The question to discuss: In development we can design two extreme positions: One position is sticking to a clearly structured project cycle, a stereotyped blueprint applicable in the steppes of Mongolia and the deserts of the Sahara, the jungle of South-America and the suburbs of Calcutta. Another position is open to the local conditions, there are no preset results but the effort to learn thoroughly the historical, socio-economic and cultural background, the routines and habits of the local population and also the local administration. And to design the project in the course of this learning process which is emphasizing the role of the main actors in development. The GTZ practice is somewhere in between; in some cases position one is dominant, in other projects position two. This depends largely on the personalities chosen to implement the German Contribution of the project.

In the following pages I clearly take sides with option two and argue that culture and traditions of a partner country are not obstacles to "unlimited technological progress" but can be support structures capable of multiplying development efforts. History which is present in the collective memory of the people is determining the framework in which projects can be under-taken successfully. A project which is not starting on the basis of
past experiences is not even built on sand - it is written in the clouds.

I. Shattered community spirit in scattered settlement patterns

People in Europe think that the village center is formed by a place, surrounded by the school, the office of the village administration, the building for religious worship. The other houses are built around this central place and along the roads leading to the village. This is exactly the opposite of what a Cambodian village looks like: A Cambodian village or "phum" is a number of houses (average about 115 families with 600 people) scattered along the road sometimes one house is located quite far from the other. The school is outside the village, mostly between two villages. The religious center, the pagoda or "vat" is also in general at the edge of a village. There is no office of the leader of the village: His house is the office. The settlement pattern in Cambodia is a very scattered one. The community spirit of Khmer villagers is a true reflection of this pattern: There is traditionally since centuries not much cohesion and little solidarity. The sense of responsibility seldom goes beyond the fence around his house.

This minimum of community spirit has been further diminished by twenty years of civil war (1970 - 1990). People have been fighting each other. Neighbors have been forced to kill each other. Children have been seduced to denounce their parents. There is little or no solidarity between families of different kin: Streets in the cities are not swept by the neighboring families. Stair-cases in houses of several floors have not been cleaned for years. In the villages families of other kin do not belong to the kind of trustworthy people except when they are long-standing and proven friends.

Cambodians tell of themselves: "where there are three Khmers trying to form an association, there will soon be four factions". The tendency to a social life not caring for the community has not been counteracted by the natural conditions. In contrast to Thailand and Vietnam there has always been enough cultivable land in Cambodia for families who wanted to settle elsewhere. There was no constraint to undertake communal efforts (dikes, canals, irrigation works) in order to raise agricultural production. This moment, the housing and farming are free charge (no taxation). and such community is now not far off, there is some time to rehabilitate them.

II. Types of various social mutual help groups

If one tries to look closer how village life is organized, one finds a wide spectrum of relations or groups of mutual aid. People do care one for the other more than a superficial glance would make us believe. There are mutual help groups of various size, functions and stability in time: mutual help groups ("krom") for house construction, well digging, dike and road construction, for assuring the security in the neighborhood, for wedding and funeral ceremonies, for rites to ask for rain, cooking groups for sharing dishes and kitchen ware for big festivals: "pot and dish groups", user groups of draft animals, saving and credit groups: "tontines", emergency help groups, rice banks, school committees, parents association, health association, boat racing groups, pagoda committees >kanakamatika vat<, and pagoda support groups: >vein<, village spirit association, arak spirit association. All of these organizations are not gender specific. When ceremonies are organized women are usually dominant in preparing and organizing but not in chanting the respective prayers. The leaders of the "horn" is mostly nominated by the village head, sometimes also elected.

In addition to these mutual help groups we find other structures in the villages: mainly political groups like the former women association left over from the SOC-time (State of Cambodia 1979-1992), militia or civilian guard, village committee (leader plus one or two deputies), the new village development committee (VDC) planned by the Cambodian government but not yet implemented in Kampong Thom Province (Jan. 96)

III. Pagoda Committees: the most important community structure

The pagoda committee was the first social institution emerging after the Pol Pot regime which tried to destroy all social groups not immediately useful as an instrument to the communist party. It is an institution which not only tries to organize the community but also part of the cultural heritage transmitting the values of Cambodian traditions. It is a real place of peace in a country and a society tom apart by many friction. The pagoda is the traditional and only meeting place for the villagers.
A. Introduction: Buddhism, buildings, and persons

The pagoda is of course not only a religious but also a social center for all believers in Buddhism (Put Borisath).

1. Buddhism

Buddhism is a world religion, a kind of philosophy and a system of ethical principles. It has also become a popular religion in many Asian countries taking up or tolerating traditions of the local people in worshiping spirits (neakfa) and respecting the ancestors. Its essence are the teachings of Buddha: the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. It is essentially a world outlook emphasizing human suffering and the way to bring the suffering to an end. To end the suffering is to respect the five precepts (not to kill, not to lie, not to steal, not to commit adultery, and not to take intoxicating thing).

The Khmer follow the path of Theravada-Buddhism as the neighboring peoples in Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and also in Sri Lanka.

For a long term dialogue on ethical grounds the text of the "Declaration of the Parliament of World Religions" (Hans Küng / Karl-Josef Kuschel: "Erklärung zum Welfethos", München 1993) can be a common denominator. Such a dialogue is important for cross-cultural (combining culture) development policies.

2. Pagoda compound: structures

The pagoda compound is a relatively large area separated from residential and agricultural areas by a fence. Inside the compound there are three basic structures: the >vihear<, the building where all worshipping ceremonies are held, the >sala<, the meeting place for the community a structure open on three sides and the largest house of all the villages nearby, the >kot<, the huts or houses of the monks, novices and in some places also nuns. In addition to these three structures there can be a tower for cremation (>pachar<), a Pali-school building (>sala rien<), a dining place for the monks (>sala chan<) if they do not take their meals in the sala as it is practice in most rural pagodas. The sala is the place where a Cambodian rural community can meet.

The pagoda has traditionally been surrounded by a pond serving as a water reservoir for the neighboring villages. It used to be also a place with many trees giving shade to big assemblies going beyond the capacity of the sala. Most of the trees however have been cut down in the years of famine.

3. Pagoda: religious persons and laymen

In a pagoda there are of course monks, novices and nuns, i.e. the religious personnel living in the Vat (=pagoda) with a certain hierarchy: the abbot with a deputy to his left and right in case of a bigger pagoda. The pagoda committee however has only lay members (men and women) living in the village. A religious person cannot be part of the committee. The pagoda committee has the task to see to the needs of the monks, to maintain and repair the pagoda buildings and compound and to organize a number of activities in support of the community. In case of a bigger pagoda (number of monks around 30 and more, the number of villages served: five or more) and according to the scope of activities, the pagoda committee (>kanakamatika<) can establish commissions (>kanakamaka<) on school construction, road and bridge construction, on finance etc. In these commissions women are more represented than in the committee. - The pagoda committee members are not paid; they are all "volunteers". say), other families prefer a "modern" pagoda, which means one emphasizing the studies of Pali-texts. Some families have a personnel relation: a son is a novice in the pagoda.

2. Structure of committee: achar and member

The pagoda committee is the link and the net between several villages: There are in general three types of lay-persons present in a pagoda: (1) the >achar vat<, or the "wise men of the pagoda", (2) several >achar phum<, or the "wise men of the village" of each phum (village) and (3) other respected members. The achar vat is the most experienced and most respected of the achars phum; there can be one, two or three achar vat. This person is elected by the monks and the elders of the community; he is the link between the monks and the villagers. In Kampong Thorn an achar vat cannot be a member of a pagoda committee; in other provinces he may very well be a member. Pagoda committee members and achars are very respected personalities. The difference between the two is in general: An achar is very well versed in all ceremonies in the family and the community; a pagoda committee member can be a person who is not achar and not very good in presiding ceremonies, but he is considered to be capable of organizing and managing the maintenance of pagodas and -
in some cases - the implementation of community projects. An achar phum is in general also a member of a pagoda committee, but not all members are also achars. Women are not achars but can be members of a pagoda committee and particular in the special commissions. One reason given is: An achar vat has disciplinary power over novices and monks and women cannot have this function. - An average pagoda committee has five members; bigger pagodas have seven, ten or more members.

3. Institutional position of the pagoda committee

The pagoda committee is a predominantly social and not a political-administrative institution. It is however reporting to the “department of religious affairs” on the district level. The pagoda committee can somewhat be considered as the lowest level of the Ministry of Religious Affairs passing through the provincial and district (not commune) departments of religious affairs. The administrative structure of the Ministry of Religious Affairs is corresponding to the structure of the Sangha, the religious organization or the order of Buddhism in Cambodia. The abbot is superior to the pagoda committee, the district pagoda however is subordinate to the district department of religious affairs, the provincial pagoda is also subordinate to the provincial department and the Sangharaj, the head of the order in Vat Unnalom in Phnom Penh is again subordinate to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. (The ministry is also responsible for other religions, like Muslim and Christian communities.) - The loyalty of a pagoda committee will be in general with the community and not the government in situations of conflicting interests.

4. Personality type of achar and pagoda committee member: trusted, honest, committed, not rich and not poor

The members are mostly men but also some women are pagoda committee members in Kampong Thorn. The achars are of mature age between 45 and 75 (average 60 years). Most of them have been monks in the past and returned to civilian life after five years dressed in the “yellow frock” of a monk. But some did not even pass any time in the pagoda. They know the texts of the Buddhist sutras to chant during various ceremonies, they know how to organize the religious and social festivals. The old achars have all studied Pali in their time as a monk. The younger ones often did not have the chance.

Whether the members of the pagoda committee (achars phum, men or women members) are elected or appointed is difficult to find out. These persons have the trust of the people and there is a large and solid consensus that they are leaders. In many cases these persons have been frequently in the pagoda and been actively serving the monks and the people: with years passing the people one day acknowledged that they should be considered as members of the committee. in other cases the member has been appointed by the department of religious affairs, mostly an initiative of the provincial level.

This is the case when the community has no strong leader who is “naturally” recognized by the people. In the future the pagoda committee members will be elected every two years according to an edict of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. - Some people think pagoda committee members are already out of this world and not able to manage any affair; the contrary is true: They are among the most competent people in the village to organize meetings, to delegate the work and to get a job done -if it is on a small scale. If they are too old to perform their duties efficiently, they normally retire from active organizing work in the committee while still being present in the pagoda to help out with advice.

The members of a pagoda committee do not come from rich families, this would be an exception rather than the rule. Rich people in rural Cambodia are almost invariably of sino-khmer background who also have other ceremonies than those practiced by traditional Khmer people. They worship their ancestors at home and in some cases they bury their kin in the countryside according to Chinese geomagnetic (“fengshui” in Chinese) considerations. The pagoda committee members are mostly “pure khmer” ethnically speaking and thus almost “by definition” not rich. Sometimes the family members of these personalities devoted to the well-being of the pagoda and the community are not happy that most of their efforts and time is spent in the pagoda rather than in their own house and field.

5. Financial aspects: collecting, accounting, management

The members of the pagoda committee belong to the small number of people in rural Cambodia who are handling other people’s money. They are collecting the money and gifts in kind for festivals. They are counting and keeping the money; sometimes the abbot keeps the money, sometimes the pagoda committee. Collecting is done either in the pagoda the year round -particularly during festivals and after harvest - or on special occasions on the road side: The committee members and other villagers indicate with a Buddhist flag their purpose of collecting money from the people passing by the road. They are discussing then with the monks and the other achars of the villages how to use the money. Some have basic knowledge of book keeping like the store keeper in the village; some have no knowledge. The incoming money is listed according to the date,
amount and name of sponsor (for a bigger sum); expenses are not listed regularly, receipts however are kept. Normally, they have never purchased something with receipt. Almost all members are able to read and write in an environment with around 60 % of illiterate people. The accounting practices are quite satisfactory to the local people who trust their natural leaders, but strangers and foreigners who do not know them would not consider this kind of book keeping as proof of their actual activities.

6. Activities and achievements: pagoda restoration, multi-sectoral communal projects

The first concern is certainly to see to the material needs of the monks, novices and nuns: food and cloths. Then the pagoda committee is concerned with the restoration and maintenance of the pagoda buildings (vihear, sala, kot and in a few cases also a library) and compound (pond, fence, trees). The committee can only rely on the contributions of the believers (put Borsath); there is no other contribution and no support from the government. Before elections however there are often contributions by political leaders to pagodas. - The pagoda committee is discussing the needs of the community and organizing a variety of communal projects: The pagoda committee is building or contributing to a school or a health center; it is organizing the construction of a small piece of road mostly leading from the main road to the gate of the pagoda; bridges and dikes are built under their guidance. Ponds in the compound are restored and deepened in order to provide enough water for men and animals during the dry season, in many villages the only remaining source of water in March and April. Trees are planted around the pagoda, some are fruit trees, other trees are providing fuel wood, another kind is giving shade during out-door meetings and a small forest of trees has traditionally been a place for meditation. Waste land is claimed. Some pagodas own land which has been allocated to them during the land distribution in the 80s or which has been donated to them mostly by families leaving for "third countries". In some pagodas narrow but long sheds are constructed to store the racing boat for the annual water festival in November. In case poor people do not find any merciful money lender they turn to the pagoda for a small grant or also a credit from cash association which organized by Achars and pagoda committee members.

IV. Cooperation

Cooperation is a two way process with each side having its own interests not necessarily shared in total by the other side. There are areas of common interest and then there are areas of distinct interest not shared by the partner. GTZ sponsored development cooperation with pagoda committees must of course take note of this situation and discuss the possibilities of cooperation on the basis of common interest. But it should also be sensitive to the interests of the pagoda committee normally not in the scope of development activities. The partner mainly in the role of the donor agency like GTZ could also respect other needs of the pagoda as a cultural center and finance for example the purchase of Buddhist literature, the organization of workshops even if they are not entirely devoted to discuss development cooperation. Why? Not only to demonstrate that the donor agency is not belonging to those dubious organisations engaged in proselytizing, but also simply because the pagoda is serving social peace and community building.

A. First contacts, workshop, rice banks

The GTZ advisor tries to keep a constant contact to the pagodas and to talk about the problems of the community. He has been invited to meetings of the department of religious affairs on provincial (one meeting) and district level (two meetings). A workshop “Learning from traditional Cambodian community work” has been organized from September 28 to 30, 1595.

1. Workshop with Achars in Vat Srayov

The workshop was organized by the Provincial Department of Religious Affairs with the organizational and financial support of GTZ Project “Fund to promote mutual help activities (since January 1st, 1996 merged into the large "Provincial Development Program Kg Thorn After an intensive preparation concerning the number and characteristics of the pagodas Kampong Thorn Province) (see: Direction de Cultes GT.Z (ed.), "Statistics of Pagodas in Kampong Thorn 1994 October 1995, 20p.) those pagodas were invited which had already a record on community projects: Out of 209 pagodas in the province 4 have noted that they are doing some kind community work and were invited. These pagodas were mainly bigger ones. More than 2 monks (provincial average 14) , more than 5 villages related to the pagoda (provincial average: 3-4). Thirty pagodas sent their member (total of 60 persons) to attend the workshop eight members of the Department of Religious Affairs on provincial level and also eight from district level took part. The purpose of this workshop was to learn from traditional Cambodia community work, to intensify contacts to relevant pagodas and to present possibilities of co-operation with GTZ and WFP. The main activities were group discussions, lectures by department heads of the provincial government and working on a questionnaire designed by GTZ and the Department of Religious Affairs. The questionnaire has
been filled out by 30 pagodas in the seven out of eight districts (except District Prasa Sambo) represented through pagoda committee members. The present paper is one result of the qualitative analysis of these questionnaires.

The record of the pagoda committees is quite impressive: Here the average calculated from those pagodas which could give figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Renovation of Pagoda since 1979</th>
<th>Money collected in 1994</th>
<th>Money collected in the last 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Pagodas</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rien</td>
<td>40.000.000</td>
<td>14.260.000</td>
<td>10.000.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S $</td>
<td>15.000</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>4.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In tons of rice</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This result has been achieved during three consecutive years of flood and drought bringing the province at the brink of famine in 1995.

The communication process during the workshop among the pagoda committee members who never attended such a workshop before was in itself very important for the participants. The prospects to start cooperation with GTZ or WFP found a very positive response.

2. Rice banks: First step in the "Pagoda Project Programme"

In a first step GTZ facilitated the organization twelve rice banks related to seven pagodas. The cooperation in the villages, where GTZ staff and staff of the Department of Rural Development on district level have been introduced by achars, has been invariably open and without re-serve. In some villages which were briefed by government officials, who also introduced GTZ staff, the cooperation has been very tactical and practically invalidating the findings of a PRA exercise: Obviously the people have been told to say that all are "very poor"; in the subsequent village meetings GTZ staff made the point that cooperation is a two way street requiring honesty on both sides as a prerequisite. There has been no similar problem since.

The earlier experiences of GTZ - SHF-Project (assisting 64 rice banks in May / June 1995 in training and rice delivery) have been discussed very intensively by the pagoda committee members: For ex. for electing a rice bank committee in one village GTZ is normally proposing to nominate at least eight candidates for five positions (traditionally only five persons have been nominated), to include at least three women among the nominees and to propose to the village meeting the option for an open or a secret balloting. (A manual "How to establish a rice bank?" including a chapter on organizing secret balloting among illiterate people with illustrations of a local artist is in preparation). The procedure of nominating has been, however, not very transparent to us: The leading member of the pagoda committee presented a list of eight candidates, certainly after some discussion with other respected persons, but whether the nomination was discussed in a village meeting, we do not know. All these proposals have been taken up by the pagoda committee and the result of the elections (all in secret balloting requested particularly by women) has been very encouraging: Two women were elected by secret balloting in each committee; in one committee only one women is represented; in another village there are three women in the committee of five. Most of the elected women have been widows or married women whose children have already grown up.

Again, it remains to be seen whether they are given the role in the management committee by the fellow men members as it was intended by the election. As far as repayment is concerned -status: 05/04/96 - all rice banks have reported a repayment rate of 10070.

a. Institutional aspects: intermediate position between village and commune

The role of the pagoda committee in these first steps of cooperation has not been to take over the
responsibility of a rice bank and to function as a management committee of a rice bank; they delegate these functions to trusted people in the various villages. A pagoda committee is not rooted in one village, it is related to several villages.

So they quite naturally played the role of a local ("sub-regional") facilitator and moral guarantor who will be actively watching in the back-ground the performance of the village rice bank committees over the year. In this process the pagoda committee as an institution is strengthened since outside assistance came to the villages through their mediation; it will play a greater role than in the past overlooking the ethics of the rice bank committee and it will become the organizational focus for other activities discussed in PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) and other village visits. On the other hand it is not entangled in the day-to-day routine affairs of the rice bank committee and not in danger to lose its moral authority in the population. The rice bank is well placed in the institutional setup of traditional rural Cambodia being introduced by the pagoda committee and functioning under its auspices.

b. Role of monks: moral support

The role of the monks in these activities has been a passive one. GTZ staff is always paying the respect to the abbot in the beginning and at the end of the stay explaining also at length the workings and the meaning of a rice bank. In the future a workshop with interested monks will be discussed and organized. It is important to have at least the understanding and tacit approval of the monks; an explicit warning of the abbot to the pagoda committee would spell the end of such a cooperation. Such a move is however extremely unlikely since it is also the traditional duty of the monks to be responsible for the well-being of the community interpreted mostly on the spiritual level but not exclusively, they are also concerned about the material well-being.

c. Role of nuns: on the periphery

There are 146 nuns ("ye chi" or "don chi") in 39 pagodas as compared to 2829 monks and novices in all 203 pagodas of Kg Thorn province; that is just about 5% are nuns compared to monks and novices. Nuns are mostly in bigger pagodas: whereas on the average only every second pagoda is also the home for one nun; in these bigger pagodas there are three nuns per pagoda on the average. The status of nuns in the hierarchy is clearly subordinate to the monks and even novices. However their functions are important in social services and the discipline of the nuns is said to be much better than among the monks and particularly the novices. So far nuns - as well as monks - have not been involved in project activities; this-point, however will be plored in the future. Main emphasis will however remain the cooperation with the laymen and lay women.

V. Advantages vs. problems

There are certainly advantages but also problems in a cooperation program with pagodas in rural Cambodia. 

A. Advantages: integrity, people’s participation, efficiency, sustainability

The advantages are manifold: The personnel engaged in pagoda committees are known to be honest, to have the trust of the people; they are experienced in organizing, settling conflicts and handling money affairs. There are slightly over one thousand persons in the pagoda committees of the province with a total population of over 500,000 people; in quantity they represent around one fifth of the government staff (1996 in Kampong Thom: 5869 staff) and they are all on grass root level. When pagoda committee members supped a project, the mobilization and participation is far easier to achieve than without them. The prospects of such a cooperation are quite wide in scope: If the projects undertaken are not only an advantage to the community but also an asset to the pagoda, many activities can be discussed and initiated: digging ponds in the pagoda compound, planting tree in pagoda and village, organizing road and bridge construction, setting up village funds and credit groups. Also buffalo banks can be organized by pagoda committees since old cattle in Cambodia is not slaughtered; first experiences have been done by the "development monk" Venerable Heng Monichenda in Battambang Province of the organization "Buddhism for Development"). Credit for the very popular programmes in pig and poultry raising however would not be promoted, since these animals are raised to be slaughtered.

Sustainability is another basic advantage of cooperating with a traditional institution like the pagoda committees. Pagoda committees have existed since the advent of Theravada Buddhism in Cambodia more than six centuries ago. They have survived colonialism and have often been a center of resistance to French
rule. They flourished in the period of Sangkurn Reastr Niyurn (= "People’s Socialist Community" in the 50s and 60s under Norodom Sihanouk), they existed in the “republican period” under Lon Nol (1970-1975), They have been wiped out completely by Pol Pot, but if they did not exist physically they were all the more present in the minds of the vast majority of Khmer people. After the Pol Pot time (1975-1979) they were reborn again in the same structure as before: performing religious, cultural and socio-economic functions. There is no organizational framework in Cambodian history which survived so many regimes. And this is sustainability.

B. Problems: Gender, authoritarian style

Of course the pagoda committee has also all the problems of a traditional social institution: It is not the strength of a pagoda committee to pro-mote the status and situation of women. The status of women in Buddhist teachings reflects the historical situation of Buddha’s lifetime in 600 B.C: it is low, the role of nuns in the Sangha and the pagodas is equally low. When working with pagoda committees the gender problem needs to be given permanent and special attention. There has however never been resistance or even silent disapproval to have women elected - on the contrary, the members of the pagoda committees agreed whole-heartedly to such a proposal. The reasons given by GTZ to pay special attention to women were: Women constitute more than half of the population; they are more interested in changing the actual state of affairs than men since their role and situation is lower; they are in general more honest and very practical. These reasons have been accepted. The guidelines of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for future elections will emphasize that more women should be proposed as candidates for elections to pagoda committees.

It should be kept in mind that the problem of gender equity is not better solved in other institutions or organizations whether governmental or non-governmental.

The decision making process is traditionally taken by the elders after some discussion; but it is still a rather authoritarian style. Although the style may be authoritarian the elders would not dare to threaten the consensus of the community by an arbitrary and unpopular decision.

Of course there are voices opposed to such an approach to work with traditional institutions like pagoda committees: From the government side it is feared that important roles and functions are taken over by other institutions. There are also voices in the Buddhist Sangha who are op-posed to this kind of worldly activity and who argue it is more important to reach the state of extinction of one’s self and to end the cycle of re-incarnations repeating only suffering.

VI. Framework of cooperation

Without anticipating too much some points can already be put forward for discussion.

A. Pagoda Committee and other mutual help groups

The pagoda committees in our short experience of project cooperation have never tried to take the implementation of a project activity into their own hands. They always tried to de-legate the functions to other persons. They will also be in the best position to activate other types of traditional mutual aid groups mentioned above. This depends largely on the type of activity like well digging, labor exchange etc.

B. Pagoda Committee and government structure

Historically there has not been any antagonism between the political structure and the cultural-religious structure. Only with the advent of French colonialism public administration, education and health has been separated from the traditional Cambodian structure. The French "republican tradition" of separation between church and state has been stamped on Cambodian society and "modernization" began. There is no political or other necessity to follow the colonial path.

What can be the relation of a Village Development Committee (VDC) or a Commune Development Committee (CDC) to the pagoda committee? It is government policy to establish development committees on each level of administration. So far these committees have been established on the provincial level: "Provincial Rural Development Committee". There is as yet no clear indication on which level these commit-tees will be established next. In Banteay Meancheay Province VDC have been established first. The village development
committees are supposed to be elected by the villagers; their role will be to coordinate all development activities in the area. At least three scenarios are possible:

(i) The VDC will represent the lowest level of the state administration; it will be a governmental body subject to the next higher level. As such the VDC can have an implementation role in all non-credit programmes only. According to most experts in credit schemes a member of a government body should not at the same time be a member of a committee managing a credit programme. If they start interfering in credit schemes these are bound to collapse.

(ii) Or the VDC will not be subject to government authority and it will be the types of local self-management of the villagers. In this case there has to be a village government represented by the village head which will exist side by side with the VDC. The VDC would be able to manage all kinds of credit programmes. There should be no mixing of functions like the village head being a member of the VDC. In this case no level of government can give instructions to the VDC.

(iii) The role of the VDC is not clearly defined: It is supposed to be a people’s organization and it will function as the lowest level of government. In this case credit programmes should be managed by associations clearly distinct from the VDC with no member of the VDC being in a management position of the credit association. Since competent personalities are not abundant in a village, it will be difficult to find enough leaders for both: the VDC and a credit association. This scenario is likely to evolve and it is not the clearest one.

Concerning the functions in each of the three scenarios above there will be complementarily between the village and the pagoda. Concerning the level of operation there is no competition because on the level of the pagoda committee there is no government structure and at the level of a village and a commune there is no pagoda. The scope of operation will also be different: The pagoda is serving several villages.

C. Perspectives in scope and time

It is quite realistic to initiate development cooperation with 20 % of all pagoda committees, that is 40 out of 203 in Kampong Thom province; in terms of villages that would be 140 to 160 villages. In all Cambodia 20 % constitutes around 600 pagodas out of 3.370; and these 600 pagodas would be related to about 1.800 villages. Once this type of cooperation is known, the number will certainly increase substantially. The activities can be manifold as described above: rice banks, credit associations, pond digging, tree planting, construction of schools and health centers, bridges and roads.

The project - in which GTZ is responsible for the German contribution concerning self help promotion - is guided by two considerations or objectives: to strengthen the self-help capacities of the people in rural areas and to reduce their poverty. In a first phase the pagoda committee as the centre of mutual help groups has been the main focus of the project activities. This phase is just in the beginning: A preliminary understanding has been achieved. But the scope of activities open to pagoda committees has not yet been explored; the limits are also not yet known. Besides pagoda committees what can be the role of monks and nuns? These questions will be explored in workshops, in action research and through practical project cooperation. While focussing on these questions the second phase will be envisaged: How can the net of mutual help groups be strengthened? One very efficient key seems to be the pagoda committee since many activities of mutual help groups are related to the pagoda, some groups are even initiated by the pagoda committee, others have a direct personal link; but some groups like the spirit groups have no relations. The means of strengthening these mutual help groups in the villages will of course always be related to the objective to reduce poverty and to fulfill better the basic needs of the rural poor. Since the beginning of the project the activities were geared to respond to the food shortage and famine in the province through the establishment of rice banks. In the future other programmes covering a wider scope of activities responding to the needs of the villagers will be facilitated.

Back to the question to discuss: The short experience has shown us that rural Cambodia is a complex and colorful network of groups of personal and family loyalties, social organizations, traditional institutions and modern administrative structures. The account above is just the beginning of an effort which is much wider and which should include the following topics:

Social ethics according to the teachings of Theravada Buddhism indicating also the possible motivations of a social commitment.

Historical account how community work be-gun, changed, diminished or grew in scope.
**Description (phenomenology) of the actual situation** (as in these pages)

**Summary of experiences** in other parts of the country and beyond in the same culturally defined region (Theravada Buddhism)

**Review of the forces, customs, arguments opposed** to such an approach without discrediting the persons involved.

A project design which tries to insert project activities into the institutions, traditions and customs of the people may begin with the motivation given by the traditional culture to deal with problems of the society. These motivations will then lead to formulate objectives of a social commitment and the roles of certain actors in social activities.

The first element started with a description of the actual situation and the presentation of a short project experience. Practical work has been the starting point and practical work will always be the reference or our efforts. But we have to admit that a project design based on "logical framework" is just a tool or a sub-tool in a culture oriented approach. It will be a useful element when "translated" into cultural terms under the condition that it is done a very flexible way: The ethics of Theravada Buddhism indicate the framework in which objectives have already been defined and actors of development been identified. The "cultural framework" approach is not incompatible with the "logical framework" approach. In the cultural approach, project identification cannot be limited to the elements: objectives, results, activities, indicators, support structures, counterpart, target group. It must start much earlier, go deeper and go on longer. The "logical framework" cannot be inserted as a whole but will be split in modules, adapted to cultural conditions and related to each other in a new way. Working along a cultural logic will lead to a new frame. So far however we grasped only one part of at least five - and it is not advisable to anticipate too much.

**VII. A concrete proposal on the way to a vision**

First step: knowing traditional types of project: There are century-old experiences of project work by all communities around Asia and other continents which are important to know. If we have sufficient knowledge of the above five elements, we will have done this step.

Second step: comparing traditional project types of different cultures: a synopsis of such project experiences would certainly demonstrate the differences in form but also a basic common ground in function.

Third step: cross cultural, conflict preventing project designs. In a wider perspective such a synopsis could serve to elaborate conflict pre-venting project designs: Samuel Huntington (Heritage Foundation, U.S.A, see: "The clash of civilizations", in: Foreign Affairs. Summer 1993. p. 22-49) predicted that the type of conflict in the future will not be one between one nation and other and their conflicting economic and strategic interests. A new type of conflict will emerge: The conflict between different cultures (fore example between moslim and Christian culture, or between Buddhist and Christian culture). Huntington's analysis is certainly confirmed by reality, for example the course of events in former Yugoslavia. His conclusion however must not be shared: He warned the Western world to be prepared ideologically and also militarily. Another conclusion however needs to be tested: peaceful cross-cultural co-operation. There can be project designs integrating social groups of different ethnic and cultural character. Such a design however can only be done when the type of traditional projects are known and analyzed; when the differences in form are respected and the similarities in function related to each other. This will be not easy at all: It must be assured that the project structure is not used by one group to dominate another one.

Such a type of project could help to prevent a conflict and not clear up the human and material debris of wars and civil wars - as so many projects are now doing, and the one in which we are working also.

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