

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis has covered a gamut of consequences due to neoliberalism – social injustice, landlessness, house evictions, disempowering vulnerable groups such as those with PLHIVs, reinforcing imbalances in power relations even amongst local civil society, food security and malnourishment. For such a broad concept, it has been equally challenging to place it in concrete and specific terms although this is what we see and understand to be the reality around us. The basic thread however keeps going back to rights (PLHIVs not seen as economically productive) as an impact of a state that has two “faces” manifested in the flexible management of its affairs and a dependency cycle that eats itself – the state and NGOs dependent on donor resources, and the citizens dependent on the NGOs, even NGOs that are dependent on each other which is disempowering.

With the recurrent economic crises and the 2008’s twin crisis on soaring food prices and economic recession, people are questioning the role of neoliberalism, there seems to be a moving away of the neoliberal orthodoxy and deep reflection on an alternative paradigm. Joseph Stiglitz (Stiglitz, 2008) and Jeffrey Sachs (Sachs, 2005) for example called for a more institutional approach on neoliberalism emphasizing the issues of social justice and poverty. Some academics and theorists (Giddens, 1998; Midgley, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Sherraden, 1992) have proposed for a social investment state as this alternative. The social investment state focuses on the need for government intervention and the direction of market forces in order to improve both economic and social outcomes. Jenson and Saint-Martin suggest that social investment state governments will rely on markets to ‘produce welfare’, but their role will probably require modifying market outcomes, to ensure a base-level security. To ensure all citizens have a capacity to adapt to change, those at most risk of social exclusion are sought out for integration (Jenson & Sain-Martin, 2003). This is consistent with the policies of social protection and Amartya Sen’s analysis of welfare in terms of capabilities rather than mere consumption (Sherraden 2003).

6.1. Is the Social Investment State the Alternative?

The social investment model however, aims at showing its value within the ambit of economic and social productivity. But as Lister pointed out (Lister, 2003) social policy is more than just preparing people for labor – but rather valuing families, communities, cultural practices, the environment and population groups ill-suited to the labor market means calling for broader social policy goals and a recognition of other forms of contribution. While the model provides for an alternative towards neoliberalism, it still works within the neoliberal domain.

Within the context of Cambodia, I find the idea of a social investment state ideal but impractical. A social investment state recognizes and designs for safety nets that realizes that dependency on the market by government policies which exposes families and individuals to risk that can be accumulative over time. Cambodia's evolution in terms of governmentality is not as forward-looking. Its neoliberal development model in prioritizing unsustainable economic growth in the belief that it can trickle down to the vast majority of the poor and the flexibility by which it manages its government and citizens to produce the best possible economic outcome is not as progressive as what a social investment state entails.

6.2. Transformative Social Protection as a Concept and as Policy

I do believe however, that a social investment state can be the end vehicle for Cambodia but that social transformation will be that catalyst and can guide the country towards that process. When I talk about social transformation, I talk about two strands of thought -as a concept and second within the framework of social protection.

As a concept it implies that the need for understanding the way contemporary processes of society and global change affect and in some cases marginalize local communities. These factors are missing in the rationality of the neoliberal development model. I recognize the work of (Castles, 2000) when he argues for the concept of social transformation as based on the following assumptions that globalization and neoliberalism has led to new forms of social differentiation,

polarisation between classes and social exclusion requiring analysis of both macro-social forces, local traditions, experiences and identities. In this sense, social transformation can be seen as the anti-thesis of globalization.

This is a dialectic argument because there needs to be an appreciation that social transformation is birthed as a result of the fallacies of neoliberalism and thus can be considered as integral to it yet also it can be a process that can undermine its central assumptions. The danger here is to believe that transformative social protection is already a single-handed tool against neoliberalism – one has to understand the weaknesses and strengths of neoliberalism in order to struggle against it – as such I believe that social protection is that particular tool. The response then to the forces of neoliberalism by transformative social protection is not adaptation but resistance by “transforming societal, individual and collective values”. Castle (2000) proposes that this may involve mobilization of traditional, cultural and social resources or through transnational civil society organizations.

6.3 Recommendations

In terms of implementation, I also propose the policy tools of social protection in terms of concrete implementation. Under the social protection framework, social transformation addresses the issue of social equity and exclusion – the very impact of neoliberalism. In a country context of Cambodia with acute chronic and economic risk and vulnerability particularly amongst the poor and the community of Toul Sambo, social transformation does not negate other forms of social protection but rather seeks to strengthen a relatively neglected area of empowering the poor to transform the conditions in which they struggle to construct viable livelihoods. This can be done by what Wheeler and Devereux say dealing with “strategies to deal with problems of social vulnerability ... where ‘transformative’ refers to the need to pursue policies that integrate individuals equally into society, allowing everyone to take advantage of the benefits of growth and enabling excluded or marginalized groups to claim their rights” This requires a different view point of vulnerability – relocating it in a socio-political space necessary to address social exclusion, rights-based approach,

citizenship and power (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2004; Kabeer, 2002)

Admittedly, this transformative approach holds no meaning if it is unable to achieve a positive change in power relations among various stakeholders. The vision should be anchored on “the extent to which it enables those whose lives are affected to articulate their priorities and claim genuine accountability’ from different implementing and ‘provisioning’ stakeholders (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004).

In the dominant paradigm of Cambodia in terms of asymmetric power relations and neoliberal framework, this is where the tools of social transformation and the concept of resistance come into play. Livelihoods can partially empower PLHIVs in the sense that it can ensure their food security but it cannot prevent them from the broader, structural issues of a neoliberal state. Thus, PLHIVs have to be first and foremost empowered; livelihood, food support and empowerment have to go hand in hand in order to have a “voice” in the socio-political space. Local NGOs are in the best position to be that catalyst of change not just for the beneficiaries but also against the injustices and social inequities caused by the priorities of the state. After all, at the end of the day, donors will leave the country and the people both the state, the PLHIVs and the NGOs will be left to ensure that development can continue.

I go further to say that rather than food security, the terminology food sovereignty is more appropriate. Food sovereignty implies the *right* of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies that are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their *unique* circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies (Food First). Food Sovereignty is more appropriate because primarily it puts a strong emphasis on rights and entitlements. Second, the framework of food security rests on the availability, use and access – of which operates within a neoliberal framework and does not touch on the basic issue of rights.

This can be a two-prong approach. On a micro and more immediate level, a vigorous policy advocacy campaign by PLHIVs themselves as supported by NGOs, the NAA and CARD to review the policies on the Continuum of Care and inject organizing and social mobilization with concrete indicators of empowering PLHIVs; the policy advocacy should not just be focused on the state but also to the general public to increase awareness of their conditions.

In my review of literature and in the course of my work experience, neoliberal forces whether it manifests itself as the state, or corporations as long as its appropriative features lead to the dispossession of many may seem almost faceless and all powerful to those whose entitlements are violated but the concept and its indoctrination took almost thirty years to be absorbed into our collective consciousness. Many propose for the dismantling of neoliberalism via the state – these conjure up images of struggles or a huge fundamental shift that can shake the foundation of a government already well entrenched into neoliberalism. I do not believe in this.

Second and on a macro level, I propose that the best way to dismantle neoliberal forces is to re-indoctrinate communities and marginalized groups in particular who are the most affected by the appropriative effects of the state and neoliberal structures; to work in exactly the same way that neoliberalism had indoctrinated people's values-in re-transforming values. There are challenges though – an alternative economic model needs to be presented but there is caution to start small and to sustain the struggle. I have personally seen this happen in the course of my work wherein NGOs with a certain ideology educate and familiarize the communities they work in, in a sustained and prolonged period of time and in a few years time are able to inculcate the values through the process of organizing, mobilizing, educating and indoctrination.

This phenomenon is pointed out in an interview with David Harvey (2006) when he described neoliberalism as hegemonic as a mode of discourse with subtle effects on the norms and political-economic practices to the extent that it has now become incorporated into the way we interpret, live in and understand our reality. Due

to its hegemonic features, there is a sense of powerlessness in struggling against a dominant paradigm that everyone considers part of their reality. The reality of McDonaldization is also the reality that encompasses people who have no homes, or have to go hungry or are disempowered to the point of dependency which one way or another is attributed to the appropriate aspects or priorities of neoliberalism.

But it does not mean that such a reality **should** be. To paraphrase the vision of the World Social Forum: "*another world is possible*". And it means aligning our seemingly disparate struggles (whether we be farmers, PLHIVs, women, vulnerable children) against a common resistance that is neoliberalism.