

Freedom through Employment



**Benefits provided by fair trade
handicraft producer organizations in
Cambodia and their impact on the
empowerment of producers**



**Martien van Dijk (0417904)
International Development Studies
Supervisor: A. Zoomers
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Executive summary

Fair trade producer organizations are small businesses which main goal is not the increase of profit, but the empowerment of disadvantaged producers through employment in their organization. Cambodia is a country with 85% of the people living in rural areas, 40% of the population living below the poverty line and a relatively high amount of physically disabled people due to the many mines which are still spread throughout the country. It is also a popular location for (child) sex-tourists and is still recovering from a massive setback caused by the Khmer rouge regime in the 70's. In this context, small enterprises arise which try to improve the situation of rural poor, disabled or former prostitutes by preparing them with skills and employment as a handicraft producer.

This thesis approaches these organizations from a Sen-based perspective on development, considering to which extent the benefits producer organizations provide to the producers increases the freedom producers have and experience. The main research objective is to determine an answer to the question:

To which extent do the benefits of joining a fair trade producer organization contribute to the empowerment of the disadvantaged producers?

This is done in three steps.

The first step is to determine which financial benefits the producer organizations provide to their producers. It focuses on different systems to determine the payment of the producers: piece-rate versus salary. As the research results have shown, producers who receive a standard monthly salary are generally better off. They make more money and their income is steadier, which provides them with more security. However, financially producers were usually better off; the average income of producers was above the minimum income, which was not common looking at the former employment of the producers. Another facility producer organizations provide is the possibility to loan money without or with very low interest rates. On top of this, another new condition to the producers is that they only have a nine-to-five job, which provides them with free time in the evening. It also shows that producers who become more financially handle it with responsibility and often send most of it home as remittances. Above all, these financial benefits provide producers with time to think about their life beyond survival alone.

The second step is to determine which social benefits the producer organizations provide to their producers in order to increase their empowerment. One important benefit producer organizations provide, which most other organizations do not provide, are periods of leave (with pay). Pregnancy leave, sick leave, personal leave and free time on the national holidays provide producers with the opportunity to make important decisions without having to make large sacrifices. For example, producers have time to get married (a process taking up to several weeks in Cambodia) or give birth without having to leave their job. Although losing one's job is generally considered less important than reproducing or getting married, it does provide producers with one important worry less. Childcare is another one of those advantages. For the disabled and former prostitutes, other social benefits are very important as well. Housing support provides especially disabled producers with more independency and a new social network, very important to increase the self esteem (and marriage chances) of



producers, who come from situations in which they were often discriminated. For the former prostitutes, another facility is important, because their reintegration into society is a long process involving extensive counseling. Without this counseling producers are very vulnerable to falling back to their former lifestyles, simply because they have lived it since they were young and do not know anything else. All in all, these benefits provide producers with a good chance to live a regular life.

The final step is to determine to which extent all these benefits do impact the empowerment of the producers. Compared to their life before they joined a producer organization, producers have a lot more opportunities and chances than they had before. Most producers had never been formally employed before they joined a producer organization, especially the disabled people who come from the villages but were physically unable to work in agriculture. Producers have more job security, more free time, more financial means, more independency and more social contacts. However, there is a limit to the empowerment of the producers. Most producers appreciate the support the producer organization provided for them, but hopes to start an own small enterprise someday. For this they require training, which the producer organizations do not sufficiently provide. Producer organizations have no interest in training their future competitors, which is understandable. However, it does stand in the way of providing producers with the independency they desire. In other words, there is a glass ceiling to the progress a producer can make. Nonetheless, the producers are empowered to a large extent, therefore these development initiatives can be considered successful and important, because it provides them with the possibility to maintain a sustainable livelihood.

1. Introduction

Although my meetings with producers were very inspiring and interesting, I think it were the meetings with people outside of the network of the producer organizations which proved the relevance of the existence of producer organizations.

One of those meetings was with Kountia, a beer girl in a café who politely asked me if I minded if she left the table to talk to her sister (even though I never asked or even wanted her to join me at my table in the first place) and came back angry sad and frustrated because she was not able to talk her sister out of prostitution, due to the low salary the beer garden provided. I've never been confronted with such problems in such a direct way and when she asked me how to stop her sister from selling her body I was embarrassed that I did not have a satisfying answer for her.

Another moment I will never forget was when my friend Chakriya called me and told me her brother just had a motor accident and might never walk again. In her eyes, her brother just lost all his means to ever build a normal life for himself. Although I never met her brother (he lived in the countryside), Chakriya was a close friend of mine who I often had a chat with after lunch, when I was making my round on the local market, practicing my language skills and learning about Cambodian culture. She was an optimistic woman with a strong sense of justice and responsibility, who did not agree with the discrimination of physically disabled people, but who was not in the position to do anything about it. Her frustration and fear for the future of her brother left a strong impression in my memory.

After being confronted with prostitution and disability, first and second type of target group producer organizations focus on, I was also confronted with the third: poor (women) from rural areas. This was in the form of Channa, a 28 year old seller on the Russian market, who spent most of her life in a small village in Kampung Tjnam. I had lunch with her every day, and although she barely spoke any English, she was always very patient with my Khmer and was one of the few who simplified her sentences so that I might be able to understand them during my first weeks of Khmer lessons. She was poorer than most other employees at the market and I knew her shop hardly had any customers, but she didn't want to move back to the countryside because the poverty was worse there. She always refused to take my money, but when I realized she accepted a drink, I bought her some Pepsi every day. Over the months we became good friends and she always stood up for me when people did not know me very well yet. Finally she was no longer able to pay the rent for her shop at the market (rent was going up, many shops closed down, once there was even a demonstration because the location of the market was very popular as location for a new mall, according to some, the desire to sell the location for a mall was a reason for the steady rise of the rent). This meant for her that she had to move back to live with her mother in the countryside, since jobs were scarce in Phnom Penh and she did not have any family in the city. Naïve as I was, I was surprised and stunned by the lack of opportunities she had. Before I knew it one of my best friends in Phnom Penh was gone.

I remember the frustration and sincere outrage I felt when I was confronted with their problems.

These were all simple, honest people who simply were not given a fair chance to succeed due to their troubled background. The idea that these people who were just like me, accept for the fact that they



were born in a different place, were so much worse off than me, still makes my blood boil. However, there is hope. Fair trade producer organizations take it as their mission to help these types of people realize their potential.

This research is focused on the extent to which producer organizations succeed in achieving empowerment of their producers. First an overview of the geographical context will be provided, in which special attention to the different target groups of producer organizations will be provided. Secondly, the theoretical background relevant for this research will be explained. Afterwards, in the third chapter, the research questions, the conceptual model and the methodology of the research are explained, before the empirical data can be provided. Before going into the results, first a chapter will provide an overview of the context of the producers, to provide a clear image of which the people are that were part of the research. Then, in the first empirical chapter, it will be determined which financial benefits of joining a producer organization contribute to the empowerment of the producers. In the chapter following that, the same will be determined for the social benefits a producer organization provides. In the final empirical chapter, it will be determined what the impact is of the benefits producer organizations on the empowerment of the producers. Then when all is said and done, the research will be wrapped up in the conclusion.

2. National Context: Cambodia

Cambodia is positioned in South-East Asia at the Gulf of Thailand and shares borders with Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. The country is 181,040 square kilometers and has a population of approximately 14.2 million people. It has a tropical climate and the surface consists mainly of flat plains, although there are some mountains in the south-west and the north. There are not many natural resources, there is some oil, gas, timber, and gemstones, iron ore, manganese and phosphates, but these do not have a large economic significance on a natural scale (CIA fact book, 2009).

The country is composed of 20 provinces, 2 municipalities, 172 districts, and 1,547 communes. The country is mostly divided by the Mekong River, which enters the north of Cambodia and passes all the way through the country to the south, entering Vietnam. It “dominates the hydrology of the country” (Tourism of Cambodia, 2009), together with Tonle Sap, the largest lake in the country (see figure 1).



Figure 1: map of Cambodia (BBC, 2009)
History of Cambodia

In 1963 Cambodia became a protectorate of France. It remained a French colony for 90 years until it became independent in 1953. By that time, communist guerrillas resisted the return of the French authority after the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. This was the beginning of a communism oriented regime under the rule of King Sihanouk. This reign lasted until 1970, when a coup was conducted by prime minister Lon Nol. Sihanouk became exiled in China and the army was sent to fight the northern Vietnamese troops which Sihanouk allowed to enter Cambodia in order to support the war in Vietnam. Lon Nol stayed in charge for about five years. When Sihanouk returned, he returned with the support of the communist Khmer Rouge, a guerilla organization led by Pol Pot. In 1975 the Lon Nol regime was overthrown by the Khmer Rouge guerrillas. This coup marked the beginning of a major setback for the country (BBC, 2009).

The Khmer Rouge forced all urban dwellers to the rural areas in order to become agricultural workers. Under their rule, basic freedoms were no longer guaranteed and religion was banned. This radical

communist rule cost at least 1.7 million people their lives in the 4 years that it lasted. The Pol Pot regime came to an end when the Vietnamese troops conquered Phnom Penh in 1979. However, no peace-agreement was signed until 1992 and even though there were elections and there was some progress, fights continued to break out in the country. By 1992 the Vietnamese troops had withdrawn and many regulations which the Khmer Rouge regime had imposed were retracted. A UN transitional authority was placed in charge of the country and shared its power with Cambodian parties (BBC, 2009). However, the presence of these UN troops resulted in an expansion of the sex trade in Cambodia (MCelland, 2003).

In 1993 general elections were held. The royalist Funcinpec party received most votes during this election, followed by the Cambodian People's party, led by Hun Sen. A coalition is formed with Funcinpec's Norodom Ranariddh as prime minister and Hun Sen as the deputy prime minister and Sihanouk is reinstated as the King of Cambodia. In 1997 Hun Sen staged a coup and Ranariddh was removed from his function. However, after the elections in 1998, when Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party won most seats, Ranariddh returned to the political arena as president of the National Assembly, while Hun Sen became the prime minister. 2001 was a crucial year for Cambodia, because that was the year when the senate approved a law to charge the Khmer Rouge leaders with genocide. Financially that year was also relevant, because it was the year in which international donors pledged to donate \$560 million in aid after a period of few assistance due to the political unrest and the socialist attitude of the country. By now, Hun Sen is one of the longest serving prime ministers in the world. He still fulfills this function today. Since 2004 Sihanouk's son Norodom Sihamoni is the reigning king of Cambodia, but this function is now mainly ceremonial (BBC, 2009).

Economy of Cambodia

Cambodia is one of the poorer countries in the world. It is ranked 136th on the Human Development index. On top of this, it is ranked 158th on the corruption perception index, ranking it one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International, 2009). It has a GDA of \$480,-, but over the last years, an annual growth rate of the GDP is maintained of approximately 6% (Unicef, 2009). There are 8 phones available per 100 people (Ibid). However, today 40% of the people still live below the poverty line of 1 dollar a day (UN, 2009).

The country is industrializing, with the garment industry as the engine of growth, responsible for 85% of the national export (UN, 2009). Other export products are rubber and timber (BBC, 2009). The tourism sector is also becoming a strong economic force in Cambodia (UN, 2009). Nearly 100% of the private sector consists of small and medium sized enterprises (Craftnetwork, 2009). Agricultural growth is lagging behind, especially when the population growth is taken into account (Ibid). This means that Cambodia might need to import food in the future to feed the people, which lead to the demand for an increase in the national export rate.

Rubber used to be the most important export product, but the Khmer Rouge regime destroyed this entire industry. In 1995, the production capacity of Cambodia was only 40% to 50% of what it was before the Khmer Rouge regime came to power (Cambodia e-gov, 2009). Infrastructure was also

heavily damaged after the conflict. Since the peace-agreement was signed, the country has been working to rebuild its former capacity, with the government loosening its grip on agricultural production so people can return to subsistence farming. Due to foreign assistance, infrastructure has been improved since then as well.

The country also suffers from a lack of educated people, which makes it difficult to conquer corruption. Cambodia has implemented several decentralization regulations, but simply does not have enough people to adequately manage local areas (Sokha, 2005). This puts the country in a difficult position if it wants to maintain its growth. It is a country highly dependent on donor funds and donors demand decentralization. At the same time it is a country which suffers from corruption and decentralization is likely to increase corruption due to a lack of capable people.

So all in all, Cambodia is rapidly urbanizing and has a growing working population, a booming manufacturing industry and a profitable tourism sector. It cannot depend on natural resources since it does not have enough of those and industries of the past have been destroyed by the Khmer Rouge regime. The country has a lot of potential to grow, but this potential lies with newly developing industries, such as the manufacturing sector and the service sector. The socially oriented businesses which are fair trade handicraft can play a significant role in fulfilling this potential, since it is focused on the manufacturing industry, SME's and on marginalized (and therefore ineffective) producers.

The people

90 to 95% of the people in Cambodia are of Khmer ethnicity. The remaining 5 to 10% consists of Chinese, Vietnamese and hill tribe people (Tourism of Cambodia, 2009). The main religion of Cambodia is Buddhism, specifically Theravada Buddhism (Cambodian information centre, 2009). The main language is Khmer. In the past, French has been a prominent second language, due to colonial rule, but among the younger people English is more common (Cambodian E-gov., 2009). The adult literacy rate is 74%, which is the same as the primary school enrollment rate (Unicef, 2009).

About 85% of the people of Cambodia live in rural areas. However, it has an urbanization rate of 8,4%, which is quite high (Worldbank, 2009). The country is not very densely populated compared to its neighboring countries. The age structure of Cambodia is a distinctive feature of the country. More than 50% of the population is younger than 18 years old and 56% of the people who are more than 18 years old are women. Cambodia also has a relatively large amount of female headed households: about 25%. This composition of the population can be explained to a certain extent by the war which cost many Cambodians (especially males) their lives (Cambodian E-gov., 2009). The population has an annual growth rate of 2.4, which is high compared to a country like the Netherlands, which only has a population growth rate of 0.6 (Unicef, 2009). The percentage of children involved in child labor is 45% (Ibid).

The HIV prevalence rate in Cambodia is relatively low at a percentage of 1.6%. However, this means there are still more than 100.000 people infected by HIV in Cambodia. Only 17% of the population has access to adequate sanitation facilities. The life expectancy in Cambodia is no more than 59 years

old (Unicef, 2009). However, among prostitutes this rate is still relatively high. According to the UN, these rates are up to 10% to 40% of the sex workers (Human rights task force, 2001).

What is also a significant problem though is that after so much conflict, the country is covered in landmines placed by the Khmer Rouge, the Heng Samrin and Hun Sen regimes, the Vietnamese, the KPNLF, and the Sihanoukists (Mekong.net, 2009). Although there are not very reliable sources to be found, it is estimated there are 4 to 6 million mines in Cambodia. (Cambodia mine action centre, 2008). Even today, still many people get hurt from stepping on mines in Cambodia each year: last year there were 841 landmine casualties (UN, 2009).

These problems with landmines especially affect the poorest people of the country, who are forced to live near mine affected areas to collect food or firewood. Moreover, the poor are also forced to use less safe measures of transportation and have to work in risky environments. On top of this comes that the poorest usually have less access to healthcare facilities, which means that even small injuries can lead to permanent disability. (Thomas, 2005). This leads to a relatively high percentage of disabled people in Cambodia. More than ten percent (1,4 million people) have a physical disability in Cambodia (Asian Development Bank, 1999). This is especially difficult in a country where the people believe in reincarnation, because the disability is generally considered as punishment for wrongdoings in a previous life. Therefore the disabled generally do not receive a lot of sympathy and become even more disadvantaged than they already were. The same goes for prostitutes, once they lose their virginity they are considered 'broken women', who cannot go back to their families and are looked down upon by the rest of the Cambodians (Mam, 2005).

The disabled and the former prostitutes can therefore be considered the most disadvantaged people in the country. They often have no education, no specific skills, and are discriminated by the rest of the people. However, besides them, a third group should be noted: the young people in the rural areas. They are the ones most likely to become part of the other two groups in the future, since their families depend on them for survival and they are therefore more inclined to participate in dangerous activities. The Disability and Knowledge research report on poverty reduction and development (2005) states: "Disability and poverty are inextricably intertwined. Poverty is a significant cause of disability. (p 05)" The link between poverty and prostitution can also be made, since many girls are offered to traffickers as debt repayment (Economist, 2003). The rate of prostitution is the highest in the capitol: Phnom Penh (Human Rights Task Force, 2001). According to the interviews with managers from fair trade organizations, the girls often become sex workers because they are either sold by their family or because they enter it in need of money. Therefore the focus in this research is on these three groups: the most disadvantaged and the people most likely to become part of those two groups of most disadvantaged people.

Regional Context: Phnom Penh

The city of Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia and located at the intersection of the Mekong River, the Tonle Sap and the Tonle Basac. This gave the city plenty of access to water and therefore the possibility to grow much faster than other areas of the country. The city was initiated by an old and

wealthy widow who ordered to build a temple after a flood carried 5 statues of Buddha (four bronze and one stone statue) to the intersection of those rivers in 1372 (Municipality of Phnom Penh, 2009). Today, the city has a population of approximately 1011,264 people, making it the largest city of Cambodia.



Figure 2: Cambodia including rivers (Cambodiaevisa, 2009).

The city is in a relatively well shape. There is public lighting, there is a sewerage system and it has asphalted roads. The surface the city encompasses is 290 square kilometers, which makes it about one third larger than Amsterdam. The city has an airport, and several markets and hospitals. All people have access to water and 53% of those people have access to portable water and 75% of the people have access to latrines. 80% of the city has access to electricity (Phnom Penh municipality, 2004).

In Phnom Penh, 60% of the population is between 18 and 64 years old, and approximately 31% is younger than that. The average family size is 5.58 and 25% of the households are female-headed. The main reasons for people to move to the city are the fact that it contains more facilities (this is the reason for 48,5%) and looking for job opportunities (20,7%) (Ibid). The largest industry in Phnom Penh is commerce, followed by industrial work, and only 7,5% of the population works in agriculture (Phnom Penh municipality, 2004).

Although the percentage of people living in poverty in Phnom Penh is lower than for the entire country, it is still a fact that 25% of the people live below the poverty line. The city has a sex industry which is the source of a lot of problems. 23% of the people who are directly involved in the sex industry suffer from HIV. The HIV rate is also surprisingly high among the police and military force: 3% (Phnom Penh municipality, 2004).



So all in all, Phnom Penh is better off than the average in Cambodia, but still faces significant challenges when it comes to eradicating poverty and especially HIV, of which the prevalence rate is higher than the national average, perhaps due to the thriving sex industry.

3. Theoretical context

This chapter will go into the theoretical framework this research is embedded in. Although the focus is on the concept of empowerment, this concept will be defined in terms of Sen, with the idea that development means an increase in freedom at its core. After a short explanation of the ‘development as freedom’ idea, it will be linked to the somewhat more applicable concept of empowerment. Once empowerment is defined in terms of freedom, the concept will be made ready for use in this context by focusing on the benefits of employment as a means for empowerment. It is in this context that the fair trade element will come forward and show its usefulness for the producers as a potentially very fruitful means of empowerment. However, it is best to start at the beginning, with development as freedom.

Development as freedom

When Amartya Sen released his book ‘Development as Freedom’ in 1999, it was a revolutionary piece of work. It provided a completely new theoretical framework for conceiving poverty. While earlier work mostly focused on development in economical terms, Sen redefined development as “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen, 1999, p 03). Sen argues that freedom is important for several reasons. The first reason is that freedom has an intrinsic value because it allows us to be agents, to realize the human capacity for agency. The second reason that freedom is important is because it is an instrument to realize other freedoms. According to Sen, freedom is interdependent. This means that when one kind of freedom is realized (say, for example, freedom of expression), another kind of freedom is also stimulated (when people have the right to express themselves, it becomes much harder to suppress political freedom). All these different freedoms allow us to be agents in certain ways. If there would be complete freedom, agency would be maximally realized. That is what Sen thinks we should strive towards (Sen, 1999, Van Buren & Van Dijk, 2008).

However, freedom in a strict sense, like for example Sartre proposes, is not sufficient for development. The concept of freedom has to entail that the several choices available to a person can successfully be *achieved*. This does not mean that each choice *will* successfully be achieved, but there should be a reasonable chance that it might. Therefore Sen proposes the concept of capabilities: “Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)” (Sen, 1999, p 75). Each person has a specific ‘capabilities set’, defined as “the freedom to achieve: the alternative functioning combinations from which this person can choose” (Sen, 1999, p 75). This freedom can be called ‘actual freedom’, as opposed to freedom in the strict sense, which is more like theoretical freedom. For example, a poor man might decide he wants to become a doctor, but without sufficient means and support to get some kind of education, that man can never become a doctor. Even though there might be medical schools near the poor man’s house, if he cannot enter such a school due to a lack of (financial) means, his capabilities set does not include ‘becoming a doctor’. Applied in the context of Cambodia, if a girl has been forced to work in prostitution since she was young, she might want to change her job, but would

lack the skills to function in anything else, due to her lack of education. Therefore, without external support, she does not have the capability to change her lifestyle.

Empowerment defined in terms of freedom

From a capabilities approach the step to empowerment is quite small. Several articles about empowerment describe it in similar terms. Lyons, Smuts and Stephens (2001), in their article “Participation, Empowerment and Sustainability: how do the links work?” Discuss several definitions of empowerment within the context of development on a micro-level. According to them, Somerville (1998) describes it as an “increase in influence and control through an acquisition of knowledge and skills” (Lyons, Smuts & Stephens, 2001, p 1253). On a micro-level this comes down to gaining more control over your livelihood by gaining more capacities. In other words, gaining a larger capability set. Another definition they discuss comes from Friedmann (1996), who proposes a similar definition, describing empowerment as “self-organization of the poor as a means of surviving, preserving some dignity and gaining control over the means to a livelihood” (Ibid). This sentence can also be interpreted as gaining a larger capability set, since it refers to self-organization (i.e. taking action in one’s own life) with the goal of gaining control over the means to a livelihood. In order to gain such control, freedom is required for the space to take action, and skills are required for the capacity to actually undertake action. In that sense, a reference to the capability set as the means to a livelihood does not seem inappropriate. Mcewan and Bek (2006) also provide a definition of empowerment, but their article has a much more political approach to the concept. However, once again it can easily be translated in terms of Sen. According to them, empowerment can be “perceived as a facilitator for the attainment of rights [...] with emphasis on the role of self-organizing” (Mcewan & Bek, 2006, p 1022). As it has been argued in Van Dijk and Van Buren (2008), Sen uses the words rights and freedom interchangeably in ‘Development as Freedom’. This “facilitator for the attainment of rights” refers to a means for *achieving* (“attaining”) freedom (or rights). Once again, an implicit reference to the capability set (“the freedom to achieve” (Sen, 1999, p 75) can be found. Finally Parpart (2008), in her article about women and empowerment also discusses definitions of empowerment and refers to Kabeer (1999), who in the debate on gender relations focuses on empowerment in the sense of “enhancing the ability to exercise choice” (Parpart, 2008, p 356). This is an example of development perceived as freedom *pur sang*, since it explicitly refers to the ability to exercise choice.

What this shows is that although the concept of increasing the capability set as a means for freedom (and thereby development) does not often explicitly come up, implicitly it is widespread among literature focusing on the concept of empowerment. Therefore it might be considered plausible to define empowerment in terms of freedom. The definition used for empowerment in this research will therefore be the following:

Empowerment = the increase in the amount of actual freedom one has in determining one’s own livelihood according to one’s own needs and wants.

Employment as a means to empowerment

Now that empowerment is defined, it can be made ready for use. Which factors lead to empowerment of the three afore mentioned target groups will partly determined in the research, but this chapter will explain employment, or more specifically, the benefits of formal employment, as a strong facilitator of empowerment. One of the reasons for this is that employment leads to an income, which opens the door to many choices concerning the determination of one's own livelihood. As Sen mentions: "The perspective of capability-poverty does not involve any denial of the sensible view that low income is clearly one of the major causes of poverty, since lack of income can be a principal reason for a person's capability deprivation" (Sen, 1999, p 87). For this reason, employment, being a necessary condition for income, is a crucial factor for reaching empowerment on an individual level.

But employment is not only important as a means for income. It also has intrinsic value for those most disadvantaged who have not had formal employment for a while. It can provide them with a sense of dignity and confidence necessary for taking control of one's own life. Case-studies show that joining a producer organization does improve the self-esteem of producers (Taylor, 2002). Moreover, besides these reasons for empowerment, steady employment also creates room for other freedoms. Social facilities and good working conditions can provide producers with opportunities they might not have without that employment. For example, a couple always has the freedom to reproduce, but if the mother works at a job which provides pregnancy leave and child support, it becomes much more realizable to reproduce while still being able to provide for the child. The fact that producers can take sick leave can also make it so that producers take better care of their health. All these facilities make it so that employment can be a strong facilitator of empowerment for those without (formal) employment.

This is where fair trade enterprises come in. The fair trade movement started out in the 1950's, when people in the west became convinced that the free market system led to unfair value chains in which the producers would suffer (Steinrucken & Jaenichen, 2007). Fair trade tended to "lean more to a post-Keynesian model of economics [...] and the balance of power is changed to offer fair access to markets" (Redfern & Snedker, 2002, p 04), providing an alternative way to trade. These fair trade organizations were radically different because they placed the wellbeing of producers above making profits. As IFAT (formerly one of the largest fair trade umbrella organizations) describes it: "Alternative [or: Fair] trade operates under a different set of values and objectives than traditional trade, putting people and their well-being and preservation of the natural environment before the pursuit of profit" (FLO, 2009). In this sense, fair trade is producer oriented, while free trade is more consumer oriented. Fair trade has gone through many developments since the 1950's, it became a much larger and more thought out concept, but the fact that producer wellbeing is at its core is what is crucial for this research. That focus on wellbeing is what makes fair trade such an effective facilitator for empowerment of the most disadvantaged people. Even today, the standards of fair trade remain faithful to the original idea. According to the WTO, the first standard of fair trade is "creating opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers". This standard of creating opportunities aligns with the definition of Sen for empowerment, which regarded creating freedom to realize capabilities.

Fair trade is defined by the WFTO as: “Fair Trade is a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade organizations (backed by consumers) are actively engaged in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practices of conventional international trade (IFAT, 2007)”. Three elements of this definition are important for this research: first: fair trade focuses on marginalized producers. The three target groups mentioned in the previous chapter are marginalized producers, since they might generally be the most marginalized people in the country and would enjoy working as producers. Secondly, fair trade is a partnership, where it is not only the producers passively receive benefits from the employers, but where producers themselves actively take a role in the relationship. The third element that is important is that fair trade organizations have to be actively engaged in supporting producers. This means that being fair trade entails more than fair working conditions and a decent salary, an organization should actively help producers develop themselves. They should empower their producers.

The above definition shows that the producer-orientedness of fair trade organizations comes down to much more than paying a fair price to producers. It also entails fair working conditions, focus on the poor and disadvantaged as a target group, skills training and generally working together with producers to help them achieve their goals. Development is the goal of these activities. As IFAT puts it, the objective is twofold: “To improve the living conditions of the poor and oppressed in developing countries and to change the unfair structures in international trade” (IFAT, 2007). In this research, the focus will be on the first of these two goals, since it is much more testable on the micro-level on which the research took place.

Now that the usefulness of fair trade as a facilitator of empowerment is determined, let it be specified to the local context. Cambodia has many fair trade producer organizations. However, as a country that does not have many natural resources, much fair trade producer organizations are not concerned with the traditional food production, but with handicraft production. In the context of empowering the mentioned target groups, handicraft production is also more fruitful than food production.

For the most disadvantaged people of Cambodia, there are several advantages to becoming handicraft producers. First, the work does not, require full body activity (unlike agricultural work), which means that many physically disabled people can do the work. Secondly, women and men can do this work equally well. Although men generally prefer woodcarving while women prefer sewing, building handicraft products is not gender sensitive, which means that women can easily do the work as well. Third, it is very easy to learn the basic skills required for handicraft production, which makes it so that everybody, even people without any education, can easily learn the work.

Why these handicraft fair trade producer organizations are especially relevant in Cambodia is because, as mentioned before, the demographic situation in Cambodia, as well as the cultural context of a Buddhist country, provides the country with a relatively large amount of (HIV-infected) former prostitutes, physically disabled and uneducated poor who are stigmatized and therefore extremely powerless within the local society. For these reasons, development organizations in Cambodia are often involved in fair trade handicraft production.

A producer organization in Cambodia is a synonym for a business that is concerned with handicraft fair trade. These organizations substantially differ in size. Some employ 25 producers, while another organization employs 190 producers. Generally, the producer organizations are placed on a spectrum. On the one end of this spectrum are organizations which are completely business oriented, while the other end of the spectrum consists of organizations which are more like NGO's and have a generally socially orientation. However, all of these organizations are members of a fair trade umbrella organization and claim to honor the fair trade standards. The difference between these types of organizations will be explained in the next two paragraphs.

Producer organizations on the business end of the spectrum generally consider themselves a social enterprise. According to these organizations, the best way to support the producers is through creating an economically independent organization that is profitable and therefore sustainable. It provides employment to people who otherwise were not able to get employment and provides them with work skills that gives them a comparative advantage compared to regular producers. Within these organizations, the working conditions can range from organization only providing a high (or 'fair') price for a product, to organizations which provide full social benefits, payment for education and a standard monthly salary (Rajana, 2009). Training provided by the organization is usually only training regarding production skills. Nonetheless, these organizations do focus on empowerment of producers, but in a more narrow sense of the word than the socially oriented producer organizations. Empowerment in these organizations mostly comes from the fact that producers now have some form of formal employment.

On the other end of the spectrum are the more socially oriented producer organizations. These organizations consider supporting the interests of the producers as a more fundamental purpose. If sales of the products cannot provide producers with certain working conditions, funds from other sources have to be generated. For these organizations, employment of disadvantaged producers is not considered the goal of the organization, but only a means to empower the producers. These organizations consider employment only part of the empowerment process. Through employment with socially oriented producer organizations, producers can get training in life skills, learn how to start their own business or get the therapy that they require after traumatizing events, such as trafficking (VCAO, 2009). These organizations generally have good working conditions for the producers, but the money to provide these working conditions often comes from aid. Another difference is that business oriented organizations will not be very eager to support producers in starting their own business, since starting their own business means producers will have to compete with their former employer. However, from a more socially oriented view, a producer starting its own enterprise, completely taking care of himself, is something that confirms the empowerment of the producer.

After defining the concept of empowerment and explaining its background, it should be clear why handicraft fair trade organizations are potentially a strong facilitator of producer empowerment. Since such organizations explicitly state empowerment of the disadvantaged as their goal, it will be interesting to determine their effects on the micro-level. With such a wide range of producer organizations focusing on empowering producers, and a significantly large amount of disadvantaged people who have a clear idea about how to fulfill their lives, but lack the opportunity to realize those



ideas, Cambodia is a fine candidate for exploring the impact of the producer organizations on the lives of the producers.

4. Research questions

Most fair trade producer organizations have as their main objective to empower the producers they employ by making them able to establish their own sustainable economic position. This research will focus on the extent to which the benefits of joining a producer organization have an impact on the empowerment of the producers. Therefore the main research question will be:

To which extent do the benefits of joining a fair trade producer organization contribute to the empowerment of the disadvantaged producers?

Since there are many different organizations, there are bound to be differences in their approach to empowering the producers. For example, only two of the organizations from AAC are IFAT certified (the largest handicraft fair trade label), while the Cambodian fair trade forum represents all organizations. This indicates there are different fair trade standards for the producer organizations, at least in practice, since most producer organizations do profile themselves as fair trade.

This research will focus on the reasons for a difference in impact of producer organizations their activities on the producers. In order to determine what the most significant differences are between producer organizations regarding the empowerment of producers several research sub-questions were established in order to answer this.

Research question 1: *what are the financial benefits of joining a producer organization that contribute to the empowerment of producers?*

One of the most important benefits of joining a fair trade producer organization is that it provides producers with an income, a necessary condition for providing a sustainable livelihood. This chapter will go into the financial benefits producers experienced since they joined the producer organization. The impact of a (steady) income on their lives will be determined and will be compared to their pre-producer organization experience. The extent to which more funds provided them with more freedom will also be determined. Moreover, different financial arrangements producer organizations provide will be compared to determine what their different impact can be.

Research question 2: *what are the social benefits of joining a producer organization that contribute to the empowerment of producers?*

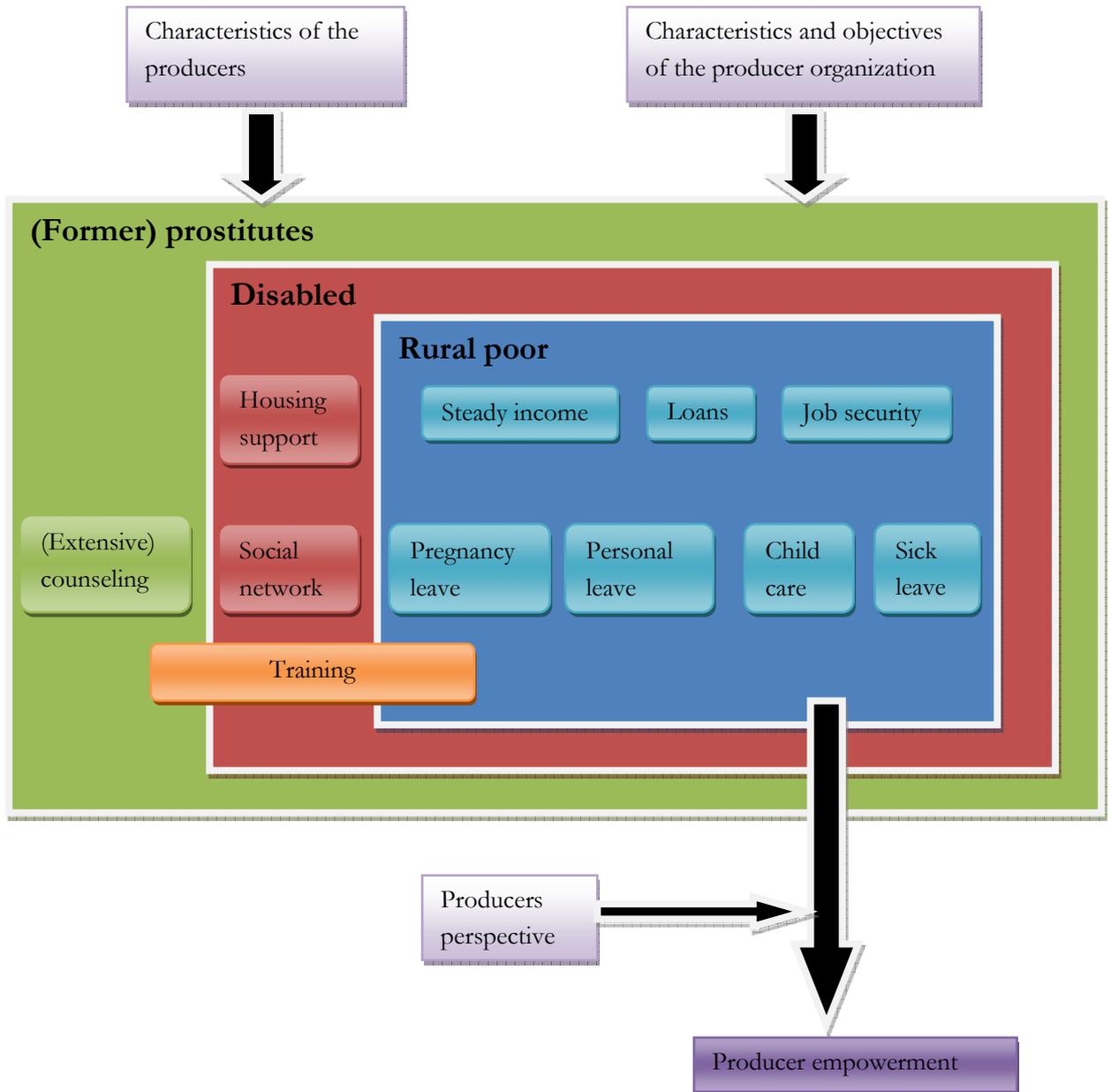
Besides the obvious financial advantages of joining a producer organization, there are also social benefits that producer organizations provide, which other organizations do not. For example, pregnancy leave or childcare at work is not common services provided by employers in Cambodia. This chapter will look into the range of social benefits and try to determine to which extent these benefits provide producers with more freedom and whether producers appreciate those benefits as such.

Research question 3: *what is the impact of the benefits provided by the producer organizations on the empowerment of the producers?*

Besides the financial and social benefits, which are somewhat short-term, it will also be determined to which extent the activities of producer organizations support producers in achieving their ultimate life goals, since empowerment does not only entail providing producers with more choices, but also supporting them to become able to make the choices they want to make in their life. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the extent to which producer organizations support producers in reaching their final desired employment situation, their eventual life goals. An important aspect of this is the amount of training a producer organization provides. Most producers want to learn about how to manage a small business or how to improve their design and production skills in order to have their own business someday. This chapter will try to determine to which extent this is supported by the producer organizations.

Once the concrete results are clear, the research provides insight in the differences between the producer organizations and the extent to which these organizations are empowering in terms of adjusting to the wants and needs of the producers without dissatisfying them and in terms of providing them with the freedom they desire. After this, there is an answer to the main research objective. This information then contributes insights to how (handicraft) fair trade projects can be more viable development initiatives.

5. Conceptual model



Explanation of the conceptual model

The squares with a white edge represent target groups that are the focus of the research. The circles with the soft squares within them represent benefits that producer organizations provide to the producers. The purple squares represent the factors that are constant in the process. The dark purple square at the bottom of the figure represents the outcome. The arrows represent the direction in which factors influence the process, leading to that certain outcome.

The model starts out with the social and economic context of the producers, since this is the starting point for the intervention. Equally relevant in determining the benefits provided by the producer organization are the characteristics of the producers and the objectives of the producer organizations. Therefore, these two are placed next to each other.

The characteristics of the producers and the objectives of the producer organization combined lead to the benefits the producer organization provides to the producers. Since different types of producers require different types of benefits, there are three layers of benefits. The first layer (blue) contains benefits provided to all the producers. The upper row contains the financial benefits and the lower row contains the social benefits. Because rural poor do not need any exclusive type of benefits, these basic benefits are the benefits all they require.

The next layer (red) represents the disabled producers. These producers require some extra benefits, such as housing support and the social network with which a producer organization often provides them. This does not mean that no rural poor producers appreciate housing support, but it does not necessarily add to their empowerment. For disabled producers this is different, because they require physical support and sometimes mental support from people from a similar background.

The third layer (Green) represents the final target group of producers: (former) prostitutes. As will be explained in another chapter, the former prostitutes require special counseling on top of all the other benefits, in order for them to function within the producer organization and society. Therefore, they receive (extensive) counseling as an extra benefit.

Shared between all layers is “training”. This is the case because each type of producers requires different types of training. While rural poor only require very basic training or sometimes no training at all, disabled have to learn how to cope with their disability while doing the handicraft work. (Former) prostitutes require extra training, for example regarding social skills or hygiene, before they can become stable producers.

All these benefits combined are supposed to lead to one common objective: empowerment of the producers. This is measured by determining the extent to which the benefits of the producer organizations have led to a position in which producers become more independent and gain more freedom.

One final factor influencing the impact of the producer organization on empowerment of producers is the perspective of the producers themselves on the activities of the producer organization. If they do not realize the extent to which they are empowered by the producer organization, it might be debated whether producers are actually empowered at all. Therefore, this variable influences the process of empowerment. This will be determined by interviews with the producers regarding their knowledge and appreciation of the benefits the producer organizations provide.



Once this process has been mapped for several producer organizations, the impact of the social and financial benefits on empowerment of the producers can be determined. Thereby the main research question will be answered.

6. The research Methodology

The research consists largely of conducting semi-structured interviews, together with some documentation research. There were three phases in the research. The first consisted of introductory interviews with representatives of the umbrella organization in order to get an idea of what was going on in the sector. The second phase consisted of doing introductory interviews with the producer organizations and other parties who were involved in the fair trade handicraft business in order to determine the most interesting aspects to focus on. The final phase of the research consisted of gaining in-depth information about the situation of producers and the producer organizations that employed them. After all the information was gathered, some final analysis was conducted and a presentation was held to present the results of the research.

The research phases

The first phase: interviewing umbrella organizations

To gain a general overview of the Cambodian fair trade handicraft sector, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of all four member organizations of the Cambodia Fair Trade Forum: Traidcraft, Craftnetwork (CNC), Artisans Association of Cambodia (AAC) and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The second purpose of these organizations, besides getting a general overview of the sector, was to gain access to the producer organizations. Once these interviews were conducted, the Cambodia Fair Trade Forum sent out a letter to all of its member organization (in English and in Khmer) that two students could approach them, and that their cooperation would be appreciated. This provided the necessary authority to gain access to the producer organizations. This was the first phase of the research.

The second phase: contacting parties

The second phase of the research consisted of approaching the members: producer organizations. This was done in order to determine which organizations were most interesting for further interviews. Through email, telephone and visits to the producer organizations, appointments were made for introductory interviews. Each of these interviews was semi-structured and lasted approximately thirty minutes. Besides contacting the producer organizations, several other parties were approached, which were expected to have valuable information about the Cambodian handicraft fair trade sector. Among these organizations were also fair trade handicraft producers who were not members of one of the four umbrella organizations and ex-fair trade handicraft producers. Interviews with these parties were also



My research partner and I also joined the umbrella organizations in the preparation of the world fair trade day, part of which was organizing a quiz for the producers, who had a day off to join the boat trip. This picture was taken during that quiz.

used to crosscheck information received in other interviews. Semi-structured or open interviews were held with these parties. As the final part of this phase, available documentation was processed as well.

The third phase: gaining in-depth information

After conducting introductory interviews with the producer organizations, the next phase of the research consisted of gaining more in-depth information about these producer organizations. Due to difficulties approaching producer organizations, there was no sample taken from the list of producer organizations. All producer organizations that were willing to cooperate in the research were included in this phase. Gaining more in-depth information about the producer organizations was done through a twofold method, one focused on managers of producer organizations and one focused on producers.

The first method was through conducting interviews with managers of producer organizations with the main goal to gain access to the producers. In addition, a focus group was organized. Managers of several producer organizations and several participants attended this focus group from the umbrella organizations that make up the Cambodia Fair Trade Forum. It focused on how to determine a fair value chain and managers their opinions regarding how fairness should be defined. Finally, to crosscheck information and to ask some questions that came up in previous interviews, some final interviews with representatives from the Cambodia Fair Trade forum were conducted in the last days of the research.

The second of the twofold method consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews with producers and staff who were employed by the producer organizations. Due to financial and time limitations, the focus has been on producers who work in a workshop. About 100 semi-structured interviews with workshop-based producers have been conducted, each interview lasting from 15 to 90 minutes. Where there were more than 10 producers working in a workshop, participants were randomly chosen. These interviews were usually conducted through the assistance of a translator. They focused on the perspective and situation of the producers. They also focused on how working with a fair trade organization affected their livelihood. To gather enough information, this part of the research also used the method of organizing a focus group. A number of home-based producers in Ratanakiri attended this focus group. It focused on their livelihood and their willingness to become full-time handicraft producers. Where possible, another interview with the manager of the producer organization was conducted after the producers interviews, also to crosscheck some of the information and to ask some questions which came up after the previous interviews.



Conducting a focus Group in Ratanakiri

Finally, some of the information that was attained through the interviews with the producers was processed through statistical analysis in SPSS. After processing this information, the results of the research were presented to representatives of the producer organizations and the umbrella organizations. Afterwards, the results of the research were discussed with those attending the presentation. After the presentation, this report was produced.

Biases

The research was conducted under several restrictions. These restrictions increase the risk of bias in the produced research. This section will go into these biases, so that the reader will be aware of them while taking the results of the research into account.

Time bias

The research is time-related biased in three different ways. The first time-related bias is that the research lasted only four months, which made it difficult to visit all the producer organizations, simply because there was a lack of time. Some producer organizations were based in distant provinces and visiting them would go at the expense of visiting organizations based in Phnom Penh. Furthermore, there were no funds to pay for many trips, therefore, even if an organization outside Phnom Penh was visited, all the interviews had to be done during that one visit. Therefore, the research only consists of organizations based in and around Phnom Penh, Siem Reap or Ratanakiri. The second time-related bias is that some organizations were too busy to make time for two students who wanted to do an interview. They simply did not have time to meet. The final time-related bias is that this research was conducted during a time of economical crisis in which many organizations face difficulties regarding their export sales and might be forced to reduce costs. The situation of the organizations could be very different during economically prosperous times. However, on the other hand, the financial crisis might also force producer organizations to reveal their true efficiency.

Language bias

This bias can also be interpreted in two different ways. First, also due to financial restraints, it was not possible to hire a professional translator. It was necessary to hire a translator for the interviews with the producers themselves, because many of them did not speak English. This means that many of the answers which resulted from the producer interviews, had to go through the interpretation of an (unprofessional) translator. This method of interviewing is always less reliable than gaining answers directly. Secondly, when interviews were conducted without translators, the English proficiency level of the interviewees was not extremely high. This made it necessary to communicate with people in simple words and leave out any difficult terms producers might not understand. However, the fact that many words cannot be used during an interview increases the risk that the researcher missed nuances.

Cultural bias

There is always a chance the interviewees told things which were very important to them but which were not perceived as such by the interviewers, due to cultural differences. Secondly, there is the difficulty that the researcher cannot ask certain questions because some questions are not done in the concerned context. For example, asking former prostitutes about their salary in their previous job was something that could not be asked.

Non-respondent bias

Some organizations were impossible to meet. There is a chance that those organizations that refused to cooperate in the research did so because they were hiding bad working conditions. This could mean that there is a bias in the research because it only includes those organizations that work under the best conditions. However, this is not necessarily the case, but it is a possibility. On the producer level there was the same problem, but furthermore there was the problem that some producers, especially female former trafficking victims, were reluctant to speak with a white male researcher.

Network bias

The research focused on organizations that were members of AAC or Craftnetwork. However, many organizations call themselves fair trade handicraft businesses. The lion share of producer organizations that were included in the research that were AAC or Craftnetwork members. There are two reasons for this. The first is that these were the organizations with available contact information. Other organizations were more difficult to get in touch with, and even if contact was established, many of them did not have an incentive to participate in the research. The second reason is that producer organizations that are members of AAC and Craftnetwork did have an incentive, that the umbrella organization sent them a letter explaining that their participation in the research would be appreciated. The bias lies in the fact that there is a chance that the organizations connected to AAC and Craftnetwork do not present a completely representative picture of the entire Cambodian handicraft fair trade sector.

Politically correct answers bias

Most interviews were conducted at the workplace. This had advantages, since many producers were there together which made it easier to interview many producers in one day, but there might also have been some disadvantages. On the organization level, there were many things that could interrupt the interview with the managers, like phone calls or employees who came in to ask a question. On the producer level, it meant that producers were often near their boss. Although most employers seemed to have quite an open relationship with their producers, interviewing producers at the workplace always has the risk that producers answer in a way they think is desired by their employer. However, on the other hand, sometimes being near coworkers made producers less shy to answer questions. Nonetheless, there is still the risk that answers were more politically correct than truthful.

Proficiency bias

The final bias comes from the fact that the researchers did not have any experience in doing research in the field yet. Therefore, during the start of the research, the questions that were asked during interviews had to be fine-tuned and some questions had to be added or removed. A result of this was that some questions were not asked in a proper sense to organizations that were interviewed during the beginning of the research. Unfortunately, due to the time restrictions, there was not always enough time to go back to all these organizations and ask everything again in the proper way. Therefore, there might be valuable information that was missed during the first interviews.



Conclusion

However, despite all these biases, there was still a reasonable amount of information gathered from the field, which makes it implausible that all the results from the research are untrue. Overall, nearly two hundred interviews were conducted, most organizations were interviewed several times and all information was crosschecked as much as possible.

7. General profile of producers

Now that indications of the umbrella organization and the producer organization have been provided, this section goes into the general properties of the producers. By doing this, a view of the producers involved in the producer organizations is provided. This section will start out by providing information about the province of origin of the producers. Secondly, it will go into how the age of the producers is distributed throughout the population as well as throughout the different types of disadvantaged producers. Afterwards, the next paragraph will provide information about the distribution of different types of disadvantaged producers, as well as how gender has been distributed throughout these different types. Once that paragraph is completed, the next paragraph goes into the issue of children, and more importantly marriage, which is partly affected by the gender of the producers. The paragraph after that provides information about the level of education the producers have. Related to that, the paragraph after the level of education covers the issue of English skills, which are also important for future employment as well as popular among the producers themselves. The final paragraph provides information about the previous employment producers used to have, in the cases of producers that had any former employment at all.

Province of origin

The lion share of the producers comes from rural areas. They come from a situation in which there are not many jobs and where there is barely any opportunity to gain income. The table below shows the percentage of producers their province of origin. 56% of the respondents came from these three provinces, which is quite a lot considering Cambodia consists of 25 provinces (explorecambodia, 2009).

Province of origin	Percentage
Kampong Cham	27%
Takeo	17%
Kandal	12%

Table 1: provinces of origin.

Most of them come from small villages in Kampong Cham, Takeo or Kandal. These are three provinces make up for 30% of the entire population and all have a population density above the Cambodian average (Explorecambodia, 2009). Together, these three provinces make up for approximately 28% of the population of the country. Considering Phnom Penh also contains 11% percent of the population (Vietnamadvisor, 2009). The high population density might be an explanation for the fact that most producers in the city came from these provinces. Another reason might be that these provinces are the closest provinces to Phnom Penh.

Distribution of age

The age of the interviewed producers varies from 15 to 47 years old. The average age however is 28. 50 % of the producers ranges between 22 and 30 years old, and there are a couple of mild outliers to the top which somewhat rise the average age. The mean and the median are close together. The mean is 28 years old, while the median is 27 years old. This is shown in the box plot below.

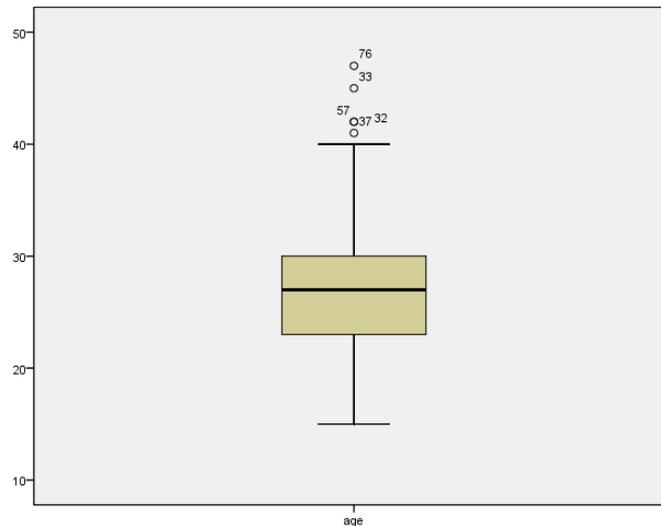


Figure 3: distribution of age among producers.

There are no large age differences between men and women. Men are averagely 2 years older than women are and there is less range, but since approximately three quarter of the interviewees were women, this does not have to mean anything. What is noticeable is that all of the five outliers represent disabled producers. The youngest producers were not officially victims of trafficking, but did work for an organization that focused on 'vulnerable' children, which meant that they had a high risk of becoming a victim of trafficking. Through providing a safe environment in which the producers were able to earn some money after school, this organization prevented that the children had to be sold to traffickers for the household to survive. The table below shows the differences in age distribution between different target groups.

	Rural poor	Disabled	Trafficked
Mean	24	31	24
Median	25	29	23
Minimum	15	18	19
Maximum	33	47	30

Table 2: age distribution per target group.

As the table shows, disabled people have a higher average age than the other groups, and they have a much larger range than the other target groups. This large range has been mentioned before, but the high average age is not yet explained. One reason for the high age is that disabled unemployed people are generally of all ages, while the rural poor and the trafficked are generally young. Trafficked people

are young because they often have to be attractive to the customers or have to have a small body that can do fine work, while rural poor often start working the land at a certain age or find other employment at some point. Disabled people often stay at home all the time, since many of them are not mobile, so even as they get older, they do not find another form of employment. Another reason that disabled people are more often old is that Cambodia still has many mines hidden in the country, so when an employed rural producer works in the field, he might step on a mine, lose a leg and become an unemployed disabled producer. One last reason why the rural poor are often younger than the disabled producers might be that some of the most successful producer organizations are young businesses which employ young rural poor since those people can grow with the company.

Gender and types of disadvantaged producers

Approximately 38 percent of the interviewed producers were rural poor. About 51 percent of the producers were physically disabled, usually their legs or their back (since it is difficult to perform handicraft work with a disability affecting the hands). About 11 percent of the producers were former victims of trafficking. About three out of four producers were women. The table below shows the distribution of gender within the different types of disadvantaged producers.

	Rural poor	Physically disabled	Trafficked	Total
Women	71%	73%	100%	75%
Men	29%	21%	0%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3: distribution of gender per type of disadvantaged producer.

As it shows, there are no large differences between rural poor and physically disabled producers, but for trafficked victims this is different. There might be two reasons this type of disadvantaged producers have such a different distribution. The first reason is that the trafficking industry is more focused on girls, since many of them end up in the prostitution circuit. The second reason might be that handicraft production is not very popular with men, so even if there are trafficked boys, they often do not want to work in the handicraft sector. The organizations focusing on trafficked people included in the research only had a sewing workshop; they did not provide woodcarving, a handicraft activity more popular with men.

Marriage and children

39% of the producers were married. 23% of the producers had children. All of the producers that had children were married. The amount of children ranged from one to four children, but 71% of the producers only had one child. Most of the disabled producers were married to another disabled producer, which worked at a producer organization (often the same one). The percentage of men who

are married is significantly higher than the percentage of women that are married. The table below represents this.

	Women	Men
Married	31%	61%
Not married	69%	39%
Total	100%	100%

Table 4: gender differences in percentage of married people.

According to this table, there seems to be a relationship between gender and the marital status of a producer. According to the test (Chi square), there is indeed a relationship between the two variables (sig. = 0,01). After further testing however (Cramers V), it shows that there is only a mild relationship between the two variables (Cramers V = 0,26, sig = 0,12). In other words, the gender of a producer does influence the chances of that producer getting married, but it does not determine it completely. What is noticeable, is that if these tests are done per target group, this relationship is only still significant in the case of disabled producers (Cramers V = 0,42, sig = 0,03). In the other cases, the relationship does not seem to be significant. This is to be expected in the case of trafficked people, since all of them were women, but not in the case of rural poor. A possible explanation for this might be that non-disabled producers have a larger chance of finding a partner outside of the producer organization, where the distribution of men and women is equal. For the disabled, it is very difficult to find a non-disabled partner, due to the stigma on disabilities. Therefore, almost all partners are found within the only source of disabled producers they know: the producer organization. However, in that producer organization, only a fourth of the employees are men, so there are about three women per man. This makes it so that disabled men have a very high chance to find a wife, while disabled women have a much higher chance to stay single.

Getting married is something very important for the Cambodians. It is still a very family oriented culture and most unmarried producers answered the question whether they were married a shy “not yet” and a nervous smile which gave the impression they were a little embarrassed for the fact they were not married.

Education

The average education varied quite a lot. Among the interviewees, the level of education ranged from zero to a completed university training. However, the lion share of the producers did not finish high school. The average education level of producers was the 6th grade, while elementary school finishes with the 9th grade. To provide an overview of the education the producers received, the education level of the producers is categorized and represented by figure 4 below.

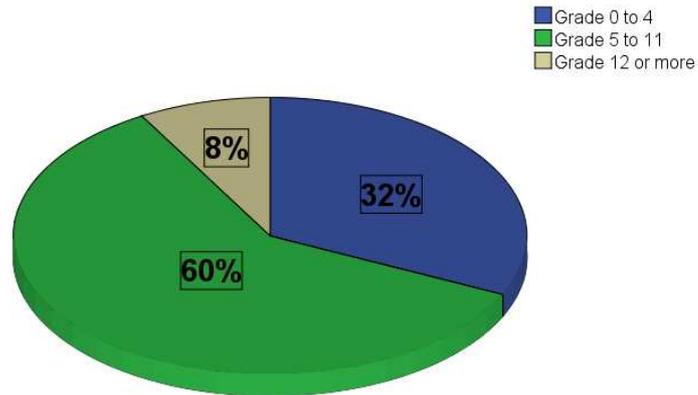


Figure 4: educational level of the producers.

The replies of producers have been categorized in three groups. The first group consists of producers who received hardly any education, no more than grade 4. The second group consists of producers who did have some education, but never finished high school (once a producer had finished grade 12, he graduates from high school). The reason to separate the producers who did not finish high school at grade 5 instead of grade 9 (the grade in which producers finish elementary school) is because students start learning the basic literacy and mathematical skills from the beginning of grade 5. Therefore, the first group (represented by the blue slice) did not learn how to read or calculate in school. The second group did learn how to do these things at a basic level. The final group consists of

producers who did finish high school and therefore who have a chance to study specific skills, such as accounting or business. As the graph shows, almost one third of the producers did not learn how to read and calculate in school and than 9 out of 10 producers did not graduate from high school. However, it does have to be taken into account that some producers did not finish high school when they joined the producer organization, but that they were able to finish it thanks to the income provided by the producer organization.



This house was used as a school for former child prostitutes. They slept here as well.

producers who are looking for a job in the city, since they have to hand in their CV, fill in forms and can read advertisements on the front of shops or in newspapers or magazines (magazines are very popular, even among the poor). Literacy also increases the economical position of producers because there are many jobs that require reading and writing. Therefore, literacy creates the opportunity to apply for much more jobs. Even for moving up the organizational ladder in the producer organization, reading and writing is



important. For example, even a simple job as selling products at the shop requires that producers are able to write a receipt for their customers. Luckily, 80% of the producers do have some literacy skills

English skills

English skills are an important factor in determining the amount of job opportunities for producers. Although literary skills are relatively widespread among the producers, the fact that Cambodia works with two different alphabets complicates the situation. Most producers who did not finish high school are able to read and write in Khmer letters, but not in English letters. English proficiency is rare in Cambodia, but is relevant for producers if they want to gain access to the tourist or the export market. Since 55% of the producers eventually hope to become manager of their own producer organization, English proficiency is an important requirement for future job opportunities. On top of that, English skills also provides producer with the opportunity to work abroad. Therefore, English is quite popular.

The English skills of producers were sometimes better than they seemed to be though. Since English is only practiced in writing and classes are not very interactive, most Cambodians do understand the language to a certain degree, but are too shy to speak it.

Learning English was the third most popular skill producers still wanted to learn (right after design skills and production techniques). 15% of the producers mentioned they desired training in English skills. To facilitate this desire, some producer organizations support their producers financially if they want to study English at an institute. 15% of the respondents mentioned they received training in English skills since they started working with the producer organization. For the producer organization themselves there is also an advantage of improving the English skills of producers, since English proficiency is crucial for many of the staff functions of the organization. Another organization hired a teacher who came by every day to give an English class to the producers after work. These classes were voluntary for the producers, and since that organization provided housing support and the producers lived directly next to the workshop, the English classes were well attended.

Previous employment

Due to the lack of economic opportunity, as well as the high population density, it is difficult for producers to gain a stable income, especially if they are also disabled. Because of this context, 71% of the producers did not have any working experience outside the fair trade handicraft business besides subsistence farming (leaving out the victims of trafficking, since it was not possible to ask them about their past employment). 14% of the producers had experience as a home based or factory producer, but furthermore there were no handicraft related experience among the producers that did have previous employment.

The salary the producers received varied greatly. Producers who worked in a factory could make up to 375 dollars a month. In fact, some producer organizations mentioned that producers sometimes quit working with the producer organization in order to work in a garment factory, since there was more money to be made there because producers could work an unlimited amount of hours. The average monthly income of producers was about 86 dollars a month, which is surprisingly more than producers make averagely in a producer organization. One producer mentioned to work as a waiter in a popular western restaurant every night of the month, 8 hours a night, for a salary of only 25 dollars a month. This was the minimum. The box plot below will provide more information about the salary of producers in their previous job.

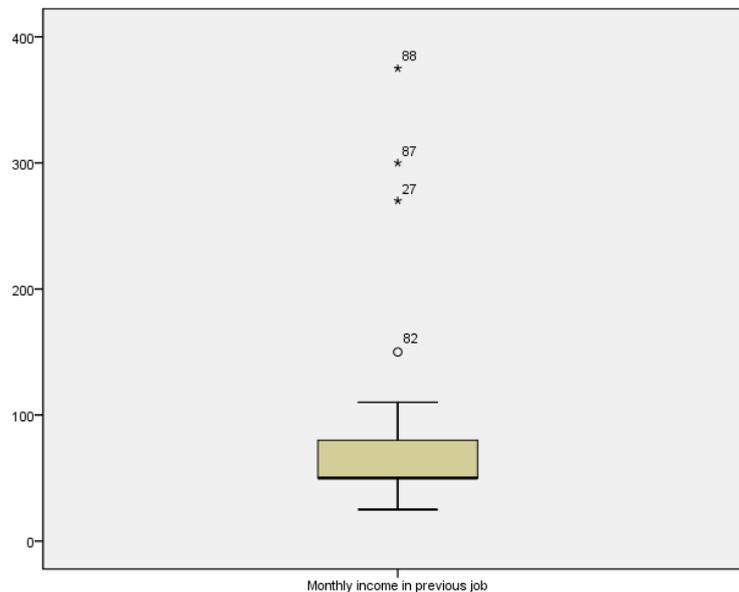


Figure 5: monthly income in the previous job of producers.

As the box plot shows, the high average of 86 dollars a month was not representative, since there are a few extreme outliers that raise the average income substantially. However, these outliers are not very reliable either, since employment in a factory is not very stable. It is true that one month can generate these large amounts of money, but it is very insecure how much money the next month will bring. As a future chapter will show, job security is a reason for joining the producer organization often mentioned by producers. It does have to be mentioned that disabled producers are not allowed to work in a factory, so the outliers do not represent disabled producers. It can also be noticed that more than 50% of the producers did not make more than 50 dollars a month in their previous job. Therefore, it can be concluded that even the producers that did have previous employment, did not have a very strong economical position before joining the producer organization.

Overall, producers generally share some properties which makes them vulnerable compared to other Cambodians. The general lack of education, the disabilities, the traumatic past and the lack of skills and working experience, combined with their (family's) poverty, makes it difficult for them to find employment and even more difficult to maintain a sustainable livelihood. The producer organizations try to let their producer catch up with the other Cambodians by improving their social and financial position. The next chapters go into details about how this can be brought about.

8. Empirical chapter 1: financial benefits

This chapter will focus on the financial benefits producer organizations provide, in order to determine an answer to the first research question: *what are the financial benefits of joining a producer organization that contribute to the empowerment of producers?* It will start out with an overview of the financial benefits producers generally provide. This will go into the general income and the working hours of the producers and the loan facilities producer organizations provide. After this overview, the impact of these benefits will be considered by comparing this to producers their previous living situation. One important factor regarding the difference in impact the activities of the producer organizations have are based on whether producers are paid on a piece-rate basis or on a salary basis. Finally, some attention will be given to home based producers and the amount of impact producer organizations can have there with their financial benefits.

Financial benefits are no unique quality of a fair trade producer organization. Any type of employment will come with financial benefits, since every job will provide an income for producers. What is different about the producer organizations is that they generally provide long-term employment and that they generally provide a higher salary than average employers do. However, as mentioned in the chapter on the research questions, this is only a quantitative difference with regular organizations. One other specifically fair-trade element here is that producer organizations employ disadvantaged producers, who often lacked experience with any form of regular employment. This makes this chapter crucial to the determination of the impact on the livelihood of producers, because it considers the impact of employment on formerly unemployed people.



The inside of a Fair trade shop, there are many of these in Phnom Penh, mainly to cater to expats.

According to official Cambodian law, employees in the handicraft sector are supposed to receive 56 dollars a month if they work fulltime. This is not a large amount of money, but generally it is just enough for one person to get by. The income producers receive is higher though, they receive an average of 84 dollars a month. They work 8 hours a day, from Monday until Friday and on Saturday most organizations producers work in the morning. This brings the amount of working hours to an average of 45 hours a week. The producers themselves confirmed this number. Sometimes producers can work more hours, in case the deadline of a large order is near, but it is not common that producers work more than 45 hours a week.

On top of this, there is one financial facility that producer organizations provide which is very useful for the producers: they provide them with loans when these are necessary. These loans are often range from 20 to 50 dollars, but they make a large difference to the producers. On top of this, producer organizations generally do not ask for interest on the loans, or only ask a very small interest as an incentive for producers to pay the money back (S. from organization R. mentioned that he would start asking 1 dollar a month if the producer had not given the money back within six months). In some

cases, the loan could be up to a few hundred dollars, which is important if producers want to make large expenditures, for example if they want to get married.

Some organizations also provide housing support for the producers. This means that producers can live together in an apartment near or inside the workshop without having to pay rent. This generally means that producers receive a lower salary, but the amount of money they had received less, was less than the amount of money they usually spent on rent. On top of that, some organizations also provided food support. However, this was not always of good quality. One organization provided a full meal for the producers for less than half a dollar, which is very cheap. However, this food sometimes made the producers sick, due to the amount of bacteria in the food. In those cases, the producers mixed their meals, sometimes they paid for the discount food, but every now and then, they would spend some more money and eat healthy food. It has to be stated though that this was an exceptional case, and was partly caused by the financial limits of the producer organization. If they could provide healthy food, they would. The manager mentioned, “Right now we do not have any orders, so we can only pay the salary of producers”, when he explained why producers received bad food. Nonetheless, most producers that receive housing support also receive food support, and generally, the producers appreciate this. It does save producers at least a dollar a day when all the food they eat is provided by the organization.

It is in this context that producers should be able to become financially independent of their family, which in turn should increase their self-esteem and empower them in the sense that they can take care of themselves, so that they can get by with only the money that they earned by themselves. This is the case in many cases, but it does happen that the financial benefits of a producer organization are not always sufficient for the producers.

Difference in livelihood

Producers who join a producer organization often have to change their lifestyle. First, most producers come from a province a move to the city to start in a workshop. This often requires moving away from ones family and thereby also from the social conventions which have to be held high there. They often move in with a group of people in one house, sometimes even in one room. Unless they have family living in the city, then they move in with them. However, although it might seem like entering the city is a fresh start for the producers, offering them a lot of freedom and opportunities. However, this is only in theory. In practice, the situation is different. Almost none of the producers ever left the house after they came home from work. Most girls considered it unsafe to go outside after dark and most producers considered it a waste of money to go out. “If I go outside, there are many bad men at night who say bad things to me”, was the response of one of the female producers (S. from organization S.). If producers do go out, they usually go “daal lane”, which means something as walking around the city for fun (literally translated: funwalking). This does not cost anything, because they only go to the park. I joined some of them once and all they did was sit on the street near the riverside, walk around the night market and look at some sort of disco-fountain in the center of the city. For this, they dress themselves up with make-up and nice clothes, but they hardly spend any money. However, they only went out like that once a month. Most nights were spent in the house by cooking, cleaning and talking

to roommates. So although this city provides freedom, they do not take it and do not desire to take it either, mostly out of (for women generally justified) fear. This situation can be considered one of the reasons why nearly all producers wanted to work more overtime. Since it is not uncommon for a person to have two jobs (one in the day and one in the evening) in Cambodia, producers with only one 9 to 5 daytime job seem to have a lot of free time in which they cannot do more to make themselves useful. Especially disabled producers experienced this, because they, unlike general poor, have virtually no chance of being employed in another job as well. If they are provided with the opportunity to make more money, they will probably take it, at least as long as they are single. Most producers were very willing to work more overtime.

Although producers hardly ever went to clubs, during World fair trade day, they did seem to enjoy casual modern dancing very much. Apparently they only dance at homes or on weddings. Clubs are considered a place for 'bad' girls.

Secondly, most producers were formerly not formally employed, so when they join a producer organization, so it was the first time they became responsible for how they spent their money. Surprisingly little was spent on the producers themselves. Usually producers spend as little as possible on rent and food, and then sent the rest to the family in the countryside as remittances. However, producers did not consider this as a bad way to spend their money: "my mother gave birth to me, so if I have money now I have to use some of it to take care of her" (T. from T.). If asked whether a producer was content with this arrangement, one of them replied, "It makes me happy to make her happy". Most producers simply preferred sending money to the province to spending money in the city. It might have also provided them with more status in the family when they assume the position of provider, but this was not explicitly mentioned. It has to be noticed that although all producers sent remittances home, a substantial amount of them also kept some money for personal savings. However, when asked whether producers could get by with the amount of money they made, many of them said they would like to send more money home. "I always need more, it is never enough", confessed W. from K. about sending remittances home.

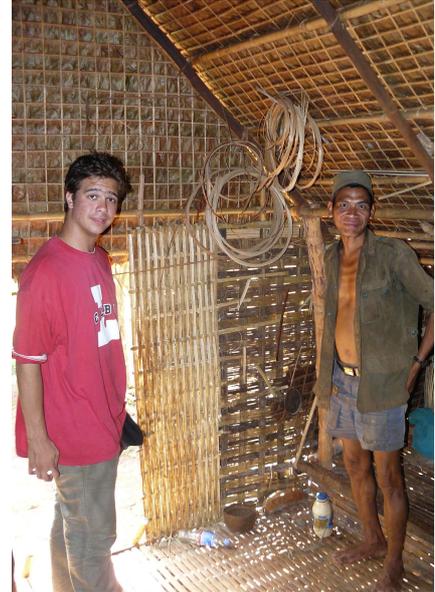
Thirdly, joining a producer organization also provides them with a steady income and job stability, which provides a lot more security than working in the province provided. Although this does not provide them with enough wealth to do whatever they want, it does provide them with the confidence that they will make enough money to survive. One producer proudly showed the fat on his stomach and claimed "before I worked here I was only 45 kilo, right now I am 55 kilo", indicating the difference the income provided by the producer organization made for him. This stability makes it possible for producers to start thinking about how they want to fill in the rest of their life. If they meet the right person, it becomes possible to consider marriage and starting a family as a realistic option, while this was very unrealistic in the past, especially for the disabled and the former prostitutes, who have been so stigmatized they had to fight for every little piece they had. "In the province, people look down on me, but here I meet people who do not look down on me". It also provides producers the freedom to think about their future employment, something that will be focused on in the third empirical chapter.

Piece-rate versus salary

Although more money means does not necessarily imply more freedom, two different systems of payment that producer organizations use differ significantly. There are two different ways to pay producers for their activities. The first way is by paying producers on a piece-rate basis. This means that the income of the producers will correlate with the number of products they have produced. The argument behind paying producers on a piece-rate basis is that it provides an incentive to work harder, thereby insuring productivity. In theory, a producer who receives his income on a piece-rate basis is the one that makes more money.

The other way to pay producers is by paying them a standard monthly salary. The argument for this is that it provides a more secure income for producers, which creates more stability for them, which is very important for the wellbeing of producers. Other ways to ensure productivity do not include these high risks for producers. For example, some organizations provide financial bonuses or select employees of the month. There are many reasons a producer can have a month in which a low production is achieved. Paying a salary would make producers less vulnerable to crises and thereby increasing their independence.

Therefore, the dilemma is this: should producers be paid on a piece rate basis or on a salary basis? Which one is better for the producers? In theory, a piece rate income can be higher than a salary if a producer is skillful enough to produce more than a regular producer. However, there is always the risk of not being able to produce enough products to pay for expenses. On the other hand, this risk might also be the necessary incentive to prevent producers from taking advantage of the situation.



The interior of a home-based producer in a village in the province Ratanakiri. Most producers come from such houses.

Average income of producers (in US dollars)

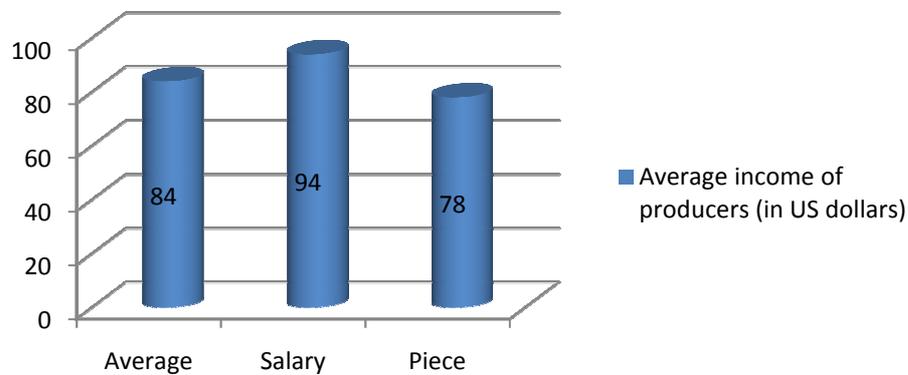


Figure 6: difference between average for producers who receive piece rate payment or producers that receive salary payment.

As shown in figure 6, the average monthly income is higher for producers that get paid salary than for those who get paid piece-rate. According to some statistical testing (independent samples t test), There is a relationship between the type of payment and the average monthly income. Producers which receive salary earn approximately 2,5 to 37,4 dollars a month more than producers which receive piece-rate. These statistics have a reliability of 95% (sig. 0,026). This is surprising, since theoretically, producers that are paid on a piece-rate basis should be able to earn more than those who get salary (since they have no maximum income). However, these results show that salary provides producers a higher monthly income.

Producers that receive piece-rate, have a varying income. Although not specifically asked for this, one out of seven of the piece-rate paid producers mentioned they had to save money for a month in which they could not work so much. One producer (B.S. from P.) mentioned she sometimes had to ask her mother to pay back remittances she sent her when she had a slow month. This information backs up the argument for paying salary: it provides a more stable income and therefore more security to producers. Job stability (and income stability) was also mentioned by several producers as one of the reasons to join the producer organization. Although producers do not fear being fired or anything like that, they are not completely sure about the amount of money they will make each month if they work on a piece-rate basis, which makes it difficult for them to consider themselves financially independent.

Another problem of piece-rate income was that producers started skipping other work-related activities in order to achieve a higher income. One producer (K. from R.) mentioned, "I prefer to stay working instead of going to the weekly work-evaluations, since I can make more money if I don't go." If producers stop going to these non-productivity related events, they lose their opportunity to express their opinion in the organization. For example, most producer organizations provided work evaluations in which employees of the month were elected, production leaders were chosen, new policies were discussed and all new announcements were made. If a producer feels like he is too busy to participate in this, he loses the chance to influence the policy of the organization. In other words, he

gets less freedom, because he does not have the freedom to influence the policy anymore. In that sense, he will be less empowered than a producer who is paid on a salary basis and therefore has all the time to go to such non-productive work-related events.

These results show that the dilemma of paying piece-rate or salary is somewhat misleading. Although theoretically producers can make more money on a piece-rate basis, in practice they almost never do. Therefore, the strongest argument from a producer's perspective to choose for a piece-rate salary disappears. However, producers are not yet aware of this. One manager (S. from R.C.) mentioned; "I let my producers vote which type of payment they wanted. They chose piece-rate because they thought they could make more money that way". Therefore, here are three arguments that favor salary over piece-rate. The first argument is that salary provides producers a generally higher income than piece-rate. The second argument is that salary provides more income stability than piece-rate, which also decreases the impact on the earlier mentioned benefit of joining a producer organization: the freedom to think about how to fill in your life beyond survival. Thirdly, producers who get paid on a piece-rate basis might be inclined to neglect all other work related activities in order to finish more products, thereby losing their vote and opportunity to express their opinion within the organization. For these reasons, it can be concluded that producers who receive income on a salary basis are more empowered than producers who receive their income on a piece-rate basis.

Piece-rate basis can damage the situation of home-based producers. During one interview with a home-based producer, M. mentioned she used to work for a producer organization, but quit because she didn't have time to go to school anymore because she had to finish orders for the that organization to make just enough money to get by.

Therefore, the producer organizations provide several financial benefits. First, it provides producers with a new context and a lot more free time. Secondly, it provides producers with financial responsibilities resulting from the decent income, above minimum wage. Thirdly, it provides job security to producers. Fourthly, producers have the opportunity to loan money without or with very low interest rates. These facilities provide producers with the opportunity to explore life outside of work, although that opportunity is not heavily exploited. Secondly, it provides producers with some financial independence and responsibility and therefore the chance to send remittances to their families. Thirdly, it provides them with a degree of income stability, which provides freedom to think about how to fill in one's life beyond short-term survival. These benefits are even stronger for the producers who receive their income on a salary basis. But for all producers, this is a significant improvement compared to the freedom producers had when they were not yet formerly employed and had to work on the land for survival, stay at home all day in order to be taken care of, or were virtually enslaved by human traffickers. This answers the first research question.

9. Empirical chapter 2: social benefits

This chapter will go into the social facilities producer organizations provide, in order to determine an answer to the second research question, which was *what are the social benefits of joining a producer organization that contribute to the empowerment of producers?* First, it will give an overview of the types of social facilities that are available to producers. Secondly, it will go into the actual impact of these facilities and determine whether different types of producers require different sets of social benefits. Finally, some remarks will be made about the extent to which these facilities can guarantee a better life for producers.

What separates the benefits from social facilities from the benefits in the previous chapter is that they are benefits that are usually not provided in simple employment in Cambodia. For example, market sellers do not get pregnancy leave, nor do they receive childcare support or discuss their activities in work evaluations. This is a qualitative difference with regular employment. However, in a way, all these facilities have their way of contributing to the empowerment of the producers.

Pregnancy leave

Pregnancy leave is a very important service for the producers, since sooner or later, they all plan to have children. According to the interviews, producers in the factory can stop work when they are preparing to give birth, but it is always uncertain if they can come back, and producers are not paid anything during their leave. The table below shows the amount of time producers got free time when they are having a baby.

Period of pregnancy leave	Percentage
None	11%
One day to two weeks	17%
Three months	61%
Don't know	13%

Table 5: period of pregnancy leave producers can get.

The average period of pregnancy leave is three months. However, 11% of the producers were not able to get any pregnancy leave at all. Two out of three times, these producers were paid on a piece rate basis. The producers that receive one day to two weeks leave were all men. Usually they were free the day(s) after the wife gave birth, to participate in rituals. In theory, it is easier for producers who receive payment on a piece-rate basis to take some time off during pregnancy. However, there is no significant difference between piece-rate producers and salary producers when it comes to the amount of time they can get off. This means that although it seems easier for piece-rate producers to take time off, producers who are paid a salary are generally able to take just as leave.

There are different systems producer organizations works with when it comes to financially supporting their producers. There are organizations that pay their producers full income during the time they are away. There are also organizations that pay 50% of the usual income of the producers. One organization paid its producers 20% of what they usually make. Finally, there were organizations which always allowed producers to return to work after their pregnancy leave, but which did not provide any income during that leave.

The fact that producers are on pregnancy leave, does not necessarily mean that they do not produce anything. If they live with other producers, or if they are married to another producer, it did occur that the producers brought home some materials and then the wife kept working during her pregnancy leave. In one organization, I interviewed a couple who just had their first child. They were very proud and all the other producers seemed a bit jealous of their situation. The wife even worked during her pregnancy leave. The man would bring home materials, and while he took care of the child, she produced some more products, because she did not want to stop working, that was how loyal she was to the organization. They were well aware that they would never be in this situation if it wasn't for the producer organization and spoke highly of the social facilities of this organization: "here is very different from the factory, there they do not hire people like me (disabled) and if you get a baby you cannot come back" (S.M. from R.C). This way, even if the producer organization does not provide any financial support to the producer, they are still able to make a little bit of money. Of course, the wife does not have a lot of time to spend producing handicraft products, but during three months of leave there are bound to be some moments that there is time to produce. The only risk is that the desire for more income is so high that the producer might choose producing handicraft over taking care of the baby. The fact that producers are willing to work during their pregnancy leave indicates their desire for income. This might also have something to do with the fact that the birth of a child brings along many new costs. Producers have enough trouble trying to get by with their regular income, without an extra mouth to feed.

All in all, producers who get paid a monthly salary are financially better off when it comes to having children, while producers who get paid on a piece-rate basis are more able to take time off (in theory, in practice most women get three months pregnancy leave when they are pregnant, even when they get paid on a salary basis). Although this arrangement was never a reason for joining a producer organization, all producers appreciated the time off, especially if it was with pay.

Sick leave

Besides sick leave, producers also have an amount of days they can take off in case they are sick. Due to this arrangement, producers can get sick without having to fear being fired or sometimes without having the fear of not being able to afford food for the next month. Almost two third of the producers get paid full salary if they get sick. However, there is a difference between whether producers are paid on a piece rate basis or not. Only 14% of the producers that are paid on a piece rate basis receive full salary during their sick leave. That is far below the average of 64%.). According to the testing, there is a medium strong relationship between the type of payment and the amount of compensation received during sick leave (Cramers $V = 0,663$). This means that if a producer receives a piece rate based

income, and then it is likely that he will not get any financial support during sick leave. Once again, the salary-receiving producers are better off.

Beyond sick leave, there are organizations that take care of the hospital costs of their producers or provide complete health insurance. One manager once paid over 1000 dollars in hospital bills for one of his employees. Even for a manager of a producer organization, this is a huge amount of money. However, according to manager K.K. from T. “this organization is like a family, so everybody who works here has to be treated as family”. Therefore, he did not mind paying the hospital bills. However, not all producers are this lucky; there were also producer organizations that did not provide any financial support beyond maybe providing a small loan for the producers, even in case of sickness. However, what producers mention as an advantage of producer organizations over factories is that it is allowed to be sick sometimes, even though those organizations do not offer any real support, they also don’t immediately replace and fire you.



Although the producers from this organization get time off when they are sick, the woman in this picture did not want to leave work, and chose to take a nap on the workfloor before going back to the sewing machine. “Woman Sickness”, manager S. from W. commented with a big smile: “It happens every month.”

Therefore, although producer organizations provide different amounts of support to producers in case of sickness, all producer organizations do provide more job security than other jobs. However, when it has to be determined which producer organization empowers its producers most, it can be claimed that the organizations which empower their producers most are the ones that keep paying producers during their sick leave and provide them with financial support to cover the costs of being sick, either through private funding or through health insurance. In these situations, there are no immediate negative consequences to getting sick, which therefore provides producers with the most freedom to choose to take some time off in case of sickness.

Personal leave and national holidays

On top of this, producers usually also get free time during the holidays. There are about 18 yearly holidays, and some can take up to a full week of free time. On top of that producers usually also get about 20 days off for personal leave, this depends on the organization. Producers who are paid on a piece rate basis can take more days off, but they are not paid during their time off. However, 18 holidays plus 20 days represent a lot of free time already. It is true that producers always want more free time, but they do not need it. Some organizations provided their producers even with a special financial bonus during some holidays, but this was usually only for producers who received a salary. The case that producers want to keep working during national holidays does not occur often, since the national holidays are usually combined with visits to the homeland, so the producers are too occupied with social activities. During these days, the staff, including the managers, also goes to their homeland, so usually the company is closed. This is very important for the producers, since these national

holidays are often the only moments they see their family. In a non-handicraft fair trade organization I knew some people from, they cancelled automatic free time during the holidays, and most of the staff threatened to quit their jobs, knowing how hard it is for them to find jobs in the first place. This indicates how important visits to the homeland are for producers.

Childcare

Another facility some producer organizations provide is childcare. Especially for the former prostitutes, childcare is an important facility. Since most of them already have children, but do not have a steady relationship and do not have a family to rely upon, the only way to go to work is by finding a place where their children can stay safely. Usually the childcare facility is run by a couple of producers who take care of the children instead of producing products every now and then. This facility provides many producers with the opportunity to work fulltime, even though they might have a child to take care of.

Work evaluations

Several organizations provide work evaluations where producers can express their worries, their functioning is evaluated and where some elections can be held, for example regarding who ought to become the new production team leader. This provides producers with the opportunity to participate in the wheeling and dealing of a producer organization and provides managers with direct contact with their producers. On top of that, these meetings can also be used to solve conflicts between producers. One manager (R. from A.) mentioned a situation in which one girl was robbed of her jewelry and in which the thief came out and apologized during a work evaluation, after the manager explained the disadvantages of stealing, especially of stealing from your colleagues.

Counseling

As a final facility, producers often get the chance to get some personal counseling. Sometimes this is through an official counselor who is hired only for that, but other times it is by talking to the manager, who more than once had a background in social work. Former prostitutes sometimes received weeks of counseling before they actually entered the working program of the workshop. In other cases, producers came to the counselor with completely different problems, like when a family member got ill and they needed someone to talk to, or when they needed relationship advice, for anything the producers needed to talk about, the counselor was there. Especially when the counselor was also the manager of the producer organization, it was possible that a very close relationship between the manager and his employees came to be, which made the employees very loyal towards the manager. In one organization, most producers were too shy to talk to me, but when the manager kindly explained to them that it was ok, I gained their trust. Eventually I was able to talk to as many producers as I

wanted to in that organization. The counselor provides a sense of security and provides a place to go when producers face difficulties in their lives that they might not be able to handle when they are on their own. Especially when working with such vulnerable target groups, this is crucial for keeping the producers happy in their work. Therefore, the counseling in a producer organization contributes to the empowerment of the producers.

Housing support as a social facility

Although housing support has been covered earlier when discussing the financial situation of producers, there is also an important social dimension to providing housing. There are several reasons to promote housing support to producers besides the financial advantages it provides for the producers. This section will explain these reasons.

First, most producers are women. In itself no reason for housing support, but when the position of women is taken into account, it is clear that housing support is an important aspect of securing the safety of producers. It is difficult for women to find a place to live that is affordable, safe and private. Therefore, most women live together with other people in one room. The amount of people in one room ranges from three to ten people. On top of this, the housing market is tight in Phnom Penh, while female producers have to live close to their job, since it is not always safe for them to travel alone after dark. This makes it so that producers do not have many different options when searching for a house, and those houses which are available can become too expensive since they are in the city center and very popular. Therefore, in order to find a place producers can afford, they might have to give up the demand for safety in order to find a place they can afford. This happened to one female friend (C., not employed in any producer organization) who lived with her two female friends and could only afford to move into a room with seven other men after she was evicted from their previous house. She was sexually harassed several times when the men arrived home drunk. She got into fights with them on a daily basis to the extent that she had to start sleeping with a knife under her pillow in order to feel safe. If other producers are less assertive, they can get into serious trouble if they move into the city. Housing support can guarantee an all female, or at least a safe environment for the producers by providing an affordable place to stay with other producers.

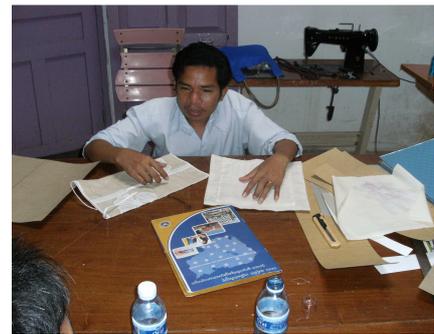


Producers having lunch together at an organization which provides housing support.

Another problem for the stigmatized producers (the disabled and the trafficked) is that they are discriminated. They complained several times about how people “look down” on them. This makes it even more difficult for producers to find a place to stay than it already is. According to several managers of producer organizations, the Buddhists considered that a disability was caused by

something done wrong in a previous life and therefore not generated sympathy, but that people felt like the producers deserved their disability. For a disabled or trafficked person in a predominantly Buddhist country like Cambodia, this means many extra obstacles in life. By providing housing support and organizing that producers can live together, the situation in their home becomes similar to that at work, where nobody “looks down” on anyone. This can also be good for the self-confidence of the producers, since it will no longer be undermined by people they live with anymore. Moreover, producers might understand each other better since they have faced similar difficulties in their life. The same goes for the trafficked people. It should be noted though, that several disabled people were happy with where they lived, even though they did not have any housing support. Usually this was because they lived with a family member who could look out for them and prevented the discrimination. However, these are exceptional situations and it cannot be guaranteed that producers will always be able to live with family members who will protect them. Therefore, housing support could be an effective alternative to avoid discrimination of producers in their homes.

Besides the fact that the producers do not discriminate each other, the disabled can help each other out. Although they share that they have physical disabilities, the extent to which that disability is severe or the type of physical disability can differ among the producers. For example, someone with polio in the legs can do very different activities than someone who lost his arms. When these people live together, they can help each other out with the activities necessary to maintain the household, like cleaning, cooking and buying groceries. However, these people do not magically find each other when they move into the city. A producer organization can facilitate this by regulating the housing process of the producers. This makes the producers as a group less dependent on external assistance. If producers can help each other out, it is less damaging to their self-confidence than when producers only depend on someone else their help, without being able to return any favors. Moreover, older disabled people may have found solutions to practical problems that younger producers with the same disability face. In this sense, they can also help each other out. For trafficked producers this is the case as well. Many trafficked people face many social problems, for example regarding boyfriends or family. Older producers may have faced these problems before and therefore “have experience” (this was what the English speaking Cambodians said when they explained why they listened to older people), which provides them with the necessary authority to get the younger producers their ear. Housing support can connect people who just move to the city and provide them with the necessary support without making them feel completely dependent.



A disabled male producer preparing the designs.

However, all these advantages of housing support aside, when producers get married and start to have children, their desire for privacy suddenly becomes much more important. The desire for a private room increases, and often producers move out of the facilitated house when they get married (if they can afford it). This does not mean that the housing support is no longer appreciated, but that the priorities of the producers have shifted towards a situation that the producer organization cannot provide for them. Therefore, in general it can be stated that although there are many advantages to living somewhere with housing support, these advantages are not enough to prevent married producers

to move out on their own. Sometimes producers find a husband who is quite rich, and they move to a place much more luxurious than the home the producer organization could provide, sometimes it is the other way around. However, in the end, this decision is up to the producers and they will take their responsibility in these situations. The producer organization can only try to facilitate as much as possible.

Despite the above-mentioned advantages, housing support may come across as a somewhat paternalistic facility, since producers are not allowed to choose where they live. This is however not necessarily the case. Although it is true that some organizations that require producers to live in the houses they provide for them, this is usually not against the will of the producers. Even among producers who did not receive any housing support, most of them moved in with other handicraft producers out of free will. Moreover, most organizations do not demand that producers live with them, but simply provide the possibility to live with other producers. Whether producers feel peer pressure to move in with fellow producers is not certain, but generally, producers accepted the housing support willingly. The fact that producers have the possibility to live elsewhere, as well as the fact that most producers who do not receive housing support also move in with each other, support the conclusion that housing support is in most cases not paternalistic, but merely a means to support the producers.

Therefore, to sum it up, housing support can provide women with a safe place to live, stigmatized people a place without discrimination, with more experienced peers and with people who can help with physical activities, while being able to help them out with other activities as well. Although this is valued the strongest by unmarried producers, it is a simple social facility which makes a large difference to most producers.

Different target groups, different needs

Unlike financial benefits, social benefits are not always equally desirable. Earlier, it has been mentioned how a producer chose to work instead of go to a work evaluation, but there are other examples of facilities which do not have the same effect on all types of producers.

All producers appreciate a minimum of facilities. The leave producers can take is always important, as well as the possibility for childcare within an organization. However, for poor producers who are not disabled and do not come from a prostitution background, this might be enough. Their main reason for joining the producer organization is that they need employment and that they need money. Everything else is secondary to them. These people might lack a high education, but besides that, they are similar to the other Cambodians in Phnom Penh. The facilities that are regarded as providing more freedom, such as pregnancy and sick leave are considered important by all, but those basic facilities might be sufficient for the producers, who mainly want to work and not concern themselves with other things.

For the disabled, this situation is slightly different. Although they also came to the producer organization to make money, they are well aware that their chances for finding employment elsewhere

are minimal. They know they are discriminated. An important factor of joining a producer organization for them is the social network it provides. Once they start working in that organization they will get in touch with many other disabled and with people who do not look down on the disabled at all. For some producers, this network is the best chance for them to find a husband or a wife. Since men are a minority in the handicraft sector, they generally can take their pick. 60% of the interviewed men were married. Only 30% of the interviewed women were married. During the interviews, I have met several couples who met at the producer organization. For this reason, social get-togethers such as work evaluation are important for the producers: they provide a social context that the producers have missed. As mentioned before, many of the disabled producers live together if they can. They do this firstly for social reasons; they prefer to live with people who do not look down on them. Secondly, they do this for practical reasons: producers can help each other out, but since they both have their disabilities, they become mutually dependent on each other, which is more attractive than the alternative of a one-way dependency on a non-disabled person. Disabled producers who received housing support considered this a perk of working in a producer organization and not at all paternalistic. Therefore, besides the general social benefits non-disabled producers appreciate, they also desire the social network dimension as an empowering benefit of working with a producer organization, especially when it includes housing support.

Former prostitutes also appreciate this social dimension, but on top of that, they also require something else. Since these girls are relatively young, uneducated and usually traumatized, they need special attention. They need a lot more guidance and support than other target groups. First, they need weeks of recovery once they get out of the trafficking circuit. Secondly, they need to understand that they live in a different context now, with different social conventions. Thirdly, they need to learn how to work together with other people. Fourthly, they often need to learn things about personal health and hygiene as well. So before a former trafficked girl can become a stable producer, she has to complete a whole list of conditions and training. For other target groups, this is not the case (or at least not to such a large extent). However, looked upon in the light of empowerment, these producers came from situations in which they had absolutely no power at all, so it makes sense that it takes a lot more effort to sufficiently empower them. The differences in these groups have been categorized in the table below.

	Economical benefits	Basic social benefits	Housing support	Full-time counseling
Rural poor	++	+	+/-	+/-
Disabled	++	++	++	+
Former prostitutes	++	++	+	++

Table 6: difference between types of producers.

Economical facilities are those explained in the previous chapter. The basic social benefits are those that are generally provided in western organizations. Among these are pregnancy leave and sick leave. Special social facilities such as housing support or full time counseling are appreciated differently among producers. However, housing support is extra strongly appreciated among disabled producers. Full-time counseling is not particularly appreciated by disabled and sometimes even unappreciated by

the rural poor who consider it an unwanted break from work. However, for the former prostitutes it is a necessity in order for them to reintegrate into society.

What should be kept in mind though, is that producer organizations do not provide the opportunity to do certain activities, they only provide the opportunity to do such activities without having to make extreme sacrifices in their lives. Producers can always get children, and they always will, no matter how bad their situation is. However, due to the support of the producer organization, the children do not have to be left alone during workdays and producers can combine work with raising children. The producers will always be free to the extent that they decide how to spend their time and what they will do with their bodies. The producer organization only facilitates the producers so that they can decide how to spend their time without making many sacrifices. In that sense, facilities contribute to the freedom of producers in order for them to live fulfilling lives.

However, despite all these facilities, it cannot be guaranteed that producers will live a happy life or anything like that. Producer organizations cannot dictate what producers should or should not do. As one manager (T.R. from A.) mentioned, “often one of my girls marries a bad guy, because she is afraid that she cannot find anyone else. I can advise her not to do it, but if she still decides to go through with marrying an uneducated and unemployed man, then that is up to her. We can only try to support her by providing her a loan so the husband can start a small business, like motodop (mototaxi) driver.” The producer organizations can only provide the facilities producers need to take control of their own life; it does not mean that producers will therefore have a more happy life. They can still make mistakes, but at least it will be their own mistakes. When development is defined as empowerment in terms of freedom, the freedom to make decisions that someone might regret in the future, can still be considered a positive development. Managers of producer organizations seemed to be aware of the fact they could not control the lives of their producers and realized that all they could do was provide a context in which it would be possible for a producer to take control of their own livelihood.



Some workshops are more tidy than others.

Now that all these issues have been discussed, the second research question can be answered. Overall, it can be concluded that the social facilities do have their impact, but that different target groups require different amounts of social facilities in order to reach the same level of empowerment. What one type of producer perceives as useful support in gaining social interaction can be considered as an unnecessary working disturbance by another producer. Therefore, it is effective that producer organizations only focus on one target group per organization and specialize in empowering that group specifically. Some producers require more facilities than others do, but all appreciate the basic working conditions that are common in Dutch jobs, such as free time on holidays and pregnancy leave. Producer organizations that provide more than those basic working conditions take on a more development-oriented role in improving the position of the producers. However, producer organizations should not overestimate themselves: they cannot determine the rest of the life of their producers. They can only support them and try to provide a context in which producers can realize their personal idea of a good life.

10. Empirical chapter 3: impact of the benefits

As mentioned in the section on research questions, the third research question was *what is the impact of the benefits provided by the producer organization on the empowerment of the producers?* This chapter will determine whether this is the case. To do this, several steps have to be taken. First, after describing the provided benefits in the previous chapters, the living situation of producers has to be compared to their previous living situation. That section will conclude that in general the producers are indeed better off than they were before they joined the producer organization. Furthermore, the future prospects of the producers have to be determined: do producers have more opportunities than they had in the future? To determine this, this section will focus on the possibility for producers to achieve what they consider their ideal working situation. For most producers, this ideal consists of running one's own handicraft business. To achieve this goal, producers require training. Therefore, the first section will explain which types of training are provided to producers. Secondly, the opportunities to move up within the producer organization are discussed to determine whether it is possible for producers to achieve a higher position within the organization they currently work in and perhaps even run it eventually. It will be clear that producer organizations do not provide producers with many opportunities to achieve their goals.

Comparison to the previous living situation

When one compares the living situation that results from the benefits provided by a producer organization with the living situation that was sketched out in the general profile of the producers, many differences are visible. Producers have a better view on the amount of income make each month. Producers now have the possibility to take some time off without having to worry about whether or not they can return to their jobs. Producers are discriminated less often and have more chance to find a husband or wife than they had before they joined a producer organization. Producers are aware that they can get psychological support from the counselors at the producer organization and appreciate the fact they will not always have to manage everything on their own immediately. So especially in terms of income, job stability, social networks and counseling, the producers have more of everything since they joined a producer organization. Since these were all reasons producers mentioned for joining the producer organization mentioned, the producer organizations reach their main goal: improvement of the living situation of producers through employment and an increase of the freedom of producers. The more disadvantaged a producer is, the more they become empowered, since the producer organizations all strive to a similar employment situation for their employees. With the employment the producer organizations provide, even the most disadvantaged producers can maintain a sustainable livelihood.

Although some producers admitted they sometimes made more money in the past, none of the producers seemed to regret that they joined the producer organization. This means that not only are producers better off in factual terms; they also perceive the improvement of their lives. Producers often come from the rural areas where it is difficult to survive, especially as a disabled person. In Cambodia, it happens that families sell their children to human traffickers out of poverty (Human

rights task force, 2001). So for people who come from such a hand-to-mouth lifestyle, to be able to work only 8 hours a day, eat several meals every day, spend time with friends, save some money and send some money home to the family, is a huge improvement by any standards. However, the situation is not perfect yet. The next section will go into this.

Limits to empowerment

Although the percentage of producers who want to remain working as only a producer for the rest of their lives is relatively large, most producers want to start their own business someday. The kind of business they desire ranges from a small business back in the hometown, where they plan to get by with orders from other locals, to larger companies like the ones for which they currently work. The graph below shows which future employment is desired mostly by the producers.

Desired future employment

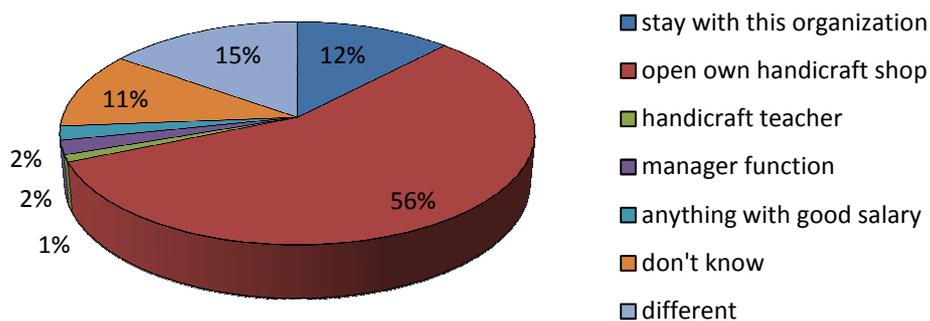


Figure 7: desired future employment.

As this graph shows, most producers want to do a job related to their current job as a handicraft producers and more than half of all the producers replied they wanted to open their own handicraft shop. Among those who did desire anything with a good salary, a job as the manager of a handicraft organization was considered as an attractive option. The same goes for those who desired a manager function. Somehow, the idea of being your own boss appeals to the producers, since even among those who replied something different, the most popular 'different' reply was that producers desired to open their own restaurant someday. Within this category, there was no significant difference between the target groups. No matter whether producers were victims of trafficking, disabled or simply uneducated farmers, in every target group opening your own business was the most desired kind future employment.

Training

However, this goal is difficult to achieve. It requires a lot of production skills as well as management skills. Producers do not automatically possess these skills. Therefore, producers receive training from producer organizations. In fact, the possibility to learn more skills is one of the most often mentioned reasons producers wanted to join a producer organization. Especially among the non-disabled poor, since they have more options for employment besides joining a producer organization.

The training provided by producer organizations differs per producer organization. Some organizations work with groups that are like classes. A number of producers are hired starting from the same date, and then they get a training that lasts generally 3 months. During these three months, they get training from special trainers together in production techniques and design, and generally all skills that are required to function as a producer. S. from R.C. mentioned, “When we get training in design, we get some examples of good designs and we copy it, but I want to learn about how to create creative designs myself”. This illustrates the difference in understanding of what trainers consider design training and what producers consider design training. After these months of training, producers will have enough skills to join the regular producers. Other organizations, which do not hire a group of producers at the same time, but take individuals on every now and then, organize it differently. Producers who join an organization individually instead of in a group often have many teachers, since they start working with the other producers from the start, learning from them while growing accustomed to the working environment. In these cases, there is often no real end date of the training, producers just keep learning and working at the same time for an undetermined period.

Usually training is provided in production skills, like design and production techniques, and then producers can function within the producer organization. However, for the former prostitutes, there was also a lot of extra training. These former prostitutes require a lot of training in ‘life skills’ as well. These life skills are general skills regarding personal hygiene, safety and health security. Since many trafficked women have children, special training on how to raise them is sometimes provided as well. These life skills are usually taught by those who raised them, but since some of the trafficked victims left the house at an early age, they never learned. To remain healthy and safe, these skills are required. In addition, therapeutic sessions with the victims are held, since some of them might be traumatized. Therefore, overall, trafficked producers require a very different, more social, approach in their training in order for them to become stable producers. It should be kept in mind that the fact that trafficking victims need a lot more (social) training also means that employing trafficked producers is much more costly for a producer organization. However, when it comes down to it, trafficked producers have the same ideal as the other target groups: they want to start their own business.



Surprised to see this Dutch poster in Cambodia I asked the manager whether they also provided training in the dutch language. It turned out the child on the poster lived near the workshop and was known to everyone who worked there.

As mentioned before, it requires both production and management skills to start a new enterprise. What also has been mentioned is that the producer organizations provide training in production skills. However, do they provide training in management skills?

There is not a lot of training available in management skills. Some organizations provided training in accounting skills that are also necessary for running an enterprise. However, such trainings were, as were the production skills trainings, not given with the intention of supporting the producers achieve their ideal working situations, but with the intention of increasing their value for the producer organization. In this context there is no place for training producers in how to run their own enterprise, since that could lead to producers starting out for themselves, which would decrease their value for the producer organization to zero, or even to less than that if they become strong competition. Therefore, producer organizations did not have any training in starting one's own business. Some producers started their own enterprise, but since they had no training in how to run a business, they were not able to keep their business running for long. Therefore, training is necessary. Moreover, although producer organizations are not inclined to improve the management skills of producers, when asked, most producers were anxious to get more training, in management skills as well as in production skills, especially when it regarded designing your own products, since that is generally seen as one of the most crucial factors for success.

There was one exception though. One organization which did support producers in starting their own business and which has successfully helped hundreds of producers starts their own enterprise over the years. However, this organization was not financially dependent on sales and completely relied on western church funding, which the manager called "the most stable kind of donors", because they did not change their conditions for funding and did not demand excessive documented accountability. Instead, he occasionally had to welcome church volunteers, who would stay in the workshop and help for a couple of weeks or months. These volunteers did not come as missionaries, but as a very informal kind of auditing. This provided the producer organization with the freedom required to support producers in achieving their goal of opening their own business, usually in a village near the producer organization its workshop. However, for other organizations this might be quite difficult to achieve, especially if those organizations depend on sales for survival.

Although there is no incentive for producer organization to support creating their own competition, there might be an incentive for them to support increasing management skills among producers in order for them to take on a higher function within the producer organization. The next section will go into this option.

Career opportunities within the producer organization

In most organizations, producers can get a promotion and become a staff member of the organization. However, in some organizations none of the staff members is a former producer. Generally, the organizations can be divided in three different groups: groups that do not provide career opportunities beyond being a producer, organizations that provide some opportunities and organizations in which producers have good opportunities to move up in the organization.

The first group does not provide any job opportunities beyond the function of producer to its employees. The argument for this decision is that staff functions require different skills than producer functions and therefore producers are not qualified to fulfill these functions. To a certain degree, this argument is valid, but there are also functions producers might be qualified for, simply because of personal merits or because they have many experience.

The second group, which represents the majority of producer organizations, recognizes that producers can be qualified for other things than producing and therefore provide some chances for producers to move up in the organization. These organizations try to employ former producers in functions that do not require a lot of specific training. For example, the function of handicraft trainer, team leader, seller or quality control supervisor, have proven to be jobs in which former producers can successfully function. However, for jobs that require specific skills, like accountant or (assistant) manager, regular producers might not be considered as qualified.



A workshop just outside Phnom Penh.

However, there were two organizations which considered that no valid argument for limiting the growing opportunities of producers within the organization. This third group supports the producers in getting enough education to fulfill a certain higher function. For example, one organization paid for the accountancy degree of one of the former producers, and now she is the accountant of the organization. This is perhaps quite costly, but at the same time, it serves the interests of the producers, who cannot afford to pay for this expensive education themselves.

Nevertheless, this last group also faces a risk. By investing in that employee's education, they gained a good accountant. However, in the past it has also occurred that former producers decided to start for themselves and compete with their former employer. The manager (S. from R.) spoke about this, saying, "I gave them all the training, but they started a business for themselves, so I did not profit from investing in their training". As a producer organization you do not want to create your own competition, therefore producer organizations are quite careful with paying for such higher education. On the other hand, producer organizations have as their goal to facilitate the empowerment of producers and providing opportunities to develop the skills required to gain the freedom to start an own enterprise does contribute to empowerment of producers. Overall, the career opportunities within a producer organization strongly depend on the attitude of the management of the producer organization. If an organization has the right attitude, there can be career opportunities within the organization. However, the chance to realize the ideal working situation of the producers, which is successfully run an own enterprise, is very limited.



Conclusion

There seems to be a glass ceiling to working in a producer organization. Most managers do not come from the same background as their producers and the producers are usually not trained in the skills required to manage a producer organization. There are also hardly any opportunities to learn how to run a business for producers. However, if they are to achieve their ideal work situation they need to learn this knowledge somehow. Therefore, it seems unrealistic that many producers someday will achieve their ideal work situation. In that context, there is a glass ceiling for producers working in a producer organization.

However, despite these limits, producer organizations improve the position of producers in more ways than any other organization ever did for them. They are empowered by the producer organization. If the business does not go bankrupt, the producers have a job they can maintain for the rest of their lives. Therefore, producers will be able to provide for themselves largely and gain a sense of independence. Strictly speaking, they will not even be depending on the producer organization, because there are many different producer organizations and it often happens that producers switch to a different organization that is more suited to their needs.

With this information, the final research question (*what is the impact of the benefits provided by the producer organization on the empowerment of the producers?*) can be answered. Producer organizations empower their producers to a large extent by providing them with social and financial benefits which increase their security and their freedom. They generally succeed in providing producers with the opportunity to maintain a sustainable livelihood, under the condition that the business is successful in receiving a steady amount of orders. Although there is a limit to the growth producers can go through within the organization and there is hardly any support for producers who want to achieve their ideal work situation, producers are still better off than they were before they joined the producer organization. Therefore, producers are not empowered to the extent they would like to be empowered to, but they are empowered to the extent that they can maintain a sustainable livelihood without depending on the benevolence of others.

11. Conclusion

It is clear that the producers come from a very impoverished background; they are usually uneducated, often unemployed and stigmatized en sometimes even traumatized and abused. They do not have many options in their life. The producer organizations try to help these people by empowering them, in the sense that they provide producers with the freedom to take care of themselves and consciously take decisions regarding their activities beyond survival. The research question that had to be answered was the following:

To which extent do the benefits of joining a fair trade producer organization contribute to the empowerment of the disadvantaged producers?

To a certain degree, these producer organizations succeed in empowering the producers. They provide them with financial and social benefits that the producers highly value. They have more financial means, can send remittances to their family and have job security, which provides them with the freedom to think about how to fill in the rest of their lives. Once they make decisions about this, the social facilities can support them in turning such decisions into action. On top of that, other social facilities such as health insurance and sick leave provide the producers with the freedom to take better care of their body. Therefore, in general, it can definitely be stated that producers have more freedom to determine the course of their lives since they joined the producer organization.

However, there are limits to this freedom. The producers often face a glass ceiling in their producer organization, which makes it very difficult for them to achieve their life-goal of starting a private business. On top of that, hardly any producer organizations provide producers with the necessary training to achieve such a goal. What this means is that producers become dependent on the producer organization (in the sense that they cannot find employment elsewhere), but within that producer organization cannot realize their life-goals, even though they might have the potential to actually succeed if given the proper support. However, there is no easy way to solve this problem, because from a business point of view, it is not desirable to support producers in starting their own enterprise, and most producer organizations consider themselves a business.

Nonetheless, despite this limitation of the producer organization, most producers are better off than they were before they joined the producer organization. Although they might not have complete freedom, they have a wide range of opportunities provided to them, which they did not have before. Therefore, it can be concluded that producer organizations empower their producers. Empowerment is not a black and white area. Complete empowerment to the maximum extent would upgrade someone's freedom to god-like proportions. The producer organizations often go well out of their way to please the producers and even though they cannot please every desire, they do succeed in making life more valuable to the producers by providing them the opportunity to take life into their own hands, something that is valued highly, especially by producers themselves. Channa, Chakriya's brother and Kountia's sister would all be able to benefit from the benefits provided by a producer organization. Thereby the main research question can be considered answered.

Implementation in other locations

It might be interesting to consider the extent to which this type of development practice can be implemented in other developing countries. The concept of the fair trade handicraft business does not depend on many specific factors. Although Cambodia does have a relatively large amount of disabled people, every developing country has rural poor and former prostitutes looking for a safe and reliable means of employment. Many countries already have some form of fair trade enterprise. However, it is important that the work is workshop-based instead of home-based, because home-based employment does not provide the safety, social dimension and counseling that a workshop provides. Of course, buyers have to be located, but in some cases, people buy the products out of idealistic motives, not esthetic ones. As my co-researcher Dennis van Buren mentioned three months into the research: “it does not matter what these people create, if they would sell a wooden square which had no use at all, it would sell just as much as any other product these people produce.” If that is the case, producers do not need any knowledge about how to create new or high-quality products, which would make it more accessible to potential producers. Generally, there are no different problems if a producer organization should start a business in another location.

One problem that might arise is that of dependency. Since producers are not likely to be employed in other businesses than the fair trade business, their livelihood comes to depend on the success of that business. In Cambodia, this dependency is somewhat compensated by the large amount of fair trade businesses, with different standards and different atmospheres. However, in another location it could be that there would be only one business. If that were the case, a producer would have a serious problem if the work situation would become so unpleasant that the producer might not be able to work there anymore. However, this might be largest difference with the situation in Cambodia when it comes to running a fair trade handicraft producer organization.

Relevance as a means for development

Although the concept of these fair trade organizations might be expandable to other countries, one question that remains is the scale on which this form of development project is applicable. Right now, the fair trade sector is mainly a niche-market for a limited amount of customers. On top of that, fair trade businesses with a strong social orientation, like those that focus on supporting former prostitutes, are expensive to maintain and cannot survive on sales alone. This limits the producer organizations to working on a relatively small scale. However, as a small-scale enterprise, producer organizations can provide producers with a sustainable livelihood for the rest of their lives. This is the most merit of producer organizations as a means for development. Although they might not be able to help many people in a short time, they provide a small amount of people with the rare quality of job security with a reasonable wage. On the long term, this is most valuable to producers (and indirectly to the family of the producers). If fair trade is able to move out of the niche-market without making compromising the benefits provided to producers, the relevance of fair trade producer organizations as a means for development increases exponentially, but whether this will happen is uncertain at this moment.



Overall, although fair trade producer organizations might not be the solution to world poverty in general, as a means for development it is very effective in achieving sustainable empowerment of its producers.

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Annex 1: List of interviewees

<i>Name of organization</i>	<i>Name of interviewee</i>
Watthan	Sophearak (manager) Mien Sochean Sokbana Sri tya Sinchan li Boei twin Soen mun Mit than Kong salin Sok lei sim Sien
Villageworks	Norm Bunak (Manager) Laa Sroei kim sien Sokall Rajana Sokin Sry nim Chandanra Reng oun
Peace handicraft	Chamnam (manager) Saaphia Srey toit Banari Rotha Sopheap Noewan Sinna Koit Boo sophea Samban
NCDP	Teng heng (manager) Roan Srey oh Sambat Sokaran Dani On win Tjariya Sok lim



	Sokheen Wan tan theum Kounty
VCAO	Kruiy malen (manager) Sela Lai lim Lin Srey laa Paan sapoan
Rehab craft	Sophan (manager) On tjan tiyeng Chany Ang Jin sing jin Sopheha Snah Sothea Srey mom Wan yen On tho
Afesip	Rotha (manager) Kohm Sopheha Toeit Srey kaa Tjoen Prain Valeen Monica Srey Leah Tjetraa
Yodiffee	Ouch nimul (manager) Kangchana Pol rothi Srey on Yari Kountia Tang saphee Nom joon Sarayn Sopheha
Rajana	Sabaay (manager) Katmangrea Sowan Sopendi



	Sida Prom tam saa Pranetrja Thaa win Mien Sophea Sok laa Sroh T'jan taa
Sentosa	Vathana (sentosa) Watanak Srey on Ai saram At Avisea
Ta phrom	Kim Kong (manager) Tanei Sokee Soklee Thawie
Samatoa	Awen Delaval (manager) 5 producers, no names.
The mat shop	Chivy (manager)
Cha	Hak Kim Ta (manager)
Nyemo	Sopheak (business manager) Nep rotha (social manager)
Knn	Kanady (manager) Svai rien
Can-do	Heang sarim (manager) Focus group with 15 producers, no names.
Independent home-based producer	Makra
Craftnetwork	Jose Vahl (manager) Oni
AAC	Men Sinoeun (Manager) Seng
Traidcraft	Nina Howard (manager) Antonia Marison
Mennonite Central Committee	Carry Martin

Annex 2: Report on how the research was conducted.

The first month: 14th of February – 15th of March

Arrival in Cambodia was good. The journey was without complications and when we arrived at our apartment Phearum, a kind Cambodian man who worked for Craftnetwork, a member of our host organization, received us. He showed us the apartment and we decided it was fine. We both suffered from our jetlag, but luckily, we arrived on a Saturday, which meant that we did not have to start work until two days later.

Unfortunately, our local host was still in Germany with her assistant and there were no other people authorized to grant us access to the documents of Craftnetwork. There were four employees of Craftnetwork who worked downstairs from us and although they were informed that two students were coming to research handicraft and we told them when we met them, we had the feeling they did not really understand what we were doing in Cambodia. Therefore, after one week we gave a presentation, which was translated to Khmer by Rotha, the accountant who had the best English level. The presentation helped, they did not look strange at us anymore after that. In the second week, Craftnetworks second-in-command, Oni, arrived in Phnom Penh and we met with her, but she could not provide us with a lot of documentation either.

We did not meet our local host, Jose, until the beginning of March, because she was at abroad until then. However, when we finally did meet her, she was very helpful. In the meantime, we (Dennis van Buren and me) kept busy with interviewing members from the other three umbrella organizations, but we were only able to meet with two of them, the third one did not reply at all and was out when we visited his office. This was a problem, because we needed his permission to get contact with most of the producer organizations, the others did not supervise producer organizations that employed handicapped or former prostitutes. Even after two meetings with the Cambodian fair trade forum, on which he should have been present, we still had not heard or seen him.

During these weeks, we had more time on our hands than we wanted, so we contacted some foreign organizations that released case studies on handicraft production. Unfortunately, only one organization replied, so we had one case study to read during our free time. We also prepared a questionnaire about a few properties of producer organizations to send out to the representatives of the umbrella organizations so we would have a clearer view of the size and activities of the producer organizations. Unfortunately, most umbrella organization members were too busy to fill in this questionnaire, only our local host filled it in in time, but she only had knowledge of about 20% of the producer organizations in which we were interested.

In the fourth week of the research we called to the office of AAC (the final and most important umbrella organization we still had not gotten in touch with) once more, looking for the assistant manager, since the manager seemed impossible to reach. However, when we called, it turned out that the manager was present, so we asked him if we could interview him. He said he would think about whether he had time for an interview and said he would call us back later that day, but we were not

very hopeful. We discussed this problem with our local host and she put some pressure on him, which resulted in him agreeing to do an interview. When we interviewed him the next day, it turned out he was quite difficult to interview, since he hardly ever gave a direct answer to a question (unlike the hosts of the other umbrella organizations). In addition, during the interview, he invited some foreign designers to join him in the interview. They were a very distorting factor, but we did not want to be impolite, so we finished the interview all together. When we finally came around to asking about documentation about his producer organizations, he claimed that Traidcraft, another umbrella organization, had the rights to these documents, so that we should ask them. Unfortunately, Traidcraft had told us to get it from AAC, so neither organization wanted to release any documentation on the producer organizations. On the next Cambodia Fair Trade Forum meeting, where both organizations were present, we asked whether there was any possibility to gain access to those documents. Traidcraft immediately replied that we had no right to view those documents and took a somewhat hostile attitude towards us (this was the first time we met with the manager of Traidcraft, before we only spoke to employees). We asked whether we could talk to her sometime and explain our intentions and she agreed that we could talk to her after the meeting. However, after the meeting she immediately started talking to other people and then she attended a lecture (which we also attended), but left before the ending and ignored us on her way out. Luckily, her behavior frustrated José, especially since the forum discussed whether it would be interesting for us to come, and they reacted quite enthusiastic and were initially willing to support us. This made Jose more willing to help us.

Overall, the support we received from the umbrella organizations was a lot less than we expected to receive. It was difficult to meet with people and asking for anything was almost not done. Part of the reason for this was that most hosts were very busy and some of them were already preparing to leave the country, but initially the response to our visit had been very enthusiastic and the organizations seemed very willing to help. The real experience was quite disappointing. Because we also did not gain access to the producer organizations until the end of the month, we were quite disappointed in the progress we made in this first month. We did visit all the tourist sites in this month though.

On the social level, things were disappointing as well. We lived in an area where no other foreigners seemed to live and the English language proficiency level of the Cambodians was a lot lower than we expected, which made it very difficult to talk to anyone. Going out wasn't always successful either, since the nightlife seemed mostly focused on stoned backpackers and sextourists, neither were groups of people we were comfortable with. In addition, there was hardly any mixing between foreigners and Cambodians, and several foreigners told us that it was impossible to become friends with the Cambodian people, even though they were very kind to the foreigners. This was another disappointment; I was looking forward to learning about the Cambodian culture from locals.

Due to the problems caused by the fact that we did not speak the same language as Cambodians and we had a lot of free time on our hands, we decided to take lessons in Khmer language. Every morning, from Monday to Friday, at 7:30 we would get class for one hour from a private tutor (who was quite expensive, but also very good).

The second month: 16th of March- 15th of April

After the meeting with AAC, we started calling producer organizations. Because we hardly had any information about them, we decided to do an introductory interview with all producer organizations. We made a list of questions that were necessary to answer for us to progress in the research, so we would have enough information to decide which organizations were interesting for more in-depth research. However, once again we thought too easily about things. Reaching all producer organizations was harder than it seemed. Some did not reply, some did not have time, and some were not interested. However, we did what we could and visited as many organizations as we could. I have had interviews with 17 of about 50 producer organizations over the course of that month. We also contacted some organizations which were not members of the umbrella organization, but they were usually not interested in two researchers auditing their activities or were simply too busy.

During one of the first meetings, we met some producers outside of the workshop who were on their break. Thanks to our little Khmer skills, we were able to chat with them about their work, which was interesting. Of course, we were not able to ask more than “do you live far from here” Or “how are you”, but this was my first contact with producers.

Meeting the producer organizations managers was not always successful either, since it sometimes was the case that we visited a workshop when the manager was out, even though we had a meeting. Although this slowed down the research process, this was a well-known difficulty, so it was no huge problem. We just had to plan everything a little slower. At first, we thought we could visit four producer organizations in one day, but in practice, we were only to visit one or two a day. That is why it took us most of the month to contact all the producer organizations and get a clear view on which organizations would be more interesting for in-depth research.

During this month, I also visited a silk farm in another province. We were supposed to join a group of Development organizations from Phnom Penh on their trip to several handicraft organizations outside of the city. This group was orienting on a project in which they provided support to producer organizations in order to improve livelihoods and preserve Cambodian traditional culture. However, when we went with them, the taxi driver had suddenly raised the price for his activities and after an argument, we were not able to join the Development organizations on the trip. However, one of the organizations was Bud’s silk farm and since Bud (a senior American who lived in Cambodia for over twenty years) was a friend of Jose, I was welcome to take a bus to his farm to visit him. Dennis decided not to join, so I went there alone. I arrived several hours before the development organizations, which gave me time to extensively interview bud, see him give his tour of the organization and even talk to some of his producers without his supervision. This was very inspiring, since his approach really seemed to catch on and although he was progressing slowly, he was progressing steadily and supporting the village he lived in by providing steady and well-paid employment by profiting of the income generated by the tours he gave around his farm and the scarfs he sold after showing the production process. When the development organizations arrived in the evening, it was a revelation. They arrived in big SUVs, asked all the wrong questions (questions which the producers nor Bud seemed to care about, like whether the products reflected the identity of the community or whether Bud considered his business a social enterprise, an NGO or a regular business) and left after twenty

minutes of looking around and a five minute conversation with the producers. In my opinion, the producers were the most crucial element of the entire organization (no matter whether it is an NGO or a social enterprise), and the fact that representatives from such large development organizations (UNDP and UNESCO were among them) were so careless really disappointed me.

Another important event this month was my birthday. We had a party and invited everybody we knew about; from the staff of the only restaurant near our house that served western food to some other Dutch students we had the email address of who were doing an internship in Phnom Penh. This was relevant for both the research as our social lives. First, it was relevant for the research, because we invited the staff of Craftnetwork, who until then was kind to us but treated us a bit skeptical. After the party, they were much more cooperative. On the social level, it changed many contacts from vague acquaintances to friends. After inviting people to our party, we were invited to other social events by them, which finally provided the opportunity to learn more about the country and the culture.

The third month: 16th of April – 15th of May

The last week of the second month and the first two weeks of the third month were not very productive, because during this period was Khmer new-year. This meant that most producer organizations closed and most producers went back to their home village and even the former prostitutes who were not able to go back to their family took a holiday together. Dennis took this time of to spend a week in Vietnam, but I stayed in Phnom Penh because some Cambodian friends asked me to spend new-year with them. My Khmer language skills had increased a lot, and even though Dennis stopped taking the classes, I still went every day and enjoyed it. I was able to speak basic Khmer after about six weeks of classes (a vocabulary of about 200 words), which was more Khmer than most foreigners spoke. This made it possible for me to become friends with Cambodians despite the skepticism of the foreigners I spoke with in the first weeks of the research. I had lunch at the local market every day, where I practiced my language skills by talking to everyone near my standard lunch address. The Cambodians responded very positive to my Khmer skills, and it turned out they mostly understood some English and were able to speak it as well, but were simply too shy. Over time, we developed a special dialect that mixed Khmer with English, which made it possible for us to communicate almost everything. These friendships also opened many doors to the Cambodian culture for me. I was taken to the clubs where the Khmer jet set hung out (and met with Cambodian models and the son of the prime minister), was invited to their house in the slums (where they usually don't invite foreigners out of embarrassment), learned to eat dog meat and drink self-made liquor (which is generally only consumed in villages or by gangsters in the city, so it's not sold openly, but all Cambodians seemed to know where it is sold) and spent a few days with the family of a friend in a small village when she was getting married there and was included in all the rituals. These contacts taught me more about how to approach the producers and my friends there advised me on how to conduct the interviews. One of these contacts also introduced me to a home-based producer, who worked for several different organizations and who showed me her social activities one time. Of course friendships are not only for sharing the fun parts, which meant that I also learned a lot about the dark side of the Cambodian culture, the enforced marriages, the exploitation of girls by foreign

guys, the impact of the international crisis on local market employees, the sexual harassments, the poverty and the generation gap.

When Khmer new-year was over, I started making appointments with producer organizations to visit their producers (producer organizations did not want to plan beyond Khmer new-year before it was over) and a few days later I was able to visit the first workshops. Because my Khmer language skills were not sufficient to do an entire research responsibly and most producers did not speak any English, I looked for a translator. I had some difficulties finding a decent translator, since proper English skills are scarce in Cambodia and because there is a lot of competition between the large amounts of development organizations for translators, an official translator was excessively expensive for me (they asked around 25 dollars an hour!). I heard that a colleague of mine received a budget for a translator by her host organization, but for me this was not possible. Students were also difficult, because even in university, the English skills were minimal and most students went to school when I wanted to conduct interviews or they had a second job where they could not easily get free time. Thanks to Jose, I found one person who spoke relatively good English and was willing to work with me for 10 dollars for half a day of work. After going through the research questions and the questionnaire for the producers with them, we started working together. He was a bit shy, but always a very proper and polite man, which was important to me, especially since we had to talk to groups of people most Cambodians look down on. At first, the interviews were quite difficult to complete, but after some experimenting with the questions in the questionnaire, the interviews were proper after about ten experimental interviews.

Most days of this month consisted of conducting interviews in the morning and calling organizations for meetings in the afternoon. Unfortunately, I had to quit my Khmer lessons when I started working with the translator, because I could not afford both, but by then I had made enough friends to ask them when I did not understand a word. I did not make a selection in the organizations which I researched from AAC, but I did decide not to go after all organizations which were supported by the Cambodian Fair trade forum, since most of those organizations either did not have any workshops and did not focus on the disabled or former prostitutes, or because they did not seem to add much to the amount of organizations I already had access to, of which most were focused on rural poor already. I had my hands full with the organizations I had access to, and luckily, Dennis did speak to those organizations, since he only spoke to managers. When he encountered an organization that was substantially different from other organizations, he let me know and then I contacted them, but that only happened one time, in the last month of the research.

In the beginning of May, we also organized a workshop for the managers of producer organizations, to learn more about their knowledge of fair trade and especially their knowledge of the value chain. This was not directly relevant for my research, but a second goal of this workshop was to educate producers on fair trade (for example, they were not aware of the 10 standards of fair trade set by the world fair trade organization). I was more interested in the second week, when there was a boat trip with many producers to celebrate world fair trade day and we were holding a quiz among the producers to test their knowledge of fair trade. Although they barely knew anything (as expected), it was a good chance to give the producers a positive image of me, which helped me when I was going to visit a workshop of former prostitutes the next week. I had been there before, but now they were less shy.

I did visit some home-based producers with a manager of an organization once. This was interesting, to see the difference between producers working in a workshop and working at home in the city. Unfortunately, my translator was unable to join that day, so the manager had to translate everything, which made the answers less reliable. However, I did not get the impression the manager was holding back any information. I also visited a workshop for former child-prostitutes outside of the city with the manager, which was the same situation. Generally, the managers were very cooperative and genuinely interested in their producers. If there were any problems, then the managers wanted to know about them too. It was also interesting to spend time with a manager in the informal setting of a bus ride or lunch; they were generally more open when the microphone was off.

The fourth month: 16th of May – 21st of June

The first two weeks of this month were similar to the last two weeks of the third month: trying to talk to as many producers as possible. Some producers were very shy and hardly gave me any input, but there were other producers who were very open and spent more than an hour interviewing. Such interviews were a lot easier. It was also quite difficult to make a producer feel comfortable when everything has to go through a translator, since compliments are sometimes changed in tone and jokes are often misunderstood. Physical comedy did seem to comfort them, like when I showed them how I was unable to sit Asian style or when I needed assistance to start my motorbike, but this was often only during the beginning of the interview, during the interview the tone would become serious again and producers would go back to their shy attitude. However, producers did answer every question I asked them, even personal questions about their social background or their income (although I was not allowed to ask too much about the past of former prostitutes, that was the only limitation). I did encounter one awkward situation with a manager of a producer organization. When I visited the official manager, she showed me the door. After coming back several times, she allowed me to interview the assistant manager, a Khmer man of my age. His attitude was the complete opposite of his boss. He was very open and talked about everything I asked him. However, after the interview he started calling and emailing me, telling me how much he loved meeting me and asking me if he could become my 'close friend'. The next time I met with him, to gain access to the producers, he wanted to meet at a restaurant and it almost seemed like a date. When I came there, he told me how handsome I looked. This made me very uncomfortable, but I was not sure if he was actually a gay man trying to make a move on me, or simply a man lacking social skills who was looking for a friend. I needed his support to gain access to the producers, so I did not comment on his attitude as long as he did not cross any lines, but it was quite uncomfortable and as soon as I spoke to the producers and had a tour of the workshop, I stayed away from his organization.

Together with Dennis, I visited an organization in one of the most distant provinces of Cambodia: Ratanakiri. There was one organization we had dinner with the evening we arrived. The next day, he showed us the villages where home-based producers worked. We were also able to conduct a focus group because luckily there was a town meeting to discuss a business plan for the upcoming years regarding the production of handicraft. What I mainly learned from that is that rural producers are not interested in becoming full-time producers, even if it would increase their income. The fact that they work on the land, just as their ancestors did before them, will not change by more money. Being

farmer was a crucial part of their identity. Although the way to the villages was terrifying (first with a bus for 13 hours, where the driver did not sleep, drank some sort of drug to stay focused while driving in the dark over a narrow and muddy road on which the bus slipped through the corners, then the next morning on the back of a motorbike, full speed off the mountains on a slippery road while the driver only has one hand on the steering wheel while using the other one to hold his phone while he is calling), it was definitely worth the trip.

In this last month, I also visited another workshop in Siem Reap, the biggest city after Phnom Penh. Dennis had visited that organization and advised me to visit it, because it took better care of its producers than any other organization he had visited so far. Because my translator was not able to get away with me for a couple of days because he had another job and school, I took one of my friends with me, who was able to get some time off from work. Although the organization did not impress me as much as it had impressed Dennis (what Dennis heard was only about one or two top producers, who also manage the workshop, the other producers were a lot less well off, although they were no worse off than most of the producers I interviewed), it was interesting to work with a completely different translator. First, she was a woman, something I did not regard as important until then, but which seemed to make the producers (who were often women) a bit more comfortable. Second, her approach was very different from that of my standard translator. She did not only translate my questions, but asked questions herself, commented on answers provided by producers and sometimes made fun of me during the interviews. Generally all things that a translator should not do, but it worked amazingly well. The producers started talking much more, were a lot more comfortable and even proposed to show us their homes. Once the interviews were finished and we had a tour of the homes of the producers (who lived next to the workshop), we stayed to chat with the producers and when we left, there were a much more comfortable atmosphere than I was used to. This made me wonder about the information I might have missed out on during previous interviews with my original translator. However, this trip was about one week before I left the country. This trip was even taken after the presentation we gave to the producer organizations and the umbrella organizations to show the results of the research, but I wanted to see if that organization was actually so different.

The last days of my stay in Cambodia, I spent processing data in SPSS, doing final interviews with managers of producer organizations to crosscheck the results from the producer interviews, buying souvenirs for all my friends in the Netherlands, buying parting gifts for all my friends in Cambodia and by preparing our going away party. Two days after the party, we went back to the Netherlands, where we spent the first two weeks finishing the research report.