

# ENGAGING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL TO COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN CAMBODIA



**Edited by Arnaldo Pellini**

**2012**

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# Chapter III

## LINKING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE GOVERNANCE OF THE SREPOK RIVER IN LUMPHAT DISTRICT, RATANAKIRI PROVINCE CAMBODIA

By: Oeur IL

### Introduction

Fish and fishing are very important to Cambodian culture (Hortle, Lieng et al. 2004). Fisheries resources are found in seas and inland areas such as lakes and rivers. The Srepok river and its tributaries, which form the case study of this chapter, provide critical habitats for fish reproduction (Baird 2009). The Srepok River has its headwaters in the Central Highlands of Viet Nam, then flows across the Cambodian provinces of Monduliri, Ratanakiri and Steung Treng, where it enters the Mekong River. The total area of the Srepok river basin in Cambodia is 11,250 square kilometers, covering about 144 villages (Swift 2006). The Srepok River provides critical fish habitats, water supply and livelihoods to indigenous river communities. In recent years, it has undergone remarkable changes, due to the construction of a number of hydropower dams in Viet Nam. Evidence shows there have been negative downstream impacts, particularly the decline of fisheries resources, human health and livelihoods (Swift 2006); (Mak 2000); (Hortle, Lieng, and Valbo. Jorgensen. 2004); (Baird 2009).

In addition to the negative consequences of the upstream hydroelectric projects, local fishermen have been using destructive fishing methods, such as natural poisons, blocking streams with traditional barrages made of wood and bamboo, and using gill nets, cast nets and fishhooks, all of which have undermined fish resources. In recent years, more modern illegal fishing methods such as electro-fishing and explosives have led to a substantial decrease in fish stocks (Swift 2006).

Maintaining the sustainability of fisheries in river communities presents a major challenge for commune councils in achieving their objective of poverty reduction. The commune council is the lowest form of national government structure promoted via the decentralization and deconcentration reform program of the Cambodian government. It performs both administrative and development functions and has a poverty-reduction objective (CCC-ADI 2003). Stopping illegal destructive fishing is one of the most critical issues facing the relatively new commune councils, especially in the context of depleted vital river resources. In response to the effects of the dam

projects upstream in Viet Nam, a local NGO named the Sekong, Sesan and Srepok Rivers Protection Network (3SPN), in collaboration with other local and international NGOs in and outside the country, have advocated at national and international levels for a reduction in the downstream negative impacts of the dams. Such high-level advocacy has been important in influencing policy changes and responses to local impacts, however the advocacy efforts often had little involvement or direct connection with local people.

There is an increasingly strong realization that local people, local authorities and government agencies must work together to ensure the sustainability of river resources (Gnui, Oeur et al. 2009), indicating that a multi-dimensional approach is needed. On one hand, the process concerns national and international advocacy efforts for policy changes on hydropower dam effects, while on the other hand, the process involves local communities themselves acting together to stop destructive fishing practices. The processes to be pursued and the decisions to be made in such a complex and multi-stakeholder environment are critical for long-term conservation, not only of the Srepok River but for sustainable development in Cambodia.

This chapter is organized in the following way: first it focuses on the conceptual framework and research approach to the case study, second, it defines social capital and good governance, third it focuses on findings and discussions, and last on conclusions and proposed policy initiatives.

## Analytical framework and research approach to the case study

Before 2007, local communities and authorities living along the Srepok River in Chey Oudom commune in Lumphat District, Ratanakiri Province did not work together to address fisheries problems. In 2007, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia's (CCC) Analyzing Development Issues (ADI) Project team and 3SPN conducted a participatory action research (PAR) in four villages of Chey Oudom commune: Deilor, Okan, Samkha and Sre Chhouk. As part of the PAR process, the researchers encouraged villagers, informal voluntary fishery committees, NGOs and the commune authorities to work together to mobilize local materials, technical, financial and social resources to conserve river resources and benefit everyone. This represented a new era of local cooperation for resource governance.

These links between villagers and communities represented the important initial steps towards vertical links with commune authorities.

The aim of this case study is to analyze how these links were developed and maintained. At the same time, the study will explore whether local villagers' vertical relationships have moved beyond the commune level, to reach district and provincial levels.

The overarching research question is:

What governance processes have been developed to establish and maintain vertical links between relevant stakeholders in an effort to sustainably manage Srepok river resources?

Specific questions are:

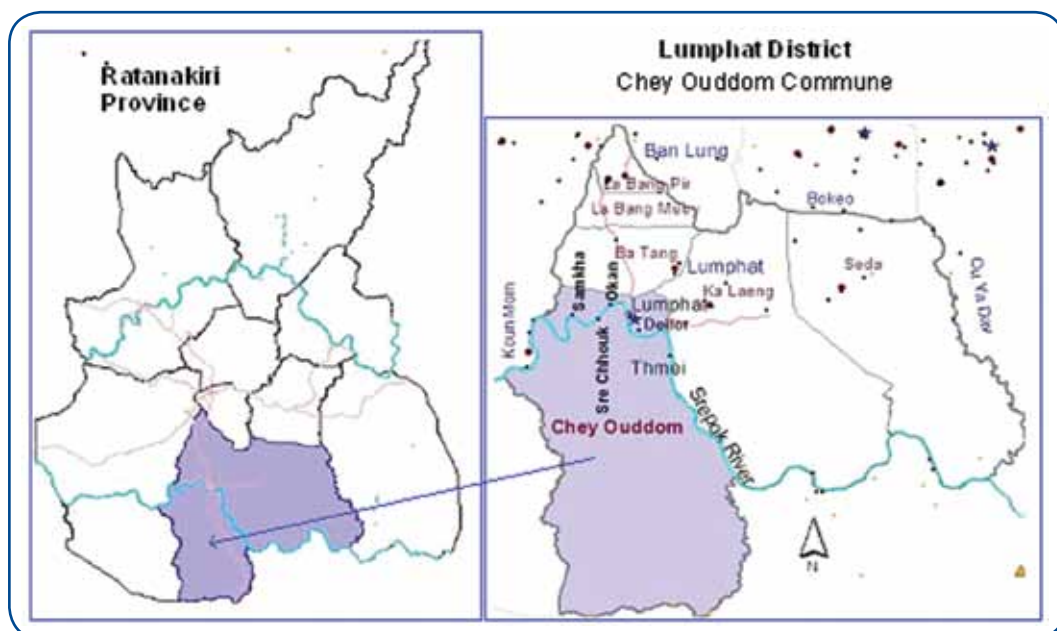
- 1) What steps have been taken to mobilize material, technical, financial and social resources to facilitate these vertical relationships?
- 2) What policy initiatives can be formulated to address the difficulties in establishing and/or using linking relationships to facilitate sustainable management of the Srepok river resources?

The study focuses on linking social networks of the village fishery committees in three villages of Oudom commune: Deilor, Okan and Samkha. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted in two stages: in October 2009, staff from 3SPN conducted face-to-face interviews with representatives of the three village fishery committees, one commune council representative and one Lumphat district authority representative. While provincial authorities were not interviewed, the interviews with the district authority representative included questions about the relationship between district and provincial authorities regarding the governance of the Srepok River.

During the second phase in November 2009, the author conducted phone interviews with one commune council representative, one community-based district network representative and one 3SPN staff member. In late December 2010, the author made two follow-up calls with the 3SPN staff to update information. These phone interviews helped the author reconcile differences in information, clarify points and probe for more in-depth information. Each interview lasted just less than one hour, which was adequate for the open-ended questions.

The village fishery committees are seen as representing the villagers. The study examines the relationships between the village fishery committees and government structures at the commune, district and provincial levels. The guide questions were formulated with this in mind. The results of the interviews were analyzed against the theories of social capital and principles of good governance. (Hortle, Lieng, and Valbo. Jorsensen. 2004).

**Figure 1: Case Study Area**



**Source:** (Gnui, Oeur et al. 2009) “Gnui, N., I. Oeur, et al. (2009). Mobilizing Villagers to Stop Illegal Fishing along the Srepok River in Ratanakiri Province. Emerging Trends, Challenges and Innovations: Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) in Cambodia. Phnom Penh, CBNRM Learning Institute.

## Social capital

As seen Chapter 1, social capital was popularized by Robert Putnam in the early 1990s. While there is no one single, accepted definition of social capital, it generally refers to features of social relations characterized by norms of trust, cooperation, connectedness and reciprocity that influence human activities (Lehtonen 2004); (Grafton 2005); (CCC-ADI 2007); (Akcomak 2008). Lehtonen defines social capital (2004, p. 204) as “including not only the largely informal, and often local relationships, but also the more formalized institutions such as the government, the political regime, the rule of law, the court system, and civil and political liberties” (Lehtonen 2004).

Grafton (2005) maintains that there are three particularly relevant principal qualitative characteristics of social capital which we have used to inform the analytical framework of the case study: 1) Trust and trustworthiness, mostly influencing economic transactions, allowing mutual exchange or reciprocity without fear of exploitation; 2) Civic engagement and cooperation ensuring a voice in decision making, sharing responsibilities, solving conflict together and exchanging information (Grafton 2005). Social capital has structural characteristics that have been defined as bonding social capital, bridging social capital and linking social capital. The first, bonding social capital refers to the strong horizontal relationships among families, friends and neighbors. The second, bridging social capital refers to the horizontal

ties that link distant friends, associates and colleagues, both inside and outside the community (Lehtonen 2004); (Grafton 2005); (CCC-ADI 2007). The third, linking social capital is represented by vertical links between communities and institutions, such as government agencies, banks and powerful people beyond the community itself. People who enjoy a high degree of well-being normally have strong networks within and across all three types of social capital (Lehtonen 2004); (Grafton 2005); (CCC-ADI 2007).

Grafton (2005) argues that in fisheries governance, bonding and bridging social capital play an important role in dispute resolution and problem solving, and supporting regional and national levels of management. Since hierarchical approaches involve higher costs of monitoring and enforcement, and normally exclude ideas and expertise of fishermen and women, social capital becomes important and necessary for co-management. By relying on local social networks, regulators incorporate local knowledge on the status of the resources, participation in decisions, set up dispute-resolution mechanisms and offer long-term tenure of resources and legal recognition. Social capital plays an important role in five crucial aspects of governance: legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability and fairness. Through networks of social capital, fishermen and women monitor the behavior of their peers and deal with illegal fishing by maintaining links with higher authorities, who have the power to enforce laws.

## Good governance principles

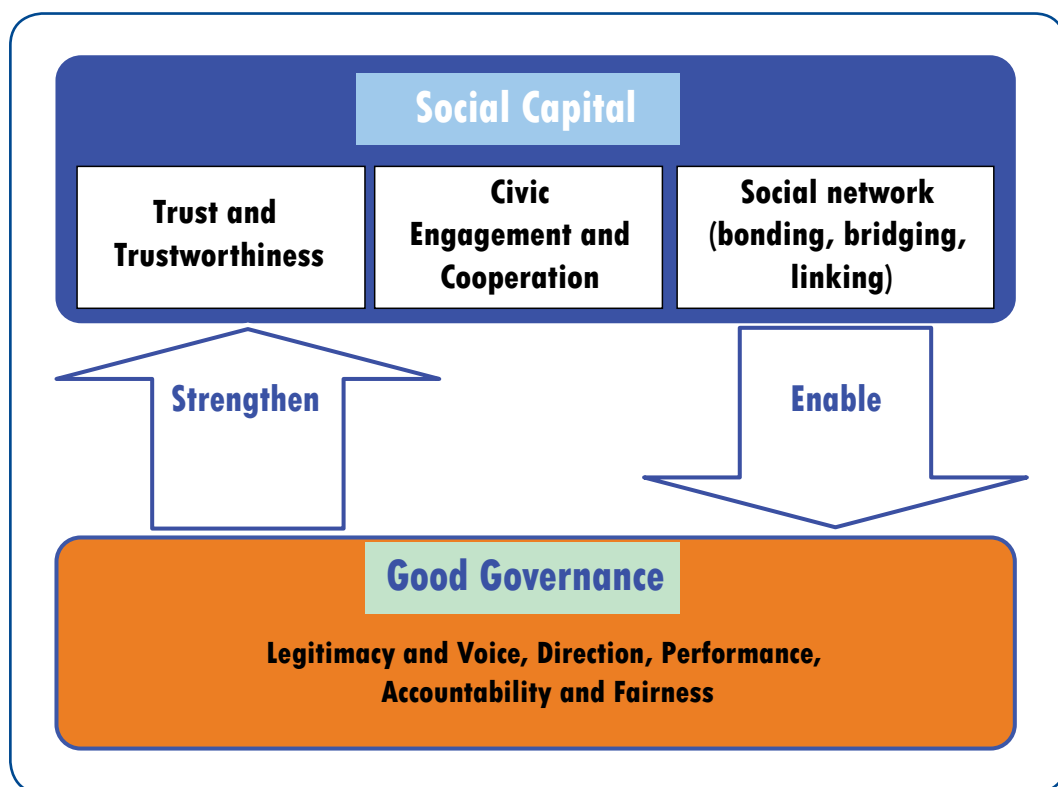
Five good governance principles have been chosen to inform our analytical framework. Good governance principles are described by many authors and institutions and may be seen as complementary in this study's analysis. The five principles of good governance based on the work of (Graham, Amos et al. 2003); (Grafton 2005); (Buck 1998) include legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability and fairness.

- *Legitimacy and voice* refers to the participation of men and women in decision making, their expression of opinions and mediation of differences. It is about the interaction between various actors including villagers, committees and government officials. More importantly, collective efforts are recognized by authorities.
- *Direction* is about leaders and members of the public who have a broad and long-term view on good governance and human development.
- *Performance* means institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders. Institutions produce results that meet needs, making the best use of resources, and supporting monitoring and enforcement.

- *Accountability* means decision makers in government, private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public. It also includes transparency which is built on the free flow of information, ability to monitor rates of change in resource use and clearly define the boundary of resources.
- *Fairness* means all men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their wellbeing. Legal frameworks should be fair and laws enforced impartially against violators.

The analytical framework that guided the design and analysis of the case study links the concept of social capital with five principles of good governance as shown in Figure 2. This study narrows down the focus by selecting only one of three aspects of the social network: linking social capital by seeing it through the principles of good governance.

**Figure 2: Social Capital and Good Governance**



Good governance and social capital are two separate concepts that overlap in several important ways. Participation, transparency and fairness are important aspects of both concepts. Similarly, the notion of collectivity encompasses trust, cooperation and shared responsibility. NGOs are able to provide resources, technical know-how and coordination. Local authorities have police forces at their disposal to enforce the law. Village fishery committees use their labor and time to tackle illegal

fishing cases. The relationships between these different actors may be considered aspects of social capital (establishing social networks), while the resulting decision making and agreements demonstrate good governance to protect the fishery resources.

While both concepts share elements in our framework, social capital can be seen to inform and influence good governance. For example, participation requires opportunities to voice ideas and concerns. Strong social capital structures (bonding, bridging and linking), make this outcome more likely, while trust and connectedness increase the likelihood even further. Social capital is considered to play an 'enabling role' and good governance a 'strengthening role'. Social capital enables an adherence to good governance principles, whereas good governance strengthens already existing social capital within a specific context, or challenges the existing social capital by questioning an unequal relationship, to achieve an equitable share of resources for all, rather than for a few. The processes are likely to interact when multiple actors at different levels have equal opportunities to work together and identify common ground, a necessary element in sustainable development.

## Findings and discussions

The results of the data collected through interviews with various stakeholders are summarized in Table 2 along the two dimensions of social capital and good governance. Based on these results, linking relationships between the village fishery committees and actors such as 3SPN, commune, district and provincial authorities are analyzed against the selected principles of good governance, namely legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability and fairness.

3SPN's role has been vital in strengthening linking social capital for good governance in the areas of legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability and fairness. 3SPN initiated and facilitated regular monthly meetings with village fishery committee members and local commune and district authorities. It established contacts with provincial authorities to amplify the voice of local committees at the provincial level through various meetings and workshops. During these meetings 3SPN ensured there was sufficient information sharing from all sides to allow everyone to do their work. 3SPN also provided some financial support to these meetings and workshops. 3SPN provided direction to the overall process, including collaboration across provinces, an important step in scaling-up efforts necessary for greater impact. 3SPN and the village fishery committees in Chey Oudom commune are in contact with Provincial Department of Fisheries officials in the adjacent province of Mondul Kiri. These officials support fishery projects in Mondul Kiri province. Through support provided by 3SPN, fishery committees from Mondul Kiri province and those from Ratanak Kiri Province's Andong Meas district came together with the Chey Oudom fishery committees of Lumphat district to develop an annual implementation plan. During the workshop, statutes were prepared with the Provincial Department of Fisheries, for

the village fishery committees to obtain official recognition from the National Fisheries Administration.

## Dimension 1 - Legitimacy and voice

Legitimacy is stronger when authorities are located nearby. Face-to-face interaction with commune and district officials at monthly meetings provided excellent opportunities for village fishery committees to voice their concerns directly to local authorities. Previously, this level of formal and regular communication did not exist in the Srepok river commune. Commune authorities strengthened relationships with fishery committees through visits and by sharing information about the Fishery Law. They encouraged them to share the information with other villagers. The fishery committees now report illegal fishing cases to the commune chief. This strong support from the commune officials empowered the committees, and as a result, they have had remarkable success against illegal fishing since 2007. The relationship has reached provincial level, with Department of Fisheries' officials making some informal visits and meetings with the village fishery committees in 2009.

## Dimension 2 - Giving direction

Face-to-face interactions with government authorities have helped the fishery committees clarify their strategic direction. However, opinions on the sustainability of the fishery committees are diverse. Some village fishery committee members from Samka and Okan are optimistic that they will continue to be active after 3SPN withdraws its support. Their roles need to be formally recognized at provincial and national levels and a clear statute is needed to strengthen voluntary efforts. Without support, the local government will continue, as they had already become involved in providing knowledge about the types of illegal fishing tools, procedures for dealing with illegal cases during patrols and occasional financial support. The fishery committee in Deilor village and the district authority were more pessimistic about the lack of funds to support meals and fuel during patrols. Social relations between the fishery committees and the Provincial Department of Fisheries were strong, as they promised to facilitate official registration at the national level. Since the commune chief signed the deika, or commune order, against illegal fishing, the fishery committees have been recognized locally. Despite having yet to encounter objections about their right to perform their roles, the committees feel the need for full recognition at a higher level.

## Dimension 3 - Performance

Support and information sharing strengthen performance. Several cases of illegal fishing were dealt with successfully through horizontal and vertical links between the committees and other stakeholders. For example, indigenous people used poisonous herbs to catch fish in the Ototeung stream which borders the communes of Serey

Mongkul and Chey Oudom. This case was addressed successfully with support from the military police, the commune police, the commune chief and officials from the District Environment Office. In another case, in April 2009, the commune authority and staff of 3SPN reported six illegal fishermen, who were chased out of the commune by authorities and police after they used illegal electrocuting fishing equipment, and in another case, even without the support of the commune authority, villagers and the fishery committee were courageous enough to seize destructive fishing equipment. The fishery committee in Samkha village said illegal fishermen have become afraid of the fishery committees because the relationships between the committees and the higher authorities have become much stronger. The close collaboration between the fishery committees and government authorities in the study villages has increased the ability of local villagers to respond to illegal fishing activities.

## Dimension 4 - Accountability

Accountability strengthens legitimacy and, as a result, direction and performance increase. To some extent, the commune authorities bridged the information gap between the fishery committees and the district and provincial authorities. The commune authorities have also responded positively to requests from fishery committees. After receiving boat engines from an NGO, two of the committees asked the commune council for permission to cut logs from nearby forested areas to build patrol boats. The commune authorities agreed, stipulating the volume of logs to be cut and the duration of the cutting, to avoid potential for abuse. The district authorities are committed to developing fishery resources over the next five to 10 years. This commitment has seen a plan at the district level to create a committee to intervene in cases of illegal fishing. The fishery committees welcome this institutional arrangement, as it gives them immediate access to a single entry point to the higher authorities, in cases of illegal fishing. Prior to this planned arrangement, the committees had to approach several people and authorities to solve their problems against illegal fishermen.

## Dimension 5 - Fairness

Fairness depends on levels of interaction and collaboration between stakeholders. Commune financial resources and police intervention have been distributed without discrimination, based on real needs. For example, when Samkha committee approached for assistance in dealing with cases of illegal fishing, the commune chief provided 100,000 riels (USD 25) from the commune budget to cover the cost of boat fuel. Similarly in Thmey village, the commune chief provided the cash equivalent to 30 liters of fuel for patrol boats. Fishery committees were able to enforce the rules and regulations for violations committed by outsiders in one case in Thmey village. Under the existing arrangement, all villages involved in the efforts against illegal fishing have equal rights to use the boats for patrolling and dealing with cases of illegal

fishing. In this way the patrol boats have been used to benefit the entire commune. In December 2009, at a meeting of the village fishery committees and the district and commune authorities, the commune officials declared that they would cover the fuel expenses of the boats patrolling the river. This arrangement facilitated equal access to resources, especially for those villages which had recently joined the efforts against illegal fishing and had not received support in the past. As a result of the collective action, villagers now see tangible economic benefits, as all informants claimed that fish resources had increased since efforts began to stop illegal fishing.

## Conclusions and proposed policy initiatives

Linking social capital relationships have been established robustly between the village fishery committees and the commune and district authorities as a result of the cooperative efforts to prohibit illegal fishing in Chey Oudom commune. This case study shows how local people can take control of their own development, rather than waiting passively for development projects. The case study has shown that commune authorities provided financial resources to support the fishery committees and the district authorities were involved in providing direction and sharing information. To support the community effort, district officials organized a special task force in response to illegal fishing activities. The district authorities have supported the preparation of statutes for the official registration of the village fishery committees.

The emergence of linking social capital of the fishery committees with Ratanakiri provincial officials has not been as strong as those with Chey Oudom commune officials or the Lumphat district officials. Nonetheless, these relationships are steadily increasing. The Provincial Department of Fisheries offered awareness-raising sessions through an NGO, and has promised to assist the committees to officially register at the national level. This is seen as a major step forward in supporting local efforts to sustain the Srepok River fishery resources. The Provincial Department of Fisheries has taken steps to help the fishery committees access telephones to allow them to seek support and advice when it is needed.

Establishing networks of linking social capital with higher authorities has been a relatively new experience for the village fishery committees. At the same time, the benefit of establishing these vertical social relations for the local governance of Srepok River resources is clearly evident. Personal relationships that have been established between committee members and the charismatic officials need to be institutionalized, to ensure that the ties of linking social capital become permanent. Institutionalizing relationships at commune, district and provincial levels would help ensure that the villagers and fishery committees would maintain access to higher level authorities, irrespective of specific individuals holding positions. These institutional arrangements need to be established at the sub-national level to maintain the sustainability of present efforts and help support the local governance of the river resources in the long term.

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