

Chapter 1

The Legacy of War and the Khmer Rouge

*"Bright red blood which covers our fields and plains,
Of Kampuchea, our motherland!
Sublime blood of workers and peasants,
Sublime blood of revolutionary men and women fighters!
The blood changing into unrelenting hatred
And resolute struggle,
On April 17th, under the flag of the Revolution,
Free from Slavery!"*

from Khmer Rouge National Anthem



DAVID MUNRO

A memorial to the dead in Svay Rieng Province, one of hundreds which house the remains of Khmer Rouge victims recovered from mass graves.

Kampuchea: The Land in Between

The many changes in Kampuchea's name during the last two decades reflect the acute social strife and turmoil which have shaken the country. From the period of French colonialism until 1970, Kampuchea was known as the "Kingdom of Cambodia". Following the overthrow of the Royal House of Sihanouk by Lon Nol, the country officially became the "Khmer Republic". From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge period, the country changed to "Democratic Kampuchea" (DK) and since 1979 the country, under the Heng Samrin government has been known as the "People's Republic of Kampuchea" (PRK). 'Kampuchea' is derived from the traditional Khmer name for the country, 'Kambuja', first used in the 10th century.¹

Kampuchea, with an estimated population of 7.6 million in 1987, is a small, once prosperous country in Southeast Asia, wedged between Thailand and Vietnam. In recent history, local, regional and global interests have made Kampuchea a contesting ground for rival powers. It has suffered numerous wars, coups, invasions, despotic regimes, genocide and devastating famine.

More than a million people and two-thirds of the country's draught animals were killed, wounded or maimed between 1969 and 1973 when the US dropped an estimated 550,000 tons of bombs on Kampuchea — a tonnage equivalent to about 120 of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima.² Also, nearly half the population was uprooted and became refugees within their own country.

As a result of both the social disintegration and the political confusion which followed the overthrow of Sihanouk and the US-Vietnam War,³ the Khmer Rouge overthrew the US-backed Lon Nol government in April 1975. This marked the beginning of one of the most savage and repressive regimes of this century, lasting from April 1975 to January

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The ruins of a secondary school in Kompong Thom, an epitaph to the US bombing of the early 1970s.

1979. In those three and a half years between one and two million more Kampucheans died from hunger, hard labour or disease, or were executed by the Khmer Rouge.

Though at first the leader of only one of three Khmer Rouge factions, Pol Pot successfully gained complete control of the country in 1977. One of the first targets of his vengeance were the officials and leadership of the other two factions. Pol Pot also launched attacks on Thai villages bordering Kampuchea and inflicted a high death toll and immense damage to Vietnamese villages on its eastern and southeastern border.⁴ Half a million Vietnamese fled from their homes.⁵

The Khmer Rouge ignored Vietnam's diplomatic initiatives for a negotiated solution and military counter-attacks by Vietnam failed to stop Khmer aggression.⁶ Kampuchea was once again at war, the Third Indochina war. In December 1978, after suffering repeated attacks by the Khmer Rouge, Vietnam invaded and drove them out, revealing the full horrors and devastation wrought by the Pol Pot years. Most Khmers considered themselves as having been liberated by Vietnam.

In 1979, a shocked world responded generously to the plight of the Kampuchean people and funded a massive relief operation.

The newly installed Kampuchean regime included a fragment of one of the Khmer Rouge factions which had come to power in 1975 and a mixed group of survivors of the Khmer Rouge years. It inherited a devastated country and a traumatised people.

Recent Governments and Opposition Groups

Dates	Leader and name of government	Primary foreign backer	Armed opposition	Foreign backers of opposition
1954–70	Prince Norodom Sihanouk "Kingdom of Cambodia"	neutralist	"Khmer Rouge" (from early '60s)	— No significant support
1970–75	Lon Nol (formerly Sihanouk's Prime Minister) "Republic of Kampuchea"	U.S.A.	Sihanouk and Khmer Rouge in coalition, GRUNK; 2 major tendencies emerge	— China; North Vietnam
1975–79	Khmer Rouge (two factions) with Sihanouk under house arrest 1977 — Pol Pot faction wins internally "Democratic Kampuchea"	China	From 1977 — pro-Vietnam group, and others stage uprisings and protests	— Vietnam
1979–	Heng Samrin "People's Republic of Kampuchea"	Vietnam (USSR)	"Democratic Kampuchea" or "Khmer Rouge" under Pol Pot 1982 — "Dem. Kamp. Coalition" includes 2 new groups: Son Sann — KPLNF Sihanouk — FUNCINPEC	— China, US, ASEAN (Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Brunei) Recognized at United Nations

- 1) Prince Sihanouk, to stay out of the Vietnam war, tolerated North Vietnamese and NLF sanctuaries along the Cambodian border with Vietnam. He allowed military supplies from China to transit Cambodia to the border, and tolerated US bombing in the border area, provided it was limited and kept secret.
- 2) Lon Nol overthrew Sihanouk in a US backed coup in 1969. China offered to support Sihanouk if he joined the Khmer Rouge, which became 'Gouvernement Royal de l'Union Nationale Khmer' (GRUNK), with Sihanouk as titular head, living in China, and Khieu Sampan and Pol Pot directing the war inside Kampuchea. The tendencies which emerged included that led by Pol Pot (in the north and southwest), and the more pro-Vietnam group (east).
- 3) After victory in 1975, different tendencies administered different areas, to a large extent. All areas underwent a drastic restructuring of society, but differed greatly in the harshness of their administration. When Pol Pot/Khieu Sampan won the power struggle, they eliminated the others in government, at all levels, and drove the pro-Vietnam people into Vietnam. Various uprisings by peasants or others were crushed.

The Khmer Rouge Years

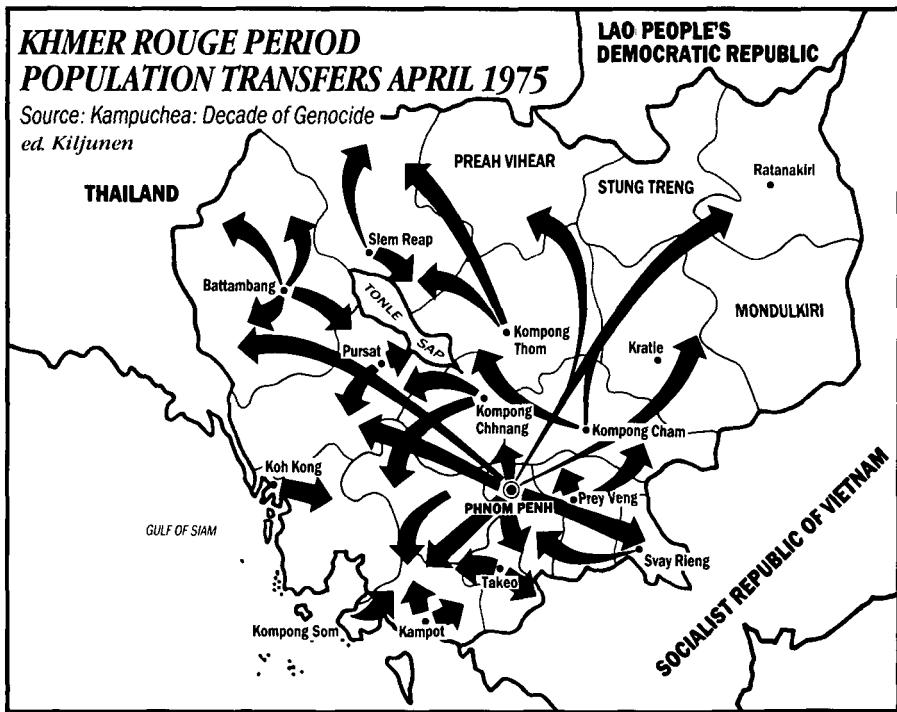
It would be difficult to exaggerate the human suffering and destruction that the 1970-1975 Vietnam war brought to Cambodia.⁷ Food production fell rapidly as bombing and military operations forced peasants off their land and concentrated them into the cities. In the months before the fall of the US-backed Lon Nol government, Phnom Penh was virtually cut off. Supplied with rice only by a desperate airlift, its population had swollen from 600,000 to almost two million.⁸ Starving children wandered the streets and the hospitals overflowed with war wounded. More than a million people were killed, wounded or maimed during this period.⁹ So when the young Khmer Rouge soldiers entered the capital on the morning of April 17, 1975, they were cheered by many Khmer and foreigners alike.

The Khmer Rouge revolution had begun before the American bombing of Kampuchea during the Vietnam war. But the results of the massive bombings, compounded by the increasing corruption of the Lon Nol military and civil administration, made it easier for the Khmer Rouge to attract popular support and march victoriously into Phnom Penh in April 1975 and take over the government.¹⁰

In 1975, peace returned to Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge promised to return Kampuchea to the glorious days of Angkor, the ancient Khmer empire, to restore Kampuchea to a traditional agricultural and class-free society, and to raise the living standards of the people. But to achieve this, human lives — particularly those of the urban and middle class Khmers and employees of Lon Nol's government — were considered expendable.

The elation which greeted the arrival of the Khmer Rouge was short-lived. A day after their entry into Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge emptied the cities, breaking up families, clearing hospitals and marching the entire population into the countryside, taking only the food they could carry. Eye witnesses saw the sick and injured being forced to get up and stagger from the city.¹¹ For the Khmer people this marked the first bitter taste of the power of 'Angkar' — the organisation which now controlled their lives. Any who complained faced summary execution. 'Year Zero' had begun, the beginning of a cruel new era in the troubled life of Kampuchea.

For the next three and a half years the country was turned into a massive forced labour camp where the evacuees, referred to as 'new people', and the peasants, referred to as the 'old people', suffered together as virtual slaves, forced to work on the land and fulfil strenuous work quotas of a minimum 10 hours per day in return for meagre communal food rations. "We were treated like machines", said one



Kampuchean, “only the Khmer Rouge gave us no lubrication”.

Anyone suspected of connections with the Lon Nol regime or with the Vietnamese risked a painful death. War was declared against any western influence in both technology and society and those thought to have had any western association were systematically executed or died from arduous labour and hunger.

The Khmer Rouge established a cooperative system which abolished all private property. Children were taken from their parents. In some places forced marriages were arranged. Religion was prohibited, monks were defrocked and churches and pagodas were destroyed. All forms of currency and trade were abolished and eating in private or scavenging for food was considered a crime against the state. Schools were closed down and western medicine forbidden in favour of traditional medicine and experimentation. Mechanisation or machinery was abandoned and the metal pilfered for other uses, while people replaced draught animals in the fields.¹²

The policies of the Khmer Rouge were summed up by Pol Pot himself in 1978: “We are building socialism without a model. We do not wish to copy anyone; we shall use the experience gained in the course of the liberation struggle. There are no schools, faculties or universities in the traditional sense, although they did exist in our country prior to

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Victims of the Khmer Rouge — just a few of the thousands tortured and murdered at the old High School in Phnom Penh.

liberation, because we wish to do away with all vestiges of the past. There is no money, no commerce, as the state takes care of provisioning all its citizens. The cities have been resettled because this is the way things had to be. Some three million town dwellers and peasants were trying to find refuge in the cities from the depredations of war. We evacuated the cities; we resettled the inhabitants in the rural areas where the living conditions could be provided for this segment of the population of new Cambodia. The countryside should be the focus of attention of our revolution, and the people will decide the fate of the cities.”¹³

The Khmer Rouge regime was not unified, but composed of tendencies with differing ideologies. This partially explains why not all regions suffered equally under the Khmer Rouge. For example, life in the Eastern Zone differed considerably from the conventional horror picture, and probably was as tolerable as it could be in the wake of the destruction from the war.¹⁴

The worst atrocities occurred when Pol Pot’s faction gained full power in early 1977. A number of attempted coups and rebellions against him were put down, and in the purges that followed most leading members of the other factions were murdered. Others, including Heng Samrin, the current President of Kampuchea, fled to Vietnam.¹⁵

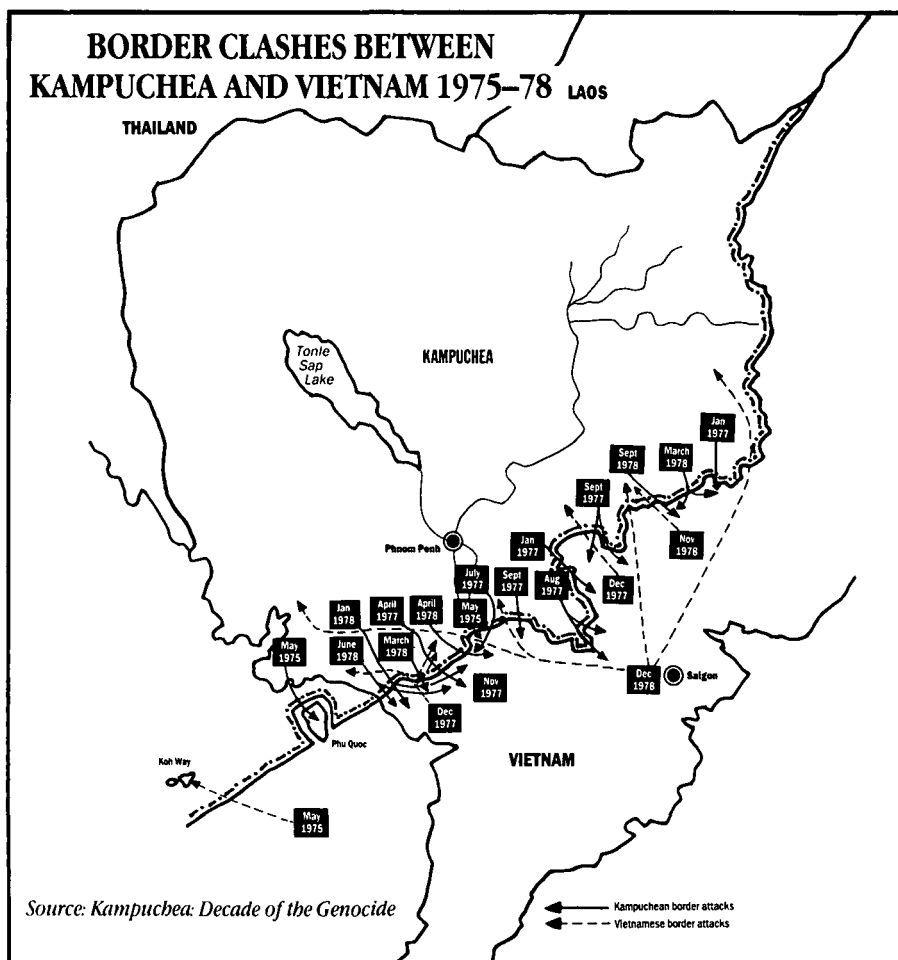
Kampuchea under Pol Pot was virtually isolated from the rest of the world, the only significant exception being Chinese and North Korean diplomatic representatives, a fortnightly scheduled flight from Beijing, and the presence in the country of some 10,000 Chinese advisors.

By the spring of 1978 between one and two million of Kampuchea’s

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population had succumbed to hunger, hunger-related diseases and extermination at the hands of Pol Pot's clique and his young Khmer Rouge soldiers who were hardened by years of life in the forests as guerrilla fighters.¹⁶

From the very beginning, as the nightmare progressed for the ordinary people of Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge mounted frequent vicious attacks on their Thai and Vietnamese neighbours. Ironically, in 1977 these included assaults on Thai villages which the Khmer Rouge guerrillas now use as bases for their attacks on Kampuchea in the opposite direction. But most raids were on the Vietnamese, who suffered large civilian casualties. The war with Vietnam escalated during 1978 and the Vietnamese then openly backed attempts to overthrow the Pol Pot regime.



The Vietnamese Invasion

On Christmas day 1978, Year Three of “Democratic Kampuchea”, Hanoi launched a full-scale offensive against Kampuchea.

The western media had rarely reported the fact that, late in 1975, the Khmer Rouge began numerous attacks over the southern Vietnamese border, threatening the agriculturally important Mekong Delta. Experts believed that Pol Pot intended to reclaim the ancient Khmer empire which once covered most of southern Vietnam.¹⁷ The border attacks increased in frequency and brutality.¹⁸ Nearly half a million people were made homeless and uprooted and over 100,000 hectares of farmland had to be abandoned because of the fighting.¹⁹ Khmer Rouge raids on Thailand were mild in comparison. As fighting escalated into full-blown war, Vietnam absorbed hundreds of thousands of Kampuchean and ethnic Vietnamese refugees. In addition to the suffering resulting from the Khmer Rouge atrocities, the war and refugee influx disrupted Vietnam’s rice bowl region at a time when there was already a serious food shortage.

The Khmer Rouge raids on Vietnam began in earnest in early 1977 and continued for two years. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with the Khmer Rouge, Vietnamese forces decided to invade Kampuchea: removing a Chinese ally from their southern border was also critical to Vietnam’s own sense of security and self-interest. They combined forces with the ‘United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea’ (UNFSK), a smaller contingent of Khmer troops made up mostly of disaffected Khmer Rouge who had survived by fleeing into Vietnam or Laos, survivors of the Pol Pot purges and some Khmer Revolutionaries who had fled to Vietnam in the 1950s during the struggle for independence from France.²⁰

On January 7, 1979, the combined Vietnamese and Khmer forces took Phnom Penh and offered the Kampucheans the first hope of an end to the nightmare. No matter what their political persuasions, and despite past traditional enmities between the two peoples, nearly all Khmers welcomed the Vietnamese as liberators from the atrocities and horrors of the Pol Pot years. The People’s Republic of Kampuchea was proclaimed on January 10, 1979, with Heng Samrin as President.

The Khmer Rouge leaders returned to the jungles along the Thai-Kampuchean border. Encouraged by western condemnation of Vietnam’s invasion and the international recognition which allowed the Khmer Rouge to continue to be seated at the United Nations, Pol Pot vowed to mount a new guerrilla war against Vietnamese domination of the country.

With the pledge of continued Chinese military support for the Khmer Rouge the stage was set for the next act in the tragedy of Kampuchea.

The Aftermath of War

After the Vietnamese invasion, the full story of the brutality of life under Pol Pot began to emerge. Refugees told their tales and the first Westerners, journalists and aid agency personnel visited the wrecked and broken country and witnessed some of the many mass graves.



MARCUS THOMPSON/OXFAM

Phnom Penh in October 1979. People were gradually returning to the devastated city, deserted for four years following its enforced evacuation by the Pol Pot régime.

During the Pol Pot era some 400,000 Khmers had fled to Vietnam and Thailand. The new war between the Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge caused many more to flee. The first were the remnants of the educated elite and at the end of 1979 these were followed by nearly half a million sick and starving people seeking refuge along the Thai border. These were largely the remnants of Khmer Rouge and the population they had kept under their control, in an especially sorry state. By May 1980, there were between 1 and 1.2 million Khmers at the border, but the massive exodus of millions predicted by the Thais and western media failed to materialise. In fact between 1979 and 1980, most of the refugees who had fled to Vietnam returned to Kampuchea, as did more than 200,000 from the Thai border.

The Heng Samrin government inherited a country whose infrastructure had been destroyed. Of 450 doctors before 1975, only 45 remained in the country in 1979. The rest had been murdered or had

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escaped abroad. Of the 20,000 teachers in the early 1970s, only 7,000 remained. Very few trained administrators survived, so those who found jobs in the Heng Samrin government were generally very young and inexperienced and often rejected by their friends as 'working for the Vietnamese'. The fishing industry was hampered by the lack of boats and nets. Few archives and books were left so that at first books, school and training curricula had to be restructured from memory. Only a handful of lawyers were left in the country to write a new constitution and rebuild an entire judicial system.

The country, by 1979, had no currency, no markets, no financial institutions and virtually no industry. There was no public transport system; no trains ran and the roads were damaged and unrepaired. There was no postal system, no telephones and virtually no electricity, clean water, sanitation or education.

Freed from the slavery of the Pol Pot years, people criss-crossed the country in attempts to return to Phnom Penh and to their home villages, and to seek out the remnants of their families. Many found their homes in ruins or in disrepair, and many small towns and cities had become ghost towns. As the Khmer Rouge retreated, they took a quarter of the rice harvest and destroyed any draught animals they could not take with them — other animals died en route. The chaos of summer 1979 prevented normal planting and so the 1979/80 harvest was only one third of the usual output. Once more the country was threatened by famine as the hungry 'road people' wandered in search of their old lives, and sought to begin again.

Even today, eight years later, many Kampuchians still do not know whether relatives are dead, or alive in another part of the country; whether they were killed or died under Pol Pot, or if they escaped and live in refugee camps or abroad. The whole fabric of society was unravelled, leaving many orphan children, elderly people without relatives, widows and an adult population of which almost two-thirds were women.²¹

One Khmer told an aid official that one of the more serious effects of the Khmer Rouge regime was the destruction of the traditional relationships within the family, especially between children and parents. Children who had been separated from their parents and taught to report on them, today no longer have the traditional respect for them. Women complain of increasing problems of marital infidelity from their husbands caused by the disproportionate ratio of women to men and the high number of widows. Relationships have changed and families are no longer intact and supportive. A Khmer man told an NGO representative that it is hard to overcome the fears inherited from the Khmer Rouge regime. "Even today, I am still afraid to confide in my wife because I am

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not sure of the future”, he said.

Kampuchea's population base has also changed. During the 1960s national ethnic minorities made up approximately 10% of the population. These were mostly urban ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese, isolated mountain tribes and the Islamic Cham. During the Pol Pot period national minorities were persecuted; the Cham suffered especially. The



MARCUS THOMPSON/OXFAM

Family preparing a meal of wild roots in Kompong Speu Province, an area laid waste by the withdrawing Khmer Rouge forces. October 1979.

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Islamic Cham population fell by 100,000 during this time. Today, national minorities make up 3% of the population.²²

The Khmers who lived through the tragedies of the US bombing, the Lon Nol-Khmer Rouge war, the Pol Pot era and the Vietnamese invasion were now faced with two massive tasks: first, survival, and then reconstruction of their battered and damaged nation.



TIM LUSTY/OXFAM

Young patients, most of them orphaned, wait for treatment at Kompong Speu hospital, 1979.

Survival

As the story of Kampuchea's tragedy emerged, people all over the world were deeply moved. Enormous sums were raised by public donation (over US\$100 million to western non-governmental organisations alone) and the voluntary agencies got aid to the suffering Kampuchean



Unloading supplies of maize and rice at Kompong Som, the first western food aid to reach Kampuchea, October 1979.

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people on both sides of the border as quickly as possible. Substantial sums were also donated from western governments, despite attempts by the United States to discredit the new regime, and were channelled through the UN agencies and the International Red Cross for both the refugees in the camps on the Thai border and the Khmers inside the country.

While aid from the Western multilateral donors became entangled in political considerations and negotiations, aid from the Soviet Bloc and Vietnam did much to stave off the massive famine predicted by western aid agency personnel and journalists. This aid, combined with that of the western NGOs and multilateral agencies, enabled the Khmer people to begin the process of recovery. The Vietnamese helped to restore the transport systems and administrative infrastructure which enabled international aid to get through. They also provided 180,000 tons of food and seed rice by June of 1980. In the summer of 1980, 1.2 million hectares were planted with rice but this was still insufficient and the country continued to be dependent on international food aid.

The Heng Samrin government adopted a liberal and pragmatic approach, concentrating on agricultural production. No taxes were levied for four years, as there was no structure for collecting them. Families were allowed to sell any excess produce either to the government or on the open market. In the absence of currency and taxes



NICK MAURICE

Hungry children raiding a lorry during a food distribution in Svay Rieng Province, 1979.

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the government had to rely on aid for the revenue to rebuild services such as health and education. This meant that much food aid was being used to feed government employees, which attracted international criticism. The inefficiency of food distribution due to the many logistical problems which the country inherited, the overbearing bureaucracy, and shortage of experienced personnel gave rise in the West to unfounded allegations of diversion of aid.²³

By the end of 1980, international aid, combined with the resilience and resourcefulness of the Kampuchean people, and the prospects of a rice harvest, dispelled the threatening clouds which had hung over the country in 1979. Having survived, the task was now to ensure revival and reconstruction, to heal the wounds and to return shattered lives to a semblance of normality.



MARCUS THOMPSON/OXFAM

Orphans of the war and Pol Pot years, Phnom Penh, October 1979.

Profile of a Village during the Democratic Kampuchea Period*

Babong, the largest of four villages in Babong sub-district, Prey Veng province, was taken over by Khmer Rouge forces in 1972 and the population evacuated east, to Ba Phnom district, where they stayed until the war ended with a Khmer Rouge victory in April 1975. At that time the people of Babong returned to their village to find that all houses were dismantled or destroyed, and they had to build smaller houses. Twenty families of new people evacuated from the capital by the Khmer Rouge also arrived needing somewhere to live.

Babong was part of the Eastern Zone of Democratic Kampuchea. For the first two years it was administered by Khmer communist veterans who were replaced in 1977 by officials from the Southwest Zone. Their predecessors died at Tuol Sleng prison.

Some villagers recall that the years 1975-76 in Babong were "a bit soft", or even "no problem", because they still had enough rice to eat, and worked fairly normal hours each day. But the years 1977-78 were terrible. They were forced to eat in communal halls, and mostly received only rice gruel. They also had to work night and day. They planted rice non-stop even when it was evident that this was useless, such as in the flood season. Two small canals were built which are now unused. Villagers say rice production was higher than it is today but that the overwork and lack of adequate rations meant suffering for all. The rice produced was taken away by the Khmer Rouge to an unknown destination.

In early 1978, 400 families from neighbouring Svay Rieng province were brought to Babong for four or five months before being sent to Battambang by the Khmer Rouge.

Unlike many other villages in the region, Babong's population was not evacuated west to Pursat or Battambang provinces in 1978. However, like many other villages, Babong suffered enormous losses when Democratic Kampuchea's Centre and Southwest Zone forces suppressed the entire Eastern Zone administration and army in May 1978. Thousands of Eastern Zone troops fled to the jungle from whence they continued hit-and-run attacks on the Central Zone forces.

The new rulers were much crueller than their Eastern Zone predecessors, and of the 200 deaths in Babong between 1975-78, most occurred in the last year.

*Profile is drawn from a report by Chanthou Boua and Ben Kiernan based on field work they carried out in Babong village, published by OXFAM America, 1987.

In the wake of fighting between Central and Eastern Zone forces, and as the Khmer Rouge officials fled, many villagers destroyed the communal kitchens and divided up cattle and communal property among themselves.

On June 2 1978, the villagers of Babong staged an uprising against the local administration and two Khmer Rouge were beheaded by

MARCUS THOMPSON/OXFAM



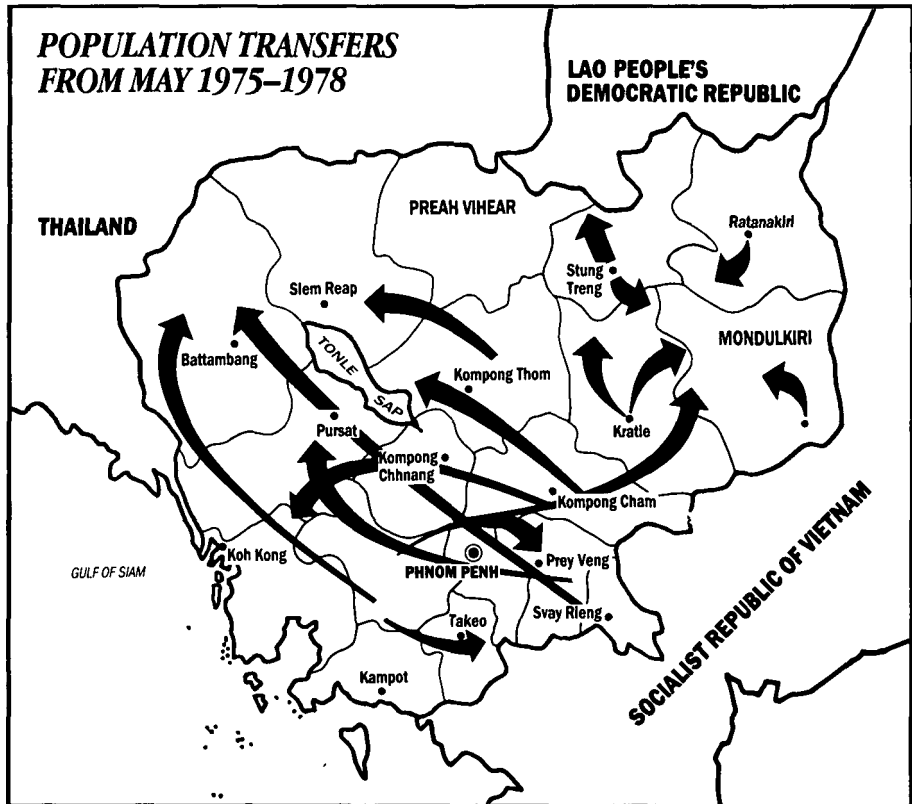
A family making the long journey back to their home village stops to rest and eat in Kompong Chhnang. Forcibly removed to Battambang during the Pol Pot years, they wear the black Khmer Rouge tunic. 1979.

the crowd. In a nearby village there was also an uprising and the village chief along with four other Khmer Rouge were beheaded. When Southwest troops loyal to Pol Pot got wind that some Eastern Zone troops were back in Babong, they attacked and caught 20 of them. Eighty villagers were also arrested for their part in the uprising and of these only 12 survived the next 10 weeks in the hands of the Southwest Zone jailers.

More than 100 Babong villagers were killed in 1978 alone, including all 12 members of one old woman's family. One man was burned alive. All villagers of mixed Khmer-Vietnamese ancestry were killed in the Democratic Kampuchea period, and there are only three survivors of the 10 families of ethnic Chinese.

In a preliminary survey of 38 families selected at random in

Babong village, it was reported that 11 members of those families were killed in 1975; 6 died of disease in 1975-76; 4 were executed in 1977; 2 died of disease and 22 were executed in 1978.



Chapter 2

Recovery: 1979-1987

"A journey of 10,000 miles begins with one step."

Khmer Proverb



MARCUS THOMPSON/OXFAM

A textile factory kept in operation despite shortage of yarn and the unavailability of badly-needed spare parts, Phnom Penh, 1979.

A New Start

Bomb craters still pockmark Kampuchea's countryside, but uneven fields of rice speak of the revival and hope of a people returned from the brink of annihilation. Kampuchea has made a remarkable recovery in the eight years following the ousting of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and though many difficulties remain, signs of progress are visible in all aspects of Kampuchean life.

It is hard to imagine what it means to rebuild one's life and one's country from scratch. The task the Kampuchean people and government faced in 1979 was a gargantuan one that would have been a phenomenal challenge to any government even under normal circumstances, let alone one that was ostracised and isolated by most other governments.

The difficult task of recovery was made worse by the condition of the land and of the people, as well as by the international recognition the Khmer Rouge continued to receive at the United Nations. This has resulted in protracted war. The Kampuchean people had been uprooted, terrorised, weakened and decimated and the fabric of their society had been radically changed. The land had also been devastated by over a decade of war. Modern technology was scarce and in poor condition, having been abandoned, destroyed or cannibalised.

Under the relative stability offered by a government which has now outlasted the two previous regimes combined, a sense of normality returned to the country. This stability, combined with international humanitarian assistance and the efforts of the Kampuchean people, led to some degree of recovery between 1979 and 1982. But the pace did not last.

In 1983, member states of the United Nations declared the Kampuchean emergency to be over despite outspoken statements by the UN secretariat that it was not. Consequently a 'development aid' embargo was imposed on Kampuchea by most UN donor governments.

DAVID MUNRO



Phnom Penh today: something of the bustle of city life has returned, though cycle and cart are still the main forms of transport.

and aid budgets of the international organisations dropped drastically. Western donors continued to provide food assistance through the United Nations to help meet food shortages but would not provide the technical inputs which would have helped the Kampucheans to go a step further and reach self-sustaining recovery. New climatic disasters and food shortages further complicated relief efforts.

As well as climatic, logistical, material and human shortages and shortcomings, other more fundamental factors continue to complicate and compromise reconstruction. The goal of food self-sufficiency has been a national priority since 1979 but it is not the only one and other pressing issues sometimes take precedence. In 1984-85, national defence works dominated all other priorities, causing a serious drain on already limited human and material resources, and especially reducing the manpower available for farming. Continued attacks by opposition forces not only disrupted the struggle for food self-sufficiency but also the work of NGOs, and the Khmer peasant suffered most.

Today, the quality of life for many Kampuchean people has improved somewhat but the struggle to meet basic human needs continues. It will be a long time before the Kampucheans are able to reconstruct their country to a pre-war level, let alone undertake development. From the experience of NGOs working in Kampuchea, it is clear that pressures brought about by the UN aid embargo make life considerably tougher for the people of Kampuchea, and the continuing denial of aid is prolonging their suffering.

Agriculture

Kampuchea's economy is based on agriculture which provides a living for 90% of the population. Until 1970 Kampuchea was a food-exporting country. Rice, the staple of the Khmer diet, was also the country's major foreign exchange earner and accounted for up to 60% of export revenues during a bumper year.¹ Yet after a decade of war and the devastation of the Khmer Rouge regime Kampuchea faced nation-wide famine in 1979.

With the assistance of governments and the international organisations, and with the return of relative stability, the Khmer people turned their attention to the revival of agriculture. However, despite impressive efforts by the Kampucheans and those assisting them, it is still difficult to achieve food self-sufficiency and the work is very vulnerable to the vagaries of weather.

A number of factors have hindered agricultural recovery. First and foremost was the restructuring of society. Whereas before 1969 Kampuchea had enough people and animals to work the land for rice production, by 1979 it lacked the labour force to produce sufficient food.

The combined effects of war and the Khmer Rouge massacres left a weakened adult population consisting of a much higher percentage of women than men.² Draught animals had been reduced from 1.2 million head in 1967 to only 768,000 by 1979 and were diseased and weakened.³ The labour power available in the countryside in 1979 was about the same as it had been in the 1950s, when Kampuchea had to feed only 4.7 million people from 1.1 million hectares of rice land.⁴ Now it has to feed



ARNOLD LYE

Transplanting rice in Takeo Province, 1987.

Rice Production and Needs from 1979–1986

(adapted from FAO Report, 1986)

RICE PADDY NEEDS

(thousand tonnes)

Year	Population ¹	Consumption ²	Required Production ³	Actual Production	Shortfall ⁴
79/80	6,339	1,471	1,692	538	-1,154
80/81	6,535	1,516	1,743	1,564	- 179
81/82	6,737	1,563	1,797	1,351	- 446
82/83	6,946	1,611	1,853	1,646	- 207
83/84	7,161	1,661	1,910	1,617	- 293
84/85	7,382	1,713	1,970	1,385	- 328
85/86	7,603	1,764	2,029	1,996	- 33

1. 3% growth rate calculated from 1984/85 population of 7,382,070 inhabitants.
2. (1) \times 232 kg paddy per year or 153 kg rice (conversion rate paddy/rice = 0.66).
3. (2) \times 1.15 to cover post harvest losses (15% of production) =
4. The Ministry of Agriculture has calculated a deficit of 151,848 tonnes of rice for 1986 because it used different parameters. The Ministry fixes each person's rice need/yr at 168 kg of rice or 271 kgs paddy. It uses a conversion factor of paddy/rice = 0.62; post harvest losses and seed = 17%.

about 7 million. The above table helps to illustrate the state of food production and food needs in Kampuchea since 1979.

Years and years of records, maps, documentation and agricultural research have been destroyed or lost. Kampuchea's four rice research stations were completely destroyed along with records and germplasm collections. Some deep-water rice varieties, traditionally important to areas flooded by the Tonle Sap Lake, were deliberately eliminated during the Pol Pot regime as they thought it unnecessary to grow rice in flooded areas. Until 1975 approximately 1,600 people had been employed in the agricultural sector as planners, technicians, or policy makers.⁵ By 1980, only 200 remained, of whom only 10 were graduates. There is only one licensed veterinarian in the country and a handful of veterinary technicians. The agricultural university was closed in 1975 and served as a Khmer Rouge ammunition dump.

The Khmer Rouge attempted to restore the water control systems of the ancient Khmer empire of Angkor. However their neglect of and hostility toward educated people meant that many of their projects were fundamentally wrong in design and resulted in poorly constructed works which were swept away at the first floods. Some irrigation systems built along grid lines on the map led to the drying-out of ricelands. The small

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rice plots of traditional farmers were consolidated into large unlevelled fields, which resulted in uneven water distribution and water pockets.

By the time the Khmer Rouge were driven from the country, peasants saw their waterways redirected, humid grazing areas dried out, and areas which had been ideal for non-flooded crops now covered with water. Thus in 1979, the peasants found themselves more than ever before vulnerable to drought and floods.

In 1979-80 international aid donors responded to the country's agricultural problems by importing over a million hoe heads, 5,000 small irrigation pumps, 1,300 power tillers, 55,000 tonnes of rice seeds and many thousands of tonnes of fertilizer. While these inputs helped to get agriculture back on its feet, other longer term needs had to be dealt with. These included training of agricultural personnel, education for farmers, increased production, the repair of waterworks and irrigation systems, and animal health and vaccination programmes.

At the same time resources were needed to restore agriculture-related industries, mainly jute, cotton cloth, fish nets, and industries that could provide other basic necessities, such as soap, textiles, and plastics for internal consumption. Foundries had to be equipped for making agricultural implements and spare parts for machinery. Communications networks had to be completely rehabilitated, roads and bridges repaired, and river transport restored.

Agricultural reconstruction was fraught with difficulties, but by 1982, it seemed to Kampucheans and international aid workers that the goal of food self-sufficiency was close at hand. The elation was short-lived. New climatic disasters such as drought and floods, sometimes occurring simultaneously in different parts of the country, caused serious food losses and shortages, thus underlining how fragile progress had been and continues to be. In addition, the continuing war sapped already limited human and material resources.

In the light of all these constraints the agricultural achievements of the Kampuchean people are very significant. In seeking appropriate systems, the young Kampuchean administration has gained experience and better organising skills, even though the highly centralised bureaucracy seems cumbersome and even counterproductive. National agricultural personnel come together at the end of each year to evaluate the previous year's work, to discuss the success of various policies, and to identify actions for the following year.

Through collective work peasants have restored thousands of kilometres of small dykes. With government and NGO assistance they have also completed several dams and repaired a number of pumping stations, restoring 250,000 hectares of land to irrigation.⁶ Nine agricultural development and rice research centres in six provinces are



Digging an 18 km canal in Takeo Province to provide irrigation for 6,000 hectares of dry season rice, 1986.

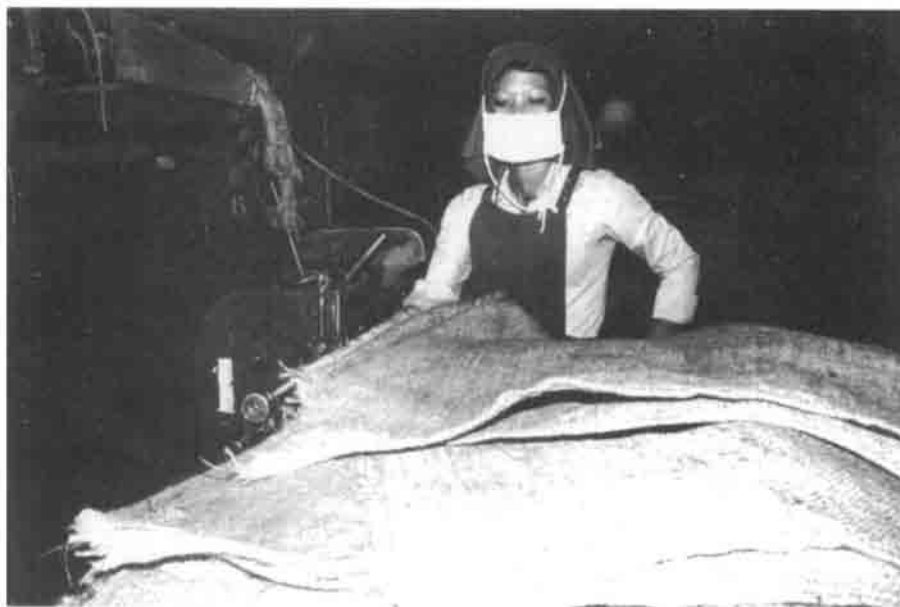
back in operation while another two are in progress.⁷ A new vegetable seed research station is also functioning and has carried out successful trials over the last two years. The Agriculture University of Chamcar Daung has resumed a fully-fledged education programme offering four faculties: Agronomy, Fisheries, Forestry and Mechanisation. Its first 30 agronomists will graduate in 1988 and its first veterinarians in 1989.

Animal vaccination programmes have not eliminated foot-and-mouth disease, but have brought the epidemic under control and are now focusing on other diseases. A new veterinary diagnostic laboratory with trained Khmer personnel has been operating for the last two years, and a new animal vaccine production laboratory produced its first batch of haemorrhagic septicaemia vaccine in November 1986. A cattle breeding station, with imported stock designed to upgrade Kampuchean draught animals, has also started functioning within the last two years.

The Tuk Meas phosphate fertilizer factory in Kompot province, which was seriously damaged during the Vietnam War, is under repair but when completed will have a capacity of 20,000 tonnes of urgently needed fertilizer. This will help to reduce Kampuchea's total dependence on fertilizer imports. Meanwhile a smaller factory in Battambang province with a processing capacity of 3,000 tonnes was repaired in 1982 and is currently producing 2,300 tonnes per year, most of which is used locally. Other notable successes are a small culvert production centre, coconut oil extraction cottage industries for local soap production, irrigation pump repair workshops and the restoration of the jute sack factory in Battambang Province.⁸

Most encouraging however was Kampuchea's 1985-86 rice harvest which left an estimated rice deficit of about 40,000 tonnes of rice — the

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Jute sacks made at the Battambang factory are vital to the transportation and storage of agricultural products. The factory has depended on imported spare parts for its rehabilitation and maintenance. 1987.

smallest since 1970. A Kampuchean farmer in Svay Rieng Province, which has suffered from chronic food shortages since 1979, said that for the first time since 1970 his family would have enough to eat.⁹ The 1986-87 rice harvest, the second successive record harvest since 1979, was even better, but there were still shortages in some areas.

Reorganisation of Agriculture and Land Tenure

The key element in the government strategy to increase food production is the 'solidarity group' or *Krom Samaki* as it is called locally. These solidarity groups usually consist of 10 to 15 families working either their own or communal paddy land, but pooling labour, farm tools and animals. Solidarity groups are not restricted to farmers' groups, but include all types of production sections such as fishing and craft work.

Although this system has been seen by many as an intermediary step on the path to total socialist collectivisation of agriculture, it is built on the traditional system of mutual aid at planting and harvesting time, and recalls the traditional Khmer tenure system whereby peasants could possess (but not 'own') a plot of land simply by working it. Land distributed to the solidarity group is allotted on the basis of approximately one to two hectares per family depending on the availability and quality of the land.

This organisation of the productive force has proved to be advantageous on several fronts. It enabled land to be put to use without first attempting to identify and reconstruct the former pattern of land ownership. It has enabled a weakened labour force to bring land back into production, and has facilitated the organisation of the rural population for special tasks, such as forest clearing or repair of irrigation systems. It gives security to widows and families lacking manpower, and provides draught power to those who would otherwise be without it.

After conducting a study of a farming community in Prey Veng Province, researchers Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua concluded that: "The *krom* system does provide security for the wounded, orphans and the elderly. They are the most vulnerable members of rural communities. These are people who would otherwise disappear into urban slums, or who would see their families disperse to work as servants or labourers near and far, if they had no safety net in their own village.

Perhaps a third of the rural families in Kampuchea today could not survive as private farmers for lack of tools, draught animals and male workers, even if land were to be fairly distributed. The *krom samaki*, by sharing both resources and benefits, provide them with that safety net."¹⁰

Although land nominally belongs to the state, peasants who stayed on their own land during the Khmer Rouge regime or returned immediately after 1979 have been allowed to re-occupy their former holdings provided that local officials could assure each family a lot between 1,500 to 2,000 square metres in size (this is in addition to the communal paddy).¹¹ Displaced peasants who returned to their homes to find their lands occupied were encouraged to settle conflicts amicably or with the help of local officials. Farmers may grow whatever they like on these family plots, and dispose of produce on the free market as they wish.

There are three types of land tenure in Kampuchea: land which is allocated to the solidarity group, land belonging to administrative units, such as the factory, village or district, which can be loaned to individual families or employees in government service, and the family lot. Land cannot be bought, sold or used for security in the case of debt. Nevertheless home lots are often bought and sold unofficially, depending on supply and demand. Peasants say this is the most significant difference between today and the past. They are not indebted and hence they have some control over the disposal of their crops.

Because of the general poverty of the population, taxes were not introduced until 1983. In the years of catastrophic food losses and shortages between 1979 and 1985 reimbursements to government for seeds, fertilizers and other items were cancelled by the state and in fact most of these were distributed free of charge, with priority going to solidarity groups. For taxation, or 'patriotic contributions' as they are

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called, land has been assessed according to five classes of terrain and productivity levels. At present the taxes are 200kg of rice paddy per hectare for good land and 120kg of rice paddy for poor quality land. In effect, about 10% of the yield.

Since 1984, all levels of solidarity groups have had a duty to sell some of their produce to the state. But as in most developing nations, government pricing policies tend to act more as a disincentive to farmers and even to discourage surplus production. The state, which depends heavily on the rural areas to provide food for the cities and supplement its workers' low salaries, has met with serious difficulties. Neither its prices nor the industrial goods which it offers farmers in exchange for rice compete with market prices, quality or variety of goods. This, a government official admits, creates a dilemma. If the government raises the prices it offers to farmers, the market price of rice will also rise and nothing will have been achieved but inflation.

Part of the answer rests in improving state industrial production to offer attractive goods to the farmer; but the supply of raw materials, spare parts and power to increase production is very limited without economic and development assistance from the West. Farmers are finding their marketing options for rice very limited and this is likely to have some impact on future production. A 1986 government circular prohibiting the transport of rice outside the province until state purchasing quotas have been met, places great obstacles to free market access and will undoubtedly affect 1988's rice production.

Profile: a Widow of Babong

Mao Yung comes from Babong, a village in Prey Veng Province with a population of 1,558 of whom 938 are female (60%). Of the 344 families that make up Babong village, 131 (38%) families are headed by widows.

Yung, a 50 year old widow, is deputy head of 'solidarity group no.22'. She is one of three widows in her group. She was married at 22 and has six children between the ages of 10 and 26. The three oldest are married with children and live in Babong while the three youngest remain under her care.

Yung's husband was arrested and killed by Pol Pot's forces in July 1976, when their sixth child was a month old. She remembers how he was led away one afternoon, with three women, another man and a child, to the security officer in Ponlei village. Two months later her three eldest children were also taken away. She courageously ran after them to the village warehouse where they



BEN KIERNAN *Mao Yung with her grand-daughter, Babong 1986.*

were being held. Yung insistently demanded that the Khmer Rouge kill her first if they were going to kill her children. As a result of her protest, her children were eventually released.

Yung's family has always lived in Babong. In the 1960s and early 1970s her family owned four hectares of land there and five hectares in Prey Kandieng. Because they lacked resources, the family used to lend the land in Prey Kandieng to other farmers in exchange for clearing work.

Like other residents of Babong, in 1972 when the Khmer Rouge took control of her village, Yung and her family were evacuated to another district, Ba Phnom. On their return in 1975 they found that their house had been dismantled. They had to rebuild new shelters from whatever was available locally. The shacks, mainly of palm leaf and thatch, are the ones which still stand in Babong.

In 1975, Mao Yung's husband built their new shelter on the same spot as their earlier home. Yung still lives there with her three sons. Her 18 year old son who injured his right arm in the army three years ago, is now in the village militia. He also helps in the fields. Her 14 year old son is at school. Her youngest son, aged 10, caught measles when he was a year old and lost the sight of both eyes.

During the last harvest, which was distributed on a points system based on each family's labour inputs, with a share for the unproductive or handicapped members, Yung's family received a share of six sacks of paddy rice, about 560 kilograms. Considering that each adult consumes about 350 kilos a year, Yung's family share is not enough to feed them. So Mao Yung supplements her family income by selling cakes and gathering wood during the five months when the rice is not being grown.

Mao Yung described her work during the rice-growing season:

"We are busy non-stop for four months. This includes three months of regulating the supply of water using the *robat* (a pedal-operated water wheel). We wake up very early in the morning and cook and pack our lunch, walk for one hour to the field and are ready to start work at 6am. We don't get home until 5 or 6pm. Friends and relatives usually feed us."

These friends and relatives in Yung's solidarity group play an important role in her life. They are the ones who help her with all the heavy work such as repairing the house or her *robat*. However she has to do many other jobs herself; patching her roof, making axe and knife handles, raising dykes and driving an ox-cart.

On Yung's private village plot there are five coconut trees, one sugar palm and ten banana trees. She privately owns one *robat*. Yung does not keep any chickens or pigs. Her solidarity group is one of nine in Babong village without an irrigation pump or a share



Young women from Babong take a break from pedalling the 'robat', which lifts water to irrigate dry season rice. 1986.

in one. The group lost in a ballot when they might have won the right to buy one of the eight pumps available in mid 1986.

As deputy leader of her solidarity group since 1979, Yung attends village meetings in her leader's place and collects money in aid of those members of her group labouring at the border (defence works) and those in the armed forces. She lets her group know what work needs to be done and organises it: clearing brushwood, raising earthworks, constructing seed beds, transplanting, pumping water and spraying insecticide.

This profile comes from a field study done by Chanthou Boua and Ben Kiernan who stayed in Babong village for two weeks in January 1986. The study was commissioned by OXFAM America.

The Economy

The People's Republic of Kampuchea found itself in a unique situation in 1979. As the Khmer Rouge had abolished all forms of currency, the country had no money or markets, and only a few factories in working order. The new currency put into circulation by the government in 1980 was surprisingly well accepted and quickly replaced other currencies, except for gold or dollars which are still the currency at the Thai-Kampuchean border.

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A stall in Phnom Penh market, 1986.

Unable to provide the basic commodities desperately needed by its population, the government adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude toward marketing and cross-border trade with Thailand and Vietnam. With all essential commodities scarce, border trade became very profitable and it was not long before markets were flourishing with both locally made goods and imported goods. Thus a dual economy of state and free market emerged and today it is small capitalism that has helped to pull Kampuchea from the economic abyss.

By 1987, the economy continued to follow a modest positive trend, but the rapid economic recovery which characterised the first few years following the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge has slowed down. Some of the visible signs of prosperity found in the capital city, such as increasing numbers of flashy motorcycles, cars, private videos, and full restaurants are merely artificial indicators of wealth, out of reach of most Khmers.

Less dramatic indicators, more representative of the country as a whole, are there too. People are visibly better dressed and better fed. For the first time since 1979 an aid worker has heard Khmer farmers say that they have had good harvests in Svay Rieng and Takeo, which are both rice deficit provinces.¹² Many houses have been improved and new houses in traditional styles have been built. Shiny new tile roofs can be seen dotted about the country side. One can also see many more pigs in family courtyards, and newly-dug fish ponds. There is a regular bus service to

many of the provinces, and both local and international bank services are available. In 1984 for example, a Kandal bank offered over two million riels in loans to local fishing groups, and seventeen million to family handicraft enterprises.¹³

Other signs of availability of cash and increasing prosperity are the numerous festive stalls erected to collect money from passers-by for the repair of temples and schools. A growing number of Kampucheans are also receiving assistance in cash or packages from relatives abroad though there are still many problems in the postal delivery system and in cashing foreign cheques.

Under the new economic regime of the PRK, peasants, artisans, and traders who constitute the private sector generally fare better than those in the state sector, including government officials, factory workers and professionals. State employees do not even receive subsistence-level salaries, although these are supplemented by rice rations at government subsidised prices. A civil servant may purchase 16kg of rice per adult and 10kg per child per month from the state at 2.5 riel/kg. Even though official salaries have been raised twice since 1980 they have hardly kept up with the rate of inflation.

For example salaries run from 150 to 500 riels per month (US\$10-70 at the official exchange rate, or US\$1-4 at black market rates). A teacher might earn 160 riels per month, a doctor 300 and a factory worker 130, plus free housing.¹⁴ But with rice costing 10 riels a kilo and meat at 60 riels a kilo, most state workers must find other sources of income in order to survive. They may take 'moonlighting' jobs such as teaching English — earning up to 1,000 riels per month — or offering private medical consultations. Or they may pool their income with others to invest in trade. Often other members of the salaried worker's family will have to work as small traders, or making handicrafts.

The private sector and family economy which are officially recognised and encouraged by the government provide more lucrative opportunities and may give a family a comfortable income. The diversity of the family economic sector is astounding, especially during the dry season when work in the rice fields has finished. Among others it may include tapping sugar palms, making clay jars, cultivating spices such as sesame or pepper, making baskets, raising silkworms and weaving both cotton and silk, collecting firewood and making charcoal, making oxcarts or farm tools, raising chickens, ducks and pigs or driving a cycle rickshaw in the towns. The collection of taxes on private sources of income began in 1983 and remained minimal until 1985. In 1986 the state identified this as a significant source of potential income and taxes rose considerably. While this action forced several small Chinese restaurants to fold up, prompting allegations of racial targeting and discrimination, in



ARNOLD LYE

The juice collected from sugar palms is used as a sweetener throughout Kampuchea.

general it does not seem to have discouraged or adversely affected market activity, which remains dominated by ethnic Chinese.

Industrial recovery since 1979 has been disappointingly slow —but this is not surprising, considering the internal and external constraints. Sixty out of about a hundred of Kampuchea's factories are functioning again though most have not yet reached full capacity. The ingenuity and skill of the Khmers in restoring these factories illustrates better than anything else the remarkable resourcefulness of the people. They have cannibalised machines in order to restore others, often without technical plans or books.

Increasing decentralisation of the industrial sector, placing more responsibility and giving more initiative to the provinces, has in most cases produced more profitable results. The main obstacles to developing the full economic potential of the industrial sector stem from the isolation imposed by most other countries, which makes it difficult for Kampuchea to import spare parts and industrial supplies. Shortages of electrical power and fuel have also been limiting factors, although Soviet aid in this field has recently done much to improve the situation.

Trade is still quite limited in quantity and diversity of products due to lack of foreign exchange, limited production capacity and poor road and transport systems. Nevertheless there are some signs of a thaw in international relations, or at least a recognition that business interests may transcend political considerations. While as much as 90% of Kampuchea's trade (which includes rubber, timber, fish, rice, beans, kapok and tobacco) goes to Vietnam, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, Kampuchea 'unofficially' trades with Japan, Singapore and Thai traders.¹⁵ (Ironically Thai goods are even sold in government shops.) This represents an important opening for Kampuchea which now has limited access, through Singapore, to badly needed spare parts and machinery.

Trade unions are another feature of Kampuchea's production sector. Active in most large workplaces, they have played an important role in eradicating illiteracy among the workforce and in providing services to their workers and families. Some factory unions help to provide extra schools for the children of the workers, some offer childcare, and some even have clinics. Several unions have negotiated paid maternity leave. Because of the low wages being offered to workers, factories are also allocated land for cultivation of rice and other crops by members' families.

Most unions offer a mechanism for workers to voice their concerns and evaluate the management but because of the experiences witnessed or suffered during the Pol Pot regime when any type of criticism met with severe punishment, if not death, many people are still reluctant to



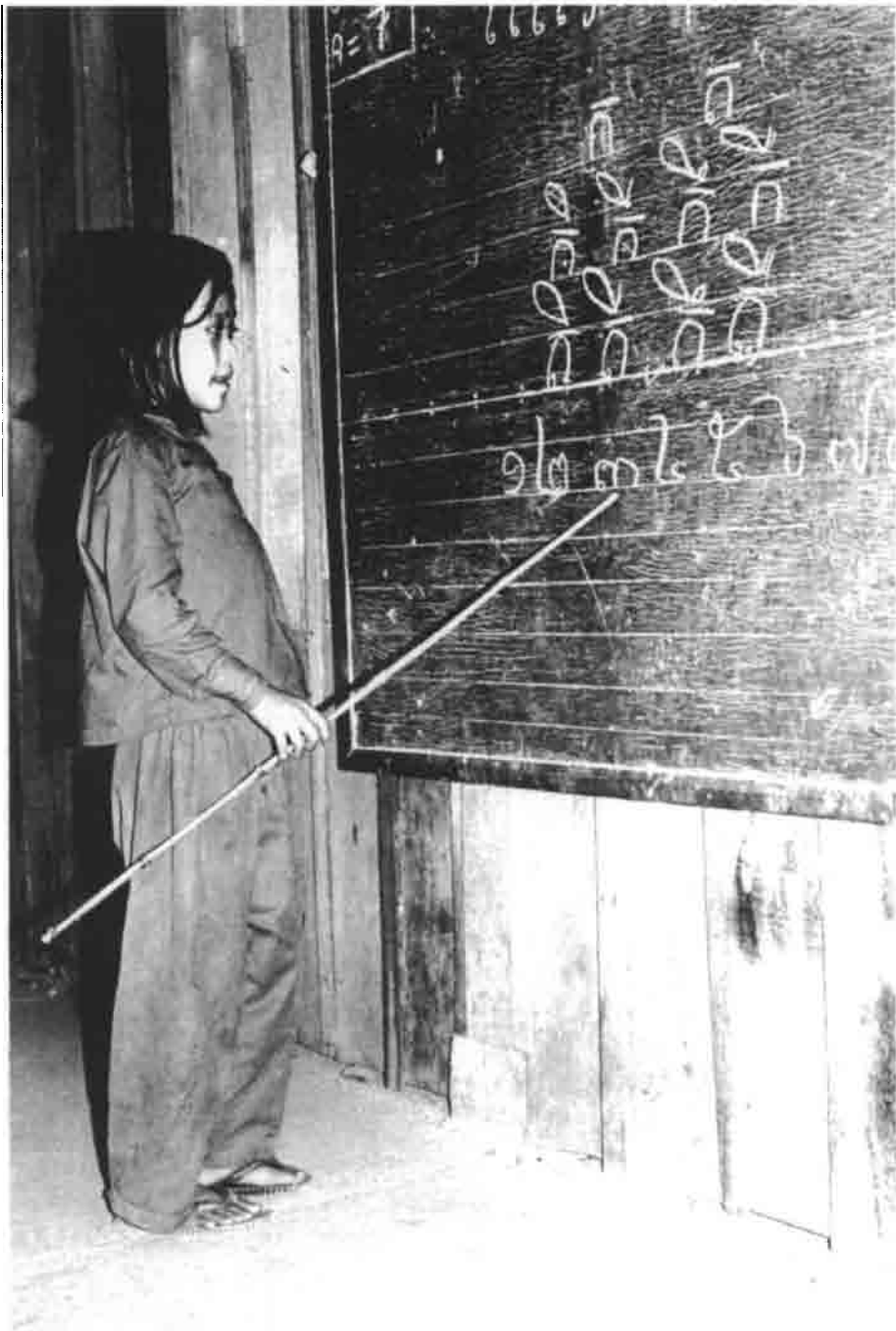
The orphanage school at Muk Kampoul, rebuilt by the teacher, Ten Va, who had spent two years in a Khmer Rouge prison cage. 1979.

criticise their superiors or the system openly. This is also true of other sectors of society and organisations. While the trade union movement has made many contributions in the reconstruction of Kampuchea it is still young and under the wing of the regime but it is in the process of growth and development. So although some unions are well organised and effective in representing their members' interests, others fail miserably, acting as mere mouthpieces for the government.

Education

The most significant revival has occurred in education which, like many other sectors of Kampuchean life, has had to start almost from scratch. Even more impressive is the fact that most improvements in this sector have been achieved in the absence of major aid and are due to the resourcefulness and hard work of the Kampucheans themselves. Having been deprived of education during the Pol Pot regime, many Kampucheans have expressed a hunger for knowledge and for books. Since 1979, education has been a high priority. People wanted primary schools and were prepared to build them. In a population of little over 7 million, primary school enrolment exceeds 1.5 million, which is comparable to 1969, the last pre-war year of education.¹⁶

A ten year primary-secondary school system consisting of three levels of education covers a list of subjects similar to that of pre-war years, but



MARCUS THOMPSON/OXFAM

A school-girl points out the letters of the Khmer alphabet.

devotes more time to Khmer language and literature and to the politics of the new regime.¹⁷ Persistent charges of Vietnamisation of education appear to be unfounded. All primary and secondary education is carried out in Khmer and by Khmer teachers. In fact, since the introduction of western education by French colonialists, education has never been more authentically Khmer than it is today. Foreign language study (Russian, German, or Vietnamese) is introduced in secondary schools, but as yet in only a handful of them.¹⁸

Of the 22,000 teachers in the country at the beginning of 1970, only 7,000 remained in 1979 and only 5,000 of them returned to teaching. Since then more than 50,000 teachers have been trained and retrained in the new teacher training centres located in each province.¹⁹ These centres train lower level primary and pre-school teachers while upper primary teachers are educated in six regional colleges. A central college in Phnom Penh trains the teacher trainers and secondary school teachers. The greatest difficulty has been the shortage of qualified teachers for higher, professional and technical education. Thus secondary and higher education are still very limited and only about 30% of secondary school students are able to continue with higher education either in Kampuchea or abroad, usually in the USSR.

An interesting feature of Kampuchea's education policy is the recent emphasis put on education of minorities and the development of minority regions, especially along the more remote northeastern areas bordering Laos and Vietnam. Special incentives are being offered to teachers and technicians to attract them to work in these difficult remote areas.²⁰ Special measures have also been adopted to reserve a certain percentage of places in the institutes of higher education for candidates from the minority regions. In line with this, education policy restricts the number of candidates from Phnom Penh and other large cities who can be accepted in these institutes in order to encourage better distribution of very limited educational opportunities among the less advantaged rural population.²¹ This had never been done in Kampuchea before.

The Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy was one of the first institutions of higher learning to reopen in 1980, thanks to aid from Vietnam, western NGOs and UNICEF. Since then five other Professional Institutes have reopened: Agriculture, Languages, Technical Engineering, Economics and Administration. Each year approximately 800 students also go abroad to study in Eastern Europe. Although new graduates are beginning to bridge the gap in needed technical and professional expertise, many still lack practical field experience. It will take more than one generation to restore Kampuchea's professional and technical corps to meet the needs of the country. Besides formal education, thousands of officials and workers are being trained or having

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Student and supervisor at the Technical Training School in Phnom Penh, 1986.

their skills upgraded through numerous short term training programmes offered by various government services and factories.

Significant progress has also been made in the fight against illiteracy. In 1987 Kampuchea proudly claimed functional literacy among 83% of its adult population.²² This was accomplished through two massive campaigns involving not only the teacher corps but other people's organisations such as the women's association, the youth corps and trade unions.

Kampuchea's educational goals for 1986 to 1990 include universal primary education for grades 1-8 (ages 7-13). In the Kampuchean context this means 100% enrolment in grades 1-5 and a place in upper primary school (grades 6-8) for all students who passed the examination at the end of lower primary education. It is also planned to introduce prevocational education in all primary schools to prepare pupils for the world of work (agriculture, wood and metal work, small repairs, sewing etc.). School curricula and textbooks will also be revised to include simple health, hygiene and nutrition education.

Health

Visitors to Kampuchea today are often appalled by the glaring health and sanitation needs and problems, especially when comparing Kampuchea to developed countries or other developing countries. But considering

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that eight years ago the entire country was on the verge of famine and emerging from a nightmare of unprecedented proportions, one can only marvel at the miracle of recovery and what it says about the Kampuchean people.

The disastrous health legacy the new government inherited in 1979 has been difficult to overcome. Like many other institutions in Kampuchea, health services were completely dismantled during the Pol Pot regime, with western style hospitals replaced by institutions offering limited traditional medicine. Of the 450 doctors in Kampuchea before 1975, only 45 remained in 1979: twenty of the 45 have since left the country.²³ Of the 3,400 medical students, only 728 have returned.

Diarrhoea, malnutrition, malaria, and tuberculosis are the most significant health hazards in Kampuchea today.²⁴ TB and malaria, which were under control until 1975, were rampant in 1979 and today constitute a major health problem. Dr. Samedy, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, estimates that up to 2.5 million people had been infected with malaria and about 200,000 with TB. Diarrhoea, dysentery and other infectious diseases affect a large portion of the population and are still a major cause of infant mortality, although new programmes for their treatment and prevention have made a noticeable difference. But recent improvements are partially masked by the generally poor health still suffered by most people.

Training of health personnel remains one of the Health Ministry's top priorities. The Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy was one of the first educational facilities restored by the government. It has made notable achievements in the training of new personnel since 1979 with 352 doctors, 550 medical assistants, 198 pharmacists and 26 dentists graduating.²⁵ Most significant in the Faculty's programme is the recent shift in emphasis from a curative approach and reliance on sophisticated technology, to a preventive approach emphasizing public health, basic sanitation measures, traditional healing methods, and practices and medicines appropriate to the country's resources.²⁶

With almost no Khmer teaching personnel left in the country, the Faculty has relied heavily on foreign aid, and teachers and advisors from Vietnam. French remains the language of learning, being taught at the Faculty by two French teachers from the Alliance Francaise. Besides the Faculty of Medicine, provincial health departments, with very limited means, are providing short term training in many fields such as basic health care, nutrition, sanitation, midwifery, health education and vaccination.

International agencies and NGOs have helped the government with a number of other health initiatives. These include the development of Maternal and Child health clinics and especially the spread of

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***Primary health clinic in Phnom Penh — one of the R.I.N.E. Centres
(Rehydration, Immunisation, Nutrition and Education).***

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rehydration, immunisation, nutrition and education (RINE) programmes.

RINE centres, in Phnom Penh and a growing number of provinces, provide preventive and curative care and nutrition for infants and young children. Because severe diarrhoea can leave a child dehydrated and unable to absorb the nutrients essential to recovery, RINE centres teach mothers to prepare a basic rehydration solution and simple weaning foods at home. Mothers also learn the importance of providing nutritious and easily digestible foods like soya milk and chicken soup. A well-baby clinic provides immunisation against the country's most common childhood diseases.²⁷ This programme, which requires very little material inputs and focuses on education, has gathered much momentum and enthusiasm in the last two years and is a successful self-help programme.

Faced with the daunting problems of shortage of medicines and medical personnel the Health Services have adopted a pragmatic attitude towards traditional health and medicines. This is reflected in the growing cooperation between traditional health workers and recent medical school personnel, better training for traditional healers and research into traditional medicines.²⁸ In 1984, an exhibition in the Faculty of Medicine featured a broad range of traditional medicinal plants found in the various provinces. Similarly, hospitals and primary health care programmes are recognising the need to work together in their goal of improving the health of the Khmer people and concepts of prevention and health care are gradually finding their way into the medical school curriculum. Health-related industry, especially the production of gauze, intravenous serum, soaps, alcohol and traditional medicines, help in a small but significant way to bridge the gap in badly needed medical supplies. Two pharmaceutical factories produce 22% of the country's requirement of basic drugs.

The Kampuchean government, with the assistance of UNICEF, has recently mobilised government personnel, education and health personnel and major resources in a massive vaccination campaign to combat the common childhood diseases: measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, TB, and polio. This successful campaign illustrates the improving coordination between services as well as a better capacity for planning and administration within the health sector, whereas in previous years lack of coordination and planning had frustrated many health projects and health personnel, both local and foreign.

Another significant development over the last two years has been the interest, development and training of personnel in carrying out studies and surveys in health and health-related topics in order to identify the real needs of the population in both rural and urban areas. So far a



BEN FAWCETT/OXFAM

Children at play around a newly-completed well in Svay Rieng Province, 1987.

number of surveys have been completed on the nutritional status of children, the incidence and treatment of diarrhoeal diseases, vaccination coverage, and identifying the handicapped and their needs. Other studies have assessed the prevalence of infectious diseases, and sanitation and housing needs in Phnom Penh.²⁹ These studies help both foreign organisations and government officials to identify and address target populations and to formulate programmes that will meet the most urgent needs.

Departments of hygiene, health education, epidemiology, and a well-drilling programme to provide safe drinking water have also grown and improved their effectiveness in educating the public and in controlling and preventing disease.

Culture

Their culture remains a great source of pride and identity to the Khmer people. Its revival after the bleak Pol Pot years colours many aspects of Kampuchean arts and life once again and is reflected in music, sculpture, dance and theatre. Temples are being restored, houses rebuilt in the traditional style, holidays are celebrated with traditional games and foods, ancestors are honoured and special ceremonies held for weddings and the blessing of new homes. Kampucheans are once again able to

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enjoy performances of the National Ballet; a national arts centre not only trains the next generation of dancers but also teaches other traditional arts and skills. Some traditional dances and songs, modified under the new regime to reflect revolutionary themes, are no threat to a culture so rich and deeply ingrained which has survived centuries of foreign domination.

Occasional athletic and cultural exchanges and competitions between Kampucheans themselves or between Kampuchea and Laos, Vietnam, India and the socialist countries, draw thousands of enthusiastic spectators and offer a welcome relief from the struggles of everyday life.

Kampuchea has also devoted limited resources and attention to the restoration of many local monuments which attract thousands of picnickers and families on Sunday and holiday outings. The national treasures and rich cultural heritage of the northwest temples, among which Angkor Wat and Bayon are best known, have suffered damage from the elements, from lack of maintenance and from pilferage, but still reveal their splendour and magnificence to the few privileged tourists. India and Poland give valuable assistance in their restoration while normal aid channels such as UNESCO are blocked by the UN ban. Their



PETE DAVIS/OXFAM

The Hindu god Vishnu dominates the centre of this epic 12th century relief at Angkor Wat. Originally dedicated to Vishnu, the temple had become a Buddhist shrine by the time of the fall of the Khmer Empire in the 15th century.

deterioration would represent not only a loss for Kampuchea but for the world community.

Among Kampuchea's more recent memorials is the 'holocaust museum' of Tuol Sleng. Once a high school, this site became a torture centre where up to 20,000 Khmer men, women and children died between 1975 and 1978, under Pol Pot's regime. It houses thousands of skulls retrieved from mass graves as well as the memories of atrocities which the world vowed would never happen again after the Jewish holocaust.

Religion

Since 1979, government policies have allowed the revival and practice of the major indigenous religions — Buddhism, which 90% of the population embraces, and Islam, the religion of the Cham, the country's most important ethnic minority. But although the government guarantees religious freedom, it still barely tolerates Christianity.

Under the brutal Pol Pot regime all monks were defrocked and nearly 25,000 were summarily executed or died from numerous hardships. It was in 1979 that Buddhism was first revived with the ordination of monks by a visiting delegation of Buddhists from Vietnam. Since then 6,810 monks (compared to 65,000 monks before 1975)³⁰ have been ordained and many *wats* (pagodas) once again gleam with gold and new tiles. With an improvement in the economy, public contributions raised through community festivals have sustained the rehabilitation and maintenance of over 2,397 *wats*. Before 1975 the country listed 3,054. Rice and food brought to the temples on special days and holidays is shared with orphans and beggars.

Today Buddhist monks continue to play an important role in the education of the public, according to the Venerable Um Som, one of Kampuchea's Buddhist leaders, but there are other changes that differentiate Buddhism from its pre-war days. Among these is a change in hierarchy. Whilst in the past religious activity fell under the supervision of a Minister of Cults, today it is the responsibility of the National Front for Construction and Defence, a party organ. According to one foreign observer, "Government policies allow freedom to believe or not believe in Buddhism, but Phnom Penh wants to see religion serve the state."³¹

The merging of the two orders of Theravada Buddhism, the Thommayuth (aristocratic) and Mohanikay (common) previously practised in Kampuchea, is another visible difference since 1979. Before the Vietnam war, approximately half Kampuchea's *wats* had religious *pali* schools, whereas today there are very few.³²

Perhaps the most controversial change in religion today is the government's restriction on the ordination of monks. A government circular, passed in 1985, limits ordination to men of fifty years or more,

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as anyone younger is expected first to fulfil obligations to the reconstruction and defence of the country. There are exceptions to this rule and one may see quite a number of younger monks in the country, though generally many of them were ordained before the adoption of the circular.

Islam enjoys the same freedom as Buddhism. Though the number of functioning mosques appears to be similar to before 1975 the Muslim community is much reduced because of particularly harsh persecution directed at the Khmer Islam under Pol Pot.

Although officially formal religion is tolerated rather than encouraged, Buddhist spiritual values are reflected even in some government policies such as the surprisingly lenient attitude towards those who have 'betrayed the revolution' or towards border returnees.

Many a foreign aid worker in Kampuchea has been impressed and moved by the spirit of forgiveness some Khmers have shown toward those who once inflicted suffering on them during the Khmer Rouge regime. For example, an aid official recounted an encounter between her Khmer guide and an acquaintance from Pol Pot days. On meeting for the first time since 1978, the two women ran up to each other and embraced, leading others around them to believe they were reunited relatives. Later the guide explained that the other woman had been head of her village under the Khmer Rouge and recounted some of the harsh treatment she had dispensed. Seeing the questioning faces of her party the guide then added, "You cannot judge someone for what they had to do to survive".

Aid workers have experienced many similar incidents. A Khmer teacher returned to his district in 1979 to find that only eight of the 158 teachers were alive there. Two of his children had died of starvation. When asked how he felt about seeing former Khmer Rouge reintegrated into society he responded, "I do not seek revenge against the Khmer Rouge. They were peasants; they were ignorant. They did whatever they were told to do without thinking. Besides, if we felt revenge, perhaps there would soon be no more Khmers left in our country."³³

The Legal System

The process of establishing a legal system in Kampuchea has been extremely slow. This is not surprising considering the very specialised nature of this work and that only a handful of qualified Khmer lawyers remain in Kampuchea. Three distinctively different versions of the Kampuchean constitution were drafted before adoption of the final version in 1981.³⁴ An American aid worker in Phnom Penh in 1980 remembers being asked by a member of one of the drafting groups to provide a copy of the American Constitution so that it could be studied along with other models.

The Constitution, consisting of ten chapters and 93 articles, defines the new political system and its various organs as well as the rights of the people within the system.³⁵ It sets economic, cultural, social and foreign policy guidelines. It establishes a judiciary, but details of organisation and procedure are to be further defined by law.

A number of laws have been enacted since 1979 to protect civil rights, the most important being Decree-Law 27, signed on March 12, 1986, regulating "arrest, detention, temporary imprisonment, release, and search of domicile, property or person."³⁶ This law is significant because it defines responsibilities and procedures; what constitutes a crime, who can carry out an arrest, under what circumstances, the length of detention, and through what procedures. It defines the penalties for those who abuse their authority by false arrest or detention, illegal search and entry, as well as for use of torture during interrogation. It also defines the rights of the individual including the right to defence, notification of the family, visiting and other rights.

A law in itself is of course no guarantee of protection of rights or justice. Mr. Uk Sary, Director of the Legislative Department of the Ministry of Justice, admits that there are still many problems to overcome in the application of the law. "There are still abuses and errors made because some representatives of state authorities do not yet fully understand the laws and have been under-trained. Not all judicial personnel have backgrounds in Law and there are not enough lawyers in Kampuchea today. It takes time to educate the public and train legal staff, and many laws have only recently been approved while others are still under study."³⁷

Until recently, the National School for Administration and Law has offered only five-month training courses to educate officials about the legal system, the laws and proper process of law. However in 1987 the school began a more intensive two-year programme of legal studies.

Because of the shortage of lawyers the process of establishing civil courts and staffing them has lagged behind other developments. By 1986, only 11 of Kampuchea's 18 provinces had civilian courts. A year later there was one in every province. Mr. Uk refers to weaknesses in the process of justice. "Normally in socialist systems judges are elected by popular assemblies, but in Kampuchea there are not yet any popular assemblies so judges are nominated by the People's Revolutionary Committee and approved by the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Justice. This procedure concerns us since it sometimes generates a conflict of interest from which abuse may result. A judge should be responsible to the law only, the fact that he is nominated by a local Committee may make him responsible to that committee as well — hence the conflict of interest."³⁸

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He goes on to say that the elaboration of laws and the development of the judicial system is progressing slowly. "It is slow because of the serious nature of the subject matter. Careful study, consideration and deliberation must be applied to every detail. We must find laws and a system that respond to our needs and our situation. We are only six persons in our department working in this field."

Chapter 3

Obstacles and Needs

*"Please tell donors that all we want is peace, security and enough to eat.
We don't want luxury—just enough to eat, for our children's sake."*

Kong Som Ol¹



MIKE YOUDE/OXFAM

Children on an ox-cart, Prey Veng Province.

Obstacles to Recovery

Despite the miracle of survival and the encouraging signs of recovery, the Kampuchean people still face many obstacles. The task before them is a daunting one, hampered by the continuing war, the isolation imposed by a majority of the international community and by the lack of positive diplomacy from the western world.

An examination of the problems facing Kampuchea today gives a clear view of the pressing humanitarian needs of the Khmer people. Those who have visited the country during the 1980s, even for a short period, are unanimous in their assessment of what is necessary for the country's recovery. Firstly, the people must have a guarantee that the Khmer Rouge will not return to power. Secondly, they need peace and stability to enable them to pursue a normal social and economic life. Thirdly, they need material aid, both for emergency use and for reconstruction and development and finally, the country must have a greater degree of independence and self-determination.

Physical Needs

Nine years after the ousting of the Khmer Rouge, Kampuchea is still struggling to achieve self-sufficiency in food. Agriculture has still not attained pre-war levels of production and the country is not yet self-sufficient in its staple, rice.² Nearly 600,000 hectares of farmland are not being cultivated because of the shortage of equipment, animals, machinery and spare parts. Without better water control the Kampuchean people will remain vulnerable to climatic disasters, both drought and floods, which may lead to new food emergencies in the future. In fact, reports from Phnom Penh of severe drought during May, June and July 1987 signalled serious food shortages in 1988.³

Often villagers are ready to restore their own irrigation schemes but lack the technical expertise to determine just what has to be done. The

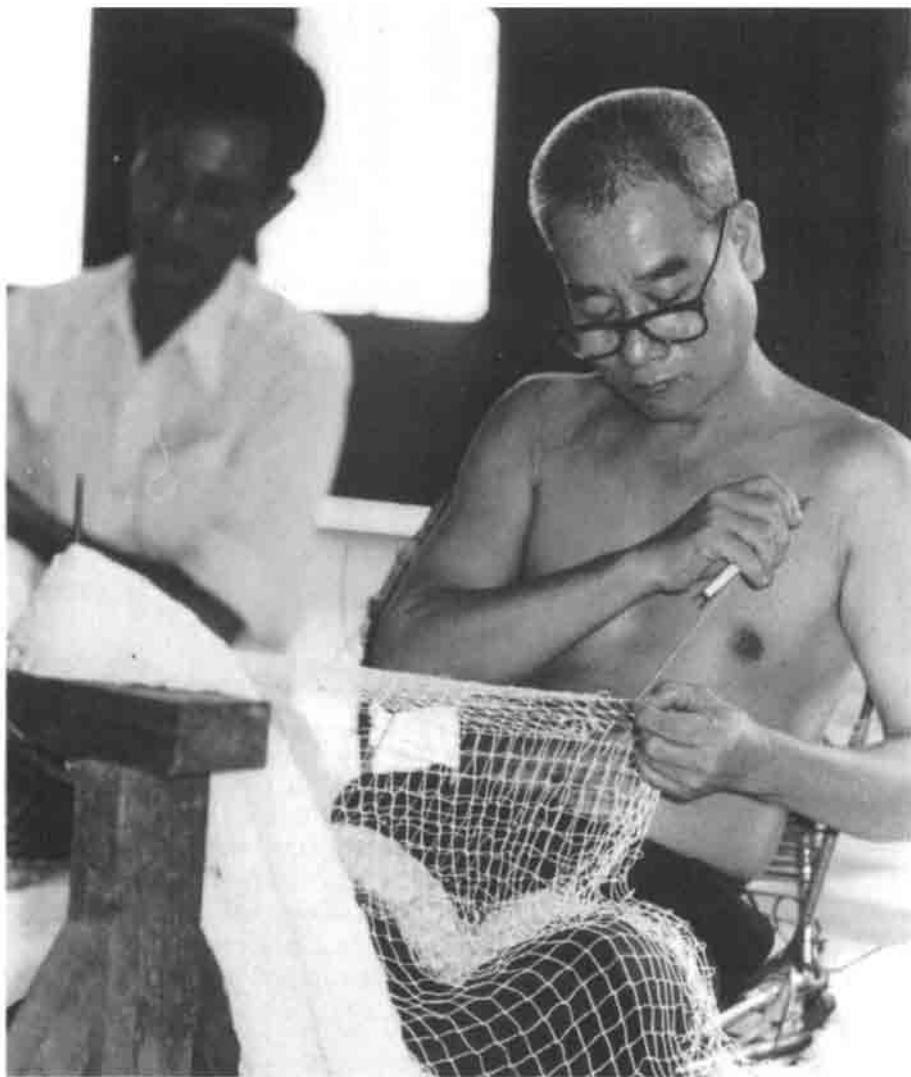


TIM LUSTY

Preparing land for planting with sweet potatoes, Takeo Province.

national hydrology department, also very limited in skilled personnel, is frequently too overwhelmed and occupied with larger irrigation systems to offer villages the necessary assistance. Where machinery is available, lack of a power supply, fuel or spare parts are often the limiting factors. Lack of foreign exchange and international isolation make it difficult if not impossible to procure these. Limited industrial production of farm implements as simple as hoes for example, or materials such as fertilizer, cement or sacks for grain storage, are other impediments to increased food production which cannot be easily overcome without importing raw materials, chemicals or spare parts.

Kampuchea's rich fishing sector holds tremendous potential as an important source of protein and foreign exchange; yet it is out of the reach of many Kampucheans. In 1982, while the country suffered a food deficit, thousands of tons of fish were thrown back into the Tonle Sap lake because Kampucheans had neither the means to transport the fresh fish to other provinces or markets nor the labour power to dry or process it. Fish nets are also in short supply and their production faces the same problems as other factories — shortages of raw materials and spare parts. The export of large quantities of fish to Vietnam and Thailand increases the scarcity and makes fish in local markets so expensive that few people can afford it.



DAVID MUNRO

Adding the finishing touches to a net at the fish-net factory, Phnom Penh, 1986.

Development of the export sector, once a significant source of foreign exchange, does not look very promising in the present climate of war and insecurity. Though the socialist countries of Eastern Europe have been actively involved in rehabilitating Kampuchea's rubber, tobacco, timber and cotton industries for the export market, their efforts are hampered by their own limited investment capacity and sometimes inefficient technology.

The deplorable condition of roads, bridges and the transport system in

general, greatly limits any further economic development. Because of the large number of still unrepaired bridges, several of the northeastern provinces of Kampuchea are only accessible during part of the year by river and often emergency aid to those provinces has had to be delivered through Vietnam, which offers the only accessible route.

Years of conflict have increased Kampuchea's need for health care, while at the same time reducing the country's resources to supply it. An NGO health evaluation mission in 1986 reported that "malnutrition and infectious diseases continue to threaten the health of many Kampucheans. Evidence of malnutrition among infants, toddlers and school age children confirms that either the production or the distribution of food is not yet adequate for the needs of the population. Malaria, TB and diarrhoea are still significant health hazards. Immunization programmes have been limited so many children are threatened by preventable diseases such as polio and tetanus, which are rarely seen in developed countries."⁴



ARNOLD LYE

The few trains, buses and lorries which operate are always heavily crowded with passengers. 1987.

Only 1% of the population has access to a safe drinking water supply, according to the Ministry of Health. Hand-dug village wells, where they exist, are often open and contaminated. The Mekong river and many lakes provide another source of contaminated water as do the many ponds dug for water catchment. Water is chlorinated at Phnom Penh's Water Treatment Station but the distribution system itself is riddled with leaks which recontaminate the water supply as it passes through the system.⁵ The same applies to other urban water supply systems, if they are functioning at all.

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Sanitation practices are poor throughout the country, causing recurring infectious diseases. A Phnom Penh sanitation survey carried out in July 1986 revealed that almost half the city's dwellings had no functioning toilets.⁶ An epidemic of a type of dengue fever which killed hundreds of children in 1984 has recurred in subsequent years, though with less tragic consequences due to more efficient control methods. Cholera has not yet occurred in epidemic proportions but has been identified in some villages and raised serious concern when it appeared in a Phnom Penh district in 1986.⁷ The conscription of thousands of people for work at the border where malaria is endemic presents a new health problem for the country. Many return home from the border operation with a chloroquine-resistant strain of malaria, spreading it to areas of the country that may previously have been free of this often fatal disease.

The laboratory services needed to diagnose and treat infectious diseases may be unavailable or unreliable or often lack the chemicals needed to run basic tests. Thus treatable diseases, even if medicines are available, may go undetected. This in part accounts for the alarming rate at which tuberculosis is spreading in some provinces. Insufficient training and inexperience also decreases the impact of health personnel as does the scarcity of essential drugs.

Effects of War

The Kampuchean people continue to suffer not only from physical illness but from unhealed emotional scars left from so many years of oppression, abuse and the loss of family members and friends. An NGO representative states that in the five years she has spent in Kampuchea, she has met only one person who claimed that he had not lost any family member during the tragic decade of war and the Khmer Rouge reign of terror. Foreign health personnel and aid workers find that emotional and psychological problems affect not only the general population but their Khmer counterparts at all levels of the administration. The Kampucheans no longer relate their tragic experiences to foreigners as compulsively as they did back in 1979 and 1980 but when memories are touched tears still come easily. There is no mistaking the terrible pain which is etched on the faces of many Kampucheans. The problems manifest themselves through depression and chronic grief, through the recurrence of nightmares, anxiety and fear of being exposed. Other symptoms of this debilitating illness include lack of motivation and difficulty in planning and organising work, as well as an inability to generate enthusiasm and hope for the future. A Khmer woman in Phnom Penh confessed to an NGO official, "I have a cloth hanging up in my home that says, 'to live is to hope'. I look at that every morning. Sometimes I want to tear it down

and wrap it around my neck. But I know I must have hope for the sake of my children.”

The recurring attacks launched by the opposition forces of which the Khmer Rouge are the strongest and most feared, only aggravate the insecurities of the Khmer people and fuel their all-pervading fear of the return of Pol Pot. Most Kampucheans find it incomprehensible that the UN supports the Coalition which the Khmer Rouge dominate, and that most nations of the world continue to give diplomatic recognition to their enemy, the Khmer Rouge. They do not understand why a majority of western governments appear to have turned their backs on the people of Kampuchea. The combination of fear and insecurity about the future, as well as the experiences under Pol Pot, also affect people's ability to take decisions, to criticise the system constructively when offered the opportunity to do so or to expose injustices. Under the Khmer Rouge such behaviour was often punishable by death. “The best policy” said the head of one technical department, “is just to keep a low profile and mind your own business. I have lived through four regimes. I lived under the king, I lived under Sihanouk, I lived under Lon Nol and the American bombing, I lived under Chinese-influenced Pol Pot, and now I live under the Vietnam-supported Heng Samrin. Who knows what tomorrow will bring and what I will be held accountable for?”⁸

The fragile political climate also creates uncertainties. According to one Khmer, “Our country has no freedom. Our leaders speak well; their ideology is good, but they don't live up to their own ideas. And we cannot say anything.”

The wounds of the past are not being allowed to heal and the Khmer people's efforts to build a future are undermined and frustrated by the ongoing conflict and ban on UN and western development aid. The conflict diverts men and financial resources away from reconstruction and agricultural production to defence work. As a result military conscription has recently been extended from three to five years and thousands of Khmer people from peasants to top administrators are deployed for ‘patriotic works’. These include border defence and clearing brush in the forests and along the roads to deny access to Khmer Rouge guerillas and to protect military convoys from ambush.

Provision of all normal services is disrupted. For example, half the health personnel from Kampong Cham province were sent to perform their 2 month duty at the border, leaving the already understaffed hospital and health facilities even more handicapped. The war is also taking its toll on the already imbalanced adult population ratio, reducing the number of men even further and increasing the number of handicapped and amputees. A restaurant owner in Phnom Penh claims that anywhere from 200 to 300 amputees a day come in threatening to

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damage the premises if they are not given a few riels. Another Khmer, when asked what he saw as the future Kampuchea answered with a prediction that circulated during the time of Pol Pot's regime: "The war will be over when every man has forty wives" — because most of the men will have been killed, he explained. The war also creates heavier burdens for peasants who must support those involved in defence work with 'patriotic contributions' — a part of their harvest.

The Kampuchean people also suffer from spiritual fatigue as a result of the ongoing conflict. They want serenity and time to enjoy their families and improve their lives. Many aid workers in Kampuchea have witnessed the emotional and physical strain under which their colleagues often work. For some, rest comes only when they have worked 7 days a week 18 hours a day for so long that they eventually suffer a breakdown and must be admitted to a hospital.

Women's Burden

Women bear a disproportionate burden as a consequence of the Khmer Rouge regime and the continuing war. The demographic changes which by 1979 resulted in a higher proportion of women to men and a large number of widows, have added considerably to their difficulties. A survey in 1986 in Phnom Penh showed that from a random sample of 217 families, 53 were headed by women.⁹ Of these women heads of households, 91% were widows. Women are having to assume more responsibility in raising their families alone and having to undertake not only their own traditional tasks but those of the men as well.

Traditionally, men and women in Kampuchea assume different roles and functions. A majority of Kampucheans are involved in agriculture, but jobs that require more strength such as ploughing and harrowing or operating a *robat*, a pedal-pushed irrigation wheel, are traditionally men's jobs.¹⁰ Similarly, house building and repairs were also considered men's work. Today women are found doing all of these jobs and during the planting season one sees many more women than men in the rice fields. This transition has not been easy for most women, who feared that taking up traditionally male functions would make them less 'feminine' and reduce their chances of remarrying in a society with few men. The undereducation of women is a further disadvantage.¹¹ In rural Kampuchea most women had less than six years of primary education, although before Pol Pot the number of women in higher education had been increasing.

Before the Khmer Rouge regime, most households depended on the combined efforts of both sexes and on the support of the extended family. But with the demographic imbalance many women found themselves the head of the household with no man to help with the

PETE DAVIS/OXFAM



Women raking and collecting sea-salt at Kampot.

domestic or financial burden. One woman agonized over how difficult it is now for women in Kampuchea, particularly those who have lost their husbands and parents. Women must live alone and must be totally responsible for their children. There is an unspoken understanding that because so many men have died, men can take more than one wife, and many have. In the words of this Khmer woman, "Relationships have changed very much; families used to be intact and supportive. Husbands and wives were loyal to each other. The men now are not good. They are deceitful and corrupt. They say one thing and do another. We can no longer trust each other."¹²

Many women who come to the hospital for medical consultation suffer from depression, according to medical staff in Prey Veng's provincial hospital.¹³ They attribute this to the trauma of the Khmer Rouge period, the heavy responsibilities weighing on women, loneliness and the lack of marriage prospects for the future. During her research on women in Kampuchea in 1981, Chantou Boua, herself a Kampuchean woman living in Australia, found that:

"In Kampuchea today one often hears widows talking obsessively about their husbands, who were killed by Pol Pot forces. They talk about memories of earlier, happier days, about the dreadful Pol Pot period, about the abduction and killing of their husbands. It seems that, tragically, many women will never forget the moment when their husbands were taken away or were shot or clubbed to death. These traumatic experiences haunt them and some women will never recover...

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KIP WARE/OXFAM



Constructing manhole covers at an open-air workshop in Phnom Penh.

Many women complain of how inefficient they are compared to earlier days. Bosses complain about their absent-minded and day-dreaming female employees. A peasant widow said, 'I do not know what I am doing or thinking everyday, sometimes I forget about the pot of rice on the stove and leave it there to burn'.¹⁴

Today, except for the 'solidarity groups' which offer support to their most vulnerable members, there is almost nothing to help women cope with the emotional and psychological scars. "I just feel a deep sadness and very much alone", said one Phnom Penh women who lost her husband during the Khmer Rouge period. "When I get up in the morning I feel very heavy, like something is pressing on my shoulders. But I cannot talk to anyone. I have no friends. Oh yes, I have friends, but no one to whom I can say what I really feel."¹⁵

An aid worker who participated in the Phnom Penh sanitation survey in 1986 found during house visits that some widows, or women who had no living relatives, lived together for mutual support and because they could not manage on their own.¹⁶

The National Women's Association, which in the early 1980s had a highly political profile, has since 1984 modified its role and become more involved in addressing the problems of women, especially widows and women with limited education and skills. The Women's Association has been active in literacy programmes for women, in providing a number of skills training programmes for them, in organising sewing and

weaving cooperatives, and helping them with income-generating projects such as the digging of fish ponds. They also provide some material assistance and support to women with children, whose husbands are fighting the war.

In view of the heavy burden and problems of women in Kampuchea today, it is disappointing to see the low priority given to programmes specifically geared to women's needs by Kampuchean government institutions and by the international agencies. However, UNICEF has increased its focus on women's programmes and their experience may lead to improvements in this area.

Effects of Isolation

Closely related to the psychological stresses experienced by the Kampuchean people is the sense of isolation they feel. Between 1975 and 1978 it was the Khmer Rouge who initiated a self-imposed isolation. Today, the Association of South East Asian Nations, China and the majority of western governments isolate Kampuchea because of the presence of Vietnamese troops in the country. Most governments ostracize the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh and since it is not recognized in the United Nations there are no diplomatic, and very few cultural or educational exchanges between Kampuchea and any non-communist nation, with the exception of India. The people's access to outside ideas and influence is further limited by the government's own restrictive policies. Consequently, Kampucheans live in a kind of vacuum, not knowing what is going on in the outside world nor sometimes even within their own country.

Inside the country, though communications have improved over the last few years, they are still difficult. People came out of the Khmer Rouge period, having been deprived of news, education and books, with an insatiable hunger for knowledge and reading material. Yet there are few reading materials available. There are no foreign newspapers on sale in Kampuchea. Those the aid agency staff receive are highly coveted.

The country's isolation is a great disadvantage in trading on the international market. The delay in receiving economic data or journals means that they cannot compete with international prices when trading their goods because information is often months out of date.¹⁷ Unbiased news of international affairs is hard to come by but there is a widely read Khmer weekly newspaper which publishes not only information about current activities in Kampuchea and the region but also popular criticisms of the regime.

Perhaps the most cruel aspect of this isolation is that it prevents family reunification and makes communication with relatives abroad extremely difficult. Khmers who lost all documentation and personal mementoes

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during the Pol Pot era have no way of finding the addresses of relatives overseas. Khmers living abroad have no current addresses for their relatives in Kampuchea and often still do not even know whether they are dead or alive. The postal system in Kampuchea is still erratic and unreliable. Many Kampucheans, mindful of the punishment received by those who had associations with the West under the last regime, are today still afraid to admit that they have relatives abroad and in some cases have changed their names, which makes them even more difficult to track down with any mail. Even though some organisations have officially attempted to negotiate reunification programmes with the Kampuchean government, the current climate of international hostility towards Kampuchea drives such efforts to a dead end.

Although to some extent international isolation has strengthened the Kampuchean people and led them to rely more on their own capabilities and resources, it sets a number of obstacles in the path of food self-sufficiency and reconstruction. Because of its isolation, Kampuchea has missed out on the last two decades of developmental experience and research in agriculture, health, appropriate technology and many other fields. Khmers are denied desperately needed training and educational opportunities abroad, although in some cases their own government restrictions prevent them going. Japan, France, the US, the Netherlands and Israel, for example, all had extensive technical agriculture and rice research programmes in Kampuchea before the war. Much of the documentation from that work is presently not available in Kampuchea. Blueprints for buildings, sewers and water systems which were built by foreign companies and which have suffered much damage from the war and lack of maintenance are also hard to come by, as are topographical maps and soil studies needed for irrigation systems or for well-drilling.

Once an integral part of the International Mekong Committee's Development Plan, Kampuchean participation and development assistance has been suspended since 1975. It is also barred from participating in many other international organisations and conferences. However more opportunities have been opening up recently through the aid of NGOs and UNICEF, such as sponsoring women to international women's conferences, or sending Khmer representatives to a sanitation seminar in India. Over the last two years more Kampucheans have been involved in educational trips abroad especially to India and more recently to the Philippines' International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) which could offer Kampuchea much help in restoring the many seed varieties lost during the Khmer Rouge regime and provide valuable and appropriate training.

Educational exchanges are invaluable to Khmer technical and professional staff who have been cut off from outside ideas in their fields

of expertise since the early 1970s. Western aid workers in Kampuchea have found that Khmers return from such trips refreshed and enthusiastic and full of new ideas. One Khmer who returned from a visit to health facilities in India remarked how much more poverty there was in India than in Kampuchea and was very impressed with the self-help preventive health programmes that Indians were managing without external assistance.

Isolation and the embargo on development aid to Kampuchea also prevents the country from obtaining spare parts or repair manuals for equipment provided or purchased before the war from US, Chinese, Korean and other international companies. For example, many badly needed Massey Ferguson tractors stand idle in Battambang province, and Korean pumps in one of Prey Veng's pumping stations were restored by a group of NGOs at a phenomenal expense because replacement parts were unobtainable and had to be made to order.¹⁸

NGO personnel working in Kampuchea feel that even the limited exposure they have with Kampucheans helps to decrease the Khmers' sense of isolation and abandonment, and increases their sense of security and international interest in their welfare. For many Kampucheans the presence of the small number of westerners working in Kampuchea on behalf of aid agencies represents a window to the outside and a glimmer of hope for their country. Several Khmers have told aid workers: "When you [humanitarian organisations] have to leave, it will be a warning that something bad is going to happen to us".

Many of the Khmer officials interviewed felt that the most damaging effect of western-imposed isolation is that it limits the options available to them in determining their future and pushes them to become more dependent on Vietnam and the Soviet Union. "How can we practise self-determination if you [western governments] do not give us any choices?" asked one official. Many western aid workers and visitors to Kampuchea have sensed a real eagerness from Khmers for international relationships and recognition. Many of Kampuchea's educated and technical people were trained abroad in France, China, the US, India, the UK and elsewhere, or were trained by the French in Phnom Penh. Today, they as well as younger people recently trained in the Eastern Bloc, reach out for friendship and assistance from the international agency staff. As Kampuchea's Prime Minister Hun Sen put it, "There are two sides to isolation". It hurts not only Kampuchea but the West as well.

Until there is a commitment to work for a negotiated settlement of the Kampuchean conflict, political games will continue to strangle the hopes of the Khmer people for a country that is once again at peace, independent and neutral.

Chapter 4

A Window to the Outside

"Hardship singles out your true friend."

Khmer Proverb



FRANK JUDD

A Kampuchean team sinking a borehole to provide a safe and convenient water supply for a village near Svay Rieng, 1987.

The role of NGOs in Kampuchea

The political stance taken by a majority of governments and the ban on development aid adopted by the United Nations has meant that NGOs are faced with a near impossible task in Kampuchea. Because it has been denied large scale international aid, the Kampuchean government has had to turn to the NGOs for help with vital infrastructural projects. Under other circumstances this assistance might be more appropriately provided through bilateral government aid or from major multilateral donors and lending institutions like the World Bank.

About 27 NGOs based in Australia, Europe and the US, with about 40 staff based in Phnom Penh provide approximately US\$10 million per year in relief and development assistance to Kampuchea.¹ These NGOs provide material and technical assistance to a diversity of projects such as nutrition centres, the supply of hospital and laboratory equipment, artificial limb workshops, rural and urban water supply, animal vaccination and breeding, sanitation, production of health education materials, sawmills for school reconstruction, irrigation and irrigation pump repair workshops, vegetable and rice research stations, and restoration of various industries. Given their limited resources NGOs have not been able to meet all requests for aid addressed to them such as the rehabilitation of the entire water pipe and sewer system of Phnom Penh, repair of irrigation pumping stations in the various provinces, requests for more fertilizer to improve crop yields, repair of roads and bridges, and the need for more agricultural tools and spare parts for existing machinery. The country has only a few sets of heavy earthmoving equipment for irrigation works and only four sets of well-drilling equipment. Some damaged tractors, bulldozers and irrigation pumps lie unused for lack of spare parts. Some hospitals lack even the most basic chemicals for laboratory tests. The list is interminable.

The less politicized and less cumbersome bureaucracies of NGOs have allowed them to fill crucial gaps in Kampuchea's efforts at recovery by focusing their energies and resources on rehabilitation schemes, which the multilateral organisations, particularly the UN, could not touch because of political constraints. So they have been better able to move in seeds to meet planting deadlines; to assist in the repair of transport systems such as trains and ferries, waterworks, agricultural machinery, industries related to food production such as jute, phosphate and fishing



TOM ARMSTRONG

Two ferries ply across the Mekong at Neak Loeung, a vital link between Phnom Penh and Kampuchea's eastern provinces, and the main route to Ho Chi Minh Ville. NGOs have played an important rôle in providing and helping maintain Kampuchea's ferries. 1986.

net factories, and industries related to health such as pharmaceuticals, cotton factories, and soap. They are able to provide tools and machinery for the training of desperately needed technicians. They have worked together with Kampuchean government institutions to help re-open technical schools such as the Faculty of Medicine, the agricultural colleges and teacher training centres and provide medical personnel for some of the hospitals.

In 1979 the Kampuchea tragedy opened a new chapter in NGO history. It challenged their traditional roles, causing them to reflect and redefine their philosophies and approaches to development work. Most

Punishing the Poor

NGOs found themselves struggling with internal conflicts in the contrast between this role and their more traditional types of activities. Not only were they dealing with aid on a far larger scale than usual, they were handling projects whose size defied their traditional "small scale, grass roots, self help" mandate. Additionally they found themselves working with and through government institutions rather than local organisations and with a socialist government unacceptable to and unrecognised by virtually all western governments.

Although the Kampuchean government shares some responsibility for compromising the effectiveness of aid programmes, the main obstacles to NGOs working in Kampuchea are the policies of their own governments. It is ironic that on the one hand NGOs and UN organisations help to treat the ill and rebuild bridges, and on the other the NGOs' governments support the coalition whose forces continue to kill and injure people in Kampuchea and to disrupt farming activity and efforts to rebuild the country. It is the war which undermines aid programmes more than anything else because it diverts the country's limited human and material resources towards defence purposes and away from reconstruction and meeting basic human needs.

Security problems caused by the opposition forces mean that NGOs can work in only 9 out of 18 provinces where they can travel safely. Some provinces however cannot be reached because of poor road access rather than insecurity. The current international climate of hostility towards Kampuchea may also be partly responsible for the suspicion and restrictions directed at western aid staff by the Kampuchean government, which make travel and social contact with Khmers outside work extremely difficult. The source of many frustrations, this too has an effect on the quality of NGO work. The need for local staff, translation and liaison personnel to attend frequent political meetings and political education courses causes many delays in NGO work, and sometimes affects the efficiency of projects as well.

The nature of NGO programmes in Kampuchea has changed considerably since the 'shopping list' days of the emergency period and points to a more positive trend in aid. The largest budget cuts which affected all multilateral agencies and NGOs after the initial emergency period (1979-1981) compelled the Kampuchean government and NGOs to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the aid given so far and to identify priorities for the future. Today more organisations are involved in longer term rehabilitative projects focusing on self reliance and the maximization of local resources. More NGO programmes now focus on preventive health care and equipment maintenance projects with strong training components (such as irrigation pump maintenance and industrial training programmes). Since 1985 more visas have been

available for western technical staff. For example, of about 70 western staff currently in Phnom Penh with the multilateral agencies and NGOs, half that number are specialists involved in technical training, and 22 of them are working directly out in the provinces and villages.

Western allegations of misappropriation of aid by the Kampuchean government and Vietnam are largely unfounded, on the basis of the experience of most western aid officials.² Although there has been some difficulty in monitoring large bulk shipments of food aid sent in under the World Food Programme, and while some donated medicines may find their way to the market, most agencies have the opportunity to see that aid reaches those for whom it is intended. However, the Kampuchean government could make the NGO's work easier by allowing more accessibility to project sites and more frequent monitoring opportunities.

The situation in Kampuchea has highlighted the need for NGOs to communicate their experience. They provide a window to the outside world to inform and educate the international community about the needs and achievements of the Khmer people, and to counter unfounded allegations spread by those opposing the Kampuchean government. The NGO presence in the country also provides links to other channels of assistance and resources outside Kampuchea and helps support those people in the administration who sincerely want to assist their people but who have too few resources to do so. An NGO presence is important to bear witness to the consequences of western support at the UN for the Khmer Rouge-dominated coalition and to provide a voice for the Khmer people.

Seven million Kampucheans are being denied the right to development and many are suffering directly because of the decisions taken by China, ASEAN and western nations.

