

“Everything We Do Is Democracy”: Women and Youth in Land Rights Social Mobilization in Cambodia

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Cambodian human rights organizations estimate that more than half a million people have been affected by land rights issues. Land conflict in Cambodia is a clear manifestation of structural violence affecting communities which are almost exclusively low income and home to indigenous and ethnic minorities. This article explores the complex interplay of actors, particularly women and youth, in land rights social mobilization (LRSM) in Cambodia, focusing on urban Boeung Kak Lake and rural Areng Valley. The article argues that the disproportionate representation of women and youth in LRSM in Cambodia is both practical as well as strategic. However, despite the role of women and youth at the grassroots and lower levels of mobilization, this movement also appears to be driven and shaped by men. Therefore, this article questions whether and to what extent the LRSM movement comes from the grassroots.

Keywords: Cambodia, social mobilization, land conflict, gender, youth, development

INTRODUCTION

The title of this article comes from a conversation with Q¹, a youth activist working on land rights issues in Cambodia, where The Cambodia League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), an NGO, estimates more than half a million people have been affected by land grabs and forced evictions since 2000 (LICADHO, 2014). Land conflict in Cambodia is a clear manifestation of structural violence. Affected communities are almost exclusively low income and many of them are home to indigenous and ethnic minorities. Land conflict has also spilled over into direct violence; authorities have destroyed homes and belongings of residents

¹ All names have been changed to protect the privacy of research participants.

who resist displacement and have beaten people engaged in protest (Chanrasey, Seiff, & Boyle, 2013; Narin & Channyda, 2010). Contentious collective action in Cambodia is dangerous; demonstrators engaged in protest on other issues have been killed, and prominent environment and labor activists have been murdered (Radio Free Asia, 2014; Hruby, 2014; Wight, 2014). Q and his colleagues risk intimidation, arrest, physical violence, and perhaps even death to do their jobs. As of this writing, for example, three staff members of Q's, as well as a community official, were in jail.

This article explores some of that differentiation, particularly the roles of women and youth, in land rights social mobilization (LRSM) in Cambodia. The study focuses on urban Boeung Kak Lake, in Phnom Penh, and rural Areng Valley, in Koh Kong province and argues that over representation of women in LRSM in Cambodia is both practical as well as strategic. Youth are also involved in the movement, and, to a lesser extent, their stories demonstrate the power of youth networks to engage participants and achieve what Wood (2003) calls *pleasure in agency* for those participating in social mobilization. However, despite the role of women and youth at the grassroots and lower levels of mobilization, this movement also appears to be driven and shaped by men, and questions remain regarding to what extent LRSM comes from the grassroots. The article will conclude with a discussion of potential avenues of exploration for this and similar research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a wide body of scholarly work on peasant resistance, with much of it focusing on the *weapons of the weak* outlined by Scott (1985), that is acts of resistance such as “foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on,” used by peasants in “the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents and interest from them” (p. xvi). In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott (1990) makes clear how key the roles of capital and material production are in generating and subsequently understanding resistance, saying that “[t]he bond between domination and appropriation means that it is impossible to separate the ideas and symbols of subordination from a process of material exploitation” (p. 188). Further, Scott (1990) states that “[r]elations of domination are, at the same time, relations of resistance” (p. 45). While the state has been the primary target of contentious collective action and social mobilization in the

modern era, postmodernity has seen an expansion in targets, including transnational corporations, international governing bodies, and governments and publics of foreign nations.

There is a slightly less robust body on resistance among the urban poor (see, for example Bayat's (1997, 2010) work on Iran and Egypt, respectively). Too often are peasants considered as unitary actors, while links between the urban and the rural are ignored. In their editorial introduction to a recent special issue of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* focused on reactions to land grabbing, Hall, et al. (2015) suggest that responses to potential loss of land are far from uniform and instead "are differentiated along lines of class, gender, generation, ethnicity and nationality" (p. 468). What these repertoires of contention have in common is that they arise at a time when relations between the people and the state are changing. Scott (1985) notes that even in the Malaysian village that he examines, relations are being centralized around the state, removing the landlords as a buffer between peasants and the state, and thus removing individual targets of contention (p. 6).

Bayat's (1997) idea of street politics, described as "a set of conflicts and the attendant implications between a collective populace and the authorities, shaped and expressed episodically in the physical and social space of the streets" (p. 15). Bayat (1997) suggests that street politics often begin with squatters. In the case of Bayat's (1997) urban communities, as squatters form networked ties, they begin to provide for themselves the social and collective goods that the government is failing to provide for them, including electricity, schooling, and healthcare. This signals an inability and thus a weakness on the part of the state, and opens up possibilities for more overt challenges. It also strengthens the network and contributes to a process of conscientization, as outlined by Freire (1996), allowing the affected population to form a different relation to the state.

METHODS

Field work for this research was completed in two locations: Boeung Kak Lake, in Phnom Penh, and Areng Valley, in Koh Kong Province. These two communities were chosen in large part because they are two of the more prominent land cases in Cambodia, but also because examining a rural and an urban case allows for exploration of different developments of the LRSM in different contexts. Boeung Kak and Areng also offer a chance to explore the LRSM at different stages of contention. This research was part of a larger project studying land rights in Cambodia. During five months of fieldwork on site, interviews were conducted with the staff of 25 NGOs working

with the communities and with more than 25 community members including current and former residents of the affected areas. Additionally, dozens of community meetings, protests, and informal gatherings in both communities have been observed. In addition, documents from NGOs and some media reports were used to further identify and elaborate on these land rights cases. Background information on the land rights issues at stake in both sites is provided.

BACKGROUND

Boeung Kak

Boeung Kak was, and to an extent still is, a mixed-use urban community in the north of Phnom Penh, with residents ranging from poor families living in shacks constructed from scrap materials or on boats in the lake, to relatively stable residents owning small businesses, including shops, laundries, and guest houses. In 2007, the Phnom Penh Municipality granted a 99-year lease to Shukaku, Inc. to develop the land around the lake, and in 2008, Shukaku, without warning residents, began pumping sand into the lake. The resulting slurry of sand and water destroyed the houses close to the lake, and, for many residents, this was the first time they learned of the planned development. Some residents left immediately because of police intimidation and the damage to their homes (interviews with current and former residents). A portion of residents were offered compensation plans, ranging from \$5,000 to \$8,500 (USD), to construct a home in an undeveloped resettlement area far from the center of Phnom Penh. An alternative offer was a lower cash payment and an apartment, also far from central Phnom Penh (Channyda, 2009). However, in interviews, many residents claim the payment they received was far lower than what was promised.

Interviews with current and former residents also reveal additional complications with the resettlement plans. The apartments were of substandard construction in an area prone to flooding, and in the case of both the apartments and the resettlement site, the distance from central Phnom Penh made it difficult for former residents to continue their previous work. Children of families needed to change, or in many cases, leave school. Some families resisted relocation and instead reconstructed houses that had been destroyed. Because of the conflict, development was delayed for many years, and construction has only recently begun. Through an active campaign of nonviolent resistance and negotiation with the Phnom Penh Municipality, some families have received land titles and settlements that they consider adequate. Currently, about 10 families still residing in Boeung Kak are awaiting settlement, but former residents are also demanding

additional compensation. Residents and former residents are also networking with and supporting other communities facing similar issues in the Phnom Penh region.

Areng Valley

Areng Valley is a remote river valley in Koh Kong Province near the southwestern coast. The residents are primarily Jong indigenous minority and are engaged in subsistence farming and fishing, with some collection of non-timber forest products (NTFP) for personal use and cash income. In 2006, China Southern Power Grid signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Cambodian government to study the feasibility of a dam on the Areng River, which would flood up to 20,000 hectares of farmland and villages and displace up to 1,500 people (International Rivers, n.d.). The contract to construct the dam has since changed hands several times, but all of the companies have been Chinese state-owned corporations. The environmental impacts of the dam have been widely criticized. Areng is home to more than 30 nationally and internationally protected species, including one of the few remaining breeding populations of the critically endangered Siamese crocodile, which has become a symbol of resistance to the dam (Catterick, 2013). In addition to the environmental impacts, the community resists displacement because of the harm it would do to their traditional culture and beliefs; the dam would flood their ancestral burial area and the spirit forest where they believe the spirits of their ancestors reside.

There have been mixed signals on what will happen in the future regarding the Areng dam. In February 2015, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that the dam was on hold until 2018, which happens to coincide with Cambodia's next national election (Pye, 2015). However, some studies have continued, as has road improvement (necessary to bring heavy construction equipment into the valley). In interviews and community meetings, residents say there has been increasing military traffic through the area, and residents suggest that the military is involved in illegal logging in the mountains around the valley.

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

In both Areng and Boeung Kak, residents have employed a wide variety of resistance tactics, from formal petitions to physically blocking development. Some of the tactics used in Areng resemble what Scott's (1985) weapons of the weak. This might be expected, as Areng residents are isolated and largely uneducated. (One of the key informants for the research, for example, received absolutely no formal education before becoming engaged with several NGOs, at which point she was already in her 30s.) In the case of Boeung Kak Lake, some of the resistance

is similar to Bayat's (1997) idea of street politics and the role of squatters; Boeung Kak, like many of the Phnom Penh neighborhoods, was settled by squatters in the wake of the Khmer Rouge and civil war. Additionally, resistance efforts are tied to changes between the people and the state, removing the landlords as a buffer between residents and the state. This is certainly the case in Areng, which is transitioning from subsistence farming and fishing to a cash-based economy. It is also true in Boeung Kak, where before 2007, residents had little contact with the state and often supported themselves via micro-enterprise, such as running a small shop or driving a motorbike taxi.

In both these communities, however, resistance has differed greatly from what one might expect based on the literature discussed above. Both communities have engaged with a cosmopolitan network of supporters that goes far beyond their own communities. For example, several NGOs have been working in Areng since 2013 to educate the people about the potential effects of the dam and ways to resist and organize the community. In March 2014, with support from an environmental and ecotourism NGO (with which Q works), residents blocked the road into the valley to prevent construction of the dam; they had also previously expelled foreign workers from the area. While the roadblock was initially an attempt to block construction, it grew into a community engagement hub of sorts. For around seven months, the roadblock was staffed 24/7 by a mix of community members, NGO staff, and youth activists who used it as meeting space and a classroom, which featured posters about human rights and the English language. Everyone coming in and out of the valley passed the roadblock and frequently stopped to chat, share information, and network informally. Police and local authorities also visited frequently. Based on information obtained through interviews with community members and observations, this had a double-edged effect of intimidating the community but also provided space for activists and community members to interact with police and authorities on a regular basis. As previously mentioned, in social mobilization literature, the rural poor are often treated as unitary actors, though this is seldom the reality (Hall et al., 2015). In this case, police and local authorities are also local residents with social and familial ties to other residents, and would also be relocated if the dam were to be built. In September 2014, however, the roadblock was demolished and several activists and community members were arrested.

While other forced evictions in Cambodia have gone largely unnoticed by the international community, both areas have received international attention. For example, Boeung Kak Lake

resident and activist Tep Vanney traveled to America to receive a Vital Voices Leadership Award in 2013 (Brickell, 2013). As for Areng, a short film, *Fight for Areng Valley*, by Cambodian-American documentarian Kalyanee Mam was released by the *New York Times* (Mam, 2014). The World Bank briefly suspended loans to Cambodia due to the conflict surrounding the Boeung Kak evictions (Chan, 2014). In contrast, other cases of forced eviction in Cambodia, such as Borei Keila, Dei Krahom, and communities affected by the Lower Sesan II dam have received little international attention, and available media coverage of those cases is primarily from the Cambodian press. NGOs have sponsored multiple exchange trips for residents of the two communities to visit and meet with other communities, and a few Boeung Kak residents have been able to travel internationally to meet with poor urban communities throughout Asia. The two communities have begun working together, albeit limited. Several Boeung Kak residents and former residents traveled to Koh Kong to celebrate International Human Rights Day, as Areng residents and other Koh Kong communities faced forced eviction and land disputes.

It has, in many ways, been easier to organize Boeung Kak residents; living in Phnom Penh, it is relatively simple for residents to join meetings or training and for NGO staff to visit community members. Traveling to and from Areng, in comparison, involves a six-hour bus trip and two hours by motorbike on a mountain road that is nearly impassable during the rainy season, making it difficult for NGO staff to visit the valley on a regular basis. Further, the community is largely comprised of farmers, so it is difficult for them to leave their farms to come to Phnom Penh. However, Areng has some advantages for community organizers, in that it is a fairly homogeneous community with a deep network of existing cross-cutting ties. Within a village, and even between neighboring villages, virtually everyone is related by blood or marriage, as well as through other connections.

ROLE OF WOMEN

In both Areng and Boeung Kak Lake, older women—or those with adolescent to adult children—form the backbone of the protest movement. Demographics of those involved in the LRSM vary widely. A number of younger women are active in Boeung Kak and there is a core group of young people, mostly male, who are active in Areng, but the bulk of demonstrations and community meetings feature women aged 40 years and older. There are several reasons for this related to both gender and work norms in Cambodia. Middle-aged to older women are more likely to be housewives, which in turn gives them a more concrete tie to their home and land, and thus

more impetus to protest forced eviction. In the case of Boeung Kak Lake and other urban Phnom Penh communities, many lower income women run small, informal businesses out of their homes, such as general shops, laundry services, or allocating rooms for rent. In Boeung Kak, many women also had a garden plot or small farm which is used to supplement the family's food and income. Thus, in the urban areas at least, women felt the loss of home and land in a directly economic sense.

Men in Cambodia are more likely to migrate for work than women, leaving women as de facto heads of household. This, again, gives women more reason to want to protect their homes and land. Additionally, women working in the informal sector can more easily close their shop and bring children and grandchildren with them to demonstrations and meetings. (Children are frequently in attendance at both.) Women also join because they have come to understand that because of their societal status, they are more vulnerable to being disadvantaged by land deals and land loss, and less likely to have recourse when their land and home are threatened. Looking at land loss across Southeast Asia, Kanosue (2015) notes that women could also be more disadvantaged by land loss because they have "less access to the process or information" (p. 6). Kusakabe (2015) notes that in one village in northern Cambodia, these concerns were realized when community members all lost at least some land, but women seemed to sustain proportionately heavier losses.

Presence of women at the forefront of protest is also strategic. Several of the NGOs involved in supporting and training the communities encourage women to take a lead in the interest of nonviolence, something the communities have adopted, though perhaps with less of a critical lens than the NGO staff. Several NGO staff point out that police and security forces are less likely to beat women, something likely to contribute to much more negative attention (see Brickell, 2014, on Boeung Kak; and Pal, 2015, on India). On the part of community members, there is also some internalization of the narrative that women are inherently nonviolent and therefore less likely to participate in or be the target of violence. However, while women may face less direct violence from police and security when they join protests, they are still threatened with violence, such as with the violent dispersal of a 2013 protest at a Buddhist temple (Marks and Doyle, 2013).

In interviews and conversations, women also are more likely to tie the land issue to other kinds of violence. In a discussion with Areng youth studying in Phnom Penh, different types of violence were brought up. The two young women in the group returned repeatedly to this topic,

arguing that violence within families was related to hierarchical Cambodian culture; just as authorities look down on and abuse the rights of less educated villagers, husbands often beat wives because they feel they have the authority. Women in Areng express concern that if the dam is built or development occurs in the valley, it will lead to domestic violence because men will drink, gamble, and go to KTVs (karaoke parlors that often serve as a cover for prostitution).

Women in Areng are also concerned that if outsiders come to the valley to work on the dam, violence against women and children will increase. This is not an idle fear; one woman's niece was raped and murdered at a time when foreign workers were in the valley doing preliminary studies for the dam. She does not know who killed her niece, but she suspects it was an outsider, not a community member. Park and Maffii (2015) find something similar in indigenous communities in the north of Cambodia, in that women resist land deals, which are brokered in a "masculine environment" over beers, on the grounds that "new comers had little to offer to them, except new problems and a gender hierarchy unknown until then" (p. 10). It seems that these fears might be related to general fear regarding the loss of traditional culture and family structure likely to occur as a result of displacement. Several women protest leaders in Boeung Kak Lake and Borei Keila, another Phnom Penh community where residents were forcibly evicted, divorced or were abandoned by their husbands, something the women tie directly to the loss of their home and community, as well as their involvement in activism.

Despite the presence of women at the forefront of protest, in Areng, there seems to be a behind-the-scenes gender imbalance. In trainings, the balance of participation is fairly even, perhaps because NGO staff work actively to encourage women to speak up. However, this balance shifts in meetings related to planning and community organizing, where men tend to dominate the conversation. In one community meeting to plan for International Human Rights Day, only two local women were present. The discussion went on for nearly an hour before either of the women spoke, and one only spoke once prompted by a male NGO staff member. This is consistent with what others have found in similar communities facing land rights issues (Hudock, 1999; McAllister, 2015; Haakansson, 2011; Kusakabe, 2015). Silence on the part of women is also consistent with traditional Cambodian culture and most Asian countries, where there is an expectation that women will remain silent and in the background while deferring to those with higher status. This is changing, but there are men who still expect women to defer to them. Perversely, increasing contact between isolated communities and outsiders may actually

strengthen this culture. Park and Maffii (2015) find that increased contact with outsiders can reinforce patriarchal culture and further marginalize women. It should be noted that in both Boeung Kak and Areng, the majority of the staff of the NGOs working with the communities are male.

YOUTH MOBILIZATION

In many social mobilizations, youth have been at the forefront (Occupy Wall Street, the 2014 Hong Kong protests, the US Civil Rights movement, etc.). In Cambodia, youth certainly take part and seem to be doing so in increasing numbers, but they are not forming the bulk of the LRSM. There are very few youth active in Boeung Kak (though one NGO is working to mobilize youth in a neighboring community and there may begin to be spillover). Areng is more of a youth issue, but it is primarily an issue for the youth in Phnom Penh, who engage through an active social media campaign waged by the NGOs. In the past year, however, one youth NGO has been working actively to organize the youth, and brought several younger people to Phnom Penh to study. Conversations with youth who are active in the LRSM suggest their peers fail to take part largely because of family pressure. They are encouraged to focus on studies and obtaining a good job rather than activism.

There are also fears, both on the part of the youth and more from their parents, that if they do take part, they will be arrested, injured, or expelled from school. Cambodia's political context is fairly repressive; one youth activist has been in jail since August 2015 for a Facebook comment asking people to join a future color revolution in Cambodia (Buth, 2015). However, some of the fear on the part of parents (and Cambodians in general) seems to be a result of the atrocities of the Pol Pot-era and civil war that followed. Parents remind the youth of Cambodia's past and encourage them to keep silent and obey the authorities.

When youth are engaged, they are typically brought into the social movement by others who are already involved. In a meeting with Areng youth, they universally agreed that they became involved with the protest movement because staff from a youth NGO came to organize them. C, a woman in her early 20s, said she heard about the dam before meeting NGO staff members but did not think it was relevant to her. She listened to the radio, particularly Voice of America Khmer (VOA-K) and Radio Free Asia (RFA), and was aware of human rights and land rights, but it did not interest her. The group agreed and estimated that only about 30% of youth in the valley were interested in and joined the protest and other social issues. According to C, there was a calculus to this; youth weighed spending time and effort and losing potential profits by joining with NGO

activities versus fishing, farming, or going to the forest to collect resin, food products, and medicines. E brought up the pressure of families. They could join NGO activities or earn money to support their families, and many chose the latter. Tellingly, this group was in Phnom Penh for several weeks of study, but the entire group went home before the planned end of the program to help with the rice harvest. Even dedicated activists are not immune to the pressures of family and the need for money.

Other youth activists tell similar stories of conscientization, being brought into the LRSM by friends and NGO staff who were already engaged. Q first traveled to Areng with a friend who had been there before at a time when the community was maintaining the roadblock. Q was initially troubled by the roadblock and felt that it abused the rights of the authorities, who had work to do, but it was then explained to him as a protest tactic. At first, Q planned to visit for a few days just to observe, but ended up taking a seven-month leave of absence from his university to work full-time for the NGO. He and another activist have since resumed their studies, but at least three others from the same NGO have left school indefinitely or permanently. (One dropped out of high school.) While they and other youth activists are undeniably dedicated to their work, they are also enjoying what Wood (2003) calls “pleasure in agency,” and Bayat (2010) simply describes as “fun,” or the joy and freedom that comes from engaging in social causes, particularly for otherwise disenfranchised youth. Through their engagement with the LRSM, for example, Areng youth have been able to travel to Phnom Penh and other parts of Cambodia that might have been otherwise inaccessible.

GRASSROOTS AND OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Q’s NGO has been criticized by other NGOs and the Cambodian government for taking a more active and hard line approach, such as engaging in more direct civil resistance (Voice of America, 2016). The Cambodian government suggests that this is driven by the NGO’s co-founder, a Westerner who has since been deported from Cambodia. The youth involved with the NGO, however, contend this is not the case, and suggest that they reach consensus on all their work. It is arguable that their more radical stance is more reflective of youth and gender than anything else. Pal (2015), in her work on land conflict in Singur, India, found that young men were more willing to engage in “revolutionary struggle” as opposed to older community members (p. 13). Questions remain, though, regarding the extent of the LRSM as a grassroots social mobilization. The Cambodian government frequently accuses NGOs, especially foreign or foreigner-led NGOs, of

instigating unrest in Cambodia, with the implication that Cambodians would not engage in protest on their own accord (Radio Free Asia, 2015; Cambodia Daily, 2011; Peters, 2011).

In interviews, community members assert that they are the ones driving protest and social mobilization and that the NGOs are simply providing support, including training, space for meetings, and finances. While the government's assertion that outsiders are the main drivers of protest in Cambodia is questionable, the reality seems more complex than community members suggest. Community members relate that before they became engaged with NGOs, they were unaware of their options, and even of the law; thus, they did not engage in protest or social mobilization. Education is a form of support, but this level of conscientization work goes beyond simply supporting the communities in their own social mobilization, in that the mobilization may not have occurred without the intervention of the NGOs. Furthermore, many NGOs in Cambodia are heavily dependent on international organizations for financial support, training, capacity building, and other assistance. Even when an NGO has a primarily local staff, many of them have been trained and educated outside of Cambodia. When one probes deeper into where a given idea or technique comes from, the answer is often from instruction by a foreign NGO or consultant. A university professor who spent extensive time studying and working with the Prey Lang Forest Network, probably the oldest and strongest rural social mobilization in Cambodia, noted that when the network started, communities were engaging in informal networking, but NGO support was crucial to organize formal activities and train activists. (This was later reiterated by an early member of the network.) However, the professor also suggested that local capacity has grown and that some communities are now able to effectively organize on their own.

The distinction, however, between real grassroots and astroturf (social mobilizations that look local but are actually driven by outside actors) is relatively unhelpful. A more fruitful question would be to explore the extent to which local grassroots capacity is being built, and to what extent local communities resist outside involvement. The Pol Pot regime and the subsequent civil war decimated civil society and community associations in Cambodia. Since the UN entered the country in 1993, there has been a boom in NGOs and associations. At first, these were, by necessity, led and fostered by outsiders. The Khmer Rouge killed much of the educated population of Cambodia, and more fled during the Vietnamese administration, creating a severe lack of capacity. However, more than 30 years later, the situation does not seem to have changed much. As noted above, many NGOs are still reliant on outside assistance. Ideally, the expertise that the

NGOs can offer filter into the communities, building their capacity to work in their own interest. This is happening in Boeung Kak and several other urban communities, where community members have become leaders, and some have begun working for NGOs assisting communities like their own.

This is not widespread, however, and capacity to act independently remains weak in many communities around Cambodia. Communities are undoubtedly acting in their own interests, but they do so with extensive support from NGO staff, and in some cases, are unsure what to do when NGO staff are not there to guide them. Prior to International Human Rights Day in Areng Valley, F, a Phnom Penh-based NGO staff member who worked frequently with the community, endured an time-consuming illness (non-life threatening) and was unable to visit the community for more than a month. When the president of the NGO came to the community before Human Rights Day, he was surprised and frustrated that the community had made so little progress in organizing for the planned events. He called together a flurry of small meetings to organize the people and sent community members and activists out on motorbikes to surrounding villages to call people to a forum the next day. Still, the turnout was a mere 30 to 40 people, versus the 100 the NGO staff expected.

The absence of F, the NGO staff member, was not the only factor in the low turnout, though. A prominent community leader, H, and three other activists were in jail at the time, and the effect on the community was noticeable. Additionally, the relationship between H's deputy and a portion of the community was straining, and perhaps as a result, the deputy did not seem to be putting much effort into organizing the community. (He also had a newborn child at the time, which likely contributed.) However, it is also clear from this and similar observations that local capacity and organization are still lagging behind what NGO staff hope for and what might be expected in a community that has been working intensively with NGOs for two years. The goal of this research is not to assess NGO capacity in Cambodia, but rather to assist NGO partners as they try to improve working relationships with these and similar communities.

CONCLUSION

LRSM, and social mobilization in general, is a fairly new development in Cambodia. The Pol Pot regime and the Vietnamese administration, as well as the civil war that followed, isolated the country and suppressed civil society at least until the entry of the UN in 1993. Some environmental activists, through interviews, identify a protest of fishermen on the Tonle Sap Lake

in 2000 as the first real social mobilization in Cambodia. Protest around land did not begin in earnest until the drafting of the Land Law in 2001, and subsequently increased again in the wake of a land titling effort in 2012. Thus, as LRSM is developing, so is scholarship on the subject.

Research on the links between urban and rural communities is needed. There is a growing body of research on land issues in rural areas, as well as information on urban areas, but virtually nothing that attempts to link the rural and urban. Moreover, a better understanding of the role of traditionally marginalized people, such as women and youth, is also critical. This is especially vital due to Cambodia's recent spike in youth populations; in 2014, more than 50% of the population was under the age of 25, with a median age for the entire population of 24 years (IndexMundi, 2014). Though the country has lagged behind its regional neighbors in terms of development, Cambodia will continue to develop rapidly, and conflict around land will continue to be an issue. Thus, further scholarship on land issues is critical to provide an understanding of Cambodia and the surrounding region.

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