



Seila



UNDP/CARERE

Improving Handicrafts and Cultural Centre Activities

**Strategies for improvements requested by
the Yak Loum Lake Committee**

**Prepared by:
Conny van den Berg
Consultant**

**In cooperation with:
Yak Loum Lake Committee**

**Touch Nimith
Advisor to the Committee**

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1 Introduction

Yak Loum is a crater lake 3 to 4 kilometres east of Ban Lung. The lake is a major tourist attraction in Ratanakiri province. Khmers as well as a fair number of foreign tourists visit the lake for a swim and to enjoy its beautiful surroundings. The lake has an important cultural value to the Tampuan villagers who are living in its vicinity. It features in a number of local legends, in which spirits and other beings are said to reside in the lake's water¹. Yeak Loum Lake and the area around it used to be spirit forests, areas that are traditionally not cut for swidden fields and where hunting and fishing is prohibited. The villages of Yak Loum Commune, used to be located in the area which is now Ban Lung, the provincial capital. When migrants from lowland Cambodia came and settled in this area, the villagers slowly started to move eastward. This development, in addition to the return of refugees, who fled the Khmer Rouge regime, from Laos and Vietnam, who were temporarily located in Yeak Loam, contributed to a rapid deforestation of this area.

When Ban Lung grew in size, the lake and its immediate surroundings became a spot for recreation which did not go very well together with conserving the natural environment. Motors and cars were cleaned in the lake, clothes were washed and there even was a karaoke bar. This continued even after 1995, when the then Governor Kep Chuk Tema declared it a protected area, among 11 other sites in the provinces. In 1996, IDRC took on the responsibility of supporting the local communities in the commune to manage the area and tourism activities by themselves. Since then, a number of milestones have been achieved. A management committee has been established for the day to day management of the activities around the lake. A cultural centre has been built, with a display of artefacts as used and made by Highland People. Income generation activities, such as handicraft sales, entrance fees to visit the lake and the centre were launched for a long term sustainability. The most important of all achievements was the signing of a 25 year lease contract of the Yak Loum Committee with the Province in 1998, in which the province hands over the management and responsibility of the area to the local communities.²

Besides some major achievements, the Committee has faced difficulties as well. Bad working relations, too many staff members who would not perform their tasks led to a re-organisation and re-election of the Management Committee. The relation with the villages and the commune authorities is also still weak. In addition, the current committee identified some weaknesses with regards to the cultural centre management and exhibition and handicrafts production and sales. It is for these last issues that the committee decided to call in the assistance of a consultant. The current report reflects the history of the cultural centre and the handicrafts activities and strategies for improvement in both areas. Although it was not part of the Terms of Reference set by the Yeak Loum Lake Management Committee, the relation with the villages will also be addressed.

1.1 Approach

To keep the recommendations as close to the abilities, wishes and needs of the Yeak Loum Lake committee their ideas have been the starting point for my work. Through an initial discussion with the committee members some key issues were identified that needed to be addressed. These were:

¹ Riebe 1999, p. 23-24

² Ibid 1999

- Assistance on the administration of the exhibition
- Advice on re-arranging the displays in the exhibition
- Advice on the quality and quantity improvement of handicrafts

Following this initial meeting a series of follow-up brainstorming sessions were conducted. Most of the time these meetings were conducted with only the key people responsible and took the form of informal discussions. Sometimes the whole committee was present for approval of decisions and thinking about additional steps to be taken.

In addition to meetings with the committee, one short workshop were conducted with representatives from the five Yeak Loum commune villages: Chree, Phnom, Lon, Sul, and Lapoe. This was a women's only meeting on the improvement of handicrafts, specifically the weavings. A second meeting was planned to discuss two issues: male handicrafts production and the improvement of the exhibition in the Yeak Loum Centre. Only two village elders of Lon and Lapoe attended this meeting.

During the bigger meetings, the main language used was Tampuan, with Khmer and English translation when necessary. The informal discussion were held mainly in Khmer.

The improvements to the administration process of the exhibition needed some on the job training as well. One morning was spend to develop a basic, and simple administration system that could be maintained by the responsible staff members themselves³.

³ For more detailed information on the contents of the training and meetings the reader is referred to the next chapters.

2 Cultural Centre

2.1 Description of history and current situation

In 1996, CEMP assisted the IDRC team in Ratanakiri to put together a display on Highlander culture inside the Yak Loum Lake area. The province requested it to be finished before December 1996 because the then Second Prime Minister Hun Sen would visit Ratanakiri. In only two months an initial exhibition of Highland Peoples' handicrafts, artefacts, agriculture and other tools was set up to educate Khmer and foreign tourist on Highlander culture and livelihood. The exhibition was designed by a team of staff from the Department of Environment and members of the Yak Loum communities with the help of an expatriate consultant⁴. Local ownership of the displays in the Centre is low. This is the consequence of uncertainty at the start whether the Centre would be a Provincial run operation, or managed by the community. In 1996 and early 1997, the Centre activities tended towards being driven by the Department of Environment with extensive support of IDRC/CEMP. Although local people were involved in collecting objects and producing display shelves and related materials, they had little say in what and how the exhibition would be arranged. Another reason why local ownership is lacking is that the exhibition was set up in a very short period of time which did not leave much scope for intensive consultation with local communities. From the time IDRC activities merged into CARERE in 1997, the focus for the Yak Loum Lake activities have shifted from being a Department driven project to a community managed operation. Suddenly, members of the Yak Loum Lake communities were responsible for managing and maintaining the Cultural Centre. However, these people had never been involved in the creation of the displays and had therefore very little knowledge about them, and had little insight as to what the objective of the Centre was.

In June 1997, a report was produced with recommendations for the Centre's future activities. These activities would include further development of displays and the production of educational material. At the time this report was produced, it was assumed that CEMP was willing to contribute the funds for a consultancy and the above mentioned activities. This has never happened because the 1997 coup caused CEMP to close down its project. All recommendations mentioned in that report have never been given any follow-up.

The Centre is now a community managed project with two staff who are very enthusiastic, but who also have limited skills. Although the recommendations in the 1997 report are valuable, the strategy of improving the centre's displays needs to be adjusted to the skills and ideas of the Yak Loum Management Committee. Only then, ownership of the Cultural Centre can be guaranteed.

2.2 Improvements requested

Over the years many of the original items got lost or stolen. Moreover, labels with the explanation of what the item was and where it came from got misplaced and lost. The exhibition has been more or less the same ever since it was first designed.

Not many tourists make it to the centre. This could be due to its location and to limited information about the centre and the exhibition at the entrance. Another reason might be that regular guests know about the centre and have been once or twice but will not visit again because the exhibition is always the same.

⁴ See Bottomley 1996.

The issues identified by the Committee regarding the Cultural Centre bare direct relation with the above mentioned shortcomings. The Committee wants to attract more people to the Centre. In addition, they requested for assistance in re-arranging the exhibition and add more items. Furthermore, the labelling and cataloguing of the exhibition items needed to be improved.

2.3 Strategy for improvements

In a series of meetings the committee members have brainstormed about how to improve the exhibition and how to attract more visitors.

2.3.1 Exhibition

The first step that was taken to increase the number of people coming to the centre was making a more attractive, bigger sign board which directs visitors to the centre. The location is still not good. It did not catch the consultants eye whenever it was first erected. The location could be nearer to the path. In addition, there may be a need for a sign right at the entrance, although the Committee and their advisor do not want more signs there. New visitors should always get a brochure of the Lake and be directed to the centre by the guards.

A brief questionnaire was developed with the responsible committee members in both English and Khmer. As only a few visitors came during the consultancy period the outcome of the questionnaire was limited. The suggestions ranged from displaying more items in the exhibition, and photographs on Highlander culture, to a request for music demonstrations to hear the sound of the gongs and other music instruments. These suggestions can easily be implemented by the Cultural Centre staff. For the future a guest book will be kept in which each visitor can describe hers or his suggestions for improvements.

The committee members themselves had a long list of suggestions to improve the exhibition. They wanted to start with building a kitchen as found in Tampuan houses, so that all items with regard to food preparation can be demonstrated in a more meaningful way. Furthermore, more music instruments needed to be purchased, in addition to agriculture tools. Rice varieties were before part of the collection but were eaten by mice, but the members thought it was very important to start showing them again. This time the rice will be put in glass containers to keep it safe from mice. Jewellery was also identified as being important to display. A special cabinet need to be designed with a lock to prevent the items from being stolen. Besides materials, more photographs of every day life, agricultural activities, ceremonies etc. would be good to have. At the moment there is nobody in the centre who can take good photographs. It is easier and cheaper if the committee learns to take pictures themselves than to hire professional photographers.

In a meeting with two village elders from Lon and Lapeau the importance of the centre was discussed. They were of the opinion that the Centre plays a significant role in preserving Highlander culture for future generations of the various ethnic groups in Ratanakiri. In addition, displaying the artefacts also teaches Khmer and foreign visitors about their culture and traditions. Although they liked the exhibition, they suggested to look for and purchase more antique materials, such as wine jars, skirts decorated with beads and metal, special kind of gongs, swords etc. Many of these objects were lost during the Pol Pot regime. The committee member responsible for the Centre agreed that these items were important but it would take some time to locate and buy them.

2.3.2 Administrating the objects

The exhibition does not only need more and new items. These items also need to be properly documented and monitored. At the moment there is only a system of labels hanging on or near the displayed objects. Nobody knows how many and what kind of objects originally were placed in the centre and which have gone missing. Through a simple cataloguing system with regular inventories this can be prevented in the future.

A simple form has been developed with the exhibition staff, on which the item, its number, the place of origin, ethnicity, location in the centre⁵ and comments. The forms are made on a type writer and can easily be reproduced. Two record systems will be kept, one arranged by number and one by alphabet. The last recording file makes it easier to establish how many khappa's, or skirts etc. the centre has.

Labels will be made in the same fashion as is done at the moment. The only addition will be that a number on each object will be written in an invisible place, in case labels get lost again. For objects that currently do not have a label only a description of the item and a number will suffice as it will be impossible in some cases to trace where the object came from.

With the help of labels and a catalogue, at least twice a year an inventory should be conducted to monitor if objects have gone missing, or need to be replaced because they are old or damaged. The two staff members responsible for the exhibition are trained in the new administration system and have started with its implementation.

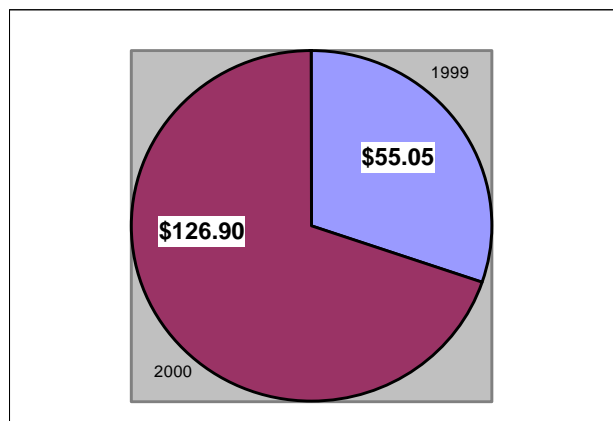
⁵ As the amount of exhibition items will probably grow over the years, not all objects can be displayed in the future. It is therefore possible that some items will have to be stored in a store room.

3 Handicrafts

3.1 Description of history and current situation

Handicrafts sales are part of the Yak Loum Lake income generation strategies, but are also important to promote and preserve Highlander culture and skills. Handicrafts on sale are currently skirts, blankets, shirts, back-baskets, and occasionally bow and arrows, bags and decorated gourds.

Profit of handicraft sales in 1999 and 2000



Over the last two years the centre made \$186.95 profit from handicraft sales. In 1999, only 8 months of sales were recorded (1 May 1999 until 31 December 1999). In 2000, the sales cover nine months, from January until September. Although both years were not complete, nor the periods equal in size, it can be concluded that profit is increasing. In eight months of 1999, the profit amounted to \$55.05, whereas in nine months of 2000 the total profit is \$126.90. This is more than double the amount of 1999 with only

one month difference.

A very small stock of handicrafts is kept. The system currently used is to replace one sold item with a new one. Although the money is there to purchase more, the supply is not that big and there is little space to keep a significant amount of goods.

Goods are mainly purchased from Yeak Loum. Some items come from Kachon village in Eikepiep commune and L'Eun Chong in O'Chum commune. Both are Tampuan villages. No handicrafts are currently sold from other ethnic groups.

3.1.1 Weavings

Production

For cloth, woven by women in Yak Loum commune villages, two production strategies have been tried so far. The first strategy was a weaving centre in the core zone. The women who were weaving were given cotton for free and got 30.000 riel a month as their salary.

They came in when they had time. The reason behind the establishment of the weaving centre was that tourists could also see how the cloth was made. The centre has not been in operation long. During the cutting of trees for making a chamkar on Lon customary lands, one man died because a tree fell on top of him. According to the village elders, the cause was the weaving centre and a taboo was put on weaving within the boundaries of the Core Zone.

After the Management Committee was re-elected, one woman was made responsible for both the management of the cultural centre and the handicraft sales. Together with the Yak Loum Lake assistant of IDRC/CARERE, she developed a new system to get women interested again in producing skirts, blankets etc. The strategy that was followed to get women to produce cloth for the centre works as follows: first the women are provided with cotton, at 12,000 riel a kilo. When the women finish the cloth, they are paid only for their labour and the money for

the cotton is deducted from the total cost price of 42,000 riel. The women only receive 30.000 riel. The second step is to provide the women with credit instead of material so they have to buy their own. This amount of 12.000 riel is also deducted from the total cost price. In the third stage the weavers are supposed to buy the material themselves without credit or material, and they get the full cost price. At the moment, all women buy the cotton themselves, with the exception of one. She borrows money from the centre, because she still does not have the money to buy the material herself. She has been told that this arrangement will end when she starts making money from her handicraft sales.

Presently only 5 women from three villages, Phnom, Lon and Lepoe produce cloth for the centre at a regular basis. The weavers work at home, in their spare time. They seldom are able to produce one piece of material per month because of their chores at home and in their chamkars.

According to the head of the handicrafts section the quality of the cloth is good. Whenever a weaver does not provide them with very good quality material, they pay only 70% of the usual price. For very well made material the centre adds another 20% to the standard price.

Constraints

The women from Chree and Sil and some other women in the other villages are not interested in weaving for the centre. They do not like the arrangement that in the end they would have to buy the material themselves. They prefer to get a monthly salary of 30.000 riel a month as they earned when weaving in the weaving centre. A few other women mentioned that the price they would get if they sell the cloth directly to tourists would be a lot higher. Furthermore, others said they could not weave because they were already engaged in other village development activities. Another reason for women not weaving was that they lacked the necessary equipment. They no longer have looms.

The cotton that the women use comes from the market and is not of very good quality. The threads are already dyed when they buy them. The reason they do not spin their own thread any more is that there are no cotton trees or seeds to be found in Yak Loum. They lost the seeds during the Pol Pot era. Natural dyes are also no longer used in Yeak Loum. The same happened as with the cotton, seeds got lost and the need for dyeing cotton was no longer there.

One of the village women mentioned that home made cotton and natural dyes do not automatically improve the quality of the cloth. It is very hard to spin regular thread. In addition, dyeing requires a lot of skills and knowledge. She pointed at a loincloth in the Centre which was hand dyed, but had lost its colour. She said not the right measures and procedures were taken to dye the cloth.

3.1.2 Handicrafts made by men

Very few men in Yak Loum commune provide the centre with handicrafts. Only two elderly men make khappas on a regular basis. It is not that nobody is willing to produce, it is the lack of natural resources necessary to make these items. Whereas women buy material at the market to substitute the home grown cotton and natural dyes, the men have no alternatives. In Yeak Loum commune no rattan or Pa'a bamboo can be found which are necessary to produce khappas and other baskets. The men who are producing khappas obtain their materials from far away, one collects it himself, and the other relies on his son living in Katieng to provide it to him. This lack of resources already causes a problem for the weaving skills to die out.

Older men stopped to make them, so younger men learn how khappas and other items are produced.

3.2 Recommendation for improvements

The Handicrafts section of the Yeak Loum lake committee wants to improve both the quality and quantity of handicrafts produced by men and women. Through consultation with the responsible persons within the committee and with producers from the villages some ideas and strategies have been identified.

3.2.1 Weaving

A first step in improving the women's handicrafts production was to conduct a meeting with village women who were already producing for the centre and women who did not for a variety of reasons (see section 3.1). This initial meeting was appreciated by all the women who attended. The women who already wove for the centre explained the others how they got involved and whether they liked the process. During this meeting the idea came up to conduct more meetings at a regular basis. These meetings could prevent future conflicts between the women and the Centre and be the start of a commune wide weaving group.

As the women are not able to produce more than one item a month at the most, the only way to increase the production at the moment is to get more women interested in weaving. This can be done through a variety of ways. The women mentioned that not having a loom was a major reason for them why they did not weave. A solution the women had for this problems was that the centre could buy looms⁶ and lend the interested women one. Whenever the women would want to stop weaving, the loom goes back to the centre. Another possibility is to give the women credit to buy the looms themselves. Within a set period the women have to return the money to the centre so that with that same amount another loom can be bought for other women.

Because most women who can weave are older, there is a big need to teach young women to weave for this traditional activity to be preserved for future generations. In the workshop the women decided to start teaching young women. It takes about one year to learn how to weave, that is if the women are interested. Another way to transfer knowledge is to set-up a commune weaving centre outside the Yak Loum Core Zone. The old centre was much appreciated by women who participated. They liked the opportunity of weaving and talking together. They also said that the weavers could share knowledge and skills by weaving collectively. Another advantage the women mentioned was that when weaving outside the house, the only thing that the women have to think of is weaving. They are not distracted by thoughts of making food, collecting firewood, gathering vegetables etc.

The quality of the cloth the women now weave they all thought to be less than what they used to weave traditionally. None of the women could do the traditional embroidery anymore⁷. Some women said that the cotton from the market produced better quality cloth than when it was home-made and dyed. This depended very much on the persons skills of spinning and dyeing. When skilled in spinning, using hand made threads improves the quality because the women themselves determine the thickness. In addition, home-made cotton thread is not as tough and difficult to handle as the cotton bought in the market.

⁶ A loom costs around 30.000 riel.

⁷ Traditional Tampuan embroidery appears to be linked to dreams and spirits. A woman suddenly knows what kind of pattern to embroider after a spirit has told her in a dream. One cannot learn the technique from another person.

One woman in the workshop already started to grow cotton again⁸, to preserve the seeds, and spinning and weaving skills in her own family. Other women of the group also wanted seeds and start planting cotton again. She was willing to distribute the seeds next season. The centre could play a role in arranging the distribution of the seeds because staff from all villages are working here. Furthermore, an effort need to be made to grow plants that produce natural dyes again in the chamkars. When cotton and natural dyes are available again the quality of the cloth may improve in another five to ten years. Additional training by skilled women who have a lot of knowledge about spinning and dyeing would, however, be necessary. These skills do not come naturally to everybody.

Generally the women agreed that hand made cotton dyed with natural dyes would have to be more expensive because of the time it takes to prepare. Quality seals or cards could be attached which identifies hand made cotton and dyed materials from the others, or whether it is antique or not. All handicraft should have seals that tell the customer where the product came from and that no middlemen were involved.

Currently cloth that is sold is limited to original items such as skirts, blankets and bags. Many visitors would not want to buy such big items because they do not have the money to spend or do not see the use of the original products. Differentiation of products is therefore required. In the meeting with village women the idea of producing smaller things such as wallets, small shoulder bags, tampuan style krama's etc. was introduced. Most of the women thought they would be able to make them. They agreed to try some products out on a limited scale to see whether these will sell.

3.2.2 Rattan and bamboo handicrafts

To achieve an increase in the production of men made handicrafts on a short term basis is difficult. Quite some effort needs to go in to arranging rattan and bamboo plantations. These are activities for which the support of the whole commune is necessary. The Natural Resources Management Committees of Phnom and Chree could be addressed to include the plantation of rattan, bamboo, but also cotton into the village land use plans. Chamkar Baing may be a good area to start planting rattan⁹.

The two elders of Lon and Lapeau were very appreciative of the idea to start planting these plants again. One of them actually planted Pa'a bamboo in the Core Zone seven years ago. None of the Committee members knew about it. He was using it as building and handicrafts. He showed the committee member responsible for handicrafts and the other elder where he had planted it and told them how he did it¹⁰. Both men agreed to tell the other villagers about the Committees plans of making plantations and to encourage villagers to plant rattan and bamboo in the Core Zone. Whenever villagers would plant something they are to inform the committee so they can help to look after the seedlings. More meetings with villagers of this kind are necessary to gain support for this idea. This will have as a positive side effect that relations with the villages will intensify.

⁸ Cotton takes only one season to produce flowers.

⁹ Apparently, there is already a plan to do so, with the technical assistance of the CBNRM team.

¹⁰ The bamboo he planted, he regards as belonging to him and his family. However, others can use it as well as long as they do not cut all of it.

Meanwhile, to solve the short term lack of handicrafts, other villages outside the commune could be approached to provide the centre with khappas, baskets and other goods that the villagers of Yak Loum cannot produce themselves.

4 Village Relations

The relation between the Yak Loum Lake Committee and the five Yak Loum villages is not very good. Although the committee members may have a good feeling of ownership of the lake project, the individual villages do not. The Commune authorities and the Commune Development Committees (CDC) and Village Development Committees (VDC) accuse the Committee regularly of unfair practices which shows a general feeling of distrust. This is likely due to a lack of knowledge about the objectives and actual activities happening in the Core Zone. In addition, the local authorities say no (financial) benefits flow back to the communities. This could be jealousy on the part of the authorities because they cannot get their hands on the income that is generated by the Yak Loum Lake activities. Furthermore, in the case of Lon village, the village chief does not see the advantage of conserving the area around the Lake when there is a shortage of land in the commune. He is one of the persons who has a chamkar in the Core Zone. Among the Committee members there is also great reluctance to involve the other villagers. The following incident is a good example:

To improve the exhibition displays, the consultant suggested it may be a good idea for each member to hold a meeting in their village and ask what the villagers would think important to show in the centre. The committee thought it was not a good idea to conduct such meetings. Another option was to conduct one big meeting at the Centre for village representatives. At first, this was agreed upon, but when the consultant asked two weeks later when this meeting was going to be held, the committee answered that the villagers were never going to come and that it was maybe better to conduct separate meetings in each village. Although the committee said to be concerned that the villagers would be too busy, there was also a feeling that they were trying not to let this meeting happen.

In the end, the meeting was delayed by a week, and only two village elders attended. Several reasons were mentioned. One is that the respective committee members did not invite enough people. If they would have invited ten villagers, the chances are higher that some of them would show up. Instead, they only asked one or two to come. Furthermore, the villagers are very busy in the chamkars with harvesting rice. Some of the people who were invited said that the meeting did not have any direct benefit for them, and they would not receive any per diem so they would not come.

In the short consultancy period there was no time to actually work on solutions for this complicated problem and the it was not in the Terms of Reference as set by the Committee. However, through the activities that were initiated do provide some opportunities that may help to improve the relations. Most opportunities to increase and improve relations with the villages are related to the production of handicrafts. Most of these activities are already described in detail in the section on handicrafts, so they will only be dealt with here in relation to improving village involvement in the Yak Loum Lake Project.

4.1 Practical suggestions to improve relations with the villages

Reforestation of an area in Yak Loum with bamboo and rattan necessary for the production of baskets and other handicrafts, can only be done if all villages agree and participate. If a commune reforestation project is not feasible, it could maybe be conceived at village level only. Reforestation benefits all villagers equally. All will have the opportunity to collect the

resources later for their own use. In addition it will serve the purposes of the lake in that more handicrafts can be made for sale at the centre.

If the Yak Loum Centre could serve as a distribution point of cotton seeds to women who are interested in starting to spin their own cotton again, this service could also be extended to other kinds of seeds or seedlings that have become rare in this area. This activity also has a clear benefit to all parties involved, in addition to the preservation of traditional crops.

Village women very much wanted to have a Commune Weaving Centre again. Because this can no longer be in the near vicinity of the lake, such a centre could be a good opportunity to start as a separate women's income generating activity but with clear relations to the lake¹¹. The initial investments could be shared by the Centre and the Commune through the Commune Development Fund. This would make it necessary for all parties involved to co-operate and share ideas with each other. The women involved will gain some additional income and have a chance to meet others. In addition, the Lake will be assured of a regular supply of weavings. Such a centre would also be an excellent meeting place for the Women's Handicraft meetings that are planned to be held every three to four months.

As many villagers complain that they never see any benefit from the Yeak Loum Lake project, more effort needs to be made by the committee to make sure that if items need to be purchased for the Centre, these are bought from individuals in the villages. The committee members should be careful not to favour their relatives or themselves, because this will make the problems worse. An immediate opportunity arose during this consultancy period to buy looms. A member of the Lake Committee quickly offered to make all the looms necessary, but the others thought it was better to buy some looms in every village, so that the benefits were shared equally.

4.2 Chamkar Baing

Chamkar Baing is a hard wood plantation, established by the Forestry Office of the Agriculture Department. Ownership of the plantation is vague until the Forestry Office was told to replant the area. In 1999 the plantation was handed over to Yeak Laom commune and the Yeak Loam Lake Committee for a period of 25 years on the condition that the villagers would maintain it properly. The maintenance of the plantation as well as the responsibility for maintaining it are a cause of problems and confusion. The cause of the confusion can be traced back to a hurried facilitation process around signing the contract. In addition, the Forestry Office only wanted to hand over the plantation on their conditions which led to a contract full of contradictions and terms which the villagers did not really agree to. The reason they signed the contract anyway was because the CBNRM team promised to offer assistance by means of food for work. Since the signing of the contract the Yeak Loam Lake Committee has been waiting for the CBNRM team to sort out when the rice is going to be distributed and the CBNRM team probably waited for the Committee to come and ask for rice. So far, the grass at the plantation has not been cut since the hand-over.

An additional problem is that the Committee did not have a copy of the contract until very recently (7/11/00). They had no clear idea what was in the contract and at the time of signing the contract they had not read it either. Furthermore, in the contract it is stated several times

¹¹ This was earlier suggested by Tonie Nooyens in his consultancy notes on Yak Loum in 1999 (see Nooyens 1999).

that the plantation is handed over to the Committee, but the Commune also signed the document. It is still unclear what the responsibilities of Commune are.

Chamkar Baing does have the potential of being beneficial to all people in the commune, and not only to the Committee, instead of only being a burden. It is advised that a meeting with the Commune, the Committee and several village elders is conducted. These discussions should be facilitated by CBNRM and the Yak Loum Assistant. The content of the contract needs to be discussed again and then it needs to be decided whether the Committee and the commune still want to manage the plantation. If not, it should be handed over to the Forestry Office again. When they decide they do want to manage it themselves, clear maintenance and development plans need to be made with clear responsibilities and conditions for all parties involved.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the Yak Loum Lake Management Committee still has a long way to go, enormous improvements have been made over the last two years. There is a great sense of ownership of all Yeak Loum Lake activities, including the exhibition and the handicraft production and sales among the Committee members. The activities undertaken during this consultancy were identified as needs by the Committee. The adjustments and recommendations were not made for them but by and with the Committee. None of the recommended activities were implemented by the consultant, but by the responsible committee members. The consequence of this working method is that very little actual activities have happened during the three weeks of work with the committee. What did happen was a lot of discussion, brainstorming and practical on the job training on documentation of the exhibition objects and preparing displays.

The work that has been started during this period obviously needs follow-up since none of it is finished and some of it has not been started yet. Therefore, it is suggested that for some specific subjects extra technical assistance is sought.

First of all there is a need for practical training in how to present the exhibition objects. A training like that should focus on how to explain a subject with objects, pictures, text and other materials. It is not useful or sustainable to hire a consultant who would rearrange the whole museum. The training would have to have a 'learning by doing' character. Special attention should be given to writing short explanations / stories on subjects such as the Highland Agriculture system, Beliefs and Spirits, the Role of women in the village etc. These stories could complement the objects and photographs already present in the centre.

The centre also needs to focus more on the education part of their displays and exhibition. In some of the older reports on the Yeak Loum project ¹² mention is made of the objective of environmental and cultural education of the centre. The only visible parts now are the 3-D map and a big painting on the use of the forest which is not even placed in the exhibition room ¹³. Apart from the displays of handicrafts, and some brochures on the wall, no cultural education activities are present. In a discussion with the NFE Advisor and NPPP it was suggested to develop stories as mentioned above, or information sheets as part of an NFE class. This could also be a entry point of strengthen the relations between the village and the Committee/Centre. NFE classes from the surrounding villages could visit the Centre and then decide on a topic which they would want to write about. These stories could later be put on a larger piece of paper, and become part of a thematic display. Translation in English should also be arranged. This should be an activity performed by the Committee, if necessary and possible with people from the surrounding villages. Furthermore, the idea of creating a special display for each season could be introduced so that at different times of the year, new things can be seen in the Centre. It might make the exhibition become more attractive to locals who have seen the museum many times already.

Handicraft production does not need much attention if the scope would remain as it now is. The women who are in charge have the capacity of arranging the supply and demand side, in

¹² See Bottomley 1997 and Taylor-Hunt 1997.

¹³ An explanation as to why this picture was not placed in the exhibition room was that the picture was of an educational character and only necessary for trainings. Furthermore it was too big and fragile to be placed in the exhibition room. The responsible staff members are not aware of the reason why it was made and why it should be displayed.

addition to making financial reports. If in the future the Handicrafts section would become a bigger sales outlet, with links to organisations in Phnom Penh, then there is a need for extra support. This would entail technical training for the current Yak Loum staff on advertising and marketing of the handicrafts. Furthermore, training would be necessary for women in making other products out of the cloth they weave. In discussion with women from the Yak Loum Centre and the villages it became clear that they do have basic sewing skills but do not know how to cut cloth into other items. If the demand increases to the level that they cannot deliver the products fast enough, women may also need to learn how to sew on sewing machines.

The traditional weaving technique and instruments make it a slow and tiresome task. Although the setting up of the loom can be done in a day, the actual weaving takes longer on a traditional loom than on a Khmer style loom. The Provincial Department of Women's and Veterans Affairs (PDWVA) initiated a small scale weaving project and also provided training to some of the women in Yak Loum. It may be an idea to contact the PDWVA to enquire whether more women could join the weaving training. At a later stage, when the handicrafts sales would increase, the centre could provide credit in cash or in kind to some of them so that they are able to purchase a Khmer style loom.

Working for a short period with the committee quite a few issues arose that highlighted the importance of taking into account Tampuan culture and beliefs. Although the Committee and the Centre seem to work as any organisation,, their traditions and beliefs are important and incorporated in every day reality. Any person who directly works with local communities should realise this. For example, it might have been a very good idea to ask a few women to come and demonstrate weaving in the centre on special occasions such as Khmer New Year. However, this is out of the question, because of the taboo imposed on weaving in the Core Zone. Also, their traditional decision-making structure should be taken into account. An important observation regarding decision making within the committee and in issues that involves dealings with the villages is that this takes place following the traditional Tampuan pattern. It is not the manager of the committee who decides on his own about matters relating to the project. Important decisions are taken through agreement with the whole Yeak Loum Lake Team. It was also observed that some people have more ideas than others, and therefore it seems if they decide on everything. That is not the case. If the committee as a whole does not agree, things will not happen. When there are issues that relate to the individual villages or the commune, the Committee has to call them for a meeting as well. These meetings will follow the same kind of decision making pattern. This decision making pattern is important to acknowledge when working with the Yeak Loum Lake Management Committee. When calling a representative from the committee to a meeting or working only with one or two persons, it must be understood that these people are not in the position to make a decision on their own. They will have to call a meeting with the rest of the members, before any issue can be decided upon.

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Annex I: Summary of improvements and recommendations

Improvements/activities Implemented	Further Recommendations	Comments
<i>Exhibition centre</i>		
▪ Bigger more attractive sign board in place	▪ Relocate sign board	
▪ Tampuan Kitchen set up	▪ Put up sign board near the entrance	
▪ Music instruments acquired	▪ Let guards hand out brochures of the lake and direct new visitors to the centre	▪ This is said to be happening already, but it would need reinforcement
▪ Brief questionnaires was conducted among visitors to ask their opinion on improving the exhibition	▪ Jewellery, agriculture tools, drums etc. needs to be acquired	▪ Jewellery needs a special cupboard from glass with a lock to prevent the items from being stolen
▪ Workplan was made	▪ Rice varieties should be included in the collection again	
▪ Village representatives contributed their ideas for improvement during a meeting at the centre	▪ Items should be catalogued	
	▪ New labels should be made	
	▪ Once the catalogue is finished every six months an inventory needs to be conducted	
	▪ After every inventory, new labels need to be made when some have gone missing	▪ The purpose of cataloguing and inventories are that the Centre can keep track of their possessions. After each inventory it is known which items should be replaced because these are too old, are broken or have gone missing
<i>Handicrafts</i>		
▪ Meeting with village women to discuss difficulties and options for quantity and	▪ Follow-up meetings will be conducted every three to four months	

quality increase		
▪ Village women will discuss handicrafts production and preservation in their own village	▪ Looms are distributed to women who did not have looms	
▪ Workplan was made	▪ Smaller items will be produced as a trial	
▪ The idea of rattan and bamboo plantations were discussed with some village elders	▪ Rattan and bamboo plantations need to be started in Yak Loum in co-operation with NRM committees	▪ This activity needs follow-up and discussion with CBNRM team/IDRC research team
	▪ Cotton and natural dyes plantation needs to be started in location of old weaving centre	▪ This activity needs follow-up and discussion with CBNRM team/IDRC research team
	▪ Cotton seeds will be distributed to interested women through the Yak Loum Committee	▪ This activity needs follow-up and discussion with CBNRM team/IDRC research team
	▪ Seeds for plants necessary for making natural dyes need to be gathered and distributed to interested women	▪ This activity needs follow-up and discussion with CBNRM team/IDRC research team
	▪ Quality and originality seals should be developed for all handicrafts	
	▪ Discussions with commune and CDC needs to be held on establishing a weaving centre	
<i>Relation with villages</i>		
▪ Meetings with women and village elders conducted	▪ Distribution of cotton and other kinds of seeds through centre to all YL villages	
▪ Looms produced in different villages	▪ Distribution of cotton and other kinds of seeds through centre to all YL villages	
▪ Items for exhibition procured in different villages	▪ Plantation of rattan and bamboo could be collective effort of commune and committee	
	▪ Commune weaving centre could be established as a collective activity of commune and committee	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular women's handicraft meetings are planned to be conducted 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular meetings with commune and village representatives could be scheduled to discuss problems and progress 	

Annex II: Work plan for Handicraft and Exhibition Sections

Activities	11/00	12/00	1/01	2/01	3/01	4/01	5/01	6/01	7/01	8/01	9/01	10/01
1. Relocate sign board												
2. Meeting with village elders												
3. Guards hand out brochures of the lake and direct new visitors to the centre												
4. Kitchen finished												
5. Music instruments finished												
6. Iron melting / smith instrument finished												
7. Rice exhibition made												
8. Jewellery exhibition organised												
9. Drum made												
10. Make catalogue												
11. Conduct inventory												
12. Make new labels if necessary												
13. Guest book prepared												
14. Looms made and distributed												
15. Produce small handicrafts												

Annex III: Events initiated during consultancy period

- 15/10/2000 Initial brainstorming meeting with whole committee on improvements**
Decisions made:
- Start building Tampuan kitchen
 - Schedule a meeting with village representatives to discuss improvements for exhibition
 - Make short questionnaire for visitors of centre
- 17/10/2000 Discussed set up of handicrafts production with Ol**
Decisions made:
- Conducting a meeting with village women on 30/10/2000
- 18/10/2000 Developed small questionnaire with Nyem and Pleut**
Decisions made:
- Nyem and Pleut make Khmer and English language questionnaire by hand
- 21/10/2000 Questionnaire ready**
- 25/10/2000 Discussed schedule programme of meeting with Ol**
- 26/10/2000 Training on cataloguing and administration of exhibition items for Nyem and Pleut**
Decisions made:
- Nyem and Pleut make form and start cataloguing items
- 30/10/2000 Forms for cataloguing produced by Nyem and Pleut**
- 30/10/2000 Conducted a half day workshop on production and quality increase of weavings**
Decisions made:
- Village women discuss outcome of workshop in their own village during informal meetings, with special emphasis on training of young women/preserving weaving skills
 - Conduct three or four monthly meetings with same women on handicrafts production
 - Try out smaller handicraft items such as krama's, bags, wallets in small quantities to see whether tourists would buy them.
- 30/10/2000 Kitchen started being set-up in centre**
- 31/10/2000 Progress meeting with whole committee**
Decisions made:
- Meeting with Village representatives on 8/11/2000
 - Kitchen ready before 9/11/2000
 - Looms will be lent to women who want to weave
- 7/11/2000 Meeting to discuss programme with Nyem and Pleut**
- 8/11/2000 Meeting with villagers (did not happen)**

8/11/2000 Work plans made with the handicraft and exhibition sections

Decisions made:

- See work plan

14/11/2000 Meeting with villagers

Decisions made:

- Bamboo and rattan will be planted by the villagers at their own initiative
- When bamboo and rattan are planted in the Core Zone the villagers will notify the Committee
- The village elders would discuss the bamboo, rattan and cotton plantations in their own villages