

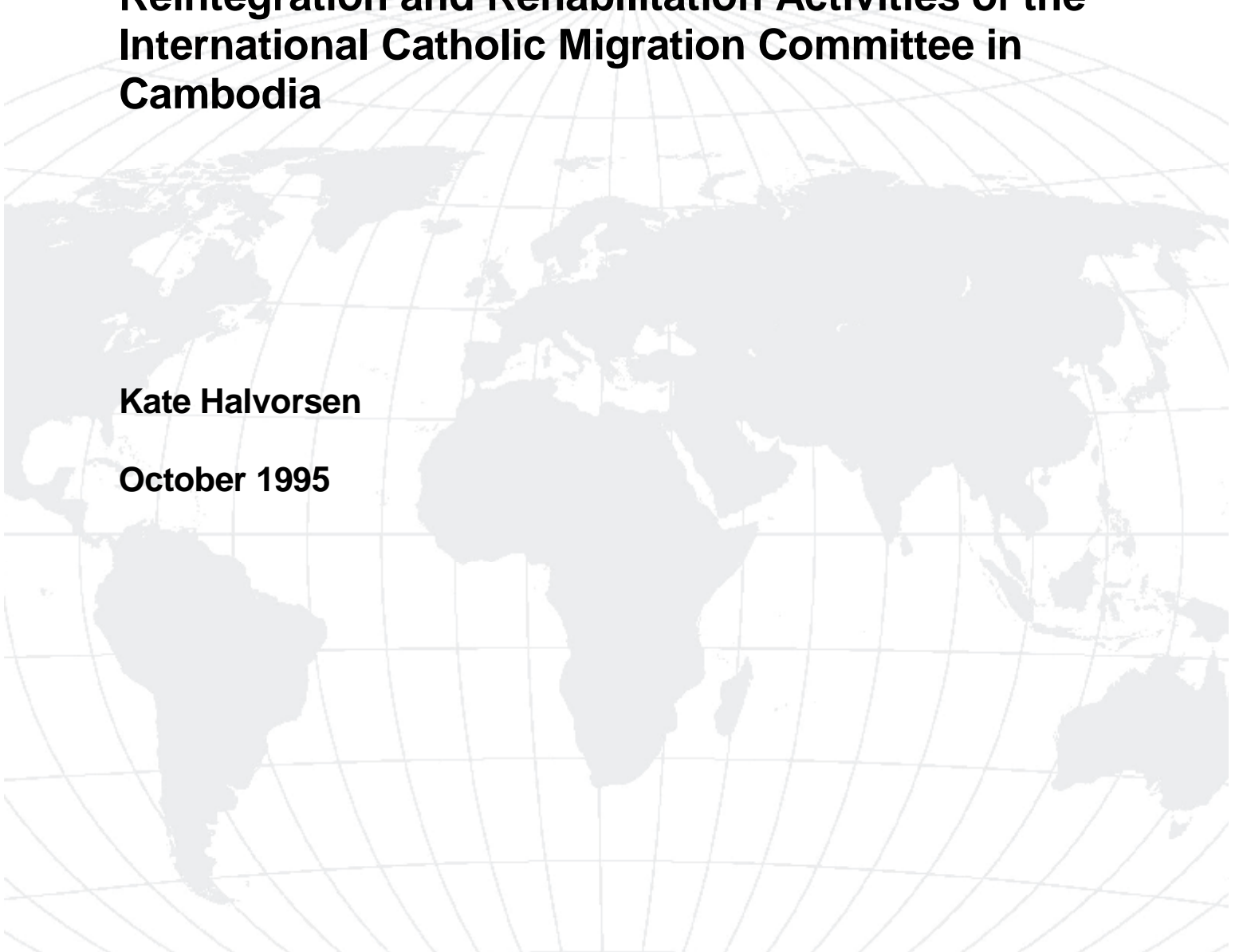
LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE PROJECT (DO NO HARM)

Case Study

**Repatriation in Safety and Dignity?
Reintegration and Rehabilitation Activities of the
International Catholic Migration Committee in
Cambodia**

Kate Halvorsen

October 1995



This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.

REPATRIATION IN SAFETY AND DIGNITY? REINTEGRATION AND REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MIGRATION COMMITTEE IN CAMBODIA

"The suffering of Cambodia has been deep. Years of violence have brought great tragedy. More violence can only bring more harm. Now is the time for peace."
Preah Maha Ghosananda, Cambodia's Supreme Patriarch

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 1991 a peace agreement was signed in Paris by the four rival factions in Cambodia, signalling an end to a decade of civil war and marking the beginning of establishing peace and democracy, rehabilitation and development in the country. It also started an intensive period of planning and implementation of the largest organized repatriation operations ever undertaken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The objective was to have all refugees back in Cambodia in time for the first democratic election planned for April/May 1993. Approximately 370 000 refugees in seven refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border required transportation to their place of destination and assistance reintegrating into the Cambodian communities. The international community promised return in safety and dignity.

The organized repatriation started with the movement of refugees at the end of March 1992 and ended before the April 1993 elections. Logistically, the repatriation operation was characterized as a huge success. Simultaneously international and national Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) began assisting the reintegration and rehabilitation effort.

More than two years later, it was possible to look more closely at what happened after the returnees arrived at their destinations. By then a lot of experience and insights had been gained about the reintegration of the returnees. This study examines the activities of one NGO, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), and how they contributed to peaceful reintegration and rehabilitation in post-war Cambodia.

2 THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

The major outflow of refugees from Cambodia started in December 1978 and peaked in 1979 at the time of the Vietnamese intervention. An estimated one to two million people were killed or died of starvation and illness during the bloody revolution of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge from 1975-79. A smaller-scale exodus continued throughout the 1980s when people fled political, social and economic restructuring by the Vietnamese-backed communist government, poverty and hardship.

Life in the refugee camps, however, was not easy. The camps were controlled by the political factions and afflicted by violence, extortion, racketeering, theft, killings, rape and prostitution. Nevertheless, these refugee camps were considered to be among the best serviced ever by international organizations. Refugees had access to a wide range of activities from health and

education to skills training and income-generation.

After the peace agreement was signed in 1991, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was responsible for organizing the first multi-party democratic election for a new national government and the drafting of a new constitution. Elections were held in May 1993 and four months later, in September 1993, the new constitution marked the official end of UNTAC's mission in Cambodia. UNTAC left a country which was in great need of development in all sectors. Agricultural production (mainly rice) was extremely low due to floods, drought, ongoing conflict and the presence of landmines. The economy was largely dependent on foreign aid and there was no functional judicial system. The country had the most densely mined areas in the world, and infrastructure was lacking in large areas of the country.

More than two years later there was still no peace in Cambodia. Fighting was still going on in many areas. There was still widespread poverty and a majority of Cambodian people were living from hand to mouth. Many had still no access to free schools, health services, safe drinking water and immunization. There was an estimated 8-10 million landmines which maimed or killed an average of 300 per month. There was a great shortage of skilled labor and educated people. The insecure and inaccessible areas were not possible to rehabilitate and develop, and little or no food was produced in those areas. One of UNTAC's major tasks as the transitional authority was to disarm the political factions, which they failed to do for a number of reasons; that the Khmer Rouge at a certain point in time decided not to demobilize was a major factor. The failure of demobilization contributed to continued fighting and laying of landmines. As a result a growing number of people were becoming internally displaced, many of whom (estimated at 25-35 percent) were returnees.

The majority of the people living in Cambodia had never experienced peace as we know it. There was a deep-rooted mistrust on both the individual and societal level, which many attributed to the Pol Pot years. Furthermore, extreme poverty and scarce resources did not encourage solidarity among people. The elements of not knowing peace, mistrust and little solidarity among people, were all barriers to the peace and reconciliation process on the psycho-social level. However, there were some encouraging signs, such as increased economic and social activity and an improvement in the standard of living for some people. Although few had experienced a life in peace people had clear ideas of what peace and reconciliation meant: no fighting; secure and safe living conditions; a good living standard for everyone including the poor; happiness and forgiveness; not being forced to do things for others; living without fear and physical abuse; freedom of speech; freedom of movement; freedom from crime. Reintegration means peace. The following study of ICMC's programming and implementation and how it contributed to peace and reconciliation is based on this definition of peace.

A number of NGOs, both national and international, together with UN organizations in various ways addressed the needs of returnees through rehabilitation, emergency relief and development projects. Most of them focused on the rehabilitation of infrastructure, such as building roads, schools, wells, hospitals and clearing mines. A shift to more long-term community development and training and strengthening of government counterparts began after the election period was over.

Many international NGOs established their head offices in Battambang province, the province with the highest concentration of returnees. Battambang was the province most devastated by war and where most of the fighting still took place. It was the rice-basket of Cambodia with very rich and fertile soils. It was also rich in minerals and gem deposits and precious woods, particularly in the areas of the Khmer Rouge headquarters of Pailin. Many refugees therefore chose to return to Battambang instead of their place of origin. Returnees constituted around 16 percent of the population in the province and one third of the total number of returnees. Around 17 percent of the returnees in Battambang settled in new settlement sites especially created for returnees, while the rest settled individually in existing villages and communities. Battambangville had a population of approximately 200000 and the province approximately 700000 in 1995.

ICMC, a Geneva-based NGO founded in 1951 to provide assistance to refugees, was one of the NGOs which early on, in 1991-92, established a head office in Battambang and a liaison office in Phnom Penh. Its main activities included the integrated women's assistance project, transitional living and life skills program and human rights education.

3. ICMC'S PROGRAMMING AND IMPLEMENTATION

One of the first projects of ICMC in Cambodia was an integrated community development project in a village called Ta Moeun Ta Pong. Before repatriation UNHCR together with NGOs had documented a number of vulnerable female heads of household and extremely vulnerable individuals, who needed special attention during and after repatriation. A large group of female-headed households had been identified in the village Ta Moeun Ta Pong and ICMC started an integrated project consisting of a community house, clinic, school, day-care center, training in health care, human rights and mine awareness and the distribution of items for farming and establishment of alternative sources of income. The women were actively involved in decision-making and running of the project. The buildings went up, were utilized by the community members and eventually the project was largely run by the community members. The project assisted both vulnerable individuals as well as the rest of the community; both returnees as well as local people. As an integrated community development project established to benefit a vulnerable group of returnees, it was quite unique at that time in the province. It soon became a success and the showcase of both UNHCR and ICMC. However, ICMC encountered some difficulties during the implementation which led to its discontinuation. During the initial phase they had problems getting the local community to accept it, especially the village leaders and elders, all of whom were men. They had difficulty accepting a project which almost exclusively benefitted women. A period of tough negotiating and discussion followed, and eventually it was sorted out. However, a combination of problems led to the discontinuation of the project; problems intrinsic to the site itself, lack of access to land, the exceptionally high number of female-headed households, and the general deterioration of the security situation. The gradual increase in sporadic fighting by Khmer Rouge created so much insecurity that everyone eventually left.

ICMC discontinued the activities in this specific village, but did not abandon the basic principles of targeting vulnerable women, nor did they give up the participatory approach and the strategy of strengthening local people and institutions.

3.1 Integrated Women's Assistance Project

The Integrated Women's Assistance project was another project developed to assist the many female heads of households in difficult circumstances due to their specific family situations and/or not getting access to land for housing and farming. Some women, who did have access to land, were not able to farm because they lacked means to work it, i.e. draught power and necessary equipment. Other problems were related to transportation, access to adequate and habitable housing and property, land rights, inheritance rights and property rights, access and availability of services.

Most of the project activities were located in a center in Battambangville belonging to the Catholic Church. The participants did not live there, but came every day from their homes up to ten kilometers away. They brought their youngest children with them, for whom day-care was provided. The large majority of women who participated were widows, divorcees, single and women with handicapped husbands. Some men in especially difficult circumstances attended the bicycle repair courses as well. Participants were identified by ICMC from exceptionally poor communes based on vulnerability and need. ICMC also received many applications from people, some of whom were accepted.

The participants were trained in the skills of sewing, weaving, candle and jostick making, silk screen printing, beauty and hair care, motorbike and bicycle repair, baking and food preparation. They learned by making, marketing and selling their own produce. The training was done by local Cambodian staff members. ICMC had established a few sales outlets for the merchandise, such as a little shop in a popular restaurant which was frequently visited by foreigners. The women themselves created their own sales outlets as well. The candle business was going extremely well as the women had managed to establish a distribution network into Thailand. For courses in sewing, weaving, beauty-shop and bicycle-repair, women spent 18 weeks in training. The food and cake production and small business training only took 8 weeks. It was possible for participants to come back for refresher courses if needed. An in-house (ICMC) survey, however, showed that only 30 percent of the participants used the skills they had learned upon completion, and that some of the skills were more useful than others. As a result, it was recommended to revise the whole training program and discontinue or reduce the silk screen, bicycle repair and beauty/hair activities.

After the women finished the skills training course in the center, a small loan was available for those who wanted to start on their own. Usually the applicants were formed into a group of four or five and each group member was responsible for payments from the whole group. This strategy was found to increase the chances of repayment. There were two kinds of loans, one repayable in ten months and the other in five months. Loan schemes could be extended for a second period as long as the first. The ten-months loan scheme provided loans that ranged from approximately 40 to 100 US dollars paid in local currency. The latest cycle in 1995 had 40 applications and 21 were approved. As part of the loan program women received training in business skills, which provided them with basic abilities in accounting, management of credit, marketing and selling of the products. ICMC also conducted a survey on the loan program and found that only 40 percent of the participants were able to fully repay their loans. Consequently, ICMC was in the process of investigating how to improve the ability to repay.

From the beginning it was realized that many of the participants would need some basic

literacy and numeracy training in order to manage to utilize the skills training. Health education was also identified by the staff and participants as a basic need and included. Human rights education was started because staff were confronted with program participants who often came to the training classes after being subjected to a number of abuses, such as domestic violence and harassment in the community.

3.2 Transitional Living and Life Skills Program

As ICMC was establishing itself in Battambang a specific social problem was becoming increasingly apparent in Battambangville. The life for people in some rural areas was becoming increasingly difficult due to continued fighting and large mined areas. In areas where fighting continued or increased, people, both returnees and local, had no choice but to leave. In other areas, poverty and destitution forced people to leave. The result was an increasing number of homeless and landless, who migrated to the towns in hope of finding a way to survive. Most of the homeless were women and children as the men often found other alternatives; they became soldiers, bandits or migrant workers. The government had no assistance programs specifically for this group nor did any of the national or international organizations. ICMC recognized this gap and established a Drop-in Center for Homeless Children, a Drop-in Center for Homeless Women, and a Transitional Living and Life Skills Training Center at Veal Trea. The intention was to work with the authorities to establish a government response to the problem.

The Drop-in Center for Children, was created in February 1994 to provide care for homeless and unaccompanied children and was located in the middle of Battambangville. Six social workers were employed at the center, four were ICMC local Cambodian staff members and two were seconded from the Ministry of Social Action and Veterans Affairs (MSA) with a stipend from ICMC. This was help to the authorities in terms of both material and human resources. According to the social workers and other ICMC staff the collaboration between the government and ICMC social workers went well. The social workers regularly made rounds in the town to pick up street children. Most of the children left their families because they had been ill-treated and physically abused by (foster) parents and/or because of extreme poverty. At the center the children were provided with food, clothes, accommodation, health care and formal education. Most of the children stayed on an average of two weeks, while some stayed longer; up to six months or more. The center did some family tracing and reunification and provided a few children with foster families. Others were taken in by a local NGO called Krousar Thmey, which assisted homeless, unaccompanied, orphaned and abused children. Those who could be placed were eventually sent to the only orphanage in town. As of August 1995 the children who resided in the center was 48, 40 of whom were boys and 8 girls. The approach was based on activating the children in daily household tasks and education. A typical day for the children started at 5 am; they tidied their sleeping places; took care of assigned household tasks; had a bath and ate breakfast. After breakfast they performed physical exercise outside followed by school classes until lunch. The afternoon was filled with class work followed by dinner and bedtime at 8 pm. Some went to the skills training center instead of going to the school classes. In the classes they were taught reading, writing, numeracy, health education, human rights and moral education including children's rights.

The drop-in center for homeless women and their children was located very close to the center

for children and operated similarly. ICMC paid for food and shelter over a short period of time, and for materials for basket or mat weaving at the center. The women participated in preparing meals, taking care of the children and making baskets, mats and brooms which they sold. They stayed there on an average of two weeks, after which time they either moved back to where they came from, traced relatives or family, or went to the transitional living center at Veal Trea. In August 1995 there were eight women at the center, four of whom were returnees. All of them were weaving mats, baskets and making brooms. The social workers visited them regularly for counselling and supervision. They talked about their situation and how to best solve it. The reason they were there was either because of armed conflict in their home village or because of domestic abuse. Some had fled because their husbands had been killed, their houses burnt down, belongings stolen and/or farm land was mined. Other women left their homes out of shame and desperation because their husbands had left them; husbands had thrown them out or because they had been raped and impregnated. Common to these stories was that the women had few family members or relatives who could or would support them. If the center had not been there some of them very likely would have become prostitutes. Battambangville had seen a significant increase in brothels and prostitution since the peace agreement.

The transitional living and life skills training center at Veal Trea was created at the beginning of 1995 in order to provide the homeless women who needed a place to stay for a longer period of time than the drop-in center. They were given the opportunity to farm and learn some skills for supplementary income while they sought permanent living and farming arrangements. The Veal Trea center was located 12 kilometers outside Battambangville close to Route 5 going north to the Thai border. The center belonged to the Provincial Department of Agriculture and ICMC had an agreement with them for the use of the property. It was situated in the middle of rice-fields and within its compound were chicken-coops, pig sties, school buildings, administration office and housing for the beneficiaries. There was a large area for gardening, fruit growing and rice farming. A nursery school for the youngest and a primary school for school-age children taught literacy, numeracy, morality and agriculture. In August 1995, 31 children were attending the primary school and 20 were enrolled in the nursery school. In order to establish good contacts with the surrounding communities the school included children from the nearby village. The women at the center also had quite a lot of contact with the local people in the village. They went to the market there and socialized with them. The average period of stay at the center was around 6 months, but they were allowed to stay until they felt confident in managing on their own. In August 1995 there were 15 women, all of whom were female heads of households. 10 of the women were returnees. In addition ICMC had 15 staff members working there to take care of the facilities, education and training. Most of the women learnt mat-basket-broom-making. They produced some of the food on the farm, but had to be supplemented with rice from the World Food Program (WFP). ICMC had negotiated with the local authorities and had been promised a piece of land big enough for 46 families. A total of six families had left the center since it started. They had managed very well because they had some money and had joined relatives or friends who helped them out. However, whether the women at the center became self-sufficient and whether ICMC managed to have a regular turn-over of beneficiaries, remained to be seen.

3.3 Human Rights Education

Few people in Cambodia had any knowledge whatsoever of human rights and democracy.

Human rights education and training had been included in the Thai border camps in an attempt to prepare the refugees for the election and democratization process, which were expected to take place. Some human rights training had also been done by UNTAC in Cambodia in connection with preparing for elections. However, the awareness among villagers remained very poor or non-existent. In an effort to raise awareness and as a result of working with people who had been subjected to various human rights violations, ICMC provided human rights training to local communities and to staff from local and international NGOs. The project included training of trainers.

The objective of the project was to raise awareness in the local communities about the various human rights and responsibilities that were applicable to their daily life in a rapidly changing Cambodia. Other goals were to focus specifically on the rights of women and rights of children and to train women specifically.

It was not possible to include many women participants, because the program required literacy. The large majority of returnee women were illiterate. Moreover, they did not have much time to spare for such activities, while men were eager to take their place. A typical community training in Battambang consisted of 26 men and 8 women. Most were educated and held high-status positions in their communities. The substance of the course maintained the focus on women and children's rights to a certain degree, but not as much as expected. The participants showed a specific interest in the rights that related to their everyday life, such as the right to free education for everyone, land tenure and criminal procedures. The training emphasized that the participants were obliged to teach others in the community what they had learned. They were taught that they were responsible for getting involved if they witnessed human rights violations and responsible for **not** violating other people's rights. There were two course modalities, one lasted two weeks and the other lasted up to 5 months. The goal was to train 80 trainers in 1995 and by the month of August 100 had been trained. The successfulness and effectiveness of the training had never been evaluated and therefore it was not known whether the objectives had been reached.

3.4 ICMC's Relationship to Local Communities and Authorities

Apart from the activities involving vulnerable groups and communities directly, ICMC played a role in the coordination and information sharing of the various organizations and government authorities. After the Peace Agreement many international NGOs failed to establish links and coordination with government ministries and institutions which provoked the Cambodians. In the beginning ICMC was not especially concerned about it either, but by 1995 had made it a matter of policy and program strategy to create good links with the government on both the local and central level. ICMC coordinated activities, shared information and also supported the authorities in terms of material and human resources.

The liaison office in Phnom Penh was established for cooperation and coordination on the central level. In Battambang ICMC had a wide range of local and international contacts for coordination and information sharing purposes. The staff participated in the provincial Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Committee which was chaired by the government coordinator for IDP assistance with participation by all agencies working with IDPs. They participated in the Child Welfare Working Group, which dealt with specific children-related issues in the province and the Working Group on Trafficking and Abduction of Children for

Prostitution, which included the other agencies working with children, community services and human rights. ICMC staff assisted in coordinating the monthly meetings of some 32 local NGOs in Battambang and participated in a weekly security meeting for all the international agencies.

Other aspects of ICMC in Cambodia related to staffing, management style and program participants also contributed to reintegration.

From the beginning ICMC emphasized the importance of hiring local staff, training them in order to eventually hand over to them. By August 1995 they had around 100 local staff and two internationals. They had recently discontinued one international staff post, leaving the Program Director and Administration Coordinator. It was uncertain how long these positions were going to be filled by internationals. ICMC had no clear plan of when and how to discontinue, phase-out or hand over their projects to Cambodians.

The leadership style of ICMC Cambodia was democratic and non-hierarchical. The program director supervised a team of 15 project managers who met once a month for information sharing and strategy and policy discussions. On a rotation basis one of the participants was given the responsibility for organizing and leading the meeting, thus giving them the opportunity to practice organizational and leadership skills. In everyday work, the director had regular contact with each individual manager on important decisions and strategies, but the responsibility for the daily running of project activities was delegated to the project managers. In general, the local staff were highly motivated, skilled and performed well in their jobs. Both staff and program participants were a mixture of returnees and local people.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF MAIN ISSUES

4.1 False Assumptions About Repatriation

Three major assumptions were made by UNHCR and the other agencies involved in the repatriation operation and reintegration activities, which had implications for the peace and reconciliation process. Firstly, repatriation was based on the assumption that peace would prevail and that the refugees returned to areas where they could stay permanently. As pointed out above, this proved false as the fighting continued and increased and forced many to leave their homes. Secondly, repatriation was based on the assumption that everyone who chose to would get access to land for housing and farming. UNHCR and other organizations negotiated with local authorities and communities for land, but did not succeed in all cases as there was much less land available than first anticipated. Land was scarce because of a high density of landmines; ongoing warfare; and because the local population was unwilling or unable to share their land. Lastly, repatriation was based on the assumption that the extremely vulnerable, including single heads of households, elderly, disabled and chronically ill would be taken care of by family, relatives or the community upon return. However, the traditional Cambodian values of the all-inclusive and caring extended family had eroded both among the returnees and the local people.

ICMC is one international organization which did **not** base their programming and implementation on these assumptions; to the contrary they anticipated problems with access to land and the reintegration of vulnerable returnees. ICMC largely based their program

activities on needs as perceived through everyday contact with the various communities in Battambang and on their own evaluations of assistance activities. The skills training is an example of addressing the need for alternative income-generation, and by targetting female heads of households addressing the problem of a vulnerable group. An aborted project for demobilized soldiers, which is mentioned below, was an attempt to address a potential source of tension, as was the Ta Moeun Ta Pong community development project.

Nevertheless, ICMC can be criticized for being too conventional and individualized in their approach. Innovation and new ways of working in a more preventive way seems to be lacking, not only in ICMC but also among the other agencies. In hindsight, they could have had a more pro-active and preventive strategy which addressed the major problems of reintegration; namely securing access to land and sustainable means of livelihoods, promoting family reunification, and assisting community building.

On the one hand, ICMC can be criticized for investing too many resources in too few individuals. Such an individualized approach limits activities both in scope and numbers of participants. On the other hand, the ICMC program in Battambang was filling an assistance gap in the province.

4.2 Addressing Tensions between Locals and Returnees

Apart from the two major problems facing the returnees, war-fare and lack of means of livelihood, there were a number of other constraints to their successful and peaceful reintegration. Returnees suffered in general from poverty and illness and many suffered from being displaced yet again and again upon return. They lacked authoritative power in the struggle to establish a new life in the communities of return, and many felt met by antipathy and hostility from those who never fled.

There were tensions between local people and returnees some places to a varying degree. Some local people felt that people who lived in the border camps did not deserve any special assistance and treatment upon return. According to many the refugees had been pampered and fed while the rest had struggled inside Cambodia to survive from hunger, illness and warfare. They saw no reason to share their scarce resources with others, who they believed were better off than themselves. They failed to understand why the returnees should be helped while they were struggling with virtually the same problems. A number of returnees, mostly young men trained and educated in the border camps, had been given jobs with UNTAC and other international organizations with comparatively high salaries and benefits. This also created some antagonism and tension among the local people. Returnees on their side, did not always respect or trust local authorities and community structures, an attitude they had from the war years. For example, they would build houses and work on land which belonged to others without properly asking permission.

There were differences between returnees and locals in their ability to cope. Some said that the returnees' ability to cope was much more limited than the locals because they had less support from family and community. One report documented that living with family or relatives was indeed a major determinant for effective reintegration and coping and that the proportion of those living with relatives or family was much higher among local people than returnees. Having been away for 10-15 years, returnees did not feel as part of the community

and felt out of place. They lived on plots and farmed land which belonged to the local population. The report concluded that the returnees were emotionally worse off as a result.

ICMC's program contributed to reduce tensions between returnees and locals because in all their program activities and staffing they included local people, not only returnees. All the program activities had a mixture of returnee and local participants, often a majority of the latter. The same went for the around 100 ICMC staff members, who were both returnees and a majority of locals. According to staff members, there were no serious problems or tensions between the two groups.

4.3 Strengthening of Local Capacities

There is no doubt that both the type of activities ICMC chose and the way they were implemented contributed to strengthening local capacities in the reintegration effort. Their approach was based on participation and reliance on Cambodian human resources, as well as solidarity. Employing, training and supervising 100 local staff members shows solidarity with the Cambodian people, and a sincere commitment to enabling them to develop their own country on their own premises. This contributed to the capacity-building of the local population and encouraged the staff and program participants to promote reconciliation in their every-day work.

However, the **sustainability** and **effectiveness** of the activities were unknown. The majority of the credit scheme participants had problems repaying the loans and the majority of the skills training participants did not utilize the skills later. Furthermore, a majority of the women who had benefitted from the skills training (60 percent) were not self-sufficient. It was also uncertain whether the two centers for women would be able to keep a regular turn-over of clients. It remained to be seen whether lasting non-institutional solutions for the children and women in the drop-in centers and transitional centers were found. Although the ICMC staff benefitted from the human rights training, the effectiveness and training of trainers in the communities had not been evaluated.

In addition, the local staff were suffering from uneasiness related to the uncertainty of the continuation of the activities and their jobs. They were in need of clear and definite plans regarding **when** ICMC would close down or hand over the various activities and **how** it would be done in order to have a realistic time perspective on their work and address the uneasiness regarding the duration of their assignments.

5.4 Gender and Targetting

Rebuilding home is the first necessary step in the process of rehabilitating the individual lives of repatriated refugees and the first step in the process of restoring a peaceful community and nation. According to Cambodian returnee women, home embodied the most important aspects of life; mental, social and physical security as well as a future in freedom and peace. Their greatest wish was to get on with lives in peace and quiet and create a peaceful future for their children. As women were largely responsible for the tasks involved in rebuilding homes, the burden was on them. Women were the ones who were **present** trying to get on with their life in **peace**, i.e. farming their land and caring for their children and other household members, such as elderly and handicapped. As caregivers and providers they took care of both

production and reproduction at the household and community level, while the men were more often **absent**, some permanently and others temporarily. Women as peaceful producers and reproducers as such contributed to peace and reintegration. However, as main caretakers of homes and households they faced specific problems and challenges and were in a weaker position in the fight for scarce resources.

ICMC realized early on the important gender and age issues in the repatriation and programmed accordingly and contrary to many other organizations. Most of the program implementation focused on women and children in difficult circumstances, and the approach was based on empowerment and promoting self-sufficiency. Targetting the most vulnerable categories of women and those in temporarily or more permanently difficult circumstances, empowered these people and contributed to the development effort. Contrary to most other assistance activities, which focused on the rehabilitation of infrastructure, ICMC worked to assist caretakers of peace, in the repatriation and reintegration process, and as such made an important contribution to peace.

However, it is important to target, not only the caretakers of peace and reconciliation, but also those who fight the wars, the soldiers. ICMC had initially designed a project to assist demobilized soldiers, but had to give it up before it started. In general it was discontinued because the whole process of demobilization in Cambodia did not occur. The project aimed at providing the demobilized soldiers in the cantonements with material assistance and skills training. However, soldiers failed to turn up at the cantonements altogether when the Khmer Rouge refused to demobilize. The project was dropped even before the implementation phase started. Many would argue that the problem of demobilization of soldiers has been the greatest threat to peace. In that respect, ICMC lost an important opportunity to contribute even more directly to the promotion of peace and reconciliation.

4.5 Relationship with the Government and Khmer Rouge

Contrary to most people's sincere hopes and wishes, peace has still not been established in Cambodia and the fighting between the Khmer Rouge and the government forces continues. One of the strategies of the Khmer Rouge seemed to be destabilization in order to stop all rehabilitation and development efforts. If they managed to stop development activities, they would increase their area of control and thus acquire a larger basis of support. The foreign aid and assistance was regarded by Khmer Rouge as support to the government and the foreigners were declared enemies of Khmer Rouge and targetted as such. Consequently, there were some terrible incidents of kidnapping and killing of foreigners.

The government was very weak and dominated by inefficiency, corruption, fractioning and no will to work constructively as a unit. There were two Prime Ministers representing the two major parties in the country, which hampered the decision-making process and effectiveness of the government. People were getting extremely fed up with the widespread corruption, especially at the local level, and there was growing distrust in the government. There was increasing oppression by the government of freedom of speech and freedom of the press and media. People were dissatisfied that a large amount of the national budget went to the military.

People were extremely fed up with Khmer Rouge and the national army, which both were

creating a lot of insecurity in the rural areas. A battle between the government forces and the Khmer Rouge was usually followed by rampant looting, theft and other criminal behavior by the soldiers for a few days in the nearby villages. People were in general fed up by insecurity caused by soldiers, no matter which side they were on, which was not always so clear. There were a number of defectors who joined the national army based on promises of training, food, salary, uniform and other incentives, little or none of which they had received. A considerable amount of arms trading was going on between the groups of soldiers, and the feeling was that neither the government nor the Khmer Rouge wanted to stop the fighting because there was too much money to be made.

In this context ICMC, by working closely with parts of the government, was regarded by Khmer Rouge as typical foreigners in support of the government. ICMC, in working closely with the local authorities both on the provincial and district levels, was clearly supporting the government. In that respect ICMC (and other international agencies), was exacerbating tensions between the Khmer Rouge and the government by **only** providing rehabilitation and development in the government-controlled areas. On the one hand, Khmer Rouge did not allow assistance or development activities in their areas, except for some food distribution and mine clearing during the UNTAC period. On the other hand, the international community was criticized by the Khmer Rouge for not doing so; e.g. during a peace march some international aid workers were kidnapped for several hours during which time they were asked why they so one-sidedly were supporting the government and not the Khmer Rouge. This shows an ambivalence which the international NGOs might have taken advantage of. Should and could ICMC have been less biased in their relationship to Khmer Rouge at an **earlier stage**? Why did no international organizations including ICMC go into the Khmer Rouge controlled areas in the very beginning immediately after the peace agreement? Could and should they have done it in order to reduce tensions? Was it possible? Two main reasons have been given; one is a moral argument and the other is a practical one. "One does not make deals with perpetrators of genocide", as one informant put it; it is morally despicable to provide relief and development assistance to perpetrators of genocide and people who do not respect the peace agreement. On the practical side, it was too insecure to go into the Khmer Rouge areas due to fighting and landmines. However, the security argument is not convincing as aid and relief is being delivered in other insecure places in the world and as many of the international organizations worked in the Khmer Rouge-controlled refugee camps for several years providing various types of assistance. By 1995 the government had formally outlawed the Khmer Rouge, and it was therefore not possible to collaborate with them in reintegration and development efforts. This may be another lost opportunity in the promotion of peace and reconciliation.

5.6 Protection by Effective Presence

ICMC's efforts to assist in the peaceful reintegration and rehabilitation process have been outlined and discussed. ICMC's role in the community, the activities and ways in which they were implemented have in various ways been found to have a positive effect on peace and reconciliation, while gaps and uncertainties about long-term effects have been pointed out. However, there is one last aspect which I would argue is very important in contributing to the peace process. This is the **mere presence** itself of international organizations, in an insecure and volatile area, such as Battambang.

Both Cambodians and international aid workers felt that the effective presence of ICMC and other international organizations in Battambang was an important deterrent to tension and war. The effective presence in terms of visible and tangible relief and development activities, contributed to deter Khmer Rouge from taking total control of the area and exacerbating the conflict. Although there are examples to the contrary, such as the cases of Ta'Mouen Ta'Poung and Yea Ath villages, the mere presence of organizations like ICMC visible and known both in the town and in the surrounding villages, had a protective and reassuring effect on people. It gave people who were extremely tired of living with war and fear, belief in a peaceful future and the means to improve their lives. They witnessed development happening around them: new roads, schools, health posts, skills opportunities, mine clearing and so on. The international presence was regarded as a neutral force which could bring the different political factions together, and thus play a crucial role in establishing peace.