the villages are not working well and communities and DPA need to think again about developing and supporting these committees.

Request DPA to help start secret working groups to monitor and follow up on illegal activities and on the people who are conducting these activities. For example when the village chief signs a land sales document which the elders don't agree with a report can be made and sent to the Provincial level to get assistance to resolve the problem.

Request DPA to support with materials such as books, pens and paper to write reports and minutes, cameras for collecting evidence and transportation costs for people doing this monitoring of illegal activities.

Request DPA to cooperate with law organizations to help solve problems like they did (with PILAP) in Teun Village.

Request DPA to organize commune level multi stakeholder workshops to discuss the above issues.

### **Support community advocacy**

Request DPA and other organizations to open the road to the national level and support indigenous representatives to go to Phnom Penh to meet high officials and the king and tell them about the problems they are facing in their villages.

**Strengthening development activities**

We would like DPA to develop a very good communication system between DPA and the COs in the villages.

COs who are found to be corrupt should be dismissed but there should be a system where good COs can become DPA staff.

Request DPA to support transportation so there can be exchanges and communication between one village and another.

**3. Improving coordination between development organisations**

All organizations need to cooperate and coordinate the implementation of activities in villages.

Development committees in the villages should coordinate their activities and communicate this to the development organizations.

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**DPA** (Development and Partnership in Action) is a new but old in experiences organization which was localized from CIDSE Cambodia early 2006. DPA has been part of the Cambodia, Lao and Vietnam Programme that been operated since 1979. We work to share a common strategy on development approaches, development education and advocacy, focusing on solidarity, social justice, peace and a preferential option for the poor.



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