

# Case Study of Grassroots Peacebuilding

## by PADEK, Siem Reap, Cambodia

**Kannaro KEP, Sarik HENG, Sokunthea SOK, Sokha EM (PADEK)  
Shiori UI, Melisanda BERKOWITZ (Asian Health Institute)**

### 1. Introduction

Through this research, Partnership for Development in Kampuchea (PADEK), with Asian Health Institute (AHI), a Japanese NGO, aimed to document the experiences of communities where PADEK has been working to build trust and peace, conflict resolution and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. In particular, this research sought to reflect with community people on changes they observed in their lives, including changes due to community development and health activities, to revisit their concept of peace, and to review PADEK's work on trust and peacebuilding.

Cambodia experienced over two decades of internal civil war since the late 1960s and three and half years of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. Due to this prolonged conflict, Cambodia became a low trust society as people lost confidence and trust within the family and in the community as a whole. Recovering trust and confidence remains a key to reconstruction and development of Cambodia.

In contributing to restore trust and confidence, PADEK integrated a peacebuilding component into its community development model by establishing a Conflict Resolution Committee (CRC) in each target commune. This peace building project as part of the development program of PADEK focuses on facilitating out of court dispute resolution for minor conflicts.

Research was conducted between December 2010 and March 2012 by PADEK staff in three project area communities in Siem Reap Province, using focus group discussions, individual interviews and community consultation meetings. Respondents reported overall positive improvements in their lives since the end of armed conflict, and argued that concrete indicators of a peaceful community include not only lack of war, but also access to basic livelihood, health and education, human rights, and methods of resolving disputes peacefully.

### 2. Background

#### 2.1. Cambodia and its History of Conflict

Cambodia experienced a bitter civil war and internal conflict over three decades since the late 1960s. Internationally, it is considered that peace was attained after the Paris Peace Accord in 1991 and UN supervised general election in 1993. However, internal armed conflicts still continued. In general, people in Cambodia perceived peace prevailed only in 1998 when the last of Khmer Rouge soldiers surrendered to the government (Boua, 2002).

Under the Khmer Rouge Regime (1975-1979) one out of five Cambodians lost their lives due to overwork, malnutrition, sickness, and direct execution by the Khmer Rouge. Even neighbors and family members were forced

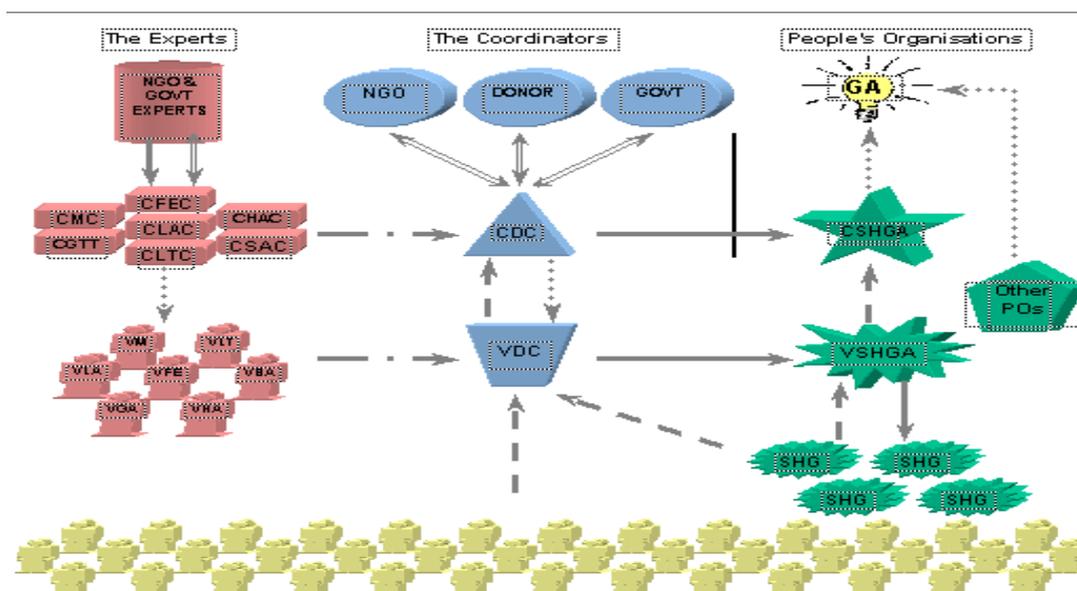
to inform against one another, destroying trust in the most basic relationships (Meas,1995; Pran, 1997; Ui 1993, 2007). Further challenges include a legacy of corruption, lack of an independent judicial system, and lack of leadership to guide social moral values. Distrust within government sectors and among the people, the government, and civil society makes Cambodian society unstable and susceptible to violence.

One basic cause of this mistrust, especially at the grassroots, is lack of appropriate venues for discussion or expression of discontent in order to address grievances. Combined with Cambodians’ poor ability to express themselves and poor education, this produces fertile ground for violent outbursts. Further, the official judicial system is costly, time-consuming, and is often seen to favor the powerful.

**2. 2. Profile of PADEK and its Strategies**

PADEK was established in 1986 by a consortium of 5 international aid agencies, and in 2008 PADEK was registered as a local NGO. It works with local community groups in rural and urban areas to manage and coordinate resources for development, with the aim of strengthening grassroots civil society organizations and linking them to government and other sectors. After initial years of emergency and rehabilitation work, PADEK focused on agriculture and food security. From the late 1990s, following its Integrated Community Development Model (PICDM), PADEK has aimed to establish three development actors in each working area: People’s Organizations composed of self-help groups (SHG), Development Coordinators composed of Village and Commune Development Committee (VDC and CDC) and various Expert Groups/Committees or local resource persons with specific knowledge and skills serving the community as volunteers (PADEK 2005, 2009). (See Figure 1)

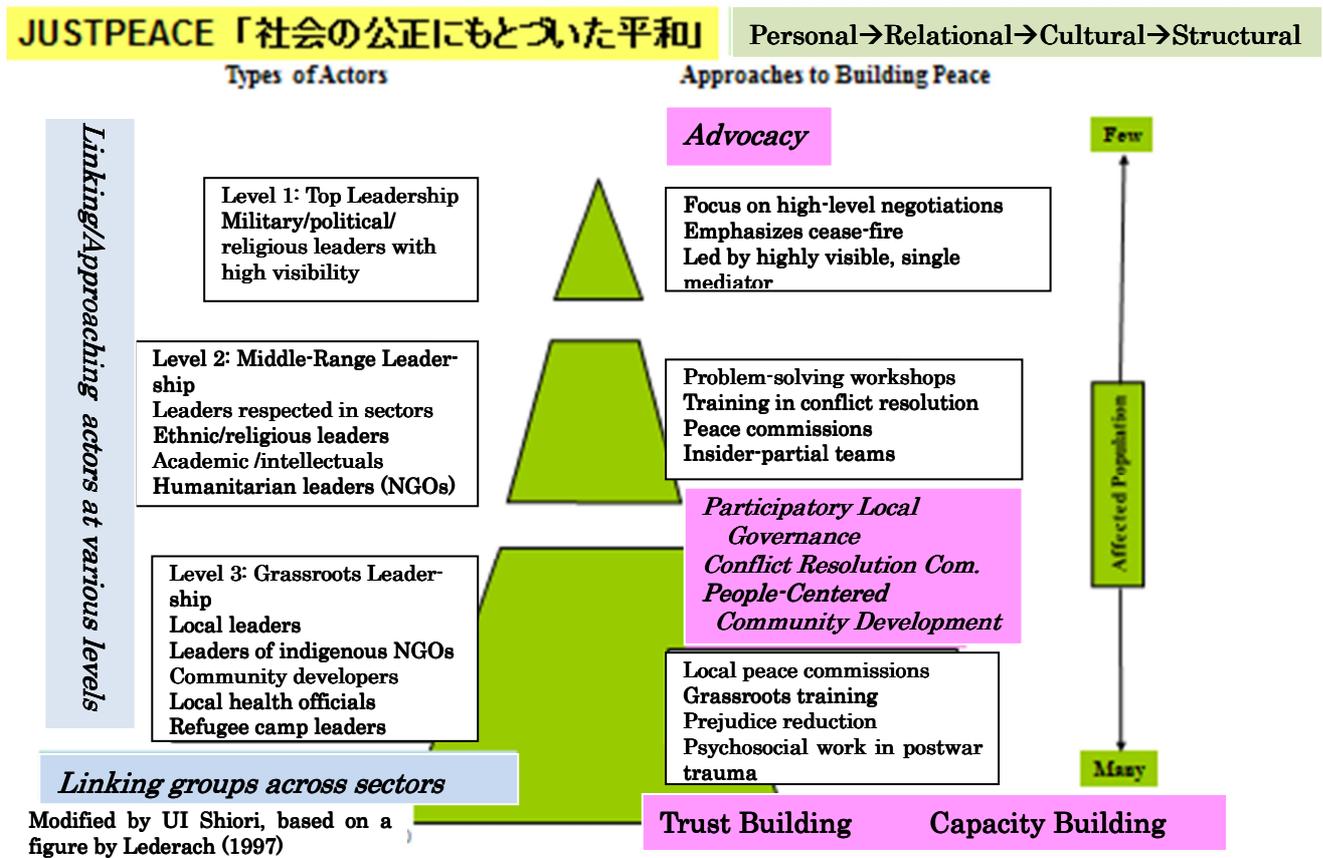
Figure 1. PADEK Integrated Community Development Model



Though community-level capacity building and empowerment through organization is a pre-condition for achieving justice, or peace with justice, it is also essential to engage government as many conflicts are beyond

the control of local communities. This is especially critical in post-conflict countries such as Cambodia where the government is still fragile and its functions are weak. A parallel approach for capacity and trust building at various levels of the government is necessary. In collaboration with wider civil society networks PADEK is involved in policy advocacy at the higher levels to tackle structural causes of conflict, such as misdistribution of resources and power. Figure 2, modified from Lederach (1997) summarizes PADEK’s conceptual framework for multi-sector peacebuilding.

Figure 2. Multi-Sector and Multi-Level Approach



Although higher level peacebuilding is also essential, the current research focuses on PADEK's work at village and commune level. At the village level, PADEK starts working by organizing small groups of 10-20 members called Self Help Groups (SHGs). The SHG helps the poor as a saving and credit group as well as being a small forum for members to express their opinions, to talk about the past, and to discuss their past and present problems. In order to solve the problems discussed in the SHGs, expert volunteers for each issue (such as livestock raising, health and agriculture) are selected and trained by PADEK. These expert volunteers then share their practical knowledge and skills with the SHGs. Representatives elected among SHG members organize a Village Development Committee (VDC) which handles development in the village including planning and resources mobilization. Likewise, the expert volunteer groups at the village level form commune expert committees,

including the *Commune Conflict Resolution Committee (CCRC)*.

The CCRC focuses on peace-building and solving conflict in creative ways. Its role is to engage in conflict prevention, resolution, and trust building through regular dialogue with stakeholders. In each commune, a CRC is established with 6 members from the community -- usually 3 from local authorities at village and commune level, and 3 from the community level (such as people’s organization leaders, elders, and heads of monks in the pagoda for example). Women are also encouraged to join and bring actual cases to the CRC. The CRC members receive training by PADEK on identifying causes of conflict, how to engage parties in conflict resolution, and to establish options for solving conflicts peacefully. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Topics of Conflict Resolution Training for CRC<sup>1</sup>

<p>1. Introduction to conflict</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is conflict?</li> <li>- Definition of conflict</li> <li>- Identify causes of conflict by using Square formula</li> </ul> <p>2. Root causes of conflict</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interpersonal communication</li> <li>- Prejudice</li> <li>- Perception</li> <li>- Suspicion /Mistrust</li> <li>- Discrimination</li> <li>- Stereotype</li> <li>- Power and Powerlessness</li> </ul>	<p>3. Analysis of conflict</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why we need to analyze conflict?</li> <li>- Tools for analysis</li> <li>- Stages of conflict</li> <li>- ABC Triangle</li> <li>- Mapping</li> <li>- Timeline</li> </ul> <p>4. Conflict Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negotiation</li> <li>- Mediation</li> <li>- Arbitration</li> </ul>
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Their main roles are to assist people in the community to solve disputes by using win-win methods outside the court system. The CCRC seeks ways to build trust between people, local authorities and other relevant bodies. Through the CCRC model, PADEK is therefore helping to educate people to build peace at the grassroots level.

### 3. Research outline

#### 3.1. Profiles of Research Sites

Research was conducted in 3 communes in 2 districts in the north-west of Siem Reap Province: Prasat Commune and Svay Sar Commune in Varin District, and Tasom Commune in Angkor Chum District<sup>2</sup>. (See Map 1) While armed conflict ended in most parts of Cambodia in the early 1990’s, fighting between the State of Cambodia, Khmer Rouge soldiers and paramilitary/supporters of US-backed groups continued in this area until 1998. Development assistance started only after 1999 when the areas were fully integrated under the government.

PADEK started working in Varin District in 2004 and Angkor Chum District in 2007 to address the livelihood needs of the community. During a community study PADEK identified many causes of poverty

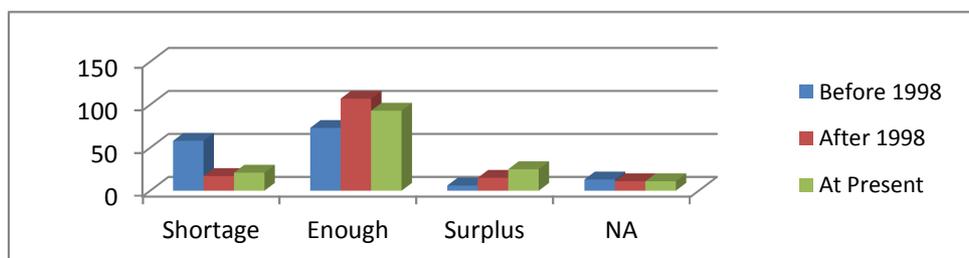
<sup>1</sup> PADEK training curriculum on Conflict Resolution at the community level

<sup>2</sup>Prasat Commune is composed of 5 villages (population of 4,000), Svay Sar Commune is composed of 6 villages (population of 4,600), and Tasom Commune is composed of 13 villages (population of 9,200). These areas are predominantly Buddhist and almost 95% of the population are rice farmers.



As most of the respondents are rice farmers, their first concern is rice productivity and food sufficiency. The number of people facing food shortages has substantially decreased (Figure 3). A slight increase of food shortage at present was, according to the respondents, due to recent frequent flooding and droughts.

Figure 3. Year Round Food Sufficiency



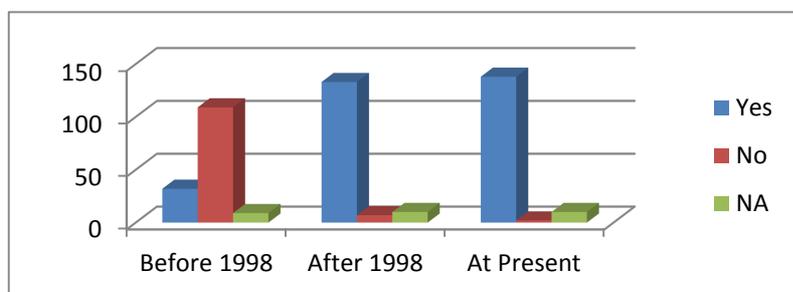
Since 1998 the main reason for more adequate food supply is more local involvement in agriculture, especially now that landmines have been removed. Some people have also benefited from their Village Rice Bank program: “We can borrow rice from one another in the group.”

Rice productivity has also increased due to the introduction of new agricultural techniques, largely thanks to NGOs like PADEK. While most people still learn farming from their elders, at present, more than half of respondents also reported learning techniques from NGOs. Even after the war officially ended, while the area did not receive government assistance, PADEK responded to people’s needs by providing agricultural training to village volunteers.

- Education

Most interviewees were concerned about their children’s education and perceived very clear improvement in educational opportunities. Before 1998 children had less chance to go to school with no safe school building or teachers available. After 1998 and up to the present, most children go to school. (See Figure 4)

Figure 4. Children Going to School



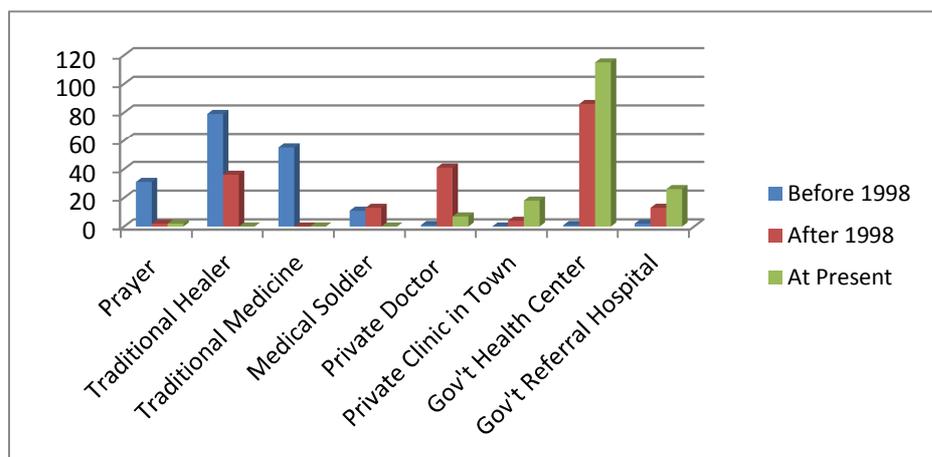
Further, government, NGOs and communities have collaborated to improve access to education. Together they have raised funds for school buildings through local temple events. Some respondents also mentioned that

Parents Teachers Association (formed with assistance from NGOs) had motivated parents to get involved and helped children of poor families to attend school free.

- Health

The respondents mentioned that they often suffer from common ailments such as headache, fever, respiratory diseases and high blood pressure, while others need care for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Treatment was from a variety of people or places as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Management of Health Problems



The survey results showed a clear shift from using non-biomedical, non-trained healers (traditional medicines and healers, or soldiers with experience but little formal training in curative care) towards seeking services at public health centers, hospitals and some private doctors. However, during the community reporting meetings, some participants noted that villagers still often seek help from traditional healers before going to formal health care providers.

Recently, a government referral hospital was newly built and health services are provided more regularly. Before, fighting hindered health personnel, and supplies and medicines were very limited. Now, government has also introduced a mechanism for people’s participation in health center and hospital management. Many CBO and village leaders trained by PADEK serve as health volunteers and participate in those health committees.

Although government health services have improved, cost is a big concern and a major cause of debt or severe poverty, especially in cases requiring long-term hospitalization. Nevertheless, in general respondents reported that people are now more knowledgeable on health care thanks to their health volunteers, NGOs and health centers, and more people have clean water and use mosquito nets at night.<sup>4</sup>

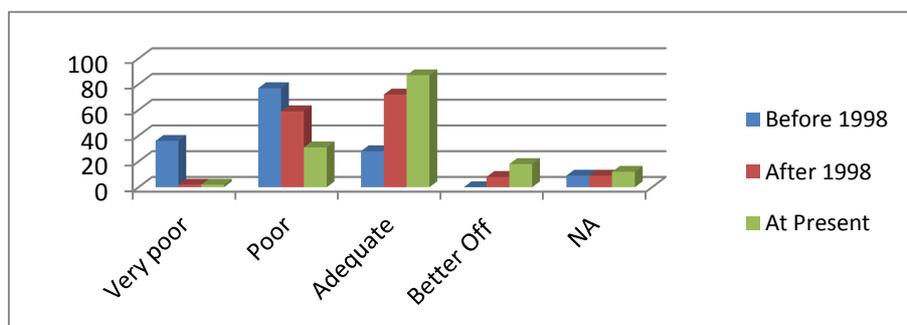
- Livelihood in General

Most respondents reported a gradual improvement in their overall livelihood, although in a few cases respondents felt poorer due to, for example, their husband’s drinking and lack of work. (See Figure 6) The main

<sup>4</sup> Toilet usage is still limited to one-third of respondents.

reasons given for this positive change included: no war, farming with new techniques, more travelling rights, increased opportunities for other business, better education and health. The respondents have also learned how to save and plan for their future needs through the rice bank and self-help groups.

Figure 6. Changes in Livelihood



#### 4.2. Conflict Resolution

- Occurrences of Conflicts in Own Village

The respondents reported a decrease in observing conflict in their villages, from 89% (before 1998) to 67% (in 2010). They identified various causes of conflicts, from individual behaviors (such as drinking, gambling, laziness and jealousy) to wider socio-economic issues (such as low education, no jobs, poverty, land and asset disputes, discrimination, and unequal share of interests in organization).

- Changes in Conflict Resolution Methods

Traditionally, parents or elders respected by the community acted as counselors to resolve conflicts. The elder in the community, usually a man, was considered a good person whom everyone could relate with. Teaching values based on Buddhist beliefs, elders aimed to change personal attitudes and behaviors (Hughes, 2002).

However, during the Pol Pot Regime, such tradition was totally abolished. Anyone who did not follow the rules set by *Onkar*, a shadowy revolutionary committee, was exterminated by local Khmer Rouge leaders (sometimes child soldiers) without discussion or trial.

Now PADEK is helping villagers set up Conflict Resolution Committees (CRCs) with trained persons based on the traditional method. Respecting the elders’ roles in the community, a group of mediators educates community people on laws and human rights. These mediators are trained on conflict analysis, resolution and prevention. People also try to solve conflicts in self-help groups, when the problems are still small scale, consulting other members and asking for help outside their immediate family. Only when problems are not solved in the self-help group, they seek assistance from village leaders or village level conflict resolution experts (volunteers). If necessary, they approach the commune level Conflict Resolution Committee (CCRC). People prefer not to bring the issues to the police or official legal system.

In the previous traditional way, individuals consulted elders for advice and mediation. Now there are more alternatives. PADEK members have their own groups to consult, or they can bring the issue to CRC. More persons

are involved with multiple views. Further, instead of seeing the issue as a personal matter, the CRC takes it up as a common concern to prevent recurrence in the community.

- **Opinions on Different Methods of Conflict Resolution**

Respondents expressed their opinions, both strengths and weaknesses of alternative conflict solving method, which is a new way introduced by PADEK based on traditional practice, and official conflict solving method through existing judicial system.

Most of them had negative views of the judicial system, because of time, cost, and “the rich always win after all.” They also felt that by bringing an issue to court, the parties break their relationship for life. Nevertheless, some appreciated that courts provide a clear outcome and clear contract documents.

Regarding the alternative methods, most of their views were positive, for three main reasons. First, it is less costly than courts. Second, many persons participate in discussion for solution. Third, since there are no clear winners and losers, the parties can maintain relations. However, some respondents felt that because there is no clear winner or loser with clear legal agreements, the conflict could recur.

### **4.3. Respondents’ Definitions of a Peaceful Community**

Responding to the questions, “What is peaceful community?” and “What are concrete indicators of a peaceful community?” villagers noted the following points. First, the majority mentioned “no war or no violence.” Second, many spoke of basic infrastructure and services such as schools, hospitals, houses, and basic needs such as food, health, and income. Many also noted knowledge and children going to school, good environmental protection, freedom from domestic violence, protection of local authority, and freedom of speech (especially related to political party affiliation) as indicators of peace. “Solidarity among people” and “sharing experiences for progress among groups” were also noted as indicators of a peaceful community.

Respondents’ opinions were divided on whether their community was peaceful at present. Some answered yes, citing the following reasons: no war, no starvation, people have skills for income generation, protection by police or local authority, and good relationships between community people and local authority.

Those who answered “No” or “Not yet” cited violence at family and individual levels up to community, and wider social problems: robbery, domestic violence, not enough food for some, low education, lack of knowledge and obedience to law, land conflict, pressure from powerful people, lack of human rights, lack of participation in community, and lack of solidarity among people

In response to the question, “What needs to be changed or improved in order to build peaceful community?” respondents noted points ranging from individual behaviors, to development efforts, human rights and social justice: Stop drinking and corruption, allow children to go to school, more development activities such as improving irrigation system and providing technical training for income generation, educate people on health, human rights, laws and violence prevention, prevent people misusing their power, and enhance good cooperation with local authorities.

During the community reporting meetings, some respondents said their views of “peaceful community” had broadened after hearing other people’s ideas. That is, during the interview they said that yes, the community was

peaceful because the armed conflict had ended, but after hearing more ideas they wished to change their answers to “No, not yet.” They agreed that their villages still have conflicts in terms of domestic violence, land disputes, lack of cooperation among villagers, and school dropout. Dialogue broadened their understanding of peace and peace building. They realized that remaining issues to make their villages more peaceful were livelihood improvement, work toward self-reliance, education, protection of human rights and environment, and realization of social justice.

#### **4.4. Cases of Conflict Solving by the Community**

##### **Case 1: Relationship between the Husband and Wife in Prasat Commune, Varin District<sup>5</sup>**

Mr. Chhoen Kaing (62 years old) lives in Prasat Village. Before 1983 Mr. Kaing was a common villager, but after 1983 he has served as a leader of his community and is now the chief of the commune council (from 2002 to present).

Mr. Kaing often assists people in solving conflicts. He recently successfully mediated one case of domestic violence between a couple, where he intervened three times in the conflict. Mr. Kaing and the other five committee members (a primary school principal, a village elder man, a temple elder, a people’s organization leader, and a village chief) all sat down together at the couple’s house. Their intervention included discussions by the mediator on the concept of “good and bad” in Buddhism -- good is that both husband and wife assist with family tasks, especially for earning money, working on rice fields, and taking care of their children; while bad means doing wrong to somebody, causing conflicts and unhappiness, uncomfortable feelings, and dishonor. Three days later, Mr. Kaing also invited more people to discuss and help the couple settle the conflict (two self-help group leaders and a clerk from commune council). According to Mr. Kaing, both wife and husband decided to live together after more discussions. The clerk made an official letter of agreement, one to keep in the commune council office and one copy for the wife. After two months, Mr. Kaing followed up on this case and found that the couple was living happily together.

Mr. Kaing learned conflict resolution methods from PADEK and another NGO. Before receiving such training, Mr. Kaing used to talk about laws and explained to the conflict parties to solve the problem according to laws. After the training, he tries to listen to the persons in conflict and give more advice for reaching mutual understanding and agreement without talking about laws. Up to now, there has been only one case, a land dispute that could not be mediated and had to be sent to the court. Mr. Kaing clearly explained his role: “I am not the person to decide for them. I just educate people and mobilize more people to help.”

##### **Case 2: Domestic Violence in Tasom Commune, Angkor Chum District.**

*(Village level and Commune level Conflict Resolution Committees set up by PADEK.)*

Ms. Ream Pi (53 years old) is an active village health volunteer in Bram Domloeng Village. Once armed conflict ended in her area in 1998, some NGOs including PADEK started working in Bram Domloeng Village, and Ms. Pi joined several of their short training courses. In 2007 she was elected a vice chief of village and appointed in

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<sup>5</sup> There was no official conflict resolution committee in Prasat Commune, but under the leadership of Mr. Kaing they formed a group of people to solve conflicts in the commune after receiving training from PADEK on conflict resolution.

charge of health promotion. She educated villagers on sanitation, birth spacing, and other health issues, and also became a member of the Conflict Resolution Committee, where she participated in eight cases of alternative dispute resolution.

In one case, Ms. Pi helped Ms. Champa with her husband, who drank, beat her and did not work. Three committee members at the village level (village chief, deputy chief and Ms. Pi herself) went and helped Ms. Champa. They met twice with Ms. Champa and her husband. The second time the committee invited the couple's parents to sit together. The couple was advised to think about their children, and was reminded of the costs of court divorce. In the end, the husband came back to live with his wife and the village chief made an official letter of agreement between the two parties. Ms. Pi regularly follows up this case, and the problems have not recurred.

Domestic violence was also addressed by a commune gender training team which has mainstreamed issues of domestic violence and gender equality. Ms. Pi says, "Nowadays, I am very happy because I have enough food to eat, money for treating health, and time for doing business. I am living with family and helping other people." She feels good about the changes in her community.

### **Case 3: Burning Neighbor's Watermelon Field in Tasom Commune, Angkor Chum District.**

Mr. Chum Chha (43 years old) is the village chief of Bram Domloeng Village and a member of his local CCRC. Mr. Chha attended training courses on conflict resolution organized by PADEK, and is often invited to assist in mediation in his commune.

One conflict Mr. Chha helped mediate was after Mr. Sok complained that his watermelon field was burned by Mr. Chea. Mr. Chha invited all CCRC members (six members including commune and village chiefs, vice village chief, and three representatives of villagers) to meet with the conflict parties, observe the situation and estimate the damage. Later on, Mr. Chha negotiated with the parties about payment. Through discussion, it emerged that the fire had been an accident as Mr. Chea only wanted to burn his own rice field. CCRC negotiated with Mr. Sok to lower his price. A compromise was reached, and the parties maintained positive relations.

## **5. Conclusion and Lessons Learned**

The study investigated general changes in the lives of villagers from the conflict period to the present, their definitions of a peaceful community, and their views on PADEK's alternative conflict resolution methods. First, survey results showed that despite continuing problems, livelihood, health and education have improved significantly since the end of armed conflict in the area. Second, respondents' indicators of peaceful community included not only absence of war, but also basic needs such as food, health and education, as well as human rights and social justice. Third, both the survey and in-depth interviews suggest that the out-of-court conflict resolution methods promoted by PADEK are successfully resolving minor conflicts, and thus contributing to grassroots peacebuilding

Peace cannot be realized when people lack basic needs. However, fulfillment of those needs is not sufficient for genuine peace, because, as the villagers expressed, peace is not merely absence of war, but involves wider aspects of social development with justice. In that sense, Cambodia is still facing conflict and is still in the process of peacebuilding. Grassroots peacebuilding and conflict resolution should be integrated into community activities

not only during or in the post-conflict period, but also at times without armed conflict.

While top level leaders and systems change, Cambodian villagers stay on their land. Establishing stronger people's organizations starting with their urgent common needs serves as a stable base for lasting development and peacebuilding. In the process of problem solving for their common goals, group members build confidence and trust in themselves and one another. Introducing an integrated peacebuilding program into this base is effective and sustainable.

As part of the research process, we shared preliminary results in feedback meetings in each commune. Villagers left the meetings with evident satisfaction, happy to know positive changes were indeed occurring in their villages. They deepened their understanding of their own communities by comparing their personal impressions and the results of the PADEK research. For PADEK staff members, it was also a valuable opportunity to analyze, document, and share our work on grassroots peacebuilding.

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