

S-33 RE-CONCEPTUALIZING LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN RURAL CAMBODIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cambodia is one of the poorest ASEAN countries and is predominately rural. The 79% of the population living in rural areas mostly depends on an agriculture sector with adjacent lakes, wetlands and Mekong River as the main water source. This paper introduces the Cambodia Unit of Asian Program for Incubation of Environmental Leaders (APIEL) and examines the situation of rural Cambodia from the perspective of sustainability. A discussion in the context of sustainable livelihoods, participation and leadership is made by examining rural infrastructure management issues in Takeo and Kandal Provinces.

(1) Outline of APIEL Cambodia Unit

Cambodia Unit is one of the educational programs organized by Asian Program for Incubation of Environmental Leaders (APIEL), which aims at equipping future environmental leaders with essential skills and experiences for solving environmental problems in Asia. The unit was carried out on 4-14 August 2012 at various locations around Cambodia, with the main focus on the capital of Phnom Penh, Battambang and Siem Reap Provinces, and with participants from the University of Tokyo, Seoul National University and Royal University of Phnom Penh. The core program of the unit focused on critical environmental issues faced by Cambodia such as irrigation, solid waste management, water supply, education and energy issues. Furthermore, through broad studies of sustainability issues complemented with practical

and detailed information gathered through field work visits, the participants developed a holistic vision of sustainability in Cambodia that links environmental issues with poverty, governance and tourism.

(2) Rural Cambodia: Challenges

Throughout Cambodia, rural livelihoods are strongly dependent on availability and quality of ecological services and natural resources, with agriculture accounting for around 30% of GDP and 77% of employment. Over the past decade rural livelihoods have faced increasing challenges due to a decline in agriculture resources (CDRI, 2002). Irrigation infrastructure has been gradually expanding over the past two decades but it remains significantly under-developed compared to neighboring countries Thailand and Vietnam. Furthermore, while lack of agriculture infrastructure remains as bottleneck, rural Cambodia also faces difficulties in maintaining existing infrastructure. System maintenance is often gravely neglected, owing to unpopularity of user fees, and failed farm credit system inhibits affordability of irrigation equipment and tertiary access. Thus, agricultural infrastructure is lacking in quality and reliability.

2. RESEARCH METHODS, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study drew primarily on secondary information sources and discussions with key people in case-settings such as development agency staff

from JICA and KOICA as well as commune council and villagers in local level. Two case studies were conducted to find out problems and potentials of rural infrastructure sustainability and semi-structured interviews were carried out with key respondents from within the community, such as commune council, FWUC chairmen and other representatives as well as service users. The following objectives and questions were used to guide case-studies.

(1) Research objectives

(a) Improve understanding of possibilities of sustainable development in rural Cambodia.

(b) Identify ways of achieving leadership for sustainability in rural Cambodia.

(2) Research questions

(a) What are the major bottlenecks that hinder sustainable development in rural Cambodia?

(b) What kind of leadership needed for sustainability in rural Cambodia?

3. CASE-STUDIES BACKGROUND

(1) Krangyov Development Centre (KDC)

Located in Krangyov Commune, KDC started in 1995 with main objectives to achieve development through large increases in agricultural production and to improve the livelihood through the construction of physical (roads, irrigation) and social infrastructure (education, health care and agriculture credit activities). Though initially run by the central government, the project was transferred to community-management in 1998.

(2) Thomaney FWUC and Thnort Te FWUC

The Royal Government of Cambodia aims in the National Water Policy of 2004 to transfer small- and medium sized irrigation systems to community-based management in Farmer Water User Communities (FWUCs) to increase sustainability of infrastructure (TWGAW 2006). However, FWUCs have faced difficulties in raising enough funds to maintain system efficiency over time. Even when irrigation infrastructure works well and yields are increased, FWUCs commonly fail to collect appropriate fees from all members (Nang et al 2011). Moreover, during the pre-study phase lack of participation, lack of complaints system and lack of transparency of money and water use were identified as possible shortcoming.

4. FINDINGS

(1) Participation, decision making and ownership

In Krangyov, participation by villagers is principally to receive assistance rather than to take responsibility and villagers tend not to have a sense of ownership. The lack of participation in decision-making by villagers has led to dependent attitudes to the development process rather than taking their own initiatives to improve it. In the FWUCs, all positions of responsibility were elected, and channels existed for consultative participation, with workable mechanisms for protest and conflict settlement.

(2) Organizational structure and approach

During the project execution in Krangyov, a top-down approach was applied with a working group set up by the central government to manage the project. When the project transferred to local commune in 2001, the physical infrastructure maintenance solely become the responsibility of the commune while social infrastructure is managed under central government through the provincial agency. As a result, the stakeholder managerial differences were seen as the main reason of the collapsed maintenance of the physical infrastructure. FWUCs were solely responsible for infrastructure management, but with support from provincial authorities.

(3) Community capacity

In Krangyov, little attention was paid to community capacity building during project execution and transfer to community management, making the community unprepared for tackling management issues. In FWUC, leaders had received training in community-based management from ODA agencies and the government.

(4) Transparency

In terms of transparency, the FWUCs were not performing well, as no accounts were held for resource use and members were poorly informed. Moreover, many farmers were reported to not understand the basic principles of community-based infrastructure management, and were thus disinclined to pay fees. Because of social norms of solidarity and technical limitations of FWUC representatives, non-payment was not significantly penalized.

5. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

(1) Community capacity building and ownership

Capacity building is necessary in rural Cambodia for development projects to have sustainable positive effects. Beneficiaries should be prepared for active participation in and ownership of development projects and infrastructure maintenance through educational programs. Furthermore, community leaders such as FWUC chairmen and representatives should receive training in leadership that inspires participation and ownership through transparency and awareness-raising.

(2) Participation and decision making

Participation and decision making improvement should be applied on gradual basis. Therefore, community effectiveness in each village should be identified first and then be given proper training on participation improvement based on its specific needs.

(3) Organizational structure and approach

Decentralized organizational structure and promoting good local governance is proposed (see Fig.1). Local governing bodies should be separated into monitoring and operational branches, which will promote transparency and good governance. District-level government should coordinate local development projects and act as a mediator between local bodies and the central government.

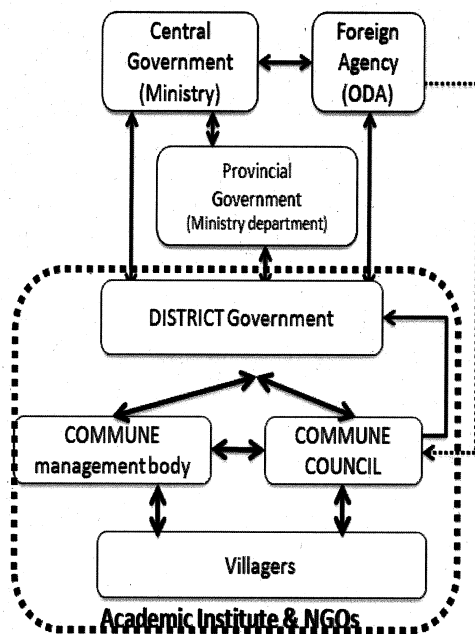


Fig 1. Proposed organizational structure.

(4) Strengthening rural leadership

Quality leadership from rural communities is another key to strengthen the community. The

transactional leadership should be re-conceptualized into transformational leadership. In addition, an action learning program should be applied to build transformational leadership attributes among community members engaged in development projects.

6. CONCLUSION

Both case-studies identified lack of community capacity, participation, decision-making, leadership and organizational structure as reasons for unsustainable rural development projects. Therefore, nurturing effective transformational leadership is vital for moving towards sustainability in rural Cambodia. Moreover, participatory governance is required, which will support reflection, inclusion, open participation and diversity of perspectives. Through carrying out these case-studies and the rest of the Cambodia unit, members gained insight into the importance of leadership and efficient participatory governance for sustainable development.

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