Preface

International awareness on gender equality has increased during the course of this study, emphasized recently by the Danish initiated *Global Call for Action* on the empowerment of women in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality. At the same time, the World Bank Group President Robert B. Zoellick pointed out that “*Gender and women’s empowerment is at the core of what we need to do in the field of development*”, while adding that it is smart economics as well.¹ Likewise, in Cambodia, though spearheaded by the international donor community, focus on gender and women’s empowerment is increasing. Thus, the timeliness and actuality of the study at hand is not to be questioned, and it is the humble hope of the author that it will provide an informative contribution for readers engaged with community fisheries, resource management, gender, poverty, and related areas, in Cambodia and elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks go to the community fisheries committee members, community fisheries members and other villagers who have given me insight in their world by taking time to participate in the interviews which constitute the centre of this research. My appreciation goes to the people in the villages Srah Chak, Bat Trang and Preaek Sala in the Kampong Chhnang province, as well as the people interviewed in other villages in the provinces around the Tonle Sap Lake.

I am very thankful to other persons who have shared their knowledge with me, including interviewees and key informants from the Community Fisheries Development Office (CFDO), Inland Fisheries Research Development Institute (IFReDI) and Fishery Officers in the Tonle Sap region, as well as NGO workers and people from other organisations, including Community Capacities for Development (CCD), Aphiwat Strey (AS), Village Support Group (VSG) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Mr Chhuon Kim Chhea also has a great stake in the study by assisting with arrangements and translation during two major field investigations. His wide experience and immense network in the Tonle Sap region provided valuable contacts and knowledge in relation to the selection of CFs for investigation. Further thanks to the Mekong River Commission (MRC) who generously assisted me in meeting my transport needs for the main investigation; and IFReDI for letting me use their office facilities during my stay in Phnom Penh.

I highly appreciate that Mr Sten Sverdrup-Jensen and the Institute for Fisheries Management (IFM) let me in on the project “Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment - GAD Activity: Enhancing the Role of Women in Inland Fisheries in Cambodia”, which became the starting point of this thesis. Also thanks to the rest of the project team for constructive collaboration during the initial phase of this study.

Further I am grateful to my supervisors Associate Professor Søren Lund and Professor Henning Schroll for their important guidance, which helped me find my way through the vast field of relevant and related issues in the periphery of this study.

Last but not least, I appreciate the help of friends and family, including Mr Rune Eliasson, Ms Lone Poulsen Hoortash, Mr Henrik B. Kristensen, Ms Nhi Le Quyen, Mr Daniel Drevfors, Mr Mikkel H. Munck, my father and others, who have supported me.

Pelle Gätke, Copenhagen, July 2008
Abstract

Key words: Cambodia, Community Fisheries; Women’s Participation; Sustainable Fisheries Resource Management; Poverty Reduction; Gender Equality and Livelihoods

In a context of widespread poverty and pressure on natural resources, the Cambodian government has launched community management of the fisheries resource. In a generally male dominated political and socio-cultural sphere in Cambodia, few women partake in the local management of the fisheries resources. Through empirical investigations carried out in the Tonle Sap region, women’s participation in Community Fisheries Committees (CFCs) is examined. This is done with regard to the development potential of their participation, as well as the likely future participation of women in CFCs. The investigations reveal that women’s participation strengthens and improves the work of the CFCs in the areas of participation, communication, awareness, good governance and enforcement. In addition women address social issues, including immediate livelihood needs of the poor. These contributions show significant consistency with areas found important in relation to achieving the objectives of the Sub-Decree of Community Fisheries Management.

Despite the emergence of a political framework, formally ensuring women equal right to participate, in practice things change slowly. Women are strongly underrepresented in CFCs, and therefore their strengths and skills, in relation to the above mentioned areas of management, are only sporadically applied. Explanations for this by and large relate to cultural and traditional patterns, which are generally found to be in-conducive to women’s participation in the political landscape. However, women’s participation in politics is on the rise, with still more women being elected at commune council elections, as well as at village level CFC elections. As a consequence of women’s participation in CFCs, villagers’ perception of their ability to carry out work in the committees is changing, as they witness that women can contribute significantly.

It is the firm belief of the author that in general the participating women will continue to contribute favourably, thereby changing the perceptions among men and women further, towards acceptance of women in public decision-making. This will make it more difficult for existing power structures to ignore the development potential of women’s participation. However, it can be expected that CFCs will develop at an uneven pace, because the personal integrity of the men and women who participate in each separate CFC is very important, as is the general power structure in the single village and in the surrounding area.
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Kampong Chhnang, Siem Reap and Battambang Provinces, Cambodia, Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007, by Pelle Gätke.
Acronyms

ADB    Asian Development Bank
AS    Aphiwat Strey
BT    Bat Trang CF
CBNRM    Community Based Natural Resource Management
CCD    Community Capacities for Development
CDRI    Cambodia Development Resource Institute
CFs    Community Fisheries
CFCs    Community Fisheries Committee
CFDO    Community Fisheries Development Office
CFDU    Community Fisheries Development Unit
CMDG    Cambodian Millennium Development Goal
DANIDA    Danish International Development Agency
DFID    Department for International Development
FiA    Fisheries Administration
FRM    Fisheries Resource Management
GAD    Gender and Development
GMAG    Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups
IFReDI    Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute
IFM    Institute for Fisheries Management & Coastal Community Development
MAFF    Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery
MoP    Ministry of Planning
MoWA    Ministry of Women’s Affairs
MRC    Mekong River Commission
NGO    Non Governmental Organization
NPRS    National Poverty Reduction Strategy
NRM    Natural Resource Management
PFO    Provincial Fisheries Office
PIU    Project Implementation Unit
PS    Preaek Sala CF
RGC    Royal Government of Cambodia
RUPP    Royal University of Phnom Penh
SC    Srah Chak CF
SDCFM    Sub-Decree on Community Fisheries Management
TSEM    Tonle Sap Environmental Management (Project)
TWGF    Technical Working Group on Fisheries
TWGG    Technical Working Group on Gender
UNDP    United Nations Development Programme
VDC    Village Development Committee
VSG    Village Support Group
WB    World Bank

2 IFM in 2007 changed its name to “Innovative Fisheries Management – an Aalborg University Research Centre”
Box 1: Cambodia Fact Box

KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

       Khmer (90%), Vietnamese (5%), Other (5%)

Area: 181,035 sq km

Capital: Phnom Penh (Approx. 1.2 million)

Major language: Khmer

Major religion: Buddhism

Life expectancy: 62 years (women), 58 years (men)

Pop. growth rate: 1.81% (2004) (Down from 2.49% in 1998)

Poverty: 35% of the population lives below the poverty line

Literacy: 73.6% (Male: 84.7%, Female: 64.1%)

Currency: Riel (Riel 4,000 ≈ USD 1)

GNI per capita: USD 380 (2006)

GDP per capita: USD 513 (est. 2006)

GDP growth: 10.80% (est. 2006)

Main exports: Clothing, timber, rubber

Head of state: King Norodom Sihamoni

Prime minister: Hun Sen

(BBC 2008; MoP 2007; UM 2007; WB 2006; CIA 2008)

Map 1: Cambodia Land Maps
Chapter 1: Background of the Study

Improved conflict management, better communication, good economic management, increased participation, reduction in domestic violence and increased capacity among women. These statements were received during an investigation of women’s participation in inland fisheries resource management, which the author of this thesis carried out from October to December, 2006. I will revert to this shortly, but first the context of the present study is introduced.

1.1 Context of the Investigation

Poverty is widespread in rural Cambodia, with some of the poorest areas located at and around the Tonle Sap Lake. Approximately 85% of a still growing population live in rural Cambodia, where they experience an increasing pressure on fisheries and other natural resources. Farmers expand and clear forest to cater for new fields; fishermen experience increasing competition for the same resources; and wood collection for cooking and production leaves its wounds on the flooded forests in and around the Tonle Sap Lake.

Picture left: Dry season, Kampong Chhnang

The importance of fisheries to people’s livelihoods is essential in Cambodia, where an estimated 1.2-1.4m people are directly involved in, and base their livelihoods on, the fisheries sector (Hun Sen, July 2007; ADB 2003 TSEMP). According to a speech by Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2007, approximately 6m people are involved in the sector in which both fishermen and all fisheries related activities are considered, making it the second most important sector in Cambodia, only surpassed by agriculture. However, a number of challenges must be faced in order to move towards sustainable fisheries resource use. These include an increasing number of fisheries resource users; the need for protecting dry season habitats and spawning areas; the establishment of more conservation areas; investment in fish culture (to reduce pressure on the natural fish stock); and a need for municipal and

Picture right: Wet season, Kien Ta Ma CF
provincial governors to take action against ‘anarchic looting’ of flooded forests and mangroves, which deteriorate fish habitats. (Hun Sen, July 2007; Catch & Culture, Vol. 13, 2, Sept 2007)

Community Fisheries Management
For more than a century, inland fisheries in Cambodia have been administered through a lot system, in which fishing rights have been auctioned off to individuals by the government. This practice led to huge areas being controlled by powerful individuals, who often collaborated with police and military to protect the areas from outsiders. Consequently, inhabitants in fishing villages, e.g. around the Tonle Sap Lake, often did not have access to the waters right next to their villages.

Competing claims on fisheries and other natural resources have increased together with a continuing growth in population, rising commercial interests, and demands for agricultural land, water for irrigation and fuel wood, respectively. These factors led to conflicts between local fishermen and fishing lot owners, but further involved local authorities, military and police. The outcome was confiscation of fishing gear, human rights abuse and reported killings of fishermen and fisheries officers. (Resurreccion 2006: 437)

In late 2000, while visiting the Siem Reap province, Prime Minister Hun Sen experienced the problems related to local fishermen’s access to commercial fishing lot areas. Concurrently, he announced the release of approximately 10% (8,000 ha) of the area under commercial fishing lots in the Siem Reap province. This initial release was soon followed up on, and by February 2001, the release of a remarkable 56% of the total inland fisheries areas previously under the lot system had been planned. This was a major step towards improved access for local communities to fisheries resources. The release called for new ways of managing the areas formerly controlled by the fishing lot owners, and thus the Cambodian government introduced community fisheries (CFs), which is a programme for local management where one or more villages can form a CF organization. A CF is given the mandate, and obligation, to manage fisheries resource use within the boundaries of a specified area in proximity of their village(s), and it is intended to manage fisheries resources sustainably and equitably, as well as reducing poverty. The launching of CFs became the beginning of a fishery reform which transfers the role and responsibility from the national government to local communities. (SDCFM 2005; ICSF 2007: 12). The objectives of CFs management, as well as the legal framework, are described in the Sub-Decree on Community Fisheries Management (SDCFM), which was finally approved in 2005.

3 The practice of selling the rights to inland fishing grounds (fishing lots) in Cambodia has - during the past centuries - provided revenue to the King (in the 19th century), the French Protectorate (for colonial administration) and the Cambodian government, respectively. (ICSF 2007)
Through community management, the expectations are that local participation may hinder illegal fishing in areas near villages which establish CFs. This will benefit the fisheries resource base and thus help to ensure sustainability, which again is a precondition for maintaining livelihoods and reducing poverty in the long run. To undertake the daily management of a CF, a community fisheries committee (CFC) is established.

According to Hun Sen, the general public have limited understanding of the importance of natural resources, environment, regulation and the concept of sustainable development. Thus, at the yearly held National Fish Day ceremony, July 1, 2007, he stressed the need to raise awareness of the importance of fisheries in relation to livelihoods in Cambodia. In line with the objectives of SDCFM, this message emphasized the need for awareness of sustainable resource use in order to uphold rural livelihoods. (Catch & Culture, Vol. 13, 2, Sept. 2007; Hun Sen, July 2007)

Women’s Role in Inland Fisheries in Cambodia
The investigation introduced at the beginning of this chapter became the starting point for this study and may - in this regard - be seen as a pilot investigation. It was undertaken during autumn 2006, while I was attached to the project “Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment - GAD Activity: Enhancing the Role of Women in Inland Fisheries in Cambodia”. (ADB 2007). Through my work with this project I gained insight in the rural context in general, including the situation of villagers in the Tonle Sap region; CFs management in practice, including women’s participation in this; and the correlation between fisheries resource use and poverty. This interplay between fisheries resources and poverty soon caught my interest.

1.2 Problem Field
The Cambodian government has chosen CFs as an important element of fisheries management with the purpose of managing fisheries resources sustainably, and in an equitable manner to improve livelihoods and reduce poverty. The history of Cambodia is one of occupation and internal conflict, and implementing CFs management in such a post-conflict setting with limited local level organizational experience and capacity entails considerable challenges. For more about the history of Cambodia, see Appendix A.

Considering the positive indications of - improved conflict management, better communication, good economic management, increased participation, reduction in domestic violence and increased capacity among women – received during the pilot investigation, it was deemed relevant to look further into women’s participation in fisheries resource management (FRM), specifically in CFCs.

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4 The project, (ADB 2007), was carried out for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and executed by the Institute for Fisheries Management & Coastal Community Development (IFM) and the Fisheries Administration (FiA), which is under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF).
Women’s Role in Fisheries

In the Tonle Sap region, where women are particularly active in fisheries, their role is still not fully recognized and acknowledged by society in general, among women as well as men. Consequently, there is little information on their contributions. Recently however, increasing awareness of women’s role in fisheries in Cambodia has been highlighted more often. This increased focus on women’s participation in - and contribution to - the fisheries sector should be seen in connection with a generally increasing donor-lead focus on women and gender, which as a consequence, has been taken up by the Cambodian government as well. Nevertheless, no studies so far have examined women’s participation in CFCs in detail. (Kaing, March 2007)

Women’s role in fishery dependent societies in the Tonle Sap region is dominated by reproductive and productive work, but traditionally not in relation to management of e.g. fisheries (Resurreccion 2006: 444). On the other hand, women are found to be predominant actors when it comes to initiatives to sustain the resources around the Tonle Sap Lake. The role of women is important, but has not yet received sufficient attention, and is thus still not fully recognized. (Kurien, Dec 8, 2006). It is in this context of lacking recognition and limited managerial experience that women’s participation has to evolve. Despite the indication that women’s participation brings about positive outcome in relation to FRM, women are strongly under-represented in CFCs. This study addresses some of the reasons for this state of affairs.

Women’s Representation in CFCs

Gender aggregated data on CFC members is scarce, but data from the Kampong Chhnang province show that in average 11% of the CFC members in the 52 CFs in the province are women. The same data reveal that more than 40% of the CFCs consist solely of male members. (CFDO 2006)

Various researchers and practitioners recommend or encourage increased participation of women in decision-making processes in Asian fisheries. Kusakabe states that most women involved in fishing lack a voice in decision-making, as well as access to tools, credit and training, and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) recommends encouragement of women and women’s groups in decision-making processes at community level, and further that women’s access to information is improved, in order for them to participate from a position of knowledge. The latter is often not the case in today’s rural societies in Cambodia, where a common perception is that women need not pursue higher education, as they should do housework and look after the children. (Kusakabe 2003: 54; MRC, June 2006; Kaing & Ouch 2002)
In a 2006 study of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Cambodia, Pernille L. Hansen found that while lack of participation has often been mentioned as a constraint for implementing CBNRM, a more specific focus and discussion on opportunities and constraints for participation in decision-making processes is lacking in the literature. (Lausen Hansen 2006: 17)

Low representation, combined with indications that women’s participation positively influences on issues such as conflict management, communication, participation, economic management and women’s capacity, imply that women represent an unused potential for increasing the overall effects of CFs management.

CFCs in Cambodia are possible scenes for increased female participation in management, and thus potentially increased influence regarding access to e.g. knowledge, technology, capital and not least decision-making - all needed for women to be able to participate and benefit on equal level with men (Sayasane and Hartmann 2004). However, the degree of increased opportunities for women depends on the form of participation, i.e. whether women in CFCs are involved in discussions and have a say in decision-making, or if they mainly carry out administrative tasks.

The overall purpose of this study is to elaborate and contribute to the limited existing knowledge concerning women’s participation in CFCs. Thus, this thesis should be viewed as an input to the numerous ongoing and future projects and programmes in the Tonle Sap region, as well as in other areas of Cambodia. Ultimately, the objective is to provide new dimensions of knowledge for development agents - decision-makers and practitioners, including government institutions, donors, civil society organizations and researchers.⁵

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⁵ Among the possible beneficiaries of this study are MAFF, FiA, CFDO, IFReDI, researchers at RUPP as well as other research institutions, various national and international civil society organizations, MRC, Danida, DFID, UNDP and ADB.
1.3 Research Question and Sub-Questions

Research Question:

What is the development potential of women’s participation in CFCs, and what is the likelihood of instituting such participation?

The *development potential of women’s participation* refers to an examination of the contributions they currently provide, as well as an analysis of these seen in relation to achieving the objectives of the SDCFM.

The *likelihood of instituting such participation* relates to an analysis of the likely future participation by women, based on the development potential of their participation, and assessed in relation to the political, socio-cultural and resource context in which it has to evolve.

Sub-Questions:

Prior to the main analysis and discussion, the context of the study is examined through the following sub-questions in the Chapters 3, 4 and 5:

- What characterizes the mainstream gender discourse, and how is the issue of women's participation best approached in the Cambodian context?

- What characterizes the fisheries resource management context in the Tonle Sap region, and which key conditions are necessary to achieve the objectives of the SDCFM?

- What characterizes the political and socio-cultural context in which CFs management has to evolve?


1.4 Delimitations

The starting point of this study is the CFs management approach chosen in Cambodia, and thus its relevance compared with alternative management approaches is not examined. The geographical focus comprises the Tonle Sap region, and thus solely entails inland fisheries.

Due to my primary focus on the contributions of women’s participation in CFCs, focus on the barriers to their participation is secondary, and will not be dealt with systematically. In line with this, it is not a central purpose of this study to present recommendations on how to achieve increased participation by women in CFCs, but rather to analyze and present the reality of women’s current participation in the studied CFCs.

Though it is outside the scope of this thesis to come forward with recommendations on how to overcome barriers to women’s participation in CFCs, the partial treatment of the issue does provide an opportunity for the Cambodian government, donors, NGOs, researchers and other stakeholders. Held up against the contributions of women’s participation in CFCs, knowledge of the barriers may serve as a platform for action.

When discussing barriers, a division between barriers for women to become CFC members in the first place and the barriers experienced once elected, has not been applied. However, given that only CFs, which already have female CFC members were selected for the study, the latter is the most pronounced.

When interviewing, the focus has been on capturing the issues which women actively involve in, and thus focus has not been on examining all CF related procedures. Therefore, this study is not meant to encompass all CF related tasks, but to depict and call attention to the contributions of women in CFs management.

Well aware of the local focus of this study, potential large-scale effects from increased participation of women in CFs management is discussed and assessed. This is to broaden the perspective from the empirical investigations undertaken locally in the Tonle Sap region for the benefit of CFs management in Cambodia more generally.
1.5 Concept of Participation

Participation as a concept has been widely discussed and numerous approaches hereto exist. An essential element of participation is its form and there is often differentiation between passive and active participation - that is whether the participants are e.g. only informed about a project, a programme or a policy, or whether they have the opportunity to influence the decision-making process, or at least have their attitudes and perceptions considered. In-between the two are a number of more or less participatory levels.

These categorizations are useful to describe the relationship between stakeholders, and are often applied in relation to e.g. planning or measuring the impact of a project on a local population. Participation and inclusion in projects, programmes and policy implementation are found important to ensure local grounding and a feeling of ownership, which is perceived crucial for the success and sustainability of any interventions. In relation to this study, the concept is found useful to understand the nature of women’s participation, especially the extent to which they are active or passive.

Participation can be seen as an end in itself, or as a means to development. The former has been described as ‘transformational participation’ and the latter as ‘instrumental participation’ (Mikkelsen 1995: 63). Scrutinizing the SDCFM, which is done in Chapter 4, it becomes clear that participation is intended a comprehensive role in CFs management. Depending on the view, participation in a CFs context can be viewed as ‘instrumental’ in the sense that local participation serves the overall goal of (among other) achieving sustainable FRM and poverty reduction, but as ‘transformational’ in the sense that CFs is also intended to support and empower people locally in attaining improved livelihoods. Considering the latter perspective, it is reasonable to argue that CFs at least has the potential to facilitate participation as an end in itself, and thus constitute a significant step in rural capacity building.

Comprehending a broad range of interests and issues, a community consists of a vast number of voices and opinions which should ideally be discussed and valued equally. According to this ideal picture, all voices in a community would thus be expressed, taken into consideration and discussed – including the voices of the rich, the poor, men and women. Being a prerequisite for influence and decision-making, participation is a necessity for women’s full inclusion in CFs management. Ideally, CFs management should evolve around a comprehensive variation of participation, as the whole idea of local management of fisheries is centred on active communities.
Chapter 2: Methodology

Women’s participation in CFCs is a phenomenon, which has so far not been subject to much attention. Therefore, it is found most rewarding to primarily make use of empirical investigations to examine this topic.

The approach chosen is exploratory, and emphasizes the need to build on existing realities. Regardless of methods used with success in Western societies or other cultures around the world, the Cambodian context and setting is regarded to be the starting point for any possible changes. In this lay the recognition that development is very much context dependent, and as such cannot directly be copied or introduced in other locations. This further implies that the results of this study first of all apply to situations and villages similar to those subject to examination.

The empirical investigations carried out at village level particularly addressed characteristics and contributions of women’s participation, barriers hereto, and their expected future participation in CFCs. In addition to the empirical investigations at village level, researchers, NGO workers, fisheries officials and other professionals working with CFs were interviewed. These interviews served the dual purpose of providing general information related to the study, while at the same time serving as a means of triangulation.

As a background for, and supplement to, the empirical investigations, secondary data, in form of reports, articles, surveys, statistics, etc. - have continuously been collected, assessed and applied throughout the study. These data have, among other, given an insight into the culture and traditions in fishing villages, and into the rural Cambodian context more generally.

Due to my physical location at the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute (IFReDI), just next to the Community Fisheries Development Office (CFDO) and the Fisheries Administration (FiA), in Phnom Penh, the conditions for obtaining knowledge on CFs were conducive. In addition to knowledge obtained through CFDO, informal talks with other key persons have been carried out.

2.1 Data Collection

In this section primary data - in form of the empirical investigations which make up the foundation of this study – will be introduced and described. Subsequently, other interviews carried out in relation to the study will be presented, and general interview considerations will be discussed.
To attain data about the villagers - who are at the centre of this research - and their context, fieldwork has been carried out at several occasions. The two most comprehensive empirical investigations will be described in the following.

The first, which in the view of this study, is best characterized as a pilot investigation, consists of qualitative interviews that were carried out for the earlier mentioned project “Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment - GAD Activity: Enhancing the Role of Women in Inland Fisheries in Cambodia” (ADB 2007). The project was by no means a pilot investigation, but in the view of the objectives of this thesis, the interviews carried out by the author can be seen as such.

After the pilot investigation had triggered a personal interest, a second and more comprehensive investigation - with regards to women’s participation in CFCs - was carried out. This main investigation was carried out solely for the purpose of this study.

The Pilot Investigation

The pilot investigation, planned and carried out from October to December 2006, was conducted in 5 CFs in four provinces (Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang and Siem Reap) in the Tonle Sap region. The interviewed CFs were: Peam Popech, Kampong Prak, Praek Trab, Kampong Phluk and Praek Sramaech (See Map 2). Semi-structured group interviews - carried out with the CFC in each CF - provided much information regarding women’s participation in CFCs management.

The interviews had several purposes. Most central to the objectives of this study, the structures of the CFCs were explored, with emphasis on women’s role in this relatively new local level institution. This was done in order to understand women’s participation in, and potential importance for the further development of fishing dependent communities. Further, and very central to the objectives of the ADB project, was to provide “Best Practice” examples of pro-women/pro-poor activities in fishing communities, which have been successful in empowering women to diversify their livelihood strategies. Thus the selection criterion for this investigation was to locate CFs with good experience of activities benefiting women, especially the poorest. The geographical spread, comprising the Tonle Sap region in general, was given beforehand, whereas to obtain the best possible information, a combination of desk studies and informal talks were practiced, prior to the selection of the specific CFs.

The “Best Practice” examples were presented in the report “Best Practices for Enhancing Livelihood Options for Women: Case Studies from Fishing Dependent Communities in the Tonle Sap Region” (See
Appendix AA), and contributed to the analysis, leading to the final strategies and recommendations of the ADB project. (ADB 2007: 105)

The Main Investigation
To learn qualitatively about the participation of women in CFCs, a second investigation, also based on semi-structured interviews, was prepared and carried out from February to April 2007. This investigation specifically focused on women’s participation in CFCs, and comprised interviews with CFCs (including both male and female members), female CFC members, CF members and other villagers.

Due to limited time and financial resources, it had to be decided whether to perform a relatively superficial study of many CFs, or a more in-depth study of a few CFs. The latter approach was considered to yield the most reliable qualitative information and was thus chosen. Consequently, 3 out of 52 CFs in the Kampong Chhnang province were selected, and 15 interviews were carried out in the 3 villages. The Kampong Chhnang province is located in the South Eastern part of the Tonle Sap region. (See Map 2)

The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight in women’s participation in CFCs, and as peoples’ perceptions often differ, it is unlikely to achieve objective facts on such a topic. As a consequence, the approach to the interviews focused on capturing opinions, attitudes and perceptions of interviewees from different groups of society, in order to enable triangulation of the collected data. The claims and perceptions of interviewees have been critically examined in the subsequent analysis and discussion.

Selection of CFs for the Main Investigation
Selection of the CFs for the main investigation was based on a number of criterions, which will be discussed in the following. During the pilot investigation and other field trips, 9 CFs in the provinces surrounding the Tonle Sap Lake were visited. Thus considerable experience from the region had already been obtained. However, with approximately 200 CFs to choose from in the Tonle Sap region alone, deciding on which CFs would provide the most valuable and representative data material, was not an easy task. (ICSF 2007)

The Selection of CFs in Kampong Chhnang Province
Through a total of four visits to 2 CFs, and through a meeting with the local NGO CCD, Kampong Chhnang was the province I had obtained most information about. CCD works with the issue of women and CFs management in the Kampong Chhnang province, and therefore much information on CFs and women’s participation could be obtained through them. Further, the CFDO had a list of all 52 CFs in the province, including the number of men and women elected for each CFC. As these lists were not complete for the remaining Tonle Sap provinces - as data had either not yet been collected or not yet distributed to the
Map 2: Fieldwork in Cambodia

Fieldwork in Cambodia
Dry Season Map

Legend
- Community Fisheries (CFs)
- CFs visited during the pilot investigation
- CFs visited during the main investigation
- CFs visited during other field trips
- Capital
- Provincial capitals
- Rivers
- Roads
- Administrative borders
- Railroad

The map is produced in ArcMap based on data from NHM DATA TOOL BOX Royal Danish Embassy - Danida Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
central level – the Kampong Chhnang province provided the best opportunity to achieve relevant information prior to the selection. Thus, choosing CFs in Kampong Chhnang was less coincidental than it would have been for other provinces.

Through CCD I obtained information about 21 CFs in which they had activities. Out of these 21 CFs, 10 received considerable support from CCD. The remaining 11 had been chosen, but activities had not yet begun at the time of the main investigation. Some other NGOs are active in Kampong Chhnang, but in relation to women and CFs, CCD is by far the most active and influential. (Ngin Navirak, UNDP, Oct 31, 2006; Fisheries Forum, Nov, 2006). This information from CCD provided the opportunity to divide the CFs in the Kampong Chhnang province into different categories: CFs in which CCD is active; CFs in which CCD will become active; and CFs as in which CCD is not present.6

Realizing that it would be impossible to make a representative choice, given the circumstances, as well as the low number of CFs to be selected, I decided to choose one CF from each category. Doing so enhanced the chances of including CFs with differing conditions, and minimized the risk of choosing 3 CFs which were randomly all heavily backed by NGOs, or 3 CFs which had received no support at all. Consequently, the selection of CFs for the main investigation represents a certain variety, however without being significantly representative.

To ensure that the CFCs and their female members had some experience with committee work, only CFs which had existed for more than 2 years, and had female members for at least 1-2 years, were accepted for the investigation. The last requirement to the CFs was that at least 2 women should be represented in the committee. The purpose of this last requirement was to make sure to examine CFs in which more women were present, as the main purpose of the investigation was to learn qualitatively how women participate in CFCs, and what the contributions of their work in the committees are. Female participation in the committees was thus necessary in order to obtain relevant data.

Choosing CFs in which women are already present in the CFCs could have implications in regards of capturing relevant barriers for women’s election to the committees in the first place. However, as made clear in the delimitation, uncovering the barriers for women’s participation is secondary to illuminating the nature and contributions of their participation. Further, it is likely that the barriers faced by the participating female CFC members have several similarities with the barriers to get elected in the first place.

6 CCD is active in Bat Trang CF, they will become active in Preaek Sala CF, and they are not present in Srah Chak CF.
Other Interviews, Meetings and Activities

In parallel with the empirical investigations, interviews and informal talks with key persons, including NGO workers, experts, researchers and government officers, were conducted at the same time.

During the affiliation with a team from IFM - who carried out the ADB study mentioned earlier - a number of interviews and meetings were carried out together with the team. These include the following in the Kampong Thom and Siem Reap provinces: Departments of Women’s Affairs; GTZ Rural Development Program; Provincial Planning Offices; Provincial Fisheries Offices; TSEM Project (FAO); Neary Khmer (NGO); and two CFs – Boeng Raunpe Lake in Kampong Thom and Chong Khnies in Siem Reap. Further, Kien Ta Ma CF in Kampong Chhnang and Sampov Meas CF in Kampong Thom were visited during field trips with the IFM team. These interviews and meetings are to be considered secondary to the core of this study, but on the other hand they have provided a thorough contextual insight. In addition, participation in a workshop in the Kampong Chhnang province in November 2006, arranged by UNDP, and a Fisheries Forum in Phnom Penh the same month has contributed to my understanding of the context, as well as consultations with the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), the UNDP and the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) has.

In the spring 2007 the following NGOs, which are all active within the issues of CFs’ management and women’s participation, were interviewed: CCD in the Kampong Chhnang province, Aphiwat Strey (AS) and Village Support Group (VSG) in the Battambang province. In addition, throughout the study, information has been obtained from several specialists working with CFs, gender and related issues.

2.2 Interview Considerations

The semi-structured interviews carried out during the empirical investigations, were conducted using an interview guide approach. The key questions were formulated prior to the interviews, but room was left for adjusting and adding questions during the interview, as well as for discussion. Interview guide examples are included in Appendix C. Open-ended questions were asked in order to attain elaborated perceptions, opinions and attitudes, which were found necessary for the qualitative purpose of the study. Further, probing questions - serving as important cross-checks and triangulation - have been practiced, by challenging answers and asking for backup information to qualify the information obtained. (Mikkelsen 1995: 103, 109)

As mentioned, both male and female CFC members were interviewed together in each examined village, but further - to ensure that women had a fair chance to raise their voices - separate interviews with the female CFC members were carried out as well. This was found
very important, considering that some of the issues concerning the collaboration and association between men and women might include potentially sensitive matters. Further, the relevance of this practice is strengthened by Kusakabe, who states that Asian women’s experience with the interview situation is in general very limited:

“Women are generally not experienced in answering questions from outside interviewers or participating in group discussions, especially when men are around. Women perceive that (or act as if) men can answer better so they leave the men to reply to the interviewer’s questions.”

(Kusakabe 2003: 56)

Carrying out separate interviews with female CFC members proved very relevant indeed, as the women talked much more when interviewed alone, and further expressed additional and sometimes challenging viewpoints, compared with those expressed by the CFCs.

**Translation**

For translation between English and Khmer during the empirical investigations, Mr Chhuon Kim Chhea was appointed. It could be argued that when examining women’s participation in CFCs it would be commendable to make use of a female translator. However, in the present situation, Mr Chhuon was recommended by a female gender specialist. This was not necessarily qualifying in itself, but accompanied by a good impression of him, and the lack of female candidates, the choice was obvious. Mr Chhuon works with CFs development, thus he has extensive knowledge of the terms used in this respect.

Mr Chhuon was engaged for translation and assistance during both empirical investigations. After successful cooperation while carrying out the *pilot investigation* in the autumn 2006, it was fortunately possible to appoint him again for the *main investigation* in the spring 2007. His wide experience and immense network in the Tonle Sap region provided valuable contacts and knowledge in relation to the selection of the CFs visited during these investigations.

Coming from a central government institution could potentially influence the interviewees, and this issue was therefore discussed with the translator. However, as the task of the CFDO is to assist in the establishment of CFs, their officers are not perceived as being in opposition to the CFs. In line with this, he ascertained that the people in the villages did not see him as an opponent, nor had they reason to do so. After having worked together for a total of 20 interviews in villages in the Tonle Sap region, I experienced nothing which challenges this assertion.

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7 Gender Specialist Ms Kaing Khim, CFDO, was the one recommending Mr Chhuon Kim Chhea. She was part of the earlier mentioned ADB project as well.
Data Handling
Due to contextual circumstances I chose not to record and make transcriptions of interviews undertaken in the field. First, in the very hierarchic Khmer society, stepping aside the social norms can be a costly affair. People are not encouraged nor supposed to go against or challenge persons of a higher rank, possessing more power (O’Leary & Meas Nee 2001). In such a context, presenting interviewees with a voice recorder could decrease or jeopardize their openness. Second, due to limited resources regarding finances as well as time, making use of transcriptions was out of reach for the capacity of this study. Consequently, the focus during the interviews was on noting down all points immediately while the translator interpreted during the interviews, and including these in the summary made after each interview. In practice, to allow for a smooth translation process, the questions asked during interviews were written in as simple a language as possible - without compromising the content - thereby minimizing the risk of misunderstandings.

Working, and conducting interviews alone, I found it very beneficial to make use of a translator. Obviously a translator was needed, due to shortcomings in the Khmer language skills of the author, but further the process of translation provided time to write down notes and reflect on the information obtained. This immediate reflection enhanced the opportunity to obtain additional knowledge on topics discovered during the interview, as well as for coming up with probing questions in order to cross-check the answers given by interviewees. In this way, the language barrier ended up being constructive in its own way.

2.3 Data Analysis
The applied approach focuses on organizing the analysis and discussion around the obtained data. Thus, the data is generally not deductively held up against existing theory, but rather becomes theory in itself. In the process of analyzing data from the empirical investigations, inspiration has been found in grounded theory. (Charmaz 2006). Gradually through the process, it became more and more clear which focus areas were the most relevant in relation to answering the research question. Deriving directly from the empirical investigations, areas of analysis all relate closely to the actual situation and context in the examined CFs, and therefore should fit this exact contextual setting.

In qualitative studies the interpretation process is not separated from the data collection process, as it is the case with quantitative studies. In the qualitative process immediate interpretation and modification of questions during interviews can contribute to an increased understanding of the examined topic or subject. (Andersen 2002: 253)

Data Reliability and Validity
Coming from a Western affluent society to study FRM and poverty in Cambodia, the background of the author is much different from that of the subjects of this study. Thus it
was important to get a feeling of the local context and always to keep in mind that most people in the examined villages depend on fisheries and other natural resources for their daily survival. The rural poor, including fishermen, do not always have an opportunity to choose sustainable use of natural resources, as that may result in not getting food on the table in the short term.

At my first arrival to Cambodia in October 2006 no specific standpoint was taken - on whether women’s participation in CFs management was advantageous or not. The fact that only sparse knowledge was available - despite the increased focus from government, donors, researchers and civil society organisations - combined with the positive indications from the pilot investigation was decisive for the initiation of this study.

**Triangulation**

As a means to qualify the data the author has been observant for conflicting statements and opinions. Interviewing various participants in each CF served to grasp potentially conflicting views and perceptions in order to be able to reach a more diversified and realistic picture of the reality of women’s participation in CFCs.

Despite the fact that gender issues are still not being well understood by the average person in Cambodia, an inherent encouragement in the SDCFM of women to participate in CFCs has begun to reach village level, so the committees are generally aware that the government desire a certain female involvement. Further, having arranged interviews with the committees under the description of examining women’s participation in CFCs, some committees may have deliberately wished to appear as doing well with regards to including women in CFs management. The mentioned issues underline the need to be open for other explanations than those given by the committees. Interviews with different parties - *CFCs*, *female CFC members*, *CF members and other villagers*, respectively - did, on several occasions, reveal conflicting viewpoints and explanations.
2.4 Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter 3, the mainstream gender discourse is examined, including the relevance of gender equality, barriers to women’s participation and empowerment of women. Further, the properties of a rights-based approach and of an efficiency-based approach, and their applicability and relevance in the Cambodian context are discussed.

In Chapter 4, the context of the Tonle Sap ecosystem and the living conditions of the rural population is examined. Then the legal framework for CFs management – in form of the SDCFM – is presented, before the practice of CFs management is discussed. Finally, key conditions for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM are outlined.

In Chapter 5, characteristics of the political and socio-cultural context, in which CFs management has to evolve, are discussed. Further, women’s representation in political bodies and the gender context of rural Cambodia are discussed. Finally, the inherent socio-cultural challenges for women’s participation are examined, including a view on the traditional code of conduct for women’s behavior – the ‘Chhab Srei’.

In Chapter 6, the empirical data are in focus, and women’s participation in CFCs is analyzed, including a view on the characteristics of female CFC members and their contributions to the work of CFCs. Finally, women’s contributions are analyzed in relation to the key conditions for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM, which were outlined in Chapter 4, in order to assess the development potential of women’s participation.

In Chapter 7, explanations for women’s under-representation, including barriers to their participation is first examined. Then relations and changing perceptions in the villages are analyzed and the expectations to the future participation of women are presented. Based on these findings, as well as the contributions of women’s participation and other contextual findings from the previous chapters, the future participation of women in CFCs is analyzed.

In Chapter 8, the final conclusions are presented, and in Chapter 9, perspectives in the periphery of the study are outlined.

In Figure 1, the structure of the thesis is outlined in the project design.
Figure 1: Project Design

Background of the Study

Contextual Framework

3  Gender Discourse & Dev. of Approach
4  Fisheries Resource Man. Context
5  Political & Socio-Cultural Context

Analysis

6  Dev. Potential of Women’s Participation in CFCs
7  Future Participation of Women in CFCs

Conclusion
Chapter 3: Mainstream Gender Discourse vs. a Contextual Approach

In the first part of this chapter an overview of the mainstream gender discourse is presented, including a view on the relevance of gender equality, good governance and empowerment of women, as well as barriers towards women’s participation. In the second part, it is discussed how to best approach gender equality and women’s participation in a Cambodian context. The sub-question examined in this chapter is:

What characterizes the mainstream gender discourse, and how is the issue of women’s participation best approached in the Cambodian context?

Discussing women’s participation in development brings about a number of questions, e.g. regarding gender roles in society and the relations between men and women and among women themselves. The answers to these questions all depend on tradition, situation, opinion, age, class and most likely gender as well, of the person replying. Further, the reply will be influenced by nationality, religion and culture. Generalizing, however, there is agreement among most researchers and practitioners that the role of women is, in most cases, somehow inferior to the role of men. Accordingly, women have usually obtained political, economic, social and other rights later than men. (Østergaard 1992: xii)

3.1 Mainstream Gender Discourse

Developed since the 1970s, Women in Development (WID) have focused on the absence of women in the development process. In the early 1990s, the failure of the WID approach to improve women’s status and participation led to the dispersal of Gender and Development (GAD), which focuses on the relations between women and men. Simplified, it could be said that WID mainly addresses women’s practical needs and focuses almost exclusively on women. GAD, on the other hand, focuses on the unequal power relations between the sexes, and seeks to transform these by empowering women and addressing their strategic needs. Where WID focused more on women’s material conditions, but failed to include women in the ‘mainstream development’, GAD increasingly seeks to change the positions of women and thus ensuring their inclusion in the general development processes. (Gender Course 2008)

The subject of inequality between the sexes has been on the agenda for many years at international meetings and among multilateral organizations and other donors. Since 1975, four world conferences on women have been held, the latest in Beijing, 1995. More recent,
the UN Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 3, addresses gender equality and empowerment of women. For further information, see Appendix F. The consensus among donor countries and international organizations on the importance of the topic has no doubt played an important role regarding the decisions on and ratifications of the laws and policies favouring gender equality, which many developing nations now have in place. However, there is often a gap between the legal framework and the implementation and enforcement. Some of the reasons for this are:

- Lack of staff and other resources in the enforcement agencies
- Lack of gender awareness and sensitivity on the part of law enforcement officials and court officers
- Women’s lack of awareness of their rights or their lack of power and resources to seek legal protection
- Tension between the formal laws and traditional norms and practices (ADB 2006b: 57-59)

The occurrence of such problems demonstrates the need for a pragmatic approach to gender equality, which takes into account, and adapt to, such contextual circumstances.

When discussing gender equality, the importance of taking into account the interplay between men and women is recognized, as they together comprise the societies and communities in which women’s participation has to evolve. Accordingly, any changes in women’s participation are likely, one way or another, to affect men as well.

3.1.1 Relevance of Gender Equality and Good Governance

From a Western rights-based point of view, it is clear that gender inequality is unfair and should not be tolerated. In addition to this, however, there are also more ‘hard’ evidence that gender inequality hampers economic growth and sustainable development. E.g. excluding women from access to resources, such as public services and the labour market restrains productivity and accumulation of human capital. Moreover, women have less opportunity than men, and due to their limited economic role they are more vulnerable to shocks and have less influence – something they need in order to have their interests addressed in decision-making. (WB 2001: 74; WB 2002: 10-11)

Evidence from around the world suggests that women more often spend their incomes to improve nutrition, health and schooling for the family members and this underlines a considerable potential of enhancing gender equality in societies where women are under-represented (WB 2002: 8; ICSF No.5, 2007). When men and women are relatively equal it tends to enhance growth, why the poor can move more quickly out of poverty; and thus gender equality is “…an issue of development effectiveness, not just a matter of political correctness or kindness to women.” (WB 2002: 1). In a Cambodian context, women’s income cover more than half of their household expenditures, as women and girls are more engaged in income-
generating activities than men. This suggests that prioritization of women’s economic empowerment is a good strategy to reduce hunger and food insecurity. (UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 58)

To attain sustainable development and poverty reduction, good governance is often pointed out to be a critical factor. At the same time, gender equality is increasingly associated with improved governance, including less corruption. As an example, data from 43 countries suggest that “…women tend to view corrupt practices more negatively than men do.” (WB 2002: 9). It is, however, still not apparent to which degree such findings might reflect their limited presence in positions of power, and thus limited opportunity to engage in corrupt practices. Anyway, in a Cambodian context, even if women become more corrupt as their ranking increases, the situation will still expectedly not be worse off than today. It has further been found that there is less corruption, as more parliamentary seats are held by women. (WB 2002: 9)

Another advantage of women’s participation in local political bodies is their ability to reach the poor and socially excluded households, including a great number of female household heads in the Cambodian context. Further they help to solve family and other local disputes, as well as addressing social issues, such as domestic violence, drug abuse and trafficking. In the view of the UN Millennium Declaration, such actions contribute to the achievement of practically all the MDGs. (ADB 2006b: 55)

Although one must be careful not to consider the above statements as universal truths, there is no doubt that women, qua experience from their working situation and social life, bring different perspectives to many issues. On the other hand, if women are kept from participating, the effectiveness of the state and its policies will be limited. (WB 2001: 97)

3.1.2 Barriers to Women’s Participation

Women’s participation in decision-making bodies, including local committees, is often low, and therefore their needs and perspectives are not communicated to the relevant level. Consequently, these are also not consistently reflected in local decision-making. This low representation by women in political bodies and decision-making is a common characteristic of the separation of female and male spheres in many developing countries. MDG progress reports from Asia and the Pacific find that the efforts to increase gender equality and empower women are impeded by the persistence of norms and assumptions related to traditional gender roles and women’s capabilities. (WB 2002: 43; Østergaard 1992: 9; ADB 2006b: 43, 55)

Some of the main barriers originate from culture, part of which discriminate women. Promotion of gender equality questions existing power structures and thus challenges deeply rooted practices in institutions from families at the local level to rules and norms at the
national level. Thus local ownership and rooting are essential for the sustainability of gender equality efforts. Women’s workloads further restrain them from participating in decision-making processes. (Danida 2004: 6, 16)

In many Asian countries, including Cambodia, the culture prescribes that women have very limited formal power, that they are supposed to take care of their families and that they, to a large degree, are inferior to their husbands or male household heads. Women further lack access to land and credit, and without support from somewhere it is very difficult for them to participate in the political sphere. Widespread lack of awareness of rights and entitlements among many women and poor people, in conjunction with limited mobility – especially in rural areas – inhibit them from claiming such potential benefits. (ADB 2006b: 60). An example from the Philippines describes some barriers to women’s participation in the fisheries sector in this way:

“Low educational attainment and socio-cultural constraints hamper the full participation of women in development activities of the sector. Their ability to use and access available information is affected by their level of literacy. Their belief in their own lack of competence and ability, vis-à-vis their male counterparts affects their self-confidence in independently pursuing projects.” (LM Siason 2001: 75)

It is my experience that the above descriptions are valid for Cambodia as well. Although the legal framework is in place, the support from local as well as central government bodies is often found ranging from weak support over neutrality to direct resistance. Thus it is not an unusual situation that existing power structures fight against the implementation of changes to the society. This situation is strengthened in Cambodia, firstly because the legislation has been approved through considerable pressure from donor countries and organizations (and not because a majority of the populace claimed it), and secondly because the enforcement network is very weak and in addition sometimes in favour of the old way of doing things.

3.1.3 Empowerment of Women

The strategy of including gender equality in development programs is widely adopted by international organizations and donor countries, and according to the World Bank, identifying and acting on key gender issues has a great potential in the areas of poverty reduction, economic growth and sustainable development. (WB 2002: 19-20)

Women get empowered by participating in something, and thus gender equality is best achieved by having women involved in existing decision-making bodies. Genuine participation is more important than achieving a certain percentage of female participants in a given political body or project by quota. Increased female representation can, of course, cater for female participation in decision-making, but experiences have proved that increased
participation ‘on paper’ does not necessarily lead to increased participation in decision-making and thus genuine influence.

As can be imagined, empowerment may indeed be a long process. It should be kept in mind that when women enter into new roles, e.g. community discussions and decision-making, time is taken from other tasks traditionally carried out. Given that these tasks require the same attention as before, the result might be that men need to take over tasks traditionally associated with women. (C.M.C Nozawa 2001: 60). From a Western perspective this might be considered old news, but in a cultural context such as the Cambodian it takes much courage for a man to step outside the norms and do ‘female jobs’. Likewise, politically active women experience resistance from many women as well, when participating in traditionally male-dominated tasks, such as political decision-making.

Gender mainstreaming may be seen as relatively more important to women, as compared to men, because they are the inferior part in most economic, political and social aspects. E.g. women receive lower wages, have lower political participation and suffer major challenges in relation to land rights and land-inheritance due to cultural and traditional norms.
3.2 A Contextual Approach to Gender Equality

Having established an overview of the mainstream gender discourse, including the relevance of, and barriers to gender equality and women’s participation in the first part of this chapter, I move on to discuss two major lines of thought on how to approach the issue. In the following, the properties of a rights-based approach and an efficiency-based approach will be discussed in relation to gender equality and women’s participation in the Cambodian context.

3.2.1 Rights-Based vs. Efficiency-Based Point of View

Dealing with gender equality from a rights-based point of view it will usually be perceived as an end in itself, whereas it is often perceived as a means to achieve other goals - e.g. poverty reduction - when dealt with from an efficiency-based approach. Cecile Jackson exemplifies this by stating that:

“…antipoverty policies cannot be expected to necessarily improve the position of women…” …
“The instrumental interest in women, as the means to achieve development objectives such as poverty reduction may ultimately undermine GAD. Gender appears to have collapsed into a poverty trap…” (Jackson 1998: 39)

This potential abandoning of the ‘equality argument’, in favour of an ‘efficiency justification’, is thus a concern of some feminists, and others adhering to a rights-based approach (Jackson 1998: 39-40). Seemingly, it is feared that an approach based on efficiency will fail to address the strategic needs (the positions) of women and thus carry on making the same mistakes as during the WID era, by improving women’s practical needs (their conditions) only.

A decisive question in this regard is whether gender equality is demanded as an end in itself, or if it is sought in order to improve certain areas of relevance - as a means - e.g. sustainable fisheries resource use and poverty reduction, and then secondarily improves gender equality. In line with Jackson’s claims, ‘using’ women instrumentally will not always lead to increased gender equality, as women sometimes work relatively more to reduce poverty, but without gaining increased equality, income or opportunity themselves, and thus not improving their position in society.

Perhaps it is a discussion of what should come first. Considering the situation in rural Cambodia, it could be that FRM would be more sustainable and that poverty could be further reduced if gender equality was widespread. But then again it must be considered how gender equality can be established in the first place. Due to what reasons would the rural population accept gender equality? As stressed in Chapter 1, this study intends to examine
women’s participation in CFCs to cast light on the ways in which it influences CFs management. If the positive indications observed in the pilot investigation are further backed, it would provide reason for increased inclusion of women in CFCs. Such contextually based reasons will be more tangible and harder for policy-makers, donors, practitioners and villagers to ignore than are Western rights-based arguments.

It could be argued that it is important to distinguish between what must be referred to as a political rights-based argument, and a more practical efficiency-based argument for gender equality. Among the implications of relying on the political equality argument, is its normative nature. In addition, the claim of gender equality was developed in a Western context under different conditions than those found in most developing countries, including Cambodia. The use of the two approaches is described in the following quotation:

> “Policy and strategy documents vacillate between the rights-based approach and one based on efficiency, depending on the sector. Areas such as economic development tend to stress the efficiency approach, while human rights and governance focus more on rights. The tendency to subsume the policy objective of gender equality under that of poverty reduction can favour an instrumental approach to equality, in which gender equality is desirable, not because it is a right, but because it is good for economic growth.” (The GAD Network 2003: 11)

Considering the differing use of the two approaches, it is found relevant to pragmatically move beyond the definitions and examine if women’s participation in CFCs can be justified and recommended from more than a rights-based perspective. When it all comes down to it, what matters is if an approach is able to make a difference for those subject to its use.

**Limitations of the Rights-Based Approach**

Another dimension of the gender equality discussion is the struggle between statutory rights and social norms. The concept of universal individual rights is often conflicting with cultural values:

> “In the global export of liberal democracy as the only form of government worth pursuing, women in countries in the South are often faced with the dilemma of how to claim rights when cultural practices come into conflict with rights.” (Gouws 2005)

In this way many women are demanded to choose between rights and culture, in case society ‘allows’ this choice at all (women might not have a real choice if choosing the statutory right e.g. leads to being expelled from the society). Gouws further questions, how the language of universal rights can be reconciled with the complexities of cultural contexts locally, as “…the ‘abstract individualism’ of liberal rights ignores the social context and social relations in which women live on a daily basis.” (Gouws 2005). Her viewpoint captures very well the challenge, or conflict, that
the rights-based approach to gender equality faces in its meeting with cultural practices in Cambodia.

The views and arguments developed in Western societies - and since the 1970s being widely recognized - cannot be expected to win immediate recognition in a patriarchal country such as Cambodia, where much different norms and traditions prevail. Thus arguing for gender equality in Cambodia, from a rights-based point of view, is likely to receive limited attention and recognition. This is not to disregard the rights-based gender equality argument in general, but to stress the need to apply incentives which are more tangible and rationally reasoned, seen from a Cambodian point of view. Basically, it is argued that a rights-based approach to gender equality will have a hard time gaining ground and momentum in the current Cambodian context, and this is why such an approach should not stand alone.

According to Jackson, an ‘instrumental’ approach is evident in major development agencies, such as the World Bank. As a consequence of this she concludes that “…women are now the means of controlling population, of achieving sustainable development, of poverty alleviation.” She uses the World Bank and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as examples of developing agencies justifying attention to gender in terms of other development objectives than gender equality as an end in itself. The World Bank justifies focus on gender with reference to economic growth and poverty reduction, and UNFPA expects empowered women to have fewer children and improve environmental management. (Jackson 1998: 40). In line with earlier arguments, the justification of a gender focus is, in my opinion, secondary to the action and outcome of such a focus. Obviously, there is a political point, which must be deemed important in relation to the intellectual struggle among major institutions and other global players, as these to a large extent set the international agenda for development intervention. Regardless of this political struggle, it is found likely that women will in many occasions gain from such changes, as they along with reduced poverty and reduced population growth will be enabled to not only address their practical needs (in form of materialistic improvements), but also increasingly to realise their strategic needs (in form of an improvement in their positions).

Thus, including women in development - even though justified on behalf of efficiency with regards to reaching other objectives - will on many occasions, if not directly lead to, then at least pave the road for improvements in gender equality.

It is important to remember that in Western societies, it has taken several decades (if not half a century) to reach the current level of equality, where women are still lacking behind in e.g. wage levels, representation in boards and top decision-making positions. In Denmark, as an example, the move toward gender equality – or women’s liberation – evolved as women became economically independent due to paid work and rights to social support.
Considering this historical aspect, a focus on growth and economic empowerment of women can be seen as a decisive step in achieving gender equality. Similarly, some GAD supporters argue that:

“…an instrumental approach to gender will put these issues into the budgets and activities of development agencies, while appeals on grounds of ethics or equity will not.” (Richey 2000: 257)

In line with my view, Richey highlights the likeliness that normative based reasons are inferior in terms of implementing a gender focus. This argumentation is found applicable in a Cambodian context, where culture and tradition in practice do not recognize gender equality. Thus, there is a need for a more pragmatic approach, which is informed by and developed through an analysis of gender in rural Cambodia with special attention to women’s participation. Commenting on the focus of development practitioners, a participant at a conference on rural economic development suggested that we too often focus on and discuss what is desirable, where we should perhaps focus more on what is feasible and realistic.9 This perception necessitates that information sought by researchers and practitioners must be contextualized and thought into the reality of the local environment, including the citizens exposed to its potential impact, in order to ensure a locally grounded and sustainable outcome.

3.3 Discussion and Conclusion

The approach in this study is to examine the practical contribution of women’s participation in CFCs in order to document and bring forward tangible firsthand knowledge about the women, who are subject to extensive discussions. This may prove valuable for policymakers, donors and other practitioners in relation to facilitating development, be it sustainable resource use and poverty reduction or gender equality in itself.

The rights-based and efficiency-based approaches are interdependent, very much as the question of who came first, the hen or the egg. The normative political pressure from international donors is likely to have triggered the first female participation in CFCs. The practical approach adhered to in this study focuses on supporting and learning from the women already participating in CFCs, scrutinizing whether, and how, they contribute to the achievement of the objectives of CFCs management. It is my perception that the practical viewpoint should be applied ‘on the ground’ in order to broaden and speed up the implementation of gender equality measures, as the Western normative political rights-based perspective has a difficult time gaining ground in the patriarchal Cambodian society.

9 The comment was put forward by Ole Therkildsen, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), at the Conference on Rural Economic Development, held in Copenhagen, April 8-9, 2008.
In the Cambodian context it is argued that it can be relevant for donor organizations to maintain and promote gender equality as a goal in itself out of political reasons. But at the same time, in order to provide local incentives for approximating gender equality, leaning towards a practical efficiency-based approach - searching to document the effects of women’s participation - can go a long way for promoting locally grounded development. Regardless of which perspective is adapted, it must be recognized that the Cambodian context is different from the contemporary Western context.

One argument in favour of the rights-based approach is that if focus is on gender equality as a means to obtain e.g. poverty reduction, it will not necessarily benefit the positions of women. This is a reasonable argument in so far as gender equality is the primary development goal. However, given the poverty situation in the country, it falls easy to down-prioritize gender equality as an end in itself. Having said this, the fact is that focus on gender equality seems to trigger more efficient and widespread development when it comes to poverty reduction. Bearing this in mind, it seems reasonable and advantageous to support a practical efficiency-based approach for at least facilitating general poverty reduction, while parallel to this, lobbying for increased attention to gender equality. In the Cambodian context, the rights-based approach might very well have triggered the first interest, whereas the practical approach has the potential to serve as an ‘eye-opener’ locally, and thus facilitate implementation of development policies which, as a minimum, paves the road for a higher level of gender equality, but in many cases adds to equality between the genders by itself. It is in the light of this understanding that the contribution and likely future of women’s participation in CFCs is examined.

Approaching women’s participation in CFCs from an efficiency-based point of view cannot substitute a rights-based approach to gender equality. But keeping in mind the Cambodian context, with severe male dominance, it must be expected that providing practical efficiency-based incentives for enhancing female participation, will go a lot further and faster in approximating equality between the genders, than relying on a normative political rights-based perception of gender equality. Efficiency-based incentives are rationally grounded, which is probably easier comprehensible for men than are rights-based arguments. Given that most decision-making positions in Cambodia are currently occupied by men, these are in practice the ones having to open up for, and allowing, implementation of gender equality. Rights-based incentives - on the contrary - express normative statements on how things should be. As long as these come from outsiders - and not from a local demand – better reception of practical and rational context based incentives is likely. This viewpoint is further emphasized in Chapter 5, where women’s role in the Cambodian socio-cultural context is presented and discussed.
If women’s participation helps achieving the objectives of CFs management, or demonstrates other positive effects found relevant by local societies, genuine participation is more likely. This again should pave the road for a more smooth endorsement of gender equality issues, which would - most importantly - also be better understood and accepted locally.

**Conclusion**

As outlined in this chapter, there is wide-ranging consensus that gender equality represents a more fair and productive way forward. This preferred ‘world order’, however, has its outset from the discourse in mainly the wealthier countries in the world. In view of that, it seems unreasonable to directly impose these ‘good Western intentions’ on a developing country such as Cambodia.

From many sides, it has been suggested that active gender policies are important for the dual purposes of efficiency in achieving a wide array of development goals and for achieving gender equality in itself. It is important to note that inequalities in rights, access to resources and political voice were found to disadvantage not only women, but societies in general. Further, the indications that gender equality in voice, rights and resources helps improve good governance; and the tendency that women view corrupt practices more negatively than men, suggests that women’s participation is important for achieving poverty reduction, as well as other development objectives.

My assessment is that the rights-based approach is important in order to influence policy-making and to ensure the inclusion of gender equality in the legislative framework. When it comes to the implementation, however, it is found insufficient. At this stage, a practical efficiency-based approach is considered having better preconditions for reaching the concerned population – at least in settings where strict enforcement is unlikely. Thus the two approaches can be understood as interdependent, as both are of immense importance at different phases of policy-making and implementation.
Chapter 4: Fisheries Resources Management Context

Moving further into the rural Cambodian context, in this chapter I first elaborate on the status of the fisheries resource and poverty in the Tonle Sap region. Then I move on to the management of fisheries resources, as the SDCFM and its objectives are discussed. Thirdly, CFs management in practice is examined, and finally, a summarising analysis will define the focus areas which are found to be of the highest importance for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM. The sub-question for this chapter is:

What characterizes the fisheries resource management context in the Tonle Sap region, and which key conditions are necessary to achieve the objectives of the SDCFM?

4.1 Context of Fisheries Resources and Poverty

In this section, the Tonle Sap ecosystem and the use of its resources will be presented, and the interrelatedness between poverty, livelihoods and resource use will be discussed.

4.1.1 The Tonle Sap Ecosystem and the Importance of its Resources

Cambodia accounts for the largest share of the Mekong River\textsuperscript{10} and furthermore is home to the Tonle Sap Lake - the largest freshwater lake in South East Asia. The Tonle Sap region is characterized by its rich ecosystem and dominated by a yearly transformation when the Tonle Sap River reverses. This follows the rise and fall in the Mekong River during wet and dry seasons, respectively. (See Map 3). The lake occupies an area of app. 2,700 sq. km during the dry season, while it increases to an area of up to app. 16,000 sq. km. after the monsoon season. (ICSF No.4, 2007)

Being the most productive and bio diverse freshwater zone in the world - catering for a huge fish production - the Tonle Sap ecosystem is of immense importance to the livelihood of the Cambodian people. (Baran 2005; ADB 2003 TSEMP). The resources extracted from the lake include many varieties of fish and other aquatic animals (frogs, snails, snakes, etc.), aquatic plants, birds and wood from the flooded forest. For the rural poor, including women and children from landless families, the collection of such resources provides an essential ‘safety net’, as it is used for consumption as well as marketing. (McKenney and Tola 2002; UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 6)

\textsuperscript{10} The Mekong River and its tributaries float from and through parts of Myanmar, China, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and finally Vietnam, where it runs into the South China Sea. The area of the Mekong River Basin is nearly the size of both France and Germany. The length of the river is 4800 km. (MRC, Sept 22, 2006)
Further illustrating the importance of the fisheries resources, the sector and related areas provide employment for approximately 5-6 million people, among them 1.4 million full time employed fishermen. In addition, fish comprises the main protein supply. Thus fish is crucial to a large part of the Cambodian population. (Hun Sen, July 2007; ICSF 2007; RGC 2004: 15)

Due to population growth and increased migration to the region, still more people rely on resources from the ecosystem for their livelihood. The consequence is increased pressure on fisheries and other natural resources, triggered partly by increased fishing and partly by change in land-use patterns, including flooded forest being cut down and transformed into rice fields and other agriculture. Protecting dry-season habitats and spawning areas are important for ensuring sustainable use of the fish resource. In the dry-season some non-migratory fish species are ‘trapped’ in small lakes or natural ponds, where they can easily be caught. However, these lakes and ponds serve as important habitats for fish during the dry-season and are thus essential for the sustainability of the fish resource.

Another threat is the growing numbers of build structures - especially dams - upstream the Mekong River. These structures cause changes in the yearly flooding of the Tonle Sap region, potentially leading to lower water levels and thus decreasing habitat for fish (and
other species) to replenish. This scenario might drastically influence the total fish production with severe consequences for resource users in the most affected areas of the floodplain.

The Status of the Fish Resource
Some researchers argue that the fish resource is declining, whereas others report indications that with regards to the total biomass and fish catch the amounts (weight-wise) are not declining (Sithirth 2000; So Nam & Buoy Roitana 2005). During the pilot investigation, information was collected regarding the changes in fish species caught by the villagers. These first-hand indications on the status of the fish resource were obtained from CFCs in 5 CFs in the provinces Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang and Siem Reap in the Tonle Sap region. This information showed that the catch of a number of species is declining; that many species are caught in still smaller sizes; and that some species have not been caught for the past 2-17 years in some areas. (Gätke 2006b, see Appendix E). Van Zalinge, Thuok and Nuov conclude the following with regards to the question of the status of the fish resource:

“Due to the reduction of larger fish species in the catch and the shift to smaller sizes, the average value per kg has decreased. Thus, not only has the catch rate per fisher dropped, the value of his catch has also decreased. Nevertheless, the overall tonnage of fish caught is still increasing. A number of larger species are overfished, but most of the smaller species are not overfished at all.”

(Van Zalinge, Thuok and Nuov)

Accordingly, the situation seems to be that the catch of a number of species - many of them high-value species - is declining, whereas the catch of other species, especially Trey Riel, has increased in recent years.\textsuperscript{11}

4.1.2 Interrelatedness between Poverty and Natural Resource Use
Poverty is widespread in rural Cambodia with some of the poorest areas located around, and at, the Tonle Sap Lake. Rural Cambodia, being home to 85% of a still growing population, experiences an increasing pressure on fisheries and other natural resources. Farmers expand and clear forest to cater for new fields; fishermen experience increased competition for the same resource; and cutting of flooded forest for cooking and production leaves its wounds on the flooded forests in and around the Tonle Sap Lake. As a consequence, habitats for fish and other aquatic animals are influenced and this may potentially cause changes in the variety and productivity of the Tonle Sap ecosystem. Another factor related to the high, current pressure on the resources, is the long history of conflict in Cambodia, especially during the time of Khmer Rouge:

\textsuperscript{11} Trey Riel is the name of a smaller fish species that are found in large amounts migrating between the Tonle Sap Lake and the Mekong River. For a period of 2-3 months, during the migration from the Lake to the Mekong, fishermen in the Kampong Chhnang province, as well as other areas, catch huge amounts of Trey Riel. Perhaps for the same reason, the Cambodian currency – Riel – is named after the fish.
“All formal property rights were destroyed by the Khmer Rouge, and the large scale displacement of populations undermined traditionally recognized claims on natural resources. In addition, following the end of civil war, lingering physical insecurity and weak enforcement of property rights led to rapid exploitation of resources to the detriment of sustainability.” (WB 2004: 18-19)

The highest poverty rates are found among rural households whose heads have little or no formal education. The poorest 10-20% of these are asset-less. The dependence on natural resources among the rural population is underlined by the fact that only 4% of the women and 10% of the men are engaged in waged employment. As a legacy of war, an average 20% of households in Cambodia are female headed, and many of these are disproportionately poor. (WB 2001b; UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 6). To give an impression of the level of development in the Kampong Chhnang province, it can be mentioned that in 1998, 26.8% of household heads were female, and that in general, 70% of the household heads had not completed primary education. Access to piped water was 0.8%, access to electricity was 2% and 97% of households cooked with wood.

Regardless of the abundant natural resources in Cambodia, not least in the Tonle Sap region, the majority of Cambodia’s population do not benefit equally. (WB 2004: ii). This is recognized by the Cambodian government and in the Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency, it was stated that:

“…the most formidable development challenge faced by the Royal Government is the reduction of poverty and the improvement of the livelihoods and quality of life of the rapidly growing Cambodian population.” (RGC 2004: 23)

Given that a large part of rural Cambodians were below age 20 - estimated 55% in 1998 - the pressure on the natural resources will significantly increase. This, together with the visible forest loss and degradation caused by unsustainable and sometimes illegal harvest of fish and other resources, underlines the importance of including natural resource management in the fight against poverty. (McKenney and Tola 2002: 1)

Considering the growing demands from an increasing population, the linking of poverty reduction and resource management seems a necessity in the context of a changing ecosystem. This conclusion was also reached in an IFReDI study on “Livelihood Importance and Values of Tonle Sap Lake Fisheries”:

“…considerations of livelihoods and ecosystem values must be undertaken in tandem if we are to design truly sustainable resource use policies that will enhance the livelihood possibilities from the Tone Sap Lake.” (Hap, N., Chuenpagdee, R. and Kurien, J. 2006)

According to Thomson (TSEM Project), CFs is, in reality, not only about fisheries, but about NRM and livelihoods as well. Looking back, the TSEM Project, which is one of the
most comprehensive with regards to CFs management, has focused mostly on conservation, and not much on alternative livelihoods. Now they feel that the need for a livelihood focus is acute. (Thomson, Dec 2006). Similar concern was raised by Koch, who found that there was a lack of emphasis on the economic and social sustainability of CFs, as compared with sustainable FRM. (Koch 2005). This schism between sustainable FRM and poverty reduction will be returned to throughout the thesis.

4.1.3 Tonle Sap Villages

The villages in the Tonle Sap region are typically divided into fishing villages – fishing and farming villages – and non-fishing farming villages. The ones visited during the empirical investigations and other field trips can be characterized primarily as fishing and fishing and farming villages. The 3 CFs in the Kampong Chhnang province, examined during the main investigation, are located at the floodplains of the Tonle Sap Lake, and thus experience a yearly flooding. For the same reason, the houses in the 3 villages are built on stilts, with the exception of some areas of Srah Chak village, which are located just outside the commonly flooded areas.

**Picture below:** Floating fish-cage with pigs on top, Kampong Phluk CF, Siem Reap
The difference between the seasons is significant, as the land that some villagers have in the dry season is turned into lake in the wet season. This limits the possibility for agricultural activities, including livestock keeping, which is, however, still practiced due to creative solutions, such as keeping pigs on top of floating fish-cages and storing cows in a small hut on stilts during the wet season.

![Picture above: Cows stored during wet season, Kien Ta Ma CF, Kampong Chhnang](image)

While a number of villages in the Tonle Sap region are located at the lake and thus do not have access to agricultural land, many villages are situated in areas that are seasonally flooded, and here agriculture often play an important role, with rice being the most important crop. There are also villages which are seasonally flooded, but still do not have access to agricultural land. This is especially villages located in the midst of flooded forest, which cannot be cleared legally, and villagers in such areas therefore mainly rely on fishing and often migrate seasonally to reach fishing grounds.

### 4.2 The Sub-Decree on Community Fisheries Management

To make clear how the CFs system is intended to function, the content of the SDCFM - including the objectives hereof, the institutions involved, the rights and duties related to CFs management, and the structure of CFs and CFCs - is briefly presented and discussed in the following.
The SDCFM was prepared between 2001 and 2005 and the objectives of it generally encompass management of “...inland fisheries areas where fishing lots have been cancelled or released in part and protected fishing areas, inundated forest and mangrove forest areas...”. In March 2006, the SDCFM was given a more solid legal standing with the approval of a new Fisheries Law. (SDCFM, Article 2; ICSF 2007: 11-12)

More specifically, the objectives include:

- Management of fisheries resources in a sustainable manner
- Ensuring equitable sharing of benefits from fisheries resources
- Increase understanding and recognition of the benefits and importance of fisheries resources through direct participation in managing, using and protecting fisheries resources
- Provide a legal framework which makes it easy for Khmer citizens, living in local communities, to establish CFs
- Improving the standard of living of Khmer citizens in order to contribute to poverty reduction

(SDCFM, Article 2)

Given the above mentioned objectives it is clear that the aim of CFs entail dual purposes of sustainable fisheries resources use and livelihood related issues such as equitable distribution and poverty reduction. Further, it clearly appears that this demands increased awareness and participation. The achievement of these objectives will be returned to later in this chapter, as it is discussed, which means are necessary in order to obtain them.

**4.2.1 Establishment of Community Fisheries**

A CF is made up by a group of physical persons holding Khmer citizenship who live in or near the fishing area. Citizens must be 18 years or older to become members of a CF. The establishing of CFs shall be carried out through cooperation between Fisheries Administration (FiA), Provincial and Municipal Fisheries Offices, Provincial and Municipal Departments of Agriculture and local authorities or commune councils (SDCFM, Articles 6 and 9). CFs shall have by-laws, internal regulations, management plans, maps of their community fishing areas and agreements recognized by the competent authorities in accordance with provisions of the Sub-Decree (SDCFM, Article 7). Thus the structure is

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12 The understanding of ‘sustainable fisheries resource use’ is adopted from the Cambodian definition, as expressed in the SDCFM. Sustainable use: “Refers to the use of fisheries resources in a way that ensures the protection of the sources of those fisheries resources so that they are sustained for the benefit of future generations.” (SDCFM, Annex)

13 Given the requirement of Khmer citizenship, Vietnamese fishermen, as an example, living in villages on the Tonle Sap Lake are restricted from establishing – or even becoming members of – CFs. The exclusion of certain groups of resource users constitutes a problem in relation to the overall objectives of sustainable resource use and poverty reduction. However, the issue is outside the scope of this study and thus will not be further dealt with on this occasion.
that the government provides the policy and legislative framework, as well as technical support such as capacity building and law enforcement. On the other hand, the local community develops the internal regulations, plans and agreements within the frames issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), which has the general jurisdiction over CFs management. (ICSF 2007: 12; SDCFM, Articles 22 and 23)

The Community Fisheries Development Office (CFDO) was established to facilitate the formulation and development of CFs, and to support and monitor their activities. The service provided by CFDO to the local CFs is intended to facilitate the implementation of the SDCFM and to create strong and self-reliant CFs throughout Cambodia. CFDO collaborates with various multilateral and bilateral organizations, NGOs, as well as with its local offices, the Community Fisheries Development Units (CFDUs). (Danida July 2005)

**Box 2: Important Examples of Roles, Duties and Rights of CFs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles and Duties of CFs Include to:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in managing and conserving fisheries resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect instructions from the fisheries authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in establishment of conservation areas, protection and reforestation of inundated forest and restoration of shallow streams and lakes to improve ecosystems and fisheries environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Guarantee that all members of the CFs have equal rights in the sustainable use of fisheries resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rights of CFs Include to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Organize fishing activities for all members of the CFs in compliance with the law and other regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cooperate with the fisheries competence to suppress all fisheries violations in the community fishing area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fish, do aquaculture, harvest, sell, use, and manage all fisheries resources in accordance with the community fishing area agreement and management plan (SDCFM, Articles 10 and 11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding fisheries violations, the CFs can request intervention by ‘competent authorities’ to seize evidence of the violation and detain the offender, who should then immediately be sent to a fisheries officer to deal with the offense in accordance with the law. It is, however, unclear what exactly the term ‘competent authorities’ covers, but according to the empirical investigation in the Kampong Chhnang province, it appeared possible for the CFCs to
detain offenders. Thus it is possible that the term may cover e.g. village chiefs.14 (SDCFM, Article 11; Pen, April 2007)

4.2.2 Structure of CFs and Member Rights
Each CF shall be led by a CFC, which shall be selected through secret, free, and fair elections by the congress, by an absolute majority of the members of the CF who voted. The number of CFC members shall be odd - from five to eleven - and women shall be encouraged to stand as candidates for election to the CFC. The CFC has the authority to lead and manage the CF, and has a term of five years. (SDCFM, Articles 15, 17 and 19)

In principle, the structure of a CFC is that the candidate with the most votes becomes chief, and the one with the second most votes becomes deputy chief. (SDCFM, Article 16). Under the chief and deputy chief there will usually be a secretary, an accountant, a patrolling team leader and one or more extension workers. The lower positions are usually divided between the elected CFC members in accordance with skills and possibly status as well. Other common positions include manager of savings and self-help groups, manager of rice bank, manager of farming and livestock groups and construction team leader. That such other livelihood oriented positions exist within CFCs is a sign that other issues than those related directly to fisheries are brought into CFs management. This is interesting, as CFs first of all relates to sustainable fisheries management, but at the same time aims for equitable distribution of the resources and reduced poverty. Considering the growing pressure on the resources it is seemingly necessary to focus broader than only fisheries management.

Functions and Duties of the CFC Include to:

- Draft by-laws and internal regulations of the CF, and community fishing area management plans and agreements
- Represent the CF in any mediation and conflict resolution which may occur
- Manage the CF finances in a transparent and accountable manner
- Make decisions on CF development with the agreement of a majority of CF members in accordance with the CF by-laws and community fishing area agreement and management plan
- Report and provide information immediately on any fisheries violations in the community fishing area to the nearest fisheries competence
- Conserve and protect the aquatic life within the community fishing area

(SDCFM, Article 20)

14 The somehow limited mandate of CFs to take action against fisheries violations comprise a potential pitfall towards diminishing illegal fishing, as patronage and power relationships, together with the habitual informal resource management practices, often influence the actual performance. On the other hand, providing CFs with full mandate to operate could also have grave repercussions.
Among the rights of the CF members are to attend the congress and cast equal votes; vote and stand for election in the CFC structure; receive information on the economic condition of the CF from the CFC; request the convocation of an extraordinary congress to discuss and decide on any matter if there is a request from at least one-third of all members; and complain or provide information on any problems which affect the interests of the CF to the fisheries competence, commune council, local authorities and relevant competent agencies. (SDCFM, Article 13). These rights could ensure fair leadership and transparency within CFs, making it possible to hold the leadership responsible for its acts. In practice, however, these rights are only applicable once known to people – something which in many cases seems not yet to be the case.

CFs can seek finances from CF members, charitable donations, the Royal Government, international organizations, NGOs and other lawful income. (SDCFM, Article 30). So far, however, CFs in general do not receive consecutive funding and thus depend on whatever contributions they are able to attract – most often from NGOs and international donors.

As it appears, CFs is a democratic institution intended to ensure sustainable FRM, while concurrently reducing poverty through equitable benefit sharing. CFs as an institution is, however, still in a phase of creating institutional structures, raising awareness and building capacity. The sudden shift to local management - from former large-scale fishing lot operations in many areas - places high demands on all involved stakeholders (from resource users to fisheries authorities) in terms of ensuring a reasonable, fair and smooth shift. By July 2007, 509 CFs had been established, but technical assistance to design the management structure of many of these communities is still needed. (Hun Sen, July 2007).

4.3 CFs Management in Practice

In this section the practice of CFs management will be examined and discussed to get a grasp of the state of CFs management, as well as to assess the challenges for its implementation. Subsequently, a number of key conditions, which are considered essential to achieve the objectives of the SDCFM, are proposed and highlighted. This is considered a decisive step in relation to the upcoming discussion and analysis of the contributions of women’s participation – including the potential deriving there from - and the likelihood of instituting such participation in the context of the Tonle Sap region.

The discussion in the following builds mainly on a 2004 study on the contribution of CFs to equitable resource sharing and sustainable management of Cambodian fish resources. The fieldwork carried out in that relation covered 12 CFs in 6 provinces, and thus represents relatively broad experience from the field. It should be noted that the study was carried out
prior to the finalization of the SDCFM, but nevertheless the findings are still considered highly relevant in the context of the study at hand.15

Managing CFs in a democratic way is bound to clash with traditional Khmer culture, in which there is a wide-spread mentality of ‘acting in the interest of one’s own followers’. Despite its informality, this practice is to a large degree accepted by the rural public. This is further emphasized by the Cambodian society being highly structured through an accurately defined social hierarchy, which determines the social interactions between people. In the traditional culture, underprivileged people rarely have the self-confidence (nor the necessary backing) to question the behavior of higher ranking people, and accordingly they have a tendency to leave discussions and organizational tasks to people they view as more competent or powerful. Under these circumstances the success or failure of CFs, with its inherent democratic nature, will be determined to a high degree by the behavior and attitude of the CFC members. (O’Leary and Nee 2001: 47; Münther 2005: 6)

Although the CFCs are elected by the CF members, they are widely mistrusted and suspected to act out of self-interest, making e.g. informal agreements with various fishing operators against the interest of the common CF members. This mistrust is nourished by the common lack of transparency in the CFC work, and the way that finances are handled. On the other hand, the CF members show lacking awareness and participation in the work of the CFCs. (Münther 2005: 5). The need for continued capacity building to strengthen CFs is apparent and was also addressed by prime minister Hun Sen at the 5th National Fish Day, where he stressed the need to empower the rural communities to actively participate in managing ‘their own’ natural resources. (Hun Sen, July 2007)

4.3.1 Enforcement of Regulations on Resource Use

Most CFs have established groups which patrol the CF areas in order to stop and prevent illegal fishing.16 However, a number of issues obstruct the outcome of the patrolling efforts, including: lack of equipment and funding for gasoline; lacking respect for the patrolling groups among powerful offenders; and the habit - among enforcers - of accepting informal fees from offenders. The lack of respect among the powerful fishing operators is, in some cases, associated with the connections between fishing operators and fisheries inspectors. (Münther 2005: 5)


16 Illegal fishing includes: Electro fishing; pumping water out of ponds to get fish; using sait (mosquito-net); using seine-net, drawn by an engine boat; using samrah (brush-park) to attract fish; and clearing flooded forest.
In general, patrolling group members do not get compensation for the time they patrol, which both hinders poor people from participating and further invites for acceptance of informal fees. Nevertheless, a decrease in the use of some illegal fishing methods (e.g. mosquito nets and electro-fishing) has been noticed. This was mainly attributed social sanctions by CF members against offenders living within the CF areas. (Münther 2005: p. 5).

Enforcing against illegal fishermen using small-scale gear – such as mosquito nets will in many cases comprise a livelihood challenge for very poor offenders, who practice these methods for subsistence.

There is a conflict of interest between CFs and fisheries inspectors which is rooted in the change in rights brought about by the introduction of CFs. Prior to the establishment of CFs, fisheries inspectors to a larger degree controlled the resources, which made it possible for them to collect informal fees from resource users. With CFs taking over areas formerly controlled by fisheries inspectors, increased struggle over resource control is likely and the pivotal co-operation between CFs and fisheries inspectors could be compromised hereby. (Münther 2005: 15-16)

**4.3.2 Importance of Sincere and Committed Leadership**

Influential leadership has proved of major importance for having CF members (and other villagers) respect the resource use regulations, which is why unselfish and engaged CFC members is a key condition for successful CFs management. Unfortunately, in many cases CFC leaders instead act out of self-interest making e.g. informal agreements with fishing operators against the interest and benefit of the CF as a whole, something many CF members complain about. In such cases the success of CFs management is severely jeopardized. Given a widespread mentality of distrust, CFC members are easily suspected, and when irregularities become public knowledge, the motivation and participation of CF members greatly decreases. (Münther 2005: 7). This de-motivation might be counterbalanced if the CFC members demonstrate good governance, including transparency and accountability. The SDCFM does provide CF members with the right to gain insight in e.g. the economic conditions of the CF and to complain to the fisheries or other local authorities, but probably due to socio-cultural reasons, this does not seem to be commonly practiced by CF members.

Adding to the wide-spread acceptance of informal fees, as well as other acts of self-interest, is the low salaries in the public sector in Cambodia, as well as a culture of impunity. This causes civil servants to enhance their salaries by accepting informal fees, some of which are passed to superiors as part of a system of protection. (Transparency International 2006: 24)

The release of fishing lot areas has resolved conflicts between lot owners and local residents regarding user rights and agrarian activities, but has also caused new conflicts between CFs
regarding borders. In addition, disputes over use of fisheries resources and distribution of fishing rights, fees and fines between fisheries staff and CFCs as well as between CFs and commercial fishermen are recurrent challenges. (Münther 2005: 8)

4.4 Analysis and Conclusion
The objectives of the SDCFM are relevant and necessary in order to change the trend of unsustainable resource use, but to achieve these objectives, a number of conditions are essential. The structure of CFs is centered on local management and thus participation by villagers is a key condition. Further, achieving the objectives is deemed to require a change in behaviour among those villagers and outsiders who e.g. fish with illegal gear or otherwise exploit the fisheries resources and habitat. To facilitate such behavioural change, communication is important. In this way, participation and communication are considered prerequisites for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM.

Awareness of the detrimental effects of illegal fishing and destruction of habitat constitute a first step in diminishing such practices. However, as poverty is widespread, illegal fishing is not easily avoided – especially where no alternatives are available for the offenders. Thus incentives of some sort, which can basically be divided into either stick or carrot methods, are relevant. The stick is increasingly applied, as patrolling teams confiscate gear and turn in offenders to the fisheries authorities. Such enforcement efforts are likely to create conflict, and therefore conflict management is another important aspect, which is needed to urge offenders and enforcers to come together in a common fight for sustainable resource use, and to address conflicts related to the schism between sustainable FRM and immediate livelihood needs, e.g. subsistence fishing. Further, enforcement is dependent on participation and communication, which further underpins the relevance of these concepts.

Given the parallel objectives of sustainability and poverty reduction, providing offenders with constructive incentives or alternatives to illegal fishing and destruction of habitats – via a carrot method – is likely to be a better solution than using the stick. Depriving people of their livelihood without providing alternatives is both less likely to provide sustainable solutions and further conflict with the focus on poverty reduction – at least in the short term. Unfortunately, CFs do not seem able to provide much immediate ‘carrot effect’, but rather has a long term perspective, as sustainable FRM practiced now will improve – or at least maintain – the fish stock for future catch and not right away. Therefore, awareness of both the detrimental effects of illegal fishing, and the outlook for improved future fish stock, is extremely important.

Given the indications from the pilot investigation there is reason to believe that women’s participation in CFs management will, as a minimum, positively influence the aspects of
communication, participation, awareness, economic management and conflict management.

Considering the hierarchical structure of the Cambodian society and the inherent risk of elite capture and power abuse, in relation to CFs management, good governance, - including transparent practices - is another crucial aspect for success.

In order to examine this possible link between women’s participation and the achievement of the objectives of the SDCFM (the development potential of women’s participation), the above mentioned concepts will be subject to analysis in Chapter 6, making use of data from the empirical investigations.

Conclusion

The management framework for CFs includes dual main purposes of ensuring sustainable FRM and reducing poverty. Along with the release of fishing lot areas and the creation of CFs, the number of fisheries resource users has increased and the pressure on the resources remains high. In the long run sustainable FRM can, with reason, be set as a precondition for sustaining rural livelihoods for a considerable number of Cambodians.

Given the Cambodian setting and context, with an insufficient law enforcement system, CFs probably form the most suitable management tool for implementing and enforcing the regulations. Ensuring compliance, however, from CFs locally, requires training, awareness and broad participation, so that the value and necessity of complying with CFs regulations is understood. Further, it requires that the needs of all resource users are taken into consideration, in order to ensure backup and broad participation for inclusive and effective management of CFs.

Significant challenges still exist and must be dealt with before the objectives of the SDCFM can be achieved. In this regard, capacity building in a broad sense is a necessity, both among local people and among government officers. Figure 2 outlines key conditions necessary for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM, as seen from the perspective of the author.
As Figure 2 illustrates, participation and communication are general prerequisites for CFs management. In addition, awareness (incl. education and dissemination), good governance (incl. transparency and accountability), enforcement (incl. patrolling and conflict management), and alternatives (incl. incentives and livelihood opportunities) are considered fundamental for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM.
Chapter 5: Political and Socio-Cultural Context

As discussed in the gender discourse in Chapter 3, a ‘world consensus’ on recommending women’s inclusion in development is dominating. Though various motives and justifications are given by supporters of a normative rights-based approach and those adhering to a predominantly practical efficiency-based approach, they by and large agree on recommending women’s participation in development, including resource management and poverty reduction. As discussed earlier, women’s participation in CFCs in the Tonle Sap region is very limited. The discrepancy between the general recommendations of women’s participation, and the Cambodian reality of a low representation, makes it relevant to explore the political and socio-cultural context in which women in CFCs in Cambodia have to participate. The structure of the chapter is based on the following sub-question:

What characterizes the political and socio-cultural context in which CFs management has to evolve?

5.1 Political Context
Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy, the current king being Norodom Sihamoni. The government is lead by Prime Minister Hun Sen and dominated by the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). The parliament has 123 elected members, and national elections are held every five years, with the latest taking place in 2003.17

The country is divided into 24 provinces (4 of them municipalities), each headed by a governor. These are divided into 1.621 communes each governed by a commune council, which comprises between 5 and 11 members. The first direct election of council members took place in 2002. On average, a commune contains around 8 to 15 villages. A CF comprises from one to several villages, but in the Kampong Chhnang province, a CF is generally comprised by one village only.

Cambodia has from 1970 to 1991 - at which time formal peace was established through an agreement signed in Paris - experienced invasions, war, and civil war, including the Khmer Rouge Regime. Almost all governance institutions were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people - especially the higher educated - were killed. Prior to this, Cambodia was under French colonial rule from 1863 to 1953, and was, in-between, occupied by Japan from 1941-1945.

17 The next parliamentary election is July 27, 2008
5.1.1 Government Focus on Poverty, Sustainability and Gender

In recent years a number of strategies – concerning areas such as poverty reduction, growth, equity, good governance, sustainable use of natural resources and gender equality – have been launched by the government. In the following some of the major policy documents will be presented, with focus on the intentions concerning poverty reduction, sustainable resource use and gender.

The National Poverty Reduction Strategy (2003) includes key objectives such as equitable distribution among the whole population of the gains from economic growth, as well as the promotion of sustainable resource use. (RGC 2004: 23)

In 2004, the government launched The Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency which, among other, included intentions concerning gender equality. Elements of the strategy are presented in the following.

Good governance is highlighted as the cornerstone in the fight against corruption and for equitably distributed economic development. Participation, accountability, transparency, sharing of information, equality, inclusiveness and the rule of law are considered key conditions in this regard. Good governance is expected to reduce corruption and ensure that the most vulnerable groups in society are heard, and their voices considered in decision-making processes. (RGC 2004: 6)

Public administrative reforms, including the implementation of decentralization and de-concentration to the commune level is recognized by the government and found crucial to strengthen democracy, especially at the grassroots level. The quality of public services and participatory local development must be improved in all sectors, and a key priority is to build local management capacity and promote the culture of participation. (RGC 2004: 9)

Regarding gender equality, the strategy emphasizes the importance of capacity building for women; change of discriminatory social attitudes; and of ensuring the rights of women to participate equally in nation building. In addition, the importance of women’s participation at all levels of institutions of governance is underlined. (RGC 2004: 21-22)

In terms of gender aware practices, the government has established various groups to promote the transformation from legislation and intentions into practice. Among them are the ‘Technical Working Group on Gender’ (TWGG), and the ‘Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups’ (GMAG) in government institutions. By March 2007, GMAGs were active in 21 out of 26
line ministries, where they attempt to influence various levels of policy formulation.\(^\text{18}\) (Urashima 2007)

### 5.1.2 Women’s Representation

Although there has been an improvement in recent years, women are heavily under-represented in the political scene. Only 12.2\% of the members elected to the parliament in 2003 were women (15 out of 123), and in the elections to the commune councils in 2002, only 8.5\% women were elected. This percentage did however increase to 14.6\% at the latest commune council elections in 2007, showing improvement in the female representation at the local level. For the civil servants 9\% of the 169,000 are women. (UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 11; NEC 2007)

The tendency observed at the local political level is that some female CFC members already play significant roles, e.g. as secretaries and accountants, and in patrolling activities as well. According to the NGO, CCD, some female CFC members in the Kampong Chhnang province have an advisory function to the commune councils. (CCD, April 2007). However, the active involvement of female officers in the provincial fisheries offices, the commune councils and at NGO level is currently at a low level despite its importance. Consequently, in order to empower women in CFCs, the participation at these - potentially supportive - levels should increase. (ICSF No. 5, 2007)

#### Women’s Representation in CFCs in Kampong Chhnang Province

As mentioned in the introduction, data on male and female participation in CFCs in the 52 CFs in the Kampong Chhnang province show that only 57.7\% of the CFs has one or more women in their committee, with the average female participation being at 10.7\%. (CFDO 2006). This relatively low representation - and the fact that more than 40\% of the CFCs have no female CFC members at all - suggests that the aims of the government, in this regard, are still far from being achieved. More importantly, it shows that a significant number of women, including many female household heads, are potentially excluded from the decision-making process, qua their lacking representation.

#### Empowerment from the Bottom: Women in Village Development Committees

During focus group discussions (in 2003) in the Kampong Cham province – a province along the Mekong River - it turned out women in village development committees (VDCs) felt well respected by their communities. Participants of the focus groups explained that villagers have more trust in women, as they are considered to be more honest and hardworking than men. In addition, it was noted that women in VDCs seemed more empowered to speak out

\(^{18}\) “The GMAGs provide a mechanism for developing and monitoring gender mainstreaming strategies and plans, and integrating gender-responsive measures into sectoral policies and programmes.” (Urashima 2007)
and articulate their concerns than women from higher political levels. (UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 137)

This seemingly increased self-confidence and willingness to speak out at village level could be an expression for women experiencing less resistance and opposition locally, which could be explained by women having more negotiation power, the closer politics and decision-making come to their usual environment, at the household level. At higher levels, male dominance seems to be more substantial, which could be ascribed increased participation by powerful people when more is at stake, while village politics is less attractive and in that way represents a more advantageous possibility for women to become active in decision-making.

5.2 Gender Context of Rural Cambodia

In Chapter 1, it was found that participation should ideally comprehend the broad range of interests and issues arising from the voices and opinions expressed by everyone in a society, including women and men, poor and rich. In the hierarchical and patriarchal Cambodian society, however, this picture immediately breaks down, as women are strongly under-represented and, in many cases, undervalued in the public sphere in Cambodia. (KID 2007). There is much consensus among donor countries and organisations on the desirability and necessity of women’s inclusion in development projects, and the Cambodian government has largely adopted this view in its official politics. Nevertheless, the reality is still characterized by a low participation of women, and this makes it relevant to look into the characteristics of the socio-cultural context in the country.

Besides their reproductive responsibilities, women have traditionally played four important roles in riparian communities, namely: 1) Finding food for the family; 2) processing fish; 3) selling fish; and 4) supporting the husband in fishing and related activities such as mending nets, etc. The introduction of CFs represents an opportunity for increased participation by women in new as well as in existing roles, and a challenge in that regard is to make women’s roles more rewarding than the tradition dictates. Here female presence in local decision-making bodies can be seen as a first step, as it gives women the opportunity to come forward and participate. (ICSF No. 5, 2007)

Women comprise the majority of farmers and informal sector workers in rural Cambodia, but in spite of this, they rarely benefit from extension services or credit opportunities. In fact, most women are unpaid family workers, and their activities are by and large overlooked by research and extension efforts. The great majority of rural government officials are male, including extension service staffs, who engage in face-to-face communications with farmers and fishermen. The problem is that cultural norms and traditions make it difficult for the male officers to communicate with women, and therefore they end up receiving inadequate
levels of information. This restrains women from increasing production and improving their livelihoods. (UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 6)

In the Cambodian context there is a sharp contrast between the male and female spheres and, as pointed out previously, politics is largely designated the male sphere. The following quotation clearly expresses this division:

“In Khmer political culture it is common for women to be discursively ‘made’ weak, vulnerable and subordinate to men. Consequently, historically they have not been expected to take controversial political positions or to act independently and publicly, which would challenge the codification of how an ‘ideal woman’ should behave.” (Öjendal and Sedara 2006: 521-522)

The expectations to Cambodian women are described in the ‘chhab srei’ - a traditional code of conduct for women’s behavior - which is described later in this chapter. It should further be recognized that the situation in rural Cambodia is very different from that of more developed nations, e.g. with regards to social systems, including childcare. In Cambodia, the social system is not ‘geared’ to include this type of services, and therefore women are often caught up with, what is traditionally and culturally seen as their, reproductive responsibilities.

5.2.1 Decentralization: Possible Opening for Women’s Participation?
The move towards decentralization, exemplified by the commune council elections, is a step forward for women to gain influence on everyday decision-making in rural Cambodia. The commune councils are given a wide-ranging mandate to administer the local society, which include overseeing a ‘budget and planning committee’ with village representation; production of commune development plans through bottom-up methods; transparent negotiations related to small-scale construction projects; encouraging broad-based participation; civil registration; and conflict management. In addition the councils can draft laws, collect taxes, provide security and manage certain natural resources. (Öjendal and Sedara 2006: 511)

According to commune chiefs, it is much better to work with the new bottom-up strategy, which represents a more participatory style than the former top-down system, where they had to comply more strictly with the central level. Now the commune investments fit better to people’s needs and thus they show less disapproval with the decisions taken by the commune council. This being said, an inherent risk in decentralisation remains - well in line with Khmer political culture - that top-down authoritarianism is replaced with establishment of local ‘fiefdoms’, including nepotism, corruption and non-transparent chains of patronage. To reduce this risk, broad-based participation is a key condition. (Öjendal and Sedara 2006: 514)
5.2.2 Experiences from the First Years with Commune Councils

A traditional view of commune authorities has been one of “korob, kaud, klach” - ‘respect, admiration and fear’ - towards the local authorities and their civil servants. However, it seems that the general atmosphere has changed, creating a new balance between the words so that klach (fear) is now much less pronounced, while korob (respect) and kaud (admiration) are on the rise. (Öjendal and Sedara 2006: 518)

This should be seen in relation to the traditional top-down approach to decision-making, where villagers were not listened to, and the commune authorities were approached with fear. Commune authorities were seen as having ‘rot amnach’ (power in a bad sense). In their fieldwork, Öjendal and Sedara found that the villagers’ perception of the commune authorities were undergoing change, in the sense that people understand their rights and freedoms better, which has made fear much less pronounced. (Öjendal and Sedara 2006: 518). However, this has not wiped out all discontent with the behavior of the commune councils, and corruption and nepotism is common, as exemplified here:

“The female head of a fishing community, for instance, commented that 'I went to see the commune chief many times but he only received me one time out of ten. This commune chief is still paying a lot of favours toward his own friends and political party members. He pays little respect to the marginalized villagers like us.” (Öjendal and Sedara 2006: 518)

That people increasingly understand their rights and freedoms, and at the same time experience less fear, are important conditions for an increase in the active participation by local communities. Together with increased awareness and self-confidence, and without the habitual fear of the authorities, it cannot be expected that villagers will continue voting for those closing their eyes to their needs.

Considering the increasing participation in local politics by women, the rational explanation is twofold. Firstly, the arrival of the development community with its inherent norms and values has promoted gender equality. Secondly, and basically more important, is the change from war and violence to peace and stability, which allows women to participate, and even to assume leadership roles. Öjendal and Sedara conclude that the socio-political dynamic of rural areas in Cambodia is complex, but that the usual references to top-down authoritarianism as an all-explanatory mechanism are slowly becoming outdated, while democratic decentralization is developing, though still heavily influenced by systems of patronage and power. (Öjendal and Sedara 2006: 523-525)

The work of Öjendal and Sedara represents one of the more thorough studies carried out on the role of the commune councils, including the role of women in local politics in rural Cambodia. Due to the very limited research available on women in CFCs, the experiences
from the commune council level contain some of the best available information related to this research.

5.3 Inherent Challenges: The Socio-Cultural Context

Social relations in Cambodia are largely conditioned by strong notions of power and status, as the society is extremely hierarchically ordered. The following quotation explains the influence of religion and power structures on the structure of the Cambodian society:

“The social order of Cambodian society, reinforced by some Cambodian understandings of Buddhism, depends upon everyone respecting the social hierarchy and keeping his or her place in it. From childhood, people are taught to obey and respect those with authority. Challenging, questioning, and holding dissenting views are discouraged, conflict is seen as bad and loss of face is to be avoided at all costs.” (O’Leary and Nee 2001: v-vi)

Despite increasing recognition that women play an indispensable role in relation to maintaining livelihoods - including income provisioning and economic development in many rural families - cultural norms still place women at a lower status than men. As an example, a man - and his wife for that sake - will 'look very bad' if she opposes him in front of others, e.g. at a community meeting. The inherent power imbalance caused by these structures are viewed as natural for a large share of male practitioners, as well as by a significant number of women, and is consequently not perceived as an issue of injustice. (UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 22-23; O’Leary and Nee 2001: 40)

This embedded perception of the power imbalance between men and women as being natural, may be approached in several ways. From a Western ‘feminist’ point of view it is an expression of severe injustice, which ought to be changed immediately. However, this general acceptance of the power imbalance between the genders is so strongly embedded in the culture and daily practice that the situation is not easily changed. Provided the ordinariness of the situation an acceptable alternative power balance is apparently not readily at hand. This is not to say that the situation should not change, but merely to emphasize the extent of ‘cultural support’ to the existing state of affairs – and thus the likely scepticism to be expected and to be acknowledged, when dealing with this issue.

Chbab Srei: Proper Behaviour of Women in Cambodia

According to the chhab srei - the traditional code of conduct for Cambodian women - they are expected to be:

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19 In addition to gender: Age, wealth, knowledge, reputation of the family, political position, employment, the character of the individual, and religious piety are, however, also determining for the status of an individual. (O’Leary and Nee 2001: 48).
• **Demure** (gentle, polite, speak and walk appropriately);
• **Respectful** (being a good daughter and a good wife – respecting her parents and her husband);
• **Caring** (be a good mother, take care of the children and the house, serve delicious food, receive guests in the right way and be friendly with the neighbors);
• **Moral** and **discreet** (do not gossip, do not bring problems from inside to outside the family, and vice versa) (O’Leary and Nee 2001: 55)

The pressure to conform to the *chhambrei* is strong and if not abided by, women fear that they will not find a husband. That the situation is different for men is illustrated here:

> “Men are like pure gold, women are like white cloth…” When a girl or woman is judged by society and found to be ‘guilty’ then the stain of a bad reputation cannot be cleaned. The reputation of boys and men may get muddied but is not lasting or serious.” (O’Leary and Nee 2001: 56)

In line with this traditional code of conduct, norms prescribe Cambodian women to marry men with higher educations and positions than themselves. Consequently, women have less incentive to pursue higher education and sons will be more likely to receive family support in this regard. Although more job opportunities now exist for women than for men, e.g. within the textile industry, young women still have to overcome a cultural barrier in order to move to urban areas to work. Travelling out of the village to work is traditionally regarded as inappropriate behaviour for a woman. These barriers include the fear of families that their daughters will become corrupted and lose their virginity before marriage. (ADB 2001; UNIFEM, WB, ADB, UNDP and DFID/UK, 2004: 23; O’Leary and Nee 2001: 48)

5.4 Summary

The government focus on equitable distribution of the gains of economic growth and on sustainable resource use is well in line with the objectives of the SDCFM. The importance of good governance and gender equality is recognized by the government and the need for participation, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness are emphasized. This political standpoint is well in line with the mainstream gender discourse. The decentralization process has led to efforts to build local management capacity and promote a culture of participation. At the same time gender awareness is increasingly promoted at government level, and women’s representation in commune councils is increasing. However, despite having a favourable political and legal framework in place, the contextual analysis in Chapter 4 revealed a relatively weak implementation and enforcement system in Cambodia.

With regard to women’s participation in public decision-making at the local level, their representation is still low, and the inherent socio-cultural barriers inhibit many women from becoming active participants in village decision-making. On the other hand, increased
stability in Cambodia and the decentralization process - including the emergence of commune council elections, VDCs and CFCs – represent a new opportunity for women to participate.

To sum up, the overall political framework must be considered conducive toward attaining the goals of the SDCFM, as well as for moving towards gender equality; while in practice CFs management - and women’s opportunities for participating herein - still entail considerable challenges.
Chapter 6: Women’s Participation in CFCs

In the gender discourse in Chapter 3 it became evident that a general agreement, among researchers and major development practitioners, on the importance of gender equality, has been established. Two rationales appear to be the underlying principles for this agreement; namely a rights-based view, arguing for gender equality out of political motives; and an efficiency-based view arguing for gender equality from a more practical motive. Other findings included arguments and examples of the importance of female participation in development, both for the benefit of women, but also for societies in general; constraints for women’s participation, including barriers related to norms and traditions; and finally that there is growing evidence that gender equality leads towards good governance.

The contextual setting in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated a close link between resource use and livelihoods, where unsustainable use of resources is deemed to impede poverty reduction in a long term perspective, while sustainable resource use, on the other hand, interfere with many poor people’s immediate livelihood needs and options. The presentation of the SDCFM and major government strategies showed a seemingly conducive legal framework for women’s participation in CFCs. However, the reality of CFs management thus far leaves much to be desired in order to achieve sustainable FRM, equitable distribution of resources and poverty reduction, as are the intentions. This is, among other things, due to the limited capacity of regional and local governments to assist and control CFs. Further, the inherent socio-cultural context limits women’s opportunities for actively participating in public decision-making.

In this chapter data from the empirical investigations will be presented and analysed with the aim of establishing an improved insight into women’s participation in CFCs in the Tonle Sap region. In this process the positions and characteristics of women’s participation are elaborated on, prior to an analysis of their contributions to CFCs. After this, the contributions are examined in relation to the key conditions for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM, which were outlined in Chapter 4, and the development potential of women’s participation is analyzed.

To set off the analysis, the 15 interviews carried out in the CFs of Bat Trang, Preaek Sala and Srah Chak during the main investigation will be introduced in the following, after which the CFC related women will be presented more thoroughly.
Throughout the analysis and discussion the acronyms **BT** (Bat Trang), **PS** (Preaek Sala) and **SC** (Srah Chak) will be applied. In **Box 3**, the 15 interviews are listed and numbered according to the way they will appear as sources throughout the chapter.

**Box 3: List of Interviews Carried Out During the Main Investigation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BT 1</td>
<td>Interview with the CFC in Bat Trang (BT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 2</td>
<td>Interview with the female CFC member in BT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 3</td>
<td>Interview with the female former CFC member in BT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 4</td>
<td>Interview with a male CF and patrolling group member in BT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT 5</td>
<td>Interview with a female CF member in BT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS 1</td>
<td>Interview with the CFC in Preaek Sala (PS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS 2</td>
<td>Interview with the female CFC member and the female patrolling group member in PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS 3</td>
<td>Interview with a female non-CF member in PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS 4</td>
<td>Interview with a female CF member in PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS 5</td>
<td>Interview with a male CF member in PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 1</td>
<td>Interview with the CFC in Srah Chak (SC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 2</td>
<td>Interview with two female CFC members in SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 3</td>
<td>Interview with a male CF member in SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 4</td>
<td>Interview with a female CF member in SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC 5</td>
<td>Interview with two non-CF members, husband and wife, in SC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction to Interviews in Bat Trang CF**

The interviews in BT were carried out over two days starting out with the CFC, which were interviewed at the house of the CFC chief (BT 1). Present at the interview were the chief (who is also chief for the village and for a federation of CFs), the female deputy chief and two male CFC members. The second interview was with the female deputy chief at her home (BT 2). On the second day in the village, the first interview was with the female former CFC member (BT 3). Her husband was present during part of the interview and contributed on a few occasions, but without dominating the interview in any way. Her mother and her young child were present as well, but did not participate. Then a male CF and patrolling group member was interviewed (BT 4). A few young men, his wife, an old woman and several children were also present, but he was the only one responding the questions. The last interviewee was a female CF member with her husband and two children present during the interview as well. On my request, she was the one replying the questions (BT 5). The two interviewed CF members and the female CFC deputy chief all considered
themselves poor, whereas the female former CFC member and the CFC chief belong to the middle class.

**Picture left:** The female CFC member in Bat Trang

![Image of the female CFC member in Bat Trang]

**Picture right:** Female CF member in Preaek Sala

**Introduction to Interviews in Preaek Sala CF**

As in BT, the interviews in PS were carried out over two days and started off with the CFC (PS 1), at the house of the CFC chief. Present were the village chief, the CFC chief, the female CFC member and the five male CF members. The next morning, at the house of the female CFC member, she and the female patrolling group member were interviewed (PS 2). Subsequent to this a woman - who claimed she was not a CF member - was interviewed underneath a house on stilts (PS 3). Soon after we started, many people gathered around us and, once in a while, two other women and two men commented. A female CF member was knitting palm leaves into wall materials while she was interviewed (PS 4). She, who is a female household head, also functions as midwife in the village. During the interview, two young men - probably her sons - and another woman arrived and commented on a few occasions. The last interview in Preaek Sala was with a male CF member inside his house (PS 5). Two other men attended part of the time, but neither of them interfered.

**Introduction to Interviews in Srah Chak CF**

The interview with the CFC in SC took place in the house of the village chief. In addition to the village chief, the CFC chief, four other male CFC members and two female CFC members were present (SC 1). Two other female CFC members had given birth recently, and therefore they were not present. The same afternoon, the two female CFC members were interviewed at the family house of one of them (SC 2). Late in the interview a very old man arrived, but he did not partake. On the second morning in Srah Chak, a male CF was interviewed under his stilted house (SC 3). His wife, children and another man were also present.

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20 The woman said that she was not a CF member, but the CFC and a female CF member all said that she was a member of the CF. What seemed certain, however, was that she was not unconditionally satisfied with the CFC.
present. A poor female household head and CF member was then interviewed at her home (SC 4). Her ten year old son was preparing a fire for cooking in the background. Finally, two non-CF members - husband and wife - were interviewed (SC 5). Because they do not fish, they are not members of the CF, but they join the big CF meetings and seemed engaged in the community.

**Picture left:** The son of a female CF member in Srah Chak

**Picture right:** Dry Season, Srah Chak

6.1 Positions and Characteristics of Women in CFCs

In the following, the interviewed women and their positions will be presented, and the characteristics of their participation will be discussed, including their interests and focus and their inclusion in CFC decision-making. Then women’s contributions to CFs management and the importance of their participation will be dealt with in detail, where after the relations between men and women and changing perceptions in the villages will be discussed.

Among the six female CFC members in the 3 examined CFs, one of them was a *deputy chief*, two of them were *accountants*, two were ‘*educators and disseminators*’ and one was *assistant secretary*. The distribution of these positions appears in **Table 1**.

**Table 1:** Female CFC members in Bat Trang, Preaek Sala and Srah Chak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bat Trang CF</th>
<th>Preaek Sala CF</th>
<th>Srah Chak CF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFC members</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female CFC members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positions of female CFC members</td>
<td>- Deputy chief (1)</td>
<td>- Accountant (1)</td>
<td>- Accountant (1)</td>
</tr>
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In the official records, it was stated that BT and PS had two female CFC members each. However, at the time of the interview, as **Table 1** shows, they had only one each. According
to the chief of the CFC in BT, one of the two women resigned after she got married and gave birth. This explanation was however challenged during a later interview, where the woman said that she had felt pushed to stay away from CFC work. Similarly, in the official records it was stated that PS had two women elected for the CFC, but it became evident at the interview that only one of the CFC members is female.

Three of the women have been CFC members for 2 years, and three of them for 4-5 years. Only one of the six is married, whereas two of them are divorced. Two are not married, and the marital status of the last one is unknown. Three of the six female CFC members grow dry rice, one fish in the wet season, one sells fish together with her husband, two have small shops, and two sometimes work outside the village. According to the women themselves, two of them belong to the poor, and two of them belong to the middle class. The social status of the last two is not certain, but is reportedly most likely either middle class or poor. (SC 2)

This pattern of the female CFC members belonging to the poor and middle class fits well with the general depiction of CFC members’ social class in Cambodia. (Kaing, April 2007; CCD April 2007; AS April 2007; VSG April 2007)

Presentation of the CFC Related Women
In the following the female CFC members - as well as the female former CFC member in BT and the female patrolling group member in PS - who were interviewed during the main investigation are described in terms of their positions, the training they have received, their social status and their motivation. A schematic overview of the characteristics of these women is found in Appendix G & H.

The female CFC member in Bat Trang (BT 2) did not have any special qualifications when she got elected, but since then she has received training both in and outside the village. She has benefited from the training by gaining more knowledge, and by getting to know the city and people from other provinces. She very much likes to work with the CFC, and she finds it important to contribute to protect the fisheries resources. When foreign NGOs support Cambodia, she feels that Cambodians should also try to support themselves. (BT 2)

Prior to the latest (and second) election she considered to stop in the CFC, because she is poor and needs time to do other work, but the CFC members and other villagers encouraged her to continue. Thus she got re-elected with the second most votes, and is now the deputy

21 That the interviewed female CFC members in Srah Chak did not know whether their CFC colleague is married or not, indicates that they might not work closely with this woman. It could be that she is not active in CFC work, but this is only guesswork. According to the CFC she gave birth recently, so she is most likely married.
chief of the CFC. To begin with she and another woman were elected, but since the other woman stopped after 3 months, she has been the only woman in the CFC. She does not see it as a problem to be the only woman in the CFC, as they know each other well in the CFC. Once her brother had asked if she was not afraid that someone would kill her, to which she had replied that “If I die it is still the best for the next generation, because they will remember my name for something good.” She said that she does not care so much about her personal life, but more about resources for the next generation. In the village she mostly talks to other women – also to the ones who are wealthier than her. (BT 2)

The female former CFC member in Bat Trang (BT 3) initially stood for election because she is interested in the CF and wanted to know how it works. Further she wished to improve her own knowledge and skills and to contribute to the CFC, upholding a good moral. She had training in gender before she became interested in the CFC. As it is common among women in the Cambodian context, she had considered to stand for election for a while, but did not do so until encouraged by others.

Once elected, she was only invited to one meeting within the first three months and never obtained a position in the CFC. Sometimes she saw the other female CFC member walk with a book or something in the direction of the chiefs’ house, which made her think that she might be going to a meeting with the CFC. When she asked the other female CFC member what she was doing and where she was going, she did sometimes not reply, but other times she said that she was going to a meeting with the chief. On one occasion the other female CFC member asked her why she never came to the meetings – she believed that they had both been invited, but that was not the case. (BT 3)

At this point, she got into a conflict with the CFC chief, who was angry because her buffalo ate from his rice field. From her point of view, the chief demanded an unreasonably high compensation, and thus this episode caused her to stop in the CFC. Her husband had supported her participation in the CFC right from the beginning, and he did not think it was a good idea when she stopped. During the interview with the CFC, the chief explained that her husband had asked her to stop after she had a baby. Confronted with this story she said that this was not true. She did not stop because of the baby, but only because of the disagreement regarding the buffalo and the rice field. (BT 1; BT 3).22

Later on she regretted that she had stopped, because many villagers support her and wants her to work in the CFC. People trust her because she is clever. If she gets the opportunity she will stand for election again. Maybe she will raise her hand at the meeting where they

22 During the first part of the interview where the husband was present, he seemed honestly supportive of her engagement in the CFC, so her explanation seems more plausible than the one given by the chief at the interview with the CFC.
select the candidates. The process is that they invite all villagers to the election meeting, where the chief suggests his relatives and friends, who live in his area of the village, as candidates. She does not know what others think, but she wonders why he only points at people from his own area. She wanted people from her area to raise their hands as well and then decided to do so herself, in order to show people from her own area that they also have skills there. (BT 3)

Though she is no longer a CFC member, she still talks with people in the village – mostly other women - and sometimes she advises about gender. Her relationship with women in the village has improved after she has become more active in the community. As an example, people in the village see her as ‘knowing of healthcare’, because she always advises about using condoms and medicine. Today people sometimes come to her house, or ask her to come to them. When asked about this, she said that she also talks with people from ‘the chief’s area’. (BT 3)

The female CFC member in Preaek Sala (PS 2) is an accountant. She has been a member for 2 years and wanted to work in the CFC to contribute protecting the natural resources for the next generation. She grows dry rice and further collects local medicine in Siem Reap, which she sells in Phnom Penh. She is 39 years old and has 7 children, but was divorced one year ago. She travels a lot in periods of one week, but she plans this so that she is in the village for CF meetings. She does not do any fishing. The village chief finds it problematic that she travels a lot, but the CFC chief still asks her to stay. She never wants to stop in the CFC. The same morning, the village chief had asked her, why she did not resign, because she travels so much, but so far she withstands his pressure. (PS 2)

The female patrolling group member in Preaek Sala (PS 2) got her position in the patrolling group, because the CFC decided to have a female member to assist in solving conflicts. She agreed to take the position, because she knows that she is good in communicating and because she wants to protect the natural resources for the next generation. Besides this she does not have any special qualifications for the position. She has been member of the patrolling group for 1½ years. She is 19 years old and grows dry rice on her own land and plants corn on other peoples land. She further works as a labourer, harvesting rice. She is not married and does not have children. (PS 2)

One of the female CFC members in Srah Chak (SC 2) is an accountant and has been a CFC member for 4 years. Although she is the accountant, she rarely sees money and never receives bills. Though NGOs ask for the accountant to keep the money, in practice, the chief keeps the money. She has heard that the chief collects fines from offenders, but this has never been reported to her. She is 23 years old, unmarried and without children. Her education includes both primary and secondary school and then she has had some training in
her first years in the CFC. Recently, she has worked at a garment factory in Phnom Penh for 3 months, and is now on the lookout for a new job in the capital.

**The other female CFC member in Srah Chak** (SC 2) has a position as ‘educator and disseminator’, and has been a CFC member for 2 years, since the latest election. In practice she mostly invites people in the village to attend meetings, when the chief informs her to do so. She is 22 years old, unmarried and without children and attended a few trainings as a CFC member, in addition to her primary school education. She grows dry rice and looks after a small shop in the village.

Both women describe themselves as belonging to the middle class in the village. They wish to join patrolling, but they were only allowed to participate one time, and only in an area with very little illegal activity. The patrolling groups use the excuse that it is better for unmarried women to stay at home, and sometimes tell them that they will get money from the group when they return from patrolling, but they never received anything. (SC 2)

**All four interviewed female CFC members** have had at least some training in relation to their roles in the CFCs, typically related to fishery law or flooded forest management, but also in relation to accounting, land law, report writing and other issues related to capacity building. Except for one, all six CFC women have finished primary school, but only one of them has finished secondary school. Three of the six stopped after the first year of secondary school. (BT 2; PS 2; SC 2)

**Women and their Positions**

At the first election in Srah Chak, one of the women received the second most votes and should thus have been the deputy chief, but at a meeting it was decided by the CFC chief and the village chief that she could not become deputy, as it was better for a woman to be an accountant. Although disappointed, she agreed, but now she feels she is only accountant on the paper. The ‘education and dissemination’ worker – felt that she never had the chance to educate people in the village, which was partly due to lack of funding, so that no educational material could be obtained. The two female CFC members explained that none of the four female CFC members in the village felt that they had the opportunity to do the work which their position ascribed. While having gained some experience with CFC work the two women agreed that it is an important issue that a CFC member should be allowed to follow the position he or she has obtained. As an example, the accountant should have the right to manage the money. (SC 2)

**6.1.1 Women’s Focus in CFCs**

The interviews carried out during the main investigation examined the most discussed issues in the CFCs. Further, the CFCs were asked which issues women brought up in the CFCs,
and female CFC members themselves were asked what they perceive as the most important issues for the CFCs to address.

According to the CFCs, the most discussed issues include: Illegal fishing, protection of resources, replanting of flooded forest and establishment of fish sanctuaries. Further, the issues of capacity building, funding and livelihood activities were found to be important on the agenda. (SC 1, PS 1 and BT 1)

In addition to the issues commonly brought up in the CFCs, women bring up the following issues: Lack of funding for CF activities, transparency of accounting, lack of information from the CFC leaders, how to get women in the villages more involved in the CFs, how to create alternative livelihood activities, and not least, problems related to domestic violence. (SC 1; PS 1; BT 1)

**According to the female CFC members,** the following issues are among the most important to be addressed by the CFC:

- Illegal fishing activities
- Transparency in the CFCs
- The money in a CFC should be kept and managed by the accountant
- The income and expenditure of a CF should be transparent to all CF members
- Funding or income generating activities to support the CFs
- CFC members need to trust each other and share information
- All CFC members should have equal training opportunities
- Domestic violence should be reduced
- The patrolling teams should avoid violence and solve conflicts in other ways

Some female CFC members in Srah Chak consider stopping due to lack of transparency. Among other issues, it was deemed important that CFC members, in general, should have the right to do as their position ascribe. Further, it is important that the CFC generate income or obtain funding in order to be able to carry out their activities. E.g. they need equipment for patrolling, including cameras to document illegal activities, as well as money for gasoline to be able to patrol more (SC 2; PS 2; BT 2)

The female former CFC member in Bat Trang mentioned the following issues as important to be addressed by the CFC: Boundary demarcation of the CF area; selection of areas to use for fish sanctuary; early distribution of positions after the election to the CFC; and the importance of assisting and educating poor villagers, rather than fining them when they break regulations. (BT 3)
Issues Raised by Women, According to CF Members
CF members interviewed during the main investigation stated that the female CFC members had raised the following issues:

- How to strengthen CFs
- How to obtain women's involvement in CFs management
- Establishing of fish sanctuary and replanting of flooded forest
- Stopping illegal fishing and following the fisheries law and the CF by-laws
- Encouraging villagers to become CF members and to protect and manage natural resources for the next generation
- That men should not be violent towards women

(BT 4; PS 4; PS 5; SC3)

According to the experience of the Battambang based NGO Aphiwat Strey (AS), women bring up the following issues:

- Unemployment and lack of funding for livelihood activities for women
- Lack of water for irrigation
- Concern about destruction of natural resources
- Health
- Lack of money for children’s school
- Domestic violence

Men do not often bring up problems related to families, but more in relation to the community. Women also bring up issues related to the well-being of their families. (AS April 2007)

Kaing divides the most important issues to be addressed by the CFCs into three groups: Capacity building; illegal activities; and livelihood activities. (Kaing, CFDO April 2007) The two latter ones match up the major objectives of the SDCFM i.e. sustainable FRM and poverty reduction, whereas the first one represents an important means to achieve these. In Figure 3, I have outlined their interrelatedness.
Figure 3: Importance of Capacity Building

As Figure 3 illustrates, capacity building of the CFCs, and ultimately all members of the CFs, is the key to achieve the main objectives of the SDCF. Kaing elaborates on the focus of capacity building to include: Knowledge and information regarding CFs, fishery law and the SDCF; leadership, facilitation and communication skills; and conflict resolution. Illegal activities will be difficult to stop, but it is possible with the support from the Provincial Fisheries Offices (PFOs), the Fisheries Inspection Offices and the police. Creating alternative livelihoods is important in order to reduce the pressure on the fisheries resource, as well as the development of a market system, in order to avoid villagers selling their fish and other products cheaply to middlemen. (Kaing, CFDO April 2007)

6.1.2 Women and Decision-Making

CFC decision-making most often starts with the CFC chief, the village chief and the CFC, agreeing on an issue. Subsequently, the CF members are informed and asked if they agree or not. Depending on whether it is a minor or a major issue, the CF members vote, using either their fingerprint or by raising their hands. (BT 1; PS 1) They also vote at the CFC meetings if there is disagreement on an issue and according to the CFC in BT, women’s opinions and suggestions are always discussed in line with those of the male members:
“The opinions of men and women are valued equally. When the female CFC member brings up an idea it is normally good, because she has a lot of experience. She has good arguments and actually she raises more issues than the male CFC members.” (BT 1)

In PS the female CFC member said that the men treat her in a fair manner and respect her participation in discussions. Sometimes however she disagrees in the decision-making, and feels that they ignore her arguments. (PS 2)

**Picture left:** Interview with the CFC in Preaek Sala

**Picture right:** Dry Season, Preaek Sala

Men and women do have different points of view, but at the meetings they always reach an agreement. As an example, the men in one village wanted to place a conservation area near the village so it would be easy to control, while the women wanted to maintain the right to fish and use the resources near the village. In another example, the men wanted to go patrolling at night time, while the women wanted to patrol at day time. As a compromise the men go patrolling at night, but when they catch offenders they return to the village with these to negotiate with the women in the village. (CCD April 2007)

It is the impression of a male CF and patrolling group member in Bat Trang that the male and female CFC members reach decisions through discussion and consensus. In Preaek Sala, another male CF member also got the impression that men and women in the CFC communicate well. (BT 4; PS 5)

In PS a woman raised the issue that the CFC should inform the villagers about new rules more timely in order not to generate problems. As an example she pointed out that when it was made illegal to use samrah (brush-park\textsuperscript{23}), people had already prepared the samrah and taken it into use, so the timing of the ban was not good. (PS 4)

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\textsuperscript{23} Brush-park is a fishing method, where a bush, or part of a tree, is placed in a river or lake to attract fish which are thus caught more effectively. Using brush-park is prohibited according to the Fisheries Law.
6.2 Women’s Contributions to CFCs

In this section, the contributions of women’s participation in CFCs will be presented, where after, in section 6.3, they will be discussed and analysed in relation to the key conditions for achieving the objectives of the SDCFM, which were developed in Chapter 4. In addition a number of positive externalities deriving from women’s participation are discussed and their relevance in relation to the ‘overall development’ in the communities will be assessed.

**Women inform and encourage**, they disseminate CFs and fisheries law to villagers; they talk to women in the village, which they are better at than men; they inform their husbands about the information they get at meetings; and they generally improve communication in the villages. In addition, women are good at arranging village meetings (including planning, inviting and buying food), and facilitating involvement from villagers on how to improve livelihoods. (SC 1; PS 1; BT 1; PS 2)

Women disseminate and inform on legal and illegal activities. Further they encourage other, both men and women, to work hard. As a female CF member in Srah Chak expresses it, women have commitment to work, and are better at building relationship with the poor, whereas the male chief is thinking more about his friends. Women have capacity and can lead the men. When they talk most things can be solved, and if the men do something wrong women can correct them, which is good. (PS 5; SC 4)

**Women help managing the natural resources** when they assist in replanting flooded forest; when they help solving conflicts with illegal fishermen; and when they provide ideas for patrolling. (SC 1; PS 1; BT 1) Further, women inform villagers and offenders about which activities are illegal and therefore should be avoided; they often stop offenders from cutting flooded forest and sometimes they participate in patrolling. (PS 2; SC 1) Women have contributed to the protection of natural resources, and as an example, the female CFC member in Preaek Sala suggested that they made a fish sanctuary in a nearby lake, which the CFC decided to agree on. (PS 4)

**Women engage in and facilitate conflict management** both related to illegal fishermen and other offenders, and in relation to internal conflicts, including domestic violence. In Srah Chak, the CFC explained that women know how to reduce domestic violence and other conflicts. As an example, women help to solve conflicts between households in the village. In general women speak sweetly and softly, and the men - including offenders – do not get so angry when they see a sweet smile. That is one of the reasons why women are so good in solving conflicts. (SC 1; PS 1; BT 1) Likewise, women’s skills in conflict management were expressed by Ngin Navirak, UNDP Phnom Penh, who said that “Women are helpful in resolving
conflicts. Women first talk nicely to the offender before the men take over, if further action is needed.” (Ngin Navirak, UNDP, Oct 31, 2006)

Women gather and provide information about illegal fishing activities to CFCs
As an example, women in Preaek Sala ask sellers at the market where they got the fish from. Sometimes the seller will tell that “Over there they are pumping water out of a pond…” This way of ‘fishing’ is illegal and the knowledge can be used by the CFC and patrolling groups to act, and thus diminish illegal fishing. Apart from gathering information from markets and elsewhere, women observe the activities taking place near the villages. (SC 1; PS 1; BT 1)

Women involve in CFC decision-making and raise important issues at community meetings. The female CFC member in Bat Trang contributes to the CFC meetings by coming up with ideas – e.g. she suggested to create the fish sanctuary and to protect and replant flooded forest around it, and further she has helped to reduce domestic violence in the village. Her own perception is that she raises more issues than men and sometimes she has to raise an issue several times. But all in all, the other CFC members support her ideas most of the time. When it comes to encouraging people – especially women - to participate in the CF, she is more active than the men. According to the female former CFC member in BT, most men in the CFC support the ideas of the female CFC member. In the larger meetings arranged with the Provincial Implementation Unit (PIU) and CCD women bring up more issues than men, and the issues are also supported by men. Women in general raise sensible issues which men can support, and more people want to listen to them because they speak gently. In BT, the female CFC member advocates that men and women should have a good relationship and that the men should support the women. (BT 2; BT 3; BT 5)

Women in CFCs encourage other women to join and participate in CFs, and by taking part in the CFCs women get access to information; they are increasingly listened to and are sometimes invited to meetings outside the villages. According to AS women contribute a lot to the CFCs, e.g. by uniting people in the communities and by managing money, including loans. Another interesting aspect is that the government seems to pay more attention if women are involved in a project, because they know that if women raise an issue, it is a real problem. Advocacy is more effective when women participate. (AS April 2007)

Women’s Contributions to Patrolling
An often mentioned advantage of women’s participation is their skills in conflict management. In relation to patrolling the CF areas, women’s presence was generally found to calm down the situation when meeting offenders. Firstly, women speak gently and politely to the offenders and explain or educate them about the importance of the fisheries resource and of sustainable use of it. Secondly, offenders generally do not use violence toward
women. A male CF and patrolling group member in Bat Trang expressed the importance of women’s participation in this way:

“It is important to have women in the CFC because women are good in negotiation with the persons doing illegal fishing. If men alone try to negotiate sometimes conflict happens. If women join there will not be conflict, as the offenders respect the women’s right.” (BT 4)

In Bat Trang the patrolling groups are aware that they risk going to jail if they fight an offender. Thus they discuss in the CFC not to use violence and not fight back if an offender attacks them. One of the means they have in this regard is to include women in the patrolling groups, and so far there are five women in 3 patrolling groups. Each group consists of 14 members and thus an average 12% are women. According to the CFC, women participate in patrolling at least 8 out of 10 times. (BT 1)

It is clear that the CFC in BT is aware of women’s potential when it comes to patrolling, and the female CFC member – who is herself very active in patrolling – encourages other women to participate. Further, she often encourages the chief of one of the patrolling groups to patrol, and when they meet an offender she always does the talking. (BT 1)

The frequent participation by women in patrolling activities in Bat Trang seems, however, not to be a general trend of CFs in the Tonle Sap region, and according to Kaing and to AS, women are rarely included in patrolling groups, but more often observe areas near the village. (Kaing, CFDO April 2007; AS April 2007)

Only one woman in the CF in Preaek Sala joins patrolling, but the CFC emphasized the importance of her participation:

“It is important to have women, because they can talk to the offender. If men meet the offender, sometimes they accept to receive “Srah” (rice wine) and let the offender go. Women can solve the problem with offenders in a good way without violence – even if the offender is angry. The men sometimes turn to violence when they argue.” (PS 1)

In women’s opinion bribes should not be accepted. The female patrolling group member patrols in daytime only, and when she observes that a conflict arises she goes and talks to the offender. Mostly, when she gets involved, the situation calms down. Her method is to approach the offenders in a polite way and explain to them why their actions are illegal. (PS 1; PS 2)

Being the only woman in the 3 patrolling groups in PS, she sometimes joins one of the other 2 groups if they ask her to go. She is happy that they ask her, because she likes to protect the fisheries resources. Besides her, the female CFC member sometimes joins in. Other women
often ask why she goes patrolling. In their opinion she should rather go and work as labourer, where she could earn at least 5,000 Riel (USD 1.25) per day instead. (PS 2) This is a common attitude among the rural women, which seemingly originates in the norms and traditions in Cambodia, as discussed in Chapter 5.

There should be women in the CFC, because they can manage money and manage illegal equipment in a transparent way when they have arrested offenders. (PS 3)

Positive Externalities
The CFs system is mainly there to manage the fisheries resources, but according to Kaing, villagers bring up all types of issues at CF meetings. (Kaing, CFDO April 2007) This reflects a local need for community forums for the villagers to be able to discuss a broad range of issues. So in reality, other, more social issues are drawn into the CFC agendas, and a few of them are described in the following.

Women’s Contributions to Reducing Domestic Violence
Though being less associated with fisheries, reducing domestic violence is of great importance for improving livelihoods and enhancing the social capital in a village. The reduction in domestic violence can be viewed as a positive externality, as it is often raised and discussed through the CFC structure.

As an example, the female CFC member in BT does well in talking with wives and husbands when they have problems with violence, and this is one of the reasons why violence has now been reduced. (BT 3) It is the experience of AS, after women joined training programs and learned about their rights, domestic violence has been reduced, because women now know the law. (AS, April 2007)

Other Positive Externalities
In Bat Trang, the female CFC member and the chief, communicated to the NGO CCD and the fisheries authorities to get a megaphone and chairs for the school. It was an idea of the CFC, brought up by herself and the chief. (BT 2) Other positive side-effects were that more children attend school and that people speak more freely.

Though not being directly beneficial for, or related to, CFs management, such externalities add positively to the social cohesion and general development in villages, which, in turn, could very well lead to a more conducive environment for CFs management, including improved transparency and more inclusive participation. The mentioned positive externalities seem to be predominantly raised by women.
6.2.1 Importance of Women’s Participation

According to Kaing it is important to have at least one or two women in a CFC. This is due to the following contributions of their participation:

- Managing of finances and budget keeping
- Encouragement of other women to involve in CF activities
- Observation of illegal activities which take place near the home
- Desire to protect the resources for the next generation
- Better representation at the CF meetings, because women are at home (Men are often further away from home, fishing or working)
- Reporting to the husband after a meeting (The husbands would rarely report to the wife, as it is not considered important for the women to know what is discussed at such meetings)
- Provision of good ideas, e.g. regarding basic needs for the families and the CF

Sometimes women see some ‘small things’ which men do not see - e.g. regarding communication, meeting times conflicting with home activities, and how to benefit households. (Kaing, CFDO April 2007) According to So Sopat (leader of a “Women’s Network Programme” at CCD), in addition to fisheries management women bring up in the CFCs a number of social related issues, including:

- Domestic violence
- Health care and moral
- Conflict management in village disputes
- Livelihood related issues
- School attendance
- Spreading information and listening to people in the villages
- Sharing of ideas with other communities

(CCSD April 2007)

Among these tasks are a number of issues not directly associated with fisheries. This reflects the wide array of issues found relevant in the rural context. Further, it might be seen as an expression of women’s interests being more associated with social issues rather than strictly fisheries management. If women see a problem in the village, they might bring it to the committee. If women have a plan to disseminate information to another village they will discuss it in the committee. Examples of social issues brought up by women are: Domestic violence, rape, robbery and traffic accidents. In general women talk more about safety and social issues, whereas men mostly talk about illegal fishing and problems with offenders who
have backing from powerful individuals. (CCD April 2007). In order to achieve the objectives of equitable distribution of the resources and poverty reduction, such a focus on other more social issues than fisheries is considered a necessity.

Likewise, AS underlines the importance of women’s participation in CFCs. It is important to have women in all positions, because they know about women’s problems, e.g. domestic violence. Men do not know much about women’s problems. Their experience is that if there is a woman in a CFC she thinks about the needs and problems of women and children in the village. Further, women play an important role in persuading people in the community to participate in the CF, and when women see illegal activities they usually report it to the CFC. (AS April 2007)

Most women in Cambodia have low self-esteem and low self-confidence. So when men see a woman working well, they want to support her. Moreover, men by themselves do not get along that well. There is less joking and laughing and men are impatient. Women are more patient and men are more respectful in the presence of women. If women are present, men also work harder in order to impress the women. (AS April 2007).

VSG also recommends that both men and women should participate in CFs management:

“If both men and women are included in decision-making there is a better balance, and the decisions will normally benefit both. If only men take part, they make decisions like they want themselves – they [mis-]use the power.” (VSG April 2007)

They further point out that women get more self-confidence after participating in training, and then share their knowledge with other villagers. Women are in general more active in dissemination of information than men. Further, women participate in protecting natural resources, and help the CFC in distributing the natural resources in an equitable manner. They hope that by protecting the natural resources their children will benefit in the future. (VSG April 2007)

Traditionally, men are more active in large-scale fishing, whereas women are more active in other livelihood activities. In order to achieve the dual objectives of sustainable FRM and poverty reduction, both the experience of men and women and their input to CFs management is considered relevant.

**When Women are better than Men**

In the empirical investigations, women’s contributions to the CFCs were found especially important in the following areas:
Improving communication between committee members and villagers
• Communication, including education and dissemination of information
• Negotiating with offenders
• Conflict management in general and solving disagreements within the CFCs
• Bringing up social issues
• Listening and speaking politely to other people

(BT 1; BT 4; PS 3; PS 4; PS 5; SC 1)

6.3 Analysis
In this section the contributions of women in CFCs will be discussed and analyzed in relation to the key conditions outlined in Chapter 4 - awareness, good governance, enforcement and alternatives – as well as communication and participation, which are considered prerequisites for fulfilling the key conditions (see also Figure 2, Chapter 4). This is done to examine the first part of the research question:

What is the development potential of women’s participation in CFCs?

Figure 4: Development Potential of Women’s Participation

Figure 4 gives an overview of the determination of the development potential of women’s participation. The figure is simplistic and does not take into account context and barriers. These aspects are included later as the likelihood of instituting women’s participation in CFCs is analyzed in Chapter 7.
Awareness
The empirical data clearly underlines women’s skills in and contributions to awareness-raising in the villages. Time and again women’s efforts in dissemination and education, as well as in encouragement of villagers to participate in CFs management, were highlighted. At the same time women also raise awareness of the CFC members with regards to the needs and interests of women in the villages, including the considerable number of female household heads. This is a crucial element in achieving ‘inclusive development’, increasing equity and reducing poverty.

Good Governance
In addition to their skills in awareness-raising, indications are that female CFC members feel more commitment working for the common best, and that they are better at building relationships with the poor, whereas men apparently tend to focus more on meeting the needs of their friends and relatives. To achieve equitable distribution of resources and poverty reduction, the inclusion of all levels of society is obviously an advantage, and therefore skills which unite people are of key importance to ensure good governance.

Interestingly some interviewees experienced that the government tends to take issues raised by women more seriously, because they apparently feel more confident about their sincerity. This reveals a possible superiority in relation to e.g. advocacy, which probably originates from a generally higher trust in women’s integrity. In line with this, women were found to complain about corrupt practices, which seemed commonly practiced in relation to patrolling practices. Moreover, in relation to patrolling, women were found to show understanding towards poor offenders and focused on educating them, making them understand the consequences of their actions. This can be seen as a sensible way of dealing with the difficult borderline between sustainable FRM and poverty reduction.

Finally, women’s skills in managing finances and keeping accounts were often mentioned, while it on the other hand seemed rare that they actually handle the money in practice. This indicates that the patriarchal power structures are still in force, as it is difficult for e.g. female accountants to assert their rights to handle money and accounts, despite the fact that it is commonly acknowledged that they are better at doing so.

The SDCFM provides a reasonable legal framework, but considering the findings in Chapter 4, it can hardly be implemented with the resources currently available. Indeed, many CFs are developing well, demonstrating results in a number of areas. However, with regards to a central part such as financial management, as an example, there is still much left to be desired. The examined CFs reveal a disturbing lack of transparency with regards to the work of the CFCs, even within the committees. This seems to be thriving among chiefs, patrolling group members and some male committee members, whereas it is complained about by
female committee members, as well as ordinary CF members and other villagers. The fact that female CFC members express dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency indicates that their participation is likely to speed up the move towards good governance, including more transparent practices. These findings are in line with the tendencies described by the World Bank and others of women viewing lack of transparency and corrupt practices more negatively than men, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Accordingly, it seems that enhanced participation by women improves good governance in the CFCs. However, as few women are used to the role at the top of the hierarchy, with the temptations this brings about, their sincerity with regards to good governance still needs to be proved in practice. This being said, improved transparency as requested by the interviewed women will make corrupt practices more difficult and thus be adding to the likeliness that women’s participation will actually improve the governance of the CFCs.

**Enforcement**

Few women participate in the patrolling groups created in the CFs, though it is clear that their skills in conflict management and communication with the offenders are highly needed and appreciated whenever applied. Part of this success comes from women’s polite approach towards the offenders, and part of it is caused by the fact that men rarely use violence towards women in such situations. The core of CFs management rely on sustainable resource use, which can probably only be ensured by active participation and enforcement of the fisheries regulations. CFs currently experience distrustful practices related to patrolling, including bribery and persons acting out of self-interest. In this regard, the empirical findings indicate that women view such corrupt practices more negatively than men, which speaks in favour of women’s ability to improve good governance related to enforcement. Thus more effective and transparent patrolling practices are likely to develop, if more women join in. The effects of patrolling must be expected to amplify along with increased awareness among offenders of the damaging effects of their acts, as well as with the lesser opportunity to bribe patrolling group members, which can be expected. The participating women were generally found to encourage other women to join as well, which could eventually prove effective.

Apart from the efforts of the few women in patrolling groups, many women observe the areas near the villages and ask around to reveal illegal activities. Finally, as more women get to know about the regulations of CFs and of fisheries law in general, which is often due to the dissemination efforts of the female CFC members, they tell their husbands to avoid illegal fishing.

**Livelihood Alternatives**

Due to the limited focus on alternative livelihoods in CFs management in practice, only limited information on women’s contributions hereto has been obtained during the main
investigation in this study. Nevertheless, the importance of alternatives to unsustainable practices must not be underestimated, as will be discussed in the following. For more information on women’s contributions to alternative livelihood options see the report: “Best Practice for Enhancing Livelihood Options for Women – Case studies from fishing dependent communities in the Tonle Sap region” (Gätke 2006), which was carried out prior to this study, by the author, as part of the earlier mentioned pilot investigation: The report contains data on, among other things, women’s involvement regarding alternative livelihood options. See Appendix AA.

To achieve the dual objectives of the SDCF – sustainable FRM and poverty reduction – it is of utmost importance to address the livelihood needs of CF members and other villagers. In the cases where people lose their livelihood opportunities as a consequence of improved enforcement of fisheries legislation, other alternatives need to be created to avoid increased poverty. A significant proportion of subsistence fishermen are severely struck by e.g. restrictions in the use of certain types of fishing gear. Reality is that if no alternatives exist, people are likely to continue unsustainable practices to the detriment of the resource base. As discussed earlier, CFs management has in its early years focused much more on capacity building with regards to sustainable FRM, as compared to alternative livelihoods. However, given the interrelatedness between the two, and the widespread poverty in rural Cambodia, a dual focus is a necessity. Women’s contributions showed out to enhance the focus on social issues in the villages, including schooling, which may be considered important for broadening the opportunity for livelihood alternatives. Many of the easier accessible livelihood alternatives include activities traditionally belonging to the female sphere, and given that women are generally considered more committed to reproductive responsibilities, (ref. Chapter 3), they are often the ones taking on extra, or new, chores.

Communication
Most interviews carried out during this research touches upon communication, which has many facets - from simple everyday conversations, community meetings to propaganda and power abuse - and it is considered a prerequisite for successful CFs management.

In a CF in the Kampong Thom province, which has a female CFC chief, they explained why she was elected:

“If they choose a woman the women can easily talk to her. Further, women are better to solve conflicts, as they never resort to using force. Men might use violence. It is also easier for the woman to talk to other women, including widows, in the village.” (Sampov Meas CF, Dec. 8, 2006)²⁴

²⁴ This was an interview carried out in collaboration with the IFM team as part of the ADB GAD Activity described at the beginning of this thesis. Sampov Meas CF was visited on December 8, 2006. See Map 2.
This is yet another example of women’s qualities and skills in relation to communication and conflict management. Especially female villagers seem to appreciate and benefit from having contact with female committee representatives, as they find it difficult to communicate with male committee members. This last mentioned state of affairs was confirmed to be a common concern in most of the visited CFs as well as by NGOs and other specialists working with CFs and gender. It thus underlines the importance of having female representatives in CFCs in order to achieve more inclusive participation by a larger part of society, as aimed for in the SDCFM.

**Participation**

Another prerequisite for the achievement of any of the key conditions outlined in Chapter 4, is participation. Basically, involvement is needed in order to practice awareness-raising, good governance, enforcement and alternative livelihood activities.

In an example from the Kampong Chhnang province, a CFC had to decide on a location for a fish sanctuary. The men in the CFC found that it would be good to locate the sanctuary near the village, because this would make it easier to protect it from illegal fishermen. However, from the female villagers’ point of view this would mean that they could not fish in the area near the village, which would decrease their overall opportunities for fishing. This example clearly shows why it is important that various groups of society are involved in decision-making processes in order to provide and ensure solutions which give equal rights and opportunities for different members of society. (CCD 2006)

As the example indicates, to ensure that women’s needs are heard and taken into consideration - in line with the priorities of their male counterparts - women need to be included in FRM and decision-making. In the example, women were included in the CFC and thus managed to have a say in the issue, while one can imagine that the male dominated CFCs in many cases either are unaware of, or ignore, issues deemed important by women in local fisheries management.

Accordingly, participating in CFs management is an important step for women to get access to, and obtain the qualifications necessary for influencing resource use and management. It can be difficult to get elected, but when becoming a CFC member, women’s capacity increase. This somehow represents a paradox, as women on the one hand - due to their (assumed) limited skills and capacity - are often not elected, which on the other hand they need to be in order to be able to obtain the relevant experience.
6.4 Summarising Analysis

There is a general consensus among the interviewees that female CFC members predominantly contribute positively to CFs management, with regard to awareness-raising, good governance, enforcement and social issues.

Women’s ability to approach other women influence the level of awareness, which is an advantage with regards to CFs related issues, as well as social issues of common interest to the development of the local societies. Women are perceived as being more committed to work for the common best, and to unite people in the villages, including the poorest groups. This strength of women, being known for higher integrity, further translated into women being taken more serious by the local governments. The criticism by many of the interviewed women, of lacking transparency strongly indicates that they dislike such practices, and therefore it may be expected that increased female participation in CFCs will lead towards good governance.

Thanks to women’s communicative skills and the fact that offenders are very hesitant to use violence toward them, they are able to practice, what may be termed as constructive enforcement, which seems to decrease conflicts with offenders significantly. As exemplified in Bat Trang and Preaek Sala, women may more easily approach offenders in a polite way and inform them about the importance of sustainable resource use. In this way the schism between sustainable FRM and poverty reduction may be dealt with in a more sensible way. Further, women show understanding for the situation of poor offenders and have in some cases advocated for a more ‘soft hand’, with regards to enforcement against these group. This may be seen as problematic in relation to the objective of sustainable FRM, but on the other hand it reflects recognition of peoples’ immediate livelihood needs, which is also part of the dual objectives of the SDCFM. This again highlights the so far unsolved schism between sustainability and livelihood needs, and this leads me to stress the need for an increased focus on livelihood activities. To meet the objectives of sustainable FRM, other options than resource exploitation must be within reach of the many people in rural Cambodia, who live ‘from day to day’.

As continuously reflected upon throughout the thesis, the current approach to CFs management, in practice, tends to emphasize resource sustainability over economic and social sustainability. Given the contributions of women’s participation, as presented in this chapter, it is found likely that increased female participation in CFCs would bring in more focus on the important livelihood aspects related to CFs management.

This together with impressions from my visits to various CFs in the Tonle Sap region leads me to conclude that women’s participation in CFCs brings into focus, issues important for
the successful implementation of the objectives of the SDCFM. In addition some of the participating women work hard and with much enthusiasm, impressing men and women and inspiring other women to participate, which eventually points towards increased participation and gender equity.

Regarding the success and sustainability of CFs, it can be noted that the personal integrity of the men and women who participate in CFCs, play an important role. Likewise, the general power structure in the village and the surrounding areas are also likely to influence the success of CFs management locally.

With respect to the contributions of women’s participation and the relevance hereof, with regards to achieving the objectives of the SDCFM, it is concluded that the development potential of women’s participation in CFCs is of a quality, which may significantly advance, influence and improve CFs management, provided that their participation is increasingly accepted and supported by fellow villagers. Whether this is likely will be examined in the following chapter.
Chapter 7: Future Participation of Women in CFCs

Having gained insight in the context in which CFs management has to operate, and further having analyzed the development potential of women’s participation, in this chapter, women’s under-representation in CFCs, including barriers to their participation, is first examined. Then relations and changing perceptions in the villages are discussed, and the expected future participation of women in CFCs is presented. Based on these findings, as well as the empirical and other contextual findings from previous chapters, the future participation of women in CFCs is analyzed here. First however, a view on what sets off female participation in CFCs.

Female Participation: Top-Down or Bottom-Up?

Participation brought about by a political rights-based point of view can be seen as coming from outside (as with a top-down approach), and might not be adequately locally rooted, with respect to generating active participation. Examples from rural Cambodia show that women do not automatically ‘subscribe’ to gender equality, and at CFC elections women often vote in favour of men, as they believe men have better skills for politics than women. It is my impression, after carrying out more than 20 interviews in CFs in the Tonle Sap region that many women do hesitate to vote for other women, as they are habitually believed to lack skills. This is in line with Cambodian culture and tradition, where women are not encouraged to be active in politics.

These factors point in favour of a bottom-up approach in order to include the specific local circumstances, and the deeply rooted cultural barriers. As argued earlier, a more practical efficiency-based approach captures the contextual setting better, in which any change has to evolve. In the studied CFs a certain level of political pressure to include women in CFCs seems to have come from encouragement in the SDCFM and influence from implementing institutions and NGOs. This message has no doubt reached the CFs, which are now aware that they ought to have women participating. When it comes to the actual level of participation, however, many challenges and barriers persist, and they are not likely to be ‘talked away’. Many of the positive examples of women’s participation and contributions – given during interviews in the field - derive from people having seen such examples with their own eyes. Such practical experience, combined with awareness and advocacy, might be able to take women’s participation in CFCs one step further.

The rights-based approach to gender equality seems to be reflected in the Cambodian policy framework, as discussed in Chapter 5, but there is still a need to search for more down-to-earth, practical approaches in order to make changes in the prevalent gender norms easier to
accept and appreciate at the local level. Change can be initiated from central level, but still needs to prove its worth locally to become successful.

Women’s groups, which in many cases are facilitated and supported by NGOs, often have one or more specific purposes. These groups are not necessarily promoting the improvement in women’s positions, but often justify existing power structures through their activities. As a response to this, Kusakabe brings up the need for furthering women’s participation in the existing decision-making bodies, and not in women’s groups exclusively. (Kusakabe 2003: 55). In line with the findings of this study, in order to ensure that women’s interests are brought up and included in the decision-making process, their presence in CFCs is important.

7.1 Barriers to Women’s Participation

In this section the under-representation of women and the barriers to their participation in CFCs are presented and analyzed, as explanations and experiences from the empirical investigations and other interviews are gone through. Explanations for women’s under-representation were many. Some of the most common, put forward by CFCs, female CFC members and CF members, include the following:

- Lack of education, skills and confidence
- Lack of time, mobility and incentives for becoming a CFC member
- Beliefs of lacking support and understanding from husbands
- Gender prejudice, including the belief that CFC work is for men
  
  (BT 1; PS 1; SC 1; BT 2; PS 2; SC 2; PS 4; PS 5)

The above claims are commonly uttered, and they express the everlasting fear of change. As an example, the traditional gender roles do not encourage women to patrol, but nevertheless the experience from places where women do patrol is good. Likewise, the common belief among women that their husband will disapprove of their participation in CFC work is not always reliable. However, the cultural aspects, including the norm that women should not be better educated - or obtain higher positions - than their husbands, are potentially in play and should not be ignored. Also, women have limited knowledge about the benefits associated with CFs management and the potential of acquiring personal skills.

Women’s lacking education and skills, including considerably higher illiteracy rates, is a reality in the villages, and with a common understanding that CFC members should be able to read and write this is a significant barrier, which explains part of women’s under-representation. In line with this, women’s traditional role in the home has not provided women with skills in community decision-making or politics in general, which further
explains the often mentioned perception that women lack confidence, e.g. to stand as candidates for the CFCs.

Many women are shy and do not speak out, but in order to get elected they need to be at least a bit strong. Traditions and culture are other reasons why there are fewer women than men in the CFCs. Traditionally, development of the village is done by men, and the women support them. In many cases, women do not want to participate, because they are busy at home and do not benefit. Thus it is important to change women's attitude towards making them participate, e.g. by creating activities which benefit women. In addition, women do not think they are able to contribute to committee work and they are also nervous of speaking at meetings. (Kaing, CFDO April 2007; CCD, April 2007; AS, April 2007)

Women's reproductive responsibilities in many cases restrain them from participating in CFCs, and especially for the married women with children it is challenging to make ends meet. Most of them work one day at a time to get food for the family, and therefore finding time to participate in CFC work can be difficult. However, in some CFs in the Battambang province, as an example, this situation has been improved by choosing meeting times, which suit women’s schedules. (AS April 2007; Kaing, CFDO April 2007). The traditional male dominance in local politics has not included women’s needs and duties in their meeting schedules, and thus married women are often left with the problematic and unreasonable choice of letting down the family, by toning down the household responsibilities, or missing out on meeting activities. The same household chores are one of the causes of the limited mobility of women. On top of these structural obstacles, women tend to feel a lack of incentive for becoming CFC members. In the eyes of many women it is a waste of time to take part in the CFC, as their perception is that they get no benefits from it. If they work elsewhere, they at least get salary or see the benefit from working in the field or fishing. This focus on incentives seems to be nourished partly by a concern that they have plenty to do already and partly by a concern that the husband will be disappointed if they do not bring anything back to the family. The result is that most women avoid participating.

In addition to the concern many women have for prioritizing CFC work before their responsibilities as good daughters and wives, some also fear to become enemies of offenders, including the possible risks this could imply. (PS 2; BT 2)

In the past there were no women in politics in Cambodia, but after the emergence of NGOs they started to include women and found that they work well. Still, however, women in Cambodia do not trust and value other women, so they rarely vote for other women. (VSG, April 2007)
As an example of the challenge women face when stepping outside the norms, the participation in patrolling activities by two women in PS was subject to considerable surprise and opposition. Other women in the village did not understand that they bothered to join, as the general perception is that it can be dangerous; that it is a man’s job; and that there are no benefits for women. Thus it is considered waste of time to join, and the common opinion is that they should rather spend their time in the field or carry out paid work. (PS 2). Such perceptions reflect a limited understanding of the long term benefits of CFs, which may be partly explained by insufficient information from government officials and the CFC.

Usually women do not care about CF related issues. But if they learn about it they start caring. When they understand that they can help ensuring that there are more fish, then they care and get interested. (Kaing, CFDO April 2007)

The CFC in BT found that traditional norms and perceptions represent a grave challenge with regards to having more women participating in the CFC:

“Most people think that it is very difficult for a married woman to work in the CFC. It is believed that it is hard for women to do patrolling and as many women have more responsibilities at home the perception is that many husbands will not allow their wife to participate.” (BT 1)

The female former CFC member knows that some women want to stand for election, but do not raise their hand at the meeting where the candidates are selected. This may be because they are not sure if they are able to work with the CFC, and do not believe in their own skills. Many women are interested, but they are not ‘klahaan’ (brave), they are shy. (BT 3)

In PS, the CFC explained that people do not vote for women because they are illiterate and it is believed that they cannot do the work. However, they informed, women are willing to participate in CFCs and to learn. (PS 1).

Lacking Knowledge of Election Procedures

In Preaek Sala, a group of women and a few men explained that the reason why there are fewer women than men in the CFC is that only 1 female candidate stood for election last time. Further they said that only 7 candidates stood for election last time and only few CF members - maybe 30 to 40 - went to vote.25 There was a lot of discussion, but many agreed on the above statements. The reasons given for not voting were centred around one issue: the candidates were all related to or friends of the CFC chief. According to villagers in this part of the village many wanted to stand for election, but were not selected as candidates.

25 There are 124 households in the village, who are all members according to the CFC, but the number of individual members is unclear.
Another female CF member later explained that the candidates are selected at a village meeting - arranged by the Provincial Implementation Unit (PIU) - where people can volunteer to stand for election. She said that everyone was invited, but not everybody showed up, or were interested. In addition, she confirmed that only 30 to 40 persons went to vote, but claimed that 8 candidates stood for election last time, and that 3 of those were women. (PS 4). In contrast to these numbers, according to the CFC there were 15 candidates, half of them women. The CFC further said that, all Khmer families in the village are members of the CF, and none was forced to become members.26 (PS 1). This information from the CFC seemed ‘political’, and appears doubtable when considering the low representation at the latest election, and the negative atmosphere which was observed in parts of the village.27

A woman in PS felt it as a huge barrier that the candidates for election to the CFC are picked beforehand. More women wish to stand for candidates, but according to her they are not allowed to, and do not know how the candidates are selected. (PS 3). Lack of knowledge among many women (and men) of the election procedure, including how to stand as a candidate, is a grave limitation to a democratic and fair development of CFs management.

Apparently not all villagers know their rights and the procedures of the election to the CFC. The discussion among the villagers regarding the number of candidates and voters together with the apparent discrepancy between the information given by villagers and by the CFC, respectively, gives a clear indication that the CFC – or at least its communication – leaves much to be desired.

**Limited Opportunities for Training**

The female CFC member and the female patrolling group member in PS both complain that the CFC chief never let them have training in Kampong Chhnang or other places outside the village. Mostly the chief, two deputy chiefs and two men, who are good friends of the chief, go for training and meetings outside the village. However, they do not feel that it is because they are women that they are not allowed to go; some male CFC members do not go for training either. However, they wish for better training conditions, as they heard from the neighbouring CF (Peam Popech) that all CFC members there have a chance to go, including women. (PS 2)

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26 Three Vietnamese families are not members, as they are not eligible for CF membership, which is only for Khmer citizens. (SDCFM).  
27 The claim of the CFC in PS - that all families are members - conflict with the general impression from visits in CFs in the Kampong Chhnang and other provinces in the Tonle Sap region, where it was found that usually not all families choose to become CF members.
In BT the female former CFC member also regretted that she did not have the opportunity to go for training. In general she finds it important that women get the chance to go for training, because this would teach them to speak out. (BT 3)

**Lacking Transparency**

The female CFC member who is accountant in PS complains that there is a lack of transparency in the CFC dealings. When the CFC members spend money, she does not get a receipt. She and the female patrolling group member both believe that some CFC members still accept money from outside fishermen who pay informally for the right to fish inside the CF area; money which ought to benefit the whole CF. (PS 2)

According to a woman in PS, many complain that the CFC is corrupt. While insiders are not allowed to use e.g. samrah (they get arrested), outsiders are allowed this when they pay the CFC. On the same occasion, another woman said that the CFC had lost support from many villagers because of corruption, and that many women tell their husbands not to participate in the CFs activities, including patrolling. (PS 3). Not all villagers in PS are of this opinion, however. A female CF member confirmed that some of the money collected from outsiders and offenders goes to own pockets, but it also goes to the Pagoda and to cover transportation costs for the CFC members to participate in meetings in other areas. (PS 4)

Seen from a government perspective, this tendency of lacking transparency and distrustful practices is directly opposed to the objectives of the CFs, as it favours the rich and powerful who can pay for fishing rights, while the poorer villagers loose part of their livelihood opportunities. However, if the income from outsiders was transparent, accounted for and spent for the benefit of the whole CF, it could potentially benefit the poorer villagers.

**Cultural and Structural Barriers to Women’s Participation**

At a higher level, the traditionally male dominated fisheries management arena is reinforced by the fact that most government officials, at central level as well as in the provinces, are male. Thus women have rarely been involved in management issues related to fisheries. This fact has indeed hampered women’s opportunity of having a say in fisheries related issues, influencing the roles they play in fishing. (CCD, April 2007). Political intentions and targets are described in legislation and political statements by the government, but yet the resources for implementation are sparse and seemingly insufficient - both economically speaking and capacity-wise. In addition, the motivation among some staff members - to apply a gender focus in their work - is also lacking, as norms and traditions persist.

In Table 2 major obstacles for women’s participation in CFCs are ranked, as assessed by interviewed NGOs (CCD, AS, VSG), and Kaing (gender specialist, CFDO). Among these obstacles, *lack of time due to household duties; lack of education and experience;* and
lack of support from the husband, were generally high-ranked. Kaing further underlined lack of benefits as the most pressing obstacle, in a context where many families lack basic needs.

Table 2: Ranking of Obstacles for Women’s Participation in CFCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CCD (NGO - Kampong Chhnang)</th>
<th>AS (NGO - Battambang)</th>
<th>VSG (NGO - Battambang)</th>
<th>Kaing (CFDO Gender specialist - Phnom Penh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lack of time due to household duties</td>
<td>Culture and traditions in general</td>
<td>Lack of time due to household duties</td>
<td>No benefit and lack of basic needs for families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lack of support from the husband</td>
<td>Lack of time due to household duties</td>
<td>Lack of education and experience</td>
<td>Lack of time due to household duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of support from the community</td>
<td>Lack of education and experience</td>
<td>Lack of support from the husband</td>
<td>Lack of support from the husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lack of education and experience</td>
<td>Lack of support from the community</td>
<td>Culture and traditions in general</td>
<td>Lack of support from the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Culture and traditions in general</td>
<td>Lack of support from the husband</td>
<td>Lack of support from the community</td>
<td>Lack of education and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Culture and traditions in general</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When ranking the obstacles for women’s participation in CFCs, the interviewees were presented with a list of un-prioritized obstacles to choose from. At the same time they were encouraged to add additional obstacles, if relevant.

Influence of CFC Work on Female CFC Members

Women’s experience with CFC work reveals both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, they obtain knowledge (on fishery law, the SDCFM and other issues), they learn to cooperate and, sometimes they get experience from outside the village. Further, they get to know more people, including people from NGOs, which mean that more people get to know them and like them. Support from older people makes them feel that they are doing a good job, and in some cases women had received a small financial or material gain, e.g. USD 5, a hand-phone, a raincoat and a hammock for their participation. (BT 2; PS 2; SC 2). It becomes less attractive when offenders dislike them and ask why they want to know about their fishing gear. This sometimes frightens the women. Likewise, a few people hate them due to their active participation in stopping illegal fishing, and finally it may be problematic to ‘waste time’ with CFC work, as it constrains them from doing other activities to make a living. (PS 2; BT 1)
7.2 Relations and Changing Perceptions

The relationship between men and women, rich and poor, in BT has improved since the CF started, and the division between groups does not seem as rigid as before. An example is that the rich agreed, through negotiation, to use family-scale fishing gear instead of larger scale gear, in favour of the poorer fishermen. These negotiations were carried out by the female CFC member. (BT 1; BT 2)

In Srah Chak, a male CF member expressed his perception of the difference between male and female CFC members like this: “Men do more patrolling and women wait for the chief to inform them on when to prepare for a meeting.” Though it may to some degree reflect limited knowledge of the CFC and its work, his perception is an indication that cultural and traditional views on women still apply. In spite of this the same man declared that women communicate better than men, and that they are also better at solving domestic violence. (SC 3). A couple in the same village, who were non-CF members, observed that the relationship between men and women has improved, and domestic violence has decreased. The husband elaborated that men’s perception has changed much, so most men now understand that women can do a lot. (SC 5)

In PS, the relationship between men and women has also changed for the better, as conflicts between men and women have been reduced, and in addition, there is now more communication between the families in the village. (PS 1; PS 4). The female CFC member and the female patrolling group member in PS mostly communicate with other poor people, as they are afraid to talk to the rich. At the same time, however, they feel that the relationship among women in the village has become better, and that the communication between men and women has also improved. Two other women - from the ‘less CF friendly area’ of the village – disagreed, as they said that the relationship between men and women had become worse. According to them, not all people are invited when NGOs or others arrange meetings and bring snacks, and it makes them angry that the CFC chief does not invite everybody. (PS 2; PS 3)

Another female CF member observed that more women now understand about the law and that there is less illegal fishing. Her experience is that women ask their husbands not to do illegal fishing. If a man does illegal fishing, his wife at home is afraid that he might be arrested or get hurt. (PS 4). A male CF member in PS also feels that the relationship between men and women in the village has improved, and the female CFC member told that men’s

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28 Receiving snacks or other small gifts is appreciated by the villagers and is thus sometimes used in relation to meetings, to ensure that people show up. Not being invited for such an ‘event’ is, of course, not well received, and could be a sign of the CFC chief using ‘amnach’ (power in a bad sense) or of ‘patronage’, where only friends and followers are invited.
view on her had changed. Men now accept that women can work well, and like men. (PS 5; PS 2)

Earlier, men and women communicated very differently. Today, men realise that women have achieved many goals, and this is the reason why they allow women to have a bigger say in the decision-making. As an example, women and men apply different communication forms in relation to enforcement of the fisheries regulations. Before, men would often start fighting when they met an illegal fisherman. Now women and men sometimes go patrolling together, and the women negotiate with the offenders. At night-time however, it is still mostly men who patrol, as this is considered more dangerous and unsuitable for women. Another example is domestic violence. If another man interferes in domestic violence, the husband will often accuse him of being the lover of his wife. Now instead of sending a man to solve these conflicts, women are sent to talk sweet words to the men. (CCD, April 2007)

Previously, the husbands did not understand why their wives wanted to participate in the CFC and therefore did not allow it. Now, more men allow their wives to participate in CFC activities. (CCD, April 2007). This is a clear indication that when people see with their own eyes that women are able to contribute to CFs management, their views on, and their perceptions of, women change. Thus from the moment villagers see and understand the potential of women’s participation, increased gender equality becomes much more likely, reference to the practical approach, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In the CFC in BT they said that many men have changed their perceptions so that they now acknowledge that women work well, and sometimes even better than men. They think women are straightforward and do things transparently, and they acknowledge that women are better than men at communicating. Likewise, it is the impression of the female CFC member that men’s view has changed. The female former CFC member noticed that the female CFC member used to be shyer than her before, but now she talks much more, after she has received training several times. Personally, she herself also used to be shy, but after three days of gender training, she talks much more. At the course they brought up the idea that women have to talk and not be shy, and this is why she changed. (BT 1; BT 2; BT 3)

It therefore seems that training of women is an important factor to empower women to believe in themselves and take on responsibilities in CFs management. This need for training was further emphasized by the female CFC members in PS and SC, who also expressed a sincere wish for more training opportunities. (PS 2; SC 2)

Women themselves also change their perceptions, as their awareness increase. In the CFs in which CCD works, women used to encourage their husbands to do illegal fishing, and before, the director of CCD heard women joking to with husbands, saying: “If you don’t bring
home any money today, I will not allow you to be with me tonight’. Now women in the CFCs urge other women to stop encouraging their husbands to do illegal activities. (CCD, April 2007)

In Bat Trang, an estimated 70% of those who join the big CF meetings are women. (BT 1). Similar overweight of women was mentioned in numerous CFs visited in the Tonle Sap region, and is primarily explained by women’s presence in the village, whereas men more often have to go and work outside the village.

7.3 Expectations to Future Participation of Women
This section deals with the expectations to the future participation of women in CFCs, as expressed by interviewees in the villages, as well as by other key interviewees. On the same occasion dreams and wishes of women are presented, as these reveal something about their state of mind, motivations, etc.

7.3.1 Expected Future Female Participation in CFCs
In Bat Trang the female CFC member believes that more women will become CFC members in the future, because CCD promotes gender, why women as well as men gradually understand more about the issue. The female former CFC member is not sure if more women wish to become CFC members, because more people are now critical about the CFC. She feels that women’s interest in CFs has changed, but this might also reflect her own perception after the controversy she had with the CFC chief. Her perception is that lack of opportunities to go for training and a general lack of benefits may hold women back. (BT 2; BT 3). A male CF and patrolling group member thinks that more women wish to become CFC members, because the women see that the community is progressing - e.g. the issue of samrah has been solved; the fish sanctuary has been established; and from the sanctuary they can even pump water, which they need for irrigation. Further, the school has been renovated. He thinks that there should be three to four women in the CFC, because having more women makes it easier for the CFC to work. A female CF member also believes more women wish to become member of the CFC. (BT 4; BT 5)

In Preaek Sala the female CFC member and the female patrolling group member both expect that there will be more women in the CFC, as women now understand the law and further know that they can gain experience from being CFC members. Women might want to become members to protect natural resources and to improve their skills. (PS 2). Their belief that more women will become members to protect the natural resources indicates an increasing awareness of the importance of these. It also expresses knowledge of long term benefits – something which is essential for achieving the objectives of the SDCFIM. According to the two women, the following should change to make more women become CFC members:
• CFC members have to explain to women about the importance of natural resources
• They must explain the importance of working together in the community
• They need to show people that the CF and CFC work can benefit them
• The female candidates should receive more training (PS 2)

The latter is now being partly realised in PS where former CFC candidates, who failed to get elected, now study because they want to become CFC members. About five women have asked better educated villagers to help them study so they can stand for election next time. The female CFC member helps one or more of them improving their skills. (PS 2). In view of this action it may be expected that more women in the village will try to get elected and seek to influence CFC work in the future.

Another female CF member also believes more women wish to become CFC members. In her opinion, to make more women participate in the CFC, they have to advice and push female relatives to stand for election. Further they have to explain to all villagers about the CF. A male CF member agreed and added that women wish to become members because they are interested in protecting resources and replanting flooded forest. (PS 4; PS 5)

In Srah Chak the two female CFC members who were interviewed, believe that less women will participate in the CFC in the future if the current lack of transparency is not dealt with. They expect to stand for election again, but the two other female CFC members in the village consider stopping because of lacking transparency. (SC 2)

According to Kaing, the main challenges for increased female participation in CFCs include awareness-raising about gender issues, encouragement of women, and strategizing on how to disseminate awareness to women. The future perspective for women’s participation depends very much on capacity building and the awareness of people. Now government and NGOs focus on women through TV and radio spots and this effort helps, though some information does not reach the remote areas. (Kaing, CFDO, April 2007).

CCD experienced a promising development in women’s active participation. In some of the CFs which CCD works in, women used to hide at meetings and did not participate in discussions. Now women, in the 10 CFs which CCD works most with, sometimes discuss more than men. Another indication of women’s increased involvement is that two women from the CFs they work with stood for election to the commune councils April 1, 2007. Further, four women are standing by, meaning that they may well be ready to stand for election next time. CCD has trained women in the role and duties of the commune council. (CCD, April 2007)
The fact that some of the women from the villages now stand for communal elections express the potential of women’s participation, once being trained and having gained confidence in themselves. Further such successful women are likely to function as role models for other women, who see with their own eyes that women are able to involve in and influence local societies by participating in the decision-making processes.

Also in Aphiwat Strey they noticed an increase in women’s participation in CFCs. Now women realise that this is not only for men and in some villages there is an overweight of female CF members. From their perspective, the main challenges include women’s reproductive responsibilities, women’s low educational level and their limited knowledge about CFC work. In this respect, women themselves should spend more time on training and create women’s groups to increase their capacity. The government has started to encourage women’s involvement in public life, and as peoples’ awareness is increasing, they expect more women to participate in CFCs and in politics more generally. (AS, April 2007)

Village Support Group added lack of support from the government institutions, e.g. caused by low female representation at commune council level, as yet another challenge to women’s participation in CFCs. In their opinion the government often merely talks, but do not support the CFs at heart. Yet, they believe there will be more young women included in the future. (VSG, April 2007)

At first when women join meetings they are shy and quiet, but after a few meetings they become more self-confident and participate more in discussions. Now more women are active and speak their opinion in meetings and training. Earlier most government officials were men, but now some women from CFs are elected to the commune councils. (AS, April 2007; VSG, April 2007)

It is a fact that there has been an increase in the number of elected female CFC members from the first to the second election in 2 of the 3 CFs examined in the main investigation. Furthermore, the CFCs in all 5 CFs visited during the pilot investigation, expect increased future female interest and participation in CFCs. (Gätke 2006)

7.3.2 Improvement of Women’s Lives
In order to improve women’s lives they should have their capacity improved, have occupation, protect the fisheries resources, stop corruption and have fewer children. This would include studying and learning more, working even harder than now and finding more alternative livelihood activities - such as chickens, cows and pigs. Further they have to be less afraid of getting involved and discussing. (BT 2; BT 3; PS 2; SC 2). Others mentioned that men have to support women and that women have to provide ideas for how men and
women may support each other. The importance of improving the relationship and trust among villagers was also highlighted. (PS 3; PS 5)

Building up the individual human capital of women, and more importantly their social capital as a group, will be a major benefit for more inclusive community empowerment. (Kurien, Dec 8, 2006). Jobs and livelihood activities would make life of women in the villages better. Now they mostly do fishing and farming. If jobs were available in the villages, young women would not go to the big cities to work. Women are now better educated than before, and if they stayed in the villages they could involve themselves much more in the CFs. (Kaing, CFDO, April 2007). Women’s skills and capacity need to improve, but they also need help with funding for livelihood activities and education. This would be more likely if female participation in politics increase. (AS, April 2007)

7.3.3 Women’s Dreams and Wishes
The dreams and wishes of women, as expressed by interviewees in BT and PS, centre on basic needs, and a wish for justice in society. Dreams and wishes of having enough food, being able to improve livelihood activities, living without domestic violence, having a cow or a buffalo, better transport for sending children to school, having equal rights with men and having fair courts, were expressed over and over again. (BT 2; BT 3; BT 4; BT 5; PS 2; PS 3; PS 4; PS 5). Kaing likewise explained that women in the villages dream of basic needs, such as food, security, water and health care. Alternative livelihood activities are a key measure in this regard, and in addition this may reduce illegal activities. (Kaing, CFDO, April 2007). In addition to livelihood related issues, such as food security, schooling and healthcare, AS and VSG mentioned changing stereotypes, e.g. that some people do not want their girls to go to school, and obtaining positions in the commune council, or as government officer, as something women wish for. (AS, April 2007; VSG, April 2007)
7.4 Analysis

There was a positive tendency among the interviewed villagers with regard to the prospects of increased female participation in CFCs. Lacking transparency, limited opportunities for training, and a general lack of benefits and incentives were however mentioned as potentially limiting factors. Other key interviewees (NGOs, etc.) had further noticed an increase in women’s participation in recent years, and expected this to continue. The increase, however, depends much on the level of capacity building, including support from government institutions, awareness-raising and on finding ways to go about women’s lack of time due to their reproductive responsibilities – e.g. by scheduling CFC meetings so they suit women better.

That an overweight of women attend CF meetings, due to their presence in the village, as stated in BT as an example, may result in a significant increase in their capacity, which could over time help shaping a better balance between men and women with regards to their skills in public decision-making.

Positions held by women in the CFCs vary, but the data show that women undertake an overweight of administrative tasks, as compared with decision-making. In other situations, female CFC members stated that they did not really work as intended – e.g. several accountants handle neither money nor receipts. The tendency of ‘male capture’ of political space in CFCs is widespread, and several female CFC members, especially in Srah Chak, expressed their frustration of not being heard; of the lack of transparency; and of being overlooked with regards to training and other benefits. These examples represent a serious threat to women’s participation, as it is felt to be of no use for women to spend time on CFs management, when they are unable to actively participate. In spite of this, their presence might be important as a ‘door opener’ in relation to the future participation of women, and they increasingly function as role models for other women.

Women’s presence in CFCs has, in many cases, changed men’s perception and attitude towards women due to the work they are able to do, and the ways in which they are able to participate and contribute to CFs management. However, not only men’s attitudes toward women’s ability to work in CFCs need to change, as the investigations revealed, women often doubt their own, as well as other women’s skills. As discussed, change takes time and breaking down existing norms and traditions in relation to women’s participation in CFCs is no exemption.

The overall impression from the empirical investigations is that more women will join, and actively participate in, CFCs. However, there is some concern that if ‘bad governance’ (lack of transparency and accountability) is not diminished then women might loose interest and
be unwilling to participate in CFs management. If, at the same time, women are unable to influence decision-making, the meaningfulness of their participation is at stake. This attitude sometimes applies for men too, as some wives complain about their husbands wasting time in the CFCs without bringing back any benefits. Such attitudes may be rooted in unawareness, cultural perceptions, disappointment with corruption, resistance towards change in fishing methods, etc. This must be taken into account when managing CFs, why e.g. capacity building, awareness raising and provision of alternatives to the usual practices are of high importance.

Social hierarchy, low self-confidence and the tendency to leave decisions to more powerful or competent persons, as discussed in Chapter 5, are important issues in relation to women’s participation. The consequence is that many women leave decision-making to men, relying on existing power structures, as defined by norms and traditions.

The barriers restricting women’s participation in CFC work include - in addition to the major socio-cultural barriers - the limited capacity of the government regarding resources for education, capacity building and enforcement; and further, corruption, which is widespread and hard to eliminate. These are also serious barriers for obtaining sustainable FRM and thus also for ensuring future livelihoods. However, as indications from the mainstream gender discourse (Chapter 3) as well as the empirical investigations revealed, there is reason to believe that an increase in female participation in CFs will lead to improved governance, including less acceptance of corrupt practices.

In Chapter 6, a number of examples illustrated that active female participation creates a number of advantages and beneficial outcome in relation to CFs management in general, and to achieving the objectives of the SDCFM.

Applying a gender-sensitive approach to local community management, such as CFs, has by many institutions and development practitioners been suggested to ensure more effective and sustainable outcomes of projects and policies. In the case of the empirical findings in this report, women’s inclusion in CFCs has proved to be decisive for communication between women villagers and the CFCs. As in many other parts of the world, women in Cambodia talk more with each other than with men. In the CFC in Bat Trang, most CFC members talk to other members of the community, but it is important to notice that it is the female CFC member who communicates with other women, including the many female household heads. Due to culture, norms and traditions it is inappropriate for a man to go and talk to another man’s wife when she is home alone, and combined with the common perception that women do not need to know about politics, women and their needs can easily be overlooked in the CFs decision-making and other political processes. When a woman becomes member of a CFC, she represents an important link between the
committee and the female villagers. Once established, such a link allows for better communication, including dissemination of information to the female population and – not least important – it allows for an information flow from women to the decision-making level in the CFC. The latter represent a common challenge in male dominated organisations, in which the concerns of women are often overlooked.

While the number of women in CFCs increases, the participation of women in decision-making does not necessarily rise proportionally. The lacking tradition for people’s organisation paired with widespread patron-client relationships, and a culture where it is improper to question the inherent power structures, makes it difficult for women to gain influence in decision-making. However, signs are that women’s participation in CFCs enhances the general knowledge about CFs in the villages, because they are significantly more active in dissemination and communication. Another important effect of enhanced female participation in CFCs could be improved transparency making corrupt practices less likely.

The future participation of women in CFCs would probably increase, if women’s reproductive role was recognized and valued, and if this leads to measures and initiatives to free time from women’s reproductive work, or if it leads to more flexible organizational structures, where meeting activities are scheduled to suit both men and women.

However, at least as important for women’s under-representation in community decision-making, and in the formal sector in general, is men’s and women’s own culturally conditioned reinforcement of traditions maintaining gender inequality, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

**Changing Relations and Expectations to the Future**

In the literature as well as in the interviews carried out, there are many statements indicating that women’s participation in CFCs have brought a change to the traditional relationship between men and women towards acceptance of women’s participation in public life. The most obvious reasons for this include the following:

- The legislation encourages women to step forward, and the communities to elect women to the CFCs.
- Most of the women elected work hard and demonstrate useful skills in several areas as described previously, leading to a change in the villagers’ perception of the capabilities of women.
- Participation in a CFC is a learning experience in itself for most women. In addition they are more likely to be offered education and training by NGOs, which, in turn, will enhance their performance and thus further impress their fellow villagers.
• Women bring a new perspective to some important issues, which is acknowledged by a number of women and men in the villages

Although the above may yet only be valid for rather a limited number of female CFC members and fellow villagers in the Tonle Sap region, as well as other parts of Cambodia, it is considered being of high importance with regards to the future outlook for women’s participation.

There is a general tendency among the interviewees to regard women’s participation in CFCs as beneficial in many areas, which by the author is translated into being beneficial for the continuing work of implementing the objectives of CFs management, including the dual purposes of sustainable FRM and poverty reduction, the latter seemingly somehow toned down. This, together with the general political context in Cambodia towards increased local democracy, potential increased economic independence for women, resulting from paid work; and the (assumed) continuing lobbying for gender equity from international donors, lead me to the conclusion that women’s participation in CFCs will generally increase. Both with regards to their representation and to their qualitative participation.

Finally, without neglecting the practice of power abuse, it could be argued that a few of the less positive comments given by some villagers may be looked upon as ordinary examples of envy or dislike between persons, or groups of persons, which can be found in most small societies worldwide. Also in spite of the many positive statements received regarding women’s integrity – and translated into better ability to practice good governance, by the author – the many complaints given by quite many interviewees, concerning lack of transparency in the dealings of male CFC leaders should be taken seriously.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The development potential of women’s participation in CFCs, and the likely instituting of this potential have been examined, taking into consideration the political, socio-cultural and resource context, in which CFCs management has to evolve. In spite of the prevailing culture in rural Cambodia, with a dominating patriarchal angle on most aspects of life, supported also by many women, CFCs management is increasingly influenced by female participation in CFCs. The research question, which has guided the examination of women’s participation in CFCs throughout this study, was as follows:

*What is the development potential of women’s participation in CFCs, and what is the likelihood of instituting such participation?*

Development Potential of Women’s Participation in CFCs

As the empirical investigations have shown, in practice the advantages, which derive from women’s participation in CFCs leads to changing perceptions - among men as well as women. Socio-cultural norms persist, but are under pressure from the ongoing development in women’s participation in CFCs management and at commune level.

The examination of the empirical data leads me to conclude the following, regarding women’s contributions:

- Women are, by both men and women, considered more skilled, and more active than men in socially related tasks, such as communication and conflict management.

- Women tend to advocate for good governance, including transparency and more inclusive participation in the villages.

- Women’s representation leads to more widespread inclusion of women’s needs and priorities. Not surprisingly, women are far better than men at disseminating information to, and understanding the interests of other women, which is important, not only from a democratic point of view, but also with regard to build up social cohesion in local society.

- Women tend to acknowledge and bring into play the necessity of including immediate livelihood needs - the objectives of equitable distribution of resources and
poverty reduction - in addition to the most commonly emphasized focus on sustainable resource management.

- Women’s participation brings about positive externalities, such as reducing domestic violence by awareness-raising and conflict mediation; increasing school attendance among children; and raising women’s voice in local politics.

It seems that women’s participation in CFCs does not only benefit the objectives of the SDCFM, but further foster self-confidence and awards women with respect and recognition. Thus, women’s participation seems to generate something beyond improved CFs management. The tendency is, generally speaking, that participating women take on a greater responsibility in village society, and that other female villagers increasingly use them as a platform to reach the decision-making level, with their needs and interests. Women’s participation in CFCs can be seen as a precondition for inclusive governance, reaching most segments of the population in the villages, as intended by the government. As women are at the same time far better at disseminating information to, and understanding the needs and interests of other women, it can therefore be concluded that female participation in CFCs enhances outreach to women at the village level significantly. The increased village cohesiveness, which is growing out of women’s participation in CFCs, has the potential to affect the overall development in rural Cambodia significantly.

The likelihood of instituting women’s participation in CFCs

The legislative framework, which encourages women to participate, is in place. However the implementation is making slow progress. This is mainly due to limited support from an undermanned, and to some extent inexperienced, public sector in Cambodia, and to the fact that the majority of Cambodians are in favour of the traditional culture. So, many obstacles – including a general lack of self-confidence – had to, and still have to be overcome in the villages. The empirical investigations revealed that women’s participation in CFCs brings along tangible advantages in several areas. Generalizing, women’s participation in CFCs, among other things, positively influences participation and communication which were found to be general prerequisites for CFs management; and awareness, good governance, and enforcement, which were similarly found to constitute crucial aspects. In my opinion the success of CFs management depends on the development of these key aspects, and it is important that policy-makers and practitioners come to acknowledge women’s contributions in this respect, and consequently they may want to work for increased female participation in CFCs.

It is the firm belief of the author that in general the participating women will continue to contribute favourably, thereby changing the perceptions among men and women further, towards acceptance of women in public decision-making. This is an ongoing development,
and it will probably be increasingly more common to see women participating in CFCs in the future, which will make it more difficult for existing power structures to ignore the development potential of women’s participation. However, it can be expected that CFs will develop at an uneven pace, because the personal integrity of the men and women who participate in each separate CFC is very important, as is the general power structure in the single village and in the surrounding area.

If the key aspects mentioned above come through in the CFs – facilitated by women’s participation in CFCs – a large step towards meeting the objectives of the SDCFM has been taken. Finally, seen in a larger perspective, women’s participation in local decision-making bodies may very well be a decisive step in obtaining goals of higher female participation in commune councils, and ultimately in government bodies.
Chapter 9: Putting into Perspective

The process of conducting this study has offered many interesting and relevant ‘parallel issues’, which it has been challenging to let go. In fact it has been impossible to capture, and include, as many elements of the topic as I had initially wished.

It would be interesting to examine in depth, the empowering effect on women, which female participation in CFCs has, and to analyse this in relation to a general gender equality perspective. The social cohesion in villages seems to increase due to women’s participation in CFCs, and this could have a significant effect in relation to the overall development of the rural societies in Cambodia. In this respect, the positive externalities deriving from women’s participation in CFCs management deserves to be further examined. Elaborating the positive contributions of women’s participation in politics, and thereby providing important incentives for gender equality, could go a long way with regards to furthering the inclusion of women in public decision-making.

While focus in this study has been on CFCs which had women elected, it would be interesting to learn about the perceptions of potential female participation in CFCs which are still without female committee members. Such an examination could provide valuable information with regards to considerations of facilitating potential future participation of women in more conservative areas.

In view of the findings in this study, it is deemed relevant to examine possible strategies for increasing women’s participation in CFCs, which could include further emphasis on capacity building and awareness-raising. A long-term, PhD, or other project following CFCs having female CFC members, as well as CFCs with no female CFC members over a number of years, could provide an even better foundation for determining the effects of women’s participation in CFCs.

More generally related to CFCs management, the need for increasing alternative livelihood opportunities seems urgent. Therefore, studies examining the livelihood related aspects of CFCs management, which is key to facilitate poverty reduction, as intended, could comprise an important contribution to the future FRM debate in Cambodia.
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Appendices

(A) - History of Cambodia

(B) - Interviews in Cambodia, 2007 - Main Investigation

(C) - Interview Guides for Main Investigation

(D) - Field Visits in Kampong Thom & Siem Reap Provinces, 2006

(E) - Indications of Fish Catch in Five CFs around Tonle Sap Lake

(F) - Mainstream Gender Discourse – World Conferences on Women

(G) – Data on Female CFC members in Srah Chak CF

(H) – Data on Female CFC Members in Preaek Sala and Bat Trang CF

(I) – Project Time Frame

Appendices Available on CD-Rom:

(AA) – Best Practices for Enhancing Livelihood Options for Women: Case Studies from Fishing Dependent Communities in the Tonle Sap Region (Gätke 2006)

(BB) – Interview Summaries – Cambodia 2007 – Main Investigation

- Interviews with the CFs: Bat Trang, Preaek Sala and Srah Chak

- Interviews with the NGOs: CCD, AS and VSG

- Interview with Kaing Khim, Gender Specialist, CFDO