IMPLICATION OF THE CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPMENT

DISCOURSE MANIFESTED IN THE INTERACTION OF CAMBODIAN AND

"WESTERN" DISCOURSE ON DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

A Thesis

by

ZEBA IMAM

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2005

Major Subject: Speech Communication

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Chair of Committee,   Antonio La Pastina
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ABSTRACT

Implication of the Cultural Influence on Development Discourse Manifested in the

Interaction of Cambodian and "Western" Discourse on Development Issues.

(August 2005)

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Cambodia has a strong presence of international donor agencies and expatriate development practitioners. The role of international donors in making government increasingly gender responsive is believed to be immense. This thesis contends that most expatriate and Cambodian development practitioners have different perceptions on the issue due to cultural influences. Due to these differences sometimes there emerge incongruence in the approach (that is often determined by international players) and the beliefs of most national practitioners who are responsible to implement these approaches. The problem of domestic violence is used as a case in point to demonstrate this incongruence.

The thesis argues that the differences in views do not get discussed and thereafter resolved because the communication processes being followed are not open and dialogical in nature. It suggests that there are two primary reasons that come in the way of dialogic communication. One is related to the hierarchically different positions that expatriates and Cambodian practitioners occupy in the context of development work.

The other is related to the difference in the perceptions of the practitioners depending on their degree of connectedness with the cultural setting.

The thesis concludes that there is a need for introspection by the development practitioners for the reasons that may lie within them and their organizations for this communication gap. This is essential for initiating communication processes that are open so that the development practitioners may begin to arrive at common understanding as well as trusting relationships. The study is conducted following the tenets of the "naturalistic inquiry" as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are a lot of strange views you will hear if you are working on domestic violence. In the ministry of women affairs itself, a minister while discussing marital rape suggested that to solve the problem of domestic violence, wife should tell a husband to go to a Karaoke bar. You can quote this in your study. [I9EF4/5-p1][1]

The statement was made by an expatriate development practitioner working in Cambodia who was justifiably dismayed that people responsible to ensure women rights in the country treat the issue of marital rape as trivial. The comment of the minister quoted by her is a manifestation of a Cambodian proverb that implies "men are sexually insatiable" (Ledgerwood, 1990, p. 111). During the course of my research I came across ample instances that suggest a divergence of views among the expatriate and national practitioners working on gender issues. While the instances mentioned above exemplify the more blatant conflict in the views, it was evident that the way practitioners analyzed issues and interpreted approaches to address those issues differed, in different degrees, depending on their proximity or distance from the cultural context of Cambodia.

By associating as a volunteer with an organization working against domestic violence in Cambodia during the summer of 2004 I got interested in studying the cultural influences on the discourse on gender equality and chose to work on it for this thesis.

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This thesis follows the style of *Human Communication Research.*

The thesis contends that most expatriate and Cambodian development practitioners have different perceptions on the issue due to the cultural influences. Culturally women appear to occupy a position lower to men in the hierarchical structure that marks Cambodian society. Cambodian development workers particularly those working on gender issues are questioning these values but traditions are held dear in Cambodia and it is not easy for Cambodian development workers to break from them completely. Therefore, in discussing women rights they often expressed a need to balance the developmental concepts with the traditional norms. The views of expatriate practitioners, particularly those from the North where gender equity is not an alien concept may on the other hand reflect the understanding of feminist theories. The research, however, suggests that communication practices being followed due to various reasons do not bring these conflicts to surface in the interaction between them. This impedes the process of resolving the incongruence between the approach (that is often influenced by the expatriates due to their position as consultants or advisors) and the beliefs of local practitioners (who are responsible to implement that approach).

The enormous presence of expatriate development practitioners in Cambodia and the distinctive cultural and historical aspects of the country make the study of communication issues between expatriate and local development collaborators imperative. The following section gives a background of Cambodia followed by a short account of the efforts being made to address gender issues in the country.

Cambodia – A Brief Background

Cambodia is a relatively small country comprising of a surface area stretching up to 181,000 sq. km (SIDA, 2001) and a population of 13.1 million as estimated for 2001 (UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP & DFID/UK, 2004). 36% of the population lives in poverty and a huge majority, about 90%, of the poor live in rural areas. War ravaged Cambodia, from 1969 to 1974, when it became a battlefield for the fighting between America and Vietnam. In 1975, when Cambodia was taken over by the Khmer Rouge forces – a revolutionary party, supported by China – deposing the existing Lon Nol's regime, extreme economic and social measures were implemented.

Estimates put the number of civilian lives lost due to the war and subsequent genocidal events during the Khmer Rouge regime at 250,000 (Ray, 2003; Burchett 1981). One of the effects of that violence was that today war widows and other women headed households comprise one third of the total Cambodian households (UNIFEM et al., 2004). Political upheavals continued in Cambodia after the overthrow of Khmer Rouge in 1979. Different political factions backed by external powers continued their struggle for power. The situation stabilized somewhat after the first democratic elections held under the supervision of United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC). Though the subsequent events of power struggle belied UN's claim of providing a lasting solution to Cambodia's problems, it did mark a beginning of the country's move towards "development". Among other things, one of the upshots was that international development assistance began flowing in to Cambodia.

The projects funded by international agencies range from dealing with socio-economic issues to infrastructure development to strengthening the democratic apparatus. The aid coming in Cambodia from various international donors amounted to $408.7 million in 2001. As a proportion of the country's GDP this sum amounted to a whopping 12 percent. It is only to be expected then that the influence these organizations wield in terms of deciding the development issues and processes is considerable.

The influence that donor agencies hold over the government is reflected in the following comments too. Piseth is a male Cambodian practitioner who works for an international organization engaged in addressing the problems of women in difficult circumstance. He is of the opinion that Non Government Organizations (NGOs) alone cannot alleviate the situation of women and said:

> International organizations need to exert pressure to make the government more responsive. They should be strict and set goals for the government and before giving them the budget they should really check. If the government is not following their rules then they should not give funds. [I3CM2/21-p4]

Louise is an expatriate development practitioner and has done extensive research on development issues in Cambodia. Currently working as an adviser to a program in the Ministry of Women Affairs, she said:

> Coming from both within and without, I can say that Cambodia is an unusual place in the sense that there are an unusual number of expatriates and they can have tremendous influence. Donors however, do not use this influence to advance social justice issues. [I9EF4/5-p9]

Though, laments that donor agencies are not using their influence enough, both the above comments reflect that Cambodian and expatriate practitioners alike recognize the influence that international donors and expatriate workers wield on the government in Cambodia. Following is a brief account of development efforts underway in Cambodia.

Development Efforts with Focus on Gender Issues

On the gender related development index, Cambodia is ranked 105 out of 144 countries, suggesting that gender inequality in Cambodia is considerably high by both regional and global standards. Gender issues are being given increasing attention by the donor community as well as local NGOs in Cambodia. At present there are 24 national and 31 international NGOs with specific focus on women and gender issues (UNIFEM et al., 2004). In addition to the work being done by NGOs, steps have been taken by government as well to address the issue. The elevation of department of Women Affairs to a Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) in 1998 is a pointer towards that. The gender assessment report for 2004 also points towards some areas of progress. It, however, states that the gaps are significant. The report concludes that "in the face of competing demands, gender is often given a low priority" (UNIFEM et al., 2004). Therefore, gender mainstreaming in all government policies and programs and the passage of domestic violence law are some of the focus areas on which national and international NGOs are pushing the government as well as undertaking projects to address.

The role of international donors in making government increasingly gender responsive is believed to be immense. In the context of government setting a low priority on gender issues "[g]ender mainstreaming tends to be donor driven," the report suggests (UNIFEM et al., 2004). Another report mentions "[g]ender equity was included as a key segment of the Governance Action Plan in 2001 because of international donor requirement" (McGrew, Frieson & Chan, 2004).

The gender assessment report analyzes that the baby boom of 1980s in Cambodia has produced a swell in the population and most people are now in the age group that will start to look for jobs. Besides, the other demands that this will put on the economic and social fabric of Cambodia the competition for jobs and other services will increase. In that scenario, unless specific steps are taken, women will be further marginalized. The report identifies a need to implement steps that ensure equal participation of women in social and economic development of the country. Besides recommending and supporting good governance and economic development to ensure opportunities for both men and women, there is a tremendous push for gender mainstreaming.

Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women defines gender mainstreaming as:

A globally accepted strategy that involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities – policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programs and projects. (OSAGI, 2001)

In this regard some of the key recommendations (including the ongoing activities) that the gender experts make for the donor community are concerned with promoting good governance in a gender responsive way. Thus, there is a recommendation to strengthen establishment of "gender budgeting" to develop the national budget that is responsive to the needs of women and men. Some recommendations are concerned with increasing women's participation in governance. These include creation of gender focal points[2] in key ministries to ensure their coordination with the MoWA. The other recommendations are geared towards fostering culture of equality and include strengthening legal reforms to combat gender- based violence (McGrew et al., 2004).

The efforts to increase women's participation in governance go right down to the level of Communes – the lowest level of governance.[3] Strengthening governance at the Commune level is a multi-donor project wherein the budget for commune expenditure largely comes from international donors [I5EF3/31-p1].

Another area of focus for both international and national organizations and practitioners working for gender equality is the passage of domestic violence law which is in the pipeline for about 10 years now (Alexander & Macleod, 2002). The proposed draft law has been debated by the Council of Ministers but due to unacceptability of certain articles by the majority of the Ministers it stays at the draft stage and is going to be tabled again soon. Regarding the draft Louise informed:

During the Consultative Group Meeting on Dec. 6th in 2004, passage of DV [domestic violence] law was accepted as a bench mark for 2005 between the

donors and the Government. The Prime Minister in a public speech on Women's day said he supports the law and hoped it will be passed this year. [I9EF4/5-p1]

In this context where both national and international organizations and activists are engaged in promoting gender equality the International donors (largely "western") bring with them the discourse on gender issues that is influenced by their cultural values. For instance O'Leary & Nee (2001) state "'[w]omen in development' and more recently 'gender and development' are considerations and priorities stemming from 'foreign feminist theories and result mainly from requirements and questions from donors and support organizations" (p. 19). The cultural values of the Cambodian society, on the other hand, influence the discourse that the Cambodian development practitioners use to communicate and understand their own social and political issues as well as the "western" discourse. According to a study, for example, one of the reasons given by several Cambodian development practitioners for having difficulty in accepting the notion of gender equality is that "[i]t is perceived as opposing 'culture' and 'trying to turn Khmer women into European women and creating conflict'" (O'Leary & Nee, 2001, p.101).

This thesis studies the interaction of the two discourses. It is essentially an exercise in understanding the differences on the analysis of developmental issues-particularly gender related-and preferred solutions as reflected in the two discourses. It also attempts to understand the ways in which development practitioners, both national and expatriate evaluate these differences in the discourse. The study focuses on the issue

of violence against women – a problem existing in considerable proportions in Cambodia (Watmough, 1999) – to understand these differences.

The role that communication plays in development has been examined by many scholars both in the field of communication (Casmir, 1991; Dissanayake, 1991; Melkote, 2000; Steeves, 2000; Singhal & Rogers, 2001; Wallack & Dorfman, 2001; Wilkins, 2000) and development (Agunga, 1997; Ebrahim, 2001; Escobar, 1995; Jamieson, 1991; Schrijvers, 1993; Servaes, 1995). The following section reviews the scholarship on development communication that is relevant to understand the interaction of development discourse emerging from different cultures.

Literature Review

Wilkins (2000) explains that the term development discourse though historically referred to "project interventions in an international setting, [that are] funded through wealthy agencies [and] implemented in nation-states with comparatively fewer financial resources" (p. 197) now has an expanded use and applies to any community engaged in strategic social change efforts.

Neither the "communication systems" nor the development projects that these systems support are value free. However these values are so embedded in the projects as well as the communication that they often go unrecognized and therefore the biases in the form of preconceived notions and/or forgone conclusions within the communication system persist, uncorrected (Jamieson, 1991). It is important to uncover and understand the values that the various discourses bring with them because as Hall (1976) says there

is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means "how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved…" (p. 14) are determined by their cultural beliefs. A research study on the relationship of culture and development practice in Cambodia demonstrated how culture permeates all aspects of the development practitioner's life (O'Leary & Nee, 2001).

Commenting on the capacity building efforts of Cambodian development practitioners over a period of almost 15 years O'Leary et al., say "it now appears that the internalization of the values underlying the training (which are usually not made explicit) has been limited, and that capacity building efforts have not impinged deeply on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of development practitioners" (p. 1). Perhaps, this is because, international donors still end up using the communication models that depict "active senders providing passive receivers with valuable information to achieve social change" (Huesca, 2001, p. 425). Angelina, an expatriate practitioner, I interviewed for the study, made precisely the same point when she said that communication is really a dialogue, an interaction for changing things and that is not happening. According to her the expatriate development professionals are on this side and are not really interested to going over the other while the Cambodian development practitioners perceive themselves as inferior as learners as compared to those who are giving knowledge to them [I4EF3/30-p7].

According to Huesca (2001), critics argue that "such static, linear, and transmission models violated the dynamic, interactive and meaning-centered nature of

communication." He terms them as "non-communication models of communication of development" (p. 425). Emphasizing the need for adopting "dialogic methods" of communication as against transmission model he says that this approach generates a "'cultural synthesis' between development collaborators to arrive at mutually identified problems, needs, and guidelines for action" (p. 426).

Underscoring the role of culture in influencing the development discourse, Steeves (2000) explains that the process of development and communication are inseparable from the cultural context from which they emerge. Barriers arising due to culturally grounded communication abound, and are inevitable in situations where groups or individuals coming from significantly different cultural backgrounds. The cross-cultural interaction often has profound results. The benefits according to Steeves, "of expatriates and nationals working together include the exchange of ideas and exposure to different management styles" (p. 105). On the other hand, he says, this interaction "can also have unintended negative effects" (p. 110). This becomes evident when we realize that "most projects implicitly or explicitly attempt to modify the values of their intended beneficiaries, particularly their attitude towards change and their roles in inducing change" (Steeves, 2000, p. 40, 41).

Pointing out the mixed effects of the development efforts that take place due to the influence of international donors, Wilkins (2000) says, that they often help to bring issues, which may otherwise have not got any attention, to the forefront. At the same time, she believes, the agendas and means to attain those agendas of the international agencies may not be entirely congruent to the given situation, social norms and needs of

a society. In such a scenario these efforts have an effect at a superfluous level and may even lead to negative consequences on occasions.   A report on advocacy efforts in Cambodia, for example, states that the strategy of relying on international agencies to pressure government does not guarantee genuine long-term changes (Mansfield & MacLeod, 2002). Elaborating this issue further, the report explains:

> Some donors use funding conditionality to achieve their advocacy goals, for example, when the U.S. Embassy insists that the Royal Government address the alleged arbitrary dismissal of union leaders …. Although this type of advocacy is important and may affect some immediate changes in behavior, these changes are unlikely to be sustainable and …fail to increase advocacy skills within civil society. (p. 19)

What is said here specifically for advocacy efforts is true for other development areas as well.

 Tisch & Wallace (1994), say "[d]onors and policymakers often have different perspectives than project implementers, whose views in turn differ from those of the poor villagers who are the intended project beneficiaries" (p. 9). They explain that in this sense whoever has the responsibility for defining the issues for development and strategies to be used also gets the power to affect the process and outcome of development activities.

The relationship between the development discourse that prevails in a situation and the power it offers to the proponents of that discourse is dealt with in some detail by Casmir (1991). According to him the question "If human change is to be brought about,

by whom will or should it be done?" (p. 24) is often a bone for contention between various players. It becomes especially problematic if an idea for change does not originate within a given culture, "but comes from someone who may be seen as alien or representing outside interests" (p. 24). Assigning roles to expatriates and national development workers thus become more than an issue of administrative efficiency; it becomes a question concerned with "control and ownership of the development process and its products" (Tisch & Wallace, 1994, p. 11). Tisch & Wallace go on to add that recipients may have little choice but to accept development aid on donors' conditions as the aid is often presented on a "take it-or-leave-it basis" (p. 53). Schrijvers (1993) goes as far as to define this nature of development aid as "top-down-violence legitimized by international agencies and governments in the North and South responsible for the implementation of mainstream development policy" (p. 28). She contends that the form of measurement and adjustment criteria, forced population control, enforced implementation of large scale projects are some of the forms this "violence" takes.

According to Escobar, (1995) international organizations have constructed the vocabulary of development for political purposes. This constructed vocabulary put forward particular realities, and then created policies to address those "realities". The complete failure to understand peasants, women, and the environment often led to misguided policies that objectified powerless local populations and did little to empower them. Dissanayake (1991) believes that due to the centralized nature of development, the "cumulative wisdom" of the people professed to be the beneficiaries of the efforts, their perception of the problem, their solutions and their cultural ethos does not get included

in the discourse on development. In an effort to remedy this deficiency, he says, the aspect of participation of the beneficiaries is getting increasing attention. The current view in the field of development is that we can no longer assume that there is one "right" answer to a problem and then concentrate on persuading people to accept it (Jamieson, 1991).

Participatory decision making, says Melkote (2000) was understood to be a process that required knowledge sharing between the "experts" and the "beneficiaries" but the strategy could never be realized by the development agencies partly due to the unwillingness of experts to give up control over the process and partly due to the inability of development support workers to appreciate and operationalize true participatory communication approaches at the grassroots" (p. 41). Thus though the participatory communication is advocated by most agencies but the design and the development agenda stays with the "experts". Discussing specifically the aspect of foreign development influences in Cambodia, O'leary & Nee (2001) comment on the change in the priorities of donors and the expectation of a similar change in the partners' priorities:

> The donors' analysis leads to the view that it is the structural causes of poverty which must be tackled whereas for partners this may conflict with the cultural belief that order need to be maintained. … The danger is of the partner doing what they know is required of them but not being fully convinced or understanding why it should be so. (p. 90)

A completely contradictory aspect of this cross-cultural situation arising due to the interaction of donors and people from the host country is what Tisch & Wallace (1994) describe as "the new age tendency to elevate or romanticize indigenous traditions" (p. 14). Casmir (1991) echoes this when he argues that while indigenous culture should be taken into account in deciding development agenda "we should not overlook the other side of the issue, namely that in many instances maintenance of cultural values can be used as a ploy by individuals who would lose both power and authority if change became acceptable within a given system" (p. 24).

The cultural dissimilarity thus makes anticipating and articulating host country needs a continual problem for both donor agency staff and recipient country officials (Tisch &Wallace, 1994). This forms the basis of the thesis statement which argues that the expatriate and national development workers have often differing views in regard to development projects. These differences need to be brought to surface so that the expatriate and national development collaborators can have a genuine debate regarding the differences. The communication practice being followed for various reasons, however, obstructs such open communication.

Approach

The study is conducted following the tenets of the "naturalistic inquiry" as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Naturalistic Inquiry is a qualitative method that stresses the importance of human instrument and emphasizes the emergent nature of research. Among the various sources for collecting data that the naturalistic inquiry

offers, three sources were employed: (1) Unstructured interviews, (2) observation, and (3) analysis of written material that includes some of the reports and studies done on development issues in Cambodia.

The informants for the unstructured interviews were selected from among the development practitioners who are currently working on either the issue of domestic violence or other issues related to women and development in Cambodia. "Snowball sampling" method was used and 16 development practitioners were interviewed of which 8 were expatriate and 8 were Cambodian. The number of interviews conducted was primarily determined by the time frame but the interviews also seemed to be reaching redundancy with respect to information thus approximating the "qualitative informational isomorph" method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I took notes for all 16 interviews but 9 out of these were audio-taped as well. The remaining 7 were not audio-taped because either the respondent requested so or because of the unavailability of the recorder at the time of the interview. Each interview lasted between 1-2 hours. The names of all the respondents have been changed in order to encourage authenticity and reflexivity from the respondents based on their anonymity. The protocol for the interviews is included as appendix A and B.

The observation method included associating with a local NGO, working against domestic violence, for a period of two months. I will identify the NGO by the name of "Say No to Violence against Women" (SNVW) throughout the length of this paper. I attended several capacity building and field activities during the period of my association with the NGO. The purpose was to understand the discourse used to define and discuss

the issue in the events of workshops and meetings, the source of this discourse, and the congruence or incongruence between the activities at the field level and the said discourse. The content or the communication taking place in those settings was always translated for me by one of my Cambodian colleagues present there. I also observed the interaction between the international and Cambodian development practitioners whenever possible. This was usually limited to such encounters in the organization I was associated with and a couple of workshops I attended. The observations from all these sources were recorded in a computerized reflexive journal.

The analysis of documents and reports included the external (mostly conducted by expatriates) and internal evaluation reports of the programs conducted by SNVW. Besides that, reports and studies published by individuals, national and international development organizations that were relevant for my research, were also studied.

I used the technique of "formal content analysis" to interpret the data gathered through interviews. This required all data to be unitized; that is, units of information that could stand alone in the context of the study were separated from the data and coded. These units were then categorized according to the content to discover themes emerging from the research. The data analysis began with the first interview, to assist the emergent design and the emergent structure of later data collection phases. This meant adding question to or taking questions off the interview protocol according to the insights gained through the analysis. Any change in the protocol was, however, kept within the focus of the research.

To build the "trustworthiness" of the research, primarily three steps were used: (1) Triangulation of data by comparing it from different sources in cases of factual information (not opinions). Besides that I paid attention to non verbal and paralinguistic cues[4] that the respondent gave out in addition to the verbal response to accurately assess their responses. Also, I searched for consistencies and inconsistencies in their responses to different questions. (2) I ran member checks during and at the end of each interview by saying back to them what I thought they meant and thus confirmed or corrected my understanding of their views. (3) Through prolonged engagement with SNVW, I could study the activities being undertaken to address the problem of domestic violence.

Key Questions

The key questions explored during the research are:

1. How do the "insiders" and "outsiders" discourses regarding gender issues interact?

   This question is concerned with looking at the differences in the analysis of these issues as manifested in the articulation of national and expatriate development workers. It is worth stating here that the discourses brought in by the expatriate development workers are varying and all outsiders' discourses cannot be treated as homogenous. For the purpose of this research, however, those differences were brought under discussion, only in the context of highlighting the differences between the Cambodian and expatriate development workers' discourse.

2. How do national and expatriate development workers respond to the interaction of discourses?

This question tries to understand how practitioners analyze the differences in their and others' discourse. It also explores how people deal with alien discourses. This will include exploring the interaction between the cultural discourse and the developmental discourse on the issue of domestic violence. The study of coping with or responding to the differences includes looking into how this translates in development planning and implementation.

Limitations

The interaction of development discourses in the event of international intervention is, perhaps, a universal phenomenon. However, the study of this phenomenon in Cambodia and consequent findings may not necessarily be generalizable to other situations in their entirety. The political and cultural setting of Cambodia, like any other country, makes for a unique setting and therefore the findings may only be partially transferable to other situations.

The frame to understand the differences in discourses is gender issues with a focus on the problem of domestic violence in Cambodia. This may again somewhat, limit the understanding generated by the study to discourses pertaining to domestic violence and related gender issues. Despite this limitation, I believe that the learnings from this study can be transferred to other issues in other multicultural situations too.

Another limitation of the thesis is a result of my unfamiliarity with the Khmer language and limited knowledge of English among some Cambodians, including development practitioners. Though the communication was on the whole functional

between me and my Cambodian colleagues but it did affect the complete understanding of nuances and complexities in some cases. In the case of interviews too, this might have affected some respondent's understanding of my questions and the expression of their opinion. Another significant limitation arising out of the language barrier is that I could interview only those Cambodian practitioners who understood and spoke English.

Despite the said limitations, I believe that an understanding of how the national practitioners receive processes and adapt outsiders' discourses on development issues and how the expatriate practitioners and consultants perceive the cultural differences they have to face may promote understanding of each others' views. The study also demonstrates a need for a kind of communication process where these differences can be shared with each other. Such sharing is necessary if any progress is to be made in closing the gap in the understanding of development collaborators.

The structure of the study's findings proceeds as such: Chapter II presents a description of the location of gender within the Cambodian culture and how Cambodian and expatriate practitioner respond to the existing gender inequity. Chapter III discusses the issue of domestic violence and the multiplicity of (sometimes conflicting) discourse on the topic originating from the interaction of cultural and "foreign" influences. Chapter IV points out the communication issues arising due to the cultural differences of Cambodian and expatriate practitioners. This chapter underscores that the communication barriers are impeding the process of open debate that is necessary for surfacing and resolving the conflict in views. The V and the last chapter details and

reiterates the conclusions of all the earlier chapters by restating the key questions and the

answers that this research provides.

CHAPTER II

LOCATION OF GENDER WITHIN THE CAMBODIAN CULTURE

This chapter aims to delineate how cultural aspects and the economic context of Cambodia influence the gender relations in the country. It also highlights the differences in the perspective of expatriate and national development practitioners, regarding the efforts currently being undertaken to address the issue of gender inequity. In the first section I discuss the location of gender in Cambodian context. I use studies conducted on gender issues in Cambodia, my observation as well as the information provided by both the Cambodian and expatriate practitioners whom I interviewed for the discussion. In the next section I deal with the views of Cambodian and expatriate practitioners separately to highlight the difference in their perspective.

Gender in Cambodian Context

Cambodia is a highly hierarchical society and the notions of hierarchy are built around several factors like chronological age, gender, wealth, knowledge, reputation of the family, political position, religious piety etc. (O'Leary & Nee, 2001). While all aspects are important and visible in the functioning of the Cambodian society, hierarchy of genders stands out, perhaps, because it is specifically laid out in various Cambodian traditional texts and also because it has been the most researched topic till now (for instance Ebihara, 1974; Ledgerwood, 1990; Nelson & Zimmerman, 1996; O'Leary & Nee, 2001; Sokhom, Sidedine, Tepmoly & Sokunthea, 1999; and UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP & DFID/UK, 2004). Among the cultural determinants of gender relations in

Cambodia, most researches as well as the interviewees for this study identify *chbap sri* or "didactic codes for women" as an influential factor. Ledgerwood (1990) informs that there are different versions of the *chbab sri*, the original version reportedly written in 1837 by Prince Ang Duong. The more recent version written by M'in Mai is the version that is memorized and taught in schools. Louise an expatriate development practitioner who has been researching and working in Cambodia since early 1990s said that according to her research every generation in Cambodia has rewritten *chbap sri* to suit their evolving conditions. She said that the latest version which she estimated to have been re-written in 1962 has limited women's independence even further and placed greater value on women's subservience to men while portions of *chbap proh* or rules for men that talk about respecting women have been diluted. There are a number of rules that characterize a "perfectly virtuous woman" according to the *chbap sri*.[5] Ledgerwood (1990) states that the most common and first comment cited when a Khmer is asked to describe a virtuous woman is "when a virtuous woman walks, the sound of her silk skirt rustling cannot be heard" (p. 98) implying she should be slow, quiet and controlled in her movement and speech.

Several other *chbaps* dealing with various aspects of a woman's life emphasize the importance of never losing control over speech and actions. One of the verses advice a woman that if her husband gets angry and curses her she should sleep over it and then return to him "speaking soft words and forgive him" (p. 99). Similarly a woman is instructed to be calm and not offended if her husband finds a mistress. The hierarchical order where the husbands hold a higher status is specified by the verse "[b]efore she may

even reach to remove a louse from his hair she must raise her hands pressed together and bow before him in a gesture of extreme respect" (p.101). I asked a Cambodian colleague who worked with SNVW - the organization I volunteered with - the significance of this *chbap*. She explained that in Cambodian culture touching someone's head is a sign of disrespect and only your elders or the Buddhist monks have the prerogative to touch someone's head (Field notes p. 8). A woman who is lower in hierarchy to her husband is therefore expected to convey that she recognizes her position, if she is required to touch her husband's head for a reason like cleaning it of lice.

Development practitioners both Cambodian and expatriate narrate instances and experiences that reflect the way, values ingrained in *chbap sri* manifest in people's behavior.

The *chbap sri* specifies that if a woman talks too much, then she wants to be "bigger" than her husband. If she acts in this way, then others too will "look down on" her husband (Ledgerwood, 1990). The responsibility of maintaining the husband's status in the community thus becomes her responsibility. This *chbap* further specifies that "[t]he woman must never think of herself as higher than, better then, her husband" (Ledgerwood, 1990, p.100). Theresa is an expatriate development worker, who has been working in Cambodia for over 10 years now. She is the founder of an organization engaged in capacity building of government and NGOs' staff, with awareness about gender issues as one of the focus areas. Her observation about her own staff makes the effect of the value specified in *chbap sri* mentioned above apparent. She recounted, during her interview, that several of the women staff in her organization are the only

ones in their family "who consistently earn a high salary, and there are changes in their family, but they have to be very careful that these changes are not seen publicly so that their husbands do not lose face" [I8EF3/31-p2].

Maaly and Somnang made similar observations in this context and stated (though not as critically as Theresa) that many women have economic independence but they obey Cambodian culture that specifies that they must respect the husband [I7CF4/4-p3]; [I3CM2/21-p1]. Maaly is a female Cambodian development practitioner who works in the capacity of trainer under an international donor funded project in collaboration with MoWA. Her job involves capacity building of the ministry's staff at national and provincial level on need and strategies for income generation activities for women. Somnang is a male Cambodian practitioner in an NGO working against domestic violence

A Khmer proverb says men are gold and women are white cloth. Thavy discussed this proverb in detail. She is a high ranking woman politician in Cambodia who has been in the Ministry of Women Affairs and has been very active in advocacy for women rights. Explaining the MoWA's motto "Nieri Ratna" meaning women are precious gems, she said that the motto was selected to counter this very proverb [I12CF4/15-p4]. The proverb implies that when a girl has her reputation sullied the stain cannot be cleaned while any stain on the reputation of men is not lasting. Such proverbs place a great deal of importance on women's honor and that is associated with the honor of the family as another proverb suggests. It goes "having a daughter is like having a toilet in front of the house" referring to the idea that "a bad smell can come any time" (O'Leary & Nee,

2001). Ledgerwood (1990) mentions that "the virginity of an unmarried woman and the sexual honor of a married woman are of critical importance to the social standing of fathers, husbands, and sons" (p. 26).

Churn is a Cambodian male development worker who supervises a project for mainstreaming gender in Natural Resource Management activities at the level of Communes. He informed that rural parents are unwilling to send their daughters to Phnom Penh for education on account of evils like prostitution and violence [I6CM4/4-p2]. The excessive concern for daughters' security and fear that they will get trapped in undesirable activities is a reflection of the similar value as mentioned by Ledgerwood (1990), perhaps.

The dilemma of garment factory workers as discussed by Louise during her interview for this study is a manifestation of the same value. She said:

Even though the economic pressure on them is to leave [their village] to find money to send back, they are still single and they are not proper because they shouldn't be working in the city alone. …They produce so much for this country, mostly exports of Cambodia are garment exports and yet their public image is janus faced. On the one hand they are applauded for contributing so much to the economic development, to their own family welfare. On the other hand they are considered to be the girls who don't protect their reputations, who adopt the new modern ways, wear tight jeans, go with boy friends, [and display] behavior that is un-Khmer. [I9EF4/5-p3]

The *chbaps* specify the roles of men and women in terms of work also. Women are specifically advised that they must prepare "delicious food" and they are responsible for the upbringing of the children. Women's role as a caretaker is reinforced by the Khmer Buddhism too. Ledgerwood (1990) says "[s]tated in simplistic terms, Khmer Buddhist sex roles are that men become monks and women feed monks" (p. 36).[6] Louise's comment indicates another reinforcing factor for this role. She suggested that there have not been many options for women. If they are not married they are asked why not; if they don't have children they are asked why they don't have children. According to her:

> The whole discourse of women's roles is also most often tied up with the concept of nationalism. The role of women in the nation is to be mother, to bear children and raise the children to be good citizens, to be good Khmers. [I9EF4/5-p5]

Revealing another link between women's roles and Cambodian identity Ledgerwood (1990) writes:

> To be Khmer means to live in accordance with a certain hierarchical order of the society, which can be more fully understood through an examination of the gender roles…. To move outside these roles is to enter the realm of chaos where, having lost what it is to be female in Khmer terms, one loses also what it is to be Khmer. (p. 3)

Churn talked about a challenge he faces in gender mainstreaming efforts within the project for natural resource management, due to the internalization of the differential role of men and women. He said that despite the awareness generation events that

explain that men and women both play an important role in managing natural resources, when they progress at the planning stage people go back from where they started the discussion. They talk about different jobs that men and women do and emphasize women's role inside the house [I6CM4/4-p3]. Piseth, the Cambodian male development practitioner working with an International Non-Government Organization (INGO), talked about the same aspect and informed:

During meetings at the community, people argue that men and women are not equal. They do different things. Women get pregnant, they take care of the baby but men can't…and some jobs men can do and women can't like they say that men can carry a rice sack but women can't. [I3CM2/21-p3]

Traditionally role of men is to provide for the family's financial needs and the role of women is to manage the household finances. Churn explained this division by giving his own example. He said that even though he is the one who earns the money but all of it is managed by his wife. However, if a decision is to be taken about making a purchase like "something for house decoration" she will consult him [I6CM4/4-p5]. The wife's role to manage finances is indeed seen as a power position by many in Cambodia. In comparing the Cambodian culture favorably to other South East Asian countries in terms of women's status, Maaly echoed Churn. She said "in our situation, men work hard and give the money to women and women take the responsibility" [I7CF4/4-p3] though she too, just as Churn, added that it is the husband who has the final decision regarding how to spend the money. Chanty, however, contended the perception that managing household finances is equivalent to women having a say. She is a well known

Cambodian development practitioner and is counted among the leaders of women's movement in Cambodia. Discussing the role of women as household finance mangers, she mentioned, that in a speech the Prime Minister commented that Cambodian women have power in terms of holding the household money. She added, exasperatedly, that people do not realize that power means equal decision making power [I14CF4/25-p1].

At another point in his interview Churn described the wife's role of household care and raising the children as an "area of her control" in which he didn't "have much right" [I6CM4/4-p5].   Similarly a study on portrayal of domestic violence in Khmer newspapers analyzes a rare case of violence by a wife against her husband as revealing "the rage of the mother who, according to Khmer custom, controls the food and water of the family to keep the family healthy" and got angry because the husband's action of buying eatables for children threatened that (Sokhom et al., 1996, p. 15).

In respect to the problem of adultery the *chbap* that advices women to be tolerant if the husband takes a mistress gets reinforced by proverbs like "Ten rivers can't equal (fill) one ocean." The proverb implies that "ten woman can not satisfy one man; men are sexually insatiable" (Ledgerwood, 1990, p. 111). In the past polygamy was legal in Cambodia but the present laws do not permit it. However, during the course of interviews as well as my association with SNVW the issue of men taking "second and third wives" came up repeatedly. Zimmerman (1998) explains "Presently in Cambodia many women are referred to as 'second wives'. Most often this arrangement is not a formal one. Often the term could be more accurately replaced with the term, 'lover'" (p.21). Though I did not hear anyone speaking of the practice approvingly but the fact

that the spouses other then the legally married wife are referred to as "second wife" and "third wife" indicates that it is tolerated.

About the practice Thavy said that men "remarry and have one or two or three wives. This is very very common even among the poor." Explaining why it is so prevalent despite being an illegal practice she said "sometimes what society allows is even more powerful then the law. It is a habit, a custom, a behavior that is very difficult to change" and women's inaccessibility to law makes it more difficult to challenge [I12CF4/15-p2]. Traditionally the importance assigned to the role of women as caretakers and mothers makes it imperative for women to have a married status. Viriny, another well known Cambodian woman activist who is known as a stalwart of women's movement, saw the importance placed on the married status of women as a factor perpetuating the practice of men having more then one "wife". She said "it is a cultural norm. … women, who are second or third wife, feel secure that now they are married, they have a husband; it is about their status" [I11CF4/8-p5].

Louise pointed towards the generational differences in terms of being constrained by the traditional mores. She maintained that both young and old women are unable to think freely outside the box of *chbap* sri and *chbap proh* [I9EF4/5-p7] but thinks some of "it is specific to an age group. The women who are in their 40s, 50s, and 60s cannot bear the public scourge of divorce or separation. So they put up with abuse to preserve the position of being a married woman." There is a whole generation of young women who, she said, are not interested in marriage "… because men are known to drink, to gamble,

to be not as industrious as women, that's there cultural perception some of which is based on reality…" [I9EF4/5-p4].

In addition to these cultural constraints, reports and development practitioners specify the economic determinants of gender inequity too. While the traditional attitudes towards the "appropriate" roles of women and towards girls' education are factors perpetuating disparities in employment, this disparity is increasing in the context of a shift to market oriented economy and limited employment opportunities (UNIFEM et al., 2004). The paid employment market absorbs only 16% of the economically active population. The number of women employed is much lower than the men and a large number is employed in the garment sector. Due to the trade liberalization process, however the future of Cambodia's garment industry is uncertain and so are women's opportunities for paid employment. In Cambodia though the women outnumber men in labor force by constituting 52% of the working population a large majority falls in the category of unpaid family labor category. The majority of the population (75%) is engaged in the agriculture sector and in the other productive sectors there is a pronounced segregation of occupation - while more men take up waged labor, women are likely to be engaged in trade. Since the level of education for women is lower than men it further affects there capacity to compete for employment.

The Cambodia Gender Assessment report (UNIFEM et al., 2004) also states that "[o]n average (taking experience, age and education into account), men's wages are 33% higher than those of women" (p. 5). Education levels are over all low for the country – 0.7 % of men and 0.2% of women hold a university degree. But even with higher levels

of education women are rarely appointed to management or decision-making positions. Though their has been some progress in girls' enrollment at the lower levels of schooling, the disparity in girls and boys education levels continues in the present times too.

Several respondents related issues that arise due to the low economic standards in general and the disparity between men and women employment opportunities in particular. Vuthy like Somnang is another male Cambodian development worker who works with a local NGO working against domestic violence. He related how women despite having a heavy workload do not realize the value of their work since it is unpaid. He narrated how when he asked a woman what she does, she replied she does nothing but on further probing she replied she wakes up at 4 in the morning and related all her tasks that go on till she goes to bed at 8 in the evening. He said "so I asked why she said that she does nothing. She said that she works but she gets nothing meaning cash, for all her work" [I1CM2/21-p3].

Louise highlighted another aspect wherein the discourse about women's domain being the housework has shadowed the reality that they are active economically outside the house. She said:

> … [T]he conventional Cambodian thinking is that men are the earners for the family and the women are the caretakers of the family but this doesn't bear in reality and it never has. Since Portuguese traders came, women have always been active as traders, manufactures, handicraft producers. They are very visible in the public realm, the market sector. I think actually women are the main earners in

the peri-urban areas, in the urban areas, the upper classes, the middle business

classes, women are very predominant in business and earn fund for the family.

[I9EF4/5-p4]

Kristin made a similar point when she said:

All humans have got this capacity to have conflicting or dissonant beliefs. It

seems very easy to point out, for example, that most of the petty trading is done

by women but *chbabs* say that women should stay at home. This conflicting

situation is not rationalized. [I15EF4/28-p13]

From my observation, traveling in Phnom Penh and several provincial towns, I

can indeed state that women appear to dominate all visible economic activities except for

the public transport system that includes two-wheeler taxis and motor bike pulled open

vans. In fact some of the first impressions that Cambodia made on me was the strong

presence of womenfolk in workplaces of all sorts. An entry in my fieldwork notes reads:

Among many things that made an impression on me when I first visited

Cambodia in August 2003 was the strong presence of womenfolk in workplaces

of all sorts. If it is an urban area, presence of women as shopkeepers and helpers

in any market place is conspicuously higher than the men. Same is true for hotels

and restaurants. If it is a rural area, a large number of women can be observed

working in the rice fields. Workforce that is seen emerging out or entering a

factory premise is also more women then men. The visible participation of

Cambodian women in economic activities, to me, signified an unrestraint way of

life as compared to the women in the Indian sub-continent [where I come from].

My subsequent research, though brief, revealed that this assumption was only partially correct (field notes p.8).

The influence of traditional rules that delineate the place of women in the Cambodian society's hierarchical structure appears to be tremendous. The attitudes about the appropriate behavior for, or the proper role of, Khmer women govern how women operate as professionals in any sector and in any position. Several participants talked about the pressures and obstacles women professionals have to deal with. Jan is an Asian American and has been working as a manger for an international organization that is engaged in fighting trafficking in women and children. She has been living in Cambodia for last six months. She sensed that though Cambodian colleagues feel affinity with her for being an Asian, they made allowances for her behavior as an expatriate woman. In the same context she said "[t]here are women in high positions here too but they are so operating as women. The entire society is endorsing the norms so how can one woman go against it [I10EF4/7-p3]. Her observation bears out in the comments of several other practitioners both expatriate and national.

Discussing about the challenges that Cambodian women face in the work place, particularly at high positions, Louise, said that aggressiveness in women is used as a convenient excuse to discredit them in every arena, be it business or politics. She elaborated "[i]f they assert and take position publicly on issues that might be seen as controversial, conservatives call it anti-Khmer" [I9EF4/5-p2]. Theresa echoed her in saying that the situation has improved somewhat

but there are still, huge problems for women managers. …it is very easy to ruin a woman's reputation by gossip. It need not be gossip like she is having an affair with somebody. It can be gossip that she is not behaving in the appropriate way. … So any woman in a managerial position is seen to be too assertive, or too controlling, or who is not deferential to people who she should be deferential to as a woman, would not be considered the proper woman here. So I feel that they have to walk a very fine line all the time, of checks and balances. [I8EF3/31-p1]

Thavy's own experience substantiates this. She recounted that she was considered too vocal for a woman by her colleagues in the Government since she discussed issues like "marital rape" in the domestic violence draft law without mincing words. She said that her advocacy efforts to get "marital rape" included in the domestic violence law required her to hold consultations with judges. They too disapproved of her language though, she added, she would only repeat how the penal code describes rape [I12CF4/15-p6].

At the level of local governance where gender mainstreaming is a focus of the donor community, the stereotypes about women as well as "low capacity" of women council members seems to be a tremendous challenge. Viriny explained that since there are only 983 elected women council members and 1621 communes, each commune has either just one woman member or no woman member at all. In communes where there are no woman members, a gender focal point is nominated to coordinate the gender mainstreaming activities and to take charge of the "woman and children committee". She said that the women members face tremendous discrimination in the sense that the

issues raised by them are not given priority and the "Commune chief will not hand them any responsibilities even though there is a clear description of the division of responsibilities" [I11CF4/8-p3]. Laura is an expatriate consultant and currently works for the project engaged in strengthening local governance. Her work area concerns gender mainstreaming at the level of local governance or Communes. She too said that there have been reports about women members being given the "keep them busy" kind of jobs [I5EF3/31-p4]. Churn was skeptical about the efficacy of having gender focal points and commented "…you will see that in the council most of the time she [woman member] is sitting quietly." He believed it is both because women members lack the skills and experience to participate in the council activities and because other [male] council members do not give them space to participate [I6CM4/4-p4].

Viriny too acknowledged the need to build women's capacity to participate and function effectively as council members since traditionally politics has not been a domain of women. She also considered low education of women as an obstacle but pointed out another kind of discrimination against women as well. She said that if they demonstrate their capability, the women members are over-burdened with work. Also, all issues related to domestic violence, health care or any other issues perceived as women related are passed on to them on the pretext that "it is your problem you solve it" [I11CF4/8-p3].

In forums that Viriny's organization provides to women in politics, issues that women face due to having the double burden of house-work and their job also come up. Viriny informed that council members get a very low salary and that too reaches them

with a delay of 3-4 months. So at one hand their household responsibilities are getting compromised due to their job and, on the other, they are not taking the income at home and this creates tensions at home. The problem of balancing their role as a home-maker with their jobs is faced by women at high positions too. Thavy, for instance, said how being in politics means "stealing time from your duties as a mom; as a good wife." Within the political parties she said women are marginalized by their names being put at the bottom of the candidates list and so women cannot become ministers "unless your party wins so many seats that even the bottom ones make it" [I12CF4/15-p3]. Somnang observed that due to the socialization the women have had, they sometimes themselves hesitate to take up leadership roles and often prefer their names to be at the bottom of the list [I2CM2/22-p1].

The demand for affirmative action to increase women's participation by instituting a quota of 30% seats for women has been rejected by the Government. Viriny explained that the excuse given was that "constitution guarantees equal rights so why do you want to demote yourself to just 30%." She said that they [the organization working for increased participation of women in politics] have tried to reason that that kind of equality does not exist at this stage but the government keeps using the argument that quota system is against the constitutional value of equal opportunity, as an excuse to turn the demand down [I11CF4/8-p2].

Practitioners' Response to Gender Inequity

As reflected in the discussion above the Cambodian and expatriate development

practitioners alike believe that the Cambodian culture puts women at a disadvantage. Most people see contribution of political and socio-economic context of Cambodia too in perpetuating the inequality. However, in analyzing what needs to be changed and how to bring about that change, there appears to be a difference of opinion. People who are distant from the culture analyze it more critically. They see gender disparity as more shocking and in need of a drastic change. At the same time most appear doubtful about those changes ever happening or are disappointed with the pace they are happening at. Most Cambodian practitioners and a couple of expatriates who express affinity with the culture seem to have a more pragmatic approach and in some ways appear tolerant of the inequity though believing it is not the ideal situation. There is also an effort to fit the demands within the cultural framework and to not appear challenging it. This last aspect emerged most prominently among the Cambodian women practitioners[7] responses. It is worth adding here that these differences do not follow a strict pattern but nevertheless a trend emerges.

The comments below reflect the opinion of the expatriate practitioners followed by those of Cambodian and expatriate practitioners who are from cultures in some ways similar to Cambodia.

Analyzing discourse that is built around the pre-eminence of the Cambodian identity Louise explained:

> …there is an expression here that Cambodians use- *Khmer Yeung*, it means 'we Khmers' - they use it without thinking [like] we Cambodians believe…, us Cambodian think that…. That makes it very hard for working for gender because

then what is existing in terms of the perceptions about ideal women is part of Cambodian identity. [I9EF4/5-p5]

She lamented that this discourse that be it music, food, art "nothing is better then Cambodia has contributed in Cambodians being closed to the developments in the rest of the world." Additionally, she explained that a tendency "unique to Cambodia and countries that have suffered great crimes against humanity is that there is a desire to recapture the Cambodian culture of the past" and that past for Cambodia is 1975 [I9EF4/5-p8]. In her study, Ledgerwood (1990) mentions the same tendency to "remember and discuss the positive images of the past, as a perfect time before the horrors … [reinforcing a] perspective on ideal images of women in Khmer society" (p. 126). Louise, however, saw promise in the fact that 50% of the Cambodian population is under 30 years and most are maturing now. They want change and want to live in the present. This, she said, can be a positive thing in terms of work on gender to the extent that this generation wants to learn about how they could fit in the world [I9EF4/5-p8].

Another expatriate practitioner Theresa expressed her shock and disappointment at the fate of one of the Cambodian woman staff in her organization. She said that the young girl who is the brightest person in the office "is effectively being sold off to a family friend in return for writing off a large debt the family owes him. She has resisted but she is under phenomenal pressure from her family and she has got to agree. Ghastly!" [I8EF3/31-p2]. The instance is an aspect of the practice of arranged marriages and the payment of bride price that Ledgerwood (1990) explains as the payment related to a transfer of rights over the woman, her sexuality, her labor, and so on to her parents who

fed and cared for her. Traditionally, this was also a provision of initial resources for the new couple, since the couple actually retains control of part of this wealth.

In the presence of such influences, however, Theresa saw minimal scope for changes and said "it is seriously a long haul." She did not see a lot of promise in pressurizing the government into taking actions to achieve gender equity, whether by international donors or otherwise. Her belief was that generally the establishment is very happy with the things as they are [I8EF3/31-p3]. Laura compared the situation of Cambodia with other patriarchal societies and said the hierarchical view of gender relations in such societies is hard to deal with. However, she believed that while countries like Vietnam and China are seeing some transition in the sense that it is "easier to get things on the table that are gender responsive," the same change is not happening in Cambodia yet. She acknowledged that there are some people making efforts at the level of national policy but doubted if there are any changes at the field level as she said, "… the legal framework is there, the intent is there but the reality is still governed by the age-old traditions" [I5EF3/31-p5].

Commenting on the challenges faced in effecting gender mainstreaming she said that "…most of the people you are working with are men. Moreover you are dealing with under resourced and under paid people and if you are talking about social and gender issues, you are talking about issues that are outside their realm of priority, they are not totally comfortable talking about" [I5EF3/31-p5]. Her assessment, as that of several other expatriate practitioners, was that it is going to be years until the idea of gender

mainstreaming will be internalized. She sounded a bit disappointed in saying that "I don't know how long it is going to take" [I5EF3/31-p4].

The later group of practitioners who are either Cambodians or from countries, whose cultural context is comparable to Cambodia in some ways, also saw obstacles and challenges in working for gender equality. Their analysis of the situation, however, appeared a little toned down or cautious and in some cases even hopeful and positive. Malini is an expatriate development worker who comes from the Indian sub-continent and works for an international organization, as a consultant for issues related to HIV-AIDS. She was of the view that "[t]here are a lot less challenges in working for human rights here. People are eager to learn and move forward as compared to the inertia in South Asia. Also, since all the written rules have been destroyed creating new ones is easy. Getting laws passed is not difficult." She however acknowledged that implementation is sometimes a problem [I16EF4/30-p1]. Analyzing the cultural context in terms of gender equality in Cambodia she said "…social and cultural values are both positive and negative but cultural things take time to change; but otherwise gender inequity is much less and also less harsh" [I16EF4/30-p2]. She found women enjoying more freedom in Cambodia compared to Indian sub-continent and substantiating her claim she said that sex workers are accepted back in their families [I16EF4/30-p2]. There is a high probability that the reasons for accepting the sex workers back in the family are economic more then cultural. However, the statement indicates her inclination to emphasize what she believes is the positive aspects about working in Cambodia.

Churn analyzed various obstacles in mainstreaming gender at the commune level. He found that women are still not included in decision making processes and that conceptions about the traditional role of women comes in the way of acknowledging their contribution in resource management. However he believed there were positive changes and said that "…now at least women talk about their issues and in some communes women are very active…" [I6CM4/4-p4]. Additionally, he was of the opinion that in order to draw attention to women's issues, lack of women participation should not be seen as an obstacle. In his opinion "if there are not enough women, never mind. Gender is not about women alone, it is about women and men so you [men] can talk about activities that women do, problems they face" [I6CM4/4-p5]. He suggested that that is the strategy he uses and it is effective. He also thought that, in general, there is a movement towards change with more and more girls opting for higher education and private companies, not just international and local NGOs, offering employment opportunities to women. He thought that the situation is "changing step by step all the time" [I6CM4/30-p2]. Maaly was of the same opinion. She said "…from my mom's generation to my generation, it has changed a lot." In the context of gender equality she asserted that in general "our culture is much better then other countries in Asia or South East Asia" [I7CF4/4-p3].

Piseth considered several effective ways of encouraging debate and changing peoples' opinion about gender issues and domestic violence. He suggested holding discussions at the grass-root level. Taking the cultural constraints into account, he added, that because men and women are unable to discuss in each others' presence there should

initially be separate forums for them until they start understanding and then there can be joint groups. His familiarity with the hierarchical order of the society perhaps led him to add "we need to assess according to age also. Younger people are shy to discuss in front of elder people." Also, he said, there is a "need to recruit group members according to the education level. If highly educated people join with low educated ones then they are not at the same level of understanding" [I3CM2/21-p4]. Discussing strategies that are effective in getting demand achieved Viriny said that nobody likes to be confronted and to be put down, "I go and meet in person and I share my concern and show them what will be the result if this is in place and if it is not. Till now everything I wanted except the quota system, I got it" [I11CF4/8-p7]. Regarding the demand about quota for women in the parliament, she informed, she changed her strategy and talks to the presidents of the political parties to include more women in their party list. In turn her organization promises to train the women to become competent politicians. Sometimes, she said "we tell that women constitute 50% of the population and we will ask them to not vote for your party if you do not put women on the list because only women can present and protect interests of women" [I11CF4/8-p2].

Several Cambodian practitioners suggested that they see scope of change within the cultural context. Viriny for instance said that "even though we have a woman's code, we study in school about how to be a quote, unquote good woman. …right now we have a lot of space to grow" [I11CF4/8-p4]. She also saw the increase in the number of women members elected at the commune council level as well as in the parliament, even though small in numbers, as sign of change [I11CF4/8-p1]. Similarly, Chanty did not

think that action for passage of domestic violence law requires challenging cultural mores. She stated that even *chbap sri* doesn't preach violence, so domestic violence law is not in conflict with Cambodian culture in any way. Feeling a need to define her actions within the bounds of Cambodian culture she said "[p]rotecting someone is not against our culture. On the other hand such a law will protect our culture" [I14CF4/25-p1]. Thavy was perhaps the only Cambodian practitioners who specifically mentioned a need to challenge traditional mores in order to alleviate the situation of women. She too, however, at certain places, attempted to reconcile her views with the cultural values. For instance, emphasizing the need for some basic universal understanding of women rights despite cultural differences she said:

> …your strategy to defend women against rape could be different from our strategy but the basic principle that we don't accept rape will be the same. …what should be the basic protection for a woman who is raped? In your country it could be different. In my country it could be shelter or a ceremony to call the soul back. Doesn't mean that we break the law, no we come back to the tradition [I12CF4/15-p5].

Concluding Remarks

Views of both the Cambodian and expatriate practitioners reveal some aspects of the context and the ongoing efforts for achieving gender equality. They also demonstrate the difference in perspectives of "insiders" and "outsiders" in the sense that insiders seemed to have a need to balance out the unfavorable aspect of the context by identifying

favorable aspects, however small they might be. Also, there seem to be a need to fit the demands for gender equality within the traditional mores and not appear questioning them.

The following chapter discusses the issue of domestic violence situated within the context discussed above. The chapter underscores the multiplicity of (sometimes conflicting) discourses on the topic originating from the interaction of cultural and "foreign" influences. It discusses not just the varying discourses but also the conflict in action and theory due to the interaction of the cultural influence and the influence of discourses brought by the development organizations on the issue.

CHAPTER III

VARYING DISCOURSES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Recognition of Domestic Violence as a Social Issue in Cambodia

Domestic violence became part of the Khmer Lexicon and began to be recognized as a social issue requiring legal and civil intervention in Cambodia only after the first research conducted into domestic violence in 1994 (Giles, 2004). The study "Plates in a basket will rattle" was organized by the then Secretariat of State for Women Affairs and sponsored by USAID through The Asia foundation and UNICEF. While this research was aimed at understanding "the situation of battered women in Cambodia" a subsequent research revealed the statistics. It found that 16% women were physically abused by their spouses, 50% of which reported serious injuries (Zimmerman, 1994; Nelson & Zimmerman, 1996). More recent research shows 23 % of women have experienced domestic violence of the physical sort (UNIFEM et al., 2004).

The increase reflects that the definition of domestic violence might be broadening as in earlier surveys, women had to be explained what acts constitute violence for them to answer in affirmative (Alexander & Macleod, 2002). Giving another explanation for the increase in numbers, Vuthy, a Cambodian male development practitioner who is with an organization working against domestic violence, said that if a survey is conducted now in our organization's target areas "the figure will come out to be much higher because now women are willing to talk about the problem. Earlier they thought it was a family matter" [I1CM2/21-p2].

Considerable progress has been made in terms of bringing the issue into the public arena since the first survey conducted and the inception of first organization to address the issue in 1995. Progress has been made at both the legal and administrative fronts in terms of sensitizing the relevant institutions about the issue. In terms of work with civil society, at least 20 local organizations are working specifically to deal with the issue (PADV, 2002). The issue has the attention of a number of donor organizations too that are supporting the local initiatives and doing advocacy work with the Cambodian Government for the passage of Domestic Violence Law. Despite the efforts, however, there is evidently a long way to go. Since the problem is grounded in cultural values, it is important to understand how the issue is understood and communicated by all involved which includes the society in general, the local and expatriate development practitioners and the political and administrative institutions.

The current (diverse and conflicting) discourses on domestic violence are manifested in the development practitioners' understanding and their experiences in working for women rights issues. In analyzing the issue SNVW ascribes "power and control" to be the root cause of the problem of domestic violence. The organization has a long history of working against domestic violence in Cambodia. In the context of SNVW being an organization that attempts to counter traditional beliefs about domestic violence, it is worth stating here that the organization was established by an American expatriate who has done several studies related to the issue in Cambodia. The present staff of the organization is completely national, the organization, however, has had a series of expatriate advisors throughout.

SNVW endeavors to counter the prevalent beliefs about the issue and establish that it is the need of one member of the family to establish control over the others that leads to the occurrence of domestic violence. The concept of gender is used to explain the fact that the abuser is usually the husband and the abused the wife. Elaborating the concept in Cambodian context Alexander & Macleod (2002) write:

> … [T]he frequency of dictatorial regimes has left the common public often impotent. Powerlessness threatens men who define themselves in terms of their masculinity…. Demonstrating control over women is a method of regaining some sense of power over your own surroundings. When men are no longer able to control their own lives, there tends to be an increase in violence against women. The combination of these two factors, misogynist and historical violence, has increased prevalence of DV [domestic violence] in Cambodia. (p.10)

This conception of the problem has to compete with the traditional understanding and cultural beliefs related to domestic violence (field notes p. 12, 13, 14, 17 & 18). The fact that there is no equivalent Khmer term for "gender" perhaps adds to the obstacles posed by the traditional hierarchical view of gender, in getting these messages through. Kristin, the expatriate advisor for a project with the Ministry of Woman Affairs pointed this out. She said in her interview "gender is translated here as sex. The conceptualization of gender, the relationship between the sexes, the differential roles and benefits is not well understood at all, despite more then 10 years of training programs" [I15EF4/28-p8].

There are several different (though related) beliefs and associated messages that are in conflict with the organizations conception. The conflicts does not only surface in the beliefs of the society and the organizations' views but also in the discourse of various development practitioners and sometimes within the same person as manifested in his or her communication and action.

Varying Discourses

The perceptions that compete with SNVW's stance on domestic violence can be treated in three categories. They are: (1) the traditional conceptions of gender equations that treat domestic violence as normal and a private matter; (2) the belief that domestic violence is only a manifestation while the real problems are poverty, illiteracy and alcoholism; and (3) the belief that the economic dependence of the wife forces her to bear with the violence. In the following sections I will discuss how each of these beliefs interacts with the "official" discourse on domestic violence and shapes the issue.

Traditional Conceptions

A verse in *chbap sri* advices women not to take "fire" from within and spread it outside. Fire refers to gossip and the import of the verse is to restrain a wife from discussing what goes on inside the house with others (Ledgerwood, 1990). Similarly, Zimmerman (1997) quotes from *chbap sri* "…never tattle anything negative about your husband or this will cause the village to erupt…" (p.7). This value perhaps leads to one of the biggest obstacles, as practitioners and researchers report, in establishing domestic

violence as a criminal act at the level of community as well as at the level of legal and administrative apparatus of Cambodia.

Vuthy explained how people perceive the issue. He said:

It is easier when they are talking about others, about neighbors. When it is about them, they hesitate to tell. They worry that outsiders should not come to know about it as it is a family matter. They [victims] look at it as opening their heart or talking about personal things. [I1CM2/21-p2]

That domestic violence is a private matter is a widely believed norm and is displayed in the views of state institutions like the police, the courts and the law makers as evident in studies done on the issue (Zimmerman, 1994; 1998; Nelson & Zimmerman, 1996; Watmough, 1999 & UNIFEM et al., 2004) and the experience of people interviewed for this study.

The efforts to define domestic violence as a social issue as against being a private matter faces tremendous resistance. Piseth, who works for another NGO that is concerned with addressing the needs of women in difficult circumstances, explained that because domestic violence is believed to be a family matter, "no one from outside tries to intervene to stop it. If you try to help then they feel that you are wrong" [I3CM3/21-p1]. The fact is that as of now there is no law that could be invoked specifically to deal with domestic violence. The criminal law has provisions to deal with physical assault but as Zimmerman (1998) notes:

In cases of domestic violence, requests for help with abusive husbands are treated as "marital problems" and are not addressed as a matter of law unless the woman

is prepared to file for divorce - the accepted legal remedy for spousal abuse. Legal action for assault, rape, or other criminal acts specified in the criminal code would not be considered. (p. 22)

The provisions of Family Law have articles to save guard the interests of women in abusive relationships but the articles are never used as family is the realm where traditional laws tend to overshadow the legal provisions (Zimmerman, 1998). In reference of cases that may call for a restraining order for the abusive husband, Zimmerman (1998) observes "[t]o issue an order that instructs another man to stay away from his own wife …is considered a gross interference in a family matter" (p.52). During a "community service providers'" meeting conducted by SNVW, a police official's comment appears to bear out the observation made by Zimmerman. He said that they should not be expected to report "minor cases of conflict" and that the report submitted by them to SNVW should focus only on cases of violence that can be counted as criminal cases (Field notes p.9). The statement needs to be interpreted in the context where traditionally some abuse is considered normal and even required for "educational purposes" (Giles, 2004). Acts of violence by the husband against the wife or a male spouse against the female spouse is, like in many other cultures, an accepted sign of masculinity in Cambodian culture. Vuthy informed that some men say they hit for the purpose of educating [I1CM2/21-p2]. Somnang, who too works with an organization addressing the issue of domestic violence, narrated his experience about how men say that women do not do household chores so they beat them. He added that sometimes women also express similar opinion if they are talking in relation to a neighbor as they

believe that men should beat if women do not understand their responsibilities [I2CM2/22-p1].

It was repeatedly noticed that during workshops, when a facilitator, in keeping with the gender neutral definition of domestic violence (domestic violence takes place when one person commits violence on other people in his family [I2CM2/22-p1]) mentioned that that domestic violence included violence committed by a wife against her husband, participants would treat it as a joke and chuckled (Field notes, p. 14). As an explanation Vuthy told me that Domestic violence is committed more often by men because men are physically stronger [I1CM2/21-p1]. He informed according to *chbab proh* men are described as "pram hattra" [five armed], which means good men or perfect men. He said Cambodian men translate it as strong men - so strong that even when they are wrong they should win. So if someone says that a man can be beaten by his wife it is considered laughable [I1CM2/21-p4].

A controversial article in the draft law is another example of the cultural acceptance of domestic violence. A section of article 3 reads in the unofficial English translated version:

It shall not be included as the use of domestic violence [any] teaching through giving advice or reminding or taking appropriate measures to allow the spouses or children or dependent persons to follow good way in accordance with the Cambodian way of living and customs. (2004)

The article was among the first 6 articles that were approved by the 88 out of 99 parliamentarians in 2003.

Thavy who was with the Ministry of Women Affairs when the domestic violence draft law was debated within the Council of Ministers, informed that she fought within her own party and the others against inclusion of the article but was put under immense pressure and gave in as she figured that the bill will never be passed if she continued to resist that article. Women rights activists and organizations heartedly contend that Article [I12CF4/15-p7]. Legal analysts feel that the law will be a nullity with this article as every defendant will claim that he used the violence for educational purpose (field notes, p. 24). I learnt that in the latest version of the draft law the article has been reworded (but not removed) to include that the action taken to instruct in ways of Cambodian culture should not violate women and children rights (Field notes p.23).[8]

The legal standards for abuse are also exceedingly demanding of "cruelty". For instance, the ground for divorce as specified by Article 38 of Family Law are, among other things, "cruelty and badly beating". The terms are not defined and imply that certain amount of abuse is acceptable (Zimmerman, 1998, p.16). Zimmermann (1998) observes "unless a woman is murdered, filing criminal charges against a husband is virtually unheard of in Cambodia. It defies cultural and social contracts" (p. 59). It does not reflect well on a woman and her children if she acts against these cultural mores by filing criminal charges and have her husband sent to jail. Since the traditional law makes a wife responsible for a family's reputation, such act is perhaps seen as an act that a "virtuous Khmer woman" would not do.

A passage in *chbap sri* advices women in the virtue of passivity in the face of violence from the husband. It reads "in the case of violent husband, who hits you in

anger and treats you like a thief or prostitute, you must not dare to respond for fear of inciting further his anger" (Alexander & Macleod, 2002, p.8). Viriny, who is known within the development sector for her contribution to women's rights movement in Cambodia, informed of several cases:

> Where women are beaten up, are bleeding to death. They want the husband to be arrested but later want him to be released. People laugh at us because we made an effort to get the husband arrested and later begged for him to be released. [I11CF4/8-p5]

Her statement conveyed her awareness of working against the accepted norms and perhaps the delight that people take in seeing her being forced to retrace her steps.

Though divorce is considered to be the only accepted legal response to violence as the authorities are reluctant to use provisions of criminal law against a violent husband it is, however, not encouraged either by the courts or by the society" (Zimmerman, 1998, p.59). Several practitioners point out the consideration of children in bearing with domestic violence but not seeking divorce. Vuthy said that those women do not want their children to be left without a father [I1CM2/21-p4]. Viriny explained that since traditionally children are a woman's responsibility, women have to deal with a double burden of cultural blame for making the children fatherless and the economic responsibility for the children [I11CF4/8-p5].

Culturally there are serious implications of being fatherless or being without a husband. The general view is that divorce causes the reputation of the woman and children to be tainted forever. Women themselves, believe that divorced women suffer

shame and community scorn. Zimmerman (1994) informs that even if a woman takes the initiative to divorce her husband they are referred to as "widow[9] whose husband divorced her" and children are referred to as "orphans". She suggests that the "phrasing reflects the public perception of her having been bad or inadequate wife, thus the husband left her." Besides, their status suffers and they are no more considered respectable as "divorced women are commonly suspected of sleeping with many men or even of prostitution" (p.35).

Since it is believed that divorce in any case does more harm then good, tremendous amount of importance is placed on the process of reconciliation. Zimmerman (1998) comments:

> Reconciliation is dictated by both the culture and by law. A brief analysis of the practice suggests that it is grounded in both the obligation to maintain the traditional family structure, as well as the desire to avoid the shame associated with the display of conflict or disharmony. (p. 33)

During the community service providers' meetings in SNVWs field area this belief was reflected by some of the participants' remarks. A commune chief reported a case of domestic violence where the husband has a "second wife" and the "first wife" lives separately. He informed that now the husband was ready to take the first wife back but she is unwilling. In reporting his intervention the chief said that he tried to reconcile the couple but to no avail (Field notes p. 9). At another point in the same meeting another participant said in the context of explaining the need for ignoring "minor conflicts" between a couple that a wife's anger is like a strong flow of water; if one waits

for it to subside it can be managed (Field notes p. 9). Besides trivializing a woman's decision the simile reinforces the need to reconsider any decision that threatens to break a family.

By law too reconciliation is an integral part of the divorce process and two reconciliations are obligatory on court officials. Most women first approach the commune council where they already go through endless sessions of reconciliation efforts despite law's requirement that if a reconciliation effort fails the case must be sent immediately to the court. Court officials also go beyond the obligatory requirement to mediate as they often take the view that reconciliation is a vital form of assistance to the couple and their children (Zimmerman, 1998). Also, it is seen as a way to avert "irreparable public conflict such as divorce." This is significant because importance placed on face saving makes open conflicts extremely undesirable in Cambodia (Nelson & Zimmerman, 1996).

The impact of the discourse about keeping a family together can be seen in the actions of various agents who are in the position of influencing the issue. SNVW and other organizations working against domestic violence are trying to encourage medical staff at the government health centers to document domestic violence as the cause of injury in such cases, both for the purpose of keeping statistical figures as well as aiding victims to file complaint. Health staff's attitudes suggest that they are reluctant to do it because "recording such information was viewed as encouraging the woman to separate or divorce" (Watmough, 1999, p. 15). My own experience during a visit to three health centers with SNVW staff revealed that the health workers accepted the forms SNVW

provided to assist them in recording such information but showed little interest or inclination in the issue. Two out of three centers reported that there have been no cases of domestic violence in the past months at all. A SNVW staff informed that earlier efforts to encourage the health staff to keep such records have not been too successful. He said that during the follow up visits they simply informed that no cases of domestic violence came to their center (field notes p.2). Though, this does not proof that the health workers' inaction was result of the belief that documenting cases of domestic violence will amount to encouraging divorce as reflected in Watmough's (1999) study, it does show the lack of inclination among the health workers to highlight the cases of domestic violence.

Zimmerman (1998) discovered that the traditional attitudes frequently affect lawyers' ability too to act in the interest of their clients. In addition to their own views they are influenced by the views of the court officials as well. She explains "…judges and clerks place inordinate amount of pressure on both the client and attorney to keep the marriage together. Many lawyers are unable to withstand the pressure and perceived threat to their future careers should they displease the court" (p.55). The role of the police is reported to be similar. Piseth for instance, said "all they [the police personnel] do is try to reconcile; [they] do not try to see the real problem. They just don't care" [I3CM2/21-p3].

The most significant influence, from the point of view of this study, of the value placed on the process of reconciliation on the issue of domestic violence is its influence on SNVW. The quarterly report format had recently added a section about number of

reconciliations achieved. Additionally Amy, a 25 years old expatriate woman, who is currently associated as an advisor with the organization, informed about another change. The change concerned the case studies and stories that are used as awareness tools by the organization. She informed that during a long term review it was felt that most stories are about women who resisted and separated. Therefore, she explained, there is a concern that people perceive SNVW a proponent of divorce. She said that some of these stories are now cut down from the presentations [I13EF4/25-p4]. In most foundational documents and studies published by the organization, there are clear discussions about how the process of and the value placed on reconciliation perpetuates the power imbalance. This change in organization's approach, therefore, appears to be an instance of the organization succumbing to the traditional discourse on domestic violence in order to maintain its credibility within the society - a necessary condition perhaps to continue to be effective.

In keeping with the traditional views about the rights that a husband has over his wife what constitutes domestic violence is also an issue of contention among the general public as well as law makers. Somnang informed that during group discussions in the community they always ask the participants what they understand by the term domestic violence and the participants invariably talk about it in terms of beating and cursing [I2CM2/22-p2]. The statement suggests that there is little recognition of psychological and sexual violence constituting domestic violence. There is enormous resistance in accepting marital rape as an act of violence. Vuthy narrated that during group discussions with men's group "in explaining marital rape, we face resistance as participants do not

want to use the term rape. They think it is their right" [I1CM2/21-p1]. The former

Minister of Women Affairs faced a similar situation in defending the draft law on

domestic violence within the council of ministers. Most people in Council refused to

accept marital rape[10] as an offence in the draft law on domestic violence [I12CF4/15-p6].

It is widely believed by both men and women in Cambodia that providing sexual

gratification to her husband is among one of the duties of a wife and she must always be

a willing sexual partner for her husband. *Chbap sri* advices women to never sleep with

their back towards their husband. Her willingness to be a sexual partner is a measure of

her faithfulness (Ledgerwood, 1990).

Ledgerwood (1990) writes that the Ang Duong's version of *chbap sri* lists the

characteristics of 40 kinds of "deceptive women". Of these she mentions six

characteristics that concern a woman's refusal to husband's sexual advances. One of the

characteristics is specified as "shamelessly deceptive, unreceptive to their husband's

touches" (p.116). In the initial survey to assess people's attitude on domestic violence,

Zimmerman (1994) found that out of 37 women 32 believed that a man should be able to

have intercourse with his wife whenever he wants. Similarly, Zimmerman (1998) quotes

a response of a highly placed judge to a question regarding marital rape "[i]f the wife

complains that her husband raped her, the court will not consider this seriously…" (p.

12). Additionally, the shame associated with talking about sexual abuse prevents the

subject from being brought up in court. Piseth explained "it is difficult for Khmer

women to discuss their problems because they can't talk about sexual abuse. It is not

easy for Khmer women to talk about their body, they feel shy" [I3CM3/21-p4].

Zimmerman (1997) made a somewhat similar observation in her report of the initial survey on domestic violence. She writes "[w]omen generally feel too ashamed to mention 'rape' in public, so in dealings with the police or the court the subject often does not come up" (p.13).

The latest version of draft law apparently continues to include "marital rape" as an act of violence (field notes p.22) and it remains to be seen if the law will be passed without further modifications whenever it is tabled next.

The following subsection focuses on the belief that economic dependence of a wife is the reason for perpetuation of violence.

Economic Dependence

Most development practitioners working directly on the issue of domestic violence or working for gender equity in general also see it as an economic issue. The economic dependence of the wife is cited as a reason for the wife's inability to escape violence but as an after thought or on further probing respondents tended to add that even if the victim is financially independent, she suffers domestic violence for various reasons. For instance, Piseth held a view as did several other respondents that women would like to escape but have nowhere to go because men have power and jobs [I3CM3/21-p2]. As an initial explanation Vuthy said that men earn money and therefore think they have the right to beat their wife and believe she belongs to them [I1CM2/21-p1]. At another point during the interview, however he mentioned that if women work outside then the husband stays home; "he may go out to drink and if she says anything

about it, the husband might hit her." He added that most women are economically dependent on their husband and therefore cannot escape domestic violence but even if they do earn money they still face domestic violence [I1CM2/21-p4]. Maaly, the Cambodian woman practitioner currently working with the Ministry of Woman Affairs also saw economic independence of women as the solution of all problems. At another point however, she stated that people's perception about women being dependent on men is a mistaken perception. She said "in reality women have control, they make their own money but the women still hold culture like they respect their husbands" [I7CF4/4-p3].

Viriny was, however, of the view that there are more deep rooted causes then economic dependence. She says "I do not deny it is economic but it is only partly a financial problem; to a larger extent it is emotional. There are woman who work and men still beat them…" [I11CF4/8-p5]. According to her one of the reasons why people perceive economic dependence as the reason for women's inability to escape domestic violence is that "most women who reveal their stories of receiving domestic violence are poor women. There are women in high ranking positions who suffer domestic violence but do not reveal it because of status, not financial compulsions. It is a cultural norm" [I11CF4/8-p5].

Louise, the expatriate advisor working with the MoWA, pointed towards the dichotomy between rural and urban women as an explanation for the perception that domestic violence is an economic issue. She said that while in urban areas women are "very predominant in business and earn fund for the family…. In rural areas where poverty is experienced differently by women and men, the dependence of women on the

men is [due to] the physical labor." She explained that because the rice cultivation requires plowing – a physically onerous works in the absence of plow machines - women have to hire out someone in the absence of adult male members. So, she said, that there is a great need for men and "[e]ven if women have great marital problems, there is a fear of divorce, of separation because who will do this onerous work" [I9EF4/5-p4].

Besides the fact that economic reasons do, perhaps, contribute in the perpetuation of domestic violence, development practitioners, particularly Cambodian, tend to fall back on this explanation because it is a more tangible explanation. Also, the fact that the discourse on gender equity in general establishes a strong relationship between economic independence and status of women, the relationship is applied to the problem of domestic violence too. Defining the problem in economic terms also perhaps provides a more tangible solution as compared to tackling the culturally ingrained causes. Among the national practitioners particularly, there is reluctance in being critical of the cultural mores. A less controversial and more straightforward solution sounds feasible if the issue is defined in economic terms. Maaly's statement "[t]he position will change when women are strong and economically not dependent; then men will not be able to dominate" exemplifies this [I7CF4/4-p3].

Given the situation of women in Cambodia and elsewhere the discourse about economic dependence could be a complementary discourse to that of understanding the issue of domestic violence as an issue of power and control. It, however, appears more as a discourse competing with the "power and control" explanation. Another competing

discourse that defines domestic violence as a manifestation of other social and economic problems is dealt with next.

Domestic Violence Is a Manifestation of Other Problems

Some competitive messages are related to ascribing alcohol consumption, poverty and illiteracy as the cause of domestic violence. SNVW as well as some other organizations working on domestic violence are consciously trying to fight this perception. These perceptions are widely prevalent within the Cambodian society and there seemed to be a differential understanding among the people concerned with the issue in one capacity or the other. Also, there sometimes appeared to be a conflict in how a person may talk about this aspect "officially" and how it is expressed at an informal level.

In expressing the challenges he faces in discussing domestic violence in the field, Vuthy said "some of the concepts are difficult to make them understand. Most people think that alcohol is the cause of violence….they relate their experiences that when people drink they beat their wife." As a counter argument he said "we ask do all who drink always beat their wives? They answer that all people drink alcohol but not all people beat their wife." He added that poverty and illiteracy are believed to be other causes of domestic violence and though the stakeholders now understand that it is not so they have problems in making grass root people understand this [I1CM2/21-p3]. The stakeholders in the case of his organization consist of local officials from various departments who the organization aims to train and motivate to work for preventing

domestic violence within their Communes. It is, however, uncertain if the understanding of the stake holders (that Vuthy believes has been achieved) is limited to only mouthing the concept or has really been internalized. Furthermore, there was an instance of Vuthy himself explaining a situation of a couple offhandedly as one where the husband drinks everyday and beats the wife (field notes, P. 15).

The fact is, perhaps, that there appears a visible connection, to all concerned, between the aspects like alcoholism, poverty and illiteracy. The intangible concepts like "power and control" and gender equations have been passed on through capacity building processes within the development sector but cannot easily take the place of life long socialization. Somnang, for instance, who suggested that people incorrectly consider alcohol, poverty and illiteracy as the causes of violence contradicted himself at another point during the interview. He stated that domestic violence takes place in every country but the percentage is higher in Asia. He added by way of explanation that people are poor and lack of education stops them from understanding the issue [I2CM2/22-p2]. Piseth, as mentioned earlier, works for an organization supporting women in difficult circumstances including victims of domestic violence. In defining domestic violence he said precisely what the other practitioners said they want to counter. He informed that he explains to people "domestic violence results from poverty, or from the husband's drinking problem. People hit each other because they do not have education" [I3CM3/21-p1].

Churn is the Cambodian male practitioner who works for an international project on strengthening local governance with a focus on gender mainstreaming. His views

illustrate the discourse that ascribes economic problems as a cause of domestic violence. He was adamant that domestic violence is not an issue at all and that the real issue is depletion of natural resources and loss of income for the families. He believed that domestic violence is simply a manifestation of this bigger issue. He expressed his exasperation at the efforts focused on domestic violence and said "if you turn on the TV or listen to NGOs that are working on women's rights, they are only talking about DV [domestic violence] and trafficking in women without considering why it is happening." He goes as far as blaming this on opportunism of local NGOs and states "some NGOs might come because they have got money to work on DV and they do the awareness rising but awareness rising is not enough until you address the root-cause of it" [I6CM4/4-p7].

It is indeed true that organizations working on domestic violence have been quite successful in getting their messages on TV and radio as spots. SNVW, for instance, has produced several spots that convey messages countering the view that alcohol, poverty and illiteracy is the root cause of domestic violence. Similarly there are spots emphasizing that it is a criminal not a private matter. In pointing out that Cambodian people have few opportunities available to expand their knowledge base, Louise too mentioned "if you listen to the radio, which most people do, what do you hear? You hear music, there are a few social programs on domestic violence and health issue but you don't know about anything else" [I9EF4/5-p8]. Besides advocacy by local organizations and activists, one of the reasons, that domestic violence as an issue has been able to get

so much space in the Cambodian media could be the attention that the issue is getting

from the donor community as a part of the gender mainstreaming objective.

From the account of many Cambodians the media is largely controlled by the

government and therefore, there is little coverage of pressing political issues. Churn

mentioned his concern about the fast disappearing common property resources due to

government policies which he believes is more crucial issue as majority of Cambodians

depend on these resources for their livelihood [I6CM4/4-p7]. Not too critical of the

existing cultural norms regarding gender relations he, perhaps, sees the prominence of

messages against domestic violence as a divergence tactic on the part of the government.

Discussion

What is striking in the interaction of multiple discourses about domestic violence

is that not only do different organizations and practitioners but the same person or

organization might unwittingly be conveying conflicting messages. An organization like

SNVW has a public stance on issues related to domestic violence. The stance originates

from the researches and conceptual understanding of its founders – an expatriate

development practitioner. The views of the staff (that is completely national) are

invariably influenced by the cultural values and socially learned explanations (Steeves,

2000). Undoubtedly, a process of learning and growth in the understanding of social

issues like domestic violence is underway both because of the practice as well as

capacity building exercises. There is, however, a gap that requires a probe. As suggested

by the responses of several national practitioners, the major source of their learning is

exposure to practices in the "developed world", workshops sponsored and/or organized by international donor agencies and internal capacity building events that use the pre-prepared material mostly by external (read expatriate) sources ([I2CM2/22-p1]; [I1CM2/21-p1]; [I3CM2/21-p2]).

The fact that most expatriate practitioners are working as experts or consultants while the national practitioners are the doer's creates a dichotomy between the conceptual stands on an issue and its practice. In case of gender issues as O'Leary & Nee (2001) note, the conceptual stands are originating from 'foreign feminist theories' and their transference through the capacity building efforts have not been adequate. This is because "the internalization of the values underlying the training (which are usually not made explicit) has been limited, and that capacity building efforts have not impinged deeply on the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of development practitioners" (p.1). I came across several instances that bear this out.

Sexist jokes and anecdotes that objectify women or trivialize violence against women abound in Cambodian discourse too as it seems to be the case in many other societies. It was, however, remarkable that I heard these jokes and stories being narrated in the interactions between the SNVW's staff and officials at the commune level who constitute the "stakeholders" of SNVW in the event of workshops and trainings. That the people concerned did not see any conflict in this discourse and the formal content of the workshops is an illustration of the fact that the conceptual issues related to gender equality have become part of the vocabulary of development practitioners in Cambodia but have not been internalized by all. During a break between the sessions at one of the

meetings with community service providers, a joke related by a participant who happened to be a police official was translated for me as follows. A girl always carried a condom with her and on being asked for a reason she told that in case she was raped she would request the rapist to use it. The joke was apparently appreciated by all including the women participants present there. If it did offend anyone, it wasn't made known (Field notes, p. 6). That an act like rape could be treated as a subject of joke on an occasion where participants have gathered to discuss violence against women indeed convey that the discussions are not being internalized.

At another workshop the facilitator, a young man of about 25 years, himself related a story about a woman whose father promised her "virginity" as a reward to anyone who taught her a useful skill and a monk accomplishes the task. The story proceeded about how she meets three men with different characteristics, who desired her. She was on her way to the monk's house and asked them to wait. The monk, however, let her go without exacting his reward. At the end of the story, the participants were asked who in their opinion deserved her virginity and were told to make a mark on the white board to convey their choice. A light discussion ensued about what their choice of the men reveals about their own personality. I later asked the facilitator the connection between the story and the session assuming that I missed it during the translation. He explained that there wasn't any connection and the story was just a warm up exercise. He elaborated that he likes to begin with a funny story to get the attention of the participants.

The irony of the situation was that the preceding session talked about "power and control" issues and the session following the story discussed psychological violence. The

story where a woman's sexuality was treated like an object to be gifted and robbed was related as a "funny story to get participants attention" did not appear in conflict with the formal discourse of the sessions, to the other staff present either. The staff and participants included both men and women (Field notes, p. 21).

The same workshop included sessions that talked about the difference between "women in development" and "gender and development" as well as the difference between terms like "gender equity" and gender equality". At the beginning of each day of the workshop the participants were administered a questionnaire with multiple choice answers that tested their ability to recognize appropriate terms and concepts for a situation. Those terms were discussed during the sessions that day. The same questionnaire was administered at the end of the day. The recognition of correct terms was seen as a measure of success of the workshop. There is, perhaps, a pressure from within and outside the organization that practitioners be familiar with the appropriate concepts and terms and disseminate them in the field.

My experience is that jokes with sexual overtones targeting women are common in Cambodian discourse and the concepts like "power and control", gender equity etc. are being mouthed by most people working on gender related issues as they have learned them officially but have not internalized. There has not been any effort to make practitioners analyze or question the values they are socialized to believe in. Therefore, hardly anyone in these field level workshops sees any conflict in these concepts being floated and their internal believes. The staff wants to pass it on to the networks being formed and are contended as long as their trainees can mouth them. The exercises are

designed to do just that. Genuine discussion on these issues is rare as far as my

experience suggested (Field notes p. 22).

CHAPTER IV

COMMUNICATION ISSUES DUE TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

O'Leary & Nee (2001) observes that "[t]he distinguishing feature of good development practice, and the feature that determines its effectiveness is congruency between the personal values, beliefs, attitude and behavior of the practitioner with the approach taken" (p. 12). This congruency is precisely what was missing in the instance of efforts being carried out to address the issue of domestic violence as discussed in the previous chapter.

One factor that undoubtedly requires to be explored in understanding this incongruence is the interaction between expatriate practitioners and the national practitioners. The expatriates are invariably in the position of defining or at least influencing the approach taken to address the development issues in Cambodia. The national practitioners who are usually in the position to translate these approaches into action are also the people who hold the cultural beliefs of their country that may be incongruent with the approach. This is not to say that Cambodian development practitioners are not actively involved in analyzing the issues that Cambodia faces at present and finding approaches to address those issues. In the context of gender issues some of the most effective people who have come up with strategies to address gender inequity are Cambodian men and women (UNIFEM et al, 2004). Due, however, to the immense presence of international donor agencies, the ideologies they inevitably bring

with them and the dearth of qualified Cambodians to fit the eligibility requirement of "experts" and "advisors" the say of expatriates in matters of approach is enormous.

In such a scenario it becomes imperative that the communication between the expatriate and Cambodian development practitioners is of the nature where both engage in a dialogue to explore the conflicts in the approaches and stances on an issue on one hand and the cultural and personal beliefs on the other. Communication of this nature may lead to both a modification in approaches and the analysis and evolution of personal beliefs to bring the two in tandem. Responses of several respondents both Cambodian and expatriate, however, suggest that there exist communication barriers that need to be overcome before an interaction like that is possible. Theresa, for instance, said that communication with her Cambodian colleagues gets frustrating sometimes because she feels they do not mean what they say. She added "being English and being a direct straightforward personality, I just like yes to mean yes and no to mean no" [I8EF3/31-p4]. Kristin mentioned this too about her communication with her Cambodian colleagues, she said "[t]here is a certain lack of precision in communication. People tend to use lot of ambiguity and generalizations" [I15EF4/28-p19].

Similarly Laura experienced difficulty in communication because of what she perceived as "a tendency [of Cambodian people] to give monosyllabic answers or very generic answers." She suspected that this tendency gets displayed among those people who have had little experience with foreigners. According to her at times she knew "there is something there, they have a bit more to tell that they aren't [telling]…" and it is not to do with language barrier. She said she has never truly been able to understand it

and did not think she can overcome the barrier [I5EF3/31-p6]. Her strategy to get around the problem is to put the national consultant forward for interaction with Cambodians as she found that the interaction is more effortless then [I5EF3/31-p7]. Laura also mentioned her dismay at the fact that even in settings like MoWA where women are in leadership role and are engaged in the efforts to alleviate the position of women, hierarchical values are maintained. She said that it comes in the way of getting to hear opinion of the people in junior positions who are directly in touch with the programs [I5EF3/31-p6]. Kristin made a similar point saying this society is very hierarchical and that is reflected and reinforced by the hierarchy in public service. She said that the attitude of junior staff is to wait for orders and to suggest something up to the senior position is to suggest that the senior people do not know [I15EF4/28-p23].

Churn on the other hand expressed his concern about expatriate development workers' lack of understanding of the hierarchical social set up of Cambodia and said in regard to the project on strengthening local governance "bottoms up approach will not work because the culture is that you are not allowed to question your big boss" [I6CM4/4-p6]. He asserted that that culture dominates Cambodian social setting and in implementing any program this has to be taken into the consideration. According to him "you have to adopt a combination type of approach where you try to bring top down and bottoms up together, otherwise it will not work" [I6CM4/4-p6]. Piseth maintained that there is no communication issues because "foreigners learn about our culture" and he himself has studied outside Cambodia and therefore has no problems in interacting with them. He, however, added that problems do occur both because of language barrier and

because expatriates "do not understand about the character or behavior [of Cambodians] and have different attitudes." Giving an instance of a gesture like hands in pocket while talking to someone, he said that people in Cambodia may find such a gesture insulting. He added "people here are very quiet and gentle. They think you look down" [I3CM2/21-p4].

He was, probably, comparing the directness of most expatriate people to the mild mannered and indirect behavior of Cambodians that Theresa referred to, as the cause of her frustration. Jan who is a Korean American and has familiarity with the norms of communication in two different cultures underscored both viewpoints. She said "I am considered as very brash here as I tend to be direct but I am a Korean so I understand that at all cost, at any cost, must save face" [I10EF4/7-p2].

Discussing specifically the communication obstacles in discussing gender issues, Theresa stated "I think discourse here is pretty difficult at the best of times and I think it gets worse if you are into value-based subjects like gender." She added:

> A lot of the development work is based on the assumption… [that] Cambodians have the same understanding about the value based word [like equality] that we do. So, you start to talk about gender equality and gender equity on very very shaky foundations. This thing about cultural value based meaning of words or concepts is really important and there isn't enough attention paid to these. These words fly around organizations all the time, and very few people take the time to go deep down into the concept. [I8EF3/31-p4]

It is evident from these responses that a sort of interaction, where these differences can be brought to surface and a process to thrash them out among the development collaborators from outside and within Cambodia can begin, is needed. The following sections discuss some of the issues and barriers that might be hindering a communication process that engages the practitioners in an earnest dialogue. The barriers as reflected in the responses of the interviewees for this study can be treated under two headings. One is related to the hierarchically different positions that expatriates and Cambodian practitioners occupy in the context of development work. The other is related to the difference in the perceptions depending on the degree of connectedness with the cultural setting.

Issues Related to Hierarchy

As mentioned earlier in the chapter the expatriates are often in the position of "experts" and advisors which puts them in a position of influence in terms of defining stances, strategies and expected outcomes of development programs (Tisch & Wallace, 1994). Considering the fact that Cambodia is an inherently hierarchical society (Ledgerwood, 1990; O'Leary & Nee, 2001) the expatriates with their position of influence automatically get relegated to a higher position in the hierarchy. The associated cultural aspect of "power distance" a dimension of culture that exists in high proportions in South East Asian countries including Cambodia (Jandt, 2000) influences the communication. According to Jandt (2000) countries with high power distance "… may communicate in a way to limit interaction and reinforce the difference among people" (p.

211). For open communication to take place, therefore, it becomes necessary that the practitioners from both sides make efforts to transcend the hierarchy and interact as "equals". Several responses however, suggest that wittingly or unwittingly the behavior and circumstances reinforce that hierarchy.

Angelina was most vocal about this divide and said "communication is really a dialogue, an interaction for changing things and that is not happening. We are on this side and are not really interested in to going over the other" [I4EF3/30-p7]. In her view the responsibility for this lack of genuine communication lies as much with the behavior of expatriates as with the Cambodian people. She said "when expatriates interact with local people here, it is not natural, it is not true engagement; it is as if they are talking two different languages." She elaborated "the communication is missing probably because it is a hierarchical society, has colonial mentality, had undergone cruelty but I think the most important reason is that expatriates are not treating them as equals" [I4EF3/30-p6]. She reproached them for staying in a sort of ghetto and felt that though some socialization is good within the expatriate community but it is important to get in touch with and know more about local people when you live in another country. She also pointed out aspects that can presumably put expatriates higher in hierarchy in a society that ranks high in the dimension of power balance. She said that an expatriate in an NGO earns ten times more then her local counterpart. Considering the fact, as stated earlier, that expatriates usually hold more influence too due to being on high positions, it is not be surprising that their may exist an unequal relationship between them and their local colleagues. As Jandt (2000) states "[i]n the higher power distance workplace, superiors

and subordinates consider each other existentially unequal. Power is centralized, and there is a wide salary gap between the top and the bottom of the organization" (p. 211). Angelina's belief was that given the circumstances and the hierarchical nature of the society, it is natural that most local people will not know how to interact with the expatriates and if they too hesitate in forging stronger relationships with the locals, "it creates a kind of separation in the society" [I4EF3/30-p6].

An instance of how organizational policies may perpetuate the inequality appears in Laura's account of her struggle to promote the national consultant working with her as her equal by giving her credit due to her. She narrated that she had an argument with the operations people at the international organization she worked for because they wanted to pay the national consultant a pittance and they authored that amount to her because:

> They said she was my assistant. I said that you advertised this position as national consultant. She is not my assistant. She is the National consultant and she is working. She runs all the meetings we do. She makes all the contact with people we meet. She is my colleague, not my assistant. They gave her a bit more. [I5EF3/31-p7]

The observation that the capacities of the local people are not trusted while that of the expatriates is overrated was made by a couple of other people too. Jan for instance said "[i]n every organization expats are in the leadership role and we are given a lot more then we are worth" [I10EF4/7-p3].

Another aspect of the hierarchical relations for which Angelina held expatriate practitioners responsible is the intellectual superiority that expatriates establish,

according to her, by using jargons. She said expatriate practitioners use words like "transparency, accountability and God knows what all…." She explained that local people do not understand but they start using these words and even make speeches but questioning them reveals they have not understood [I4EF3/30-p6]. Churn echoed her though he was talking in the context of expatriates' interaction with the project's clientele. In his words:

Sometimes they might try to use scientific knowledge and that is not very appropriate and not understandable by the local people. That is also one of the problems. They put that knowledge in front of them and local people do not understand what they mean. [I6CM4/4-p6]

Explaining why the interaction happens at a superficial level, Angelina explained that local people "haven't developed a sort of trusting relationship [with expatriate practitioners]. [They] will not say can you please explain again. What do you mean?" According to her it is a sort of power relation between those giving knowledge and those who are the recipients [I4EF3/30-p6]. Viewed in the context of the traditional roles assigned to the teachers and students this relationship between expatriate and local practitioner is significant in understanding the hierarchical relationships that may exist between them. In Cambodia traditionally teachers have authority and power and students must respect and obey instructions (O'Leary & Nee, 2001). Being the "learners" the Cambodians thus may perceive themselves as inferior to the expatriate "teachers".

The role and responsibilities of the expatriate advisors at times come in the way of communication that might be described as dialogic. Often their job is to bring the

project planning in line with the requirement of the donor agencies. Laura for instance stressed that the Cambodian practitioners should be at the forefront as it is their issue. She, however, added that at times she has to get autocratic and tell "this is the methodology we have to use for this; this is what you have to do". She said, by way of explanation, that there are donors who "require specific information that has to be assembled and analyzed in specific ways and to be reported in specific ways and there isn't hell of a lot of choice there" [I5EF3/31-p7]. In a scenario that she described, the outcome of the discussions is pre-decided. The role of the expatriate consultant is to bring the others to eventually confirm with the requirements of the donor. Talking about her experience working with the national consultant Laura narrated:

> We can argue about all sorts of things but in the end this is what you have to put on the table if the bank is going to look at it as a viable project… there were times when we would spend the better part of the day talking through an issue and where I knew from the beginning that I have to get her to understand that for whatever reason what she was thinking about was a non-starter. It went beyond the resource capability, outside the term of reference etc. [I5EF3/31-p8]

She added that this is a part of her job as both her management role as well as capacity building role. Given the lack of experience and skill building opportunities available to Cambodians due to historical reasons, such discussions are indeed required and contribute in building the capacities of the local practitioners. A flip side, however, is that such discussion where the outcome is fixed in advance leaves no space for consideration of the local practitioners' views. The discussion thus becomes a somewhat

superfluous exercise and assumes the character of a "transmission model" despite appearing to be dialogic.

Another aspect of the relationship between expatriate and local practitioners is that at times the hierarchy is reinforced by the behavior of the Cambodian practitioners. Several expatriates mentioned the manifestation of hierarchical relationship in their interaction with Cambodian practitioners. Discussing communication barriers Theresa for instance said:

My Cambodian staff treats me as a senior Cambodian, which means that I am deferred to in ways that I do not like, and I am spoken to in ways that I do not like. This thing about going round and round, or if you want a message conveyed, you go through an intermediary. [I8EF3/31-p4]

Some other respondents indicated that their and other expatriates' opinions are given importance over that of a local person. Laura recounted:

… [P]eople always want to thrust me out there as the international consultant … and I always have to work very hard to say this person here next to me is my equal, in fact better than me in this particular situation because he or she offers you the opportunity to communicate easily and the confidence that you are being understood. [I5EF3/31-p7]

Making a similar point Amy said:

The Khmer people feel they can't do as well as expats. They [the expatriates] however, do not know the culture, Khmers have better understanding of that but

people listen to expats first…. There is a possibility, though not in every case that his or her opinion will outweigh a Khmer person's opinion. [I13EF4/25-p3]

Jan also sensed that expatriates are considered to be far more educated and she said "maybe we are but …they attribute a lot more to us then we are worth in terms of skills and everything else." As an instance of the superiority assigned to expatriates she found that the kind of power she may wield with government officials as a female expatriate she can never wield in another country [I10EF4/7-p5].

A trend about the responses that indicate awareness about the hierarchical nature of interaction is that with one exception all other responses are those from the expatriate practitioners. There are indirect statements from a couple of other Cambodian respondents that reflect their awareness and resentment of the hierarchical relationship. Chanty for instance related how the American participants in a gender awareness workshop were behaving arrogantly and not paying attention to their Cambodian facilitators [I14CF4/25-p1]. Similarly Maaly, who is slightly critical of expatriate practitioners and believed that they should understand the cultural aspects before presenting themselves as experts, informed, somewhat sullenly, that the international consultants work part time and she is the one who works full time as a trainer. She seemed to imply that she is the one who does the real work while they get the credit [I7CF4/4-p2].

There could be two possible explanations for the lack of recognition on the part of Cambodian respondents. One could be that some of the other Cambodian respondents did not see the inequality in the relationship as remarkable but saw it as a natural state of

affairs. The other possibility is that since a lot of emphasis is placed on interpersonal harmony in Cambodia and expressing that one is upset or dissatisfied is avoided (O'Leary & Nee, 2001), most local practitioners did not divulge their opinion on the issue.

Distinction in Views

In addition to the hierarchical differences that might be coming in the way of dialogic communication, there appeared a conspicuous distinction in the views about obstacles in implementing development projects. Most expatriates' responses point towards the issues regarding the capacity and initiative of the Cambodians that they find sometimes obstruct efficient implementation of development projects. The cultural and historical reasons were identified by the respondents to explain this constraint. The responses of several Cambodian respondents on the other hand identified the issues regarding what they believed was expatriate's lack of touch with reality of Cambodia as a reason for some of the implementation problems. A remarkable trend that I observed in the responses was that the expatriate practitioners' from the South had views that were, somewhat, in line with those of the Cambodian practitioners. Most of them found the mismatch in the paradigm brought in by the international agencies and the Cambodian context responsible for implementation difficulties. The following is an account of distinction of views between practitioners.

Discussing the conceptual understanding on gender issues, Louise said that there is a big difference in the understanding of the "returnees" as compared to those who have

always lived in Cambodia. Elaborating on the reasons for this gap she stated that it is because they have been isolated and:

In Cambodia nobody is doing research, or writing, or publishing so if you have to excel in any area- financial, administration, gender you have to read French or English. If you can't read anything then you can't open yourself up to develop your knowledge, challenging your understanding, so how can you evolve as a thinker, as an activist. [I9EF4/5-p8]

The lack of critical thinking and conceptual understanding is mentioned by almost all expatriates. Jan, for instance observed that ability to think critically and do analyses is missing in her Cambodian colleagues. She wondered "… if it is a skill that is built or something that is inherent and is honed. …It is essential to have it if you are working on issues related to human rights" [I10EF4/7-p3]. Laura found it surprising that community people whose livelihood is resource based were not able to grasp the concept of "natural resource and environment management" [NREM]. She said "[i]n moving from day to day realities to the level as a group of issues, to a more conceptual level was a real intellectual obstacle. Inclusion of gender in NREM made it even more complicated" [I5EF3/31-p2]. She added that she anticipated that some explanation will be required but expected the recognition to be quicker. Theresa echoed her in saying that one of the communication obstacles she faces is in "translating things into concrete terms that people can grasp and understand." She added "I find that few Cambodians think very conceptually, people think in very linear ways, and this is because of how their brains

have been drilled. People do not make links between things that I will quickly make as obvious" [I8EF3/31-p1].

Another aspect towards which all expatriates pointed was the effect of trauma that, according to the respondents, most Cambodians over the age of 30 years display due to the excesses committed during the Khmer Rouge's regime. All respondents who discussed this aspect pointed towards the tendency of Cambodians of being risk-averse and their need to not get noticed. Amy, for instance, said "there is little individualism. There is an easy to go along mentality… the whole need for security which is completely understandable" [I13EF4/25-p3]. Theresa explained "the effect of trauma is that people suppress themselves their own initiative, creativity, individualism. It is about survival behavior. Once people have learnt survival behaviors, it is very difficult to unlearn them" [I8EF3/31-p3].

All expatriate development practitioners, without an exception, mentioned the effect of Cambodia's history of genocide and wars as a factor affecting the behavior of Cambodian people and therefore communication. Few Cambodians however mentioned the history on their own and when asked gave non-specific comments. It is not that they do not talk about it at all. People I got to know well would off and on mention something like "my father was killed during the Pol Pot's time" in a matter of fact manner (field notes, p. 9) but perhaps that aspect is a part of their private lives and they do not want to share it with someone they are meeting for the first time. There is no way to estimate the degree to which those painful experiences continue to affect the behavior of the

Cambodian people but they cannot be discounted in considering any aspect of human behavior in Cambodia.

In discussing the effects of trauma O'Leary & Nee (2001) observe "During the conflict period, the existence of authoritarian local leaders created fear in people who were powerless to complain about or contest any leadership decision. Individual initiatives were discouraged. As a result, there is a strong legacy of fear and obedience …" (p.65). The fact that there are few counseling support services in Cambodia and there have never been any public tribunals to provide any semblance of justice to those who survived 1970s makes this factor even more pertinent. Jan wondered "Ones who survived, I do not know if they have truly processed it and have got over it. I am not a believer in western counseling but if you are still bogged down by the past it is a problem" [I10EF4/7-p4].

The other perspective focuses on what Cambodian respondents and few non Cambodian from the South perceived as the mismatch between the approaches of expatriates and the reality of Cambodia. Churn, for instance, expressed concern about the disconnect he perceives between the concepts and the culture. In regard to the efforts for gender mainstreaming he says "You have to look at the culture, the society, how they treat women, how women and men have relations, what are the beliefs here. If you adopt a concept you should not push for it but adapt it to the culture. That is normally the clash." He did not specify the clash but uses a simile of technology. He stated that there might be lot of successful technologies to increase agricultural yield but if traditionally people prefer to cultivate just one season and like to enjoy the dry season letting the land

lie fallow, then the new technology that disregards this culture will not work.. He concluded by saying "that is what they are doing in forcing a concept [on gender equality]" [I6CM4/4-p5].

Maaly saw the approach of some of her expatriate colleagues as detrimental to the cause since they, she believed, do not understand the cultural context and are extreme in their views. She said:

> To be honest, some international experts do not have any gender expertise. They bring their own strong ideas without understanding the real situation. They cause fights between men and women who were a good husband and wife before the training. [I7CF4/4-p4]

According to her the time is not ripe yet to encourage women to challenge their husbands as Cambodian women have not yet become like "western women who are quite strong and are not dependent on men" [I7CF4/4-p4]. Angelina may or may not share Maaly's view but she also believed that there is a mismatch between the approach of practitioners from North and the reality of Cambodia. She said "I am myself from South; I like to look at it from that perspective. … I mean they haven't really experienced those things. They are good intentioned but sometimes I think they cannot grasp the realities of the issue." Though, she added that perhaps this is her bias [I4EF3/30-p4].

Malini is of the view that neither the government nor the people lack in intention in working for development issues but considering where Cambodia started the country has a long way to go. According to her, not finding visible and fast changes, [expatriate]

development workers get a negative attitude" [I16EF4/30-p13]. Angelina refuted what she perceives are external views about Cambodian people's lack of capacity by saying:

I had initially to confront the theoretical knowledge that I had about Cambodia by reading and hearing about Cambodia from others. I had learnt that there education system is retarded, that the capacity of the people is very low. I was surprised to see that all the [Cambodian] researchers… were all very proactive. They asked challenging questions that can be compared to anybody from the so called developed countries. [I4EF3/30-p1]

She believed that one of the reasons that people struggle with understanding the concept of gender is "this word doesn't exist anywhere; it is a label brought from North." As a way to deal with the problem she said that she uses simple words to explain the concept and uses the label only if she knows people have understood the concept. She contended that even people from a lot of international organizations do not understand the concept implying that this is not something peculiar to Cambodians.

There is also a perception among several respondents who are critical of the approach brought by the international development agencies that the there is no real effort in building the capacities of the local practitioners. Malini believed "there is not enough faith in the local capacity. Head of the organizations are always expatriates. Capacity building is not being done" [I16EF4/30-p33]. Angelina commented that in research work local people are used only to pass questionnaires. "They are not taken from A to Z to complete the whole cycle; that way they will have the capacity. …That means you are not investing in the locals" [I4EF3/30-p5]. Jan expressed similar concerns

and speculates if the international efforts are creating dependence as in every organization expatriates are in the leadership role. Voicing her doubts about transfer of skills she said "the challenge is to empower our Cambodian colleagues and not just in a token sense. It really requires shaking things up" [I10EF4/7-p3].

Assessing the impact of the presence of International donor organizations and expatriate development practitioners in Cambodia, Malini acknowledged that there are more resources flowing and more issues are getting attention. She however believed it is all being done at a superfluous level and said that cosmetic or superficial actions are being undertaken to make the programs look like what they want. She added "in the process, they have put in place things that the country may not need at the time. Self-determination is not there in the real sense" [I16EF4/30-p2]. She was of the view that the western notions of human rights cannot be generalized and giving an instance of cultures that are different from west she said that actions taken for "protecting society" are sometimes in opposition to rights. As an example she mentioned how children in some cultures are protected but the price they pay for it is giving up their human rights. She mentioned the practice of "arranged marriages" in the same context and said that there is acceptance of repressing of such rights and this cannot be dismissed altogether" [I16EF4/30-p1]. In her view "development assistance workers are failing by not providing good paradigm - development efforts that take societal boundaries into consideration."

There are, I believe, legitimate and valuable insights in all the views expressed as they are coming from the experience of the practitioners engaged in social development

projects. It is however, notable that responses can roughly be categorized by the nationality of the practitioners. The distance from the culture of Cambodia and the values of ones own culture seems to markedly affect what aspects a respondent identifies as obstacles in communication and implementation of development programs. In order, that these obstacles are transcended, I reiterate that there needs to be a sort of interaction that would make each other aware of the difficulties that the other faces or perceives. This is the essence of dialogic communication. According to Beltran as cited by Huesca (2001) "[t]his required development researchers and practitioners to seek out the experiences, understandings and aspirations of others to jointly construct reality and formulate actions" (p. 426). In the following and the last chapter, I elaborate on this aspect by summarizing, and stating the conclusion drawn from, all the earlier chapters.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Notable Instances

During the course of my research work the most remarkable aspect were several incidents where local practitioners engaged in conversations or displayed behavior that was in stark contrast to what they communicated at a formal level. The other participants too in such instances never appeared to notice the discrepancy in communication. There was just one exception where the local practitioner translating the workshop proceedings for me showed her disapproval of the facilitator's treatment of marital rape as a joke.

The session was being conducted by a young male practitioner who took pride in the fact that he holds participants' attention due to his humorous style of facilitation. On this particular instance, as he talked, the participants seemed to visibly enjoy the narration. I knew that the session concerned marital rape and the woman practitioner who was translating it for me told that he is relating a case where a woman was being repeatedly raped by her husband and she decided that she cannot take it anymore, therefore filed for divorce. Assuming that she skipped over the joke being shared by all, I asked her the cause of laughter. She appeared a little upset and said that the facilitator should not relate this incident in such a humorous manner since rape is a serious matter. She said that she needs to tell him to stop "over-joking" (field notes, p. 21). The other team members present in the room including women seemed unperturbed and appeared to enjoy the joke.

Through the translation I could not get the humorous content in his description but it was perhaps the presentation of the entire episode of the couple's behavior that caused the laughter. Inclusion of marital rape as an aspect of domestic violence, as mentioned in chapter III, faces enormous resistance from the society including the law makers. Culturally, a husband cannot be accused of raping his wife as demanding sex from his wife is considered to be a husband's right and providing it, a wife's duty. Therefore, the description of a husband compelling his wife for sex and resistance displayed by the wife is more likely to be treated as a joke then a case of serious assault. The young facilitator's effort, therefore, to make the workshop interesting by relating the incidence as a joke did not, perhaps, offend most of the people present there.

The description of the "cycle of violence" by the same facilitator also amused the participants as well as all the team members including my translator who had got offended at his jokes regarding marital rape. The concept of "cycle of violence" explains how squabbles between a couple keep building up till there comes a point of explosion when the violence takes place followed by a period of reconciliation and subsequent buildup again. It specifies that with time as the victim and the abuser both get used to the cycle, the frequency and severity of violence keeps increasing. I requested the facilitator after the session to repeat in English for me what was causing the laughter. His account was full of comical episodes about excessive display of affection between the couple in the initial months of marriage and the subsequent emergence of sarcastic comments between the two. He mentioned the episode of violence casually and gave a humorous

description of the husband wooing the wife after the violence while she resists and then gives in "falling in his arms leading to the birth of another baby."

Sexist jokes may abound in all societies and are not peculiar to Cambodia. These instances, however, stand out because this communication was taking place between the staff of an organization working against domestic violence and the community service providers who are expected to work closely with the organization to eradicate domestic violence. Since all such jokes, stories and proverbs were related by male participants, in a conversation with a young woman staff present in the workshop, I asked if she found any aspect of such jokes and stories offensive. Assuming that I found them offending she assured me that these are only jokes and the facilitator does not mean any harm.

It was quite apparent that the discourse on domestic violence was happening at two levels there. One was at the level of formal content of the workshop that required people to discuss the stances of the organization on issues related to gender based violence. The other equally, if not more important communication was taking place at an informal level in the form of these jokes and stories and how people responded to them. The fact that people present did not see any conflict in the two discourses illustrates that neither the concepts that were being mouthed had been internalized by the facilitators nor the cultural beliefs been analyzed consciously. It was notable that some of the team members included people who have been with the organization for a considerable period of time.

Key Questions Explored

To summarize all the previous chapters and the narrative above I would like to restate the key questions of my research and then proceed to reiterate my observations to summarize the answers that this research offered me. The two key questions were: (1) how do the insiders' and outsiders' discourses regarding gender issues interact and (2) how do national and expatriate development workers respond to the interaction of discourses?

The first question is concerned with looking at the differences in the analysis of gender issues as manifested in the articulation of national and expatriate development workers. I have argued throughout the paper that most expatriate and Cambodian development practitioners have different views on the issues related to gender equity. That most expatriate and Cambodian practitioners were aware of variance in their and the other's understanding was evident. Most expatriates mentioned that the influence of cultural norms that undermine the concept of gender equity, is overpowering in Cambodia. Several Cambodian's on the other hand suggested that it is not that the concepts of gender equality are alien to Cambodia, it is just that expatriates' concept of gender equality do not fit in the Cambodian context. Churn's response exemplifies this belief. He said:

> A lot of them [expatriates] think that the concept of gender has come from outside, but if you look within the culture, there is a component of respect in terms of many things but I think that the concept being talked about is different.

It is in terms of political work and development work, not in terms of the power within the family. [I6CM4/4-p5]

He goes on to give the example of his wife who, he says, does not earn money but has her own area of control within the family in terms of managing finances and children.

Both the interview data and field observation indicated that there are implementation issues due to the differences. In analyzing the obstacles to efficient implementation what factors were identified by the practitioners depended on their proximity with the cultural context. The practitioners from North tended to identify the aspects that concerned the cultural constraints and the behavioral aspects of Cambodian practitioners. Cambodian practitioners as well as the expatriates who belonged to proximate cultures on the other hand, identified the foreign practitioners' "lack of touch with reality" as one of the obstacle.

The second question explored how practitioners process, and respond to, the different discourses. It is evident that there is often a mismatch between the approach that is based on one kind of discourse and the beliefs of the local practitioners reflecting the other discourse on gender issues. The expatriates' response consisted of utilizing their influence to encourage changes in policy documents and ensuring that contract guidelines between NGOs and donors or Government and donors are followed. Another response of several expatriate practitioners, as apparent in the interview data, was a sense of disappointment due to the perceived lack of changes happening on ground.

In the case of Cambodian practitioners who did not agree with the approaches brought in by the expatriates, there were a few who voiced their resentment for having to follow approaches that they believed were not appropriate in Cambodian context. The other response that has perhaps more serious implications for implementation of development projects was the conflict that appeared in the formal and informal discourse of the practitioners. The practitioners used the vocabulary expected of them as part of their professional responsibility. The concepts however, stay alien for them. Any effort at internalizing them would inevitably have forced them to question the existing beliefs and only then the conflict between the two discourses would have become apparent.

This conflict may not always emerge in the form of inconsistent speech which is perhaps easier to detect. At times it may get reflected in the behavior of people present in the meetings. One of the instances of such a conflict was revealed in a community meeting in one of the villages in which SNVW is working. A very innovative and promising project initiated by SNVW concerns focusing on men and engaging them in discussions on domestic violence. The said meeting was facilitated by three male staff members from SNVW and consisted of participants who form the "core group" under this program. The core group is expected to work on domestic violence cases within their villages. There were people from the police department, the Commune Council and adult and youth male volunteers. The sole female in the group was the gender focal point from that Commune. Her participation in the meeting was limited and she was constantly getting up to place water bottles in front of other "important people" present in the meeting. She took care of snacks during the break and cleaned up at the end of the

meeting. A couple of other members from the youth group present helped her but she seemed to be in charge (Field notes, p.15 & 16). No one seemed aware that she was playing out a gendered role within a meeting that directly or indirectly was meant to promote questioning of gendered roles.

A point worth making here is that conflicts in attitudes and the organizational stances were more often visible in the actions of practitioners who were working at the ground level and were responsible for implementing the approaches decided by others. There is a distinction in the views of Cambodian practitioners who are themselves in positions of influencing the approaches. These include the ones described as "returnees" like Viriny and Thavy who have lived outside Cambodia for an extensive period of time. They did not see the concepts on gender equity as "foreign" but could analyze the cultural aspects that influenced their own and others' behavior that was in conflict with those concepts. Thavy, for instance, mentioned that according to *chbap sri* a woman should never leave the village or even the house unescorted. She remembered that as a child she always had someone to accompany her even if she went to the market. That was necessary "to be a good woman, even a good little girl. You don't wander around alone," She said. Explaining how her socialization continues to influence her she said "even today despite being liberal with my daughters and giving them all the independence, due to my Cambodian head and as a Cambodian mom I ask them to take the driver along and my daughters say we don't need the driver. It is ingrained you know" [I12CF4/15-p3].

Discussion

Such a conscious analysis of cultural influences on oneself as well as others, as demonstrated in Thavy's narration, is perhaps necessary if the interaction of different discourses on gender equality have to enrich the knowledge base of development practitioners rather then generating conflict between approach and implementation (O'Leary, 2001). In the absence of an opportunity for such an analysis either the practitioners do not realize the conflict at all or discard the concepts on gender equality and women rights as an alien concept. Thavy's experience again exemplifies this. She was aware that because of her foreign education she is not considered a credible person to speak on cultural matters. She commented while narrating her efforts to advocate for the passage of domestic violence law:

> There is a lady called Theiry [name changed]. …she is older and went through a real Cambodian education, a real Khmer school; I didn't. So when I was [in the Ministry] and I wanted men to accept the changes that I wanted, I took her along because first of all they didn't want to listen to me because I want change now while she explains the culture. I can't because I was exposed to it for only 18 years. She was exposed for 25 years and that makes a whole lot of difference. [I12CF4/15-p8]

That the expatriate practitioners are looked upon as even more foreign then a Cambodian woman residing out of Cambodia is only to be expected. Their views, therefore, are perceived as even more alien in accordance to the cultural norms of Cambodia. Theresa's statement illustrates this well. She said:

There is this compartmentalization. I question my male colleagues that Cambodian women can not do this and that, and I do. And they tell me its different – you are an English woman. People often feel that some of the ideas are alien and are not fit for our women. [I8EF3/31-p3]

This thesis does not dwell on the debate that what conception of gender issues is best in order to realize women's rights and achieve gender equity. It focuses on exploring the nature of communication between foreign and national development collaborators in Cambodia on issues related to gender and how that influences the development practice. This is crucial because currently the contribution of international development organizations and the presence of expatriate practitioners in Cambodia is considerable.

Though there are exceptions, but there clearly is a distinction in the views of people depending on their cultural background. This underscores the importance of communication that is truly of dialogic nature and as Huesca (2001) mentions only such an approach will lead to "'cultural synthesis' between development collaborators to arrive at mutually identified problems, needs, and guidelines for action" (p.426). The research reveals that there is a need for an interaction that brings the differences in opinion to surface so that a process begins where a genuine dialogue between people who decide approaches and who implement them is possible. Currently it appears that the communication practices being followed, due to various reasons, do not bring these conflicts to surface. This impedes the process of examining the incongruence between the approach adopted to address the issue and the beliefs of practitioners.

The influence that donor agencies wield in Cambodia is recognized by all and several Cambodian as well as expatriate practitioners mentioned the changes that have happened due to that influence. Several lamented that the donors are not using it as much as they should. It is indeed true that considerable progress has been made in making the government responsive to gender equity and getting the focus of the civil society on gender issues. The attention that the domestic violence draft law is getting and the likelihood of its passage in near future can be, to a large extent, credited to the donor pressure, the local activism and supportive people within the government notwithstanding [I9EF4/5-p1]. In regard to the role of international donors in the whole process of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in the government, Kristin, perhaps, rightly said "none of these things would have happened. Some Cambodian women leader had been aware after the Beijing conference and wanted to do something but they would have been powerless to do anything" [I15EF4/28-p4].

While the importance of policy level changes that donors influence has achieved cannot be overstated, there is a flipside too to the whole process. The compulsion of the local practitioners to accept the approaches handed down to them and the position of the expatriate practitioners due to which their views prevail, creates a situation where debate can be dispensed with. Tisch & Wallace (1994), say that whoever has the responsibility for defining the issues for development and strategies to be used also gets the power to affect the process and outcome of development activities. It is due to this "power" that most expatriate practitioners usually possess, that the perspective of the Cambodian practitioners, particularly those who are responsible for implementation tends not to be

counted. The research underscores that wittingly or unwittingly both expatriates and Cambodian practitioners get caught in the unbalanced power equation between them and that impedes open communication.

Furthermore, in the context of project interventions in an international setting, the question "[i]f human change is to be brought about, by whom will or should it be done" (Casmir, 1991 p. 24) becomes a bone of contention. This assertion is exemplified in the resentment of some of the Cambodian and proximate culture's practitioners who reproached expatriates for not being in touch with the reality. The conflict in formal and informal discourse displays issues about acceptance of ideas perceived as foreign. This bears out Casmir's contention that problems arise "…if an idea for change does not originate within a given culture, but comes from someone who may be seen as alien or representing outside interests" (p. 24).

This thesis does not focus on the discussion about political reasons ascribed to construction of a certain kind of development vocabulary by international donor agencies to describe the problems in the third world (Escobar 1995). It is, however, pertinent to refer to Escobar's claim here that this constructed vocabulary puts forward particular realities, and then creates policies to address those "realities". He adds that the complete failure to understand peasants, women, and the environment often lead to misguided policies that objectify powerless local population and do little to empower them. Malini's remark referred to this aspect when she used the "cosmetic analogy" and said:

Development assistant workers use cosmetic or superficial actions to make the programs look like what they want. In the process, they have put in place things

that the country may not need at the time. Self-determination is not there in the real sense. [I16EF4/30-p26]

Several other people particularly those who are expatriates belonging to proximate cultures indicated that the current development practices are not empowering national expatriates, rather are making them dependent on expatriates.

The most critical remark in this regard was given by Angelina who said in regard to the communication practices of expatriate practitioners "if I am working as an expert why will I built the capacity of my counterpart if I am going to loose my job" [I4EF3/30-p5]. These remarks indicate that there is a lack of confidence on the strategies and intent of international donors and the expatriate practitioners. This again underscores the need for initiating communication processes that are open so that the development practitioners may begin to arrive at common understanding as well as trusting relationships.

The work being done on gender in Cambodia also makes good case for "standpoint feminism" as it argues that women have a variety of experiences and thus have different "standpoints" or perceptions from which to view the world. The theory refrains from "constructing women discursively as a homogeneous group" but considers the influence of varied and multiple oppressions like race, class and gender (Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar & Papa, 2000). It perhaps explains the bewilderment of some expatriate practitioners at finding Cambodian women to not want to break away from traditions that, they realize, put them at a disadvantage [I8EF3/31-p2]; or the accusation of a Cambodian woman development practitioner who believes in empowering women

but reproaches international gender experts of creating conflict in the families by encouraging women to question their husband's position of superiority [I7CF4/4-p4]. Papa et al., (2000) state "paradox and contradiction are part of the process of social change. Since established patterns of thought or behavior are difficult to change, people often engage in contradictory or paradoxical activities as part of an adjustment process until new behavior patterns are fully internalized" (p.114).

In conclusion, I must note that this study is not exhaustive in nature but indicates that there is a need to look into the communication issues that are limiting the interaction of national and expatriate development collaborators. It suggests that both expatriate and Cambodian practitioners should introspect for the reasons that may lie within them and their organizations for this communication gap. This is of utmost importance as the approaches that are arrived at by dialogue between all concerned as against those that are formed by those having "power" will benefit the work being done on gender. With the evident gap between the cultural mores of Cambodia and most feminist theories this may take a long time and perhaps require giving up of stands on both sides. Considering Casmir's (1991) warning that "while indigenous culture should be taken into account in deciding development agenda we should not overlook … that in many instances maintenance of cultural values can be used as a ploy by individuals who would lose both power and authority if change became acceptable within a given system" (p. 24), this may not be easy. Nevertheless, a need for genuine dialogue where approaches can be negotiated and are not pre-decided cannot be overstated.

I must also note that the fact that this research tends to highlight the problems in the development communication practice in Cambodia does not mean that there are no positive aspects of work being done on gender in the country. There is much to be applauded in the efforts of both expatriate and Cambodian practitioners. However, the content of this thesis was determined by the questions it intended to explore and answer.

NOTES

[1] In the code [I9EF4/5-p1], I9 = Interview 9, E = expatriate (in case of Cambodian interviewees E is replaced by C for Cambodian), F= female (in case of male interviewees F is replaced by M for male), 4/5= month and date the interview was conducted and p1= page 1 of the transcribed interview.

[2] A woman member from the Commune council is appointed as gender focal point. She is responsible to coordinate with the MoWA on all issues regarding gender mainstreaming at the Commune level. In the absence of any elected woman member in the council, a woman member is nominated to be the gender focal point.

[3] Communes are constituted of a cluster of villages and form the lowest level of administrative units in Cambodia. Commune Council, an elected body is responsible for its governance at the local level. A multi-donor project for strengthening local governance in Cambodia provides most of the funds spent by the Council.

[4] Due to cultural barriers there is, however, a possibility that I may have missed or misread some of the non-verbal cues in case of both expatriate and Cambodian practitioners.

[5] There are no English translation of *chbap* sri as a complete document. The most extensive translation I could get was from Ledgerwood's dissertation "Changing Khmer conceptions of gender".

[6] Ledgerwood specifies that an order of female monks (Bhikkhunji) did exist in the time of Buddha but today in other Theravada countries, too, women are referred to as "nuns" and they are generally those who are old and withdrawing from the world. Their roles are akin to the domestic servants of the monks.

[7] While I did not get to interview any expatriate male practitioners working on gender issues, among the Cambodians 4 out of 8 interviewees were men. This was, perhaps, because the number of men development practitioners working on gender or any other issue is quite high as more qualified men than women are available for jobs in the development sector. I have however not analyzed the interviews for differences between men's and women's opinion for this paper.

[8] Since the English version of the latest draft law on domestic violence was not available, I am not aware of the exact modifications. An interviewee at the MoWA got this information by calling up the department dealing with the bill at the ministry, at my request.

[9] In all texts that I reviewed as well as the translations that my Cambodian colleagues did for me during workshops, divorcee and separated women were also referred to as "widow". Though I could not confirm this from any source but I believe that a reason for this could be that there is no Khmer term for "separated" and "divorcee" as traditionally a married woman could conceivably be without a husband only in the event of his death.

[10] Some legal advisors contend that the wordings of Article 28, that deals with rape in the domestic sphere, in the draft law, in any case focus on sexual assault within a household and exempt sexual assault within a married relationship from being defined as rape.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR DEVELOPMENT WORKERS IN CAMBODIA

Introduction

Hello. My name is Zeba and I am doing a research for my Master's thesis regarding the different ways that Cambodian and non-Cambodian Development workers may feel and communicate about domestic violence and related gender issues. I believe that understanding these differences may help in strengthening collaboration between local and expatriate development workers. Your views and understanding regarding this will be of great help. The interview data will be treated as confidential and no identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.

1. The first question is about how long have you been working in the area of social development?

2. Explain to me how you understand or interpret "domestic violence?"

3. What has been your source of developing this understanding?

4. What are observable indicators of domestic violence?

5. How do people generally talk about domestic violence :

   - About themselves?

   - About others?

   - Men?

   - Women?

6. How does your organization understands and talks about domestic violence?

7. What are the ways in which you generate awareness about issues of domestic violence?

8. Who do you think your audience(s) is? Or please explain how many audiences do you have?

9. If there are many audiences, what are the strategies you adopt to target these different audiences?

10. What channels of communication are you using to disseminate the organization's understanding on domestic violence, to your audiences?

11. What kinds of direct support are you providing?

12. How do the "victims" respond to these support systems, mechanisms?

13. What kinds of influence, if any, are these efforts having on your audiences?

14. What kinds of influence, if any, are these efforts having on the issue of domestic violence?

15. What are some of the arguments, if any, that you come across against your organizations' point of view?

16. How do you think your expatriate colleagues have similar and/ or different understanding of the issues as yours?

17. Would you like to add to what we have spoken about to add to my understanding of your work?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKERS

Introduction

Hello. My name is Zeba and I am doing a research for my Master's thesis regarding the different ways that Cambodian and non-Cambodian Development workers may feel and communicate about domestic violence and related gender issues. I believe that understanding these differences may help in strengthening collaboration between local and expatriate development workers. Your views and understanding regarding this will be of great help. The interview data will be treated as confidential and no identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.

1. The first question is about which country are you from and how long have you been working in Cambodia?

2. What are some aspects of your experience – while working for women rights/domestic violence- peculiar to Cambodia?

3. Explain to me how you understand or interpret the issue of "domestic violence?"

4. What do you have to say about general (Cambodian) people's understanding on, domestic violence/women rights?

5. Do you find any conspicuous gaps between your concept of women rights/domestic violence and the Cambodian concept

6. How difficult or easy is it to work for women right/ domestic violence here compared to other places?

7. Do you perceive any influence of Cambodian history on this understanding?

8. Ca you talk about challenges or/and support you face from

- Government

- Bureaucracy

- Cultural and social beliefs of people

9. How do you deal with these challenges?

10. What kind of, if any, challenges you face in communicating on the issue

- With your Cambodian colleagues?

- With other audiences?

11. What influences according to you have the international development efforts have had on Cambodian society, on the issue of women rights/domestic violence in particular?

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Feb 02-May 03:	**Consultant, Development Support Unit.** Responsibilities included- Annual reviews and planning for selected CRY projects; being a resource person for CRY sponsored trainings; analyses of project proposals.
Apr 00-Feb 02:	**Team Leader, Development Support Unit** Responsibilities include-assessing, supporting and monitoring development programs of 22 nongovernmental organizations; promoting collective action among partner organizations on human rights and child rights.
Apr 99-Mar 2000:	**Coordinator, Development Support Unit** Responsibilities included-project selection, planning and review; conducting capacity building programs for project teams.
Sep 97-Mar 99:	**Executive, Development Support Unit,** Responsibilities included- project selection, planning and review; supporting non-government organizations in rural areas to prepare models for non-formal education centres.

Prerna, New Delhi, India, a not for profit voluntary working for reproductive health and population control

Sept 96-Jul 97:	**Executive** Responsibilities included-implementing vocational education classes and sexual and reproductive health seminars for adolescent boys and girls.