

Community Economies in a Global Marketplace

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ABSTRACT

Despite substantial scholarship documenting the continued relevance of common property resource management systems, many policy officials continue to view such “traditional” modes of organization as vestiges of the past, out of sync with a modernizing, global economy. This paper examines cases of popular mobilization in two post-conflict societies that aim at once to reassert the value of community and the viability of community economies where local livelihoods depend on constituting and maintaining a commons. Recent policy reforms addressing forests in Guatemala and fisheries in Cambodia have each responded to local demands by curtailing commercial concessions in favor of community management of common-pool resources. In this paper, we assess and compare the experiences of two members of the Association of Forest Cooperatives of the Petén (ACOFOP) in Guatemala, and two fishing villages of the Tonle Sap (Great Lake) in Cambodia, highlighting the links between community economies and sustainability, the way community economies seek to engage the market on terms that do not sacrifice their commons, and the role of the state in influencing the prospects for establishing and maintaining community economies.

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Despite substantial scholarship documenting the continued relevance of common property resource management systems, many policy officials continue to view such “traditional” modes of organization as vestiges of the past, out of sync with a modernizing, global economy. A dangerous assumption persists among development planners in many places, sometimes explicit but often implied: that taking advantage of the modern, global marketplace necessarily means giving up community. It means looking at the environment and people as resources to be allocated efficiently towards the goal of increased production and capital accumulation. It means investments and economic activity organized on a large scale, according to principles viewed as rational in the eyes of the market.

But “the market” has no eyes, no inherent means of judging what is in the common good, what is ethical, what is right. This ability to judge rests instead with individuals as part of communities, who assert shared values to determine what is right among the many courses of action that are technically or economically feasible. The heated debates over the rules of global trade witnessed most recently with the failure of WTO negotiations at Cancún constitute a clash of visions concerning what sorts of community values should constrain the freedom of corporations in the global marketplace, and to what extent. In this essay, we focus on the interplay of community and the market at a more local scale, under the material life practices we call the community economy.

Our premise is that all economies manifest the realms of the communal and commercial values, of mutuality and self-interest. In contrast to the market, community offers a degree of predictability and protection from uncertainty. Community economies embed material life in social relationships that make communal projects take precedence over self-interest. The community economy describes a situation in which certain assets are collectively managed, in which shared values of community members promote maintenance of the local commons – the “base” – before profit, and where income is

reinvested in expanding that base. We understand the commons as “anything that contributes to the material and social sustenance of a people with a shared identity: land, buildings, seed stock, knowledge of practices, a transportation network, an educational system, or rituals” (Gudeman and Rivera 2002:359). This understanding of the commons, therefore, is broader than either the categories of common-property resource systems or public goods (Ostrom 1990).

The community economy does not reject the broader market economy, but aims to engage it on terms that don't imperil the base. Community economies are widespread but threatened in many places. We argue that struggles to create or protect community economies are critical to the viability of common property resource management and environmental conservation. Indeed, we surmise that the tension between market and community, and in particular the ability of communities to form and exercise constraints over market exploitation of the natural world, is at the heart of today's drama of sustainability from local to global scales.

This essay considers examples of popular mobilization aiming at once to reassert the value of community and the viability of community economies in two post-conflict societies, Guatemala and Cambodia. In each case, popular mobilization has contributed to a significant policy shift that aims to transfer productive common-pool resources of national importance (forests in Guatemala and fisheries in Cambodia) to community management. In each case, the results vary widely depending on the characteristics of the community at hand, the characteristics of the natural resources they have access to, the broader institutional and governance framework, as well as available market opportunities. This consideration of the broader context of community-based management coincides with the approach recommended by Agrawal (2001). We touch on each of these contextual factors but focus on the characteristics of community, because we feel the cases reveal much about processes of community-building that, in our perspective, are synonymous with constituting and maintaining a commons (Ratner and Rivera 2004).

In particular, these cases offer insight into the dynamics of constituting and maintaining a commons among “stressed” communities in contested places. Guatemala and Cambodia each experienced violent civil wars that transformed rural society, each involving systematic efforts to undermine networks of religious, social, and political

organization that the state deemed threatening. Despite this legacy, rural people are reconstituting community networks in development initiatives that recognize the potential benefits of market integration while attempting to engage on terms coherent with local values and livelihoods. The specific communities we describe, two members of the ACOFOP (Asociación de Cooperativas Forestales de Petén; Association of Forest Cooperatives of the Petén) in Guatemala, and two fishing villages of the Tonle Sap (Great Lake) in Cambodia, demonstrate the tensions locals face in bridging the values of a community economy, focused on reproducing life as they know it, and market-oriented values, focused on efficiency and making profit. The cases also provide a vantage point on the particular difficulties that confront efforts at common-property management in places where the social networks of community have been severely disrupted.

The following sections introduce the Guatemala and Cambodia cases in turn, drawing on field experiences of Rivera with forest communities in Guatemala (2002 - 2004), and Ratner with fishing communities in Cambodia (2002 - 2004). We report not on a discrete investigation but on our own encounters as engaged researchers seeking to understand the reform initiatives and community dynamics in the context of work that aims explicitly to support equitable resource access and sustainable livelihoods for politically and economically marginalized groups.¹ Our observations are drawn from meetings with NGO networks, local community management groups, and interviews with villagers, local and national officials. After describing the cases, we reflect on common themes, and, in the final section, draw preliminary conclusions on how national policies and institutions can support the maintenance and strengthening of community as a way to achieve both economic improvements in livelihoods and sustainability in ecosystem management.

Community forestry in the Petén, Guatemala

As Guatemala's last major "frontier" region, the Petén has become the stage for a clash in models of economic development and natural resource management. Home to the largest community forestry association in the world, it is also the site of intense experimentation on how to "manage" the commons in ways that benefit local livelihoods

and the ecosystem. Against the backdrop of “mega projects” in transport, energy, and tourism, local communities are advancing alternative models of development that recognize the potential benefits of market integration while asserting that this be achieved on terms coherent with local values and livelihoods. Local resistance to large-scale development in the Petén is not just a matter of “traditional” attitudes, nor does it signal a rejection of the idea of integrating the local economy into international markets. Instead, locals are articulating an astute reading of current trends and advancing a model of market integration that does not risk their base – the means of maintaining the community.

Guatemala has designated some 30,000 sq km, more than a quarter of the country’s territory, as protected lands. Eighty-three percent of those protected lands are found in the Petén. The extraction of gum and precious tropical woods in the first half of the twentieth century reinitiated the occupation of the forest after a 900-year lull. For the last 50 years, the Petén has acted as safety valve to reduce the social pressure of demands for access to land in the southern Pacific coastal plains and agricultural areas of the Western Highlands, where most of the impoverished rural populations lives. In the last decade, deforestation has increased at an alarming pace. According to some reports (ACOFOP, presentation, April 2004), in the last five years twice as much forest has been destroyed as in the previous 40 years; as a result, of the Petén’s 14,000 sq km of forest that existed in the early 1960s, only 7500 sq km remain.

Since 1959, a government agency administrated the use of natural resources and promoted human settlements in the Petén. In the 1980s, government began granting short-term (3 to 5-year) forestry concessions to industry, without a requirement for management plans (CONAP 2002:8-9). Indeed, up until the early 1990s, the agrarian policy defined natural forest as “idle land” (*terrenos baldíos*), thus free to be put to “use,” a legal definition that became an institutional endorsement for deforestation. Today, the government has recognizes the need for forest conservation. Yet, there continues to be an imbalance between the long-term value of the environmental services that natural forests provide but which are not reflected in the market, and the short-term profits to be made in deforesting for agriculture or cattle raising.

On the other hand, the introduction of conservation legislation, and in particular the creation of the Mayan Biosphere Reserve in 1990, covering 17000 sq km, was seen by

many forest-dependent communities of the Petén as a threat to their livelihoods. Communities that had previously enjoyed free access to local resources now faced regulation restricting their use. Moreover, expressing little faith in the ability of local communities to manage forests, the central government proceeded with plans to grant large concessions within the Biosphere to the private sector (ACOFOP 2004:8). Old communities like Carmelita, established in the early 1900 as camps for gum-tappers, began to organize and, in 1994, six mayors of small towns in the area gathered to discuss their future and the forest. The following year, these communities and others organized under the Council of Forest Communities of the Petén (Consejo Consultivo de Comunidades Forestales del Petén) joined forces with the guilds of gum-tappers and wood workers to present a joint front in protesting against the expansion of industrial concessions. Local folks had no intention of being relegated to subservient positions as laborers in the industrial forestry concessions.

From their point of view, local residents had successfully dealt with outsiders invading the forest, their livelihood depended on the sustainable use of forest resources, and they deserved, more than outside corporations, the right to manage forests in the future. Industry representatives claimed that locals did not have the know-how, the resources or the necessary organization to manage a concession. Locals pointed to the dismal record of industrial forestry concessions in enforcing against encroachment, noting that relying on the police and the legal code proved far less effective than a community's ability to monitor use within its own forest zone. While acknowledging they would need assistance in establishing formal forest management plans and developing business management skills, local remained convinced that they would be able to manage community forest concessions.

Local grassroots organizations and NGOs coordinated their advocacy efforts, and, in the wake of the 1996 Peace Accords, helped influence a compromise law that recognized the right of both industry and communities to gain forest concessions. Under the regulations, local organizations must present the National Protected Areas Council (Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, CONAP) an environmental impact study and a 25-year natural forest management plan detailing how many trees will be cut and in which locations. They receive training and technical support from NGOs such as Centro Maya.

Today, most of these communities, represented by local associations and cooperatives, belong to The Peten Association of Forestry Concessions, known by its Spanish acronym ACOFOP (Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén).² From 1997, the number of member cooperatives and organizations has grown from 12 to 22, present in 30 communities. They are in charge of close to half a million hectares (5000 sq km) of forest in the multiple-use zone and the buffer zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, which, according to the Forest Stewardship Council, comprises the largest certified, community-managed forest in the world.

ACOFOP is as diverse as its members. There are communities like Carmelitas and Uaxactún, whose residents settled in the early part of the twentieth century to make a living off of non-timber forest products such as edible fruits, gum resin and palm leaves. Other member organizations are made of relative newcomers, like the Asociación Suchitecos, an association of people from Suchitepequez in the Western Highlands who arrived individually, attempted to cultivate the land, failed, and started to extract wood illegally. Still other organizations are comprised of dispersed communities, such as Árbol Verde, a collection of people from 9 different settlements who struggle to build relationships and common values, as they become known collectively as certified tropical wood producers.

The divergent experiences of Uaxactún and Árbol Verde in organizing around their respective concessions reveals the importance of social networks built over time in creating shared values and commitment to maintaining a base that sustains the collective.

The remote community of Uaxactún lies at the very end of the dirt road, some 30 km north of Tikal. Here practically everybody lives off the forest and is part of one of more than a dozen committees of all kinds by means of which the community organizes. The main productive activities are the extraction of xate leaves (*Chamaedorea* spp), a palm leaf used in flower arrangements, gum (*Manilkara zapota*) which only recently has regained a specialty market interest after having been supplanted by artificial gum, and all-spice (*Pimenta dioica*), used in cooking. Everyone in the community is aware of the need to preserve the forest for their livelihood depends on it. Folks who gather xate know that the wrong cut can kill the plant and they won't be able to use it anymore. That is why they don't like to have outsiders pick the leaves, because, "They don't take care of the plants." "Chicleros," men who cut into the "chico zapote" bark to drain the sap, are well aware that

if ill treated the tree will yield little or no sap the following season, or worse, badly open entries for insects that invade and kill the tree. Villagers are equally leery of outsiders who harvest allspice by felling the tree and destroying a resource that took years to grow and could have yielded seeds for many seasons. In the school, forest preservation is a common theme and, with the support of an NGO, village children have made large signs promoting awareness of forest fires when the dry season arrives. Many women make a living producing dolls made with leaves, mushrooms, lichens, seeds and other natural products from the forest.

In Uaxactún, need forged a tradition of managing the resources to ensure their reproduction and growth. But people are acutely aware of the developments around them that threaten this way of life. In the Spartan house and shop of Ramón García who, with much success, teaches others in the community to build furniture with vines, he summed up his recent visit to San Miguel La Apalotada, his community of origin, after a ten year absence by saying, “By God, there’s no more forest. It’s gone.” He had turned around, left, and swore never to return. This awareness of the fragility of the forest and humans capacity to overwhelm it is not new. On top of the highest and most impressive Maya building in the site, Alberto Escalera, a local resident, recounted how in 1947 his grandfather, who had walked the forest and found mounds and Mayan roads everywhere, told him that centuries ago the Mayas had destroyed the forest with dire consequences for them. The grandfather added that in years to come roads would be built and throngs of people would arrive to destroy the forest once more.

Today, residents of Uaxactún explain a sense not only of the forest’s fragility but of its eminent destruction as mega-projects such as the Puebla-Panama Program propose a network of roads and other plans to “develop” the jungle and local communities. They have collectively discussed the effects of a road cutting through their forest, and the consensus is that the road will be their demise. They would have no control over who enters the forest or what is taken out of it. Such a state would destroy the forest. They see their isolation or end of the road condition as a defense against the onslaught of peasants seeking land to plant and ranchers seeking pasture that is destroying the forest elsewhere. A common line in Uaxactún voiced by women from the artisan cooperative and men engaged in collecting xate, gum-tapping, or gathering bayal, the vine used to make

furniture, is that they want to be able to live off the forest and they need to manage it in a sustainable way. When envisioning the future, most folks talk about small-scale operations that they themselves can run with minimal impact on the forest. The expectation is that the community would be able to regulate the use, identifying acceptable and unacceptable practices.

Árbol Verde is a cooperative that groups some 344 households from 9 different settlements along the road from El Remate to Tikal and from El Remate to Melchor de Mencos on the road to Belize. Árbol Verde is a sundry group of people from different parts of the country joined together in a common interest around a government forestry concession. Most of them were expelled from their territories of origin by greedy landowners, by dwindling yields in overexploited lands, or as refugees of the civil war. Most had no previous history together, no common values, visions or ideas. They had not cultivated social ties among themselves until they started to work together around an economic option that is slowly becoming a material and social sustenance of growing importance for most of them – a commons in the making.

Judicious management and reinvestment has allowed the community forestry organization of Árbol Verde to acquire and run a sawmill with trucks, a tractor, motor saws and other equipment. It has a paid manager, and the president is a businessperson with political skills. Many members earn salaries of between \$4 and \$7 a day, more than twice the minimum wage and much more than the going rate for day labor in the area. With the income from wood sales, they have invested in schools in each of the communities, in potable water and machinery for added-value products. Árbol Verde is sponsoring a fine carpentry program for young folks from the communities (most but not all from member families) aimed at adding value to the forest products in situ. With those goals and practices, the organization is building capital, a common interest around the market potential of their effort and, perhaps, an incipient community. Yet, while the members of Árbol Verde may be individually concerned about the forest, they have no sense of shared values oriented towards protecting the forest, much less a common set of practices aimed at protecting the forest, at protecting their source of livelihood. The forest is something Árbol Verde members can live without. It is not yet a commons.

Community fisheries of the Tonle Sap, Cambodia

Home to the fourth most productive freshwater fishery in the world, Cambodia is exceptionally dependent on its lakes and rivers for food security and rural livelihoods. Fish products represent an estimated 75 percent of animal protein intake in the diet of a typical Cambodian, a figure that ranks among the highest in the world (Ahmed, Navy et al. 1998: 51; Dey, Rab et al. 2003). Historically, however, the livelihood interests of small-scale fishers and processors have been marginalized in a tenure system aimed primarily at extracting maximum economic rent for the state through the allocation of private fishing lots. Codified in law by the French protectorate in 1908, the system “constituted a formalization of pre-existing exploitation patterns” that had supported royal tutelage (Degen and Nao Thouk 2000: 53). After a hiatus during the Khmer Rouge regime, the system was reintroduced in the 1980s, with lots allocated for 2-year terms by auction. In the 1990s, the private fishing lots were supplemented by “research lots” administered directly by the Department of Fisheries, which also constitute an important source of revenue.

Finding themselves increasingly hard-pressed to earn a livelihood in the interstices of the fishing lots, angered by the threats and occasional violence that locals suffered at the hands of the private lots’ armed guards, and burdened by unofficial fees required to access fishing grounds, fishing-dependent communities began to mobilize in the late 1990s against a system they saw as highly unjust. Though the courts were largely unresponsive to the claims of poor fishers against their better-financed and better-connected adversaries, the media attention created by provincial level gatherings and protests in front of the national assembly proved influential in raising awareness among NGOs and government leaders alike. By 1999, a few of the smaller fishing lots had already been abolished or reduced in size, but it was only after the Prime Minister ordered a high-level commission in 2000 to review the fishing lot system in a series of provincial forums that the momentum for reform built strength. In 2001, major reforms were introduced that reduced the total coverage of fishing lots by some 56 percent to increase the area accessible by local communities. (The main reductions came from commercial lots, while most of the research lots were retained.)

The Prime Minister also declared government's support for the establishment of "community fisheries."

Despite several years of debate over draft legislation, however, there are still no regulations specifying how community fishery organizations may be established, how community fishing grounds may be designated, and what sorts of authority these organizations should have in their allotted area. In several provinces, nevertheless, district and provincial authorities have proceeded to officially recognize community fishery organizations and their locally-devised management plans. The resulting tenure situation is highly ambiguous, and conflicts are widespread concerning fishing access, the use of illegal gear, as well as water management between fishing and dry-season agriculture in some areas.

A comparison of two fishing villages provides a sense of the considerable variation in the extent to which they are able to control and to protect their shared resources, and in the extent to which they have been able to create a commons. Tamol Leu is a riverside village in Kampong Chhnang Province, and is one of the few communities in the country that successfully campaigned to have a commercial lot released in 1999, two years before the major reform initiative. It was a small lot comprising several ponds and the streams connecting them during the dry season, which expanded to some 260 ha during the wet season. The lot concessionaire, himself a member of the village, commonly said, according to local accounts, that "as far as the fish go, that's how far the boundaries of the lot go" (Eng Soeun, interview, May 2004). He often subleased portions of the lot to other villagers, but he was also resented by the majority for not allowing them to fish or even travel across the lot area by boat, and was forced to go some distance to hire guards. Community members say they probably would not have succeeded in getting the lot released were it not for a fortuitous chance that village representatives had to meet with the Minister of Agriculture on a personal visit he made to the province.

Today, villagers in Tamol Leu provide leadership in a community fishery organization that includes two neighboring villages and is responsible for managing a water area of 3716 ha in the wet season (76 ha in the dry season). With approximately 280 families in the village, all engage in fishing but not as their sole income, as roughly 90 percent also own and farm agricultural land. The head of the community fishery

organization says his legitimacy as a leader comes not from being recognized by the state but rather from his accountability to the community, from his commitment to “respect the opinion of the people within the community fisheries organization” (Eng Soeun, interview, May 2004). While in many areas the relationship between fishing villages and the police is fraught with distrust and non-cooperation, in Tamol Leu, building an informal partnership with local police officers has been key in strengthening enforcement against illegal fishing activity.

The community fishery organization’s most important initiative to date is the establishment of a fish sanctuary in one of the larger seasonal ponds, which members claim has already succeeded in increasing fish stocks in surrounding areas during the wet season. This has become a point of dispute with the former lot owner, however, who now uses the pond to grow and harvest lotuses for sale and claims the land around the fishing sanctuary as his family’s. (Under the lot system, the land in question had previously been state property.) Concerned that allowing the area to become an official sanctuary would jeopardize his property claims, he has told the community fishery organization that to formalize the sanctuary they would need to purchase the land from him. Amidst the legal ambiguity left in the wake of the removal of the commercial lot, the dispute that emerged is a struggle to legitimize common property pit against a claim that would transfer assets from state to private hands. “The biggest problem we’ve got is not illegal fishing,” says the leader of the community fishery organization, “...it’s assuring that the sanctuary remains in the community” (Eng Soeun, interview, May 2004).

Anlong Reang is a floating village on the Tonle Sap in Pursat Province, whose members rely on fishing and fish rearing as the foundation of their livelihood. Considerably poorer than Tamol Leu, the community faces severe challenges with what locals describe as a declining resource, increased competition from outsiders, and growing needs (the village has grown from a core 5 households who remained after the Khmer Rouge period to 91 households today). With assistance from a local NGO, the community established a fishery organization in 2002 responsible for an area of 572 ha of open lake, bordering another community fishing area to the south and one of the remaining commercial lots to the north. The deputy head of the fishery organization says that because of the training provided by NGOs, “we are learning about our rights, about the law, and we

have knowledge to seek our rights” (Koau Ratha, workshop presentation, May 2004). A village fund seeded by one of the NGOs has provided for a community-managed microcredit scheme, which has enabled household investment in alternative income-generating activities such as pig and chicken raising (an impressive site on a small houseboat!). Funds from repayment are also pooled to provide a variety of safety nets such as emergency funds for medical care or families in dire need. Villagers point to these as a sign of social solidarity (*samakii*).

Despite what may well be a strong sense of community orientation, the authority that villagers in Anlong Reang exercise collectively over the fishing resource that constitutes the base of their economy is very weak. At considerable personal expense, members of a patrol committee travel the perimeter of the community fishing area to notify outsiders who encroach on the area, often with larger vessels. But they complain that the local government fishery office (under the line authority of the central ministry rather than the province) routinely declines to intervene, arguing instead that, in the absence of national regulations defining the authority of community fishery organizations, there is no basis for enforcement. Another grievance is that, under the draft legislation as it now stands, individuals who opt out of community fishery organizations would be permitted to use medium-scale gear, while members of such organizations would be restricted to small-scale gear, which is only suitable for subsistence fishing. As one of the NGO representatives working in Anlong Reang described the situation, the legal framework should give communities not only a chance to fish for their own consumption, but also a decent livelihood, which today means having products to sell in the market (Lou Som Nan, workshop presentation, May 2004).

It is telling that, with the returns from capture fishing declining, most families in Anlong Reang now rely on a supplementary strategy by keeping fish from the more valuable species they catch in cages under their houseboats, to be sold months later once they have reached marketable size. This requires the additional effort of catching small fish to supply as feed to their caged fish, but families see it as a more secure alternative to relying on the common-pool resources of the lake alone. When asked about the prospects for alternative livelihoods outside of fishing, the village head recounted that during the Khmer Rouge regime, the authorities had moved the village residents on land to join the

agricultural collectives. But the local Khmer Rouge leaders became exasperated on realizing that these people don't know how to farm, and so sent them back to fish. On hearing the story recounted again, the village leaders who had gathered laughed, but they were also sobered by the idea that they don't see alternative livelihoods. Knowledge of fishing is part of the community's base, an asset and something they see as part of their predicament. They are scared about depending on a common-pool resource over which they have so little control.

Common themes

Cambodia and Guatemala are very different places, and we do not underestimate the importance of the distinctive political and economic context in each country, the varied legacies of their civil wars, or differences in their social and ethnic makeup that all influence the options available to local groups and the strategies they adopt in making use of common-pool resources. Despite these differences, there are similarities we observe in the cases introduced above that lead us to conclude that the notion of community economy provides a valuable frame of reference in these two countries and beyond. Indeed, we suspect that, whatever terms one chooses, it is impossible to understand the prospects for sustainable natural resource management and sustainable economic development in any country today without appreciating the tension between the spheres of value and exchange posed by market and community. In this section, we compare the cases, bringing in additional detail as well, to highlight what we see as common themes.

Community and sustainability

A community economy is oriented towards maintaining the base upon which community livelihoods depend, and therefore is oriented towards maintaining the community itself. To the extent that the community economy relies on shared ecosystem resources, it is oriented towards resource sustainability as well. In the absence of communities that guide and constrain it, the market has no such orienting value; the

community economy gets the upper hand for “maintaining life.” None of the local cases we present here completely fits the “ideal type” (Weber 1949) of community economy according to the characteristics we outlined. Rather, they are examples of communities that have been in some instances more successful (Uaxactún, Tamol Leu) and in some cases less successful (Árbol Verde, Anlong Reang) at constituting a commons and a means of maintaining that commons that offers a prospect for long-term community sustainability. In all these cases, the viability of the commons is in question, and in all the role of the market is ambiguous – offering opportunities as well as serious threats to community welfare.

The commons or base that we describe is more than the physical resources typically connoted by “common property.” The base includes the forest, the land, the waters held in common, but it also includes the knowledge and the social relationships that make a collective livelihood project possible. Even if, for example, the forest domain conferred to Árbol Verde were, in market terms, more “valuable” than that managed by Uaxactún, the still tenuous social networks among the members of Árbol Verde and their lack of shared values and practices oriented towards maintaining the forest means they would face more difficulty in organizing a community economy. (Whether or not they might profit more individually is another matter.) Building a commons also means building meaningful social networks over time.

The Cambodia cases illustrate the difference that individuals can make in building such networks through service to the community. In Tamol Leu, a leader is one who listens well, who responds to the collective will, who works towards a consensus, and who knows how to build alliances with potential adversaries, including the police and local officials. In Anlong Reang, leaders of the community fishery organization explain how the first step in dealing with the few village members who are found to be using electric shock or other illegal fishing methods is to educate them, not to punish them or shun them from the community: “We bring them into our house and explain to them how this damages the environment, how it means less fish for us all.” In each example, the underlying strategy is to build relationships focused around common values. In neither of these cases is the viability of a community economy clear, but people’s choice to invest their time and effort

is remarkable – it is a recognition that they see this as perhaps the only option that can work for everyone’s benefit.

Community economies and the market

Market economies have as a primary value individual or corporate self-interest. Market exchanges are the realm of separate actors with short-term material relationships. In contrast, community economies circle around the long-term goal of making and sharing a commons. In the Petén, this clash of material life practices and visions has come to a head as local groups oppose the large-scale development plans for the region. Years of organizing and struggle to obtain forestry concessions honed communities’ awareness of the differences between strategies for economic development that are locally-controlled and oriented towards maintaining a community versus those that are externally-controlled and oriented towards extracting profit. Local grassroots organizations under the umbrella Petén Solidarity Group (Grupo solidario de acción y propuesta, GSAPP) have made public statements rejecting the roads, hydroelectric generating plants and the “tourism for the rich” plans of the Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP) (GSAPP 2004). In Uaxactún, the main threat is road development; in Carmelitas, the dispute is over access to archeological sites and the jungle surrounding them which provides a source of livelihood for the community; in other communities such as Bethel, proposed dams would flood the jungle, the archeological sites, and agricultural lands. In the Cambodian example of Tamol Leu, the community has succeeded partially in creating a commons out of a resource base that had previously been divided for individual gain, but the dispute with the former fishing lot concessionaire illustrates how the tension between market-oriented and community-oriented values remains very much alive.

Where the experiences at maintaining or developing a commons look most promising, locals aim to develop alternative economic strategies that take advantage of market opportunities in ways that do not sacrifice their base. In Uaxactún, all of the main livelihood activities in the community depend on the market, whether this involves the production of xate, gum, and allspice, or, more recently, fine tropical woods and Ramón nuts, which are ground to make a coffee-like beverage that locals hope to market in the

United States. In Tamol Leu, community investment in the creation of a fish sanctuary represents a conscious decision to forego immediate, private gains for the prospect of a collective benefit in the future (even if the nature of the resource and limits on enforcement mean that keeping the benefits within the community is in not assured).

The extent to which gains made from market transactions are then reinvested in the collective base helps distinguish to what degree a community economy is at play.

Interestingly, the community fisheries organization in Tamol Leu has decided to sublease some of the ponds it manages to individual community members on a seasonal basis, who then sell their catch as they choose. The rationale for this choice is revealing, however: the funds generated were used for school repairs and other communal projects. In Anlong Reang, there is a similar orientation towards collective investment: everyone is said to have taken out a microcredit loan, including those less needy, because the repayments (with interest) help build the community fund. What they have not yet managed to do, however, is find a way to make their shared resource (the lake) generate returns directly for this kind of collective reinvestment (as opposed to relying on the funds provided by an outside NGO).

In Uaxactún, some of the profits from wood sales are being used to fund high-school scholarships for community members; more significant still is the investment made in forest firefighting. The community has movable tanks, hoses, shovels, machetes and water-vests people use to move in the jungle to fight fires. The various committees participate in fire drills, know where the water sources are in the jungle – there are only a few – and can move swiftly when a fire is located. This volunteer work, a service outside the market, is demonstrated as community members participate in village meetings, and fill roles such as committee president, night guard or peon. This service is embedded in a sense of shared values that identifies the forest not only as the source of material sustenance for local folk but also as a foundation for their identity. Threats to the forest are real (they have seen the destruction from fires and logging around them) and are understood as threats to the Uaxactún community itself. In *Árbol Verde*, by contrast, there is so far very little reinvestment in the community, whether in the form of funds generated from wood extraction and processing or in the form of volunteer service. *Árbol Verde* does not have

firefighting equipment or fire drills; its members hope there will be no fires in the forest, but they are not prepared to react collectively if their shared resource is threatened.

Another distinguishing factor of the community economy, and a major point of concern in all of the cases examined here, is the extent to which a community exercises control over its own commons. Part of this has to do with the characteristics of the natural resources. Much of the vulnerability expressed by fishers in Anlong Reang, for example, is because there are no natural boundaries that delimit the area they have been conferred to manage from the vast lake of which it is just a tiny part. The fish spawn and migrate without regards for these lines on a map. For some species, the relevant management unit corresponding to its habitat is the full Tonle Sap Lake, its floodplains, and the rivers that feed and drain it; yet, there is so far no meaningful community to manage the commons at this scale. The area managed by the community fisheries organization at Tamol Leu is joined with this broader ecosystem as open water during the wet season, but for at least part of the year can be effectively managed as discrete ponds and streams. Forests, of course, stay in one place, and can be more easily demarcated than open aquatic resource systems. But the Petén cases show that community management of forests entails exposure to other vulnerabilities, including old risks like fires, and new ones like roads, dams, oil exploitation, and irresponsible tourism.

The issue of community control is also closely linked to the scale of economic activity and the sorts of group interests that this activity serves. The mega projects of the PPP rely on an investment of capital and a level of central political support that make it exceedingly difficult for local communities to influence specific development decisions that impinge on their local commons. From a market perspective it is not lamentable, and indeed may be considered economically efficient, if locals shift from their various small-scale productive ventures to participate more completely in the market as wage earners. But from the perspective of those trying to maintain a commons, the shift is tragic: it means that people are dispossessed of their resources – a sacrifice of community to yield labor for the benefit of (GSAPP 2004).

In fishing communities of the Tonle Sap, the owners of private fishing lots have typically been both inaccessible and unaccountable to locals, instead managing their affairs through layers of complex subleasing arrangements that ensure a profitable return on their

investment. In addition to this social distance that separated concessionaires from the communities they affected, the short (2-year) concession terms provided little incentive to manage the resource sustainably. The case of Tamol Leu presents an interesting counterpoint to this typical scenario, as the size of the concession was relatively small and the concessionaire himself a village resident. Though his orientation towards market gain at the expense of the other villagers distanced him from the community, in other ways he remains embedded in local social networks. Community fishery organization leaders, in asking him to cooperate with the fish sanctuary, are in essence asking him to recognize the commons and reintegrate him as a member of the community – a strategy that invokes a shared history rather than a formal legal framework as a basis for resolving differences.

Community economies and the state

In circumstances where local resource users face a variety of competing claims on the resource base or risks stemming from other market-oriented development activities (few inhabited places in the world are remote enough anymore to avoid such description), the state has a key role in influencing the viability of community economies. In both the Guatemala and Cambodia cases, the state responded to local pressure by legitimizing community management of significant natural resources that otherwise probably would have been assigned for commercial exploitation. In Guatemala, the legal framework setting the conditions for forest concessions to communities is now clear, whereas in Cambodia, the fishery reform is in legal terms incomplete. Having released private fishing lots to community access, there are as of yet no regulations to define the basis for community management. Even in a country where law enforcement is generally very weak, it is remarkable how deeply the implications of this legal ambiguity reach into the lives of individual fishing communities. The chief of Anlong Reang village cited the need for the national government to complete the sub-decree on community fisheries as a top priority for resolving his local predicament. He also acknowledged that, because he expects the sub-decree won't give the community rights to detain and fine violators, partnership with government will be essential in the future: "We can't [achieve good management] just on

our own, so we need the fisheries department to play a strong role too” (Sing Lay, interview, May 2004).

The prospects for viable community economies depend on much more than the legal right to common property. The same legal designation of a community forest concession may, as in Uaxactún, serve to provide legal backing to an existing commons, or, as in Árbol Verde, provide an opportunity for local people to choose to make a commons (and it’s not yet clear whether they will do so). In addition to the importance of the social networks, values, and practices internal to a local community, the ability of community members to link effectively with outside groups is often essential in articulating their stake in a commons and protecting it. In both Cambodia and Guatemala, the policy reform initiatives responded not just to the sum of many disparate grievances, but to a *coordinated* effort among local groups from many places whose interests aligned. This capacity for coordination, based on a recognition of common interests and values (whether explicit or implied) reflects an emergence of community at supra-local scales.

In defining shared interests among local communities, and in facilitating dialogue between local communities and state institutions, there seem to be some who play an exceptional role. These “social brokers” may operate at the local level, like the head of the community fishery organization in Tamol Leu, or they may be the driving force behind informal coalitions at larger scales, like ACOFOP or the Petén Solidarity Group. In Cambodia, a coalition of NGOs that emerged to support the advocacy interests of fishing communities, known as the Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT), has since worked to build partnerships between among agencies at provincial and district levels, elected commune councils, NGOs, and communities, that “help government do its job more effectively” (Mak Sithirith, interview, May 2004). In Guatemala, the community forestry association, ACOFOP, is now a regular member of the national protected areas agency (Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas, CONAP), giving Petén forest communities representation alongside industry and landowner representatives in deliberating issues that affect the protected areas system, a situation that several years ago would have been unthinkable. Those who are effective in bridging the worlds of villages, NGOs, and government agencies are typically able to speak in the different languages that each of those contexts demand, and they can translate between different perspectives (such as the

divergent bases of legitimacy that stem from the formal legal system or from local service to community). In places where the legacy of social conflict has undermined social networks among local communities, and between local communities and the state, the importance of this work, creating dialogue and weaving new threads of shared interest, cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

The commons are an expression of community, and the work of creating community entails identifying and maintaining a commons. When viewed in a short-term perspective merely as resources for the market, forests may be logged out, rivers and lakes may be fished out and habitats destroyed. Or, alternatively, when the focus shifts from short-term profit to long-term livelihood, forests can provide a sustainable source of a wide variety of products including seasonal fruits, nuts, sap, and mushrooms as well as wood; in shared waters, fish can be harvested sustainably and their habitats protected to maintain natural cycles of ecosystem reproduction. When there is a community around the resources, when there is a commons, people frequently talk about holding these shared resources “for the future,” as something in store that will be useful in times of need. The ethics of community is a powerful means of managing nature for the long term, as it can set limits to the tendency of the market to favor short-term exploitation for profit.

Values alone, however, cannot sustain a shared resource base; where people depend on that base for their survival, they also need to find ways to make it “work” to provide for the community’s material welfare. In creating community economies, in getting organized to make the commons work, there is tremendous diversity. The cases we have chosen from the Petén in Guatemala and the Tonle Sap in Cambodia illustrate just a few examples of the strategies that local groups employ – and the obstacles they face – in engaging the market on terms consistent with local values and with a view towards resource sustainability.

In describing work to create community economies, we have emphasized the dynamics of community-making at the local scale. Yet, the cases also demonstrate that sustainability is never uniquely local. Markets, ecosystems, and political structures all

transcend the local, and therefore present challenges of mediating diverse interests at larger scales. In protesting against the private fishing lot system in the Tonle Sap or against large infrastructure and tourism schemes in the Petén, locals are at times taking a defensive stance – attempting to protect the resource base and their source of livelihood from what they see as serious threats driven by market-oriented values. In both cases, this protest has revealed networks of shared interest among communities, providing the basis for new coalitions that help them articulate their interests more effectively in the political realm. At times, locals and the NGOs that work with and represent them, have taken a more collaborative stance – actively building cooperation with government agencies at different levels. Even so, the definition of a commons at a broader scale – the whole of the Tonle Sap or the whole of the Petén – has only just begun and remains deeply contested.

As examples drawn from post-conflict societies, the cases presented here illustrate some particular challenges involved in building and maintaining community economies where the communities themselves have been dislocated or reconstituted after a rupture, where local relations with government are often fraught with mistrust, and where tenure rights are in flux. Building successful community economies requires organizing collectively to deal with these constraints. As such, the immediate, practical work of trying to make a living together is intimately related to the broader challenges of reconstituting social relationships and “making peace” on terms where the rights of different groups are respected.

Yet the tension between community and market as realms of value and social practice is unique neither to post-conflict societies nor to rural resource-dependent populations. We venture that all economies manifest interlaid tendencies of mutuality and self-interest. Consider, in post-industrial societies, urban parks, libraries, environmental health regulations, emergency assistance programs, public support for the arts. All of these represent social investments, the result of communities of people – often very dispersed – who define a common interest in a project valued not for the economic gains it brings them individually in the short term but for the broader, collective good that it serves in the long term. New, global environmental challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss similarly invoke the creation of communities of interest at still broader scales, communities that struggle to define things valued in common for the future that constrain the freedom of actors in the global marketplace. Few among us operate exclusively in either the realm of community or market; we make choices oriented in both directions. In an increasingly “human-dominated world” (Vitousek, Mooney et al. 1997) – in which we’ve developed economic systems that, with increasing efficiency, are able to undermine the very conditions for human survival – the choices we make collectively to manage the tension

between the realms of community and market must be understood as a defining theme in the ongoing drama of social and environmental sustainability.

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² See www.acofop.org