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Supervisor: Prof Katarina Sjöberg

Author: Stefanie Licht

“Even though we are angry we cannot do anything”

**An Ethnographic Case Study of the Interplay between Local
Power Structures and the Identification of Poor Households
Programme in Rural Cambodia**



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Abstract

This thesis studies the interplay between the pre-existing social structures in rural Cambodia and the ‘Identification of Poor Households Programme’. The aim is to comprehend the processes and dynamics that people’s actions give rise to when they accommodate and adapt the external development intervention into the realities they live in. A focus is put on the influence of local power structures on the adaptation of the programme. To identify and research these dynamics, an ethnographic approach is applied. The analysis indicates that the community's former experiences with development interventions, a hierarchical social order, self-identification as inferior citizen, and related to that, certain local social norms influence the way the programme is adapted by the community. The results show that the programme design’s underlying conceptualisation of power is too simplistic, as it addresses only formalised decision-making processes, but neglects power exercised ‘behind the scenes’ or in form of internalised domination.

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List of Abbreviations

DFID	Department for International Development of the United Kingdom
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit / German Society for International Cooperation
IDPoor	Identification of Poor Households
NGO	Non-Governmental-Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development.
VRG	Village Representative Group

1. Introduction

This research has been a journey. It started with an internship in a development project on social health protection in Cambodia implemented by the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ).¹ This was the first time for me in this country. Since the start of the United Nations' mission in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1993 numerous development agencies have entered the country and set up their projects. According to the Cambodian Council for Development² up to date 19 governmental bi-lateral partners and 14 multi-lateral partners (like UN bodies) are implementing various development programmes (Council for the Development of Cambodia, 2015a). The non-governmental sector is equally busy with 530 national and international NGOs registered, currently implementing over 600 programmes throughout country (Council for the Development of Cambodia, 2015b). Thereby, Cambodia ranks second after Rwanda on the total number of NGOs active in a country (Strangio, 2014:7).

Within this jungle of development programmes the 'Identification of Poor Households Programme' (IDPoor programme) was designed to facilitate poverty-oriented planning by shedding some light on the poverty situation in rural Cambodia. The objective is to categorise all households in the countryside into different poverty categories, based on their socio-economic situation. This is supposed to improve targeting of services and development assistance for the poorest households in the communities. The programme it is supposed to be used as the main planning tool by the different development agencies active in the country (Ministry of Planning, 2015).

The IDPoor programme captured my interest as I encountered anecdotic evidence according to which the project fosters social exclusion and stigmatisation of the identified poor during my time in Phnom Penh. Even though, the technical aspects of the programme had been scrutinised by the World Bank in an unpublished study (World Bank, n.d.), no research regarding the impact of the project on the communities had ever been conducted. Hence, an explorative research design was chosen to investigate the rumours more systematically by studying how the IDPoor programme influences the local social structures. Yet, throughout the fieldwork, it became apparent that rather the social structures influence

¹ GIZ is the main implementing agency of the German governmental development projects.

² The government institution coordinating the development assistance between the royal Government of Cambodia, development partners and NGOs.

the programme, not vice versa. As my understanding of the local situation shifted, the focus of the research changed as well. The fieldwork indicated that the unfolding of the project³ was affected by intersecting perceptions of local leadership and citizenship, acceptance or resistance to domination, and the communities' experiences with former development programmes. The study scrutinises these processes by exploring the ways in which the IDPoor programme is adapted and shaped by the community's pre-existing local power structures. This reflexive approach also guided the development of the research questions and the theoretical framework, which were constantly refined along the process of making sense of the material.

1.1. Research Questions

Once in the field, my empirical material pinpointed to the need to apply a theoretical framework that allows for analysing how actors can exercise power in different ways to influence decision-making processes, as well as how domination creates willing subordination and hidden resistance. Even though power forms a central concept for understanding societies (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009:1), it is regarded as "one of the most badly theorised concepts in development studies" (Nuijten, 2005:1). The study addresses these shortcomings by illustrating how – when designing a programme – a narrow and simplistic understanding of power can facilitate elite capture and the reproduction of (unequal) power relations. Hence, this work contributes to a more thorough understanding of the complex processes that shape the adaptation of development interventions by the local realities they encounter. Specifically, I illustrate how the concept of power constitutes an important aspect in understanding these processes. The main research question therefore reads as follows: *How does the Kaoh Moan community adapt the 'Identification of Poor Households' intervention to its pre-existing social structures?*

In order to analyse this, the following sub-questions will be addressed:

1. *How are the communities' perceptions of the intervention related to their historical experiences with development programmes?*
2. *How are dimensions of power essential in understanding the process of adaptation?*
3. *How do the local power structures limit and enable villagers' actions when engaging with the IDPoor intervention?*

³ Within this study the terms programme and project are used interchangeably.

1.2. Disposition

In the next chapter the relevant literature, the background of the case under study and the setting of the fieldwork is presented.

The section on methodology clarifies the study's underlying theory of science and presents different stages of the ethnographic work. The decision to conduct an ethnographic study entails more than just applying a certain research design, which will be elaborated on throughout the section.

The theoretical framework, presented in chapter 4, builds on Long's conceptualisation of development programmes as external interventions, which allows scrutinising emergent forms of interactions and strategies that the intervention gives rise to. In order to theorise how these interactions are limited and enabled by power structures Giddens' duality of structure is introduced. His idea of power as transformative capacity forms the basis for applying Lukes' three-dimensional concept of power. In order to present and analyse conflicting local strategies, Scott's concept of hidden resistance is introduced as a complementary model of explanation to Lukes' idea of internalised domination.

In chapter 5 the material gathered during my fieldwork is thematically presented. I cover four identified themes which represent the community's experiences and perceptions of the IDPoor programme and the local structures that shape its adaptation.

Within the analysis, I theorise the various interplays through which the community adapted the two participatory features of the project. Accounting for the ways in which the village chief was able to broaden and consolidate his power I illuminate the interconnectedness of power exercised in different dimensions. Moreover, villagers' understanding of leadership and self-ascription as citizens restricts their engagement with the programme. Yet, only some members of the community have internalised the domination, whereas others tactically comply to benefit from the programme while pursuing non-confrontative strategies of resistance.

In chapter 7, the implications for a more complex account of power when designing programmes are represented. I scrutinise in how far the IDPoor project facilitates the reproduction of unequal power structures. This thesis ends by emphasising the need for better contextualisation of development activities and highlighting areas of further research.

2. Background of the Case and Context

This chapter first discusses previous relevant studies and illustrates academic debates in order to position the study in the overall research context. Afterwards, the IDPoor programme is outlined, whereby a focus is put on the projects' participatory features, as they form the core of the later analysis. Afterwards, the local setting – Kaoh Moan village⁴ – is described in order to illuminate the context in which the IDPoor project is implemented and to provide background information for the reader to be able to situate the findings in a broader context.

2.1. Literature Overview

In this work the 'traditional' three-stage research process (read - do - write) was dropped in favour of a mixed approach whereby reading, doing and writing was combined right from the beginning. This is common in ethnography and allows to gradually piece together a study which is interesting, relevant and doable (Crang and Cook, 2004:2). Therefore, this review discusses the literature I have read and reflected on throughout the research process which helped me to form an understanding of my study and to position my research.

Previous research shows that a discrepancy between the expected outcomes of development programmes and their actual impacts and consequences exists. One identified reason is *the dismissal of the local social-cultural structures* when 'outside experts' design development programmes. Li's (2007) brilliant historical study of the Indonesian highland shows how the causes of underdevelopment were rendered technical and non-political by the different development agencies engaging in the area. Obviously, if agencies conclude they cannot tailor an adequate project to tackle the causes of underdevelopment their legitimacy is threatened. Thus, social relations and political processes are framed, problematised and rearranged in alignment with outsiders' expert design to reaffirm the own position (Li, 2007). Arce and Long (1992) focus more on the dynamics between development experts and the 'target group' when researching the intersections of different forms of knowledge between Mexican peasants and bureaucrats in a rural development programme. Analysing how their knowledge production is relational to social, cultural and situational factors, the authors trace the limited success of the programme back to the failure to consider and bridge these different knowledge forms (Arce and Long, 1992). Advancing this argument, Nuijten (2005) claims the already existing (informal) organising practices within the communities have to be taken

⁴ Different English spelling variants of the name of the village exist. In this work the transcription from the IDPoor Data base is used for the village, the commune and the district.

into consideration when designing external projects. By researching a natural resource management programme, she contests the idea that establishing a community-organisation, equipping with democratic decision-making processes and transparent procedures, will automatically foster empowerment of the whole community. Instead the organisation will be accommodated and shaped by the fractured context and does not lead to more power and freedom of the excluded per se (Nuijten, 2005).

Yet, not only has the neglect of essential structural aspects of the different contexts limited programmes' progress and impact. Related to that is the *(mis)representation of the 'target group'* of the programme as passive, traditional and backwards oriented and a naive understanding of how local people adapt and shape development activities. Various studies highlight, how people negotiate, manipulate or resist projects as active agents. Results vary from refusing responsabilising participation (Gardner, 2012) and adapting front-stage behaviour for the development agencies (Mosse 2010; Rossi, 2004) to monopolising or side-tracking aid opportunities (Olivier de Sardan, 2005; Moore, 2005; Villerreal, 1994). Villerreal (1994) highlights how women strategic align or resist certain features of a programme fostering women's economic inclusion. Her results indicate that the women adopted parts they regarded useful from their individual perspective (not all women valued the same parts of the project), while overall keeping their own particular objectives (Villerreal, 1994). Similarly, by reflecting on years of anthropological research in West Africa Olivier de Sardan (2005) finds that "development packages are never completely adapted by the target group, but picked apart and adopted selectively" and that these "appropriation [...] [often] assumes frames which run counter the project's objective and methods" (Olivier de Sardan, 2005:145). Hence, 'the target group' cannot be regarded as passive, static entity but rather as a diverse group of actors with different rationales which appropriate the programme and influence the way it will unfold.

As a response to the limited success and failure to trigger and control development researchers and practitioners explored alternative approaches to development. Thereby, participation became the silver bullet to development throughout the 1990s and was integrated into the mainstream developmental discourse. Through the participatory turn the focus shifted towards the importance of local-level history, geographies and socio-cultural circumstances in order to understand community level development (Biggs, 2014). Hence, the aspects the former studies identified as root-causes for unsuccessful development activities were addressed. Yet, scrutinising these new participatory programmes, many studies identified a

too simplistic and technical understanding of participation (for example: Gomez et al, 2010; Hoben 1995; Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Long and Long, 1992; Oliver de Sardan, 2005; Rhoades, 2006). Exemplary is Biggs and Sharp's (2004) research of the World Bank's attempt to integrate indigenous knowledge and local participation into their strategies. They conclude that the Bank's approach framed local knowledge as little more than a list of technical, easy identifiable forms of knowledge, which were not understood as embedded in wider socio-cultural and historical structures. Thereby, the Bank's conceptualisation of local knowledge did not foster fundamental changes within the institutions top-down discourse (Biggs and Sharp, 2004). Cook and Kothari (2001) go as far as to label participation the new tyranny in development studies, claiming participatory programmes "facilitate illegitimate or unjust exercises of power" (Cook and Kothari, 2001:4). According to the authors, this is based on a naive understanding of local communities as homogeneous, static and harmonious entities, whereby power relations and conflicts between different interest groups are concealed (ibid.; also see Li 2007). Hence, the idea of bottom-up participatory development projects became detached from its anthropological claim to draw attention to actor's practices, strategies and contextual constraints (Bierschenk, Chauveau, Olivier de Sardan, 2002). In sum, the research indicates a miss-match exists between the insights thorough ethnographic research could offer for development programmes, and development practitioner's use of formalised participatory tools (Gomez et al, 2010; Mosse, 2013; Olivier de Sardan, 2005).

The discussed studies highlight the failure of development programmes to adequately reflect structural as well as agency-related characteristics of development settings in their designs. Even though the participatory turn in development was expected to address these shortcomings, the review indicates that its instrumentalisation for mainstream development programmes fails its purpose. This study positions itself within the broader academic claim for a systematic (re)engagement of ethnography in development studies. Not just by applying 'ethnographic tools' to imitate participation and context-sensitivity, but through research thoroughly grounded in people's life-worlds.

This study contributes to this by researching how the IDPoor programme interacts with and is adapted by the context it is introduced to. As mentioned in the introduction, the programme has not been researched yet even though it is supposed to function as a basis for many other development activities throughout Cambodia. I argue Giddens' theory of structuration offers a valuable and so far underestimated approach in development studies to understand the interplay between structure and agency when new programmes enter a

development setting. Through focusing on the participatory features of the IDPoor programme and how they are shaped by the power structures in Kaoh Moan, the study contributes to a better understanding of the multiple ways in which power influences the unfolding, progress and effects of development projects.

2.2. The Identification of Poor Households Programme

2.2.1. Programme Rationale and Objective

The ‘Identification of Poor Households Programme’ is a national development programme managed by the Cambodian Ministry of Planning with the objective to “officially mandate National Standardised Procedures for Identification of Poor Households and to achieve their implementation throughout Cambodia” (Ministry of Planning, 2015). This means, based on certain socio-economic criteria the poverty level of Cambodian households will be assessed and a poverty status⁵ will be assigned. The identified poor households obtain a personalised Equity Card, which grants access to different development services available in that region. The Ministry of Planning states a number of potential benefits, like the provision of free or discounted health care, financial support for poor pupils and students or allocation of land concessions to the poor. To date, mainly the provision of public health care is connected to data of the IDPoor programme (ibid.). The programme has only been implemented in rural areas, but an expansion to cover urban areas is envisioned (GIZ,2015). The purpose of the programme is to “directly target services and development assistance to the poorest households in a village in order to help lift them out of poverty” (Ministry of Planning, 2015). Overall, the government of Cambodia “intends to make IDPoor the primary targeting methodology across all social protection schemes” (ibid.), which highlights the importance of the programme as a foundation for social services and other development projects. So far, cooperation partners have included the European Commission, the former Australian development organisation AusAID, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and GIZ. From 2015 on the Ministry of Planning intends to carry out the procedure independently using exclusively state funds.

In regard to the research interest this study focuses on the implementation of the project on the local level and how it is shaped and adapted by local structures. Hence, the

⁵ Three categories exist: Level 1 Poor households (the extreme poor), Level 2 Poor households (poor), and non-poor households (Ministry of Planning, 2015a).

participatory features of the programme design, with which communities directly interact, will be explored in the following chapter.

2.2.2. The Participatory Features of the Programme

The IDPoor programme has a clear participatory approach, as the categorisation of households “is based on transparency and participation” (GIZ, n.d.) and relies on villagers’ perception of poverty and their local knowledge to identify who is poor within their communities (ibid.). In order to achieve this, two participatory features are integrated into the design.

The first is the constitution of a *Village Representative Group* (VRG) as the overall responsible body for implementing the IDPoor programme on the local level. The groups’ responsibilities range from jointly deciding which households shall be interviewed and conducting these assessments, to dealing with objections and requests made by the villagers in regard to the categorisation (Ministry of Planning, 2008:8). The score each household gets assigned, based on the questionnaire, serves only as an indication for the poverty categorisation. Sometimes special circumstances (like illness of a family member, crop loss or a high number of young children) impact the poverty status of a household, but are not adequately reflected in the questionnaire score. The VRG can consult on such cases and jointly assign another poverty category to the household (Ministry of Planning, 2012:4). Hence, the VRG is not just responsible for technical aspects of establishing a list of poor households, but constitutes an active and influential actor in the process of discussion, reflection and modification of the categorisation of households. Every VRG consists of at least five members of the community that are publicly elected by all villagers. Additionally, the implementation manual of the IDPoor programme demands certain composition criteria, like the inclusion of women (Ministry of Planning, 2008:7-8). Through the public election it is ensured that the group acts independently from local power structures or conflicts within the village and is accepted and legitimised by the community. Thus, the VRG not just reflects the participatory principle of the programme. It also constitutes a control mechanism of the categorisation process to enhance transparency and accuracy of the implementation. This is in line with one main objective of the activity: “to reduce conflicts in the communities due to the shared acceptance of the categorisation” (ibid.:1).

The second participatory feature of the programme’s design is the *village consultation meeting* on the first draft list of poor households. The meeting constitutes a platform for the

whole community to discuss and give feedback to the preliminary categorisation of households done by the VRG. The aim is to reach consensus regarding the categorisation within the community. Additionally to the meeting, villagers can submit objections and requests to the VRG (or the Commune Council directly) up to seven days after the meeting. The suggestions of the villagers are reviewed by the VRG and they must find a joint decision for each household in relation to the objections or requests from the villagers (Ministry of Planning, 2008:22-26). Overall, this element of the design advances legitimacy and acceptance of the programme within the community while fostering a transparent implementation and gives the villagers the opportunity to take part in the implementation process.

2.3. Description of the Setting – Kaoh Moan Village

Within this chapter the setting in which the case study was conducted is presented. This does not constitute an ‘objective account’. Rather, the text and all following accounts of the village or its inhabitants involve interpretation. Hence, describing Kaoh Moan means framing and representing the village in a way I consider important for understanding the gathered material and the overall context of the study.

The fieldwork was conducted in Kaoh Moan village, in Kaoh Andaet district in Takeo province. The map in the appendix indicates the location of the village within Takeo province. There are 126 households and around 560 to 580 people currently living in the village. A rather big number of households were female-headed during the time of the fieldwork, as a lot of men work outside the village on construction sites throughout the dry season. In March 2015 eight households were landless, mostly due to failure to pay back loans.

The village is located approximately one hour by motorbike from the nearest market in Thom Loab. Thus, traders regularly come to the village to buy and sell products. The village itself has no market – only three little kiosks with a very limited variety of products, mostly sweets and gasoline, exist. It takes around 15 minutes by foot to walk from one end of village to the other along the main street. The houses are mainly traditional rural Khmer houses made out of wood with an open ground floor. Most households in the village have electricity and a television, and around one third has a toilet in the back yard (in total there are 45 toilets in the village). Three families own a car and around 60 motorbikes are in the village. There are two public ponds and approximately 20 pumps, out of which three are public.

Nearly all families make a living from cultivating wet- and/or dry-land rice. An irrigation system is partly developed, which reaches some, but not all fields. Farming becomes more and more uneconomical, as prices for fertilizers increased while – at the same time – rice prices dropped. The fieldwork was conducted after an unstable monsoon and therefore a very low crop yield. Villagers complained they even have to buy the water this year, which makes farming even less profitable. Therefore, in many families at least one member works outside the village and sends money back home. Young women work mainly in garment factories, men on construction sites. Additionally, (illegal) labour migration to Thailand is common, as various families cannot secure their livelihood from farming anymore.

The village has a long history with the IDpoor programme. It was implemented for the first time in 2003 through the local NGO ‘Buddhism for Health’. In 2007, the Cambodian government resumed responsibility for the programme as part of a nation-wide upscaling. Since then the programme is implemented through local government structures and now Kaoh Moan faces its seventh round of implementation. The process of implementation changed throughout the years, the current practices have been in place since 2010. The categorisation is redone around every third year, to keep track of livelihood changes of the families in the village.

3. Methodology and Research Design

This chapter explains the study’s underlying theory of science and the implications of an ethnographic approach. From an ethnographic perspective, what is found out is inherently connected to how it is found out. Hence, ‘the findings’ and ‘the analysis’ cannot be separated from the methods used to gather the empirical material (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995:11). Therefore, these methods and methodological assumptions should not be ignored, but ought to be reflected on, which I will do in this chapter.

I decided to conduct a case study, as it is suitable for researching events and processes within their context, whereby sense can be made of seemingly unrelated phenomena. Grounded in sensitivity towards the complexity of the social world, case studies produce rich material and in-depth analysis, thus contributing to a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study (Hasselskog, 2009:40). Thereby, the adaptation of the IDPoor programme can be viewed as a multifaceted process, allowing to research how different social dynamics enable, limit and enforce each other.

As I do not speak Khmer a local research assistant was hired, who accompanied me to Kaoh Moan and worked as my translator. I will reflect on the implications of cross-cultural cross-language research in chapter 3.4.

The research was supported by GIZ⁶, which assists the Cambodian Ministry of Planning in implementing the IDPoor programme. The support consisted of financing the research assistant and providing transportation. In return I reported my findings back to GIZ. I selected the translator and the setting of the case study independently from GIZ as well as from the Ministry of Planning.

3.1. Ethnography and its Methodological Assumptions

The study is based on a social constructivist understanding of social science, thus certain epistemological and ontological assumptions underpin the research. Through making these assumptions transparent a better understanding of the research design, the explanatory power, and the (de)limitations of the study are given.

From a social constructivist perspective, no ‘single external reality’ exists without a perceiving subject. Facts are understood as the outcome of individual interpretation, influenced by previous experiences, group belonging and social negotiation processes. Thus, phenomena relate to the perceiving subject in various ways, depending on the cultural and social context the subject is embedded in (Luckmann, 2008:281). Thereby, the idea about universal knowledge and truth – prevalent in positivism – is contested. Rather, truth is understood as “an experience in which the knower is a constitutive element of the knowledge attained” (Hekman, 1983:208). Knowledge is seen as (a) subjective; (b) situationally and culturally variable; as well as (c) ideologically conscious (Marvasti, 2004:5). Thus, applying social constructivism allows me to focus on the process by which meanings are created, negotiated and sustained and to understand the world of lived experience from the perspective of the people under study (Andrews, 2012). This enables me to capture villagers’ diverse and conflicting perceptions of the IDPoor programme and understand their actions when accommodating the activity.

As no research regarding the interplay of the IDPoor programme with local social structures exists an explorative ethnographic design is chosen. It allows to “enter new worlds” (Marvasti, 2004:37) in a flexible and open-ended approach and is “particularly suited for

⁶ As mentioned in the introduction, I was an intern at the GIZ Social Health Protection Programme before conducting the research. The IDPoor programme and the health programme are carried out by the same agency but are not further connected.

observing changes [like the introduction of an external development project] in the everyday lives of the research subjects” (ibid.:43). The concept of ethnography has no standard well-defined meaning, as it was re-interpreted and re-contextualised across time and disciplines in order to deal with various circumstances the researchers were facing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:2). This follows the methodological argument of situated knowledge and meaningful praxis outlined above, whereby no ‘standard’ ethnographic approach detached from the particular context can be designed. Hence, a distinctive feature of ethnographic research is the sensitivity towards the social context. As Tedlock argues, “[e]thnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context” (Tedlock, 2000:455 in Marvasti, 2004:36).

The fieldwork was conducted in Kaoh Moan village, and was divided into two stages, with a break of ten days in between to scrutinise the preliminary material. Overall I stayed three weeks in the village. Even though this potentially limits the depth of my insights I argue that ethnography is not primarily about the length of stay in the field but rather about applying certain methods. According to Marvasti, three dimensions distinguish ethnography from other forms of qualitative research. Firstly, emphasis is put on the involvement in and participation of the researcher in the topic under study. Secondly, as mentioned, attention is paid to the social context in which the empirical material is gathered. Thirdly, the researcher is sensitive on how the subjects are represented in the research text (ibid.:35-37). The idea about one “true” or “objective” representation is contested; rather a “constructionist awareness of how descriptive styles and political agendas shape ethnographic writing” (ibid.:37) is employed. In line it is necessary to reflect on the researchers’ personal biography as the individuality and distinctiveness of the ethnographer is no longer ‘neutralised’ (as is positivism), but the unique characteristics and its influence on the research process is acknowledged (Gottlieb, 2006:59).

Hence, this study is “coloured as much by [personal] emotional as by intellectual factors” (ibid.:64). Being a white, university-educated female sociologist from what is perceived as the ‘West’ shapes my research interest, the decisions regarding the course of research, and my interpretations. Throughout studying sociology I was interested in forms and reasons of social inequality and stratification. Within the Master’s programme of Development Studies I extended my focus to evaluation research to be able to assess the impact of development activities. These two aspects led to my decision to research the consequences of the IDPoor programme for the ‘target population’. Once in the field, I sympathised with the marginalised members of the community which is reflected in the decision to investigate the interplay

between the project and local power relations. This affected my field notes, which are always “a form of *representation*, that is, a way of reducing just-observed events, persons and places to written accounts” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2001:353). Thereby, they are inevitably selective and, given my background, represented in a sociological language.

3.2. An Ethnographic Single Case Study

It seems obvious, as Atkinson points out, to choose a setting which is most appropriate for studying the research questions (Atkinson, 2007:29). Yet, this is not an easy task for open-end and explorative research designs. As I was not able to specify the particular nature of the setting required beforehand, the selection of the case was driven by pragmatic considerations and arising opportunities.

First of all, the village needed to be reachable within a day's return trip from Phnom Penh, a condition of GIZ to provide transportation. Secondly, I was interested in a ‘rather small’ village to be able to get a sufficient overview over the village and build a rapport with the community within three weeks. I established contact with the Cambodian NGO ‘Buddhism for Health’ which was related to the IDPoor programme several years ago. A member offered me assistance in selecting a village and facilitating the contact with the local authorities. I selected Kaoh Moan through discussing four potential cases with him which I had chosen from the IDPoor database. Next to the practical considerations a selection criterion was a sufficient number of Level 1 and Level 2 poor in the villages while avoiding choosing the poorest villages in the province. Kaoh Moan suited me, as it is rather small with 126 households and has a quite equal distribution of identified Level 1 poverty (13%) and Level 2 poverty (16%) households.

After the selection of a village it was important to bound the case, to be precise about which aspects will be addressed in the study and which elements will not form part of the research. The way a case is bounded has to be in accordance with the research interest and will influence the process and findings of the research (Mills et al, 2010:56-59).

The study focuses on an entity with relatively clearly defined spatial boundaries – the village of Kaoh Moan. Commonsense and theoretical bounding merged when I decided to include all people who describe themselves as members of the village community and whose families live in the village. As it is important to conceptualise the case in a way that reflects my theoretical reasoning (ibid.) I needed to make sure my (framed) case enables me to investigate the interplay between the IDPoor programme and the local context. Since

especially members of poorer families are forced to work outside the village it is necessary to include labour migrants into the study, as they constitute an important part of my research interest.

The temporal boundary of the case is defined as the start of Round 7 of the IDPoor programme in 2013 until the distribution of the Equity Cards in February 2015. More specifically, the first village meeting in which the villagers were informed about Round 7 marks the temporal beginning of the case study.

3.3. Field Methods

3.3.1. Accessing the Field

Access is not simply a question of physical absence or presence, as there is a difference between “being in a place and having access to the social relations that take place there”. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:44) Moreover, it is not something stable once it is gained, but a process which develops and can be enriched over time (Feldmann, Berger, Bell, 2003:vii). Hence, access is understood as a relational process in which building rapport with different individuals constitutes an important part. This perspective allows to reflect on the influence of the own identity on the ‘access process’ as well as to understand the information received in relation to the established rapport (ibid.:x-xi). Getting and developing access is in many ways a practical matter which arises from different opportunities and is only partly influenceable by the researcher. Within this part I will discuss how the research team gained access and established rapport. Moreover, I will reflect on the field roles the research team got assigned and how we were able to benefit from this.

After obtaining permission from national and local authorities the research team (me and the research assistant Rithy) entered the village for the first time on February 13, 2015. Even though arranged otherwise upon arrival, it was re-decided that we should stay with the village chief and his family. Having the field base at the village chief’s house was not desirable, as it influences our field roles and the villagers’ perception of us as ‘in line’ with the local authorities. However, during the debate no other opportunity arose and we had to accept the offer.

The research in general and gaining access in particular required acceptance from the village chief, as he holds the position of a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are often the initial point of contact with the research setting and they shape the conduct of the study. Staying with the village chief meant to a certain extend we were “channelled in line with the existing network

of friendship and enmity, territory and equivalent ‘boundaries’” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:59) of him. Throughout our stay he was concerned with our impression of the village and his leadership and offered guiding us through the village. By constantly pointing out that we were independent and politely but firmly denying his offer we were able to organise our time autonomously.

During the course of research it became apparent that the villagers, as expected, associated us with the village chief. Rithy and me tried to overcome this obstacle of mistrust and assigned field role by showing that we were interested in and open to different experiences and narratives. Spending time with the families at their homes helped to build rapport and gradually changed their perception. Also coming back to the village for the second time had a very positive effect on the relation to the villagers. They greeted us like old friends and told us what we had missed in the meantime.

Staying with the village chief also had an unanticipated positive side-effect. As the research focus became clearer it became apparent that the relation between the village chief and the villagers is of great interest. Through staying with the leader we were able to observe villagers approaching him when seeking permissions or bringing forward requests. These situations provided valuable insights to understand the social position of the village chief and his relation to different villagers.

Our field roles were determined by various aspects, some assigned, others deliberately chosen. The decision about which sort of field role to adapt depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the setting (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:86). The concept of ‘researcher’ was new to the villagers and we got associated with being part of a development organisation.⁷ We stressed that we do not belong to any organisation, but this role was assigned to us based on the villagers' experiences. The implication was that villagers thought the research team will distribute development benefits or can influence the IDPoor programme. Moreover, being perceived as a woman had gender implications which did not allow me to enter certain social situations. For instance, I was not able to access exclusively male groups, especially when they were drinking alcohol. This is considered not appropriate for ‘respected women’.

⁷ During the second stay we found out that most villagers thought we belong to World Vision, as this development organisation is very active in the commune and sometimes members of the organisation visit different villages. Luckily, World Vision enjoys the reputation of being independent and fair.

3.3.2. Gathering Empirical Material

Within this study the main tools to gather empirical material were interviews and observations. Throughout the first stay in the village explorative interviews and two focus group discussions were conducted with various villagers from diverse backgrounds (gender, age, registered poor and non-poor). The two focus groups consisted of six and eight participants per session, of either registered poor or non-poor members of the community. In both focus groups male and female villagers participated, which were between 20 to 55 years old. In the beginning we selected across time and people as far as possible to gain a wide understanding of the setting and the different stories at the ethnographic side. Through this we quickly assembled massive amounts of empirical material on various topics, which helped me to gradually expand and deepen my understanding of the community and of issues that could not have been demarcated and defined at the start. Over time the research approach became narrower and more focused and after finishing the first phase in the field preliminary research questions were defined. The second phase of the empirical research consisted of more strategic search for empirical material along with deliberate investigation of ‘stories’ that seem illustrative to the research interest.

The main purpose of interviews when applying an ethnographical approach is to “view things from the respondents’ perspective, to get to know what she or he knows, thinks and wants, and to understand her or his feelings, intentions and meanings” (Merriam, 1994 cited in Hasselskog, 2009:52). Hence, the interviews in this study took more the form of a guided conversation than a strictly structured inquiry. At the beginning mostly explorative, reflexive interviews were conducted to cover a wide range of topics. As the research process moved along, the interviews became more structured and focused on specific issues to investigate, verify, invalidate or supplement previous findings. The villagers were mostly interviewed in their homes, in a natural and relaxing setting. Informed consent was obtained before every interview. The interviews and the focus group discussions usually turned into collective encounters as family members or neighbours got involved as they pleased. This influenced the context and thereby the accounts given by the interviewees. Even though individual interviews are easier to steer and analyse it would have been odd to stop other villagers from joining, as the interviews in general were conducted ‘in public’. During these spontaneous and flexible gatherings various opinions were expressed, discussions emerged and we were able to observe group interactions. Nevertheless, topics regarding very personal experiences required

privacy. Therefore, during the second phase, appointments were made and privacy was arranged for a number of interviews. This was with individuals who had been identified as offering illustrative cases to investigate relevant analytical aspects like conflicts with the village leadership or social exclusion. For these interviews it was very important that a relation of respects and trust had been established.

As a “strategic search for empirical material [...] is essential to a reflexive approach” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:104) it is important to reflect and control whom to interview. Otherwise the empirical material could be misleading or selective in regard to important aspects (ibid.). The selection of the interviews was informed by the progress for the research. As the research became more focused a purposeful snowball sampling was applied. Respondents helped to identify further suitable respondents with similar or different experiences and follow-up interviews were conducted with villagers who offered especially valuable insights. Through this, rapport was continuously enriched, which allowed to have more open and trustful conversations.

Given the sensitive topic of this study I cannot reveal too many details about the interviewees to ensure anonymity, yet I will shortly illustrate some general characteristics of this group of people. Overall, 17 interviews were conducted, including the village chief and the five members of the Village Representative Group. The interviews were mainly conducted during the second time in the field, as the research focus was clearer by then. Out of these 17 interviews, ten participants were female. Mostly members of the community considered as poor were interviewed, yet only seven interviewees were identified as poor through the IDPoor programme. The interviewees were from different ages groups. The youngest participant was 23 years old, while the exact age of the oldest participants is unknown, but he is estimated to be around 60 years old. Some interviewees seemed to obtain a rather marginalised position within the community, which seemed to be not only related to their economical situation. As the interviews were taped several informal talks were required beforehand to obtain trust of these villagers in order to conduct the interviews.

Observations constitute the second main tool for gathering empirical material in this study. This approach is suitable for investigating aspects people are reluctant to talk about. For example it is crucial to “not only ask who holds power, but also to watch who wields different sorts of power on different occasions” (Hasselskog, 2009:56). During our time in the village we were able to observe how different issues arose and were dealt with between individuals and the community. Due to the language barrier full participation was not

possible, thus my position can better be described as “observer as participant”. (Gold 1958 cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:83) However, through sharing meals, playing with the children and in general ‘hanging out’ with the families I was able to “to learn about [...] feelings, rules, and norms in context rather than asking about them” (O’Reilly, 2009:160). It allows including the “entire context of an event [...] rather than relying on the interpretation [and] recollection [...] of events that tend to go with reporting” (ibid.). I was able to map kinship to a certain extent, which helped understanding the social structures. I usually wrote extensive field notes during the mid-day break when everyone was fleeing from the heat and after dark. The nature of the field notes changed from a wide scope to a selective and more detailed description of relevant aspects.

3.4. (De)Limitations and Trustworthiness

Several boundaries of the research design exist, which will be addressed in this chapter. In relation to this, aspects ensuring a high quality of the study, through assuring trustworthiness, and the influence of my own background on the study will be discussed.

It should be clear by now that, no abstraction or generalisation of ethnographic results is possible. They reveal their meaning only against the backdrop of the context in which the empirical material was gathered – in this case Kaoh Moan. Moreover, cross-cultural, cross-language research poses some margins to the explanatory power. Language is a central aspect of all qualitative research. It is inseparable from culture and not simply “a tool we use to communicate ideas [...]; it is implicated in discursive practices that actively construct our sociocultural world through systems of representation and assigned meanings” (Wong and Poon, 2010:152). Given that language is a cultural construct not all aspects could be translated from Khmer to English, as no conceptual and cultural equivalent exists. However, the local research assistant Rithy had experiences in conducting and translating qualitative interviews and helped to overcome some of these limitations. Rithy had a Bachelor of Law degree and was working for a human rights NGO in Phnom Penh. I chose him because he grew up in rural Cambodia, which would make it easier for him to understand and navigate in the setting. As ethnography was new to him, we met multiple times prior entering the field to clarify the research approach. Moreover, we discussed the value of full and open disclosure of accounts given by the villagers. These meetings helped to establish a trustful and open relationship I consider necessary when conducting an ethnographic study with a local research assistant.

Apart from working with a research assistant who served as a ‘cultural guide’, the quality of the study was assured through dependability (consistency of the inquiry process), method triangulation and cross-checking. I assure dependability of my results, based on a consistent, traceable and logic inquiry of my empirical material. In order to assure credibility I rely on method triangulation. Hence, the use of multiple instruments to gather my material increased the credibility of my findings (Schwandt, 2007:299-301). I gathered material from three distinctive sources: (a) semi-structured and open-ended interviews; (b) focus group discussions; (c) participant observations and informal talks. Moreover, the iterative process of follow-up interviews and day-to-day engagement with different members of the community allowed cross-checking accounts brought up by the villagers as well as my own sense-making and conclusions (Hasselskog, 2009:56).

3.5. Ethical Concerns

As every social research, the study poses various ethical questions which need to be discussed. Firstly, all research contains dimensions of power in multiple relations. In this case between the researcher and the research assistant, the research team and the researched, the local authorities and the villagers, the ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in the village, etc. The case under study focuses on ‘poor people’, a group generally considered as holding a vulnerable social position. According to Desai and Potter (2006), in regards to power relations, the researcher needs to be context-sensitive and honest about the research interest as well as the possible consequences of the study (Potter and Desai, 2006:28). This implies, that the researcher is aware of any social, political or legal complication that might emerge from participating, and should safeguard against these. Rithy and I discussed the implications of the study for the participants along the course of research, however, given our outsider status not all implications were known to us. We ensured confidentiality and gradually established a rapport based on trust and respect. Through visiting various families we avoided to single out certain community members, which might have lead to negative consequences for them. Nevertheless, the villagers did also possess a certain degree of power over the course of research, the research setting and about what they reveal during interviews and informal talks (Lindsjö, 2013:100-101).

Moreover, the research focuses on aspects of local power relations and experiences of social exclusion, which constitute very sensitive topics. Rithy served as a guide in regards to cultural sensitivity, as “the researcher should be sensitive towards the rights, beliefs and

cultural context of the researcher” (Desai and Potter, 2006:63). Additionally, when recognising signs of distress for the informants, we guided the conversation to another topic.

A third aspect concerns the demand of villagers for compensation when participating – a concept they know from development agencies conducting interviews or workshops with them. We emphasised participation is voluntary and not financially compensated. The distinction between “formal interviews” and “informal talks” was fluent throughout our stay. Hence, if we had paid for formal interviews, the question of paying the villagers for generally spending time with us would have been posed sooner or later, which would have probably ruined the research. Even though no monetary compensation was given, I believe the research can still be beneficial for the villagers, as the findings are discussed with GIZ and can contribute to improving the IDPoor programme.

3.6. Model of Analysis

Once gathered, the analysis of the empirical material depends on the aims of the study, the underlying epistemological assumptions and the research questions (Atkinson, 2015:3). Yet, the analysis cannot be considered a distinct stage in an ethnographic study (Atkinson, 2007:158). In this research, the sense-making of the material started as soon as we entered Kaoh Moan and continued through the whole course of the research. Throughout the inquiry the research problem was constantly (re-)formulated and (re-)focused. This occurred rather ‘naturally’ by taking up and reflecting on talks and observations and gradual broadening of my understanding of the social structures in the community. The final research questions were clarified and delimited through close reading and coding of the material and constant discussion with theories and former studies, which helped me to discover and define what my research is about.

The empirical material was analysed through applying a thematic analysis. As a broad and flexible technique, the approach can be adequately tailored for the purpose of scrutinising my diverse material. This technique allows for organising and synthesising large amounts of empirical material, and helps to negotiate the interplay between the raw material, codes or themes and the overarching conceptual framework (Guest and McLellan, 2003:3).

Generally, it can be defined as a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within empirical material” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:80). A theme captures something interesting and important about the material in relation to the research questions and usually represents a “*patterned* response or meaning” in the material. Albeit, a repetition

of certain codes can be a strong indication of a theme, quantity in itself does not pose a sufficient condition of a theme (ibid.:82). Emphasis was put on identifying latent themes to “examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations [...] that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the empirical material” (ibid.:84). Themes were identified by merging an inductive with a theoretical approach (ibid.:83). Even though the themes are strongly connected to the material itself the coding was driven by my analytical interest. However, in respect to the explorative and actor-oriented nature of this study it is important not to force the analysis of the material into pre-existing theoretical concepts and ideas (Atkinson, 2007:163).

4. Theoretical Framework

Within this chapter the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis is presented. The theory was developed in close dialogue with the findings and other ethnographic studies. The findings denote the centralisation of power as well as various respond strategies developed by the villagers. This pinpoints the need to establish a theoretical framework which allows analysing how and why agents with different social positions exercise power and how social structures influence the actions agents pursue.

Most of the studies discussed in the literature review apply a Foucauldian framework in order to study power. Yet, given the findings, a post-structuralist approach to power is contested. The conceptualisation of power as something which can be accumulated or centralised is opposed by the Foucauldian understanding of power as flux and fluid (Sadan, 1997:57-59). Moreover, the findings clearly indicate an actor-centred analysis whereas Foucault’s work has been criticised for dismissing the agent (ibid.:59). In sum, conceptualising power in different ways allows scrutinising different dynamics and social processes relevant for understanding the ways in which development projects become shaped and adapted by the local context they encounter. This study does not aim for researching all possible aspects of such a broad concept. Rather, based on my material and my research interest, one particular framework was developed and applied.

In order to analyse my material adequately and to be able to discuss conflicting findings, the theoretical framework combines (complementary) concepts from Long (2001), Lukes (2005), Giddens (1984) and Scott (1990). The chapter begins by defining development programmes as social interventions which encounter life-worlds at “interfaces”. These

interventions become shaped and adopted by existing social structures. In order to analyse how agents understand and accommodate the IDPoor intervention power is conceptualised as transformative capacity influenced by actors' ability to access and mobilise structural rules and resources. According to Lukes' concept of three dimensions of power, this transformative capacity is exercised in a visible, a hidden and an invisible sphere. Through combining Lukes' three dimensions of power and Giddens' concept of duality of structure, focus is put on who does and who does not participate in decision-making processes and how actions are influenced by structures of domination. In order to represent complex and conflicting social realities, Lukes's third dimension – the internalisation of domination – will be contrasted by Scotts's concept on tactical submission. Thereby, not only willing compliance through internalised social norms and accepted domination, but also strategic subordination and hidden resistance can be analysed.

4.1. Social Interventions Encounter Life-Worlds at Interfaces

Within this research development programmes are regarded as external intervention into a local setting. A number of scholars and practitioners with diverse backgrounds and ideologies have regarded development assistance as interventions (e.g. Easterly 2006, Escobar 1995, Hasselskog 2009, Li 2007, Olivier de Sardan 2005). Considering development projects as external interventions allows to see them as “on-going socially-constructed, negotiated, experiential and meaning-creating process[es]” (Long, 2001:25), instead of simple executions of specific plans with expected outcomes. Thereby, emergent forms of interactions, practical strategies, types of discourse and cultural categories (ibid.:26) come to the centre of attention and can be investigated in this study.

According to Norman Long, the encounter between an external intervention and an already existing context takes place at an ‘interface’. Interfaces are “arenas in which interactions become oriented around problems of bridging, accommodating, segregating or contesting social, evaluative and cognitive standpoints” (Long, 2001:65). Although the term ‘interface’ conveys the image of a kind of face-to-face situations, a social interface is much more complex in nature and consist of “many different interests, relationships and modes of rationality and power” (ibid.:66). At implementation level, manifestations of a development intervention encounter and interact with the life-worlds of individuals and are mediated by them. Life-worlds describe the lived-in and taken for granted worlds, defined by the actors, not by the observers (Arce and Long, 1992:212). The ‘external factors’ become internalised

and form a part of the resources and constrains of the social strategies people develop. Thereby, development interventions can have various meanings for different interest groups or individuals and are often modified or even completely transformed through the interplay. Hence, through diverse interactions between prevailing and newly introduced features, development interventions become shaped and accommodated in socio-economic structures, in people's life-worlds and in the overall local dynamics (Hasselskog 2009:112, Long and Long 1992:147-148, Villarreal 1994). The focus of this work is to understand and analyse the process of shaping and accommodating the IDPoor intervention by the existing local power relations.

4.2. Defining and Conceptualising Power

Power can be seen as one of the most contested concepts in sociology and no single definition exists. Rather it represents a cluster of concepts, where different perspectives as well as normative stances influence its theorisation (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009:1-4). Within this study power is conceptualised according to Giddens and Lukes as 'transformative capacity' and 'power over'. This constitutes one way of framing the concept and many others – equally valuable ones – exist. Yet, given the research questions and the empirical material at hand, this conceptualisation seems most adequate. Not only does it allow to analytically understand how and why the villagers comply with the village chief. Also, it enables to focus on how the unequal social structures limit and enable possibilities to manoeuvre within the given space. Thus, villagers are not just framed as 'powerless', but rather their struggles, negotiations and compromises within their special circumstances can be scrutinised.

Both – Lukes and Giddens – perceive power mainly as 'power over something' and stress the importance of human agency in order to study the concept. Moreover, both authors tried to overcome the structure-agency dilemma. Whereas Lukes developed a 'dialectic' approach (Lukes, 2005:11), Giddens emphasised the 'dualism' of structure and agency (Giddens, 1984:25). These similarities allow for a useful combination of the two approaches. They differ in their understanding of the relation between power and personal interests. Whereas Giddens argues power is not intrinsically linked to the achievement of interests (Giddens, 1984:27), Lukes argues that powerful actors or groups exercise power to pursue their interests (Lukes, 2005:12). My empirical material points to Lukes' perception, and even though other reasons for exercising power exists, they do not form part of this study.

4.2.1. Defining Power

In order to apply power as a concept to an empirically grounded study, a clear delineation is necessary. In this chapter I develop a definition of power adequate for this work and highlight its relation to social structure and human agency. I consider the stance taken on these fundamental sociological concepts important for the theorisation of power, as different perceptions of power often arise from different understandings of structure and agency.

On the most fundamental level, power refers to “A having some affect on B”, hence “power involves the production of causal effects” (Scott, 2001:i). A generic definition then refers to the “capacity to bring about change” (ibid.), which can be seen as an integral aspect of all human actions. In this sense throughout this study power is defined according to Giddens as the “transformative capacities of human action” (Giddens 1976:110 cited in Hausgaard, 1992:91). In other words, as the “ability to make a difference in the world” (ibid.). This is an essential prerequisite for agency, thus all actors possess some degree of power and can develop response strategies to the course of everyday life.

Individuals are able to do this because they possess ‘knowledgeability’, which means “actors not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the context in which they move” (Giddens 1984:5). This knowledge about social structures is ‘stored’ in “memory traces” (ibid.:17) of actors and is recallable. Thereby, actions become intentional, since actors can usually explain why they decided to engage in certain actions (Hausgaard, 1992:78).

Structures are defined as systems of generative rules and resources. An actor exercises power through using these *structural resources and rules*, and by drawing on them he/she reproduces them as aspects of the social order (McPhee, 2004:130). Rules are understood as “taken for granted processes or conventions” (Giddens, 1979:100). Resources are either ‘allocative resources’, as command over objects, or ‘authoritative resources’, as command over persons. Giddens speaks of ‘structures as domination’ when an unequal distribution of resources characterises the social structures. Hence, through the mobilisation of resources these structures of domination, which determine an actors’ ability to influence the world, are reproduced. The reproduction of structures is not perceived as a mechanical outcome, but “rather [...] as an active constituting process, accomplished by, and consisting in, the doing of

active subjects” (Giddens, 1977:121). Thereby, power is not itself a resource but rather exercised through structures of domination (ibid.).

To understand this perception of power it has to be grounded in Giddens’ overall social theory of *Structuration*. “Structuration theory attempts to [...] [show] how ‘social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution’ (ibid.). This is what Giddens means by ‘duality of structure’, whereby he tries to overcome the structure-agency dilemma through offering a “reciprocal relationship where neither structure nor action can exist independently” (Giddens 1984:25). Social structure and human agency can be understood as different sides of the same coin, because “[s]ocial structures are represented in the choices agents make during social practice, while at the same time, agents shape and reshape social structures” (Hardcastel et al 2005:224).). Thereby, social structures are enabling and constraining for human actions simultaneously. This implies that the structural characteristics of social systems are the medium and the outcome of the social actions they recursively organise (Giddens, 1984:25).

4.2.2. Three Dimensions of Power

Power – perceived as a capacity to bring about change through drawing on rules and resources – is conceptualised by Lukes as three-dimensional: with a public, a hidden, and an invisible dimension. His basic argument emphasises that even though every actor possess some degree of power, it is important to not just understand who participates in decision-making processes and draws on rules and resources, but also who does not participate.

The *first dimension* describes visible and definable aspects of power, like formal rules, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision-making realised through elections, political parties, laws, budgets, etc. Here the mechanism through which power functions is relatively straightforward, like actors drawing on their resources and advantageous structural positions to obtain an advantage when bargaining on key issues (Lukes, 2005:9). This dimension is grounded in a rather positivist perception of power. Yet, as obscure and less visible social and cultural practice shape who takes part in these observable decision-making processes – hence who sits at the table and whose issues get addressed –hidden and invisible dimensions of power also have to be taken into consideration.

Therefore, in addition to the first dimension, powerful actors can mobilise or influence “rules of the game” to work in their favour. This *second dimension* of power is less obvious, thus called hidden dimension. Hereby, decision-making might be prevented through the threat

or use of force and sanctions or the mobilisation of biases, which means the reinforcement of “values, beliefs, ceremonies and institutional procedures which present a very particular and limited definition of problems” (Sadan, 2002:43). The dynamics in the second dimension can lead to the exclusion and devaluation of the concerns and representation of less powerful groups (Lukes, 2005:11). This dimension refers to the power of framing or representing a problem in a certain way. Even though I consider the phrase ‘mobilisation of biases’ inadequate, as it indicates a non-biased, power-free way of defining problems exist, the overall idea that powerful groups can influence the agenda setting is important to understand how domination works.

The *third dimension* operates in a way which renders competing interests or problems invisible. This means issues are not only kept from the decision-making table, as is the second dimension, but overall from the consciousness of the different players involved (ibid.: 24). Thereby, through processes of domination the relatively powerless internalise and accept certain values and social norms as well as perceptions of themselves and their conditions. So, those subjected to power acquire beliefs and form desires that work against their ‘real interests’, which results in their consenting or adapting to being dominated. The unawareness of the real interests occurs through a ‘false consciousness’ which then leads to the willing compliance of the subordinated to the domination (ibid.:13).

Especially the third dimension raises a set of complex questions and critiques which need to be addressed in order to develop a thorough framework. Firstly, the idea of ‘false consciousness’ implicitly presupposes the existence of ‘true consciousness’. This is criticised as elitist and over-simplifies the ways in which social order is maintained and stabilised (Haugaard, 2011:165). To overcome Lukes’s shortcomings in this study, I will refer to Giddens’s division of social knowledge into practical and discursive consciousness, which is characterised through awareness and unawareness, whereby the notion of falsity is dropped. Practical consciousness is “what actors know tacitly about the conditions of their own action *but cannot articulate*” (Bryant and Jary, 1991:8, emphasis added). It enables actors to “go on” in social life (Haugaard, 2003:100), but they are unaware of it. Discursive consciousness “comprises knowledge *which we can put in words*” (ibid., emphasis added), or as Giddens describes it: “what actors are able to say about the condition of their own action” (Giddens, 1984:5). This separation into two types of social knowledge helps to understand how systems – also the ones characterised by unequal power relations – are maintained in a stable way. If an action has never been critically evaluated, in the sense of forming part of the discursive

consciousness of the actor, then it will be reproduced similarly to a reflex. This happens even when the structures which are reproduced disadvantage the actor. Through this separation of types of social knowledge the false-true dilemma can be replaced through the idea of unawareness. Yet, this unawareness can change – through “consciousness raising” (Haugaard, 2003:101). This happens, for example, through “making actors aware of aspects of their practical consciousness knowledge which previously they never confronted in a discursive way” (ibid.). Thus, once knowledge of structural reproduction becomes discursive, the actor may reject it. To conclude, the normative true-false dichotomy of consciousness can be replaced through the idea of awareness/unawareness. Haugaard gives an illustrative example when he explains how reading Foucault’s description of the Panopticon did not reveal truth to him through deconstructing falsity, but rather he came to realise patterns of conduct which he was not aware of – which he had internalised (Haugaard, 2003:102).

The second analytical problem Lukes’s third dimension poses is: “[w]ho is to say who is dominated and on what basis?” (Lukes, 2005:111). This question is related to the unresolved debate on how to distinguish between domination and socialisation. When does one comply to something because he/she is dominated and when does one comply because he/she has been socialised that way? Lukes and many other scholars’ elaboration on theories of power lack to give a conclusive answer to this question and the theoretical debate between socialisation and domination cannot be adequately addressed here. As theoretical development is not core of this study I operationalise domination in a way useful to analytically understand my empirical material and leave the theoretical debate as a front line for other academics. Domination will be defined as a particular type of power relation, which is hierarchical and difficult to reverse. In these relations, the subordinate agent has little room for manoeuvres and sparse access to structural rules and resources to exercise power. Domination has been internalised when agents do not recognise it anymore, as they emphasise the 'naturalness' of this hierarchy.

4.2.3. Subordination as Tactical Positioning

Even though Lukes offers an applicable theory to understand willing compliance, in order to be able to analyse conflicting aspects of my empirical material another causal explanation for submission will be integrated into the framework.

A number of studies indicate that agents can be aware of their domination, but either comply willingly or are rather fatalistic due to on-going experiences of defeat (e.g. Gaventa, 1980; Scott, 1987; Villarreal, 1994). As my empirical material indicates similar aspects I will

integrate Scott's conceptualisation of compliance as tactical decision of agents as a second way of explaining subordination to structures of domination. Instead of claiming agents internalised suppressing norms and are unaware of this, he argues agents do resist, even though less visibly. He distinguishes between 'hidden' and 'public transcripts', with the former displaying "social space in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations might be voiced" (Scott, 1990:xiii). By contrast, the public transcripts display evidence for the dominant power relations. Hence, a study based solely on these public accounts "is likely to conclude that subordinated groups endorse the terms of their subordination and a willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination" (ibid.:4). Thereby, Scott differentiates between a front-stage and back-stage behaviour which is driven by the objectives to (a) avoid any explicit display of insubordination, and (b) practical interest in resistance to minimise the extractions, labour and humiliations (ibid.:86). This leads to a form of resistance "that avoids an open confrontation with the structures of authority being resisted [...] [and] performance of subordination will [...] be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful" (ibid.). Aiming to research hidden transcripts calls for an ethnographic approach, as the objective is to engage in the field in order to investigate people's back-stage behaviour.

4.3. Summary – Towards a Working Framework for Analysing Power Structures

To summarise, the theoretical framework underpinning this study defines development programmes as social interventions into a pre-existing social order. The intervention encounters the social setting at interfaces, where the newly introduced features become bridged, accommodated, contested and integrated into the existing order. This systematic thinking allows to analyse how through diverse interactions between prevailing and newly introduced features, development interventions become shaped by local dynamics. The local dynamics are characterised by a reciprocal relationship between human agency and social structures, whereby structures limit and enable agency.

In order to analyse the dynamics which occur in Kaoh Moan a conceptualisation of power is necessary which scrutinises why and how subordination to domination occurs and how this reproduces structural power inequalities. Therefore, power is defined as a capacity to bring about change, which is exercised by mobilising structural resources and rules. If the social structures are characterised by unequal accessibility for different actors they take the form of

‘structures as domination’. These structures of domination determine and actors ability to influence the world.

This capacity to influence the world will be analysed along three dimensions of power, categorised as a formal and observable exercise of power (visible), power that is exercised from behind the scenes to influence the agenda-setting (hidden), and as hegemonic norms and beliefs that secure consent to domination (visible). In order to avoid Lukes's impasse on false consciousness it is replaced by Giddens's perception of awareness derived from differentiating practical and discursive consciousness. To be able to represent and analyse conflicting narratives from my empirical material Scott's concept of subordination as tactical positioning is integrated as a complementary concept to the internalised domination.

5. Empirical Findings

Within the thesis the findings and the analysis of the findings are represented in separate chapters. The following section illustrates the findings, based on my empirical material gathered during my fieldwork in Kaoh Moan in February and March 2015. The separation can be considered an unusual practice in ethnography, as the division into findings and analysis stems from a positivist thinking according to which the findings are the objective representation of facts. Yet this is not what I want to indicate through this structure. Rather, already portraying the findings constitutes some kind of analysis, as deciding which parts to represent and how to structure them is a form of making sense of the material. Thereby, the notion of objectification or representation of facts is contested. However, the division into findings and analysis helped me to better understand what is going on in my material and to present it in a more structured way, whereby also conformability can be enhanced. Therefore, I discuss the two parts separately, even though they both compose parts of the analysis.

Within this chapter four identified themes are displayed, which cover the villagers' perceptions of: (a) *IDpoor intervention*⁸; (b) *the management of development interventions in Kaoh Moan*; and (c) *local leadership*. The fourth theme illustrates (d) *villagers' strategies to keep a good relation with the leader*. The four overarching themes that could be identified overlap and mutually affect each other, therefore clear-cut delineation was difficult and some overarching aspects will be repeated in different chapters. Overall, these findings have to be

⁸ In accordance with the theoretical framework of this study the IDpoor programme will be regarded as external intervention. Chapter 5 discusses this.

understood as depicting the perspective of the group of people under study, yet my own perspective and limitations influenced the representation of the community.

The findings illuminate the overall research question: *How does the Kaoh Moan community adapt the 'Identification of Poor Households' intervention to its pre-existing social structures?* and form the basis of later analytical discussions.

5.1. The IDPoor Programme – A New Link in a Long Chain of Development Activities

The first theme is divided into two sub-themes depicting the perceptions of the villagers on the overall programme, and the perception of the VRG members in relation to their role within the programme. Given the social constructivist assumption that distinct social positions within a community influence individual perceptions, I consider it necessary to display these different stances.

5.1.1. The IDPoor Programme as Putting Resources on Display

This sub-theme illustrates villagers' perception of the IDPoor intervention, which has to be understood in relation to the long history of development programmes implemented in Kaoh Moan. Overall, the community is aware that development interventions put different resources on display and the Equity Card is perceived as such a potential personal benefit.

From the moment we entered Kaoh Moan people approached us to ask for which development organisation we work and what kind of benefits we distribute. The villagers were wearing T-shirts from different development agencies, from global non-governmental organisations like World Vision and the Red Cross to governmental agencies like DFID and USAID and bodies of the United Nations. According to the community members, apart from the IDPoor programme, there exist(ed) programmes in regard to education, agriculture and water management, safe delivery and new-born care, vaccination and health insurance, sanitation and hygiene as well as three different micro-credit operators and a sponsorship programme for children. Two public ponds were, through financial support from a national development organisation, collectively built and are supervised by a pond commission. A 'gender group' and a 'village development group' existed, however both groups seemed to be rather inactive. Additionally, at least three village health workers and a village veterinarian have been trained by development agencies and were more or less active.

Thus, the community in Kaoh Moan was quite experienced with different development interventions. The different projects were debated within the community, some are judged useful, others damned as being merely sales promotions, a bunch of pointless meetings or leading to indebtedness. It was obvious that Kaoh Moan had a long history of different development activities and that villagers were familiar with a variety of projects.

Villagers perceived development interventions as offering different personal benefits they can capitalise on. They showed us pumps and toilets built in their yard by UNICEF, scholarships provided by World Vision and donations of rice and fertilizer from the ruling Cambodian People's Party. Apart from material assets, engaging in a development programme sometimes comes with financial compensation for participating in meetings or becoming an interviewer.

Frequently, after clarifying that we research the IDPoor programme, villagers approached us to claim their family should get an Equity Card. A woman living in a small shed in the east of the village told us:

We want to get a poor card [Equity Card] as well, because when I went to the hospital, I spend much money. I borrowed 1 Million riel⁹ from a development organisation to give birth to my baby, and until now we are still in debt... And people who have such a card, when they give birth, they do not spend money... [laugh] I want to have the card as well.

(Interview at her house, 18.02.2015)

The understanding of the Equity Card as a useful resource was widespread and nearly all villagers perceived being registered as poor as something advantageous. The village chief goes as far as to claim: "Now that everyone knows about the programme everybody wants to have the poor card [Equity Card]. Even the rich want to be poor. [laugh]" (Informal talk, 16.02.2015). Another indication that villagers want to take advantage of the Equity Card are the accounts of the VRG members and the village chief, that some households were hiding information or property in order to appear poorer. Hence, the community members are aware that being registered as poor entails certain benefits for them and their families.

To summarise, the meaning the community ascribes to the IDPoor intervention has to be understood in relation to the extensive amount of development activities implemented in Kaoh Moan. All families had been in contact with various development programmes and are aware that personal benefits can arise from engaging in interventions. The IDPoor programme

⁹ This equates to around 124 Euros.

just seemed to be the latest link of a long chain of development interventions which put resources on display. The villagers perceive the IDPoor intervention as useful, as it offers access to free public health services. Hence, the Equity Card is perceived as beneficial resource. Overall, the fieldwork indicates that the villagers are experienced in dealing with different development programmes. Against the backdrop of this the Equity Card is perceived as a new resource the villagers would like to capitalise on.

5.1.2. The VRG Members as Assistants to the Leader

This chapter displays the perceptions of the VRG members in regard to their tasks and the village chief's role as head of the VRG. The findings reveal the members' passive understanding of their responsibilities and the acceptance of an ancillary position in relation to the village chief.

It was a frustrating piecemeal process to identify the members of the VRG. It turned out they themselves do not know who forms part of their group. With help from the village chief and the deputy we were able to identify the current members. The group consists of four men and one woman. Three of the five members are relatives of the village chief, while one man is the son of the deputy village chief. The village chief serves as the head of the group.

One key aspect of the VRG is its legitimisation and independence based on its public election. However, accounts differ on how the VRG was established. While two members claimed they got elected, two stated they got selected by the village chief, and one member cannot remember the process. The villagers cannot recall an election of the VRG either, yet many stated they do not participate in all meetings the village chief schedules.

A main task of the VRG is to jointly decide which households shall be interviewed based on their local knowledge of the community. Again, accounts of the members differ on how this was accomplished. While some claim they jointly decided whom to interview, the others declare they got assigned certain households by the village chief. The village chief explains that he, together with the Commune Council, decides which households shall be interviewed.

In spite of the many uncertainties, all members of the VRG perceive their tasks within a rather narrow scope. A male member of the VRG, states:

My responsibility... I went to the villagers' household and asked them about their properties [...] I interviewed them, and I note it down in the questionnaire, and then I total the score. [...] Afterwards we give the questionnaire to the village chief, then we finished our job.

(Interview at her house, 06.03.2015)

The female members' account draws a similar picture:

The village chief gave us the name of the households to be interviewed and told us to share the household. [...] I did not do much work because I went directly to interview the villagers at their home, and I could interview around 2 or 3 households per day. That is all.

(Interview at her house, 08.03.2015)

So, neither the VRG decides which households shall be interviewed, nor do they come together afterwards to jointly discuss if special circumstances would justify a re-categorisation. When talking about categorising the households according to the score the son of the deputy chief claims:

I don't know. I never saw it [draft list of poor households]. I don't know. We only interviewed the villagers and gave it [questionnaires] to the village chief. And then I don't know what the upper level did. This was not my work.

(Interview at his house, 06.03.2015)

Not knowing or not being responsible was constantly expressed by all VRG members, which indicates their narrow understanding of their scope of work and the subordination of their position as VRG member to the local leaders. When asking what they do, if villagers approach them to complain about the categorisation or make suggestions all accounted to refer them to the village chief, as they are not responsible for the programme.

This is manifested by the village chief's position as coordinator of the group. He explains:

I do not have any role in doing the IDPoor card, but the document [implementation manual] states that the village chief is the coordinator of the Village Representative Group. [...] That is how I became head of the group.

(Interview at his house, 09.03.2015)

Yet, throughout the conversation he later adds tasks like: selecting which households will be interviewed, supervising the VRG members, checking the answers given by the families and calculating the scores, assigning a preliminary poverty category, considering special

circumstances, organising the village consultation meeting and distributing the Equity Cards. Although the implementation manual does not state that the village chief automatically serves as head of the VRG, none of the group members or villagers questions this. Instead, it seemed rather ‘natural’ that the village chief takes up this position. The son of the village chief (also member of the VRG) reasons why the village leader has such an influential role in the programme:

After the interviews we took the questionnaire back so the village chief can check whether the interviewers are right or wrong. (...) Sometimes some interviewers might be confused or the villagers were hiding something, so they may give wrong information. When the village chief checks and sees that it is incorrect, he changes it *because he knows*.

(Interview at his house, 04.03.2015)

Hence, the village chief’s knowledge about the individual situation of the households justifies his influence. This perception is shared by all VRG members and relates to the overall understanding of local leadership in the village, a theme which is explored in-depth in the next chapter.

To summarise, it is not clear how the VRG was established, yet strong indication exists that the leader selected the members. They perceive themselves neither as a group nor as responsible for any task apart from executing the interviews. All members see the village chief as responsible for the overall intervention and perceive their role as inferior to his. Therefore, they comply with his decisions.

5.2. The Management of Interventions – The Leader Decides

The second theme represents the communities’ perceptions of the influence of the village chief over development interventions in Kaoh Moan. This serves as an example to illuminate his influential position within the village. In regard to the research interest, an emphasis is put on his control over the IDPoor programme. Conflicting opinions in regard to the village chiefs’ influence over interventions exist in the community, which will be displayed within this chapter.

Not just the VRG, but also the villagers perceive the process of identifying poor households as being influenced by the village chief. A middle-aged woman states during the focus group discussion: “The village chief *selected* who will get the [Equity] card, we did not grab it from each other. *The village chief appointed the households. He selected us because*

we are poor.” (FGD, 16.02.2015) Another woman adds: “[...] I think it is fair ... I don’t know about other people, but *the village chief gave me* the [Equity] card because I am poor and I am a widow.” (ibid.)

So even though the identification of poor households should be based on objective criteria which are assessed through independent household interviews, the process is perceived as being controlled by the local leader. He is seen as responsible for selecting and distributing the benefits which are put on display by the IDPoor programme. The village chief himself backs this up by claiming he knows his villagers best and therefore, if some accounts in the interviews were not right, he could change them and the score accordingly (Informal talk, 14.02.2015, paraphrased). Furthermore, he controls which households, if they were absent during the time the interviews were conducted, can register for exemption of public health care fees. Thereby, the households are not enlisted as poor, but gain the same health care benefits as the Equity Card offers.¹⁰ Another aspect of his influence on the process of identification is his control over the establishment and functioning of the Village Representative Group, as illustrated in the former chapter. The villagers are aware of this and perceive the VRG as steered by the village chief. To conclude, the communities’ understanding of the intervention is that it is influenced – if not controlled – by the village chief.

The former quotations of the two women also indicate that the identification process creates tensions between the villagers. Even though many villagers perceive the influence of the village chief on the distribution process as something positive, also negative perceptions were revealed. A man, whose family is registered as poor, states:

The selection is unfair, like I said. [...] Some people have a better live but they still get the [Equity] card. They [villagers] are jealous of each other. And some are the relatives of the village chief. After he [village chief] had selected, it was reported to the upper level [commune level], but the upper level doesn’t know.

(Interview at his house, 15.02.2015)

He criticises not only nepotism but also irregularities when categorising the families. Within the community the families seem quite knowledgeable about the livelihood of each other. Crop yields, purchases of cows and work opportunities in factories or on construction

¹⁰ This process is called post-identification for the Health Equity Funds, which grants free access to public health care services. Formally, poor households, who have not been identified as poor, can demand post-identification in the health centres or district hospital (Flores et al, 2013). However, only the village chief seems to know about this possibility and selects which households demand post-identification and facilitates the process.

sites were discussed which each other. Hence, the villagers are able to estimate and compare different household situations. Several villagers share the opinion that the village chief selectively favours families, even if their livelihoods are judged superior to other households which were not categorised as poor. This leads to tensions and disagreements and various villagers – categorised as poor and non-poor – stated they feel jealous, angry or upset about this.

The influence of the village chief expands beyond the IDPoor programme and in order to understand his standing in the community and villager positioning towards him, his influence on other aspects of the villager's lives will be presented. Overall, he manages the administrative aspects of the village life, like authorising lending contracts for microloans¹¹, issuing work permissions for underage youth¹², administrating marriages and divorces, or settling conflicts between the villagers and – if necessary – the amount of compensation payments. An illustrative example of the strong position of the village chief (and how villagers perceive it) is the management of donations. Donations, either from political parties or development organisations, are mostly handed out after destructive floods. Still, they appear irregularly and come as surprises to the community. Many villagers call them gifts and their distribution was a frequent subject of debate. During our stay in the village a donation in form of rice was given to a poor widow. The village chief had put forward a request regarding a donation for her at the commune council a few weeks earlier. When we talk about this with a poor family, which did not get an Equity Card, the husband tells us:

I never get anything. [...] They [local authorities] gave the donations only to their relatives. It was not a big donation, only noodles, sugar, clothes, hats, 50 kilogram of rice... They gave it everywhere, but my house never gets anything from them.

(Interview at their house, 18.02.2015)

His wife adds:

The only time we got something was from World Vision. During the flood season they gave us medicine to clean the water. Yes, that they gave us. [...] Besides this, every donation that is provided to our commune, if he [village chief] selects 50 or

¹¹ In order to obtain a microloan villagers provide their rice land as collateral to the lending organisation. Since legal land titling does not exist, three villagers need to confirm that the household who wants to obtain the credit owes the land. The village chief needs to sign this document before it can be sent to the organisation.

¹² According to the law, persons less than 16 years old are not allowed to work in factories. However, if a family is depending on another income the village chief can issue special work permits. Many families emphasised the work of their teenage children (especially women in the garment sector) as an important source of income for their families.

60 poor people who get the donation in this village, I never get anything. But for those who are rich, they say they are still poor. [...] Even though we are angry we cannot do anything. [laugh] *We are under their leading.*

(ibid.)

Thus, the village chief has a strong influence over the allocation of benefits. He and the ‘upper level’ decide who will profit from donations, and even though some families feel neglected they see no possibility to challenge this situation. What is meant by ‘being under their leading’ is explored below.

This theme indicates the very influential position of the village chief in Kaoh Moan, with a particular emphasis on his control over development interventions. He not only administers legal aspects and settles conflicts, he also manages the IDPoor intervention or donations. Villagers are aware of his influential position.

5.3. Local Leadership- The Caretaking or Dismissing Village Chief

The aforementioned perceptions of the community in regard to the allocation of development benefits relates to their overall perception of local leadership. There seem to exist two contrary opinions about the local leader and his leadership qualities in the community, which are explored in the third theme.

5.3.1. The Gentle and Wise Leader

Some villagers describe the village chief as a parent, guardian or father. An elderly woman states in an interview: “The leaders are not different from *our parents*, because they always look after their children” (Interview at her house, 10.03.2015). Later, when we discussed how tensions are solved in the village she comes back to that metaphor and adds: “Yes, they [villagers] go to the village chief, and he does not resent us because he is *like a parent*. If he would resent us how could he have become a leader?” (ibid.). A young woman used a similar metaphor when explaining: “The village chief knows clearly [about the village]. If he would not, he could not be *the guard* of the villagers” (FGD, 16.02.2015). Even the poor family, which feels neglected by him, refers to him as a parent, yet in a negative comparison:

If he [village chief] decides that we get the [Equity] card, we will get the card. If he does not give us the card, we will not get it. *It is like in a family, when the parents love one child they give everything only to that child.* This is like our

situation. We also want to have it [the Equity Card], because we are poor, but they don't give to us.

(Interview at their house, 18.02.2015)

A perception of authority and knowledge underpins all these metaphors and it is claimed the leaders take care of *their* villagers and look after them. Or, as in the case of the poor family, neglect them and favour another child, which also entails the notion of authority.

Even the village chief describes himself as “the father of the villagers who takes care of them” (Informal talk at his house, 05.03.2015). He tells us that villagers seek his guidance when they are in debt or have other troubles and he advises them to work hard and to try not to depend on others (ibid.). During a conversation with a group of women it was argued that the leaders know what is best for the village, and therefore villagers should trust them (Informal talk, 06.03.2015, paraphrased). This adds the notion of wisdom and trust – apart from the already attributed characteristics of knowledge and authority – to a good leader.

5.3.2. The Biased Leader

In contrast to the former theme, a number of villagers perceive the village chief as being unfair and favouring himself, his relatives or rich families. He is perceived as being “good at making friends with the upper level” and “only takes care of people he likes” (Informal talks, 11.03.2015).

When discussing how conflicts are solved in the village with a group of women I asked if they turn to the village chief. All denied and said they rather settle their conflict on their own. One elderly mother gave an example of a conflict with another villager. Her son was taking care of the man's ducks for three months but has not been paid. She said she approached the owner of the ducks several times, but he claimed not having the money to pay her son. When she finally went to the village chief he turned her down, arguing he could not do anything, as her son and the villager had no proper contract. She laughed about this and stated barely any work is done based on a formal contract in Kaoh Moan. She reasoned that the villager is rich and therefore, the village chief defended him. I asked if she complained about this to the deputy village chief or someone on commune level and she denies. She explains complaining at the commune is too expensive for her and overall she does not like complaining, as she does not want to break the relationship with the village chief (Informal talk, 07.03.2015, paraphrased).

During another discussion with a group of men and women the villagers complained about an incident which happened a few years ago. A development programme was donating three public pumps to the village. The villagers should decide jointly where to set the pumps. However, the village chief did not share all relevant information about the programme right away and influenced the process in a way that one public pump was built in his backyard. When the other villagers noticed this, the construction work had already started and it was too late to reallocate the pump. The village chief defended himself by pointing out he lives very central and villagers can just come and get water from the pump in his back yard (Informal talk, 11.03.2015, paraphrased). We observed how neighbours used the pump in the garden of the village chief and when we asked them about this they all claimed it is a public pump, therefore, they are entitled to use it.

A similar story shared in the village relates to the case of the village veterinarian. As the village chief heard that a development organisation is providing free training and financial compensation for one villager per village to become trained as a veterinarian he sent one of his sons immediately. The villagers could not decide on this and reason that the village chief wanted to get the money the organisation provides (ibid.).

So even though the village chief claims he is like the father for the villagers, some members regard him as favouring his own family and capitalising on development benefits. The villagers who perceive him like this prefer keeping a good but distant relation to him, while solving their problems by themselves. Other local authorities, like the commune council, are perceived as distant and inaccessible.

To summarise the third theme, for some villagers, aspects like wisdom, authority and knowledge constitute a good leader and the community should trust and follow the village chief as he combines these characteristics. The distribution of development benefits according to his decision is accepted and should not be challenged. Yet, another group of villagers criticise the village chief for selective favouring when distribution development benefits or capitalising on them. These villagers try to keep a low and distant profile. Their perception of local leadership interrelates with their self-ascription as citizens. This will be explored in the next chapter.

5.4. Strategies to Keep a Good Relation to the Leader – The Good Citizens and the Distant Villagers

The aforementioned aspects illustrate the influential position of the village chief in Kaoh Moan and how the villagers perceive and judge this in regard to the IDPoor programme and their overall understanding of local leadership. The fourth theme emphasises the importance of a good relation to the village chief and villagers' different strategies to secure this.

In a former example the woman reasoned she did not complain when the village chief failed to support her claim against the owner of the ducks. She valued the good relation with the village chief to be more important than demanding his support. The link between a good relation to the village chief and obtaining the Equity Card was brought up by several members of the community. Even though only two elderly men mentioned this relation directly during a conversation, many villagers reflect on the bad relationship between the village chief and certain families when discussing cases they perceive as unfair. One villager reasons on the case of a very poor woman who did not get the Equity Card:

There is an old woman, not married, who lived behind that house. [points across the street] She did not get the [Equity] card. Her house was falling down and she went to Thailand.¹³ Now nobody knows where she lives... She had nothing. [...] She is very old, she is poor and her house was falling down, but the village chief thinks nothing of her.

(Interview at his house, 18.02.2015)

After he explained her difficulties and hardship for over a minute he concludes by reckoning her bad relation with the village chief. Even though he does not directly claim this as cause, he indicates that the village chief's negative perception of her influenced her classification as non-poor. Another illustrative example constitutes the case of a very poor family, who lives in a simple shed and has not been categorised as poor. The deputy village chief explains he had lobbied for the family at the commune council and talked to the village chief directly, but nothing happened. He reasons that: "The village chief does not get along well with [...] [them]. Maybe [...] [he] dislikes her, that's why he ignores her" (Interview at his house, 08.03.2015). Lastly, the commissioner of the pond tells us that he had a conflict with the village chief regarding some trees near the pond. He chopped them down to build an additional wall for the pond, albeit the village chief prohibited this. He claims this could be

¹³ We counted six families which have been migrating all together to Thailand, to work on construction sites or in factories, to strive for a living. According to the village chief these were landless or very poor families. Other families have sent either one or two family members or left their children with the grandparents to work in Thailand.

the reason why the village chief is mad at him and did not give him an Equity Card (Informal talk, 03.03.2015, paraphrased). Thus, as indicated in theme 2, villagers are aware of the village chief's influence over the allocation of development benefits. In order to obtain development benefits, like the Equity Card, they perceive a positive relation to him as prerequisite.

One strategy to ensure a positive relation is behaving appropriately – like a “good or easy citizen”. An elder widow mentioned the concept of being an easy citizen when reasoning why she got an Equity Card. “[T]hey [local authorities] saw that I am very hard-working in order to feed my children and *the village chief gave me the card because he can see with his own eyes that I am an easy citizen.*” (Interview at her house, 10.03.2015) When inquiring what she means by being an easy citizen she elaborates: “For example, when they [local authorities] collect some money I never complain and I will give them the money if they need it” (ibid.). Every now and then the village chief collects public fees from the villagers, around 2.000 to 8.000 Riel, for maintaining the roads or the public ponds. This is debated between the villagers, as some families claim the money is misallocated by the village chief or the commune. Therefore, several families try to avoid paying the fee. The widow explains:

Sometimes the village chief and sometimes the deputy come to collect some money. [...] Some people did not give the money. But for me, I always gave the money whenever they came to collect it. *I am never against them.* Although I do not have money, I borrow money from other people to give it to them, because I live in this society and *I do not want to be difficult for them. This is my duty.* [...] But some people they never give the money.

(ibid.)

For her, not to criticise, not to be against ‘them’ and to supply what ‘they’ demand – even through running into debt – is seen as the responsibility of a good citizen who is member of Kaoh Moan.

Another characteristic regarded appropriate for an ‘easy citizen’ is not to talk negatively about the local leaders or complaining too much. During a conversation concerning conflict resolution in the village with a group of women it was discussed how a “good citizen” should behave. Here the concept had a different connotation. A couple of women in the group agreed that a good citizen does not talk negatively about the local authorities outside public meetings. The women explained a few people are always against the leaders as they constantly complain and talk badly about the village chief. The group agreed, that there are enough village meetings for people to complain and that the leaders are willing to listen. However, the

villagers never raise any complaints officially, instead they criticise the village chief outside the meetings. The women regarded this as unsuitable behaviour and one woman explained:

People should work hard and go to the Pagoda to pray ... Not think and complain the whole time. And they should not get involved in other family's issues. No, they should not.

(Informal talk, 06.03.2015)

The perception of complaints as inappropriate has to be understood in relation to the already mentioned perception of leadership. If notions of wisdom, knowledge and authority form villagers' understanding of the village chief, challenging him seems improper. Perceiving the village chief as guard or father of the village indicates his superiority which shall not be questioned but accepted. This is also indicated through the permanent emphasis of the difference between citizens and leaders by the villagers.

Yet, even though all villagers agree on the small amount of complaints brought forward officially, not all reason this is due to the inappropriateness of complaining. Some villagers claimed they "do not know how to complain" (Interview, 18.02.2015), "do not dare to talk" (Interview, 17.02.2015), or "are lazy to complain, as nothing ever changes" (Interview, 18.02.2015). When discussing the case of the family which feels neglected with their relatives a woman tells us: "We do not dare to complain. We just can be silent. If we get the Equity Card we are happy, if not, there is nothing we can do" (Informal talk at her house, 11.03.2015). This is in line with her daughters' statement that: "Even though we are angry we cannot do anything. [laugh] We are under their leading." (Interview at her house, 18.02.2015). This indicates helplessness and resignation the villagers feel when it comes to challenging the distribution practices and the power of the leader. A clear separation between being a citizen and a leader is emphasised. In this case, complaining is not just perceived as unsuitable behaviour, but also insecurity about how and where to complain limits villager's actions.

A young woman reasons complaining would be more effective if organised as a collective action:

If they [villagers] agree to complain it can work out. But if only some people are going to complain, but some people are not joining in, it can't be done. ... It's like what I was doing in the factory. [...] For example if there are 2,000 workers and they want to make a strike, they are going together, so there is no problem. But if only some workers are making a strike and some workers not, they [factory owners] will ask who are the leaders of the group and they will face some problems. It's like that in the village.

(Interview at her house, 03.03.2015)

Thus, apart from insecurity, individual complaining is seen as ineffective and dangerous. It could even lead to negative consequences and harm the relationship with the local leaders.

In sum, villagers perceive having a good relation to the village chief as a pre-requisite, to obtain the Equity Card. What defines a good relation and adequate behaviour is related to their self-perception. Some villagers describe themselves as a 'good or easy citizen', which characterises someone who provides what the leaders demand without questioning them. Moreover, not challenging local leaders and not getting involved in other family's issues is perceived as appropriate conduct of a good citizen. Yet, silence is not always grounded in satisfaction with the leader or a certain social norm. Rather, insecurity and fear seem to be the driving motivations for other villagers to not bring forwards criticism and to sustain the good relation to the leader. Both perspectives emphasise a sharp distinction between being a citizen in comparison to being a leader, while the relation is perceived as highly hierarchical. Yet, the 'good citizens' did not voice concern or discontent about this relationship. For them it constitutes the 'natural social order', which is grounded in the leaders' wisdom and trustworthiness. For the other villagers, the hierarchical relationship is perceived as limiting their actions, as they do not know how to challenge it. They are afraid of sanctions and do not dare to officially complain.

6. Analysis

Within this chapter the adaptation of the participatory features of the IDPoor intervention by villagers' actions – which are shaped by the local power structures – will be analysed. The focus is put on the participatory aspects as they are regarded as 'development interfaces' in which different life-worlds intersect. In these interfaces various villagers with different interests, perceptions, social positions and capacities to exercise power interact and shape the ways in which the IDPoor intervention is adapted by the community. These processes have to

be understood in a holistic way, whereby the exercised powers in the different dimensions overlap and mutually influence, enforce or limit each other.

The overall question this work tries to answer reads as follow: *How does the Kaoh Moan community adapt the 'Identification of Poor Households' intervention to its pre-existing social structures?* In order to do that, first the establishment and functioning of the VRG is analysed. I illustrate how the village chief was able to expand and consolidate his power through strategically withholding knowledge and mobilising social norms related to his social status. This has to be understood in relation to villagers' self-perception as (inferior) citizens and their experiences with former development interventions. Therefore, in second part of the analysis the village consultation meeting is scrutinised and I illustrate how villagers' self-identification and the structures of domination respectively limited their behaviour during the meeting. Yet, these structures also enabled certain response strategies and hidden resistance, which will be represented as a complementary model of explanation for the behaviour during the village consultation meeting.

6.1. The Village Representative Group – Consolidating and Expanding Power through Capturing a Participatory Approach

Analysing the establishment and functioning of the VRG reveals the dynamics and processes through which the village chief was able to manipulate and control the primary responsible institution for managing the intervention on the local level. The analysis illustrates how actions in the hidden power dimension enforced dynamics in the visible one.

As outlined, the IDPoor intervention is supposed to be implemented according to a detailed implementation manual which assigns clear responsibilities to the different bodies involved. The VRG is supposed to constitute an independent and legitimised group of villagers who are responsible for the implementation of the intervention on the village level. Official rules regarding the establishment, group consultations and voting mechanisms set the framework of their actions. Hence, the implementation manual demarcates regulations for decision-making processes positioned within the visible dimension of power. Yet, the village chief was able to influence these formalised exercises of power and seized control over the group. In order to understand this processes it is necessary to scrutinise the consequences of assigning himself head of the VRG. Even though this action occurred within the hidden dimension of power, it broadened and consolidated his power in the visible power dimension.

According to the village chief the implementation manual determines that every village chief serves as head of the VRG in his community. His claim is based on a formal rule which allegedly delegates him this position, albeit this is not specified in the manual. He is the only member of the community who knows the implementation manual, and he uses this knowledge strategically for his interests. Referring to his appointment as a formal requirement from the local government adds a notion of external authority to his claim. Through demanding the position as head of the VRG he influenced the ‘rules of the game’ and thereby delegated himself into a position which enabled him to manipulate succeeding steps of implementation. This position ascribed him various authorities in the further course of categorising the households and legitimated his influence. The findings indicate three ways in which power is exercised to manipulate decision-making processes of the VRG:

- a) by mobilising and expanding his authoritative resources
- b) by monopolising formalised joint decision processes
- c) by excluding less powerful groups

The first aspect is illustrated through the constitution of the VRG and how the village chief was able to control it. The group was not publicly elected, rather its formation was influenced by the village chief. Their narrow understanding of their scope of work limits the members’ engagement in the implementation process. They perceive the village chief as their supervisor and comply with his decisions. Disputing a decision of the head of the VRG seems out of question for them. Thereby, the village chief is able to access, mobilise and expand his authoritative resources. He gained influence over the actions and self-perception of the VRG members, as he tells them what to do and defines their scope of work. He possesses the capacity to pass his commands on to them and to enrol them, at least partially, in his personal agenda. Thereby, the VRG loses its participatory claim – neither are the members legitimised by the community, nor do they find joint decisions based on their local knowledge.

Another way in which the implementation of the intervention became framed by the village chief is through seizing the tasks of the VRG. An illustrative example constitutes his monopolisation of the re-categorisation of households. As not all relevant aspects defining a households’ situation can be reflected in the questionnaire, the VRG shall jointly discuss all cases where special circumstances would justify re-assigning a different poverty category. (Ministry of Planning, 2008:17-18). However, this cooperative task has been captured by the village chief. He excluded the VRG from the decision-making process, thereby transforming

the practice from a public, transparent one to a closed one happening ‘behind the scenes’. Hence, he re-allocated the re-categorisation of households from the visible to the hidden dimension of power. Once the decision process is allocated within the hidden dimension he can exercise power as participation is banned. He was able to do this based on withholding information regarding the official process and the ascribed authority and legitimation rooted in his position as head of the VRG, which results in him controlling the VRG.

A third way of executing power based on this authority is by excluding less powerful households. Again, through manipulating the ‘rules of the game’ in the hidden dimension, he was able to select which households will be interviewed. Thereby, he pre-determines who will potentially benefit from this intervention.

An example how this exercise of power within the hidden dimension leads to the exclusion of less powerful households is the case of Sokunthy¹⁴ and her family. I referred to Sokunthy’s case throughout the findings as the poor family which feels neglected. I discussed her case with herself and her husband, her mother, some neighbours and the village deputy chief.¹⁵ Sokunthy’s family had not been interviewed. She does not know why or how she could demand to be assessed. Many neighbours perceive her family as poor and her case has been a subject of debate. The deputy village chief lobbied for her case at the Commune Council and talked to the village chief directly – yet nothing changed. Sokunthy and her family see no way to challenge their treatment. They feel neglected by the village chief, yet perceive themselves under his leading. This case illustrates the leader’s manipulation of the preliminary setting, before the assessment of the households started. As a kind of a pre-decision, the village chief dismissed Sokunthy’s family from the list of households which will be assessed. Now, in the visible arena of decision-making processes she cannot draw on any means – neither rules nor resources – to influence this. She can only manoeuvre within a very limited space, as the structures of domination are constituted to her disadvantage. According to the implementation manual the VRG is responsible for such cases. Yet, as the leader influenced the constitution and restricted the tasked and thereby the self-conception of the VRG, they do not perceive themselves responsible for this case.

In summary, it becomes clear how the village chief was able to generate and use authoritative resources, manipulated formal rules to his advantage, and used information strategically in order to expand his control over the programme on the village level. He is

¹⁴ Name changed.

¹⁵ The neighbours and the deputy chief brought up her case by themselves.

capable to influence the official implementation procedures by re-allocating decision-making processes from the public to the hidden sphere, thereby limiting participation. At the same time, through assigning himself head of the VRG, he expanded and consolidated his power in the visible dimension. Thereby, a network of actors emerged, which – at least partially – supported his agenda. Thereby, this study reaches a conclusion similar to Nuijten's research discussed in the literature review. She argues that newly-established community-level organisations in natural resource management programmes are often assumed to regulate and manage relatively homogeneous communities, without acknowledging differentiations among the rural community or pre-existing informal modes of organisation (Nuijten, 2005). This claim can be extended to the design of the VRG. The organisation was supposed to control the influence of local power holders. Instead, through disregarding the communities heterogeneous nature and pre-existing modes of organisation embedded in the overall power asymmetry the VRG did not challenge the pre-existing structures but was rather channelled along them.

These processes were facilitated by social rules, internalised norms and self-perceptions of the villagers and the VRG members. In order to coherently analyse the ways in which the intervention became adapted and shaped by local power structures these practices have to form a part of the analysis and will be addressed in the next chapter.

6.2. The Village Consultation Meeting – A Feature Disregarding Social Norms

As emphasised in the former chapter, the village chief gaining the position as head of the VRG is a key aspect in understanding how the intervention became shaped and accommodated by local power structures of Kaoh Moan. He was able to assign himself this position, as nobody questioned it, neither the villagers nor the VRG members. This has to be understood in relation to the community's history of development interventions and villagers' awareness of the important social position of the leader in every-day life. This chapter discusses how villager's understanding of leadership and their self-ascription as citizens influenced their actions during the village consultation meeting. Thereby, the lack of contextualisation of this participatory feature is revealed, as it disregards social norms and self-ascriptions – rooted in the structures of domination – in Kaoh Moan.

6.2.1. Being a Good Citizen

The invisible dimension of power conceptualises how domination leads to the internalisation and acceptance of certain values, social norms and self-perceptions of the relatively powerless, which results in consenting and adapting to being dominated. Some villagers defined themselves as ‘good or easy citizen’, which exemplifies how power renders certain aspects invisible.

A good citizen neither complains, nor challenges the leader, as he is perceived as wise and skilled father, who takes care of his villagers. A notion of authority and gratitude is attached to this. Within this mind-set speaking up is perceived as unsuitable behaviour, as well as getting involved in other families’ issues. The instructions or commands of the leader should be accepted and followed, even if that increases personal hardship. In general, a good citizen has a good relation to leaders and does “not want to be difficult for them” (Interview, 10.03.2015). The hierarchy and strong position of the leader constitutes the accepted natural social order for a ‘good citizen’.

This internalisation of domination and the acceptance of a social order which disadvantages the villagers form part of their tactical consciousness. The ‘good citizens’ are unable to reflect on this. The social practices based on this understanding, like paying public fees without questioning the allocation, or accepting the distribution of the Equity Cards, as the leader decided this – are internalised and reproduced in an unreflective manner. Hence, situated knowledge and self-perception influence the ways in which the interventions becomes adapted by ‘good citizens’.

This interplay between the villagers’ unconscious submission to domination and the IDPoor intervention can be illustrated through scrutinising the village consultation meeting. During the meeting villagers are expected to put forward complaints or suggestions regarding the preliminary categorisation, thereby addressing conflicts and reaching consensus. The meeting takes place in public and is directed towards community action. The findings indicate that only very few complaints were brought up during the meeting, which the village chief interprets as affirmation of the intervention.

The gap between the features’ rationale and villagers’ actions based on self-perception and internalised norms is apparent in several ways. Firstly, as the findings emphasise, the intervention is perceived as being controlled by the village chief. Thereby, the course of implementation is legitimate, justified and beyond doubt, as the leader is perceived as more

knowledgeable than a ‘good citizens’. Therefore, it does not occur to the ‘good citizen’ to speak up during such a meeting. Frankly, there is just no reason for them to do so, as they trust and accept the decisions made by the leader. Thereby, ideas and perspectives are not just kept from the decision-making table, as power exercised in the second dimension would indicate, but generally from the minds of the agents. This indicates internalised domination – a form of power exercised in the third dimension. Secondly, even if speaking up during the meeting would occur to a ‘good citizen’ it would be regarded as defiant or disobedient to the village chief. The social norm that complaining is perceived as unacceptable behaviour influences villagers’ actions, especially in such an open setting. Given the norm it is no surprise that barely any complaints were made. Hence, conducting such a meeting always happens within the structures of domination characterising the village, which limits agents’ actions. ‘Good citizens’ behaviour during the meeting is shaped through the social norms and self-perceptions grounded in the accepted domination. Through this adaptation along the structures of domination and the influence of the third dimension of power, the feature becomes a self-serving activity and loses its purpose.

6.2.2. Tactical Submission

Another aspect shaping the adaption of the intervention is the villagers’ submission to domination as strategic, deliberate decision. This can be seen as response-strategy to the village chief’s control over development resources.

The community perceives the intervention as controlled by the village chief and all villagers stressed the importance of a good relation to the village leader. This knowledgeability about the social context of Kaoh Moan guides their behaviour in regards to the intervention. They tactically subordinate to the domination as a strategy to minimise extraction while benefiting from potential resources. In contrast to the ‘good citizen’ they perceive submission and acceptance not as duty. Rather they position themselves in a way to avoid direct insubordination, while withdrawing themselves from the influence of the leader as far as possible. This mediates how the IDPoor intervention is accommodated by them, which can be exemplified through scrutinising the village consultation meeting.

These villagers perceive complaining as ineffective, grounded in their experiences, that the leaders are un-responsive. Within their understanding, complaining will not change their situation, yet it can backfire, as the fear of sanctions and punishment indicates. The villager stated they did not dare to complain during the village meeting, as they did not want to

jeopardise the good relation with the village chief. Thereby, open confrontation is avoided and the meeting fails its purpose. Hence, the village chief's threat or use of sanctions influenced their actions, which illustrates how he exercised power over them, as they would have acted otherwise if it would not have been for the leader's influence.

Yet, villagers do resist and try to manoeuvre themselves in an advantageous position within their limiting structures of domination. Illustrative is the strategy to hide information during the assessment by the VRG. Through withholding information and making false statements families attempt to appear poorer in order to receive the Equity Card. This indicates tactical resistance in order to capitalise on benefits. As the unequal distribution of rules and resources limits their possibilities to act, they pursue this strategy to benefit from the development resources while not risking the good relation with the village chief or confronting him directly. Another example poses the village chief's complaint on how difficult it is to collect public fees within Kaoh Moan. He claims villagers try to avoid him or search for excuses or argue to avoid paying. They have a practical interest in resisting him, in order to minimise extractions. This emphasises that even subordinate agents pose some capacity to exercise power. Although the structures of domination restrict villager's actions, they also enable them to pursue certain strategies.

So even though public transcripts, like silently participating in different village meetings, display that these villagers accept the subordination unchallenged, hidden transcripts reveal a different picture.¹⁶ Tactical positioning and hidden forms of resistance indicate that villagers are aware of the power relations. They strategically select where to resist and where to comply. This motivation shaped their actions during the village consultation meeting, whereby the feature – through dismissing local power structures – does not function as the control mechanism it is intended to provide, but rather plays into the hands of the local leader.

In sum, the village consultation meeting constitutes a forum which disregards the cultural context and the local social relations of Kaoh Moan. The idea of a collective, public event directed towards community action is not in concurrence with the local norms and embodied power relations. A leader is constructed as beyond doubt and challenging him would constitute a cultural affront. Moreover, out of fear and/or strategic positioning, villagers only express the 'official' and accepted view while criticism is held back. Thereby, the feature

¹⁶ This nicely illustrates the purpose and usefulness of an ethnographic approach, as a thorough understanding of peoples everyday lived experiences is gained, which enables the ethnographer to 'look behind' the front-stage behaviour and to research 'hidden transcripts'.

triggers front-stage action and public consent instead of a debate in which various opinions from different groups of the community are discussed.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This case study set out to gain an insight into the processes that happen at the interface where “development interventions encounter local life-worlds” (Hasselskog, 2009:11). Given the explorative ethnographic approach, the focus of the research was gradually narrowed down, as my understanding of the context broadened. After the fieldwork, the empirical material was comprehended through the lens of a tailor-made theoretical framework discussing power based on conceptualisations of Giddens, Lukes and Scott. Yet, interpreting and sense-making occurred throughout all stages of the research.

The final research question reads as follows: *How does the Kaoh Moan community adapt the ‘Identification of Poor Households’ intervention to its pre-existing social structures?*

A focus is put on the two participatory features of the intervention, where different actors interact to accommodate, shape and translate the intervention in accordance with their interests. In order to analyse this question the following sub-questions will be addressed:

1. *How are the communities’ perceptions of the intervention related to their historical experiences with development programmes?*
2. *How are dimensions of power essential in understanding the process of adaptation?*
3. *How do the local power structures limit and enable villagers’ actions when engaging with the IDPoor intervention?*

The analysis indicate that the community’s history with development interventions, a hierarchical social order, self-identification as inferior citizen and, related to that, certain local social norms influence the way the IDPoor programme is adapted. These aspects are constituted and constitute the local power structures, which limit and enable the villagers’ thoughts and actions in relation to the intervention. The village chief expands and consolidates his influence over the interventions through controlling the VRG, monopolising formalised joint decision processes and banning participation, thereby drawing on his special social position within the community. Villagers’ actions are influenced by the internalisation of domination as well as the perceived inferiority, which limits their capacity to reflect on or to challenge the monopolisation of the project by the leader. Yet, some villagers consciously adjust their behaviour to the domination and strategically comply with the leader while

resisting in less obvious ways. Hence, the interventions assumption that local group dynamics would lead to participatory and consensus-oriented decisions as well as the inclusion of less powerful groups is refuted. Rather, the interests of the already powerful actors were reproduced.

Four key elements that characterise power relations in Kaoh Moan and the adaptation of the IDPoor programme could be identified. Firstly, the formal and visible institutions, like the power of the village chief to manage everyday life in Kaoh Moan. Secondly, informal structures like norms and beliefs, which constitute the embodied form of power, for example the concept of being a good citizen. Thirdly, villager's interests, like the desire to capitalise on the development benefits, and fourthly, the processes of cooperation and contestation, like tactical submission to obtain these benefits. The study highlights that all these aspects mutually affect each other and steer the ways in which the intervention unfolds in the village.

Conceptualising power as a – shaping but also shaped – aspect of individual choices and structural elements illuminates how the dynamics villagers' actions give rise to (re)produce power and (re)create the structures of domination (Hausgaard, 1992:2). The intervention facilitates the reproduction of unequal power relations through villagers' conscious and unconscious actions which embody these unequal relations. The community understands development interventions as putting benefits on display – benefits like the Equity Card. The leaders' management of the interventions constitutes the 'normal course of events'. In order to be able to capitalise on these development benefits, it is considered necessary to have a good relation with the chief. This local knowledge and villagers' interest in the benefits lead to actions which play into the hands of the leader, as villagers submit voluntarily or out of strategic choice. Hence, introducing the IDPoor programme led to a situation in which the village chiefs gained control over a new resource which he can distribute in accordance with his interests. Villagers' awareness of this forms part of the strategies they pursue and they adapt the intervention in ways which reproduce these unequal social relations.

The analysis reveals that the social context of Kaoh Moan has only partly been considered when designing the intervention. As Olivier de Sardan put nicely: "the natural tendency of any project is to assume that history begins with the project, to underestimate everything that came before and to overestimate its own impact" (Olivier de Sardan, 2005:139).

The community's long history with various development interventions shapes the local's understanding of the IDPoor programme as distributing personal benefits one can capitalise on, if self-represented in accordance with the intervention's objective. In the case under study

this means presenting oneself and the own family as poor. Hence, the community's history which affects villager's rationalities in relation to development interventions had not been taken into account when designing the programme.

Also local power structures have only partly been addressed, which is illustrated by the design of the participatory features. The understanding of power underlying the conceptualisation of the features is too simplistic and positivistic, as only formal rules of decision-making processes in the visible dimension are reflected. It is assumed that the community forms a harmonious entity, whereby power relations or rifts between different groups are concealed. The intervention's approach to diffuse power in decision-making processes through establishing formal rules of procedures neglects the processes of power operating behind the scenes or through internalised forms of domination and willing submission.

The research indicates further areas of investigation, like analysing the ways in which the local knowledge of the community reflects local power structures. Thereby, the focus would shift on the influence of local knowledge on the process of adapting the IDPoor intervention, which might reveals other relevant dynamics to understand how power shapes the unfolding of development interventions.

To summarise, the study illustrates how ethnographic research contributes to a more complex understanding of power in development settings in particular and the unfolding and adaptation of development projects by the context in general. The analysis shows that interventions designed by outside experts fail to address the specific social context the intervention will be introduced to. Even though participatory designs claim to address these shortcomings, the case under study reveals how features disregarding the interwoven dynamics of power, history and social norms only serve as rubber stamp activities instead of fostering the inclusion of marginalised groups and safeguarding against elite capture. Hence, through an actor-oriented development ethnography and sustained empirical engagement with development phenomena social logics can be entangled (Olivier de Sardan, 2005:11) and development interventions can be tailored more adequately in response to the specific context they will intervene in.

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Stefanie Licht
Masters of Science in Development Studies
Graduate School & Department of Sociology

Wong J. and Poon M., 2010. Bringing Translations Out of the Shadows: Translation as an Issue of Methodological Significance in Cross-Cultural Qualitative Research. In: *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 21(2), pp:151.158.

Appendix

Map 1: Map of Cambodia, indicating Kaoh Moan village within Takeo province



Source: Cambodia location map.svg: NordNordWestderivative work, Licensed under CCBY-SA3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.