

Creating Plans Is Only One Step

Melissa Marschke highlights experiences with community based natural resource management in Cambodia*

“We plan and then make more plans. But, while we sit and plan, our forests get cut down and people grab our land. People do dynamite fishing in the Tonle Sap: there are fewer and fewer fish. We want to find a way to solve these problems, not just talk about them.”—villager, Pursat, March 9, 2004.

For Cambodian villagers interested in dealing with land encroachment, solving conflicts in their fishery or protecting a forest, it is not that easy. Villagers may work through existing conflict resolution mechanisms, which might include enlisting the support of village or commune chiefs and/or working with a pagoda or mosque leader. However, it is more likely (especially if villagers are working with a government institution or NGO) that some type of resource management committee will be formed to deal with the issue. Its name will largely depend on which government institution or NGO is involved. It is entirely possible for a community fisheries committee, a community forestry committee, a land use management committee, or a subcommittee of the commune council, all working on different aspects of natural resource management, to exist in the same village. Such committees may or may not include the village chief, who will also have ideas about natural resource management. This gives insight into why community members express frustration with the number of planning sessions they are involved in.

This is not to suggest that villagers are not interested in addressing natural resource and land management problems. They are, especially when they believe that they can solve issues related to their livelihoods. Rural villagers are connected to the landscape and use local resources in many ways, depending upon their availability. Many villagers do not compartmentalise resources the way government institutions do. For instance, the Department of Fisheries deals only with fisheries issues, the Forest Administration only with forestry issues. Villagers, by contrast, see the connections between land and water, trees and fish (Marschke 2003). Importantly, many villagers recognize that it takes multiple strategies to deal with resource-related problems. Therefore, some critical thought is needed to assess how different community-based policies identified in a range of legislation and programs can best support community needs.

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This paper begins by highlighting early experiences with community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) in Cambodia, followed by a synthesis of three approaches to CBNRM: (a) community fisheries management, (b) participatory land use planning (PLUP) and (c) an emphasis on mainstreaming natural resource and environmental management (NREM) within commune council plans. These approaches will be compared and briefly analysed, before turning to field experiences related to CBNRM practices. I argue that it takes more than a policy context to ensure that villagers can carry out community-based management work. Planning may be meaningless if people do not believe that their plans are supported by a *neak thom* (big person), regardless of the quality of the plan or what the law says.

Proliferation of CBNRM Processes

While it may make sense to endorse community-based management programs (such processes, theoretically, enable villagers to take action), it is more challenging to understand what it really takes to enhance livelihoods, solve conflicts or increase access to resources for rural Cambodians. Households and village-level institutions practise a variety of resource management strategies: for example, protecting forests to serve as buffers from wind and storms. However, village-level institutions often cannot engage in resource management through patrolling and enforcement without some form of higher level support, because social relations in Cambodia take place within an authoritarian, hierarchical context. Resource management strategies, therefore, may be enhanced when there is appropriate formal (policy) and informal (*neak thom*) support for community involvement.

Several projects have been working on CBNRM in Cambodia since the 1990s (such as those funded by FAO, GTZ and IDRC). Much of this initial work was experimental: community members, NGOs and/or government facilitators worked on understanding just what resource management could look like “on the ground.” In these cases, village-level institutions were created in a policy vacuum, with maps and management plans being recognized informally through appropriate signatures (from village headperson to the provincial governor) and in some cases by technical departments at a provincial or national level. These initial experiences contributed to the proliferation of CBNRM processes (or parts of processes) now found across Cambodia, for example, through government decentralization programs, land management programs and community forestry and fisheries programs. Additionally, environmental NGOs have added “community-based management” to their work (Marschke 2004).

The CBNRM work in Ratanakkiri (supported by IDRC/UNDP/SIDA) has informed much of the approach towards mainstreaming natural resource management within Cambodia's decentralisation program. Efforts to mainstream resource management into commune

development plans began in 2003 within 40 communes. Other experiences have fed into policy creation, supporting community forestry and community fisheries; the FAO-Siem Reap project significantly influenced Cambodia's 2001 "fisheries reform." Linking land management and natural resource management, PLUP guidelines emerged from a series of workshops with community forestry and fisheries facilitators and government officials that took place between 1999 and 2001 (a process facilitated by GTZ). However, it is unclear if these processes, as they are currently unfolding, are enhancing local livelihoods or solving resource management problems.

The 'Formal' Policy Context

"I know about the law. The high law and local laws are opposite. The local law wants to protect the community, but the top levels do not support this. They say it is illegal for us to stop and catch the thieves. We can monitor and inform technical staff. [But] by the time we do this, it is always too late. I can understand the law some, because of many trainings that I've attended. The government law doesn't allow any rights to local people."—villager, Siem Reap. 18 March 2004.

Many government departments are mandated some responsibility related to resource management (see Table One). Each government institution is working with its own policy makers to draft legislation. In some cases there is a strongly centralised planning emphasis, such as within the Forest Administration; in other cases there is a strongly decentralised planning emphasis, such as within the Ministry of Interior. Institutions are not always aware of, or connected with, other institutions doing similar things.

A number of legal mechanisms support community involvement in resource management. Within the Law on Management and Administration of Communes, a broad clause allows commune councils to manage and

protect natural resources (articles 41 and 43), although "Commune councils have no authority over forests" (article 45). According to the community forestry sub-decree, community forestry can take place with approval from the Forest Administration. Other legislation, such as the recently drafted community fisheries sub-decree, is awaiting approval.

With this proliferation of legal mechanisms and resource management processes comes an emphasis on planning. Planning is an integral part of working within the commune council structure or, for that matter, of working on resource management. Whether it is preparing the five-year commune development plan and the subsequent annual investment plans or preparing a community fishery or forestry plan, villagers in every commune do have planning experiences. In 2002 there were an estimated 162 community fishery sites in Cambodia (McKenney and Prom 2002); in January 2004, according to the Department of Fisheries, there were 329 community fishery sites.

Unfortunately, many of these plans are driven by outside facilitators (NGO or government) who may or may not understand what it is they are meant to be facilitating. There is often an assumption that local people lack the capacity to carry out such plans on their own; hence the plethora of training and capacity building exercises villagers may be exposed to. A critical question arises whether such elaborate planning mechanisms are appropriate. There are a lot of policies on paper, but in many cases the "doing" appears to lag behind the planning. Blunt (2003: 57) also questions the need for such complicated processes regarding infrastructure development:

"the question is whether high production costs are adding sufficient value. Do the complex planning procedures that are employed lead to different and better decisions by commune councils concerning development needs and priorities? Or would the same roads, bridges and wells have been built in

Table 1: Institutional Responsibilities Related to Natural Resource Management

Institution	Responsibilities related to natural resource management	Legal Instrument / Policy related to CBNRM
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (MAFF)	Responsible for agricultural development and fishery activities in the fishery domain	Draft Community Fisheries Sub-decree
Forest Administration (FA)	Responsible for all forestry activities in the forest domain	Community Forestry Sub-decree
Ministry of Environment (MoE)	Responsible for protected areas; wildlife and environmental protection	Draft Protected Areas Sub-decree
Ministry of Interior (Mol)	In charge of decentralization and supervising the Commune Councils	Law on Management & Administration of Commune
Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning Construction (MLMUPC)	Responsible for land use planning, land adjudication (land allocation), land management	Social Land Concession Sub-decree Participatory Land Use Planning (a policy)

Table 2: A Comparison of Three Resource Management Processes

	Community Fisheries	PLUP	NREM Mainstreaming
Objective	To enable villagers, with enforcement support from DoF staff, to protect and manage the fishery.	To solve resource management and land tenure issues (and create maps).	To build an understanding around NREM issues within commune-level planning processes.
How many	329 Community Fisheries sites	11 Communes completed; 9 communes on-going.	40 communes in 2003; expanding in 2004.
Challenges	Villagers cannot do enforcement of regulations without DoF staff (not enough staff). Fish are very mobile. Limited capacity of DoF staff to facilitate this.	Complex problem-solving approach that requires strong facilitation skills. "Land grabbing" is complicated. Not easy to map out land issues given the informal nature of much land exchange.	Integrating NREM into a pre-defined, infrastructure focused planning process is challenging as NREM issues require longer-term solutions. NREM mainstreaming not yet driven by local level.

the same places if much simpler and cheaper planning procedures had been employed?"

Considering that planning infrastructure development is often far simpler than solving resource management issues, and that the complexity of planning for infrastructure is questioned, a lesson can be learned. Planning processes need to be made both simpler and more flexible, to enable villagers and NGOs/government institutions to spend more time on livelihood enhancement projects and in solving resource management issues.

Comparing Three Resource Management Processes

While there are some initial "bumps" to smooth, a policy context does exist to enable communities the space to plan for and potentially carry out local resource management activities. Closer analysis of community fisheries, PLUP and NREM mainstreaming processes illustrate how these processes overlap; although each process does have a slightly different objective (see Table Two).

Each of these processes emphasizes in-depth planning in the village or commune. For example, the NREM mainstreaming program adds an additional two days of commune-level planning to the already intensive planning process (Marschke 2004). Facilitating a PLUP process at the village level is estimated to take 21 days per village (limited implementation experience to date). Creating a community fisheries management plan can take days or months depending upon whether fisheries or NGO staff are facilitating. In all three processes, outside facilitators are required to help villages or communes in planning, including creating detailed technical maps. Moreover, expectations of the participating villagers are raised, expectations that may be dashed when there is limited follow-through.

What often happens is that villagers are facilitated to make plans and get approvals, and are then left on their own to carry out the plans. There is little time for facilitators to work with villagers on actual problem solving, since they need to go to the next village or commune to continue the planning process. What is important, therefore, is to understand better how villagers can be supported in carrying out plans and finding solutions. For

instance, actually carrying out CBNRM activities often requires continuous facilitation and support as villagers grapple with complex issues. Equally importantly, a "buy-in" is required from local authorities and a few key officials to ensure that villagers feel comfortable in carrying through with their plans.

What Is Needed on the Ground?

The following example, based on experiences of the Participatory Management of Mangrove Resources (PMMR) in Koh Kong province, illustrates why time and facilitation support are necessary for villagers to carry out some resource management activities.

In Koh Kong province, stopping illegal charcoal production is an ongoing battle, for villagers and provincial officers alike. In the 1990s many villagers migrated into mangrove areas to produce charcoal (mangrove wood produces a high quality charcoal), which was sold to Thailand. Middlepersons reaped most of the benefits, while poor people cut the trees and produced the charcoal. Various government-supported crackdowns began in the mid-1990s, the most significant occurring in 1999. By this point, it was clear to villagers that producing charcoal was not a secure option for them, and most switched to fishing.

When the elected village-level resource management committees in this area began producing their resource management plans, stopping illegal activities, such as charcoal production, was included. Before the establishment of resource management committees, local communities were afraid to stop illegal activities, especially those supported by powerful persons. However, the situation detailed below shows the growing confidence of one committee in its resource management work.

In May 2002 the resource management committee in Koh Sralau seized one boat carrying a large number of mangrove logs. The boat owner did not have permission from the locally elected resource management committee to cut trees: according to its regulations, mangrove trees can be cut only for house construction. However, the boat owner was related to the provincial police commander, and after the committee confiscated his logs, he called the provincial police. The provincial police called

a member of the PMMR project at the provincial level. PMMR reminded the police that the provincial governor had signed the management plans of the committee, and that the committee was stopping illegal activities. PMMR asked the police to work with the committee to resolve this issue; at the same time, PMMR reminded the committee that it had the right to solve the conflict. The committee was able to negotiate with the boat owner to pay a fine and sign an agreement that he would no longer carry out illegal activities in the area—a significant victory for the resource management committee (Nong and Marschke, *in press*).

Although the committee needed the support of PMMR, especially to remind it that it had the right to stop this activity, it was up to the committee to negotiate a solution to the problem. Without the signature of the governor, and the facilitation support from PMMR, it is debatable if this could have worked. CBNRM requires the support of multiple players at local, provincial and national levels. Sometimes including multiple interests can seem exhausting, but generally, the support will prove useful. Successful mangrove protection comes from cooperation among those who support CBNRM both directly and indirectly. As noted by Sick (2002), successful resource management occurs “not because there is an absence of diversity, conflict, and power struggles, but through established mechanisms for negotiation and resolution.”

Analysis of Trends in NRM

“I am very sorry that the power men benefit from the destruction of our natural resources. You see, by destroying the resources in the forest and in the Great Lake, they gain more and more money, which brings them more power.”—villager, Siem Reap, 18 March 2004.

Although CBNRM has expanded across Cambodia, little research exists to indicate if livelihoods are improving with resource management practices. Rock (2004) comments that the community-based management approach of government institutions generally leaves little initiative with a village, undermines the role of the commune council and provides limited management responsibilities and tenure security to communities. The trend in community forestry, for example, is to give degraded or disturbed forests to communities with the aim of protecting and regenerating resources. Valuable forest or fishery resources are rarely allocated: poor resource allocations make it very challenging to enhance local livelihoods

Perhaps it takes a combination of bottom-up and top-down decision making really to tackle natural resource management. Since Cambodia’s cultural context is largely unreceptive to bottom-up forms of decision making or influence, it makes sense to rethink how to approach CBNRM. While villagers should be assigned a voice in resource management, appropriate institutional support must also be fostered to ensure that this approach can work. Blunt (2003: 62) comments, “[T]he best prospect for improving levels of participation lies in

strong and unequivocal (authentic) direction from above that the local government system should engage with communities in this way, combined with incentives that are directly tied to this form of engagement.”

Conclusion

“I do not see what happens after the plan. There is no implementation, and I feel frustrated as I see no results,” commented one villager when asked about her involvement in creating a commune development plan. Yet another villager complained, “We have made so many plans, but our forests continue to be cleared and our fish are fewer and fewer” (Marschke 2004). Since community fishery or forestry, PLUP and mainstreaming NREM processes are new, both facilitators and villagers are learning. At this point, there is an emphasis on detailed planning, in part because facilitate the creation of a resource management plan is easier than actually solving an issue. Less emphasis needs to be placed on creating plans, so that the “action” part of these processes can happen. Many resource conflicts cannot be anticipated (such as land encroachment or an increase in fishing gear theft); thus, CBNRM processes need to be both pro-active (planning and networking) and reactive.

CBNRM processes overlap. Villagers involved in mainstreaming NREM into commune council plans may or may not be involved in planning a community fisheries project with the Department of Fisheries. Addition

ally, PLUP or other facilitation teams may come into the village without considering the information in a commune data base, therefore repeating participatory rural appraisal exercises with villagers. Greater understanding of current methods and greater coordination between government institutions are required to reduce the time villagers spend planning activities and the number of committees related to CBNRM found in each village or commune.

Finally, community management plans and maps alone will do little to enhance local situations or engage critical provincial and national actors. A shared framework amongst institutions and practitioners, more accountable to local livelihood needs and more culturally appropriate, is required. In addition to having a policy that supports CBNRM, government officials at provincial and national levels need to take leadership in ensuring that such processes really benefit villagers. Implementing CBNRM takes a team committed to problem solving and working consistently on issues with different partners. Most importantly, it takes villagers who are willing to take risks and dedicate their time to resource management.

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