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DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE IN A HYBRID POLITY: LOCALISATION OF DECENTRALISATION REFORM IN CAMBODIA



HENG Seiha, KIM Sedara and SO Sokbunthoeun

Working Paper Series No. 63

November 2011

A CDRI Publication

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Phnom Penh, November 2011

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ISBN-10: 99950-52-56-0

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Responsibility for the ideas, facts and opinions presented in this research paper rests solely with the authors. Their opinions and interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute.

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Printed and bound in Cambodia by Sun Heang Printing, Phnom Penh

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Abbreviation and Acronyms

ADR	Annual Development Review
CARERE	Cambodia Resettlement and Reintegration Project
CAS	Centre for Advanced Study
CBOs	Community-based Organisations
CCs	Commune Councillors
CDRI	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CSF	Commune/ <i>Sangkat</i> Fund
D&D	Decentralisation and Deconcentration (D&D)
EIC	Economic Institute of Cambodia
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
RGC	The Royal Government of Cambodia
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund

Khmer Words

<i>Saboraschon</i>	សប្បុរសជន (Generous People)
<i>korob</i>	គោរព (respect)
<i>kaud</i>	កោត (admiration)
<i>klach</i>	ខ្លាច (fear)
<i>bomreu krom robos klourn</i>	បម្រើក្រុមរបស់ខ្លួន (only serve 'their group')
<i>brochom angkuykroy</i>	ប្រជុំអង្គុយក្រោយ បើកអំណោយអង្គុយមុខ (there are gifts, people
<i>beuk omnoy angkuymok</i>	prefer to sit in the front row, but sit in the back during other meetings for easy exit)

Acknowledgement

This research would not have happened without the kind assistance of individuals and groups. The authors are deeply grateful for the vital funding support generously provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the British Department for International Development (DFID) to CDRI's Democratic Governance and Public Sector Reform Programme. We would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution and cooperation of our interviewees: officials from the Ministry of the Interior, district councils, district boards of governors, commune councillors and villagers in Battambang, Kompong Cham, Kampot, Kratie, Ratanakiri, and Svay Rieng.

We are grateful to our research advisors, Dr Caroline Hughes, for her invaluable guidance and constructive comments, and Dr Joakim Öjendal who gave frank and constructive comments to strengthen the paper. Dr Rebecca Catalla, research advisor at CDRI, is thanked for her review and comments.

Finally, thanks are as well due to many staff at CDRI who provided essential logistical and administrative support during the research. The authors are indebted for the support and interest of the executive director, Mr Larry Strange, director of operations, Mr Ung Sim Lee, and programme coordinator, Mr Ou Sivhuoch.

Abstract

This paper reviews the progress of the decentralisation and deconcentration (D&D) reform in Cambodia. It revisits the conflicting positive and negative views on the achievements of the reform in the literature. The goal of the reform is twofold: promotion of local democracy and improvement of local service delivery. Both of these goals are theoretically related to the assumption that decentralisation brings about various social, economic and political benefits through the enhancement of local government's accountability and responsiveness, people's participation in local development planning and improved representation of marginalised people. The findings suggest that there has been some good progress in the reform; however, the achievements are far from being uniform and linear, as is theoretically assumed. Instead, possible changes and achievements have been localised in the Cambodian hybrid political context¹ and the general environment within which decentralisation takes place.

¹ The notion of political hybridity depicts a transformation that takes place within a political situation characterised by Carothers (2002) as a “grey zone” in which countries transitioning from authoritarian rule fall between a “full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship”. It is a product of interaction between externally imposed liberal democratic values and local conditions including elites' interests and local values.

Introduction

Cambodia has made substantial progress in its state building, starting from a very low base in the early 1990s when the country was beset by all sort of difficult challenges in rebuilding its governance system, including security, physical infrastructure and overall effectiveness of the state (McCargo 2005; Öjendal 2003). A decade later, Cambodia enjoyed an increase in political stability, rapid economic growth prior to the global financial crisis in the late 2000s and a reduction in the poverty rate. Elections have been held regularly since the one administered by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1993.

Behind this progress lies a range of important reforms. Among them is decentralisation, introduced and implemented as part of a democratic development programme geared also toward improving local service delivery. Two laws were enacted in 2001: the Law on the Administration and Management of Communes (the Commune/*Sangkat* Law) and the Law on Commune Elections, which provide the legal framework for decentralisation. Commune/*sangkat* council elections were held in 2002 and 2007. The Commune Council elections aim to provide a substantial level of autonomy to local governments so that councils can represent the interests of the people better.

Further sub-national reform occurred in 2005, when the government adopted the Strategic Framework for Decentralisation and Deconcentration. By design, the Strategic Framework paved the way for the adoption of the Law on the Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans (the Organic Law) in April 2008. The Organic Law created two additional layers of sub-national government higher in the administrative hierarchy, the district or municipal and provincial councils. These councils were indirectly elected by commune councillors.² The first such election was held in May 2009. Within this reform, significant functions, authority and resources are to be delegated from the centre to the municipality or district and province under a unified administration.³ Further, mechanisms for accountability, public participation, representation, effectiveness, democratisation and local development are also mandated (RGC 2005: 524).

Despite this legal progress, there has yet to be a systematic review of the substantive achievements of the reform. The existing literature offers conflicting views on the prospects of decentralisation reform, thereby presenting only a partial picture of what has actually happened on the ground. These studies can be categorised into two main schools of thought.

-
- 2 On the other hand, the district or municipal and provincial administrations (known as the boards of governors) are appointed by the government at the request of the Ministry of Interior (Article 141 of the Organic Law). Working procedures and relations between the councils and the board of governors are defined in the Organic Law and through various sub-decrees.
 - 3 “Unified administration” refers to a sub-national administration that is able to administer functions and resources, including its finance, personnel and assets, and is able to coordinate service delivery and development within its jurisdiction, including services and development delivered by various ministries and institutions of the government (Organic Law).

The first claims that decentralisation has faltered or fallen short of expectations because it is not conducive to Cambodian political culture. For example, Blunt and Turner (2005, see also Turner 2002) claimed that due to deeply embedded patterns of hierarchy and patrimonialism, decentralisation does not fit in, thereby contributing to its weak forms. Smoke and Morrison (2008:19–20, 22) shared a similar view. Citing Cambodia’s history of centralisation and its institutional structure, they suggested that the country does not possess socio-economic and fiscal characteristics that are commonly found in decentralised forms of governance and that decentralisation here was largely driven by the need to achieve political goals rather than a genuine desire for democratisation. For them, a range of political, economic, fiscal and cultural conditions, including a hierarchical bureaucratic culture, patrimonialism, the interests of ministries to maintain centralised control and weak state-society relations form “some binding constraints” on decentralisation.

The embedded patterns of hierarchy and patrimonialism raised by this literature do represent a stumbling block to decentralisation. This can be noted in various difficulties (claimed by both local officials and stakeholders including national and provincial level in decentralisation) including coordination issues between line ministries and local administration; lack of delegated power from line agencies to the elected councils; incomplete autonomy of commune councils; no clear-cut line between political party and state; and accountability issues caused by a power imbalance tilted toward appointed rather than popularly elected officials. However, this analysis may overemphasise the static nature of Cambodian political culture and downplay achievements (Hughes & Öjendal 2006). A range of literature indicates that decentralisation works according to different socio-political context. Moreover, culture is not completely static but can be reshaped slowly within a changing political environment. Based on his long experience, particularly in India, James Manor (2008:3) showed that deeply rooted “caste hierarchies” and “patronage networks” do not pose an impediment to local democracy, and decentralisation systems are still working well.

The second school centres on an institutional approach and takes a more sanguine view. It argues that decentralisation is suitable for post-conflict reconstruction and restoring the regime’s legitimacy (i.e. good governance, democratic development and state building). It suggests that decentralisation is “soft politics”, bringing about political changes, reinventing state institutions and opening space for deepening democracy and good governance. This suggestion emerged from the belief that conventional state-building approach, for example national elections and international intervention, might not work; therefore an approach that provides democratic education among local leaders, fosters demand from below and restores contractual relations between the elected and the voters (electoral accountability) may be necessary. Decentralisation then becomes a means for reinventing or introducing democracy to the grassroots. This literature points out that the achievements of decentralisation have been substantial, including “broad-based appreciation, opened democratic space, considerable commune administration performance, increased accountability” (Öjendal & Kim 2011), deep popular participation in development planning (McAndrew 2004) and increased gender equity (Öjendal & Kim 2006). With these achievements, decentralisation can be viewed as successful given Cambodia’s history of conflict and political transition.

The achievements were brought in part by the changing political culture and empowerment of local people through election of local leaders and accountability mechanism. Öjendal and Kim, for example, pointed out: “Khmer political culture is no longer holding still for its portrait ... instead, they interact with evolving political and institutional development in multifarious patterns” (Öjendal & Kim 2006: 525–526, see also Ann 2008; Kim & Öjendal 2009;

Öjendal & Kim 2011; Kim 2011). Along the same line, Ann claimed that decentralisation has brought about change in the local political landscape by transforming the nature of patron-client relationships into a new paradigm, in which the relationships are “no longer exclusive to one patron or one political party”. Indeed, it has opened space for local leaders and villagers to manoeuvre in political circles (Ann 2008: 88). Manor shares a similar view, arguing that the reform has, to a large extent, contributed to local democracy by fostering accountability and participatory and responsive processes that did not exist in the past (Manor 2008).

This paper reviews claims of achievements and challenges in Cambodia’s decentralisation. It argues that any challenges and possible outcomes of decentralisation should be viewed in the context of ongoing negotiation between externally imposed liberal democratic values and local conditions, including elites’ interests and local values.⁴ Without downplaying the constraints raised by the first group literature, it acknowledges that decentralisation in Cambodia took place within a politically hybrid environment. Political hybridity is a situation in which the forms of a liberal democratic system are fused with local or historical political cultures and institutions (Van de Walle 2001; Diamond 2002). It reflects a transformation that takes place within a political situation characterised by Carothers (2002) as a “grey zone” in which countries making a transition from authoritarian rule fall between “full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship”. Thus, challenges including a variety of “informal institutions and cultural predispositions, invented ‘traditions’ and politicised networks, many of which are either non-democratic or anti-democratic” can be expected (CDRI 2006:6). This paper also cautions that possible changes and achievements claimed by the second school of thought are likely to vary in different context. This is because possible outcomes are shaped, constrained or negotiated by elites’ interests and local values rather than a reflection of linear relations between decentralisation and its commonly assumed social, economic and political benefits. Theoretically, the benefits emerge from the assumption that decentralisation increases government accountability and responsiveness toward the citizens, enhances citizen participation in policy decisions and provides opportunity for representation of the marginalised (for more detail, see Annex 1).

This study will fill a gap in the literature by addressing three interrelated questions:

1. What have been the achievements or challenges to decentralisation?
2. Are the achievements the same in different contexts (e.g., communities with different natural resources or varying personalities of local leaders)?
3. How has each specific context contributed to or obstructed the sustainability or prospect for further democratic decentralisation?

Research Methodology and Data Sources

This study is based on a desk review of materials and empirical data and findings of the CDRI Governance unit (from 2002). The unit under its two previous five-year programmes—PORDEC⁵ (which focused on the design of decentralisation) and KECHHNAY⁶—completed

4 This notion of hybridity differs from that of Young (2000) and Bhabha (1994) which heavily emphasises the local cultural elements.

5 Policy-Oriented Research Programme on Decentralisation, was established in late 2002 by CDRI to provide policy analysis support for the Decentralization & Deconcentration (D&D) reforms. In mid-2006 the Policy-Oriented Research Programme on Decentralisation was renamed the Democratic Governance and Public Sector Reform (DGP&SR) Programme.

6 CDRI’s Proposal for a Four-Year (2006-2010) Policy Research and Capacity Building Program under DGP&SR Programme – is a metaphor which connotes initiative and process to innovate, transform, brighten, sharpen, improve and polish an ongoing piece of work to achieve the best outcome.

a number of major studies assessing the progress of decentralisation, including sectoral output studies, local leadership and accountability (see Annex 2). All these studies and various research reports commissioned by bilateral and multilateral agencies, and other academic publications on D&D reforms in Cambodia have been extensively reviewed. This study also utilises data from a baseline survey of D&D carried out by CDRI from 20 December 2010 to 5 February 2011, covering 531 commune councillors from 313 communes and 423 district councillors and boards of governors from 64 districts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with officials from the Ministry of the Interior, commune councillors, district council members and district governors to identify continuities or changes since the research carried out by the Governance unit.

The progress of decentralisation is assessed on (1) accountability and responsiveness, (2) citizens' participation in local development (civic engagement) and (3) representation. These three variables play a critical part in promoting and sustaining good governance.

Accountability and responsiveness of elected officials to local citizens are among the most important features of democratic decentralisation (Diamond 1999). The link between decentralisation and improved accountability and responsiveness is that decentralisation reduces the size of the constituency and thereby helps to bring government closer to the people and increase accountability between the elected leaders and their electorates. With smaller constituencies, elected officials are under more pressure to be accountable and responsive (Diamond 1999; Crook & Manor 1998; Manor 1999; Smith 1985). Its success also requires citizen participation, which is "a means to" and "a goal of (successful) democratic decentralisation" (Litvack & Seddom 1999, cited in Bergh 2004: 781). Improved citizen participation and involvement in development planning and decision making help to direct the attention of elected officials to priority needs, thereby obliging them to become more responsive and accountable (Bergh 2004).

Decentralisation can also improve local representation of minority groups and opposition parties, who may have little chance of being represented nationally (Diamond 1999). Decentralisation can give opposition parties local space and test cooperation among different parties. This improved representation may also link to national reconciliation, which Diamond (1999:130) refers to as "contingent consent". Decentralisation also gives local leaders, who do not have an opportunity to contest nationally, the popular legitimacy to rule their territory.

The rest of the paper is organised into three parts. First, it briefly describes the policy and regulatory framework in the government's decentralisation policy. Second, it maps the progress or challenges, which are discussed under each of the three factors crucial to democratic decentralisation: (1) accountability and responsiveness, (2) citizen participation in local development and (3) representation. Variations in the progress and challenges in specific contexts are also discussed. The paper concludes with an assessment of the sustainability, prospects of deepening democratic decentralisation (the way forward) and proposals for future research.

Government Policy and Regulatory Framework

Decentralisation emerged out of the Cambodia Resettlement and Reintegration (CARERE) Project in 1992–93. Supported and led by the United Nations Development Programme, this project focused on the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced people, and the restoration and reconstruction of damaged infrastructures. This project in its second phase evolved into an institutional and capacity development endeavour for local participatory planning and service delivery (CARERE II, 1996–2001). In parallel with CARERE II, the government also established the SEILA programme⁷ to experiment with decentralised governance. CARERE II was operated in conjunction with provincial and municipal authorities under the SEILA programme (UNCDF 2001). When CARERE II came to an end in 2000, SEILA took over and evolved into its third phase (2001–05), working on local participatory development and decentralised structures to improve rural infrastructure and service delivery through village and commune development committees. The CARERE or SEILA experience and its success in local development through “bottom-up” participatory planning and financing became a development model and inspired the national decentralisation reform (UNCDF 2001; Kim & Öjendal 2009; Öjendal 2005; Smoke & Morrison 2008; Rusten *et al.* 2004). The government publicly stated:

As the only programme in the country working at commune level and as Cambodia’s only direct experience in applying deconcentration and decentralisation, SEILA represents a foundation upon which new laws and policies pertaining to decentralisation at the commune level and deconcentration at province level are being formulated (cited in Öjendal 2005: 299).

The Commune/*Sangkat* Law and the Law on Commune Elections were adopted in 2001. These constituted the formal launch of decentralisation. The 2005 Strategic Framework for Decentralisation and Deconcentration Reform spelled out the government policy for sub-national democratic development through the restructuring of institutions at sub-national administration levels. This entailed two major changes. First, it established a new tier of decentralised governance through the creation of indirectly elected province or municipality and district or khan councils. Second, it created a unified administration aimed at improving the development and delivery of public services within its territory (RGC 2005). The Strategic Framework was followed by the adoption of an Organic Law in 2008. In addition, the government formulated a 10-year National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development, 2010–19. This detailed policy document was completed in June 2010. Its main objective is:

7 SEILA, meaning foundation stone, was a collective undertaking by seven ministries (Economy and Finance [chair], Planning, Women’s Affairs, Interior, Rural Development, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Water Resources and Meteorology). These ministries make up the national SEILA Task Force, supported by a secretariat and located at the Council for the Development of Cambodia.

to develop management systems of provincial/municipal, district/khan and commune/sangkat levels based on the principles of democratic participation that will operate with transparency and accountability in order to promote local development and delivery of public services to meet the needs of citizens and contribute to poverty reduction within the respective territories. (RGC 2010a: 13)

This 10-year programme is organised around three plans—the first two of three years each and the last of four years. After the adoption of the programme, the government put forward an outline for the first three-year implementation plan, whose aim is to (1) define the scope of implementation in 2011–13 and (2) identify programme components and associated implementing agencies for subsequent formulation of time- and resources-bound “project” and other activities (RGC 2010b:14). The first implementation plan, which prioritises the district and municipality as an entry point for the development of the entire sub-national system of governance is developed under five sub-national areas: organisation, human resources, functions, resources and national support. Thus, districts and municipalities would become more structural, equipped with clear functions, adequate resources and personnel (RGC 2010b).

Progress or Challenges in Decentralisation

Decentralisation is now in full swing, being implemented in all sub-national administrations. Anecdotal evidence suggests some good achievements here and there. These can be categorised as procedural and substantive. The former are largely associated with the legal framework of decentralised governance. This governance system provides a framework for improving accountability, citizen participation and representativeness. Examples include local elections; accountability boxes for receiving complaints of abuse or mismanagement of commune funds (and provincial and national accountability working groups to collect, investigate and address complaints from accountability boxes); a democratic participatory process; and a mechanism for improving the representation of under-represented people. These procedural achievements are not the focus of this study; it examines the more substantive achievements associated with the broader goal of promoting local democracy and service delivery.

Accountability and Responsiveness

Commonly cited improvements in accountability in the literature point to positive signs aligned with common theoretical assumptions (Kim 2011; Kim & Öjendal 2009; Kim & Öjendal 2007). Commune councils commonly claim that they are downwardly accountable to voters. Most commune activities were carried out based on the principle of accountability such as keeping citizens informed about critical decisions or plans affecting the locality, sharing information with the people and allowing them to attend council meetings (Kim 2011; RGC 2008). CDRI's baseline survey on D&D confirms this: 70 percent of 531 commune councillors claimed to be primarily accountable to the people in their jurisdiction (CDRI forthcoming). Further, people generally demonstrated an understanding of the right to hold locally elected leaders accountable. A survey in 2009 also found more than 90 per cent of 583 voters interviewed stating that they could hold their commune councils accountable by voting incompetent councillors out of office (Kim & Öjendal 2009: 117; see also Kim 2011).

With improved local accountability mechanism, increase in local government's responsiveness to citizen's demand is also evident. A citizen satisfaction survey carried out by the Economic Institute of Cambodia found that most of the 2341 respondents agreed that commune councils are more responsive than before:

Thirty-four percent (34%) rated the council as “very responsive” and a further 53% chose “responsive” with only negligible numbers of citizens selecting the “very unresponsive” answer. The number selecting “very responsive” is significantly higher than in the baseline survey (24%) (EIC 2010: 32).

Similarly, the creation of the CSF⁸ enables councils to respond directly to priority local needs through participatory planning and project management. As a result of this fund, local development and improvements have been realised, particularly in basic service delivery and local infrastructure (Kim 2011; Öjendal & Kim 2006; RGC 2010a; Rusten *et al.* 2004). According to the 2002–06 Commune Project Database,

there were nearly 5000 water points (including drilled wells and community ponds); over 7000 kilometres of earth and laterite Commune roads (including structures); 730 primary school rooms; and many small-scale irrigation, agriculture, environment and health-related schemes financed by this C/S Fund (RGC 2010a: 5).

Improved service delivery may also be facilitated by local councillors' knowledge of people's needs. Kim's 2011 survey reported that 96 percent of 74 commune councillors interviewed were confident of their own knowledge of local people's needs. At the same time, 70.5 percent of 583 voters confirmed that councillors understood local situation well (Kim 2011:132, 146).

The CCs' and people's claims of increased accountability and evidence of improved service delivery are the visible change or progress since the reform was introduced. However, the literature and recent fieldwork suggest that improved accountability and responsiveness did not emerge naturally from decentralised governance; rather, they are a by-product of the interactions between the formal system of decentralised governance and the Cambodian hybrid system. A great deal of continuity in the way local governance is being administered can be noted. For example, many commune chiefs originate from the People's Republic of Kampuchea. There is still a strong party discipline, although local elections open up political space, allowing some sense of downward accountability. A commune chief in Kratie explained:

My boss is the party. I am automatically out of my position if I am kicked out of the party. However, the party now needs capable people with good popularity to bring electoral victory (interview, Kratie, 27 February 2011).

The improvement in service delivery, one of the goals of D&D, reflects some interaction between elite interests in maintaining strong grassroots support and facilitation offered by decentralised governance. The elites' acceptance of electoral rule and the need to maintain popular support have made improved local service delivery a priority. Improved service delivery at local level does not emerge solely from the CSF, which is very limited in amount and cannot respond to all local needs. Local leaders frequently seek funds from other sources including *saboraschon* (generous people), political parties and NGOs. There is a blurring between development projects funded by the state and those funded by the party or *saboraschon*.

8 The share of the national budget allocated to the Commune/Sangkat Fund increased from 1.5 percent of current domestic revenues in 2002 to 2.7 percent in 2008. From 2009 to 2010, it increased to 2.8 percent. According to the three-year implementation plan of the National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development, the state contribution to the CSF will remain at 2.8 percent over 2011 to 2013.

The ruling party through its working groups⁹ also funnels a great deal of resources via the commune to mobilise popular support through mass patronage. These additional resources help to complement the meagre CSF (Craig & Pak 2009). It is estimated that party funding is two or three times the development component of the CSF (Craig & Pak 2009; Hughes 2010).

... from 2003 to 2007, the district [ruling party] working group has contributed about US\$1,050,000, which is around 2.2 times compared to the US\$487,000 from the development component of the commune/sangkat fund (CSF) received by the 10 communes of the district for the same period (Craig & Pak 2009:13).

There is also a limitation on how the CSF should be used in local development schemes; service delivery that meets local needs requires local leaders' pragmatism, initiative and discretion to utilise both formal and informal channels to make local development projects feasible. For example, because the CSF could not be used to rehabilitate a canal of about 3.5 km, the commune chief sought support from the party working group and then decided to combine party resources with the CSF:

... the CSF was able to finance only part of project. To deal with problem, he raised it with the working group, and was finally successful in receiving additional grants of about US\$3,000 to make the canal project possible. In the absence of additional funding, he related, a lower priority project such as building a road might have been picked up instead (Craig & Pak 2009, p. 22).

The CSF limitations have made local leaders dependent on *saboraschon* and party to finance local development. Ultimately, accountability and responsiveness to local people is contingent on leaders' personalities and ability to access resources. To be responsive, local leaders need to be highly motivated and well connected within the party apparatus. A *sangkat* chief in Svay Rieng province explained:

... in order to address the shortage of CSF, we have employed a few approaches like requesting support from generous people, NGOs and the party working group. Yet, to be more successful in mobilising resources, to me the commune/sangkat chief's leadership and personal connections (how to approach those people) are of great importance. For example, it is a bit easier for me to approach the party working group since I am the commune CPP [Cambodian People's Party] chief and have a good connection with higher officials in the government. At times, I also contribute my personal funds toward a development scheme. If I received \$10 from any services I provided, I would spend \$8 for the development of the community and bring home only \$2 (interview, Svay Rieng, 28 February 2011).

Good connections in the political patronage network and party apparatus, a commonly cited source of corruption and collusion between local officials and higher ones, allow some local leaders to achieve local development goals. However, dependency on informal sources

9 Party working groups are a mechanism by which central and sub-national party officials provide financing and other support for local investment projects. The party financing is channelled through provincial and district working groups. Projects include big investments in infrastructure: irrigation, roads, schools, pagodas (Craig & Pak 2009).

of financing raises questions of broader accountability. A range of literature suggests that funds other than those formally provided by the state usually emerge from dubious sources.

Regardless of the personality of local leaders, there is an added constraint on their accountability and responsiveness to citizens when there are more natural resources in the locality. People living in natural resource-rich communes commonly maintain their livelihoods through access to common property resources. Rich natural resources attract outside interests, creating competition between powerful outsiders and local people. A commune chief in Ratanakkiri complained: “It is usual to find natural resource-rich communes facing a lot of problems; greed and temptation for self-enrichment drive power abuse and disrespect for law” (interview, 3 January 2011).

Commune councillors, whose need to secure votes gives them strong interests in supporting local people in assuring the sustained use of common resources, formally have no real management or decision-making power, although the people expect them to act. They also appear weak in the face of three powerful institutions associated with the informal side of the hybrid system that generally contributes to the overall tendency to centralise. First, the relevant provincial departments appear uncooperative. Officials in these departments are accountable to their bosses or patrons at the central ministries and often ignore or bypass local officials. Many technical agencies station themselves in natural resource-rich communes, but they maintain limited cooperation with and frequently bypass local authorities. Second, powerful tycoons can secure agreements or licences from the government and disregard lower authorities. They often secure security backup from the state in some invisible form to stake their claim over the resources. Third, powerful territorial authorities including the military, police and provincial officials are more accountable to the ruling party than to the people. At the time of writing, the unified administration was just beginning to be implemented, and its ability to resolve this coordination issue could not be assessed.

To a great extent, corruption in natural resources in Cambodia seems to be well defined from the center (national level). Economic land concessions, under the leasing system that allows the government to lease land of up to 10,000 hectares to a private company for up to 99 years, sometimes fall on forest land (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2007: 13) and sometimes overlap with community forest land. This renders even provincial authorities powerless to protect natural resources, especially land and minerals because business tycoons work out the deal at the national level. There seems nothing that local authorities or associations can do but stand by and watch outsiders extracting the resources from their community. In Kratie, for instance, a community was establishing community forestry, but after years of planning and initial work (with help from an NGO) and applying for official recognition, the land that was planned for community forestry was allocated to a private company by the government (authors’ field trip, August 2010). To date, more than one million hectares have been granted to private companies by the government. Community resource management is minimal compared to the national large-scale control and extraction of resources. In short, natural resource rich areas attract vested interests from outside the community particularly at national level beyond the scope of D&D, suggesting a greater difficulty in achieving improved accountability in resource-rich areas than in resource-poor ones.

The inability of councils to manage natural resources disappoints the people and severely impacts their credibility (Kim & Öjendal 2007: 34–35). For example, a group of people in a fishing village in Kampot province complained:

We voted for the commune council, but they cannot help us with anything regarding fishery issues. They can help us to report to a higher level, which does come to check. Then there are two kinds of interventions. The first is to make an arrest but then release the perpetrators for a bribe. The second is to arrest to satisfy the people. The second can be done to any boat, even a boat with a legal licence. When they say, "You are wrong", it has to be wrong. There is no objection allowed, and money has to be paid. It is their norm; they do business like that. We are willing to obey the law, but if obeying the law will kill us, we have to violate the law sometimes. We are prohibited from catching in shallow water, but if we cannot catch anything in deep water, we have to work in the shallow area. We have to put food on the table and pay back our loans (interview, Kampot, 20 October 2004).

The above-discussed achievements in local government's accountability and responsiveness, while departing from the common theoretical assumptions on decentralisation, represent progress. Local governance today is not similar to 20 years ago. Citizens are able to enjoy improved service delivery due to accountability requirements in D&D. This outcome is consistent across different places. However, variations in service delivery arising from different personalities of local leaders and the added pressure for accountability in communes endowed with natural resources can be noted.

Citizen Participation

Improved citizen participation in local politics and development can be noted since the introduction of decentralisation. Through the local elections, Cambodian citizens have the opportunity to participate and select their local representatives or leaders (COMFREL 2007; Malena & Chhim 2009). There was an increase in voter turnout from 4.54 million in 2002 to 5.29 million in 2007.¹⁰ This important achievement may reflect citizens' valuation of their voting rights, but it may not necessarily mean that local governance is more democratic.

Participation in local development, a crucial aspect of D&D, seems to lag behind. Participatory local governance allows citizens to engage and express their preferences in relation to community needs and development. Local people have the opportunity to participate in project and budget planning, be involved in development and be informed about council activities. However, citizen participation at council meetings has not been widespread. According to one public opinion poll conducted by the Centre for Advanced Study, 71 percent of a random sample of 900 "ordinary citizens" said that they had never attended a commune meeting (CAS 2007). Anecdotal evidence also suggests a decline in participation in council meetings in various communes.

The literature and recent fieldwork suggests that participation is constrained by economic and cultural factors. Poor living conditions discourage participation. Despite policy reforms that reduced the overall poverty rate, many rural Cambodians are still poor. This obliges them to devote more time to making a living rather than prioritising public activities (COMFREL 2007; EIC 2010; KAS 2007). A Konrad Adenauer Stiftung survey in 2007 noted that 89 percent of 68 interviewed councillors thought that the main reason for lack of participation in commune or village meetings was poverty and busyness with daily businesses or jobs (KAS 2007: 45; see also Meerkerk *et al.* 2008). Another survey found that 92 percent of

10 National Election Committee, "Election Results," Ministry of Interior, Phnom Penh <http://www.ncelect.org.kh/English/elecResults.html> (accessed 25 November 2010).

poor citizens had not attended a council meeting in the past year (EIC 2010: 15). Various communes see a decline in the number of people participating in council meetings, including project planning (COMFREL 2007; interview, Battambang, 13-18 February 2011 & Svay Rieng, 28 February 2011).

Participation depends on who hosts the meeting. The authors' field observations indicate that there is high turnout for meetings organised by NGOs and political parties because they offer snacks and gifts, which are unavailable at council meetings. A commune chief in Kompong Cham explained that the number of people participating in meetings has declined by about 50 percent compared to the first term, in part due to poor living conditions and the resulting priority for their living needs. Because of this, participation is driven by immediate benefits. He added that when there are gifts, people prefer to sit in the front row, but sit in the back during other meetings for easy exit [*brochom angkuykroy beuk omnoy angkuymok*]. This problem is exacerbated by the councils' inability to respond to people's needs (interview, Kompong Cham, 10 January 2011). Another council member in Kratie voiced a similar concern:

People's turnout is not good in council meetings because they do not receive any immediate benefit. They prefer to participate in meetings or workshops organised by NGOs because they receive something back—a small payment [per diem] (interview, Kratie, 28 February 2011).

When people do participate, cultural factors that inhibit personal expression are a major challenge. Cambodians are generally reluctant to participate in public activities and meetings. As Kim put it, "... motives and the implicit views behind this reluctance to express themselves in the public sphere, but almost everyone said that this is the norm, a result of being shy ... (Kim 2011: 184). Suppression and authoritarian rule over a long period make the reluctance to engage with authorities understandable. Although they are invited to meetings, they rarely express their opinions or challenge authorities in public. They normally attend to listen. A villager in Kratie province said:

People in the village are not used to talking in public meetings or gatherings, but rather whisper behind their backs. I personally think this is a bad habit. Another thing is the issue of non-interference or not challenging leaders, being afraid of wrong words or being impolite (Kim 2011: 184).

This reluctance was evident also in a survey that found that only 5 percent of 2341 respondents had spoken in a meeting in the past year (EIC 2010: 15). Similarly, a public opinion poll of the Centre for Advanced Study and the World Bank found that "less than 10% of people (and less than 1% of women) who attended meetings spoke up, and even smaller numbers dared to raise problems, ask questions or make a demand" (Malena & Chhim 2009: 30).

The invitation required to attend council meetings reinforces this reluctance. Although the Commune/*Sangkat* Law states that commune meetings must be open to the public, it was found that people cannot attend meetings unless they are invited (EIC 2010; Kim 2011; Malena & Chhim 2009; Meerkerk *et al.* 2008). When asked why they participated in meetings, 77 percent of those who had attended meetings said that they were informed or invited by the authorities to attend (EIC 2010: 16). Additionally, 94 percent of the councillor respondents agreed that "Citizens should have an invitation before attending a commune council meeting" (Meerkerk

et al. 2008: 41). Interestingly, civil society organisation leaders, who regularly participate in the council meetings, also stated that it is necessary for them to receive a formal or official invitation. As a leader of cash savings association in Kompong Thom province put it:

If they [the commune council] do not invite people by sending an invitation letter people do not dare to go [...] If they have not invited me I do not go, only if they invite me [then I will participate] (Malena & Chhim 2009: 29).

An added constraint on participation in development planning is the inability of the council to respond to the needs of citizens. A majority tend to judge responsiveness based on material outputs. As discussed earlier, funds for local development are very limited and cannot cover all the needs. This inability of councils to respond creates resentment and reduces interest in participating. As Kim and Öjendal put it, "... attracting people to participate in the commune development plan depends on the level of responsiveness and efficiency" (Kim & Öjendal 2007: 41). Kim also noted:

... Voters seem active in the beginning because they have expected some material outputs from CCs. However, most of their expectations are not immediately realised which lead to discontent and resentment with CCs (Kim 2011: 148).

Whether decentralisation will lead to democratic participation in local development planning remains a question. However, an obvious change is the opening of political space. This permits the emergence of a model that is not entirely dominated by cultural hierarchy and not entirely participatory. Regardless of whether popular participation in council meetings is active or passive, decentralisation provides the space for development planning that better responds to citizens' needs. According to the EIC's second citizen satisfaction survey in 2010, 71 percent of those who attended meetings strongly agreed that meetings were useful in informing the council about their needs, and 72 percent strongly agreed that they were useful for learning about council activities (EIC 2010: 16). Moreover, 96 percent of councillors strongly agreed that meetings were an important opportunity to learn from the people (*ibid.*: 18).

Representation

Progress in representation can be observed. To serve 1621 communes and *sangkats* nationwide, 11,261 representatives were elected in 2002 and 11,353 in 2007. All councils have representatives from at least two political parties.¹¹ Leaders in former Khmer Rouge areas who would not have any chance in national politics were elected locally. This contributes to national reconciliation.

Decentralisation has also brought the representation of women in local politics (Öjendal & Kim 2006; Thon *et al.* 2009; Hun 2010; Kim & Öjendal 2011). The roles of women in politics have changed noticeably. Such a profound shift is a great achievement, since in Khmer political culture political leadership has long been perceived as "a masculine-coded realm" and women are viewed as weak and subordinate (Lilja 2009). As a group of male commune councillors claimed,

11 National Election Committee, "Election Results," Ministry of Interior, Phnom Penh <http://www.ncelect.org.kh/English/elecResults.html> (accessed 25 November 2010).

I think the constraint of traditional norms on women is not a major problem anymore; it changes gradually. All institutions seem to work hard to disseminate the values of gender [equity], people are well aware of their rights, including equality of women in all sectors of society. Women are less under pressure from traditional norms compared to how it was in the past (Kim & Öjendal 2011: 19).

The representation of women in commune councils increased from 8.5 percent in 2002 to 15 percent in 2007; women working in village management were about 30 percent of the total. Moreover, women are 11 percent of provincial, municipal, district and khan council representatives elected in 2009 (Hun 2010). Given this, Öjendal and Kim thus argue:

... decentralisation can be seen as opening up an arena where political power can actually be competed for – although on unequal terms and with structural limitations – and serves as an instrument to destabilise dominant discourses on gender roles (Öjendal & Kim 2006: 525).

In spite of the above achievements, further improvement of the representation of opposition parties locally may be stalled. There is an increasing nationwide concern that decentralisation symbolises a growing politicisation and patronage politics (Blunt & Turner 2005; Kim & Öjendal 2009). Decentralisation may have been internalised in the hybrid system and may function as a means through which the ruling party has consolidated its control and reinforced or strengthened its political forces (Smoke & Morrison 2008). The ruling party won the overwhelming majority of the commune/*sangkat* councils in the 2002 and 2007 elections, with more than 90 percent of commune chiefs. This majority and the commune councils' increasingly important role (appointing village chiefs, electing the Senate and district and provincial councils) fortify the CPP's political position. As a commune councillor from an opposition party in Battambang put it:

Only commune councillors vote in the village chief selection. This is unjust for the small parties. For example, we have a total of 11 councillors in this commune – 7 from the CPP, 2 from FUNCINPEC and 2 from the SRP [Sam Rainsy Party]. It is predictable that the CPP will definitely win the election. This is a good way to legitimise the CPP village chiefs; people do not have a choice in the selection of their village chiefs. Most of the village chiefs have been in their position for too long. The hope is that each party would try to select the most qualified and popular candidates who would work for [the] community but not the party (Kim 2011: 127).

Kim and Öjendal (2009: 121) found that although 76 percent of commune councillors claimed that “they are primarily accountable to the people, there are also complaints that the commune councillors only serve ‘their group’ [*bomreu krom robos kloun*]”. COMFREL also pointed out in its assessment of the first period of decentralisation:

The form of decision making on activities just shows that all commune council work comes from the majority vote even though in many cases, commune work plans are only shown or announced to councillors, with the commune chief still the biggest influence over decision making. Often, councillors from minority parties are unable to raise their views. Decisions made by the council conform to the position of the majority party; if

others express their views and opinions, councillors do not consider these or implement what they have raised (COMFREL 2007: 18).

This situation provokes debate on the prospects of democratic decentralisation when political party local representation is not widespread. Therefore, Smoke and Morrison (2008: 23) argue, "... it remains to be seen how the future trajectory of party politics will affect the evolution of decentralisation in Cambodia".

The representation of women in local politics is heavily influenced by socio-economic, cultural and political factors. Family responsibilities, limited education and low self-confidence seriously limit women's ability to participate and represent the interest of women in politics (Öjendal & Kim 2006; Cambodia Daily, 3 November 2010, p. 26; Kim & Öjendal 2011). The low financial remuneration exacerbates the problem, as a female councillor in Kratie province explained:

The most difficult problem ... is the standard of living. I get only 70,000 riels [approximately 18 USD] a month salary. Just to spend [money] for transport to come to meetings four times a month, it [is] almost finished already. I had to stop my teenage daughter from going to school, because there is no one doing the housework and keep the house running when I come to work at [the] Commune Council ... I will never stand for [election to the] Commune Council again (Öjendal & Kim 2006: 524).

The legal assignment of female councillors to be in charge of women's and children's affairs (such as health, education, domestic violence, etc.), areas granted hardly any funding, reduces women's stake "in other important areas where funds are allocated" (Rusten *et al.* 2004: 110).

The cultural hierarchy that assigns a lower status to women leads to discrimination from their male counterparts. Women's opinions are not well appreciated or recognised by most male councillors. This disappoints women and erodes their self-confidence over time (Rusten *et al.* 2004; Öjendal & Kim 2006). Kim and Öjendal (2006: 524) argued: "... women may have been given space but this has not necessarily increased clout, and the patriarchal reduction of female influence is still very much alive". A female councillor in Takeo province expressed her frustration:

I always try to raise my opinion during the meetings, but it seems as if I am just [a] minority. Other male CCs [commune councillors] still think that women are not capable, and women are not given full priority yet. [For] every ten words I say, they listen only to three ... I am just a paper figure. Because they put me [down], they never let me know about the details[s] of the project[s] (Öjendal & Kim 2006: 524).

Politically, women are still in a marginal position, their representation remaining dependent on party priorities. The current electoral system is based on a proportional party list. Thus, in order to win representation, women need to earn the trust of their party and be placed high on the party list. The will within political parties to promote women is still limited, however (Kim & Öjendal 2011). As a female councillor in Kratie put it:

For the political aspect, some parties, for example CPP, were not able to promote female commune council chiefs because of the internal priorities and or political will of the party. The first candidate for the commune election from the party must be smart, popular, educated, and the most important thing is that he or she understands the local context and can deal with local situations well. However, every political party is complaining that it is difficult to find qualified female candidates for the CC election (Kim & Öjendal 2011: 25).

A chief of a political party in a commune in Kratie elaborated:

The reason that CPP does not have a female commune council chief is because the party did not put a woman as the first candidate on the party list - as you know the electoral system in Cambodia is on party basis. There are three reasons: first, it's difficult to find a competitive female candidate and, second, it's not yet time for women to work as the commune council chief since we mostly deal with security issues at night time; I doubt that women would dare to go out. Third, having women in local politics depends on the party; within the current system there is not much room for female candidates. The party does not yet strongly prioritise the placement of women candidates at the top of the list. This is only my personal view. It does not apply to all the commune councils in the country, but in remote rural areas like this, women face difficulties (Kim & Öjendal 2011: 26).

The opening up of political space since 2002 has allowed opposition political parties and women to participate in local politics and development. However, meaningful representation is being constrained or shaped by socio-economic, cultural and political factors and ruling elites' interest in maintaining political control. The interaction between local factors and decentralised governance has produced a form of representation that deviates from the theoretical formulations of democratic representation.

Summary of Findings and Analytical Approach

Taking hybridity as a point of departure, this study reviewed the progress of D&D in contributing to local democracy and improving local service delivery. The review builds on three commonly assumed benefits of decentralisation: accountability and responsiveness, participation in local development planning and improved representation of the marginalised. This review suggests that there has been progress; however, this has been shaped by the hybrid context and is far from being uniform and linear.

Accountability and Responsiveness

Some progress in accountability and responsiveness can be noted after more than a decade of reform. Both commune councillors and people reported improved accountability and service delivery. Commune chiefs indicated that they are accountable to the people or voters and carry out their duties or mandates based on accountability. Local people also feel empowered by decentralisation. They said that they can hold elected leaders accountable by voting incompetent councillors out of office. Increased responsiveness of local leaders can also be noted. However, this improvement deviates from common assumptions about decentralisation. There is a great deal of continuity in local administration. Party discipline is very strong, creating a pressure that contradicts downward accountability. Councils' responsiveness has been driven by the ability of local leaders to garner external funding support. The CSF is limited in amount and insufficient to meet local development needs. Thus the ability of local leaders to be accountable and responsive depends on their access to other resources for development. Councils have tried to be responsive and supplement funding shortfalls through appeals to the party, *saboraschon* and other sources. Personal connections and patronage were also used to secure funding for public services. However, dependency on informal financing raises questions of broader accountability since it is not always clear where the additional funding comes from. An added constraint on local government's accountability and responsiveness occurs in resource-rich localities.

Citizen Participation

Decentralisation has created a space for citizen participation in local politics and development. Citizens are now allowed to choose local leaders and participate and show their preferences for local development and community needs through participatory local governance. Despite this improvement, the question remains whether decentralisation has really brought about participatory local democracy. The literature and recent fieldwork suggest that citizen participation in Cambodia has been determined by economic and cultural factors. Poor living conditions force many people to spend time making a living rather than attending public or community activities and create a demand for immediate benefits from participation. The issue is exacerbated by the inability of councils to respond to the people's needs. When people do participate in local meetings, a cultural hierarchy may prevent genuine participatory activities.

Representation

Decentralisation has also opened space for improved local representation of political parties and marginalised people, including women. Having locally elected commune councillors not only reflects democratic principles but also helps to bridge the gap between the state and the people. Despite this improvement, meaningful representation and its impact on local politics and development remain in question. Opposition parties are unlikely to improve their local presence in the face of a strong and politically affluent ruling party, which has consolidated its power and reinforced its political forces. Similarly, increased women's representation does not create an increase in political power. The situation is constrained by socio-economic, cultural and political factors. Family burdens, limited education, lack of self-confidence, lack of financial support and cultural hierarchy place women in a politically weak position. Apart from women's and children's affairs, women are rarely assigned other important tasks. Further, political representation is largely dependent on each political party, and women's ranking in the party list depends on the priorities, motivation and political will of party leaders. However, the will within parties to raise women's role remains limited. When women, particularly village gender activists and leaders, are engaged politically, they are frequently tasked to encourage defection from opposition parties rather than to hold decision-making offices.

The Way Forward

There has been progress in the legal framework and mechanisms of decentralisation, but implementation brings an intense interaction between democratic decentralised governance and local interests and values. Change within the hybrid political system has involved a gradual transformation or localisation of external values to match local elites' political interests and the local cultural context. The outcome of decentralisation shows some features associated with democratic decentralisation and others associated with local factors. The achievement is not a full-fledged democratic decentralised governance, but can be termed, in David Roberts' words (2008), "indigenised democratic practice".

Whether there will be further developments in democratic decentralisation beyond the "indigenised democratic practice" remains a question. Developing democracy is not an easy task. However, decentralisation has already laid the groundwork for local democracy, and the potential of D&D to develop democracy should not be underestimated.

First, decentralisation has helped to create political pluralism by setting up multiparty local councils (Kim & Öjendal 2009; RGC 2010a; Öjendal & Kim 2011; Kim 2011). It has reconciled political differences through grassroots compromises on local development. For instance, commune councillors from different political parties "are now working together to develop their localities" (RGC 2010a: 5; Sak 2008). Political pluralism pressures the ruling party to nominate popular candidates, contributing to responsiveness and accountability. D&D have also created space for women to engage in local politics and development.

Second, decentralisation has increased the political legitimacy of the regime by revitalising the local state apparatus, which was left out for a long time due to political *upheaval* and *civil war* (Öjendal 2005; Manor 2008; Kim & Öjendal 2009; RGC 2010a; Kim 2011). *Indeed*, the previous structure of the local state, particularly the commune administration, was purposely created to control civil war and the people politically (Öjendal 2005: 292). In contrast, decentralisation has restructured and reinvented local political institutions, and local authorities have been empowered as agents of local development.

Third, decentralisation has connected society and the state. Fear, repression and coercion have gradually disappeared. Villagers' perceptions of local authorities have changed significantly. The way in which local people are expected to show *korob*, *kaud*, *klach*—respect, admiration, fear—to local authorities has also shifted. "Villagers' dealings with these authorities used to be characterised by *klach*, and in good cases some *korob*, but very little *kaud*; now, there is a lot of *korob* and some *kaud*, but not so much *klach*" (Öjendal & Kim 2006: 157–158; see also Kim & Öjendal 2009).

Decentralisation may appear mismatched with a hierarchical and non-participatory culture, but it has promoted familiarisation with democratic values for both voters and elected officials. Elected representatives or leaders are now well aware that being a leader signifies being accountable to people, responding to local needs, engaging people in community development and representing local interests. The style of local leaders has changed from

issuing orders to a more participatory and accountable approach. As argued by Kim (2011: 247), “Decentralisation has been playing a role as political education to the rulers who were used to be[ing] commanding and using military power to switch to formal administration and to follow the concept that to rule is not to rule but it is to serve people”.

The way forward for further deepening of democratic decentralisation will require at least:

1. empowered local councils with improved formal access to resources and a reduction in their dependency on informal sources of funds;
2. improved civic education and engagement in demanding accountability and good governance from sub-national governments and line ministries;
3. enhanced coordination among ministries and territorial authorities with a unified administration so as to improve accountability and service delivery;
4. improved capacity of sub-national (particularly district) leaders so that a unified administration can function appropriately.

Areas for Future Research

Empirical evidence shows that decentralisation has produced an outcome that deviates from common theoretical assumptions. Each outcome has been shaped by cultural, political and other factors specific to each context. Thus, further research addressing specific areas may contribute to increased knowledge and informed policy. Future studies should include but not be limited to:

1. exploring how decentralisation impacts specific sectors, e.g. natural resource management, education, health and agricultural extension;
2. a more systematic comparison of resource-rich and resource-poor communes. Much of what was laid out in this study is based on anecdotal evidence. A more systematic study will be needed;
3. a study on the relationship between decentralisation and reconciliation, with a focus on former Khmer Rouge regions;
4. a study on party discipline and its implications for commune councils, including, for example, how party discipline impacts service delivery and local government accountability.

Annex 1: Assumed Benefits of Decentralisation and the Development Context in Cambodia: A Literature Review

Assumed Benefits of Decentralisation

As stated in government documents, decentralisation has two main goals:

1. to promote a transparent and accountable local government to deepen local democracy and
2. to improve local service delivery or development to reduce poverty (RGC 2005).

These goals are in line with textbook theoretical assumptions on the political, economic and social benefits of decentralisation. It is assumed that decentralisation increases government accountability and responsiveness, enhances citizen participation in policy decisions that impact their lives and provides opportunities for representation of marginalised people.

Accountability can be improved in decentralised governance through election of local leaders. People's ability to vote local leaders out of office should they perform poorly and the relative proximity between the people and their leaders increase pressure for accountability (Diamond 1999: 125–128; Smith 1985: 4–5). This situation also improves the responsiveness of local leaders in two ways. First, local representatives, who have local knowledge, local interest and good understanding of local affairs, are in a good position to provide what the community needs (Smith 1985: 28, 186). Second, a smaller constituency allows closer government attention to local concerns, demands and preferences (Faguet 2004: 867–868). However, being accountable and responsive also requires resources at the leaders' disposal. Thus, “some tax authority” for local governments and “the ability to raise revenues from own sources” may be necessary (Shah & Thompson 2004: 11–14).

Citizens' “meaningful participation in local development decisions that affect them” can be improved by decentralisation (Blair 2000: 20). Decentralisation provides access to “structures and processes of governance”, particularly locally. It creates conditions in which participation and civic engagement can be broadened in democratic discourse (Brillantes 2004: 33–39), because more power and resources are placed in a tier of government closer to the people and hence “influenced more easily” (Bergh 2004: 781). Moreover, since decentralised local governments are “more proximate to the public than the central government”, the number of people involved in political and democratic processes is expected to increase (Olowu 1997, cited in Kulipossa 2004: 775). Increased participation helps to enhance citizens' “performance” in consultation, judgment, decision making and management (Smith 1992, cited in Kulipossa 2004: 775). It also enables citizens to learn “to recognise the specious demagogue, to avoid electing incompetent or corrupt representatives, to debate issues effectively, to relate expenditure to income, to think for tomorrow”, thereby strengthening democracy (Maddick 1963, cited in Smith 1985: 21).

Decentralisation can increase local representation (Blair 2000; Cheema 2005; Cheema & Rondinelli 2007; Diamond 1999; Rondinelli 1981). Groups of under-represented people such as women, minority ethnic groups, small business people, farmers, youth or professionals have greater opportunities to gain local representation in a small constituency than nationally (Blair 2000: 23). It can lead to “greater political representation from various political, ethnic,

religious, and cultural groups” in development decision-making and planning (Cheema & Rondinelli 2007; Diamond 1999; Rondinelli 1981).

Economic, social and political benefits are expected from decentralisation. “Economically, decentralisation is said to improve the efficiency with which demands for locally provided services are expressed and public good provided ... Socially, [it] contributes to realisation of individual values and collective welfare. Politically, decentralisation is to strengthen accountability, political skills and national integration [—] it brings government closer to people ...” (Smith 1985: 4).

Mixed Evidence of Social, Economic, and Political Benefits

Such assumptions carry a high expectation of decentralisation. However, empirical records on decentralisation and its assumed benefits have been mixed. Decentralisation has helped to increase accountability and responsiveness, popular participation and representativeness in some countries but failed in others.

In Kumaon, India, decentralisation in forestry shows impressive results. Councils are found to be accountable not only to higher levels but also to their constituencies. “The rights of specific council members to hold office can be and sometimes are challenged if evidence of wrongdoing is available.” Local people participate not only in elections but also in council meetings, and they file complaints about councils’ performance (Agrawal & Ribot 1999: 9–10). To varying degrees, Bolivia, Honduras, India, Mali, the Philippines and Ukraine also experienced better accountability after decentralisation (Blair 2000). The six countries also experienced increased representation for minorities and women. The Malian Songhai and Dogon ethnic minorities gained seats in the new rural commune councils. In Karnataka, India, one-third of all members of elected local bodies were women, a third of whom held council presidencies and vice-presidencies (Blair 2000: 23–24). A case study in Bolivia found that responsiveness to local needs improved significantly after the local government invested devolved public funds in human capital and social services (Faguet 2004). Likewise, Colombia experienced an improvement in the capacity of provincial administrators, resulting in increased responsiveness to local needs (Rondinelli *et al.* 1983).

Some countries’ decentralisations, however, deviated from the theoretical assumption, producing little or no improvement in accountability and responsiveness, popular participation or representation of the marginalised. In Nigeria, weak downward accountability was due to a lack of local funds, weak local institutions, inadequate awareness of programmes, the weakness or absence of active local politics and a lack of real devolution of power (Crook & Sverrisson 2001). Uganda’s heavy reliance on intergovernmental transfers and limited power to raise local resources, including taxes and fees, severely limited downward accountability after decentralisation. Local governments did not have full autonomy in decision making, while the central government, particularly line ministries, still exerted enormous influence on the selection of local projects or service provision and the use of allocated funds. About 80 per cent of financial resources of local government were conditional grants (Steiner 2007: 180). Ivory Coast’s and Ghana’s decentralisations suffered from challenges including a lack of commune development funds and local capacity, elite bias, patronage and corruption (Crook & Manor 1998).

Lack of participation was a challenge in some countries. In Kenya, weak local accountability is related to the absence of local participation in decision making (most decisions being made behind closed doors) and a lack of information on funds and accounts (Devas

& Grant 2003). Decentralisation in Bangladesh also suffered a severe shortfall due to lack of popular participation in local government work. This problem emerged from “a lack of interest and/or lack of education” (Shah & Thompson 2004). A similar problem was found in Uganda, where participation in non-electoral forms (council meetings) continued to be low due to factors including “high opportunity costs of attending meetings in the form of foregone income, an overload of meetings, the fact that discussed matters appear too technical, the limited resources at stake, or the perception that local government decisions are the prerogative of elected representatives ... [and the] lack of information among citizens” (Francis & James 2003, cited in Steiner 2007: 179–180). In addition, lack of a participatory culture is also critical (Steiner 2007: 180).

In some countries, the structure of power and elite capture intensified the marginalisation of under-represented people. Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, Ghana and Kenya displayed these conditions. Most elected council positions in these countries were captured by local political elites and the wealthy, who had strong connections with ministers, senior civil servants and members of parliament (Crook & Sverrisson 2001).

Theoretically, decentralisation is related to democratic development and good governance. However, empirical evidence from various countries indicates a “great variation in the success and failure of decentralisation policies, both within and across countries and over time” (Kulipossa 2004: 778). The literature cited above points to various reasons, including weak institutions, ill-conceived design, a political culture not conducive to decentralisation and a tendency to centralise as a result of a lack of political commitment from ruling elites as causes of failures in decentralisation. Cambodia shares some characteristics with these failed cases, including but not limited to weak institutions, lack of local development funds, a non-participatory culture, patronage and corruption, which are common features in a hybrid system. However, anecdotal evidence indicates some progress with regard to the assumed benefits rather than outright failure. This suggests an analytical gap.

Contextualising Decentralisation in Cambodia

Decentralisation in Cambodia was introduced within the context of political hybridity. Thus any progress reflects the possible constraints of this hybrid system. Cambodia’s system emerged from its incomplete transition to democracy. Following the end of the Cold War, Cambodia joined many other countries in democratic experimentation. Democracy was a key part of a peace settlement that brought major armed factions together to resolve their differences and secure their legitimacy through the ballot box rather than armed conflict. A multiparty system with other democratic institutions was introduced. After nearly two decades, Cambodia’s political trajectory has not trended toward liberal democracy. Unlike the commonly assumed “transition paradigm” in which countries eventually become liberal democracies, Cambodian political development remained in a gray area (Carothers 2002).

Transformation since the introduction of democracy has stalled in a hybrid system in which the old values and practices are fused with a liberal democratic discourse (Öjendal & Lilja 2009). The country is characterised neither by a dictatorial regime nor by a fully fledged democracy. It resembles Carothers’ characterisation of “dominant power politics” in which some basic forms of democratic institutions are upheld and limited political spaces as well as contestation from oppositions are allowed. In general, dominant power countries are characterised by a lack of differentiation between ruling political force and the state. This lack of clear differentiation places resources under state control, and public information, the use

of violence and judicial power are at the service of ruling elites, limiting genuine opposition politics (Un 2009). Elections are held regularly and are not outrightly fraudulent, but the playing field is sufficiently tilted in favour of the ruling elites (Carothers 2002: 11–12). Deficient as it seems, “this system has been successful in introducing peace, stability, economic growth, and declining levels of poverty over the past 15 years”, although these achievements may not adequately cushion against resentment caused by corruption and an increasing gap between state and society (CDRI 2006: 15).

Decentralisation in Cambodia may be sandwiched between national elites’ political culture of patronage, interests and preference for centralisation and the masses’ docile culture. Experiences from various countries indicate that there is a tendency for national ruling elites to maintain centralised control because decentralisation may reduce their power. As a consequence, local governments may be given only limited power, by either design or default, allowing central government to intervene in local affairs. Similarly, a hierarchical bureaucratic culture can obstruct democratic decentralisation. A 2007 study found: “... reporting upwards and waiting for instructions is traditionally the appropriate thing to do” (Kim & Öjendal 2007: 42). A 2010 survey found that 72 percent of 390 councillors interviewed agreed or strongly agreed that councils must obtain the approval of district officials before making most important decisions (EIC 2010: 34).¹² A 2011 survey found that 85 percent of 531 commune councillors still considered higher authorities as their boss, specifically the Ministry of the Interior (43.1 percent), the district board of governors (31 percent), district council (5.1 percent), provincial board of governors (5.1 percent) and the provincial council (0.7 percent) (CDRI, forthcoming). Internal contradictions in the hybrid system can place additional constraints on democratic decentralisation. Informal patronage networks associated with local or historical political cultures and institutions can serve as a major force of centralisation that cuts through formal decentralisation. This raises questions about local leaders’ ability to maintain downward accountability. Furthermore, when interests are involved, elite resistance to decentralisation can be stronger, with much pressure emerging from informal networks. If groups benefit from some practice, they may promote it instead of encouraging reform goals. Therefore, the outcome of decentralisation is likely to vary with different levels of natural resource wealth.

A docile mass culture is evident in the preference to align with powerful political figures, an inclination emanating from the long-standing hierarchical patron-client system. Many ordinary citizens—particularly those in rural areas, who make up around 80 percent of the population—do not have a culture of confrontation, preferring to accept the status quo. Although this trait is not exclusive to the country, Cambodians are said to be particularly culturally docile towards higher authority even when it appears to be dictatorial and unfair (Mehmet 1997). In a study of a Cambodian village,

one old lady did not receive development aid although she was clearly poor. However, her complaint was that she did not belong to the village chief’s “clients,” for whom he arranged the distributions. She did not think that the system was corrupt and should be changed, but she felt that she had to belong to this clientele in order to share in the benefits. When asked if what the village chief did was wrong, she focused on the fact that he did not regard her as a “favourite.” (Ledgerwood & Vijghen 2002, p. 128)

12 There are two reasons that commune councillors still consider district authorities as their bosses even though the latter do not have direct control over commune administration or finance. First, the district has power as the commander of the military, the military police and the police. Second, the district governor is usually the head of the district political party to which councillors are subordinated as party members (Kim 2011: 170; see also Hughes & Devas 2008).

This situation raises a question on the feasibility of decentralisation. For some observers, this hierarchical culture and the lack of individual citizens willing to hold the state and its leaders accountable are unreceptive to decentralisation, creating a major stumbling block (Blunt & Turner 2005).

In spite of these constraints, decentralisation is moving forward, with elites appearing supportive, although not without some resistance. This apparent support is due in part to the achievements of SEILA and the fact that its achievement aligned with elite interests.

The legacy of that experience [SEILA] lives on within Cambodia, and has helped to persuade key figures in the government that democratic decentralisation has developmental promise—and that the pursuit of it serves the vital political interests of the government, the ruling party and its leaders. Such figures can be found not just in the Ministry of the Interior which oversees decentralisation, but also closer to the apex of power. The situation is nonetheless ambiguous. No government is monolithic, and other potent forces are (like their counterparts in all other countries) hesitant about decentralisation—especially in the Ministry of Economy and Finance and various line ministries (Manor 2008: 2).

While the hierarchical culture may constrain participation and appear mismatched with decentralisation, it is not necessarily inimical to decentralised governance. As mentioned earlier, the decentralisation goals are twofold: promoting local democracy and service delivery. The former could be circumscribed by hierarchical culture, which inhibits participation. However, the same culture also allows local leaders to mobilise participation in planning and delivering local development. With differing personalities of local leaders, the impact of hierarchical culture is likely to vary. This variable also has its own limitations since local leaders do not operate independently but form part of a broader hybrid setting. Decentralisation occurs within and is shaped by this structural constraint.

Given the hybrid political condition, difficulties in decentralisation and promotion of democracy can be expected. Rather than over-emphasising the difficulties, this study takes hybridity as a point of departure, accepts the possible challenges and attempts to recount how possible achievements have been constrained, shaped or localised by the hybrid system.

Annex 2: Summary of Major Research Findings, 2007–10

1. Core Kechhnay Research Projects

Accountability and Neo-patrimonialism in Cambodia: A Critical Literature Review (Pak Kimchoeun, Horng Vuthy, Eng Netra, Ann Sovatha, Kim Sedara, Jenny Knowles and David Craig, Working Paper Series No. 34, CDRI, Phnom Penh, 2007)

This paper shows that while the Cambodian state structure formally reflects the international practice of legal, relational bureaucracy, its accountability is still shaped largely by personalised relations of patronage, which penetrates the state from top to bottom. The coexistence of formal and patronage-based accountability has given rise to a hybrid regime similar to the neo-patrimonial states often found in Africa. To see patronage as nothing but bad for development, the paper argues, would not help much in finding solutions to Cambodia's current governance deficit. It suggests that more needs to be learned, especially about the nature of Cambodian patronage and its accountability implications.

Accountability and Public Expenditure Management, Planning and Human Resources in Decentralised Cambodia (Pak Kimchoeun and David Craig, Working Paper Series No. 38, CDRI, Phnom Penh, 2008-9)

These three working papers separately apply the framework of accountability and neo-patrimonialism to provincial public expenditure management, planning and human resource management.

Accountability and Planning

It was found that current provincial development plans are largely a wish list presented to secure funding from various sources, including the national budget, NGOs and donors. The paper documented how patronage networks are used to secure funding for projects listed in the plan.

Accountability and Public Expenditure Management

Different funding streams were found for provincial and lower development activities, including the salakhet [provincial]'s budget, sectoral priority programmes, provincial investment funds, Commune/*Sangkat* Fund and various donor programmes and projects. Patronage was found to be common, especially in the execution of the national budget, whose management system was weak. Such weaknesses have justified the creation of parallel projects by donors to channel and protect their own funds.

Accountability and Human Resources

Low incentive, politicisation and centralisation were the main challenges for provincial human resource management. These factors have led to high absenteeism among provincial and lower state officials, resulting in low quality service. Salary supplements and other incentive schemes were found to have only limited (or even negative) effects on the broader human resource management system. Patronage and politicisation were identified as the main challenges to civil service and future provincial decentralisation.

Leadership in Local Politics of Cambodia—A Study of Leaders in Three Communes of Three Provinces (Thon Vimealea, Ou Sivhuoch, Eng Netra and Ly Tem, Working Paper Series No. 42, CDRI, Phnom Penh, 2009)

The study seeks to identify different kinds of local leaders (including women) and their associated characteristics and elements of legitimacy in order to see whether and how they can bridge the state-society gap. Findings indicate at least three major forms of local leadership: administrative, economic and traditional. Administrative leaders, including village and commune councillors, are associated with the authority of the state. They are commonly associated with a political party since they are dependent upon backing and financing from political parties to supplement the meagre Commune/*Sangkat* Fund for local development. Their average education is lower than needed to carry out their mandates and responsibilities; the majority are aged 49 or above. Economic leaders are usually more educated and have the wealth to contribute to commune development, and thereby become increasingly powerful and influential. They have networks linking them to the centre, which allow them to bypass local authorities and to run their businesses smoothly, including illegal activities. Traditional leaders, including elders and achar, have no formal connection with the state but are powerful because of the cultural hierarchy. Women were not found among traditional leaders, but when they appear as leaders in other categories, they tend to be younger and have higher education than their male counterparts, although they are relatively inexperienced and face constraints from their gender roles. Traditional leaders are especially helpful in bridging the gap between authorities and the people via their important roles in mobilising labour and contributions for projects (including religious activities), in solving minor domestic conflicts and in commune planning with local authorities. They get along with virtually everyone in their villages and communes.

The Local Governance of Common Pool Resources: The Case of Irrigation Management in Cambodia (Chea Chou, Working Paper Series No. 47, 2010)

The study seeks the factors that enable or constrain good governance of common pool resources, using irrigation water as a case for analysis. It explores the dynamics of community-based natural resource management and decentralised natural resource management and how these two approaches interact. The study found that community-based management, which is being implemented locally to manage irrigation water, is working, although unsatisfactorily due to three constraints. First, there is difficulty in collecting irrigation service fees. This emerges in part from the uncertainty of water flow, a technical and natural issue beyond the capacity of the local management association. Second, people have no sense of ownership of the farmer water user community, which is seen by most as just another state authority in which officials put their own interests before those of the community. The non-transparent election of leaders, patron-like leaders who are autocratic in their thinking, decision-making and implementing of plans and the lack of independent information, making the data on revenue collection and expenditure not transparent, worsen the situation. Third, the community possesses low management skills, poor networks and very limited revenue. This situation was exacerbated by the flawed relationship between the association leader and the commune chief. Decentralised management seemed not to be functioning in the selected case. Commune intervention was seen occasionally but was not effective. The study found disconnections between the farmer water user community and the commune council, and between the leaders and the led.

Where Decentralisation Meets Democracy: Civil Society, Local Government, and Accountability in Cambodia, (Kim, Sedara and Öjendal, Joakim, Working Paper Series No. 35, CDRI, Phnom Penh, 2007)

The paper identifies three different modes of accountability, each focusing on the demand side. Three communicative relations are explored: between people and community-based organisations (CBOs), between CBOs and commune councils and between commune councils and the wider political system. The paper found that decentralisation has enabled the establishment of local democratic institutions, but democratic politics have not yet developed locally. One observes a growth of CBOs, which may have a greater ability than individuals to demand accountability from local government. However, CBOs also have their limitations, making accountability uncertain. Further, while there is a vibrant relationship between CBOs and councils in terms of services and local development (i.e. trying to be accountable to each other), it has been hampered by councils' lack of real discretionary power.

A Gendered Analysis of the Decentralisation Reform in Cambodia (Kim Sedara and Öjendal Joakim, forthcoming 2011) ICLD-EWC

Decentralisation is commonly regarded as the deepest public sector reform and the most significant democratic development in Cambodia. It rearranges power structures, creates space for a more pluralistic political representation, addresses gender equality in local politics and triggers articulation of new opinions. However, female representation in decision-making bodies remains inadequate, gendered articulation of ideas and priorities has a limited resonance, and gendered power structures are not easily altered, much less removed. This study explored the space for women in Cambodia's local governance: to what extent is there an increased gender balance, and how do women articulate and pursue their views in local politics? Two critical issues were examined empirically: female representation in commune councils and women's political influence in local politics.

Cambodian Economic Transformation: A Look into State Capacity (Ou Sivhuoch, Lun Pide, and Kim Sedara, forthcoming 2011)

This study was inspired by literature which suggests that the idea of developmental states is still relevant far into the 21st century and that late developers need to fulfil certain conditions as prerequisites for sustainable growth. This prerequisite is the basic state capacity, i.e., the quality of state bureaucracy (staffed with capable people with proper incentives). This basic capacity is crucial to (1) the ability to maintain peace and political and macroeconomic stability, (2) delivery of basic public goods that are crucial to citizens' livelihoods and (3) the ability to devise and implement policies corresponding to private sector and societal needs. These may be translated into sustained and equitable growth. Preliminary findings suggest that Cambodia is able to maintain peace and political and macroeconomic stability, necessary conditions to encourage investment, yet its overall bureaucratic quality is uneven. Because of this, the high economic growth for nearly a decade prior to the world economic crisis may not be sustainable. This bureaucratic weakness is caused in part by Cambodia's turbulent history.

Fiscal Decentralisation in Cambodia: A Review of Progress and Challenges for Next Steps
(Pak Kimchoeun, Annual Development Review-ADR, CDRI, Phnom Penh, 2011)

This paper reviews fiscal decentralisation in Cambodia up to the time when the 3 Year Implementation Plan was adopted (in November 2010). Using international literature and practice as its analytical framework, the paper focuses on the importance of district administration for the next step of reform, the need to link decentralisation to sectoral service delivery (especially agriculture, education and health), and the challenges of coordination among national ministries and agencies, between the government and donors and among donors.

Democracy in Action: Decentralisation reform in Post-Conflict Cambodia, (Kim Sedara, 2011), PhD Dissertation, School of Global Studies, Goteburg University, Sweden.

The paper explores the role of decentralisation in democratisation in post-conflict Cambodia. The decentralisation is analysed using three main concepts: elected commune council responsiveness, accountability and devolution of power. The paper envisages that decentralisation has a critical role in enhancing democratic institutions, especially at the grassroots, and building political legitimacy.

A dominant party in a weak state: How the ruling party in Cambodia manages to become and stay dominant in power, (Pak Kimchoeun, forthcoming), PhD Dissertation, Policy and Governance, Australian National University, Australia

The dissertation examines four different areas of the Cambodian People Party's domination: how it controls state funds, how it builds its rural party structure, how it finances rural infrastructure projects and how it benefits from decentralisation. The study indicates that while allowing central elites to seek rent from the state, the CPP has obliged those elites to contribute to its financing programme, which aims at building infrastructure throughout the country since 1998. This party financing has been used to build the CPP's and its leaders' image and legitimacy. In addition, the CPP since 1998 has strengthened its organisational structure down to the sub-village ("group") to ensure effective voter mobilisation and local surveillance. The CPP has used local elections as a way partly to legitimise its rural control, and partly to clean up its unpopular party chiefs through intra-party democratic means. The thesis concludes that the core of the CPP's domination is its adaptive capacity, its ability to keep changing the balance between control and legitimisation.

Patron-Clientelism and Decentralisation: An Emerging Local Political Culture in Rural Cambodia, (Sovatha 2008) Masters' thesis, Department of Anthropology, Northern Illinois University, U.S.A

The thesis suggests that decentralisation through local elections has to some extent transformed the political landscape that has dominated Cambodian politics since 1979. First, it brings into play a hybrid democracy in that villagers get to elect their leaders, yet simultaneously are bound to them by traditional patron-clientelism. Second, local elections open space for political parties and local leaders who are not in the dominant party, thus strengthening political plurality. Third, decentralisation makes a new discourse of power possible, one that gives clients a certain control over their patrons; it provides electors with broader choices of politicians, a choice that was completely absent in the 1980s. Lastly, it encourages local leaders to acquire merits through good personality, being clean, politically neutral and fair in their handling of disputes and development. These findings are positive given the close control by the ruling party before democracy was introduced. The dynamics of local political leaders and their

competition will have brought even more progress by the time decentralisation is completed. These findings refute a common assumption that Cambodian rural society is conservative and reform-resistant.

Farmer Participation and the Success of Farmer-managed Irrigation Systems: A Case Study of the O-treng Farmer Water User Community, Kompong Speu Province (Ros Bandeth, Annual Development Review, CDRI, Phnom Penh, 2010)

This study explores factors influencing farmer participation in a successful farmer-managed irrigation system. It reveals four modes of participation: fee payment, water distribution, scheme maintenance and community meetings. Participation is influenced by a range of factors: benefits from irrigation, farmers' awareness (of their rights, rules and the importance of participation), rule enforcement, community leadership and farmers' trust in the leadership, the quality of scheme infrastructure, external support and farmers' characteristics. The personality of leaders and their ability to generate trust by managing fairly and transparently, putting the interests of the community first, working hard, maintaining the scheme and addressing farmers' problems have a significant impact on participation.

Decentralised Governance of Irrigation Water in Cambodia: Matching Principles to Local Realities (Chea Chou, Nang Phirun, Anna Thompson, Isabelle Whitehead, and Phillip Hirsch, CDRI Working Paper, forthcoming 2011)

This study investigates the extent to which the governance matches the requirements of diverse irrigation scheme through detailed ethnographic study of three schemes: Roluos and Steng Chinit in Kompong Thom province and Damnak Ampil in Pursat. It investigates (1) the match between governance arrangements and requirements imposed by the physical configuration of the schemes and (2) ways in which stipulated governance arrangements have been modified in response to local requirements. The study found discrepancies and inconsistencies between the actual day-to-day governance practices and the requirements imposed by the physical infrastructure of the irrigation scheme as well as between these practices and the ideal governance outlined in the Integrated Water Resource Management. The study found that the command area was much too large for the poorly resourced water user committees, which lack both financial and human resources. The roles of the committees fell short of what was mandated and were not well executed. The strongest committee role was that of mediator between farmers and the provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology. They also had roles in water allocation from main and secondary canals, resolving minor conflicts between farmers and organising irrigation service fee collection. The current governance arrangements deviate from both the physical requirements of the schemes and the idealised governance intended in Participatory Irrigation Management and Development policies. Fixing these problems requires changes to policy, mandates and the governance structure to align with traditional governance frameworks.

2. Commissioned Research Projects

A Background Study on the District Office's Role and Potential Facing the Deconcentration and Decentralisation Reform (Joakim Öjendal and Kim Sedara, 2008)

This article analyses district political dynamics using the historical evolution of districts and communes. It reveals that the district's function and role in local development have been blurred. Lack of a clear unified administration is a major challenge for the district.

Searching for an Improved Path to Civil Society-Parliamentarian Interactions in Cambodia (Ou Sivhuoch, Lun Pide and Kim Sedara, 2009 ADR (CDRI) and report for ODI)

This study explores the degree and quality of engagement between parliamentarians and civil society organisations. Twenty-one percent of 116 sampled organisations have relations with parliamentarians. However, qualitative interviews illustrate that the quality of the engagement is limited because of a general lack of trust on both sides. Parliamentarians are constrained to act accountably to their parties and to defend the legitimacy of executive officials; thus little room is left for popular representation. Civil society, emerging from docility, is rather immature and not equipped with appropriate skills to engage with parliamentarians. Civil society is largely constituted by NGOs that are more accountable to donor funders and lack a strong civic engagement. Some organisations have achieved good quality outputs from engagement with parliamentarians: some comments on draft laws were accepted by parliamentarians and some visible effective intervention was made by the National Assembly. The study suggests that genuine relationships occur when the following factors are combined: parliamentarians trust the organisations; the organisations are politically affiliated; reliable evidence is used; appropriate engaging strategies are used; the nature of the organisations is conducive to building rapport. In general, development organisations work better with parliamentarians than political ones, which are often viewed as threats by parliamentarians (of the ruling party).

Qualitative Analysis of One Window Service Office (OWSO) in Cambodia (Thon Mealea, Heng Seiha, and Krui Virak, ADR (CDRI) and report for the World Bank 2010)

The research suggests that challenges to One-Window Service Office include delegation of services, conflict with line departments, capacity and incentives. In spite of this, there is a great deal of satisfaction among citizens with such offices. The District Ombudsman, though faced with constraints that include a lack of dissemination and trust among the citizens, plays a crucial role as a check and balance for the local district administration. The new alternative has been better received than the government's existing system of service delivery. The study also found enthusiasm and political will from a large number of local government officials, including municipal governors, deputy governors and one-window office chiefs and staff, and a strong policy commitment from central government. These reform-minded individuals could be a catalyst in bringing change to the old governance system. However, any attempt to expand the framework of OWSO-DO to other districts and municipalities should take the above challenges into account in the interest of sustainability.

3. Publications of Other Organisations

Real Democratisation in Cambodia? An Empirical Review of the Potential of a Democratisation Reform, (Joakim Öjendal and Kim Sedara, 2011) ICLD

The UN intervention in Cambodia in 1992–93 could not itself achieve democracy; at best it could lay the institutional foundations. Cambodia has had major impediments to democratisation from its political culture, its violent recent history and institutional limitations. Decentralisation—including local elections, invention by appropriate state institutions and popular participation—is expected to achieve both reconstruction and democratisation, but the outcome is far from certain. This article investigates popular perceptions of decentralisation and the views of commune authorities. The aim is to analyse empirically some key dimensions, namely the reform's role in post-conflict reconstruction, local democratisation and local development. In line with other research, the study suggests that the country is moving towards agreement that decentralisation has brought improved local governance; there is broad

appreciation, greater democratic space, improved commune administration performance and increased accountability. Decentralisation has so far triggered two distinct processes. Firstly, it has opened political space in a benevolent and democratic way. This has facilitated a more positive relationship between civil society and the local state, reduced the governance gap and enhanced the legitimacy of the local state. Secondly, it has reconnected the local and the central state since the former has acquired a crucial role in a bold reform that attracts attention and some financial resources.

Local Leaders and Big Business in Three Communes, (Caroline Hughes, Eng Netra, Thon Vimealea, Ou Sivhuoch, and Ly Tem, in Caroline Hughes and Kheang Un (eds) Cambodia Economic Transformation, forthcoming 2011)

Decentralisation and deconcentration have put local governance at the centre of the government's strategies for public administration reform. However, there have been few studies of how local authorities relate to one another and to the villagers they are supposed to serve, and little of the policy discussion surrounding D&D has focused on the relationships between local leaders and big business. This paper examines the relationship between local leaders and big business in three different communes. It suggests that administrative decentralisation has been accompanied by economic policies that favour highly centralised decision-making, with far-reaching and deleterious implications for local democratic practices. Out of the three communes, in the most resource rich one, the councillors are powerless in the face of a dominant economic leader (an Okhna). In a commune with fewer resources, councillors control resources and extract revenues from the sale of communal land. They have strong political backing and no serious concerns over party discipline or electoral competition. In the last commune, where resources are poor and a key national patron is in charge of the commune, the locality is stable. In all three cases, leadership has been remarkably stable for the last 25 years.

Transforming Local Politics in Rural Cambodia: In Search for Accountability in Natural Resources Management, (Kim, Sedara and Joakim Öjendal, in Caroline Hughes and Kheang Un (eds) Economic Transformation in Cambodia, NIAS Press (2011))

The article examines the accountability relationship between community-based organisations and commune councils, focusing on popular participation, mobilisation and partnership. It suggests that community-based organisations are crucial for accountable and responsive decentralisation. These are intermediary institutions that can help bridge between the people and authorities. They have a greater ability than individual citizens to demand accountability from local government.

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