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Working on Environment Projects in Cambodia: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
of the Experiences of Some Western Expatriates

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Abstract

The experiences of western expatriates working in the environment sector in Cambodia were explored in this study. Given that there is no indigenous environment movement outside of NGOs, and the importance of NGO work to the post-conflict phase in Cambodia, how expatriate environmentalists make sense of their experiences, and strategies they use for success in their work pursuing environmental change is of interest. The process of overcoming environmental degradation and experiences of working on environmental projects in a crosscultural setting are of interest to health psychology. The chosen method, interpretative phenomenological analysis, allows themes to emerge from the talk of participants, whose sense-making is of interest. Four superordinate themes emerged from the transcripts of semi-structured interviews with 8 expatriates, who had lived in Cambodia from 2 to 11 years. Themes included understandings about Cambodia's environment, experiences of environment work in Cambodia; politics in environment work and their experiences of being expatriate environmentalists.

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Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review	1
Chapter 2: Method and Methodology	15
Chapter 3: Cambodia's Environment: Expatriates' Understandings	24
Chapter 4: Environment Work in Cambodia	56
Chapter 5: Politics in Environment Work	80
Chapter 6: On Being an Expatriate Environmentalist	111
Chapter 7: Conclusion	127
Appendix A: Information Sheet	133
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form	135
Appendix C: Interview Schedule	136
Appendix D: Tape Release Authority	137
Appendix E: Table of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes	138
Appendix F: Newspaper Articles	144
References	155

Chapter 1 Introduction and Literature Review

Environmental problems are social problems which increasingly affect human society, and for this reason are relevant for psychology which has much to contribute to the study and living of environmental concern and response (Castro, 2006). As well as relevance, knowledge and insights into the issues, we in this discipline have a *duty* to bring the resources we have to bear on what is undeniably a global threat to the overall health of human populations.

Environmental problems have been declared to be the most “daunting” of all social issues (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000) in which land, culture and health are intertwined (Wilson 2003), meaning environmental degradation and rights abuses related to natural resources ultimately affect health. While some argue about the issues, there is no agreement about the state of the problems.

As a concept, Environment has gained currency across academic disciplines and in other parts of global societies. De Luca (1999) wrote of ideographs as forces. Just as the ideographs of “nature” and “progress” dominated the 19th and 20th centuries, “environment” could be argued to be the ideograph of the new century so far, as it increasingly frames and pushes social, political and economic events. This emergence of Environment has occurred in a time of two other major awakenings: concerns have been building about the future health of the ecosystems of the world, and their human populations; and the awakening to issues around human rights. In response to both these new fields of concern and inquiry, environmental groups have proliferated in many forms, ranging in positioning and interest from emancipatory and grassroots groups to environmental governance groups.

Environment, is one of those words which is variously defined, and is claimed by many fields. “The environment” is political, and it is social, and as such is used differently in the furthering of different political agendas (Doyle & Doherty, 2006), in what some have suggested is a ‘transboundary’ fashion. The threats we humans now face are transboundary too, and therefore necessitate transboundary managerial networks (Doyle & Doherty, 2006). However if constructions of environment are also plural and ‘divergent’ (Lynch, 1993) then our consideration of, and responses to environmental issues in the context of the current global concern must be reflexive and open to the insights and experiences of others. Such reflexivity is welcomed in health psychology and essential to the method of this current study. A shift in

thinking about management of the environment towards a more holistic approach has occurred, bringing people firmly into the picture, superseding a pure conservation model, or environmental fundamentalism, and encompassing social justice concerns (Gow, 1995).

Responses to rising environmental concerns have been plural. In this context of a broader understanding of environment, the environmental justice movement arose in response to negative experiences of the impacts of environmental degradation and related issues, because often it is the most marginalized people who are directly impacted by environmental problems (Bullard & Johnson, 2000; Stern, 2003; O'Toole, 2009). The history of environmental activism in the Americas is entwined with justice movements, where environmental justice emerged in relation to rights discourses and movements of democracy, and as a reaction to rights infringements, as people of colour and poverty are more likely to have their health compromised by environmental degradation. Bullard & Johnson (2000) call this 'environmental racism'; for the Asian Development Bank it is 'the environmental vulnerability of the poor' (Asian Development Bank, 2009); and for others the poverty-environment nexus (Dasgupta, Deichmann, Meisner & Wheeler, 2005). There is considerable argument over environmental justice, both the framing of what constitutes environmental injustice (Walker, 2009), and the research which is used to legitimize the framing of the arguments (Čapek, 1993; Abel, 2008).

Environmental movements have been described by Doyle (2005) as new social movements, with diversity and constant change being their most important traits. Distinguishing environment movements in majority and minority worlds, Doyle notes both worlds often occur within the same country but have different needs and characteristics. The issue of how to organise the emerging environment grassroots movements is a critical one, with Doyle questioning whether they should be organising along the lines of political realities which have been the cause of so much environmental devastation.

Grass roots groups usually comprise more marginalized communities (Čapek, 1993) than traditional environmental NGOs, and form as a response. Often organising themselves around an environmental justice frame, their focus is on the issues which relate to their experience. In the Americas, first peoples have long histories of environmental resistance to losing access to or degradation of their natural resources; in other places such as Thailand it is deforestation.

The responses of these people to problems of access to or degradation of their local natural resources, on which they very often rely for livelihoods, are sometimes at odds with or competing with organised environmentalism.

Considering questions about the effectiveness and autonomy of grassroots groups is an important critical analysis; how autonomous are they really in relation to international NGOs and their local and regional governments (Frank et al, 2007)? The tendency has been noted, for local environment movements to be swallowed up into bureaucratic processes of institutionalization or absorbed by larger managerial groups (Brosius, 1999). Bryant & Bailey outlined a political economy of grassroots movements in their discussion of grassroots actors (1997). In spite of all the critical analysis in the past twenty years, there is overall optimism in the environmental justice movement in some places such as the Philippines (Austin and Eder, 2007), and in India environmental movements combined with a democratic awakening or 'democratic churning' have successfully impacted government policy (Swain, 1997).

Other critical analysis is directed at attempts to invoke some imagined social interactions which are imagined to constitute 'community.' Community movements are often encouraged in attempts to invoke social change towards environmental ends. However, this manner of social organisation is non-traditional behaviour in patron-client societies, where the prevailing available positions are fealty and protection; therefore attempts to encourage development of this form of social capital may bring unforeseen and unexpected outcomes (Ballet, 2007). As so much is written about community movements in relation to environment, more attention could be given to the contextual nature of community, and to understanding different forms of support which people give each other, and why, in different places, and how this might inform any environmentalist agenda.

As the world community has been attempting to address environmental concerns, some have lamented how little progress has been made as lofty aims have given way to barriers, realities and political boundaries (Clémnçon 2004). Larger environmental governance NGOs have been theorized to work as part of a transnational green global governance state; a group of like-minded NGOs whose practices and cultures work to enforce and ensure the global power of capital and the market system (Doherty & Doyle, 2006). Governance groups have been described as being party to the neoliberal project; where environmental concerns become a

vehicle to enforce the project of disciplining the world to live the ideals of that project (Doyle & Doherty, 2006). Is environment work aiding the globalization of western ideas and the spread of capitalism, and how is this presenting in Asia, and Cambodia?

Asia is influential with regard to the global environmental picture; as environmental degradation here has been described as extreme, and grave (Frank et al, 2007). Specific factors distinctive to this region which complicate any initiatives include lack of effective environmental regulation on the ground, and density of industrial production and process, which not only directly and negatively impact local environments but also are contributing to worldwide environmental degradation. Poverty is a very important factor as so many people in this region struggle just to survive. Asia's importance in terms of the global environmental crisis is also particularly related to China's role as a 'future hegemon', and the influence their environmental regulation has on the rest of the world (Carter and Mol, 2006). Environmental threats are now being recognised in Southeast Asia (Glover & Lee Poh Onn, 2008) where ASEAN countries are responding to considerable environmental problems, alongside other large challenges such as poverty and human rights violations. Their environment website outlines the cooperation at many levels within the ASEAN community (<http://www.aseansec.org/10371.htm>).

Environment sector work by NGOs has commonalities with human rights advocacy and moves towards democratization. There has been a proliferation of environment NGOs and their work in one party states such as China and Iran, as those seeking to establish democracy in China are aware that environment is 'a platform for civil society's most dynamic growth. It is critical that people committed both to the improvement of China's environment, and shifts within its political setting, observe this recent development. The nexus between the two is imperative to the country's future,' (Cooper, 2006, p. 136). Despite claims of being at the forefront of pushes towards democracy, these groups are tolerated by the ruling regimes, perhaps because NGOs are not usually radical in their advocacy for political change. Although environment NGOs are the 'most visible players in environment politics around the globe' (Doyle & Mceachern, 2008, p. 123), they too are political organisations which are willing to work with and within state political structures. Their local projects, woven into relationships with local governance

structures, therefore have the attention of the authorities, and so the NGOs become what some have termed 'green governance groups' (Doyle & McEachern, 2008).

Non-compliance with environment law, and enforcement problems, are central to the global politics of the environment, and environmental crime has not been 'securitized', made a part of the global discourse about security concerns and responses, like other transnational crime (Elliott, 2007). Many of the environmental threats and degradation in South East Asia, and particularly Cambodia, could be seen as crimes, and, resistance brings a particular dynamic and even threat of danger.

Among the nations of South East Asia, Cambodia has particularly serious environmental issues, including degradation and a wide range of threats covering almost all possible problems with the exception of nuclear issues. Cambodia's situation has been described as ecological destruction and as a steady eating away of natural systems (Rehbein, 2007; Bonheur & Lane, 2002). Recent newspaper features contain claims that the country is considered to be at extreme risk of disaster associated with climate change (Vrieze, 2009), with the poor expected to bear the heaviest burden (O'Toole, 2009). Following the recent post-conflict rebuilding and development phase, responses to these environmental issues have been mediated mainly through nongovernmental organisations with money from foreign governments and donors. There are many local and international environmental NGOs in Cambodia, and a corresponding population of short and long-term expatriates and volunteers working in these organisations with local colleagues. The impact of the recent conflicts on human capital, combined with how people get into positions means local capacity is often described by observers as low (Bonheur & Lane, 2002). Grassroots environmental movements hardly exist outside of supportive relationships with NGOs.

The Indochine era of the French Protectorate enabled Cambodia to ease ongoing conflict with Thailand and Vietnam (Soth, 2000; Meas & McCallum, 2009). During this colonial era, people continued their indigenous political relationships of patronage, while trying to also negotiate the introduced systems and requirements of the French administration (Soth, 2000). This relating within and between two economies could be argued to be a current issue, as powerful interests position themselves in what has been suggested to be Southeast Asia's newest Kleptocracy (Springer, 2009), made up of a so-called politico-military elite (Le Billon, 2000),

allegedly appropriating the natural resources of the country (Global Witness, 2008; Meas & McCallum, 2009). In addition, local press has reported that the flood of foreign investment seems related to accessing Cambodia's natural resources (Strangio & Vong, 2008; Post & Wire Services, 2008). Officials therefore are working within two very different logics, the goals and strategies of which are not often synonymous, in a changing scene where the development and globalisation economies are rubbing against indigenous economies of patronage and gift-giving.

Globalisation is a confusing and variously defined concept, which has been described as highly complex, contradictory and ambiguous (Kellner, 2002), but which speaks to the 'complex mobilities and interconnections that characterize the globe today' (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008, p. 3). The world economy can be thought of as a mysterious financescape, the complexities of which are due to 'certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics' (Appadurai, 2008, p. 51).

If globalisation is difficult to conceptualise, we can at least say that much of Cambodia's re-emergence to the global market economy has been linked with that of Vietnam and Laos and the end of the cold war (Hirsch, 2001). Rehbein (2006) outlined effects of globalisation in Cambodia, using Bordieu's concept of "social fields", although he assumes villages are undifferentiated fields with no struggle for social positions and also relies on Thai terms, condensing Thai and Cambodian social systems. Rehbein also assumes globalisation in Cambodia started with UNTAC, and that globalisation is America to everywhere, not everywhere to everywhere. Do we then speak of the globalisation or westernisation of Asia? Rather than west to a static and not assertive east, it is everywhere to everywhere. Certainly, globalisation is the aspect of environmental politics which has changed the most in the past twenty years (Doyle & Eachern, 2008).

Anthropologists talk of the deterritorialisation of culture (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008) as being a process involving power where western cultures act hegemonically. A pessimist reads globalisation as Americanisation, rendering western culture as actively and forcefully working on passive other cultures, and effectively homogenizing the world. This may be a particularly western critical view however, because it continues to pose an image of 'Asia' as itself homogenous and unassertive in relation to 'Americanisation'. After all, it is not only western

cultural influences and expressions which are becoming globally available. More positive analyses propose that globalisation can help to empower nondemocratic states as they give the impression that the neoliberal regime must be accepted and is without alternative (Hirsch, 2001). From this point of view 'empowerment' is equivalent to 'democratisation'.

However 'globalisation' is theorised, it is clear that environmental concerns are becoming a nexus connecting many rights infringements and mobilising people who are variously concerned with poverty, racism, development, and both historical and contemporary forces of colonisation. The framing of the environment movement as environmental justice has a particularly western focus, which consumes much of the heterogeneity that might be visible from within specific South East Asian perspectives, such as those in and of Cambodia. How well do western concepts and analyses of globalisation and the broad goal of effecting democracy, environmental protection and development in other countries transfer to Asia?

Development in Cambodia is contributing to environmental degradation and problems for local communities. Resistance is also problematic according to reports in newspapers locally. Deals between governments of the region for hydropower projects are causing problems for local communities in some areas in Cambodia (Strangio, 2009). A planned dam in Stung Treng province will provide electricity for Vietnam but it is feared this project will also displace people, threaten livelihoods and health by affecting fish and degradation of the river water (Neou & Vrieze, 2009). Local people who feel they are adversely affected by development attempt resistance, and meet with varying responses. In Koh Kong province, the local people succeeding in having the highest group of government officials order that their mango forest be returned to them (Mom & Chhran, 2008); whereas members of ethnic minority groups in Kratie province protested clearing of their ancestral lands and were criticized by authorities for using NGO services to do so (Chrann & Bjerrekaer, 2008). Recently, 50 community representatives of 19 provinces travelled to Phnom Penh to protest land grabbing. They were asked by a high ranking official who coordinated their visit, which could be interpreted as a threat (Rann & Collin, 2009) implying that people who organised such a gathering could be in danger of some action coming against them. Recently, there have been several cases of local NGO workers or community organisers who have been charged with incitement, and in some cases imprisoned.

Indigenous environmental resistance has not so far been written about in academic literature with regard to Cambodia, and it would be impossible to discuss any environment movement here without reference to NGOs. The proliferation of the NGO sector in this country has been welcomed by many as a positive development, bringing improvements and employment, but there are also voices of dissent. Cooley and Ron (2002) outline how NGOs increasingly act like companies in their economic setting and assert that the economic factors of the marketisation of the NGO sector probably outweigh any idealistic goals they have. In addition lack of understanding between international NGOs and their local partners, as well as lack of funding for long term projects complicates the development relationships (Nee & Healy, 2003).

Environmental degradation is a current issue in Cambodia, with foreign and locally owned companies implicated, as well as local communities. There are many issues of regulation; law enforcement reportedly appears irregular, while the government is continuing its work of environmental protection and green planning in line with the logics of global environmental governance regimes and development logics (Phorn, 2009; Neou, 2009). Environmental resistance is resistance against powerful elites, and it seems violence can be a strategy to snuff resistance (Springer, 2008). Land rights is an important current issue, which has come into sharp relief more recently as the country has rapidly entered the global market systems and, 'over the past 15 years, 45 per cent of the country's land has been purchased by private interests' (Global Witness, 2008, p. 8).

Hirsch wrote in 2001 that the political space for resistance and advocacy is probably more open here than anywhere else in South East Asia. However, recently space for free speech is becoming increasingly limited, making advocacy difficult, and resistance often dangerous as elites use the court process to silence critics. Cambodia teeters on its political status as a democracy, while being famous as an anarchic environment characterized by violence and impunity (St John, 2005; Springer, 2008; Global Witness, 2008). Fear of imprisonment, lawsuit or violence accompanies any move of resistance, and such stories are reported often locally (Chrann & Ainge Roy, 2008).

Environmental issues are close to rights-based struggles in Cambodia because natural resources are being controlled, exploited and appropriated by highly connected business

interests. Environmental resistance quickly becomes resistance to these abuses and the threat of physical violence is felt if advocacy is too pointed or obvious.

Issues related to indigenous minorities are also current in Cambodia. Socio spatial communities are being identified as 'indigenous' in a way that identifies them as in opposition to development and modernity, whereas they did not previously need modernity to formulate their identity (Aikau & Spencer, 2007), and did not subscribe to its rational and linear goals. When communities take up the indigenous identity (Dove, 2006), it affords them political currency and access to necessary resources in their particular located struggles. However in Cambodia so far political currency is not available through taking up indigenous identity. In Cambodia 17 indigenous minority groups have been identified, and they comprise less than 1.5% of the population. Over half of them live in the northeast provinces of Monduliri and Rattanakiri. Indigenous minorities are relatively isolated and marginalised in Cambodia.

Environmental concerns are clearly linked with well-being especially for indigenous groups (Panelli & Tipa, 2007). Spiritual importance of the land to indigenous peoples makes environmental degradation devastating. Thinking about the effect of relationship with the environment for non-indigenous peoples, places them as also in a relationship with the environment, not constructing them merely as either victims of colonizers, or as implicated in past injustices. The interrupted significance of the land for others who perhaps are inheritors of stories of colonization does not negate the significance of possible impact of environmental degradation on their well-being either.

Idealising the relationship indigenous people have in their environments as something mystical and natural, is common, such as, 'in the past, their practices were sustainable, in harmony with the regenerating power of the surrounding ecosystems' (Asian Development Bank, 2009). Indigenous environmental ethics, rather than a static set of folk beliefs, are all the ways people relate to and believe about their environment, incorporating their old patterns of behaviour and beliefs, as well as newer introduced ideas (Kelbessa, 2005). Relationship to environment is a process which people engage in reflexively in response to their experience. In Cambodia, with several different people groups and languages, it is important to acknowledge that environmental ethics cannot be talked about as one thing or as a set of beliefs people ascribe

to. Conklin (1997) outlines the problem of assuming western and indigenous environmental framings and concerns are identical or even overlapping.

A plethora of NGOs employing local and expatriate workers, implement the project of “development” in what is a postcolonial and more recently a post-conflict rebuilding stage in Cambodia. Environmental degradation, deforestation and pollution are at crisis levels and impact people’s lives significantly and directly in terms of health and livelihoods. Issues such as the appropriation of resources by powerful individuals, in a context of continued grinding poverty for the majority of rurally-located Cambodians add urgency to resolving environmental problems. Many NGOs are involved in work relating to the environment. Human rights NGOs also speak on environmental issues, displaying how interlinked these fields are. In their advocacy work, these NGOs maintain a more oppositional stance in relation to the government, who are constructed as a corrupt and illegitimate regime in relation to human rights. Other groups are working with or within government structures, in a bid to build capacity for environmental change.

Some analysts argue that we cannot assume the state agencies are not co-opted to serve private interests, so we cannot rely on ideal models of environmental management for environmental activism. By doing so, foreign funders could be inadvertently supporting the ‘shadow state politics’ (Le Billon, 2000). It is facile to assume NGOs are independent of government or powerful private or commercial interests and that they always work in civil society for the greater public good; rather we need to critically evaluate the role NGOs have particularly in their contribution to environmental policy (Lane & Morrison, 2006). This project seeks to contribute to this critical evaluation by examining the experiences of expatriate environment workers in Cambodia.

Frank et al (2007) assert that domestic NGOs in Asia are not powerful actors but that local environmental policy is the product of the global environmental regimes. They argue that local environment NGOs are not only less effective than is popularly claimed, but also crucially that they are not autonomous from the local and global forces which are dynamically shaping us all. They also are not autonomous from local political struggles and dynamics. Even though in Cambodia NGOs are not subject to such direct, rigid and threatening force as are those in some nearby countries, in my own experience here it is clear to most people where the line is. One

must speak carefully if addressing political realities and how they affect the environment here. Whispers of stories and rumours give guidance about how to steer clear of causing offence and inviting an unwelcome response.

Environment work is work for social change, and in non democratic states is a platform for furthering democratisation or other civil society agenda. Cooper (2006) outlines how environmental workers in China see their role as facilitating “reform” in China. She shows how civil society looks in authoritarian and post-authoritarian societies, comparing environmental NGOs in Russia and Eastern Europe with China, and calling the environment a ‘pliant entry point’ and a ‘diverse working platform’ (Cooper, 2006, p. 134-135). She notes the cross-over effect of environmental NGOs, asserting that their most important contribution is to effect policy change (Cooper, 2006, p. 126). The limitations of NGOs have to be admitted too though, and the challenges that the rigors of funding bring (Cooley & Ron, 2002).

Environment NGOs are increasingly competing for donor funds, and their competing logics of the work bring them into conflict sometimes too. Conservation groups factor people less into their strategies and targets, or have tagged community aspects onto their programmes while others see people as central to issues of environment. NGOs involved in advocacy have a variety of forms and positions available for them to take up. Effective advocacy has been found to involve flexibility and opportunism, and NGOs taking positions of either supporting or opposing the government (Nathan, Rotem & Ritchie, 2002).

Bebbington et al (1993) also look at the relationship between local organizations and resource management particularly among those who occupy fragile lands. It is assumed that spreading democracy is a worthy goal, and that strengthening local groups is part of strengthening rural society. At the same time mainstream northern managerialism has become entrenched in the NGO sector bringing with it institutionally developed sets of knowledges and practices (Roberts et al, 2005: p 1849).

These contradictory logics that local organizations have to deal with should be noted (Bebbington, 1993), along with the hopeful possibility that NGOs can help mobilise community resistance to bad environmental practices, even in politically inhospitable climates (Austin & Eder, 2007). For local organisations, politics in the area is a curbing force, a delimiting force in

what is possible. In conceptualising politics as being so important and restrictive of possibilities, the long grassroots work of local groups is invisibilised and weakened. This may lead to questions about the effectiveness of local groups as they are conforming to the demands of their political context; and to acknowledgement that the politics of working in some regimes necessitates non-formal, non-western, perhaps *local* structures. The politics of sustainability is the political context in which these local NGOs are situated.

Constructions of the environment and assumptions about the psychology of sustainable behaviour can't be assumed to be constant, nor western, but should be acknowledged to be situational, contexted and produced. All too often western psychology is based on assumptions that are not compatible with other contexts. For example, Clayton and Brook (2005) set out a psychology of environmentally sustainable behaviour which does not represent, embrace or allow nonwestern cosmologies and psychologies. The situating of their conservation psychology is especially obvious in one of their examples focusing on how people look after their lawns. They do not reflect on their construction, the 'natural environment', which is positioned as a victim of people's helping or hurting, which needs to be protected (Clayton & Brook, 2005, p. 340). Different understandings and semantic fields of language used need to be taken into account (Reser & Bentrupperbäumer, 2005).

In the context of discussing oppression and the transformative potential contained in community psychology, Prilleltensky (2003) theorises 'psychopolitical well-being' as diminished by the consequences of environmental rights infringements and dispossession. In the context of health psychology that is relevant to environmental work (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000); something more than an individualised psychology is necessary. To take account of psychopolitical well-being we need to recognize that social and political dynamics also highly influence psychological processes and environment work, and therefore all environmental outcomes. Relationships between NGO workers and local colleagues, and how they differently approach their work are important to understand. It is valuable to find out from western expatriates who work within the development sector what their experience of 'what works' is, in relation to their indigenous colleagues. Their reflections and experience are relevant and important as 'people working with people' is pivotal to achieving environmental goals. The importance of something as simple as good relationships between NGO workers and

community leaders and participants which can lead to empowerment, and relationships which continue after the project has ended, is often overlooked in literature concerned with systems and theories..

This project seeks to understand the experiences of expatriate environment workers in Cambodia; to find out what they feel contributes to their success in their work, and what meanings they are making of their embodied experience living here.

I have a personal interest in the environment movement in Cambodia through my role in The Rubbish Project, an environmental arts movement activity that artist Leang Seckon and I began 3 years ago. Environmental concerns have been expressed in art for a long time; Tarsila do Amaral (Damian, 1999) in the early 20th century was painting her concerns about deforestation of the Amazon. The effects of colonization and searching for and celebrating indigenous Brazilian expression are all themes which can be found in her work.

In Cambodia in 2009, local artists took part in an exhibition at The Bophana Audiovisual Resource Centre in Phnom Penh focusing on the value of local bodies of water, or lakes. There have been many natural lakes which have been sold and filled in, as land values have risen sharply. A most recent case is that of Boeung Kak Lake, a large natural lake in central Phnom Penh. Its importance in terms of flood protection and the climate of the city is possibly being seen already with unusual flooding in surrounding districts as it is slowly being filled. Contention centres on the sale of the Lake, and claims of lack of any proper compensation by the company to land owners there. Cambodian artists were invited to contribute works on the theme of precious waterways, in a softening of the positioning of the exhibition as advocacy. The artists are being invited to contribute work on the issue, which is bound to raise awareness, but their participation doesn't necessarily indicate a commitment to these issues, in an environment where the arts scene is competitive.

The arts movement, The Rubbish Project, aims to also be involved in raising awareness about the issues as they are present in Cambodia, through arts projects and events. Trying to position ourselves carefully, not as adversarial advocacy, we hope to have some influence in some local issues.

This project will show how other expatriates working on environment in Cambodia are making meaning of their experiences in the programmes, events and people they are involved with. This study fits within the wider fields of both health psychology and community psychology. Work in environment relates to aspects of health psychology where community health outcomes are related to development issues within a globalised context where environmental concerns are becoming more mainstream.

Chapter 2: Method and Methodology

To gather the perspectives of those who could best inform my research, interviews were conducted with Western expatriates about their experiences working for environmental change in Cambodia.

Participants who had lived in Cambodia for at least 2 years, talked about how they understand their work, and of being expatriates, and their relationships with indigenous colleagues. Related themes of interest included experiences of working in the environment sector, and how they believe their work is enabling and impacting indigenous efforts to respond positively to environmental issues. Also relevant were the strategies they reported using to ensure effective working relationships with Cambodians, which then positively support environmental interventions locally.

It is hoped the knowledge gained from systematic interviewing and conceptual analysis of the ideas of expatriate environmentalists can further inform cross cultural community and health psychology in situations where foreigners are working with indigenous peoples for local social change.

Methodology or Why This Topic and Why IPA?

Environmental issues are plural and complex, and importantly, they are woven with the quality of human life and health; meaning they are relevant to, and an important focus for, health psychology. Many environmental NGOs aim to address these issues in Cambodia, yet little is known about the way in which foreigners working here both understand and adjust to the complexity of their experiences in partnership with indigenous Cambodians working for change. Where is the indigenous environment movement in Cambodia? How do NGO workers understand their work in relation to indigenous responses? How is the politics of environment working out in the relationships of people working here? Social science literature which addresses or describes this, is seemingly lacking.

Issues which come together uniquely in the globalized context of Cambodia make expatriates' interpretations of their work in the environment sector, and their understanding of their place here in relation to indigenous social relations, a rich source of information for cross-cultural,

community and health psychology. The politics of power relations in NGO work here are represented in expatriates' interpretations of environmental issues, and are intertwined with practical access to resources. Given the political sensitivity involved with working for change cross culturally and the role of NGOs in developing countries, it is important to identify the psycho-social dimensions of successful expatriate contributions to environmental solutions in Cambodia.

Living in Cambodia for ten years during this post-conflict and rebuilding period, I have had opportunity to reflect on the uneven distribution of benefits recent rapid and broad development has brought in Cambodia. While some people remain poor with complex health and life challenges, others have benefited from entering the newly exposed market with exploding land prices and a growing economy. Their work and business have developed alongside a plethora of NGOs still working to implement a range of development agendas using internationally sourced money. In this newly globalised context, rapid environmental degradation and exploitation continue, despite the NGO presence.

Health psychology as a more recently established discipline which embraces all the ways health and psychology are interwoven, must involve itself in environmental issues, and not just as a currently relevant line of enquiry because of its wide ranging impacts on health. We must act on what we find out, to help to improve the lives of others (Marks, 2004), to be changing the societies we live in, not just commenting on them.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provides a systematic way of identifying commonalities and differences among participants' understandings, valuing their viewpoints rather than attempting to produce a real or quantitative account (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). As a 'bottom up approach' the researcher tries to avoid preconceptions, rather, allowing a picture to emerge from participants who are assumed to be experts about their own life-worlds and experiences (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). That IPA allows for an idiographic approach to experience, where individuals' reflections on *knowing* about their lives is considered to be of interest, and their experience is valued, resonates with me as a 'way in' to learning more about environmental issues in Cambodia (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

IPA lacks a 'methodological commitment to quantification' (Smith, 1996, p. 262), and its roots in phenomenology make it a useful method for the current study because of this positioning of the participant as expert on their experience, and the lack of a quantitative emphasis on facts or a requirement of a 'rigidly deterministic' model of causality concerning the nature of things. This consideration is important in the current project because the way expatriates talk about their experiences carries important information about their cultural assumptions. It is not only about the participants, however, as starting with the assumption that people reflect on their experiences, IPA recognises that the reflections and interpretations of the researcher are a key and complicating part of the story which is constructed, as well as recognizing the creativity of the interpretative process (Brocki & Weardon, 2006; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The researcher is also Being-in-the-world (Eatough & Smith, 2008), and my own lifeworld is implicated, as well as the interaction between us around the carrying out of the research (Willig, 2001). The origins of IPA are in the theories of phenomenologists Heidegger and Husserl, as well as Giorgi's phenomenological method, and symbolic interactionism (Smith, 1996; Eatough & Smith, 2008). These origins reflect the values of community and critical health psychology in honouring the knowledge and experience that we create together when we accept responsibility for social change.

After conducting a critical review of 52 articles using IPA as a method, Brocki & Weardon (2006), concluded it was useful and applicable to a wide range of topics, noting it is now used widely in health psychology and other fields of enquiry interested in human experience. As a qualitative method which is grounded in psychology, IPA is also noted to be an important tool for cultural psychology (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

Method

Participants

I planned to interview between 6 and 12 expatriate environmentalists; the recommended number of participants needed for saturation of data according to recent studies of qualitative research, where the participants are a relatively homogenous group (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). In the end, this study involved 8 participants who identified as western expatriates. Recent discussions between leading theorists of interpretative phenomenological analysis

became available to me during the interviewing process and suggested much smaller numbers of participants are acceptable so I also felt more relaxed about fewer interviews (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ipanalysis/>).

Potential participants were identified by snowballing through existing networks I have in Cambodia. Friends, who knew about my topic and the stringent requirements of the Massey Ethics Committee to ensure that no-one felt pressured to participate, helped me by suggesting participants and contacting them on my behalf. These potential participants were either invited to contact the researcher, or agreed via the third party to be contacted by me for this research. Potential participants were given the Information Sheet by the researcher (Appendix A), containing information about the study, and disclosing that I am involved in The Rubbish project, and therefore also involved in environment work in Cambodia. After they agreed to participate, and after any initial queries about the research were answered, interviews were arranged.

Interviews

Interviews were held at a time and venue of the participant's choice, and in each case this was at a café in Phnom Penh; it being quite common here to hold meetings in cafes. Before interviews commenced, participants signed the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B), were offered opportunity to ask further questions, and I tried to make sure they were comfortable by reassuring them about confidentiality and explaining again that I was really interested in whatever they would like to tell me about their experiences. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 2 hours, and were recorded on an audio recording device. At the start of the interview, I explained again the goal of the research; that I was interested to hear their experiences of work in the environment sector in Cambodia, and thanked them for being willing to participate. I then said something like, 'so, please tell me about your experience of environment work in Cambodia.' Rapport was easily established as two of the participants I already knew socially, and the other six, because of the snowballing method, were known to me through a third party.

I had devised an interview schedule which includes a list of questions. On a few occasions, I showed it to participants at the beginning, or I referred to it as a prompt for further areas of

interest. The Interview Schedule, with the list of questions, can be found in Appendix C. To avoid my list restricting the areas of interest that participants had for the conversation, I only showed it to two participants in order to allay any sense of initial awkwardness.

I transcribed the interviews myself over a period of weeks. It was very helpful to hear all of the interviews several times again, and I found that in the process of typing it up, I was able to hear things in another way and notice comments or emphases which I had not heard in the moment of the interview.

Identifying details were not transcribed, however in some cases details from transcripts were deleted later as after reflection I was not confident that the participant's privacy was protected. Participants were invited to look at a copy of their transcripts and they were able to delete anything they wished me not to use, or to make corrections if they chose. Five people asked to see the transcript; one participant made an alteration to one minor detail and a place name spelling mistake on my part, and another asked that I not use a portion of the conversation because of worries about negative consequences should they be identified. Apart from those details nobody raised any other issues with the transcripts. Participants also signed a Tape Transcript Authority Release Form (Appendix D); 5 of 8 participants signed the release form on the day of the interview, 2 people signed it after viewing their transcript, and 3 signed the form on the day but asked to see the transcript too.

Transcripts were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis to identify superordinate and subordinate themes which I believed were emerging from the data.

Analysing Data and Results

After interviewing participants, I made transcripts that included all of the taped conversation and illustrated pauses, hesitations and turns of talk. These I read through, and each time a part of the transcript seemed to suggest a theme, I noted this and listed the theme into a new document. This I did for all 8 transcripts; sometimes the items on this list looked like a summary of the quote, and sometimes like a theme.

After looking though the resulting 15-page long list of themes, I cut and glued them, and the line reference to the transcript onto 8 pieces of paper which were labelled as the higher

themes which seemed to me to be emerging. These were: corruption, power and hierarchy, law, personal, Cambodia, NGO politics, environment/environment movement and NGO work. On each of these pages, the snipped quotes were arranged in groups, which made the themes in the box below, until all of the quotes and themes were absorbed. Finally they emerged as four superordinate themes which form the analysis reported in chapters 3-6:

- Cambodia's environment: expatriates' understandings- what participants told me about their understanding of the state of the environment in Cambodia, environment as a general concept covering flora and fauna, or all the biodiversity found in the country and the interactions of people in that.
- Environment work in Cambodia, or what they said about their experiences working for environmental change as expatriates.
- NGO work and politics. NGO politics was a strong theme to emerge from these transcripts.
- On being an expatriate environmentalist. Participants spoke of what it was like for them to be an expatriate, of their very rich journey of provocation, reflection and resolution living in Cambodia.

Table 1. Superordinate, Subordinate Themes:

Cambodia's environment: expatriates' understandings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Cambodia as a Unique Site of Biodiversity 2 Environmental Vulnerability 3 Environmental Crime 4 Environment and Globalisation 5 Globalisation and Market Forces 6 Land Speculation and Development 7 Environment Work and People 8 Indigenous Environment Movements 9 Indigenous Sustainability
Environment work in Cambodia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Justifying NGOs 2 Seeking to be effective with local communities 3 Supporting Government 4 Seeding change
Politics in Environment Work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 NGO politics 2 Relationships with Donors 3 Relationships between NGOs 4 Relationships with communities 5 Politics of Environment Work 6 Legal support 7 Negotiation and facilitation
On being an expatriate environmentalist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Opportunities 2 Stress 3. Success strategies employed by expatriates 4. Meaningfulness and pleasure

Cultural Advisors

The role of cultural advisor on this project entailed advising the researcher on the appropriateness and usefulness of the research as well as ensuring that data analysis is not harmful to indigenous organisations or to participants' cultural groups.

The following people agreed to act as advisors to me during the research. I have contacted them at various times during the course of the research to discuss issues arising including those related to the Cambodian context, political issues with NGOs and the environment sector, and reflections about experiences of being expatriates. Because of the reflexive component of IPA and my awareness of my own position as a pakeha woman living in another colonised context (Cambodia), I was delighted that these people agreed to help me:

Reverend Paddy Noble, Ngatiporou, from Waipiro Bay, East Coast, Aotearoa has lived in Cambodia for 5 years, and is involved in peace-building work with various organisations. Paddy is my cousin by marriage; my family comes from Poverty Bay. Since we met in Cambodia about three years ago, we have had many long and enlightening discussions about the politics of race, identity and colonisation in New Zealand. We have talked a lot about our journeys, as we both live here as foreigners having to adjust our identity to the Cambodian culture and our relationships with people. My friendship with Paddy, his open hearted inclusion of me as family, and the insights which have come as we have spent time together have been pivotal for me in understanding my own identity more, as a person growing up in New Zealand's particular race politics and postcolonial awarenesses, and now living as a foreigner in the postcolonial context of Cambodia.

Say Vathany, Cambodian American, has moved back to Cambodia having completed her Masters in Anthropology to take up her current role as Executive Director of the Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre. As a friend and with her social science background we often talk about the politics of development and of race as it pertains to her as a Khmer American now living in the country she identifies with as home and me as a New Zealander living in Cambodia as an expatriate.

Leang Seckon a leading Cambodian contemporary artist. Well known for his environmental advocacy through his own artwork, his interest in this research as my partner in The Rubbish Project, an arts project we founded in 2005 as environmental advocacy through art.

Emma Leslie, Director of the Centre of Peace and Conflict, is a Nobel Prize nominee who has lived in Cambodia for more than ten years. I always love speaking with Emma not only about Cambodia's politics, development and culture, but for deep reflections about the experience of being an expatriate

Indigenous social researcher Tong Soprach recently completed a Masters of Public Health at the University of Cambodia. He and I often have conversations around the politics of various aspects of NGO work and health, environment and other development issues in Cambodia.

Massey Human Ethics Committee approved my protocol for data collection and management as meeting ethical guidelines with regard to privacy, protection and beneficence (MUHEC approval # 08-54). My advisory group has supported me to ensure that this project locally protects privacy, is relevant, and does no harm throughout the time I have been conducting this research. Their contribution has continued through to the analysis, which is discussed in the following four chapters.

Chapter 3: Cambodia's Environment: Expatriates' Understandings

This chapter discusses the themes and sub-themes that emerged from participants' understanding of the environmental issues that are central to their work in Cambodia, and wider environmental issues as they understand them. The way in which they characterise the Cambodian environment and its place in relation to issues of global development and environmental disaster are considered, alongside issues that are uniquely connected to Cambodia such as the interface between environment issues, globalisation and social justice concerns for ethnic minorities.

Cambodia is known for an unusual range of biodiversity, making it a unique site in the region which inspires excitement and devotion. The development the rest of the region has enjoyed was not been replicated here as Cambodia silently slipped away from a development agenda, surviving the upheaval and devastation of conflict during the American war in Vietnam, the Khmer rouge years, the era of Vietnamese occupation and then the recent rebuilding phase. Large areas of the country remained isolated, and environmental resources sustained the conflict at that time as the Khmer Rouge traded timber and gemstones. Participants, like Andrew, spoke of the potential for Cambodia to serve as a habitat for endangered species,

Cambodia has pretty much the world population now in terms of [*species*] are extinct everywhere else. They were extinct till 1993 and we discovered them and [*another species*] the same - in theory it's got a good chance to thrive and survive in Cambodia.

The comment that 'in theory' these recently re-discovered species should be able to survive well in Cambodia shows this participant's awareness that there are other factors at work which may threaten their survival. Having the physical environment, for example an area which is demarcated as protected, and which is necessary to host any particular species is not all that is required. Conservation is not merely about physical environment and protected areas, although having an available habitat is obviously crucial, but factors involving people are also implicated as being of central importance. The survival of the species which still exist in Cambodia in unique habitats not found elsewhere in the region is a key concern of conservation groups and was a concern of the participants in the current study, as they watch these habitats steadily degraded and these species undermined by trafficking.

There has been a huge decrease in biodiversity as Cambodia's natural resources have become visible through commercial discovery and exploitation, and as habitats have become degraded, particularly through deforestation. Although there was some exploitation of forests as a means of revenue during years of war, commercial logging during the nineties and continued illegal logging since then has been faster, on a larger scale, and far more devastating. Lack of information about the rate of biodiversity loss means people are unaware of the magnitude of the problem and the possible ramifications. Andrew spoke of his impression of the opinion of local people regarding Cambodia's increasingly compromised biodiversity, based on interviews he has conducted in the course of his work,

All the interviews I've done if I've said to them "has wildlife increased or decreased in the last 5 years?" they'll all say "it's decreased" they'll all say "there's less now than there was before", so, in some respects they are aware that it's going down but maybe they're just not aware how fast or how uncontrollable it is.

Progress in terms of exploration of Cambodia's environment in the past ten years has included not only exploitation, but in other sectors, documentation of its biodiversity, as Andrew again explains,

The work I'll say first has been- a lot - I mean a helluva lot been done over the last ten years in terms of people doing research and making discoveries. There's um there's new discoveries every year really, whether it be a new species or something we knew was here but now we've found out more about so in terms of that respect the work is exciting and it's always developing.

The 'exciting' and 'developing' work has included 'new discoveries every year' of either new or previously thought to be extinct species. Environment work in Cambodia includes the logics of science, working to reveal the natural environment according to its own categories.

That this unique site of biodiversity is at risk if the current rate of exploitation and degradation continues is not in dispute, however possible responses are diverse, and effective strategies for social change with regard to environmental behaviour in all sectors of society are elusive. For one participant, it was critically important to engage local communities in caring for the environment and creating change,

There's also a huge need to engage the Buddhist community in environmental stewardship as well as to be able to provide these children with ... ah getting themselves giving themselves their own voice, education and some appreciation for the forests in their more natural state.

The way in which expatriate participants advocated for involving local and indigenous communities in environmental activism is addressed more fully below. Their awareness of the danger to Cambodia's rich natural environment was interconnected with their appreciation of, and struggles to understand, the local and regional cultural and political environment.

Cambodia's diverse environment is also increasingly vulnerable.

Expatriate environment workers living and working in Cambodia, such as Tara, understood the dynamics affecting Cambodia's environment, making it vulnerable to degradation, as complex, weaving together both global and internal pressures or 'forces',

It's um ... so complicated and then there's I think there's more global forces affecting the environment here.

Some expressed the opinion that for a small country with an unusual range of both natural resources and biodiversity, there are pressures; global, internal, and regional. These seem to participants to be somehow magnified compared to other places with similar resources and similar pressures on the environment. Andrew linked these pressures to the size of the country itself, as well as the fascination it seems to hold,

From a Cambodian point of view it's a small country and there's a lot more interest whereas there's just vast areas in Africa, and I mean the Chinese are there and all sorts of people are there, and there are there are pressures without a doubt but I think the same pressures are just much more exacerbated in somewhere like this.

Others talked about pressures related to Cambodia's internal politics, as a country emerging from conflict with a unique blend of both a strong presence and influence of international development industry agencies. In talking about pressures coming from internal politics, Andrew said,

There's pressures between [*official bodies*].

Other pressures were related by participants to difficult relations between the government and civil society. Recent newspaper reports have drawn attention to the relationship between government and civil society, suggesting that the difficult tensions between the current government and civil society are so disrupted that dialogue is unlikely to provide a resolution (See Appendix F). Others spoke sympathetically of a government which is facing internal pressures, and of being aware of internal conflicts between government departments,

So I mean the government's it's doing the best it can I mean there's a lot of pressure within between departments.

This perception of trying hard under pressure is a sympathetic stance which was not taken by all participants. People who have lived in Cambodia longer tended to show more sympathy for the difficult position of government staff who continually negotiate conflicting social boundaries and cultural logics between indigenous power networks, and newer and contradictory structures, expectations and assumptions of NGOs. This appreciation of the politics of environment in Cambodia is expanded in Chapter 5, and Abby reflected on how she feels that her environment work is affected by the political situation between a neighbouring country and Cambodia,

so we have protected areas all around us except for that one boundary where we have ... not a protected area – big problem ... yeah ... we have a lot of problems with that border [int: trafficking of endangered species you mean?] mm yes and people coming in. Logging poaching all sorts of stuff. So ... and obviously it's kind of politically sensitive I guess they don't really want to piss the [*neighbouring country*] off, even if they are coming in and stealing Cambodian wood.

Abby believes that the Cambodian government approach amounts to tolerating environment crime, rather than risking regional, international relations, which recent globalisation shifts have made more complex. The protected zone where she is located for her work provides little protection for endangered species located there, because of the smaller unprotected area which enables those from across the border to steal and poach. Abby links the impossibility of dealing effectively with this problem to the political relationships between Cambodia and the

neighbouring country, and the consequences of creating offense. She understands that the government prefers to avoid offence than protect Cambodia's natural resources.

Understanding local cultural and political realities often challenges participants to make sense of situations they see as contradictory or difficult to defend,

There's a lot of beliefs and things like that so on the one hand you've got this reverence and respect for wildlife and on the other hand you've got – I mean I think a lot of people like to separate in the mind and say oh yeah that's history and now this is our commercial venture and we don't really pay attention anymore to that.

Andrew is trying to understand the disconnection he has noticed between cultural beliefs about environment which he believes people hold, and what people do in relation to commercial development. Saying 'on the one hand' they say they believe this and 'on the other hand' they do that, shows he finds their behaviour and their beliefs to be incongruent. Trying to make sense of people who he believes respect their natural resources, and the seeming headlong rush to exploit them, he resolves what is to him a conflict, with a psychological explanation: that people 'separate in the mind' their cultural beliefs about the environment, 'oh yeah that's history', from their exploitation of it, 'this is our commercial venture'. He feels that they are simply ignoring the issues, 'we don't really pay attention anymore to that'. Perhaps resources are now being seen as valuable in a different way, in another expression of how Cambodia has become exposed to the global market. Andrew believes people are revising their natural resources in these terms as well, viewing them as available for commercial exploitation ahead of other ways of relating to them. Participants understood that people held beliefs regarding the environment and their relationship to it, which they interpreted variously.

Cambodia's diversity in terms of people groups was also noted and appreciated by participants. Alongside the difficulties of understanding local belief systems, expatriate environment workers are also dealing with quite specific, local conditions affecting ethnic minorities. For example, Sarah is working with an ethnic minority who have lived for thousands of years in this one area, whose habitat and natural resources are now at risk of degradation due to rapid

exploitation and destruction. She discusses the importance of bringing a broader context to the villagers' appreciation of their forest,

I hope that- I hope that it's contributing if anything to the fact that environmental change is not just an individual context. It's not one village's problem it's everyone's problem and what we're trying to do in [*area of the work*] is to raise that awareness in the local community not to say that it's their forest and they should manage it and have rights to it but the fact that if they don't look after it everyone else is gonna suffer as well. Four provinces are gonna suffer. It's an extremely vital watershed for the country. ... the whole entire country's dependent on that fish so hopefully, hopefully if we can achieve this we're not only saving [*that resource*] but we're saving a vital watershed.

Due to its location and relationship with the Tonle Sap Lake and river, and implications for fish and rice production, this area is extremely important for the economy and food security of the whole country. Therefore protecting the rights of indigenous groups living in this area and trying to advocate against the degradation of it by illegal commercial exploitation is not really just about helping this people group, but about all people in Cambodia. In Sarah's work they are trying to bring an awareness of the nationwide importance of this area to the local people in the hope of instilling values of custodianship and conservation.

As well as showing their awareness of the vulnerability of environment in Cambodia, expatriate environmentalists I spoke with noted that some of Cambodia's most pressing environmental threats come from business deals and environment crimes.

Expatriate environment workers spoke about local manifestation of environment crime in Cambodia, most often land grabbing and illegal deforestation. Abby explains how people gain land in an organized fashion by paying other people to move to that area to clear it for them, in return for being able to live there and farm for a few years,

But what tends to happen, they'll be organized somebody who will say - who will go down to a to a crowded province and find a bunch of people and say here I'll give you a few hectares to farm up in [*province*] for a few years but then you have to then you have to go, so they bring in a few families clear some forest, build some houses, they

stay there for a few years, then they're - then they go – they're told to go by whoever's in charge and then that's his land.

From Abby's point of view people in the area where she works, which is a protected area, seem unaware of the consequences of cutting the forest. She is so puzzled by this that she poses a possible reason for this behaviour which she draws from western psychology,

And then in most places people have some idea that, ok, I need money but I know if I – whatever - cut down all these trees then there'll be some consequences like there won't be any whatever for my children and grandchildren. It doesn't seem to have that doesn't seem to have occurred to anybody here! And I dunno if it's something to do with their past you know – I dunno. Maybe.

She draws a distinction between people in 'most places' who will not cut forest, framing it as a resource for future generations, and the people she has observed in this protected area to whom this idea 'doesn't seem to have occurred'. In trying to explain their behaviour she takes a sympathetic position by imagining them to be unknowing of the devastation they are bringing to the environment in this area because of their past experiences.

While some participants were deeply puzzled by contradictions in local beliefs and behaviours, or the willingness of local people to become involved in environmental crime like land grabbing, others showed sympathy with the difficult choices people in business and politicians in Cambodia face. These participants felt that environmentally destructive behaviour and crime isn't as serious as it could be;

You know these politicians are incredibly smart people. You know, if you're good at politics in Cambodia, you're must have a real mind for it. You know. And you're not going to have some international guy come and threaten you with idle threats, work you over like that it's just silly. So for forestry like cos I even went out and visited rubber plantation concessions that were you know clear felling and I met these concession owners and even business men business owners who understood that they needed to manage it a little bit better cos some of them were okhnyars (*excellency*). The one I worked with was an okhnyar and he actually had you know some sense that this is going to stop sometime so there are forward thinking people. Ah he was

internationally educated though so that might have had an influence but you know he himself was saying: the government system, I have to recoup this much money to pay off all that corruption, and the only way I can recoup that much money is to - but he actually kept forest reserve within his concession 'cos we went thru with him and identified that look you know some of this stuff you just can't take it so there are people there, but not very many. Same thing with the fishing lots.

In this case, space for a rubber plantation is created by clear felling forest. Bill has lived in Cambodia for more than ten years and is aware of the complexities informing people's situations. He shows his understanding of the politics of resources in Cambodia: powerful elites have certain skills and personal qualities which have secured them these positions in society through their 'mind for it' (politics). It is these elites who often have had the opportunity, connections, resources and expertise to appropriate land for their own economic benefit.

Bill recognizes the lack of power of international NGO workers; that they have no real leverage point to force compliance with the law or to force people to align themselves with environmental ideals. Rather than expecting people to completely stop activities which degrade the environment, he aims to personally convince this powerful business man of the benefits of mitigating damage. He feels he has been successful as some forest reserve was left within the plantation. The influencing of elites by personal persuasion and relationship is a strategy which is not a part of normal NGO advocacy in Cambodia, even though it takes advantage of the relationship oriented nature of the culture.

Bill talks about the response of the Cambodian government to environment input from NGOs over the years, and again the sympathy he feels for their position,

They have changed their forestry approach quite a lot and, and like fisheries, so... they've actually in forestry and in fisheries they actually have some very smart people but they're working in institutions or or or a bigger institutions where they need to give a certain amount back, and that's what makes it very difficult and frustrating for them cos you know they've got people like me coming saying "come on you can't keep doing that" and they're just like "just remember what I'm working with and the parameters

I'm working in. and the fact that I can manage to do something positive mm be happy for that" and you know over time I have become happier for the little the little positives cos you know from the very top of the system you see that you know taking what you can is a priority... and and there's a culture where if you're the person who didn't take it when you had the opportunity you might be looked down upon culturally so, and loss of face is not a good thing so that that creates another problem. But it's not it's not total doom and gloom it could have been worse.

Bill seems to be trying to find a way to explain what he has come to know over the years, which is how caught people feel in their web of relationship. He is taking a longer term view that small positive shifts are realistic given the way things work, and he show how his perspective has shifted with growing understanding of the local politics of environment in Cambodia. He also appeals to an understanding he has of the cultural expectation that people must exploit opportunities that come, and that they are not respected for failing to do so.

Participants explained some of what they know of illegal exploitation of the environment of Cambodia, showing understanding of the complexities of relationships which allow these behaviours, as Cambodia has increasingly entered the global community.

It is in a far broader context of globalisation and development that the opportunities which local people are culturally obliged to support become dangerous to the environment. Tara explains how global forces are accessing Cambodia's agricultural land,

They're trying to find farm land to do more agriculture here. A huge area they're looking for and so whether they will try to clear people off those areas and do kind of industrial agriculture or whether they will work with small holders and just support more production for their markets I don't know.

The interest of foreign companies in exploiting Cambodia's resources have increased risks that Cambodians have often felt from their neighbours after many centuries of conflict and shifting borders. Most recently, Cambodia's fertile lowlands are currently in the gaze of foreign companies and governments looking for land to grow biofuels and to find ways to ensure their own food security. The complexities of the judicial system mean agreements can be made which are taking advantage of the now-and-the-not-yet of Cambodia's entry to the global

systems of regulation, meaning deals which are often felt not to be in the best interests of local communities. This is a very common problem and one where we can see Cambodia's links to global and environmental politics.

As Cambodia becomes increasingly exposed to global forces which participants view as threatening to the environment, the possibilities of environmental intervention become more difficult, as Tara elaborates,

It's um ... so complicated and then there's I think there's more global forces affecting the environment here than there used to be like the biofuels and the dams and the investments from [*foreign*] companies coming in.

Recent developments of intervention in the environment sector here follow the latest trends in global environment movements, including the development of projects which are connected to the global carbon market. Expatriate workers such as Tara are in Cambodia are among the first in the world to try to use carbon offset projects with local communities to encourage natural resource conservation,

We've been working um [in] ... carbon offset projects. You've heard of that? Ok, there's um there's a new mechanism ... -relatively new- called REDD. It's uh Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation. And it's um it's operating on the voluntary carbon market right now. Since COP13 um is where it's been sort of gotten gotten a lot more support I guess... COP13 in Bali December 2007. And there's been a real push to see if REDD this REDD mechanism could be included under the UNFCCC – the Convention on Climate Change.

I'm not sure that it's the UN. It's not actually under the UN framework yet. I think it's sort of an independent institution, it's based in Switzerland, it um reviews projects. Up til now it's been mostly energy projects. Um... and... Certifies them- goes thru the methodology, checks all the data. Um and then kind of put its stamp of approval on the project. Then it can go to market basically.

A new economy and framework of regulation and monitoring has emerged quickly, linked to the carbon projects, in accordance with the logics of NGO work. Tara explains the complex

dynamics of regulation of these projects, with the implication the UN will inevitably become involved in the regulation of new environmental measures, 'not actually under the UN framework yet'. While the projects appear to have clear benefits for Cambodia, they may also feed into the problems of development that environment workers are concerned with. Is this trend really the ultimate in rendering the environment as money according to the logics and parameters of capital? Or is it reasonable to accept that this is the way things work while enabling local people to benefit too? These complexities are aggravated for Westerners trying to make sense of how regional governments are implementing policies and initiatives which will directly and negatively impact other eco-systems and economies in the region,

You know if that was collectivist China wouldn't be building 16 dams- you know who's going to be worse off is southern Vietnam and Cambodia we're at the bottom you know pretty much. It's quite disturbing.

The view of diverse Asian cultures and governments as 'collectivist' makes it difficult to conceptualise the hierarchies of power and exploitation that participants are witnessing in their work. Comparisons with other regions sometimes help to make sense of otherwise puzzling regional developments,

So the big the big perspective difference from people working in Asia compared to people working in say working in Africa in conservation is, in Africa they feel like to win the battle you have to conserve a hundred percent of everything forever but in an Asian perspective I find that we're just kind of happy to slow the decline and to delay the inevitable.

Participants demonstrated the considerable work they undertake to understand the global and regional context in which their environmental work is undertaken. While sometimes their own Western conceptualizations, such as the concept of 'collectivism' could be used with only limited success in helping their sense making, at other times their familiarity with Western monetary systems made the pressures on the Cambodian environment sector starkly clear. For example, in recent trends Tara spoke about, funders show a preference for awarding funding to private consulting firms over local groups,

Um there's its getting more and more difficult to find donors that are willing to support environmental work because more NGOs in the sector and donors are becoming...mm like [*agency deleted*] is putting all their money into private sector consulting firms.

This trend pressures environment NGOs as the larger funding institutions favour efficiency and outputs over local nuanced knowledge and a longer term investment. In a globalised context dominated by Western knowledge and economic systems, the importance of local social change can be seriously underestimated without an appreciation of the important role that non governmental agencies can play in environmental change.

Environment trends in other parts of the world are often used as models for participants working for social change in Cambodia. In the model Sarah uses, local people are seen as worthy stakeholders, who are assumed to have rights to take their place at 'the table' of decision making processes,

So they need to be at the table at the same time at the same level and that will take time and work not only to build the communities' capacity to engage at that scenario, but also to get the government and the private sector also to understand that they deserve to be there with them, you know? They deserve to be at the table they deserve to be key decision makers because it is their land it is their forest. Um so this is the model that we're trying to move on it has been successful elsewhere in the world there are examples of it in South America and in Africa and Nepal; um in those countries however the governments have been a little more flexible.

Advocating for a flattening of the power structures which she believes needs to happen requires NGO input, means the local community's ability to take part in these processes is seen as an issue of 'capacity'. Sarah believes it is a matter of training in new skills but also imparting of the idea that all parties need to accept that the local community has the right to take part in these processes as they live with and rely on the natural resource.

Social change therefore was considered by participants in the current study, to be a goal of their environment work. They further expressed the ideas around Cambodia's environment and the effects of globalisation.

With globalised values and markets being embraced in Cambodia, the environment is necessarily conceived and reconstituted in the terms and logics of progress, which was reflected as participants spoke of the exploration and value of Cambodia's natural resources, and the environment and global capital became closely related, as Andrew explains,

I mean they do see it as uh an infinite resource in many respects

As Cambodia is exposed to the global market, natural resources like everything else are reconstituted according to how they are related to or can be represented as capital. Speaking about a carbon project, Tara commented,

There was a recognition that this is a real market.

People have entered and are dependent on systems involving money, and in some areas where Tara's organisation is involved, sustainable management of the resource means supporting livelihoods by using the resource without destroying it.

And that, in that area we've been supporting communities to develop uh community based enterprises. So we're uh usually linked with the community forest area or community protected area, where the communities are already managing the forest, and they have ideas about sustainable ... management; they have an incentive to make sure their- their extraction doesn't jeopardize-you know- the resource in the long-term. And it's up til now it's been mostly piloting activities but were hoping we'll be able to upscale ... to um... think we'll have 20 sites this year, so.. slowly uh hoping to have more of an impact on livelihoods, poverty alleviation and uh demonstrate that community management of resources can have a real impact in uh- on food security and um forest protection. Cos when-when communities have um when they see the benefit of protecting the forest, and are extracting livelihood benefits then they are more likely to cooperate to resist outside pressures and deal with illegal logging encroachment.

The communities need the support of the NGO to become proficient in both the producing and selling of these products. Tara shows how environmental NGOs such as the one she works for are very involved in supporting livelihoods; they clearly understand that environmental

exploitation and degradation can be impacted by poverty alleviation. This role that NGOs play between communities and their developing sustainable livelihoods is about capacity building. All sectors of the environment are affected by the logics and cycles of 'the market'.

Recent shift in the global capital landscape have been felt immediately in Cambodia's economy, as involvement with the global market means sharing in whatever shifts it makes. The global recession has impacted the price of land in Cambodia, although it is also believed that prices have been overinflated locally in a sort of bubble. Nina talks (below) about the influence of global markets on environment in Cambodia due to less demand for natural resources in a time when the business climate is suffering. She feels less than optimistic about NGOs being able to respond in this dynamic where foreign investment has slowed down,

So when people start selling again it will be interesting to see at what value they're selling and if the market really has crashed. And whether that will benefit people at all. People are talking a lot in the NGOs working in extractive industries sector or mining, hydropower dams, these large scale agri- anything to do with foreign investment are now saying we've now have a breathing space because the foreign investment is slowing down. Um and I'm not sure if we really do cos if we do what do we do with that how do we use that space? And is there time to... Are we going to use it to the best of our ability as NGOs or not? Mm... Probably not.

The indecisiveness that Nina alludes to reflects the difficulty organisations have in trying to respond quickly to changes in the global environment, especially against a background in which Cambodian land has been critically important to economic development.

Recent years have seen government and large NGOs align the legal and financial structures of the country with requirements for global participation. In the past 5 years land has increased in value staggeringly, peaking in 2008 before the global financial crisis. People have bought and sold land everywhere in a largely unregulated environment with reports of many chaotic scenes of illegal appropriation and people being forced off their traditional land; people who took part in this trading have become a lot wealthier.

Many of the emerging middle class have made their money through land speculation. Andrew feels they are largely outside the influence of NGOs in terms of their efforts towards environmental protection,

Erm engaging the middles classes is difficult er for us cos we're not kind of experienced in that it's just – and because it's so rapidly evolving I don't think anybody is yeah ... they don't wanna move there they just wanna speculate.

Andrew's bafflement in relation to working with those who are more middle class and profit orientated in relation to land development is connected with recognizing the importance of the emerging middle class as stakeholders in environment work,

The emerging middle class has gotta be- have some kind of buy-in in terms of kind of stakeholders and that to see a kind of value in keeping environmental integrity not just be it litter in Phnom Penh or be it litter in the rain forest or exploiting wholesale natural resources.

Being able to reach and convince those who have most immediate personal gain especially from land speculation practices that put Cambodia's naturally unique biodiversity at risk, is an ongoing concern for environment workers who participated in the current study.

Land development is also at stake in issues related to the demarcation of particular areas as important to protect. Sarah talks about obfuscation in demarking areas as protected, as demarcating them will render them visible to the advocacy of NGOs, politicising any exploitation of them. The watchdog role of NGOs makes it difficult to exploit the forest for example,

You've got an area of land that doesn't have that sort of political contention or interest from outside players because it's not a protected area. There's no conservation organisation there there's no human rights organisation there specifically in that area, and no one's looking at it and it's all concessioned, it's all still under economic logging concessions. So the logging concessionists still own the titles to that land um which is a really sad case so no-one's watching it.

Sarah further asserts that development in one major region of Cambodia is working against its stated objectives,

I mean it's just it's really a poor the current development in that region is really poorly thought out it's not sustainable it's um set up to get cash up front immediately none of the actual projects are you know um invested by reputable companies. Um none of the environmental or social impact assessments have been done which are mandated under the law. None of the um environmental management plans have been developed to restore the area, I mean it's all shortterm money making opportunities there's no longterm objective or goal and sustainability. I mean when I say that word in Khmer does anyone understand it?

Sarah believes the short term approach is to exploit while the opportunity is there. Any attempts to follow the requirements of Cambodian law are seen by Sarah as a perhaps cynical gesture to gain access to the resources themselves for immediate financial gain with little regard for the future implications.

Land speculation and development issues intersect here with global financial interests and local instability to complicate, and sometimes even thwart, the efforts of environment workers. Participants spoke about the importance of people in their work, outlined below.

Degradation and exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources and biodiversity would not occur without people, and they are the key to reversing the destruction. Expatriate environment workers said that their work is about people. Conservation both involves people and relies on them for its success. Several participants reflected on how their views about this have changed since coming to live in Cambodia, and spoke of their journey of coming to understand this point,

Yeah I was more conservation oriented before, that saving species saving ecosystems was of paramount importance and by coming into contact with people I've been more aware of the need to of people. You know they're people you need to work with and um yeah, seeing it's more complex and the- this need to work with different stake holders to engage people and collaborate. Also find if people have made up their mind already it's very difficult to you know change behaviour.

When Tara came to work in Cambodia she was focussed on 'saving' species and ecosystems, and as she became aware of the dynamics of environmental issues in Cambodia she realised the importance of engaging people. She mentions several times what she terms the 'need' to engage people, both to see them as stakeholders in the conservation process, that livelihoods is integrally related to environmental protection,

I think when before I came here I think I was more interested in like saving the elephant or the tiger and also I've become more aware of how important it is to um engage the local people in that effort and also realizing how much more complicated everything is than when you first go into a situation.

For her this is imperative for the success of any conservation efforts in Cambodia, 'if people have made up their mind already it's very difficult to, you know, change behaviour'. Abby also firmly links conservation of species with the activities of people,

But there is and erm it's getting - there's more and more coming all the time. Mostly [*people group*] communities uh I mean ... that's who was there initially. But now we're getting more and more Khmer families coming up from [*province*] ... if you wanna, if you wanna, if you're kind of interested in working on a species you can't ignore the fact that there's all these threats around you can't ignore what's causing those threats what's driving all these pressures ... and it's all about people you know.

In this case she feels people are the cause of the threats to endangered species, 'it's all about people, you know'; people are 'driving all these pressures'. She is very sure of this, linking success of any conservation project to this knowledge; 'you can't ignore the fact'. The protected area in which she works has many people moving there from other parts of Cambodia, both as a response to being victims of environment crimes such as land grabbing, and in efforts to find new opportunities and improve their situation. Developments such as these negatively impact the endangered species as well as the forest in that area.

People working in government are also key to the success of conservation work. Liz believes there is a need to persuade officials, but she has not so far felt successful in this. In fact she finds them unresponsive to new information which could be helpful, or a less impacting means to the same end,

But even when we do say to the government there is this alternative method they don't seem to be interested. They've got their power plan down and that's what they're going to do so it is becoming quite difficult.

Whether it is difficult and frustrating because there seems to be little progress or leverage for influence, or exciting and empowering because the changes needed become increasingly clear, participants affirmed that environmental work was about people – at least as much or more than it is about the natural environment itself. This realization leads participants to see that the rights of the environment and the rights of people are also interconnected.

The vision of environment work as being about people is consistent with environment workers' commitment to human rights. Western human rights discourse was introduced by NGOs to Cambodia, and is always informed closely by the UN Charter of Human Rights. Some of the expatriate environment workers interviewed clearly expressed that environment work *is* human rights work, and that their work is furthering a human rights agenda in Cambodia,

Um... yeah I think I've always felt like-like just on the brink of seeing like a-a really good change and working in human rights and it kind of encourages me.

Tara sees her work of securing communities' rights to manage their local natural resource as human rights work; she believes that people living in an area have the right to sustainably manage and use it. She believes that helping them to secure legal tenure and management rights over the natural resource will ensure they at least have some hope of recourse if there are attempts to illegally appropriate it.

Sarah also believes that people living locally to natural resources have a basic right to use them sustainably, and she felt there was a conflict in her previous work between the conservation movement and people,

You could see it throughout the programme that there's always that constant struggle and tug of war between conservation and humans and you know laying it down on the line well actually it's human rights, isn't it? It's their right to use and access their resources.

NGOs work on an assumption that the local people have rights to sustainably use these resources, which may be very different to the beliefs of the people attempting to appropriate them for themselves. She sees that conservation work which tries to keep people out of protected areas can actually be working against human rights to sustainably use these resources. Nina also linked the livelihoods of people with the success of environment work in Cambodia,

What we're trying to say to the [*other agencies they relate to*] is this doesn't fit into a box. This is a general human rights um issue relating to land. It's both land and natural resources and livelihoods; it's all the same thing.

From Nina's point of view old categories and ways of constructing the work and environmental issues are not helpful and she suggests there is a need to expand thinking about these issues to involve poverty and livelihoods. I wonder if this view is based on an assumption that people will not participate in the cycles of exploitation of their natural resources or of other people if they are relieved of extreme poverty. Assumptions like this link to other, idealised views of indigenous groups as caretakers of the environment, with ideas that 'they' feel and behave as one with their physical environment and always will act to conserve it, and are prevented by doing so by their immediate problems.

Participants linked people's dynamic relationship with the environment to demographics. In the extract below, Andrew speaks of what he feels is an 'Asian perspective'; that there is a lower expectation for conservation work, related somehow to what he feels is more rapid development in Cambodia and population density issues,

But in an Asian perspective I find that we're just kind of happy to slow the decline and to delay the inevitable. Because I think there's much more ... the countries are developing much more rapidly probably the population density is much higher there's much more of a demand for these resources.

Bill also talks about changes in population density, through both population growth and migration. He believes that previously sustainable practices of indigenous minorities cannot be represented this way now; citing the change in population density is one of the 'biggest problems',

One of the biggest problems I s'pose is population. I mean ethnic minority groups, they had amazing slash and burn systems that were actually sustainable but now the population is too big and they've got so many Khmers migrating there it's not sustainable anymore.

From the point of view of participants, bringing a 'people focused' approach to environmental issues means understanding the way in which environmental change links to human behaviour, how environmental protection links to human rights, and also taking account of the way in which global changes are impacting on population movement and affecting traditional, sustainable ways of life. Linked to the sense that environment work is about people and human rights, participants spoke about their perceptions of community here.

Community was not felt to exist in Cambodia in a way that is familiar to expatriate environment workers, and they spoke about how their work functions in relationship to social change towards a community which would be more recognisable for them. Andrew outlines his idea of community as people engaged and willing to helping each other and being friendly neighbours who know each other, and he suggests this idea is a western one,

They just they just it's very hard for them to band together. As a westerner we have this concept of community but in my experience it just doesn't exist. I mean I've helped not me we've helped villagers in a community where... you know they just weren't in a position to help themselves before I mean it just might be getting them together every week to have a meeting and discuss things. We've I've worked- I've seen farmers that have lived on the same site for 15 years and they're never spoken to the guy on the next plot and so um you- you just assume these things happen but they don't.

Tara also finds that when a community has a problem another community is not 'willing to back them up'. Rather they will act, presumably against those perpetrating environmental crimes of degrading and stealing natural resources, only when they are personally affected,

It's questionable whether you know one whether one community seeing another community's problem is is willing to back them up and you know whether people are

willing to stand together on the issues or – or feel like when it affects me then I'll do something it's kind of everybody just for themselves a bit.

Community to participants is understood to be expressed in actions such as helping your neighbour, and being willing to expose yourself to risk in support of other people when it comes to environmental issues. The politics of risk in Cambodia is outlined in many news items about deaths, legal action, and threats as people try to resist environmental crimes. The risk associated with environmental resistance is high; and politics in environment work is further discussed in chapter 5.

Linked to a perceived lack of community is a sense that people don't trust each other,

Um there's also um seems to be this lack of trust within Cambodians, and it was just this mistrust between people and resentment and not being willing to work together um, I think there's probably two things, one is trust but also power.

Liz locates lack of trust here as 'within Cambodians', linking it to resentment and an unwillingness to work together that she feels is connected to power.

Participants like Nina spoke about differences they perceived between Khmer people and other indigenous groups and how they find some indigenous minority groups easier to work with because of their sense of community,

It's difficult I think probably in [*regions with indigenous minority populations*] there's a much stronger sense of community among indigenous people in those areas why? Uh I think because the culture is different indigenous communities, and um dependence on natural resources also has been communal, so um it's I think there're also being a minority in a country 90 what is it 90 percent Khmer um probably draws people together as well. And then all the threats from outside can tend to cause people to kind of band together to resist some of those pressures.

Tara links a perceived stronger sense of community as she recognises it, in minority groups, to differences in culture and the way those minority communities have communally relied on natural resources as well as sharing experiences of being a minority,

I think the indigenous people I'd have to say are so much easier to work with than the Khmer they're just simpler they don't have any pre- ... commercial expectations or you know they're not influenced by all of this status um that comes with Cambodian society.

Sarah felt that the reason she finds indigenous minority people easier to work with is also cultural; that their organisation within society is not so hierarchical and related to status.

Indigenous minorities were also noted by Andrew as more marginalised and at risk of exploitation by land crimes as they do not relate to capitalist concepts of land ownership. Land in these areas is being sold by people who do not own it, stolen from people who do not believe people *can* own the land in this way. Andrew locates this as a reason that indigenous minorities do not resist land speculation- they perhaps do not understand the significance of land being sold or owned,

Often they're poor or indigenous they're in no place to stand up ... I mean a lot of indigenous communities they don't believe you know ownership of land... it's a big problem.

As people in these areas become affected by the outcomes of these processes which are not a part of how they traditionally relate to the land, they may start to resist. NGOs have for years been involved in advocacy for these people in these cases and participants' experiences of advocacy in particular regions have led them to see the absence of indigenous environmental movements as a serious problem for environmental advocacy.

Given the focus that environment workers put on the relationship between environment protection and people, I asked participants to tell me about the indigenous environment movement in Cambodia. Most felt that any indigenous environment movement in Cambodia does not exist outside of NGO work as far as they are aware. Environmental advocacy as Liz and Sarah understand it involves NGO projects and some bodies within the government,

No, I can't say I've seen anything besides ... um within the government there are the [*deleted*] office and that's supposed to be overseeing projects.

I think there's, there's a lot happening I mean environment is, it a very broad term so, can basically include a whole range of different types of projects initiatives and government mmm plans and work.

Not everyone agreed that the indigenous environment movement is led and constituted by NGO work. Nina feels the environment programme of the NGO she works for does not constitute an environment movement as it is NGO-led and focussing on specific issues, and the wrong issues,

I mean we have an environment programme at [*local NGO*] but it's not really, it's taking a very narrow view on environmental issues so um ... well I mean they're ... I don't think they're taking a very good view ... they're kind of focusing in on specific issues, and not really talking I mean, talk about environment... and again its very much led by a small group of NGOs there doesn't seem to be much um, I know that some of the kind of youth groups are interested in working with them but they don't seem to be reciprocal at the moment in terms of how to respond to that which I think is a bit frustrating for me I wouldn't really call it an environmental movement I would call it more sort of ... initial steps towards it.

In this case Nina's view is not unlike other participants in that she does not think there is a viable indigenous environmental movement in Cambodia, though she also believes that NGO work is not an environmental movement either. From her perspective there is still a vacuum where a movement for environmental protection is needed.

The question of an environment movement in Cambodia was linked by participants to social relationships that empowered local communities in indigenous environmental resistance which is located as a response to victimisation and rights abuses. Nina expressed her belief that people are very much responding to rights infringements and environment crimes that directly affect them, rather than there being an issues-based environment movement akin to those in other countries,

And to be honest my experience of environmental movements in Khmer in Khmer areas always seems to be very much about your local environment and local access or loss of access loss of control of resources or land. I wouldn't have said there was an

environment movement. I mean any sort of social movement that exists is much more about land and access to forest resources and even then it's much more on case by case basis and it's not really a movement so you get communities I've only ever seen communities getting together when it about something that directly affects them, rather than, so they're not interested in envir- in an environment movement in general. They are as far as I'm aware completely unaware of climate change or anything to do with that although so people talk about land conflicts people talk about loss of access to forest resources.

Nina further outlined her understanding of how communities respond to environmental problems when they are directly affected; how they access help in power relationships where they cannot resolve the problems themselves,

Because someone else has taken their forest so it's very much targeted at the person who's taken your land and then either, you know you as a community member try to enter negotiations to try to resolve conflict with that person, or you're trying to persuade your local commune council or district chief to get involved, and then if that fails coming to the NGOs trying to get the NGOs involved. So it's not really a movement it's more kind of these ongoing negotiations, yeah and attempting to resolve conflicts.

In cases such as these, indigenous environmental activism is located in direct responses to rights infringements and crime, and she sums the situation in Cambodia up as 'everything else seems to be fairly NGO driven you know workshops and forums',

You have movements of activism - this group this community ... network and that I mean that's as much as close as I would say you would get to any kind of movement right now because that is a genuine response to common issues across the board but again its more about governance than environmental issues um and everything else seems to be fairly NGO driven you know workshops and forums.

Bill feels positive about communities he is aware of who are 'starting to do something' in terms of resistance to environmental crime, albeit 'at a small scale', and he links this to the successful introduction of democratic political processes such as commune council elections.

At a small scale communities themselves are starting to do something and I think the commune councils having democratic elections is actually gonna start to have a very significant impact ... and these communities are pretty savvy about there's certain people in our community that are taking too much and its impacting the rest of the community and in some of the community fisheries they've actually started to stop them. They're and some fisheries staff, with support from fisheries administration are now cracking down on these illegal activities so we're, there's definitely things happening.

By viewing small scale change and local democracy as successful in resisting environmental crime, the possibilities for growth of an indigenous environment movement are placed in the context of local people's responses to exploitation of environmental resources. Bill's perspective also draws attention to the importance of good cooperation between government department staff and local communities in 'cracking down on these illegal activities'.

Although some participants did not see any indigenous environment movement in Cambodia, those who did see a local movement saw it in relation to processes of resistance mostly around the consequences of losing access to land or natural resources

[Laughs] is there one? [*Indigenous environment movement*] Aaah yeah I think that could be one of the issues that ... an environment movement isn't really that strong here I think. There's probably more energy behind land issues I think in general it um a lot of- a lot of activity and protest related to land but um, and that can also be considered an environmental protest I guess but I think it's not that well coordinated.

Tara explains the process of indigenous environmental resistance which happened in a community her NGO works in. This resistance included appealing to authority using official procedures. Tara then links their success to the community in this instance 'putting effort into it',

So when they found out about these concessions coming into the area all – they were fearing that they would lose all of their forest area, so they wrote a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture and they were able to collect thumbprints from more than a thousand villagers in protest, and there were representatives of the community who

came to Phnom Penh and advocated with the [government body], contacted the NGOs um went to the Ministry of Agriculture and tried to get meetings there and they ended up compromising and allowing the community to keep 12 000 hectares and kind of carving out the a lot less than what they were hoping but uh [int: so those mechanisms are working then? going through official...] yes slowly slowly I think you can see some success if the community is mobilized and understands um yeah if the community understands the importance of protecting the [resource deleted] then they'll put effort into it, trying to keep it.

Nina further clarified that any environmental movement is about resistance,

So it's always about local resources rather than what we might say is environmental issues you'd have in New Zealand or in the [her home country] so it's much more about yeah resource conflicts or what is the law what are your rights for this or resin or honey.

Nina explains that her environmental work in Cambodia operates on two levels at once – some groups are involved in individual cases, trying to get resolution those they have been made aware of, and others are involved in high level advocacy,

Well as I said its very much conflict resolution. I mean I guess you get the two- you've got two tiers you've got the groups working at a local level who are really responding to specific conflicts, specific cases and trying to help mediate trying to help facilitate some kind of resolution of these conflicts and trying to get the communities' land or forest or whatever it is fisheries back again um and that's working very much within the government channels you know thru the commune chiefs through the district chiefs through all the different um [deleted] commissions – land um trying to work with the [government bodies] and then you have the groups like [deleted] who are trying to work at the national level on these issues and engage more on policy dialogue so not using specific cases of examples of what's wrong but trying to work more on the policy framework as a whole and they are you know getting involved in ah helping to monitor the progress to for MDGs or getting involved in you know helping enable consultation on new legislation coming out or advocating at these big government

meeting or taking part in technical working groups and that's sort of so those are the sort of two levels I guess.

Those involved at higher level advocacy try to influence policy development and monitor adherence to the Millennium Development Goals and other international frameworks of environmental governance which discipline and form Cambodia's government's approach to and relationship with the environment in accordance with global trends. At both levels the role of NGOs is critical to the resolution of the issues which still usually involve environmental crime.

The important role NGOs play in environmental activism is illustrated clearly by some participants' interpretations of damage done by previous interventions. Bill feels that the environment movement in Cambodia is slow to develop at least partly because there is a lack of any indigenous leader,

I think for a while it was a bit too highjacked by conservation which and that's the thing that the conservation movement has also evolved a lot. So now conservation talks about community mobilisation, but there's still a lot of people embedded in conservation that they don't really think it's important to protect the communities they're really protecting the biodiversity. And that for a place like Cambodia is not really workable. So I think that's been a bit of tension in the environment movement in the past. I think there's no lead. There's no one iconic Cambodian person that stands forward and represents something very positive and you can't have an international person do it.

When Bill cites 'a bit of tension in the environment movement in the past', he is talking about tension among NGO workers and a lack of agreement on what the important issues were to address. He notes the conservation movement is now accepting the importance and implication of people's involvement in environment issues in Cambodia. Bill believes that the environment movement is NGO work, and that it should be indigenous with an indigenous leader. Bill distinguishes between an indigenous environment movement and some form of an environmental understanding in the communities,

Whether or not the environmental movement's getting there the environmental understanding in the communities *is* getting there cos they're seeing these two things that they want. The livelihood and the concept of sustainable isn't really there yet but they see that this livelihood's impact is impacting this livelihood so I s'pose that's the first step towards considering what is sustainable? How can this and this exist together for the future? They're very optimistic. Um talking to the communities one of the biggest thing that came out of the communities was there is a level of optimism that things have been getting better and will continue to get better but illegal activities that conflict are the big issues.

Bill believes people are finding the logics of environmental protection and conservation make sense to their lives in terms of improved livelihoods, and making sure resources are available for the future.

Mike has long felt that ordinary people such as motorbike taxi drivers have a good grasp of environmental issues at a general level and would weave these subjects into general conversation about the state of the country and their concerns,

Conversations with the taxi drivers were always insightful ... very frequently they would talk about the deforestation or the water quality or the air and they wouldn't know that I was interested in the environment per se they they'd just come up with these things about ...how it's a rich-poor country and the rich people are making these problems. And that seemed to be a theme that maybe in 20 different conversations over 8 or 9 years would crop up and so I think that there's a sense of a perspective amongst people that are somewhat disenfranchised that is quite true or quite healthy.

For both these participants the involvement of indigenous people in environmental advocacy was considered crucial, and local understandings and optimism were important to recovering from the less respectful attitudes of others.

Participants expressed a sense that their local environment NGO workers and local partners are either not aware of or committed to important issues, or to seemingly obvious applications of environmental ideals. Bill talks about the 'reduce re-use recycle' theme which he has introduced to his staff,

Right now our organisation the staff are still learning about the environment every day. We're talking about reuse recycle you know just for our office we're just doing this school flipchart which is quite new, and we're using recycled rice bags for it and they're like oh, if people know that we're reusing it they might say we're just trying to be cheap. Right, OK let's go back again. One of the messages in the flipchart is reuse, it's a very important waste management principle we're constantly having to go through it and they're environment staff, so, if you've got it with the staff that are doing it, the rest of the country you know it's not really a big priority.

In contrast to his positivity about the awareness of communities, the local environment workers in Bill's NGO are not aware of or committed to ideas and values which he thinks would be expected and he doesn't feel they easily grasp these new environmental concepts.

In contrast to awareness of new concepts of environmental protection, indigenous environmental resistance is not a new concept in Cambodia. Andrew is aware of farmer revolutions and various other rebellions and uprisings in Cambodia's history,

When the land speculation was rife a couple of years ago he was genuinely scared of a farmers revolution cos these people they've lost their land; lost their livelihood; lost their homes they've got nothing left to lose but just go on the rampage... tip... Well hopefully that awareness is good because they can see it happening so hopefully that will have some kind of process.

He is aware of a high official talking about past indigenous resistance through violent uprising in a speech, and he hopes the fear of this happening again might effect some concern and action on the part of the government.

In another part of the diverse construction of the environment movement reflected in the themes emerging from these conversations, some people talked about the environment movement as research,

Well there's a lot been done in ten years but you know that's a short time in terms of a country's natural history so, research- in terms of environmental movement in

Cambodia in terms of Khmers I mean I think it's very young I think the concept has only just really kind of being planted the seed, and it's got a long way to grow.

The seed of the possibility of an environment movement is being planted, through conservation work. Andrew feels his work is part of this process, and considering the relatively short period of time that NGOs have been operating in Cambodia, he is taking a long term view.

In other themes about Cambodia's environment, and continuing with the idea that environment and people are inextricably interlinked, expatriate environment workers have a sense that indigenous practices, mysterious and exotic as they are, are sustainable. Bill succinctly expresses that 'subsistence is sustainability',

But at the same time the more provincial you go, ... the more sustainable or the more subsistent they are. Subsistence is sustainability and that's what a lot of people really don't kind of get. It's a challenge, it's a matter of introducing quality of life things without interfering too much with that system that they have going.

More remotely located people, in Bill's experience, live sustainably with their surroundings and natural resources, which he equates with subsistence living. People, who may be perceived by some to be unknowing about environmental protection and sustainability because of their remoteness from western environmental concepts and influence, do actually live sustainably. But really the unknowing ones are those who do not appreciate the strengths of a subsistence lifestyle in rural Cambodia. He is concerned with the impact of new ideas and wishes his work to augment the people's quality of life while not interfering with how they are living, implying that these communities are pure and better left untampered with.

Participants such as Sarah here expressed beliefs about and respect for local knowledge about the environment;

And I think that farmers get it more than officials and NGO workers cos farmers work off the land so they see yield to yield the changes in the soil see the changes in the weather and the seasons so they understand environmental sustainability.

Sarah expresses a belief that the proximity of farmers to their physical environment means that they know it is being degraded, because 'they see'. They therefore already have concepts of sustainability because they see the negative impact of unsustainable actions,

In a rural setting like Cambodia there is no disconnect between the people and their land, the people and their natural resources.

Sarah feels there is a fluid connection between rurally located people and the physical environment by virtue of their location. Talking about a minority group located in an important forest area experiencing exploitation, Sarah comments that sustainable use is a very old practice,

So the core pristine primary forest area is about 80 to 100 thousand hectares and communities have used it and protected it subsistently for a long time but to actually regenerate ... to actually keep it alive for instance you do need to use it. That's just a natural fact of nature and to be honest if you even though to us in the naked eye it's pristine it has been exploited cos of hundreds of years of indigenous people so it is altered ultimately.

Sustainable behaviour involves using the forest, and Sarah recognizes the western ideal of pristine untouched forest to be a myth; the forest needs to be used in order to survive. So, environmental protection work is about arguing for sustainable use of the forest rather than no use at all, which is the logic behind encouraging sustainable business such as non timber forest products. It is using the forest perhaps in a new way. Still it really is a matter of reconstituting the natural resource according to the logics of capital but in a way that won't destroy it and to improve livelihoods of the local people. Sarah names the traditional subsistent use of the forest over hundreds of years by this ethnic minority 'exploitation'. So, can exploitation be helpful to environmental protection goals?

Bill expresses understanding of the logic given by people who cut the forest and replace it with their commercial plantations, that they may equate trees with trees. He accepts this argument and finds them to be unknowing; taking a sympathetic position that they don't really know the damage they are doing,

Trees grow pretty quickly and they've it it's not biodiversity, it's monoculture but to the untrained person they if they don't know they can say look I took those trees I got a benefit from it I put these trees here - what is the problem? So you know that really needs to be understood a lot of people in government and in business they don't see a problem. They're getting money and putting trees back and how happy should everyone be? Um so it's it's pretty tough, it's, and they're creating employment.

The beliefs of participants about the environment in Cambodia, which are drawn from themes emerging from the interviews, are fleshed out in the next chapter by what they said about their experiences of working in the environment sector in Cambodia, located as it is in a highly politicised development context.

Chapter 4: Environment Work in Cambodia

Participants talked at length about their experiences of environment work in Cambodia, and this chapter elaborates on themes and sub-themes that emerged from the transcripts about these experiences. The expatriate environmentalists who spoke with me talked about their justifications of NGO work, tensions arising from foreign concepts and models and their sense of the spiritual interconnectedness that informs the significance of their work. They raised issues related to arduous processes of environmental protection, local workforce capacity and the strategic use of resources. They also talked about seeing their work as seeding environmental change in Cambodia and at the same time questioned the effectiveness of their efforts.

Expatriates involved in environment work in Cambodia expressed justifications they hold for NGO work.

Expressing that his work is important in the process of environmental protection, Andrew elaborated,

I don't see it as we're coming in for our own ends and means; we're here because this—well from my perspective we're here because the species might go extinct, where and in theory it's got a good chance to thrive and survive in Cambodia.

Citing saving the biodiversity of Cambodia from unnecessarily disappearing as the reason he is working here, works to distance himself from more clearly personal motivations for coming to work in Cambodia. He believes his coming to this country to work will help the process of establishing and securing the survival of the species his project is focused on.

Another participant saw the justification for NGO work in the crucial role they play in the process of assisting communities to obtaining legal tenure to sustainably use their local resources. These legal processes take a lot of time and resources; however negotiating them successfully is no guarantee of reaching the wider goals of environmental protection and access to natural resources. The likelihood of success with other strategies such as carbon credit schemes also seems sure to be complicated by the associated future influx of money, but Tara is still hopeful,

So there seemed to be very strong commitment there, also the project has the endorsement of um of the Prime Minister through the Council of Ministers in a government decision document that says the project should maximize benefits to local communities so yeah we're we're hoping that they'll stand by those commitments when the money actually starts to flow so that will be the real difficult time I think when the money starts to come ... But it can also be you know very encouraging if we can have a good impact, be managed well, this site can be sort of a model for other similar projects in other provinces.

Gaining the express support of the Council of Ministers, the most powerful group of government officials, would have been impossible without advocacy and support by NGOs, who have the right contacts, funding, and the technical expertise to support and enable communities to negotiate with government,

So the whole legal framework is in place, and uh we've worked with the [*government body over one natural resource*] to try to... take the legal framework and...define a clear process... It's basically uh a process of 8 steps, and that includes... uh doing awareness raising, and PRA –participatory rural appraisal... sending a request letter to the governor and to the [*government office*]. Then electing a local [*deleted*] management committee developing by-laws, regulations, mapping, um then applying for the [*deleted*] agreement, and following that communities can apply for a management um [*deleted*]management plan which allows them to sustainably harvest [*deleted*] and commercially harvest uh [*deleted*], then the 8th step is just monitoring and evaluation so it's really the first 5 steps to get up to the agreement that – we've been focusing on and uh we've we've been working with more than uh 100 communities around the country.

As well as justifying the involvement of foreign NGOs in Cambodian environmental work, as outlined below, the participants also emphasized the importance of their relationships with indigenous and local communities and the critical importance of indigenous concepts.

In the search for effectiveness, expatriates I spoke with explained how they value and seek to incorporate indigenous concepts, as tools which further the chances of success in their bid for environmental change. Andrew felt,

I mean it's a it's a tool we can use definitely...

Due to the perceived ineffectiveness of 'imported' ideas and strategies, a major international funding and development group has given Bill and his organisation more freedom to develop new, local models,

So a lot of what we do is really work on um assets-based approach; strengths-based approach; critical thinking, and that's what this learning based community overall is. The community learns themselves and we respond. We catalyze but we don't try to lead as much and that's really difficult no matter what anybody in development tells you very difficult not to lead, but just about all the work we do you reach a point and then you are offering solutions; it's disempowering. And and that's one of the biggest issues for Cambodia is been so disempowered by past approaches, um we're we're struggling a little bit cos it's not an easy model to develop and that is what the [organisation]'s employing us to do and they've given us three years to work with 6 communities and develop a learning community model, so they've said look our ... our models aren't working.

Bill is reflexive about the politics of power in development work in Cambodia, and he believes introducing critical thinking will lead to people being empowered to find change in ways appropriate to them. Mike talked about a project which he designed using this logic of making room for indigenous concepts, explaining that he worked on it for more than a year before finally hearing it would not receive funding,

The modus for the whole project was not just to reforest the floodplain and to create um a sense of education and working with the monks and training the monks to be more ah interested in some of the more environmental stewardship aspects of Buddhism... so it was using the monks to train the kids but also using the monks to train the monks themselves, and the story um the storytelling aspect was a key element ...providing a reason for them to get together so that they knew one another

because very importantly this area was slated for community [resource deleted] management and the only way that you can have community [resource deleted] management is to have people trusting one another and working with each other.

Mike planned to involve monks as a means of education, in the hope there would be mutual learning for all involved and the respect for monks in Cambodian society would cement the environmental message. I sensed that he feels monks in Cambodia are not as interested in environmental stewardship as he would expect given the way he understands community in Cambodia. So the project was aiming to create a sense of community through storytelling, which is a local, traditional form of passing on knowledge.

As a complement to valuing indigenous concepts, participants reflected on their impression that transferring foreign environmentalist concepts and language may not be understandable in Cambodia. Constructions of environment and how people view themselves as relating to their local resources can be very culturally and linguistically different, and NGO workers bring language and concepts which are often new to the people they are working with,

I mean they'll- if you say it to an indigenous person or to a rural person they'll say life and diversity but they don't connect it as biodiversity in the context that we think of as biodiversity.

Sarah has noted that technical terms used in environment work such as 'biodiversity' are not indigenous terms in Cambodia. Although the words have been translated into local languages, the semantic fields of those concepts are not the same. Models used in development and conservation work were noted by Sarah as not corresponding with indigenous concepts. So, when Sarah is talking about sustainability or biodiversity there will be a semantic difference between her understanding and that of somebody whose life has informed them very differently. She recognizes that when talking about 'biodiversity', a basic and important concept for international environment sector workers, the word is an introduced one, and is technical language used by NGOs; it doesn't exist in any of the languages used in Cambodia. She spoke of the limits she feels this brings to the effectiveness of her work and of the NGO sector more generally, her repeated words showing her strength of feeling about this point,

So you've gotta understand that these partners are working thru a model that is conceptualized by outsiders imposed upon them. They've never experienced it and then asked to do it so... So and this particularly this this concept of a society, this concept of being a unified voice and having that voice and being able to express that voice in a unified way, is really really so misunderstood.

Participants expressed awareness that the project of NGO work is to change communities, but the local partners are working with concepts which that have largely been imposed by outsiders. Expatriate environmentalists are reflexive and concerned about the implications for social power relationships within their work. They are aware of the distance between local understandings and experience, and what colleagues and partners must produce in order to perform the requirements of the NGO and to gain the benefits they hope will come from involvement with the NGO. The tension between 'outsider' and 'insider' conceptualizations of environmental issues and solutions is a crucial dimension of the politics of environment work, given the importance that participants placed on involving local communities in environmental advocacy. The significance of politics to environment work is explored further in chapter five.

The extent to which environment workers are committed to environmental change in the face of the complexities of working with government as foreigners in their local communities was often evoked by metaphors of a cosmic battle of good against evil. This metaphor is used as a way to understand what people felt was incomprehensible and unacceptable – the continued degradation and exploitation of the environment in Cambodia despite so much money and work and time being spent for protection.

Um yeah I think I mean he has forces around him that he has to battle with too.

Tara feels that a high level government official she knows is in a battle and surrounded by forces acting against him. Environment work is a battle, and she herself is in a cosmic battle,

And I often feel like you're sort of battling against forces that should be working together like sometimes just difficult to understand why it's always so difficult to do things that seem to be the logical right thing to do and it shouldn't be meeting that much resistance.

Conflict within the environment sector she finds ‘just difficult to understand’, and resistance to protecting the environment doesn’t make sense to her. In the face of the environmental threats it would be more sensible for them to collaborate. She feels caught, perhaps between government and NGOs, or perhaps between local people and government agents, or perhaps between her personal values and the problems she talks about elsewhere: all three are possible. Bill expresses his battles in his work relations with a large multinational funding agency,

Yeah so it’s a bit of a battle but its lucky cos I’ve worked with [*agency deleted*] long enough to not get pushed around as much.

Having felt ‘pushed around’ by them in the past, Bill believes with experience he has found ways to deal with it. Now he is not so vulnerable to these pressures he considers himself to be ‘lucky’, which indicates how widespread and normal he perceives the pressures to be. Sarah talks about the struggles of a local NGO partner worker involved in environmental advocacy against illegal appropriation of the natural resource her community has lived long with,

We don’t want her to jeopardize her own security right? And it’s not her battle. We recognize that.

If it is not the battle of the local people, perhaps Sarah sees that the NGOs are battling on behalf of this community for something that is valued by them and the foreign NGO workers in a different way to other parties. Once again security concerns are raised as being a direct result of environmental advocacy, especially if a local person involves themselves in this battle. She mentions two provinces in Cambodia where there is both ‘a battle field’ and a struggle due to land rights problems,

I mean Siem Reap constantly you know it’s a battle field. Kampot is struggling at the moment with the land issues.

Protected areas are being cut back to bring the proportion of Cambodia’s landmass which falls under some kind of protected status more into line, Andrew thinks, with the regional average,

I think I think the strategy we’re going to use in the future is you know fight the right battles and don’t I mean we-we can’t save every last bit but as long as we can – I think

the role of a project like the one I'm working on is to highlight the really important areas and strive to keep those as best as we can and, and yeah we'll just have to concede other areas.

Andrew sees the role of his NGO is to 'fight the right battles' and 'strive' to conserve the 'really important areas', and he acknowledges this process involves 'saving' and 'conceding'. Along with recognising that they are involved in 'battles' with significant consequences, the environmental work of expatriates is also understood through a concept of the geospiritual, connected with their view of the beliefs of local people, and how these function to inform their actions,

Certainly for the [deleted] people I mean they al- they actually have a very strong connection with the forest I mean that's always been there maybe it's diminishing though... well they're animists.

This indigenous minority has a spiritual connection with the forest which Abby links to their animist religious beliefs, although she believes 'maybe it's diminishing'. She goes on to explain how beliefs about the forest affect who is willing to do local work,

It is very difficult to find Khmer people who are willing and able to work in the forest because it's very physically demanding and they're afraid they're actually afraid of the forest ... it's where the ghosts are.

Indigenous minority groups living in the forest live peaceably with spirits which Khmer people fear. These beliefs mean it is difficult to find Khmer NGO workers who are willing to work in the forest; certainly Abby also feels they are not willing to work in such a 'physically demanding' job as hers. Usually NGO work requires education; however the politics of exclusion by difference as well as long conflict, poverty, and isolation have meant people who are from indigenous minorities often have not had opportunities to gain the skills required to enact the technologies and systems required in NGO work. Thus there are few available indigenous people whose skills are valued by NGOs; most NGO workers are therefore Khmer and hold these views about working in the forest.

Inequality of opportunities in the context of geospiritual struggles over the environment raised questions related to the capacity of local staff. Participants tried to explain their perception of gaps in capacity for NGO work by appealing to specific cultural and national issues. The nature of the education system was offered by Tara as one reason why people accept their place in the politics of the NGO and its work,

Um how to encourage participation within office and uh within the local area its uh it's not always easy because the culture here is not I don't think it enc- I mean the school system doesn't encourage people to ask a lot of questions or do a lot of creative thinking so um in some ways people are looking for that structure and hierarchy to make them comfortable.

I recognize in Tara's words the familiar idea that Cambodian staff have low capacity, as well as the reasoning about the hierarchical nature of society and the education system. It was not only local NGO staff who were felt to lack capacity; other participants talked haltingly about the difficulty of working with officials who are poorly educated and elites who seem not to understand the issues,

Uh ... uh I mean ... without sounding derogatory I mean it's difficult working with the people in positions of power that have very little knowledge or understanding -of the issues and that comes down to education again.

Liz cited a lack of seeing 'the whole picture' when she spoke of local staff, elaborating about one situation where a Khmer colleague came up with few advocacy points about an environmental issue, despite being given a lot of ideas by her expatriate advisor,

And I'm not sure of the whole reason I think part of it is probably capacity of the staff that I work with but sometimes they don't seem to ... to see the whole picture ... my colleague missed a lot of important points that could have been picked up ... I think it's a shame but I see that quite often.

Despite these beliefs about capacity of local staff, the logic of most NGO work includes plans to localize operations, as Abby explains,

I mean – eventually ... erm eventually hopefully there'll be a Cambodian person doing my job but I think ... erm ... as an NGO we're in- we'll be here longterm.

Thus, building local capacity and understanding the inequalities and struggles of local communities also served to justify NGO work. Participants understood a key part of success in their work to be not only the capacity of the local staff, but also their virtues. They spoke often about the importance of working with 'good people', who are honest, committed to environmental ideals, and capable in NGO work; as opposed to those who oppress and take advantage of others,

Actually it's a good model because the um I'm not the well I'm the advisor but the manager is Cambodian and he's really really good.

They've got some good people.

There're some good people and there're others who are good people caught up in ah in a system a government system where they can't, there's a line they can't cross.

One of the good things is the team of people I work with my colleagues are really really great and it's been sort of a process of elimination but now we have sort of the best left so that's enjoyable.

The majority of people who work with NGOs are working in the development sector it's an ... economic choice ... often they're doing that job because it's what paying them the best salary ... because of that I've found some people extremely disappointing because they've made it quite clear that they don't actually care about the environment at all or they're the ones that are buying land and they're working as land issues, they're the ones working as land traders. or they're using their position as an NGO worker to bring benefits to themselves so that's very difficult on the other hand some people I've been working with are extremely inspiring and amazing activists and leaders and it's been a privilege to work with them.

As well as seeking to be effective in working with local communities for environmental change, expatriate environment workers were aware that their NGOs perform a supportive role with

regard to the government of areas within the country which have protected status and have been allotted to various NGOs to monitor.

As in many other sectors in post-conflict Cambodia, NGOs support the government to perform their tasks, and there is a complex negotiating of roles between NGOs and the government bodies responsible for environmental protection. Andrew speaks about a new environmental assessment department within the Ministry of Environment,

So I mean the government, it's doing the best it can. I mean there's a lot of pressure within between departments but I mean there's a new Environmental Impact Assessment Department within the Ministry of Environment it's very young and its keen to grow, so ak ak I think they uh are aware ... the need to conserve and the need to protect.

The percentage of Cambodia which is gazetted as protected is more than twice the regional average, a figure which he takes as normative and as a reason to support the government cutting back those areas.

You have to have a bit of reality check, there's 25% of Cambodia's land mass is under a protected area of some kind, which is too much and um the regional average is like 11 %.

While supportive of the country's development, which he calls a need, he sees the NGO role in the future is to make sure the right parts are protected, rather than trying to protect everything. He speaks of this goal in a general sense, which may be taken to mean that it is not an explicit goal of the project he is working on. The NGO will help with development and also try to ensure exploitation does not go beyond a critical stage to completely degrade and destroy the natural resources of the country. It is not clear what is happening to the land which is being 'cut back' from being protected, but this may be producing a space for elites with connections to gain concessions to exploit resources in these areas.

In speaking about his work in the environment sector, Andrew also said there are many protected areas, and many different classifications; the whole field needs rationalizing as the system of notating them is complex and confusing,

Like I said there's almost too many, you've got national parks, you've got protected areas, you've got protected forests you've got wildlife sanctuaries you've got multiple use areas you've got heritage sites all these things and some of them are - I mean some of them have just been fallen by the wayside and... I mean NGOs are just not enough to kind of cover it we try and before we used to protect another area as well but we just couldn't afford to do it so we just had to concede. We had to say – it's all it all should be managed by the government. We just try and improve it and make it uh make it happen but we just had to retreat in that there and say we're just gonna focus on this one. we still kind of are affiliated with it but I mean it's open now to a lot of uh... insidious practices and there's a lot of logging around ... so you've got a lot huge charcoal production and um a lot of ah land concessions granted it's always gonna come under pressure ... and so all of a sudden you get outside interests turning up and you're like well who are these guys? and you've got chaos. some areas –[*province deleted*]- land has been sold three or four or five times over to different parties and the actual owner of the land is 'what do I do?'

Andrew notes NGOs do not have the resources to cover the many different protected zones; and when the NGO has to turn their protective eye from monitoring some areas, which they now are just 'kind of affiliated with', Andrew notes it becomes open to various 'insidious practices', in the rush to exploit resources which he describes here as 'chaos', underscoring the protective role of NGOs. These areas are very quickly exploited in the current environment. As NGOs don't have the resources to cover all the areas, they concede it really is the government's role anyway and try to focus on the really important areas,

But I think on the whole here I mean I mean we fight a losing battle every day just to conserve these areas so I mean ultimately it's going to have to change I don't think there's I don't think – as long as the-the-the kind of thought is behind it is that we will conserve what's worth conserving I don't think many people would have a problem with that.

Andrew feels again that the 'battle' to conserve these areas is being lost, and that it would be strategic to not try to conserve everything that is protected, as this would be a hopeless and unrealistic goal in the current environment. While there are multiple justifications for NGO

work, from participants' perspectives, the work itself needs to be strategically directed to match NGO resources to the most significant and serious environmental needs.

Explaining the logics which inform their strategic planning, Tara talked of how her NGO move their resources to areas that are of concern locally,

And we decided to take a demand-based approach, so where we go depends on where we get requests.

Where people are already sensitized that they may lose access to their local natural resources, they will look for help from a source with the ability to help, or with connections to people with power to help. Given that Tara's NGO has had success on behalf of local communities to 50 sites, it would seem they have a reputation as an effective means to secure legal tenure to enable locals sustainably using land to support their livelihoods.

Environment NGO workers talked about other strategies of their work in trying to advocate to and advise the Royal Government on sustainable use of and access to natural resources across a broad range of environmental issues,

Whether it be a mine a mineral extraction or a hydrodam or whatever there's some - we're not against mining we we know- like I say we're not against a lot of things but it's just saying well you should really do it this way or you should really do that one and not do that one - yeah best practices so I mean there's a whole range of different issues.

In addition to supporting government, expatriate environmentalists spoke of understanding their work as encouraging the indigenous environment movement, and in this they saw their work as seeding change in Cambodia.

Andrew elaborated on the idea of seeding change,

In terms of environmental movement in Cambodia in terms of Khmers I mean I think it's very young I think the concept has only just really kind of being planted the seed, and it's got a long way to grow.

Planting seeds is perhaps a euphemism for a lack of control over outcomes, seeds are scattered and it is processes beyond the control of the workers which make the seeds grow. Expatriates are part of the process of seeding change, seeing themselves as providing seed but with awareness that the process of environmental change involves more than new ideas or technologies in order to grow and bear fruit. Participants' responses indicated that they feel planting the seed of an environmental movement is their work, their initiative, rather than an indigenous and spontaneous response from local people affected by environment degradation and crime in Cambodia. They are the ones to bring the seed of initiating an environment movement in Cambodia, and some expressed a goal to change the mindset of Cambodia's population,

So it's gotta be a combination of things it's just a -like I was saying before it's just a mindset which a long time is probably but yeah the challenging thing is how can we speed that up cos we can't just let it develop at that slow pace.

Andrew feels challenged because he senses change is happening too slowly in the context of the urgency of resource degradation. Other participants felt that challenges included genuinely involving local people in the environment movement. For example, Tara noted that while it is not hard to get people to attend meetings, this may be due to the financial benefits of attending,

And then what is happening the a lot of the meetings and things the networks it's really driven by NGOs I think and uh it's difficult all this per diem issues and things you know getting people to come to meetings if they're really coming with their own initiative or if they're coming because they're being supported by NGOs.

The language Tara uses implies that the logistics of the NGO work somehow obstruct reaching the goal, clearly stating that the networks and therefore any environment movement is 'driven by NGOs'. As was outlined in the previous chapter, any environment movement is conceived of as NGO work; she is unaware of any networks meeting for environmental protection or advocacy purposes which exist outside of the NGO endeavours. Perhaps this relates to safety concerns as people observe and know the politics of environmental advocacy, and the need to be connected to some form of powerful protector before engaging in environmental

resistance. In general, participants did not feel that the government is effectively working towards goals of conservation.

With this disillusionment with working with the government and little in the way of an indigenous movement outside of NGOs, some expatriates are involved in tertiary level environmental education. In order to influence the people who will become environment sector workers, both in the government and NGOs, they are trying to change the curriculum. In his comments about this strategy, Mike stresses the importance of teachers in the process of seeding environmental change. His plan involves a specific Cambodian man who is at present overseas,

There's another project that uh I think is significant um and it still may go on at some point in some year in the future but it requires a Cambodian person particularly a specific individual ...and this guy, [name] is now doing his doctorate at [overseas University] but uh we've developed a large proposal to totally change the curriculum, the pedagogy of the department of Environmental studies at the Royal University ... and we're sort of waiting for [name] to come come back to Cambodia with his doctorate in hand and want to take up the charge of doing this within his former department.

Disillusionment was also related to participants' misgivings about the effectiveness of NGO work. Meetings and training are a basic mode of NGO operations, both in the environment field and others, but participants questioned these strategies. Tara and Liz explain that meetings and workshops are a normal part of the work of seeding environmental change in Cambodia,

We just had a launching workshop with more than 100 people.

Well I do try to have regular meetings with the colleagues that I work with.

It's really difficult really challenging. Especially when you report most NGO or donor statistics are how many activities did you conduct? How many workshops did you do? It's just like – outputs. And they're just statistical outputs that don't mean anything they don't mean anything to the average farmer that you're working with.

Sarah points out that activity is not the same as outcome, and she feels that a lot of activity is ineffective but is satisfying to donor requirements. She clearly is aware that going through a course or being at meeting is not the same as learning. However, it is reported to the donors as an output even though it does not constitute a successful outcome. Since it is difficult to show that somebody actually learned anything or changed their mind on an issue, especially across language and cultural differences, stating activities which have been held is often enough to satisfy monitoring and evaluation requirements.

In voicing other concerns around effectiveness of their environment work, it was expressed that money for the work sometimes doesn't get down to the ground level. Despite the huge amount of money given to environmental projects, there is a sense in which money is lost or absorbed along the way,

Um yeah, there's also difficulties sometimes when... there's a lot of money out there but its eaten up with you know consultancies and through different [*organizational structures*] and things it's difficult to see the money actually getting down to the ground level sometimes.

Tara is frustrated at the amount of money which goes to consultants; it is 'eaten up', or disappears somehow as it moves through different organisational structures. It is difficult for her not to feel the money is disappearing and it is also difficult for her to talk about this, as her hesitant first words indicate. The NGO project of development does not allow money to be 'absorbed' along the way into the indigenous economy, but it still does disappear this way, not making it, as Tara says, 'to the ground'.

Expatriate environmentalists are not sure of success. All felt uncertain of their successfulness in influencing people to adopt the NGO ideas about environmental issues, and they talked about how difficult it is for people to perform the required tasks of the NGO development agenda. NGOs report NGO activity as success- activities which donors are interested in and which may not be perceived as success by the local communities. The logic of what is a success in NGO terms may in fact be far removed from what is a success for a local community, who may perceive NGO requirements as useless activity for them. This difference in perception can

damage the relationship between NGOs and local communities, which as Sarah outlines are not hard to build but hard to maintain,

Um I don't think it's hard to build relationships or working relationships with the indigenous people or Khmers in a work environment I think that's fairly easy. I think what's um challenging about it is the fact that the goals you reach are so small even though we report them as you know steps or milestones in the you know donor world they're insignificant to them. So I think it's really hard to keep maintaining a relationship with a community or an NGO worker when the steps that we perceive as successes... are so miniscule and impact so minutely to their everyday lives that's it's hard to maintain that loyalty and that friendship or that working relationship cos they don't see the benefits they don't see any benefits you know? It's really difficult really challenging. Especially when you report most NGO or donor statistics are how many activities did you conduct? How many workshops did you do?

Sarah outlined how frustrating it is for her that while it is easy to build good relationships, the impact of few felt positive outcomes is detrimental to those relationships, as change was understood to be a part of the deal and they do not feel enough change is occurring. A further issue raised by Sarah concerns the difficulties local partners have in fulfilling NGO requirements such as reporting,

And I think the partners, one, aren't good at reporting in general and secondly they are not good at deciphering what is relevant and not relevant. So what is an outcome from an activity? Um that's actually achieving our goal relevant they don't distinguish very well between that and I think that's really challenging to capture and puts a strain on your relationship on your working relationship with the partner and the community members so you're constantly trying to look for positive avenues for positive feedback to give back but you're encountering a society that's not used to receiving it yeah and it's difficult it's really difficult. And the way I'm trying to do it is through a model which I think is very western and I haven't found the bridging mechanism yet to overcome that.

NGO logics are based on Western models that are not immediately obvious to their local partners. What is relevant from the point of view of the NGO workers is not obvious to them either. Sarah mentions they are 'not good at reporting in general'. But by working within a Western model the NGO also conveys to the local people that they are not able to decide what is relevant in a process of collaboration. Thus the local systems of meaning are undermined.

Expatriate environment sector workers I interviewed expressed critical views of the normal NGO approach. Generally they expressed that they hold a less than hopeful outlook for the future of Cambodia's environment. In this long extract about environment crime, Sarah outlines how NGO strategies interface with a complex reality to lessen the effectiveness of NGO advocacy,

All of the destruction that's happening and the changes in the atmosphere and oh it's just amazing so I'm pleased that some of the organisations we work with are taking the steps to record the information cos that's lacking in Cambodia I mean there's not a lot of good journalism here, it's very limited and it's only in the English press, um and the information usually doesn't get out and if it does ever reach the [*large international organisation*] ... or a conservation organization I mean it dies there I mean they either chop it up into what is appropriate for them they don't look at the global overall picture and then what you've got is just another case, and another case is just another case, but then nobody puts those cases together and looks at it and says in this particular forested area which we work which is [*name of area*], over four provinces you've got supposedly four provincial centres with four different communities four provinces. they're all ethnic minorities, they're all [*indigenous minority*] and they all are under enormous pressure from reducing access to natural resources, loss of natural resources, complete violations of their human rights um um displacement issues they've got all of these.

Sarah went on to outline specifically how a host of different abuses which make a complex whole story can be 'chopped up' because NGO agendas may focus on one aspect of the story, rendering the whole story broken up and not the same story as the whole, and reducing the effectiveness of NGOs in being able to help or even effectively advocate. The lack of a holistic focus among the NGOs contributed to the concerns she raised about their effectiveness.

Appealing to NGOs for help is one very common avenue people pursue for assistance in countering aggressors who are usually either powerful or connected to elites in Cambodia. NGO strategies involve very precise goals and areas of work which are mapped out in proposals and activities then carefully monitored, audited and evaluated by donors in a competitive climate. Sarah also noted how slow the NGOs are to respond to complaints, often meaning a deal is done or it is too late. This blend of factors greatly reduces the possibility that NGOs will be successful, further contributing to a sense of future failure.

Strategic decisions about where funding will be focused means direct conservation takes too narrow a view in what they attempt to deal with, meaning NGOs don't have a good overall picture of the issues,

And I think that's the key and that's the problem with direct conservation is they funnel money in so directly to one little element they neglect everything around it which of course is part of the greater eco-system and then run out of funding and then withdraw and then you you've rejected all of the indigenous people so who's looking after it now, cos you've turned your back and that's the model I see in Cambodia all the time all the time. And it's it's really sad

Expatriates noted that local NGO workers are worried that they will not be needed and their jobs will not be there, if they fully commit to and achieve the NGO goals of enabling communities,

so what I get is from a lot of local players is but oh if you do that and the communities take on board all of this then you won't need the NGO. But yes we will cos your role will change

'Local players' attempting to solidify and protect their own position means that there is a lack of full commitment to NGO goals. This contributes to Sarah's sense of future failure. She sees there would be new roles opening up for these people but they don't share her vision, which also suggests the NGO approach and goals are not fully understood either.

Participants talked about disillusionment they perceive about NGO involvement and effectiveness,

There's there's a lot of NGO fatigue I think so many people are all through these areas doing six months a year and then they leave and another one comes oh yeah bye who's next kind of thing end of the day we don't want to be here in ten more years doing the same thing we want them to do it.

Seeding change for these expatriate environmentalists involves a clear plan to localize operations. There are some NGO workers who are reflexive about the appropriateness of the project design and the logic of the work. NGO workers are aiming for change and eventually localization; and bemoaned the short life of so many projects, seeing the lack of trust built with recipient communities. Andrew expressed that this is leading to 'NGO fatigue' where the target populations are disenchanted with the possibility of real environmental change by collaborating with NGOs.

People I spoke with felt mixed about the success of advocacy, meaning they held a negative outlook for the success of conservation and environmentalist objectives, and therefore the future of Cambodia's biodiversity and natural resources. Some expressed that they will leave because of these frustrations,

Obviously it's not all what you see on the tv and all the picture is not good, the outlook.

Speaking about their thoughts about the future, participants outlined the stress they experience due to these reflections, and were reflexive about their achievements. Nina talked about the need people have to find success in their work, and how they make that happen, when I asked her whether she thinks people feel like they are making progress in their advocacy efforts, she said,

Sometimes you do sometimes you don't, yeah? You know? And I think ... no- I mean there are successful cases they are very few and far between but they do exist. um and often cases go on for so long, you know years so you can have small successes within a larger failure. Um. Or you become you know output... you know you look at outputs not outcomes. you hold a workshop and you did the workshop that's the success kind of thing so I think in general it's fairly pessimistic but there are ways I mean everyone needs to find the success in what they're doing otherwise we wouldn't be here

Nina may be saying that the picture is not one of success but despite that she is finding ways to frame what happens as a result of the work as success within a series of very depressing scenarios, to the point that even just holding a workshop that you planned to hold becomes a success. Nina has outlined the process by which the focus can shift, for expatriate workers, from outcomes to outputs in a bid to construct success where they also feel negative about the future of the environment in Cambodia, because they fear they will not be successful. She went on to outline how this has affected her personally,

I'm leaving ... I've had enough, I can't work in this situation anymore I find it- I find the whole- the- all of these power structures and issues that we've been talking about extremely depressing and I have completely come to the end of having any ideas of how to respond to this effectively and actually make any difference. you know I've tried working at the local level, I've tried working at the national level, I've tried international advocacy, I've tried working with the Ministry I've tried working with the donors you know, tried carrot tried stick nothing - nothing has worked and in the meantime the situation has got immeasurably worse um and I don't, I think the NGOs, all the NGOs are totally failing the Cambodian people, because we've just made no difference at all and things have just got so much worse and there are so few good success stories so I'm just you know I can't do it anymore I'm totally burnt out and totally cynical and I I need to go and maybe at least go and work somewhere else for a few years.

The main reason for Nina's decision is her conviction that the future of Cambodia's environment is not secure, and she explained how she feels about that by saying, 'I find the whole- the- all of these power structures and issues that we've been talking about extremely depressing'. She feels the work happening through NGOs is ineffective. The frustration she has experienced trying to bring environmental change and not feeling successful despite trying several approaches has been overwhelming for her, 'I'm just you know I can't do it anymore I'm totally burnt out and totally cynical and I I need to go'.

Abby also is certain that the future for Cambodia's environment is not one of protection and successful conservation, but of failure in 'the battle',

Not just here but almost everywhere we're fighting a losing battle we're gonna lose we know we're gonna lose so you know we're not going to lose everything but we're gonna lose a lot. That's just a foregone conclusion so and I think- so that's kind of a difficult thing to have to think about every day.

Thinking every day about losing the fight for the environment, which expatriate workers are so committed to, is a very stressful and if not resolved leads to burnout or deciding to leave Cambodia altogether. Abby talks also of the hopelessness of watching environmental degradation despite feeling like she is having some successes in her work. She speaks of both the pleasure of working in proximity to the forest and the difficulties of the intimate knowledge she has of environmental crimes and their impact, which is due to this proximity,

it's difficult because the erm it's a great place to work cos there's lots of forest and there's lots of wildlife but - and you can do a lot you can actually achieve a lot but at the same time you're seeing stuff disappear so fast and just to see that every day ... more logging, more poaching every day I guess it just wears you down I mean it can be ... it can be difficult to stay optimistic

Liz feels she has not been able to achieve what she hoped. She has been here two years and said,

I don't really feel as if I've achieved a huge amount.

Participants spoke about their belief that Cambodia's forests will continue to be cut in the future. The environment will be degraded and biodiversity compromised,

The face of reality here which is that we're gonna - Cambodia's going to lose most of its forest and most of its wildlife so you can - you've gotta try and stay focused on what small little thing you're doing and that you can be instrumental in helping to decide which bits get kept you know like if it's only going to be ten percent of what's here now you know in fifty years then at least you can help and make sure that it's the right ten percent then you've gotta watch the other ninety percent disappear and that can be difficult you know so ... ah... and just I mean the lack of political will and the corruption and everything blah blah blah.

Abby explained how she copes with the emotions which she experiences while watching this happen slowly and becoming intimately acquainted with the mechanics of power that need to be worked in order for this exploitation to happen. Abby believes about the future of Cambodia's forests come from her work in one very remote part of the country which although hard to get to and somewhat invisible is at the nexus of environmental politics. She is aware every day of illegal deforestation and poaching, and it is easy to see that this ecosystem is in fact doomed if this continues. To be successful in her work, she tries to stay positive in the face of this knowledge by lowering her expectation for success, focusing on where she has power to act, and finding ways to be 'instrumental'. But the emotional stress of watching this destructive process in the every day is obvious in her words. Choosing to be involved where you can have some influence is a strategy she is employing. She is aware of her lack of power to stop the poaching, to stop the cutting of the forest, but perhaps she can be instrumental in helping to preserve as she said, the right bits. Any sense of success is tempered by the feeling that it is at a slower rate than is ideal, as Tara explains,

And you know it's there's there's like uh 50 maybe ... sites that have been signed off in the country which is great, it's a big step but um it's a lot slower than what I personally would like to see.

Tara feels happy that the communities living with fifty important natural resource sites across Cambodia have completed the complicated systems required to get legal tenure over their resources with the help of her NGO. This is success, but it is tempered by her feeling that it is slow. Abby again talks of the possibility of burnout in the face of the political economy of the environment in Cambodia, and of the energy she exerts in attempts to stay positive in her outlook,

But it takes quite a lot of energy you know effort to maintain that trying to stay positive about it and I'm not you know I'm actually pretty cynical I could be better but um cos there's only so long you can do it for you know? That seems to be the pattern anyway after about 5 or 6 years people are like... 'F' Cambodia.

She does feel cynical, and she blames herself for this, 'I could be better' but realizes the stressful effect of watching the environmental degradation while trying to successfully enforce a protected area which is every day being degraded, exploited, and sold.

In a bid to make meaning of the gaps between expectations people brought to their work, and the situation as it is and as they find it to be, others also made comments amounting to blaming themselves,

I think I've also gotten a little lazy with some things like organising staff parties and retreats and things (giggles) and when I.. I did a lot of that in the beginning like uh I uh think um I... I guess I hesitate to do things where I think that use up a lot of resources and then where you don't see the real clear impact or outputs so um sort of finding a balance between efficient use of resources and also some of these intangible type of ways of managing things.

Tara calls herself 'a little lazy', feeling pushed to make the most of the funding money and spend in areas where there are clear and countable gains or outputs or efficiencies. Even though she personally feels staff functions are important, she mentions these strategies which she believes lead to success in her work as being one of the 'intangible type of ways of managing things', and they have given way to 'efficient use of resources'. The logics of NGO work are clearly not aligned with the human sense of what is efficient. Tara says she was 'naïve' in the beginning, is not sure she completely understands the situation she has worked in for more than ten years,

And also realizing how much more complicated everything is than when you first go into a situation. I - I guess I was a bit naïve in the beginning (laughs) - probably still but uh.

Mike blames himself for not having fluent Khmer language and he thinks of this often,

I think that my my issue has been I don't speak khmer which is a huge impediment and a frustration to me.

Realizing that he is blaming himself Mike also knows it does not account fully for his sense of being less effective than he had imagined,

So it's easy to blame myself but I also think that timing is always important and if you have money you can do something here if you don't have money it's really tough and ah the Cambodian people are willing to do anything if there is money, ah and that's reasonable, appropriate, but it's come around to be an Achilles heel for me.

In trying to make meaning of his experiences over more than ten years, Mike finds it easy to blame himself, not just for his language, but for not having money and even the elusive factor of not having the right timing. He also alludes to the cosmic mystery of planting seeds and not knowing what results will come from involvement with people, but he still blames himself that somehow something about him personally meant he didn't achieve the success he could have done, couldn't 'maintain the energy'.

And you never know what seeds you've planted and what they'll grow up to be but um I don't have that perspective you know I've got more of a perspective that I came there two seasons did a lot of hoopla lot of excitement, a lot of media coverage and then left. And wasn't able to maintain the energy.

Metaphors of energy and growth gave a sense of organic purpose to work that the participants passionately believed in yet found limited and frustrating.

From the frequency with which the politics of environmental advocacy was mentioned as participants spoke about their experiences of their work; it was clear that political considerations were interwoven with justifications for NGO intervention in Cambodia, the participants' experiences of tension between NGO models and local understandings and their sense of the importance and limitations of their work. In the next chapter, themes explicitly related to the politics of expatriate environmental work are explored more fully.

Chapter 5: Politics in Environment Work

The politics of environment sector work in Cambodia were discussed in all the interviews conducted with participants. The significance of politics in relation to environmental advocacy work in Cambodia covered the role of NGOs and the way in which politics affects how the work happens. Participants also outlined their views about the politics of relationships with donors, between organisations, and with their local colleagues and partners, with whom they take up positions as experts. They spoke about differences between them, as well as the politics of work with indigenous minorities. Expatriates negotiate complex and difficult realities regarding power, hierarchy, and elites in the pursuit of environmental goals, as well as the dangers of environmental resistance and advocacy, and the use of the law for both environmental protection and exploitation.

Organisational politics and changes exert influence on the way NGO environment work is organized, and some participants explained how the politics of NGO work affects organisation of the work on the ground.

In one case new programmes have been formed from organisations which merged, bringing organisational and other changes,

... Which is a new programme which they've just uh established um and it's... it's grown out of a merger with my previous uh organization.

This new programme has come about because of funding changes, and she is still working hard to secure funding for the salaries of her local counterparts, who she values highly and feels responsible for. The work absolutely depends on the funding and cannot go ahead without it. Funding pressures can radically affect both the direction and organization of the work, and directly threaten and challenge the very existence of the programme. Tara is also worried about the way money is spent, with expensive foreign consultants being considered somewhat wasteful,

There's also difficulties sometimes when... there's a lot of money out there but it's eaten up with you know consultancies.

Where consultancies eat up a disproportionate amount of the available money, the organization of the work is then also affected, as money is becoming harder to find, which Tara makes clear elsewhere,

But now I'm in kind of a difficult situation where my programme's been transferred to this new organization [*deleted*] but without funding support so with very small funding support and there's a lot of pressure on me to do this new business development to get donors interested in the program and bring a lot of money on board for [*deleted*].

In this case the political difficulties associated with funding provided added stress to Tara's work.

Participants showed sensitivity to politics of NGO work in the environment sector in Cambodia. In general, the politics of relationships with donors, which includes the funding issues Tara raised, were commonly discussed by other participants. Donors are felt by Bill to take a top-down, demanding, and inflexible approach, which is not responsive to the local situation, despite protestations to the contrary,

In as much as they say it the donors aren't actually that flexible. It's they have a theme and you have to fit in that theme. They don't follow the government ... well yeah the local needs have to be bent to fit whatever the donor wants.

Fundraising thus influences the work on the ground by requiring that workers think and act creatively to negotiate between the restrictions of outside donors and the issues facing those inside Cambodia. Tara talked further about experiences with donors who were not open to critical feedback about their models, and tried to drive programme design,

A lot of it is where you that know maybe [*organisation*] will design a programme, outlines what they want and then they're just looking for someone to do that work rather than putting out a call for proposals for people to think about the issues then design something that fits from their experience on the ground. So it's - that makes it more donor driven I think.

A complicating factor which makes relationships with donors pivotal is that money for environmental projects is becoming harder to find. Changes in trends for funding forces groups to alter their work strategies,

Um there's its getting more and more difficult to find donors that are willing to support environmental work because more NGOs in the sector and donors are becoming...mm like [organisation] is putting all their money into private sector consulting firms there may be subcontracts in there but there's less money going directly to NGOs for conservation ... um I think they there's a perceived efficiency in working with private sector consultancy groups where they can handle massive amounts of money and everything's based more on deliverables. Uh there's uh less flexibility.

The current trend of favouring these consultants on short contracts may have developed because they bring outputs which are more easily identified as successful outcomes in a competitive atmosphere. This approach Tara feels has developed because efficiency is valued above requesting and supporting creative, nuanced, local solutions.

Funding pressures directly affect the direction and organization of the work, and can threaten and challenge the very existence of the programme. A change in funding led Tara's NGO to 'transform' their programme delivery strategy,

Well, we used to uh work thru local NGOs, um when we first started the program and then our funding changed so we ended up transforming the program to do our own training and capacity-building and sending out teams.

In the competitive process of applying for funding, Tara believes her personal demeanour affects the outcome, so she feels she cannot be open with the donors about the difficult situation her organisation finds itself in, and how it is affecting her,

... and after June, if we haven't found it, basically people will start to be cut from the organization so it's hard to, if if you um convey a feeling of desperation about funding then you're very unlikely to get funding I think.

As well as feeling they need to put on a brave face to donors to be more competitive in the funding game, people felt pressure from donors for positive reporting; that they were not free

to honestly report critical reflections as they would not be welcomed by donors, particularly about project strategy,

You know they're not thought through enough and they're not evaluated you know let's face it they don't have anyone really going in there and questioning them. Like [deleted organisation]. You know if you put something negative in a [deleted] report you're probably not going to work for [deleted] again. You know they don't like negative they want you to spin doctor everything you know that's really what they're about cos they're such a bureaucracy they've got all these middle people.

Bill feels the results must be positive as reporting negative outcomes bring the fear of a likelihood of never working for this powerful group again. He talks about the bureaucracy of this group obstructing goals, in this case because of politics between environment workers and the 'middle men' of the group. Whether it is difficulties to do with the middle men of large funding institutions or with consultants, the politics of funding constrain the work of expatriate environmentalists.

The timeframes of donors were felt to be inappropriately short. The successful outcome of projects, in Sarah's view, necessitates long-term involvement and therefore a long-term funding commitment by donors,

I think the challenges that we face at that political level long-term sustainability of the project and that's the NGO world - it's always reliant on funding and I think that it will sink or make this project if donors continue to only fund projects for short periods of time with you know one year projections it's this project is twenty years in the making in [deleted] National Park for instance took a good ten years or fifteen years.

As well as relationships with donors, as discussed above, expatriate environmentalists I spoke with talked about relationships between NGOs.

Funding issues also affect relationships between organisations. The nature of the bidding process for funding pits groups against each other, making a competitive space, where trust and openness are not common. Reaching environmental goals is further complicated by lack of trust between stakeholders, there's competition between NGOs, as Tara reluctantly tells me,

Um I think uh there's that there's a lot of initiatives but it's sometimes difficult to see... it's difficult to get coordination between different groups and... it's difficult to see sometimes the... the real collaboration and cooperation between different stakeholders.

Even though so much activity is going on in the environment sector, Tara is not feeling positive about it, as the competitive atmosphere does not encourage trustful working relationships.

As well as the relationships between NGOs the expatriate environment workers talked about relationships with the local communities they work with. Participants value local colleagues in NGOs, and community based partners who they feel believe in the work and share ideals which they hold in terms of environmental protection,

It's the values and ethics that kind of underlie the work and motivate people, how to develop that. I mean it hopefully if you have good ethics and good you know motivation for the work it will somehow if you're a good leader it should carry over and have some influence on other people but I'm I'm not so sure sometimes.

Tara outlines the motivation for the work that she hopes for and values in local environment workers. She feels part of her role is to exert influence as the leader of the organization and she feels an imperative to nurture these values in her staff. Abby has noticed differences between her own approach and that of her local colleagues to environment work in Cambodia, in that local environment workers may not have what she calls passion for conservation, which is about how environment is constructed and how we understand ourselves in relation to it,

I think they'd be good at any job it just so happened they studied forestry or whatever they studied and they ended up in this job and they're good at it but they don't have this – most of them, they don't have the same sort of passion for you know saving endangered species that most of us westerners working in conservation.

Sarah notes that she believes environment workers are doing the work for the love, as a thankless task in service of the environment, and she does not see this commitment in the same way in Cambodia,

Because the NGOs if they don't feel on top if they don't feel better they don't feel any gratitude and if you're an NGO worker, there is no gratitude in your work to a certain extent I mean you're doing it for the love. Whereas in Khmer society I don't think NGO workers are there for the love well not in not a large proportion anyway.

Expatriate workers feel they are positioned by others as experts with power due to higher educational opportunities and their facility in English or other languages of development work. Tara speaks of the temptation to take up this available power as an expatriate,

It's very easy as an expat to think that you know the answers and you're more educated and you've seen things how they work in other places and that people here don't really know how to deal with things and it's a trap that I think probably I've fallen into quite a bit.

Tara understands the heady effect of this positioning as a 'trap' which she tries not to fall into, as it does not lead to effectiveness. Cambodia's colonial history and post-war absence of the intelligentsia due to their targeting in the Khmer Rouge era strengthens this deference to the skills and knowledge foreigners bring. Bill recalls an instance where the experience he gained from his western background and education was taken up by the people he was working with in developing strategy and approach to the work,

I have an education background so my approach was thinking about the audience more so I, to our fortune, they responded to that and we changed the approach.

The politics of foreign intervention alongside Cambodia's specific history create social power relationships in which it is easy for NGO workers to be seen as 'experts' and local knowledge to be relatively disempowered. As well as this interface of politics and NGO 'expertise', participants were also concerned with the ways in which foreign NGOs could set regional priorities.

Indigenous minorities live in areas with significant natural resources, so they are involved with NGO attempts at environmental protection. Participants felt that the attention of NGOs was narrowly focused on two provinces, to the exclusion of larger groups of indigenous minorities living elsewhere, in areas with valuable resources which are under threat,

All of the people, all of the money that's doing a lot of the money that's going into indigenous people's rights in Cambodia is all funded to [deleted] it's really heavily focused in those two regions to me that's a really negative thing because what you're saying is that there's no other indigenous people in the entire country and that's not true. So for instance, in the area where I work in there's 250,000 people in the region ...we're talking about ... one indigenous culture with an enormous amount of people with no support for indigenous rights in that area at all so they are a lot more what's the word I used... assimilated into Khmer culture but they still recognize themselves as ethnically Khmer cos they are.

Mm and nobody's paying attention because they don't dress funny and they don't speak funny.

Sarah explains here that the funding which goes to supporting the rights of indigenous minorities in Cambodia is focused in the two provinces where hill tribes are located but in fact the largest indigenous minority population is not located in those provinces. She draws attention to the discrimination ethnic minorities face within Cambodia, and the lack of space for cultural diversity which pushes them towards assimilation. Sarah is reflexive about the politics of exclusion working to marginalise the minority group members, and other participants also showed reflexivity about the environment sector, and its limitations in bringing environmental change.

Despite being NGO workers, participants were clearly not reluctant to criticize NGOs for their part in the politics of environmental conservation and preservation. Alongside their criticisms of NGO priorities, they also raised issues related to their colleagues' approaches in some cases.

Participants thus explained the meaning they make of their experiences of relationships with local communities. They further discussed themes about the politics they have encountered in environment work, and how they understand this to be.

Expatriates understood that the politics of environment work is complex and many environment workers are inspired by ideals that don't necessarily fit well with the political and economic realities they are working within. There are various positions available to expatriates

on how to approach their work, and some participants spoke of their view that conservationists are pushing too hard,

... the need to conserve and the need to protect the you have to have a bit of reality check, there's 25% of Cambodia's land mass is under a protected area of some kind, which is too much and um the regional average is like 11 %.

Andrew feels some environment workers hold unrealistic beliefs about how much land can reasonably be protected. He takes the regional average as normative, and assumes the logics of development which accept that degazetted areas can become available for commercial exploitation. The role of environment NGOs, for him, is to help to conserve the most important areas and prevent those from being exploited,

Cos you know the country needs to develop. We're not blindly unaware of that... I think conservation is, it is a buzz word and when you say it there is a kind of radical element kind of springs to mind with people chaining themselves to trees or whatever but I think on the whole here I mean I mean we fight a losing battle every day just to conserve these areas. So I mean ultimately it's going to have to change...— as long as the-the-the kind of thought is behind it is that we will conserve what's worth conserving I don't think many people would have a problem with that.

Distancing himself from radical conservationists, whose protests he finds extreme, Andrew feels his position is reasonable. He thinks it should be acceptable to most people, except perhaps those adopting a more radical position, 'chaining themselves to trees or whatever'. The differences among environmentalists, those involved in conservation, protection and sustainability movements, are indicative of the internal dimension of the politics of environment work. Alongside recognising conflicts within the movement, participants also spoke of ways in which their 'outsider' status affected the politics of their work.

Difficulties in relationships between NGOs and government are acknowledged by participants who expressed that NGOs sometimes find effective collaboration difficult with the government bodies they lobby. Alluding to the party politics of Cambodia, one participant believes that there is no space for constructive environmental change while the current party is in power.

As a volunteer Liz clearly feels her work is political, and that it is either enabled or stifled directly by the country's political situation,

All the time that this present um party is in power nothing will change all we can do at the moment is capacity build everybody so that when things happen, there is a change of party and the country can actually move forward true.

Power to effect environmental change or to achieve any environmental goals is clearly equated by her to a shift in the political landscape which she believes will bring 'space',

Until there's a change of party a change of power in Cambodia there isn't going to be much happening cos there isn't the space for new ideas to be taken on board.

Liz feels the fixed and impermeable agenda she perceives in her contacts with the government, and the ineffectiveness to achieve environmental change she feels in her work, are consequences of a hierarchical system which needs to change,

Although I might have planted a seed of what could happen if NGOs and government were willing to work together he's not in a high enough position to influence that idea to anybody else so.

In Cambodia's environment sector, it is regular practice that NGOs accept government counterparts working in them as part of their Memorandum of Understanding signed with the ministries involved. Sarah and Andrew explained some of the issues arising as a result of these arrangements,

They're all they're all contracted like that. They're all contracted to have government counterparts so, working with them, and paying them subsidies and salaries.

We don't call it a project we call it a conservation group which is partnership- a trio of partners between my organisation and uh it just kind of brings the technical capacity to it and also the ministry of [*deleted*] and also the [*government body deleted*].

The way their work is organized they have left behind the conventional NGO term of 'project' although it seems it really is a project whereby the NGO workers work alongside the two ministries bringing technical expertise. The working relationship with the government is

designed to build capacity, by providing expertise through advisors, and Andrew describes this experience,

Uh but we do have government counterparts from two ministries and it varies sometimes they're great and sometimes it's frustrating but that's the same with any other.

Finding the experience of working with government counterparts variable like any other, he speaks elsewhere of his manager who used to work for the government, who he greatly admires.

Which he just kind of ... no it's essentially Cambodian led Cambodian managed ... I mean, the manager is great uh he's on board.

Participants talked about practices and transactions they called corruption, and how they understand the politics of power in accessing Cambodia's natural resources. Corruption was understood to be endemic in Cambodia, not limited to the environment sector. Reasons given by Sarah for the occurrence of corruption were cultural,

I'm not saying that it doesn't happen in every sector. I don't know. And I'm pretty sure even in human rights it happens. I mean people pay lawyers all the time or people pay judges all the time you know ... it's like ... here it just comes with the culture here and the whole trend in what's acceptable and what's not in terms of corruption.

In a bid to keep the relationship with government bodies and officials open and working, others I spoke with, such as Bill, sought to minimise corruption, terming it 'institutional barriers', or comparing it with their home countries,

You know Ministry of [deleted], some of the staff we work with are notorious [deleted] with other ministries and you know you know there's insidious things that are the government staff how do you really break down those institutional barriers and um maintain a working relationship with the government- real real challenges... The corruption is, corruption in Cambodia is probably better than many other countries. Probably New Zealand and Australia are examples of corruption that's hidden.

Mike does not feel he could work within the government structures, and talked about how he tries to manoeuvre the systems he understands, so as to avoid working with people whose modes of operation he understands to be corrupt,

You look for the best people you can to work with, and I don't, I avoid working with the ministry. I'll work with individuals within the ministry and I'll try to get support from the ministry, ah an example would be for all my projects I have support from the Ministry of [deleted], I know the Minister, [deleted], um but I wouldn't work within the ministry formally because the situation is rigged there.

Government employees are considered by some expatriates to be giving lip-service to environmental protection goals; their actions are interpreted as opposing their rhetoric, while furthering environmental degradation,

Yeah I think I think at the moment up until now it's been a lot of kind of the government saying yes yes yes but action that's been taken is to the contrary as you can see by a lot of things... so, yeah there's a lot of there's a lot of over-exploitation.

Also difficult to deal with was the control government counterparts sometimes seek to exert while working within the NGO. These difficulties combined with the potential complications for funding presented ethical dilemmas for expatriate environmentalists,

And um dealing with the government is also difficult... so our last year's funding was channeled through the government to us so everything we did was scrutinized by the [government body] and uh we also had to accept [deleted] their staff to come and work with us.

Difficulty in working with government officials was sometimes understood as obfuscation so as to hide their activities,

Another problem I had working with [deleted] in all three provinces was I was not allowed to stay overnight ... so um but I think also they just didn't want to work with me and I found this within the provincial offices um and we'd you know we'd worked out a timetable for by the time I got there they'd done it the week before, all their team meetings I attended, in a year and a half I attended only 3 or 4 team meetings...

they – they - there seemed to be this reluctance to work with me and I think it's probably cos they just wanted to do the bare minimum and just so they can tick the box and say they'd done the work whereas if I go with them I'd be encouraging them to improve their work to work harder to take on new ideas and you know they've got other priorities government staff don't earn much money they need to be able to do things outside the office so you know their priorities lie elsewhere.

One participant spoke haltingly about people working for various government ministries fighting over access to natural resources, managing to get official sanction to illegally access them or sell access to them using their work positions,

You've got the fighting with the ministries of who's more powerful and who has the rights over the resources – you often get one ministry selling the rights for mining and others selling the right for agriculture and the ministry that's in charge of protecting the area knows neither of those things and so all of a sudden you get outside interests turning up and you're like well who are these guys? And you've got chaos. Some areas –*[deleted]*- land has been sold three or four or five times over to different parties and the actual owner of the land is what do I do? ... um I think I mean it – have trouble saying but I think they obvious- certain certain people want to extract the most valuable things.

Powerful elites who know how to work the legal system and the informal indigenous networks of patronage use their power to secure their business interests, in this case land for a plantation,

Yeah I was in *[deleted]* um about 3 weeks ago and the forest that had we'd seen a few months before had just been uh completely cleared I mean to the ground, just barren soil. [Int: what sort of a size of area?] I think it was about 3000 hectares maybe? They were just starting to plant the sugar cane.

Abby has experience of the official process of degazetting being twisted for commercial benefit by elites,

I mean they've been degazetting protected areas there's been two they've been degazetting parts of them and even whole areas, in the last couple of years ... to make them into plantations.

When Tara came across practices by colleagues which she recognised as corruption, she felt she had been put into a very difficult position with no easy solution,

You're you're jeopardizing your relationship with the government and jeopardizing your funding it's really tough sometimes that kind of ... and you feel sort of drawn into the vortex of how it all works yeah.

Whether or not she ignores those instances, she is clear that this vortex *is* how it all works. She understands that her response puts the relationship of the NGO with the government at risk, and therefore the funding, the programme, and eventually the environment that she is working to save. Perhaps this is because the funding is channeled through those government bodies and could be stopped, or because the MOU would then be under threat and therefore the very possibility of working in Cambodia at all. A change in funding led to increased scrutiny by the government office they worked with, and this was followed by having to accept government counterparts working in their NGO,

Honesty is just so important to me and um that that sort of issue really I find very difficult to deal with.

This vortex of corruption causes a lot of stress as she feels her personal morals are compromised if she is complicit with these practices and her goals for environmental change are compromised if she isn't.

Expatriates I spoke with talked of the effect they noticed of the hierarchical nature of society on NGO politics and the effectiveness of environment work. Liz felt it is difficult to encourage people who have no power to effect change in a hierarchical system, giving an example of a process she attended where local people were intended to be given a voice and an opportunity to ask questions when boundaries of a protected area were being explained,

Well I had a translator that was paid for so it was an independent person, and he raised he he'd said to me that the communities weren't asking questions. And when I

asked him why it was because they were um scared of offending the provincial governor because they didn't know how to address him, they didn't know how to word the questions so I'd made the suggestion that they could even write down or tell a mediator the question and that that person could ask questions on their behalf and when I put this to the head of the department it was oh no we don't want to cause trouble we can't have too many questions and there was a huge opportunity there. So what if they're controversial questions if they've got serious concerns you need to address those concerns and make the community feel comfortable with the decision that's being made and find ways of stopping those concerns so the community would then be willing to look after this protected area because they're seeing the benefits to them... I think it was the hierarchy problem they didn't know the formal way of approaching the provincial governor.

Even when space is made for questions or communication, power relationships in society weigh in on whether questions can be asked, and how, and by whom.

From the community point of view ... um ... they didn't they didn't seem to have a full understanding of what each zone meant to them ... there was a clarification purpose at the community meeting um and if they don't have those answers then they're gonna get themselves into trouble just through misunderstanding.

Liz notices the effect of the hierarchy and power relationships in this workshop, feeling dismayed as she felt the local people didn't really understand the content of the workshop, but wouldn't ask questions, and she could foresee them unknowingly falling foul of the authorities.

Other expatriates I spoke with felt hierarchy could be used, rather than just seen as a barrier to environmental protection. The possibility for positive influence with powerful elites was discussed by participants, as was the importance of their support for the success of NGO environment work. Participants outlined the importance of relationships, networks and knowing people of influence in order for efforts towards environmental change to be successful,

So I've worked with him on and off for 8 years or something. That means we have a different sort of relationship.

In some cases fulfilment of promises of support from these elites are crucial if the project is to be successful at all,

He would really like to demonstrate that [*community management*] can impact on rural livelihoods. He's said that numerous times and he would like to see as much of the revenue as possible going back to the communities, I think, so there seemed to be very strong commitment there, also the project has the endorsement of um of [senior government officials] in a government decision document that says the project should maximize benefits to local communities so yeah we're we're hoping that they'll stand by those commitments.

Bill relies heavily on his networks and connections with powerful players in Cambodian society and in official positions, relationships built through previous work contact,

Like even today it really benefits me a lot cos I actually know people in the different ministries. So for environment work in Cambodia that's pretty important.

Cambodia, this is networking hub everybody knows somebody if you don't know somebody you're incredibly poor.

When visioning innovative strategies of environmental protection, seeking and courting the personal support and endorsement of powerful elites in various sectors of society, not just the NGO world, is essential. Sarah outlines the strategy for ensuring the protection of an important area in Cambodia,

So what we've come up with is a strategy on how we can protect it. It's gonna involve a lot of players and it's gonna involve them at a very high senior level so we're gonna need a lot of political will and buy-in from the government. To get that will we're gonna need a lot of backing from very high hidden also politically connected people so that's your organisations like [*deleted*] it's like the ambassador getting on this project it's it might go all the way up into you know back into [*organisation deleted*] it might have to push it at that level. To get hard-hitting conservation organisations like [*deleted*] for instance.

It is clear from Sarah's explanation of strategy that the support of elites is considered by expatriate environmentalists to be essential for success, and they are giving resources to developing these relationships. Well connected elites sometimes use their own resources in strategies of direct intervention to effect environmental change and protection, thereby they are able to act outside of perhaps restrictive conventions or laws,

She gets she gets money to influence the government and have another military in [deleted]- different model but you couldn't really do that in many places as well and she just went in there and played their game.

Bill recounted this alternative strategy where one woman, circuits both the NGO systems and local authority structures, but with their blessing.

The most important decisions about Cambodia's environment are believed by participants to ultimately be made by a very small group of people; powerful elites who cannot be accessed by NGOs workers,

I think most of the problems stem from the real decisions being made by a handful of people in Cambodia and and it's you can pretty much never get into that room to be there when they make that decision.

Just its just all closed doors – I mean as an NGO you never you never have that window to those decision-makers.

It was felt, by participants, that NGOs are irrelevant to these powerful leaders, and that having any influence or even relationship with them is impossible,

But they're not going to listen to NGOs anyway they're never gonna come I mean how on earth would you even access these groups?

Expatriate environmentalists are advocating and advising in a sense blindly, hoping that their efforts will have some impact in the way development is happening, to ensure environmental protection and sustainable use of resources. Andrew implies that a change is occurring as over time there is a generational change of leaders, and he feels that his work is helping this change to occur, however the indigenous networks of respect given to wealth and power remain,

And ... so yeah I mean... you... if the ... accountability is brought and locals and middle class can be effective to say no we don't want that anymore then yeah it's great. It's just everyone has this immediate deference to a Lexus.

The inaccessible leaders are isolated, and older, but gradually they are retiring. The assumption is that the younger generation of leaders will be more open to NGO influence. When the NGO sector does give input to decisions, there is a sense in which they feel absolutely disregarded about critical environment issues which are central for them and for which they have been working to provide technical benefit. In some cases they have put energy and resources into decisions but in the end participants such as Liz feel that even when they are in an advisory capacity this contribution is disregarded,

We've have meetings with the *[deleted]* department and the heads of the *[deleted]* department but again they're not the decision makers they just the people that collate the information review the *[deleted]*'s and make recommendations to the higher level it's the higher level that still make the decision ... we do make recommendations we don't see evidence of any of our recommendations being taken on board.

Participants felt these significant decisions are made in secretive processes where stakeholders are excluded, and any consultative process is a somewhat cynical nod to how it might have been conducted,

No, they're definitely not doing any pre-planning public or stakeholder participation it is very much behind closed doors the decision making process and when there is public participation it's very much ... getting out information no ... two way discussion so public participation is very very limited in Cambodia so you're not going to get grassroots level information.

Grassroots information is discounted; not included but silenced, as the interests of the few are made more and more secure in the processes of environmental decision making which purport to secure environmental protection but effectively are doing something else.

Participants pointed out the importance of reaching a group they named the emerging middle class, yet they feel it is difficult to know how to reach them with the message of a threatened but valuable environment in Cambodia,

How can we get the message across? ... I think the I think --- uh uh working with the communities has in some respects been the easiest part cos they see the benefits it's very simple they actually get that erm engaging the middle classes is difficult er for us cos we're not kind of experienced in that its just – and because it's so rapidly evolving I don't think anybody is.

Social change in Cambodia because of exposure to global capitalism is rapid and fluid and the 'new rich' are not perceived by Andrew to be from 'the communities' where people are intimately acquainted with the environmental threats in Cambodia. These are already affecting their lives.

The politics of resistance to environmental crime in Cambodia means people understand that the fear of violence or some other terrifying end is close always if resistance is pursued. Local activists have to make choices in a context which includes stories of what happens to those who have resisted the powerful. However, those who are victimized by land grabbers have little available recourse, in Andrew's experience,

Often they're poor or indigenous they're in no place to stand up ... I mean a lot of indigenous communities they don't believe like the [*indigenous minority*] in [*province*] they don't believe you know ownership of land so they've never had tenure in the first place so the government would argue that it's state land anyway so what are they doing on it? So, it's a big problem.

Moved like elements in a game where they don't know the rules, manoeuvred until they desist, some people affected by environment crimes such as land-grabbing still find the courage or sense of destiny to engage in the very dangerous available courses of indigenous resistance. As Nina recounts, if they lose their land they feel they have lost everything anyway,

Some of the most amazing people are the villagers, the community members who become active and take massive risks every day to themselves and their families to try

and fight every day for something that they believe in ... death, viol- arrest, violence, their families being threatened, losing their house, being accused of- being having criminal charges put on them these have all happened to people so they- they're very real risks ... I think most often people make that choice because they don't really have any other choice it's either that or lose everything other people make that choice because they mistakenly think that they're going to somehow be protected by the NGOs or the UN or something um other people want to make that choice but cannot or aren't able to because they're afraid and their families don't support them or something ... we can leave and we can't imagine what it's like not being able to leave and we can't imagine what it's like knowing that- having our cousins threatened having our you know distant relative or our sister-in-law's cousin who happened to have a job as a commune chief being told that he won't get promoted you know the the impacts can be so so out of beyond your control.

I mean anyone who's got a- who's fairly high profile, like even the community activists who've become fairly high profile they have got a level of protection now and they've become sort of untouchable however they can still be killed... I mean, the only measure of protection is that their names are so well known now by the UN and by the NGOs and by the press that they would you know it would be if something happened to them ... it would be news, which doesn't stop them being ... which doesn't you know stop them being killed though. I mean and whether or not they really want to be given asylum somewhere else is also you know it's a massive choice to make.

The silencing of local activists is underlined by an absence of reporting by NGOs of the silencing of environmental resistance, resulting in a dangerous space activists occupy which Sarah told me about,

In a bad circumstance the community member will pick one leader and because the NGOs turn their back that one leader if they're advocating very strongly for something, say for instance um against illegal logging activities that one leader gets identified he will get the you know tall poppy syndrome either chopped down or coerced one or the other because the NGOs not looking they can do whatever they want, so no one's monitoring no one's recording what's happening.

Andrew and Nina talked about the despair of people who are victims of environment crimes. There is little available in the way of recourse for them, as they are powerless in the face of such people,

So I mean you talk about what mechanism do they have for resisting these things - I think they're very very ill-equipped because they feel hopeless.

[int: how are people responding to this?] With anger, with frustration with despair um some communities are just then saying ok well yeah give me 500 dollars. I'll sell my land now cos at least I'll get the cash some people are fighting it some people are struggling on a day to day basis; some people are going out and clearing more land and cutting down more trees cos they've gotta they know that there's a race to the bottom in terms of getting as much as you can. getting hard cash um for this, some people are becoming a part of it, you know, perpetuating it becoming corrupt local officials themselves or whatever and others are yeah trying to fight against it and generating support from NGOs. There's a whole load of different responses.

Environmental resistance is not only dangerous for community activists, but for local NGO workers too. Participants explained they feel a need to be careful so as not to endanger their colleagues. Andrew feels that as an international environment NGO worker he is responsible for putting the lives of his staff 'on the line',

These rangers uh basically we're putting their lives on the line. They're locals and they're protecting their local area but yet other locals maybe their friends their family their relatives are the ones erm and they're faced with a situation where they have to arrest people... I mean there's a lot of problems I mean in the past ten years I can't remember how many but rangers have been shot and killed and uh it's just it's an issue now for our staff we're we're at some point we may have to withdraw cos it's just going to become unsafe because we're ...we're being too much of a problem.

Rangers who work for environmental NGOs are in immediate danger from violence as they work in environmental protection. In some instances, participants knew of land rights abuses, and the violent threats which often accompany them, directly affecting their colleagues,

I mean one of our team was forcibly ah thrown off two thirds of his land you know. Told if he was to talk to anybody then he'd be killed. so, it's pretty – faced with threats like that I mean what – people are often too scared to even say anything about it ... that's one instance that's close to me but I mean it's I would not I don't consider it a rare occurrence.

Awareness of acts of aggression and threats by powerful elites including outright threats to safety to participants or to local staff. Even if expatriates know that threats to themselves would be rare, the thought of endangering local staff with whom they work closely and have ongoing relationships, is enough to curb open advocacy of a style they may be used to. This all undergirds their actions and strategic choices.

Participants spoke of the complexities of working with the government. Andrew feels that although the goals of environment NGOs and of government bodies may not be completely aligned government officials are aware of the need to protect.

It's very young and its keen to grow, so ak ak I think they uh are aware ... the need to conserve and the need to protect.

The sympathetic stance is one which enables expatriates to speak and act safely in what they experience as an aggressive climate. Framing the government as 'young' and 'eager to grow', explains the complex situation where lack of effective prevention of environmental degradation and exploitation of resources, is seen as a lack of capacity, rather than as environmental crime.

In taking a sympathetic approach to government, environment workers spoke of a particular strategy they used in their work: showing how conservation and sustainable use of natural resources will be beneficial to the government, and to structure projects in such a way that this can happen,

So, yeah there's a lot of there's a lot of over-exploitation. But I mean the government recognizes it and I mean as long as it can be shown to be financially beneficial to keep resources and manage them sustainably I think it's on a winner ah it's just how we do that effectively.

That is, creating and following laws and policies, and supporting ventures which are in line with sustainable use of resources and conservation can be financially beneficial to the Royal Government of Cambodia. Conservation workers are working to find an effective way to convince the government to protect Cambodia's unique biodiversity and other natural resources. Andrew's words show that the key issue, though, is 'it's just how we do that effectively'. His 'ah' before that phrase signals that this is a major point, it all sounds so easy but the reality of effective advocacy is people need to be convinced. The idea of using financial benefit as incentive or motive for sustainability alludes to the links of government agents with an indigenous economy in which financial benefit is crucial to decision making. Thus NGOs try to reconstitute Cambodia's resources as capital in a bid to conserve them effectively.

Even with an openly sympathetic stance towards the complexities faced by Cambodia's government, participants also reported negative views of government actions or agencies. They recounted experiences where they felt the people they were working with, in government bodies, were obfuscating environmental goals and were working towards other goals. Expatriate workers in environment NGOs also expressed frustration about some negative experiences when working with government structures. Liz talked of the sense she has that the government has a fixed agenda, and of her perception that there is not an open relationship although the NGO is doing its work of advocacy. She does not feel that their efforts have been welcomed,

As an advocacy organisation we are working at a national level and trying to promote the best practice in the Cambodian context um but the government are so fixed with their agenda that they're not willing to take on board comments or even advice or anything.

Sarah also mentioned the obfuscation of a recently introduced environmental impact assessment process which involves a new government department. She recounted one instance she knew of where government gave a report to two parties in languages they don't speak. She interpreted this as an attempt to confuse a process which may have eventually obstructed their goal to make a hydropower project,

The [organisation] itself is extremely inadequate mind you, they gave them all the Khmer version so they couldn't read it. Um and then they gave all of the provincial governors the English version so they couldn't read it.

As she outlines, the process of making an environmental impact assessment was followed, as is required by law, but in this cynical gesture a disregard for sustainable development is made visible. These kinds of incidents undermined participants' trust in the relationships between government and NGOs.

NGO strategies and funding politics did not always make it easier to build open trusting relationships between government and NGOs. Indeed some of the strategies that are used to focus attention on particular areas mean that other larger areas of the country are effectively removed from view, thereby opened to commercial exploitation. In this way the NGO strategy is understood to work in favour of those who promote commercial exploitation,

But no one you know all the money funnels into one strategic area and I think it's strategic from the government's perspective as well. so basically you focus there and you do whatever you want back here and no-one's looking and that's what's happening I think.

Sarah alludes here to the policing role of NGOs, that even as they try to be strategic in their work efforts, concentrating on certain areas where 'money funnels', this leaves other areas neglected. Cambodia's natural resources are then available to be appropriated without attracting attention of advocates.

Given their experiences of the politics of environment work, it was not surprising to find that the focus of participants talk about supporting government environmental initiatives concerned the protection and defence of the environment.

In the face of environmental political realities, some expatriate environmentalists, particularly those who have lived in Cambodia for several years or more, were actively looking for nonconfrontational ways to influence government counterparts towards goals of environmental protection. After more than ten years in Cambodia Tara reflects on advocacy approaches she has found to be successful and those which in her experience are not. Now

she looks to influence using advocacy strategies which are culturally acceptable and take into account local sensibilities,

Yeah embarrassment and causing people to lose face just makes them very angry and defensive and ... it's good to think about other creative ways of solving problems and I think uh different people react to different strategies so yeah it's difficult to predict what will work in what situation with what person. You know whether it's financial benefit that would appeal or reputation or yeah to be a leader and to be to have more power like have to try to find out what appeals to people and what they desire that yeah for me that's difficult figuring out the diplomatic conversations and the way of convincing and persuading people who aren't necessarily on board, I find that very challenging.

Here the emphasis is on doing what is required to make a successful outcome likely, in this case taking into account the impact of people losing face; rather than pointing the finger or blaming or confronting. Tara is aware that advocacy in a western sense isn't going to work and she is aiming to use personal influence in order to persuade the elites she is involved with by offering them whatever would appeal.

Advocacy in the traditional sense is avoided by larger NGOs in Cambodia, which sets them apart from smaller local NGOs. Nina explained reasons for this are not just because of cultural understandings around face or differences in acceptable ways to influence people or achieve goals. These groups are co-opted as working for the government in ways that will not jeopardize their relationship,

The biggies – conservation groups – they work very much in area management and conservation you know service provision to the government so, they don't get involved in anything that's remotely could be termed as advocacy um and they don't they don't work they work very independently you know [*deleted*] have their area, [*deleted*] have their area, it's quite separate um they don't seem to be – well some of them work quite well with local groups but in general there's not much kind of cross- there's not much integration with the local NGOs who are working with cos local NGOs working in

environmental issues are working on advocacy and these larger groups don't want are not able to do that ...because of their relationship with the government.

This agreement not to criticize the host government is not linked to funding, but to the invitation to work take part in the work; the permission to operate in Cambodia. Here, advocacy is made visible as an unsafe activity, despite Cambodia's status as a democracy. Advocacy is cited by Nina as a reason why local groups and international conservation NGOs don't foster close relationships. She delineates clearly between the work of the large international NGOs doing what she calls 'service provision' to the government and the advocacy efforts of local NGOs. Nina is also critical of the large NGOs for failing to work well with local NGOs and when she notes that they fail to work with local groups she clearly feels this is because the local groups are working on advocacy.

The larger international environment NGOs usually sign Memoranda of Understanding with the Royal Government of Cambodia in which they agree not to criticize the government, as one of the conditions of having permission to operate here. Sarah clearly finds that this places those groups as collaborators with the government in the politics of environment in Cambodia, which then renders them ineffective in achieving their goals of environmental protection,

Conservation organisations are really putty in the government's hands you know... all conservation organisations in Cambodia sign contracts or waivers to actually not advocate... If you can't say to the government, well this is actually really poorly developed, the EIA is insufficient, the environmental management plan is not sound, ... um... you're talking about ... I mean to the extent where I don't even know if they can say to the government this is an environmental catastrophe waiting to happen I mean to what extent can they say that to the government? Or, alternatively to what extent are they willing to, regardless?

After three years working here Sarah also feels strongly that conservation organizations are used by the government given that they agree not to advocate as part of their arrangement which allows them to work here. She expresses that she is unsure to what extent they can be critical given their agreement not to advocate, and to what extent they would be willing to risk this relationship, even if there was an environmental catastrophe looming. These

organisations, and their staff, are then in a position to choose between their loyalty to their environmental ideals or to the government.

Such a stark choice is less clearly drawn by Andrew who believes that government departments are 'doing the best [*they*] can' in a climate where he senses there is 'a lot of pressure between departments'.

... So I mean they're taking steps now to cut back some of those areas so I think I think the strategy we're going to use in the future is you know fight the right battles and don't I mean we-we can't save every last bit but as long as we can – I think the role of a project like the one I'm working on is to highlight the really important areas and strive to keep those as best as we can and, and yeah we'll just have to concede other areas cos you know the country needs to develop we're not blindly unaware of that.

He uses language to soften or explain the perception that the government is underperforming in their role of environmental protection. Although he expresses hopefulness he has trouble stating definitively that they are aware of the urgent need for conservation and protection ('ack ack I think they are uh aware').

Abby was asked whether it is easy to work with the government, and she explained how her organisation has aimed to build a positive relationship from the beginning of their work in Cambodia,

The NGO I work with has a very good relationship and they specifically talked about that relationship when they started here ten years ago so yes I mean it's it's officially an [*government body deleted*] site and we're just there to advise, pay the bills!

This organization has worked intentionally to build a good relationship with the government bodies they work with, and there is a sense that the money is also important, even key to the success of the relationship. Abby comments that paying the bills and advising is all they are there for; this carefully crafted relationship is very much about money.

As well as politics of the environment as discussed above, participants in the current study expressed their understanding of how legal processes are used both in environmental protection and exploitation.

Participants spoke about using the law in support of their environment work. Legal processes are used to secure tenure of local people over natural resources. Tara outlines the logic of the approach of her NGO to conservation,

... involved assisting rural communities that live near [*natural resource*] areas to um to get the official legal tenure and management rights to [*those*] areas near their village so they can uh manage them sustainably and um protect them for conservation benefits for future generations uum.. and... also ... extract uh various[*things from the resource*] to support their their livelihoods. And um in order to support them in that process uh we work with the [*government body with jurisdiction over the resource*].

The strategy of Tara's NGO is to assist communities to get legal tenure which ensures the rights to be able to sustainably use their local natural resources to support their livelihoods, so they can benefit from the resource without destroying it. The NGO role is to support and assist them in this process, and to do this they work with the government body which has jurisdiction over that resource.

Legal tenure and management rights may be secured, however having the piece of paper is certainly no guarantee, and achieving that much is a very long and difficult process with which communities need a lot of assistance. The hope of the law as protection is a tenuous, fragile one because ongoing problems with the judicial system and law enforcement. Tara explains which regulatory frameworks give the community the right to manage their forest,

And uh we try to follow the existing laws that uh recognize communities' rights to manage forests, so that's uh the Forestry Law, the Community Forestry Sub-Decree and the Community Forestry Guidelines... slowly I think you can see some success if the community is mobilized and understands.

Abby talked about her view of the importance of law enforcement as a deterrent to environment crime,

What has become more clear to me is actually – and this is just my opinion but actually the most important thing is to have proper protection, proper law enforcement I mean you need to do all that community stuff as well but if you don't have proper law

enforcement as well it's not going to work you know um because ... um if you don't have proper law enforcement then you basically just get open access a free access situation there's no reason for communities or anyone else not to do activities that are detrimental to ... I mean if you go and make a for example a land use plan with a community living inside a protected area. and then some guy from Phnom Penh comes up and like you know clears a couple hundred hectares makes a rubber plantation and nobody does anything about it then why in the hell are the community gonna stick to their little land use plan when nobody else is paying any attention to the rules you know?

Her views come from her experience in an isolated protected area, where enforcement has been successful in preventing exploitation, compared to the area nearby which has been degraded and exploited because nobody was there to stop that happening,

I mean erm within the site where I work because we do we have active law enforcement there so there isn't much migration into the site. we – there's another site that is a wildlife sanctuary beside us that has no - there's no NGOs working there and it has no active um protection and ... I mean now it's full of people and there isn't any wildlife left in it... so ... yeah it's a big problem.

Participants spoke about the law being used by powerful elites in order to secure access to Cambodia's natural resources with the force of the law behind their efforts, because as Nina tells,

Um, and they are the ones who understand the law they're using the law they're twisting the legal framework to support their own interests and so the communities who've a been left on their own for a long time and not got secure tenure of this and never expected to lose tenure are suddenly finding that they've got ... everything's been taken away from them and they don't understand the rules and they don't understand the game and the law's being misused [int: and the law's never been available to them as a mechanism really] yes. And even if they do understand it and even if they are trying to access it and apply it, it's not it's being manipulated to support those with power through the legal system.

As Cambodia's broad development continues apace, local people are summarily disenfranchised from their land or the resources they have always used and lived with, by people 'who understand the law' and who are 'twisting the legal framework to support their own interests'. Even if those people understand their legal rights, there is very little they can do in the face of the aggressive moves of these people to take control and ownership of their resources.

Environment work is enforcing Cambodian law, and participants felt they were following the government with respect to this aspect of their work; enabling the government in this case rather than advising or advocating to them,

Well we've all of our work is enforced in the law of the Ministry of Environment so we don't – the organisation doesn't say what policies we enforce we enforce the Cambodian law ... but I mean it's like I said before, we're helping in the enforcement of Cambodian laws yeah and that that's the best way to achieve it I don't see it as we're coming in for our own ends and means.

This point is also a further justification participants have for their work, and some expatriates feel law enforcement is a key strategy in environmental protection,

And now mostly what I think is about law enforcement. about how we can protect these animals. not actually about the animals at all- cos you don't have time doing that to do that cos you're too busy trying to make sure they're still there you know.

As well as outlining what they thought about the use of the law in environment in Cambodia by various actors to various ends, participants talked also about their work as being about negotiation, facilitation, and ultimately social change.

Sarah explained the thinking behind the strategies used to try to induce social change in the hope of effecting changes in social politics which will enable environmental protection in Cambodia,

At a grassroots level with communities, we're- we try to implement a flat level structure right? So the NGO's also part of the community and the community's part of the NGO and government officials are no bigger or less than you are so we try to

implement very flatly but it's culturally ingrained this hierarchy. it's really challenging ... this is what's really disturbing to me about that whole – cos to me it is a cultural thing so you have, you have ... you have NGOs who are coming in who are trying to be flat, and then you have communities who are looking for leadership but when the communities look to the NGO we're always encouraging the NGO to say, okay give them advice but then tell them to look and reflect within themselves, ok? but what generally happens is the NGOs find that too difficult because it's not- you know they don't see that model anywhere so they often always will revert to that community NGO on top top-down approach I so I haven't resolved that and so.

The aim is to implement a flat structure, in overtly expressed opposition to the existing cultural politics of power, which are identified as central to environmental issues. Sarah aims to get everybody to the table as equals, in a bid to change the power dynamics of how people relate. They are using the environment as a platform to shift the political relationships and to empower local people more. Sarah is not unrealistic about the difficulties of these changes taking hold but she finds it disturbing, especially that NGOs are not able to enact these ideas effectively but either 'turn their back' if the communities become empowered, or enforce the cultural norms.

Expatriate environment workers talked about their involvement in facilitating communication between different government bodies, and between government and communities to somehow protect communities in processes where they are not able to participate thereby hoping to reduce exploitation, by inference.

Yeah and our role was when I was with [*previous NGO*] was kind of be a steward of the process because community really didn't have enough understanding to um to ask some of those questions so we were.

So and a lot of the project is trying opening channels for those two ministries to communicate where they never did before and helping to ensure that Cambodian [*species name deleted*] are managed in the correct way– or the best way possible to ensure that they're there for the longterm.

Politics of environment in Cambodia was understood by participants to be a central theme in their work, woven through all aspects of relationships with communities, donors, collegial organisations and local authorities. Ultimately participants understand their work to be a project of social change.

Chapter 6: On Being an Expatriate Environmentalist

Expatriates spoke of their intense journey as they have sought to resolve very different understandings and experiences which they described as provoking. I asked these environmentalists to reflect on the strategies they employ to be successful in their work. They also spoke of other aspects of their expatriate experience, such as stress, meaningfulness and pleasure, and opportunities Cambodia's particular circumstances have afforded them. Development workers have come into a space created by the devastation of war, genocide and upheaval, which has altered the normal politics of exclusion and inclusion. They not only found a creative space for their work but also for their own personal growth, and careers.

Due to the isolation of the most recent war and regimes, the development project was late to come to Cambodia. Like her natural resources which remained invisible to large-scale exploration and exploitation of the market until recently, the very country was only recently exposed to global forces and the development industry. After the Paris Peace accords in 1992 and with the United Nations Transitional Authority peacekeeping operation in Cambodia, a plethora of NGOs and people came to reconstruct the country, according to the logics and values of the western development project. Cambodia was suddenly an open country in terms of availability to NGO work and influence.

This makes for an unusual situation where most expatriates have not been here very long, and they talked to me about Cambodia as a place where they have been able to gain experience and opportunities.

Expatriate environment sector workers told me their time in Cambodia gave them exposure to opportunities for diverse and new work experiences, in networks which included government, private sector and NGOs. All of the people I interviewed spoke of Cambodia as a place which afforded opportunities due to the small number of competitors for jobs, and the need for educated people with the necessary skills to negotiate NGO and development systems. Most came originally as volunteers, and were soon offered opportunities to move into further work.

Participants reported that these experiences usually enabled them to easily move into more senior positions due to the local knowledge they had gained, and also due to the politics of NGO work here, where personal relationships are important. Those who have been in

Cambodia longer than ten years came at a time when there were few expatriates in the environment sector, and few NGOs. Tara talked of the opportunities she has had in Cambodia for work experience and for promotion,

Um coming here 11 years ago I didn't have experience in management, I didn't have experience in um really in setting up environmental projects myself so, I think cos at that time there weren't that many people that wanted to work in Cambodia it was a very small group of NGOs here in in environment, so it sort of opened a lot of doors for me and gave me lots of opportunity to to learn and to really expand my own um my own kind of opportunities for for work yeah.

Tara appreciates Cambodia as a stimulating environment in which she is able to work creatively.

Andrew also talked about exposure to networks and opportunities for diverse and new work experiences he has enjoyed since coming to work in Cambodia, in a variety of sectors,

It's been good but a lot of experience I've got on the positive side like working with media, working with private business, working with government, working with other organisations.

Andrew feels the opportunities for a broad range of new experiences has advantaged him in his career. Tara said that there is something distinctive about Cambodia which makes it unique in the region, compared to neighbouring countries. Postcoloniality, different forms of regime espousing communist ideology, Cambodia's royal family and a political context which included the American war in Vietnam, are particular to this country. Many of these factors are shared with Laos and Vietnam, and to a lesser extent Thailand, the Khmer rouge era is unique to Cambodia. The sudden openness of Cambodia in the 1990s, combined with these particular factors, has allowed creativity in her work which Tara senses would somehow not be available nearby,

And I think probably compared to other countries in the region here, Cambodia's relatively more open, there's there's a lot of NGOs here, it's a stimulating environment

to work in there's always new ideas coming up and it allows me to be more creative I think to pilot new ideas.

Through networking it is possible to be exposed to opportunities for work that may not have eventuated elsewhere, due to the dynamics of the fewer competitors for jobs, the small expatriate community, and the power of being an educated westerner who can negotiate and perform the requirements of NGOs.

Bill talked about the importance of informal networks in Cambodia for expatriates, and opportunities which come from those to seamlessly slip into work,

And met somebody from [NGO] and they offered me a job and I went yeah alright.

Participants spoke of gaining opportunities to do things they were not already qualified for, and space and freedom to learn while in the job in the environment sector in Cambodia. They spoke about being aware these opportunities come because of networks and relationships,

Yeah so I wasn't actually a biodiversity specialist but it was an amazing opportunity... so then I was a biodiversity specialist for a couple of years. Which is what happens in Cambodia. You're if you show an interest and you're in the right place at the right time yeah you just get taken to different things.

Um I originally came to Cambodia as a volunteer, and um that ambition – well that project fell through, purely through lack of funding and then I sort of just fell into work.

Career opportunities and networks were available to participants in ways that enabled them to develop their skills, exercise their creativity, and become embedded in relationships that supported them in their environmental advocacy.

Opportunities that participants talked about were not limited to employment but also included personal growth, learning the technical skills needed to negotiate NGO systems, and feeling they have grown while in the job,

I mean in the beginning I think I didn't have so much patience and I didn't have much experience as a manager in general. so.. I mean I've been here eleven years so I've had time to work on that and I think this I've learned a lot from experience of other people

and other the way things are done in other organizations where you can sort of observe and pick the things that you think think are useful. I mean how to do workplans and how to develop strategic plans how to um manage things efficiently, and how to encourage participation within office and uh within the local area.

As well as learning necessary skills while on the job, participants had become more aware of their privilege and the power they have as westerners, which they felt also brought more opportunities than would have come to them at home,

Um... I mean you're extremely privileged as a westerner here and you're given a lot more opportunities. I would have had, I wouldn't have had so many opportunities certainly to work here as I have done if I was working in [*home country*] um you're in a very powerful position if you're an educated westerner, speaking English and uh you're allowed in to participate enjoying networking watching other professionals which you wouldn't ever have access to so that's been extremely interesting.

Nina believes that power which she has gained from education and networking opportunities, somehow work together to allow her 'in' to gain exposure and experience that advantaged her in her career in a unique way. She could not imagine this would have occurred had she been doing work in this field in her home country. The privileges that come with the power of being a westerner in Cambodia were more extensive than just the opportunity to earn a living doing work that is personally meaningful.

However, despite the opportunities outlined above which they felt had come from working on environmental projects in Cambodia, participants reported stress as a central theme to all of their experience.

Expatriate environmentalists frequently talked about stress they have experienced while living and working in Cambodia, attributing it to various and intertwined factors about their work, and life in the country. Some of these issues are raised in previous chapters in connection with the relevant themes. Expatriates expressed a need to feel effective in their work, and some reported experiencing stress due to frustration when they did not sense they were making progress in influencing environmental change,

Like sometimes just difficult to understand why it's always so difficult to do things that seem to be the logical right thing to do and it shouldn't be meeting that much resistance sometimes it's it's stressful to be in that situation and uh exhausting in a way, but it's also feels worthwhile as well I guess, you get to meet with local people and see the needs and what the potential is.

Other participants, who are located rurally for their work sometimes for long periods of time, spoke of experiencing stress which they attributed to the physical demands of work in the provinces and the associated long periods of isolation. Because of the location of protected areas they work in, and the length of time it takes to travel on bad roads to get there, they are there for weeks at a time, returning to Phnom Penh only every few months,

Well usually we'll a week or ten days um but then I mean even when we're back at our base camp it's kind of the same there there's not really anything to do and we are really very isolated erm so it can be difficult yeah.

Abby is reflexive about the effect on her of this isolation, where she is the only woman and expatriate in the forest with a small team of local colleagues for up to 70 percent of the time. On occasion when out in the forest they meet armed people trafficking endangered species, or people involved in questionable land transactions. The work involves walking many kilometers every day, and camping with minimal equipment in extremely isolated areas. Isolation and danger contribute to the stresses she experiences.

In relation to the way participants believe these stresses have affected their health, they also spoke of the risk of burnout as a coping strategy, and the stories of people they know who have burned out. Abby's strategies to deal with stress and avoid burnout include,

But see you've gotta try and keep that balance where your head's in a good space and it's great. You gotta be careful that you don't go forest-crazy.

Putting energy into strategies for preserving her mental health, she deliberately engages in what she terms keeping 'that balance', using these strategies to avoid another space in her head which she calls 'forest-crazy'. Having been here longer than 5 years Abby is aware the job is very stressful and that people tend to burn out,

Erm ... so ... yeah but then the other thing is that what tends to happen is that people get after 5 or 6 years people just sort of burn out so ... because I mean it's pretty stressful job.

As a volunteer for more than two years, Liz has felt stressed about how her health has been impacted by the available choices due to coming as a volunteer. She linked her low income with impacts on her health and safety,

Now I'm in Phnom Penh. So to move into Phnom Penh I've just had various health issues which I didn't have in [town] just like rolling almost one into another, um I've had two bag snatchings within the last 6 months so I'm not feeling as secure as I used to feel in Phnom Penh. I'm reluctant to go out in the evenings unless I can go with a friend so I've got to the stage now where maybe if I'd got a - like stopped being a volunteer and got a paid job I could use tuktuks in the evening make myself feel more secure ... um ... and possibly have more money for a more healthy diet (laughs).

Liz thought moving back to the capital city would reduce her stress, helping her feel more comfortable; but she has not been well, and has been robbed twice; and these episodes have left her feeling out of control and stressed. She hopes making changes to her work situation will ease the financial constraints, and the effect she feels this has on her quality of life.

This series of events and the way they are woven together show both how expatriates can feel a loss of control which they find stressful, and how they attempt to feel in control by changing aspects of their situation.

Working in a different culture is also stressful as people encounter and bring differing logics of behaviour and expected work values and norms that may not be shared by their Cambodian co-workers. Participants try to resolve what they understood as a clash of worldviews, and of understandings of environment work and how the environment is constructed, what appropriate response could look like, and possibilities within the work context,

I got to the point where I need to think about myself. Also the Cambodian work culture, I think I'm starting to lose my patience with it at the moment. That might help so I'm actually got to the point now where I'm thinking of leaving.

Liz is at a critical point where she feels driven to make a change. Coping with what she calls the 'Cambodian work culture' in a local NGO has been very stressful and provoking for her, to the point where she feels her effectiveness has been limited.

So I'm wondering whether I'll change to an international NGO where there's more of a western influence um ... so that might fit my work ethic more closely whether that might be better for me as well so I'm in that limbo stage at the moment. Do I need to leave Cambodia?

As well as difficulties due to cultural differences at work, stress also was reported to be due to gaining awareness of the politics of environment work in Cambodia. Most participants had developed an awareness of the need to be cautious in talking about their work,

Yeah you I mean ... one definitely needs to be careful what you say to people... but no I've never felt endangered – yet-... yeah tact and there's cultural aspect to it as well the right way to do things the wrong way to do things.

Andrew knows there is a possibility of physical threats to local staff and partners as a result of his work. While he says he himself doesn't feel directly threatened, he is still aware of the political realities of environment work in Cambodia. Although not feeling threatened yet, Andrew understands that the nature of the work is sensitive and therefore there is the need to be careful. Showing his understanding of the local nature of the work, and that 'environment' is located in a place and a time, with people, Andrew feels there is a right and a wrong way to do things. He believes there is a Cambodian cultural 'way', which is definite and prescribed. It is easy to forget though, that Cambodia includes the many minority indigenous groups who are located often remotely, and not just Khmer culture.

In addition to feeling stressed about the possibility of harm to local colleagues, participants in the current study reported feeling stressed about difficulties in their relationships with local staff,

This is another problem I'm finding is that my colleagues aren't ... letting me know exactly what's happening in their work so I'm not always able to advise for them.

Liz has felt that her colleagues are limiting her effectiveness by not providing her with information, which then prevents her from being able to perform her role as advisor. Stress was also reported by participants to be due to the conflict they felt between perception of corrupt practice with values and beliefs held about corruption,

But if you don't if you don't [*go along with some things*] you're you're jeopardizing your relationship with the government and jeopardizing your funding it's really tough sometimes that kind of- yeah, and for me, I you know honesty is just so important to me and um that that sort of issue really I find very difficult to deal with.

This participant perceives there is an implied but real threat to the very existence of her work and the work of the NGO if she does not comply with demands of government counterparts who the NGO have recently been required to host. She feels drawn into what is commonly accepted to be the endemic institutional corruption that exists in Cambodia, and she shows her awareness after many years here of this indigenous economy crossing the development world's assumptions. It is an ethical dilemma for her where she has to make a decision whether or not to participate in activities which are part of the indigenous economy located outside of the economy of development funding, and certainly located outside of its logics.

This 'corruption' which is so common is normalized, and to make clear that you are not approving of this which could impact your effectiveness negatively. The stress of this dilemma has been impacting for Tara in a climate where funding for environment projects is harder and harder to come by.

Stress around issues of corruption was also reported by participants in relation to insecurity of their NGO funding. Some feel directly responsible for the jobs of others, which makes pursuing funding and wooing those who make funding decisions, very stressful,

And what's challenging for me is knowing that all my 15 colleagues are depending on me to find this funding and after June, if we haven't found it, basically people will start to be cut from the organization. So it's hard to, if if you um convey a feeling of desperation about funding then you're very unlikely to get funding I think so it's trying to be confident and optimistic and at the same time having a lot of concerns and worries about the situation.

Tara has responsibility for finding funding with a short timeline in an increasingly aggressive and frantic climate, where funding for environment work is becoming more difficult to secure, the process is more competitive and the logics along which funding is awarded are changing. This is partly the impact of the current trend for donors about whom she spoke earlier, where they currently favour employing private consulting firms, moving away from funding work like that her organisation performs. She feels personally responsible for the jobs of her local colleagues, using the word desperation, that they are depending on her, and that she finds this to deeply confronting and personally challenging.

In relationships with donors, she feels it is necessary to portray an impression of being 'confident and optimistic', and effectively does not feel free to reveal her real position which is 'having a lot of concerns and worries'. The context is aggressive, competitive, unsympathetic, and definitely not idealistic in service of our imagined and idealised environment.

Overall, participants spoke of multiple stressors affecting their health, safety and sense of wellbeing. The privileges of their western status that they also recognised did not service as a protective factor against the pressures they felt when they accepted the responsibilities that environmental advocacy work brought with its many opportunities.

Along with the stress that has been their partner in this experience of working in Cambodia, participants spoke of the successful strategies they employ in their efforts towards environmental change.

Collaboration, negotiation and communication with local colleagues were emphasised as crucial to their work. Remaining flexible and ethical in the face of political, cultural and economic complexities was also critically important. Expatriate workers try to remain open to the ideas and solutions of local staff, showing respect for local knowledge by actively making space within the work of the NGO for local knowledge not to be discounted or ignored,

I mean you really have to listen to what people are telling you sometimes it's, it's very easy as an expat to think that you know the answers.

Tara spoke about how she tries very hard to make this space, in the structuring of the work, to allow room and create a climate in which it is safe for people to bring their ideas. She seems to

be aware that aspects of culture, politics of change and history means this space has to be actively and carefully created.

When I asked her what strategies she uses for success in her work, Tara spoke of her belief that communication is really important. To illustrate this, she talks about trying to make opportunities for openness and communication, through providing space in meetings to share information and ideas,

So um in some ways people are looking for that structure and hierarchy to make them comfortable. Um what else? Um I think communication is really important like, I think previously maybe we had monthly or bimonthly staff meetings and I found out that really wasn't enough, to keep people informed and get their ideas and open line of communication - so now we have weekly meetings with uh all the staff together just an hour or two, just to check in and see where everybody is and what ideas are coming up.

As well as being responsive to her Cambodian colleagues who felt they needed more frequent meetings, Tara encourages an open process whereby people 'check in' with each other, see 'where everybody is at' and share ideas 'coming up'. That they are seeking more such opportunities indicates that she is successful in creating a climate of trust.

Strategies Tara gives as being those she feels have helped her to be successful included flexibly and reflexively changing her approach to work and her understandings of environmental issues and of Cambodia. Outlining the variety of her work experience and changes in her outlook over the more than ten years she has worked and lived in Cambodia, openness to revising her ideas and assumptions in a responsive and reflexive manner has led to success,

I think uh for me I've gone from working with the local NGO to working with an international NGO, um... from being not so much engaged with government to being more engaged and trying to find compromise and um yeah just trying to see the benefit of cooperation and engagement rather than, I think when before I came here I think I was more interested in like saving the elephant or the tiger and also I've become more aware of how important it is to um engage the local people in that

effort and also realizing how much more complicated everything is than when you first go into a situation.

Awareness of the implication of people in environmental conservation has been a reflexive shift from her previous priority given to saving certain species. Tara has become aware both of the complex issues which surround the threats to the survival of these species, and the important role the local people play as part of the eco system. She has also become more 'engaged' with government and believes that cooperation and engagement is necessary, and compromise is absolutely necessary.

Other expatriate environmentalists I spoke with also reported an awareness of the importance of reflexivity and have an evolving understanding of the issues being inseparable from their effectiveness,

I've really moved towards community livelihoods that's, that's really where the focus of my work is because sustainable livelihoods is a- but environment you know that's the pure link.

Bill considers that flexibility in his understanding of the issues has been a key to success in his more than ten years in Cambodia working on environment sector projects. He has come to believe people are the vital link in conservation. As he mentioned when talking about environment work in Cambodia (in Chapter 3), he feels subsistence living is sustainable living, making improving community livelihoods the 'pure link' to environmental protection and education. Others attributed success in their environmental work in Cambodia to allowing their understanding of issues to become fluid, with an awareness that they cannot understand the whole picture as an insider. When I asked Andrew whether he felt his view of environmental issues had changed since coming to Cambodia, he replied,

I think ... um I wouldn't say it's changed it's probably evolved a lot erhm.

Tara has resolved the crisis of expectations over the years, and as a key to her success she speaks of this shifting her goals, and of being less optimistic now of effecting environmental change than when she first arrived in Cambodia,

Yeah um I'm I guess maybe I was more optimistic and about everything when I first came and now I guess I'm just hoping that I'm satisfied with what I personally am doing and accomplishing and just doing my best and not having like such a huge ambition to change everything or anything but just you're working in a situation and just do what you think is the right thing and see what happens; try to be strategic.

Others may also feel something about this 'waiting to see what happens', while carrying on 'doing your bit' and feeling more a part of the fabric of the process and less an agent of change. Perhaps this is about adjusting to the culture too, and perceiving your place and your role as an expatriate quite differently over the years. Nina has also showed flexibility in allowing changes to her ideas, allowing them to evolve in response to her experiences in Cambodia in a reflexive process which both enables her effectiveness and enables her to cope with the confrontation of her understandings,

I guess I've got a lot more interested in governance issues, and um rights and legal frameworks and how those are interpreted um. My understanding of the law and legal frameworks I know I'm not a lawyer but I've been working a lot with legal issues and legal legislation so that's improved a lot um, ahh, yeah and uuuuh yeah and then the power dynamics driving the negotiation of daily access to environmental resources. I think that's probably more now I think that's more important than I did when I first arrived um. I think you become more um probably more realistic or cynical depending how you look at it in terms of what how communities have to manage land and resources, you know and what cost the government has too and what what capacity and what interest the government has to actually making a difference. Especially when it comes to the governance side of things rather than I mean pollution or rubbish collection things like that.

Participants try to understand people's behaviour with regard to their environment, realizing it is a complex picture. Tara spoke about accepting that some things will always remain mysterious as she explained she now avoids judgement of high officials,

So I dunno if all the criticism is fair or not. It's it's hard to judge sometimes ... it's very uh I think you don't- you get like 30 percent of the picture you know there's a lot more going on that you just can't figure out.

In another reported strategy participants cited as contributing to success, Sarah has quite quickly shifted her role to a more advisory and strategic one, allowing her colleagues to 'do all of the legwork' because she recognises their facility, as locals, in doing so,

I have two counterparts now, and they do all of the legwork and they get more done and they get more done cos it's easier for them to build relationships with NGOs than it is for me because they understand culturally.

Tara talked about her sense that effectiveness is linked to personal qualities. She feels formed and changed by her time living in Cambodia, citing the importance of a personal process involving developing patience, born of a respect for local people and conditions,

Let's see. Um what sort of works for me I guess is um ... I guess developing patience is important. I mean in the beginning I think I didn't have so much patience.

Mike feels he has made a contribution to environmental change but he is hoping for a larger effect with his next project. Feeling frustrated by past experiences of NGO and funding politics, he is strategizing for an intervention where he can really see that he has made a difference. After many years of designing projects with a view to making a firm contribution to environmental protection and convincing people to live more sustainably within their threatened environments, he is hungry for feeling he has made an impact,

I want I want something more substantive now. I know that intangibly there have been people who have benefitted and re-directed with their focus, their interest their understanding but I'd like to I need personally to do something that is a swansong, a direct hit that really has the effect to make a change to hit a leverage point that is replicable and sustainable and affects many people. So that's that's what I'm looking to do here.

When asked what strategies they used for success in their work, several people offered that they felt unsure if they are successful or not. It seems it is hard not to feel ultimately

ineffective as an expatriate in environment work. Some participants felt hopeless about making any difference to environmental degradation and other issues in Cambodia, feeling they are in a battle against forces, in a link to the cosmic battle discussed in Chapter 3. Tara is not sure that she has been influential in ways she hoped to have been despite her leadership role,

It's the values and ethics that kind of underlie the work and motivate people, how to develop that. Not. I mean it hopefully if you have good ethics and good you know motivation for the work it will somehow if you're a good leader it should carry over and have some influence on other people but I'm I'm not so sure sometimes. So.

She feels ineffective in influencing people she works with in the area of motivation for the work and ethics, and it seems clear she is also referring to corruption. The oblique way in which she says this also speaks to the politics of environment in Cambodia; how careful people feel they need to be in response to the power dynamics, and the threat they sense they may invite if they are critical, or outspoken.

Questioning their effectiveness remains a crucial strategy of the participants' reflexivity and flexible willingness to change themselves and their work within the context of the local conditions, to recognise when it is time to leave particular projects, or bend to the conditions of the moment. Although the consequences of their reflexive, critical gaze often include feeling more pessimistic about the differences they can make through their advocacy work, they draw strength from the meaningfulness and pleasure of their everyday working lives.

Participants all commented on the importance of their sense of the meaningfulness of their work, and many mentioned aspects of their work that they found enjoyable. For instance, people who spend time in the forest are in a physically demanding situation but they love this aspect of their work, as Andrew explains,

I mean if you're walking around in a forest it's challenging. I mean it's just the I mean getting around is hard, navigating, the logistics, it's uncomfortable there's leeches, there's mosquitoes there's diseases. That's challenging yeah ... the first year I was here I was out for 45 weeks of the year but now I'm based mainly in Phnom Penh just do small trips mainly in the dry season as well. It's just too ridiculous in the wet season

but yeah that's challenging getting around but it's enjoyable at the same time for me it might not be for somebody else but...

And for Abby,

I probably spend about 70 or 80 percent of my time actually out camping in the forest um we're about an hour and a half out of *[deleted]* town so in the middle of nowhere.

For others such as Sarah, there is a clear sense that it is vital for her to be here, as she is, involved in the environment sector and doing this work,

Well, I wouldn't be here I think it's needed I think the question is more it hasn't enabled my work as such as it's needed I think I just think it's needed.

In response to a direct question, she doesn't feel Cambodia has enabled her work, rather, she feels Cambodia really needs her work. This bare sense of her skills being needed, is what brings a sense of meaningfulness and justification for her presence in the country, and her involvement in the work for Sarah.

All participants except for one reported that they find their work to be very enjoyable. They said this is because they have experienced their work to be variable, meaningful, innovative, interesting and useful,

I think there's a lot of things you can get involved in a lot of experiences. I enjoy it, every day.

And uh yeah it's been exciting to be able to try something that's very new and innovative.

I think it's given me a bit more meaning ... um I really enjoy I just really enjoy the work here it's so much more interesting.

Yeah, in my work I think I've always from the beginning... I've always felt like the work is useful in the community. I felt encouraged when I go to the field and see the enthusiasm of the local people, and their... real um interest in collaborating and getting

support and working together. Um... yeah I think I've always felt like-like just on the brink of seeing like a-a really good change.

I love it I mean it's my dream job erm ... s ... erm ... I like everything about it erm ... I like living in the area, I like being around lots of wildlife I mean a- it's kind of a unique place ... I feel really lucky to have the opportunity to do that job so it's great I love it all.

It seems that despite the demands of the work and the reported stresses about which participants spoke, the enjoyment and meaningfulness they experience is an overwhelmingly positive part of their time working in Cambodia's environment sector.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The 8 expatriate environmentalists who participated in this project shared many of their experiences and their reflections in semi-structured interviews. The themes resulting from the analysis of these interviews reflect a double hermeneutic: I) our making meanings from their expression within the fixed time-space of the interview, and II) their attempts to make meaning of their lived experience while living in Cambodia and working in the environment sector. Through this double hermeneutic process we may gain understanding of the struggles of expatriate environmentalists in Cambodia both in their work and, more richly, their sense-making.

The first superordinate theme was about the participants' understanding of Cambodia's environment. Participants brought their western understandings of environment and environment work with them when they came to Cambodia. Over time, they reflexively revised their western conceptualisation as they began to understand their limitations, and began to encounter, more openly, local knowledge and understandings.

Western concepts of environment had given participants a sense of Cambodia's uniqueness as a site of surviving biodiversity which also is vulnerable to degradation and exploitation because of the politics of the environment in Cambodia. In their talk about Cambodia's environmental vulnerability, participants expressed appreciation of the complexities of the situation, account for the sympathy they articulated about the government, whom they spoke of as doing their best under pressure. This also was a reason people gave for the disconnect they noticed between cultural beliefs about environment and behaviour, which they experienced as a conflict. Participants understood the importance of ethnic minorities to Cambodia's diverse yet vulnerable environment because of the way they saw indigenous worldviews as promoting sustainable environmental relationships.

The mechanics of environment crime as they understand it to be occurring here was recounted by all participants, as they showed that they believe many environmental threats here could be accounted for this way. However some did feel that the situation could be worse, and showed an understanding of why people make the choices they do, believing they are employing strategies to mitigate environmental harm. Participants spoke of the impact they feel

globalisation is having on Cambodia's environment as global forces seeking to access and benefit from Cambodia's natural resources. Trends in global environment and funding, environmental politics, as well as the work done by NGOs towards social change, located Cambodia as existing, for participants, within a global environmental politics.

Cambodia's natural resources are revealed as the country further engages with global market forces, by efforts towards progress through exploration where the environment here tends to be viewed as an infinite resource and natural resources are reconstituted as capital. The interviewed environmentalists explained how the global recession has affected environment work in Cambodia, and how this effect continues to be felt currently as funding pressure. Participants spoke of land speculation and other developments which have recently emerged to affect Cambodia's environment. The emergent middle class with newly gained wealth were seen as unreachable. Participants shared the perception that obfuscation in processes around protected land is related to the value of land.

Environment work was recognised to be about people, and environmental issues were seen as closely connected with human rights and population demographics. Participants in the current study struggled to see a form of community which they recognised in Khmer groups, but they did see this in indigenous minority groups. Cambodia was not felt to have an indigenous environment movement outside of NGOs and some participants seemed to equate any environmentalism as being NGO work or research. Unlike areas where there is a movement with a visible leader raising awareness about issues, in Cambodia, resistance is mainly around land issues, with people becoming involved when they are affected, as resistance is ultimately unsafe. Participants discussed the environmental awareness of their colleagues, commenting that an indigenous movement seems slow to develop. Beliefs around indigenous practices and sustainability were interesting; with expatriate environmentalists believing indigenous practices are ultimately sustainable.

The second superordinate theme was about the meanings participants made from their experiences of environment work. For most, they had come to Cambodia as volunteers, forging a career with the experience they got here, and they spoke about their sense-making of these experiences as they attempt to be agents of social change for environmental protection. How they understand environment work in Cambodia and how they understand their role

within this were important subordinate themes. Participants justified the work of NGOs by expressing their work as important to environmental protection and explaining the important role NGOs play in helping communities negotiate arduous official processes. In seeking to be effective to local communities, participants emphasised that they feel indigenous concepts are important, and they noted problems coming from the use of introduced foreign concepts, worked to build capacity of local staff while valuing good people, and framed their work as a cosmic battle.

Participants believe they are supporting the government in its role of protection and conservation. While feeling that too much of Cambodia has protected status, they explained that NGOs are under-resourced to cover all that area. Some take a demand based approach of where they work, and see themselves as advocating to and advising the government about sustainability.

As they plant the seeds of change, expatriate environmentalists reported that they feel unsure about their effectiveness and the effectiveness of NGO work in general, expecting future failure for environmental protection, and of the NGO and government interventions toward that end. These perceptions and expectations they reported as a source of stress.

The third superordinate theme was about the politics of environment work in Cambodia. As noted in the introduction, the environment is both social and political, so it is unsurprising that many aspects of the meaning expatriate environmentalists made of their work and experience related to environmental politics. NGO politics was noted to affect the organisation of the work primarily in the way funding affected programmes. As they described donor politics, participants noted their impression that donors drive programme design, and some take an inflexible and demanding approach with timeframes which are too short. Some noted feeling pressure to positively report outcomes. Relationships between NGOs were indicated to involve a lack of trust as some level, and a sense of competition. Participants spoke many times of working with good people.

As they talked about relationships with communities, participants spoke about their local colleagues, about being positioned as an expert and about politics regarding indigenous minorities. In more general comments about environmental politics, participants spoke about

difficulties in working with government, and their negative feelings in this regard. Some feel that the government is largely having difficulty in effecting their environmental protection work, there are also difficulties in the relationships NGOs have cultivated with government partners. Issues about government counterparts working within NGOs were discussed, as was advocacy, and the need to use approaches which will be successful here. People were concerned about corruption, about NGOs signing agreements not to criticise the government while they are also trying to run advocacy programmes. Meanwhile making conservation attractive by showing it to be financially rewarding was reportedly a strategy being used. Conservationists were felt to be pushing too hard, while huge areas of the country are invisible to NGO efforts due to funding politics and NGO strategy. Power and hierarchy, elites, the isolation of powerful players, power issues within the organisations of participants, and the threat of violence, and mechanisms of environment crime were all discussed.

The advocacy programmes of environment NGOs are usually based on adversarial models which were created elsewhere and where they may work. The environmental advocacy programmes here are not working, if it is true that NGOs cannot get meetings with the most important players who make the most important decisions affecting environments in Cambodia. That relationships are not working in a context where relationships are carefully attended to is of concern.

The use of the law for environmental protection was a strategy of participants, and they also described how the legal system is used by those who wish to access natural resources. Law enforcement was felt to be important, and environmental resistance is resistance to environmental crime. In Cambodia resistance is understood as being dangerous, and negotiation and facilitation therefore are a strategy towards the goal of social change, and protection of communities.

The fourth superordinate theme was about the experience of living in Cambodia as an expatriate. Participants all spoke of the opportunities they had been afforded since coming to Cambodia, most as volunteers. As well as career opportunities they spoke of their personal growth, which most indicated they felt was enhanced by living in Cambodia.

Stress was talked about by all expatriate environmentalists interviewed. They outlined what they felt were contributing factors to stress, and it was a combination of things related to life in Cambodia such as health and culture stressors, relationships with local colleagues, and the political sensitivity of environment sector work here. More general issues which would possibly be experienced as stressful anywhere in environment work were stress from NGO politics such as funding, perceptions of ineffectiveness and demands of the work.

Strategies felt to be successful included actively trying to work in a spirit of collaboration and flexibility while employing reflexivity and considering communication to be important. Participants reported changing their role to work in a more strategic and advisory capacity, resolving the crises that arise from cultural differences. They spoke of the importance of personal qualities and the importance of finding meaning in their work.

Meaningfulness and pleasure were important to the expatriates I spoke with. Almost all are enjoying their work despite the demands, and they are of the impression that their particular contribution is vital to environmental change and protection in Cambodia.

From their reported experience, it seemed as if participants are sometimes confronted, and experience confusion as there is more than one available position for them to take up as expatriates. They may take up their role as part of what they understand that work of a development discourse might require, but over time they start to perceive the logics of local ways of doing things, and to understand that things make sense to the people who are 'from here' and make life together here. Perhaps they start to feel less sure of themselves, less able to take up the position of 'helper' or 'resource', especially when they start to believe the rumours that the development agenda is not always in the best interests of people's lived lives. The development project is not as easily successful as they had hoped.

People also start to feel the places where the two great economies here don't co-exist easily. The indigenous economy exists and works well alongside the local expression and construction of the global market, but places and spaces where they come together, they clash awfully. Both have requirements, both have social expressions and expectations, as well as distinctive political relations. In the case of the indigenous economy it is outside the global capital system, although it makes use of some of its technologies. It has been in place for generations,

changing with time and need. It is a feudal system of patron-client relationships, with awkward conflicts for the unfamiliar of being both in different relationships. In this feudal place, strong men relate to the centralised ultimate power in the country, and these relationships are critical to environmental protection in Cambodia.

Participants noticed cultural assumptions they have from their embodied experience at home and other places do not work here. Each person will be different in how they feel about this and what they then do about it. Moving from pleasure to distress and back again is a regular experience of expatriate life in Cambodia. Taking up certainty then uncertainty, it is easy to feel either pressured or entitled to have an answer, to be a resource or patron for people on many levels and in the many contexts we move in. Or perhaps we pressure ourselves. Being aware of understanding and not understanding, and sometimes not being willing to accept that life is the way it is. The confusion and distress that comes with the confrontation of such different answers to life's great commonalities, is soothed by the privilege of being a foreigner in a patron-client culture.

APPENDIX A: Information Sheet

Working on environmental projects in Cambodia:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the experiences of some expatriates

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

My name is Fleur Smith and I am completing a Master of Arts degree in Health Psychology from New Zealand's Massey University. I have lived in Cambodia for almost ten years, and co-founded The Rubbish Project which is an arts response to environmental issues here in Cambodia.

For my thesis, I am interested to talk to westerners working in the environment sector here about their understanding of their work. I aim to identify some of the ways that westerners successfully contribute to indigenous responses to environmental issues. Using transcripts of interview conversations, I will identify the themes that emerge from participants' talk to best learn from those who are doing the work in Cambodia.

Participant Recruitment

Participants will be recruited by snowballing. People I know who are already working in the environmental sector will be asked to recommend people, or to approach possible participants on my behalf. People will need to have lived here at least 18 months so they have had some time to settle in and reflect on their work and on the Cambodian context.

I would like to recruit between 6 and 12 participants.

Participant involvement

Participants will be invited to take part in an interview with the researcher to talk about their experiences of environmental work in Cambodia. Interviews are expected to take between one and three hours, and will take place at a mutually agreed location.

Project Procedures

Interviews will be audio recorded, and stored in a locked drawer at my home, electronically in a password protected file. Transcripts will be made of the interviews, and no names or

identifying details will be recorded. After transcripts are finished the interview files will be deleted. Participants will have an opportunity to review their transcripts and make changes before they are analysed. A summary of the findings of the project can be given at the request of the participant.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- *decline to answer any particular question;*
- *withdraw from the study within six weeks of their interview;*
- *ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*

- *be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.*
- *ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.*

Project Contacts

If you have any questions about the project you are invited to contact me at floddy@gmail.com or by phone 012 683040, or alternatively my supervisor Dr Mandy Morgan, can be contacted at C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz.

"This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/54. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form

Working on environmental projects in Cambodia: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the experiences of some Western expatriates

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INTERVIEWS

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the research have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also know that I am free to refuse to answer any questions, can withdraw any information I supply, and can withdraw from the study at any time up to six weeks after the interview..

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that it is confidential and that this information I supply will not be used for any purpose other than this research. I understand that the researcher will do all that they can to ensure my privacy but it is impossible for them to guarantee that no-one will find out that I took part in this research. I also agree to the researcher audio-taping the interview, and know that I have the right to ask for it to be turned off at any time during the interview. I am also aware that my tape will be destroyed after it has been transcribed.

I understand that the researcher may use brief direct quotations from the interview in her reports of the study provided these do not identify me in any way.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name - printed

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Working on environmental projects in Cambodia: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the experiences of some Western expatriates

Interview schedule

1. Arrive to mutually agreed location.

2. Discuss the research project and sign consent form when the participant has had all their questions answered.

3. A conversational style of semi-structured interviewing will be used to allow participants to lead the discussion according to their own interests and to raise issues that they are interested in discussing. This also allows the researcher to collect rich data by following up aspects of the participants' experiences that are significant to them.

The interviews will begin with an open ended invitation such as:

As we've discussed, I would like you to tell me about their environmental work in Cambodia.

The researcher may use prompts to support further exploration of issues raised by participants or to ensure that all of the areas of interest to the researcher are covered. Prompts will not be flexibly, depending on the areas already covered by the participant.

- How is your work contributing to environmental change in Cambodia?
- How has the Cambodian context helped enable your work?
- How would you describe the indigenous environment movement in Cambodia?
- How have your views about environmental issues changed since coming to Cambodia?
- What strategies do you use to enhance your relationships with indigenous environment workers?
- What have you found challenging about your work?

APPENDIX D: Tape Release Authority

Working on environmental projects in Cambodia: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the experiences of some Western expatriates

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Fleur Smith, in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Appendix E: Table of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBORDINATE THEMES and SUBTHEMES
Cambodia's environment: expatriates' understandings	<p>1 Cambodia as a Unique Site of Biodiversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambodia's potential as a habitat for endangered species • Decrease in biodiversity <p>2 Environmental Vulnerability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global, internal, and regional pressures • Disconnect between cultural beliefs about environment and what people do • Importance of ethnic minority regions to the whole country <p>3 Environmental Crime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanics of environmental crime • Environmentally destructive behaviour isn't as bad as it could be <p>4 Environment and Globalisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalisation, and global forces now exploiting Cambodia's natural resources • Global environment trends • Trends in development funding • Links to global and regional environmental politics • Efforts by NGOs towards social change <p>5 Globalisation and Market Forces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress and exploration, where the environment is seen as an infinite resource • Natural resources reconstituted as money • Effect of the global recession on environment work in Cambodia <p>6 Land Speculation and Development</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and speculation and emerging middle class • erceptions of obfuscation in official processes regarding land <p>7 Environment Work and People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment work is about people • Environment work is human rights • Linking environment to population demographics • Looking for a sense of community <p>8 Indigenous Environment Movements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An indigenous environment movement does not exist in Cambodia • Communities are mobilised and react when affected • Indigenous resistance is mainly around land issues • Environment movement is slow to develop • Environmental awareness of local environment workers • History of environmental resistance • Environment movement as NGO research <p>9 Indigenous Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in the sustainability of indigenous practices • Exoticism about indigenous groups
Environment work in Cambodia	<p>1 Justifying NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justifying NGO involvement by expressing a belief that their work is important to environmental protection. • Importance of NGOs in arduous processes of environmental protection <p>2 Seeking to be effective with local communities</p>

- Importance of incorporating indigenous concepts
- Problems with foreign concepts
- Complexities of environment work framed as a cosmic battle
- Building capacity of local staff
- Success is about working with good people

3 Supporting Government

- Supporting government in conservation and preservation
- Work in environment sector amounts to a protection role
- Too much of Cambodia is protected
- NGOs do not have the resources to cover the many different protected zones
- Taking a demand based approach in the decisions of where to work
- Advocating and advising Government on sustainable use of natural resources

4 Seeding change

- Planting seeds
- Feeling unsure about effectiveness and rate of change
- Involvement in tertiary education
- Money lost along the way
- Questioning effectiveness of NGO modes of work
- Uncertain of success in their work/8 Future failure
- Negative outlook for future of NGO and conservationist interventions
- Negative outlook for the future of Cambodia's environment
- Stress and self-blame due to perception of failure
- Logic of localising basic to project design

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relying on one person – fragile strategy
Politics in Environment Work	<p>1 NGO politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGO politics affects the organisation of work <p>2 Relationships with Donors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors driving program design • Some donors take an inflexible and demanding approach • Pressure for positive reporting • Timeframes of donors are too short <p>3 Relationships between NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGO competition • Lack of trust between stakeholders • Good people <p>4 Relationships with communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Environment Workers in NGOs • Expat as expert • The politics of NGO approaches with indigenous minorities <p>5 Politics of Environment Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservationists are pushing too hard • Complex issues working with government; sympathy and safety • Strategy linking conservation to financial benefits • Negative view of government and frustrations expressed • NGO strategies and funding politics invisibilises huge areas))) • Difficulties between NGOs and government acknowledged • Government environment work viewed as ineffective

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government counterparts within NGOs • Corruption • Need to adjust advocacy for local scene • NGOs sign agreement with government not to criticize • Advocacy and service provision, or, how conservation groups are 'putty in the government's hands' • Power and hierarchy • Elites • Isolated leaders, and decision makers • Difficult to work with the rapidly emerging middle classes • Threats, forced relocation and mechanisms of illegal resource grabbing • Threats and dangers for local staff and their families • Power issues within the NGO itself, and with staff <p>6 Legal support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing legal tenure over local resources for local people • Law enforcement as a deterrent to environmental crime • Using the law to gain illegal access • Using the law as a conservation strategy • Environmental resistance is resistance to environmental crime <p>7 Negotiation and facilitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Goal</u> to change the politics of how people relate to one another • Facilitation to protect communities
On being an expatriate environmentalist	<p>1 Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place of career opportunity

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunities for personal growth <p>2. Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stress linked to perceived ineffectiveness• Stress from demands of the work• Health stress• Culture stress• Stress because environmental work is politically sensitive• Stress in relationships with local colleagues• Stress from NGO politics related to funding <p>3. Success strategies employed by expatriates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Actively taking a collaborative approach• Considering communication to be important.• Flexibility, and reflexivity• Resolving the crisis of expectations and shifting goals accordingly• Changing to a more advisory and strategic role• Personal qualities and importance of finding meaning in work <p>4. Meaningfulness and pleasure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enjoying the work and finding it meaningful despite its demands• Feeling their contribution is vital• Enjoying work every day• Wider perspective about environment work
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Appendix F: Newspaper Articles

Climate crisis threatens poor

Phnom Penh Post 16-09-2009 p.4.

A World Bank report argues that, without urgent action on climate change, Cambodia and other developing nations will be imperiled within a decade

BY JAMES O'TOOLE

CLIMATE change could slash agricultural productivity and make famine and natural disaster commonplace across the developing world without urgent action within the next decade, climate experts from the World Bank warned Tuesday.

Though they produce only a small fraction of the world's total carbon emissions, Cambodia and other nations in the developing world will be disproportionately affected by the warming temperatures and rising sea levels brought on by climate change, a panel of World Bank representatives told reporters in a teleconference from the US.

The teleconference coincided with Tuesday's release of a World Bank publication titled "World Development Report (WDR) 2010: Development and Climate Change". Climate change puts poor countries like Cambodia in a difficult position, the panelists said, because despite their tiny contribution to the world's total carbon emissions, they will be most severely harmed in the absence of coordinated, world-wide reforms.

Poor countries typically lack the capacity to manage the fallout from climate change and also "depend more directly on climate-sensitive natural resources for income and well-being," the WDR report said.

Any efforts to avert climate change, therefore, "[have] to start with high-income countries taking aggressive action to reduce their own emissions".

Developing nations, though, will be major sources of emissions growth in the near future, and risk falling further behind developed countries economically if they are unable to transition to clean energy sources, the



Khem Yeth, 28, a rice farmer in Takeo province sits in a dried-out paddy last year. HENG CHHIVAN

NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMME INTENDED BY YEAR'S END

Cambodia's forests are integral to the future of the Kingdom, senior forestry officials said Tuesday during the start of the final public consultation into a programme intended to reduce deforestation. Ty Sokhun, director of the Forestry Administration, said: "Forests are the source of the living earth. In Cambodia, forest has provided 6.9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to reduce

human poverty." Forests cover more than 59 percent of Cambodia, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). But though the government aims to reach 60 percent by 2015, critics say that figure has been overblown, and that rampant illegal logging continues. "We have planted more than 850,000 hectares of trees and given millions of trees seedlings to the people for planting," Ty Sokhun said.

"We also cracked down on thousands of cases of illegal logging and sent many illegal loggers to court." With deforestation historically a significant problem in Cambodia, the government established the NFP in 2007 with the help of international aid agencies to reverse the trend. The government expects to finalise the National Forest Programme by the end of the year.

KHEALTHY SOURCE CHHIVAN

World Bank report added.

Developed countries, it argued, must provide assistance to aid poorer nations in climate-change mitigation efforts.

Justin Lin, the World Bank's senior vice president for development economics, noted the importance of such assistance, emphasising that developing nations must not be forced to

choose between climate-change mitigation and economic growth.

"I would encourage Cambodia to look into the possibility of funding and also technological assistance in order to pursue its economic development and at the same time to achieve the goal of reduced emissions," he said.

But for this option to be realistic worldwide, donor countries must massively increase their funding. Currently, there is less than US\$1 billion available for climate-change mitigation efforts in the developing world, in contrast to the \$75 billion that may be necessary, the WDR report said.

Though national budgets

around the world have been stretched thin by the global financial crisis, Rosina Bierbaum, the WDR co-director, said that developed-world policymakers should think seriously about this funding shortfall. "We can't really argue that stopping climate change is not affordable," she said. "Indeed, we can't afford not to do it."

Cambodia's diplomatic embrace of Gulf states is in full swing, with the PM set to visit the Middle East in January, but just why is the Kingdom so keen to befriend Arab nations?

The ties that bind us: oil, money

The Phnom Penh Post, 12-09-2008, p.5

BY SEBASTIAN STRANGIO
AND YONG SOKHENG

PRIME Minister Hun Sen will make a state visit to the Middle East, next January, in what foreign ministry officials and local Muslim leaders are describing as a consummation of Cambodia's growing economic relationship with the Muslim world, following visits from two Gulf state delegations earlier this year.

"Hun Sen is scheduled to visit the Middle East in January next year," said Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Sin Bunthoen.

"The aim of the visit is to strengthen our political and

bodian Islamic Development Association.

For Ahmad Yahya, there is an economic logic to Middle East relations that is hard for the government to ignore.

"All the countries in the Middle East are desert countries, and they need to make sure if something happens they don't starve. So they are keen to plant rice (in Cambodia) and export it back to their countries," he said, referring to an emerging new global trend of wealthy non-arable nations investing directly in crops in developing nations.

While critics have warned that such practices risk jeopardising food security in the developing world, the gov-

ernment is busy doing deals, spurred on by the knowledge that its vast swaths of under-utilised farmland make it an extremely attractive trade incentive for largely desert Gulf states.

In April, the Qatari prime minister announced a \$200 million investment in Cambodia's agriculture sector, while Kuwait last month pledged \$546 million in soft loans to upgrade irrigation systems and roads throughout the Kingdom.

Sith Ibrahim, secretary of

and Religions, said Cambodia's commitment to religious freedom had further increased its attractiveness to Muslim nations. "We are open to all Muslim countries," he said, adding Cham leaders have played an vital role in breaking the ice with Muslim governments.

"There are 19 Cham associations across the Kingdom, and they are playing an important role in helping improve our relationship with the Middle East," he said, adding that the Chams were benefiting in turn.

"Cham Muslims have received direct benefit from the government's political and economic links with countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait," he said.

In addition to its development loans, the Kuwait government has also pledged \$5 million for the renovation of the International Dubai Mosque at Boeung Kak lake, and the construction of a Islamic studies centre nearby.

Who really wins?

But some are less optimistic about the flow of cash from the Middle East. Son Chhay, chairman of the National Assembly's Commission on Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, Information and the Media, said the recent growth in the relationship with the Gulf states was a result of two things - Cambodia's valuable land concessions, and its offshore oil deposits.

"At the moment, I cannot say how the country will benefit

I agree that the government should pursue relations with Muslim countries, but at the same time, [it] has to thoroughly examine the economic and religious effects," he said.

One such possible effect - growing Islamic radicalism amongst the Cham community - also has some Western governments preaching caution on the growing links with the Islamic world.

"The United States has excellent relations with many Middle

Eastern countries and we would expect that Cambodia will have the opportunity to develop positive relations in that region as well," said US Embassy spokesman John Johnson by email.

"However, we do need to look out for groups that teach intolerance and violence, and who provide funds in an effort to change the atmosphere and attitude of Cambodia's Cham Muslim minority."

But Mohammad Younis Khan, Pakistan's ambassador

in Phnom Penh, said that while Cambodia's Chams were a natural point of linkage with other Muslim countries, long-term commitments were based more on economic considerations than religious ones.

"People like to help their Muslim brothers, particularly with aid for mosques and so forth," he said.

"But it's not the Cham Muslim minority here that attracts countries like Kuwait or Qatar, it's Cambodia itself." ■

WE NEED A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MIDDLE EAST BECAUSE THE GULF STATES HAVE OIL AND MONEY."

economic links with Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates."

Friends with benefits

Such links have grown apace with oil-rich Gulf states pledging Cambodia over US\$700 million in soft loans and investment already this year.

"We need a relationship with the Middle East because the Gulf states have oil and money, Cambodia needs soft loans and investments in order to develop its infrastructure," said Ahmad Yahya, government adviser



Dubai Group eyes Cambodia

Cambodia's Leopard Group could manage investment from the UAE-based fund, with sights set on energy, agriculture and property development

Phnom Penh Post p.13 25.09.2008

BY POST AND WIRE SERVICES

DUBAI Group, an investment company managing more than US\$40 billion on behalf of the emirate's ruler, said it may invest in Leopard Capital's Cambodia fund, the group's first investment in the Kingdom.

"We are interested in Cambodia," said Lim See Teik, a senior private-equity analyst at Dubai Investment Group, the asset management unit.

"There seems to be a lot of potential."

The prospect of oil and gas development and political stability are luring foreign investments in Cambodia.

The Cambodian economy grew 9.5 percent a year from 2000 to 2007, the fastest pace in Asia after China.

An official at the Finance Ministry said he had no details on the investment.

"I am unaware of the news, but if it materialises, we are pleased to welcome the investment," Hang Chuon Naron, a secretary general at the ministry, told the *Post* Wednesday.

Dubai Group has invested in other Southeast Asian countries, except for military-ruled Myanmar, Lim said.

The group bought a 30 percent stake in Malaysian biodiesel company GBD Investment Ltd for \$49.5 million in April.

"Cambodia is probably the missing link in the jigsaw," Lim added, declining to say how much Dubai Group will invest.

Cambodia ranked 166th among 180 countries in Berlin-based Transparency



Cambodians harvesting rice; the Kingdom's agro-industry sector is attracting increasing amounts of foreign investment. HENG CHHIVAN

International's 2008 survey of perceptions about corruption. Myanmar was the most corrupt.

'Opportunities'

Dubai Group, which includes seven units with interests in asset management, conventional and Islamic banking, private equity and insurance, was set up as part of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum's plan to diversify Dubai's economy.

Leopard Capital has invested in a housing project in Siem Reap.

The fund has identified potential investments in agriculture, commodities processing, a fast-food restaurant, banks,

power plants and hotels, promising returns of about 25 percent a year, Chief Executive Officer Douglas Clayton said.

Earlier investments will offer much higher returns, he added.

"There is no shortage of opportunities," Clayton said. "Here, there are too many deals and not enough money; the country's changed faster than the perception has changed."

Leopard Capital told Bloomberg News it is taking longer than expected to raise the targeted \$100 million amid the global financial turmoil.

The fund has raised \$12.6

million and is set to attract additional commitments following meetings with investors from 17 countries in Phnom Penh last week Clayton said.

Tougher environment

"The fundraising environment for everyone is a bit tougher right now given the Western banking crisis, but there are still plenty of investors out there looking for safe havens of growth, and private equity in Cambodia is certainly one of the few in Asia," said Clayton.

Cambodia's stock market, scheduled to open by the end of 2009, will have a capitalisation of as much as \$2.5 billion in 2014, or about 20

percent of the nation's gross domestic product, said Ken Stevens, chief investment officer of Leopard Capital. Leopard Capital plans to cash out of most of its investments through share sales in the local market.

"The key thing is the development of a capital market which has sufficient breadth and depth to allow exits from investments," Dubai Group's Lim said.

"That would be a key concern for us," he said.

No information on the investment was available on the Dubai Group's website, and a company spokeswoman would not confirm or deny Dubai Group's plans. ■

MONDAY, AUGUST 25, 2008

3

Cambodia To Establish An Embassy in Kuwait

Cambodia plans to open an embassy in Kuwait, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Sin Bunthoeun said Sunday. Prime Minister Hun Sen made the decision following the visit of Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah earlier this month. Hun Sen is scheduled to visit Kuwait early next year, where he will sign a loan agreement of about \$500 million for a hydroelectric dam in Kompong Thom province and other infrastructure projects, Sin Bunthoeun said. According to a Council of Ministers' statement dated Friday announcing Hun Sen's decision, Kuwait has given \$5 million to renovate a mosque and build Muslim education facilities in Cambodia, and \$6 million for the new Council of Ministers building. *(Yun Samean)*

PM seeks more Chinese aid

Phnom Penh Post 15-09-2009 p.4
 Hun Sen announces push to secure up to \$600 million in funding for projects including national road upgrades and hydro-projects ahead of a visit in October

BY CHEANG SOKHA

THE government is negotiating with China to secure funding for infrastructure projects in Cambodia worth \$600 million, Prime Minister Hun Sen announced on Monday.

Projects include upgrading 11 national roads and building several hydropower dams. The prime minister said that the length of the road expansion project will total 1,500 kilometres.

"China will be the country responsible for building the longest roads in Cambodia," he said during a linking celebration at the Cambodia-China Prek Kdam Friendship Bridge.

The bridge, which spans the Tonle Sap River in Kandal province, is replacing a ferry service and should save travellers both time and money, the premier said. It is due to be completed before the Khmer New Year in April 2010.

If the agreement comes to

fruition, the prime minister will travel to China to take part in an official signing ceremony in October, he said.

Earlier this year, China's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao pledged \$15 billion in funding for members of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN). Cambodia is asking for \$400 million for the road-expansion projects and a fur-

CHINA WILL BE ... RESPONSIBLE FOR BUILDING THE LONGEST ROADS IN CAMBODIA."

ther \$200 million for hydro-power projects.

"Minister of Economy and Finance Keat Chhon had already submitted the proposed plans to China... China is leading in the development of infrastructures and hydro-projects in Cambodia," Hun Sen told a crowd of hundreds on Monday.

In 2007, China pledged around \$600 million to Cam-



Prime Minister Hun Sen speaks Monday at a linking ceremony for the Cambodia-China Prek Kdam Friendship Bridge. Cambodia is seeking \$600 million from China for similar projects, he said. *SOHAN PHILDING*

bodia for the construction of two bridges – Prek Kdam and Prek Tamak – as well as National Road 8 and the road

that connects Kratie province with Mondulkiri province.

Cambodia has so far spent a total of \$6.7 billion of Chinese

capital, including \$1.4 billion on infrastructure, \$4 billion on tourism and about \$300 million on agriculture.

Coalition raises dam worries

The Phnom Penh Post, 18-6-2009, p.5.
 Group says Cambodian fisheries vulnerable to planned Mekong hydro dams

BY SEBASTIAN STRANGIO

ELEVEN large-scale hydropower dams proposed for the Mekong River's lower mainstream will threaten regional food security and the livelihoods of millions of people, including thousands inside Cambodia, according to a regional anti-dam coalition.

As part of a new campaign to be launched in Bangkok today, representatives from the Save the Mekong coalition, which includes NGOs, community groups and citizens, are to present Thailand's Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva with a petition signed by 15,000 people calling for the halt of controversial dam developments.

The signatures were collected on postcards distributed by the group, many of which

were returned with personal messages.

"What we're collecting is a diversity of opinions about what the river means to different people. Everyone has a lot of different perspectives," said Carl Middleton, Mekong program coordinator of International Rivers, a US-based advocacy group involved with the coalition.

"What everyone agrees on is that the Mekong is a valuable and shared resource that's worth protecting."

The petition will also be delivered to Prime Minister Hun Sen and to the leaders of Vietnam and Laos.

Vital arteries

Of the 11 proposed projects highlighted by Save the Mekong, just two are in Cambodia. But the country, heavily

reliant on the freshwater fisheries of the Mekong and Tonle Sap, could also be vulnerable to the nine developments planned in Laos.

At a workshop Tuesday, environmental scientists and government officials said the 240- to 360-megawatt Don Sahong dam, to be situated in Laos's Champassak provin-

IT'S NOT A MATTER OF BEING AGAINST THE DAMS, IT'S ABOUT BEING IN FAVOUR OF THE RIVER."

ince, could have particularly serious effects downstream in Cambodia.

"I think the main concern of Mekong mainstream dams in relation to Cambodia is related to changes to the Mekong and Tonle Sap, especially when

looking at fisheries production," Premrudee Daoroung, co-director of the Bangkok-based Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance, said by email.

She added that 70 percent of the fish catches on the Tonle Sap Lake use the Mekong as a migration channel, which is likely to be blocked by dam developments, including Don Sahong.

Pich Dun, secretary general of the Cambodian National Mekong Committee, said Cambodia would work through the Mekong River Commission – which also includes Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar – to discuss proposed developments on the river.

"My own opinion is that we need development, but we have to be careful about building dams along the Mekong River,"

he said, adding that the government had requested Vientiane forward on technical studies of the Don Sahong dam.

"We are waiting for the official notification from the Lao side ... in order to proceed with the negotiations and consultations."

Ultimately, Middleton said that such developments are risky, since the replacement value for lost fisheries stocks, which reach remote communities inaccessible to development workers, would be "unimaginable".

"This is a food source that spreads itself laterally through the whole region, and reaches the most remote communities," he said. "It's not a matter of being against the dams; it's about being in favour of the river and ... what the Mekong provides to the region."



DEVELOPMENT TURNS THE TIDE

Villagers Along the Srepok Face Uncertain Futures
As the Planned Lower Sesan 2 Dam Draws Near

WHAT IT IS
The proposed \$250-million Lower Sesan 2 Dam is an \$1.6-billion hydropower project that will require the resettlement of more than 1,000 families and the flooding of about 30,000 hectares of land.

WHERE IT IS
The dam will be located on the Sesan River about 25 km from Siem Reap town.

WHO IS INVOLVED
Echecolac du Vietnam, the project developer, says the construction could begin within six months, however, the Cambodian government has denied that claim.

By NICH KANNARIN and PAUL VITTORE
Siem Reap, Cambodia
Sarge and I crossed three rivers over the bridge, an ethnic Khmer village located on the banks of the Srepok river, deep in the jungle of Siem Reap province. A few hundred hectares of recently planted rice fields have a bright green tint around the eastern side of the village, separating it from the larger areas of forest that lie beyond.

"The river here is 100% wild rice," he said, while he sat on a wooden bench at the edge of the house last week. "Before, we had further downstream and we did not grow many crops, but then we came here because there is much good land and we started to grow more rice." He said. In 1970 the soldiers came after liberation from the Khmer Rouge and they taught us how to grow things and crossed this," he added, while pointing at the rice fields

that shaded the village from the burning midday sun.

However, the livelihoods the villagers have enjoyed since they settled in the area, rice-based agriculture, are being threatened by the planned Lower Sesan 2 Dam, an \$1.6-billion hydropower project that will require the resettlement of more than 1,000 families and the flooding of about 30,000 hectares of land, more than one-third of which is forested.

Company officials at Echecolac du Vietnam, the project developer, said last week that the Cambodian government had agreed with the company's resettlement plans and the Vietnamese state joint venture company was expecting final approval to begin construction within months. Cambodian government officials have even later denied the project would start any this week, saying better environmental impact studies were needed.

Jim Daird, a fisheries expert from the Western Highlands of Cambodia who studied the area, wrote in an e-mail last week that most villages in the planned reservoir, which covers parts of the Sesan and Srepok rivers, are Khmer, Lao, Chinese, Kmering and Thai communities that rely on fishing, agriculture and forestry.

He added that the village located upstream of the planned dam at the confluence of the two rivers, about 25 km east of Siem Reap, was one of the only communities scheduled for relocation, while many tens of thousands of people living in similar villages along the rivers would be severely affected by a loss of fish stocks, reduced water quality and safety.

According to research conducted by Jim Daird in 2006, at least 75 percent of all fish caught in the Sesan river migrate from the Mekong river.

The NGO Forum group has criticized the lack of transparency in the planning of the project, saying the government has so far failed to meet repeated requests for greater information and more public consultation with people affected by the dam who urgently needed.

The compensation and relocation assistance that company officials have offered to villagers during negotiations is considered insufficient, NGO Forum said, while resettlement site culture sites, water for rice, and poor quality agricultural land and are possibly located in areas of economic land concessions and wildlife habitat.

Mr. Tay, the Khmer village resident, said he was deeply concerned about the plans to resettle 120 families to his village, one of the 100 of 100 hectares of land.

"We don't want to leave. We want to protect, but the old people say we should go," he said. "I don't know about our future. If we need to go into the highlands, maybe there will be no rivers and no fish there."

Ron Miles, chief of Khmer village's committee for water resources, said the dam would also affect the water quality in the river, raising health concerns for the community.



A riverbank view of Phnom Village (top right), a Lao minority community located 2 km down stream from the proposed dam site. The village is expected to be affected by significant changes in water flow and water quality after the dam is completed. Khmer Forum villagers make their way back to Khmer village (bottom) after working on their fields.

The equipment that since the construction of several dams on the Sesan and Srepok rivers upstream in Vietnam in the 1990s, the community had experienced lowering water quality in the Srepok river.

"After they built the dams on the river in Vietnam, fish stocks went down and people and animals started to get sick. We started to get malaria and skin diseases and now have to filter and boil the river water before we can drink it," he said.

There are also significant problems associated with such a massive scale of other minority villages. In one of the large wooden houses in Khmer village, a group of about 40 Khmer villagers gathered for a ceremony that followed an earlier ritual last last month. Village elder Noy Tay said the villagers had worked several months of their fields to become a good harvest.

"This ceremony is for the happiness of the village. We pray to the spirits of the land not to change our rice and bring us good crops," Mr. Tay explained, as he and several other villagers chanted a few verses of rice wine.

"We offer food and drinks to the spirits of the land and then we bring it here and eat and drink it," he said, adding that the ceremonies were held at the beginning and in the middle of the growing season.

As some took turns at sipping rice wine from large ceramic jars with long necks and narrow mouths to lighten the drink, Mr. Tay explained that according to the ancient beliefs of the Khmer, the villagers will have to make many such rituals as their fields are reduced in order to appease the spirits in the new area, adding that he doubted the government will give money to the villagers to cover the cost of these elaborate ceremonies.

"This is our culture, we cannot avoid it. It is the same as the Buddhists who have their ceremonies," he said.



A woman passes an insect and one of the large wooden houses of the Khmer village (bottom). The jungle covered banks of the Sesan River (right) host the proposed dam site.



The jungle covered banks of the Sesan River (right) host the proposed dam site.

July 11 - 24, 2008

Cautious Kampot villagers await return of mangroves

Phnom Penh Post, p. 14.

By MOM KUNTHEAR
AND CHIRAN CHAMREOUN

The residents of Kampong Nesad Samaki in Kampot province say they are anxiously waiting for a letter from the Council of Ministers approving a decision by the provincial governor to return 72 hectares of mangrove forest to their community.

"I am happy with the governor's decision to return our mangrove forest but we will not be satisfied until we receive the letter from the Council of Ministers," community representative Kim Thy, 54, told the *Post* on July 7.

Thy said the community had been seeking the return of the forest since April, when he alleged that Governor Thach Khon had approved its transfer to a provincial agricultural official and three others.

"When the governor gave our land to the others they received a letter from the Council of Ministers approving the transfer and now that they have said it will be returned to us we need a letter to that effect signed by the Council of Ministers as well," Thy said.

"We hope we are not cheated," he said.

"There are 754 families living in Kampong Nesad Samaki and 85 percent of them rely on fishing to make a living," Thy said, alluding to the importance of mangrove forests as breeding grounds for fish and other marine animals.

Try Chhoun, the coordinator in Kampot province for human-



VANDY RATTANA

Kampong Nesad Samaki villagers wonder if they are holding their breath for the return of their mangrove forests.

rights and development NGO Adhoc, said that if the community did not receive a formal letter from the Council of Ministers up to 600 residents planned to march to Phnom Penh to ask Prime Minister Hun Sen to resolve the issue.

"They don't want to make trouble but they do want the governor to honor his promise to the community last month to return the land," she said.

Deputy provincial governor South Yea said the community had been happy to receive a formal letter from Khon in mid-June announcing the return of their land.

"I know they are waiting and worrying about a formal letter from the Council of Ministers, but I do not know when it will be signed," Yea said.

Meanwhile, concerns have dissipated in another nearby fishing community since it received a letter from the Council of Ministers in mid-June approving the return of 21 hectares of mangrove forest that was transferred in April to the same four people who received 72 hectares of Kampong Nesad Samaki land.

"We were delighted to get our land back," said Lan Saman, 64, a vice-chairman of the Lark com-

munity, about 1,500 meters from Kampong Nesad Samaki.

"The Lark community has a total of 366 hectares, of which 30 hectares is mangrove forest; they wanted 21 hectares of the mangroves but in the middle of last month they announced it would be given back to our community," Saman said.

"The mangrove forests are very important natural resources and we must protect them because they produce many benefits for the people and for marine life."

Most of the 360 families in the community depended on fishing to make a living. Saman said

Ethnic minorities protest clearing of their ancestral land

A govt-sanctioned economic land concession has come under fire from villagers who say their forests and farms are being destroyed

BY CHRANN CHAMROEUN
AND CAMILLA BJERREKAER

MORE than 300 Stieng and Phnong ethnic minority members from five villages in the Snuol district of Kratie province have demonstrated against the clearing of their ancestral farmlands by a private company.

"The company has been building a 10-kilometre road from the national road into the economic concession land ... which is affecting people's farmlands," said Saraen Kaet, a community representative for the district's Srae Char commune.

Saraen Kaet told the *Post* Sunday that the protesters had

THE CIV COMPANY HAS NOW STOPPED CLEARING THE FOREST AND FARMLAND.

blocked the company's tractors, preventing them from clearing the land.

He added that villagers from Srae Char and Bi Thnou communes have been farming the land since 1979 and that the produce supports 1,200 people from surrounding villages.

"We have complained to the governor about the economic land concession given to the company" in 2002, he said, adding that the farmers had not been consulted before the clearing began and were still waiting for a response from the district governor over their concerns.

Temporary halt?

Snuol District Governor Ear Sophum confirmed that the locally-owned CIV Co had obtained rights to the land as part of the government's eco-

DISPUTED CLAIMS

The locally owned CIV Co claims to have obtained legal rights to 700 hectares of land in Snuol district in 2002, when it was granted an economic land concession to develop a rubber plantation. District authorities confirm the company's ownership.

conomic land concession scheme.

He said a study had been conducted by the government's ELC committee before the concession was granted and had authorised the project.

"Those villagers always pass over our authority and they have never complained to me. [Instead] they go to ask for help from NGOs ... which violates our authority," he said.

Suong Runaveth, a monitor for the Cambodian rights organisation Licadho, said several organisations have travelled to the site to monitor the protest and protect the people from any violence from the company.

"The CIV Company has now stopped clearing the forest and farmland and is waiting for a resolution from the local authority," he said.

Although there was no reaction from local authorities, the protesters went home after the company moved their tractors from the site on Sunday.

The protesters vowed to return if necessary. "If the tractors come back ... so will the people," Saraen Kaet said. ■

Phnom Penh Post 07-10-2008 p.5.

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Gov't Presents Draft of Plans for Green Growth

BY PHORN BOPHA
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The Ministry of Environment presented a draft of its road map for so-called "green growth" at an inter-ministerial meeting in Phnom Penh on Monday.

The road map broadly outlined challenges faced by 13 different ministries, ranging from water quality to poverty to alternative energy, as well as a few possible solutions. Cambodia is working toward developing a green growth policy to achieve environmentally sustainable growth, as outlined by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

During an opening speech,

UNESCAP representative Aneta Nikolova said that sustainable development is just as important for developing nations like Cambodia as it is for developed countries.

"This is the right time to start, while infrastructure is being built. Don't be hesitant to do it," she said.

In the draft road map, water quality is repeatedly mentioned as a challenge for Cambodia because of a lack of water treatment plants, a poorly developed sewage system and erosion caused by deforestation.

"Water supplies at present are provided inadequately and do not respond to consumer demands, especially the poor, and noticeably, only less than half of rural house-

holds in Cambodia have access to safe water," according to the section of the draft addressing challenges of the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy.

The draft road map also lists possible tools to achieve green growth, including alternative energy sources, improved forest management, microfinance loans for women in rural areas and ecotourism.

Green growth, as defined by UNESCAP, comprises policies promoting sustainable consumption and production, green business, sustainable infrastructure and ecological indicator systems.

(Additional reporting by Bethany Lindsay)

TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2007

The Cambodia Daily, p. 28

Newly Protected Forest To Act As Deterrent to Illegal Logging

BY NEOU VANNARIN
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The Council of Ministers on Friday approved a drafted sub-decree written by the Ministry of Agriculture to establish a new protected forest area in Mondolkiri and Kratie provinces, officials said Sunday.

According to a statement released after the meeting, the area will be classified as protected forest to prevent illegal logging, protect biodiversity and wildlife in the area.

The newly established protected forest covers a large area in Keo Seima district in Mondolkiri and Kratie province's Snuol district. The statement, however, did not specify the size of the area.

Thun Sarath, a spokesman for Ministry of Agriculture's Forestry Administration, confirmed that the area known as "Seima" will now be classified as protected forest, but he could not say how big the area will be.

"It is the...Forestry Administration's response for protection of forest and wildlife. This may be the 10th protected forest," Mr Sarath said.

"The goal is to protect the forest, wildlife, biodiversity and ecology in the area," he added, before referring further questions to Men Pimean, bureau chief for Ministry of Agriculture's wildlife department, who could not be reached for comment.

The area, which will now be protected under Cambodian law, consists mainly of thick forests and is the habitat of many different animal species, said Mondolkiri Governor Say Sokha.

It is important to classify this as a protected forest because there is a lot of illegal logging in the area, he added.

When asked if the classification alone would prevent deforestation in the area, Mr Sokha said: "It is up to the Forestry Administration."

Seng Bunra, country director for Conservation International, said he was unaware that the area had been classified as protected forest.

"Protected forest means that the forest is protected by law, but local people can still use the forest for traditional purposes," he said.

(Additional reporting by Cajsja Collin)

NATIONAL

Arrests quash land dissent

Human rights advocates say the arrests of nine community organisers in the past week is an attempt to silence dissent on the issue of rural land-grabbing

BY CHRANN CHAMROEUN
AND ELEANOR AINGE ROY

LOCAL rights groups are becoming increasingly concerned over the recent spate of arrests of community organisers, with the leaders of nine land-grabbing resistance groups arrested across the Kingdom in the last week.

"Community representatives continue to be arrested, charged and imprisoned because of their efforts to assist fellow villagers to protect their land," said Kek Galabru, president of the human rights group Licadho.

"Frequently there is no evidence whatsoever for the charges against them – the law

is simply misused as a weapon to try to intimidate their communities into giving up land."

The recent arrest cases are unsettling as two of the charges against six of the arrested have been discovered to be unfounded and inaccurate, according to a Licadho investigation.

Six people arrested in Kampong Thom province on October 22 were the representatives of 1,300 families who are facing a land dispute with a Vietnamese company, Tin Bean Co. All six have been released, although only three have been formally charged.

In Svay Rieng province on October 23, two community organisers – Sum Oeung and Tia Khun – representing thirteen families, were arrested



Boeung Kak resident Nhoem Ray at a protest against eviction in Phnom Penh on Monday. HENG CHHANG

and have been charged with damaging private property. They are in detention.

A further four community organisers representing forty families were arrested in Siem

Reap province Friday, and have been sent to pre-trial detention. The men in this case were charged with using violence, but according to Licadho's investigation, the ac-

cusations are incorrect.

International human rights group Amnesty International and the Asian Human Rights Commission have added their voices to the escalating concerns about the detention of community organisers.

Sam Rainsy Party spokesman Son Chhay said detention is commonly used as a scare tactic to frighten potential protesters.

"Such action is pre-meditative. It is used to scare other provinces from rising up and protesting," he said.

Son Chhay said such acts would continue as long as the justice system remained dependent and always supported those in positions of power and authority. ■

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