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# Losing the Land

THE CONSEQUENCES OF LAND CONCESSIONS IN CAMBODIA  
FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF CHOICE



# Losing the Land

## The Consequences of Land Concessions in Cambodia from a Perspective of Choice

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Image title page: A broken house in Kon Kok. All photos in this thesis are by the author, unless stated otherwise.

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## PREFACE

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Before you lies my thesis 'Losing the Land: The Consequences of Land Concessions in Cambodia from a Perspective of Choice.' I conducted research in Cambodia for three months and wrote it as part of the master Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University. This research was the first of its kind for me, on my own and so in-depth. I have conducted anthropological research before, for three weeks in the Netherlands during my bachelor, and three months in Nepal for a Dutch foundation with a friend. I have also lived abroad several periods on my own before, of which one was six months in Cambodia. These previous experiences were definitely an advantage, as well as my extensive knowledge of Cambodia, gained from living there and multiple visits. I also wrote my bachelor thesis on land concessions in Cambodia, so the existing academic knowledge provided a solid foundation for the research.

I did not have a research location before going to Cambodia, since it proved difficult to arrange things from the Netherlands. As soon as I arrived I met Seang, my best friend in Cambodia whom I stayed with when in the capital Phnom Penh. We discussed research possibilities, and the location where I eventually conducted research came up. She introduced me to Sea, a contact of hers living there. While I explored other options as well, I read many academic, NGO, and media articles about the case. I decided on my location after a visit to the area and meeting Sea, with whom I discussed options and the case. He helped me arrange my stay there and introduced me to Thy, who became my research assistant.

Here I would like to express my gratitude to my research participants, for without their consent and kindness none of this would have been possible. Also a big thanks to Thy, I was lucky to have a research assistant as good you. Much gratitude goes to both Sea and Seang and her family, as I would not have conducted research where I did without them. I also thank my supervisor dr. Erik de Maaker, for providing guidance throughout the phases of preparation, fieldwork, and writing. A major thank you to everyone else that has supported me throughout this process, such as my family, other students in the program, and the great group of people I got to meet in Cambodia. Lastly, I am very grateful for receiving two study grants: the Leiden University Fund's International Study Fund and Leiden University's LUSTRA+ scholarship.

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# 1 | INTRODUCTION

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In this thesis I analyze what choices rural Cambodians have when they lose their land due to a large-scale land lease, and what the consequences are for their livelihood (the activities, skills, and assets necessary to make a living).<sup>1</sup> I argue that the choices people made, such as to resist the concession or to comply, have direct consequences for people's livelihoods. In this chapter I introduce my research: the larger issue and its relevance, the specific context of my case and the field, my research questions, methodology, and ethical considerations. The conceptual framework of this thesis is laid out in chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses land rights in Cambodia and how land is used as a resource. In the following chapters (4, 5, and 6) I present my core ethnographical data, organized by different groups of people I found in my research. Lastly I conclude my findings.

## 1.1 THE ISSUE

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The world is experiencing a 'global land rush.' The World Bank announced that in a one-year period (2008-2009), global land deals have amounted to 45 million hectares (Scheidel 2013: 3), roughly the surface area of Sweden. This land rush is driven by many factors, of which the 2007-2008 food crisis is one. During this crisis food prices doubled in comparison to 2006, due to for example droughts and high oil prices, which led people to invest in agricultural land (FAO 2017). Some of these global land deals have been identified as 'land grabs' in media and academic writing. There are many different definitions of land grabbing, and often the difference between a land grab and a land deal is not specified. Sometimes land deals concern sale of land, and sometimes long-term leases. In my research land grabs are leases by the Cambodian government to national and international actors that have direct negative consequences for the people that used or owned the land, such as forceful evictions and no fair compensation.<sup>2</sup> Large-scale land deals and land grabbing also occurred centuries ago, for example when Europeans settled in what is now the United States. The current frequency and scale of land grabs and the context of a highly-globalized world is new. The food crisis in particular has made land grabbing a 'hot topic.'

In the case of Cambodia, more than 11 percent (2.036.170 hectares) of the total Cambodian land surface has been leased by the government to either foreign or domestic actors ('concessionaires') (Vrieze & Naren 2012: 6). In almost all cases this has resulted in forced evictions, displacement, and loss of land for rural villagers. The evictions were sometimes accompanied by extreme violence, such as burning and bulldozing houses, and villagers being shot (Titthara & Boyle 2012). Many complaints from for example local communities and national and international organizations about the consequences of land concessions for local communities and the environment, have resulted in the Cambodian government putting a moratorium on the granting of land concessions in 2012. However, the rules laid out in this directive were not all implemented

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss the concept of livelihood in detail in chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> I discuss land grabbing and the Cambodian context in detail in chapter 2.

straight away, and new concessions were still granted.<sup>3</sup> In 2014 the Cambodian government announced that it had annulled over one million hectares of concessions, of which 340.000 hectares Economic Land Concessions of 128 different companies (MLMUPC 2014). While the concession I discuss violates multiple laws<sup>4</sup> and should be (partially) revoked according to this directive, so far nothing has been done.

The concession situation in Cambodia is characterized by two contrasting visions and realities of land use (Scheidel et al. 2013: 342). On the one hand, the government attempts to transform rural areas into high surplus-producing farms that will lead to overall economic growth, employment creation and poverty reduction, while smallholder farmers try to make a living through mostly self-sufficient farming (ibid.). However, development at the national level does not necessarily benefit people at the local level, and Scheidel et al. argue that the Cambodian government's development policy risks 'getting rid of the poor' rather than 'getting rid of poverty' (2013: 351). This dilemma is central to my thesis: I analyze what local people's livelihoods were based on before the granting of a concession by the government, and how they have changed after. By focusing on how people were using land as an asset, or a resource, the reality of its loss becomes clear, and the question of who profits from the governments development's policy does too.

The biggest problem of this land rush in Cambodia, is that there is little attention from the side of the government to the impact on the local population of granting these concessions. In-depth research on the way affected people cope with land grabs is missing. In the academic world, most have focused on the phenomenon as a whole, or the drivers of land grabbing (e.g. Schutter 2010; Zoomers 2010; Borras et al. 2011), who the actors are and how they exercise control (e.g. Vermeulen & Cotula 2010; Hall 2011), or labor and land grabbing (e.g. Li 2010). Non-governmental organizations are concerned with the consequences, but mostly focus on direct problems, such as eviction, housing, and protesting the concessions. Little is known about the long-term consequences people face and especially the way land loss affects livelihoods.

Another reason why the case of Cambodia is so interesting, is because of its recent history of civil war. In April 1975, the communist Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot overthrew the US-backed Lon Nol regime. During three days the Khmer Rouge soldiers forced all urbanites (about two million people) to march out of Phnom Penh and provincial towns to the countryside, where they were forced to work in agrarian collectives, often for over twelve hours a day (Neupert & Prum 2005: 222). Families were split up and people were forced to move to other parts of the country throughout the regime (Ung 2000). Millions of people were murdered or tortured by their own countrymen or died of illness or starvation (ibid.). The Vietnamese liberated Phnom Penh in January 1979, which marks the official end of the Khmer Rouge regime. However, only in 1997, after Pol Pot's death, the last Khmer Rouge strongholds near the Thai border were liberated and the remaining Khmer Rouge leaders and cadres surrendered. The result of this civil war was a scarred and mostly displaced population; a country in chaos. People

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<sup>3</sup> At least 33 new concessions were granted after the moratorium, but it is not clear if negotiations were already underway before the stop, in which case the moratorium would not apply (ADHOC 2014: 10).

<sup>4</sup> For example that the concession is larger than 10.000 hectares, and the fact that it is located in a national park.

randomly settled in houses or on land, which results in a unique land rights situation that I discuss in chapter 3.

Thus, my research has both scientific and societal relevance. Land grabbing is a worldwide phenomenon that involves many people either directly or indirectly. In-depth research into the consequences is necessary to understand what top-down practices like these may do on the ground. Also, my research focuses on an area that not many academics have looked into. Tracking changes in livelihoods as a consequence of these deals has – that I am aware of – not been done. The same goes for my focus on how choice has shaped the consequences of the concession.

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## 1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD

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### THE FIELD

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My research focuses on two land concessions granted by the Cambodian government in Botum Sakor National Park, Koh Kong province, Cambodia (see figure 1). The concessionaire is the Chinese real estate company Tianjin Union Investment Development Group Co., Ltd., or Union Development Group (in this thesis also 'UDG' or 'the company'). In 2008 a 36.000 hectare concession was granted to the company, which affects five communes<sup>5</sup> from two districts.<sup>6</sup> I limited my research to Koh Sdach commune ('the commune'), which consists of the Koh Sdach archipelago (12 small islands) and a 175 km<sup>2</sup> area on the mainland (see figure 2).

The commune consisted out of three administrative areas, of which one was the island Koh Sdach ('Koh Sdach'/'the island'), where about 3.000 people lived (650 households) and most commune and district services were located (such as a clinic, government building, and police post).<sup>7</sup> The other areas, Preah Smach and Peam Kay, were located on the mainland and had approximately 1.000 inhabitants (230 households) and 500 inhabitants (100 households) respectively. Both consisted out of more villages or spread out village areas. The villages I discuss most in this thesis are Poi Yopon and Anlong Trei, both part of the administrative area of Preah Smach. The concession area covers Peam Kay and most of Preah Smach, but not the island. However, many people from Koh Sdach are still affected by the concession since they had farmland that became part of the concession. Anyone living within the concession area was forced to relocate. The designated relocation site, Kon Kok, was created more than 15 kilometers from the coast. This area was not part of the original 36.000 hectare concession, but realized through an additional 9.100 hectare concession granted to UDG in 2011 (see figure 3).

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<sup>5</sup> The English 'commune' derives from the French *commune*, which is a territorial division also called 'municipality' in English. The French divided Cambodia in communes and nowadays the term is still used by government and citizens alike. It is not a commune in the socialist sense.

<sup>6</sup> Cambodia is administratively divided by provinces, districts, communes, and villages. The affected communes are Koh Sdach, Phnhi Meas, Prek Khsach from Kiri Sakor district and Tanoun and Thmar Sar from Botum Sakor district, in Koh Kong province.

<sup>7</sup> The information on inhabitants I present here derives from official police data, from 2010-2011.





Figure 1: The concession (red) in Cambodia and the region<sup>8</sup>

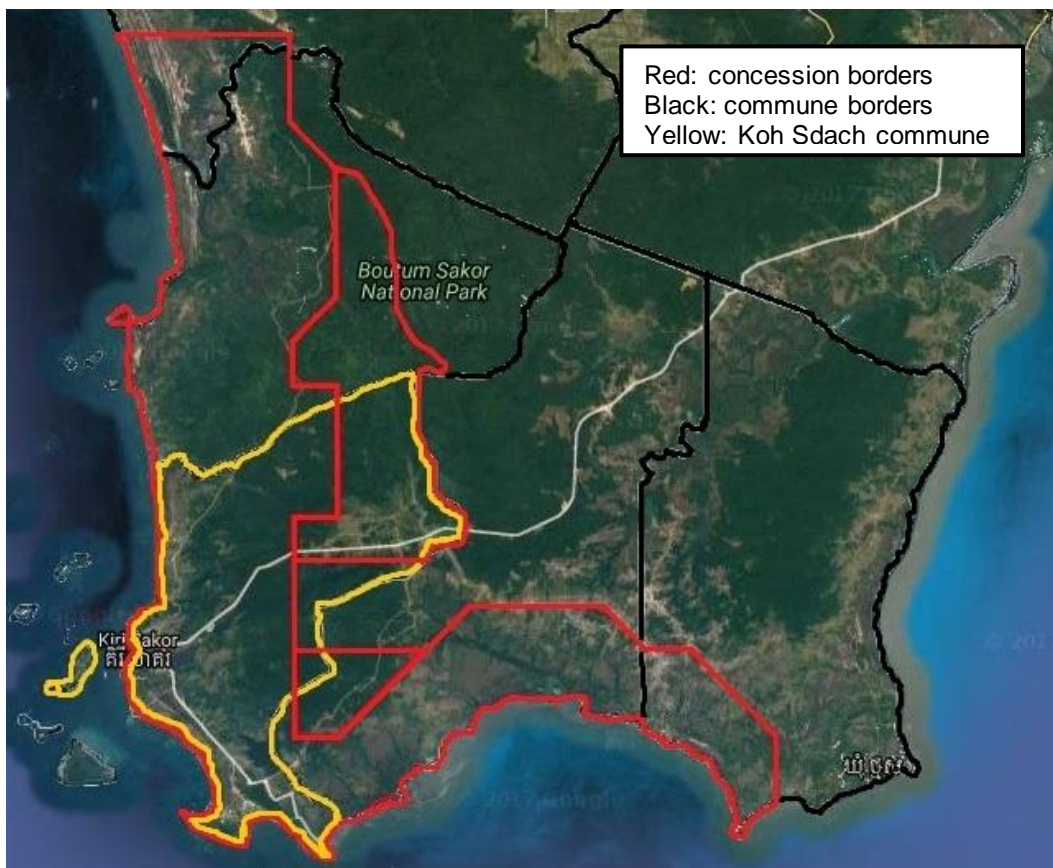


Figure 2: The concession and affected communes in Botum Sakor National Park<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Figure is my own compilation from Google Maps and LICADHO data, available from [www.licadho-cambodia.org/land\\_concessions](http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/land_concessions).

<sup>9</sup> Figure is my own compilation, from Google Maps, LICADHO data (see footnote 8), and Open Development Cambodia data, available from <https://opendevolucioncambodia.net/map-explorer/mapping-kit>.



Figure 3: Koh Sdach commune and the most relevant places in this thesis<sup>10</sup>

In this thesis I make a distinction between three main groups I found during my research. These are the ‘movers,’ ‘resisters,’ and ‘islanders.’ Most families relocated to Kon Kok (‘movers’), but not everyone did. In Poi Yopon five families still resist relocation. Up until the fall of 2016, there were 19 other families resisting there as well. Besides the people that never moved, Poi Yopon is the commune’s center of resistance for people that have relocated, but now resist to ask for more compensation. These people (both continued resistance and people that changed their minds) I call ‘resisters.’ People from Koh Sdach that lost their land I call ‘islanders.’

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### THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

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According to their website ([www.sunnyunion.com](http://www.sunnyunion.com)), Union Development Group’s development plans consist of creating the ‘Cambodia-China Comprehensive Investment Development Experimental Zone,’ with the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort (including a casino, hotels, villas, and golf courses), an airport, and “ecological and farm areas.” It is unclear what UDG is planning to plant in these areas, if this is only for show for tourists, and if there are jobs for local people on these farms. They also want to set up a free trade zone with a deep sea port capable of handling big container ships and an international tax-free shopping business district. The precise plans are not in the public domain. Because part of the project is a type of free trade zone, all their imported materials, equipment and machinery for construction are exempt from Cambodian tax during the construction and operation period. At the moment, a large access road to the area, two water reservoirs, a water treatment plant,

<sup>10</sup> Figure is my own compilation from Google Maps.

access to the electricity grid, a power plant, an 18-hole golf course, casino, hotel, some villas, and a part of the deep sea port have been finished. These plans have a projected \$3,8 billion price tag (Kotoski & Hor 2016).

The situation of the Union Development Group is complicated. On the one hand their development plans have been approved by the Cambodian government, who might have assured them that all their plans could easily be implemented. On the other hand the situation was not as favorable as thought; they probably did not foresee the resistance by locals and attention to the project by NGOs and media. Especially a report from the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights proved damning: many of their investors backed out of the project.

When I went to the resort, which is partially finished, it was practically empty. The hotel reception employees admitted they did not get many guests. That came as no surprise to me. The resort is not nearly as beautiful or has the finished facilities as some others in the region. Also, according to their website their target clientele is “the wealthy Chinese,” and it is not easy for them to get there. Since the proposed airport is not built yet, the closest airport is at least four hours by road away, and one would need to have own transport. With barely any income and high overhead costs (think of maintaining the golf course alone) the resort stands almost abandoned. When I was there demolition of the casino, which used to be the main building on the resort, was underway. The building was one of the first to be opened, but now it is closed and all decorations have been stripped. Locals have mentioned that no serious construction has been done since 2015, which is probably due to having no investors.

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### COMPENSATION PROCESS

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In April 2008, King Norodom Sihanouk signed a Royal Decree to cut out the 36.000 hectare concession area from the Botum Sakor National Park (Human Rights Council 2012: 118). One month later, the Cambodian government granted a 99-year lease of the land to the Union Development Group. At the time locals were not aware of this deal, although some say they saw government agents and company representatives measuring land before the agreement was signed (Touch & Neef 2015: 7). The locals were officially informed in November 2009, when a meeting was held in Poi Yoapon with officials from the Ministry of Environment, provincial government, Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, and representatives from the company in attendance (ibid.).

The lease agreement states the intent to apply the ‘tiger skin policy’ or ‘leopard skin policy,’ allowing local communities to stay within the concession area, their villages ‘cut out.’ Since some disruption to local communities was expected, the agreement specified that the government would be responsible for administrative tasks regarding relocation and compensation, while the company would bear any associated costs (Human Rights Council 2012: 119). In case no solution to relocate villagers or land possessors was found, the company had to stop activities in the area (ibid.). The plan to apply the tiger skin policy was soon abandoned “for reasons linked to water and sanitation,” claiming that the locals on the coast would pollute the water and thus have a negative effect on Union Development Group’s investment (Touch & Neef 2015: 7). It is unclear if there really was an intention to apply the policy, or if this was only for show.

For several months in late 2009, villagers were invited to go to the district office to get their compensation status reviewed and land measured. When people received compensation offers it was dubbed ‘the crying office,’ since far higher offers were expected but not received. Poi Yopon was the first village to be relocated, and most families moved in 2010. The compensation policy was laid out in a letter from the Ministry of Environment to prime minister Hun Sen in May 2009, and sent to the provincial governor in October 2009. The three standards for compensation can be seen in table 1. In practice monetary compensation reportedly ranged from US\$250-8.000 per hectare of farmland, and new residential and/or farmland was sometimes awarded as well (Human Rights Council 2012: 120). Since awarding land is not in the official compensation policy, this was probably done in lieu of higher monetary compensation. The full policy (table 2) can be read on the next page.

<b>Standard A</b>	A maximum financial compensation of \$8.000 per hectare
<b>Standard B</b>	A house of 6 by 7 meters. When necessary, the old house will be demolished upon agreement of the owners. They will receive fair compensation, or a house comparable to the standard of the old house will be built at a new site that has adequate infrastructure, within the company’s leased area.
<b>Standard C</b>	A maximum financial compensation of 75% of standard A (\$6.000 per hectare) for people considered local; a maximum of 50% of standard A (\$4.000 per hectare) for people considered outsiders

*Table 1: Compensation standards*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Own compilation from Human Rights Council 2012 and Sao 2015.

Land rights category	Land occupancy	Compensation policy
<b>Category 1</b> Land title before 1993	<b>Case 1</b> - Has land title issued before 1 November 1993 - Has occupied and used land for home or farm - Can be local or outsider	- Compensation for farmland is standard A - Compensation for housing is standard B - Land not specified in land title will not be compensated
	<b>Case 2</b> - Has land title issued before 1 November 1993 - Has not used land at all - Can be local or outsider	- Compensation is 25% of standard A (maximum of \$2.000 per hectare) - Land not specified in land title will not be compensated
<b>Category 2</b> Land title after 1993	<b>Case 3</b> - Has land title issued after 1 November 1993 - Has occupied and used land for home or farm - Can be local or outsider	- Compensation for farmland is standard C - Compensation for housing is standard B
	<b>Case 4</b> - Has land title issued after 1 November 1993 - Has not used land at all - Can be local or outsider	- Compensation is 25% of standard A (maximum of \$2.000 per hectare) - Land not specified in land title will not be compensated
<b>Category 3</b> No title but local	<b>Case 5</b> - Has no land title - Has a home and stays in the village - Is a local person	- Compensation is standard B
	<b>Case 6</b> - Has no land title - Has occupied farmland - Is a local person	- Compensation is 12,5% of Standard A (maximum of \$1.000 per hectare) - Compensation for no more than 5 hectare per household
<b>Category 4</b> Other	<b>Case 7</b> - Has a land title - Has bought land from someone	- If sale is legitimate, compensation is same as case 1, 2, 3, or 4
	<b>Case 8</b> - Has no land title or title certified by local authorities after 30 August 2001 - Is an outsider	- No compensation - If challenged, compensation committee has to do a field assessment

Table 2: Compensation policy<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Own compilation from Human Rights Council 2012 and Sao 2015.



## 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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I have changed my research questions from my research proposal to reflect my focus on the choices people had regarding the concession. Initially I planned to focus on how people make use of 'livelihood assets,' such as social and financial resources, to help them overcome the granting of the land concession. Below I explain both my main research question and my sub-questions.

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### RESEARCH QUESTION

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*What choices do local people have when faced with a land concession, and what are the consequences for their livelihood strategies?*

In this thesis I take a perspective of choice: I analyze how a land concession and the choices of local people regarding it influence their livelihood strategies. These strategies are the activities that people engage in and the choices people make to maintain a livelihood, such as employment and investment choices. I use the term 'local people' because I focus on the choices of people living in my research area and not on for example the choices of the government. When conducting research I focused on livelihood strategies, and found that especially the initial choice people made regarding the concession was important. I found three main groups of people, 'movers,' 'resisters,' and 'islanders,' which I introduced in the previous section. I further break down my research question in the three sub-questions below.

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### SUB-QUESTION 1

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*How can a land concession be granted on land already claimed by local people, and in what way are they using it as a resource?*

This first sub-question deals with the information necessary to understand what rights people had to the land and why losing it can have consequences for their livelihood strategies. I analyze how people were using the land to make a living, but also explore what other resources or strategies they employed before the granting of the concession. In order to understand why people have to deal with the consequences of losing their land and thus livelihood strategy, the land right system in Cambodia is examined.

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### SUB-QUESTION 2

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*What choices regarding land concessions do local people have, and why do they make them?*

The second sub-question serves to delve deeper into the choices available to local people concerning land concessions. As mentioned, people had the choice to resist or not, but depending on which group my research participants belong to (movers, resisters, or islanders), there are other choices available as well. For example, some islanders have the choice to move to the relocation area, and some

movers can choose to sell some land. Through this sub-question I analyze why people make certain choices (if they were conscious choices), and what the consequences were.

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### SUB-QUESTION 3

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*How do local people's livelihood strategies change due to the granting of a land concession?*

This third sub-question examines the livelihood strategies of my research participants after the concession was granted. By comparing the strategies before the concession (through the first sub-question) to the ones employed after, I analyze the consequences of a land concession on local people's livelihood strategies.

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## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

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In this section I discuss the methodology of my research. First I discuss the actual methods used: participant observation, life history, semi-structured interviews, and document studies. I expand on each of these, discussing methodology, the application in the field and analysis. Second I discuss two matters that have methodological implications for my research: my use of a research assistant and ethnographic seduction.

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### PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

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Participant observation is a method by which the researcher immerses him- or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behavior, listening to conversations, and asking questions (Bryman 2012: 714). Of course, this research was only three months long, so the "extended period of time" was actually rather short.

I used this method as a way to observe my research participants' lives and to gain a better understanding of what people would tell me in more formal interviews. In the field this meant being constantly aware of what was going on around me and trying to absorb as much information as possible. Usually I would jot down notes during meals and at the end of the day, but as soon as possible after important conversations. At each main research site doing participant observation was different. In Koh Sdach for example, this was mostly walking along the main street, while in Poi Yopon it often consisted of 'hanging out' at the café since that was usually the place locals were.

The data gathered by this method I wrote down as field notes. During the process of writing this thesis I reread them several times, and analyzed them by connecting it to data gathered by other methods. I start each ethnographic chapter of this thesis (chapters 4, 5, and 6) with a vignette that comes from my field notes.

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### LIFE HISTORY

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The life history method and its corresponding life history interviews emphasize the personal experience of individuals regarding several events and phases throughout the life course (Bryman 2012: 712). This method is perfect for my research, since it allowed me to delve into an individual's

experiences at several moments in their life that are key to my research – why they moved to the area, how they built up their livelihoods, the pivotal moment of the granting of the ELC, and what happened after. This method is a form of unstructured interviewing, which is “excellent for building initial rapport with people” and for sensitive subjects (Bernard 2011: 158).

I gathered nine life histories. It is a time consuming and very in-depth method, but it resulted in important ethnographical data. This data is unique for each person and thus not meant to generalize for a bigger group. I applied a stratified purposive sampling method, meaning I chose respondents intentionally from several groups in the field. These life histories serve as case studies for these groups. I conducted life histories for five movers, three resisters, and one islander. I conducted more mover life histories since this is by far the largest group, and I wanted to get different in-depth views of people there. The resister life histories correspond to the three different groups of resisters. I only did one islander life history, since I did not know there were so many affected people on Koh Sdach until the very end of my research.

I needed multiple sessions for each respondent to conduct a full life history. Usually these sessions were quite informal and relaxed, even though we sometimes discussed sensitive topics, such as the Khmer Rouge time. I recorded each interview and made notes (not just the answers, but also on emotions). I transcribed the recording and compiled the notes in the same document. I analyzed the interviews with the qualitative data analysis program MAXQDA, in which I coded all segments thematically.

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### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

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A semi-structured interview is a general term to describe an interview where the researcher does have some questions prepared, but has room to deviate from that guide and ask follow-up questions (Bryman 2012: 716). I planned to use this method for interviewing ‘experts,’ like local officials and NGO workers. Examples from the field are a Chief of Village and the leader of the Koh Sdach Community Fishery Organization. I also used this method as an alternative to a questionnaire I planned to use. My plan was to search for a generalizable pattern in for example the access people had to certain resources (such as money, land, and labor) and the livelihood strategies they were using. It was too difficult to use a questionnaire, since my field is larger and more spread out than I anticipated, and people would not be able to fill it out themselves. My back-up option was conducting short structured interviews, but to be able to generalize, this meant conducting over 275 interviews.<sup>13</sup> This was too labor intensive to do on my own in the time I had. Instead I conducted a limited number of semi-structured interviews in the beginning of my fieldwork that, while I cannot use them to find a generalizable pattern, were very useful and provided me with a rough overview of the field. In total I conducted 24 formal semi-structured interviews. In some cases, experts were also affected villagers, so it is difficult to give detailed totals per group.

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<sup>13</sup> I calculated this with my estimation of an affected household total of 1.000 (‘the population’), a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 5%. This means that for example, I would be able to say I was 95% sure that half of the affected households (plus or minus 5%) were farmers. To be able to make such statements for the entire population, the sample size would have to be 278 households.

I compiled questions for each interview, which I always discussed with my research assistant. This way he knew what to expect, and could help me expand on topics or add new ones. The expert interviews were usually spontaneous. There was no need to arrange them in advance since they did not for example concern high-level government workers. The other interviews were also not scheduled. In Kon Kok, in the beginning Thy and I would just go to random houses and ask if we could interview them. In Poi Yopon I started my first interview and then other people just came to be interviewed as well. At a later stage we would go to specific people that I wanted to speak to.

I conducted and analyzed these interviews in the same manner as the life history interviews: I recorded and transcribed, added my notes and coded them in MAXQDA.

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## DOCUMENT STUDIES

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The last research method I used is documents. These not only include academic literature, official government documents, and NGO reports, but also maps (some hand-drawn by respondents), personal documents (such as documents villagers received from the Union Development Group after receiving compensation), and resistance documents (such as lists of affected people, petitions, and manifestos). Some of these documents are official government data, while others were compiled by activists. Therefore I had to be extremely reflexive about these documents, asking questions such as 'Whose perspective is this from?' and 'What is the purpose of this document?'. Sometimes these documents were integrated with interviews, and I would discuss them with my research participants.

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## RESEARCH ASSISTANT

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My use of a research assistant has some methodological implications. I have a fair understanding of Khmer, meaning I can understand most of what is being said, and I have limited speaking skills. As Borchgrevink (2003) notes, using an interpreter in anthropology is a bit of a taboo; not many authors are open about their use of one, and methodological issues are even less written about. In his literature review, Borchgrevink also notes that sometimes using an



Figure 4: Thy and I

interpreter is more beneficial than being fluent in a language, because you might notice different things. In my case, I fully back my choice of using a research assistant. Thy was not only my interpreter, but also a key informant, my *moto*-driver<sup>14</sup>, and the person that could introduce me to whomever I wanted to speak to in the field. Thy studied English and has worked as a (freelance) interpreter before, for example for some NGOs that came to research this land concession. Before we started 'in the field,' we met for a few afternoons to discuss my research, questions I wanted to ask,

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<sup>14</sup> A *moto* is a semi-automatic motorcycle and the main mode of transportation for the majority of Cambodians.

and how we would conduct conversations or more formal interviews. When we did go in the field, we were more attuned to each other. However, there was still some miscommunication or sometimes mistranslation. Since I did have some Khmer language skills, I could follow both the gist of what was said (including inherent cultural practices and emotions), and then get a word-for-word translation from Thy. I recorded all the more formal interviews, which allowed me to listen to both the Khmer sentences and Thy's translation, so I could double-check. The translations in this thesis thus came about through both Thy and I. Working in this way allowed me not to focus too much on what was being said word-for-word, but on the way people said it, and the interview questions itself. Thy did play a big part in my research, but at the same time I also tried to limit his influence. For example, I did not just talk to people he knew well, but also people he had never talked to before, to make sure I would not just hear one side of the story. I also conducted most informal participant observation conversations myself.

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### ETHNOGRAPHIC SEDUCTION

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Ethnographic seduction is about the “ways in which interviewees influence the understanding and research results of their interviewers” (Robben 1996: 72). Robben (1996) speaks about ethnographic seduction in the context of violence, victims and perpetrators. He goes on to explain that not only perpetrators can ‘seduce’ us with their words, but victims “might mold what they tell us [to] contribute to their victimization” (Robben 1996: 74). Ethnographic seduction is definitely pertinent to my case. That is not to say I think my respondents lied to me; just that they told their version of the truth. I believe some consciously exaggerated some parts of what they told me, not only to emphasize their role as victim to me, but also to themselves. This is also a reason why I take a perspective of choice in this thesis, to show that my respondents were not just passive victims, but actually did have some choices available to them.

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## 1.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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### CONSENT

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Conducting research in an ethical manner is only possible with the voluntary collaboration of research participants. The first time I met people in a research context and whenever I would sit down to do a more formal interview, I would explain who I was (an anthropology student of Leiden University in the Netherlands) and was there to conduct research on how their livelihood strategies had changed due to the concession. Then I would ask if they wanted to talk to me and consented to participate in the research. I recorded more formal interviews. Before each interview I would explain why I did it and ask if they consented. Everyone I met consented to both. Another example is that I would always ask if I could take photos. Not just if they were photos with people on them, but also if I wanted to photograph for example their house.



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## ANONYMITY

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A related issue is anonymity. Especially resisters and others that were angry about the situation wanted to talk to me, to vent their frustrations and get their story to a bigger audience. However, some people said things that were sensitive, or could potentially put them in harm's way. This was done in full awareness that it might be publicized, but causing harm to research participants needs to be avoided. Initially I thought about fully anonymizing all my research participants. However, in some cases it will be extremely easy to find out who they are, for example in the case of the five resisting families in Poi YoPON. In other cases it is important to know who the respondent is because of their authority, such as Chief of Villages, leaders of organizations, or other notable local government officials. I thus decided not to fully anonymize the people in my research. I use first names only except when it concerns authority figures, then I use their full names and positions. In all cases I aim to refrain from matching sensitive information with research participants.

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## RESEARCH (PERMISSION) AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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The first day my research assistant Thy and I really started conducting research, we were sitting at a coffee shop in Poi YoPON when a man stood at a distance watching us. After a bit he drove off, and Thy explained to me that this person was someone who always liked to "watch people and tell the police." And so he did. Thy got a phone call from the police not 30 minutes later, asking if he could please come to the station and explain the situation. I could not attend myself, since I was leaving for a meeting in another province that afternoon. Luckily, Thy is good friends with all the officers and it just gave him an excuse to have drinks with them. Everything seemed okay after that. In the last week of my research though, Thy told me we should visit with the Inspector of Police (the head of police in the commune). When I asked why, Thy told me that "the inspector thinks you are ISIS." We had a good laugh over that, and Thy explained that the national government tells people they should for example be afraid of IS, but not explain to them what it is. So that afternoon I met the inspector with Thy and had a long informal conversation over some beers, the way you show you are a friend in Cambodia. This taught me that even though it is not required, introducing yourself to all local government posts at the beginning of your research is a good idea. That first day of research I did introduce myself to the Chief of Village of Preah Smach (the only one in Koh Sdach commune on the mainland), but obviously this was not enough.

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## REFLEXIVITY AND PRESENTING MYSELF

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While in the field I tried to be as reflexive as possible of my position and background, which influenced my role as researcher in the field. For example, I became highly aware that the preparatory literature I read from academics, NGOs, and newspapers, was all written from a certain perspective and for a certain reason, mostly casting affected people in an innocent victim role, and the government and company as perpetrators. Before I entered the field I already felt strongly connected to my research participants' case due to this literature, my previous experiences in Cambodia and knowledge of how the Cambodian government operates. In the field I tried to keep an open mind and to let go of my own

bias. At the end of each day I reflected on what I did, why I did it and what my aims in the research were.

In line with this, I was very open to my research participants about who I was as well. They all knew I was a researcher for university, that I was not affiliated with any NGOs or the government, that I did not come bearing any money, gifts, or other aid, and I chose this research location myself, bearing all costs. Some people asked how my research would benefit them. I was very honest about this, saying that I would write a report but the reason was not primarily to influence NGOs or the government to help them. I did not make any promises of what my research would accomplish.

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### DOING JUSTICE TO MY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

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My most important ethical concern is doing justice to my research participants, and making sure I do not cause harm to them. In this thesis I try not to present my research participants as victims. I did not just find passive victims, but people that took control of the situation through the choices they had available to them, as best as they could. These choices were limited and they still faced negative consequences. In this thesis I try to walk the thin line between a disempowering victim narrative (which does not reflect the power of choice) and a narrative in which local people have the power to fully take charge of the consequences of a land concession. Of course, the first narrative would serve my research participants' endeavors to resist or claim more compensation, but it does not reflect my findings. The second narrative could lead to misuse of publication, for example by the Cambodian government and concessionaires as a way of legitimizing their policies and actions. In this thesis I thus aim to present a well-considered account of my findings, walking the line between these two narratives.

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## 2 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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In this chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework of my research. First I review literature on land grabbing, both general and the Cambodian context. Second I discuss the concept of livelihood, including livelihood strategies. Third I review the concept of everyday politics, which may help to understand the choices my respondents made regarding the concession.

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### 2.1 LAND CONCESSIONS

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#### AN OVERVIEW

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This research connects to a larger debate on 'land grabbing' and the global land rush. The term land grabbing signifies the current phenomenon of large-scale and long-term land acquisition by governments and private actors, which is mostly concentrated in non-industrialized countries of the Global South (Scheidel 2013: 3). Land can be sold or leased (Borras et al. 2011: 209). Some only define land grabs as cross-border or transnational land acquisition (e.g. Zoomers 2010; GRAIN 2008), while others also include the transactions within a country (e.g. Scheidel 2013; Borras et al. 2011). In my research, land grabs are leases by the Cambodian government to national and international actors. However, none of these articles discuss the difference between a land deal and a land grab. Land grabbing carries obvious negative associations. Specific local contexts are important in determining if it is a deal or a grab, but mostly depend on whether local people feel wronged by the deal (Cotula et al. 2009: 95). When there is no 'free, prior, and informed consent'<sup>15</sup> by all local people, not just the local elite, one could apply the term 'land grab' (Cotula et al 2009: 105).

Zoomers (2010) has identified seven processes that drive this global land rush, and argues that analytical frameworks that only focus on one or two driving processes offer a too narrow perspective on the issue. The most emphasized driver of global land grabs is "the production of food for export to finance-rich, resource-poor countries in the aftermath of the food crisis of 2007–2008" (Zoomers 2010: 429). The others are: (2) foreign direct investment in non-food agricultural commodities and biofuels; (3) development of protected areas, nature reserves, ecotourism and hideaways; (4) Special Economic Zones, large-scale infrastructure works, and urban extensions; (5) large-scale tourist complexes; (6) retirement and residential migration; and (7) land purchases by migrants in their countries of origin. While some of these may not seem large-scale, they can be. An example of retirement migration: every year large groups of retirees from the United States settle in Central and South America, often in gated retirement communities or neighborhoods that have their own administration and rules (Zoomers 2010: 439). This retirement migration thus drives the sale or lease of large land plots or buildings, that become communities designated for foreigners and not for the local population. The case I discuss in this thesis concerns drivers four and five (Special Economic Zone and tourism), but possibly also one and two (food and non-food agriculture). The latter is unsure since Union Development Group's plans are not specified.

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<sup>15</sup> Free, prior, and informed consent here means that everyone in a community should be informed about a project before it has commenced, and everyone has the right to give or withhold consent to it.

Land deals are inextricably connected to land titling. Assies discerns two orientations in land tenure and titling debates: one that regards land as an economic asset, and another that takes a (human) rights orientation (Assies 2009: 573-4). In the first orientation the argument of 'legal empowerment' is made: a formal land title can be used to access formal credit or can be sold, which would stimulate 'development' and lead to poverty reduction (Assies 2009: 574). The other orientation is about seeing access to land and tenure security as human rights or a means to achieve human rights (such as right to shelter, secure livelihood, and food security). However, the EU Land Policy Guidelines state that "land titling is not always the best way of increasing tenure security, and nor does it automatically lead to greater investment and productivity" (EU 2004: 6 in Assies 2009: 574). In the next chapter I analyze how weak land rights in Cambodia have resulted in the possibility of granting land concessions so easily.

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## THE CAMBODIAN CONTEXT

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Agriculture is central to the Cambodian government's development policies. Cambodia's economic growth was largely based on tourism and the garment industry, making it vulnerable (RGC 2004: 13). By increasing productivity and diversification, they hope to make the agricultural sector a "dynamic driver for economic growth and poverty reduction" (ibid.). The government wants a shift to industrial agriculture, led by private investment (ibid.). The instruments for this are 'Economic Land Concessions' (ELCs), which make it possible for the government to grant land to a concessionaire for agricultural and industrial-agricultural exploitation (RGC 2005: article 2).

All legal aspects of granting concessions were set out in the 2001 Land Law, which states that one ELC cannot be larger than 10.000 hectares; one person (or legal entities controlled by the same person) may not hold multiple ELCs exceeding 10.000 hectares in total (RGC 2001: article 59); and the maximum lease period of an ELC is 99 years (RGC 2001: article 61). It also states that concessions may only be granted on 'state private property' (RGC 2001: article 58). There are two types of state land. State public property consists of for example forests, roads, water, and heritage sites like Angkor Wat, and can only be the property of the state (RGC 2001: article 15-16). Only when land loses its public function (for example because it's not used), it can be classified as state private property, which can be sold or leased (RGC 2001: article 17). In total about 75-80% of Cambodia's surface area is registered as state land, because the Khmer Rouge regime abolished private property (USAID 2011: 6). I discuss the Khmer Rouge's influence on Cambodia's land rights in detail in the next chapter.

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## 2.2 LIVELIHOOD

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### SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FRAMEWORK

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A concept that is central to my research, is livelihood: the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living (Chambers & Conway 1991 in IRP 2010). To make sense of all that a livelihood comprises, I use a livelihood framework. From the 1990s on, these frameworks have been central to the rural development policies of development organizations. I use the British Department for

International Development's 'Sustainable Livelihoods Framework,' since it most fully represents all that a livelihood encompasses and is influenced by. One of the biggest strengths of a livelihood framework is that it provides perspectives on the multitude of factors that influence people's lives, and highlight the flexibility of people in making a living (Parizeau 2015: 161-2). At the same time, a rigid application of such a framework (as sometimes done in development practice) can result in a simplistic view of livelihoods. Also, a framework is a top-down approach to local context, and the thoughts and ideas of individuals themselves are not captured by it. I use the framework as an analytical tool, and have not tried to completely fill it in for the people in my research. As such, I decided not to include the schematic version of the framework here, but only to discuss the most important concepts for my research.

The building blocks of a livelihood are livelihood assets. Instead of just focusing on income in making a living, these assets show that more is necessary (DFID 1999: 5). In the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework there are five categories of assets: human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital. I operationalize the five categories in table 3.

People's livelihoods are influenced by 'transforming structures and processes.' These are the institutions, organizations, policies, and legislation that shape a livelihood (DFID 1999: 17). This is an important dimension to the livelihood, since they operate on every level (household to international) and in all spheres (public to private) (ibid.). They determine access (to livelihood assets, strategies, and sources of influence), the terms of exchange between livelihood assets, and returns (economic and not) to livelihood strategies (ibid.). For example, they can determine whether or not people are allowed to hunt in a forest. Structures are the 'hardware,' and include organizations (private and public) that set policies and deliver services, and most important of all, make processes function (DFID 1999: 19). Processes are the 'software' that determine the way structures and individuals operate and act (DFID 1999: 21). Processes include 'culture' and 'power relations,' such as gender and class (ibid.).

The vulnerability context consists of shocks, trends, and seasonality, and influences livelihoods in a way people cannot control. Shocks (like illness, conflict, and a granted land concession) may have direct consequences for people's livelihoods, for example through destroying livelihood assets (DFID 1999: 3). Trends (such as national or international economic trends, like a growing demand for a certain product) can be anticipated and thus planned for, and can both be beneficial or detrimental (ibid.) However, rural villagers are often not as aware of these trends as others. Seasonality (in food security, labor, price, etc.) is also often a source of adversity for people in the Global South (ibid.) It is possible to anticipate it, for example through saving food, but people don't always have the opportunity to do so (ibid.).

Based on the assets they have and influenced by the vulnerability context and transforming structures and processes, people undertake livelihood strategies. These are the activities that people employ and the choices people make in order to achieve their livelihood goals (DFID 1999: 23). Examples are employment, growing your own food, and reproductive choices. Livelihood strategies should be seen as a dynamic process in which strategies are combined to meet the specific needs of



Category	Livelihood assets <sup>16</sup>	Notes
<b>Human capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Skills</li> <li>- Knowledge</li> <li>- Good health</li> <li>- The ability to work</li> </ul>	Together these assets allow a person to pursue livelihood strategies. Human capital is needed to use other livelihood assets, but can be a goal on its own (f.e. good health).
<b>Social capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Membership of formal groups</li> <li>- Networks that increase access to institutions</li> <li>- Informal networks (family, friends, neighbors)</li> <li>- Relationships of trust, reciprocity, and exchange</li> </ul>	These are social assets that people use to pursue their livelihood goals. Social capital has a direct influence on other asset categories, through the trust and reciprocity networks. All these networks and relationships may concern religious allegiance and ethnicity.
<b>Natural capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Land</li> <li>- Forest</li> <li>- Water</li> <li>- Animals</li> <li>- Sun/wind</li> </ul>	These are the natural sources of which assets that are useful for the livelihood and ecosystem services (such as protection from erosion) are derived.
<b>Physical capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Infrastructure (transport, shelter, water supply, energy, sanitation, access to information)</li> <li>- Producer goods (tools, equipment, livestock, agricultural technologies)</li> </ul>	This comprises the infrastructure (changes to physical environment) and producer goods needed to support livelihoods. It can save both time and money (f.e. being able to go the market faster).
<b>Financial capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Available stocks (savings, credit)</li> <li>- Regular inflows of money (from income, trade, pensions, remittances)</li> <li>- Debt</li> </ul>	These assets are least available to poor people. Financial capital can help pursue different livelihood strategies.

Table 3: Livelihood assets in the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework<sup>17</sup>

that moment, and the more choice and flexibility people have in these strategies, the better they are able to withstand or adapt to shocks.

Livelihood outcomes are the achievements of livelihood strategies, for example more income, increased well-being, and reduced vulnerability (DFID 1999: 25). These outcomes feed back into the livelihood assets (which may be increased or reduced), and subsequently livelihood strategies.

<sup>16</sup> This is not a complete list, but examples of what constitutes as this type of livelihood asset.

<sup>17</sup> Own compilation, from DFID (1999: 7-16).

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## CRITICISM

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Scoones (2009) identifies four core challenges that must be addressed if livelihood perspectives continue to be applied. First, Scoones argues that it is necessary to look at the knowledge-making process of these perspectives: “Livelihoods analysis is presented as a rigorous and rational process, yet inevitably it is pursued with many buried assumptions and commitments. [...] The problem is that livelihoods analysis can be made to serve multiple purposes and ends.” (2009: 185). I try to be extremely reflexive about the way I have applied this tool and what my own assumptions and goals for my research were.

Second, politics and power must be central in livelihood perspectives, and should not just be a context (Scoones 2009: 185). In this research I do focus on power relations (large-scale like the government and company, and also small-scale through social inequality) and politics. An example of a situation where power relations had direct consequences for people’s livelihoods is the way the compensation was handled, which I discuss fully in chapter 4.

Third, livelihood approaches have often been unable “to address wider, global processes and their impingement on livelihood concerns at the local level” (Scoones 2009: 187). The phenomenon of land grabbing that I take a livelihood approach to, is driven by global factors. The case thus shows the influence of these on local livelihoods.

Fourth, Scoones argues that another challenge for livelihood perspectives is to deal with long-term change, driven by for example demography, regional economic shifts, land-use and climate (2009: 188-9). A livelihood approach may thus only portray a moment in time. Land grabbing is a long-term global process that brings about rural change (and thus change in livelihood strategies), but locally the change is direct. In the case I discuss there is a clear distinction between people’s livelihoods before and after the concession. Of course, there are historic factors that made the granting of the concession possible, which I discuss in the next chapter.

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## 2.3 EVERYDAY POLITICS

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In order to understand the choices villagers have made in my research, I use the concept of everyday politics.

Politics, according to one very concise definition, are about who gets what, when, and how (Laswell 1958 in Kerkviet 2009: 227). Kerkviet elaborates that “politics is about the control, allocation, production, and use of resources and the values and ideas underlying those activities” (2009: 227). Politics could thus be everywhere, but in the conventional sense it is mostly limited to governments, political parties and for example individuals trying to influence governments. However, political processes are not limited to these areas and also permeate daily life in peasant societies, where it takes different forms (Kerkviet 2009: 230).

To distinguish everyday politics from conventional forms, Kerkviet discusses official politics and advocacy politics. The first involves “authorities in organisations making, implementing, changing, contesting, and evading policies regarding resource allocations,” while the latter involves “direct and concerted efforts to support, criticise, and oppose authorities, their policies and programs, or the entire

way in which resources are produced and distributed within an organisation or a system of organisations” (Kerkviet 2009: 231-2). Everyday politics instead involves “people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources and doing so in quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that are rarely organised or direct.” (Kerkviet 2009: 232). The main differences are thus that everyday politics is often not organized and “done by people who probably do not regard their actions as political” (ibid.). Everyday politics can take many forms, which Kerkviet clusters under four headings: support, compliance, modifications and evasions, and resistance.

Kerkviet defines resistance as “what people do that shows disgust, anger, indignation or opposition to what they regard as unjust, unfair, illegal claims on them by people in higher, more powerful class and status positions or institutions” (Kerkviet 2009: 233). Key are thus that resistance is intentional, and it has an upward intention. How people resist varies from organized and confrontational (demonstrations, rebellions, petitions) to indirect, subtle, and non-confrontational (jokes behind superiors’ backs, sabotage, stealing). The latter can be called everyday resistance. Often the target of everyday resistance does not know (immediately) what has been done at their expense, and little to no organization is involved.

In his influential work *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Scott argues that by focusing on highly visible resistance, such as rebellions, it is easy to miss the powerful everyday resistance in peasant societies. Often subordinate classes haven’t been “afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity,” which is usually the domain of the middle class and intelligentsia (Scott 1985: xv). Instead everyday forms of resistance are used; “the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on” (Scott 1985: xvi). While everyday resistance provides a way of focusing on more subtle ways of protest, some authors have argued that Scott casts peasants in a powerless role; peasants’ resistance can be ‘noisy, public and open’ and does not have to be ‘quiet, disguised and anonymous’ (O’Brien 2013: 1051 in Touch & Neef 2015). In this thesis I thus discuss both open and concealed forms of resistance.

One finding in studies on everyday resistance is that while peasants may seem to accept exploitation or impoverishment, these are often facades hiding contrary views and actions that grow from discontent to how they are treated by more powerful people (Kerkviet 2009: 234). For everyday resistance to escalate into open, confrontational resistance, scholars have found two conditions. The first is changing political circumstances favoring peasants and disfavoring the targets of the resistance, which appears to help peasants overcome fear or insecurity of repercussions (Kerkviet 2009: 235). Second, leaders or groups that can frame the discontent and resistance need to emerge in order for peasants to overcome reluctance, so they can come together and collectively confront the targets of resistance (ibid.).

Besides everyday resistance, other forms of everyday politics can be found in peasant societies as well. Societies are full of unequal relationships between people (for example through status and class) and between citizens and government authorities, which have unequal roles in the production, distribution and use of resources (ibid.). Everyday forms of support for this system involve

deliberate endorsement, while forms of compliance are about supporting the system without thinking too much about it (ibid.). Unequal interpersonal relationships like patron-client relations reinforce differences, and perpetuate a political system in which inequality is inherent (ibid.). Of course, everyday politics can be as straightforward as talking about a governmental figure and policies because people support them. Compliance may take shape as daily activities, just 'going through the routine' of what the system expects of you (Kerkviet 2009: 237). People do not want to be seen as transgressors and risk punishment, so they behave as though they believe or tolerate the system (ibid.). By doing this, they become players in the game, "thus making it possible for the game to go on, for it to exist in the first place" (Havel 1985 in Kerkviet 2009: 237). This is especially interesting in the case of Cambodia, because of its recent gruesome history and also the current political leadership. Many of my research participants were old enough to have experienced life under the Khmer Rouge regime. With these ordeals still in mind, it is easy to see why people would choose to comply instead of to openly resist. Still, there are people that do resist; for the first time in a long time, civil society has a chance.

In between support or compliance and resistance, there are everyday modifications and evasions of the system. Usually, actions in this category are about 'cutting corners' to get by, and "convey indifference to the rules and processes regarding production, distribution, and use of resources" (Kerkviet 2009: 237). An example is that during the 1960s-1980s in Vietnamese collective farming cooperatives, some families secretly used some of the land to farm individually, because they believed they could do a better job alone (Kerkviet 2009: 237-8). In the case of these farming cooperatives and many others, combinations of everyday modifications and evasions and everyday resistance contributed to changing policies (Kerkviet 2009: 238).

Since my research concerns different groups that have different power positions (government and company versus villagers, government versus company, villagers living on Koh Sdach versus those on the mainland, etcetera), looking closely at different forms of everyday politics can shed some light on why the different groups made the choices they did.

### 3 | LAND IN CAMBODIA: RIGHTS AND RESOURCE

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In this chapter I answer my first sub-question: 'How can a land concession be granted on land already claimed by local people, and in what way are they using it as a resource?'. First I discuss land rights, demonstrating that it is difficult to determine who really had right to land in Koh Sdach commune, and thus how it is possible local people were dispossessed. Second I analyze how land is the foremost resource for many Cambodians, and show why losing it is such a big problem.

#### 3.1 LAND RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA

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Cambodia finds itself in a unique situation regarding land rights, due to its many drastic regime changes in the last century. While the Khmer Rouge practically pushed the 'reset button' for a land rights system, habits and regulations from before the regime are still prevalent in this time. In this section I discuss what right Cambodian citizens historically have to land, and how the Khmer Rouge's influence has been so problematic.

Before the French colonial period (1863-1953), all land theoretically belonged to the Cambodian king. However, by Cambodian 'customary law' cultivation has always been recognized, and thereby possession of land (Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013: 438). If farmers cultivated land continuously for five consecutive years, their possession was recognized. When they did not cultivate the land for three years, farmers lost their possession right (ibid.). This system was also called 'acquisition by the plough,' and was mostly based on oral agreements between people in the area (Springer 2015: 145).

The French started a cadastral mapping and registration system in 1912, which could convert possession rights to ownership with a land title (Springer 2015: 143). These two systems of land rights continued to exist after Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953. The cadastral system was successful: results from the 1962 census indicated that 76,9% of farmers had documents issued by the land department that proved their land rights, of which 84% was recognized as owner of the land (Pet et al. 2005 in Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013).

The Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) abolished private ownership and destroyed all land records, installing agrarian collectives. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, many Cambodians resettled on land and in houses wherever they could, regardless of who owned the land before. The focus was on overcoming the tragedies of the past years and rebuilding lives. In the succeeding Vietnamese occupation, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989) established a socialist economy and all land continued to belong to the state (Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013: 438). While many households tried to make a living by farming on their own, the Vietnamese installed voluntary partial collectives similar to those in Vietnam, called *krom samaki* (ibid.). The government distributed land to these groups.

After Vietnamese withdrawal in 1989, private property rights were reintroduced under a program of land reform (ibid.). In the early 1990s, land rights were further articulated in several laws: all ownership rights prior to 1979 were not recognized; ownership rights of houses were granted; and customary law (possession) became regulated. One had 'temporary possession' when cultivating land,

which could be converted to exclusive ownership after five years, and three years of not using the land constituted abandonment (Springer 2015: 145).

Only under the current Kingdom of Cambodia (1993–) a new cadastral registry was introduced. The 2001 Land Law, which also details legislation regarding land concessions, made private ownership of all types of land possible and removed loss of rights after not using land for three years (*ibid.*). The right of temporary possession was nullified and official ownership of land now required a land title issued by the national government (*ibid.*). People that had cultivated land for a minimum of five years before the law was passed – so starting in 1996 at the latest – could apply for a title (Springer 2015: 153). It is the responsibility of the farmer to apply. However, many have interpreted the law as it being possible to apply after any consecutive period of five years (*ibid.*). People starting to use a plot of land from 1997 or later have no legal entitlement to the land without official written documentation (*ibid.*). Also, cultivating the land for five years is no guarantee for a title; you are just allowed to request one. Cambodians do not pay tax over land, so that is not a way to derive rights.

In practice, the government has failed to properly introduce the new official system in most rural areas (Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013: 439). Oral agreements and actual use of the land continued to reflect Cambodians' understanding of possession, and little attention was paid to the official cadaster (Springer 2015: 150). Two types of land titles are recognized by different levels of the government, 'soft' and 'hard' titles. The soft titles, or 'possessory titles' are registered at the district government, and not in the national registry (Green 2008). These titles are technically not ownership, but give security on a local level. To get a soft title, the farmer needs to survey his land with the Chief of Village, and have some documents signed by both the Chief of Village and Chief of Commune. They send it to the district governor, who registers the soft title and issues it. This system is quite complicated and sometimes expensive, so not all farmers have this title (Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013: 443).<sup>18</sup> When launched, about 4,5 million people applied for possession titles, but only an estimated 51.000 people obtained them prior to 1998 (Pet et al. 2005 in Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013).

The hard titles are registered at the Cadastral Office of the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction in Phnom Penh, and are proof of ownership (Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013: 443). The titles are recognized on every government level and the most secure title available (*ibid.*). The process to convert a soft title to a hard title is not clear, so out of reach for most farmers. The cost of this process is high, and most farmers lack the proper documentation to meet all requirements for a hard title. Alongside the 2001 Land Law, the government introduced 'systematic registration' land titling. The Land Management and Administration Project (LMAP) officially started in 2002, with support from the World Bank and the governments of Germany, Finland, and Canada. The Cambodian government designated areas for titling by the project, and 26 teams went around Cambodia to survey plots of land, review land documents, and issue titles, village by village (Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013: 444). Through this system, over 1,1 million hard titles were issued. One of the problems of LMAP however, is that the government only designated areas not likely to be disputed or

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<sup>18</sup> This is called 'sporadic registration' and exists since 1992, although the requirements and process were never articulated clearly. The system is expensive for most, and sometimes people are asked to pay extra fees because of "budget shortfalls" (Sekiguchi & Hatsukano 2013: 443).



away from potential land concession areas (ibid.). Also, many vulnerable households were arbitrarily excluded from the titling (The World Bank 2009: i). Since LMAP did not have the capacity to issue land titles faster throughout the whole country, the result was a patchwork of hard titles and increased inequality in land security. In 2009 the government cancelled the World Bank's financing of the project because they were in disagreement over LMAP's results and the way forward. The World Bank even froze all lending to Cambodia over this dispute in 2011. The project now continues with other donors.

Cambodia's regime changes and different land laws that are not well detailed or well implemented, result in a confusing system with different legalities on different government levels. So who has rights to land in the case I discuss? While the Khmer Rouge regime officially finished in 1979, some soldiers and supporters of the regime withdrew into the jungle throughout the country. One of those places was in Koh Sdach commune. They campaigned to liberate the country from the Vietnamese, and some Cambodians joined them. These soldiers meant no harm to local people, but fought the government, who could not go near these areas. After Vietnamese withdrawal, the Cambodian government encouraged people to go to the area and do agriculture there, as a way to keep it under government control. The Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1991 and the United Nations ruled the country to implement them, until elections in 1993. While the Khmer Rouge officially signed this agreement for peace, the soldiers remained in the jungle until 1997. Koh Sdach commune has always been an relatively isolated area due to a lack of roads leading there, and the presence of Khmer Rouge soldiers reinforced this.

Many of the people that lost their land due to the concession, came to the area because of the government's encouragement. Customary law of cultivating land and gaining possession of it was followed, but after five years no title was issued. Oral agreements between local authorities (such as the Chief of Commune) and farmers were enough to recognize land as belonging to a specific person. As one of my respondents said: "We didn't need an official paper. The tree is the paper."<sup>19</sup> Being able to show that you used the land was thus deemed enough. The government's encouragement to "just take some land"<sup>20</sup> makes the varying land rights even more complicated. While no one in the area had a hard title, some had soft titles registered at district level and others relied on oral agreements, but could have applied for possession rights. In accordance with the compensation policy, having a soft title should have ensured higher compensation when the land concession was granted, but in practice some with soft titles did not receive any compensation at all. Since no land was registered at the national level, it could look like no one had a right to land in the area, and the Cambodian government could thus grant the concession. So who is right, or who has the rights? Neither view is completely wrong. The malfunctioning land registration system is in large part the cause of many land disputes in Cambodia.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with a resister (name unknown) on 17 February 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with resister Thorn on 6 March 2017.

## 3.2 LAND AS RESOURCE

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To understand why losing land is so difficult for many Cambodians, I analyze how land is used as a resource in Cambodia and by my research participants. I also look at the other livelihood strategies they were using, so the changes in strategies after the concession become clear in the next chapters.

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### FARMING IN CAMBODIA

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An estimated 66 percent of Cambodians is dependent on farming (Maclean et al. 2013: 149). Rice is the main staple in Cambodian diet, but of course supplements are needed (Shams 2007: 110). Normally, foraging and fishing in rice field ecosystems<sup>21</sup> supply most of these for Cambodian farmers (ibid.).<sup>22</sup> The proximity of the old villages of my research participants to both the ocean and many freshwater canals meant that fishing and foraging there was easier than in and around rice fields. The farmland available to my research participants is also different than most places in Cambodia. Especially in the center of the country around the Tonlé Sap lake and river and the Mekong river, land is flat and very fertile because of annual flooding of the rivers in the wet season. Most of Cambodia's rice fields are located here. Rain-fed lowland culture rice is produced, accounting for 93% of the total production area of wet season rice in Cambodia (Sarom 2007: 57). Rice is planted in a field submerged by water, from rain or flooding rivers and canals. Sometimes small ditches are dug in the low embankments between fields, to make sure all plots flood. At the start of the rain season, from late May to July, the rice seeds are planted. A few weeks later, the rice shoots are transplanted to give the plants enough room. Harvest is usually in December.

Koh Sdach commune is not completely flat, but has some flat areas interspersed with hills, gaining altitude inland. Many Cambodians do not know how to plant rice in hilly areas, so upland rain-fed rice only accounts for two percent of total rice production in the country (ibid.). In Koh Sdach commune this meant that some land was unsuitable for planting rice, and instead was used as *chamkar* [orchard] land. Many Cambodians plant some fruit trees near their house, but in Koh Sdach commune this was done on a much larger scale. Especially cashew, mango, and coconut trees were popular, but some also planted pineapple, dragonfruit, and jackfruit. In practice almost everyone in the commune had some *chamkar* land, and by my estimation about 40 percent had rice land as well. Land usage evolved through people moving to the area and just using a piece of land; whoever came first could thus take some rice land. People that arrived later may not have had that opportunity. As such, I found no jealousy between people in how land used to be distributed. A reason that people were generally content with the land they had, is because in most cases it was already far more than the average farm size of about one hectare in Cambodia (Mund 2011: 12). The amount of land used by my research participants varied. Some even mentioned having twenty hectares before, which I was

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<sup>21</sup> Rice field ecosystems consist of "rice fields, levees surrounding the fields, irrigation channels, streams, and all uncultivated lands within rice-growing areas, like termite hills, small bushes, swamp lands, and natural ponds and irrigation channels which connect rice fields to permanent water sources" (Shams 2007: 111).

<sup>22</sup> Animals (fish, shrimps, crabs, snails, snakes, rats, insects) as well as plants (like waterlilies, mushrooms, grass and bamboo shoots) can be found, that farmers use for their own consumption or animal fodder (Shams 2007: 111).

able to verify through government documents.<sup>23</sup> The overall impression I got from these documents is that 'having' more than ten hectares was not that uncommon in the Botum Sakor National Park.

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#### LAND USE AND OTHER LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN KOH SDACH COMMUNE

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In formal interviews, I asked people to list the ways they provided in food or got money, and then to score them (in percentages) on importance to make a living. This way I gathered data on livelihood strategies before and after the granting of the concession. Since I could not ask these questions on a large scale, I cannot generalize or apply these numbers to the entire commune. I still present this data here, since the overall pattern I found by asking these questions is something I verified through informal conversations and seemed to fit most cases.

In the old villages, before the concession, livelihood strategies were mostly food security-oriented, such as farming and fishing. As I discussed above, some farmed rice and some had *chamkar*, or both. Almost every person I spoke to, and all 17 households I formally asked, farmed in the old village. On average, they thought 45 percent of their livelihood depended on it. Rice farming is a seasonal strategy; usually people could only produce one harvest per year. Sometimes people also grew some vegetables on the land in the dry season. On average, one hectare could yield at least 1500 kilograms of milled rice. The by-products, such as the husk, bran, and brewer's rice (small pieces of broken kernels), are for example used for animal fodder or to make rice flour. Depending on the size of the farm and size of the household, a part of the harvest was sold. In Koh Sdach commune, one of the most common *chamkar* crops was cashew. This crop is purely for sale: people do not eat the bitter fruit but just sell the shells. Coconut and mango are both for food and for sale. These crops are usually sold to intermediaries (shopkeepers), who continue to sell them at a bigger market. It can be a highly lucrative business. At the time of research, one kilogram of cashew nuts (with shell) sold for 7.000 riel<sup>24</sup> (\$1,75), meaning that selling just over ten kilograms of cashews<sup>25</sup> can already buy a family 50 kilograms of rice.<sup>26</sup> So while rice traditionally may seem more valuable than *chamkar* for Cambodian households, losing these trees is a big shock income-wise.

Many used the ocean and canals around the old villages as resources as well. Almost everyone I spoke to was using these resources to supplement their daily food needs, by occasional fishing and foraging. Nine out of the 17 households I asked this question to were also fishing on a larger scale, to sell catch in the area or abroad. On average they thought 43 percent of their livelihood was dependent on fishing. Many people used to be fishing on a larger scale and had a boat, since there was no road. Eventually there was not enough place to dock the boats, so many sold them and started cutting trees instead (which I discuss below). Due to the proximity of the villages to the ocean and canals, there was no seasonal restriction on fishing and little catch was processed. In chapter 6 about islanders I discuss current fishing practices.

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<sup>23</sup> These documents were collected by the Ministry of Environment, and included land size and names of people affected by the concession. The report was given to one of my respondents, an activist, by a friend of his who worked as clerk in the ministry.

<sup>24</sup> In Cambodia, two currencies are used: the Khmer riel and American dollar. One dollar is 4.000 riel. Throughout this thesis I will present both currencies.

<sup>25</sup> Cashew trees only bloom once per year. A tree can yield between five and ten kilograms of nuts.

<sup>26</sup> A 50 kilogram bag of rice costs about 80.000 riel (\$20).

These more food security-oriented livelihood strategies were mostly supported by own cash generating ventures, such as producing charcoal, owning a restaurant, or weaving, or jobs as 'workers.' Worker is a term used in Cambodia to cover many hard jobs: clearing farms, cutting trees, breaking rocks, construction, and more. Many workers do multiple types of work, since these jobs are not formal. Often people are a sort of freelance worker that can be called upon for a day's work by companies or individuals. Six out of 17 households I asked were supporting their livelihood with a job as worker before the concession. On average, they thought this only accounted for 19 percent of their livelihood. Five households had an own cash generating venture, which on average was said to account for far more of the livelihood, 47 percent.

Poi Yoapon is built upon a history of logging, since from 1969 to 1975 a Japanese company set up a wood factory in Poi Yoapon, and it is what the village is named after (Yoapon being Japan). According to a respondent living there at the time, this company knew which wood to cut. Their success might have inspired a Thai-Cambodian company to start logging in 1984. This company just clear-cut the forest. Many workers came to Poi Yoapon just to work for the company, but the village was thriving. This was the only time Poi Yoapon had a market. When the company left, many of the workers did as well, although some stuck around in the area. Now people started cutting wood from the jungle themselves, either for local use, or for export to Thailand. Besides building materials, aloe wood was cut as well.

Most of the households' livelihoods were diversified: they had multiple strategies which could help them to absorb shocks to their livelihood, like a bad harvest. However, the most important strategies were still farming and fishing and because of the concession people lost access to these resources. While losing rice land is also difficult, rice can be easily planted on another piece of land (if available). With *chamkar* this is more difficult: it takes at least five years before new trees can be harvested. The trees they had before only needed little attention throughout the year, but were a great source of income. In the following three chapters I discuss how each group I found in my research has dealt with losing these resources and what changes they had to make in their livelihood strategies.

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*Today was my first day of conducting research on the mainland. Thy and I hit the road on his old Honda Daelim moto, driving along the asphalted Chinese-built road to the relocation site, Kon Kok. The road there takes us up and down steep jungle covered hills, and sometimes we barely make it to the top. When we are near Kon Kok, we turn off the highway and the path changes to a dusty, red dirt road. There are some small shops and a few houses, but there is barely anyone around. In the distance I see a hilltop covered with houses. It is as if we entered a Center Parcs area, all houses are exactly the same. Going in the opposite direction, we pass a boy pushing a moto. Thy calls out to him, laughing that he has a flat tire. A few minutes later we pass a truck with a big water tank on the back. It delivers water to villagers, since wells are dry. Not so Center Parcs after all. After a few hours we leave Kon Kok. Suddenly the tire pops, and we end up walking just like the boy did that morning, over the dusty road towards the highway. Villagers are calling out, laughing that a barang [foreigner] has to walk. The next day we find that the story has made its way around the village like wildfire. Now everyone in Kon Kok knows I am there.*

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## 4 | MOVERS: KON KOK AND MIGRATION

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In this chapter, the group of movers is examined. First I introduce the group and Kon Kok, where they live now. To understand how they got there, I discuss the implementation of the compensation policy. Second I present three case studies of movers. I use these to analyze how movers' livelihood strategies have changed due to the concession. Third I explore why these people chose to move and if they are content with their choice. Lastly I conclude my findings on movers.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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#### WELCOME TO KON KOK

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This chapter concerns the people that accepted compensation, and moved. Most people moved to Kon Kok, where the compensation houses are, although some also moved to other places or migrated.

Union Development Group built over 300 houses in Kon Kok, each on a 0,5 hectare plot of land. They did not preemptively built houses for everyone affected. As of 2014, only 255 of these houses were occupied.<sup>27</sup> Later, some parts of the relocation site were 'cut' to a different commune. Then 217 families lived in the commune's relocation site. Through satellite imaging, I have counted at least 260 houses built in the Koh Sdach commune area. This means at least 17 percent of the houses built in the commune are not inhabited.<sup>28</sup> This is due to multiple reasons: postponing, moving away again, resisters, and islanders. In some cases, people have postponed moving to Kon Kok after being evicted. An example is my research assistant Thy, who first moved in together with his wife and three children with his brother's family on Koh Sdach. He eventually had to move to Kon Kok in mid-2016, since the house was growing too small. There are also people that did move to Kon Kok for a time only to leave later, for example to go live with family in different provinces, or to migrate for jobs. Other reasons are that some of the houses built are destined for people that continue to resist, or people that live on Koh Sdach and have no plans of moving. People received ownership titles for the land they received as compensation.

At the time of research, many of the houses were already broken down. Walls had blown of, roofs had rotted or stairs fallen down. A picture of such a broken house can be seen on the front page of this thesis. Often houses were patched up with temporary solutions, since people did not have money to fix the house well. The roads through the village were unpaved, dusty, uneven, and full of sharp rocks that as the vignette shows, can easily puncture tires. In the rainy season such roads often deteriorate even more, becoming rivers of mud and creating deeper holes. There was no electricity in the village, or a reliable water supply. In the agreement, the company promised to provide both (Sao 2015: 24). Each family would receive a well, but they were only built at a few houses. At the time of research, the existing wells were dry and most people had to buy water from a truck, at about 100 liters for 1.000 riel (\$0,25). This may not seem like a lot of money, but this water had to be used for

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<sup>27</sup> These numbers were given to me by the Chief of Village of Preah Smach, Chheun Vanna.

<sup>28</sup> When taking 260 as 100 percent of the houses in the relocation site, 217 inhabited houses means 83 percent are used.



drinking, cooking, washing, and irrigation. While the villagers may have been aware that Kon Kok would face water shortages, it became clear only later that the company would not honor its promise of providing (deep enough) wells.

There was no clinic near the village, so Koh Sdach was the closest option. To get there, you would need to take the boat which costs 5.000 riel (\$1,25) per way. There were schools in Kon Kok, up to grade 9 (15 years old). What many people thought was a good thing to come from the concession, is the road. Union Development Group built a 70 kilometer long, 10 meters wide road through the national park, from the entrance to the resort, in order to bring construction materials. Before, there was no road through the park connecting these villages to the rest of Cambodia, the only way was by boat.

Kon Kok is roughly organized by the old villages: some areas house mostly people from Anlong Trei, while in others there are mostly people from Poi Yoapon. The reason for this is that people from Poi Yoapon were just appointed houses by the company (in order of moving). Poi Yoapon was evicted first, and when most moved, it was Anlong Trei's turn. However, they were moved in groups. Some Cambodian villages are subdivided in groups of 20 households, with a leader (not an official capacity) that reports to the Chief of Village. The reason for this is that some administrative areas (like Preah Smach) existed out of multiple spread out and hard to reach areas. This way, the job of the Chief of Village is a bit easier. When a whole household group agreed to move, the leader could choose a spot at the relocation site. It was up to the leader to discuss this (or not) with the members of his group. This system of relocation resulted in a patchwork of groups of people from the same village.

Movers that did not go to Kon Kok are either people that migrated for jobs, or families that received high compensation and could build or buy a house somewhere else. Only 15 families received the highest compensation possible, of which seven or eight families from Koh Sdach. This compensation consisted out of \$8.000 per hectare, for up to five hectares. If they had more land, they received between \$2.000-4.000 dollar per hectare. While according to the compensation policy this was for people with a (hard) land title, it was mostly awarded to people with the right social capital, like friends in the government or ties to other influential people. With the exception of the families on Koh Sdach and one other family, these people moved away.

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#### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPENSATION POLICY

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The compensation process was far from smooth. While on paper the compensation packages UDG offered were much better than those of other land concessions in Cambodia (often non-existent), the implementation leaves much to be desired. For example, the villagers claim that when their land was measured, the company promised \$8.000 per hectare compensation. While \$8.000 is the maximum compensation per hectare, the compensation policy (which the villagers did not see) states clearly under which circumstances this amount is agreed. While I don't know how the villagers heard of the \$8.000, I believe gossip might have been in play. At that time, most villagers were still positive about the 'development' the company would bring. It is possible they were told about compensation up to \$8.000, which one enthusiastic villager may translated into a definitive amount per hectare.

Eventually, only 15 families received the highest standard of compensation. According to some villagers, the company gave the money for compensation to the Cambodian government (since they were responsible administratively), who allegedly kept most of the money meant for affected villagers. The company was also thought to 'play games' with villagers in the way they measured land. Often, the company's measurements were less than what the villagers' own records showed. However, the Chinese measured by GPS, so either they adjusted the size later in the computer, or the villagers'

own records were not precise to begin with. Many villagers were angry about this. The company also refused to measure land without crops, while seasonality determined that sometimes land was 'empty.' Ironically, when villagers wanted to harvest their crops before moving, the company allegedly said that people did not need crops.

In an initial meeting with the affected local communities, government officials promised that Hun Sen's tiger skin policy would be implemented and the village 'cut out' from the concession area. When agreeing to compensation, villagers thus allegedly thought they were trading in their farmland (and hut at the farm where they sometimes stay during harvest season) for a new house and land at the relocation site, and that they could keep the house (and land) in the village. After about 70 percent of the families from Poi YoPON accepted compensation, company representatives, Chinese laborers, government officials and army forces came in 2011 to demolish houses of those that had moved to Kon Kok. The laborers demolished the houses, and the army was there to protect them. Some people that accepted compensation but did not move yet received one million riel (\$250 dollar) as an incentive to move. Others were threatened: family in Kon Kok of people that did not move yet were told by army officials that their family members would go to jail. These movers then urged them to move as well. It took about 2,5 years to remove all the houses of the movers from Poi YoPON. While I partially understand the confusion of my research participants, I also believe there was some ethnographic seduction in play. How would farmland (with or without a hut at the farm) compare to a house in a newly built village and sometimes farmland (in a different location from that village)? I think some of my respondents now regret their choices or initial naivety, and thus tried to construct a narrative of victimhood to conceal that or to believe they had no choice. Of course, I cannot know exactly what my respondents thought and what happened then.

*"This is just a trick. [...] The government agent comes to pay only to these people, and they take a video and some photos to show it's good, and then they stop giving compensation. These are officials and leaders from the government playing a game."*

*- Resister Thorn*

## 4.2 CASE STUDIES

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I use three case studies of research participants to illustrate my findings. These are not meant to generalize for all movers, but to give an idea of the different situations I encountered.

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## CHANNY

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Channy is 46 years old and living with her husband, three children, and one grandson. Four older children live in Phnom Penh; two daughters are married, one son is attending high school, and one son works there. Channy was born in Poi Yoapon in 1970. During the Khmer Rouge regime she had to move to Kampot province, to return to Poi Yoapon in 1983.

Before the concession, Channy and her husband were both farming on their land of about ten hectares. About half was used as *chamkar* land, where she planted mango, jackfruit, and cashew trees. The other half was used to plant rice in the rainy season, and in the dry season vegetables. She also had three cows and many chickens. Her household's livelihood was almost completely supported through the strategy of farming, but she foraged and fished a little as well. Channy could generate cash income by selling parts of her harvest. For example cashew nuts, although the price strongly fluctuates each year: this season one kilo sold for 7.000 riel (\$1,75), while that was just 1.500 riel (\$0,38) last year.

Channy received \$1.250 for the land and a new house (on half a hectare of land) at the relocation site.<sup>29</sup> In Kon Kok, Channy planted the land around her house with new trees – mango, jackfruit, and cashew – soon after arriving. Now the trees are all big enough to harvest and she has a thriving garden. She is one of the only families in Kon Kok that have that though; most others just have a few trees on their land. Her husband supplies most of the family's cash income as a 'worker,' mostly doing construction. Sometimes her children in Phnom Penh can send some money back as well, but since they have their own family to care for, this is not regular. About 70 percent of the livelihood depends on Channy's husband's job, 25 percent on the *chamkar*, and five percent on remittances.

These strategies are supplemented by one time, opportunity, or seasonal strategies. For example, during my research period it was cashew season. When Channy's husband had time, he would go in the jungle and harvest nuts there to sell. Channy also had a loan from a microfinance institution, but the money from her husband's job was not enough to pay it back. They had to "cut some land for sale," meaning they sold a strip of land to "outsiders," who for Channy are people from a different commune. She was able to do so since she (randomly) received a house along the highway. This is a wanted area, since the accessibility is good and for example a shop here will have more customers.

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## DEURN

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Deurn is 58 years old, and lives on her own in Kon Kok. Her husband has passed away, and her only son does not stay with her permanently. Two daughters are married and live in Siem Reap. Deurn was born in 1959 on Koh Sdach, but grew up in the provincial capital of Koh Kong. When the Khmer Rouge came into power, she was 16, which was a prime age to be a worker under the regime. At first she was moved to Kampong Speu province with her parents and brother, but soon she was put into a mobile workforce. She had to leave her family and was moved around the country for different

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<sup>29</sup> This corresponds to cases 5 and 6 from the compensation policy. She received \$250 per hectare for up to five hectares of land.

projects, such as building a harbor in Sihanoukville. She has never seen her family again. “To this day, I don’t know if they are alive.”

After the Khmer Rouge regime she married her husband who was a police officer on Koh Sdach. She had a restaurant there. In 2000 they moved to Anlong Trei, because they wanted to farm. One daughter had already moved away, but her other children stayed on Koh Sdach instead of moving to Anlong Trei. However, they still saw to their livelihoods as a family. Deurn had six hectares of land, most of which was *chamkar*, planted with cashew and mango trees. In the rainy season she also planted rice. Her children supplied monetary income; her daughter fixed fishing nets and her son was working on a fishing boat. To supplement the income, they had four buffaloes that could be rented out to carry wood from the jungle. Deurns husband would accompany the buffalo. All the income was necessary to buy food for the family, they did not have much surplus.

After her husband died in 2009, she stayed with family in Srae Ambel for a while, a small town just outside the national park. In 2010, while Deurn was still adapting (her livelihood) to the loss of her husband, Anlong Trei was evicted. She received a new house in Kon Kok, but the company demolished her house before she could move all her possessions out, since she stayed in Srae Ambel. This made her very angry and sad, since it was where she lived with her husband and she did not want to lose those memories. Deurn did not know how she could live at the relocation site, having to start completely over. So she took a job as cook on Koh Toteang, a small island about a 15-minute speedboat ride away from Poi YoPON, on which there is only an eco-resort. She lived there for three years, before moving to the relocation site.

There she started a small shop, which is enough to support her daily needs. Deurn took out a loan to be able to buy the inventory for the shop. She has invested in a large battery and a TV, and now many people come around at night to watch it, while she sells coffee and biscuits. She is able to sell for about 60.000-70.000 riel per night (\$15-17,5). She used to get money from her son as well, who migrated to Thailand to be a boat worker there. He could send about 5.000 baht (€130) per month, which constituted a big part of her income. She saved most the money to improve the house she received, and now has a far larger and more durable house (and shop). During my research period, her son had just come back home to find another job in Phnom Penh, so the remittances stopped.

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#### VET

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Vet is 42 years old, and lives in Kon Kok with her husband, three sons, and granddaughter. Vet’s daughter is married and lives in a different province, but her child lives with her parents. Vet has lived in Poi YoPON since 1993, where she ran a small restaurant selling things like porridge and noodles. Her husband was a worker, mostly cutting trees in the jungle or working on farms. He did not have work regularly. They also owned five hectares of *chamkar* land with cashew trees, but it was far away and with low prices for cashews, it was often not worth it to harvest them. About 90 percent of the income came from the restaurant, the rest from her husband’s work. In this case as well, supplementary strategies were foraging and fishing when necessary.

Vet received a house, two hectares of farmland, and \$750 as compensation.<sup>30</sup> After the move to Kon Kok, Vet's husband got sick and cannot work as a worker anymore. Most of the livelihood now depends on her oldest son (22), who is a worker. Vet, her husband, and the middle son (18) supplement this income by going to the jungle to forage, or harvest cashews. The youngest son (15) mostly stays at home, since he had to stop going to school after grade six (final year primary school), when he was 12 years old. It was too difficult for him to go to secondary school, since it was farther away and they did not have the money for it. The household received two hectares of land for compensation, but "it is very far away, and [they] have never seen it." The land isn't really far away, but it is not along the road, so they would have to walk through the jungle for a bit before reaching it. Also, the land itself is still jungle, so they would have to clear it first. Vet was also unable to plant many trees on the land around her house, because it was on a too steep slope and unfertile ground. The household does not have a stable livelihood and has a hard time meeting its needs. Vet said they are already \$1.000 in debt at shopkeepers, since they sometimes cannot pay for food.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.3 LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

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In this section I analyze and theorize my findings on movers' livelihood strategies, illustrated by the above case studies. This concerns my third sub-question: 'How do local people's livelihood strategies change due to the granting of a land concession?'. I found a multitude of livelihood strategies: both activities (income generating) and choices (such as the choice to continue education or not). For many people in the old village food security-oriented strategies like fishing, farming, and hunting and foraging, were the most important way of meeting their immediate livelihood needs. Even if these kind of strategies were not the main activities for families, especially foraging and fishing were still supplementary or back-up strategies. These strategies were supplemented by some cash generating strategies, such as jobs a workers. Since the access to (arable and resource-rich) natural capital is low after the concession, food security-oriented strategies were not used as much, and usually less successful. I observed a partial shift to cash generating strategies. In most cases, these livelihood strategies are less sustainable (both environmental and long-term) than the strategies employed in the old village. This shift from food to cash-oriented strategies is the biggest difference between livelihood strategies in the old villages and in Kon Kok.

Many respondents missed "the easy life"<sup>32</sup> in the old village, since food used to be abundant there. Although many people did get some land at the new village, most of it went unused. As respondents often noted: "It is on a mountain!"<sup>33</sup>. The soil was not as fertile as the land on the coast, the land was sometimes on a steep slope, difficult to get to, or still jungle. Farming for instance was practiced by six out of ten formally interviewed movers, but two of those could not harvest anything yet, and for all this strategy was small-scale only (some fruit trees at the house). These movers

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<sup>30</sup> This corresponds to cases 5 and 6 from the compensation policy.

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps a case of ethnographic seduction; I doubt the actual debt amount is that high. It did seem like the family was struggling a lot to meet their daily food needs.

<sup>32</sup> For example interview with mover Neuk on 7 March 2017 and mover Pisey on 16 February 2017.

<sup>33</sup> For example interview with mover Mov on 16 February 2017 and resister Phana on 23 February 2017.



thought on average farming accounted for just 15 percent of their livelihoods at Kon Kok. Fishing was only practiced by one of the interviewed movers, who only did it occasionally and for his own food. Instead, the cash generating strategies became more important. Four of the ten interviewed households used the livelihood strategy of the construction-type worker jobs. In two cases, this constituted the entire livelihood. Cash generating ventures were also used by four out of ten, and were thought to account for an average of 76% of the livelihood.

Another interesting strategy that I encountered in Kon Kok is the collection and sale of yellow vine (*Coscinium fenestratum*). The vines can be found in the jungle around Kon Kok, are sold to someone in the village, and cut up into small powdery pieces that drip a yellow liquid. This is the only part of the production process I was able to witness, since it is then sold to a company outside of the village. When asking people what it is used for or where it goes, most said they didn't know. It was unclear to me if this was because they truly did not know, or due to the fact that export of yellow vine in any form or setting up processing facilities is illegal (Otis 2014). What exactly yellow vine is used for remains unclear. Some say cosmetics, but it also used as traditional or Ayurvedic medicine, and sometimes believed to be connected to narcotics such as ecstasy/MDMA (ibid.). Cambodian environmental activist Chut Wutty was shot in 2012 after investigating yellow vine and its possible drug connection. Later, a pharmacologist and medicinal chemist revealed that it was impossible to use the medicinal compounds in yellow vine for these drugs (ibid.). Collecting and selling yellow vine could be used as a backup livelihood strategy by villagers, when a household was low on cash. Two of the movers I interviewed also used it as a regular livelihood strategy. For one of the households it even accounted for 80% of the livelihood. The father and 15 year old son from this family would go into the jungle almost every day, and could earn about 70.000-80.000 riel (\$17,5-20) per day. However, the vines cannot be harvested year-round, so it is only a seasonal strategy.



Figure 5: Yellow vine bundles and mountains of chipped vines<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Photo by Daniel Otis, see Otis (2014).



Some people started poaching as well. The Botum Sakor National Park is home to many different species of wildlife, some of which are endangered (Human Rights Council 2012: 118). While the poacher I spoke to will eat anything he kills and cannot sell, he mostly hunts for “expensive animals,” such as turtles, monitor lizards, and snakes. If he can catch them alive, he sells these animals to middlemen who continue to sell it to China, where there is a demand for these types of animals. Local people generally do not eat these animals because they are expensive, but if someone for instance catches a snake himself, he will eat it.

After the concession, out-migration increased, although I was not able to get any numbers on this. One of the reasons it was difficult to get an idea of how many moved, is that mostly young people followed this strategy. Instead of splitting off from their parents into their own families in the villages, people migrated. It was harder to gain a stable livelihood or gather food after the concession, so to move was perceived as easier for young people. This is a trend in Cambodia: most land is claimed in one way or another, but demand rises due to a growing labor force. The country’s young demography originated mostly from the Khmer Rouge time, due to the many deaths and subsequent baby boom in the 1980s (Neupert & Prum 2005: 217). Young people wanting to enter the labor force will have to secure land for subsistence (which is difficult), or find a job outside the agricultural sector. Since there are already land shortages, this will lead to a shift from an economy based on self-employed farmers, to an economy based on employment-dependent laborers, which could indicate accelerated rural-urban migration (Scheidel et al. 2013: 348). Not only young people moved, I also heard about whole households migrating. Many moved to Thailand or Phnom Penh, for example to work in factories or as boat workers. Due to this, remittances as a livelihood strategy increased as well. Deurn for example was able to use the money her son sent her as a way to invest in her own livelihood strategy of shop keeping.

According to Deurn, 90 percent of the people in Kon Kok have a loan, often from a microfinance institution. It is possible to take out small loans from a local bank, ACLEDA, but it is located just outside of the national park and going there to make payments is thus difficult. There is a branch of the Cambodian AMK Microfinance Institution near Kon Kok, and agents would be in the village almost every day. One of my respondents showed me the papers she received from AMK. She has a \$750 loan, on which she has to make monthly payments for an 18-month period, with a 2,84% interest rate. The problem with these loans is that they were given too freely: the agents worked for commission, so it served them to give out many. My respondents were not very familiar with loans (no one had a loan in the old villages), so sometimes did not understand the risks. If someone asked for a loan it would usually be granted, without thinking about how that person would repay the loan. Thus situations like Channy’s emerged: her household had to sell some land in order to pay the loan back.

People that have stable jobs (like driving a truck) are generally more capable of maintaining their livelihood. Channy for example was able to maintain a sustainable livelihood even with many young kids to care for, since on arrival she immediately planted fruit trees. This ensured she could be partially self-sufficient in the future and provided a stable base. While most workers do not know when they can work, Channy’s husband managed to find a more stable job. These strategies together have proved reasonably successful for the family. Deurn is living on her own, which means that it is easy for

her to survive from the shop income herself. She has managed to gain a niche in the market of shops, by providing entertainment (TV), which was only possible with the remittances from her son. Yet however, is having a hard time. The reduced human capital due to her husband's illness means the entire household's livelihood is dependent on her son. Since he is a worker, he has little control over when he can work, and thus their livelihood is quite unstable.

#### 4.4 THE CHOICE OF MOVING

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In this section I explore why people made the choice of moving. It concerns the second sub-question: 'What choices regarding land concessions do local people have, and why do they make them?'. I cannot claim to know why exactly all movers chose to move, but I offer some common reasons.

First, people actually believed the concession was a good thing. The promise of development in an area that was quite isolated made villagers think the government was helping them "become modern."<sup>35</sup> If villagers would have to relocate their farm for that, to be able to build a road, why stand in the way of that?

Second, some wanted the compensation. "When I heard that that place must be developed, I was happy. Because I thought I could get fair compensation [...] I did not know they would develop like this."<sup>36</sup> Many believed they would receive compensation of \$8.000 per hectare. Such an amount would have encouraged many rural Cambodians to comply, and it is an understandable disappointment when this turns out not to be true.

Third, some might not have wanted to stand out by resisting openly or are used to complying with the government. The Cambodian People's Party (the ruling government party; CPP), and specifically prime minister Hun Sen, have effectively been in power since the Khmer Rouge regime ended, with Hun Sen being prime minister since 1985. Cambodian politics are marked by his authoritarian rule. For a long time, opposition was hardly allowed, making it difficult, even dangerous to oppose him.<sup>37</sup> Even in May of this year, the prime minister warned of a civil war if the opposition would win the commune elections in June (Meas & Mech 2017). Especially in rural areas many people still vote for the government party, perhaps because they are scared of the consequences if they do not. Also, the royal family has endorsed him, and "people just follow the king, so they keep voting for Hun Sen."<sup>38</sup> Applying the theory of everyday politics then, people may have complied with the concession, simply because it was what the government told them to do. While not deliberate, this compliance is

*"When we heard that this village was in investment area, people were very happy. Because when the government came to discuss with us, they said they need to develop everything. [...] And we would get a road, and they would build a new health center and school."*

*- Mover Pisey*

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with mover Pisey on 16 February 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with mover Mov on 16 February 2017.

<sup>37</sup> The president of the main opposition party (Cambodia National Rescue Party), Sam Rainsy, has practically been in exile since 2005 because he (among other things) accused the CPP of corruption. Many also think Hun Sen is tied to a high profile murder of political activist Kem Ley in 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Conversation with my research assistant Thy.

“making it possible for the game to go on” (Havel 1985 in Kerkvliet 2009: 237), doing nothing to keep the government in check. This does not necessarily mean the movers agreed with what was happening, but that compliance was the easiest, safest choice for them. While initially and outwardly movers complied, they engage in everyday resistance as well. An example is that villagers bad-mouthed the company, the government and specific government officials. To each other, but also to me. While it may not accomplish much, it is a low risk way of resisting the system and the authority of the government.

After this initial choice, movers had many choices available to them as well, for example in what livelihood strategies they would pursue. For example, Channy straight away tried to make the best of the situation. She planted many trees on the small plot of land around her house to provide a sustainable livelihood in the long run. Vet, like many others, did not want to clear the land for farming she received, since it is hard work and costs a lot of time. However, it could have been a stable livelihood strategy in the long run. Instead many villagers turned to cash generating strategies, which is a logical development, but not one with infinite capacity. In a commune where most people employed non-job strategies, jobs are not suddenly created because there are more people looking for them. As one of my respondents noted: “What the government is doing is not really development, it is destroying. Normally, when they develop, they must develop all the local people as well. They must have jobs for the local people, not move them like this. This is not the real development.”<sup>39</sup>

Another choice movers could make is to outwardly resist after all. The 184 families that changed their minds are proof that this choice became popular. I discuss this group fully in the next chapter, where I also look into the reasons behind this choice to change tactics.

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#### 4.5 MOVERS: IN CONCLUSION

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The movers accepted compensation and received a house and land in Kon Kok. There is also a significant group that accepted compensation and migrated elsewhere, for example to Thailand or Phnom Penh in search for jobs. These are mostly young people. The compensation process was far from smooth. The confusion around the implementation of the tiger skin policy is what angers most movers: they thought they received compensation for their farm and could keep their house in the village.

The living conditions in Kon Kok are not good, especially due to Union Development Group not honoring its promises about providing infrastructure and facilities. These conditions limited people in their livelihood strategies, especially not having a reliable water supply and a lack of good farmland (not on a steep hill, fertile, and not still jungle). The livelihood strategies of movers generally changed from food security-oriented such as farming and fishing, to cash generating strategies like being a worker or gathering yellow vine. Almost all movers had a loan to supplement their income. Overall, the livelihood strategies employed in Kon Kok were less sustainable (long-term and environmental) than the strategies in the old villages.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with resister Thorn on 6 March 2017.

I found three main reasons for choosing to move. First, people believed the concession would bring development (such as improved infrastructure and facilities, perhaps employment), which could only happen if they moved. Second, some wanted the compensation, sometimes because they thought they would receive \$8.000 per hectare of farmland. Third, people did not want resist openly and thus complied, or are used to complying with the government. However, some movers still employed everyday resistance strategies, as a relatively easy and safe way to resist.



*As soon as I step on the beach, Thy tells me excitedly that “today, they are building a house!” The 184 families that resist to receive more compensation have teamed up and are building the ultimate sign of defiance: a big house right where everyone can see it, both UDGs trucks and the minibuses heading to the dock rushing by. We decide to go to the house later. On the 30-minute drive to Kon Kok, we keep passing motos and carts packed with people, all shouting greetings to Thy, who swerves each time in order to reply. They are all going to help build the new house, and Kon Kok is even quieter than normal because of it. When at the building site, a group of about 60 people greet us. The men are hanging in poles to construct the frame, while the women, children, and elderly are sitting in the shade, chatting and playing cards. The house is shared with 18 families who will take turns staying there to resist. After talking to people, we go to Koh Sdach. Walking through the main street, Thy stops to talk to many islanders who lost their land, in the street or at their houses. “You have to go to Poi YoPON! The company and army are coming tomorrow to fight! We all have to go there.” The next day the resisters wait in anticipation, but soon it becomes clear that the company will not come. It makes no sense attracting the media and kicking up a fuss, while UDG doesn’t have any immediate plans for Poi YoPON.*



## 5 | RESISTERS: THE POI YOPON FIVE, BOAT DRIVERS, AND THE MOVERS THAT CHANGED THEIR MINDS

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In this chapter I discuss the resisters, people who have decided to resist the concession in different ways. There are three groups of resisters that I discuss here: the Poi YoPON Five, the boat drivers, and the movers that changed their minds. Each group is introduced with a case study. Then their livelihood strategies are examined, in line with sub-question three: ‘How do local people’s livelihood strategies change due to the granting of a land concession?’. I conclude each group’s section by discussing sub-question two: ‘What choices regarding land concessions do local people have, and why do they make them?’. In the last section of the chapter I summarize and bring together my findings from the three groups of resisters.

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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The Poi YoPON Five are five families living in Poi YoPON that continue to resist the concession and have not accepted compensation. There used to be a bigger group of resisters in Poi YoPON, an additional 19 families, who were mostly boat drivers. This group negotiated with the company about compensation, and accepted the offer in early fall 2016. Everyone from Anlong Trei moved, although some still resist in Peam Kay. This village only counted 19 families<sup>40</sup> before the concession, and the resisters here negotiated high compensation and will not talk about it, as that was their deal with the company. That is why I will not discuss the group from Peam Kay here. The last group consists of movers that changed their minds. There is one group of 184 families that resist in Poi YoPON, although they did not all live there before the concession. This group regrets their choice to move, and try to “reclaim” more compensation, as they say it themselves. All groups expressed their resistance in Poi YoPON, but did not necessarily live there while resisting. Below I discuss the livelihood strategies and choices per group, and also introduce one case study per group.

### 5.2 THE POI YOPON FIVE

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#### INTRODUCTION

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I spent a lot of time with this small group of resisters. Often Thy and I would start and end our day at a small café and *moto* repair shop of one of the families in Poi YoPON. It was in the center of the village and a place where the other resisters would sit and talk, so it was a good place to observe. For this group, the biggest change was that their village had gone from thriving to a sort of ghost town. After many Poi YoPON residents had moved to Kon Kok, the company started demolishing the houses of those that moved. Now concrete foundations and overgrown gardens are the only indications that this village used to have many more inhabitants. The makeshift huts people built as signs of resistance complete the eerie look.

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<sup>40</sup> There were only 19 families living in Peam Kay village, but administratively it seemed like 99 families lived here (just like Preah Smach). These other families were spread along the part of Koh Sdach commune south of Poi YoPON.





Figure 6: Some of the resistance huts on the beach of Poi YoPON

Thorn (72), a member of the Poi YoPON Five, became one of my key informants. He was already documenting important events in the village or his life before the concession, both by writing about it in a notebook, making drawings, and taking photos. When he first heard about the concession he started gathering official documents and recording events concerning the concession (such as meetings and NGOs coming to the village).

*“Because the Khmer Rouge got their ideas from the Chinese communists, the way we worked then is the same as the way people have to work for the Chinese company now. We had to work from six in the morning to twelve at night. Then we could just rest for a little while, and we had to work again. If it was not complete, we had to work during the night as well. There was never enough food.”*

*- Resister Thorn*

Thorn grew up in Kampot province. When he was 13, he learned to become a monk. After 11 years you finish the education, and he became “like normal people” again. After, he married his wife and became a farmer in Kampot. During the Khmer Rouge regime he was allowed to stay in the same commune, where he had to toil in the fields. The entire family of his wife’s sister and brother were murdered.

Under the Vietnamese government after the Khmer Rouge, Cambodian men were conscripted to for example work as soldiers, or to cut trees at the Thai border. Thorn had to go, but knew many died from the hard work. He had a friend already living in Poi YoPON, who asked him to come live in the village. In 1983 he moved and “escaped working under the Vietnamese.” At that time, there were about ten other families living in Poi YoPON. Before the concession was granted, Thorn donated ten hectares of his land attached to

the village in order to build a pagoda and a school. The school was finished and in use, but the pagoda still stands half finished, now overgrown with weeds since the monks were forced to move as well. He still has 3,5 hectares for *chamkar*.

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### LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

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Every household of the Poi YoPON Five used to be farming. One family stopped, since they earn enough money for daily life with selling food and drinks and repairing *motos*. Since Poi YoPON is abundant in food to be foraged and aquatic animals such as fish, crabs, and frogs to be caught, all families do this to supplement their daily food needs. Farming mostly consists of growing vegetables and sometimes rice in the rainy season, and maintaining *chamkar* land with cashew and mango trees. The vegetables and rice are for own use. Also, all five families kept cows together. Thorn for example owns 45 cows, and the shopkeeper more than ten. The cows are personal property, but they graze together. This is mostly a back-up strategy. Cows are worth a lot of money, and they all sold cows to make some extra cash. Thorn sells about two adult cows per year, it depends on how much money he needs. One cow sold for about \$1.000 (while the GDP per capita is \$1.150 (The World Bank 2017)). None of the Poi YoPON Five have changed their livelihood strategies drastically because of the concession, although some still lost access to (a part of) their land if it was not in the village.

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### THE CHOICE OF RESISTING

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The Poi YoPON Five initially resisted the concession for two main reasons: not wanting to move and too low compensation. For all both reasons applied, but to varying degrees. For example, one member actually did accept compensation for her farmland (\$500 per hectare for five hectares), but also had 3,5 hectares in another place that she believed she could keep, just like her house in the village. The company took that land too, while she never received compensation for it. "What is necessary [to have] for the government and the company, they must give fair compensation for. In these conditions, if I move from the old village, I will get poorer. So I decided that I will stay."<sup>41</sup> If she would have received fair compensation, she would have moved to Kon Kok. Her last sentence echoes the feelings of all members of the Poi YoPON Five: they will not move under any condition now.

Other members, like Thorn, primarily cared about keeping the land. They did not want to move, and resist to have the village cut out from the concession. "I stayed because the company and the government never respected the agreement that they signed. [...] They said that they would cut out the old village, like tiger skin, and then they never did it. They never follow the law."<sup>42</sup> In Thorn's case, his disregard for the compensation might stem from his large amount of physical capital (cows), which is worth a lot of money. "I never went to negotiate with the company because I am the owner of the land. I don't want compensation, the village must be cut out."<sup>43</sup>

The Poi YoPON Five resist by refusing to move from Poi YoPON, but interestingly enough do not just employ everyday types of resistance, instead turning to advocacy politics. "I wrote a letter to

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with resister (name unknown) on 17 February 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with resister Thorn on 18 February 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

local officials, to the Chief of Commune and the district governor. But these people always ignore me, or they say they don't have the ability to do this. They just say 'of course,' or that they have to confirm with the province... But then nothing happens. After the last time we decided we needed to go to nongovernmental organizations."<sup>44</sup> Clearly advocating on their own did not achieve much.

Since it is such a large case, many national and international nongovernmental organizations<sup>45</sup> have been involved and researched it, although not many published anything on it. The case has also been in the media quite often. These organizations all followed the case, tried to advocate with the government for the locals, gave workshops in the villages about land laws and villager's rights, and sometimes helped them with food (giving bags of rice). Also, if there is a big protest or the company or government "come to have violence or to destroy more things,"<sup>46</sup> someone calls the NGOs who then come to the area to observe and pressure them to stop. One of the biggest successes of these advocacy politics is a workshop organized by The NGO Forum on Cambodia and other organizations in 2015, where among others resisting villagers, the Union Development Group, Ministry of Environment, local authorities, and the United Nations' Human Rights Council were present. The workshop's aim was to discuss the situation and to seek solutions together. A list of suggestions to better the situation was drawn up, and included implementation of the tiger skin policy, more transparency from both the company and government and a stronger cooperation between NGOs and the government (The NGO Forum on Cambodia 2015). The workshop has not resulted in anything concrete yet.

The company and government mostly point fingers at each other, while nothing changes. The government does this through official politics. One example is that the Minister of Environment has urged the Union Development Group publicly to provide more and better infrastructure and facilities at the relocation sites, such as schools, a market, and a hospital (Sen 2014). Another example is that the government threatened to revoke the concession. After several clashes between villagers and UDG in late 2014, three parliamentarians from the National Assembly's human rights commission went to the concession area to speak with affected villagers (Khuon & Hul 2014). They found that the company had not adhered to government policy, and the concession would have to be reviewed. Among others, the Minister of Environment was summoned for questioning at the National Assembly, and for example asked about the possibility for the families to continue to live on their land (Pech 2015b). The minister pledged to resolve the land dispute. While these two examples show that the government is willing to stand up for affected villagers, they are mostly just statements made for the media's sake. No real improvements were made through official politics. As the undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Environment was quoted as saying: "Only the government head [Hun Sen] has the right to decide [the outcome of the land dispute]" (Pech 2015a).

Resisters have also engaged in forms of organized and confrontational resistance (opposite of everyday resistance). For example, 100 villagers stayed outside of UDG offices for two days, after

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with resister (name unknown) on 17 February 2017.

<sup>45</sup> For example Cambodian organizations ADHOC (Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association), LICADHO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights), and CHRAC (Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee), and Czech People in Need.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with resister (name unknown) on 17 February 2017.

company security guards backed by government soldiers destroyed over 40 houses in Tanoun and Koh Sdach communes (Touch & Neef 2015: 8). Another example is that villagers put up a road block, after the company blocked villagers from returning to their old villages (Harbinson 2015). Sometimes there are violent clashes with the company and government, such as villagers being attacked with knives, axes, and rocks (Taing 2014). The two conditions for everyday resistance to escalate into open and confrontational resistance are present in Koh Sdach commune. The first condition of changing political circumstances in favor of peasants and in disfavor of the targets of resistance (Kerkvliet 2009: 235), could be the government's use of official politics to stand up for the local people as discussed above. These instances may have helped resisters overcome fear of repercussions (ibid.), in this case from the government itself. The second condition of leaders or groups that can frame the discontent and resistance to emerge, in order for locals to overcome reluctance and band together (ibid.), is present as well. This is done by NGOs that help the local people resist and strengthen their legal argument, but also by the self-proclaimed 'activists' in the communities. These people, such as Thorn, take the lead by gathering as much information as possible and attending every possible meeting. Both the NGOs and the local activists provide leadership that invite others to openly resist as well.

So far, you could say the Poi YoPON Five's resistance has both been successful and unsuccessful. There is no solution yet, but in the meantime the families could continue to live their life in Poi YoPON, where there is easy access to food, which is not the case in Kon Kok.

### 5.3 THE BOAT DRIVERS

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#### INTRODUCTION

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In total, 24 families did not accept compensation and resisted in Poi YoPON. Five of those families I just discussed. The other 19 are the ones this section is about. I named this group the 'boat drivers,' although five households in this group did not use this livelihood strategy. The 19 families negotiated with the company for better compensation, and finally reached an agreement in the early fall of 2016. They received better and more compensation than most of the people that accepted before. There were differences in compensation within this group as well. The leader of the group – an "activist" – was the one that negotiated with the company for the group, and he received more compensation. Some families wanted to negotiate for themselves and also received more. Other families just agreed with what was offered. This group does not want to talk about the compensation they received, as that was a (perhaps unspoken) condition of the agreement.

I managed to talk to Phana (28), who was a part of this group, but at the same time a bit of an outsider. When the concession was granted, she lived with her parents. One week before people started moving to Kon Kok, she married her husband, who was not local but working as a boat driver at the dock in Poi YoPON. Her parents accepted compensation but only received a house on half a hectare of land, and they had to start over to build their livelihood. Thus Phana "did not know how to live with her parents" and stayed with her husband in Poi YoPON, trying to get more compensation even though they did not own anything before. Because of their strange situation they were both part of the group and outsiders. For a while they could live in her parents' old house, until it was



demolished by the company and they had to move to a makeshift tent. Once they got children Thorn allowed them to move into the old school building (since it is his land). A big reason for them to stay in Poi YoPON was Phana’s husband’s job as a boat driver, which I discuss further below.

Phana managed to receive a plot of land of 20 by 30 meters on the highway, “with flat land and good soil.” They moved to the new location to prepare the land and since there is no house, to build one. At the time of research, it was about 60 percent finished, but they ran out of money. They moved back to Poi YoPON in December 2016 to save money in order to finish building it. Other families received land on the highway as well, and sometimes got a house from the company built to their specifications. Another part in the agreement was that UDG would allow the boat drivers to stay at the pier in order to do their job. The company will build a dorm at the pier so those families can stay there. They planned to start building it after the commune elections this June. This dorm is not meant to live in permanently: they can only stay there for a few nights, and then have to stay at their new house for a few nights. Now there are only four of these families living in Poi YoPON permanently; three (including Phana’s) in the school, and one at the pier. The other 15 families already moved to the new location, but the boat drivers of the families sometimes sleep close to the dock for their job.



Figure 7: Speedboats on the beach, 150 meters from the Poi YoPON village beach (figure 6)

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### LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

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Most of the families’ livelihoods in this group are based on the strategy of boat driving. Phana’s husband owns a small speedboat that he takes people to Koh Sdach with, just like 13 other families in this group. A single ride from Poi YoPON to Koh Sdach costs 5.000 riel (\$1,25) per person. A driver earns 30.000-50.000 riel (\$7,50-12,50) on a normal day. On ceremony days (like Khmer New Year),

when many people go to the island, they can earn over 200.000 riel (\$50) per day. It seems that the livelihood strategy of these families meant a greater will to stay – they made a big investment in physical capital (the boats), it is a job they can only do from Poi YoPON, and quite lucrative at that.

Before the concession, some of the families were farming, and most were supplementing their daily food needs with foraging and fishing, although the boat driving made up most of their livelihood. At the new location, most families will plant fruit trees, but larger scale farming and foraging and fishing will not be possible anymore. Then their livelihoods will most likely be fully dependent on boat driving.

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## THE CHOICE OF RESISTING

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In the case of the boat drivers, the choice to resist was directly related to their livelihood strategy, which they can only do in Poi YoPON. Some also thought the compensation was not high enough. Previously, this group engaged in the same resistance activities as the Poi YoPON Five, but this group negotiated compensation as well. A solution was found, allowing the boat drivers to continue their livelihood strategy, while also awarding them with fair compensation for the land that is now the company's. Their resistance has thus been successful.

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## 5.4 THE MOVERS THAT CHANGED THEIR MINDS

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### INTRODUCTION

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The third group of resisters I discuss is movers that changed their minds. There might be more people that fit this description, but I specifically discuss 184 families that visibly took steps to resist in Poi YoPON. This group has a documented understanding with each other that they resist as a group. In a hut on the beach in Poi YoPON, there is a list of their names and fingerprints, saying that they do not agree with the compensation they received and resist to claim more. It also states that if there is no solution, all 184 families will move back permanently to Poi YoPON. At the time of research, about 100 temporary huts had been built in Poi YoPON (sometimes on the land people owned before), as a sign of resistance. Often they were no more than some sticks in the shape of a house, and not many people actually stayed there. Only when the company or government were rumored to come to Poi YoPON, many would return from Kon Kok and squat in the huts. Besides that the huts are not very comfortable, another reason for not staying in Poi YoPON is that there was not much for them there. It is easy to fish and forage for food, but there are no facilities (such as a school) that invite to stay there permanently now. Some people would occasionally spend the night in Poi YoPON, when they were harvesting their old farms. This is the group that built the house from the vignette at the start of this chapter. Instead of a small hut, several families built a large and more permanent shelter together.

The only family that has made some sort of permanent move is Morng's. She (31) forms a household with her husband, father, and four children, including one newborn daughter. Morng lived in Poi YoPON her entire life, before she moved to Kon Kok in 2010. In early 2016 she moved back to Poi YoPON with her husband, although the neighbors in Kon Kok take care of her father and children (except the newborn). Before the concession, Morng's husband went fishing, and worked to clear farms, while she farmed and took care of her children. After moving to Kon Kok, the entire livelihood

depended on her husband's job as worker. Clearing one hectare (converting jungle to farmland) cost \$300, but it takes a long time, the amount is split among workers, and it is not regular work. They had to take out a loan to buy food. After Mornng moved back life was easier. In Poi Yoapon she could fish and forage for food again, and farm. She could also go crab fishing a few times per month (depending on the moon), and sell two kilos for \$15-20.

*"Life is easy in Poi Yoapon, here I am happy again. But since we are protesting, I don't know what will happen in the future."*

*- Resister Mornng*

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## LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

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Since most of the resisters in this group live in Kon Kok, their livelihood strategies have changed in the same way as the regular movers. The only difference is that the people in this group go to Poi Yoapon more often, and sometimes harvest old farms, or fish and forage when they are already there. Resistance can be seen as a livelihood strategy as well. It may not be the most lucrative strategy, or the one that yields quickest results, but if they do get more compensation it is a strategy that can help them see to their livelihood needs.

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## THE CHOICE OF RESISTING

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A big reason movers chose to resist after all, is the success they saw resisters had. Here the conditions of everyday resistance escalating into open resistance apply again: by seeing that the resisters could remain living in Poi Yoapon without dire consequences, and activists within the mover group that helped overcome reluctance, people changed their minds. A second reason is that movers did not know what their choice really meant. Initially the situation in Kon Kok was unclear, as the company was still working on the relocation site when people started moving. Only later people realized that roads would not be paved, no more wells would be built, there would be no health center, and the company would not clear allocated 'farmland,' or even allocate any to some households. When movers started realizing their situation would not improve, instead of engaging in everyday compliance or everyday resistance, they started openly resisting as well, mostly through 'moving back' (building the huts).

As of now, their resistance has not had the hoped-for result. The company has not engaged in negotiations with this group or made any infrastructure or facility improvements in Kon Kok. What can be seen as a success is the increased access to the resource-rich coast. Since this group has accepted compensation, legally they do not have any right to more compensation.

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## 5.5 RESISTERS: IN CONCLUSION

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I found three main groups of resisters in my research: the Poi Yoapon Five, the boat drivers, and the 184 mover families that changed their minds. This first two groups resisted from the very start and never moved to Kon Kok, while the last concerns movers that decided to resist after all. All groups have resisted in various ways, often surprisingly open and confrontational. Advocacy and official



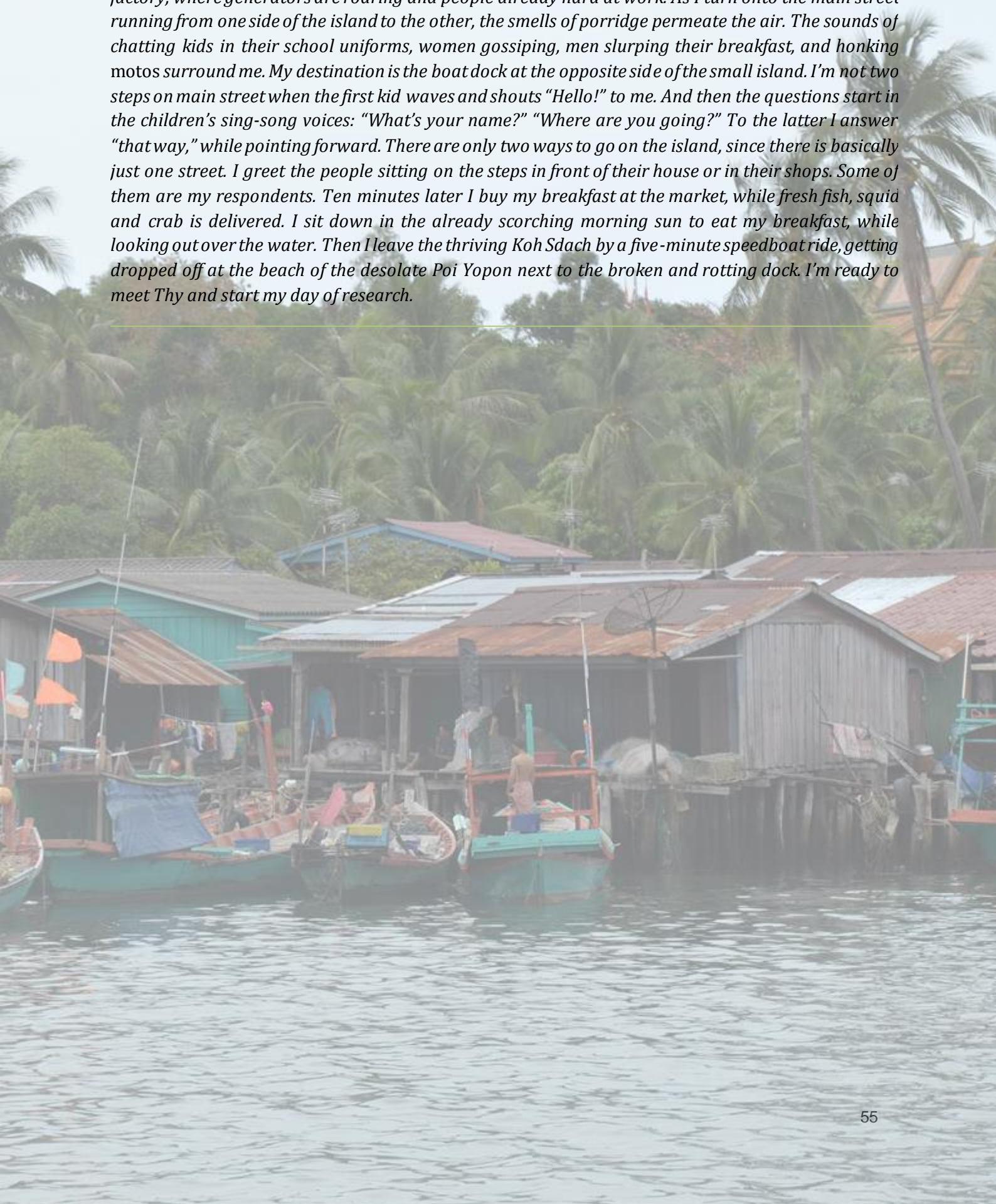
politics were used, such as petitioning for more compensation. Other examples of resistance are demonstrations, road blocks, and erecting huts or houses to 'move back.' The boat drivers were successful in their resistance, and have managed to negotiate what they wanted: more compensation and a way to continue their livelihood strategy. The other groups have not reached their goals of getting the village 'cut out' (Poi YoPON Five) or more compensation (movers that changed their minds) yet. They do have some success, because the Poi YoPON Five can remain living there, and the movers have increased and easier access to resources in Poi YoPON.

The livelihood strategies of the now resisting movers changed in the same way as those of other movers, although they have increased access to the coast and can thus forage and fish again. Their choice of resisting is mostly based on discontent with Kon Kok and the compensation they received, and that they saw the success of other resisters (even in being able to stay in the old villages). The livelihood strategies of the other groups have not changed drastically due to the concession, since they were able to remain in their old village, although some lost access to (parts of) their land. A main reason of these groups to choose to resist is because they have a livelihood strategy (like raising cows or boat driving) that is difficult or impossible to employ in Kon Kok. Other main reasons are too low compensation or simply not wanting to move from the village they are attached to.

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*I awake to sounds of roosters crowing, dogs barking and the sweeping of streets. After a freezing bucket shower I head out for the day, sun shining over the hill and through the palm trees. I pass the ice factory, where generators are roaring and people already hard at work. As I turn onto the main street running from one side of the island to the other, the smells of porridge permeate the air. The sounds of chatting kids in their school uniforms, women gossiping, men slurping their breakfast, and honking motos surround me. My destination is the boat dock at the opposite side of the small island. I'm not two steps on main street when the first kid waves and shouts "Hello!" to me. And then the questions start in the children's sing-song voices: "What's your name?" "Where are you going?" To the latter I answer "that way," while pointing forward. There are only two ways to go on the island, since there is basically just one street. I greet the people sitting on the steps in front of their house or in their shops. Some of them are my respondents. Ten minutes later I buy my breakfast at the market, while fresh fish, squid and crab is delivered. I sit down in the already scorching morning sun to eat my breakfast, while looking out over the water. Then I leave the thriving Koh Sdach by a five-minute speedboat ride, getting dropped off at the beach of the desolate Poi Yopon next to the broken and rotting dock. I'm ready to meet Thy and start my day of research.*

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## 6 | ISLANDERS: 'LOCAL' OR 'OUTSIDER'?

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In this chapter I discuss the islanders, the third group I found in my research. First I introduce the group with a case study. Second I discuss common livelihood strategies on Koh Sdach, and lastly I discuss the choices islanders had available to them.

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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Koh Sdach is the only island in the Koh Sdach archipelago with a village. Another island, Koh Toteang, has an eco-resort on it and a few fishermen's houses, but the other ten are uninhabited. Koh Sdach is densely populated for rural Cambodia, with roughly 650 households or 3.000 people on an island of 1,8 km<sup>2</sup>. The village only covers a third of the island, the rest is jungle.

Due to the government policy of inviting people to farm, many Koh Sdach residents had farmland on the mainland, and are thus affected by the concession. At least 100 Koh Sdach households did receive compensation, and at least 43 did not get any compensation at all. Who did and who did not get compensation seemed to be based foremost on who was deemed local and who deemed outsider, since they also had a house on Koh Sdach. This distinction may have differed per commune, if the household had good relations with the local authorities (as they could confirm if someone was local), and how much time someone spent at their land. People deemed outsider (having no land title) were not eligible for compensation in accordance with the compensation policy. Interestingly, there are seven or eight families from Koh Sdach that received the highest compensation possible, of \$8.000 per hectare (from 15 families in total). Most of these families had ties with the government or significant social power in the commune. The islanders are different than movers or resisters, since it is not their initial choice that placed them in a group, but the fact that they lived on Koh Sdach. The subsequent choices for the islanders however, are not that different. The ones who received compensation could choose to move or not, and all could choose to resist or not.

Here I present a detailed case of an islander who did not receive compensation. I was unable to do a life history for another family in Koh Sdach, since I was unaware so many people from the island were affected until the very end of my research. Ev is 56 years old, and lives with her husband and three grandchildren. She was born in Tanoun commune, one of the other communes affected by this concession. Under the Lol Nol regime (1970-1975), Ev was separated from her parents and sent to live with a relative who was a Lol Nol soldier. In the Khmer Rouge time, some soldiers came to him to ask about his background. The Khmer Rouge killed anyone associated with the previous Lol Nol regime, and the interview was to find out if he was. The relative mentioned in the interview that Ev was not family. That night, the cadres came back and took away and killed the whole family. Except for Ev. She was sleeping in an ox cart outside the house, and the cadres did not go looking for her, because she wasn't named as family.

After the Khmer Rouge regime, Ev managed to reconnect with her parents and moved back to her parents' land in Tanoun commune. An aunt living in Koh Sdach invited them to stay on the island as well. Eventually the aunt left, her father died, and her mother moved, so both houses and the land in Tanoun (four hectares for rice and three hectares *chamkar*) became EVs. Usually she would live in

Tanoun in the rainy season, to plant rice, and in Koh Sdach in the dry season with frequent trips to tend to the land. Later, she was permanently living in Tanoun, so her daughter's family could stay on Koh Sdach and the children could go to school. Their livelihood was completely based on farming. Ev did not receive compensation, because she was deemed an outsider.

Ev was forced to move to Koh Sdach and build up a new livelihood. A while later she also had to care for her three grandchildren, since their parents divorced and Ev's daughter moved away. They had to take out a \$1,000 loan to buy a boat so her husband could go fishing. They're having a hard time making the payments, since Ev's husband only knows how to fish in the traditional way with a hook, instead of with a net, which most islanders now do. They can barely catch enough fish to meet their daily needs, and now also have to pay back the loan and interest. The oldest granddaughter, 14, had to stop going to school and is now a worker, mostly doing construction. To supplement the income, Ev sews clothes (patching up holes or hemming) for 1,000 riel (\$0,25) per piece.

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## 6.2 LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

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In this section I analyze the livelihood strategies of islanders, which concerns my third sub-question: 'How do local people's livelihood strategies change due to the granting of a land concession?'. Before the concession, most people on Koh Sdach were fishing to support their livelihood. Up to 90 percent of the households employed the strategy, both for sale and for food. Since there was no road through the park connecting Koh Sdach or Poi Yoapon to the rest of Cambodia, everything was done by boat. As such, most fish went to Thailand (quicker to reach) and the currency in the area even became Thai Baht. Most local go more than eight miles from the island to fish, outside of the Community Fishery (CFI) area that is being established. Most of the fishing inside this area is done by illegal trawling boats from Thailand and Vietnam, which drag nets along the bottom, damaging the seabed and catching every species in its way. Establishing a CFI could control this type of damaging fishing and ensure the local people can continue to make a living. The CFI leader Heng Savuth estimated that about half of all the catch around Koh Sdach is from these non-local boats.

Around 40 percent of the local fishermen use nets to fish. They try to catch schools of fish, which they then sell on the island and to the 'fishery products collection' on the island owned by a local businessman, who sells it to Thailand and Vietnam. One kilo of fish (depending on the species) sell for around 6,000 riel (\$1,5), 4,000 riel (\$1) when sold to the fishery products collection. There are only a few families on the island that fish for 'regular' fish and do not use a net, but hooks instead. "This is the traditional way of fishing, but you cannot catch a lot."<sup>47</sup> Usually people cannot catch more than what they need for their own food needs. In the dry season, some families fish with traps. A few traps are put on the seabed (near reefs) and left for four or five days. They are fishing for what Cambodians call *trei takei* [lit. gecko fish], which are colorful fish not eaten by the locals. These fish have to be alive and are sold to a Chinese agent who comes to collect them. These fish can sell for up to \$20 per kilo.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with islander Ev on 23 February 2017.





*Figure 8: Trei takei caught in a trap in the Koh Sdach archipelago<sup>48</sup>*

There are only a few people on the island that fish for crab, but these are big business. Each boat needs at least six people to work it, and has about 3.000-5.000 traps in total. Traps are put on the seabed and marked by GPS and surface markers. They are left for three to seven days (depending on weather conditions), and then pulled up. Because the traps are left for a while, this process is staggered and there are never 3.000 traps on the boat at once. Four to five of the bigger crabs go in a kilo, which costs around 40.000-50.000 riel (\$10-12,5). Smaller crabs fetch a lower price. An increasing amount of crab traps are necessary to have the same amount of catch: before only 500 traps were used, now 3.000 traps are necessary. This is a sign of overfishing, which is becoming a bigger problem for Koh Sdach.

About half the fishermen from Koh Sdach also fish for squid. This is done at night, so also people that engage in other forms of fishing sometimes do this, "the smallest to the biggest boat."<sup>49</sup> People only fish for squid when there is a lot of moonlight. Fishermen go out in boats and mostly stay in one spot for the whole night. Most use hooks to catch squid. "It is easy to use the tools, and we only have to spend 20.000 riel to buy them."<sup>50</sup> How much can be caught depends on the skill of the person and the area. Some get three kilograms per night, while others catch 20 kilos. Squid sells for about 25.000 riel (\$6,25) per kilo.

<sup>48</sup> Photo by Taylor Wright, used with permission.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with islander Savuth on 17 March 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Besides fishing, many owned land so they could farm as well. For islanders that owned rice land, this meant that during the rainy season (a part of) the family would temporarily stay at the farm, to plant and harvest the rice. With *chamkar* this is a bit easier, since the trees do not need much work, and only in harvest season the family would have to spend much time on it. A third common strategy employed in Koh Sdach is to own a small business, often a shop. Owning a shop is a strategy that can primarily be employed by people with a house directly on main street. The small alleys and boardwalks leading to houses in the back of these do not get much traffic and are thus not good business. About 90 percent of the houses on main street are also shops. People that do not have houses here can still have a small business, for example selling some food in the market or around the village.

After the concession, farming as a strategy has all but disappeared on the island. In recent years, fishing had diminished as well. Now about 60-70 percent of the households fish, since the business of fishing is not as good as it was before. Fish aren't as plentiful and new techniques make competing difficult. This is also Ev's problem: her husband only knows how to fish with a hook, while others can catch a lot more fish with nets or traps. So on Koh Sdach as well, there has been a slight shift towards cash generating strategies. People still have small businesses, and other jobs such as working in construction or the ice factory have become more important.

### 6.3 THE CHOICE: MOVING OR NOT, RESISTING OR NOT?

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Here I explore what choices islanders had available to them. It concerns the second sub-question: 'What choices regarding land concessions do local people have, and why do they make them?'. As discussed above, some islanders received compensation and some did not. For the ones that did, the initial choice consisted of moving or not. Many did not move, since there was not much to gain from it. If they received land they could farm it, but it would take a lot of work before it would pay off, which many did not deem worth it. During my research I have not met an islander that received compensation and moved to Kon Kok.

All affected families had the choice to resist or not for (more) compensation. Not many were actively resisting the concession, since they at least still had houses to live in and there was not much they could do. When 'something big' happened on the mainland (like government agents coming), some islanders would go to the mainland, and many had affiliated themselves with advocacy groups. One islander, Savuth (also the CFI leader), was actively resisting the concession, also for the other islanders. He is a self-proclaimed activist who is working to advocate for many people (on and off the island), compiling documents with for example people's land size, names, and compensation status. He had close to four hectares of land in the concession area himself. "I didn't get any compensation – nothing. No land, no money, no house." Since he is an activist he would still be able to negotiate compensation for himself. UDG wants to solve issues with people that for example have connections with NGOs, like Savuth does now. However, he wants to make sure everyone receives compensation. At the moment, there are 318 families across the five communes that have not received any compensation at all, of which at least 43 families from Koh Sdach. According to his document, a total of 2.259 households had land in the concession area. While he does not like that the government granted the concession, he said that if the agreement was followed, people would have been okay



*“In the agreement,  
everything is good. But in  
practice, nothing is.”*

*- Islander Savuth*

with it. It would still bring development and maybe jobs to the area, while people’s livelihoods would not be disrupted due to the implementation of the tiger skin policy.

The choices that islanders have available to them are thus initially based on being dubbed a local or an outsider in the commune where they had land. While the families with compensation can choose to move, they have less opportunities to maintain their livelihood in Kon Kok and thus don’t. All could choose to resist, although not many actively do. It is mostly in the hands of people like Savuth, who spend an incredible amount of time to compile evidence and petition authorities. Resistance has not been successful and no one has received (more) compensation, possibly because the group is easily overlooked, a mistake I made in my research as well. Because Koh Sdach is an island and not in the concession area, it seems strange inhabitants would be affected on such a large scale, and the consequences of the land concession are not immediately clear. The fact that they mostly lost farmland and still have a house to live in adds to the group being overlooked. There is not much else to do for islanders than live on Koh Sdach and try to continue their lives.

#### 6.4 ISLANDERS: IN CONCLUSION

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The choices of islanders regarding the concession were mostly dependent on if they were deemed local or outsiders. If they received compensation they could choose to move to Kon Kok, but this would not improve their livelihood opportunities or living standards. All affected islanders could choose to resist the concession, but not many did actively. Most only resisted occasionally when ‘something big’ such as a demonstration was planned, and joined advocacy groups. Resistance by this group has not been successful, possibly because the group is easily overlooked. This also results in the islanders’ choices not being very meaningful: the choice to move is not really an option and resisting does not change anything.

The concession did change their livelihood strategies. Before, many islanders were both farming and fishing and went back and forth between the island and their farmland. After the concession they had no access to farmland anymore, and fishing decreased as well. This is due to difficulty competing with others and depleting resources around the island, mostly caused by overfishing and illegal trawling boats from Thailand and Vietnam. Instead, cash generating strategies such as small shops and jobs as workers became more important.

## CONCLUSION

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In this thesis I have answered the research question: 'What choices do local people have when faced with a land concession, and what are the consequences for their livelihood strategies?'. I started by analyzing how it is possible in the first place for a land concession to be granted on land already claimed by local people (sub-question 1). The answer is a defunct land rights system, which is the result from Cambodia's many regime and policy changes in the past century, especially the abolishment of private property under the Khmer Rouge. Possession rights have always been acknowledged, and are still commonly used in rural areas. The current government's wish to integrate land ownership titles into one central system could provide security for many farmers. Instead it increased inequality and made people without titles more vulnerable to lose their land, facilitated through the government's policy of Economic Land Concessions. Because the government failed to properly introduce their new policies in rural areas and oral agreements constituted rights locally, it is difficult to determine who really had right to the land. In Koh Sdach commune the situation is even more difficult, since the government encouraged people to settle and farm on a plot of land in order to keep the area under government control.

To understand the consequences of a land concession, of 'losing the land,' I continued exploring how local people were using land as a resource (sub-question 1). Before the concession was granted almost all of my respondents were farming, sometimes rice but always *chamkar*. The reason most planted trees like cashew and mango is because of the hilly area, which is mostly unsuitable for planting rice. Some of the crops people planted were for own food needs, and others for sale. Crops like mango and cashew are almost always in high demand and can make a lucrative business. The majority of Cambodian households are dependent on land, and as such there is an economy mostly based on self-employed farmers, and not one based on employment-dependent laborers. While Cambodia is moving in this direction, a sudden change from farming to a more formal job is difficult due to a lack of opportunities. Possible consequences of losing land are thus large.

In the chapters 4, 5, and 6, I looked at the three distinct groups I found in my research: movers, resisters, and islanders. Here I discussed per group both sub-question 2 ('What choices regarding land concessions do local people have, and why do they make them?') and sub-question 3 ('How do local people's livelihood strategies change due to the granting of a land concession?'). The names of the 'mover' and 'resister' groups reflect their initial choices regarding the concession. The first group accepted compensation and moved to Kon Kok. The latter group consists of people that did not accept compensation and thus resist, or changed their minds and started resisting later. The islanders are people that live on Koh Sdach and lost land due to the concession. The height of compensation differed by the strength of someone's land claim (like having a title, or proof of usage), if the person was deemed local or not, and possible connections to influential people.

The movers received a house and some land in Kon Kok. The conditions here severely limited people in their livelihood strategies, since there was no reliable water supply, land was sometimes on a steep hill, not fertile, or still jungle, and it was far from the resource-rich coastline. The livelihood strategies of movers generally changed from food security-oriented such as farming and fishing, to cash generating strategies like being a worker or gathering yellow vine. Migration to for example

Thailand and Phnom Penh increased, since people were unable to make a living. Almost all movers had a loan from a microfinance institution to supplement their income. Overall the livelihood strategies employed in Kon Kok were less sustainable (long-term and environmental) than the strategies in the old villages. The choice of moving was commonly based on three reasons. First, the government said development of the area would be beneficial for the villagers: they would get improved infrastructure and facilities, and perhaps even jobs at the resort. Second, some wanted compensation, mostly due to the confusion about the 'promise' of \$8,000 compensation per hectare. Third, some did not want to resist openly and are used to complying with the government. This does not mean the movers agreed with the situation, since they did use everyday resistance strategies such as bad-mouthing the company and government.

There were three main groups of resisters. The Poi YoPON Five and the boat drivers resisted from the very start and never moved to Kon Kok, the 184 mover families changed their minds. All groups resisted in various ways, which were surprisingly open and confrontational. Advocacy and official politics were used, such as petitioning for more compensation. Other examples of resistance are demonstrations, road blocks, and erecting huts or houses to 'move back.' The boat drivers were successful in their resistance as they negotiated more compensation and a way to continue their livelihood strategy. The Poi YoPON Five have not reached their goal of implementation of the tiger skin policy, but can remain in the village which can be seen as a success. The resistance of the movers that changed their minds has not resulted in anything yet, but the group has increased access to the resource-rich coastal area and can thus forage and fish again. The Poi YoPON Five and the boat drivers resist for multiple reasons. Some simply did not want to move, for example because they are attached to the village or have a livelihood strategy (like raising cows or boat driving) that they cannot employ in Kon Kok. Another reason is that some thought the compensation was too low. Their livelihood strategies have not changed much, since they could remain living in the old village. The livelihood strategies of the now resisting movers changed in the same way as those of other movers. Their choice of resisting is mostly based on discontent with Kon Kok and the received compensation, and fueled by the success of other resisters.

For islanders mostly the distinction between local and outsider seems to have mattered when receiving compensation or not. This group perhaps had the least meaningful choices available to them. When families received compensation they could move to Kon Kok, but often this would not improve their living situation or opportunities to maintain a livelihood. All islanders could choose to resist, but since they mostly lost farmland and not their houses in the village, it is an overlooked group and they have not had success resisting. Many islanders fished and farmed before the concession. After, due to lack of land, farming was not practiced anymore. Fishing did not increase but decrease, due to difficulty competing with others and depleting resources around the island, mostly caused by illegal trawling boats from Thailand and Vietnam and overfishing. Instead many households started small shops, or employed other cash generating strategies such as jobs as workers.

The case I have discussed in this thesis comes back to two visions of land use: the people that have farmed small-scale their whole lives and need land to make a living, and the government's wish to create high-surplus producing plantations that lead to overall economic growth, employment

creation, and poverty reduction (Scheidel et al. 2013: 342). This case clearly shows the argument that Scheidel et al. (2013) also make: the government's development policy risks getting rid of the poor rather than getting rid of poverty. Union Development Group's plans are not even aimed at agriculture, instead at creating a sort of tax haven for trade and shopping and a tourism paradise. No jobs for local people have been created, the project is not generating much income, and the people that do go there do not spend money in the area. At the same time, local people that lost the land have a hard time making a living. They are forced to take out loans which they can sometimes barely pay back, to engage in illegal activities (such as the yellow vine business and poaching), and even to migrate in search of jobs.

While land concessions are not necessarily bad, those in Cambodia are marked by forceful evictions, violence, and often non-existent compensation. I advocate for better practices regarding these land deals, to minimize the negative consequences for local people, and to maximize positive outcomes. As this case shows, prior consultation with local people is of the utmost importance. If local people are already consulted from the start of the project in the planning phase, local concerns and possible pitfalls can be identified and negotiated. Only when a full agreement is reached and documented, a concession should be granted. Discussed topics should include compensation, possible employment, and other local benefits. The consultation process should be extremely detailed, clear, and transparent, to avoid confusion such as the \$8.000 per hectare 'promise.' It is important all locals are involved in this process and not just the local elite, since all concerns should be heard and corruption is widespread in Cambodia. Even then, if (some) choose not to agree with the concession, they should be allowed to keep their land or find a different mutual solution.

When these practices are not followed, the consequences of losing land can be disastrous for people's livelihoods, since there are no good or not enough alternative stable livelihood strategies. I have argued that the choices people make regarding a land concession, such as to move or to resist, have direct consequences for people's livelihoods. As such, my research participants were not just passive victims, but could take control of the situation as best as they could. However, I have also shown that making these choices is not easy, and in the end it is just a matter of choosing the lesser of two evils.

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