

A Perspective from the Village in Cambodia: Toward Democratization from Below

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Abstract:

Political alterations have frequently become a serious obstacle for Cambodian people to develop their country. More than ten years after the formation of United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), all aspects of development have progressed slowly. Presently, a general feeling of uncertainty and insecurity still plagues many villages of the country. Poverty is still the biggest issue among others and local people can exercise their rights and freedom of associations and speech only to “some degree” in their daily life.

But still, Cambodian people seem to satisfy with the present government, even though the government is not democratic and implement few significant changes in meeting basic needs of people. People can live in peace and stability under the present system. They can obtain a bit better living standard and use a bit larger freedom and rights.

Even though the present government has been continuously authoritarian and repressive, partnerships for development among the government, donors and NGOs have been conducted. Cambodian government depends heavily on foreign aid and has to hear the democratic slogan of the world. Moreover, there is a reality of massive lack of human resources and basic needs in the country. The government definitely needs grassroots activities organized by NGOs. The space for democratic NGOs is still small and limited. But I can find some increase of people’s grassroots participation including the proliferation of Buddhist associations at the village level.

Keywords: Village, participation, socio-political environment, and democratization.

Introduction

Eighty three percent of the nation’s 6.3 million eligible voters peacefully went to the polls on July 27, 2003 to select the national government. This was the third election since the 1991 Paris Peace Accords that officially started the end of Cambodia’s civil war by protecting liberalism, pluralism, human rights, and the rule of law.

In the last decade, the country has maintained a culture of peace and moved toward good governance and democracy.¹ The economy has shown remarkable growth including export with the average growth at about 5 percent per annum. People can exercise their rights and freedom of associations and speech, to some degree, in daily life. Civil society is vibrant. In June 2003, the

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government and the United Nations agreed to establish the international tribunal to try surviving Khmer Rouge leaders blamed for the killings of up to two million people. Less progress, though notable steps forward have been made in countering corruption, poverty alleviation, human rights abuses, poor governance and protecting the environment.

The prospect for democracy remains unclear because trauma of past experiences and civil war is still visible among local people. Communist ideology still persists in the mind and behavior of the ruling groups. Building democratization from below in such a post war society requires more than just holding competitive elections. Grassroots participation and movement in many aspects of village development through civil society will effectively enhance political development toward democracy (Fisher 1998: 1-37). Civic community can also make democracy work (Putnam 1993: 121-162). Political culture contributes in maintaining democratic process (Diamond 1999: 161-211). Therefore, deepening democracy must involve in strengthening democratic institutions and laws that enshrine civil and political rights, freedoms of associations and media; socio-economical rehabilitation and independent judiciary (Diamond 1999: 64-116 and Kuma 1998: 64-117).

From the above points of view, I will look for the aspects in the villages, which can contribute effectively to change a fledgling democracy from below. Six main aspects as life in village, land ownership system, local authority, social networks, political culture and religion will be discussed as keys as the key components of people's grassroots life.

Research Methodology

This article is based on two-month fieldwork conducted in Oh Dambang-2 and Ta Meun communes in Battambang province and in Prah Sre commune in Kompong Speu province, Cambodia during my half a year research stay there. During the fieldwork, qualitative research or participant observation (Dooley 1995: 257-262)² and the case-study method (Bulmer and Warwick 1993: 9-10)³ were used. These methods were very important to collect data and to develop the good relationships which greatly contributed to the quantity and the quality of the information obtained. Personal interviews and village stays were used among key informants' respondents in the villages and the local government. Respondents include village leaders, elders, traditional healers, teachers, opposition activists, ordinary people, and NGOs members.

The objective of the interviews was to learn about life in the village, social trust, local associations and participation, leadership, democracy, rights and freedom, conflict resolution, and help-seeking behavior.

1- Life in Village

Village community (*phum*) is simply a group of people living and working together in the same area, sharing common values, ideas, and beliefs within the villages and also outside the villages. Four

to seven villages usually consist of one commune (*khum*), five or more communes consist of one district (*srok*), and five to ten districts consist of one province. Cambodia consists from 20 provinces and 4 municipalities, 185 districts, 1621 communes and 13406 villages (NEC 2003). About 85% of Cambodia's population lives in the rural areas (see also Ledgerwood 2000: 1-14). Most of these people are rice farmers. In villages we can see several groups of people live together, and belong to one or different families. There are also certain village services such as school, administrative offices, health center, and small market. Habitually, there is also a pagoda (*Wat*) among a few villages.⁴

The village is a place where local people interact on an everyday basis. They share their values and interests together and talk about their life and problems. Generally, they create a sense of interpersonal connections and participation in their day-to-day activities. Traditionally, members of a village meet and develop relationships at temple, school, and a variety of other social events such as wedding party and funeral ceremony. In such traditional relationships, local people really possess a sense of collectivism and organize self-help or labor-exchange groups (*Krom Provas Dai*), later known as solidarity groups (*Krom Samaki*) after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979.⁵ Those associations include plate-sharing groups, labor exchange groups, water-users' groups, cooking groups, cow-supporting groups, parent-pupils associations, pagoda committees and pagoda associations (see also Yeng 1999: 5-7). Historically, these informal associations have nurtured efforts toward self-help, mutual help, solidarity, and cooperation. Such associations still proliferate and unite people from different families and groups, who work together for a common purpose and have a visible identity in their village (see also Hean 2002: 4-8). These activities increase feeling of solidarity and strengthen social cohesion. They help to form a sense of collective consciousness, and allow the village to share experiences and to develop trust among individuals and families.

There are also other types of associations in the village. The village development committees (VDC) at village level and the commune development committees (CDC) at commune level are official voluntary organizations involved only in community development.⁶ They were founded by the promotion of UNDP directly connect with Provincial Departments for rural development. Usually, the CDC members are selected from the VDC of each village largely from women. They bear different responsibilities as health, water, education, and credit inside their villages. As project partners for village development, the VDCs and the CDCs cooperate with all departments, agencies, NGOs, and funding sources. NGOs mention that collaboration with the VDCs, local associations, and local authorities will strengthen the projects, making them more effective and successful.⁷

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has also officially committed itself to decentralization through the creation of local government structures called as commune councils (CC) in commune levels, after the first commune council election in February 2002.⁸ This new political structure is a good mechanism for making commune administration compatible with conducting their activities in general as in managing properly local resources and directly allocating development funds to

communes.

As a result, village organizations can be categorized in to three: village government (the most powerful organizations) under the close connection with the government party, Cambodian People's Party (CPP), local militia and police, grassroots associations, and volunteer based development associations.

2- Land Ownership System

Historically, land in Cambodia officially belonged to the state. Practically, however, it belonged to the person working on that land. Traditionally, peasants paid tax on harvest, rather than on land. After 1979, land distribution was controlled under the solidarity groups "*Krom Samaki*" system. Until late 1980s, there were also no clear official demarcations of each plot, nor was the concept of private property recognized. In 1992, with a change in government policy from a planned market economy to a free market economy, the Land Law was introduced. However, it was not officially promulgated by the government of the State of Cambodia (Lor and Soun 2002: 2-3). This 1992 Land Law officially recognized the following:

- All the land in Cambodia belongs to the state and is governed by the government.
- Only property rights from 1979 onward are recognized.
- People have the right to own, to use, and to profit from the land's production.
- People have the right of inheritance on the land they use and farm.
- Any natural resources and cultural or historical sites are the property of the state.
- Private ownership of the land is not permitted, also natural resources and public infrastructure too.

Since the Land Law of 1992 was adopted, one of the most worrying consequences that accompanied this transition to market economy is the loss of access to land for many poor families in rural areas. Fraud and forgery of official documents by powerful people have frequently occurred.⁹ There are also many disputes over land issues caused by many factors as poverty, lack of land records, no clear legal framework or law, widespread informal acquisitive possession of lands and state property by all classes, weak governance in all levels, wholesale privatization of public properties, and setting up of commercial concessions with limited social assessment and inventory of existing rights. These problems still remain countrywide as the main factors until the present and make inequalities and difficulties for people to survive in villages.¹⁰

The percentage of rural population belonging to landless families rose from less than 5% in 1969 to more than 13% in 2001 (Sok 2003: 8). Families in local areas possess from 0.75 to 1.32 hectares on average (Six 2000: 35-42). At present, the Cambodian population is more than 12 million, and cultivated land is only about 2.71 millions hectares; 0.10 million hectares or more are contaminated by land mines (Sar 2002: 2-4).

The passage of the new Land Law by Cambodia's national assembly on July 20, 2001 clarifies the immovable property regime that was unclear and contradictory under the 1992 Land Law. The Law recognizes the importance of good governance issues in relation to landlessness, as well as the need to establish private property rights and facilitate private sector development in the country. It also provide legal protection to establish the security of land tenure, the reduction of land disputes, and the facilitation of land management by clarifying the ownership regime for land, and creating protection for the state property. The new Land Law marks a major milestone in the sustainable development and management of Cambodia's natural resources (Malik 2002: 1-2).

This new Land Law is a major step toward land reform. However, there are still many practical difficulties in forming legal regulations and frameworks, setting up institutions for land administration and management functioning committees aimed at improving land tenure security, establishing an efficient land registration system, and creating an index map for urban and rural areas (Im 2002: 4-5).

3- Local Authority

Generally, the village leaders are the formal and powerful appointees of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in the village since 1979. The village political leaders group consists from government appointed village head, militia and police, their relatives, and other village better off people. There are also some informal respected people such as elders, traditional healers, teaches, traditional birth attendants (TBA), and also religious people, such as monks, *achaa* (the old men who assist the monks), and nuns (*doon chi*).

The ruling party, the CPP held a virtual monopoly on local power by making the appointment of local officials in all communes throughout the country, after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in January 1979. From this political landscape we can see all commune leaders are loyal to the ruling party. They believe that they will benefit more for their local community development through maintaining good relationships with their political leader. If they do not follow their party's policy, their villages may be cut off from national level development assistance such as for building temples, roads, schools, and providing others basic needs. Sometimes, local leaders have to step down because of the lack of political performance and achievement in their communes. The incumbent commune chiefs also wield immense power at the local level because they usually command all the local militia and police.¹¹ The ruling party's establishment of a widespread network of branch offices throughout the country is a clear structure to success in the elections. This shows its clear objective to act forcefully to achieve the long-term goal of leading the country (Osborne 2003: 84-86).

The research show that political parties can and do send messages to villagers through village leaders, for example in relation to registering vote and voting in elections.¹² If local people do not follow the leaders, their security cannot be guaranteed. Further, they also suffer economically because many avoid contacting with them. Example, if they run a small shop in the village, people are afraid of

buying any thing from their place, including their relatives. Typically, the most common difficulties are to identify the villagers who support opposition parties, because they seem frightened to publicly criticize the local government for fear of reprisal and isolation from their villages. Political rights are still restricted, although the government policy officially supports a multi-party system and pluralism. Therefore, in remote areas local people still remain at the mercy of local authorities which continue to use their power through threats, coercion, and intimidation to ensure support only for the ruling party.¹³ Many cases of politically related violence and intimidation have gone unpublished officially, leaving local people, political activists, and even NGO staff vulnerable.¹⁴ Alleged perpetrators of abuses are predominantly commune and village officials as well as local members of the police and military.¹⁵ Generally speaking, all local police and military belong to hierarchical (centrally-run) police and military organizations. Usually, they are more loyal to their leaders with the same political party than the others.

The commune council election on February 3, 2002 marked an important step in the development of democratic institutions in local areas. For other political parties, this election was an opportunity to try to increase their representative strength around the whole country. The role of the commune council is to manage the budget and local development plan as they help to run local affairs. The council also has the role of representing the state in organizing village chiefs for taking care of public orders.

The official election results announced that the CPP emerged as the frontrunner in 1,597 of 1,621 communes (98.5%) in 24 provinces, meaning that its top candidates in these communes would become the commune chiefs. The Sam Raisy Party won in 13 communes and the FUNCINPEC in 10 only. This means local people still refrain from using their rights and freedom on decisions affecting their everyday lives because of political domination by the ruling party.

Political discrimination is one of the major problems faced in this decentralization process, because the assignment of duties between the commune chief, the first vice chief and the second vice chief has not been implemented pursuant to the Law on Commune Administration.¹⁶ Such roles and activities would make the commune administration incompatible to conducting their activities. Thus, those mechanisms put in place by the ruling party have proved ineffectual in many parts of the country. The current reality in the post-commune election serves only the incumbent groups more than local interest.

4- Social Networks

This section explores the various social networks among village members and networks between local people and outsiders (See more detail about type of social networks in Pp. 3-4, 1- Life in Village). Putnam's notion of civic community is useful to some degree in investigating the villages in Cambodia through local associations and volunteerism.¹⁷ The strength of these networks truly defined a strong

village, increase the capacity of the village to deal with local problems, utilize internal resources, prevent conflict and strengthen democracy in the villages.

On the other hand, we understand social networks are not a solution to the past traumatic experiences of urban and rural hardship, but maybe just one component of successful village renewal and sustainability. What we are concerned with is the creation of social trust and cohesion to interface with poverty, inequality, indignity, exclusion, and poor governance in urban and rural villages in the post war-torn society (Colleta and Cullen 2000: 3-12). Utilization of trust, active relationships, harmony, and collaboration will produce real changes in the social, economic, and political life.

Rehabilitation of the war-torn society has a long way to go; authoritarian and totalitarian rule are still too recent in Cambodia's history. Furthermore, the Khmer Rouge destroyed senses of self-identity, self-belief, norm and trust among families and community. These events transferred many Cambodian villages into the lack of using their previous social networks. Most village associations are motivated to help each others if they can expect something in return (see also Van de Put et al 1999: 17-26). At the present time, deep mutual distrust is an obvious cause of concern among villagers and leaders. Four points are discussed below:

Firstly, from late 1990s, the informal network of village associations became less active and was shaped by market forces more than by kinship and affinity. New networks based on rigid reciprocity and the needs to earn cash income are replacing the old networks based on mutual help, as a result of increased market economy penetration. Although there are some changes in social relationships in village, social trust and voluntary activities still persist in local people attitudes (see also Hean 2002: 8-10). Some examples of the uses of informal social relationships are introduced in the box below.

- A man, 62 years old from Prah Sre commune in Kompong Speu province reported that last year, when he rebuilt his house, most men in the village came to help him voluntarily. This is a usual activity called *self-help group* and has existed in his village from a long time ago. He also said that he did not pay them anything, only tea for drinking and some cigarettes for smoking during their work. (Interview, May 28, 2003)

- A village leader, 60 years old from the same commune above reported that, *labor-exchange groups* still exist, but informally. They are less active than in the past. In this rainy season, he got help from his neighbors as usual to plough his farming land for the planting of the seeds. Next day, he went back to help them. He also pointed out that if you have money or rice to pay, it is easier to ask someone to help you at any time. Presently, some families look for jobs in the city, and come back to use cash to pay for their farming. (Interview, May 29, 2003)

- A woman, 45 years old from Tamen commune in Battambang province said that because after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 there were many gifts and material assistance from NGOs, political parties, and the ruling government to support the local grassroots fight against poverty.

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These contributions may also have made local people passive in many voluntary activities needed to develop their villages. They expect material returns first, before getting involved in their village activities such as digging a well or a pond or building a road. This is one negative aspect of informal networks in the village exists presently. (Interview, February 11, 2003)

Although mutual help is shaped by the market economy and political context, but voluntary activities still exist in many places and are considered effective social relationships at village level, except participation in political activities. Villagers maintain their social trust and relationships and use them at proper times for their village development.

Secondly, because of political liberation toward pluralism, many political parties exist in village areas. According to the new constitution, freedom of participation in political preferences is free, but in reality fear still pervades local people's minds. Rights and freedom are used officially only in paper. Villagers are afraid of talking about politics to each other; they can easily become isolated in their villages, and may be killed if they belong to any opposition parties (see also Hughes 1999: 99-22). Frequently, there are also many serious conflicts among family members and groups, because of deep belief in various political parties. On the other hand, one research presented a different view, as in a survey conducted by the Center for Advanced Study (CAS) and The Asian Foundation, which found 79% of Cambodians feel free to express their political opinions, only 13% feel unable, and 8% are not sure (the CSA and The Asian Foundation, 2003: 22). It seems in this research village people prefer saying "yes" is better than saying "no". They follow orders peaceably, concentrate more properly on risk avoidance and reduce volume of opposition (See more detail in section-5: Political Culture).

Thirdly, local people do not want to go back to civil war and feel so tired of being war victims.¹⁸ They do not want the men to be taken away again by village leaders to serve as soldiers. Many soldiers have also complained about being ignored by their leaders after the end of civil war. Some of them have lost hope in the future and have little trust in the present government.

Fourthly, villagers' trust in any political parties and leaders was weakened, because they have experienced "all of them are the same",¹⁹ their life is still poor, lawlessness and corruption are worsening nationwide, and nothing has improved.²⁰ Frequently, the changes from one regime to another have served only for political leaders and their groups more than for the interest of the people. Local people prefer to use their trust properly to benefit each other and to develop their village, but not to get involved in politics (see also Schuurman 2003: 1003). Presently, poverty is the biggest problem in Cambodian society.²¹

Case study: from Battambang province, Sangke district, Ohdambang-2 commune:

This 31 year old woman has two children, a boy and a baby girl. She says, life has been better since the 1993 elections and local leaders stopped coming to coerce men into being soldiers. Her

husband is a construction worker in the city and comes home only on weekends. Five years ago, he used to be a local policeman, but was dismissed because of being a member of an opposition party. Although she has not had any political threats in the last few years, she is still afraid to stay in her own small house at nighttime, instead of staying in her parents' house. She has also been ignored by people with whom she had good relationships. Rarely is she or her relatives asked to join in any social events.

She owns only a small piece of farming land around 0.75 hectares. Her husband said she will have more land when her supporting party wins in the coming election. He also wants to have his previous job, but they are worried that they do not have enough money to pay the bribes for his job back to the leaders.

A serious worry in her mind now is what she hears on the radio, particularly the ways CPP accuses Sam Rainsy Party of being this or that, and again, Sam Rainsy accuses CPP of this or that. She doesn't want to go back to war and for the men to be taken away again.

At the end, she looked at me and said she cannot trust any political parties; all of them are the same, they serve only for their own interests. Her life is still poor and nothing has improved. Because of the unstable living in such village, she has to keep more rice in this year, to sell less, and to save some money from her husband's part-time job, just in case something happens in future. (Interview, March 3-4, 2003)

Thus, for such unstable living and security, it is difficult for local people to maximize their relationships and social networks freely. They believe that "keeping quietly and growing slowly as a tree is better to live in such society".²² Ideally, societal harmony and political stability is the best way for them to help creating prosperous villages and democratization.

5- Political Culture²³

For the last few decades, Cambodian government has changed frequently from one regime to another. Confrontations have served the interest of political leaders more than the national interest. Here we identify key elements of political culture of the ruling groups.

Firstly, there is a winner takes all powers habitually based on regular distrust among competing groups and serving only closed relationships. Treason is a common accusation used against their opponents. Ruling groups have oftentimes expressed the belief "If you do not stay with me, you are my enemy".²⁴ This is a belief in their own status as political messiah with a supernatural power to deal alone with all problems facing the country (Sorpong 2000: 426-429). Having such belief has deeply affected the development of civil society, opposition parties and freedom of expression. It also encouraged nepotism, tyranny and violence (Chandler 2000: 7-10).

Secondly, many political leaders in Cambodia have clearly known the way to become popular

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among village people, but lacked responsibility for village development.²⁵ Generally, they promise a lot during occasions of seeking power and during electoral campaigns, but forget all when they are in power, and provide the least responsive, the most unaccountable, and the least transparent regimes in history.

Thirdly, successful politicians traditionally easily become rich through corruption and exploitation.²⁶ That means leaders in power maximize their ability to be corrupted as much as they can and ignore people's interests. Many leaders insist on staying in power although they provide development only for their small groups and not for all people in general (see Loa 2000: 1-5). They also consider themselves perfect leaders and suppress their opponents with hegemonic power. As Sorpong (2000: 76-114) notes, Cambodia has many strong men, but a weak state and poor governance.

Fourthly, injustice still remains in many local areas because the judiciary is weak. Frequently the judiciary is interfered by leaders and rich people, and is also marred by corruption and politics (Osborn 2003: 48-49). Many criminal cases and especially politically related crimes were rarely prosecuted.²⁷ In court cases, village people often appear without defense and thus got less than the right to a fair trial.

Fifthly, the reasons above have also exacerbated village people's tendency to distrust one another and fear leaders in power.²⁸ Some people keep away as far as they can from any political manipulations and conflicts. Further, violence and assault often occurs in the villages.

Poverty, intimidation, human rights abuses, pervasive fear, culture of impunity, and violence have remained in many parts of the country. For daily survival village people focus on the basic needs, and where possible health and education are. In order to avoid political pressures and censorship, they often feel that saying "yes" is better than saying "no". Thus, living in such a political environment, it is difficult for local people to maximize their rights and freedoms. If the above problems continue, democratization at all levels will remain unsuccessful.

6- Religion

Buddhism is the state religion in Cambodia. Ninety five percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist. The pagoda is one of the important places where local people look for their physical, emotional, and moral support from individual to community levels. Buddhism is deeply connected to Khmer identity and non-violent behavior (Yos 1999: 1-2). Abandonment of Buddhism is often seen as abandonment of Khmer identity and culture, including the ideas about ethical governance, peace, forgiveness, and justice.

By tradition and in theory, monks were apolitical and not involved in any civic affairs. However, the merging of religious and political interests gave monks something of quasi-political role in shaping public opinion at the villages (Bit 1991: 41-43). Presently, Buddhism is very weak largely because of the destruction of religion during three decades of civil war, especially under the Khmer Rouge regime.

Internal weakness means increased ability of political players to manipulate the Khmer-Buddhism as a successful strategy in any political interest and popularity (see also Hughes 1999: 100-103). Traditionally, lifetime is determined by the law of *karma*: good or meritorious actions will produce good results; *sinful* actions will produce badly results (see also Girgling 1990: 32-33). In such situation, local people usually believe that their low living status is the result of the demerits of their previous life. Poverty and social inequality and injustice are the past *karma*.²⁹ Furthermore, they feel they have to follow their leaders in all activities, because of the fear of sin causing more suffering in the next life (see also Colletta and Cullen 2000: 27). That is making merit and avoiding sinful activities in the present will produce good results in the next life.³⁰

Cambodia is currently undergoing a renaissance of Buddhism which greatly helps in the development of society.³¹ In this process, Buddhism plays a very important role through many peaceful activities. Every year, peace walking (*Dhammayietra*) is organized by a spiritual leader, *Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda* who has been highly respected, and widely seen as effective work in calming the public to vote in the elections. During the World Conference of Religions for Peace-2003 in Phnom Penh, the peace-walking founder says if religions and NGOs work closely together, peace and development will realize in Cambodia. NGOs' involvement in health initiatives has been made more effective in villages through collaboration with pagodas and local associated volunteers (Jacobs and Price 2003: 399-410). Pagodas can offer trusted leadership, active local organization, resource mobilization and management.³² There are religious NGOs operating across Cambodia, where they have conducted their activities in terms of village development and participation at grassroots level.³³

From the above reasons we can recognize that Buddhism in the country is still strong in theory and organization, but weak in practices. Cambodian people possess deep belief in Buddhism. Peace and aspects of development are conducted by Buddhism which greatly helps in the development of society. There is something more important elements in using Buddhist concepts in villages: if all leaders use the concepts for the people's interest, development and democracy will realize, because these Buddhist concepts stress peace, governance, and justice.

7- Conclusion: Toward Democratization in the Village

Throughout this research, several positive aspects we can recognize. Public participations and social networks in the village activities have functioned only in terms of development and not in politics. Generally speaking, village people perceive uneasy participating in any opposition groups. Village people have little trust to their present government and they follow orders and participate in many developmental aspects for promoting peace and stability. Then, the new Land Law in 2001 provides more officially the legal aspects for the land tenures, the reduction of land disputes and the facilitation of land management. Village people can productively conduct their activities to gradually develop their community on their own land. In addition, although Buddhism is weak in pursuing

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people's political interest and power, Buddhism still keeps strong and respectable status among Cambodian people in the sense of pursuing many peaceful activities and village development.

On the other hand, negative aspects remain too. Leaders still practice autocratic attitudes in the villages. Violence and suppression have been used as common tools to defeat opponents and to look for more power, particularly in the elections and human rights issues. People in the villages are still victimized because of political abuses, lawlessness and impunity. They fear leaders in power. Thus, the use of freedom and fairness are far from reality and these matters are complicated and difficult to eradicate.

As a result, I can conclude that there are several positive elements for the emerging democratization from below in the villages, but it is still far in sight. Regulations and policies are more in rhetoric than in practice. Changing them all in reality toward consolidating democracy as mentioned by Diamond (1999: 64-116)³⁴ is not a simple process; there should be the same willingness and practices among people, local authorities and all organizations and institutions in the villages for pursuing participation, democratization, peace and people's better life so as the people in the villages will have democracy they deserve. For that purpose, higher levels of participation including the election of village head, NGO and other associations' activities and Buddhist activities should be strengthened not only through domestic organizations but also through the international framework.

Notes:

- 1 The internal reforms and adopted a policy of liberalization moving towards a mixed market economy in the end of 1980s, the Paris Peace Accord (PPA) in 1991 and the role of United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), the promulgating of new constitution in September 1993 and the elections are the main sources for Cambodia moving toward liberal democracy and pluralism.
- 2 Qualitative research or participant observation (Dooley, 1995: 257-262) is a research methodology used based on field observations analyzed without statistics in some particular areas. This method is combined of using structure and semi-structured interview, observation, informal communication, and participation in fieldwork to collect all information needs for the study.
- 3 The case-study method (Bulmer and Warwick, 1993: 9-10) is a research methodology involving the in-depth study of the particular milieu. This method also provide more information to add more effective into the research.
- 4 Interview, February 26, 2003 in Ohdambang-2 commune, Battambang province with two old ages. There is not clear indication of a pagoda among numbers of villages, but usually among a few villages.
- 5 Self-Help Groups is considered as a result of further development of the kinship and in practice. The Groups have more formal structure and comprises of 15-30 people from different families, usually in the same village. They join together and organize different social and economic activities benefiting each others.
- 6 The VDCs were introduced in Bantay Meanchey province, where CARERE/UNDP was working in close col-

- laboration with provincial authorities. The VDCs provided a structure and a framework for broadening participation in decision-making regarding village priorities, which previously was limited to the appointed village chief. Most of them are young people in the villages. A certain minimum number of seats on the committee were reserved for women. CARERE/UNDP facilitated the establishment of linkages between the VDCs and the Provincial Departments of Rural development, so as to make line departments more responsive and aware of local priorities. This new rural development structure, between Provincial Rural Development Committee (PRDC) and elected VDCs was formalized by a Royal Decree no.164 in January 1995.
- 7 Interview, February 28, 2003 with Dr. Meas Nee, Coordinator and Representative of Community Development in Battambang province.
 - 8 Cambodia has not held local elections of any kind since the late 1960s. All commune leaders have been the appointees of the ruling CPP. This event marked an important step in the development of democratic institutions in local levels in Cambodia.
 - 9 Using fraud and forgery of official documents, district officials in Ratanakiri province and intermediaries of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces General Nuon Phea attempted to force nearly one thousand indigenous minority villagers to give up their rights to 1,250 hectares of land that their families have lived on for generations. See more detail in a report by Adhoc and Oxfam Britain. 2001. Cambodia: Landmark Indigenous Land Rights Case To Be Heard in Ratanakiri Provincial Court.
 - 10 Frequently, there are many articles raising in the news papers about land grab in the villages by powerful people. There have no clear action to take openly yet, although there are the speech by PM. Hun Sen in the CDC about the action of taking land back from the land grabbers. Dealing effectively with such problems are very difficult. More details see in news paper as in Kampuchea Tmei, November 11, 2004 and Monakseka, November 2, 2004.
 - 11 All local police belong to centrally-run police organization. Usually, they are loyal to a local leader with the same political party.
 - 12 A Survey of the Cambodian Electorate, by *CAS and The Asia Foundation*, 63% reported getting their information from village chiefs, while only 19-25% sought political information from radio or television. pp. 98-100.
 - 13 Personal communications with two ordinary people in March 17-18, in Ta Meun commune in Battambang province.
 - 14 Human rights organizations working in Cambodia have documented more than 267 cases of alleged violence and intimidation mostly occurring in the remote military-controlled areas, from January 1, 2001, through January 5, 2002. These include harassment, threats, arbitrary arrest and detention, restriction of assembly, property violations, destruction of political party signboards, and numerous violent acts, including fourteen confirmed murders.
 - 15 See more detail in Human Rights Watch Press Backgrounder. January 18, 2002. Cambodia's Commune Council Elections.
 - 16 Interviews with a village leader and a teacher in March 5-6, 2003 in Oh Dambang-2 commune in Battambang

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province.

- 17 Making Democracy Work (Putnam 1993: 121-187): From the Italian north as a stronghold of a communist party, SC refers to the collective values of all horizontal social networks and the inclinations of doing things for each other (norms of reciprocity). Norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement create trust, solidarity, socialization and mutual benefits. It defines as a strong civic community (civic virtue). Strong civic community makes strong economy and strong economy will enhance strong state and democracy.
- 18 Interview, February 25, 2003 in Ohdambang-2 commune, Battambang province with two ordinary people.
- 19 Quotation from personal communications with two ordinary people in March 14, 2003 in Tamen commune, Battambang province. "All of them are the same" means all political leaders are the same and they serve only their own interests, not for people in general.
- 20 Interview, March 4, 2003 in Tamen commune, Battambang province with a teacher and an opposition activist.
- 21 According to a survey conducted by the Center for Advanced Study (CAS), 52% of respondents considered poverty the biggest problem facing Cambodia. Water problems were seen as the major problem by another 27%, followed by various other issues.
- 22 Quotation from a personal communication with an elderly man, March 4, 2003 in Oh-dambang commune, Battambang province. "Keeping quietly and growing slowly as a tree is better to live in such society" means people should live quietly, focus only on their daily life, and not oppose any orders from above.
- 23 Political culture is a people's predominant belief, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments, and evaluations about the political system of their countries and the role of the self with that system which includes three types of orientation: cognitive (knowledge and belief), affective (feeling), and evolutionary (values and judgments) orientations (Diamond, L. 1999: 161-211).
- 24 Quotation from a personal communication with an old age in February 26, 2003 in Ohdambang-2 commune, Battambang province. "If you do not stay with me, you are my enemy" means all people have to support only the ruling group, even though they cannot survive and are considered as the enemies of the incumbent.
- 25 Interview, February 26, 2003 in Ohdambang-2 commune, Battambang province with two old ages.
- 26 *National Survey on Public Attitudes towards Corruption*, by Center for Social Development (CSD), Phnom Penh, Cambodia, August 1998. Among 1513 respondents, 75% believe rich people are practicing corruption, only 25% are not and also 84% consider bribery is the normal way of doing things, and only 16% are not. Pp. 48-49.
- 27 Among 24 perpetrators, only 7 arrested, 14 were at large, and 3 uncommment. This survey was done by Human Rights' NGOs (ADHOC and LICADHO) in 2001 to monitor human rights violations and investigate human rights abuses by civilian and local authorities.
- 28 Interview, March 11-12, 2003, in Ta Meun commune in Battambang province with a village leader and a traditional healer.
- 29 Personal interviews, May 30, 2003 with an old age and a traditional healer in Prah Sre commune, Kompong

Speu province.

30 Quotation from personal interviews with an elder and a traditional healer in Prah Sre commune, Kompong Speu province. They believe that present life depends on previous life; if you make many merits, your life will be happy accordingly.

31 Every year, across the country, the process of rebuilding pagodas is growing significantly. The number increased from 3326 in 1994 to 3731 in 2000, and also number of monks increased from 39, 342 in 1994 up to 50, 873 in 2000 (Annual report from Ministry of Religious Affaires, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2000).

32 Personal communications with two monks in May 27-28 in Prah Sre commune in Kompong Speu province.

33 See more details in the activities by some local NGOs as Association for Supporting Buddhism (ASB), Buddhism for Development (BFD), Association of Humanity and Religion Development (AHURD), Buddhism and Democracy (B&D), Buddhism Development Association and Supporting Environment (BDASE) and Khmer Buddhist Society in Cambodia.

34 Consolidating Democracy should possess effective political institutions, productive regime performances and viable civil society.

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