Conflict on the interface

The process of knowledge production and negotiation in local capacity building of Cambodian vegetable farmers

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Summary

This research takes place in Svay Rieng, Cambodia where SNV Netherlands aims to develop vegetable farmers' value chain through building the capacity of a local organisation, CFAP Cambodia, as well as assisting farmers’ organisations and the farmers themselves. The aim of the research is to answer the question: How does the interface of different actors’ knowledge networks, as well as the brokerage of knowledge exchange by these actors, influence knowledge for capacity building and farming techniques in the SNV/CFAP project supporting vegetable farmers in Svay Rieng and how do these farmers negotiate this knowledge?

It is important to answer this question as practicing development intervention shows us that projects are rarely linear in nature (whereby a uniform goal leads to practiced objectives and clear results), but rather complex. Its complexity is partly due to there often being several actors involved who each have their own goals, visions and perceptions of the project and even, the problem. The way a group of people understands the world and applies meaning to their experiences is their individual knowledge network. Furthermore there is a gap between the ‘experts’ and the ‘users’ which often results in them not understanding each other or misaligning their goals. Different actors’ knowledge networks meet on an intersection called the knowledge interface. Mapping the knowledge interface of the project shows us that the various actors’ involvement complicates the project structure. For example SNV aims to build the capacity of CFAP, who are expected to build farmers’ organisations capacity, who in turn provide trainings to the farmers. However, as SNV is not only interested in the capacity of CFAP but ultimately in the development of the farmers, they often have direct contact with these groups as well. Secondly, CFAP is not only connected to SNV but also to other NGOs and therefore has different priorities or interests then SNV does, leading to some frustration and negotiation of power on both sides. It is then clear that the complexity of the interface leads to conflict as the actors attempt to reach their own goals through negotiation and sometimes resistance. Power-plays in negotiation must also not be overlooked, as actors work to establish their position in order to execute influence. Important actors on the nodes of the interface, called knowledge brokers, especially, hold a powerful position and they are able to incorporate their own views by focusing on certain information or steering other actors. Different actors’ constructions and negotiations then change how information is transferred in the project, leaving little of the original information (as envisioned by SNV) to actually reach the farmers.

In the case of the farmers, the way they receive the information they get from the experts is also dependent on the way they perceive their situation, their needs and the project. This is influenced by their lifeworld, as their decisions are dependent on their internal knowledge, that is, their habits, preferences, tacit knowledge, beliefs, etc. and their external circumstances, such as their financial situation and difficulties they encounter such as floods or drought. These three elements then play an important factor in their knowledge negotiation. However rather than seeing farmers as products of their circumstances it is interesting to discuss how they are active in creating their own development. Farmers are not limited by the characterisations placed upon them by experts but rather make use of different performances in order to negotiate their position and reach their goals. Through case studies we find that they are then not passive recipients but rather active agents who make interesting choices and strategize their survival in unique ways. It is then important that experts are careful to categorise them or rationalise their behaviour through labelling or overarching rationalisations. Finally, we need to question whether the estimation of experts of a project not reaching its goal is due to their own constructions, and consequently, how they can work towards objectives while simultaneously respecting possibility the farmers that farmers see things in a different (but not less true) way.
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Introduction

As seen from the outside, development projects can seem fairly straightforward: a goal is set up, objectives are pursued, which eventually should lead to results. However, if one looks closer, one would see that in fact, rather than consisting of a clear linear structure, most projects are a spider-web of complex linkages with different stakeholders pursuing different goals, or at least, different interpretations of the original goal. It is important to understand more about these complexities when carrying out a project, as it leads to better understanding and subsequent fewer misconceptions.

The development project that this research wishes to focus on is one supported by the Dutch development organisation SNV. Since 2009 SNV has been involved in a vegetable value chain development programme in Svay Rieng, Cambodia, and includes delivering capacity building advisory services to CFAP (Cambodian Farmers’ Association Federation of Agricultural Producers). CFAP is geared towards a FO (Farmers’ Organization) style of development, meaning for example that it aims to be member-driven in governance structure, and focuses on increasing knowledge, technical skills and leadership skills. The project that SNV is involved in aims specifically to improve the income of small producer groups from fresh (safe) vegetables cultivated for both domestic consumption and market supply.

In a development project such as this several stakeholders can be distinguished who operate on different levels. The SNV project takes place on three main levels of organisation. CFAP’s members are commune farmer associations (CFAs) and commune-based organisations (CBOs), who in turn support small farmers. Knowledge and skills needed to scale up vegetable production and marketing can then both be transferred through several stakeholders before reaching the end users. However, these stakeholders also have their own knowledge networks which they use as an information source and which influences the way they process or transfer the information. The project becomes a field in which knowledge is negotiated. How then do these knowledge networks work? How do they interact with each other and create new knowledge? And what role do power and peoples objectives play?

This research will explore the plane upon which information is transferred (the so-called *interface*), the ways people make project knowledge their own and use it for their own goals, the resulting (lack of) cohesion between organisations and end users’ goals and finally argue for the necessity of regarding users as actors.
Research objectives

The objective of this study is three-fold: societal, scientific, and personal.

The societal objective of this research relates to SNV’s value chain development project in Svay Rieng. While this project is already running, SNV has noted that it is not as effective as they had aimed for. Vegetable farmers are not being supported adequately and as a result are not making progress as planned. It is hoped that this research will help SNV to understand more about the processes taking place within their project with regards to information transfer between the various stakeholders as well as points where objectives of the organisation and farmers do not match. A better understanding of the farmers and their goals might lead to more effective training programmes, with the end goal of a more successful development of the vegetable farmers. Finally, having better quality products and being linked to economic markets will increase their livelihood security.

The scientific objective of this research is an application and possible elaboration of Long’s theory on knowledge interfaces and actor oriented research. Case studies will attempt to apply the theory to a current project, testing its relevance and linking the theory to insights for development intervention. This study then hopes to add to the existing body of knowledge on the concepts of interface and knowledge negotiation as well as possibly provide openings for new research.

Personally, I have long had an interest in the relationship between expert knowledge and user knowledge, as well as their respective goals and strategies. An article on sanitation management in urban slums first acquainted me with the concept of the expert-user gap, and a course in Anthropology of Development introduced the concept of interface and widened my way of thinking about development. I am excited to be able to apply the knowledge I gained to an existing case. Through this research I hope to gain insights on the difficult contexts that development projects deal with, and learn to avoid linear thinking. Finally, this research is my Master’s Thesis for International Development Studies at Wageningen University.
Setting the scene

It is interesting to me that, several times as I told people I was leaving for Cambodia, they assumed I was talking about a country in South-America (most likely Colombia). It appears then that Cambodia is not well-known, and therefore, neither is the reason why development aid is even necessary there in the first place. That is, other than the general assumption that ‘they are poor’. So, before I begin, I feel it is important for the reader to get acquainted with the setting within which I performed my research, as learning more about Cambodia’s history and the dynamics between Cambodian people and development organisations, ultimately helped me to understand their lifeworlds better (which I will discuss later on).

Cambodia is a Southeast Asian country, bordering Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and the gulf of Thailand. It has a population of almost 15 million people, 90 per cent of whom are ethnic Khmer. Over 95 per cent of the population is Buddhist, making the population fairly homogenous, by those standards. Unfortunately this did not prevent extreme internal strife, as recent history shows. After gaining independence from France in 1953, Cambodia was a constitutional monarchy under Prince Sihanouk. However, the Vietnam war caused unrest in the country, as Cambodia became a sanctuary for Vietnamese communists. Sihanouk’s perceived support for the communists led to a military coup and a new, anti-communist regime. Conflicts erupted between the two forces, resulting in a decade-long civil war between the republican and communist forces.

This ended in 1975 in the victory of the Communist party Khmer Rouge, and Cambodia became the Democratic Republic of Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge period lasted until ’79, during which many assassinations of people associated with the former regime and educated elites took place. Now a worker-peasant revolutionary state, the Khmer Rouge’s main focus was on a self-sufficient agrarian society. Towns were evacuated and Cambodians were forced to work in large rural cooperatives, where many died from hunger and exhaustion. While production was sufficient, massive exports and storage of food for the war led to famine in ’77 and ’78. In total at least one million and perhaps two million people became victims of the war and the regime.¹

¹ GOM, 1997
The Khmer Rouge fell from power through the invasion of Vietnam in ’79. They installed a new regime and continued to occupy central Cambodia until ’1989. Finally, after decades of conflict, continuing resistance and the forming of a coalition government-in-exile led to a settlement and peace accord in 1991. However, many areas continued to be controlled by the Khmer Rouge, making many parts of the country unsafe for years to come. All this has resulted in a massive part of the population being highly traumatized as well as lacking in access to land (through displacement, ongoing violence and landmines), natural assets, infrastructure, low access to trade markets and low security (crime and violence).

During the Vietnamese regime, attempts were made to rebuild the government apparatus. At this time, administrative and political institutions were either non-existent or not yet functioning at the local level. Also, there was little capacity, as the educated elite had either fled or been killed during the war. Since there was still much continuing unrest, the main focus of the local administration was security, and the military often played a part in local governance. A focus on development was only possible in those areas where there was more peace. Also, the conditions created by the war, together with the country’s socio-cultural values made it difficult to transform from an authoritative regime into a democratic state and from a centrally planned to a market economy. Bureaucracy was overextended and generally weak, and systems of patronage and hierarchical power relations fostered a governance characterized by strongback relationships and corruption.

Currently, Cambodia is ranked 139 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index. While this is still considered considerably low, there is recognition for the fact that Cambodia has made significant progress between 1995 and 2011. Between 2004 and 2007, there was an economic growth rate of 10 per cent per year, a result of an expansion of the agricultural sector and the garment, construction and tourism industries. However, while industrial growth has been significant since the end of the war, over 70 per cent of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. Rice farming is the most important agricultural activity, followed by livestock, rubber, corn, and vegetables. Though this varies per province, as some areas are capable of specialised plantations while others are much less arable. Also, low and fluctuating prices keep poor families in a constant state of poverty. Agricultural production is mainly low-skill subsistence farming on a small scale. According to CFAP, the main constraints to the Cambodian agricultural sector are: inadequate transportation and irrigation infrastructure, lack of agriculture inputs, inefficient marketing and inconsistent institutional support. Furthermore, entrepreneurship, networks, value chain linkages and general agricultural skills are weak, and farmers have limited access to technical support and market information.

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2 GOM, 1997
3 GOM, 1997; Narayan and Patesch, 2010
4 UNDP, 2011
5 CIA World Factbook, 2012
On my very first fieldtrip, a staff member of SNV showed me around some of the farms they were helping. It was interesting to see how, in addition to SNV, the influence of other development organisations was also visibly present. As I looked closer at the water pump, there was a sign that it was donated by Unicef. Another farmer showed us his biogas installation, installed by another NGO. During my many subsequent visits to farmers’ houses, I could often spot such little clues and found it funny to think how the signs become almost little flags, marking the spot, as if to say ‘we were here’. Though this doesn’t necessarily mean that all farmers are helped by (or make use of) NGOs on a regular basis, I think that even a short glance shows that NGOs are an important factor in the Cambodian agricultural world.

**Development cooperation in Cambodia**

According to Bennet, the history of development cooperation in Cambodia can be divided into three periods. The first is called the 'emergency period'. From 1979 to 1982, the country was in dire need of assistance, and received a massive influx of aid from the UN and Western states. Priority was given to health and agriculture, with the NGOs focusing on infrastructure and services. After the emergency period, the 'isolation period' was characterized by a withdrawal of aid and a ban on trade and development aid imposed by the UN and the West. The only influx of aid came from the Eastern bloc. Finally, a period of 'transition and liberation' set in after 1987. As aid from the Eastern bloc dried up, the main change was the emerging aid from major donor organisations and NGOs. Mehmet states: "From the late 1980s onwards Western indifference and guilt finally resulted in the arrival of a new invading force in Cambodia: Western NGOs".

The ‘NGO invasion’ had a huge impact on the Cambodian administrational landscape. A distrust of the existing administration led to a parallel structure created with NGOs, multilateral agencies and consultants, which performed many government tasks. There was little attention for government participation and capacity development, and national economic policy was heavily influenced by the stabilization and structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and WB. At the end of the 90s most international NGOs reoriented their programmes away from the involvement with national government structures, and started focusing more on partnering with Cambodian groups.

As Cambodia made significant economic progress, the government began to regulate NGO behaviour more, feeling they were too domineering on matters such as human rights, corruption and environmentalism. Furthermore, developmental activity in Cambodia is now increasingly focused on participation, leading to emergence of cooperatives such as community based organisations (CBOs) and farmer organisations (FOs). These organisations are membership based, their objectives being for the benefit of the membership and independent of politics or religion. Main points of interest are technical training, environmental management, and gender issues. Difficulties for the FOs and CBOs mainly lay in the fact that their style of working is fairly new and they are therefore often misunderstood for NGOs. Concepts such as an annual membership fee are therefore difficult to implement, as members are reluctant to pay regularly as they are used to outside donors covering

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6 GOM, 1997
7 Mehmet, 1997, p.681
their costs. Recognition is growing however, and larger organisations and governments are working to increase their capacity and help them to become more and more independent from outside aid. There is a great potential for this, as there exists in Cambodia a wide variety of strength of NGOs, from those backed by international NGOs and operating nation-wide, to community-based organisations at the local level. As GOM stated, international NGOs should be more devoted to develop national capacity and genuine partnerships with national NGOs, as they can help each other.

"National NGOs hardly have access to the means and the experts, they do not speak the 'development jargon', have limited access to international donors and networks. There is no way that national NGOs could copy the community development methods, with its baseline studies, project design and assessment phases. This is far too high-tech. But, on the other hand, national NGOs do have a powerful advantage over international NGOs: they are Cambodian and know their possibilities as well as limitations within the political context." 8

This last quote I find especially interesting, as it discusses the necessity for development to use expert knowledge and connect this to the local level. For decades, many NGOs have been active in Cambodia, each envisioning a way in which they can help the country develop. But years later there are also many that feel they have not been making as much progress as they wished. Why do so many good plans go to waste? This is also a question that I have been asking myself over the course of my studies, and by studying the dynamics between expert knowledge and local knowledge in Cambodia, I hope to find some answers.

The first chapter will explain about the research methods I used to gather my information and discuss some important concepts necessary for my analysis. The second chapter will then map the project interface and discuss how information is transferred in the project and how knowledge negotiation then takes place. Also, I will describe the farmers’ lifeworlds and discuss the effects of their lifeworlds on how they view the project and act. Chapter three will discuss the processes of knowledge negotiation more thoroughly, as well as the processes surrounding the expert-user gap. Finally, in the last chapter, I will use specific farmers’ cases to explain how farmers negotiate on the interface and how they are actors in their own right.

8 GOM, 1997, p.35
1. Researching the interface

Recently I visited a friend who showed me a lamp that she had created out of an old tree trunk. She planned it out and proceeded to drill a hole from top to bottom through which she could lead the electrical wires. However, the tricky part was not the planning, but the execution. Because the drill wasn’t long enough, she needed to drill top-down to the middle of the trunk on one side, then turn it over and drill from bottom-up. She told me it took her forever to get both drill-holes aligned, as both ends kept missing each other. I imagine development is like that. Both parties can have great ideas of how to reach their goal, but eventually, even with the best of intentions, completely fail to connect and miss their purpose.

Long and Villareal tell us “intervention is a highly complex process which is continuously being reshaped by the negotiations and strategies that take place between the various parties involved. This means that planned intervention aimed at establishing a particular project becomes the catalyst for the emergence of several, often contradictory, interpretations of the aims and significance of the so-called project. This arises because different actors accord different social meanings to the events and visualize different trajectories for the project. These different social constructions are formed through a process of internalization by which the actors attempt to locate their experiences of the project in relation to their lifeworlds and aspirations.” In any development project it is vital to ensure cohesion between the experts’ goals and those of the users. When they do not match, situations can result where stakeholders are at cross-purpose and neither feels that their goal is being reached. A variation in expectations of the project can lead to a lack of cooperation or other differences. On the level of the end users, their expectations of what they hope to get out of the project might lead them to behave differently than is expected of them.

Over the last few decades, development theorists have increasingly recognised that development intervention is not as straightforward as was (and often still is) assumed by NGOs. That thinking was based on the idea that intervention took place within ‘a defined time-space setting involving the interaction between so-called intervening parties and target or recipient groups’. The developer was essentially a doctor who diagnosed the problem and prescribed a cure according to a specific project cycle with various activities in a logical order: setting the policy agenda, defining the problem, formulating alternatives, designing the policy, implementing it and evaluating the results. The intervention, or the cure, was then imagined as a ‘package’ (material or otherwise) from outside, to be delivered to a lacking target group.

The growing recognition of the complexity of the development process has allowed NGOs to realize more and more that their intervention does not take place in a vacuum, but rather in a complex arena of evolving social practices and struggles. On both the side of the ‘intervened’ and the ‘intervening parties’ there is existing knowledge, both collective and individual, and therefore intervention implies ‘the confrontation or interpenetration of different lifeworlds and socio-political

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9 Long and Villarreal in Long. et. al., 1989, p.103
10 Long and van der Ploeg, 1989, p.228
11 Long and van der Ploeg, 1989
experiences’ Development then is an ‘on-going, socially-constructed and negotiated process, not simply the execution of an already-specified plan of action with expected outcomes.12

However, even with this growing realization, it has proven extremely difficult for theory to be put into practice. How can an organisation truly connect with the people they are trying to help? Zawde says that “many programmes are formulated in foreign offices instead of being built around local realities and so fail to respond to real needs.” 13 It seems to me that with all their good intentions, the result of development intervention is often frustration. How can this be overcome? As in most cases with development, there is no clear-cut answer. But I believe that a step towards bridging the gap between the experts and the locals is understanding more about the way in which they think and how this affects the way knowledge is transferred and negotiated.

I finally found an opportunity for researching this matter more closely when I joined SNV Netherlands Development Organisation as an intern in April 2012. Stationed in Svay Rieng, a Cambodian town close to the Vietnamese border, I spent four months working with SNV and CFAP Cambodia, a local organisation. Together with another Dutch intern I was asked to research the functionality of SNV in building the capacity of CFAP, and the connection of CFAP’s activities to the needs of the Cambodian farmer organisations (FOs) and farmers. The reason SNV had asked us to do so was that they felt that the project wasn’t making as much progress as they had hoped, stating: “CFAs/CBOs do not seem to be quite active in assisting/supporting their vegetable farmers. We believe that this is probably because of something to do with incentive, resource mobilisation, management and visioning.” 14 SNV’s project in Svay Rieng has been operational since 2009 and at first was projected to take three years. Now, at the end of that time-frame, they seemed to feel that their goals had not been fully reached, and the internship was set up to evaluate the project However, I felt that besides the thoughts and recommendations we were able to give SNV, there was definitely room for more in-depth study on how the farmers personally perceive the knowledge they receive from SNV through CFAP. Because even though SNV feels the project is not progressing as planned, does that mean the farmers agree? How do they see SNV, and how are they actively working to pursue their own goals? And what can we tell about the farmers’ lifeworlds and how this affects their knowledge negotiation and decision-making?

During my internship I found there were two interesting processes in the project that were worth examining so I could learn more about knowledge negotiation. Firstly I learned about how the different actors transfer information via each other to the farmers. This knowledge transfer includes negotiation, as the various actors have different goals, expectations and ways of viewing the project and each other. Secondly, the farmer also negotiates the knowledge he eventually receives through the project to come to his eventual decision of how to practice his farming. It is important to really understand the farmers’ lifeworlds, as this shows us why they make the choices they do and what motivates them. Also their goals and expectations are significant. The circumstances they have to deal with, together with their motivations, will then be a factor in the aforementioned negotiation. I also want to compare what I learned about their personal knowledge negotiation with the way SNV/CFAP sees the farmers. This can explain how farmers are not merely targets of development aid, but rather actors in their own right active in developing themselves.

12 Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989
13 Zawde in Hilhorst, 2002, p.364
14 SNV, 2012a
1.1 Research questions
In order to understand these processes I have formulated a main research question and several sub-questions. These are:

How does the interface of different actors’ knowledge networks, as well as the brokerage of knowledge exchange by these actors, influence knowledge for capacity building and farming techniques in the SNV/CFAP project supporting vegetable farmers in Svay Rieng and how do these farmers negotiate this knowledge?

1. At what levels of the project does information and knowledge exchange take place and who is involved? What different knowledge networks can be identified for SNV/CFAP and the CFA/CBOs and farmers?

2. How is information transferred in the project? How do the actors negotiate and broker knowledge? How do they relate to each other, and how do their visions, goals and expectations, influence their interaction?

3. What are the lifeworlds of (Cambodian) farmers and how does this shape their understanding of the project and their learning experience?

4. What is the process of knowledge production from the farmers’ perspective and what interactions can be found on the interface?

5. How is knowledge negotiated by the farmers, and what strategies of involvement and agency can be found in their application of the knowledge?
1.2 Methods

I was lucky that the data I gathered during my internship was also extremely helpful for several of my research questions. In particular I feel like I learned a lot about the project structure and the different knowledge networks of the organisations and how they work together. I also learned about the different information sources the farmers make use of and about their expectations for the project. Some information was still missing however, in particular in-depth information about specific farmer cases. All in all there were several methods that I used to gather the data I will use in this report.

During the course of my internship, Participatory Rural Appraisals were conducted with 9 farmer groups and 5 CFA/CBO committees. We were also often able to learn through participating in activities of SNV and CFAP. Several interviews with SNV and CFAP staff and a trainer were conducted, some of which during the main data-gathering time of the research. I also held ten additional interviews with the farmers and committee members as well as observing three case farmers more closely during a two-day homestay while interviewing and observing them.

As I did not speak any Khmer (even after six months I’ve only been able to learn enough to buy vegetables at the market, never mind conducting an interview), SNV arranged for three local students (from Kampung Cham and Siem Reap) to assist us. During the internship they fulfilled the role of cultural translator and assistant, helping us with many practical issues, as well as translating during the interviews, conducting some interviews on their own, and facilitating the PRAs. When I did my main research one translator stayed behind to help me with my interviews and case studies. She also took on the task of moto-dap, driving me through the rice fields on the back of the motorbike.

As the translators were contracted by SNV and had no other daily activities, this provided us with the luxury of being able to set our own schedule. After the internship however, one of the challenges I found in working with my translator was our different understanding of conducting in-depth narrative research, especially as I was still learning to do so myself. She felt for example that it would be more efficient for her to do the interview without translating it directly, and telling me about the results afterwards. This is a method we had used during the internship interviews and PRAs. Therefore it was difficult for her to understand why now all of a sudden it was necessary to know what specific expressions and words were used by the farmers, and why I wanted her to translate as literally as possible. This was frustrating at times, as I did not always know how to convey my thoughts in a way that she would know what was expected of her. I found this a definite challenge that I had not yet before encountered in doing research. During the case study homestays however I found her presence helpful at times as her interaction with the farmers and their families eased the atmosphere and the farmer’s idea of being ‘researched’. All in all she proved an invaluable help both in translating as in facilitating meeting for which I am truly grateful.

As stated, the research was conducted in the provincial town of Svay Rieng, and the surrounding area of Svay Rieng province (see Figure 3). The advantages of living in this area were that we lived close to the farmers we researched and were able to really become part of the CFAP team, in contrast to SNV staff members who only visited the area on occasion and for short periods of time. Furthermore it allowed us to learn about Khmer culture and identify with the people, more than we probably would have done if we had lived in the capital Phnom Penh, with all its ‘Western’ facilities and its expat community. The research population comprised SNV and CFAP staff members, hired trainers and committee members of FOs and Cambodian vegetable farmers. The specific people I interviewed and spent time with were based on a method of convenience as well as being referred to by others as interesting people to talk to. I also asked around a lot for people with interesting stories noted down interesting cases during my internship, which led to my final selection of interviewees.
1.2.1 Literature
During the beginning phases of writing the proposals for this research and for the internship I read many documents on SNV, CFAP and the project, as well as studying literature on the concepts of knowledge, interfacing and negotiation. I am now able to build on this foundation with additional literature research, providing a strong theoretical basis for my conclusions.

Figure 3: map of the research area

1.2.2 Participatory Rural Appraisals
The main goal of the PRAs was to collect data from vegetable farmers and CFA/CBO committee members in a way that was participatory and interactive. As explained in our internship research report, “PRAs have a variety of advantages over other qualitative data collection methods, like focus group discussion and interviews. First, PRAs enable researchers to gather data from a group of people in a relatively short time. Second, PRAs are an interactive research method, which makes the data collection a potentially interesting process for both the researchers and the informants. Third, PRAs have the potential to empower the participants, since in PRAs the participants are the teachers of the facilitators. PRAs can give a voice to people who are otherwise not heard”. The data gathered in the PRAs was intended to answer the questions of our internship research, but have also provided me with useful information for my thesis. For instance I learned a lot about the livelihood activities that vegetable farmers depend on; their relations with organisations that provide them with knowledge and services related to vegetable farming; and their views on being a member of a CFA/CBO. Nine farmer workshops were conducted, with the numbers of farmers attending ranging between eight and twenty-five, as well as four committee workshops with most of the members attending (around 5 people).

1.2.3 Interviews
The interviews conducted were semi-structured interviews, meaning that the questions were prepared beforehand but if the interviewee mentioned something interesting I would deviate from the question and ask them more about that. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher ‘sets the agenda in terms of the topics covered, but the interviewee’s responses determine the kind of information produced about those topics, and the relative importance of each of them.’ During the internship Vera and I interviewed six members of CFAP staff, three members of SNV staff, as well as CFAP’s managing director and the local capacity builder (LCB) recruited to provide training to CFAP staff and CFA/CBO committee members. During the research period I interviewed several farmers.

15 Borsboom and De Vries, 2012
16 Green and Thorogood, 2004
1.2.4 Direct and participant observation
During my internship and research period there were also many opportunities for observation. We attended several trainings, targeted towards the CFAP staff, committee members or farmers themselves. This was helpful in understanding the actors and their approach towards the project, as well observing the actual knowledge exchange moments first hand. Observational methods are important as they help to understand what people do, not only what they say. People can give very different accounts of situations that are not observed in reality, either because they do not speak the (whole) truth, or actually believe the situation to be different themselves. Observational methods allow the researcher to ‘record the mundane and unremarkable (to participants) features of everyday life that interviewees might not feel worth commenting on and the context within which they occur.’\textsuperscript{17} I conducted both direct observation and participant observation, the first meaning having a detached perspective as a researcher, and in the second actively taking part ‘in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture’.\textsuperscript{18}

The latter was mostly done during my three case studies in which I spent two days at farmers’ houses (spending the night twice), joining in on their family activities, playing with their children, and taking time to formulate questions in accordance to what I observed. One of the best moments of my research was the time when I allowed myself to be dragged by three small children to their neighbours’ houses, so they could show me off. They commandeered my camera and took pictures of what they found interesting, I was fed treats and tried to make conversation (which was difficult as my translator had stayed behind to ask some questions to the farmer). Even though these children could not tell me anything about growing vegetables, I felt that the experience was rewarding as it gave me a unique perspective on how they live their lives and who they are.

1.3 Theoretical concepts

1.3.1 Knowledge
As the theory of knowledge is central to researching the farmers’ knowledge negotiation processes, I will now discuss what exactly is meant by knowledge in this research. Knowledge is generally defined as the facts, information and skills acquired by a person through experience or education.\textsuperscript{19} Though often mixed up in general speech, there is substantial difference between the concepts of information and knowledge, as explained by Roux et. al.: “We often fail to discriminate between information and knowledge. In general, information refers to organized data, data endowed with relevance and purpose, or interpreted data. (...) The end product, information, is explicit and can be readily transferred to another party. (...) Knowledge, on the other hand, is defined as a mix of experiences, values, contextual information, and intuition that provides a framework with which to evaluate and incorporate new experiences and information. It is this knowledge that gives people

\textsuperscript{17} Green and Thorogood, 2004
\textsuperscript{18} DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002
\textsuperscript{19} Oxford Dictionary, 2012
their capacity for effective action”.  

Additionally, while information is ‘out there’, knowledge is an internal construct, dependent on the receiver’s ability to internalize and interpret.  

Similarly, in his theory on learning, Van der Veen describes reproductive learning, wherein a fixed body of knowledge is transmitted from a teacher to a learner. For the purpose of this research however, knowledge is not a fixed package, but part of a more reflexive process that influences the way people make sense of the things around them. This is a more subjective type of knowledge, whereby thinking is the main source of knowledge. Knowing involves making a construction of the world in our minds, and through communication with others a consensus is formed, and eventually the development of explanatory perspectives, ‘that permit us to deal with a broader range of experience, to be more discriminating, and to be more open to other perspectives’. According to Bourdieu there is only ‘perspective knowledge’. As it is then consistent of interpretations, it cannot be transmitted as a set body of knowledge. The learning process than can never be a straightforward transmission of information or competencies, and constructions such as ideologies ‘cannot be exported in the same way as bicycles’, since they are transformed in the very process of importation.  

Knowledge is also a social construction, it does not only remain isolated in the individual but is created through interaction, such as when two opposing parties learn from each other by stating their point of view and come to a new insight that neither had beforehand. Knowledge is also social in that its transfer is often dependent on people’s social networks. People with a larger network are more likely to hear about an innovation and trust it as it connects to people they know. Knowledge is social as it is made meaningful through agency. Farmers’ experience is seen in actions as well as knowledge, and is constructed through interaction with other farmers. As Leeuwis et. al. state: “Knowledge arises out of, and is continuously being reshaped by, the accumulated social experiences and culturally acquired dispositions of the actors involved. It is, therefore, crucially associated with the idea of human agency” 

Finally, knowledge is not always explicit, even to those who hold it. Actors often hold beliefs or make assumptions that they are unaware of or do not know how to explain. This is what we call tacit knowledge. “Tacit knowledge is highly personal and difficult to formalize, often making it problematic to share with others. Such knowledge is deeply rooted in an individual’s action and experience, as well as in their ideals, values, or emotions. (...) human knowledge is so deeply contextual, we always know more than we can verbalize, and we can verbalize more than we can write down”. Because it is not explicit and often unrealised, tacit knowledge is difficult to formulate and hold into account, it is, as put by Krätke, ‘sticky’. During this research it is then important to keep in mind that not all

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20 Roux et. al., 2006, p.6  
21 Leeuwis et. al., 1990  
22 Van der Veen, 2000  
23 Van der Veen, 2000  
24 Bourdieu in Brouwers, 1993  
25 Cohen, 1985  
26 Phelps et. al., 2012  
27 Brouwers, 1993  
28 Leeuwis et. al., 1990, p.22  
29 Roux et. al., 2006, p.6  
30 Krätke, 2010
knowledge is ‘out there’ in the sense that it can be captured by outside observers or even be formulated by the actors themselves. Actors can be deliberate in their acts of negotiation as well as being unconscious or even in denial of them and we need to be careful not to make easy assumptions about their motivations or their knowledge.

1.3.2 Knowledge networks and interface

A rural community, having a similar worldview, can have a shared set of knowledge. Wiersum calls this a knowledge system, defining it as “the way a group of people understand the world, and interpret and apply meaning to their experiences”. However Leeuwis et. al. argue for the term ‘knowledge networks’, as their network theory wishes to illuminate the fundamental social character of knowledge processes and places an emphasis on agency. According to them, “different actors develop and utilize different networks of social relations, define their goals differently, and adhere to contrasting cultural models of what constitutes effective social knowledge. These actor relationships and definitions are themselves subject to continuous change and renegotiation. (...) we are not dealing with a unified system or a set of functionally or hierarchically ordered sub-systems, but instead are faced with a multiplicity of social networks and webs of meaning that only partially overlap and are often incompatible. This concept is what we imply by the notion of ”multiple realities.” When different actors utilizing a different network come together, this can result in clashing knowledge networks. However, this conflict is not necessarily negative, but rather can create new knowledge through adaptation and knowledge exchange. The intersection on which different knowledge networks meet and are negotiated is called the knowledge interface. In this research I will map the project interface and describe processes of conflict occurring at the interface, such as negotiation and brokerage.

1.3.3 Local knowledge

When discussing knowledge networks in development projects, it is important to recognise the importance of local knowledge. Local knowledge, also often called traditional knowledge, is often assumed to be mainly those time-old practices that have been passed on to a traditional group of people for generations, never changing. It is defined by the UNISDR as “practices developed by a group of people from an advanced understanding of the local environment, which has been formed over numerous generations of habitation, originating from the community.” Following that assumption, it is easy to see Western knowledge as something standing opposite of local knowledge and coming in to fill a void. However, according to Arce, modernity is not the onset of knowledge in an existing vacuum, but rather knowledge used as an adaption to changing realities. We should then not view knowledge as existing in the Western and non-Western camp, but rather “deal with the interplay and joint appropriation and transformation of different bodies of knowledge”. Local knowledge is then not the pure, traditional knowledge we imagine it to be, but more varied. Agricultural producers experiment and combine information as they think best, learning from others and new means such as radio programmes. Rather than following the expert plan, actors can then choose to combine different elements of separate bodies of knowledge to reach their own goal in a

31 Wiersum in Lawrence, 2000, p.20
32 Leeuwis et. al., 1990, p.23
33 UNISDR in Heijmans, 2012, p.32
34 Arce and Long, 2000, p.23
35 Hilhorst, 2003
way that is neither ‘Western’ nor ‘traditional’.\textsuperscript{36} Local knowledge is then “the result of a great number of decisions and selective incorporations of previous and new ideas, beliefs and images”\textsuperscript{37} taking what is useful and setting aside what is no longer relevant. As it is dynamic then, and the result of individuals’ choices, we should not assume that local knowledge is homogenous throughout the community with everyone in the village sharing the same ideas.\textsuperscript{38}

1.3.4 The expert-user gap

This disconnect between how experts view local knowledge and how locals see their own role, as well as the different knowledge networks they make use of, is sometimes called the expert-user gap. As ‘experts’, we must recognise that sometimes the best technical solution is not the one that the users feel they need. Sometimes development projects have the effect of increasing people’s vulnerability, making them recipients instead of actors, so that the development agencies can claim the need for their expertise and legitimize their intervention.\textsuperscript{39} Consciously or unconsciously, development agencies have a tendency to claim superiority. Feldman and Welsch feel that local knowledge production often ignores the actual people relations and interests that constitute the rural economy.\textsuperscript{40} Additionally, Hilhorst states that: “with the exception of some indigenous movement actors, people refer to their local knowledge as knowledge. It is rendered local because outsiders, in particular intervening experts label this knowledge as local, a status that no matter how admiring is ascribed to them by people from a superior position of universal knowledge”.\textsuperscript{41} While expert knowledge is assumed to be universally applicable, knowledge termed ‘local’ or traditional is often assumed to be particular or even worse, based on ignorance or superstition.\textsuperscript{42}

Hilhorst states the importance of identifying ‘alliances between actors from different domains’, meaning that the scientific domain and the local domain should learn to work together and search for complementarity.\textsuperscript{43} To do this, Western scientists and experts need to recognise the power inequality and notions of superiority present in their knowledge networks. In characterising targets for development, discourse can characterize the ‘users’ as victims in need, for example when discussing that: “women constitute the majority of the labour force, but they are the most neglected, oppressed and vulnerable part of the shattered Cambodian society”.\textsuperscript{44} Also, farmers participating in a development project can be categorized based on their adoption of newly technologies, giving them labels such as ‘early adopters,’ ‘middle adopters,’ and ‘laggards’.\textsuperscript{45} Through their discourse, development experts acquire symbolic capital that keeps them dominant and enabling them to neglect the value of local knowledge.\textsuperscript{46}

In order for the knowledge gap to be closed, these discourses need to be broken down. Also it is important to start seeing expert contributions as factual rather than normative.\textsuperscript{47} A step towards

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{36} Arce, 2011
\item\textsuperscript{37} Arce and Long, 1992, p.211
\item\textsuperscript{38} Heijmans, 2012
\item\textsuperscript{39} Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010
\item\textsuperscript{40} Feldman and Welsh, 1995
\item\textsuperscript{41} Hilhorst, 2003, p.42
\item\textsuperscript{42} Elgert and Krueger, 2012
\item\textsuperscript{43} Hilhorst, 2003
\item\textsuperscript{44} Mehmet, 1997, p.685 (underlining added)
\item\textsuperscript{45} Feldman and Welsh, 1995
\item\textsuperscript{46} Evers and Müller, 2009
\item\textsuperscript{47} Elgert and Krueger, 2012
\end{itemize}
doing so is to recognise the value of agency in local knowledge, and start seeing the ‘user’ not as a victim, but as an active agent of their own development. Sardan reasons that people have their own motives, knowledge and strategies for what they think is best.\textsuperscript{48} While actors have their own strategies and objectives, project designs often already contain a number of assumptions of the actors that are involved, such as which groups should cooperate, what decisions need to be taken, and what tasks must be done. Much seems to be predetermined for them, but the reality is that actors can make choices that seem illogical for experts or outside agents, and can simultaneously be the source and the recipient of knowledge. Also, they are not passive, but rather both knowledgeable and capable, as they ‘attempt to solve problems, learn to intervene in the flow of the social events around them, and monitor continuously their own actions’.\textsuperscript{49}

Rather than being the receivers of a knowledge transfer process, they are then actors in a process of knowledge interfacing and sharing, contributing their own knowledge network in order to create new knowledge and come to a sustainable solution. An example of this is the work of Hendriksen et al. They state that a major challenge in sanitation development is the lack of user acceptance, which is often ignored by technical experts and municipal decision makers. It is necessary to have an in-depth understanding of to users’ life and preferences, created through engaging them in the decision making process. This resulted in the development of a multi-decision criteria analysis where the end-users are heavily involved in the problem analysis stage and discussing the consequences of all feasible alternatives. Their deliberative participation then would lead to high user-acceptance and identify user values for experts.\textsuperscript{50} The different stages of the proposed decision making process and the actors’ involvement can be seen in Figure 4.

![Figure 4: The decision making process. Source: Van Vliet et. al., 2010](image)

### 1.3.5 The actor-oriented approach

Besides involving the end-users in the decision making process, it is extremely important to see them as actors in their own right rather than merely recipients of a development project. In the actor-oriented approach, human action and consciousness plays a central role. We need to lay aside the idea of a structural logic in development and models of development policy and focus on the ‘social life’ of development projects as well as the responses of the social actors who reflect upon their experiences and what happens around them and use their knowledge and capabilities to interpret and respond to their environment.\textsuperscript{51} Important are the actors’ rationalities, desires, capacities and practices through which they shape social arrangements and bring about change. Their agency, being their capacity to process social experience and devise ways of coping, involves ‘the generation and use or manipulation of networks of social relations’ and ‘the channelling of specific items (such as

\textsuperscript{48} Sardan, 2005
\textsuperscript{49} Long, 1989, p.223
\textsuperscript{50} Hendriksen et. al., 2012
\textsuperscript{51} Long, 2001 and Long in Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010
goods and information) through certain nodal points of interpretation and interaction’.\(^{52}\) The difference between actors social perspectives makes it important to analyse ‘differing actor practices, strategies and rationales, the conditions under which they arise, how they interlock, their viability or effectiveness for solving specific problems, and their wider social ramifications’.\(^{53}\)

All actors exercise some kind of power through their agency, thereby actively engaging (consciously or not) in the construction of their own social worlds. In the farmers’ case, it is important to understand how they do so, developing strategies for dealing with the new circumstances set upon them as a result of the development programme. Hilhorst and Jansen speak of social negotiation, wherein the realities and outcomes of aid depend on how actors interpret the context, the needs, their own role and each other through ‘messy interaction’ and struggle to negotiate and guess to further their interests.\(^{54}\) As Arce states: “The process of agrarian development is not a dynamic which moves around different abstract models or rationalities, but is a social construction of actors, who, by linking different international settings and social zones, make practical use of their own concepts and classifications, and in doing so they generate a common ground where they might demand, negotiate or diffuse solutions aimed at change”.\(^{55}\) Actor involvement, then, is at the heart of this ethnographic research as it tries to explain how Cambodian farmers make sense of the project and construct the world around them.

1.3.6 Performance

Besides negotiation, part of farmers’ strategies of construction is not merely how they interpret a situation, but how they choose to be interpreted, in other words, how they want others to see them. The way people present themselves and their perceptions through their behaviour and discourse is also called their ‘performance’.\(^{56}\) It is “all activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers”\(^ {57}\)

Performance theory is a subset of interaction theory and the interactionist approach, in which human life is believed to be essentially intersubjective, thus human behaviour cannot be understood apart from the community context in which people live.\(^ {58}\) Collins argues against the assumption that individuals are constant even as situations change, rather they are formed through a chain of encounters across time. Each individual’s self is being enacted or constructed by the situation and social roles do not exist in itself but are only made real by being acted out.\(^ {59}\)

According to Goffman, when an individual ‘performs’, he implicitly requests his observers to believe him. When looking at the performer’s own belief on the other hand, we find that it is possible for him to really believe the impression of reality which he stages is actually the case, or he may know it is not reality but continue the performance in order to reach a desired effect (such as giving a

\(^{52}\) Long, 2001, p.17
\(^{53}\) Long, 2001, p.17
\(^{54}\) Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010
\(^{55}\) Arce in Long, 1989, p. 48
\(^{56}\) Goffman, 1959
\(^{57}\) Goffman, 1959, p.32
\(^{58}\) Prus, 1996, p.10
\(^{59}\) Collins 2004
In the case of the farmers this can for example mean that the farmers’ way of portraying themselves is either what they really believe themselves to be, or the way they want SNV to see them. This portrayal can be through their manner, which tells us about the interaction role the performer expects to play (for example that of the timid, ignorant farmer), the stage they set (how they try to come across through their dress, style of living, etc.), the things they conceal (whether this is a skill or a flaw), and what they deliberately do and say. In addition, rather than merely deceiving themselves or the NGO a performance can be an attempt at achieving a desired reality through presenting an idealized view of the situation. A farmer can hope that through continually portraying himself as a ‘good farmer’, he will eventually become so. And so the part that is played reveals more than a fake reality. As Goffman states: “In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be”. In other words, in choosing how he wishes others to perceive him, the farmer reveals the person he wants to be.

Understanding farmers’ performance can help us to see their actions as a deliberate exercise of power whereby they portray themselves in a certain way in order to reach their purpose. Furthermore it is important to study how farmers present themselves through language and concepts and the power and cultural dynamics that come in play. Gudeman and Rivera state that we need to be careful of adopting the idea that ‘facts’ are ‘there’ to be collected, meaning that social life cannot be reduced to certain defined facts to be pinpointed by an outsider (in this case, an anthropologist). In this same way it is important not to attempt to pinpoint the underlying motivations of the farmer. This research is therefore not about explaining farmers behaviour but rather about providing an interpretative framework for understanding how users construct their social world. This coincides with interpretivist theory, where human behaviour is an interactive process which is concerned with the meanings people attach to their situations and the way they construct their activities in combination with others. Human experience is then ‘rooted in people’s meanings, interpretations, activities and interactions’.

Performance theory can help us to move beyond the question of ‘why’ farmers do what they do and go towards studying the way they are actively constructing and negotiating. Ultimately, describing the processes that are part of their daily lives will provide some insight into how the knowledge network works for these farmers, and shed some light on the project as a whole.

The following chapters will discuss the various actors’ differing knowledge networks and lifeworlds and their effect on the project interface as well as their personal strategies. The processes taking place as information is transferred in the project are an important focus of this study, as well as the way farmers’ performance and agency plays a role in their negotiation of the interface.

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60 Goffman, 1959
61 Goffman, 1959, p.30
62 Gudeman and Rivera, 1990
63 Prus, 1996, p.9
2. Information transfer and conflicting interfaces

We came to Cambodia in mid-April, in what we jokingly called ‘the killer month’, having read that on a website describing Cambodia’s climate. The hot season is at its worst then, and viewing the dried out pools and dusty roads made it difficult to believe that any type of farming could really prosper here, let alone high water-demanding crops such as rice and vegetables. And though water is in fact one of the major problems for Cambodian farmers, it is not merely the risk of drought, but also floods that make farming a risky venture at times, as within weeks of the beginning of the rainy season those same pools were already overflowing and the area turned greener than I could have imagined. Quite a spectacular sight, I admit, but not exactly the stable environment a farmer might be looking for. Svay Rieng, I am told, is one of the poorest provinces in the country. Its farmers often struggle to earn their livelihoods, and from a NGO’s perspective I understand why SNV has chosen this as one of the areas to work in.

2.1 Mapping the project interface

Though SNV wishes to target vegetable farmers, they have chosen not to work with the farmers directly but through a local organisation, CFAP. They came in contact with CFAP through a mutual partner, Agriterra. After evaluating whether their objectives would match SNV approached CFAP (CAMFAD at the time) to work with them. SNV felt that they could add value to the project by supporting CFAP and helping them with: leadership development, business planning and value chain development. As they stated: “The idea is to focus with CAMFAD on the fruits and vegetables sector and to create a spill-over from that sector to their other interest sectors. Especially leadership skills towards a real farmer representation / membership organisation need to be developed as well as their business and entrepreneur experience.”

Through building CFAP’s capacity, SNV then hoped to impact the farmers in the area.

CFAP’s activities aim to improve the living standards of small farmers by strengthening the agricultural activities of small producers through promoting agro-ecology, savings, agricultural credit and sustainable farming practices. Furthermore they wish to strengthen management capacity and production activities, as well as helping member organisations achieve a democratic governing structure, having a strong wish to work with FOs (Farmer Organisations). Capacity building of organisations is done through various advisory support meetings, trainings and coaching as such on entrepreneurship, leadership, and farmer field schools.

There is special attention to improving the knowledge and leadership capacities of CFAP’s staff members and the leaders of commune farmers’ association (CFAs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). They represent their members and are expected to pass along the knowledge gained.

CFAP’s activities in the area are numerous, as they combine their personal plans with their duties toward Agriterra, Rabobank and SNV, and the SNV-CFAP project is thus merely a part of the whole picture. This particular area focuses on helping vegetable farmers, as SNV envisions that ‘farmers need to become more commercial so that they can earn money instead of consuming it, and vegetables are higher in revenue than rice’. It is within this specific part of the project that I performed my research, focusing mostly on vegetable farmers and specifically on those farmers who

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64 SNV-CAMFAD, 2009
65 CFAP, 2011
Conflict on the interface

Anna de Vries

fell within the scope of the SNV-CFAP project. Figure 5 shows how the various organisations in the project are related to each other.

When I wrote the proposal for this research, I knew I wanted to learn more about the expert-user gap and it was my goal to learn how the users (i.e. the farmers) negotiated the knowledge they received in the process. However, during the course of my internship, I began to see that the farmers were not the only recipients (or users) in the project, and across the different levels of the project there were several interfaces of knowledge networks, and thus several opportunities for knowledge negotiation.

To clarify, as I have discussed the difference between information and knowledge, I want to keep a distinction as I describe the processes on the project interface. Thus, when discussing the data (technical or in terms of skills) that SNV and CFAP aim to provide the other actors with, I will use the term information, as it involves a specific external package of data that either has been put into a training or is transferred in another way, such as through personal interaction. What I call knowledge then is not what is being transferred but rather the processes going on inside and between the actors, the combination of the information they receive and already hold, as well as their experiences and contextual framework that helps them interpret the data and make decisions.

In the project, most information transferred to the farmers has been technical training, such as lessons in planting, growing and harvesting techniques. Still, there is a great desire in SNV, and in a somewhat lesser manner in CFAP and the CFA/CBOs for the farmers to develop business skills through commercial training, managing finances etc., and some trainings have been given on these subjects, though they do not seem to be picked up as much (I’ll discuss this in further detail later). The committees have also benefited from some leadership trainings.

The basic structure of the project can be seen in the black sections of Figure 6 on the next page. The project starts with SNV and ends with the farmers. While they mostly deal directly with the actor ‘beneath’ them, both SNV and CFAP also have direct contact with the farmers at times.
SNV builds CFAP’s capacity (in issues such as leadership and monitoring and evaluation) through an outside trainer and a Local Capacity Builder (LCB) (blue). The trainer is also responsible for training a junior LCB who lives in Svay Rieng and can assist CFAP directly in the future. Some of the CFAP staff members are Community Development Facilitators (purple) and are assigned specific communes which they oversee and help directly, both through assisting the committees and visiting the (model) farmers and advising them. CFAP also directly hosts Farmer Field School trainings to build the capacity of the farmer groups and model farmers (red). The committee members help in the trainings and are expected to take over eventually. CFAP also wants to train the committees in topics such as leadership etc. The farmer groups and model farmers are expected to share their knowledge with the other farmers in the commune (these do not necessarily need to be members of the CFA/CBO). The committee members also frequently have contact with the farmers (mostly informal) in order to help them with questions etc. (black).

Though I hope the model makes it somewhat clear how information is exchanged in the project and what interactions take place, I have to admit that I still feel it doesn’t truly capture the true processes going on in the field. As I attempted to make sense of the activities and processes occurring in the project, I observed from the start that information flow is never straightforward or easily defined. It is then important to map the knowledge interface in order to understand the realities of working with multiple actors in development and learn how they interact.

Pictured simply, a development project which aims to build capacity through providing information would be fairly straightforward: the experts think up the information and transfers this to the receiver. There is then only one possibility for knowledge negotiation. However, as SNV has decided to work through a local organisation and has several goals (that is, building the capacity of CFAP and reaching the farmers) this makes the situation much more complicated. CFAP in turn works with the farmers but also through the CFA/CBO committees whose capacity they want to build. Both CFAP and the CFA/CBOs are then both givers and receivers of aid. SNV then measures their success not only by assessing whether or not CFAP’s training and operational capacity has improved, but by looking at how the vegetable farmers are performing or questioning the abilities of the committees. In addition, SNV staff also often get frustrated with CFAP as they do not always cooperate according to their expectations.

If the project reality was as linear as the black section of the model, it would be as follows: SNV helps CFAP, who helps the committees, who then help the farmers. But instead because their goals reach...
beyond the actor ‘beneath’ them (and moreover, do not entirely match), there are many other processes that I have observed. Both SNV and CFAP often have moments where they interact with the farmers directly, either giving them advice or checking up on them. They do not always rely on the estimations of either CFAP or the CFA/CBOs on how well the farmers are doing, feeling they are not always accurate (possibly also because their understanding of ‘doing well’ is different and not because CFAP and the CFA/CBOs are poor at judging).

In their direct interactions with the farmers their activities also do not always fall immediately in line with the ‘vegetable value chain development’ project, as SNV has other projects to help the farmers such as digging tarpaulin ponds to store water, and CFAP also helps farmers with their rice and livestock activities. In these activities they do not really involve the other actor (SNV or CFAP, respectively), but more or less deal with the farmers directly. There are also several ambiguous roles in the project structure, where different actors have different perceptions of the situation and their role in it, which leads to confusion or conflict.

The position of the CFAP director, for example, is ambiguous, as he believes himself to be equal to the SNV staff, while they see him as someone to be trained.

In the case of the Local Capacity Builder (LCB), his tasks and purpose are either not clear or not agreed upon both in SNV and CFAP. Even worse, there is uncertainty whom they are actually talking about when they say ‘LCB’. One SNV staff member called the outside trainer the LCB and the other the junior LCB, while another staff member said that the junior LCB and the organisation he came from was the LCB. Both do think that the LCB’s task is to build the capacity of CFAP, though the first staff member said that the outside trainer needs to train the junior LCB so he can take over. This training process is not really taking place however, as both the trainer and the junior LCB are unclear about what is expected. In fact, the junior LCB thinks his task is to build the capacity of the committees, not CFAP.

While CFAP deals with the CFA/CBOs directly by training the committees, the Community Development Facilitator (CDF) also works as a more personal advisor for both the committees and the farmers (as they also visit the farmer in person). The committees work directly with the farmers (visit them in person) but also train model farmers and farmer groups, who are also expected to pass on their knowledge to other farmers. These then turn to those people who they are closest to or who are most easily available for relevant information. The structure can cause difficulties in knowing who is responsible for what information flow, but at the same time makes space for individuality in trainers who respond to their role as they see it and choose their own way of approaching the farmers or dealing with problems.

Committee members often have a double role of being both teacher and
student, as they are often model farmers.

With regards to the group members and model farmers, there are several understandings as to what it means to be a model farmer. Sometimes the farmer where the FFS is held is called the model farmer, at other times it is a farmer who has taken up a specific task and responsibility to grow their crops according to the new techniques and show these to other farmers. Both are expected to pass on information but do not really take initiative to do so but rather answer questions if farmers ask them.

Finally, the farmers who are members of the vegetable groups do not necessarily see themselves as vegetable farmers but may have chosen to assign themselves to this group as they feel they already have enough knowledge on farming rice and think they can learn something extra to grow their side crop of vegetables in a better way. CFAP and the CDF actually do not only target vegetable farmers but also assist rice and livestock farmers with trainings.

The realities of the project in the field then reveal an extremely differentiated structure where interfaces are not fixed but continuously shift. It is then an interesting question whether the idea of SNV that the project is not working is the result of the actors’ different perceptions and expectations rather than there actually being a problem. As we examine the power roles of the different actors we also see how they struggle to maintain or improve their position of power. An example of this is the way that CFAP uses the junior LCB as an extra office-hand rather than a capacity builder or the time actors spend in controlling and checking up on each other rather than working together in a clear and direct manner. Paying attention to these instances of competition and distrust then reveals the conflict on the interface intersections that we are looking for.

In the next section I will discuss how the actors’ constructions influence information transfer in the project as data is continually transformed by actors’ differing visions and perceptions.

2.2 The actors’ constructions of the project

As explained before, the actors’ knowledge networks are a shared set of understanding and their way of interpreting the world. This interpretation leads to a certain construction in their ‘mind’ with regards to the project. In this paragraph I will discuss the actors’ perception of the project and the processes that take place as a result, as well as the way they attempt to rationalise situations they find confusing or hard to explain.

2.2.1 SNV

According to SNV, one of the ways to really improve farmers’ livelihoods is to get them to commercially grow and sell vegetables. They want to increase the number of vegetable farmers and get them to use a larger percentage of their crops for producing vegetables. The reason for this is that vegetables provide more revenue, and especially in Svay Rieng there are market opportunities as most of the product sold at markets is imported from Vietnam. One of the ways that the farmers need to do this is to work together, as they are not selling at markets individually and then they cannot get a good price for their products. If they combine their crops they can take them to a wholesale trader and get a better price. The SNV member in charge of the project envisioned the possibilities of farmers no longer competing against each other but rather becoming ‘competing colleagues’, although he feared that this is still a concept too foreign for them as farmers still often see each other as rivals in the market. In the years SNV has been active in Svay Rieng, farmers have
slowly started commercially selling their products, but so far choose to sell their products themselves at the local market rather than searching for other market opportunities, such as a wholesaler. SNV fears that the farmers find it difficult to become commercial as they do not have a commercial mind set, and cannot work together because of a lack of trust. Also SNV feels that some of their main issues are a lack of willingness, though they explain this lack in different ways. One staff member said that it is often just a phase and caused by difficulties or failures. While it is frustrating sometimes it is also important to understand their feelings and consider each case separately and understand their feelings. He felt the reason they do not apply can be a lack of money or family issues, but also because they do not understand what SNV wants from them. “Then we say we want objective ‘A’, and they know ‘A’, but do not know how to make ‘A’ so you need to know how much they understand”.

Another SNV staff member however felt there was a more general explanation for a lack of willingness: “I don’t know, they need motivation. In our culture, people don’t want to do anything without motivation. Nobody wants to do anything voluntarily. They will ask: what’s my benefit? Sometimes, reputation can be an incentive, when they have already enough to eat. When they don’t have enough to eat, they think about their stomach first.”

These two answers are interesting as they show the difference between characterising farmers as a group or seeing them as individuals with different problems and motivations. It is interesting to see how SNV talks about the issue and socially constructs the farmers through finding explanations for their behaviour. Also their discourse with regards to the ‘improvement’ of farmers reveals the way they see the project and the farmer. For example they speak of wanting farmers to become ‘good farmers’ or well-performing farmers being ‘real farmers’ as well as often equating improvement with commercialisation. This suggests that SNV sees farmers as they are now as lacking and in need of intervention in order to become complete, that intervention being something that SNV needs to bring. I will later discuss the way that farmers see improvement, but it is important to note that there is a difference between the discourse of ‘advance’ of the rural people, and that of economists (or experts). The ‘advance’ being the constructed idea of what their improvement entails, as explained by Gudeman and Rivera.66 I will later further discuss the way experts in general, and SNV in particular, see farmers and attempt to categorise them.

As SNV has chosen to reach their target farmers through CFAP, it is important to understand how they envision their own role in the project with regards to CFAP. When I asked the SNV staff how they saw this, it was interesting to hear how they characterised SNV’s role as a ‘coach’ or a ‘hands-on-expert’, advising them on how to do things and how to improve. This implies that they sometimes feel SNV is the one teaching, instead of the two organisations being equal partners. In fact, one staff member even stated: “we as SNV are a bit senior compared to the CFAP staff and so our advice is important to make sure they are on the right track and that they have enough confidence for service delivery.” Though I did agree that the SNV staff was often quite capable in their assessments I also noticed that there was a tendency for them to take a dominant position, for example in scheduling or in pushing them towards making certain decisions as they feel things were not going well. Also, one or two staff members even made the somewhat controversial assessment that they felt one of the main problems of CFAP was their managing director of CFAP, who was characterised as too controlling over the staff members and unwilling to listen to SNV. One even stated that he felt that

66 Gudeman and Rivera, 1990
replacing the managing director would be very helpful in solving some of the problems they were experiencing with CFAP.

What was interesting to observe was that the staff sometimes felt they had one role, and at other times contradicted this, displaying a possible distinction of what they felt to be the ‘right’ sentiment other than the one they usually automatically assumed. One SNV staff member said: “The main purpose is to increase the income and employment of farmers. (...) The secondary goal is capacity building of CFAP staff. This goal is supposed to serve the main goal. (So,) the goal or final destination is the farmer, but CFAP is the client.” But later he characterized SNV’s general relationship with CFAP as partner: “We are for sure not a donor, we only provide capacity building services. We work together to reach our goal. It’s not CFAP’s goal, it’s not SNV’s goal; it’s common goal. That’s why CFAP is not our client.” Staff members’ discourse shows that they use SNV’s role as a way to navigate their position of power and as part of their performance, stating themselves to be equals while talking to outside observers or to CFAP, perhaps in order to avoid conflict, while also actively deciding when it was necessary to take a more dominant role when they felt decisions had to be made (push in order to get progress).

We can also see how the SNV staff struggle with certain situations and tries to navigate their feelings about a desired situation with the difficulties they perceive. Their discourse is then also a way for them to rationalise these situations in a desire to make sense of what they experience. In the following conversation a staff member explained her feelings on the cooperation with CFAP: “CFAP is very busy with many obligations, they cannot fulfil expectations of SNV. The staff continues doing other things. (...) Why do they agree with us and then don’t follow? They give priority to other activities/organizations. It seems that they can ignore us easily. Capacity building is not a priority for them. Agriterra funding is a higher priority. They should have said NO to SNV if they don’t find it important enough, but they agreed on the cooperation themselves. (...) Sometimes, we feel hopeless about our feedback. How much of it can they fulfil? That’s why I say, no more training, first apply our previous recommendations! (...) We ask ourselves: do we give too much feedback? If we ask them if they agree, they will agree. But still they do not apply.”

In this conversation it is possible to see the frustration that staff members encounter when their expectations aren’t being met. Their struggles herein can also be seen in their desire to portray the cooperation as going well, saying: “the relationship between CFAP and SNV is very good”, while later they talked about certain CFAP staff members that never listened to them or did not like them. An SNV staff member even said “they don’t want us, they have no interest in us. They don’t need us, think they are strong enough already. We can see points of improvements but they don’t see it.” It is possible that SNV staff use the (perceived) lack of capacity of CFAP as a rationalisation. One person said: “They are ambitious but less focused and they fail to analyse the situation thoroughly and it is a waste of resources and effort.” and wondered whether it would not be better to work directly with CFA/CBOs instead of via CFAP, as “it is hard to implement the projects successfully because CFAP staff have too many loyalties and they are not focused.” Another staff member questioned their leadership abilities, and doubted their ability to assess the farmers correctly, though he said their technical skills were very good.

Finally though, despite many doubts expressed, an SNV member stated that there had been significant progress in the past couple of years, saying: “there have been a lot of changes, before the
way they spoke was very different, now they are more professional and knowledgeable than when we started early 2010. Also now they are able to provide trainings at a higher level and the way they train is also more acceptable for both CFA/CBOs. I asked the CFA/CBOs about this and they said that it is better. Also their technical skill has improved, this is easy (practical) to learn and they enjoy it, they can now answer farmer questions etc. and they could not do this before. Also they learned ‘soft skills’ such as leadership and marketing but I think this needs more time to observe whether they really learned it or not.” True or not, this shows a desire of SNV to either believe or portray that their work is making a difference.

2.2.2 CFAP

Though vegetable value chain development is the main point of focus for SNV, it is merely a small portion of the work that CFAP is involved in. CFAP as an organisation is specifically dedicated to act in the cooperative style of development. They feel it is important to work with FOs, build their capacity and provide them with opportunities such as stores, ways to get materials, etc. Their work includes training in farming techniques, income generation, community management, fertilizer credit and animal raising. Seventy per cent of the organisations activities are capacity building programmes, aimed to generate better farm management and market access.

According to CFAP documents, their work aims to improve the living standards of small farmers by strengthening the producing activities of small producers through promoting agro-ecology, savings, agricultural credit and sustainable farming practices. They also wish to strengthen farmers’ management capacity and production activities, as well as helping them look for possible markets to sell their products. Strengthening of small farmers’ associations and their membership base is also an important goal, helping them towards financial independence and a democratic governing structure. CFAP wants to build the capacity of the associations on topics such as entrepreneurship, leadership, and farmer field schools. Leaders are expected to represent their members and are expected to pass along the knowledge gained.67

CFAP has many points of focus rather than merely the vegetable farmers. Besides their cooperation with SNV, CFAP is involved with other organisations, namely Agriterra and Rabobank. They then also have responsibilities towards these organisations. One of the places that the difference in priorities between CFAP and SNV comes up very clearly is the fact that SNV would like to link CFAP to some other organisations such as SAC and IVY to help them market their vegetables. However CFAP’s managing director doesn’t agree because he wants to work with FOs (additionally he appears to have a personal conflict with someone from IVY, though he doesn’t mention it explicitly) and expressed that he feels disappointed in the SNV staff’s lack of understanding.

CFAP’s assessment of FOs is that they lack proper skills in organisational and financial management, leadership skills, and specific agricultural skills in vegetables/crops growing, animals/poultries rearing and use of fertilizer and pesticide. Furthermore they think the organisations are making little initiative to become sustainable.68 Support is needed to increase recognition of the cooperative development style in which members are more active in investing their own organisation. Because the organisations do not understand this, CFAP still feels that the members still have expectations of CFAP which should in fact be provided by the members themselves. Capacity must also be built in

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67 CFAP, 2011
68 CFAP, 2010a
their governance structure and communication. Farmer improvement according to CFAP is then closely linked to sustainability in FOs and technical improvement in farmers specifically. Especially with regards to FOs they feel they have a unique role to support them. Emphasising this in the project then also strengthens their position. They do speak about commercialising farmers, but it is hard to say whether this is their own viewpoint or if they are copying that of SNV when it suits them, thereby expanding their bureaucratic range and being able to use SNV’s resources for their own goals.

Also in the discourse of CFAP it is possible to find ways that the staff are rationalising, with regards to difficulties they encounter in the project, but also their own behaviour. Staff often talked about being very busy and having many different tasks, which is ‘hard’ for them. Their busy schedule was then used as a reason for why they do not apply the trainings and they said SNV doesn’t take this into account. On the other hand they did portray themselves as being willing to learn, often asking for new training topics. With regards to her capacity, one staff member said she wanted to improve her facilitation, agricultural and technical skills. Another expressed her appreciation for SNV by saying: “they are very brave, sometimes they just come alone to work with us. I observe and learn from them step by step. Yes, I want them to tell me what they see what I do and how I can improve. If yes, I want to learn more with M&E and [she’s laughing]... and if SNV can give again I want to have leadership and entrepreneurship.” While these training topics might be genuinely of interest to the staff members, their interest can also be a way of securing SNV’s continued assistance, as there are always new needs to be attended to. Furthermore I find it interesting to see that CFAP staff didn’t always profess to know why SNV wants to work with them and did not express any idea of SNV’s goals to target vegetable farmers through them. Also SNV’s aim to commercialise vegetable farmers doesn’t often appear in their discourse. It is then an interesting question whether CFAP staff truly don’t know SNV’s goals, strategically pretend to be ignorant of them (through performance) in order to be able to pursue their own goals, or even, does not want to know and deliberately keeps themselves ignorant.

Behaviour or statements from CFAP members shows that sometimes they feel SNV does not think they are as capable as they really are and that they know better. Whether or not CFAP’s assessment of their own capabilities is correct, the fact remains that this is how they see themselves, and it has consequences for the way that SNV can cooperate with them as either a teacher or a partner. An interesting example of this is the performance of the managing director. He especially expressed that he feels SNV is trying to control CFAP, stating: “sometimes they force us to do this or that but technically we cannot do it. Sometimes they just estimate something from outsiders and do not go into the internal issue. Like last year I disliked some activities of the SNV. But the program is very good.” He also said that the local staff of SNV pretended to be much more capable than they really were, and he actually estimated them at the same level as the CFAP staff, and that: “Sometimes I feel that CFAP gets influenced by staff of SNV that their behaviour changes, they have maybe worked with low capacity people before and now speak however they want, they assume that they are superior. It is correct that when they work with CFAP staff but sometimes they even try to influence me (...). Sometimes it seems that their behaviour is that they think there is nothing to do, that I do not have enough activities as a managing director.” In CFAP the managing director holds a strong position of power in CFAP and the staff members respect him and sometimes expressed they cannot do things without his approval. Additionally he distances himself from the staff as a leader to create this position, for example by not joining trainings (as he feels he doesn’t need them) and said he needs to
do a lot of their work as they are not yet capable. So while he felt that his staff have a lot to learn from both himself and SNV, when we asked him what SNV had to offer him as a leader, he did not talk about what they could teach him, but said that he could ‘learn from both their weak points and strong points’. The behaviour of the managing director especially shows how power relations are always a factor in knowledge negotiation. I will elaborate on his power position as a knowledge broker in the next chapter.

With regards to the CFAs and CBOs it is clear that CFAP plays ambiguous roles, navigating the question of whether they should act as donors or are also responsible for them, and how dependent the organisations should be on them. Some CFAP staff members recognise this. One said: “They are not independent. They do not dare to make decision... they don’t know that they are a farmers’ association.... they understand that we control them... tell them to go right! right! Tell them left! left! But actually, we want them to be independent by themselves.” On the other hand, when talking to the managing director of CFAP about their work with the CFAs and CBOs, his speech implied that he feels that rather than working with the organisations, CFAP needs to do a lot for them, saying ‘they do not follow’, and ‘we need to improve’. CFAP even has a lot of say in their governing structure, as it was their decision of how many people (and often whom) would be in the committees. According to CFAP staff members they check with the FOs about what their needs are before they prepare trainings. They often ask for technical trainings. In general the staff’s opinion of the FOs is positive, while there are some things they can improve on and learn as ‘their education is limited’, they feel that they are committed even though they do not receive any benefits from being a committee member. CFAP then places themselves in a position of power by being able to make decisions on the requested trainings and benefits and portraying the committees as ‘limited’. And while I have not found any evidence of patronage or favours being exchanged between the staff and the committees, it might be interesting to research their existence.

There are then many opportunities for CFAP staff to negotiate knowledge in the project through their portrayals of themselves and their constructions. In terms of the farmers many CFAP staff said not to understand why it is so difficult to motivate them and why they do not apply. They said that they try to persuade the farmers to adapt the techniques but they are reluctant to change their habits, even though they can see the benefits. Farmers also do not always come to the trainings in large numbers. According to CFAP staff the farmers think that the new techniques take too much labour and are difficult. They also said farmers mostly like the trainings because the CFAP staff provide free labour (such as transplanting an entire rice field during a training). Also staff often found it difficult that farmers keep asking for benefits such as seeds and materials, saying: “They don’t understand our purpose they only know what they want immediately.” Through these statements the staff attempt to rationalise what the difficulties are that they encounter in their aims towards the farmers.

2.2.3 The CFA/CBOs
The CFAs and CBOs are designed to be member based, where the members govern their own organisation and are able to discuss their agenda at a committee level. Members pay fees, making the organisation’s self-sufficient, and the committee members are elected by the members. However, while neither are then financially supported by CFAP or SNV, in practice the FOs often take a more dependent position towards them. This is especially true for the CFAs, who were founded by CFAP, whereas the CBOs were not and are often more in contact with other organisations. This creates a difference between the two which can be seen in how they are organised (for example, the
CBOs having more staff members and having a community building in which they work) and how they behave, CBOs showing themselves to be more critical and independent than the CFAs. During the PRAs I have found that the FOs mostly profess a similar goal, namely ‘the improvement of the livelihoods of their member farmers’. They then do not necessarily focus on a specific group of farmers or even certain tasks, but also concern themselves with issues such as domestic violence which go beyond the scope of either SNV or CFAP. One committee member was critical of CFAP because the goals, objective and activities of their CBO are broad, whereas CFAP only shares parts of these, focusing on food security. This can be a difference in perception between the organisations, but could also possibly be a way for them to distance themselves from CFAP.

With regards to their role towards CFAP, the organisations sometimes place CFAP in the role of ‘parent’, waiting for them to decide what they should do or give permission, even if they have the capacity to act for themselves. The result is that they are seen by the experts to lack independence and ownership, placing them in a lower position of power. This could be a strategic move in order to remain connected to CFAP rather than becoming independent.

Other points of conflict are for example that not all FOs seem to understand the role of CFAP. There was a request that CFAP would provide agricultural materials to all farmers instead of merely the model farmers, whereas CFAP tries only to help the model farmers along with materials as their success can stimulate others. While this request could either be caused by ignorance, it is also possible that the FOs feel that by portraying themselves as ignorant they can continue to submit such requests and possibly be granted some. Committees also continue to ask for more frequent visits from the CDFs and more trainings, even though the idea is that they eventually take over the trainings for their farmers themselves.

As the CFAs and CBOs are heavily dependent on the committees that run them, their dedication and willingness has proven to have a huge impact on the way the organisations function. Overall the committees said they had a lot of willingness and motivation to do their work and are dedicated to improving the lives of farmers and the community. Committee members often portrayed themselves as being enthusiastic for their work and having a lot of ‘willingness’. I enjoyed one conversation with a committee chief who kept smiling when talking about her farmers and told me how much she loved them and wanted them to improve. She told me that because of her dedication her commune had improved in the years after she took charge. However during the PRAs other committees displayed doubts as to their own capability, for example by saying they are not confident enough to raise ideas or sometimes motivate the farmers to change their habits. There was also an instance where a committee member expressed having to face angry farmers who did not receive the benefits they expected, and said this was very hard for him. These are further examples of ways committee members choose to portray themselves or attempt to rationalise difficult situations. A final example of these rationalisations is the way CFA/CBOs have learnt to mentally categorize farmers according to the project expectations. During a mapping exercise in the PRA they indicated farmers who are commercial and use the new techniques as ‘well-performing’, and those not using the techniques and growing for their own consumption as ‘underperforming’. They also said that the performance of a farmer had a lot to do with willingness, regardless of outside circumstances such as problems with diseases and water sources. But while interesting tools, these categorisations do bypass the complexity of the reality that CFA/CBOs deal with and make it difficult for them to see farmers as they are.
2.2.4 Farmers

As the farmers are the end users in the project I want to elaborate on their lifeworlds before discussing their constructions. This will be done in the next section. Farmers’ way of portraying themselves and their strategies of knowledge negotiation will be discussed in the following chapters.

2.3 Lifeworlds of Cambodian farmers

The above text describes my first encounter with the farmers’ lifeworlds. I had only been in Cambodia for less than two days and everything still felt slightly surreal. In setting the scene, my descriptions mainly focus on what I observe to be special: the bamboo beds, the landscape, the facilities… So mundane to them, but so exotic to me. It struck me then, as it has many times after, how different my lifeworld was from theirs. And it was those moments that helped me to move beyond the theoretical understanding of the importance of understanding farmers’ lifeworlds and experience in person how the way their world provided them with a frame of reference for the project and the information they received.

Simply put, the idea of a person’s ‘lifeworld’ means all the immediate experiences, activities and contacts that make up the world of an individual. It describes how everyday life is experienced by individuals and affects the way they manage their social relationships and give meaning to everyday experiences. It involves both meaning and action, as it both shapes us and is shaped by us. Understanding people’s lifeworlds and their strategic actions, as well as ‘the processes by which interventions enter the lifeworlds of the individuals and groups affected and thus come to form part of the resources and constraints of the social strategies they develop’ is then crucial for analysing how they attempt to create space for their own projects and thus, how they negotiate their knowledge. The ideas a farmer has of his life and how he is supposed to live it and improve it influences his idea of what is positive improvement and what is not, and can also shape his acceptance or even perception of development intervention. He can thus either disagree with or misinterpret certain actions on the side of the experts, and only when we understand the shape and shade of his coloured glasses will we be able to make sense of his responses. As Long and Van der Ploeg state, “people process their own experiences of ‘projects’ and ‘intervention’. They construct their own memory of these experiences, as well as taking into account the experiences of other groups within their socio-spatial networks, that is, they may learn from the differential responses, strategies and experiences of others outside the target population or specific action programme.”

69 Oxford Dictionary, 2012
70 Schutz, 1973
71 Long, 1989
72 Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989, p.229
By entering the lifeworld of the farmers, interventions become part of their internal, individual social strategies, and thus mean different things to different actors.\textsuperscript{73}

Then who are the Cambodian farmers? What is their world like, and how does this affect their views on farming and the project? Though I spent some weeks in close contact with them, I cannot say that I know all there is to know, nor do I wish to. To say I really know them would be a generalisation of an entire population of individuals while I’ve only seem a glimpse of their lives. At best I can present an impression. In the coming paragraphs I will focus on describing various aspects of the farmers’ lives. While some instances of discourse and the effect of their lifeworld on their lives might come up, I will later focus more specifically on farmers’ representations and performances. But while their strategic performance as farmers is a topic for later discussion, it is interesting to remember that even their lifeworlds as we see them are staged by them and influenced by the way they talk about their activities, families, and even through the setting of their house.

\subsection*{2.3.1 Homes and households}

“\begin{quote}
\begin{quote}
We arrive around 10 at the house in Bassac. It is a small one bedroom house with a larger outside area such as a small shed and an open kitchen and separate toilet. They have some rice fields a little further off but vegetable plots close to the house, as well as a tarpaulin pond. There are some chickens and two dogs. Everything is done outside, things smell like farm (especially if you get too close to the pigs). Water is pumped from the ground and the only drink available is tea. There are fruit-trees to climb in and pick fruit. There are ants and flies and crickets. The farmers seem to be very relaxed and don’t really have a busy agenda, perhaps this is only when there is a new cycle of planting or harvesting etc. instead of just tending the crops. So also to be here is just casually doing some things and then something else, even sleeping a bit in the afternoon. They don’t have a lot of luxurious comforts but enough to make them happy and content (or so they seem). They don’t speak English but apparently Tet speaks a little French.
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

Tet has already worked on his rice fields this morning and is now just going out to help fix the road. He is the representative of the Bassac community in which they live and therefore he has asked people to do this with him. They have a little grandson who lives with them. When we arrive we play with him while his wife cooks some rice. Tet wears more official clothes when he goes out to help build the road (as a part of his position?) but at home he wears casual clothing, even the traditional wrap when it is very hot. Tet’s wife wears pajama-like clothes, in true Cambodian fashion. Both are heavily tanned from working in the sun.”

\hfill Box 2: Field notes 02-10-12

Cambodian farmers live in houses made of natural materials, such as wood or palm leaves, though the wealthier farmers sometimes have concrete buildings underneath, as typical Cambodian houses are on raised poles in case of floods. A separate wood-burning stove, a manual water pump and a toilet are their standard facilities. Electricity is provided by a generator which is on a few hours after dark, lighting one or two lamps in the yard, possibly a tv, and charging a cellphone. The main living area is underneath the house where it is cooler, on large flat bamboo beds which simultaneously feature as tables. The scene is completed by the fruit trees in the yard and the little spirit house at the foot of the stairs leading

\textsuperscript{73} Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989
up to the house, an important element in their Buddhist practice. Farmers usually have some vegetable fields close to their house and some rice fields further away.

They diversify their income by raising various animals such as pigs, chickens and ducks. This, in addition to the dogs and cats running around, means that the farm is always full of life and sometimes they even have larger cattle such as cows or even water buffalos.

The composition of the farmers’ household can vary and is not as I had experienced always the standard nuclear family. Rather I met an older couple with their grandson, a father with his younger children while his wife works in the city, and a mother who does the same. In fact, often a spouse or child will work in the city to earn money while the children, spouse or parents remain behind in the rural areas, thus diversifying income and labour (see excerpt below). Some farmers also have other means of income such as charging generators or selling products in little shops along the road.

Live-in grown-up children with their families as well as the many neighbours who turn out to be relatives show that the farmers’ family life is an important part of their social lives and the way they experience the community. They are also very social in general as I have frequently observed neighbours stopping by to hang out under the house with the family, children of neighbours staying over, and people helping each other with their farming such as transplanting a field or digging a pond. In an exercise of the PRAs, neighbours are also often mentioned as a source of information. Though farmers sometimes say they cannot ask their neighbours because ‘they also do not know’, they do watch (and copy) each other’s practices according to many of the interviews. Other information sources named are the market, other organisations active in the area and the tv and radio, though these are all mentioned much less than CFAP and the CFA/CBOs.

2.3.2 Livelihood strategies and activities
Farmers’ livelihood strategies consist of many different activities. To a casual observer at times it seems like they aren’t doing anything at all (the standard naptimes in the hammock don’t help to take away this image), but I think this is mainly because their day doesn’t consist of one large task but rather of a lot of little things; they weed, they cook, go to the field, go to the market, check on

“When we arrive there are two old women in the house. One is over 90 years old - a tiny, wrinkled, crooked, toothless lady. She came to visit because she wanted to meet the barang for the first time.”

Box 3: Field notes 08-10-12
things (if they have community responsibilities), talk to neighbours, feed their animals, etc. The fact that they have so many activities makes them flexible to change things around when, for example, it starts to rain and the fertilizer cannot dry, or when someone stops by. Flexibility in other things also solves some problems, for example when one farmer ran out of rice seedlings she planted water spinach in the other half of the field, and during the dry season she will use the land for growing vegetables. Also because she doesn’t have to do everything at once she said she has enough labour for her tasks. This is not to say that farmers do not work hard, as income diversification means that there is always something to do, and at times when crops are ready for harvesting and selling some labour intensive crops mean that farmers have to work almost continuously in order to harvest and sell them. What I have mainly observed by spending time with the farmers is that you cannot neatly categorise their daily schedule into domestic and farming activities as they do not ‘go to work’. Farming is their life, not just their job. The interview excerpt below also shows how a farmer talks about his activities:

**Model farmer:** “The reality like you see when I am free I can work on my own farm and now we just get the yield after we took care such as weeding, warm, apply fertilizer. Beside work in vegetable farm I work at the rice field. And usually, I’m not so busy. Sometimes…… now I’m a bit busy with the farmer field school but it’s not every day. I go to check different villages how are the vegetable that CFAP gave is it good or not. And after I provided the training I need to follow up we look at the situation of the vegetable to see if there is any insect or decease and encourage the farmers to grow vegetables so they can increase their yield and are able to sell a lot. I needed to move the class to other farmer house because the first one that provided the training was covered by the water. CFAP have the plan to give one each village. My wife sells vegetables at the market at Svay Rieng. Mostly we help each other to work in our own field and actually, she helps a lot because sometimes I am busy with my work in the community.”

Qn: “Are there things you do to relax or have fun, what do you like to do when you have free time?”

Farmer: “Mostly, I am busy with my responsibilities. When I have free time I visit my relative and friends.”

The family gets up around six to start their day. It has rained a lot last night and the ground of the farm is muddy. The pigs and chickens are making noise and it is still quite cool. It smells like wet bamboo and charcoal from the wood burning stove the breakfast is cooking on. (...) We have breakfast together and after this Tet shows us some pictures of him and his wife visiting Siem Reap (I showed him a few pictures of my family the night before). He also showed me a picture of himself as a soldier. Together with the holiday pictures are pictures of vegetable field trainings which he shows us. (...)There are also some papers and programme booklets in the folder, as if this were a camp he’d been to and wanted to save memories from. Now that I look around I see that there are also other memorabilia from trainings and evidences of his being a model farmer in the outside seating area.

After our conversation he takes us to the rice field just outside his house to show us the rice transplanting. He doesn’t really explain about this but just watches with us. Also he has some conversations with people who pass by. The rice transplanting is done in the traditional way. After the rice field we shortly walk through another house where Tet talks to the people and buys some bananas. SNV comes by to install a pump for a tarpaulin pond that farmer Tet is a pilot farmer for.

The rest of the day is pretty quiet; Tet picks some palm fruits and washes the moto. There is a lady in the farm who seems to be collecting plants or grasses close to the vegetable rows. The wife rests and has a stomach-ache, but later she goes to the market. They feed the chickens and take a nap, and Hoeung interviews Tet. He talks to her quietly while chewing on a toothpick (like many Cambodians do). In the past two days we have been there they haven’t really done anything to their vegetables, which might indicate that as with many crops (especially rice) there are some periods which are very busy but often there is quite little to do but wait for them to grow.

**Box 4: Field notes 02-10-12**
Farmer: “All those jobs are not easy but at the same time we can do extra job such as agriculture... grow rice and vegetable and besides that work we can add other job we can do it... and work, if I have something I do it. Besides work as a teacher I grow rice and vegetables and more of that I also do other job related to election, human right and also democratic. Recently I have been involved in Non-government organization, I advertise about human right and democratic and national law and at NDI about married law and mother right and democratic with that organization.”

Qn: “And why does she go to work in the factory not work in the farm? both your daughters and wife, they don’t work in the farm and they go to work at the factory?”

Farmer: “I have small plot of rice. One circle of rice I work only 2 or 3 days if they stay here... it’s like what I mention our rice field is small. So if we stay together... our goal is one and we spend a lot so that’s why we live separate. I let them go because they go to work and in dry season I grow vegetable and they come back if they don’t come back no one to collect the money, until she come so we can get the money.... we grow like this unless she can collect the money..”

Besides their daily activities, as I have already mentioned, it is common practice for many farmers to have other jobs next to their jobs as farmers. Some take them (or their family members) as far away as Phnom Penh or Sinhuanoukville, such as being a seasonal tuktuk-driver, while others can be done in the village, such as being a teacher. Farmers talk about such decisions as strategic moves to earn income, as can be seen in the interview excerpts above.Labour is then a resource that can be deployed strategically, whether at home or away, if this is more cost-effective. During the times when they practice these other jobs they cannot do their farming, so someone else in the family takes over (such as their wife or parent). Also in trainings, most farmers attending are women who inform their working husbands later of what they have learnt. Regarding gender division I have been told that in general, Cambodian women make many of the decision’s regarding household budgets, and often they are also the ones selling their goods at the market. I have also observed many variations in households regarding who decides what, ranging from a wife as vegetable entrepreneur to a stay-at-home dad. Other couples discuss and decide together. I therefore do not feel I can generalize on the topic of gender but mainly want to point out that we need to be careful in assuming that it is always the same person taking up a particular role.

The bulk of their product goes to home consumption. Farmers’ discourse shows this is their main focus as when they talk of wanting to ‘increase their yield so they don’t have to buy’, or perhaps so they have more than they need to consume and can sell the rest. When they sell their products they do so at the local markets (if available) or take them into town. Sometimes they sell alongside the road or to traders, but often there is no clear structure for this. Farmers’ perception of ‘the advance’ (their idea of improvement, as explained by Gudeman and Rivera) is then radically different from that of the experts as discussed earlier in this chapter.74

It is interesting to see that while they find part of their identity in being farmers, saying ‘we are farmer’, this does not necessarily mean that they limit their activities exclusively to farming. They will take on other jobs when it suits them or go back to farming after a few years if they inherit land. Parents often pass land on to their children, or when couples marry they sometimes become responsible for a piece of land, marking that as the starting-up point for many farmers. It can also be necessary to farm in order to supplement their income. One farmer used to be a garment worker and

74 Gudeman and Rivera, 1990
said she would have preferred to continue doing that, but she had to come home and take over her parents farm. Now she is content. Another person I spoke to had a consulting job but actually envisioned becoming a farmer later in life. When I asked him whether he felt this would not be a step back with his education or a risk he said felt that with a good business plan farming is a good thing. It was interesting to me because in my Western view farming is not something which highly educated people envision doing, and this taught me something about the pride Cambodians take in their farming culture. Also for some people becoming a farmer is a matter of course. According to my translator, children are expected to help out with farming and this is how they learn and it becomes natural to them, they aren’t really actively taught techniques. Sometimes they have some vague idea of wanting to be something else like a teacher but no idea of realizing this practically. It isn’t really normal for young people to have great ambitions as to what they want to be or plans how to make this happen, so it is often seen as a natural thing to become a farmer rather than an actual choice.

2.3.3 External circumstances that influence farming practice
An important part of how he farmers experience their lives is also the struggles that they face. This challenges them into having to make choices and decisions regarding risks, or limits them when their preferences might have been to do otherwise.

Most often mentioned when asked about external circumstances that hinder farmers were a lack of resources, labour and land. The issue of money often came up when talking about farming practices and why they do or do not use specific techniques. Sometimes they said they don’t have money for the mulching film (plastic to cover the soil in order to prevent it from drying up easily and prevent weeds) though they would like to use it, and some new techniques are in fact quite an investment;
for example digging a tarpaulin pond costs about 160 USD while the average income for Cambodian farmers is 500 USD per year. In some communities it is possible for them to borrow money from the saving fund of the committee but not all farmers want to do this. Also as mentioned, farmers sometimes work away from their families for some time in order to save up money, and a farmer growing vegetables commercially hoped that because she now earned more her husband would be able to stay at home.

Another lack of resources often mentioned by farmers was a lack of manpower. This is also a consequence of family members working away, and some of the new techniques are in fact more labour intensive. Farmers do not always feel it is worth putting in the work (sometimes they even described themselves as being lazy) or sometimes cannot do it even if they want to. Their land can also be unsuitable, being in a flood-prone area where vegetables are at risk, far away where crops could be stolen, or in a small or unfertile plot.

Farmers also experience several problems with their crops due to pests, diseases and climate issues (drought and floods). Almost every farmer I have met has spoken of this to some extent though for some it has been more of a hindrance than for others, and their reactions vary according to their situation. Some ask the CDF for help and advice and look for ways to reduce the risk, others decide to grow different crops on that piece of land, and others just try again and hope for better circumstances next time.

Finally a major problem experienced by farmers is that there is no market for their products and it is difficult to sell. There can be too little buyers, marketplaces are too far away, or there are too many farmers with the same product. This makes them very hesitant to become commercial. Also when the quality gets better because of the new techniques the buyers sometimes think the vegetables are imported and they cannot sell their products (as products from Vietnam are highly distrusted). When asked many farmers suggested that CFAP and SNV finds them a market.

In talking about their struggles it is possible to detect certain issues that farmers especially focused on. This could be a part of their performance as they strategically chose to emphasise certain issues they want to be helped on. Eventually the performances are seen as real by both themselves and the experts, as Gudeman and Rivera state: “facts are partly constructed by our success in persuading one another”.

Besides the emphasized problems there are also some other external circumstances from the farmers’ lifeworlds that can influence their farming practice, such as a lack of facilities, poor quality schools, bad roads etc. which, though general community problems, can have a very real impact on individual farmers’ lives and practices. Farms being located far away from cities and markets in combination with poor roads can isolate farmers and make it more difficult for them to sell their products or go to trainings and a lack of education can make it more difficult for farmers to learn or understand new techniques. There were two women I encountered who said that they found it difficult to learn from the trainings because they could not write and it was hard to remember the techniques. In the eyes of the experts, a lack of understanding also forms a difficulty, as farmers do not always seem to understand more detailed technological processes which makes it more difficult to get them to adapt to them. For example, one SNV staff member said that the farmers do not have

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75 Gudeman and Rivera, 1990, p.6
Conflict on the interface

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enough knowledge to really understand what you mean when you explain the different minerals (nitrate, phosphate, etc.) and then they misapply the fertilizers and feel it is not working. This was also the case with the use of pesticides and practices such as crop rotation, where farmers had difficulty switching to other crops, partly because they want to stick with what works and are unaware of the process of soil nutrients or plant-specific diseases. SNV wants to help them to use chemical pesticides in a healthy way, since now farmers often use them wrong (i.e. during the wrong growth stadium of the plant) or are resisting using chemical pesticides because they feel they are always bad. Other things such as business plans are also extremely difficult for them to understand according to SNV staff. It is possible that farmers portray themselves as ignorant, but in cases where their lack of education truly hinders their understanding, it can be more difficult for them to accept techniques as they don’t fully understand the ‘how and why’ or are untrained in the necessary analytical skills.

Also affecting the farmer’s family life is the problem of poor health. Sick family members are a huge income drain and can mean a loss of labour too, making it hard for farms to prosper. Some farmers I spoke to told me of family members that were or had been ill, and I spent several days in the company of a happy little girl who had suffered from polio and, once she had decided to like me, dragged me around town using me as one of her crutches. Her mother told me that when she got sick she spent all her money on curing her and even borrowed money from neighbours, later using her livestock and rice crops to pay them back. Now one of the reasons she started growing vegetables commercially was to have money for food and for when her children get sick.

Cultural issues also can affect farming practice. Almost all Cambodians are Buddhists and mainly express this by offering food and incense in their spirit houses, going to the pagoda or giving alms to monks who pass by their house, sporadic practices I’ve heard about but not really observed. Traditional values and beliefs also sometimes featured in their explanations for farming practices: they blamed the drought on it being the dragon year and waited to hear what predictions the royal cow had made during the Royal Ploughing Ceremony. Also we were once told that it is better to grow vegetables than livestock, as “Khmer are Buddhists, they believe in sins. When we raise animals, you have sins. Older women always go to pagoda. Growing vegetables does not affect the sins. In Buddhism, when you often go to the pagoda or are a monk, you are not supposed to kill animals (eating is not a problem). That’s why animal raising can be a sinful activity.” These casual comment on beliefs made me realise that even though Cambodians do not always talk about their faith it can really influence the way they view their farming.

On my very last day in the field I was invited along to the pagoda for the Pchum Ben festival, one of two major religious holidays in the Khmer calendar. I woke up early in the village and after conducting my interview, followed a group of farmers that had befriended me to the pagoda. The women were dressed up in their finest traditional outfits and sat sideways on the back of the motorbike holding containers of food (which I can say from experience is quite a feat, especially as most roads are full of holes). After an hour of kneeling, chanting and offering prayers to the Buddha, the food was offered to the monks. We took the remainder home and had a terrific lunch, during which they attempted to make me drink my fill of rice wine as they toasted to my birthday (which was that same day). While I thoroughly enjoyed myself, this day also helped to impress upon me the Cambodian’s appreciation for community, good food and tradition, showing that every experience in fieldwork can be edifying.

Box 7: 11-10-2012
Lastly, a difficulty often mentioned is that farmers lack confidence, which makes it difficult for them to learn because they assume they can’t. A farmer told me that she didn’t want to learn business management “because my knowledge is very low... I don’t want to learn it”. When listening to such farmer remarks, it is interesting to question whether this is part of a portrayal of ignorance and a farmer’s strategy to use things that are ‘common knowledge (such as that the experts think farmers have a little knowledge) to explain their actions. In any case, whether it is a performance or not, it is important to be careful with these kind of generalisations while at the same time remembering that farmers’ lifeworlds do have a real effect on their practices and the constructions they form about their lives as a farmer.

2.3.4 Farmers’ attitudes and strategies

Female farmer on her future plans: “(Farming vegetables) can help to solve (problems such as sickness or lack of food) but not 100% .....some problem not all, we also raise animal. (For the future) I don’t have any plan yet. For the children nowadays I have some money to support them to go to school and will support them in the future.... hope that they will have brighter future than us. I want them to work..... They can earn the money and feed their own life. (That they) don’t need to depend on us. (...) I want to expand the pond and I have the rice field behind I can grow more vegetable I can earn more money. I’m also worried because sometimes dry season it’s change it can spoil the vegetable. (...) I don’t what to do besides search for the new technique.... I continue doing it.... because we are a farmer we don’t what ??? else to do besides growing vegetable... don’t know what to do.... (I get the information from CFAP), don’t know what else to do.”

Farmer attitude also varies, some showed themselves as eager to learn, optimistic and determined: “Even though I am tired but I am happy because when I do it I get the result and then the tiredness is gone.”. Others were uncertain, cautious, or described themselves as lazy: “there is nothing.... we just survive...” Some saw mostly obstacles and felt they need to be helped while others tried for opportunities and experimented. One farmer was very proud of how she had gotten the idea of raising fish in the tarpaulin ponds as an extra source of income. Another farmer even reversed the roles after the interview and asked me questions about farming practice in the Netherlands as compared to that in Cambodia. This huge range of ways farmers experience their farming impressed upon me the importance of understanding their livelihood strategies as a dynamic and daily way of life rather than as a pre-planned strategy.

Looking at the way they see their lives and themselves then helped to understand more about their motivations. For example, being able to get acquainted with their daily life showed me how they truly see farming as a part of their identity and how it is not merely a career choice but a survival strategy. They don’t see farming as a way to earn money but rather as a way of life, which explains why it is so difficult for them to get a commercial mind-set. Also, because they have little capital they live from day to day, which can explain why they often don’t really know how they want to improve their farm or find it hard to be business oriented. As they grow for consumption the risks are also higher as failure doesn’t merely mean loss of income but loss of food. Their income diversification strategies protects them from these kinds of risks and also keeps them flexible with changing circumstances such as weather, prices, loss of labour, etc. One farmer I talked to had lost her entire crop and I had been told that she would stop farming vegetables. But when I went to her she wasn’t outwardly upset or emotional but seemed quite accepting about it, as this is one of those things that happen and not necessarily a huge shock or issue. Farmers I spoke to didn’t really mention whether
or not they enjoy what they do, and when asked they mostly told me that they liked their work because they had success.

2.4 Information transfer and knowledge negotiation

Discussing the various actors’ constructions has then hopefully given us some insight into the complexity of their knowledge networks as well as the conflicts that take place. Additionally, it becomes clear why information transfer in real life does not follow the plans of the experts but rather takes its own course, as different actors see situations differently and rationalise them in their own way. As Roux states: "(a) barrier to the free flow of knowledge is rooted in the worldview or frame of reference of each individual. If the existing knowledge, understanding or worldview of individuals is not engaged during the sharing of knowledge, they may fail to grasp new concepts and information that are presented" ⁷⁶ As actors, through their constructions, fail (or refuse) to grasp the information that is being transferred to them, this results in distortion of the original information.

Through negotiation, each individual actors chooses to take over that information that fits with their view of the project and their goals, increasingly diluting and transforming the information package in a bottleneck-like situation, resulting in only a changed information package actually reaching the farmers themselves and bidding for a place in their knowledge network. In the case of SNV, CFAP and the CFA/CBOs, the negotiation mostly affects the information that they pass on to others. In the case of farmers however, the results of their knowledge negotiation is most clearly seen in the way they ultimately apply it. As end-users or beneficiaries they are not passive recipients but active at both the individual and group level, both involved in shaping their role in the project according to their personal interests and understanding and being shaped by their encounters at the boundaries of their lifeworlds, as they are confronted with new ideas that lead to self-reflection.⁷⁷

Identifying the two processes of knowledge negotiation in the project provides us with a simplified model of the interface. On the first interface, that of the project, information is transferred through various actors in the project. During this transfer the various knowledge networks of the actors encounter one another on the interface, and the differences in perceptions, goals and views leads to negotiation, transforming the information that is subsequently transferred to the next actor in line. This explains why the (outside) information that reaches the farmers can be different from what the experts wish to give them.

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⁷⁶ Roux et. al., 2006, p.8 ⁷⁷ Long and Villarreal in Long. et. al., 1989
On the second interface the farmers’ lifeworlds and accompanying knowledge network influences them to see the project according to their expectations and wishes, hereby also causing a selectiveness in what they ‘receive’. This unconscious coloured view and other tacit knowledge, together with their conscious preferences and habits play a large part as well, and are what I call ‘internal knowledge’. Additionally there are the external circumstances that limit and influence their decisions, whether they want to or not. Farmers’ knowledge negotiation thus takes place through the coming together of three elements: outside information, internal knowledge and external circumstances. They weigh the costs of certain actions, decide on their relevance and relative usefulness, search for alternatives, ask for advice and combine, thus negotiating their way to their decisions and practices.

While the above models hopefully provide some clarification for the negotiation processes in the project, it is important to note that in reality they are more complex. Tacit knowledge and limitations set by external circumstances also influence the project knowledge interface, as well as the fact that the actors do not interact exclusively with those of the intersecting networks. As far as the farmers go, I have attempted to simplify their decision-making process into these three elements in order to structure my questions and find some explicit instances of negotiation. But naturally their actual thought-processes are not as structured. They do not have the option of neatly laying out the project information, what they already know and believe and what is realistically possible, and weighing each factor, finally leading up to the most profitable outcome. Rather the decision is a result of processes in which the different elements merely play a role. The next chapters will discuss farmers’ knowledge negotiation more specifically, as well as the way they actively portray themselves as a form of negotiation. First however I will discuss how knowledge is negotiated by different actors in the project through brokerage, resistance and representation.
3. Knowledge negotiation

“Intervention practices as they evolve are shaped by the struggles between the various participants, rather than simply on intervention models, by which we mean the ideal-typical constructions that planners, implementers or clients may have about the process. There is in fact no straight line from policy to outcomes. Implementation should be viewed as a transactional process involving negotiation over goals and means between parties with conflicting or diverging interests, and not simply as the execution of a particular policy”.  

The above excerpt from Long and van der Ploeg discusses how intervention is shaped by knowledge negotiation. The previous chapter discussed the meeting of different knowledge networks on the interface and the selective transfer of information caused by the clash as an act of knowledge negotiation. This chapter will discuss knowledge negotiation as part of more specific power struggles. Firstly, the ‘participant struggles’ described by Long and Van der Ploeg can take place in the form of brokerage as key actors negotiate their goals through their positions of power.

3.1 Knowledge brokerage

Long defines social interface as “a critical point of intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found”. The points of intersection, or rather of confrontation, create a dynamic environment where discrepancies in interests, interpretation, knowledge and power are mediated and transformed. Rather than remaining focused on individual strategies of actors, interface analysis concerns itself with the linkages that develop between them.

These linkages are managed by those persons we call knowledge brokers who exist on the nodal points of the network. Hilhorst states that knowledge brokers have ‘the ability to bridge different life worlds by mastering a large range of development discourses, and the ability to create social relations and communities.’ They bring together two parties who need each other. She also calls them interface experts, as they become nodal points where knowledge about development is concentrated due to their high involvement in development activities. Put simply, knowledge brokers are those people that facilitate the knowledge exchange process. They can provide opportunities or act as intermediates between parties, but they can also build capacity, thereby improving communication and exchange. I speak of knowledge exchange here, as once we deviate from the linear concept of information transfer in the project, we need to recognise that knowledge negotiation is a two-way street and is as much about giving as it is about receiving. When knowledge networks interact both parties are actively engaged and adapting their knowledge. The information then doesn’t flow in one direction but rather something else flows back, such as knowledge about the other actor, the strengthening of social relationships or other services. This means that the knowledge brokers have a unique position to manage and manipulate these resources. Additionally, they actively portray themselves in a manner that suits them in order to maintain this position, as the knowledge brokers’ unique position is a position of power. They are key to the production and

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78 Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989, p.226
79 Long, 1989, p.2
80 Hilhorst, 2000
transfer of information. Hilhorst describes how NGO leaders, being brokers of meaning, ensure that other stakeholders acknowledge their position, and accept their representation of situations, organizations and themselves. This can be done by performance and convincing the other party of their abilities. Also, rather than merely assuming the position of broker where this is necessary (for example when development languages between organisations do not match) they can make themselves necessary, seeking to ‘make the other parties to brokerage relations - patrons and clientele-dependent upon their services’. Their position as nodal points gives them a definite knowledge advantage and allows them to make decisions to steer situations as they see fit.

In the project there are several knowledge brokers occupying different positions. One example is the SNV trainer who teaches the CFAP staff to facilitate committee meetings. On some occasions I have observed him to change the training material because he felt it was more relevant or he critiqued the way SNV had envisioned the training. One occasion is described in Box 8.

Once, the CFAP staff was asked to observe a committee meeting. It was organised at the last minute and the meeting was held at the house of the committee chief. While there were four committee members, they were surrounded and observed by the entire CFAP staff, SNV, the trainer and the interns. The goal of the observation exercise was that the CFAP staff would learn how to judge how much the committees had learnt. During the meeting, the SNV staff member told us he was unhappy with how things were proceeding. The committee members did not understand why they were observed by so many people. According to the SNV staff member, it was the job of the trainer to clear this with the committee members, but he did not. The trainer on the other hand told us that he hated this type of meetings and said it was unethical to be observing a meeting by so many people. These feelings might explain why he didn’t follow the instructions of SNV. During another training the trainer told me about some very specific ideas he had on the development of CFAP’s capacity that he came up with these himself separately from the SNV programme. Both examples show how he has (and executes) his own ideas of training needs.

There was also one occasion when we noticed that a CFAP staff member had not been paying attention during the training but was working on other things instead. When we asked the trainer about this, he said that that person had asked him if he could do this: “I allowed it with one person because he has some issues with (one of the SNV staff) and he asked me particularly if he could open the computer to do other work.” This instance shows how the trainer has power to influence the knowledge exchange and facilitate for that CFAP member who was reluctant to learn, contrary to the wishes of SNV.

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81 Cohen and Comaroff in Hilhorst, 2000
It is interesting to note that, though employed by SNV, the trainer displayed the wish to critique them on several occasions and influence the project through his brokerage. Still, when I asked him why he didn’t voice these critiques to SNV itself, he was reluctant to do so and said that they also did not give room for feedback: “They give their opinion on my designs but there is no room that they ask me about the design, if I am comfortable with it or think it is well. It is true I should talk to them. I was thinking about it but there is no room and I did not take action on it, I was mainly waiting for things to happen and did not initiate anything. And I had the idea because I had two more days because I will write the final report (...). I write training reports but they pay me only for one day to write it so they do not expect a big report. I discussed if I could present it. But (...) there was no time anymore for me to present my feedback on the designs etc. So I won’t do it because of the time.” His portrayal of himself was then as a person who is knowledgeable and capable, but he also wished to come across as obedient towards SNV, possibly because he thought covert changes are better in his position of employed trainer.

Another interesting knowledge broker in the project is the CFAP director, who is often the point through which all communication between the two parties goes. One SNV staff member told us: “Most of my communication was with (the CFAP director) at first so it is difficult to communicate with the staff. It is easier for us to communicate via him and then let him give them orders. (...) Sometimes the staff are capable and know how to make decisions, but others are still reluctant to make decisions and then you need to go back to (the director) to communicate with them.” I have also observed that several times the staff referred back to the director for answers and decisions, indicating that he has quite some power over the direction of the project and the degree in which the wishes of SNV are followed. This is certainly felt by that same SNV staff member, who stated: “CFAP staff gained a lot of capacity provided by SNV but (the director) will not let them do anything and he does not give them freedom to work this out.” It was also interesting to hear himself speak about his relationship with the staff and his opinion of their capacity (see Box 9). CFAP’s dependence on the judgement and decisions of their director fit the earlier description of Hilhorst of NGO leaders being ‘brokers of meaning’.

When assessing the attitude of the director, we noted that he seemed to portray himself as very important, or even irreplaceable, for the running of CFAP. Interestingly however his manner also suggested that this was not because he wants control (as he did not act in a domineering way) but perhaps because he really believed that he is the best person for the job and he wants it done well. Also, when he told us that he did not discuss SNV’s offer to cooperate with the CFAP staff, his attitude suggested that he felt it was a good thing for him not to be dependent on their opinion. This is also an interesting portrayal that shows his desire to appear in control. In his actions the director also shows that as a broker he has a unique position of power over the project. As a political agent he often shows a preference for negotiating with Agriterra, who is a direct donor. He sometimes chooses to execute his position of power by resisting the SNV plans. For example, as mentioned earlier, he is not always happy with SNV, and he told us that sometimes he agrees with SNV but does
not apply what they have learnt: "I do not try to speak something bad but try to speak what SNV wants. (...) they tell me that I do not listen to what SNV tells me to do, for me I think we do not have anything to advise them on but we just tell them what we want." In that same interview however he told us of his intention to provide some critique for SNV at the next reflection meeting: "sometimes I do not react at the same time and this is a mistake (...), they should learn from their own mistakes(...). But I think SNV will not be happy with my feedback, some of them will not like critique. Sometimes they say a partner should not criticize, but I think it is a partner’s duty to improve, it is not criticism.”

In the end however, we observed that the director did not in fact make any critical comments towards SNV in the aforementioned meeting, which showed that he was in the end more comfortable with covert rather than overt acts of resistance.

Other knowledge brokers in the project are the CDFs and committee members who are the farmers’ main links to the project and, to a lesser extent, the SNV workers who carry out the plans of SNV. They execute their influence mainly by the choices they make in communicating and facilitating, for example focusing their work on those topics, areas or farmers that they feel are most important. The knowledge brokers’ performances show the need for portrayal in these actors as well, as they need to be looked up to in order to maintain their position.

Knowledge brokers position of power is sometimes called into question by them playing a double role in the project. This is especially evident in the case of the committee members. For example, the committee members act on behalf of the farmers, but are actually also farmers themselves. And as such they practice their farming not only as they feel is best for them, but are simultaneously expected to be an example for other farmers. The expectations laid on them through the project thus require them to navigate their role as committee members with their own livelihood strategy. Additionally, as a farmer and a committee member, they are both the ‘target’ and ‘author’ of development. This was true for other actors in the project as well. Several times I attended a training in which I wondered whether the CFAP staff was supposed to be learning from SNV and the trainer, or whether they were supposed to be teaching the committee members.

One case was a Monitoring and Evaluation training targeted at the CFAP staff. The staff gathered in full to attend a monthly committee meeting, during which they were to observe and later give some pointers on how to conduct more effective meetings. What I noticed immediately was that the entire dynamic of the meeting changed due to the presence of the staff. Rather than discussing the issues amongst themselves, the committee began to present them to the staff. They had even made a sort of podium in which they faced the staff as their ‘audience’. The trainer told me that the purpose of the training was to teach the CFAP staff how to support their committee members (though I could not help but wonder why this was necessary for all staff members rather than only the CDFs). The trainer also told me that there was a whole section on filing management in the training, but this was a rather unnecessary topic, since the committees have very little documentation anyway. He said that he did not know how SNV came up with the topics. After the meeting the committee sat in the audience, as one of the staff members gave several practical tips about how meetings should be conducted; like how they can be prepared, the responsibilities of the note-taker etc. However rather than feeling natural, it seemed more like a lecture. A short discussion followed during which there was some more actual input from the other staff and the committee. However the whole proceeding left me slightly confused. I asked myself:
“Who is the person who is actually supposed to learn from this? Who is the target of the training? If CFAP is the one that is learning here, who is teaching them, as they are not being assisted (later I found out that they learn and review before and afterwards). And if they are the ones teaching, then is it practical that they are with so many? (I learned that later on this will not be the case but now they are also being trained). All in all it seems like the proceedings are very dually minded, the staff is both teacher and student, and this brings some troubles with it, as both Hoeung and I feel the committee is shy to really perform their meeting and feels very observed by such a large group. The CFAP staff starts out by more observing, after the ‘meeting’ is finished they start their coaching.”

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My confusion shows that knowledge exchange is a field where lines are often blurred and not everything is clearly defined. Even the knowledge brokers themselves do not always know when they are in charge or when they are on the receiving end of another actor’s intervention and what role to play.

In conclusion, discussing knowledge brokerage sheds a new light on clashing knowledge networks, as it shows the power dynamics that are at work during knowledge negotiation. Knowledge exchange is not merely a neutral exchange of ‘products’ of equal value, but rather the actors are investing in the advancement of their own goals and strengthening their position of power. Consciously or unconsciously, actors seek to get the upper hand. An example of conscious negotiation in the project is when CFAP staff don’t agree with all the training topics of SNV and decide only to actively participate in those trainings they feel are necessary. Unconscious negotiation is for example when the farmers’ focus towards livelihood improvement instead of commercial farming gives them coloured glasses in understanding what CFAP is trying to do for them. We can also identify a difference between covert and overt struggles as a form of negotiation (for example in the actions of the CFAP director). This is a result of the existence of power dynamics, as some actors might feel covert resistance is safer or more effective.

3.2 Resistance and counterwork

According to Benhabib, “we are all participants in different communities of conversation as constituted by the intersecting axes of our different interests, projects, and life situations”. As actors attempt to pursue their interests, it is reasonable to suppose that this can lead to conflicts or friction. Arce and Long term the arena in which knowledge systems (in this research: ‘networks’) clash the ‘battlefield of knowledge’, indicating a field wherein strategic movement and power play takes place with different ways and levels of involvement and agency. These levels can vary from radical opposition to Western knowledge and expert to minor forms of coping.

Counterwork then is “the transformation that social actors perform on any development intervention as they necessarily reposition the said intervention (project, technology, form of knowledge, or what have you) into their cultural universe to make it meaningful for themselves”. Small strategies of side-tracking, manipulation and negotiation can be found in any development project, as each actor works to turn situations to their perceived advantage. In a refugee camp, an old man might pretend to be sicker than he really is because he feels that otherwise he might not be helped; a vegetable farmer might sign up for a project that will give him a free pig because he figures he can always sell it.

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82 Benhabib in Van Ufford and Kumar Giri, 2003, p.112
83 Long et. al., 2000, p.32
and free is always good; farmers might attend only the end of trainings because they know they will get free fertilizers at that point; and middlemen might leave out information about underperforming farmers because they want the project to be considered a success. Harrisson\textsuperscript{84} does not limit this dynamic agency to the locals, but rather that there are complicated and personal relationships between people in different positions of power, particularly for those people who have ambiguous positions, such as village leaders or local trainers, who are both insiders and outsiders.\textsuperscript{85} In our case this positions would be applied to the knowledge brokers.

There are several levels of intensity in which actors attempt to negotiate the interface through resistance. Van der Ploeg argues that there is a wide field of action through which resistance materialises, and that it can take shape in three forms. These are: covert sabotage, interventions in the organisations of labour and production (introducing alterations), and overt struggles.\textsuperscript{86} Overt struggles could range from open critique and protests to strikes or even more violent acts. Covert sabotage can be small, everyday forms of resistance, such as foot-dragging, dissimulations, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, slander or sabotage, and are common in circumstance where open defiance is dangerous.\textsuperscript{87} Mild examples of some of these forms have already been given in the description of various interactions in the project.

Taking the farmers’ attitude towards the project as a case, there are several ways in which we can detect some everyday forms of resistance. Most of the time this ‘just’ takes the form of ‘not following the methods’ diligently. Farmers who say they are lazy sometimes confess to cutting corners or not doing as instructed. They find it difficult to believe in new methods without seeing results first and will often be hesitant towards new techniques, preferring to sticking to something they know works. A farmer I visited didn’t rotate her crops despite being told to, because she saw that that crop had improved from the new methods and wanted the same results, not realising that the next year they would be less good because of the lack of nutrients. Only after her crop turned out bad after all, she said that next year she would rotate. It also varies whether farmers display a learning attitude, as some farmers are active in asking questions to the committee and the CDF, and others don’t feel the need to interact with them.

Farmers also find it difficult to understand (or do not accept) the project and the necessity of certain actions. For example their frequent questioning for materials and reluctance to pay membership fees makes it difficult for the FOs to work in the way they should, and become self-sustaining and self-serving. Another example is that some farmers make up market prices to write on the information board, seeing it more as a homework assignment and not realising how it can help them, same as farmers who cut corners in their techniques choose to forget that this means less yield. Their actions then consist mainly of small actions such as foot-dragging, non-compliance etc. Overall the attitude of farmers who don’t follow is often more one of reluctance than active resistance and I feel it has more to do with their individual strategies rather than a focused opposition of the project. They don’t necessarily hide their acts but don’t openly critique the project either, choosing rather to stay quiet and go about their own business.

\textsuperscript{84} Harrisson in Van Ufford and Kumar Giri, 2003
\textsuperscript{85} Harrisson in Van Ufford and Kumar Giri, 2003
\textsuperscript{86} Van der Ploeg, 2007
\textsuperscript{87} Scott, 1985
There were two major components of the project that I feel farmers were finding especially difficult to identify with. These were the focus of the project on farming vegetables rather than rice, and the aim of the project towards farming vegetables as a commercial business rather than it being merely part of a larger livelihood strategy. Farming rice is extremely important to Cambodian farmers, and is seen as part of their identity. Also it is a safe crop that is easy to grow and requires little effort. Vegetables, on the other hand, are more labour intensive and carry more risk.

An SNV staff member told us: “At household level, people feel that vegetable growing is high-risk. Rice is good, vegetables not, they don’t want to take risks about vegetables. People don’t believe in something new, we want to change their mind into commercializing vegetables, we have that idea, but the farmers don’t share that idea. That’s a big challenge for us as well, to scale up the number of farmers involved. To reach the targeted number is a concern for us.” Also, a committee member told me that farmers only grow vegetables if it doesn’t interfere with their rice farming activities. Farmers therefore often feel that vegetables are good to grow ‘on the side’, but are not something they would want to do exclusively. Even farmers joining vegetable groups sometimes say that they don’t really want to be vegetable farmers but just want to learn how to improve the vegetable crops they grow for their family. During one occasion they said rice is their priority and vegetables are second to them, but they felt that because they are farmers it is good to learn if given the opportunity, so ‘why not’. This can also be seen in the following observation:

*The woman says that she does not farm vegetables yet but she wants to attend the FFS so she can decide whether or not she wants to grow vegetables for family consumption. When asked why she’s not thinking of commercial vegetable farming she says that this is because she has a lack of labour and too little land; she has a rice field farther away but she cannot grow vegetables there.*

*Field notes 12-09-12*

Rice farming activities are also hindered by there not being suitable land, for example if it is too far away (they prefer vegetables to be grown close to the house because they can be stolen and also need a lot of tending) or unsuitable, for example easily flooded.

Farmers also find it difficult to make the step towards commercial farming. According to the committee chief of one CFA, ninety out of one hundred farmers grow vegetables for home consumption but are able to sell the surplus. She said they have more surplus because they use the new techniques, and instead of sharing their vegetables with their neighbours (like they used to) they are now selling them and becoming more business-minded. It is interesting to note however, that her idea of being business-minded is selling the surplus, whereas ideas expressed by SNV were often of farmers producing vegetable crops in order to sell them to large buyers. Farmers’ ‘surplus’ attitude shows that they continue to see vegetables as a supplement to their income rather than a primary livelihood strangely. It is possible that they truly cannot fathom becoming commercial, or that their inability to understand is part of a performance. One farmer told me he went to the entrepreneurship training but it was not for him because the amount of vegetables he produces are not enough to have a business. He said that if you have a lot of products then you can get middlemen to sell them, but he has little so he needs to bring them to the market himself. In speaking about the training in this way I felt the farmer did not understand that the purpose of the training was to encourage farmers to start growing more vegetables and becoming entrepreneurs, instead he dismissed it out of hand because he felt it didn’t apply to him since he only grew little.
Conflict on the interface

Market difficulties can be frustrating for farmers. On farmer told me: “sometimes we get lot of yield we cannot sell its all; it’s too cheap.” Farmers also didn’t like to sell to the wholesalers because they wanted flexible prices which traders don’t want to give, and they often professed their doubts about the stability of the vegetable market and were afraid they couldn’t sell at a good price, which made them reluctant to grow vegetables. In addition to linking farmers with traders, SNV wants them to start working together to supply the demand but says it is difficult to get the farmers to start selling the same products because when they see their neighbour growing a crop they think there will be better demand for something else. According to SNV this would be true on the local market but it is important for them to get a mind-set for a larger-scaled market. The farmers see each other as competitors, even though they really should be working together in order to be able to supply a larger demand. Farmers then have not taken on the concept of ‘producing together’ that is a requirement for this type of solution to the market problem.

It is interesting to see the difference between the farmers’ economic way of thinking and that of the experts. Gudeman and Rivera describe the concept of the house economy as opposed to that of the corporation, where the house is smaller and self-maintaining, while the corporation is focused on profit. Farmer’s difficulty of adopting commercialisation is then not merely a difficulty in understanding but a result of a completely different way of thinking. Which causes the expert-user gap.

I believe then that farmers’ resistance towards the two project components was either caused by them being so distant from the way they experienced farming that they were unable to identify with or recognise them as something that was expected from them, or farmers were reluctant to adjust their habits or learn the necessary (business) skills because they didn’t feel it was something they wanted. They subsequently resisted these elements in the project by not going to trainings, not expanding or changing their crops and going about things in the way they felt suited them. Additionally their ignorance could also have been a strategy of performance.

In their everyday actions, the farmers separately exhibit behaviour that can become more meaningful if seen from the right point of view. Scott warns us not to explain human action in the same way as we would explain “how the water buffalo resists its driver to establish a tolerable pace of work or why the dog steals scraps from the table.” I myself find I am guilty of this when I write off farmers’ behaviour as ‘normal human laziness’. Instead, it is necessary to link these actions to their consciousness and the meaning they give to their acts. Therefore, “however partial or imperfect their understanding of the situation, they are gifted with intentions and values and purposefulness that condition their acts.” This purposefulness stems from a conceived ideal situation that may or may not be a possibility and influences their thought and actions. Nor are these actions to be isolated from each other with the assumption that collective action is organised. Rather, actions in peasant societies are coordinated by networks of understanding and practice and ‘a form of coordination is achieved which alerts us that what is happening is by no means merely random individual action’.

Pooled together, the actors’ everyday acts of resistance form a pattern of resistance that carries a great deal of weight and can change the course of an intervention. In this light, the vegetable

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88 Gudeman and Rivera, 1990
89 Scott, 1985, p.38
90 Scott, 1985, p.38
91 Scott, 1985
Conflict on the interface

Anna de Vries

farmers’ various ways of deviating from the project can be seen as a strategy of negotiation through which they attempt to exercise their power over the ‘experts’ in the project. This is also done through how they present themselves towards the experts. In the next section I’d like to discuss how the experts attempt to categorise the farmers and how this contrasts to the farmers’ perceptions and presentations of themselves.

3.3 The expert-user gap

In this section I’d like to discuss how Cambodia farmers in the project are seen by the experts, and how this contrasts with how they see themselves and the project. This can tell us a lot about the effect actors’ different perceptions have on the project and how this creates an expert-user gap. For example, the conversation in Box 10 between a farmer, an SNV staff member and myself shows how the expert’s eagerness for the project to be successful can change their perception and therefore limit the way the farmer is being heard.

While working together with SNV I noticed that some generalisations were made about Cambodian farmers. By using these generalisations they attempted to explain some of the farmers’ behaviour to us (and possibly to themselves). I’d like to discuss a few of the topics that came up most, because it both gives an idea of how the farmers are seen and how generalisations are used by experts to make sense of what they encounter.

3.3.1 Expert characterizations

First of all, some elements of Cambodian culture were used to explain difficulties in the project. While some elements only came up sporadically, the influence of Cambodia’s hierarchical social structure was frequently mentioned in conversations from the beginning of my stay. Before coming, I had actually already done some research, and found that "Hierarchical power relations are a pervasive feature of Cambodian society, and relations between persons of lower and higher status are often personalized and cast in terms of family and kinship networks. Those with lower status must show respect for those with higher status, and they are not expected to question or challenge those in positions of authority." 92 During my attempts to learn the Khmer language, I also learnt that there are three forms of speech, ranging from ‘farmer speech’ (common) to ‘monk speech’ (polite) and ‘king speech’ (extremely polite). Higher speech is used when addressing those of higher rank or age, and it is then common to address this person as ‘Bong’, ‘Puh’, or ‘Ohm’ (older brother, uncle or grandfather, respectively). It is also regarded as impolite to disagree with someone from a better rank or age. Older people also find it difficult to accept advice from younger people, and one SNV

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92 Narayan and Patesch, 2010, p.368-369
staff member said that he finds it difficult to give feedback to older staff ‘because of the culture’. According to the trainer, getting feedback or critique from participants was difficult because it is deemed disrespectful. He told me that especially older Cambodians will not easily express their opinions as they place value on being silent and not outspoken, this is seen as wise and more mature. He said however that the younger generation is becoming more critical. When people are on the same level they do have more discussions amongst themselves about what they are taught.

Interestingly, another explanation for participants not asking questions was that they were afraid to admit they did not know or understand. This would make them lose face (‘keeping face’ being an important understanding in many Asian cultures). An SNV staff member said that ‘respect is a very important aspect of Cambodian culture’, but the downside was that it sometimes caused people to be reluctant to express their feelings.

Another cultural aspect often mentioned was that they practiced ‘copying behaviour’. During my first week, a friend living in Cambodia told me: “Cambodian culture is typical in that they do not like to try out new things, but if they see a new idea and it works they love to copy it. There are then no real entrepreneurs but many copycats.” This was later also mentioned by the trainer, when he told me that Cambodians like to copy good models, but lack initiatives for their own ideas and the ability to search for new ideas. After hearing this I started searching for examples of such behaviour and finding them, for example when a farmer told me that she started using the new techniques after she saw her neighbours do it and she saw that it worked. This matched a report from SNV that stated that farmers do not directly ask their neighbours about the techniques, but rather observe what they do. The report went further however, stating that “there is also a strong need for conformity. Farmers feel the need to be ‘like other farmers’, and will copy them if the majority of other farmers are behaving in a particular way. Farmers clearly fear being different, as this may be associated with increased risk.” I have not found any evidence of the latter during my time spent with the farmers. Also, copying is not exclusively a trait of Cambodians, but can also be considered part of normal learning behaviour, as we learn through mimicking others’ actions. It is then an interesting question why this feature of Cambodian farmers is so much emphasised by the experts. Perhaps it is a way for them to rationalise certain difficulties they encounter in convincing them to innovate.

The SNV report also said that “agricultural producers in Cambodia tend to be risk averse and are reluctant to undertake any value added activities unless they see direct demonstrated benefits.” I did observe farmers’ wish to be assured of results before taking on new techniques, but on the other hand there were also several instances where the farmers did not let the risk of floods etc. stop them from growing vegetables even if they had failed before. This showed me that they were not entirely risk-averse. A committee member told me that farmers do not really think about risks and are not afraid of them. He said that they are a part of life, and when it happens you just need to accept it and then do better next time. Despite this, farmers are described by SNV and CFAP staff as being afraid of risks. One of the CDFs told me for example that their fear of risks was the reason farmers were not switching from growing rice to vegetables. Also, according to the trainer, Cambodians suffer from low self-esteem and are intimidated by educated people which makes them reluctant to learn. Confidence is then also seen as a real problem for the project. It is interesting to see then how the intervening actors’ portrayals are not always consistent and therefore often the result of their

93 SNV, 2012b, p.24
94 SNV, 2012b, p.12
rationalisations of certain difficult situations rather than objective facts. Also they are often different from the way farmers portray themselves and can even be a way of making farmers more dependent.

Finally, SNV believes there is a high level of distrust between farmers. According to the SNV report “Social capital in Cambodia is low, which may in part stem from the recent civil war and in part from an alleged long history of individualistic values in the country. This has led to a high degree of distrust among farmers and between farmers and outsiders, including government officials and NGOs. This has hindered the potential benefits of collaboration or more stable exchange relationships. In turn, this has resulted in weak linkages between farmers and between farmers and other key stakeholders, such as sellers of inputs, traders, processors, and service providers (including NGOs).” In farmers’ behaviour this distrust manifests in their reluctance to grow crops further away where they can be stolen, an unwillingness to share information with each other and not wanting to cooperate with other farmers either in growing or selling vegetables. However while this was an important topic in the report, not all SNV staff members believed the farmers were unwilling to share information. One said that sixty per cent of the knowledge the farmers have comes from their neighbours, because “they more easily believe their neighbours and (...) after trainings from SNV not everybody believes what they are taught. Some farmers have more influence and are persuasive, so it is best to convince these farmers who are real vegetable farmers and encourage them to test the techniques so they can teach it to the others. These real farmers are the ones who are doing well and have social respect.” On the issue of cooperation, SNV believes that they see each other as competitors instead of working together to market their crops. This was expressed by both a staff member and in the report. Still, SNV’s portrayal was not always what I observed, as I found it hard to detect definite signs of distrust.

Characteristics of Cambodian farmers in an SNV report:
- Farmers grow mainly for self-consumption.
- Most don’t want to grow vegetables for commercial purposes.
- Farmers grow vegetables because “that is what a farmer does”.
- Farmers have different strategies to sell their surplus vegetables: directly at markets, from house to house, to market vendors and to collectors from the farm gate.
- Farmers in general prefer to diversify vegetable cultivation for auto-consumption and only sell what is currently at a high price.
- Farmers only want to grow vegetables in their garden plots for reasons such as safety, lack of water, and risk-aversion.
- The need for conformity among farmers is very strong.
- Farmers have a limited understanding of the way markets work.
- Farmers do not want to cooperate. They are openly distrustful of each other and believe that people are dishonest.
- They’re ‘trapped’ between the benefits of top-down knowledge transfer approaches and the lack of bottom-up initiatives.
- The links in the value chain are very weak. There is no trust between farmers or between farmers and middlemen.
- Farmers feel the main obstacles to growing vegetables are poor infrastructure, lack of capital and labour, and lack of knowledge.
- The benefits from growing vegetables include extra income, better health, more food on the table.
- Women, who are largely responsible for growing vegetables, have little time to gather to discuss agricultural or other issues.
- Farmers would prefer their children to migrate to the city rather than stay and work on the farm.
- Farmers that grow vegetables intend to continue on doing so.
- Commercial vegetable farmers are generally men, older and more experienced than other farmers, sometimes have a higher educational level, tend to have larger plots of land near home, are more risk-oriented and independent minded.

Box 11: Source: SNV 2012b

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95 SNV, 2012b, p.12
96 SNV, 2012b, p.12
This difference could have been the result of SNV’s constructions as well as the farmers’ wish to portray themselves to me or to SNV in a different manner.

Interestingly, ‘the opinion of SNV’ was voiced by both the Cambodian and Western staff workers, which indicates that the observations made have been adopted by the staff as they became part of the organisation’s knowledge network. As a researcher I also found it hard to completely ignore the generalisations of SNV and remain entirely objective. This is logical since the observations of SNV are also based on research they have done amongst the farmers, as well as their own experience, and are therefore there were several times that the farmers did behave in the expected way. But it influenced me in such a way that I started searching for these instances myself and using them as explanations for farmer behaviour. In doing this I recognised the desire of SNV to categorise the farmers they work with in order to understand their behaviour and help them more efficiently.

Especially for an NGO seeking a strategy of approach, bureaucratically assumed needs often translate into stereotyped identities. Those on the frontline of development intervention often feel forced to make such categorisations in order to achieve standardization and define client groups, their needs and tactics of approach. An example of this in the project is the way SNV staff members make distinctions between ‘real’ farmers and farmers who are seen as amateurs. Through labelling, policy agendas are established and people are conceived as objects of policy and defined in convenient images. Besides using labelling to create strategies, generalisations can provide explanations to an organisation for why certain objectives fail or are less successful, for example by claiming it has to do with a cultural issue or a lack of willingness. Policy discourse then becomes a rationalisation for actors’ dominant behaviour and a way to exercise power through language constructions. However, labelling is not exclusive to NGOs. Recipients of aid have also been known to label themselves in order to fall under certain categories and be eligible for the aid they wish to receive. De Vries discusses this as part of their strategies of intervention-coping. The capacity of the beneficiaries to influence implemented intervention through shaping their relationships is often underestimated. Therefore it is also important to look at how the farmers present themselves and what that tells us about their perception of themselves, the project, and the gap existing between them and the experts.

3.3.2 Farmers’ representations

While the issue of performance has come up several times in this research, I’d like to take a more thorough look at the way the farmers in the project portray themselves. According to Long and Van der Ploeg, the people on the receiving end of policies, or those responsible for managing implementation, do not reduce or limit their perceptions of reality and its problems to that defined by the intervening agency as constituting the ‘project’ or ‘programme’. Rather, people process their own experiences of ‘projects’ and ‘intervention’. In attempting to look beyond the definitions of SNV however, we come into an area of research that is difficult to define. Because how do you measure how people see themselves? What kind of questions do you ask and how do you look beyond the answers they give (if they even know how to answer such a question) to their

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97 Woods in Zetter, 1991
98 De Vries, 1995
99 Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989
perceptions and feelings? Helpful in this case is focusing on their performance, as it reveals how a person would like to be perceived, and in this, his ‘true self’.

There are several interesting cases that allow for discussion on how the farmers in Svay Rieng portray themselves. It is important to note that one farmers’ performance is not indicative of the behaviour of the group, and another farmer, if discussed, might choose to portray himself very differently. Rather this section hopes to show more about how farmers’ performance works and present some cases to contrast to the expert’s idea of the farmer. I will start by discussing farmers at work in the project, followed by farmers’ discourse about themselves.

It is difficult for me to say how farmers consciously conducted a performance during the trainings I attended, as most of the discussions held and things said were not translated to me. However I have attempted to closely observe them during these trainings. During these and other trainings I noticed that farmers often brought writing materials to make notes with, even though they hardly ended up using them. They would politely listen during the theoretical training and seemed to give little feedback. During the practical portion farmers would take turns planting the seeds. Pictures were taken of them by the committee member and they posed for the pictures while planting. The farmers’ observable behaviour indicates that farmers find it important to come across as eager to learn during the trainings and take pride in the trainings that they have followed, posing for pictures and keeping pictures of previous events. The host farmer arranged everything perfectly, preparing the training space and the soil. Being chosen as a host is seemingly a point of pride for them, as they can show their progress to other farmers and to SNV. During the training there was also a lot of social interaction between the farmers, they talked before the training and have some snacks after, and generally they give off a happy air during the training and seemed to enjoy themselves, not being in a hurry to leave. Farmers taking time to interact with others suggests that they do not only come to the trainings for the information itself but also to share experiences and build their social networks. What I found interesting as well was the behaviour of some farmers towards me after a rice transplanting training. What I thought would be a quiet meal after a training turned almost into a party when I found myself being repeatedly pressed to drink beer with the committee chief and some male farmers, despite my protests. Each time the toasting chant of ‘Chuol Muy’ was called out, they would reach across the table in an effort to clink their glasses to mine, and the chief seemed especially satisfied after he convinced me to down my glass with him. Their desire to drink with me, the barang (literally ‘Frenchman’ but now a nickname for all Westerners), seemed to me an effort to establish some camaraderie with an interesting guest, thereby making themselves special amongst the group. Farmer behaviour then indicates not a wish to conform but rather a desire to stand out and seek ways of presenting themselves well in a group, as other’s opinions matter a great deal to them. Gudeman and Rivera also state that another person’s interest to listen is also a form of validation, perhaps my interest as barang especially. In addition to this they seemed to want to show to me that they could be fun and leave me with a positive impression of them.

100 Goffman, 1959
101 Gudeman and Rivera, 1990
There were several times when I spoke with farmers about changing their habits to the new techniques from what they were previously used to. One of these conversations can be seen in Box 12. Another farmer I talked to was a farmer who was farming commercially and was doing very well according to SNV. She told me that she used to grow another type of vegetable but changed after she talked to other farmers and found out the new techniques were easier and also costs less labour. Her cousin also grew vegetables in a small plot of land but got more yield than her own big plot of land, convincing her further.

At first she did not join the trainings but only asked the other farmers for advice. She told me that she started growing the new type of vegetable because string beans and cucumber are easier to grow and take less time with the other vegetables, with them she sometimes had to work into the night. Also standing in the water was bad for her feet because her nails became ugly. After she joined the technical training she decided that only wants to use new techniques from now on and test how this goes. She wanted to test whether they can solve the problems with disease that she had been having and if she could get a good yield like her cousin.

In talking about the training she was extremely positive. They were very good and she felt that she was learning new things “because with the old techniques the other farmers did not mix the soil and cook it but just prepared the land like that and covered it with plastic”. But the planting technique was not new for her. She also told me of some inventions that she did to make planting more efficient such as sticking a piece of palm leaf in the soil so the seedlings could get pulled out easily. Also they were taught to cut holes in the plastic with hot charcoal before, but she used the sharp edge of a tin can, and now in the Farmer Field School they taught all the farmers the same. She also said that even though the new vegetables are less labour intensive sometimes she does not have enough time to do all the things, such as cut off the lower part of the string beans. Later on in the conversation she said she agreed with the new techniques that were taught, and she could see from her cousin’s example that they are better. When she is taught new things she tries to practice it immediately after the trainings because she was dedicated to the training. When I asked her about her personal preferences in farming she found it difficult to answer though, and just went back to discussing the training.

This farmer was interesting as her way of speaking suggested at first that she blindly copied the new techniques. Also she was practically unable to give any points of critique to me about the trainings, expressing herself in an extremely positive way about the project. At the same time she talked about several adjustments she had made to improve techniques, or saying that some new techniques cost too much time. The farmer then found it important to be on good terms with the project as well as portray a high level of enthusiasm for her farming in general, while simultaneously showing off about the ways in which she as a farmer was special and actively working to improve her vegetables. This could indicate a desire to show her control and not just be a dependent participant, even of something she agreed with. The creativity of this farmer was not a lone example. Rather, I found that
during my conversations with farmers others also liked mentioning little things they thought of to improve their techniques or small ways in which they could take initiative. This supports the idea that farmers like to portray themselves as having their own ideas and not blindly following the trainings. I have seen examples of farmers’ creativity in various ways, ranging from totally new ideas, to ways of testing the effectiveness of the new techniques before applying them on their entire farm, and ways to make the new techniques easier or cheaper by using alternative materials.

What farmers say about the project also reveals a lot about how they see it. It is important to pay attention to farmers’ discourse as their conversation are connected to their practice.\textsuperscript{102} Box 13 shows some (direct or paraphrased) quotes from the farmers. It is interesting to see that farmers focus on the similarities between the project goals and their own. This could be out of a desire to identify the project to their own cause. Farmers portray themselves as being extremely satisfied with the project, even while having several suggestions for specified trainings or requesting materials when asked about their needs.

\begin{quote}
“I decided to join the training because I wanted to increase my yield because through the climate changed there is less rain I couldn’t work the same as before so it was necessary to change habits also.”

“The goals of CFAP and the project are the same as mine, I also want to grow vegetables and get high yield and this is also the kind of things they are trying to provide. The project of CFAP is successful, the project is good because the other farmers follow it and they had success.”

“Yes, the plans of CFAP match my own plans because they want to increase the income of the farmer and this is also something that I want to do and to increase my vegetable yield. In the future I want to increase production and the size of my land and also grow more types of vegetables. Also I want to continue growing rice because I grow it in the rainy season and it takes less time than vegetables so it is convenient.”
\end{quote}

On whether the project is trying to change them from rice farming to vegetable farming: “Not really, they only try to improve our vegetable growing. But I wouldn’t stop growing rice.”

Though farmers say they agree with the project information, they also confess that they often do not follow the techniques to the letter. However these ‘confessions’ mostly come up after further questioning and are not easily admitted, and I have never come across a farmer who openly stated that he did not agree with the information or that it was not suited to his options. Thus farmers do not like to show that they do not act according to the project but only reveal so when asked (or when their change from the project is due to own creativity).

In general farmers express themselves as ‘happy’ with the project and with their own achievement if successful, or act resigned when things don’t work out due to circumstances. Happy or not, farmers I talked to hardly (if ever) acted in an enthusiastic manner but remained rather stoic in their expression, making me wonder whether they wished to come across as resigned, content, or neutral. Also in their portrayal towards SNV and CFAP they then portray themselves alternatively as the satisfied, grateful customer and the farmer in need. Possibly their manner is also due to trying to find the right balance between these alternate portrayals.

When farmers talk about dealing with obstacles it reveals a little about how they want their abilities to come across. One farmer told me that while he had followed all the techniques before, he could not do it this season because his sons were no longer at home and he has less labour and there is no

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{102} Gudeman and Rivera, 1990}
time to do his vegetables with the new techniques, so he is not growing any vegetables at all at the moment. As he was explaining this, the farmers’ demeanour was quite downcast and he repeatedly said that he was sad that he could not do it. Another farmer had lost all her vegetables in a flood but hardly mentioned being sorry about this at all. Rather she seemed to accept it as a fact and was now waiting for the next dry season so she could start over. She said that she did not find it difficult to take the risk because she believed that there would not be another flood next year. In analysing these different performances, it is possible that the first farmer was trying to convey his dedication to the new techniques, even though he could not practice them, while the other farmer was trying to show her resilience. Farmers can then alternatively decide in what manner they want to talk about obstacles. While several farmers I spoke to spoke of obstacles as a decisive factor, the role they wished to portray seemed to vary according to how they spoke of possible solutions to their problems. Some said they didn’t know what to do except ask for help, others spoke about trying again or looking for ways to improve. Both of these solutions places the farmer in a specific position (i.e., that of the victim or the actor) that the farmer can use to receive attention from CFAP.

It proved difficult to ask farmers about their plans for the future. They often said that they didn’t know. Mostly farmers talked about wanting to improve their livelihood for the sake of their families and maybe being able to get some things for their farm such as a pump. Farmers did not talk about saving or having an idea of how to reach their goals. As these issues were difficult to talk about and often absent in their discourse it seemed that the farmers did not have long-term strategies but rather lived from day to day. This also helps towards understanding why encouraging a business mind set amongst farmers is so hard. Still it is difficult to say whether this was because the farmers wished to portray themselves as such or whether they truly agreed with this image of themselves.

From the various examples discussed we can conclude that the farmers have many different ways of portraying themselves. They can be deliberate or unconscious, noticeable or subtle. And farmers can also use several different actions or words to convey the same image. Studying farmers’ performance more closely can then help us to understand how they use themselves in a fluid manner to adapt to changing audiences and execute power even while portraying themselves as powerless. This is especially the case when farmers deliberately conform to labels given to them by the organisations in order to receive aid. It is then also interesting to look at the target of the farmers’ performance. In one of the farmer examples I discussed some farmers who seemed to want to portray themselves as being independent and creative. I have also spoken to several farmers however who repeatedly said things such as “I don’t know what else to do than ask”, or “I just grow it, I don’t know if it will give yield or not”. This could indicate a wish to portray themselves as more ignorant or in need of help. I wonder now how the farmers saw me at these moments, in other words, what audience they thought they were performing for. Farmers might then have either wished to come off as strong towards an interesting outsider or wished to portray themselves as more helpless to someone they thought could convey their needs to CFAP. For the farmers then, performance is a way of negotiating their position with one of their strongest assets, themselves.

In conclusion, what can the discussed perceptions teach us about the expert-user gap? From learning about farmer views on themselves and how they speak about the project, it is clear that there is a discordance between SNV and the farmers. While SNV feels farmers are reluctant to change and the project is not as effective as expected, the farmers often regard the project as positive and a success. Furthermore, what the farmers believe they need and believe the project to be about does not seem
to match the aims of SNV. The expert-user gap for SNV then means that they are disappointed about the progress of the project. But is this the farmers problem or that of SNV? Can the project only succeed if the farmers start seeing things from their point of view, or does the problem only exist from SNV’s standpoint? In addition, SNV has taken to generalising certain aspects of the farmers in order to explain their behaviour. In doing so they have given them certain roles. The performances of the farmers however shows that they are not limited by the categories placed upon them but are much more fluid in these roles. Sometimes they deliberately choose to place themselves in them, while at other times they distance themselves. This shows a level of action that needs to be further explored. How are the farmers active in shaping their own development, and how can we see this in the way that they live their lives and practice their farming? The next chapter will discuss the importance of the actor-oriented approach and use three cases to attempt to deconstruct fixed ideas on farmer behaviour.
4. The farmer as actor

Earlier chapters have shown how through negotiation, resistance and performance, producers are not only consumers of technology, but creators of norms in their own networks. As end-users or beneficiaries they are not passive recipients but active at both the individual and group level. They are both involved in shaping their role in the project according to their personal interests and understanding as well as being shaped by their encounters at the boundaries of their lifeworlds, as they are confronted with new ideas that lead to self-reflection.\footnote{Long and Villarreal in Long. et. al., 1989,} \footnote{Roux et. al., 2006, p.1} We see then that, as actor involvement is at the heart of the interface, the clashes of knowledge networks are not negative points of conflict but rather opportunities for creating space for new ideas or situations. Roux et. al. propose that we should aim towards co-production of knowledge through collaborative learning between experts and users rather than knowledge transfer. “This can be achieved through knowledge interfacing and sharing, but requires a shift from a view of knowledge as a ‘thing’ that can be transferred to viewing knowledge as a ‘process of relating’ that involves negotiation of meaning among partners.”\footnote{Long and Villarreal in Long. et. al., 1989,} \footnote{Roux et. al., 2006, p.1}

This then emphasises farmers’ agency as producers of knowledge. In previous chapters I have discussed farmers’ performances and acts of negotiation, hereby attempting to provide a framework for interpreting farmers constructions and subsequent actions. This suggested way of thinking is brought into practice in this last chapter, where I will extensively discuss three farmers I spent extra time with during my research. Discussing the processes that take place in their lives as a farmer and their interactions as well as their performance and social constructions will then ultimately help to understand how farmers act as individual agents of their own development.

4.1 Farmers Tet and Sokha

Farmer Tet is old, or so he says. He wasn’t always a farmer, up until he was forty he was a soldier, like his father before him. He only started teaching himself how to farm when he received a plot of land from the government and he decided he didn’t want to be a soldier anymore after the Pol Pot period. “So many people in Cambodia are farmers”, he tells me, “so it is a natural thing, you don’t really have to learn it because you can just see it from others”. After he remarried he was asked to join the CFA Bassac committee. He wanted to join because he felt it was important and wanted to share his knowledge with other farmers. He also has two other leading positions in the community, saying he does it because it is important to do these things for others and because he enjoys discussing things. Being a model farmer also means that you are an example to others so you can help them with your good farm. This is something he also enjoys. He also feels that it is good to get help from NGOs, because “though we are farmers, we still need to learn more”.

Though SNV or CFAP mainly speak of farmer Tet and give him roles such as ‘the committee vice-chief, the model farmer, the pilot farmer, etc., it becomes clear to me while staying there that it would be more appropriate to speak of Tet and his wife Sokha as a team, a ‘model farmer couple’. They work together on their farm, and she tells me her story. The farm that we are at now used to belong to her parents, they grew vegetables as well. She grew up here and later moved to another place to be a garment worker. She grew up here and later moved to another place to be a garment worker. She didn’t want to get married at first because she saw that her neighbour
experienced domestic violence. In 2005 she moved back to take care of her parents. This made her a little sad because she would have preferred to stay a garment worker, but her siblings were all busy and so she had to come back to do it. When her parents died she took over the farm. Also she married Tet, a widower who has 3 sons and a daughter. She doesn’t really mind now though that they grow vegetables and she likes the work. Tet and Sokha now share the farm she inherited, while his land went to his children. They make decisions about their farm together. After being asked to invest in the tarpaulin pilot project, they talked about it, evaluated the costs and decided to do it. Sokha even added to the idea by deciding to raise fish in the pond, as she had heard about this option from fish raisers, she proudly tells me. Tet has some interesting insights as well that he likes to share with us: when Hoeung picks some cucumbers he tells her to keep a part of the stem of the vegetable, because people will see it is organic and it might fetch a higher price.

At my request he also tells us about the new techniques he uses to grow vegetables. He is extremely detailed in his explanation as he describes the process step by step with the use of pictures. But while he is knowledgeable about the technical aspects of the training he finds it hard to comment on the social aspects, such as how the farmers learn to work together. After our conversation he takes us to the rice field just outside his house to show us the rice transplanting. While we watch, he talks with people passing by. After this we shorty walk through another house where Tet talks to the people and buys some bananas. When we come back the SNV staff has arrived to install the pump for the tarpaulin pond. Together with SNV Tet works to put the concrete rings together and install the hand pump. When they test it and it works both Tet and Sokha seem extremely excited and look as if they are proud they now have this.

Sokha also has some answers for us on the use of the new techniques. Besides the techniques from the training, she finds that most Vietnamese skills are very adaptable to their current needs “so we think that their ideas and trainings that they offered us were totally perfect in our situation.” Other things she also learnt outside of the training, such as how to raise pigs. “We put mosquito nets so the mosquitoes won’t bite the pigs. Nobody taught us but instinct tells us that we have to use it to protect the pigs from mosquito bites.” She also has something to say about how she decides what training techniques are best: “The techniques that we are using in planting vegetables are coming from our own experiences. They teach us but we are not applying most of them because it’s not adaptable to our environment and to the vegetables we are planting. (But the training is) the best so far that I have known (from other trainings I get). Before when we didn’t have any training, we always have problems with pests invading our vegetables; but after we had our training, we didn’t have any problems anymore. (Still) we have to work more hours than before. We are not so clear yet, so we have to practice more. (But) we are so happy because we are successful in our planting and there is greater yield compared to before.”

Finally, Tet speaks to us about his farming. “When I am free I can work on my own farm and now we just get the yield after we took care such as weeding, removing worms, applying fertilizer. Beside working in vegetable farm I work at the rice field. And usually, I’m not so busy. Sometimes. Now I’m a bit busy with the farmer field school but it’s not every day. I go to check different villages: how are the vegetables that CFAP gave, is it good or not? And after provided the training I need to follow up. We look at the situation of the vegetable, if there are any insects or diseases and suggest the farmers to grow vegetable to increase yield and have a good sell. And I need to move the class to other farmer house because the first one that provided the training was covered by the water. My wife sells
vegetables at the market at Svay Rieng. Mostly we help each other to work in our own field and actually, she helps a lot because sometimes I am busy to work for community. (After I joined her farm) some changes were that the soil was more fertile, we get higher yield etc. I will keep doing if the vegetable is still good (there is a high yield) and increase the income. (Vegetable farming is important, because) people need food to survive. Food refers to three things fish, meat and vegetables. So we can’t live without vegetables. (As a model farmer) other people want to learn and keep their eyes on us. We are model even though we grow little but it’s better than other farmers who do not grow anything at their house. That’s the idea of CFAP. And we have our vegetables and don’t need to buy it from the market and it’s good for our health and comfortable to eat because we know exactly the source. I try to share my knowledge and techniques with other farmers.”

About the future: “I want to grow cash crop (sugar cane) because I can earn more money to support my family’s livelihood, use as capital for vegetable and rice farm, save to take care of our health when I and my wife are old, and use to buy medicine or join wedding, party and ceremony. In the future I don’t want to give up these jobs but if I sick I’m not sure. I don’t want to change anything. I don’t have other skill and I’m old; farming is good for me. I want to expand my vegetable farm and not focus on anything else. In order to reach this I need to gain the spirit to focus on my farm and keep improving new technique to get more yield.”

4.2 Farmer Snor
Also living in Bassac is Ms Ken Snor. She is a relatively young farmer of around thirty who has caught the attention of both SNV and CFAP since she has only joined the programme recently and is already doing very well. She lives on farm with her three children and her husband who is there during the wet season. Both Snor and her husband grew up in this village and have many family members around. Through living with them they learned how to grow vegetables, in the traditional techniques. Before they got married he worked in Phnom Penh as a baker, but now they inherited some rice land. In the dry season her husband still sometimes works in another province and is away for months at a time. The last time he was gone for 9 months, and when he came back she had already started growing vegetables for commercial farming. Before they only had vegetables for family consumption. She tells us about this process: “Before we grow it normal with the traditional habit and after that I saw the other farmer join the training and they use new technique. I ask them to join the training through CFAP. After I got that training, I grow it by myself. There are some people who complain to me that ‘to grow vegetable you don’t need to learn! If you want to grow it well just put more fertilizer, it will do well’. And then I’m angry and I tell myself ‘I need to do it’ and then now I can do it. (I decided to join the training) when I see the other farmers get high yield and we grow with the normal habit we cannot get it (high yield).”

On using the new techniques: “Before I wanted to laugh to others too because they need to cook the soil, do seedling, etc. It takes a lot of time until we grow it on the row; before we grow it directly. But with the new technique they ask us to do seedling and before do seedling we need to cook soil with ash and natural fertilizer (cow or buffalo dung). It’s very different now than before. For example when we grow normally (in the old habit) we don’t care about how to use fertilizer, (…) but we don’t get any yield, we only can use for our consumption, even not enough to eat! Now it is very different (high yield). It’s not difficult because with the new technique we use less seed and money. But if we use old technique we put 4 or 5 seed per hole and it’s very close to other but this time we do seedling and we
use only one seed per hole. And it’s more profit.” She’s laughing as she talks about this and explains more about how the new techniques are better for the vegetables and how they are fresher.

About the training: “Since I got the knowledge, I know more. I get success and I am happy because I got high yield. I hope I can get more new knowledge because right now I didn’t get it 100%. I still need more knowledge. What (techniques) I can do I follow but what I cannot do, I don’t do it (...). I want to learn all the variety of vegetables (and) I think they should train us more how to use natural pesticide. We are the one who eat it so it can affect our health.” Also when asked whether the knowledge she got belonged to her or to CFAP, she said it was hers. She continued on by showing us her farm on my request and explaining how she did things. Overall she seemed happy with her work, telling us she was satisfied with what she had done and wanted to go on like this in the next crop cycle without changing anything.

Still, some things were difficult for her. When she started with the new techniques other farmers who did not join the training ridiculed her. “I’m happy with the success because it’s my commitment and also before the others they laugh at me. I’m committed to do it and now I can do it and I am really happy. (When they laughed I felt) very hurt like I am uneducated. I feel hurt. I commit to do it even though I am alone.” Also, when her husband returned he showed little interest in her farming plans, even though she had hoped it would make it possible for him to stay now as the vegetables earned as much money as he did while being away. But “He doesn’t care. He feels normal... like he wants to go back and he doesn’t want to help here with the heavy or slight work. I want him to stay because he went there and he didn’t bring anything back. If he stays at home we can grow vegetable, take care the animal and the children can go to school. We can grow vegetables, take care of it and sell it, and if we get lot of yield we can take it to the market. (But) if he wants to go he goes, I cannot stop him.”

Despite farmers laughing at her, the community seems important for Snor. She has a lot of relatives who live close by and several times neighbours drop in to make conversation. On one occasion Tet and Sokha even stop by to pick up some plants they can use to feed their fish. Snor also sells a lot of her vegetables to her neighbours and makes sure the product is good for them. “We don’t use pesticide. If the neighbour knows we use pesticide they don’t come to buy our vegetable. I don’t use it, so they come to buy 2 or 3kg per person every day. They don’t need to go to market, and I collect around 10kg per day.” Also, when her daughter got sick from polio, she was able to borrow money from her relatives. And now there is a group in the community that cooperates together where they can borrow money from.

When talking about dealing with external obstacles Snor says that she tries to overcome them by asking CFAP for advice and search for new techniques through them. That’s the only thing she knows.” Also she tries to reduce the risks with the techniques, for example using natural fertilizer. “I find the solution like I call to teacher (committee) for how we can kill the insect for example.” She also explains how she wants to reduce using pesticides but still wants a high yield. Risk for her, then, mainly means the risk associated with using chemical pesticides and fertilizers rather than the possibility of losing her crops through floods etc. Still she says, if there are floods, there is nothing to do but grow anyway but in a reduced quantity because otherwise “rain can spoil all and we lose”. She is also happy that now she has a tarpaulin pond to supply water in the dry season. She already wanted this before being asked to be a pilot farmer for the project, so she is happy that they can
help. Her farm is good, a bit better than that of other farmers because she has enough to eat and sell: “When we want to eat the vegetables we don’t need to buy we have our own vegetable that we grow. It reduces the expense of buying vegetable. (When other farmers) harvest they can harvest only one time or only of home consumption, but if we grow with the new technique we can both eat and sell. (So) even though I am tired I am happy because when I do it I get the result and then the tiredness is gone. (After farming commercially) I’m much happy”

4.3 Farmer Somol

I chose Mr Somol for my last case study after an interview I had with him earlier. During this time he told me how he used to do his own research with fertilizers before starting the trainings. He used natural fertilizers at first, but after hearing from others about the chemical fertilizers they used he bought some, mixed it and tried if it was good for his vegetables. Mr Somol is enthusiastic and smiling as he tells about his experiments. Even after the trainings he wants to keep experimenting because even with the new techniques there are still some diseases that happen, so he wants to find a way to solve this problem. The experiments are for example to test whether or not mulching film is practical or not by doing one row with and one without, and he saw that the vegetables do not grow any faster but the difference is that it takes less time with the new techniques because you do not need to weed as often and also vegetables grow better and there is more yield. So with the test he sees that it works and now he decided to keep using it. Another experiment is with pesticides, he wanted to try something else than what they told him to do with the training because it didn’t work, or the pesticides instructed in the training are not available in the market. He feels that the training cannot help 100% (he says that he is 80% confident about it) so it is still necessary to experiment; so he did 10 rows according to the training and 2 rows for experimenting. He tells me that 40-45% of the techniques he uses is from the training and 60-70% is his own way, though my translator later notes that from the rest of his story it seems that he uses mostly the training techniques. Also, Somol tells me he agrees with the techniques because they have given results. The main reasons he experimented was because of the money (he could only buy materials for the new techniques for 10 rows so he had 2 rows left on which he did his own experiments on) and because he wanted to compare and see if there was a difference and things were better in another way.

Though Somol talked a lot about his experiments in my first interview with him, he seemed to downplay his experimental behaviour the next time we meet. When I question him about his previous comments on experimenting, he starts describing the process of growing vegetables and explains the necessary techniques in great detail. During this conversation he also several times compares his farming with that of other farmers. He explains how it is difficult for him to follow all the techniques: “before I have lot of work and I am also alone, so I couldn’t take care enough. (...) So it’s related to the time. From my observation, the farmers who follow are very few and if I compare with the other... For me it is difficult but the other never do it. They grow like us but small, just one or two rows, they just grow it by nature, and if they have yield or not it doesn’t matter. We never look at the other and the others never look at us. We just try by ourselves. So we don’t know what other farmers do or how they are the same or different from us. (They only grow for their family), they grow few rows so it’s not possible to sell it (because of little yield), it cannot support the market. (But) some farmers they make the row until the soil is very small and use the right amount of fertilizer and they know that if we use more it can spoil the vegetable because the plants are still small so it doesn’t have enough power to absorb that nutrient. I don’t know how they do it or if they do more than me. I don’t know how to.”
Besides being a farmer, Somol also has several other activities as a teacher and doing odd jobs for an NGO such as advertising human rights issues and observing the elections. “Yes, that’s all jobs besides my job as a teacher that I try to do, and for what? For earning livelihood and in order to find more news related to social work. And in the future I will do more if any NGO still wants me to do.” Somol is very enthusiastic about his activities and continues talking about them for a while. Even though it is tiring it is possible to combine the works with his farming because he can do that in the morning or after he works. Originally, Somol wasn’t a farmer but primarily a teacher. His father grew rice but during the war he had a lot of difficulties, and after the war he started studying. “I didn’t have anybody to depend on”, he says, so he needed to grow sugarcane at the same time to support his studies financially. After a while he was selected to be a teacher, but the salary was not enough. “Salary per month is only 240 dollars, but I get 15 kilos of rice and shampoo and oil etc. So in order to improve the livelihood, besides my work (as a teacher), I also grow sugarcane, spey and water spinach and garlic leaf. So I worked hard since that time, grow the vegetable from that time.” Somol tells me that at that time there were a lot of NGOs promoting agriculture, but “they taught us but don’t have technique yet. They grow it normal but when we practise it, it doesn’t get the result. A few years after CFAP brought the technique and when we use it we get more success. If we compare what we have done before, it’s very different.”

Somol also spends a lot of time discussing his family situation, which he finds quite hard. Because his wife works away in the city he needs to take care of their youngest children (though his daughter lives next door with the grandmother). His marriage with his wife was arranged by a relative as a business decision: “She is from Svay Rieng so my purpose was to marry a woman from Svay Rieng so I can make business at the market. But her stepfather did not help us like he said, and my mother is also a widow and I move there so what can I depend on? So I face the difficulty. (...) it’s like we build a house without the wall. If I stay there I cannot survive, so if I stay here (in the village) even if I don’t do anything and I just grow rice at least I can live 5 or 6 months so we can find something else. So that’s why I start these (vegetable) to be my new job and my wife also has work.” His three eldest daughters also live away from the family as they are already grown. Somol finds this difficult because there are many expenses in the family instead of sharing the expense if everyone is at home. “I have struggled a lot until I have today. So all the life if nobody helps we need to struggle for ourselves”.

He doesn’t find it difficult to make farming decisions on his own because his wife doesn’t have farming skills. “She is good at collecting money from the market, but these kind of works she not skilled in them. So all these work happen because of me. If I don’t do it, these work not going to happen. So in everything I have make decision. I play very important role in this family. If I don’t have these ideas my family cannot improve. I let her go because she goes to work and in dry season I grow vegetable and she comes back. If she doesn’t come back no one collects the money. When we have a lot, she sell it. My wife is good at marketing, when she take it to market she never take it back home. She is talkative and she knows lot of people. So if she doesn’t come it’s difficult.... I ask my younger sibling to take it to the market if I have a lot. My struggling life is very difficult.” Somol emphasises the importance of his struggles by explaining how two of his children died ‘because of the livelihood’. He tells me: “So I work hard for children. Work hard, if you don’t work hard it’s not achieved.”

4.4 Case analysis

The three farmer cases show us three very different farmer experiences. Even though at least the first two are generally described as ‘good’ or ‘well-performing’ farmers by CFAP and SNV, I wish to
move beyond these categorisations. Because ultimately, what does it mean to be a good farmer? Is it to be a model for others and work to pass on knowledge? Is it to show significant progress and follow the project’s commercial aims? Or is it to show independence and creativity? In the end, I feel it is not so much about how the farmers are viewed but about their performance and the stories they tell about how they shape their own development. Starting with their history, I learned that while I expected farmers to have grown up to be farmers, their farming is part of a greater story and life strategy. Therefore they do not talk about farming as a matter of course, but as a choice. Even though it was a choice born out of necessity (e.g. for Sokha because she needed to take over her parents farm and for Somol in order to supplement his income), to them it is a choice nonetheless. Their discourse about becoming a farmer suggested that they saw it as an active move on their part and, when talking about their farming, tried to show how they had made it their own. The farmers’ family situations also show three very different gender patterns: grandparents taking care of their grandchild working together as equals, a mother who makes the business decisions while her husband is away and a stay-at-home father with a wife who works outside. Both Snor and Somol portray themselves as the decision makers. However, Snor gives as reason that her husband ‘doesn’t care’, portraying herself as the victim even while making radical farming decisions. Somol on the other hand speaks as if it is his decision to let his wife and his older daughters work away, saying ‘I decide to let them go’. Because his wife is not skilled in farming it is better that she works and earns outside, only coming back to help with the selling, which is her specialty.

Somol finds it important to portray his role as a person who makes decisions and has control. While he portrayed himself as happy, independent and creative in my first interview with him, he later started emphasising his independence by illustrating how he was struggling and how he needed to be determined and in control in order to survive. He often used the word ‘struggle’, and expressed how important he was in the family for their survival. Farming for him is then something that he is good at (more than his wife) and has control over. On the other hand he also speaks of his farming as part of a larger strategy, as he likes to talk about his teaching and NGO work and perhaps gives himself importance through this. Snor takes a more subtle position as someone who is overlooked or ridiculed but is overcoming this through her success in farming. When she speaks about her life and difficulties she is demure, but when she talks about her farming she becomes active and cheerful. For example, she has no control over what her husband does (“I cannot stop him”) but when she harvests she feels happy (“I am success”). Her success as a farmer then seems to give meaning to who she feels she is and can be. Perhaps it gives her a sense of control over certain things (such as the risk of another illness of her children). She likes showing her farm to people stopping by and is happy that SNV thinks she is doing well. Tet and Sokha’s portrayal of themselves is of experienced and knowledgeable farmers (using the words ‘old’ and explaining processes in great detail), even though they only started farming late. They like telling about their own ideas and rarely speak of difficulties, making them come across as content instead of struggling. As model farmers they want to be an example for others and be dependable. When Tet does work for his committee or as a community representative he dresses up officially, while at home he is more casual. The farmers’ social position is important, as how they are perceived depends on those around them. The cases have shown how they frequently interact with neighbours and members of the community to establish their position, build social capital, or learn from them by interaction or observation.

Finally, the three cases show how these farmers shape their own development. They make conscious choices in their strategies rather than waiting on NGOs, and even while participating in the project
evaluate their level of involvement. Even though they follow the new techniques, their farming is still ‘their own’ as it needs to be adapted to their personal situation and has become part of their strategy. Extremely important in their strategies is becoming self-sufficient, commercialisation is therefore mostly an afterthought (i.e., selling everything that is left after their own consumption) rather than the main point of their farming. Rather than being shaped by the project they make use of it, as the new knowledge they gain helps them towards increasing their yield and reaching their goal. Knowledge also seems to them something that they already have, rather than only something they can get from the experts. For example, Tet explains how you don’t really need to learn farming because you can see it from others, and Sokha said that she didn’t need to learn how to protect her pigs from mosquitoes as it was ‘instinct’. In their eyes then there seems to be a stock of knowledge already available through them (in their own lives or around them) that they can use. Expert knowledge is then something that adds to this stock, not something that comes into a knowledge vacuum.

Furthermore farmers use their perceived position to navigate their way, being alternately independent and in control, motivating CFAP to use them as examples for others or further their progress, or portraying themselves as in need of assistance. Their acts of counterwork are rarely overt but rather a variation of passive resistance. As discussed earlier, while their knowledge negotiation is a combination of the limitations placed upon them by external circumstances, outside information and internal knowledge, these three factors do not neatly add up in a universal formula through which the farmers can calculate their decisions. Neither is it beyond their control. Rather, the outcome of this negotiation is an effect of their own agency, as for example outside circumstances can be overcome or ignored to a certain degree, (such as when a farmer decides to plant anyway, despite the risk), outside information is changed by their perception as they unconsciously or consciously see the project through coloured glasses (mainly by focusing on their personal aims and believing the project is there for these aims as well) and their internal knowledge is dependent on their beliefs of what is important and how they choose to portray themselves.

Learning about how the farmers act then connects to the project as it proposes a new way of viewing the farmers as dynamic and also very human. They make choices that might not seem to make sense and are a result of what they feel is best at the time. They have a story that goes beyond the scope of the project. They are actors with varying strategies to either improve their lives or survive. Farming is a part of that strategy, either the most important element or a supplement, but mainly portrayed as something they can use rather than something they have no control over. This is different from how farming as a livelihood strategy is mostly portrayed by experts, as it is then seen as a fixed fact, that they are always farming in the same way, while in fact their ‘level’ of farming varies as their circumstances change, from being their main source of income that they want to focus on entirely, to supplementing other activities when other opportunities arise. Trying to get farmers to commercialise in a coordinated way might be overlooking this fluidity that exists in the farmers’ experience. In conclusion, there is a need for the experts to understand the way that they see the farmers and how that limits the options they give them in the project or how they judge the project’s success. Seeing the farmers as they see themselves will eventually give them the skills to play the game with them rather than playing a whole different game entirely.
Conclusion

I began my research with the expectation that the main point of focus would be on how knowledge is negotiated by farmers as they make conscious decisions about which information to use and how to combine new knowledge into their existing knowledge network. However I found it interesting to learn that it is not merely their decisions and mindset that is relevant in negotiation, but the way they negotiate their position through their performance and thus are able to reach their goal. Realizing the relevance of farmers’ portrayals and power plays, I find myself wishing that I would have been able to pay more attention to this during my empirical research. This would have allowed me to have more extensive data to choose from, rather than having to base it on my recollection of events. I therefore think that a follow up research that focuses on these issues would be valuable. I would also like to conduct more research on how new knowledge is produced through conflict on the interface.

In the above chapters, I have analysed the different processes in the project in an attempt to understand more about the effects of knowledge negotiation on development intervention. The aim of this research was to answer the question: How does the interface of different actors’ knowledge networks, as well as the brokerage of knowledge exchange by these actors, influence knowledge for capacity building and farming techniques in the SNV/CFAP project supporting vegetable farmers in Svay Rieng and how do these farmers negotiate this knowledge?

After examining the project I have found that there are two significant knowledge negotiation processes taking place. The first is the transfer of information and subsequent negotiation via SNV, CFAP and the CFA/CBO eventually leading up to the farmer. Through the actors’ different visions and goals, as well as their priorities and capacities (in short, their knowledge network), the project gets changed and/or distorted along the way, leading to a different body of information eventually reaching the farmer. The second knowledge negotiation process is that taking place within the farmer after receiving the information.

In mapping the knowledge interface of the project I have found that the multitude of actors, as well as their direct or indirect interaction with each other has created a complex structure. Instead of only transferring knowledge and negotiating with the actor directly in contact with them in the project, actors are involved at various levels of the project, creating many points of conflict on the interface. Their knowledge networks clash frequently, and the actors’ varying perceptions of each other, constructions of the project and rationalisation of difficult situations actively change the information that is transferred through the project. Additionally, actors’ double roles as being both donors and recipients as well as their negotiation in order to maintain their position of power complicates their role in the project.

Some interesting processes in the project that can be detected are the interactions between SNV and CFAP. SNV often doubts their willingness and their priorities. They are frustrated by the fact that CFAP often doesn’t do as they agreed and tries to explain this in various ways, for example the fact that they are busy, a lack of dedication and the non-cooperation of the managing director. CFAP on the other hand doesn’t always agree with SNV’s assessment of them and sometimes feels as if they act superior. This results in some issues of resistance. In the behaviour of CFAP it is interesting to see
how their performance helps them reach their goals, for example in getting continued trainings from
SNV or maintaining a position of power with regards to the CFA/CBOs. In the FOs and farmers’
perceptions it is also possible to see a difference in goals and views of what it is to improve. FOs then
do not prioritize vegetable farming but rather have farmer groups for rice and livestock as well, and
farmers do not have a commercial mindset but are more focused on income diversification and
prioritising their consumption needs as a livelihood strategy. This leads to negotiation, as for example
committee members will influence the trainings by what they feel is a priority or argue with CFAP
and SNV as to what their needs are. As the committee members are farmers themselves there is also
blurred line between the FOs and the farmers as actors and many of their priorities are the same.
Interestingly, many farmers state that their goals are the same as that of CFAP, but whether this is
truly their belief or part of a portrayal is uncertain. Besides the clash of the different knowledge
networks of the actors at large there are also specific points where negotiation takes place in a more
concentrated form. As nodal points on the interface, the knowledge brokers have a unique position
of power in the project. By selectively choosing training topics, relaying information or making
choices in communicating or facilitating, they are able to negotiate from a more powerful position
and further their own goals. They also use portrayals of themselves to establish this position.

From the different networks and subsequent processes of interaction we can see that the different
actors have quite different ideas of how the project is going and what the others are supposed to do.
Their mutual interaction and the influence of these goals and views, as well as their perception of the
project changes the information that is transferred by them and the way they receive that
information. This leads to a bottleneck situation of the original information, which explains the
reason SNV sometimes feels they are not having any effect. It shows how complicated a project that
comprises of several independent actors can become, and how important it is for these actors to
keep working on communicating and aligning their goals continuously throughout the project.

As I stated before, the way farmers receive the information passed on to them in the project is
influenced by their perception of the project. As farmers have their own goals and ideas of how the
project will help them, they do not receive the information at face value, but rather view it through
coloured lenses, tainted by their worldview, experiences and circumstances, in short, their lifeworld.
For example, from getting to know the farmers’ lifeworlds we can see that farming is not merely an
occupation to them, but rather an integral part of their daily life. It is a part of their identity, and
therefore they regard it more as a way of living, rather than a way of earning money in order to fund
their living (as we in the West often work in order to pay for things and state: “I don’t just work, I also
have a life”). Their lifeworld and knowledge network can give us some understanding in how they
conduct their livelihood strategies and the choices that they make as combine the information with
their own existing knowledge and preferences, adapt it to their circumstances, and make their own.
Farmers’ knowledge negotiation then takes place at the intersection between their received outside
information, internal knowledge and external circumstances. For example, their willingness to
dedicate themselves to the new techniques varies, sometimes they feel it costs a lot of time and do
not complete all the steps due to ‘being lazy’, while other times they work extremely hard in spite of
adversities. Besides these internal processes of negotiation, I also found that farmers negotiate their
position within the project by the way they choose to represent themselves. Portraying themselves
as independent and creative or ignorant and in need of help can be useful in reaching their goal.
Farmers’ performances are thus an interesting part of their negotiation as it goes beyond their
internal mindset and ideas and focuses on their creative actions as independent actors.
In terms of counterwork I found that farmers are more prone towards ‘everyday forms of resistance’ such as foot-dragging or side-tracking rather than overt resistance and therefore more part of their personal negotiation strategies rather than being an organised struggle.

Finally, the difference between the farmers perceptions of themselves and the project contrasts with how the farmers are seen in the project by the experts creating a so-called expert-user gap. While experts attempt to categorise and rationalise farmer behaviour, these categorisations make it difficult to understand some of the real processes occurring in the field. SNV’s behavioural change analysis, for example, while containing relevant information concerning farmer motivations, does not sufficiently take into account that farmers are agents of their own development process. It is important to develop an awareness of farmer agency and, even while trying to explain their behaviour, to keep seeing them as individuals with differences that must be taken into account rather than a uniform, homogenous group, as the experts are wont to do. This of course can be rather difficult as some generalisations are helpful for understanding a farmer group and for forming a plan of how to help them develop. Without such a plan an organisation might not be able to target specific issues or keep track of their progress. However, these generalisations must remain guidelines that lead to a better understanding of individual farmers who show their own unique qualities and ways of reasoning, rather than becoming an easy explanation for the behaviour of the whole group.

The expert-user gap is then not only a question of two parties simply misunderstanding each other, but also of power plays as a result of uneven relationships between NGOs and farmers. SNV questions why the project is not proceeding as envisioned, but we need to ask ourselves whether this problem only actually exists from SNV’s point of view. If the farmers do not experience the problem is it then even real? We could argue that development intervention often mainly aims to solve and issue that has been problematized by an outside expert rather than to answer to a need that came from the grassroots. Additionally, it is important for the experts to acknowledge that local knowledge is not necessarily inferior to their knowledge and both can co-exist, as long as they accept that they are from their very nature, different, and thus have different perceptions of the ‘problem’. Learning this, they may come to regard development as a more fluid concept rather than a fixed target that can be missed, bringing them a step closer towards bridging the gap. Practically, SNV can learn that while the problem is a concrete issue that they can work to solve, it is also their own construction, and therefore they need to remain flexible in their understanding of success.

Finally, we don’t have to be afraid of conflict on the interface. While conflict has a negative connotation, examining the processes on the interface shows that knowledge production takes place and space is created for new ideas or situations as actors relate to each other. Contradictions taking place within development can be frustrating, but also ensure that the process remains interesting and dynamic, an absolute necessity in a field whose very name, ‘development’, shows that nothing ever stays the same.
Conflict on the interface

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