

From Peace Building to Human Security?

Heang Path and Larry Strange rethink approaches to community-based peace building and conflict resolution training. *

Despite major achievements in the maintenance of peace and stability and macro-economic and infrastructure development, Cambodia remains a post-conflict, aid-dependent, least developed country (LDC). The legacies of prolonged and devastating armed conflict, which came to an end as recently as 1998, have impaired Cambodia's capacity for social and economic development, and for the maturation of democracy. In recent years, new sources of conflict have arisen over access to natural resources, human rights, social and economic inequalities, ethno-cultural relations, political affiliation, unequal access to development resources and labour disputes. With at least a third of its people still living below the poverty line, Cambodia is struggling to meet its specific United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

For the past decade, the Cambodia Resource Development Institute (CDRI)'s Centre for Peace and Development (CPD) has played a significant role in community peace building and conflict resolution, with a mission to build a culture of peace and enhance human security in Cambodia through training in peace building and conflict management. CDRI, CPD's parent institution, undertakes policy-relevant development research on the macro-economy and trade, poverty, agriculture and rural livelihoods, natural resources and the environment, governance and decentralisation. This article considers how these two activities might be better integrated, moving from targeted community peace building and conflict prevention and resolution to community-based training designed from a human security perspective, which locates the causes of conflict and prospects for conflict prevention, management and resolution within a development paradigm. This would mean designing community-based training that is more deeply rooted in local communities' specific development needs and challenges, on the basis of human security assessments and research-based issue-rich case studies in development.

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An Illustration—CPD's Recent Experience in Veal Veng

Veal Veng in Pursat province is an isolated and very poor district located in the Cardamom Mountains close to the Cambodia-Thailand border. About 25 percent of the district land area is covered by conservation zones. Although the road from Pursat town to the district centre is currently in good condition, two of the district's five communes are accessible only by motorcycle during the dry season. Because the district was one of the longest lasting and most recent Khmer Rouge strongholds, the vast majority of the population are former Khmer Rouge who remain isolated physically, socially and psychologically from the rest of Cambodia.

Veal Veng's main livelihoods are based on subsistence or *chamkar* farming—growing rice and crops such as maize, beans, peanuts, sesame, potatoes—and reliance on the district's forests for firewood, hunting, resin, rattan, edible leaves, fruit and roots. Although the district is conducive to cultivation, production is badly limited by a lack of tools and cattle and the seasonal impassability of roads for getting *chamkar* products to markets. Their crop land is constrained by protected areas, and access to forest products to supplement agricultural income is restricted by conservation agencies, land mines and a lack of basic infrastructure. Unlike other areas of Cambodia, only a few civil society organisations have carried out community development activities in the district.

Traditionally, the local community has relied almost entirely on natural resources for survival. However, in recent years, a number of Veal Veng's people have been arrested and fined and had their equipment confiscated for entering protected areas to access forest products. In a very unusual arrangement, two international conservation organisations were mandated by the government to oversee the protected areas, with the authority to take punitive measures, often acting independently of local authorities. This was identified by local community leaders as a major source of potentially serious conflict during CDRI's CPD peace building training activities in the district. The denial of local people's access to forest products has caused protracted tension and confrontation between the community and government-designated conservation agencies, provincial and district officials often playing a difficult intermediary role.

Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Training

Veal Veng is but one example of conflicts occurring in Cambodia over unequal distribution of natural resources and limited community and individual rights to security and development. There are real and immediate threats of conflict over land ownership, access to agricultural land and forest and land concessions, as well as other natural resources, with associated loss of life and serious injury, displacement of people and destruction of homes

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and livelihoods. For example, on 25 March 2005, five people were killed and three seriously injured when military police and police in Poipet, in north-western Cambodia, opened fire on hundreds of villagers who were protesting their forced eviction from a disputed plot of land. The enforcing of a court order related to a land dispute between a village chief and more than 200 poor families had turned into a human tragedy. This was only the most recent in a series of tense and often violent confrontations between local communities and the authorities over land and forest concessions, forced evictions and elite grabbing of natural resources. Such conflicts have real potential for causing serious unrest in rural and remote areas, and are a major challenge to the government in maintaining stability and security and in addressing the underlying causes of these grievances.

Against this backdrop, CPD has conducted peace building and conflict resolution training in various remote locations¹ in former Khmer Rouge strongholds or reconciliation zones, some reconciled to the national government only as recently as 1998. Training in those areas has targeted local commune council members, district officials, local NGO staff, temple and women's associations, village chiefs, heads of local police, military police and soldiers who are in a position to resolve conflicts at their respective institutions. The training provides skills and approaches that can be used in response to conflict situations but does not pretend to address their root causes. Trainees are carefully selected, with particular attention paid to those who are in a position to apply the learning in community life. They include local government officials, police and security officials, NGO staff, community leaders, commune council members, peace workers and activists and monks.

What do we know about the effectiveness and impact of the training and, importantly, what don't we know? To go back to the Veal Veng experience, we know from participant feedback and course evaluations that the training is highly valued as a community capacity-building exercise that provides awareness and skills. The courses, by bringing community leaders together to work with a trusted neutral external organisation, also serve as a community-building catalyst. We know of many cases in which the skills acquired in the training have been practically useful in helping community actors to counsel caution and engender calm in tense community situations, or to think twice before resorting to conflict. We know that the training in the reconciliation zones had a positive role in promoting understanding and acceptance between former Khmer Rouge and non-Khmer Rouge living in close proximity and daily interaction. We also know that the training is perceived as being of value to the community by both Pursat province and Veal Veng district officials, through their responses in interviews and through their repeated re-

quests for more training programmes with similar objectives but deeper scope. What we do not know, however, is also very important. We do not know if the training has any impact on addressing the root causes of conflicts or helps communities to deal better with or negotiate the development challenges that often cause them.

From Peace Building to Human Security?

The Veal Veng training example suggests that, although some in the community now have the knowledge, skills and capacity to discourage and constrain violent action, they cannot yet address the root causes of conflict. This is particularly so regarding food insecurity and livelihoods and access to natural resources, because these issues are rooted within deeper development challenges and still beyond the control of community actors. This is where the concept of human security within a development paradigm may be useful for Cambodia and for the design of case study and research-based community training programmes.

The 1992 UN Agenda for Peace defined peace build-

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ing as actions to identify and support structures that will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. This definition encompasses preventing recurrence of conflict, developing structures that would consolidate peace and advancing a sense of confidence and well-being. It involves the removal of underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems, and the transformation of deficient national structures and capabilities. Typically, peace building includes activities like disarmament, troop cantonment and demobilisation, weapons collection and destruction, election monitoring, deployment of civilian police, repatriation of refugees and the restoration of order. It also addresses systemic issues like the protection of human rights, reforming or strengthening government institutions, promotion of formal and informal political participation and the creation of structures for the institutionalisation of peace, all of which have been experienced by Cambodia as it moved from conflict to post-conflict reconstruction and development.

The 2003 Commission on Human Security's definition of human security is:

*"to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment ... It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity."*²

Human security encompasses the security of individuals and their communities rather than the state and

its national population. It embraces seven dimensions: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.

Human security is people-centred and integrative rather than defensive. It differs from peace building in that it addresses both conflict and development issues, including displacement, discrimination and persecution of vulnerable communities, as well as insecurities related to poverty, health, education and gender disparities. It also responds to other types of inequality through ensuring safety from chronic threats of hunger, disease and repression, and the protection of people from sudden and negative disruptions in the patterns of daily life—whether in homes, jobs or communities.

Human Security Assessments & Training—A Useful Approach?

The United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) characterises human security as the removal or reduction of vulnerability to economic, environmental, social and cultural threats that undermine sustainable development. UNCRD has recently undertaken human security assessments in the Lao PDR, utilising community vulnerability and coping strategies analysis, and capacity assessments at village and district levels, focusing on issues such as household perceptions of risk and coping strategies, access to credit, health, women's concerns and decentralised planning. For CDRI and CPD, this human security assessment and training approach raises some interesting questions about the possible linkages between policy-relevant development research and policy work, and community peace building and conflict transformation training.

Is human security a useful and relevant concept for Cambodia, and how do we establish and validate this? Or is there a risk of simply “importing” yet another international development concept that will further divert attention and capacity from making progress on critical development outcomes? If it is a useful concept, how do we ensure that it is “Cambodianised”, with ownership

and participation by Cambodians at all levels of government, in civil society and in local communities? And what does this mean for the long-term development of the capacity of Cambodians to use the concept effectively in programme design and implementation? How do we design more effective and participatory instruments to assess community human security needs, and particularly key threats, on the basis of which effective capacity development and training programmes on human security, delivered at all levels, can also be designed and evaluated?

At this early stage, we believe human security has potential as both a useful concept and a methodology, but requires further exploration. There is still an important role in Cambodia for specific community-based training on peace building and on conflict prevention, management and resolution, and for such approaches in building community-based reconciliation in relation to the unresolved issues surrounding the Khmer Rouge regime and the prospects for and impact of a Khmer Rouge tribunal. However, it may be that in the future such community-based training would be more effective when designed and delivered in the context of a human security framework linked to key aspects of the social, political and economic development needs of Cambodia and specific local communities. This could have major implications for CDRI's work and for community development in Cambodia.

Endnotes

1. CPD has conducted Working Together for Peace and Development training: three courses in Veal Veng, two courses in Srei Snam of Siem Reap province, four courses in Trapeang Prasat and Anlong Veng of Oddar Meanchey province, two courses in Samlot of Battambang province and two courses in Phnom Vor of Kampot province.
2. *Human Security Now: Final Report of the Commission on Human Security 2003*, p. 4.

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communes in two socio-economically different provinces. The CBPMS data have promoted links between commune, provincial and national planning. The project has developed the capacity of local authorities to implement and take responsibility to update CBPMS in their localities. Six communes in the pilot were able to produce their own poverty statistics books, which they can use for planning and monitoring. In addition to poverty rates at the village level, the exercise provided scientifically generated statistics regarding demography, education, housing, land, water, health, household expenditure, occupation and income, assets, livestock and domestic violence. The results have been widely shared for consideration of repeating CBPMS in other areas. As a result of the national workshop, a technical working group on

pre-identification of poor households was set up and led by the Ministry of Planning.

NIS expressed a keen interest in adapting the CBPMS exercise and gradually nationalising it. However, the lower administrative systems capable of handling the data management and processing are not yet in place because of resource and capacity constraints. NIS has support from various donors and can take up this initiative if there is more seed money from the international Community-Based Monitoring System network. With the valuable experience of this project, CDRI can be an active member of the network, promoting CBPMS replication and expansion. Thus external technical and financial assistance for NIS will be critically important in taking this initiative forward.