CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES AND INFLUENCE ON ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

This chapter explores the ecological setting of Ratanakiri and the environmental adaptability of forest dwellers in ethnic minority community. This provides the context needed to explain the underlying motivations for conflicts over the use of resources in upland areas. Discussion is divided into five main sections. The first section describes the characteristics of the ecological setting, climate and resources. There is also a description of the population of Ratanakiri and the context of traditional practices and associated meanings. The second section deals with the community landscape, providing an overall picture of ethnic minorities and how they manage their natural resources and their social relations within their communities. The third section explores the development projects that have been implemented in the ethnic minority communities at the remote frontier, as well as the role and responsibility of government agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) in highland development plans for transforming the ethnic minority community. The fourth section describes how development interventions have been influenced traditional institutions and the different perceptions of various local institutions. Finally, the last section describes the management of land and forest resources in local communities. The focus is on the changes in the natural resource tenure system, which relates to resource utilization, land ownership, traditional practices and livelihood systems.

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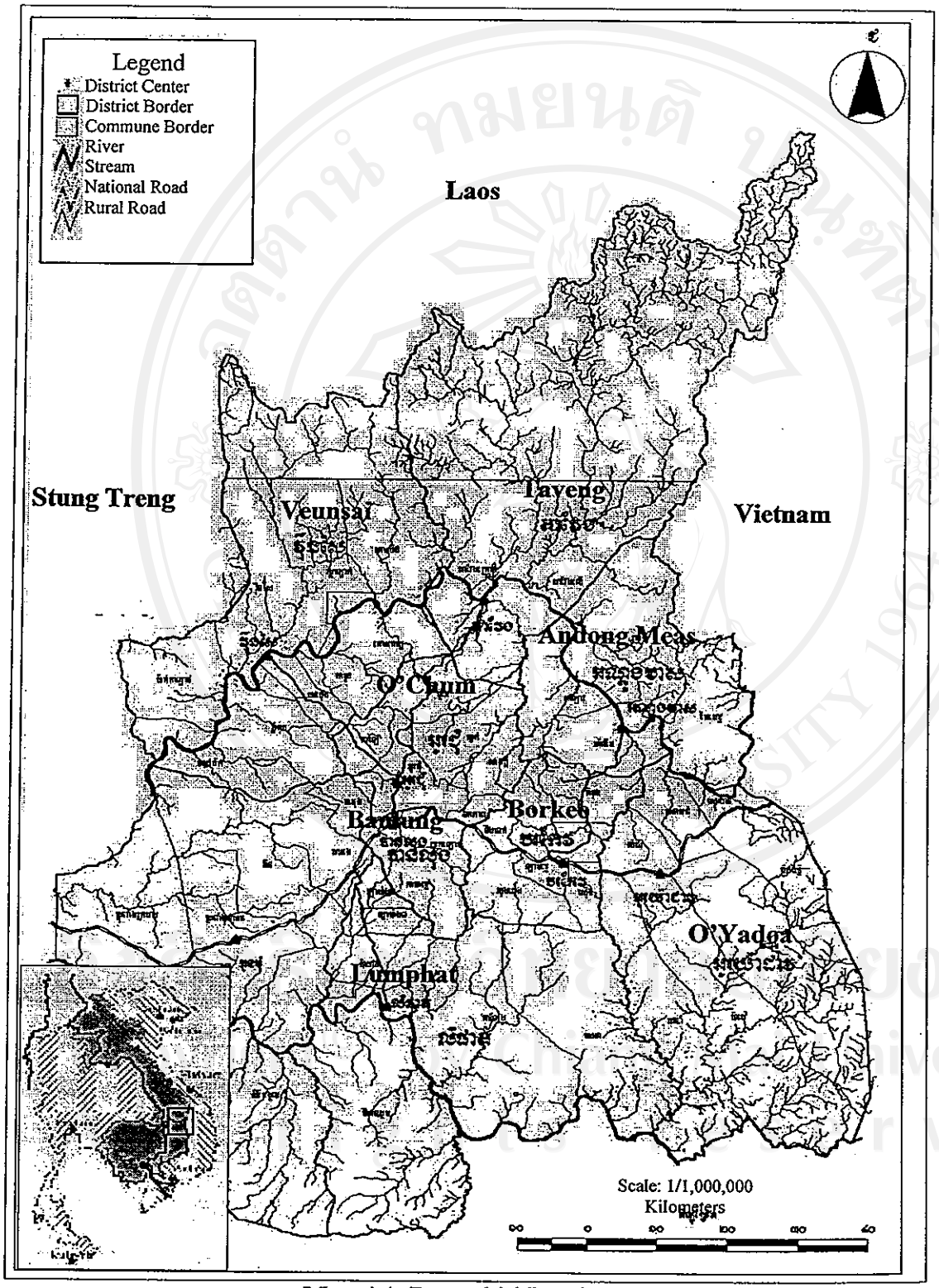
4.1 The Ecological Setting of Ratanakiri

The name Ratanakiri means 'the mountain of precious stones' and it is situated in Northeastern Cambodia. Ratanakiri covers a total area of 12,500 km² and is approximately 635 km from the capital of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. It shares borders

with the Stung Treng and Mondulkiri provinces to the West and South respectively, with Vietnam lying to the East and Laos to the North.



Map 4.1: Ratanakiri Province

Source: Land Use Planning Unit in Ratanakiri 2003

The Sesan and Srepok Rivers flow across Ratanakiri to the West from Vietnam and drain into the Sekong River, a tributary of the Mekong. The Northern area of the province between the Sesan River and the Laos border is a mountainous area covered with broadleaf evergreen forest totaling 5,636 km². South of the Srepok River is a tropical broadleaf evergreen and deciduous forest that covers an area of 4,858 km². The remaining area between the two rivers lies upland with red basaltic soils, covering an area of 1,200 km² and characterized by tropical broadleaf forest (Department of Agriculture in Ratanakiri, March 25, 2003).

The elevation of Ratanakiri ranges from 100 meters to 800 meters and can be divided into three main zones: mountainous, upland and low-lying zones. The mountainous zone ranges from 400 meters to 800 meters in elevation on the right bank of the Sesan River near the Laos border. It is composed of dense forests and bamboo trees, with abundant wildlife. The upland zone ranges from 200 to 400 meters in elevation and is situated in the largest region of the province between the two major rivers. The red basaltic soil in this zone supports the dense tropical broadleaf forest and extensive areas of shifting cultivation, with potential for cash crop plantations. The low-lying zone is less than 200 meters in elevation and is situated on the left bank of Srepok River. It supports wetland rice cultivation and deciduous forests (Sopheap 1998, Fox 1997b).

The mountainous and upland zones are characterized by a tropical monsoon climate, beginning in late May and finishing in October. From October to January the weather is cool at night and cloudless during the day with an average temperature of 15°C. The low-lying zone is dry, with a clear, bright atmosphere. Annual rainfall is always above 2,000 mm, and can reach up to 2,950 mm in Banlung. However, there is almost no rainfall between December and April, and the maximum temperature can rise up to 36°C (Kirivuth 1998, Bourdier 1995).

Ratanakiri has a vast wealth of natural resources, such as, dense forests, rivers and their tributaries, minerals, wildlife and fish. The upland zone has beautiful landscapes including lakes, waterfalls, and natural springs, with fertile soil that has supported traditional shifting cultivation for centuries. This area also has potential for agro-economic development and eco-tourism as revenue generators.

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Administratively, there are nine districts in Ratanakiri, including Borkeo, Andong Meas, O'Yadao, O'Chum, Taveng, Veunsai, Koun Mon, Lumphat and Banlung. Banlung is the provincial capital. In 2001, the population of Ratanakiri was 108,000, with 52,627 males, and 55,373 females, constituting 19,223 families. This was a significant rise from the previous year's data, when the total population was 99,733 with 18,624 families. This difference can be attributed to migration from lowland areas. The average household size is 4.5 persons, while the national household average is 3.5. Women are the head of the household in 1,554 families, which comprises 8.08% of the total (Development Investment Plan 2000-2001 Ratanakiri).

Table 4.1: The Percentage of Population in Ratanakiri Province 2000

District	Total Number			Population		Percentage	
	Communes	Villages	Families	1999	2000		
Taveng	2	20	994	4,523	4,559	5	5
Andong Meas	3	21	1,160	6,998	7,606	7	8
Koun Mom	6	23	1,899	9,542	9,555	10	10
O'Yadao	7	29	2,150	11,022	10,885	11	11
Lumphat	6	26	2,131	11,068	11,062	11	11
Borkeo	6	34	2,506	12,238	12,864	12	12
O'Chum	7	37	2,696	12,648	12,655	13	13
Veunsai	9	34	2,013	12,952	14,148	13	14
Banlung	3	16	3,075	17,831	16,369	18	16
Total	49	240	18,624	98,822	99,703	100	100

Source: Development Investment Plan 2002-2004, Department of Planning Ratanakiri

There are eight ethnic minority groups in the area including Kreung, Tampuan, Brao, Jarai, Kachok, Kavet, Lun and Phnong, representing 70% of the population of

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the province, the rest being Khmer, Cham, Lao and Vietnamese. The pie chart of the total population (Figure 4.1) shows the relative proportions, with Kreung and Jarai representing 16% each. Tampuan is the largest group representing 24% of the population and Lun and Phnom are the smallest groups representing only 0.1% each (Development Investment Plan 2000-2001 Ratanakiri, National Census, 1998).

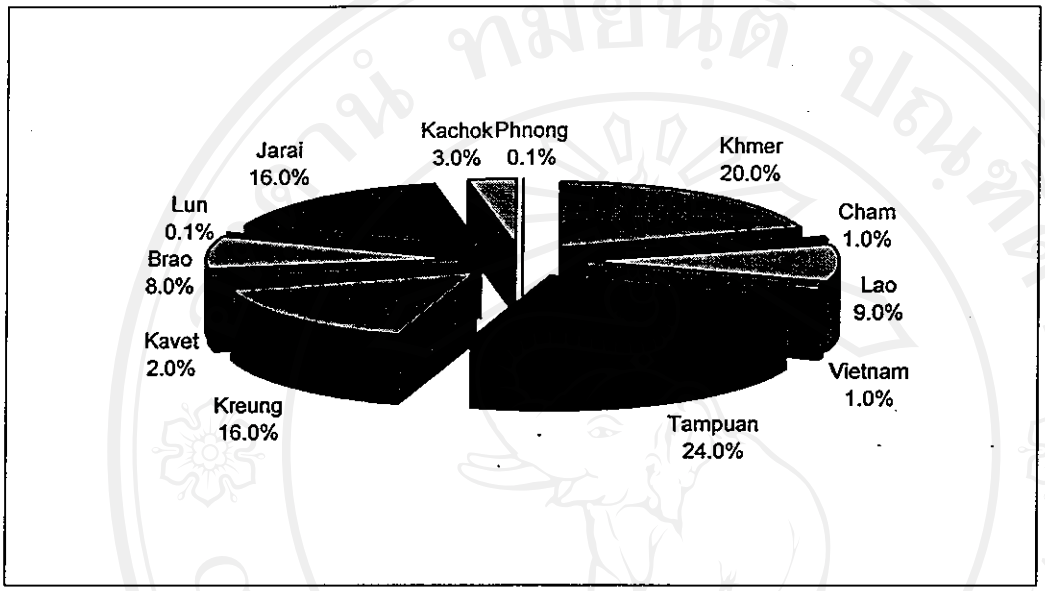

Figure 4.1: Population Percentages in Ratanakiri Province 2000
Source: Development Investment Plan 2000-2001, Department of Planning Ratanakiri

Ethnic minority groups are characterized by diverse cultures, languages, religion, belief systems and social practices. The language of the Kreung, Tampuan and Kavet were derived from the Brao language, and so these groups are able to communicate with each other. Many ethnic minority people can speak several languages including Lao, Vietnamese, and Khmer (the official language). The languages of the Kreung, Tampuan and Brao are often used as mediating languages. It was interesting to observe the Tampuon, who is a staff of CARE speaking in the Kreung language to members of the Yak Kaol (Kreung) community and in the Brao language with the Brao community.

There are differences in the practices of the various ethnic minority groups relating to the natural world, when compared with non-traditional (modern) and traditional societies. Ethnic traditional cultures have relationships with the natural world that are generally spiritual and animistic, while non-traditional cultures do not (Soheap1998: 20). In addition, ethnic minorities observe customary practices that

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perceive local communities as embedded in their natural surroundings through continual interaction with their local environment. This characteristic of closeness with the natural world plays an important part in the social relations among extended families, nuclear families and wider kinship. In times of hardship, family and clan members can help each other or exchange information related to experiences or traditional knowledge or labor and materials or food among the community. The following section deals specifically with the ways that community members support each other in times of hardship.

4.2 Ethnic Community Landscape

The villagers in Yak Kaol community prefer to establish their villages and homes in the red basaltic lands. They cultivate different upland rice varieties and various other crops, graze livestock, hunt, fish, and gather various plants and vegetables for subsistence.

The Yak Kaol community is located in the Northern portion of the Ratanakiri, which extends from Southern Laos to Banlung. Kreung people speak the Mon-Khmer language and follow a bilineal kinship system, which is different from the other two main ethnic minority groups of Tampuan and Jarai that have a matrilineal kinship. Under the bilineal kinship system, newly-married couples live with and contribute labor to the bride's family for several years, then move to live with the groom's family. They often move back and forth between their parents' homes before settling on their own. In this context, men and women have equal responsibility and control over land, of course, under their parents' authority and also maintain their relationships among family clans. But matrilineal kinship systems are less favorable towards the current situation of economic development, due to lack of labor and capital resources support from their family clan, leading to week relationships (Berg et al., 2000:34).

Yak Kaol community is usually located between 100 and 400 meters in elevation. Historically, villagers in this community lived in large fortified villages for the protection of their ancestral Yak Kaol community from disturbance by outsiders. However, from the French administrative period, the Yak Kaol community frequently broke into smaller village settlements. Villagers lived in villages during the dry

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season, with most people living in shelters on their farms (*Chamkar*) during the agricultural season until the completion of the harvest. Even so, they often traveled back and forth between the farms and village every day because of taboos against staying on the farms.

Traditionally, the unique culture, religion and subsistence livelihood of villagers are linked to the trees, forests, mountains, rocks, streams, water and agricultural lands. Villagers have inhabited the Yak Kaol community for hundreds of years as an ancestral domain and place of worship for spirits. They also perceive their guardian spirits as powerful protectors of their settlement, and perform religious activities to dispel evil spirits who roam the settlement area.

In terms of natural resources, in the settlement areas there are taboos restricting and guiding resource utilization, for example, some plants, trees, animals and birds are regarded as sacred and are prohibited from use. The protected forest area is where the villagers believe the *Arak* dwells. This belief prevents people from cutting down trees in this area of spirit forest. The animals that live in the forest are also protected, since these taboos mean that hunting wild animals near the spirit forest is forbidden. It is believed that hunting in the area would anger the spirit. This observance of supernatural forces provides the basis for a traditional system of protection for natural resources, preventing abuse or overuse.

These rules and regulations facilitate collective decision making in among community members. This can be seen through family kinship and clan consultations within their groups. For example, one village member in Krola commented during the interview:

> I chose a new shifting cultivation plot near the Bree Arak Tranouk Touch. Before I occupied this plot I discussed it with my parents and elders, regarding customary practices. It is necessary to be prudent to avoid being harmed. I often follow the rituals in traditional agriculture which appease the Arak for taking care of my crops and health.
>
> (Krola villager interviewed April 25, 2003)

This community, spiritual forces are believed to determine individual obligations to ancestors and the family. The customary law of the Kreung dictates that elders mediate human affairs to improve the well-being of villagers. Certain obligations must be fulfilled and ceremonies performed in accordance with traditional norms or

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else ill effects might follow. Therefore, customary practices have evolved to create a strong social organization that binds the members of the community together.

Within these strong communal ties, however, each family is independent in their community-oriented economy. Families can own certain possessions including livestock, gongs and ceramic wine jars. The traditional social system is considered as a force for solidarity that brings village members together in daily life. As such, collective practices are central to traditional spiritual ceremonies, such as, the funerals, spirituals and traditional agricultural ceremonies. At these times, small animals, such as pigs or cow and chickens are sacrificed after being contributed by community members, or even by relatives from other communities who participate in proceedings. It can be seen from the case study carried out in Krola of Yak Kaol community:

During funerals, families sacrifice a pig, or even a cow, in order to satisfy the ghost of the dead. In case the family has no pig, they can borrow one from another family, for which they incur no immediate financial obligation or time restrictions for repaying the gesture. Instead, they replace the borrowed animal when they have one to spare in the future. Each family contributes in kind and with cash, with women collecting firewood and vegetables and the men entering the forest to make a funerary casket and carry it back to the village. Some mourners contribute rice and jars of rice wine. Overall, there are many jars of rice wine prepared. During such difficult times, local people share their grief, and eat and drink together. At night, traditional funerary dances are performed. Family members or relatives of the deceased always sit beside the coffin for the entire day to express the sorrow and solidarity of family members (Figure 4.2). Therefore, funerals can be seen as place and time for gathering villagers within and outside community. During this time, many traditional leaders, elders, spirit mediums as well as younger people spread out their ideologies and wisdom to strengthen cultural values and ethnic identity. This performance becomes one of the mechanisms of informal organization to strengthen their relationship that is political linking and economic subsistence across ethnic minority communities.

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Figure 4.2: The Husband and Daughter of the Dead Woman Sit Near Her Coffin. Photographed by author January 11, 2004

Furthermore, in the context of economic subsistence and social linking, it can be seen that ethnic minority people often share resources and establish social networks among community members. During the agricultural season villagers often exchange labor with friends for planting or weeding. Commitments are often made for this kind of work to assist until completion. Mr. Sithort of Krola provides a good example that:

> My cousin and I will weed her farm for two days. After that, she will come to help me for three days. Thus, we do not consider how many days we owe because we have much work that needs support from each other. For instance, when her child got sick, I looked for herbal medicine for her without considering labor exchange.
>
> (Mr. Sithort member of Yak Kaol community, December 14, 2003)

In another occasion, particularly during January and February, villagers often cooperate in the preparation of agricultural equipment. In the case of the village blacksmith, for example, if a blacksmith spends two days making knives to be used for harvest, then the person he makes the knives for, works for him some time in the future.

The Yak Kaol community has communal upland rice fields, in which the villagers contribute labor and work together from the beginning of planting until harvesting. These activities effectively ensure close relationships among the community. Indeed,

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this sense of community feeling and norms of reciprocity have extended into many areas of everyday life.

Traditional system of labor exchange at the village level also lends to this sense of community and is most evident after the harvest period each year. Villagers often build their own homes, but this depends on the size of the house. If the house plan is large, many villagers come to help, a system that is very useful for widowers and elderly families. Yak Lam Beut, one of the Yak Kaol community members said, "I wanted to live near my sister, when I moved out from my daughter's hut (Mrs. Deng Sovann), my nephews helped me to carry the hut cross the village" (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Villagers Helping to Build a Small House
Photographed by author December 7, 2003

This is similar to the experiences of Mr. Re Katie, who, while building a wooden house, had many extended family members help him during the entire construction that lasted several days. In return, he prepared food and tobacco for them (Figure 4.4).

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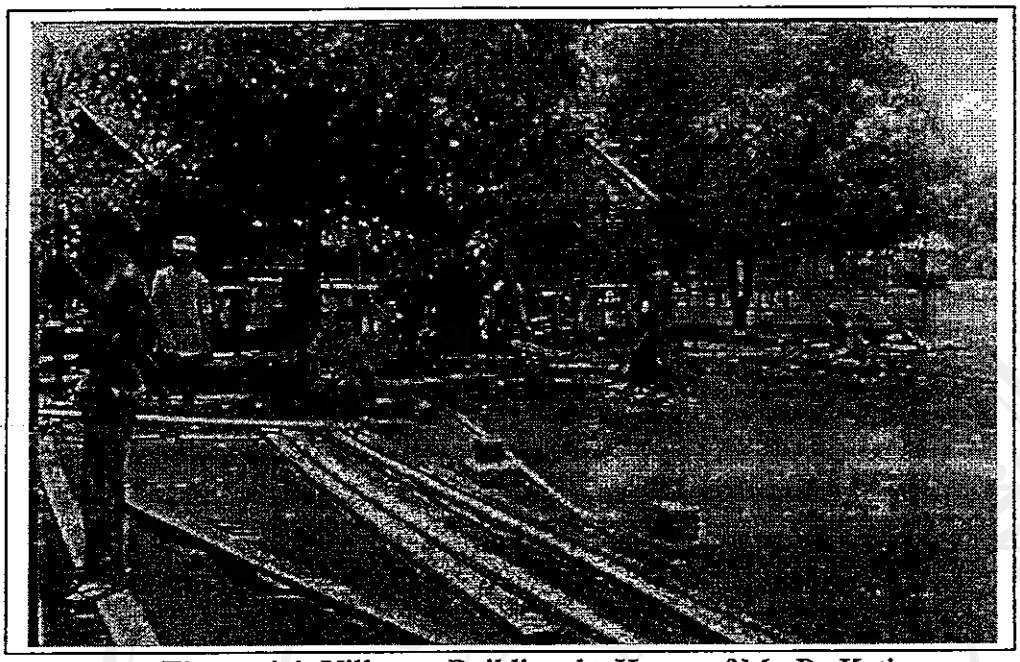

Figure 4.4: Villagers Building the House of Mr. Re Katie
Photographed by author April 25, 2003

Furthermore, this contribution occurs not only at the village level, but also at the commune level, and involves both work and cash. During the fieldwork in December 25, 2003, about one hundred villagers came from ten different villages in Yak Poey commune carrying wood from the community forest to build the community center that is located near the Yak Poey commune office. These villagers also contributed cash that totaled over 3% of the whole project cost, and was presented to the commune councillor. Thus, the cooperation and reciprocity within local communities can be enhanced by building relations with local authorities and government development agencies. The above examples illustrate the resilience nature of social organization within community members that they have chance to meet each other for a whole community to express their daily life illustrated:

> The forest exists in a great amount but we don't know how to manage it. We also want to live in wooden houses but we don't know how to get them. We depend upon the forest; we live because of it and when I die it with me, in my coffin. Now the companies ruin the forest; they use tractors to clean it up. It is impossible to make Chamkar and there is no coolness either.
> (Ethnic Tampuan commented during the seminar proceeding 1996:7)

Therefore the following sections address alternative models of behavior that are emerging among ethnic community members by influencing from development project.

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4.3 Strategic Interventions in Local Community Development

4.3.1 Role of NGOs in Development

This section outlines the historical process of development by government and NGOs to exercise their technology of power and influence within the ethnic minority communities. Additionally, I attempt to review briefly the fund allocation and the influence of international donors concerned about the regeneration of Cambodia after long civil war.

The Khmer Rouge ended its regime of genocide 1997, but the civil war left Cambodians with suffering from great poverty and starvation. In the early 1980s, the new government of Heng Samrin put an effort to reestablish the country that had inadequate human and capital resources. In response, the International Organizations (IOs) were concerned with the emergency situation of the Cambodians living with the starvation. Later, the donations were disrupted by international sanction on Cambodia, and the country was isolated from the world community (Bennett and Benson 1995 cited in Nee 2000:238).

After the Peace Accord in Paris on October 23, 1991, International Organizations had brought the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) that operated peacekeeping mission in Cambodia between 1992 and 1993. This authority had been implemented mainly to carry out three important tasks: (i) verifying the peace process or peacekeeping; (ii) establishing a democratically-elected government in Cambodia; and (iii) repatriating Cambodian refugees from neighboring countries (FizGerald 1994 cited in Nee 2000:235-236).

In the wake of the Cambodian peace process in the early 1990s, the government initiated several development projects aimed at improving the quality of people's lives. Approximately 85% of the national population lives in rural areas without electricity, poor water supply, inadequate sanitation, and few accessible roads (Seila Task Force 2000:8). Both government development agencies and international organizations carried out highland development plans. In 1994, the government of Cambodia initiated the 'Seila Program' in Battambang, Siam Reap and Pursat provinces in order to test new development models. The Seila Program has been adopted as a model to strengthen local governance system at local community level (ibid.).

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The UNDP/CARERE project supports government agencies in their attempts to strengthen the capacity of local people in planning and local governance system in local communities. It also aids their efforts to deliver basic services to villagers and strengthen local infrastructure facilities to cater for gender-specific needs, non-formal education, and natural resource management issues.

Even though development programs benefited only some segments of society. National economic development policies have often placed pressure on local people to distance themselves from their traditional ways of life (ADB 2000:15). Thus, there is little room left for the powerless or the poor to exercise freedom and access to resources they need. The distribution of resources is mainly managed by the powerful who are part of the military patronage system, ensuring that their friends and relatives are the most immediate target beneficiaries (Nee 2000:251).

With the economic growth, sustainability, equity and social justice was put in place of the government development plan for 1996 to 2000 (Royal Government of Cambodia 1997). The government's development initiatives have been undermined by a lack of capital resources. In this case, external influences are unavoidable, which the government has to meet face to face with the donor community to report progress towards conditions and criteria posed by the international community as a condition for granting aid in every three to six months. By 1999, Cambodia received total loans of US$717 million from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. This amount does not include hundreds of millions more that the government has already signed for in the form of bilaterial loans from other countries (NGO Forum on Cambodia 1999 cited in Nee 2000:256-257).

Besides, it is very important to explore the mechanisms of development project implemented within ethnic minority communities. There are many NGOs, including Coopération International pour le Dévelopment de la Solidarité (CIDSE), Health Unlimited (HU), Non-Timber Forest Products Project (NPFP), International Cooperation for Cambodia (ICC) and the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) working in the area. There are also various international organizations, such as, United Nations Development Program/Cambodian Rehabilitation and Regeneration Project (UNDP/CARERE), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Labor Organization (ILO), German Technical Assistance (GTZ), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Asian

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Development Bank (ADB) supporting fund directly to government development agencies. These NGOs focus on empowerment of local community to participate in development processes. They strengthen local capacity of development planning, rights awareness and natural resources management. In the meantime, some NGOs work closely with the government development agencies in order to link with local community.

In 1990, HU worked on health issues to support poor people in their efforts to achieve better health and well-being. In the meantime, HU also trained provincial staff and providing health services. HU supported mainly four activities of health care at the village level: (i) strengthening the village health committee; (ii) providing facilities and medical supply; (iii) training the traditional birth attendant; and (iv) setting up network of women linkage between village and district health staff. HU has implemented its program for long-term mission to build health care knowledge and skill to disseminate information into the local communities.

In 1992 ADHOC a leading agency came in to strengthen both ethnic minority associations and local community organizations in support of community rights, human rights and legal protection. This organization was training the legacy of society violation mainly for women. Additionally, in 1994 ADHOC involved with land conflict issues by facilitating between local community and local authority to solve the conflicts.

In 1993, CIDSE initiated their projects and focused on promotion of food security, non-formal education, gender awareness as well as health programs. But this project could not solve all problems of local community need. In 1994, CIDSE initiated the integrated development community program by working closely with the Commune Development Committee (CDC) and the Village Development Committee (VDC) in order to strengthen local capacity for developing own local communities, and to motivate the VDC to undertake village planning and to take responsibility for project implementation.

ICC replaced by World Concern initiated local development project in 1994 by recognizing local community structure, and promoting health care and food security. In 1998, ICC increased its activities to play vital role with local communities to promote health care and non-formal bi-lingual education in languages, such as Khmer

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language and ethnic language (Kreung, Tampuan and Brao). Similarly, in 2002 CARE also promoted the education of highland children by formulating school curricula with the Department of Education in Ratanakiri. CARE recruited knowledgeable persons from the local community to be teachers to help ensure appropriate teaching of traditional culture.

In May 1995, government agencies and UNDP/CARERE initiated the Seila Program in Ratanakiri by defining and testing systems for planning, financing, and delivering services and investments for local development. Recently, this program has been extended to cover all districts. The primary focus of the program has been to promote an integrated local governance approach to development. The other focus has been to encourage the provincial and national authorities to facilitate and endorse an approach of sustainable environmental management. In term of implementation, the Seila Program has operated local governance system through a hierarchy of province, district, commune, and village development committees. In the process of development, the commune and village-level development committees were formed through local elections facilitated by the Provincial Rural Development Committee (PRDC).

In 1996 NTFP played a facilitator role with local communities by aiming to mobilize human resources to secure land and forest resources. The NTFP has assisted local communities in the demarcation and mapping of community boundaries, including setting up rules and regulations for land use and forest resource utilization. This was carried out in conjunction with encouraging villagers to build their own capacity for governance of community resources, and revitalize traditional social organizations based on customary laws and belief systems in their local communities.

In late 1998, Seila Program had changed its development agenda by focusing on Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Project led by the Department of the Environment, supported by UNDP/PLG. This CBNRM Project has now been applied in all districts. The main goal of the CBNRM Project was to secure ethnic minority tenure rights to land and natural resources. At the same time, the CBNRM Project has tried to develop a model for government standardization. The process of CBNRM Project has been developing management plan, which includes zone analysis, demarcation and the mapping of land and forest utilization areas, and the development of relevant statutes (village rules and regulations). The

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CBNRM Project advisor pointed out that in 2003 this project was successful in having the provincial authority recognize the rules and regulations of community land and forest management for at least 16 communes, and in 2005 it would obtain official recognition for another 33 communes.

Since the 2002 commune council election, the Seila Program focused on the main objectives of reforming the commune structure, and also to locally implement the policy guidelines of the Ministry of the Interior. Therefore, the commune structure was considered as a local administrative unit to manage and control the local community, which shift the power of management system from local development institutions perspective to local administrative unit. The local development institution persuades villagers to participate in development process, such as, building rural infrastructures and food security. However, the local administrative unit has been involved in reorganizing social structures of community in order to control local people and resources imposed from the power of the state.

The Seila program has highlighted how the livelihoods of ethnic minorities are closely linked to the natural resources around them. The integrated approach employed combined several elements, such as, non-formal education (NFE), agricultural production and animal husbandry, the building of small-scale infrastructure facilities, agro-forestry and a redefining of community forest. Through the result of development UNDP/CARERE provided financial supports since 1996 to 2003 amounting to US$ 9,848,157.

4.3.2 Conflicts in Development

Throughout the transformation process within ethnic minority community, which many conflicts were caused. For example, CBNRM project was initiated by the Seila Program. In processes of demarcation and the mapping of community boundaries, there were several conflicts: conflicts between villagers, conflicts between neighboring communities, and conflicts between the villagers and outsiders, such as, lowland immigrants, concession-holders or other powerful individuals. Many communities have sought to protect their land and forest resources and to prevent neighboring communities from utilizing these resources. In some instances, community members have started to give high importance to individual needs by

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developing rules and regulations to manage their own natural resources, disregarding traditional natural resources tenure system that is communal in nature.

The reasons of conflicts were happened because the process of demarcation and mapping was implemented in a short period of time, with limited dialogue between stakeholders (the government development agencies and local community members). Villagers also lacked a comprehensive understanding of the differences between traditional and modern tenure systems. The modern system was potentially confusing, encompassing formal rules and regulations as well as community rights. Katrin (2003) viewed that the provincial authorities quickly recognized these rules and regulations of the community forest management at the district level, creating conflicts in the local communities over varying individual benefits. The CBNRM agents have been unable to solve conflicts between outside elites and local people. In one case, a conflict in the Tuen commune in Kuon Mom District arose when a government officer from the Department of Agriculture took over land from the community to grow cashew nuts for personal profits. There are also cases of conflict between companies and local people. This was the case when the Tay Seng Company forced local people to sell their lands for the creation of a rubber plantation in Banlung District. The conflicts that have arisen in both of these cases have prompted villagers to complain to provincial authorities and the agents of the CBNRM Project for many years, but there is yet to be a satisfactory resolution.

Villagers do not understand the process of implementations of the CBNRM Project. It has result into some villagers selling their land to lowland migrants and local elites. Since 2000, many local NGOs have strengthened their networks to link with ethnic minority communities to secure local communities' resources and traditional cultures. For instance, ADHOC has collaborated with the NNRM and the *Khmer Leu* Association play key roles in the mobilization of human resources and lobbying for community rights from local to national levels. In addition, these organizations have formed networks throughout the province to help securing rights to traditional land and forest resources, especially in the maintenance of the traditional culture of local communities. They also carry out research projects about local livelihoods and traditional cultures. Further, the ICC and CIDSE collaborate with the NTFP 2001 to strengthen local communities in the management of land and forest resources La'ak commune in O'Chum District and Teun commune in Koun Mom

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District. Throughout the strength of network of these NGOs and local communities had pursued provincial authority to recognize community rights, and rules and regulations to control and manage the local resources in 2002. However, these NGOs have very limited human and capital resources with only few communities covered through the projects. The local community resources, then, have gradually declined without any appropriated-management.

All of the projects mention above impacted upon ethnic minority communities. Some progress has been made in improving local living conditions, and raising local awareness of national laws and local rights. In terms of access to modern lifestyles, some ethnic minority families now have motorcycles, tape recorders and live in modern houses. However, many people are not fully satisfied, with state and NGOs implemented development project: (i) they have not fully responded to their needs; (ii) they have left unresolved problems surrounding conflicts between local people and companies or local elites; (iii) the rights of local communities control land and forest resources are not fully recognized; and (iv) the rights of local communities receive in social services, such as, health care and education are still limited.

Even though the participation of ethnic minority communities in various projects is generally limited to the involvement of representatives at different levels, participation by women in development programs in ethnic communities has not been equal to that of men, despite much training on gender issues provided by governments and NGOs. Men are not always supportive or respectful of the rights of women to participate in, contribute to, or control topic of discussion in meetings. For example, prior to meetings on natural resource management, women generally have to clean the meeting room and the area around the *Rong* (meeting hall) while men discuss the meeting agenda. During this time, the men also welcome visiting officers from the provincial municipality, with women serving them hot water or tea. When the meeting starts, women have no prior knowledge of the meeting's specific agenda. This situation certainly restricts the opportunities for women to participate fully in decision-making processes.

Overall, at the provincial level there are few direct representatives of ethnic minority communities involved in decision-making process and advocacy with government agencies. Representatives work under various NGOs, and are not always capable of adequately representing the diverse interests of ethnic minorities to

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provincial authorities. This is due to misunderstandings between government development agencies and the representatives of NGOs about the community rights to manage local resources. Government development agencies often rejected the case and also complained that the representatives prevent the benefits of NGOs and persuade local people to be conflicted with local authorities. In contrast, the representatives of NGOs want to help villagers suffering from the government of Phnom Penh that had authorized the logging and land concession to companies without any consideration of local community rights and livelihoods.

Overall, government development agencies are not always good facilitators in negotiations with ethnic minority communities, and do not provide adequate opportunities for people to voice their concerns. Jarai people complained, "They look down poor people, who do know any thing of development" (Sarom and Vanthon 1996:11). In contrast the government development agencies' perceptions, as Chayan (1996:11) commented that:

> Local people have traditional knowledge and wisdom, they know where resources are: different types of trees, plants, animals, fish etc. when they can collect them and for what purpose. They also have a certain value system, which means using resources with respect their customary laws and taboos
>
> (Chayan 1996:11)

Despite recent official initiatives in community participation, government development agencies often do not respect the rights of ethnic minority peoples to publicly discuss their concerns, needs and ideas because they think that ethnic minority groups have nothing to offer in terms of planning for development. But community participation should provide opportunity to villagers to make decision, as Chayan (1996) strongly remarked in his paper of 'farmers' coping strategies' that:

> If we want to help villagers cope with changes, meaning that they select what they want to have based on their existing value system and local knowledge, then we need to strengthen coping strategies – the ability to select and deal with problems based on one's own ability. So we are development workers have to try to help villagers stand on their own feet, help them to re-think and revitalize their culture and their knowledge. It is a social learning process that doesn't assume that development workers know more than villagers. Villagers and development workers should learn from each other. Through this process villagers will reach some autonomy and pride in their own culture. We should help them think about what is good and what is bad so that they can make their own decision and participation in development process.
>
> (Chayan 1996:5)

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In other cases, international NGOs, for instance UNDP/CARERE does not explicitly aim to seek empowering members of ethnic minority communities to act as their own representatives and develop ownership of specific development projects, with projects themselves at times having no clear criteria for implementation the step of organizing local community development of resource management. Further, many NGOs have at times used their association with ethnic minorities to implement their own agendas such as negotiation and resistance with government. According to the Asian Development Bank (2002:15) many international organizations and local non-government organizations working in Northeastern Cambodia do not have good relations with local government agencies, even though ethnic minority communities have improved rural infrastructure facilities and changed the basis of their livelihoods with such things as increased access to health care, promotion of community rights and cash economies. Collectively, those development projects have reorganized local community structures and changed community landscape, which can be seen in the following section.

4.4 Development Influences on Local Institutions

4.4.1 Perception toward Leadership

This section illustrates a fundamental contradiction in the role 'traditional leaders' and 'new local leaders' including village chief and village development committees are intended to play. There are also illustrated the changes of local community structure. The new local leaders are supposed to bring about 'reorganization of local structures' or 'social change' sometimes of a dramatic and far-reaching of traditional leaders point of view. However, within the development process the traditional leaders have transformed their views, which are varying degree tractability or resistance to the development projects. The section thus has seen how traditional leaders acted out this fatalistic drama in its question for 'development influence'.

The leadership role of the 'traditional leaders is informal, which they seem to be associated with the daily life of the community than the new local leaders. In the ethnic minority community, the traditional leaders and spirit mediums refer to the key respected persons with the kinship system, informal community elders, who are absolutely vital. These leaders have historically been the main caretakers of villagers

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and play central roles in upholding local structures that rely on communal participation and agreement. In the past, traditional leaders were the only sources of local people's empowerment for mobilizing the people against unjust government and colonial power (Nee 2000:148-153).

Further, these traditional leaders have the right to relocate and identify a new location for the village to modify land and resource tenure systems as well as to compel villagers to respect customary law, reflecting local institutions that are similar across ethnic minority communities in the highlands of Cambodia. These elders also play crucial roles, for example, in community organization, such as, building roads, raising funds for public service, conduct traditional ceremonies and play an important part in conflict resolution. Traditional leaders also play key roles in transfer traditional knowledge through stories, myths and legends in order to preserve and maintain their traditional culture. As villagers are expressing their confident with traditional leaders or elders:

> Most people here believe in the traditional healer and my experiences with them is good... when I get depressed, when my business goes down I go and see a few and compare what they say. If they are similar I take their advice. It is not so much the advice they give me but hope – they give me hope in the future.
>
> (Boyden et al. 1997 cited in Nee 2000:154)

In the ethnic minority communities, the selection of elders to become traditional leaders occurs through the interpretation of dreams, and with the agreement of community members. These elders considered to be more knowledgeable and experienced are elected, except of the traditional leaders of Jarai most of the time has appointed through their family clan. The traditional leaders often identify younger people who are respected by the community members as potential future leaders. These traditional leaders often educate these young people during participation in and observation of spiritual events in everyday life.

During the 1980s in all ethnic minority communities in the highlands, village chief were appointed by the state to established local authority. The village chief plays an important role in networking between the local communities and the state, and will often call villagers together for meetings to explain 'orders' from the government concerning various development decisions, plans and policies. The village chief not only informs the villagers of these requirements but is also

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responsible for enforcing these government orders that may involve restrictions on land and forest utilization or providing contributions towards development project budgets. These roles of village chief continue to be used by some authorities, even within the process of community development. As a village chief said:

> Do not worry about collecting the money. Ever since 1979 I take responsibility. For what is bad and for what is good. I collected rice for the government and I collected soldiers for the army, so I will collect money for development.
>
> (Biddulph et al., 1997 cited in Nee 2000:149)

4.4.2 Traditional Leaders versus New Local Leadership

This section highlights the different perception of local leaderships. Villagers often perceive their village chief as government agent, because of village chief serves for central government rather than help local communities. Therefore, villagers were fragile the mutual relationships from their new leaders. The government development agencies should paid much attention, while appointing new local structure. Accoring to Chayan (1996), commented during the seminar proceeding on 'Sustainable Development in Northeast Cambodia that:

> In Kreung, Tampuon and Jarai villages they have their own organization, so if government official appoint a new village committee without understanding that there is already a village committee or village traditional leaders, there will be conflict between these two set of leaders.
>
> (Chayan 1996:5)

It is clearly evident that reorganizing local community development explored the contradiction among community's members. Since the mid-1990s, many government development agencies supported by UNDP/CARERE and NGOs that work in local communities have created a wide range of new local institutions, such as, the Village Development Committees, natural resource management committees, health care agencies, agricultural extension agencies, and many sub-committees in delivering credit services. These new local institutions play central roles in developing work plan for various projects, and carry them out according to government guidelines (see section 5.5).

The selection of community members for these committees is often based on criteria, such as, Khmer literacy and the ability to travel to the district or provincial center for meetings. According to these criteria, some elders are not eligible to participate or join this network of committee, because they are faced with language

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barrier. Some elders, though, are selected to be advisors in the Village Development Committees. Overall, many elders have lacked a comprehensive understanding of government policy, laws and other information relevant to provincial and national courts. Traditional leaders therefore have a limited voice in the development process. Most projects are carried out by new younger leaders who deal directly with development agencies and assume responsibility for project implementation.

The leaders are not always fully aware of traditional practices within their local community. New leaders may support actions that threaten traditional practices. Thus, tensions between new and traditional institutions have emerged. As an elder in the Yak Kaol community stated during the interview on May 20, 2003, "We are not satisfied with the new leaders, who are often easily influenced by the development workers". The elders therefore pay great attention to the behaviors of new local leaders, who may think about the immediate monetary benefits of development project rather than the future consequences in terms of culture and community. However, the elders do not oppose these new local leaders if they support the needs of villagers. Further, traditional leaders have to accept the status of the new local leaders selected by development workers because villagers also participate in voting. Additionally, the implementation of development projects often strengthens these new local leaders, gradually leading to a shift of power in communities from the traditional leaders to younger people.

With the changing of village structures, many local groups have attempted to strengthen their power bases. For instance, the village chief can maintain his power through associations with local authorities or even political parties. The village chief is often the key mediator with development agencies and has great influence over village members with a key role in the development process. Traditional leaders in Yak Kaol community try to increase their power through membership in local community committees. They are frequently elected as members of the land use and natural resource management committees, which provide them with opportunities to manage local natural resources by following customary laws and taboos. The traditional leaders thus also play a critical role in the development process, helping to promote village solidarity, and ensure food security by encouraging villagers to plant fruit trees, to practice shifting cultivation, and wetland rice production.

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Consequently, villagers change their attitude to participate in the development project. Villagers thought that if they follow their local leaders and government development agencies, it would be easier to survive without any contradiction and also get the benefit. But, several villagers seem completely unaware of the purpose of the development activates. As Jarai villagers commented during the seminar proceedings 26 February – 2 March 1996 on 'Sustainable Development in Northeast Cambodia' that "I don't understand what 'agriculture' is. I don't understand the word 'development participation' either. According to Nee (2000:151), reveals that:

> There is no qualitative of community in the decision-making process. Most of the families we visited did not exude any special confidence that can be attributed to outside intervention. This is understandable when we see that they have not had any opportunities to discuss their own problems.

Thus, this is a major constrain depleting the community' capacity for self-determination and empowerment.

Within this context, traditional leaders are still influential in solving disputes between village members and neighboring villages. If serious conflicts occur, the traditional leaders will forward the case to the village chief or commune chief in order to find a solution to reconcile the conflicting parties or to impose sanctions. However, the village chief must inform traditional leaders before calling conflicting parties to any meetings so that they may observe the judgment. As Zweers et al., (2003) find in their study of local institution in development process, if traditional leaders have no role in the process of development, it is harder to bridge the gap between development and tradition. There is therefore great contestation among local institutions for the control of local regulating institutions to manage community development projects.

The process of development has changed local behavior and perceptions in ethnic minority community. Similarly, Zweers et al. (2003) explain that the traditional leaders do not always want to explain the detail of cultural taboos to young people. This is also true in upland community of Cambodia, the sacrifices that worked in the past no longer seem to be effective in appeasing the spirits. Traditional leaders may fear that if a sacrifice does not have the desired effects, they will be blamed for it (ibid). Therefore, these traditional leaders do not always inform young people when they think an illness is related to the breaking of a taboo. When the traditional leaders

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keep quiet, information about cultural taboos is no longer being passed in the traditional ways to the next generations.

Overall, though, Kreung and other ethnic minority traditional leaders seem to have lost power through the development process as younger men gain more confidence, and more opportunities to participate. Younger men have received higher education, have often traveled to other places outside their communities, and can communicate effectively with development agencies both government and NGOs. As students from the Indigenous Youth for Development Project (IYDP) commented during the workshop 5-6 January 2004:

> We are interested in learning computer applications, the English language, and modern lifestyle. We get support from the NTFP and often make study tours other provinces. We have learned many things and besides that we will have a good job in the future.

Moreover, IYDP students have mobilized among their group who study in high school in Ratanakiri to participate in development process since 2000. They have conducted field research on traditional music, cultures and customary practices on natural resource management. Then, they also disseminated the information through reports publication and video show.

There are many differences, then, in the perceptions held by the traditional leaders and young people. Many ethnic minority communities, young people use modern equipment for transportation and entertainment, but the traditional leaders prefers to maintain their traditional culture through songs, traditional dance, and the playing of gongs and other traditional musical instruments. Young people and new leaders prefer to live close to the main road with easy access to school, health care centers and market towns. In contrast, the traditional leaders make commitments with development agencies to remain living in the village. The fact that the community has received much rural infrastructure, such as, the building of a road, schools, wells and well pumps, a rice milling machine, and a community tree nursery, the village cannot move without the agreement of local authorities and development agencies.

Therefore, traditional leaders have competed with new leadership for maintaining their authority, customary practice and managing local community resources. However, the power of traditional leaders have gradually transformed due to reorganizing local development system. In the following sections can be seen 'social

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transformation' in terms of land ownership, traditional agricultural practice and involvement of crop development.

4.5 Changes in the Natural Resource Tenure System

Kreung settlements are found in the densely forested upland areas in Ratanakiri, where they practice rotational cultivation and are easily able to collect plants and vegetables. Traditionally, villagers practiced shifting cultivation on the same plot of land for a certain number of years, then move to another plot. This means that forested areas are temporarily cleared and the land is cultivated for periods of three to five years depending on the quality of the soil. The land is then left for regeneration into secondary forest to restore soil fertility. The process of forest regeneration takes 10 to 15 years, and it is only after this period that communities are able to work again on that piece of land. Historically, young people in ethnic minority communities in the area have learned from elders, parents and neighbors by observation, listening to stories and through experience about how to manage the ecological environment. Their traditional knowledge is embedded in nature, and is not only vast and complex, but also effective in the sense of sustaining the forest through the practice of traditional shifting cultivation.

In the process of shifting cultivation, the Kreung community observes certain taboos and spiritual beliefs in selecting cultivation plots. Traditionally, Kreung villagers first identify viable forestland, clear a small area, and then wait for four or five days to determine by their dreams whether the selected site has been approved by the spirits or not. If their villager has a good dream, for example, a spirit comes to water the their farm, or the farm was fenced. If the villager has a bad dream (such as a natural disaster, or tigers attacking buffaloes), it means that the spirit is angry or does not give permission to use that part of the forest and the villager has to find another place to farm.

Beyond this, Kreung belief forbids clearing shifting cultivation plots (*Chamkar*) onto another village's land. If a member of one village clears land in another village's *Chamkar*, it is believed that original landholder and his family will fall victim to sickness, death or other misfortunes caused by displeasing the spirits. Also, if villager clears fields on the far side of another village's *Chamkar,* access to the same walkway

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and water source is forbidden, and a walkway that crosses each other's land is prohibited. Any violation of these customary laws will anger spirits and cause misfortune or death.

If a villager wishes to re-use another person's old cultivation plot, he or she must first ask permission from the previous cultivator in order to transfer use rights. The shifting cultivation plot then becomes available, but the new occupant is required to look after any fruit trees, and share the harvest with the previous occupants. If old shifting cultivation plots are not re-used, they are left for forest regeneration. The Kreung still follow these regulations regarding the re-use of old shifting cultivation plots in the community.

In 1997, the local Land Use Committee within the Yak Kaol community cooperated with the NTFP to implement a new land use planning system. This process includes the identification and mapping of community boundaries, and this committee has developed new rules and regulations to control and manage local natural resources. Specifically, the Land Use Committee in Yak Kaol community aims to (i) control the use of land and forest resources applicable to customary practices (ii) strengthen land security in order to support the sustainability of the community and surrounding environment, and (iii) cooperate with local authority and government development agencies, and NGO workers in order to strengthen the local natural resource management system.

Land-use planning and collaborative natural resource management in Yak Kaol community has become a development model that has achieved broad acceptance by traditional leaders and community members. Many villagers anticipate that this model will reduce conflicts among the community and with neighbouring villages. Equally important, though, are issues of land ownership, which local community members contest for their own benefits, it can be seen in following section.

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4.5.1 Changing in Land Ownership System

In the Cambodian context, land ownership is not a relation between people and things. It is a relation between people, concerning things constituted by social transformation. Where the constellation of social force is different, one may

anticipate the possibility that land ownership may be structured differently. Such is indeed the case of ethnic minority communities in Northeastern Cambodia.

Traditionally, villagers in the Kreung community prefer to cultivate crops near water sources and in red basaltic soil. Now with limited available farming lands, the government prohibits the cutting of secondary forest or the cultivation of a new *Chamkar* without prior government permission. In deed, the village chief in Yak Kaol community described how he was invited to attend a provincial meeting for all ethnic minority communities in 1995. At the meeting, it was announced that the forest belongs to the government and that villagers could subsequently use only *Chamkar Chas* (old fallow plots), and were prohibited from clearing new plots. During the meeting, it was declared that all village chiefs present that day must work to protect the forest around their villages. After this, all villagers across the areas have felt uneasy selecting shifting cultivation plots in the traditional manner. However, some villagers in Yak Kaol community continue to practice shifting cultivation after receiving permission from local authorities who are related by family or kinship. Some smaller plots deep in jungle areas have been cultivated without asking permission. Shifting cultivation has remained important for ethnic minority people's livelihood and culture. As one member of Krola village in Yak Kaol community said during interview on June 5, 2004:

> We have managed our shifting cultivation plots for hundreds of years. Our life relies on shifting cultivation and the forest surrounding us. We share our forest resources within our community and with neighboring communities.

Villagers have noted that farmland has become increasingly scarce, with many new lowland migrants arriving and taking their lands by both legal and illegal means. Newly arrived migrants to the area may request a piece of land from certain ethnic minority communities, specifically the communities at Koun Mom, Banlung, O'Chum and Borkeo Districts and pay a small amount of money, then later expand their farmland holdings without asking permission. In particular, some ethnic minorities who live in these districts such as Koun Mom, Banlung, O'Chum and Borkeo have experienced high levels of encroachment on their village lands, and so many have moved to live with relatives in remote communities in the O'Chum and Borkeo Districts.

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Besides these new restrictions on forest use, there have been several village confrontations with companies over logging concession across ethnic minority community in Yak Kaol. In early 1999, a conflict arose between the Hero Taiwan Company and Kreung villages living in its logging concession areas. The company had begun logging in the spirit forests and other forests where villagers collected plants, and vegetables, and protected as sacred places. According to villagers, the logging company had disturbed the spirits that caused illness, misfortune and natural disasters. Community members wanted to protect their forest for future generations as a source of livelihood and the location of sacred sites. In response, villagers had opposed the logging companies by seizing tractors, and prohibiting logging workers enter the forest areas and also complaining to district and provincial authorities to stop them cutting the forest.

The villagers of Yak Kaol have been aware for some time that logging and land concessions may adversely affect their community and have used a variety of strategies to protect against this. Since 1996, community members have occupied a piece of land along the main road, where an individual family owns a piece of land, land use for each group of community members and some swidden plots were also preserved for communal land use. These villagers did not want to cultivate the area, because it is far from water sources, but they chose to use this method to secure their land from future encroachment.

In 1997, the traditional leaders and the Land Use Committee collaborated with the NTFP to help secure their land and forest resources. As mentioned previously (see section 4.5) they developed rules and regulations for resource utilization and management, which specify the rights to access and manage local community resources. There is now a policy of land protection in the Yak Kaol community, enforced and regulated by the village chief and Land Use Committee. As village chief explained during interview on May 17, 2003:

> Even if our family got a serious illness and had no money to pay for medicine, we would not sell the land. If a villager sells parcels of land or Chamkar, that villager is punished or dismissed from the commune.

Additionally, community members generally believe that they would have no sources of livelihood after such a transaction and so are reluctant to sell their land. In

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this way, the community has been strongly influenced by the village chief and the Land Use Committee in terms of protecting communal land ownership.

Other major issues for ethnic minority communities are related to national laws (Land and Forest Laws). Villagers in Yak Kaol and several communities in Ratanakiri do not have legal papers securing their rights to land. While interviewing community members in Yak Kaol community on June 5, 2003, they appreciated the benefits of obtaining legal entitlements "It is nice to have land title because it can protect our land from land encroachment, land grabbing and speculation from outsiders". Land certificates are important not only as evidence of ownership, but it is a tool for negotiating with outsiders' violation and also can be useful for preserving natural resources and wildlife. Villagers need full rights to control and manage their local natural resources. Many villagers in Yak Kaol are aware that land title can help to protect their *Chamkar* cashew nut farms situated along the main road, as well as other good land that outsiders wish to claim. They do not, however, want to establish land title for the shifting cultivation plots that have historically rotated within their community boundaries.

The traditional communal land system is collectively managed so that everyone is forbidden to sell land but have rights to participate in its control and management. Under this system, each family occupies one to three hectares for cashew nut farms and 0.5 hectares for wetland rice field. Under this system, villagers perceive that *Chamkar* belongs to their family, and will be inherited by their children.

To understand the relationships between local people and forests, it is important to understanding how local people feel about ownership.

> I was in a Kreung village in October 1995 and I was told that the paddy field belonged to the community, anyone can use it. This is very important to understand in resource management: if people do not have communal ownership of land they will not protect it. Similarly, if people do not have the sense of ownership of communal forest they will not take care of them.
>
> (Chayan commented on February 26, 1996)

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Currently, the traditional leaders in Yak Kaol community need to maintain a system of communal land ownership rather than individual titles. As one of traditional elders and also member of Land Use Committees in Krola of Yak Kaol community commented on June 25, 2003 that "If local people possess the individual tittles, they may abuse or sell to anybody without any consultation with community

members either. We also try to adopt to the strategy of land policy of Royal Government state that:

> Indigenous communities shall be granted ownership rights to their land. This communal ownership includes all the rights and protections of ownership, with a sole exception that the community does not have the rights to dispose of any communally owned property that derives from the State to any person or groups outside of the community.
>
> (Royal Government of Cambodia 2002:29-30)

Historically, ethnic minorities have relied primarily on shifting cultivation and the gathering forest products as the basis of their livelihoods. Since the forest resources were destroyed in the mid-1990s, villagers are no longer depending upon the use of forest products, and available agricultural land is insufficient for subsistence and economy. Since 2000, the Land Use Committee and village chief in Yak Kaol restricted on the land use of each family, which can obtain five hectares as maximum entitlement. Community members also agreed this rule through the process of community meetings and awareness of resources scarcity. This rule aims to preserve agricultural land for the next generations and to help vulnerable people, such as, widows and widowers, who have inadequate access to agricultural lands.

Due to the limitation of land use, which villagers in Yak Kaol community are uneasy to practice shifting cultivation, as it would mean competition among the community members for agricultural land. Each family intends to occupy individual piece of land, which lead to violate community preservation areas. In particular, some wealthier villagers have tried to clear as much forestland as possible to expand their cash crop production. They also hope to secure a substantial piece of land for their children and future generations. Some villagers have only swidden plots, and are trying to access more land for wetland rice fields in community areas.

Currently, many of the villagers in Yak Kaol run large cashew nut farms and they also require a huge amount of labor. In this way, many of wealthier families used grass-cutting machines to clear weeds in order to increase available farmland since 2003. Overall, those with more resources have been able to farm both shifting cultivation plots and wetland rice fields. In contrast, poorer villagers have no opportunity to farm wetland rice because they are weeding their cashew nut farms by human labor. Sometimes they have to work as wage laborers for within wealthy families or outside the community to supplement household needs. Additionally, the

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poorer families find it hard to compete with wealthier villagers in the search for new shifting cultivation plots.

The social changes in traditional land use occupancy systems outlined above have led to changes in and an increased complexity of the traditional way of life for villagers in Yak Kaol community in particular, but also across various ethnic communities in Ratanakiri. A couple of Krola commented during interviewing on July 10, 2003 that:

> Before, we used to move often living with our parents-in-law for few years. Since we started growing cashew nuts and fruit trees, we cannot move any more. This is because we invested a lot of cash and labor into the farms and we need to look after them.

In this situation, the local community ties become weaker in terms of social relationships and broader kinship networks. Traditionally, the shifting residence of newly-married Kreung couples between the homes of their parents-in-law is meant to pay gratitude and respect to their parents, and strengthen relations among their family clan (see Chapter V).

Now, land as a commodity is highly monetized. Buying and selling of land are based activities occurring in ethnic minority community due to social force. This social transformation may appear everywhere else, rights to land, for instance, are allocated to heads of household by a land use committee or in former times by a traditional leader. With the allocation, comes a set of rights and responsibilities over the land, but in no case may the land be bought or sold according to national legal or policy 'ownership' is vested in the ethnic minority community, and ethnic minority community is not commodities. Having a restriction of government on land use and legal recognition, ethnic minority community becomes fixed to land ownership. Therefore, each household is forced to permanently occupy its farmland, which builds the sense of ownership and competition over allocations of land. In the pages that follow I will attempt to explore the traditional agricultural practice in ethnic minority community that emerges in everyday life of ethnic minority people.

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4.5.2 Changes in Traditional Agricultural Practice

In the previous sections (section 4.3 and 4.4), I focused on various development projects, including integrated community development program[1] that were brought into the ethnic minority communities. These were among the important Highland Development Project's activities and they illustrate well the character of the project's encounter with the political and economic realities of the targeted 'development of local community'. However, development of local community was restricted on land use and accessed over forest resource by government. There is also due to land policy, which leads to fixed land ownership as mentioned in earlier (section 4.5.1). These problems have changed traditional agricultural practice to the sedentary farming system. This section attempts to point out the case study of social transformation of agricultural development within an ethnic minority community.

Shifting cultivation is a common practice for many ethnic minority communities in Northeastern Cambodia, and is an important livelihood source. On the red basaltic soils of the upland area, each family may have three to five shifting cultivation plots, which are periodically rotated. As mentioned above, the fallow period might be two to three years according to soil quality, with regeneration lasting for 10 to 15 years. This practice appears to be a sustainable form of food production for areas with low population densities, whereby the disturbance of primary forest is minimized and biodiversity protected (NTFP 2000:16).

The Kreung people in Yak Kaol have practiced shifting cultivation for centuries, but have also had to adapt to various changes in political and socio-economic condition. In terms of agricultural development, the local community has been supported mainly by the Seila Program, the NTFP and the CIDSE. CIDSE has promoted integrated community development (ICD) projects related to credit, health care, food security and the development of other rural infrastructures, such as, school, community building and cooperative market building. Alongside these initiatives, the NTFP promotes natural resource management and provides office supply for Land Use Committee. The Seila Program promotes capacity building of local development planning, and development of rural infrastructure, mainly road construction project. Currently, villagers have perceived new ideology of agricultural development

[1] The projects of health care, education and food security

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program, which they practice not only shifting cultivation but also wetland rice cultivation and since 1995 CIDSE has supported small irrigation projects within the community area. Through out the result of this project, villagers now are able depending upon rice farming as a source of income and livelihood, they typically practice both forms of cultivation every year.

In the last decade in particular, villagers in Yak Kaol have used rice not only as a staple food, but also as source of exchange for acquiring household necessities, health care and medicine. They also save rice to sow the following season, as seeds for the new harvest. In shifting cultivation plots, villagers grow multiple crops, such as, corn, sponge gourd, cucumber, eggplant, chilli, cassava and pumpkin, however, during the raining season. From the mid-1990s, villagers have increased their cash-crop production of cashews, mango, coconut, guava, rambutan, jackfruit, and durian. Due to this increased cash crop production, villagers do not have much time to farm wetland rice, as they spend more their time maintaining their cashew farms.

The Yak Kaol community has expanded the growing of cashew nuts since 1996, enlarging the area of cashew farms along the main road and also spreading over the village boundaries. The traditional land use system has had to adapt to these drastic changes from shifting cultivation to the cultivation of cashew nut farms and fruit trees. In these changing processes of land use, for the first three years after the planting of cashew trees, villagers grow rice, sesame, and vegetables, inter-cropping between the young cashew trees. In the fourth year after planting the maturing cashew nut, trees have grown so that their branches reach the other trees so that the villagers can no longer grow seasonal crops. Households then occupy one to three hectares of their cashew nut farm, but also generally aim to increase their shifting cultivation plots. However, the forestland near the village is now limited and inaccessible. Villagers have to look for new shifting cultivation plots far away from their village. This activity has increased the burden on villagers, especially households headed by women or elders, who have difficulty traveling long distances to their farms.

In terms of major livelihood changes, then, villagers now face shortages of farmland and shortfalls in rice production. The increased pressure to create high yields through shifting cultivation has induced shorter fallow periods, and resulted in the use of land that is less fertile. This agricultural intensification forces a change

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from traditional shifting cultivation to permanent cultivation areas. As a result, villagers have had to increase crop diversification in the fields, and some are looking for new wetland rice farming and even increasing their financial investment to buy buffalos as draft animals for ploughing. Poorer families have had to rely on intensive human labor for planting, harvesting and transporting agricultural products. In the meantime, they also need more capital for investment their farms, while they borrow some cash from the village credit union or their relatives. Sometimes, they hire labor within and outside their community. Thus, the traditional system of exchange labor among the community members has been changed.

Therefore, the above factors including the promotion of cash crop production by government development agencies and NGOs, restriction of land use and forest utilization and the logging concessions operated by international entrepreneur have forced villagers in Yak Kaol community to change their traditional agriculture practice, a situation that is similar to many other ethnic groups in Ratanakiri. However, cash crop production was initiated in Yak Kaol to improve household income but villagers must negotiate also changing social conditions that come with this increased income, and there have been some broad changes in attitude across the community. Villagers have generally become more interested in commodities, such as, modern clothing, motorcycles, and videotapes for entertainment. Villagers are interested in this social transformation as soon as leading them to invest more capital and labor for increasing their income. Due to this intensification of income generation, in which have reduced the ritual traditional agricultural practice that could be seen in the next section.

4.5.3 Ritual in Traditional Agricultural Practice

This section reviews the effects and adaptation to the new environments of traditional agricultural practices. Traditional agricultural ceremonies are practiced during the seasons of land preparation, planting, and harvesting, and are performed at least eight times during the agricultural cycle from the beginning of the season in February until storage of rice in January. There are many ceremonies related to agricultural practices including those related to the selection of appropriate fields for planting, clearing the land, preparing the land for planting, sowing the seeds, and ensuring an abundant harvest after the rice shoots grow to knee-height. Other

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ceremonies are performed at the first rice harvest, second rice harvest, and for the third rice harvest, which is longer in duration, and finally the storage process stage.

Broadly speaking, though, while ritual now plays a smaller role in agriculture, most members of Kreung society still generally perceive agricultural ceremonies as crucial and beneficial parts of everyday life, during which elder members of the community transfer their traditional knowledge to the young, as well as narrate the myths and legends of taboos (see Chapter V). Agricultural ceremonies have traditionally been performed to appease the spirits and gain higher yields, and avoid danger from falling trees or knife accidents. These cultural events provide the context of meanings and values for traditional agricultural practice and social relations. Sacrificing a chicken or a pig is usually a central component of agricultural ceremonies. The meat is then shared among kin and neighbors, building social bonds and providing an essential source of protein in the diet (Figure 4.5). Despite changes in agricultural practices, community members often help each other from the clearing of land until the harvesting and storing of agricultural products. For instance, during rice planting, men use a stick to make a hole in the ground and women put the seeds into it. In the harvest season, the men and women of many families also harvest rice together (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.5 : Ritual Sacrifice of a Pig in Traditional Agricultural Practice
Photographed by author January 13, 2004

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Figure 4.6: Villagers Help Each Other During the Rice Harvest
Photographed by author December 26, 2003

When they have free time they collect plants and vegetables, hunt wild animals and fish with their clan members and friends. In addition, young men learn from elders or their parents during times of relaxation and drink wine together, talking about the selection of swidden plots and seed varieties.

Large ceremonies are performed during the harvest season (Figure 4.7).

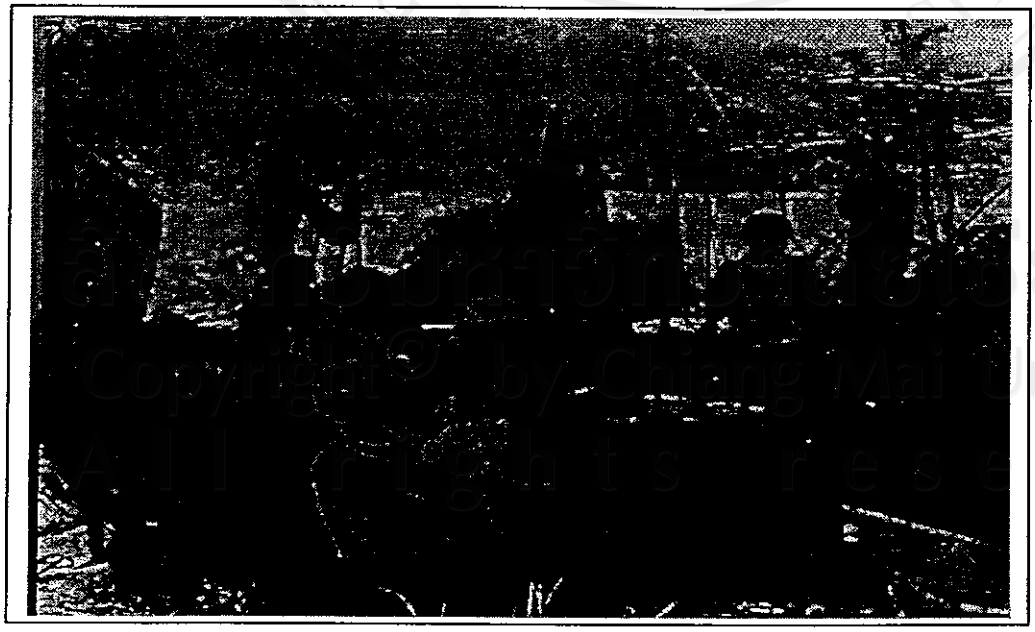

Figure 4.7: Villagers' Activities During the Wetland Rice Harvest Season
Photographed by author January 12, 2004

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This ceremony asks Arak (the field spirit), to provide a high yield of agricultural products, and also bless the community with happiness and prosperity for the coming year. Elders also wish for good health when eating ceremonial rice, and ask for more energy to keep working for Arak in the future. On these days, many relatives participate in rice harvesting. There are at least six wine jars that villagers drink together, sometimes adding rice alcohol or pineapple whisky, if local wines are not sufficient.

During this harvest ceremony elders first burn sandalwood (Krishna wood), creating a pleasant aroma to announce the commencement of the ceremony, and then open the cover of a wine jar to offer to the spirit. Elders and spirit mediums start drinking, and young men carry water to fill the wine jar. For a while, they all drink together with their family clans and friends. Young and old join together and talk about their lives. The elders talk to the young men and women about their rice harvest experiences, as well as specific agricultural techniques.

Rituals performed in traditional agricultural practice traditionally provided an important source of enjoyment, a basis for social relations, and health benefits, which sacrificed animals providing a source of protein for community members. In recent times, the sacrificing of cows, pigs and chickens rarely occurs. The sacrifice of chickens, however, is only performed on special occasions and on auspicious days. Since the practice of traditional agricultural ceremonies have been important shared sources of protein, as well as experience and knowledge, without the regular practice this kind of cultural event, one of the effects is that poor families have encountered food shortages and health problems.

Ritual practices and performances related to the agricultural system, however, have been reduced to being held only three to four times per year since 1996, with villagers busy maintaining their cashew nut farms or working outside the community, as discussed in the last (section 4.5.1). Wealthier families have increased the investment in their farms by hiring wage laborers and buying 'hi-tech' equipment ,such as, grass-cutting machines and members of poorer families are often hired outside the community rather than working on their own farms. The poor families thus have less opportunity to prepare for and participate in traditional agricultural ceremonies. They have limited time available to farm their own shifting cultivation plots, and to raise the chickens and pigs that are the main food for offering to spirits

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and feeding their families. As a result, a few families have converted to Christianity because they do not have chickens or pigs to offer the spirits and because they have received support from Christian association in terms of food, medicine and educational opportunities. An example of this situation was provided by Mr. Neak Neam, who during the interview said:

> In 2000, I converted to Christianity and gave up offering food to *Arak* because I cannot afford to sacrifice a pig or cow. Now, I have a few pigs, which I sell when I need to buy rice or a bicycle for my daughters. I often go to Church in Banlung town to study the Bible and I can get food and other commodities during my stay there. Now I don't worry much about health problems. When my family gets sick, the Christian association members take my family to the hospital. My family rarely joins the spiritual ceremony in the village.
> (Mr. Neak Neam villager in Krola of Yak Kaol community, January 5, 2004)

Within this support, some poorer villagers have been able to reduce their workloads and embraced a new religious faith. Mr. Neak Neam's family is a former military family, some of whom resigned from military service in 1998. When his family came back to their homeland in Krola village, his family faced difficulties finding new shifting cultivation plots. His family did not have pigs or cattle to sell or offer to the spirits when his wife got sick and died in 2001. In this economically and socially constrained situation, the family decided to convert to Christianity.

Agricultural ceremonial practices provide meaning for Kreung society. The ceremonies are not only important for appeasing spirits but also for promoting the importance of collective labor and village solidarity. It is possible to conclude that Kreung culture and community will be dramatically affected by continued limitation or abandoning of these traditional agricultural ceremonies practices.

4.5.4 Cash Crop Production Development

This section attempts to explore the great transformation of 'subsistence' crops to the 'cash crop productions' through agricultural development projects encounter with the political and economic realities within the remote ethnic minority community. But the project was involved with a number of other programs as well, which may be discussed brightly as a supplement to the preceding section.

Cashew nut trees (*Anacarduim occidentale Linn*) have been grown sporadically by a few families in Ratanakiri since the Sangkum Reast Niyum era in the 1960s. The growing of cashew nut trees increased after 1985 when officials from the Provincial

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Department of Agriculture started encouraging local people in Koun Mom and Banlung Districts to grow fruit trees such as coconut, jackfruit, mango and cashew nuts for family consumption (Figure 4.8).

At this time, ethnic minority people do not get involved much with agricultural development because (i) none of the farm work is mechanized; (ii) lack of water (no irrigation system); (iii) lack of new seed and information about new techniques; (iv) lack of credit; and (v) lack of market information and transportation. As Kreung people complained in early 1990s "If we produce more, there is no market so there is no point. There is no road to the market."

Figure 4.8: A Cashew Nut Farm in the Yak Kaol Community
Photographed by author May 7, 2004

Since 1996, Highland Development Projects initiated rural infrastructure and promotion of cash crop production in an attempt to bring about major changes in the traditional agriculture practice. The projects were based on the idea of switching from 'subsistence' crops (traditional upland rice) to the production of cash crops (cashew nut and other fruit trees) for the market. Villagers were interested in this switch, as they would have easy access to marketplaces, due to the improvement road construction project managed by Seila Program, with technical and financial support from UNDP/CARERE.

The road construction would reduce transportation cost and time for local people brings their agricultural products to the market. As high ranking government officer

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in Ratanakiri municipality commented during the interview on December 14, 2003 "Since we developed road now villagers are improving their living condition and they buy a lot of cheaper products". With the new road construction, many lowland people migrated into the upland community areas. The retail business in Banlung town boomed, shops, such as, coffee and karaoke expanded, restaurants and hotels were started. Agri-business boomed throughout the investment of national and international agricultural entrepreneurs. This project could be transformed suddenly into an agricultural export economy simply by connecting it up to the 'outside world' with roads.

Furthermore, government development officer pointed out that the provision of access road to rural community would be linked up the remote ethnic communities via road to larger economic centers of the country. But the local economies are often destroyed with the influx of cheaper and alternate goods. Traditional cultural values can also threatened because the project often seen to promote unequal development, as the Jarai people complained, "We are like slave, the slave owners come from the lowlands and the companies because they have money buying all our lands and our labors" (Savill 1996:27).

However, effectively all ethnic minority communities have already been brought within monetary economy as they involve market and earning from wage labor. Almost all households are forced to buy certain basic commodities, which are not produced within locally, and cost of these items, such as, television set, motorcycle and zinc for roof local house are high. The following case study further illustrates the effects of local people's livelihoods.

In the early 1990s the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development also distributed cashew nut seeds to villagers. Other villagers were given free seeds and fruit trees by the CIDSE. Due to this government development planning of promoting agricultural development, international entrepreneurs and lowland migrants started coming into the highland areas. The commercial agricultural development became viable when the land tenure laws changed to allow successful farmers to buy up the land of the less successful and begin farming on a truly commercial scale mainly in Banlung and Koun Mom Districts (Sokhum et al., 2002). Thus, the early stage of agricultural development has provided the benefits to rich farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs to generate real agriculture development. This

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has benefited those who have plots large enough and well managed to be economically efficient, while the poor farmers are facing many constraints and losing opportunity as mentioned in above paragraph.

Since 1996, villagers in the Yak Kaol community as well as other ethnic communities in Ratanakiri have responded to the cashew nuts' high market value when a large proportion of the community turned their shifting cultivation plots into cashew nut farms and fruit tree gardens. Villagers have gradually started to depend upon this market and the monetary benefits of harvesting cashew nuts. The cashew nut provides other benefits for villagers, including using the bark and leaves for herbal medicine (Sokhum et al., 2002), and using the fruits for desserts or to feed animals ,such as, pigs, cattle, buffalos, and chickens. In 2000, villagers in Yak Kaol community increased the number of pigs and cattle they raised, however, this engagement activity provided more opportunity for the wealthy farmers. They also combined with selling cashew nuts to generate increased household income. At the same time, many families have increased the size or number of their farmland plots, and let their livestock often roam freely, which has at times destroyed the crops of neighbors. This has caused conflicts among villagers, especially during the planting season, and affected community relationships. This kind of conflict has arisen not only among ethnic minority groups, but also between ethnic minorities and migrant lowland farmers.

Many villagers now rely financially on the benefits of harvesting cashew nuts every year. Traditional systems that promote exchange of labor have increasingly changed into cash-based transactions. Additionally, villagers often use cash to buy food and household materials rather than exchange products with other village members, and the cash earned from the sale of cashew nuts does not always cover these expenses. As Mr. Sithort from Krola village of Yak Kaol community commented during interview December 16, 2003 "This year my family sold cashew nuts and sesame seeds for only 50,000 Riel[2], but my family expenses were over 60,000 Riel. With this amount of money, we bought clothes, household materials, food and zinc". Further, there are many families similar to the case of Mr. Sithort family, and every year, several villagers can earn between 1,000,000 to 2,000,000

[2] One US$ is equal 4,000 Riel.

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Riel. But this amount of money goes towards buying rice, medicine, kerosene, petrol, and pineapple whiskey.

Villagers have thus increased their monetary dependence on cash crop production rather than depending on the collection of forest plants and herbal medicines. But cash crop production is unstable and prices vary according to wider markets. For instance, cashew nut prices have gone down every year since 1997 to 1999. Cashew nuts sold for between 2,000 and 2,500 Riel per kilogram, but between 2000 and 2003, the prices were only 1,300 to 1,800 Riel. Currently, villagers are faced with uncertainty about their livelihoods and cashew farmers also have problems related to land ownership including increasing conflicts and competition within and between communities.

During this time, women's workloads on their farms increased because their husbands spend more time traveling to town, selling and buying products. Sometimes, men enjoy pineapple whiskey with new friends in town, leaving all of the farm work to the women and children. In poorer families, sometimes the husband is hired as a wage laborer in Banlung town weeding larger cashew farms, making fences for wealthier landowners or working in house construction. Women and children thus work harder on their farms to supplement the work of the men while they are away from the village. Women also engage in wage labor in their communities in cases of urgent need to exchange products, such as MSG, salt, kerosene or rice. Girls also often work on the family farm from the beginning of the season until harvest. Such work by young people is sometimes adopted to help paying for 'modern' life-styles and entertainment.

The size of cashew farms signifies different classes in the village. Rich families have three hectares, medium-income families have one to two hectares, female-headed households have one hectare and poor families have less than one hectare to cultivate cashews. Wealthier families often have motorcycles, tape recorders, videotapes, and live in large wooden houses, with surplus rice to sell. Poor families often have no means of transportation and also suffer from shortages of rice. The poor are often competing for wage labor within and outside of the community to make sufficient money to buy food for their families.

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Especially since 2000, several poor families in Yak Kaol have increased their wage labor outside the community due to scarcity of natural resources and lack of capital investment for their farms. They have communicated and interacted less with their immediate family and clan. In particular, these villagers may be absent from spiritual ceremonies and various rituals related to traditional agricultural practices within the community. Medium-income families can increase their profits through more ambitious agricultural activities, at times looking for new farmland without regard to customary laws and taboos and paying less attention to spiritual ceremonies.

Due to livelihood needs those ethnic minority communities have rapidly changed their ways of life with adverse affects, including traditional agricultural practices as well as culture. Overall, this means that villager generally display less trust for community members, and less respect for village elders, with a marked decline in the bonds of solidarity in the community.

Therefore, the agricultural development within the ethnic minority communities were supposed to make possible this great transformation: the reason why villagers have changed their livelihoods to invest more capital in improving agricultural production and also using intensive human labor. The poor farmers lost opportunity due to lack of capital and information as well as lost their land, because of government's program in 'agricultural development'. This project has in fact been an open opportunity for national and international entrepreneurs rather than ethnic minority people. It can be seen that land is freely bought and sold. Thus land tenure laws make viable commercial farming difficult or impossible, yet the country's rulers have never seen fit to privatize land. However, agricultural development project were promoted by government and NGOs have performed a more important task than producing crop; this project ties the population of the labor reserve to the land, and keep ethnic minority people unmoving to the city and unofficially encouraging lowland people living in high densely population areas migrate to highland communities. The land in the highland areas may not produce much food, but it has helped to produce something that is even more prized of what government has viewed this project as 'poverty alleviation'. Thus, land is firstly a political resource and secondly an economic development. The question of the future of the land is intimately with the political reason, and must therefore remain a matter of the uncertainty condition.

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4.6 Summary

Local communities in Northeastern Cambodia are characterized by diverse ethnicities, cultural practices, languages, and ecosystems. Traditionally, ethnic minorities have had distinctive strategies for managing their natural resources. The upland communities had rich natural resources and plenty of land available for cultivation. These resources significantly shaped livelihoods and other cultural practices in complex and numerous ways.

The Cambodian government, however, has long considered upland communities a source of state revenue. Various government development agencies have implemented highland development projects to improve the living condition of local people, and have promoted commercialization with cash crop production. Land and forest resources have been lost to communities through the granting of logging and land concessions. At the same time, the government has accumulated local resources and increased penetration of upland community structures. These interventions, however, have threatened and suppressed local cultural practices, natural resources tenure systems, and the livelihoods of local communities. International and local NGOs have also implemented their own development projects. Their intervention has generally aimed to strengthen the capacity of local people to secure their traditional cultures, community rights, to manage local community resources, and improve living conditions.

This transformation of ethnic minority community has influenced local institutions and has changed the perception of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority community has undergone many changes with regard to customary practices and land ownership, which have affected the traditional ways of life, and their basic sense of community and co-operation.

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