

Developing Organizational Capacity in Cambodia

Case Study of the Ministry of Environment:

In conversation with

Cor Veer

1. Introduction

I am Cor Veer, first trained to become a dairy farmer and then trained to become a rural sociologist. Since 1978 I have worked in forestry, starting as a lecturer in Holland. Since 1985 based in Bangkok, working with FAO and later in a regional community forestry development organization. Presently I work as an independent consultant in CBNRM development.

I suspect that I got involved in the case study, because of my involvement in review and planning of IDRC projects in Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, in 2005-2006. I was interested as organizational development had emerged as an issue in the review of the IDRC projects, but we had no idea how to deal with it.

2. Overview of study

The core of the study is the assessment of the effects from 2 IDRC projects on the capacity of the Ministry of Environment in Cambodia. Both projects developed and introduced participatory research, in coastal zone management and in community forestry, respectively. The coastal project was run by a team from the Ministry of Environment, the community forestry project by a team with representatives from 3 agencies: the Ministry of Environment, the Forestry Administration and the Agricultural University's Forestry Faculty. The community forestry project worked in 5 different sites with a range of local organizations and teams. They also had a part time international adviser for project management, whereas the team with the 'simpler' project organization had one full time and a few part time international research advisors. Despite these differences it was found that both projects had contributed considerably to the development of capacities to conduct, manage, and conceive research as well as to promote use of the results in policy and practice.

It was, however, also found that preceding this emphasis on building of research capacity, IDRC had initially (from 1993 to 1997) emphasized the building of organizational capacity of the Ministry, together with other donors.

And presently the building of research capacity is embedded in a strategy in which building 'Cambodian capacity for capacity development' is emphasized. Key MoE staff involved in the IDRC projects have initiated a new capacity development organization, with linkages with a wide range of other organizations working on environment and development in Cambodia. If organizational capacity development were to be explored as a strategy in Cambodia, then a focus on this and other

'development research' organizations would seem most appropriate. Development of the organizational capacity of the Ministry of Environment, would require the support from these development research organizations as well as collaboration with key donors. This could be further explored for the management of protected areas. One requirement is a clear definition/shared understanding of organizational capacity, for which the study recommends building on recent work in ECDPM.

3. Surprises during the case study

- The appreciation of 'research' in what appear to be hostile bureaucratic/administrative environments and of 'participatory research' in hierarchical cultures such as Cambodia.
- The continuing interest and widening commitment to environment and sustainable development, despite the increasing disregard and violation of its core principles in practice.
- The corroboration of the intuitive need for 'organizational pluralism' in environment and development in Cambodia, by the results of reviews in other countries.
- The great capacity for organizational and institutional development displayed in cases where the incentives are right (see e.g., CBNRM Learning Institute, but also see the re-organization of the Forestry and Fisheries Administrations,)...
- The consistency of IDRC's programming strategy in Cambodia without an explicit long term strategy,
- The progress in clarifying –research and organizational- 'capacity' that I was not aware of...