

One Cambodian Community's Struggle with Development

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Introduction

In August 2005, my son and I spent one week in Russey Krang, a rural Cambodian commune. Several months earlier I had learned about the needs of this commune through Nabuur.com, a Dutch non-governmental organization that links volunteers with poor communities throughout the world.

Cambodia and Laos are the two poorest countries in Southeast Asia. Approximately 40% of the Cambodian population lives below the poverty level. In addition, the per capita GDP is roughly US \$260; only 10% of the roads are paved; life expectancy is roughly 54 years; the illiteracy rate is 31%; less than 30% of the population has access to potable water; the infant mortality rate is 9%; and almost 50% of children under age five suffer from malnutrition.

Russey Krang is located in the Tonle Sap Lake region, which is the poorest part of Cambodia. The annual per capita GDP in this region is low even by Cambodian standards, only US \$150, which is roughly 60% below the international poverty line of one dollar per day.¹

During our stay in Russey Krang, I trained 30 villagers interested in learning how to develop a business plan. Most of the students were in their early 20s and were members of a community youth group. The rest of the students were village elders. Virtually all of the students were subsistence farmers, who were trying to eke out a living despite a persistent drought that had lasted almost three years.

Prior to the training, I had little information about the participants. I knew that all of them were literate, but I was unsure about their degree of interest in business planning, their intellectual curiosity, or their level of skepticism about being instructed by a foreign teacher. However, the most important issue for me was communication. I was not so much concerned about the fact that I had to communicate through an interpreter, but rather concerned about our radically different frames of reference. Would I be able to communicate effectively with traditional people from a remote part of the world?

I formulated my lesson plan as a result of a series of e-mail exchanges with a local area resident, Sa Kimsorn, Nabuur's representative in Russey Krang. I had initially planned to introduce the villagers to the basic elements of business planning—not knowing exactly what types of business they wanted to start up. During the course of the first day of training, a consensus formed in the class that they wanted to develop a business plan for a small ecotourist resort that would be run collectively. In turn, I agreed that I would serve as a technical advisor to the project as long as necessary.

In this article, I will explain the motivation for launching such an ambitious project. However, first I will describe the significant hurdles that they face, including their struggle with a lack of capital, a paucity of technical capacity and a non-existent infrastructure; reviving an economy ravaged by the maniacal Khmer Rouge regime during the mid to late 1970s; surviving an almost 20 year civil war in which the people of Russey Krang were situated on its front line; and coping with the lure and pressures of globalization.

Obstacles to Development

Getting by with a Lack of Capital, a Paucity of Technical Capacity and a Non-Existent Infrastructure

Poor communities throughout the world are beset by a lack of capital.² Russey Krang is no exception. What little accumulated money the farmers in this area had saved prior to 1975 was largely eliminated when the Khmer Rouge took power and outlawed private property. As a result, people in the rural areas of Cambodia continue to struggle to survive. To this day many people in the area are either homeless or without a spouse, thus making their survival that much more tentative.

With an average annual income of US \$150, most people lie outside the cash economy. They are subsistence farmers and will undoubtedly remain that way unless they receive aid from family outside of Cambodia or move to the cities themselves. There are local moneylenders, but their interest rates are exorbitant. One commune leader told me that the average interest rate for loans is prohibitively expensive at seven to ten percent per month.

Although most of the population engages in subsistence farming, they lack agricultural skills. In a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis that I conducted with my class, participants frequently mentioned that they lacked an understanding of agricultural techniques. This is borne out by the literature. There has been no significant improvement in rice production in Cambodia in the past forty years.³ One author noted:

However, 98% of the farmers have the practice of saving their seeds and only changing their varieties once in every 4–5 years. These seeds saved by the local farmers are characterized by inferior physical qualities with germination being as low as 50%. With rice being the most important staple food of the country, the low levels of production have in effect led to the majority of Cambodia's arable land being used to cultivate rice.⁴

Furthermore, most villagers in Russey Krang have an elementary school education at best. There is no high school in Russey Krang. The nearest high school is about 15 miles away in Moung Russey, the district's main town, and that school lacks a dormitory. With limited access to any motorized transportation, few attend high school. Their educational standard, however, is not that different than most Cambodians. Nationwide less than 1% of elementary school teachers have completed their secondary education and roughly 60% of all teachers have only eight years of education.⁵

Not surprisingly, infrastructure is also lacking country-wide. The Central Intelligence Agency's *Factbook* on Cambodia states quite bluntly: "The population lacks education and productive skills, particularly in the poverty-ridden countryside, which suffers from almost a total lack of basic infrastructure."⁶

Recovering from Civil War

The Khmer Rouge regime was perhaps the most brutal regime in the 20th Century. In their efforts to revive the ancient kingdom of Angkor, the Khmer Rouge regime managed to devastate Cambodia in less than four years. Undoubtedly, thousands died as a result of assassination; however, the vast majority died from starvation or simply being worked to death.⁷ Within a day of conquering the capital Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge forced all residents to leave the city, which for thousands of people was a death march. Their intention was to revive Angkor's power by increasing agricultural production and in so doing stand up to their erstwhile enemy, the Vietnamese. Like the Chinese, they were trying to achieve a "great leap forward," but they significantly outdid the Chinese in their brutality. Cambodia was a country laid waste until the Vietnamese invaded in 1979 toppling a severely weakened state. The Vietnamese occupied the country until 1989 and still maintain influence over the country's president Hun Sen. To this day, they also have consulates in Cambodia's major towns, which some of my interviewees maintained, to their dismay, were in place primarily to gather intelligence.

The country's devastation did not end with the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. The Khmer Rouge retreated to the northeastern part of the country and fought a guerilla war for almost twenty years. They financed their war in two ways: with profits from the mining of rubies and with military aid primarily from China, who were assisted by the Thais, who provided logistical support. During the war, China shipped arms to Thai ports and the Thai military transported these weapons to the Khmer Rouge through the Thai-Cambodian border.⁸ China's aid ended in 1991. Nevertheless, after the aid cutoff from China, the Khmer Rouge continued to receive some support from factions within the Thai military.⁹ On the diplomatic front, an anti-Hanoi coalition in the United Nations composed of the United States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China

kept the Cambodian seat in the United Nations in the hands of the Khmer Rouge.¹⁰

As I noted previously, Russey Krang was located on the frontlines of the fighting between the government and the Khmer Rouge. Residents reported to me that virtually every night during the civil war they could hear gunfire or see fires caused by artillery shells. According to residents, the Khmer Rouge would frequently randomly lob artillery into government-held areas, presumably in an attempt to terrorize the population. This was a guerilla war, largely a war of attrition, but occasionally large battles were fought, including some in the vicinity of Russey Krang.

Despite the end of the civil war, the war's legacy continues to live on. Experts on Cambodia estimate that anywhere from one million to six million unexploded land mines still exist in the country. Although I observed very few people who were physically scarred, one author claims that one-third of rural residents have lost a limb.¹¹ These unexploded land mines remain primarily concentrated in areas that were contested during the civil war. Thus, Russey Krang is once again disadvantaged, even when compared to Cambodia's broader population.

One source estimates that roughly two-thirds of Phnom Penh residents own guns.¹² Furthermore, hotel staff routinely remind guests that they must check their guns at the front desk. Cambodia remains heavily armed—perhaps as insurance in the event that a Khmer Rouge-like regime once again attains power in the country.

Aside from the devastation caused by four years of Khmer Rouge rule and an almost 20-year civil war, the residents of this area undoubtedly continue to suffer psychologically from the conflict. I was especially moved when I interviewed five women, each of whom had lost a husband to the Khmer Rouge. (Aside from the emotional hurt the killing of their husbands caused, these women were also economically disadvantaged. Two of them were both homeless and lacked any means of support, outside of the kindness of their only slightly more affluent friends.) Indeed, the incidence of post-traumatic stress and other mental disorders among Cambodians is very high and it is undoubtedly even higher in areas that were located on the frontlines of the civil war.¹³ Unfortunately, given the poverty of the area, post-traumatic stress disorder remains untreated in the area.

Several memoirs document the horrors of life in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, which undoubtedly affects survivors to this day. For example, Sameth May writes:

Starvation, hard labour and terror were the normal circumstances of my life. My experiences were no different from those of my family and friends. Any of us could tell the same story. But unlike so many of us I managed to survive. The revolution forced me to become a liar, a thief, a smuggler, a classical dancer, a refugee and finally a stateless person.¹⁴

In another harrowing story, Nya Srey reports:

My third son lost his sight to the Communists, and the soldiers beat one of my sons so badly with bamboo poles that he still has scars. I too was once beaten by a woman boss. I felt very angry and revengeful then, but there was nothing I could do; I didn't want to be killed. All I knew was I didn't want to die, like my sister.¹⁵

Niseth, a former college student, states:

I never thought I would die of starvation, because even though we didn't get enough to eat, we had more food than my parents. My biggest fear was that the Communists might discover that our dad had been a government worker, and kill all of us. I often thought they suspected him, but they couldn't be sure because Dad was dark-skinned like the farmers. Furthermore from the beginning of the Khmer Rouge rule, Dad changed his name, and told the soldiers that although he lived in the city, he had worked as a shoemaker. He told us to change our ways too.¹⁶

Another survivor writes:

My mother loved the teachings and the ceremonies that went with being a Buddhist in Cambodia. Now the inner peace and serenity Buddhism teaches its adherents was often the only haven she found in the raging storm tearing asunder the life she had known. She did not fear death. In fact, it would have been a welcome relief, but she knew that her existence was all that kept me from giving up.¹⁷

Unlike South Africa, Cambodia has, to date, had no truth and reconciliation commission to help heal the wounds of war. Instead, the conflict was resolved when parts of the Khmer Rouge military were incorporated into the Cambodian military and some Khmer Rouge leaders were given limited suzerainty over ruby-rich areas near the Thai border that they controlled during the civil war.¹⁸ In most peoples' minds, national reconciliation has not been achieved.¹⁹ The longstanding conflict remains an open sore. One Cambodian noted:

Talks of a tribunal stirred strong feelings of revenge against or a desire for punishment of the Khmer Rouge in many ordinary Cambodians. Yet many of these former Khmer Rouge leaders still feel proud of their role in what they perceive as the just cause of liberating the poor masses of Cambodia.

Despite these concerns, in order for our society to stabilize and move forward, and for all the people

to develop their full potential, we felt we must work together. Our society faces the difficult issue of how to deal with our past. This must be discussed in public, there should be dialogue.²⁰

The membership of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which traces its origins to the same conference in 1951 that launched the Khmer Rouge, is clearly ambivalent about trying former Khmer Rouge leaders before a tribunal. Indeed, most of the senior leadership of the CPP were at one time low to mid-level functionaries of the Khmer Rouge.²¹ Nevertheless, as of May 2006, the Cambodian government began appointing judges to preside over the trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders. However, some of those judges named were criticized by local NGOs, which evoked harsh criticism from Cambodia's leader Hun Sen.²²

Although Cambodia has held several national elections since 1993, Francis Fukuyama has described the democratization process there as being premature.²³ Indeed, Evan Gottesman has described Cambodia's political system as "a tenuous compact among competing patronage systems."²⁴ Although subsequent elections have been held, Cambodia remains an authoritarian state run by Hun Sen, who staged a coup in 1997 and since then has jailed, bought off and/or intimidated his political opponents.

Recently, in 2005 opposition leader Sam Rainsy had his parliamentary immunity revoked when he claimed that Hun Sen was responsible for the death of some of his followers during a peaceful demonstration in 1997. Upon the revocation of his immunity, Rainsy fled the country and was convicted by a Cambodian court in absentia of defamation, a conviction that carried an 18-month sentence. In February 2006, Rainsy apologized for his remarks about Hun Sen and with the compliance of the Cambodian courts and the granting of a pardon from King Sihamoni the so-called defamation charges against Rainsy were dropped and he returned to Cambodia.

Furthermore, in 2005 five activists were jailed for criticizing a border agreement that Hun Sen signed with Vietnam. These five activists were freed from jail shortly after they also apologized for their criticism of Hun Sen.

In 2004, the FUNCINPEC, the royalist party and one of the country's three dominant political parties, allied themselves with the ruling CPP and formed a government. FUNCINPEC is no longer a serious opposition party and Sam Rainsy charged that Price Ramarindh, the leader of FUNCINPEC received \$25 million in bribes to create the coalition.

Coping with Globalization

Given the difficult conditions in the countryside, it is not surprising that many rural Cambodians are flocking to the cities, specifically Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, a town near AngkorWat. As in much of the Third World, the lure of the city and the Westernizing influences present there prove to be very intoxicating for many Cambodians accustomed

to the hardships of rural life. Although American fast food and ATMs haven't yet come to Cambodia, there is a very visible Western presence in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. These cities have many of the accouterments of Western civilization, including English daily language newspapers and guidebooks; upscale boutiques offering fine Cambodian silks and handicrafts; pizza and coffee shops that appeal to the Western palate; multiple five star hotels and internet cafes.

Unfortunately, those who do leave their homes in the country have relatively few options in the city. Two of the principal options are factory work or prostitution. The garment industry accounts for roughly 90% of Cambodia's exports,²⁵ amounting to \$1.9 billion annually²⁶ and it employs 250 thousand people,²⁷ 90% of whom are women.²⁸ "For the countryside's ill-educated young women, garment factories offer almost the only good jobs outside the brothels of the capital's teeming red light district."²⁹ Fortunately, labor conditions in Cambodia's garment factories surpass those in most developing countries. In 1999, the United States negotiated a trade agreement with Cambodia that first increased Cambodia's export quota by 14% a year and later to 18% annually. In turn, the Cambodian government agreed to comply with international and Cambodian labor law.³⁰ Although some non-compliance does exist, the Cambodian industry is free of forced labor, sexual harassment and child labor abuses.³¹ Mostly as a result of this agreement, between 1999 and 2003 garment exports rose from US \$600 million to US\$1.5 billion and the number of garment workers tripled to 235,000.³² Today, garments constitute approximately 98% of Cambodia's exports.³³

However, the Cambodian garment industry was only guaranteed a portion of the U.S. market until January 2005. With the expiration of a WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing, garment makers in Cambodia face increased competition from producers in lower priced and more mechanized plants in China and India. The Manila-based Asian Development Bank predicted in April 2005 that because of this increased competition that GDP growth in 2005 would fall to 2.6% down from 6% in 2004. However, in June 2005, they revised their estimate back up to about 5% in 2005.³⁴ Indeed, according to the International Labor Organization, the total value of Cambodian garments and textiles increased 10% in 2005 and between January 2005 and April 2006, the number of garment workers increased by almost 30,000 and the number of factories increased by 13%.³⁵

Another drag on economic development in Cambodia is pervasive corruption. A study by the World Bank found that 75% of businesses reporting paying bribes that accounted on average for 5.2% of their revenues.³⁶ Furthermore, a United Nations investigation revealed that 44% of the rice intended for poor villagers in its work-for-food program had been stolen or diverted by government officials.³⁷ In addition, patients routinely pay bribes to doctors and nurses for prompt and effective medical care and students regularly bribe their teachers.³⁸ Another indicator of the level

of corruption is that although more than five billion US dollars of external funding assistance has been funneled into Cambodia between 1993 and 2003, there has been virtually no reduction in poverty.³⁹

Prostitution is also a growing problem. A writer for the Phnom Penh Post estimated that there are 80 to 100 thousand prostitutes in Cambodia.⁴⁰ Like neighboring Thailand, Cambodia is increasingly becoming a destination for "international sex tourists," 25% of whom are estimated to be Americans.⁴¹ One author noted, "For altogether too many women and girls, Cambodia has become a virtual 'rape camp.'" The country has one of the fastest-growing sex industries in the world.⁴² Indeed, one academic estimated that \$300 million annually is transferred from urban prostitutes to their families in rural areas.⁴³ In part due to the growing trade in prostitution, Cambodia has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS, amounting to 2.6% of the adult population.⁴⁴ Although recently, the government has been successful in promoting condom use in houses of prostitution and the infection rate has at least stabilized.

The Training Session at Russey Krang

The Initial Session

As stated earlier, I was unsure of what to expect from the students. I asked the students in advance of the class to think of the types of businesses they would like to manage. As part of my lesson plan, I developed a rough outline on business planning. One of my concerns was that this course could easily become irrelevant to them—a course on business planning with no real business to which it would be applied. Could this course transform them from largely self-subsistent farmers into entrepreneurial farmers? I thought not, since I brought with me no expertise regarding how to increase their agricultural production.

To try to solve this potential problem, I engaged the group in a fairly open-ended discussion at the beginning of the class. I hoped that during this discussion I would learn more about their life situation or what the German Idealists refer to as "Lebenswelt" and thus make the class more relevant to them. We talked about what it was like being a rice farmer; their hopes, needs and fears; and their place in the community. I don't remember which student came up with the idea of developing a collective ecotourist project, but I quickly jumped on the idea, seeing it as a potential means of maintaining their culture; providing the villagers with more income; and slowing migration from this community.

This experience reinforced in me the importance of being a student-centered teacher. I could have ignored the ecotourist idea and proceeded with my lesson plan. However, fortunately I chose to alter my plan. We spent most of the remaining first day of training refining the concept of ecotourism as it applied to them. I had normally thought of ecotourism as applying solely to nature, something which

left the appreciation of culture out of the equation. In our give-and-take, we expanded upon the concept. Our ecotourist project would primarily focus on Cambodian village life. It would provide travelers with the opportunity to live in a Cambodian village while sampling their life style by learning how to cook Cambodian; conversing about philosophy with Buddhist monks; learning about traditional arts, crafts and music and; understanding how to grow rice, the main staple of the villagers.

It soon became apparent that the class participants were extremely energized by the topic. In my sixteen years of teaching, I have seldom witnessed so much energy put into class discussions and exercises and this from a group in which the average participant had only a primary school education.

Russey Krang's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities And Threats

After the initial session, I thought it would be appropriate if we reviewed what they perceived to be the commune's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. As a means of broadening individual participation, I broke the class into four groups. I have commonly used this approach when conducting strategic planning for organizations in the United States. I have found it to be not only a useful way to get the conversation going, but also a means to establish parameters regarding what can be accomplished and what probably cannot be accomplished. Was an eco-tourist resort, albeit a small one, beyond the capabilities of the villagers? I hoped that this exercise would answer that question.

Strengths. One would not think that a community that is this impoverished would have many strengths; however, the group did identify several. Like people in traditional cultures throughout the world, they tend to view themselves much more collectively than people in the West and more "developed" countries. Most of the strengths that they cited related to their sense of themselves as being a collective. For example, most of the groups noted that they had a strong sense of unity and that 100% of them were Buddhists. This unity was manifested in a number of joint group ventures. For example, the community had formed a village bank that provided protection for villagers' money; they had created a funeral association, which provides financial support to the bereaved; they had formed a village rice bank, which served as a place to store excess rice; they had initiated a community youth group, whose members formed a majority of the class participants; and the community had developed a set of by-laws.

SWOT analyses reflect the perspectives of the individual participants. These perspectives are obviously relative. For example, one group mentioned that their community had a good infrastructure, noting that villagers could

travel on the roads in both the dry and wet seasons, despite the lack of any other infrastructure. However, this perspective was contradicted by the other groups.

They also mentioned that they had support from community leaders. These comments were supported by interviews I conducted with commune leaders, all of whom expressed their support for any project that might further the economic development of their communities.

Weaknesses. The weaknesses were more obvious and glaring. One major area that they identified was a lack of human capacity. Specifically, the participants noted that they lacked knowledge of agricultural techniques, which resulted in low crop yields; they possessed only a very basic education; none of the class participants spoke English; no vocational education was available, specifically they mentioned hairdressing, electronic repair, traditional music and art; and there was a general unawareness of the outside world since they had very limited access to the Internet or television.

The community's scarce infrastructure was also frequently mentioned. Specifically, they mentioned the lack of a secondary school; an inadequate primary school; no health care clinic (the contraction of typhus is a major problem in the area); no irrigation system; no paved roads; no electrical power or land telephone system; and no source of clean water. These problems were compounded by the fact that they lacked sources of affordable capital to start small businesses and/or improve the community's infrastructure.

Opportunities. Another example of how one's perspective is obviously relative was the comment made by several groups that the community had good security. From most peoples' perspective good security is taken-for-granted-reality, but not so for people who have been subjected to civil war for a generation.

However, what is probably most essential to any development effort in Russey Krang is assistance from outside the community. They see several potential sources of assistance. First, they believe that the Cambodian government's developmental efforts will eventually reach the villages. Second, several NGOs, besides Nabuur, have taken root in the larger community. Indeed, one NGO is trying to combat the relatively high incidence of HIV/AIDS. Third, on a related note, they are also somewhat confident that people in outside countries will assist them. Nabuur's website may be helpful in getting the word out about the needs of the people in this and other impoverished communities.

Threats. What outside threats do they face? One that was unspoken, but probably was on some of the group members' minds, was the fear that civil war could reignite, especially if former members of the Khmer Rouge are dealt with harshly. This wound remains open. This fear probably accounts for why so many Cambodians still own guns.

Natural disasters have further impoverished people in the area. In an area in which an overwhelming number of people derive their income from agriculture, the area's three year drought, which was preceded by two years of floods has crippled the local economy.

They also indicated that morale among the general population is low. Some people have given up hope. After civil war, natural disasters and years of enduring grinding poverty, how could one expect anything different? Furthermore, when one is struggling to survive, how does one find the energy to participate in long range ventures that may or may not prove to be successful?

The Planning Process

How does one get started planning such an ambitious project? It seemed reasonable to form committees around the types of problems the group members would face. I decided to be fairly directive and came up with five different committees to handle organizing and implementation issues. I spent a considerable amount of time detailing the responsibilities of each committee. I also provided an explanation of basic marketing principles, in addition to talking about how such a venture could be governed. I asked class members to join a committee depending on their interest. Fortunately, the 30 class members divided themselves roughly evenly among the five committees. The five committees were: the Management Committee, the Human and Physical Resources Committee, the Program Committee, the Budget and Finance Committee and the Marketing Committee. These committees had the following tasks:

- the Management Committee would establish by-laws for the venture, including rules for membership; and create criteria for the selection of a governing board;
- the Human and Physical Resources Committee would determine the group's training needs and make decisions regarding the project's infrastructure needs, which would, most importantly, include housing;
- the Program Committee would decide what training programs/events would be available to guests, including music, arts and crafts, farming and field trips;
- the Budget and Finance Committee would initially make projections about expected costs and revenue and during the implementation stage would monitor costs and revenues;
- the Marketing Committee would initially plan for how to advertise the project and form partnerships with other elements of the tourist industry in Cambodia, including travel agents, other resorts, NGOs and local and national government agencies.

Each group met separately and developed an initial plan for how they would accomplish their goals. After several hours of preparation, they presented their plans and each plan was critiqued by myself and the entire class. The presentations were particularly thoughtful and the participants were especially mindful of the obstacles they faced. After

the presentations we discussed what would need to occur sequentially. We came to a consensus that the first step need would be the establishment of a training center, which would include three laptops and English language software programs. This goal was made somewhat more difficult by the lack of electricity in the village.

After these presentations, the training ended. The group, led by Nabuur's representative Sa Kimsorn, agreed to put together a comprehensive strategic plan in about four weeks. We hoped that the plan could serve as a selling point for potential funders of the projects, including NGOs, lenders and government officials. I left Sa Kimsorn with some basic information about strategic planning and agreed to review their plan in the upcoming weeks.

I was not disappointed with the group's plan. It was extremely thorough. In their plan, they established five succinct and central goals. Those goals included:

- providing basic knowledge of English to 50 youths in the community;
- creating a traditional Khmer clothing and sewing project;
- developing a traditional music, dance and art project;
- creating a handicraft project; and
- building several houses, which would be available to guests.

In addition to these goals, the authors of the strategic plan also included numerous sub goals, which provided details regarding a description of the activity to be accomplished; a description of the process; a detailing of responsibility; a time frame and the resources that will be needed. It was a very impressive document.

Upcoming Plans

As a follow-up to this training, I will be searching for some laptops capable of running the language programs, in addition to procuring a solar power source capable of charging them. Sa Kimsorn will make local NGOs and local government leaders aware of the project, maintain contact with group participants and search for a site for the English language training center. In 2007, a colleague of mine and I plan to return to Russey Krang. We intend to provide the village with solar power generators and also provide the group with examples of how other organizations have succeeded and failed in their ecotourist ventures. I also hope to explore differences in culture that exist between rural Cambodians and Westerners. In addition, I plan to raise money for this venture by putting on a photographic exhibition at my university and other venues.

Can we make a difference in the economic and cultural life of this community? I hope so. We have taken on a very ambitious project. Given the obstacles, it may fail. However, if it succeeds, potentially it can serve as a model for other poor communities throughout the world.

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