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# **Organic Agriculture: An Empowering Development Strategy for Small-Scale Farmers? A Cambodian Case Study.**

**A thesis presented  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores claims that organic agriculture may be an empowering development strategy by investigating the impacts of conversion to organic farming systems on the lives of small-scale farmers in Cambodia. The thesis interrogates the diverse uses and abuses of the term ‘empowerment’ in development rhetoric and argues for an empowerment model that is derived from farmers’ self-defined concepts of development. This model was used to conduct a qualitative case study involving semi-structured interviews and focus groups with members of organics initiatives in seven diverse Cambodian communities.

Results indicate that many farmers in all communities felt that their most important objective was not only to achieve food security, but to be able to grow sufficient rice to feed their family. Farmers joined the organics initiatives primarily to improve their health and reduce the cost of farming inputs. As a result of joining the initiatives, all farmers (including both certified and non-certified organic farmers) felt they had improved their health and food security. Most farmers also increased incomes, created stronger family and community ties and felt they had more control over their livelihoods. These benefits were not, however, distributed equally amongst individuals or communities. Very poor and isolated farmers could not generally access benefits. The three main factors that determined the impact of the organics initiatives on farmer empowerment were identified as: the individual’s level of resources, the strength of the farmer group, and the policies and values of the supporting organisation.

The implications for future initiatives are, firstly, the tremendous potential for farmers and wider rural communities to benefit from organic agriculture as a development strategy. However, this study also shows that if organics is to be viable for low-resource people, it may be necessary to promote both resources and techniques in organics initiatives. Also, a focus on building strong relationships both within the farmers group and linkages with local and wider stakeholders may enhance long-term sustainability of organics initiatives.



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## Abbreviations

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>AFA</b>	Asian Farmers Association
<b>AFN</b>	Alternative Food Networks
<b>ANT</b>	Actor Network Theory
<b>ANU</b>	Australian National University
<b>AUSAid</b>	Australian Government Overseas Development Agency
<b>CEDAC</b>	Centre d'Etude et de Developpement Agricole Cambodgien/Cambodian Centre for Study and Development in Agriculture
<b>COrAA</b>	Cambodian Organic Agriculture Association
<b>DFID</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>DK</b>	Democratic Kampuchea (Pol Pot's political party)
<b>EM</b>	Effective Micro-organisms
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation
<b>FFS</b>	Farmer Field Schools
<b>FSR</b>	Farming Systems Research
<b>GAD</b>	Gender and Development
<b>GCC</b>	Global Commodity Chain
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GMO</b>	Genetically Modified Organism
<b>GTZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellescha fur Technische Zusammenabeit (German federal Development Agency)
<b>IDRC</b>	International Development Research Centre
<b>ICS</b>	Internal Control Systems (peer review inspection process for organic certification)
<b>IFAD</b>	International Federation of Agricultural Development
<b>IFOAM</b>	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>IPM</b>	Integrated Pest Management
<b>IRRI</b>	International Rice Research Institute
<b>JICA</b>	Japan International Cooperation Agency
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>MFI</b>	Micro-Finance Institution
<b>MoC</b>	Ministry of Commerce
<b>NAP</b>	Natural Agri-Products
<b>NEDC</b>	Network of Eco-agricultural Development Cambodia
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OFNZ</b>	Organic Farm New Zealand
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute UK
<b>PDA</b>	Provincial Department of Agriculture
<b>PRA</b>	Participatory Rural Appraisal

<b>PRK</b>	People's Republic of Kampuchea (Government established following 1997 constitution)
<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
<b>QOL</b>	Quality of Life
<b>RGC</b>	Royal Government of Cambodia
<b>SDC</b>	UK Sustainable Development Commission
<b>SOP</b>	Systems of Provision
<b>SRI</b>	System of Rice Intensification
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCAP</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
<b>UNHDI</b>	United Nations Human Development Index
<b>US</b>	United States of America
<b>WED</b>	Research group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries
<b>WFFS</b>	World Forum for Food Sovereignty
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WID</b>	Women in Development
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organisation