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**SUPPORTING STATE-BUILDING FOR DEMOCRATISATION?  
A STUDY OF 20 YEARS OF SWEDISH DEMOCRACY AID TO CAMBODIA**

**Henny Andersen, Karl-Anders Larsson and Joakim Öjendal**



# Supporting State-Building for Democratisation? A Study of 20 Years of Swedish Democracy Aid to Cambodia

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and Joakim Öjendal*

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*till*

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In the **appendix** “The authors’ previous work in Cambodia”, further details are presented regarding each author’s previous involvement in Cambodia, to allow readers to form their own assessment of whether the authors’ previous work in Cambodia are assets for this study or raise concerns about potential bias on the part of the authors.

## **Acknowledgements**

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The views expressed in this study, as well as any errors and omissions, are those of the authors.

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# Foreword by the EBA

Democracy and human rights are core values for Swedish development cooperation. The present study assesses the long-term effects of Swedish development assistance to Cambodia in the area of democracy and human rights. The report is the result of an open invitation for country evaluations by the Swedish government's Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) in 2017, and is thus one of several EBA evaluations that have studied the long-term effects of Swedish development cooperation in individual countries.<sup>1</sup> Spanning twenty years of cooperation, from 1997 to 2017, the study scrutinizes the influence of Swedish support on democracy and human rights and what can be learned from those experiences. Furthermore, the study has been conducted in parallel to the EBA report 2019:04, which focuses on a specific programme for decentralization, local democracy and local economic development in Cambodia, a program that is also considered in the present evaluation.

The total Swedish assistance to Cambodia between 1997 and 2017 amounted to 4 billion SEK, and was largely directed towards democracy and human rights, including contributions to decentralization, education and civil society. In terms of the size of its financial contribution, Sweden currently ranks third among bilateral EU donors to Cambodia, following France and Germany.

The evaluation concludes that, overall, Swedish long-term commitment to Cambodia has, in fact, contributed to promote democratic development, particularly at the local level. Furthermore, Swedish development assistance has assisted in strengthening the country's civil society and its education system.

For the future, the authors recommend to continue development assistance to Cambodia in order to counter authoritarian tendencies. To bring such support to its full potential, Swedish assistance should be based on in-depth risk analysis, be flexible and be ready to deal

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<sup>1</sup> Other country evaluations from the EBA are: Bosnia & Herzegovina (EBA Report 2018:10); Tanzania (EBA Report 2016:10) and Uganda (EBA Report 2016:09).

with political and economic changes in the country. Moreover, the study suggests that institutional support alone is not enough to promote democracy and human rights. Hence, support to civil society needs to supplement support to the state. The democracy support provided should focus on strengthening the interaction between state actors, and between state and civil society while taking account of cultural and political conditions.

I hope that this report will find its intended audience among decision- and policy-makers at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, as well as among readers in civil society, the research community and the general public who are interested in Swedish development cooperation with Cambodia. Also, people with an interest in democracy and human rights, including the evaluation of democracy and human rights support, will hopefully find the report rewarding.

The study has been conducted in dialogue with a reference group chaired by Fredrik Ugglå, member of the EBA. However, the authors are solely responsible for the contents of the report.

Gothenburg, June 2019



Helena Lindholm

# Sammanfattning

Sveriges stöd till Kambodja inleddes med nödhjälp och humanitärt bistånd i slutet av 1970-talet när den folkmordsregim som leddes av De röda khmererna föll. Från mitten av 1990-talet övergick svenskt bistånd till att stödja återuppbyggnad och utveckling. Den första landstrategin för långsiktigt svenskt bistånd till Kambodja godkändes för åren 1997–1998. Den nu gällande landstrategin gäller till slutet av 2019.

Demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter (D/MR) har sedan 1990-talet varit ett viktigt mål i svenskt utvecklingsamarbete, så även i samarbetet med Kambodja. Denna studie spänner över åren 1997–2017 och syftar till att besvara följande frågeställningar: *Har svenskt bistånd haft inflytande på förändringar relevanta för D/MR i Kambodja? Om så är fallet: på vilket sätt och i vilken utsträckning? Vilka lärdomar kan dras av utvecklingsarbetet över tid och hur kan lärdomarna bidra i till dagens samarbete med Kambodja inom demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter?*

## Metod

Studien bygger på en omfattande genomgång av dokumentation och intervjuer med intressenter i Kambodja och Sverige. Rapporten innehåller tre delar, var och en med egen analytisk ansats och metod. Den första delen är en sammanfattande analys av politiska och socio-ekonomiska förhållanden och övergripande processer i Kambodja över tid, samt en sammanfattande analys av svenskt utvecklingsamarbete med Kambodja.

Den andra delen innehåller fallstudier av svenskt bistånd till tre områden som fått svenskt stöd under åren 1997–2017: i) decentralisering och lokal demokrati; ii) undervisning; och iii) civila samhället. Tillsammans har de stått för runt 75 procent av Sveriges utbetalningar till Kambodja under perioden.

Tredje delen är en övergripande analys av hur svenskt bistånd bidragit till demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter i Kambodja, utifrån fallstudierna och den politisk-ekonomiska analysen i studiens första

del. Här finns ett särskilt fokus på hur svenskt bistånd har relaterat till den politiska utvecklingen i Kambodja.

Begreppet demokrati saknar en allmänt vedertagen definition. Studien utgår därför från tre demokratimodeller (processliberal, substansliberal och deltagande) för att identifiera tolv demokratiska grunddrag som kan följas empiriskt över tid. Den konkurrensbetonade auktoritära modellen för en hybridregim är också med i studien för att kunna fånga upp eventuella icke avsedda effekter från svenskt D/MR stöd till Kambodja. Demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter behandlas som oskiljaktiga i den mån att mänskliga rättigheter ses som centrala demokratiska grunddrag.

I fallstudierna har processspårning använts som metod för att följa den kausala processen i Kambodja från svenskt bistånd till D/MR, uttryckt genom påverkan på de identifierade demokratiska grunddragen. Processspårningen genomfördes vid fyra kritiska tidpunkter (engelska: critical junctures), d.v.s. tidpunkter eller kortare tidsperioder då institutioner var särskilt öppna för förändring. Dessa kritiska tidpunkter identifierades utifrån analysen av den politisk-ekonomiska utvecklingen i Kambodja i studiens första del.

## **Den politiska kontexten i Kambodja**

Den demokratiska kulturen i Kambodja är svag. Partier konkurrerar om legitimitet snarare än med politiska program och kvinnor är gravt underrepresenterade i alla partier. Det juridiska systemets oberoende och neutralitet är likaledes svagt. Cambodian People's Party (CPP) har en befäst makt, som reflekteras valframgångar på såväl nationell som kommunal nivå. De har uppnått makten genom personliga och starkt hierarkiska förbindelser byggda på gunstlingsvälde, beskydd, tacksamhet och lojalitet. CPP:s svaga resultat i de nationella valen 2013 kom därför som en överraskning. Den betydande förlusten av röster till oppositionen i de kommunala valen 2017 ledde till oro inom partiet.

Detta skifte i kambodjansk politik avspeglar Kambodjas dramatiska strukturella förändringar vad gäller demografi, ekonomi och informationsteknologi. Farhågor om valförlust i de nationella valen 2018 drev på regeringen att förbjuda inte bara

oppositionspartiet Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), utan även all betydande oberoende media och alla kritiska offentliga röster som hade växt fram i Kambodja sedan 1993. Relationerna mellan regeringen och civila samhället hade förbättrats något, från det öppna förtryck och allmänna hotelser som dokumenterades under 1990-talet, till en övergripande atmosfär av samarbete och engagemang fram till mitten av 2000-talet, då föreningsfriheten och yttrandefriheten återigen hotades av politiskt förtryck. Friheten att ordna allmänna demonstrationer och kritisera regeringens politik har på senare tid kringskurits väsentligt i både lagar och praktik.

### **Svenskt utvecklingsamarbete med Kambodja**

Svenskt bistånd har under den period som studeras baserats på en multidimensionell ansats, i vilken det är omöjligt att skilja finansiering av D/MR från finansiering av fattigdomsminskning. Även om Sverige intagit en kritisk hållning till hur D/MR har utvecklats, så har kambodjanska policydokument och strategier hela tiden setts som i grunden sunda. Riskfaktorer har identifierats, men det har antagits att fortsatt utländskt stöd kunnat bidra till en utveckling mot D/MR. Sverige har förutsatt att den kambodjanska regeringen delat svensk syn på D/MR. Svag kapacitet har därmed setts som det största problemet, med reformer och institutionsbyggande som effektiva medel för att åtgärda svagheterna. Politisk vilja, snarare än systemet som sådant, har identifierats som en riskfaktor baserat på liknande antaganden. Korruption har setts som en svaghet i systemet snarare än som en fundamental del av systemet.

### **Svenskt mervärde inom fallstudieområdena till demokratiska grunddrag och modeller**

I en bedömning av de tre fallstudieområdenas samlade mervärde för de tolv demokratiska grunddragen finner vi att svenskt bistånd gett ett *betydande mervärde* vad gäller fem grunddrag: nedifrån-och-upp-processer, tillväxt av oberoende civilt samhälle, mobilisering på gräsrotsnivå/folkligt deltagande, utbildningsnivå, och politisk medvetenhet. Bara beträffande två grunddrag finner vi ett *obetydligt mervärde* (maktindelning mellan lagstiftande, genomförande och juridiska funktioner samt rättsstatsprincipen med oberoende

rättsväsen). Beträffande övriga grunddrag har svenskt bistånd inneburit *mervärde men av mindre betydelse* (t.ex. avseende fria, rättvisa och konkurrensutsatta val mellan flera politiska partier, upprätthållandet av mänskliga rättigheter (politiska, civila såväl som sociala, ekonomiska och kulturella rättigheter), jämställdhet, vertikal uppdelning av oberoende maktcentra, och stärkta och mer utvecklade lokalsamhällen).

*Svensket stöd har format decentraliseringsprocessen.* Det har spelat en central roll i omvandlingen från ett nödhjälpsprogram till ett riksomfattande program för demokratisk decentralisering, och även spelat en central roll i decentraliseringsprogrammets genomförande. Decentraliseringen har tydligt bidragit till processliberal demokrati genom att främja lokala val, bygga lokala demokratiska institutioner med vertikal uppdelning i oberoende maktcentra, genom etableringen av kommunala rådsförsamlingar med flera partier, samt genom att starta en reformering av den statliga administrationen på lokal nivå. Alla dessa uppnådda resultat visade sig dock inte vara så hållbara när de konfronterades med högre politiska intressen. Programmets utvidgning till distrikts- och provinsnivåerna under den senare delen av studieperioden hade begränsade demokratiska effekter då den innefattade högre intressen och politik på nationell nivå.

Decentraliseringens styrka ligger i stället någonstans mellan substansliberal demokrati och deltagardemokrati. Lokal demokrati har etablerat sig som en naturlig del av det politiska systemet, med ökad politisk medvetenhet och bildning, samt politiskt driven utveckling. Decentraliseringen har haft sitt djupaste mervärde inom ramen för en deltagardemokrati, genom bidrag till mobilisering på gräsrotsnivå, nedifrån-och-upp-processer, tillväxt av det lokala civilsamhället och stärkta lokalsamhällen. Sådana påtagliga resultat från tidigare faser kan komma att bestå också under förtryck från det formella partisystemet, och kan i så fall vändas till en viktig tillgång om/när demokratiseringen återupptas.

Decentraliseringen har emellertid också bidragit till att CPP kunnat behålla sin makt. Trots ett vidgat lokalt demokratiskt utrymme har CPP:s lokala politiska dominans möjliggjort inflytande över utfallet i nationella val genom social kontroll och påtryckningar.

Det är troligt att det djup som sågs i den lokala demokratiseringen oroade CPP och bidrog till partiets beslut att upplösa oppositionen.

*Ett kontinuerligt, om än varierande, mervärde av svenskt bistånd kan ses inom basutbildningen.* Via stöd till UNICEF spelade Sverige tidigt en katalytisk roll. Sverige bidrog till insamlingen av övertygande empiri för att utbildningsministeriet (MoEYS - Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport) skulle kunna fatta nödvändiga beslut om reformer, som decentraliserad styrning av utbildningen. Genom det långsiktiga samarbetet mellan Sverige-UNICEF och MoEYS har förtroende byggts upp för framgångsrikt påverkansarbete. Sverige har spelat en pådrivande roll vad gäller jämställdhetsperspektiv i undervisningen och ett ökat fokus på marginaliserade barn. Svenskt stöd (sedan 2013) till att stärka skolledningarna omfattar även skolkommittéer, för att underlätta för lokalsamhället, föräldrar, lärare och elever att delta i och påverka skolans planering och budgetering, och därmed stärka det lokala samhället, mobilisering på gräsrotsnivå och deltagarprocesser. Skolkommittéer kan dock också visa sig sårbara för politiskt övertagande.

Utbildningsnivå är ett grunddrag i både modellen för substansliberal demokrati och i modellen för deltagardemokrati. Inget direkt mervärde kan påvisas för något grunddrag inom modellen för processliberal demokrati, men det är troligt att utbildningsstödet indirekt har påverkat efterfrågan på fria och rättvisa val. Därmed kan det bidra till påtryckningar för mer rättvisa valprocedurer.

Förutom att vara ett grunddrag inom två demokratiska modeller är utbildning likaledes ett centralt grunddrag inom den konkurrensbetonade auktoritära hybridmodellen. Medan det svenska perspektivet är att utbildning är avgörande för en övergång till demokrati, så värderar en konkurrensbetonad auktoritär regim utbildning som en avgörande faktor för ekonomisk tillväxt och social utveckling, vilket ses som nödvändiga förutsättningar för bibehållen legitimitet. Utbildning har lett till ändrat väljarbeteende bland framför allt unga kambodjaner, ur svenskt perspektiv ett tecken på en pågående demokratiseringsprocess. Ur en auktoritär ledares perspektiv utgör ändrade väljarbeteenden däremot ett hot mot makten, och betraktas därmed som ett hot mot bibehållen

politisk stabilitet. I ett sådant sammanhang riskerar deltagarstrukturerna på skolnivå att omvandlas till användbara hjälpmedel för bibehållen partikontroll. Annars kan de utgöra lovande mekanismer för lokalsamhällets inflytande.

*Motvikt, komplement, mobilisering och inflytande är fyra processer som Sverige använder för att uppnå mervärde för D/MR genom sitt stöd till organisationer inom civilsamhället (CSO:s). Sverige har gett kärnstöd till viktiga nationella CSO:s engagerade i påverkansarbete för att balansera staten, vilket dock emellanåt visat sig utgöra ett hinder för samarbete och dialog med regeringen. Kurser genom CSO:s har lett till ökad folklig efterfrågan och krav på lokal dialog med regeringen. Positiva effekter inom civilsamhället vad gäller kunskap, kapacitet och intern demokrati har däremot haft obetydligt mervärde på nationell nivå. Svenskt stöd för att komplettera regeringens D/MR reformer har grundat sig i antaganden om att CSO:s skulle vara mer effektiva i sitt D/MR arbete genom att röra sig från det som ibland varit aggressiv påverkan mot ett mer "konstruktivt engagemang". Detta har visat sig framgångsrikt inom områden såsom bevakning av socialt ansvarstagande inom decentraliseringsprocessen, bevakning av miljö och klimatfrågor samt av offentlig ekonomisk förvaltning för ökad transparens.*

Folklig *mobilisering* har stötts av Sverige i syfte att bredda deltagandet i demokratiska processer. Valstöd, inklusive väljarutbildning, gavs i början av studieperioden tillsammans med juridisk utbildning. Stöd för jämställdhet har fokuserat på att stärka kvinnors egenmakt, och ungdomar har mobiliserats i anti-korrupsionsprogram. Vad gäller *inflytande* har svenska strategier och nyckeldokument antagit att CSO:s skulle kunna engagera sig i dialog med olika nivåer av regeringen, vilket dock har visat sig felaktigt. Det finns få plattformar för dialog på nationell nivå, med undantag av gemensamma tekniska arbetsgrupper i vissa sektorer.

De mest hållbara bidragen från svenskt bistånd till civila samhället har varit kopplade till grunddrag inom modellen för deltagardemokrati, och i viss mån till grunddrag inom modellen för substansliberal demokrati. Vi har inte funnit något som tyder på att stöd till civila samhället på något sätt samtidigt skulle ha implicerat stöd till den hybrida regimmodellen. Vi har heller inte sett några

exempel på att svenskt stöd skulle ha bidragit till att underminera det lokala civilsamhället. Tvärtom så har svenskt bistånd stöttat lokalt förankrade organisationer och lokala rörelser genom biståndet till kambodjanska CSO:s.

### **Sammantaget svenskt bidrag till D/MR**

Fallstudierna visar att Sverige har bidragit med mervärde till underliggande och substansbaserade grunddrag och aspekter för demokratisering, huvudsakligen i linje med de substansliberala och deltagande demokratimodellerna. Stöd för den processliberala modellen har varit avsevärt mindre effektivt. De positiva effekterna av svenskt bistånd var mer uppenbara under den studerade periodens första hälft, speciellt på lokal nivå och inom decentraliseringen. Inom utbildningen hade svenskt bistånd dock större inflytande under den andra hälften av perioden, främst beroende på att CPP:s intressen sammanföll med Sveriges och andra givares intressen.

De positiva effekterna har i stor utsträckning funnits kvar även sedan politiken blivit mer auktoritär, något som tyder på att svenskt bistånd till stor del undgått att oavsiktligt understött auktoritära intressen. Vår övergripande analys fann emellertid också att svenskt bistånd fortsatte att begränsas till perspektiv rörande formella procedurer, system och strukturer, med mindre uppmärksamhet på det allt tydligare patrimoniala systemet. Detta kan med tiden ha inneburit avtagande effektivitet i det svenska stödet. Generellt förändrades det svenska utvecklingssamarbetet från omkring 2008 till en mer teknokratisk ansats, med fokus på portföljhantering, riskaversion och starkare betoning på resultatbaserad styrning av programmen. Sverige blev därmed en givare med mindre potential att bidra med mervärde till demokratisering.

### **Lärdomar**

Viktiga lärdomar innefattar *betydelsen av strategiskt risktagande med en explicit riskhanteringsstrategi*. Att stötta återuppbyggnad och demokratisering är inte nödvändigtvis helt ömsesidigt förenligt. Återuppbyggnad kan inte alltid förväntas framskrida helt enligt demokratiska principer, och ibland måste ett val göras kring vad som ska prioriteras. *Värdet av långsiktigt samarbete* är en viktig, närliggande

lärdom. Sveriges långa och konsekventa engagemang i Kambodja har lett till respekt och gott rykte hos den kambodjanska eliten och har möjliggjort uppbyggandet av kunskap och förståelse för hur samhället fungerar, dess institutioner och maktstrukturer. Detta har i sin tur skapat förutsättningar relationer och fora för dialog mellan regeringen och biståndsgivarna. Emellertid borde de politiska maktstrukturerna ha tagits mer på allvar i processerna för att planera och utforma biståndet.

Det finns ett *värde i kontinuerlig politisk-ekonomisk kontextuell analys*. Genom ökat svenskt fokus på resultatrapportering övergavs övergripande bedömningar av den politisk-ekonomiska utvecklingen, inklusive av det nödvändiga politiska intresset på hög nivå för att genomföra också mer obekväma reformer. Bristande politisk-ekonomisk analys har troligen bidragit till orealistiska förväntningar på genomförande och demokratiskt värde av nationella reformer. Medan demokratistöd från västliga givare generellt har baserats på de liberala principerna i konstitutionen, har det kambodjanska statsbyggandet baserats på de primära målen att uppnå fred och stabilitet.

Generellt har Sverige genomfört mindre proaktiv och strategisk planering under den andra halvan av studieperioden. Detta har troligen minskat möjligheterna för innovativa och effektiva insatser, vilket pekar på *värdet av en proaktiv ansats i den strategiska planeringen och i genomförandet*.

*Värdet av ömsesidigt förtroende och respekt i partnerskapen* visas i denna studie. En av Sveriges bästa arbetsmetoder är (försök till) dialog, interaktion och förtroendeskapande med partners. Förtroende och relationer mellan civila aktörer och regeringstjänstemän har varit en konsekvent underliggande bärande idé, som dock inte alltid varit lätt att uppfylla.

## **Policyimplikationer**

En viktig implikation för framtida stöd till demokrati i post-konflikt sammanhang är *inriktning på den höga graden av misstroende i det politiska systemet* genom bistånd till bättre fungerande institutioner och för

interaktioner mellan statliga aktörer och mellan staten och det civila samhället. Detta kräver en förstärkt ansats vad gäller flexibilitet och beredskap för förändring, baserad på förståelse för utvecklingen av politisk-ekonomiska processer på alla nivåer i samhället.

Svenskt bistånd till fundamenten för demokratisk förändring, i första hand basutbildning och strukturer för lokal styrning, men också stöd till kapacitetsutveckling av ett demokratiskt civilt samhälle, förklarar det relativt framgångsrika svenska demokratibiståndet. Den långsiktiga ansatsen har främjat utvecklingseffekterna. Strategin måste emellertid kontinuerligt anpassas till förändringar i den politiska kontexten. Under perioden 1997–2017 har Kambodja utvecklats från ett sårbart/post-kolonialt land till ett stabilt samhälle, sett i politiska och ekonomiska termer. Statsbyggandet är dock fortsatt koncentrerat på fred och stabilitet, inte på liberal demokrati. Tvärtom har statsbyggandet blivit allt mer auktoritärt. Som en följd av detta blir demokratibistånd mer komplext. Rent institutionsstöd kommer inte att främja demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter, utan snarare motsatsen. Å andra sidan är det också kontraproduktivt att enbart rikta biståndet till det civila samhället, eftersom detta sannolikt leder till ökad polarisering.

*Starkare hänsyn bör tas till underliggande kulturella och politiska strukturer när det gäller stöd till institutioner och organisationer. Empirisk forskning på fältet erbjuder en viktig källa till information som kan användas vid återkommande bedömningar av den politisk-ekonomiska situationen i mottagarlandet.*

# Summary

Sweden first provided aid to Cambodia in the form of humanitarian and emergency support in the late 1970s following the end of the Khmer Rouge's genocide regime. From mid-1990, Swedish aid evolved into support for reconstruction and development. The first country strategy guiding Sweden's longer-term bilateral aid to Cambodia was approved for 1997–1998, and the most recent country strategy is valid until the end of 2019.

Democracy and human rights (D/HR) has been an important objective for Swedish development cooperation since the 1990s, including in Cambodia. This study covers the period 1997–2017 and aims to provide insights into the specific question: *“Has Swedish aid played a role in influencing changes relevant to D/HR in Cambodia over time, and if so, in what way and to what extent? What important lessons can be learned and how can they inform Swedish cooperation on D/HR today?”*

## Methodology

The study is based on extensive document review and stakeholder interviews in Cambodia and Sweden. It includes three major ‘blocs’ with different hallmarks regarding analytical approach and methodology. *Firstly*, a summary analysis of the political and socio-economic situation and overall processes in Cambodia over time, together with a summary analysis of Swedish development cooperation with Cambodia. *Secondly*, a study of support for three case study areas: i) decentralisation and local democracy, ii) education and iii) civil society. Sweden has supported each of the case study areas throughout 1997-2017, and together these three areas accounted for approximately 75 per cent of Swedish disbursements during the study period. *Thirdly*, an overall analysis of the contribution of Swedish aid to D/HR in Cambodia, based on the conclusions of the case studies and on the political economy analysis in the first ‘bloc’ of the study, with a particular focus on how Swedish aid has related to political developments in Cambodia.

The concept of ‘democracy’ lacks a commonly agreed definition. Three models of democracy (procedural liberal, substantive liberal and participatory) were therefore selected in order to identify a set

of twelve researchable core features. The competitive authoritarian hybrid regime model was included in order to also capture possible unintended effects from Swedish D/HR support to Cambodia. Human rights and democracy are considered as inseparable, in the sense that human rights are considered a core feature of democracy.

For the case studies, the process tracing methodology was applied to follow the causal process from the insertion of Swedish aid to D/HR in Cambodia, as operationalised through the identified set of core features of democracy. The process tracing was performed around four ‘critical junctures’, i.e. points/shorter periods in time when institutions were particularly open to change. These critical junctures were identified based on the Cambodian political economy analysis in the first ‘bloc’ of the study.

### **The Cambodian political context**

The democratic culture in Cambodia remains weak, with parties competing on legitimacy rather than political programmes, and with women severely under-represented in all parties. The judiciary system’s independence and neutrality is equally very weak. The consolidation of power in the hands of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) is reflected in its electoral success at national and commune levels, and has been achieved through the enforcement of personal and deeply hierarchical relationships of patronage, protection, gratitude and loyalty. The CPP’s low turn-out in the 2013 national election therefore came as a surprise, and the significant loss of votes to the opposition in the 2017 commune elections resulted in panic.

This shift in Cambodian politics reflects Cambodia’s drastic structural changes in terms of demographics, economic transformation, and information and technology. Concerns about the electoral defeat in the 2018 national election prompted the Government to dismantle and prohibit not only the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), but also all significant independent media and critical public voices that had emerged in Cambodia since 1993. The relationships between the Government and civil society organisations had improved somewhat from the overt oppression and public intimidation documented in the 1990s,

towards a general atmosphere of cooperation and engagement until mid-2000, when freedoms of association and expression came under renewed threat of political repression. The freedom to hold public demonstrations and to engage in criticism of government policies has been severely restricted both in law and in practice.

### **Swedish development cooperation with Cambodia**

During the study period, Swedish aid has been based on a multidimensional approach, in which it is not possible to separate funding for D/HR from funding for poverty reduction. Although Sweden has been critical towards the development of D/HR, Cambodian policies and strategies have always been seen as basically sound. Risk factors were identified, but it has been assumed that continued foreign assistance could support development towards D/HR. Sweden has implicitly assumed that the Cambodian Government shared its view on D/HR. Weak capacity has thus been seen as the major problem, with reforms and institution-building being seen as effective means of addressing this weaknesses. ‘Political will’, rather than the system as such, was identified as a risk factor based on similar assumptions. Corruption has been acknowledged as a major problem and seen as a weakness in the system, although it could just as well have been seen as a fundamental part of the system.

### **Swedish value added to core features and models of D/HR in the case study areas**

In assessing combined value added from the three case areas across the twelve identified core features of democracy, we find *significant value added* to five core features: bottom-up processes, growth of independent civil society, grassroots mobilisation/public participation, education level and political awareness. For only two features do we find *insignificant value added* from Swedish aid (separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government, and rule of law and independent judiciary). For the remaining core features, Swedish aid has *added value, but to a less significant extent* (i.e. to free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties, upholding of human rights (political, civil as well as social, economic and cultural rights),

gender equality, vertical separation of independent powers, and empowerment and community development).

*Swedish support has been formative for the decentralisation process*, playing a key role in transforming emergency aid into a nationwide programme for democratic decentralisation, and also in the implementation of this programme. Decentralisation has made a distinct contribution to procedural democracy in that it has generated local elections, built local democratic institutions with vertical separation of state powers through the establishment of multiparty commune councils, and started to reform the state administration at local levels. All of these achievements however proved to be of limited durability when colliding with the interests of 'high politics'. The expansion of the programme to district and province levels during the latter part of the study period also had limited democratic effects since it involved higher stakes and central level politics.

Decentralisation's strength instead lies somewhere in between substantive liberal democracy and participatory democracy. Local democracy has established itself as a natural part of the political system, political awareness and political education have risen, and politically driven development remains. Decentralisation has had its deepest value added in the shape of participatory democracy, through contributing to grassroots mobilisation, bottom-up processes, the growth of a local civil society and community empowerment. Such tangible benefits from the previous phases are likely to remain under the repression of the formal party system, and may turn into key assets if and when democratisation resumes.

Decentralisation may nevertheless also have contributed to the CPP staying in power. In spite of opening up the local democratic space, the CPP's dominance of politics at local level facilitated control over the outcome of national elections through social control and pressure locally. It is likely that the depth of local democratisation was alarming to the CPP and a factor in the decision to dissolve the opposition.

*There has been constant, yet changing, value added to basic education from Swedish support*. In its earliest support through UNICEF, Sweden

played a catalytic role, contributing to gathering sufficient empirical evidence to convince the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to take the required decisions on educational reforms, such as decentralised education management. The long-term Swedish-UNICEF cooperation with MoEYS has built sufficient trust for successful advocacy and influence. Sweden has played a significant role in pushing through gender mainstreaming within education, and in increasing the focus on marginalised children. Swedish support (since 2013) for the improvement of school-level management includes strengthening school support committees (SSCs) as channels to facilitate community, parent, teacher and student participation and influence in school planning and budgeting, thus enhancing community empowerment, grassroots mobilisation and participation. There is however also a possibility that the SSC structures will prove vulnerable to political capture.

Education level is a core feature in the substantive liberal and participatory models of democracy. No direct value has been added to features under procedural liberal democracy, but it is likely that education support has indirectly influenced the ‘demand side’ of free and fair elections, thus contributing to demands for future changes towards unbiased/fair procedural election arrangements.

In addition to being a core feature of the two democracy models, education is also a core feature of the competitive authoritarian hybrid regime model. While the Swedish perspective is that education is essential in order to facilitate democratic transition, a competitive authoritarian regime values education as a determining factor for economic growth and social development, seen as prerequisites for maintaining legitimacy. Education has led to a change in voting behaviour among young Cambodians in particular, a ‘sound sign’ of an ongoing democratisation process from a Swedish perspective. From the perspective of an authoritarian leader, changing voting behaviour however poses a threat to continued power, and is thus seen as a threat to political stability. In this context, the participatory structures supported at school level risk becoming a useful tool for upholding party control, while simultaneously being a promising mechanism for community influence.

*Counterbalance, complementing, mobilisation and influence are the four processes used by Sweden to add value to D/HR through its support to civil society organisations (CSOs).* Sweden has provided core support to key national CSOs engaged in advocacy work to *counterbalance* the state, which however became an obstacle at times to cooperation and dialogue with the Government. Training through CSOs has led to increased public demand and some local level dialogue with the Government. Positive effects within civil society in terms of knowledge, capacity and internal democracy have nevertheless had an insignificant effect on policy at national level. Swedish support to *complement* government D/HR reforms has been based on the assumption that CSOs could be more effective in their D/HR work by moving from what is sometimes aggressive advocacy to more ‘constructive engagement’. This has been successful in areas such as monitoring social accountability within decentralisation, monitoring environmental and climate issues, and public financial management for enhanced transparency. Popular *mobilisation* has been supported by Sweden to expand participation in democratisation processes. Election support, including voter education, was provided in the early phases as was legal education. Support for gender equality has focused on empowerment, and young people have been mobilised in anti-corruption programmes. As for *influence*, Swedish strategies and key documents have assumed that CSOs could enter into dialogue with the Government at different levels, which has however proved inaccurate, with only a few platforms available at national level other than joint technical working groups in some sectors.

The most sustainable contributions from Swedish aid to civil society have been in terms of features of the participatory model, and to some extent features of the substantive liberal model. We have found no evidence to suggest that support to civil society has in any way caused unintended support for features of a hybrid regime, and nor have we seen any examples where Swedish support has contributed to eroding local civil society. On the contrary, Swedish support has supported community-based organisations and local movements through support to Cambodian CSOs.

## Swedish overall contribution to D/HR

The case studies show that Swedish aid has added positive value to underlying and substantive features and aspects of democratisation, mainly in line with the substantive liberal and participatory models of democracy, while support in line with the procedural model has been considerably less efficient. The positive effects of Swedish aid were more obvious during the first half of the study period, in particular at the local level and within decentralisation. In education, however, Swedish aid had more influence during the second half, mainly because the interests of the CPP coincided with the interests of Sweden and other donors.

The positive effects have largely been sustained even when politics turned more authoritarian, suggesting that Swedish aid may largely have escaped the unintentional effects of supporting authoritarian interests. Our overall analysis however also found that Swedish aid continued to be confined to perspectives of formal procedures, systems and structures, with less attention to the increasingly visible patrimonial system, which may over time have led to the declining effectiveness of Swedish support. In general, the Swedish development cooperation from around 2008 moved towards a more technocratic approach, with a focus on portfolio management, increased risk aversion and stronger emphasis on results-based management of programmes. Sweden thereby became a donor with less potential for contributing added value to democratisation.

## Lessons learned

Key lessons learned include the *importance of strategic risk-taking with an explicit risk management strategy*. Supporting reconstruction and democratisation may not overlap perfectly; reconstruction may not always be able to progress according to purely democratic principles, and at times choices have to be made about which to prioritise. The *value of long-term cooperation* is a related key lesson. Sweden's long and consistent engagement in Cambodia has led to respect and a good reputation among Cambodian elite and professional circles, has allowed knowledge and understanding of the inner workings of society, its institutions and power structures to be built up, and has

created conditions for building up relations and fora for RGC-donor dialogue. However, political power structures would merit having been taken more seriously into account in the planning and design processes.

There is a *value of continuous political economy contextual analysis*. With an increased Swedish focus on results reporting, overall assessments of the political economy development, including the required high-level political interest to push through more uncomfortable reforms, were omitted. A lack of political economy analysis has probably contributed to the unrealistic expectations of implementation and democratic value of national reforms. Whereas democracy support from Western donors has generally been based on the liberal principles of the constitution, the Cambodian state-building process has been based on the primary objectives of achieving peace and stability.

In general, Sweden has implemented less proactive and strategic planning during the second half of the study period. This has probably reduced the possibilities for innovative and effective contributions, pointing to the *virtue of proactivity in strategic planning and in implementation*.

The *virtue of mutual trust and respect in partnerships* has been demonstrated. One of the Swedish best practices is the (attempts at) dialogue, interaction and trust-building with partners. Trust and relations between civil actors and government officials have been a consistent underlying concept, although not always easily achieved.

## **Policy implications**

*A key implication* for future support to democracy in post-conflict contexts *is to address the high level of distrust in the political system* through assistance in creating space for the better functioning of institutions, and for better quality interactions between state actors, and between the state and civil society. This requires an enhanced approach founded on inbuilt flexibility and preparedness to change, based on an understanding of the evolution of political economy processes at all levels in the recipient country.

Swedish aid to fundamentals for democratic transition, primarily basic education and local governance structures, but also through support for capacity building of a democratic civil society, explains the relatively successful Swedish democracy aid, underpinned by the long-term approach taken. However, the strategy has to be continuously adapted to changes in the political context. During the period 1997-2017, Cambodia has developed from a volatile/post-colonial country into a stable society, in political and economic terms. State-building nevertheless remains concentrated on peace and stability, not on liberal democracy. On the contrary, state-building has become increasingly authoritarian. As a consequence, democracy support is becoming more complex. Pure institution development support will not promote democracy and human rights, but rather the opposite. On the other hand, focusing support only on civil society is also counterproductive since it will probably lead to increased polarisation.

*Stronger note of underlying cultural and political structures* should be taken, at the outset and throughout the process of supporting institutions and organisations. Empirical research in the field provides an important source of information to be taken on board when regularly re-assessing the political economy situation in the recipient country.

# 1. Background and Rationale

## 1.1 Introduction

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), a government committee with a mandate to analyse and evaluate Sweden's international development assistance, published an invitation to submit proposals to evaluate Sweden's long-term development cooperation. The invitation included a requirement that one of the (current) largest recipients of Swedish development cooperation and/or humanitarian assistance should be studied. The invitation was however open-ended in the sense that neither the country nor the objective to be studied was specified.

The study should take a long-term perspective and was expected to place Sweden's contributions in a wider context of development and other donors' contributions over time. The aim of the study was twofold: i) to obtain an in-depth understanding of how and to what extent Sweden has contributed to the achievement of development objectives in a particular country, and ii) to highlight potential lessons for Swedish development cooperation and, if applicable, humanitarian assistance. It was requested that strengths, weaknesses and the general applicability of the proposed model for the country study should be discussed in the report.

In response to the invitation from the EBA, we proposed a study to look into the role of Swedish aid in influencing changes relevant to democracy and human rights (D/HR) in Cambodia over time.

## 1.2 The rationale for choosing Cambodia

There are a number of related reasons why Cambodia is a suitable case to study the long-term added value of Swedish aid regarding D/HR. The justifications for choosing Cambodia also have direct advantages for the report's policy relevance and overall conclusions.

Sweden's long-term engagement in Cambodia, spanning almost 40 years, initially required a fair amount of risk-taking, involving a country in an acute post-war phase, plagued by violence, political authoritarianism, poverty and broken institutions. Cambodia has over time transitioned from a country needing humanitarian assistance, to a post-conflict case, to a country regarded as the poorest of the poor, to what is now a lower middle income country. Swedish assistance has moved along with this transition and played different roles in different phases. The review will display a range of different guises under which Swedish aid has been pursued, as well as its ability to gradually transform in relation to its context. As such it will have relevance for today's common situation of pursuing development assistance in countries with shrinking democratic space. Furthermore, at some points in Cambodia's contemporary history, Swedish aid seems to have had the potential, we hypothesise, to play a pivotal role; with small resources applied at critical junctures aid it may have added value beyond what we ordinarily see. These events are documented but rarely highlighted, assessed, and placed in a wider context. The review will show whether there are examples of strategic interventions and their methods, and which vulnerabilities these interventions have had.

Cambodia is a controversial case regarding democratic development. Undoubtedly it is one of the more solid development successes, having moved from genocide, civil war and absolute poverty to become a politically stable lower middle income country in only 25 years. On the other hand, democracy is thin, freedom of speech is circumvented, corruption is widespread, and human rights are commonly violated. The country is currently in a delicate phase where the underlying structures (e.g. income, education, historical experience, general expectations, political awareness and internationalisation) have grown so strong so that manipulation of the techniques of elections may no longer suffice for the dominant party to remain in power. The lion's share of the Swedish aid under the democracy portfolio has sought to promote democracy through altering the underlying fundamentals. This may be interpreted as a long-term strategy but it is not so visible in regular project and programme evaluations. A long-term review will illuminate

strengths and weaknesses of this way of supporting democracy which differs from many other donors' approaches.

### **1.3 The rationale for selecting case study areas**

Even with the above advantages, a study of Swedish aid in Cambodia over the course of 20 years is a major undertaking with many dimensions, phases and cooperating partners (Cambodian and international). Hence, given the available resources, the task has been delimited in order to be pursued with credibility and depth.

The study primarily covers the period 1997–2017, but also refers to experiences from previous phases of Swedish support. During the last 20 years Swedish official development cooperation with Cambodia has been dominated by support for three intervention areas: 1) decentralisation and local democracy, 2) education (mainly primary) and 3) support to civil society. In terms of financial support, approximately 75 per cent of all disbursements during 1997–2017 have been in support of these three areas. All three areas are also explicitly seen as contributing to democratic development within Swedish policies and strategies (chapter 5) as well as within published research (as seen in the introduction to each case study, chapter 6).

## 2. Purpose and Methodology

### 2.1 Study purpose and approach

Democracy and human rights (D/HR) has been an important objective for Swedish development cooperation since the 1990s. The effects in terms of this objective are however difficult to evaluate since traditional methods are not very useful. The effects cannot easily be objectively traced, since they are not primarily related to effective delivery of financial resources, but rather to processes that create, sustain and transform relationships over time. It is also necessary to have an overall and long-term perspective. This study therefore attempts to examine and assess the value added from development cooperation on D/HR over a longer (20 years) period.

*The specific questions for this study are:* Has Swedish aid played a role in influencing changes relevant to D/HR in Cambodia over time, and if so, in what way and to what extent? What important lessons can be learned and how can they inform Swedish cooperation on D/HR today?

When it comes to the role of Swedish aid in influencing changes relevant to D/HR, one assumption is that the donor and the recipient government do not necessarily share the same objectives regarding D/HR (even if they use the same words). The processes cannot therefore be analysed only in terms of capacity and effectiveness, but must go further in order to analyse the emerging political processes and conflicts.

We therefore use a ‘political economy approach’ for the evaluation of Swedish long-term development cooperation with Cambodia, building upon the donor-recipient relationship and associated processes as the key focus. The field of political economy encompasses several areas of study, including the politics of economic relations, domestic political and economic issues, the comparative study of political and economic systems, and international political economy. It refers to the interaction of political and economic processes, the distribution of power between

different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time (e.g. Khan 2010). As many analyses by political economists have revealed (ibid), in actual government decision-making there is often a tension between economic and political objectives. The common idea linking politics, economics and political economy is that they are all decision-making mechanisms for allocating scarce resources and/or conflicting values. Complex calculus is involved when governments attempt both to balance their political and economic interests and to ensure their own survival.

The political economy approach – and the methods by which it is applied – is therefore especially relevant when studying the role of aid in promoting democracy and human rights, where results need to be assessed not primarily on quantitative estimates of impact on poverty reduction but more on changing structures, processes and relationships. In other words, support for democracy and human rights is inherently political and therefore eludes simple cost efficiency calculations.

## **2.2 Human rights – a pillar of democracy**

In our study we consider human rights and democracy as inseparable, in the sense that we consider human rights to be one of several core features of democracy. Progress or regression in human rights is thus one among other indications of progress or regression in a country's democratisation process. Two arguments underpin our view:

Firstly, in Swedish policies and strategies human rights and democracy are closely interlinked, with human rights seen as contributing to democracy, and to a large extent being a necessary precondition for democracy (see chapter 3). The inseparability between democracy and human rights is also expressed by the Swedish Government on its website:<sup>2</sup> “Democracy policy includes general elections, measures to strengthen and protect the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.government.se/government-policy/democracy-and-human-rights/> (most recently accessed April 2019).

individual's opportunities for influence, and measures to promote and guarantee respect for human rights." Secondly, while the view of which human rights are most vital may differ, it is difficult to find a definition of democracy that does not encompass some notion of human rights as essential for a functioning democracy.

All types of human rights are *a priori* considered as essential in this study, i.e. political and civil rights, such as freedom of expression, equality before the law, and right to life, liberty and property, but also social, cultural and economic rights, such as the right to education. The precise selection of human rights that are discussed follows from relevance to the three selected intervention and case study areas (decentralisation and local democracy, education, and civil society support) and relevance to models of democracy chosen for this study (chapter 3).

## **2.3 Study methodology**

Assessing the development of democracy, or democratisation, involves assessing complex and multidimensional changes brought about in structures, processes and relationships between government and citizens. The long-term perspective of our study further involves studying the combined effects of several projects/programmes. The traditional impact chain (input-output-outcome-impact, e.g. OECD DAC 2013) is one-dimensional, suited to evaluating effects against specific objectives of a specific project/programme, but not well suited for assessing contributions to dynamics of multidimensional change within democracy and human rights.

We therefore use the concept of 'Swedish value added' which we define as positive changes in the D/HR situation that can be assessed to have been influenced by Swedish contributions or interventions, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended, via change processes through individuals, organisations or institutions.

The added value of Swedish contributions to D/HR over the period 1997–2017 is assessed mainly within three selected areas to which Sweden has provided development assistance: support for

decentralisation and local democracy, support for education and support for civil society. In doing so, a *case study approach* is the core approach. Case studies are a practice-oriented research strand where: “Compared to other methods, the strength of the case study method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a ‘case’ within its ‘real-life’ context” (Yin 2009). The case study approach is ideally used when for instance the following three knowledge items are sought: *seeking causal links, describing an intervention into an existing system, and explaining certain aspects within an evolution* (Yin 2009).

Seeking to understand the value added by Swedish aid to democratisation in Cambodia corresponds well to these three qualities in case study research. Moreover, case studies benefit from having hypothesis to investigate; in our case the thus far untested and unproven hypothesis is that *Swedish democracy aid has added positive value to the Cambodian political process heading towards increased democracy*. Case studies are further suitable for qualitative comparison (George and Bennett 2005), which could be useful when assessing relative contributions towards democratic progress between our three areas.

In viewing the above-mentioned areas as cases (possibly) contributing to democratic development, we use a *process tracing methodology* (e.g. Bennett 2010; Bennett and Checkel 2014). Process tracing is a common approach in case study research. It is often seen as a ‘within-case’ methodology, making cases intelligible and analytically rigorous. In scientific language, the process tracing method follows the causal process from the independent variable (insertion of Swedish aid) to the dependent variable (democratisation in Cambodia). Our operationalisation of democratisation in Cambodia (the dependent variable) is shown in section 3.4 below. In the process, intervening variables can be accepted/rejected when processes need additional explanatory factors. In our case, explanatory factors influencing the causal process may be expected to come from the Cambodian context, from the context of Swedish aid to Cambodia and Swedish internal arrangements for development cooperation, as well as from Swedish aid in relation to aid from other donors in Cambodia and Sweden’s relationship to Cambodia (see further chapters 4 and 5 respectively).

This implies that we, to the extent possible given the limited resources and time, carefully follow how the processes initiated by the influx of (Swedish) aid resources and specific Swedish approaches in these areas have evolved and which value added they have generated. In more detail, the areas under scrutiny are suitable as cases because they are reasonably discrete entities of research, have their own internal logics and have a relatively clearly delineated set of key actors.

Data collection utilises project documents, evaluations, Swedish/Cambodian government policies and strategies, published research, and information from a range of semi-structured and focus-group interviews drawn from core groups in the three selected areas. The assumption is that the findings from these three areas will mirror the trajectory of democratic development in general and the role of Swedish aid in support of the democratic development process.

Although this report draws to a significant extent on documents, which can be viewed as primary and secondary sources, dealing with democracy aid and democratic development in Cambodia during the last two decades, it also draws heavily on individual and group interviews pursued primarily during 2018. These interviews include Cambodia specialists, government sources, opposition representatives, Cambodian intellectuals, representatives from the international donor community, former and current employees of Sida and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), employees in the relevant projects or ministries, and consultants with long-term involvement in the sector. These have been formative for many assessments in the report. This source is, however, not so visible in the text. Given the controversial and suppressive nature of recent Cambodian politics, where punitive actions have been common, we have chosen not to systematically reference interviews and not to list the performed interviews and interviewees in the report. This is unfortunate, but research ethics and the do-no-harm principle trump transparency in this case. An undisclosed comprehensive list of interviews and interviewees exists, stating times and places, which will not be made public.

## 2.4 Contextual dynamics

In November 2017, i.e. one month before our chosen study period expired, a court declared the only major opposition party (CNRP – the Cambodia National Rescue Party) illegal. The court’s decision was most likely influenced by the dominant party (CPP – the Cambodian People’s Party). In this context, it is imperative not to confuse the evaluation of democracy support with the evaluation of democracy as such, a frequently found confusion when perusing evaluations of democracy support (Madsen 2007:120). What may be immediately concluded is that the events of November 2017 effectively interrupted any imagination of a functioning procedural liberal democracy for the time being in Cambodia.

While procedural liberal democracy may thus have faltered, other forms of democracy may have advanced considerably. At the core of evaluating democracy support is the assessment of changes in the essential features of the democratisation process within a given country or context (which is why we unpack various forms of democracy in chapter 3). Democratisation processes typically go back and forth, and Cambodia is scoring higher in 2017 than it did in 1997 on many qualities that are needed in society for sustainable democratisation. Which way and form the democratisation process in Cambodia will take in the longer term hangs in the balance today as much as it ever did.

The events of November 2017 do not provide sufficient foundation on their own for concluding that Swedish support for democracy and human rights has failed. The dynamics of change within democracy and human rights are known to be very multidimensional and unpredictable (Madsen 2007:123). The design, quality and consequences of interventions pursued a decade ago therefore may, or may not, have been well designed and performed irrespective of what has happened a decade later. Our chosen process tracing methodology, applied to three cases, is centred around critical junctures, which allows us to assess the influence of Swedish interventions at different points in time, related to the prevailing contextual dynamics at each specific point in time (chapter 6).

## 2.5 Study design

We present our approach to operationalising democracy and democratisation in chapter 3. We thereafter organise the study in three major ‘blocs’ with different hallmarks regarding analytical approach and methodology.

*Firstly*, a summary analysis of the political and socio-economic situation and overall processes in Cambodia over time, together with a summary analysis of the Swedish context for providing aid to Cambodia and relations between Sweden and Cambodia, provide the overall contextual framework for continued analysis (chapters 4 and 5). Findings from our review of the content, ambition and expected outcomes of Swedish aid cooperation with Cambodia in relation to D/HR are presented and discussed. In doing so we rely on well-known methodologies of *reviewing the key steering documents (Swedish and Cambodian)* – such as overarching Cambodian policies and strategies, Swedish country strategies, project documents and relevant evaluations – in the various phases under scrutiny. In addition, we conduct a *series of interviews* with relevant key persons including current and former staff of Sida/the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm and at the Embassy, Cambodian partners, other donor representatives and a limited number of other professionals in Cambodia (internationals and Cambodians) who have insights into and experience of these processes.

*Secondly* – and this is the core of the empirical part of our study – we break down the support for D/HR, into the previously identified three most relevant areas, being i) decentralisation and local democracy; ii) education (mainly primary); and, iii) civil society (chapter 6). These three areas were selected because they are all major sectors in society, have proven to be dynamic for democratic development and human rights protection, are important for Cambodian development, have attracted major Swedish aid resources, and we have good insights into these fields collectively (and they are also well documented).

*Thirdly*, we paint the bigger picture of Swedish aid and its value added in terms of democratic evolution in Cambodia. This includes a *macro narrative*, drawing on the conclusions from the case studies

and the overall analysis. In light of the current rather drastic measures taken by the ruling party in Cambodia, the drawing together of findings regarding democratic evolution may be seen as a main issue (chapter 7).

### 3. Unpacking the Concepts of Democracy and Democracy Aid

The lack of a commonly agreed definition of ‘democracy’ poses a problem for the choice and design of aid supporting democracy, as well as for the possibility of assessing the relative success of such aid. For the purpose of this study we wish to establish a ‘model’/‘framework’ which allows us to draw conclusions regarding possible value added to democracy and human rights in Cambodia from long-term Swedish support. We believe such a ‘model’/‘framework’ must take its point of departure in the Cambodian expressed intentions regarding democracy following the comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian conflict, as well as in the definitions and theories embedded in Swedish development policies for democratic change. The established ‘model’/‘framework’ for our continued assessment must also be firmly rooted in acknowledged theories of democracy and democratic development.

#### 3.1 Comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodia conflict and democracy

The *Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict* (commonly referred to as the Paris Agreement) came into force on 23 October 1991. The Paris Agreement concerned the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability, neutrality and national unity of Cambodia. It further included a declaration on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Cambodia and detailed arrangements during a transitional period.

Strong emphasis was attached to the protection of human rights and freedoms embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international human rights instruments. In the agreement it was emphasised that special measures are required to protect human rights given the recent Cambodian genocide history and that the Cambodian people shall be assured the ability to exert the right of self-determination through free and

fair election of a constituent assembly, which is to draft and approve a new Cambodian Constitution. The basic principles, including those regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as Cambodia's status of neutrality, which the new Cambodian Constitution would incorporate, were set forth.

*The 1993 Cambodian Constitution* (Kingdom of Cambodia 1993) established a constitutional monarchy where the Cambodian King reigns but does not govern. The Constitution adopts the principles of liberal democracy and pluralism. It mandates regular elections and provides for the right to vote and to be elected by universal and equal suffrage, and states that these elections shall be open to multiple parties and conducted by secret ballot. All powers belong to the people and the people exercise these powers through the National Assembly, the Royal Government and the Judiciary. The Constitution provides members of the National Assembly with parliamentary immunity. The legislative, executive and judiciary powers shall be separate. Human rights, as stipulated in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and the covenants and conventions on human rights, women's rights and children's rights, shall be recognised and respected. The Constitution guarantees the rights to education and health for all citizens. Citizens have the right to establish associations and political parties. There shall be freedom of expression, the press, publications and assembly, with the regime of the media to be determined by law.

As such, both the settlement and the ensuing constitution are deeply steeped in a liberal form of representative democracy with a high degree of respect for human rights. However, this may more than anything reflect the global democratic trend of the times, known as the 'Third Wave of Democracy' (Huntington 1991), the donors' hegemonic role at the time, and the weakness of the Cambodian political actors. Cambodian political development has been shaped neither entirely by the spirit of the settlement, nor entirely by the dictates of the constitution. Instead a hybrid version mixing elements of liberal democracy and neo-patrimonial politics has emerged, which has subsequently been fine-tuned quite efficiently in order to fit into a liberal world order and external demands for democracy and human rights (see further chapter 4).

## **3.2 Swedish definitions and underlying theories of democracy and human rights**

The Swedish position regarding democracy and human rights in development cooperation was developed primarily in the 1990s, based on a multidimensional view of poverty reduction, and detailed in a government communication in 1997 (Regeringskansliet 1998). Since then it has been impossible to distinguish clearly between poverty reduction and human rights/democracy in Swedish development cooperation.

In 1997, democracy was defined in a broad sense, covering certain formal institutions and procedures as well as actual participation by citizens in political life and promotion of a democratic culture. It was stated that democracy in the Western world has included free and fair elections as well as the division of power and protection of individual rights. It was concluded in the communication that it was based on Western and Swedish conditions, adding that democratic forms of governance also existed in other cultures, in particular at local levels. Democracy was seen as a process which required continuous analysis and assessment of the actual situation.

Human rights and democracy were seen as closely interlinked. Respect for human rights was said to contribute towards – and to a large extent be a precondition for – democracy. All types of human rights – basic freedoms, security and living standards – were included and the right to education was seen as a determining factor for democracy. Regarding support for HR and democracy, several areas were mentioned as being of special importance: public administration, decentralisation, education, judiciary systems and grassroots democracy.

In 2008, the Government formulated democracy as a “polity characterised by collective decision-making and the exercise of power by citizens equal under law”, with stronger emphasis on human rights than in 1997 (Government Offices of Sweden 2008b:7). The democratic process was viewed as being based on seven preconditions: “Elected leaders, free and fair elections, universal and equal suffrage, the right to stand as a candidate for

elected office, and freedom of expression, information and association.” The definition of democracy was thus based mainly on formal institutions and procedures, with the key point being that Swedish development cooperation must be based on a rights-based approach, implying that the recipient government’s capacity and responsibility to guarantee individual rights was a critical issue. Regarding human rights, the emphasis was on civil and political rights. Supporting actors (in both government and civil society) in achieving democratic change was a high priority.

The most recent strategy for 2018–2022 states three objectives for the support for D/HR (Government Offices of Sweden 2017): 1) inclusive democratic societies, 2) equal rights for all, and 3) security, justice and accountability. It maintains the rights perspective but introduces a new concept: ‘inclusive societies’. This could indicate that the Swedish view has withdrawn somewhat from the focus on procedures, institutions and individual civil and political rights that characterised the documents in 2008–2010. It is also interesting to note that increased democratic participation and influence is mentioned as an element of inclusive democratic societies, something which could be read as a return to the broader democracy definition from 1997. It is further stated that a long-term approach must be combined with flexibility and rapid response, and that the political nature of the activities requires a close dialogue between relevant actors.

Despite the noted changes, the Swedish view of D/HR has been relatively stable during the last 20 years. Democracy has been defined as primarily a ‘Western’ concept, a system of free multiparty elections, parliament and democratic governance. But it has also been seen as a system for popular participation and influence. Human rights have consistently been regarded as integrated and inseparable elements of democracy, but mainly regarding civil and political rights.

Sweden decided on equality between women and men as a specific goal for development cooperation in 1996. Even if this is a goal for all cooperation, it has been closely linked to D/HR in particular. It was however not specifically addressed in the 1997 communication on D/HR in Swedish development cooperation,

except that women are mentioned as a special target group. No specific reference to gender equality is included in the 2008 communication. Women are mainly mentioned together with children, young people and vulnerable groups. The only exception is women's political participation. In the new strategy for D/HR (2018–2022), gender equality is mainly addressed in relation to the empowerment of women.

The Swedish view of democracy as a process is based on a theory of change (as in 'democratisation') which is key for external support, even if it is seldom explicitly presented. It has been stated that an analysis of power relations and actors must be carried out, in order to identify agents of change for democratisation. These agents could be active in all kinds of institutions or organisations, in public administration, parliament, civil society, media and universities. It is not quite clear how these agents for democratic change are identified and supported. Sometimes the need for a 'democratic culture' is emphasised and this cannot be changed by reforms of procedures and institutions, since it involves how individuals think and act in a social context. The only arena where change actors are clearly identified is civil society (Government Offices of Sweden 2010).

A Swedish policy paper (Government Offices of Sweden 2009:7) defines civil society as: "an arena, distinct from the state, the market and the individual household, created by individuals, groups and organisations acting together to promote common interests". Civil society plays an important role in Swedish development cooperation. A substantial part of Swedish aid is channelled to civil society organisations (CSOs). The objective of Swedish support to civil society has been formulated as: "a vibrant and pluralistic civil society in developing countries that contributes effectively, using a rights-based approach, to reducing poverty in all its dimensions" (Government Offices of Sweden 2009:10).

### **3.3 Typology and models of democracy**

It is useful to note that while the concept of 'democracy' is continuously contested, there is common acceptance for the

approach of distinguishing between ‘procedural’ democracy and ‘substantive’ democracy.

*Procedural*’ democracy emphasises the formal systems, assuming that the electoral process is at the core, and to a high extent it involves assessing the quality of a democracy by judging the quality of the electoral procedures. In a ‘procedural’ democracy authority is placed in elected representatives in free elections, and the ‘rightness’ of an electoral outcome is constituted by the fact of its having emerged in some procedurally correct manner. The previously elected representatives may to some varying extent use electoral procedures to keep themselves in power, at times against the common wish of the people, thus thwarting the establishment of a full-fledged democracy. ‘*Substantive*’ democracy, on the other hand, emphasises the deeper underlying issues that provide the foundation for a functioning democracy. It focuses on issues like poverty and education levels, equal participation of all groups in society in the political process, the upholding of human rights, gender equality, and political awareness among citizens at large.

This distinction between ‘procedural’ and ‘substantive’ democracies is important for our purposes since Swedish aid for democratic development/democratisation has been based, at least during some periods, on both approaches to democracy. ‘Procedural’ democracy has always been a point of departure, but in its implementation it has been complemented, or even dominated, by a ‘substantive’ approach. As a result, Swedish aid under the umbrella of democracy support has been aimed at sectors or arenas supporting core underlying aspects, and that are seen as vital for a deep and sustainably functioning democracy.

Within the basic ‘procedural’/‘substantial’ dichotomy, there are more specific models of democracy, each to a varying degree emphasising the various aspects of ‘procedural’ and/or ‘substantive’ democracy. The *liberal democracy* model agreed on for Cambodia following the signing of the Paris Agreement, and eventually confirmed in the 1993 Constitution, coincides with what seems to be the commonly preferred model in contemporary views, especially since the end of the cold war and the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1992). In a liberal democracy, citizens would tend to have more

influence between elections than in a pure ‘procedural’ democracy, but less than in a ‘substantive’ democracy with appropriate underlying structures of a functioning democracy in place. In the liberal democracy – besides free and fair elections in which individuals have a choice and thereby a chance to choose a government freely – there is separation of powers with an independent judiciary and the rule of law, together with upholding the rights of the individual citizen (Dahl 1998). While the focus remains on the national level and the possibility of the change of government through fair elections, many liberal democracies also use vertical separation of powers dividing governing powers between national and sub-national levels in order to increase the space for public inputs and prevent abuse of power (e.g. Germany and Sweden).

The liberal democracy model is often referred to as predominantly ‘Western’ (or even US) in style, and is also the model of democracy which is most clearly articulated in Swedish policies (see section 3.2 above). The Swedish definition of democracy, as seen from policies and strategies, can be said to be a hybrid, based on a liberal, procedural model with an emphasis on forms for elections and representation, but complemented with a broader ‘substantive’ approach including institutions for democratic governance and control.

Another relevant model of democracy – pertaining to Chambers (1983) and the participatory revolution in the development field in the 1970s, and the ensuing mainstreaming of participation across the field – would be the *participatory democracy* model. This form of democracy strongly emphasises a broader involvement of all strata and segments of the population, and aims for a higher degree of involvement than what representative democracy in itself may reach. In a participatory democracy the characteristics of a ‘substantive’ democracy are further broadened. As such it works with the grounding of political processes such as through community and social capital building/local democracy. This may be particularly relevant in developing countries and in new democracies where access to the democratic mechanisms for regular citizens (especially the poor, the illiterate, minorities and other disenfranchised categories/groups) cannot be taken for granted, such as in the case

of Cambodia in the 1990s. This model relies on concepts and processes such as *bottom-up decision-making*, *grassroots mobilisation*, *participation*, *empowerment* and *a progressive growth of independent civil society*.

Democracy and authoritarianism are not entirely opposed to one another. It is possible for democracies to possess some authoritarian elements – a ‘procedural’ democracy may lack features such as protection for minority groups and rule of law with an independent judiciary. Similarly it is possible for an authoritarian political system to have some conventional institutions of democracy. Such *hybrid regimes* (combining democratic and authoritarian elements) are not new; multiparty, electoral but undemocratic regimes existed even in the 1960s and the 1970s (Diamond 2002).

This came to the fore in the 1990s since the post-cold war era featured many enforced transition processes from authoritarianism to democracy. Scholars noted that these ‘transitions to democracy’ were often imperfect or incomplete, instead creating permanent ‘hybrid regimes’. These then constituted partial and/or impaired forms of democracy (Levitsky and Way 2002). Hence transitions did not always lead to democracy, and many countries that policymakers and practitioners persisted in calling transitional were in fact not in a transition to democracy; it became increasingly clear that the “transition paradigm has outlived its usefulness” (Carothers 2002:6). In this context, Levitsky and Way (2002) proposed the concept of competitive authoritarianism, a kind of hybrid regime remaining committed to a procedural minimum conception of democracy. Competitive authoritarian regimes however fall short on at least one – and usually more – of three defining attributes of democracy: free elections; broad protection of civil liberties; and a reasonably level playing field.

However, even if they fall short, we need to pay attention to this sort of regime when assessing the value added by Swedish support. Democracy aid is an imperfect form of aid. Often the recipient regime does not fully share the donors’ view of democracy. In the friction between various conceptions of democracy, negotiations and politics occur, often producing unintentional consequences. In Cambodia, there has certainly been a friction between donors’ views of democracy and the RGC’s view. Some democracy support has

been ‘successful’, but ending up in a hybrid situation, failing to actually achieve democratic change (or achieving only partial change). Other inputs have been subtly manoeuvred into a process where authoritarian interests unintentionally benefit from support aimed at democratisation. This may not be the donor’s intention, but could still be justified due to the need to foster for instance stability, peace or reconciliation. So, some support from Sida (and others) for democracy in Cambodia may have been channelled into benefiting the ‘wrong’ processes, or may have benefited some good processes (such as ‘peace’) while nevertheless having adverse democratic effects. It is likely that some democracy aid has been subject to these outcomes. Therefore we need to include features pertaining to hybridity and competitive authoritarianism.

*Competitive authoritarian systems* are defined (Levitsky and Way 2010:5) as: “... civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents’ abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favour of incumbents. Competition is thus real but unfair.” There is *unevenness in terms of access to state resources, to public media, to justice and to political, civil, social and economic rights.*

### **3.4 Supporting democratisation**

‘Democracy assistance’ – if stated without qualifications – is in itself a vague and unclear idea, pertaining in part to several different models of democracy. Based on the above brief literature analysis, ‘democracy’ is broken down into core empirically researchable features for each of the three models included in this study (Table 1A). There are similar and complementary features, as well as conflicting characteristics, between the models. The researchable features of the hybrid regime model are in turn shown in Table 1B.

The overview in Table 1A demonstrates the wide range of factors influencing democratic transformation. It follows that ‘democracy

assistance’ may be provided through for instance capacity building in public administration in support of democratic and legitimate governance, to support the strengthening of the judiciary to achieve rule of law, etc. (i.e. support for the ‘supply’ side of democracy). Assistance may also be provided to strengthen citizens and popular organisations to participate in policymaking processes and to exert influence beyond formal elections (i.e. support for the ‘demand’ side of democracy). For our purposes, this thus allows opportunities for including support for decentralisation, education and civil society as vital parts of a process of democratisation, and for ensuring that people will have an actual voice in their political system.

**Table 1A: Models of democracy and their core features**

Models of democracy	Description – core features
Procedural liberal democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties</li> <li>• Rule of law and independent judiciary</li> <li>• Vertical separation of independent power</li> <li>• Upholding citizens’ political and civil rights</li> </ul>
Substantive liberal democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties</li> <li>• Separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government</li> <li>• Vertical separation of independent power</li> <li>• Upholding of citizens’ political, civil, social and economic rights</li> <li>• Gender equality</li> <li>• Growth of independent civil society</li> <li>• Empowerment and community development</li> <li>• Education level</li> <li>• Political awareness</li> </ul>
Participatory democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties</li> <li>• Upholding of citizens’ political, civil, social and economic rights</li> <li>• Gender equality</li> <li>• Bottom-up processes</li> <li>• Growth of independent civil society</li> </ul>

- 
- Grassroots mobilisation/public participation
  - Empowerment and community development
  - Education level
  - Political awareness
- 

Democratic transformation must be understood from historical perspectives. However, regardless of where democratisation starts, it will inherently imply political as well as social processes that create, sustain and transform relationships over time. As the democratisation process progresses alternative systems and structures may be created (intentionally or not). Over time, new organisational skills are likely to emerge and increasingly grow stronger among citizens, and societal culture and mind-sets may be expected to shift as development and democratisation progress. Potential dominant and existing structures will need to adapt accordingly to allow space for increased citizen influence, for instance. There may be institutional barriers that impede effective democratisation, or political forces for transformative democratic politics may be fragmented and limited in capacity.

**Table 1B: Model of hybrid regime and its core features**

Model of hybrid regime	Description – core features
Competitive authoritarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties; formally but being restricted and/or manipulated by incumbents</li> <li>• Rule of law; but violated in favour of incumbents</li> <li>• Upholding of citizens’ social and cultural rights</li> <li>• Economic growth and prosperity with unequal playing field; thwarted in favour of incumbents</li> <li>• Personalised leadership and political stability</li> </ul>

The hybrid regime model also allows us to capture unintended effects from the included support for decentralisation, education and civil society. The foundation for establishing liberal democracy in Cambodia in 1993 was weak. There were limited historical experiences of democracy within the population and no strong social or political forces for transformative democratic politics. Further, there were no functioning institutions to defend or promote the rooting of the envisioned democratic system (emerging

political economic processes in Cambodia are further analysed in chapter 4). It is likely that the form of democracy emerging in Cambodia will have hybrid features and contain some authoritarian elements, which we also aim to capture in this analysis.

### 3.5 Analytical framework for case studies

The analytical framework for assessing contributions of case studies to each of the three models of democracy is illustrated in Table 2 (Table 2 appears again in the concluding chapter, filled in, comparing cases and drawing conclusions).

The basic design of the case study methodology was described above (section 2.2). The empirically researchable democracy features (Table 1) are used to guide fieldwork searching for the democratic qualities of the decentralisation, education and civil society cases. It is commonly pointed out in the case study literature that the requirements for high-quality case study research are a good prior grasp of the situation, the ability to listen and adapt, and the ability to ask the right questions (so as to construct the narrative of the case tightly). An introductory description of each case is therefore presented in sections 6.1–6.3.

**Table 2: Analytical framework: the listing of empirically researchable features across the report’s case studies**

<b>Case studies</b> <b>Features of democracy/hybrid regime</b> (Drawn from the various models of democracy and the hybrid regime model listed in Tables 1A and 1B)	<b>Decen- tralisa- tion</b>	<b>Educa- tion</b>	<b>Civil society</b>	<b>Value added for democratisation per feature</b>
Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties				
Separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government				

Rule of law and independent judiciary				
Upholding of human rights				
Gender equality				
Vertical separation of independent powers				
Bottom-up processes				
Growth of independent civil society				
Grassroots mobilisation/public participation				
Empowerment and community development				
Education level				
Economic growth/prosperity				
Political awareness				
Personalised leadership and political stability				
<b>Value added for democratisation per case</b>				

Although every intervention has a specific purpose, it is common for direct and indirect consequences to go beyond (or even against) its stated purposes. This assumption has two consequences for this study: Firstly, support for a particular democratic model (like elections’ fit with procedural liberal democracy or grassroots’ empowerment fit with participatory democracy) may go beyond that particular ambition and add value to other aspects of democratisation. Therefore, we will observe various elements of value added. Secondly, given the long-term perspective of this study, we will be vigilant to the chronological dynamics and our methodology will also be able to catch long-term (in)direct effects of every intervention per sector.

## 4. The Cambodian Context

This chapter has five main sections. It begins with an overview of some key institutions in upholding and strengthening democracy as enshrined in the 1993 Cambodia Constitution, and an overview of key indicators for development and democratic outcomes between 1997 and 2017. In explaining the diverging outcomes for development and democracy, the chapter examines the nature and evolution of Cambodia's political development. The chapter then goes on to review the government's key long-term strategies. This is followed by reviewing the roles, contributions and influence of international donors in establishing and supporting democratic institutions in Cambodia since the early 1990s.

### 4.1 Institutions for democracy and human rights

The 1993 Cambodian constitution established a *constitutional monarchy* (see section 3.1). While being steeped in a liberal form of representative democracy, it has not led to equal opportunities for the political parties. Members of opposition parties and government critics have been harassed continuously. The nature of harassment has changed over time, moving from physical violence and administrative and legal obstacles to abuse of the criminal justice system (McCarthy and Un 2015).

The contention regarding democracy in Cambodia is not so much about the procedures of elections, but more about the underlying culture. One example is that both the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the opposition parties are competing for legitimacy, rather than competing on political programmes. For this reason, there is limited space for political discussion or dialogue, and political ideology plays a minor role. One example of this is that the political influence of women as a key determinant of genuine democratic development is a marginal issue within all parties. Gender equality is still considered as 'targeting women' and treated as important for legitimacy, or as a moral issue, rather than as an

ideological concern about appropriate influence on party politics. No political party has a specific agenda or mechanism to promote women's representation in key party positions. Men dominate the political arena, formulate the rules of the political game, and define the standards for evaluation and deciding who should be selected to lead (Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia 2016).

The National Election Committee (NEC) is responsible for managing the election of members of the National Assembly, Senate, and Commune and Sangkat Councils, as well as for compiling and publishing the voter list. However, the NEC's neutrality and competence is questionable (COMFREL 2013). The NEC is housed under the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and does not have an autonomous budget allocation or its own constitutional or other independent legal status.

The judiciary is constitutionally awarded the power of checks and balances, and is charged with reviewing legislative and executive acts, enforcing constitutional provisions and defending civil, social and private property rights. However, the independence and neutrality of the judiciary system is very weak (Un 2009; McCarthy and Un 2015). The judiciary institutions are filled with individuals who are regarded as part of the state and therefore likely to be loyal to the Government. For example, the Government created the Council on Legal and Judicial Reform, an institution placed under the direct control of the Council of Ministers, and co-led by senior ranking CPP members and close allies of the Prime Minister.

The relationship between the major government institutions can be characterised by the dominance of the executive, the weakness of the legislature and a judiciary that is too intimidated to exercise independent power. Within the executive, nepotism and corruption are rife (Transparency International Cambodia 2014). Appointments and promotions are routinely awarded to those candidates with the most powerful family or political connections. This state of affairs has undermined the establishment of mechanisms for performance review, internal discipline, accountability and transparency. The capacity and functions of public officials are improving through training and capacity support programmes, but reforms for merit-based pay and performance for

the public service and anti-corruption measures outlined in the government reform strategy have not replaced the embedded personalist and unofficial bonus and rent-seeking arrangements.

The media sector in Cambodia has shifted from largely pro-Government and state-managed broadcasters towards a commercially operated sector, particularly for television with most stations owned by family members and businessmen directly linked to the CPP and the Prime Minister. Cambodians place little trust in these, although televisions and radios provide a key source of pro-Government information (CDRI 2019). Radio Free Asia and Voice of America are accessible and popular among local listeners, and they focus their broadcasts on critical content such as land grabbing and corruption.

Print newspapers are confined to Phnom Penh and urban areas, and reach few Cambodians in rural areas. Most newspapers belong to individuals with strong links to the CPP. Newspapers and radios in Cambodia used to be relatively free and unregulated, but have increasingly been suppressed by the Government through threats, physical harassment and criminal defamation lawsuits (International Federation of Journalists Asia Pacific 2018). The internet in Cambodia remains relatively free, and the rapid shift of Cambodians moving online for news has presented a challenge for state surveillance. However, internet freedom has been significantly reduced with the Government's recent measures against critical voices.

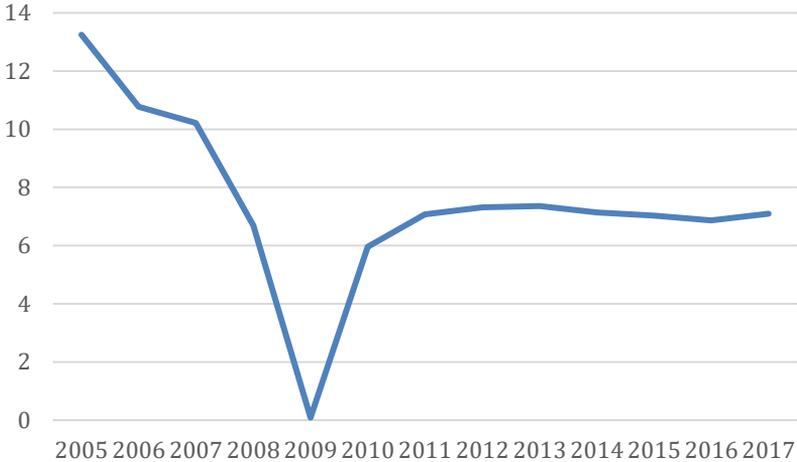
Civil society organisations (CSOs) have played an important role in development in Cambodia since the early 1990s (further discussed in the civil society case study in section 6.3).

## **4.2 Performance for development and democracy**

The existing institutional arrangements have produced uneven outcomes for development and democracy. In terms of development, the government is highly praised internationally for

its ability to foster economic growth, reduce poverty and improve human development. Cambodia’s rapid economic growth in the 2003–2008 boom period, and its subsequent steady growth (Figure 1), have transformed the economy from rural subsistence farmers to more urban manufacturing and service sectors.

**Figure 1: GDP growth (annual %)**



The impressive economic performance has contributed to significant improvements in key human development indicators, particularly in education (further discussed in the education case study in section 6.2) and in health. Health outcomes have significantly improved; for instance, maternal mortality per 100 000 live births dropped from 1 020 in 1990 to 161 in 2015 (World Bank 2017).

Poverty was substantially reduced from 47.8 per cent in 2007 to 13.5 per cent in 2014 (World Bank 2017). However, the poverty level remains high in rural areas and urban poverty is an increasing trend. There is also increasing vulnerability to poverty. In 2017, for instance, 11 per cent of the population lived on USD 1.25 a day, but in 2011, 40 per cent still lived on less than USD 2 per day (Asian Development Bank 2014). Gender discrepancies in economic participation/opportunity remain considerable, but are improving (World Economic Forum 2017). The view of women as “the guardians of Cambodian cultural identity” imposes a socio-cultural

burden upon women limiting their opportunities to contribute on equal terms to national socio-economic development (Sen 2017).

In terms of democracy and human rights, data from international organisations suggest that the Government receives consistently poor ratings for freedom and respecting human rights, especially political rights (Freedom House; Bertelsmann Transformation Index). With the exception of the figures for freedom in 1998, the three indicators show a similar and stable pattern (Table 3). The low rankings in 1998 may reflect the tension and instability surrounding the 1997 coup. The indicators for freedom and civil rights then improved remarkably in 2002, possibly due to commune council elections, but these indicators have subsequently remained unchanged throughout until 2017. The indicator for political rights has remained unchanged from 1998 to 2017.

**Table 3: Freedom House’s Indicators for Cambodia 1998–2017<sup>3</sup>**  
(1=most free; 7=least free)

	1998	2002	2003	2007	2008	2012	2013	2017
Freedom	7	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Civil rights	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Political rights	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6

The Country Report from the Bertelsmann Transformation Index gave Cambodia a ranking of 2 (out of 10) for democracy for 1998–2003, and commented:<sup>4</sup> “An evaluation of the 1998–2003 period shows that political stability has increased, but political and economic liberalization remains unconsolidated, due largely to the growing dominance of the CPP, weak institutional structures, and weak performance in the public and private sectors” (Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2003). The 2006 report noted improvements

<sup>3</sup> See Freedom House’s Country reports 1998–2017 available online at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/>

<sup>4</sup> See Country Report Cambodia, online at <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/KHM/>

particularly related to an increased level of political and social stability, and hence rated Cambodia at 4 for democracy, a rating around which Cambodia has subsequently fluctuated throughout the 2007 to 2017 period. The 2010 report observed democratic stagnation, and the 2018 report suggested a return of the authoritarian regime for the 2015–2017 period, noting that the Cambodian Government had drastically increased repressive measures against its critics.

The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators for Cambodia for voice and accountability, rule of law and control of corruption also reflected the overall low and deteriorating rating for these indicators during the 1998–2017 period. The World Bank's comparative assessment places Cambodia well behind the ASEAN-5 countries and other lower middle-income countries (World Bank 2017).

The data for both development and democracy for Cambodia over the 1997–2017 period suggests that improved development outcomes have been achieved – despite poor records for democracy and human rights. In other words, although the Government has been quite successful in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction, the political strategy does not conform to models of democracy promoted by international agencies, and divergence from these norms may explain the poor rating of the Government by international indexes for democracy and governance. The following section elaborates on this point further, suggesting that the Government does not embrace the liberal democracy system, but has rather relied on the reinforcement of personal and steeply hierarchical relationships of patronage, gratitude and loyalty to organise and maintain its political support.

### **4.3 Cambodia's political development**

Cambodia's current political development has its roots in the post-Khmer Rouge civil war of the 1980s and the state apparatus and military structure built by the CPP at that time. These structures were partially transformed following the peace agreement of 1991 and peacekeeping mission of 1992–3 to accommodate an

environment of free market economy and electoral competition. It is not necessary to review the history of this period in detail; however, some features of the functioning of the state and party have remained pertinent since the 1980s and help to explain the contemporary political development and responses to reforms promoted by Western donors since the 1991 peace agreement.

The current CPP leadership at national and local levels has remained remarkably stable since the early 1980s and is linked by long-standing ties of loyalty. Ties of loyalty, gratitude and personal obligation have also been essential in linking this leadership to the broader civil service and military since the 1980s, and continue to be important in understanding the expectations of public servants towards their leaders and their responses to reform programmes. During the 1990s, following the 1991 peace agreement and despite a formal process of integration of public servants and soldiers from other parties, the CPP was successful in maintaining the dominance of CPP supporters within both the civil service and the military. This was achieved in part through the discretionary allocation of perquisites as well as benefits from slush funds generated by corrupt practices to fund its operations (Hughes 2003, Pak 2011, Korm 2011). These flows of cash are quite highly ritualised, taking on a patronage aspect, and have also been used on a mass scale outside the state apparatus to attempt to secure the loyalty of voters, particularly in rural villages (Hughes 2006, Craig and Pak 2011). The personalised networks of loyalty and clientelism that underpinned the state, the military and the party were used to exclude political opponents from significant opportunities within the new institutions set up following the UNTAC-organised first general election in 1993, and remain into the 21st century.

The 1993 national election was attended by 20 political parties, with two main opposition parties: the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) and the royalist party, Funcinpec. Despite well documented violence attacks and harassment against opposition parties, the CPP came second and rejected the election results, threatening to launch a military coup. A coalition government was formed whereby power was supposed to be shared equally between Funcinpec and the CPP, with Prince Norodom Ranariddh of

Funcinpec and Hun Sen of the CPP becoming joint prime ministers. The fragile coalition government ended after the CPP ousted Prince Norodom Rannarith in a military coup in 1997 and significantly undermined the opposition parties (Downie 2000; Peou 1998). The 1998 election was an easy victory for the CPP, but its legitimacy was questioned by domestic and international communities. The first CPP-led Government was sworn in in 1999, and the new Government appeared to be vigorously pursuing Western donor-imposed reforms to attract further international aid and recognition.<sup>5</sup>

In the 2008 election, for the first time since the 1993 electoral defeat, the CPP won more than fifty per cent of votes cast. A similar success for the CPP could also be observed in local elections. In all commune elections since being introduced in 2002, the CPP has dominated, and in the 2012 election it controlled all but 41 of the 1 633 communes around the country.

The integration and expansion of market economy in the 1990s and 2000s provided a further push to the CPP-controlled informal economy (Hughes and Un 2011). Rents and benefits from the opening up of the economy were highly concentrated among closely connected government officials and senior CPP party leaders at the expense of the rural population. This practice has continuously forged a close relationship between the trusted groups of political, military and bureaucratic officials who controlled key positions within the Government and the party. Over time, the merger of state and party produces powerful new political and bureaucratic elites within the CPP while effectively weakening and excluding other parties and their supporters from government jobs, contracts and development benefits.

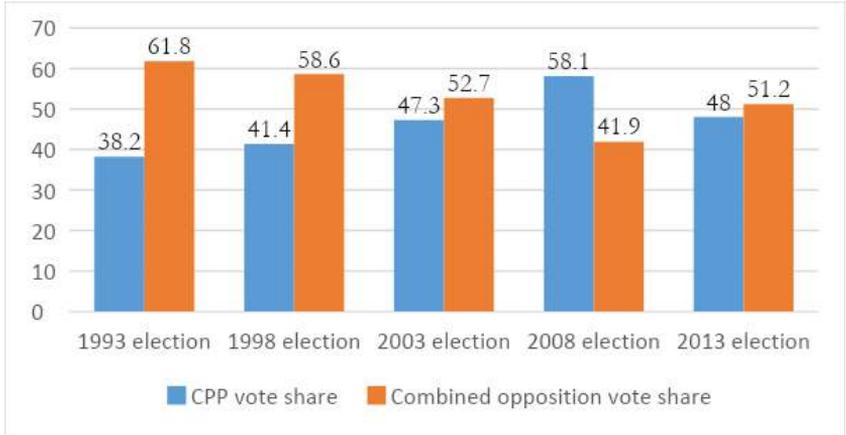
The consolidation of power in the hands of the CPP, as reflected in its electoral success at national and local levels (presented in Figure 2 and Figure 3), has been achieved through the enforcement of personal and steeply hierarchical relationships of patronage,

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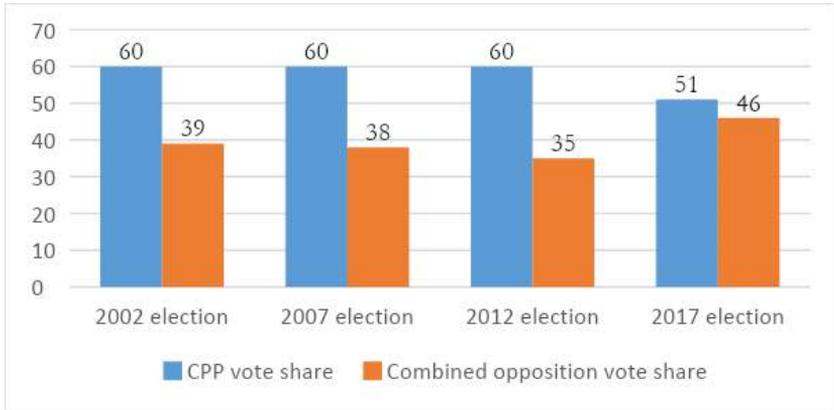
<sup>5</sup> During this period, conflict was still ongoing between the Phnom Penh Government and Khmer Rouge insurgents along the Thai border. With support from the US, the Khmer Rouge also occupied Cambodia's United Nations seat until 1991.

protection, gratitude and loyalty to organise its political support (Heder 2005; Hughes and Un 2011; Pak, Horng et al. 2007; Un 2006; 2011). The CPP legitimating strategy shifted from elite patronage to mass patronage (Hughes and Un 2011), but then lost confidence in gaining sufficient votes through mass patronage, resorting to authoritarianism in 2017.

**Figure 2: Vote share in national elections 1993 to 2013**



**Figure 3: Vote share in local elections 2002 to 2017**



Following their 1993 electoral defeat, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his CPP experimented with politicised rural development programmes through which small-scale infrastructure projects were delivered to rural communities by the party elite in exchange for votes at election times (Hughes 2003; Pak 2011). These politicised development programmes were paid for by funds mobilised from the private sector, from donors and NGOs, and by siphoning off public funds and revenues (Thon et al. 2009; Hughes and Un 2011; Pak 2011). Public officials from both the national and local levels were expected to go down to ‘the base’ (local level) and be seen working with the villagers to deliver party-sponsored projects (Craig and Pak 2011). Funding from the CPP for rural infrastructure projects through the party structure of working groups has outstripped funding made available to the state channels provided to sub-national administrations (Rusten et al. 2004; Pak 2011, Eng 2014).

Although the CPP secured a 2008 electoral victory, it did poorly in the national elections of 2013 and the local elections in 2017. As the above graphs illustrate, the opposition (CNRP) performed surprisingly well in the 2013 national election where it secured 45 per cent of the popular vote while the CPP lost 10 points from 58 per cent in 2008 to 48 per cent in 2013. A similar trend was observed in the 2017 commune election where, for the first time since 2002, the CPP lost a significant number of votes to the opposition.

The CPP’s loss in the national 2013 elections came as a surprise, and the significant loss in the 2017 commune elections brought panic, providing clear evidence of a strong shift in Cambodian politics over the 20-year period (Norén-Nilsson 2015; McCargo 2014; Soeung 2013; Strangio 2014). The political implication of these electoral results reflected Cambodia’s drastic structural changes, namely: demographic change, economic transformation and information and technology (Eng and Hughes 2017; Hughes and Eng 2018; Eng, Hughes, Ojendal forthcoming).

Concern about electoral defeat in the 2018 national election prompted the Government to dismantle and prohibit not only the CNRP but also all the significant independent critical public voices that had emerged in Cambodia since 1993. New laws passed in 2015

and 2016 increased the regulation and oversight of CSOs and trade unions, imposing onerous registration and reporting commitments and incorporating threats of heavy punishment for transgressors. A Telecoms Law, also passed in 2016, allowed the Government virtually unlimited scope to wiretap, and prescribed heavy punishments for telecoms use that “infringes national security”. The closure of the Cambodia Daily after it was charged with failure to pay tax and the sale of the Phnom Penh Post to a businessman with close ties to the Prime Minister removed the most consistently independent sources of news in Cambodia that had been in operation since the early 1990s. The Government also closed down a dozen independent and pro-opposition radio broadcasters (Phnom Penh Post, 25 August 2017). Almost all broadcast and print media is now pro-Government.

The CPP has manoeuvred in various ways to stay in power since 1998. Although this has included violence (in 1998), extra-legal measures and human rights violations (throughout), and anti-democratic interventions (2017), it should also be mentioned that the CPP has tried, and preferred, to stay in power with legitimate means of a predominantly legal nature, operating in a hybrid regime with distinct competitive elements. It has generally gathered the popular vote through cultivating its historical role as the saviour of the nation, guaranteeing peace and stability on the one hand and delivering development and economic growth on the other. It has been successful with both these promises, but it is still questioned by the citizens for other shortcomings (such as corruption and narrow patrimonialism).

Recent clampdowns have been controversial, including within the CPP (several interviews in November 2017). Many internal actors and interests within the CPP do not see its future as an authoritarian party and dislike the recent changes, crossing lines it has not crossed before and getting too close to the military and security forces, hoping that they can be undone sooner than later. The CPP has remained the backbone of Cambodian politics since 1979 and has stayed surprisingly united. This does not reflect the many violent internal power struggles and several deviating opinions

within the fairly heterogeneous party.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the move in 2017 represents more than anything else the Prime Minister's alignment with close family, military interests and security interests (and a limited number of cronies), alienating (for now) moderate factions within the CPP. In the longer term – which is a part of the current dynamics – there are two scenarios: One is a transition of power as a whole within the family, and the other is a sliding of power towards a more moderate CPP faction. Both these scenarios explain the absence of righteous violence in the current clampdown from the CPP, being cautious to maintain a basic legitimacy for future needs.

#### **4.4 Overview of the Government's long-term strategies**

The government documents reviewed here are the five-year political and economic agenda of each elected government since 1993. These are: the National Programme to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia (1994), the Triangular Strategy (1998), and the Rectangular Strategies I-III for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency (2004, 2008 and 2013).<sup>7</sup>

The *National Programme to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia* was formulated after the 1993 general elections and adopted in 1994. The strategy focused on three goals: stability, social development and poverty reduction. Then, after the 1998 elections, the government formulated a *Triangular Strategy*, in which the vision expanded considerably from the previous document. The three overarching goals became: i) building peace, restoring stability and maintaining security for the nation and the people; ii) integrating Cambodia into the region and normalising relationships with the

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<sup>6</sup> The recent deaths of Sok An and Chea Sim have altered the power balance within the CPP, allowing Hun Sen to align with security forces and suppressing more progressive/business-oriented actors in the party.

<sup>7</sup> Relevant sectorial strategies are reviewed as an integral part of the three case studies that follow below (chapter 6).

international community; and iii) promoting economic and social development.

The focus of the Government's efforts for political stability, demilitarisation and economic integration in these two strategies reflected a context in the 1990s of ongoing conflicts and the early stages of political and economic reforms.

An elaborate long-term strategy was conceived following the CPP's election victory in 2003. The *First Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency in Cambodia* was formulated and adopted in 2004, with the overarching goals of: i) peace, stability and social order; ii) economic growth through building trust and enabling relationships with investors; iii) poverty reduction through infrastructure development such as roads, bridges and schools; and iv) reforming state institutions to become more effective and more efficient.

'Reforming' state institutions was identified as critical to the future direction of Cambodia's development. The Prime Minister reassured his audience during the launch of the strategy that "Reform is the life and death issue for Cambodia" (p. 1). Good governance was identified as the 'cornerstone' of the strategy, being important in order to achieve the other four related priorities. Good governance was to be achieved through "wide participation, enhanced sharing of information, accountability, transparency, equality, inclusiveness and the rule of law" (p. 6).

The focus of governance reforms was on i) reducing corruption; ii) strengthening the judicial and legal system; iii) enhancing the performance of public administration; and iv) restructuring the armed forces. These governance reforms were further detailed by activities, projects and institutions in an updated version of the Governance Action Plan (GAP) in 2006. (The first version had been developed in 2001.)

The Government also recognised the role and contributions of international donors and civil society organisations in the implementation process. It was stated in this first Rectangular Strategy that "the Royal Government continues to strengthen cooperation between the state and civil society based upon the rule

of law to enhance democracy, freedom, social order and the primacy of law” (p. 9). In this context, the Government aimed to speed up the adoption of an NGO law.

The subsequent *Second Rectangular Strategy*, which was a slightly updated version of the first document, was adopted in 2008 after the formation of the fourth Legislature of the National Assembly. There was marginal change, with good governance remaining as the core of the strategy and with the four overarching goals remaining from the previous strategy.

The *Third Rectangular Strategy* was adopted in 2014, and was more ambitious than the previous two versions in that it set out to propel Cambodia toward its vision of becoming an upper-middle income country by 2030 and becoming an equal member within the international community. As such, the overarching goals were as follows: i) a Cambodian society which is peaceful with political stability, security and social order; ii) achieving long-term economic growth, and sustainable and equitable development; iii) a society which is committed to environmental protection, enhanced culture and national identity which firmly adheres to the principles of multi-party democracy and shows respect for human rights and dignity; iv) an advanced society with well-connected social fabric and a well-educated and culturally advanced population; and v) a noble nation with a high reputation in international fora and a full-fledged member of the international community with equal rights and functioning on an equal footing with other members (p. 6). Like in previous versions of the Rectangular Strategy, governance was the ‘cornerstone’ of the strategy with a continued focus on the same three main reform areas: i) corruption; ii) the legal and judicial system; iii) public administration.

In this phase, although good governance remained at the core of the strategy, the attitude of the Government with regard to governance reforms had shifted. In various places in the document, political stability and social order were repeatedly identified as being critical to the future development of Cambodia. The government’s preoccupation with maintaining peace, political stability and social order, as stated in the document, was to be achieved through “strengthening of the rule of law, democracy, culture of peace,

morality in the society and respect for human rights and dignity, along with zero tolerance to provocative activities that lead to political instability and social unrest” (p. 9).

*In summary*, the overall priorities of the Government’s long-term vision for Cambodia have consistently been along three interrelated strategies: maintaining peace, maintaining political stability and enhancing infrastructure development in order to accelerate economic growth. Governance reforms have been promoted and implemented selectively to support the Government in attracting and improving relationships with private investors. In all three areas, the Government and the CPP can claim concrete achievements over the 20-year period (1993 to 2013), and they have been able to promote them effectively during and between elections to their advantage.

## 4.5 International donors in Cambodia

International aid has been a major source of development funding in Cambodia since the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991. Official development assistance (ODA) as a share of gross national income (GNI) stood at 12 per cent in 2002, but had decreased to 4 per cent in 2016 (Table 4) as a result of Cambodia’s high economic growth. The total amount of ODA per capita peaked in 2012, but in spite of a decline since 2014, the level of ODA per capita continues to indicate aid dependency, with aid amounting to approximately 70 per cent of the Government’s capital budget.

**Table 4: Cambodia ODA 1997–2016**

	Year	1997	2002	2007	2012	2016
<i>ODA per capita, USD</i>		29.7	38.5	50.6	54.7	46.3
<i>ODA/GNI %</i>		9.3	12.0	8.6	6.2	4.1

Source: World Bank

The composition of donors has changed radically during the period. In 1997, the major donor was Japan, followed by the EU, the USA and the UN system. China, an insignificant donor in 1997, has

become the largest donor since 2011, representing around 30 per cent of total aid. The Asia Development Bank (ADB) has also increased its share, while the shares of all other official donors have declined. The Swedish share of total aid is around 2 per cent. Funding from international NGOs/CSOs has increased and the share of total aid from their own funds (which may, as in the case of Sweden, be provided by donor support) was 17 per cent in 2015. If donor funding through CSOs is included, this rises to 24 per cent of total aid (Royal Government of Cambodia 2016).

From 1999, many governance reform programmes advocated and supported by international donors were incorporated into government policies and strategies – including the Governance Action Plans 2001 and 2006 and the two phases of the Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Effectiveness in 2003 and 2008. The long list of programmes for governance reform found in these documents includes civil service reform, public financial management reform, judicial reform, reforms of the armed forces, specific sector reforms such as in education and health, deconcentration and decentralisation reform, and anti-corruption reform. Some observers have argued that the Cambodian Government's acquiescence to these donor-promoted reforms was mainly to secure a flow of foreign aid and only when the reforms served their interests (Greenhill 2007; 2013). With the significant increase of aid from China and revenues from private investors, pressure from international donors on the Government had been substantially reduced over time (Sullivan 2011).

The Government made aid coordination a high priority and, as early as 2004, created the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board (CRDB) at the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) as the focal point for aid coordination. The Consultative Group (CG) mechanism between the Government and the donors was introduced in 1996, and to reflect local ownership this was transformed in 2007 into the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF), chaired by the Government. At annual Government-donor meetings, donors would generally criticise the Government for various reasons, including some related to D/HR. At the end of the meetings, an increased level of aid would nevertheless normally be pledged by the

donors. In 2012 the Government cancelled the CDCF and postponed it indefinitely. This has been interpreted as a sign that “Hun Sen was no longer willing to endure the theatre of donor criticism” (Strangio 2014:217).

The Technical Working Group (TWG) structure that had been established as part of the aid coordination efforts remains in place. Within the TWGs for different sectors and reform programmes, the Government, donors and CSOs have agreed on joint monitoring indicators (JMIs). The specific plans, strategies and detailed work plans for each sector and governance reform are regularly monitored through these TWGs. In 2017, aid effectiveness was however given lower priority by both the Government and donors, and the TWGs only play a substantial role within a few of the 19 sectors/areas for which they were established.

Fungibility of aid resources has also been pointed to as a likely effect in Cambodia. Fungibility refers to the fact that aid funding, even if it is earmarked for specific purposes, can support projects or programmes which would otherwise have been funded by domestic revenue. Aid thus releases government funding for other purposes. Since aid resources have funded roughly half of the Government’s budget over many years, this has probably been an effect in Cambodia. One interpretation is that donors have funded social sectors and poverty reduction and thereby facilitated the release of government funds to further establish the corruption system, built on patronage and mutual obligations (Brinkley 2011:183).

The fungibility concern also applies to the role of CSOs. According to one study (CCC 2013), funding from CSOs (directly and indirectly through donors) in 2010 amounted to around 40 per cent of all aid to Cambodia, which was equal to the entire government budget for social sectors. In specific sub-sectors and specific provinces and districts, it was even higher. According to some informants we met as part of this study, the situation remains the same today in many parts of the country: social issues are totally dependent on foreign CSO support.

Several authors have, in particular since 2010, criticised donors for being naïve in their assessment of the 1991 Paris Agreement as

a basis for democratisation in Cambodia and assessed the effect of their continued support as mainly serving to strengthen an undemocratic system, based on one party (the CPP) and one strongman (Hun Sen) (e.g. Brinkley 2011; Strangio 2014). The focus of Western donors on assistance for elections, according to some observers, became an integral part of a democratic façade and subject to authoritarian manipulation which since the UNTAC-led election in 1993, and up to 2008, has been used by the CPP to strengthen its power (Sullivan 2016). According to this view, the international pressure for elections was used by the CPP to domesticate opposition forces and confine political action to a narrow window around election time. Donors have also continually approved elections as being “free and fair enough”, based on technical criteria, although they have otherwise been assessed as deeply flawed.

Thanks to the continued generous donor funding, the RGC has been able to achieve substantial external legitimacy, even if donors have increasingly criticised the lack of reforms in various areas, primarily anti-corruption and judicial reform. It has been assessed that aid has also improved internal legitimacy, through the patronage system and improvements to living standards (Ear 2009). At an even earlier stage, it had been argued that donors had not fully understood the role of reforms and capacity building in the Cambodian context. Donors assumed that Cambodian decision-makers had the same interests as the donors, while Cambodian leaders saw the risks in undermining the networks of loyalty and corruption that underpinned the cohesion of party and state (Conway and Hughes 2003).

It has further been questioned whether donors have really had a primary interest in D/HR. A diverging interpretation is that donors have been aware of a hidden agenda on the part of the Government, but for various reasons have been more interested in stability and good relations and made the assessment that the CPP is the best (or only) option to achieve this (Sullivan 2016). In this interpretation, donors’ views of democratisation in effect come closer to the competitive authoritarian model, implying that development must come before democracy; an approach termed as ‘developmental patrimonialism’ which suggests that the aid community should relax

its governance focus and instead support elite pacts in the name of development (Lekvall 2013:104). In this context it is interesting to note that although some major donors have reduced their assistance, and in some cases left Cambodia (the DFID, Denmark, Canada, etc.), this has never been officially motivated by the D/HR situation. Also in the present crisis situation all donors except the US, and to some extent Sweden, have kept a very low profile. Sweden decided in November 2017 not to enter into any new agreement on development cooperation with the Cambodian Government, except in connection with education and research.

## 5. Swedish Context

### 5.1 Swedish aid to Cambodia – overview and context

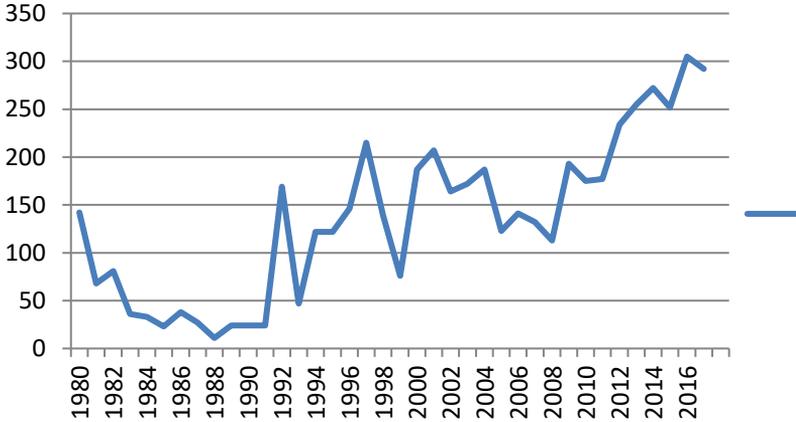
Swedish humanitarian assistance to Cambodia (1979–1989) supported areas inside Cambodia, whereas other Western donors restricted their support to refugees at the Thai border. Even though volumes were reduced during the 1980s, in accordance with the Western boycott of the Cambodian regime, Sweden maintained relatively significant levels of emergency assistance, mostly channelled through United Nations (UN) organisations. The first governmental agreement between Sweden and Cambodia was concluded for the two years 1995–1996, followed by a first country strategy (1997–1998) for long-term development cooperation.

#### 5.1.1 Volumes and composition of disbursements

The trend in disbursements of Swedish aid during 1980–2017 has increased overall, although with some fluctuations (Figure 4). Over the period studied (1997–2017), Sweden has disbursed SEK 4 billion in development assistance to Cambodia.

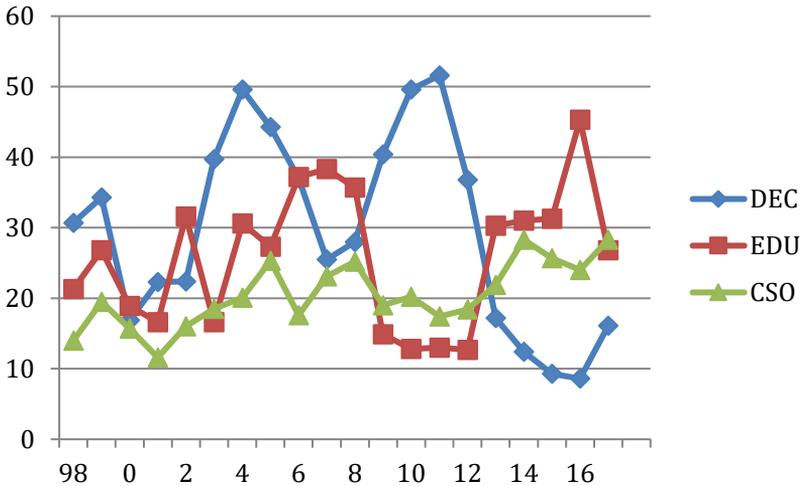
During the study period Swedish aid has been based on a multidimensional approach, in which it is not possible to separate funding for democracy and human rights from funding for poverty reduction. Other objectives, like economic growth, security and environmental sustainability, are also integrated into this multidimensional approach. Changes made in Sida's internal classification system further contribute to the difficulties in comparing funding across sectors over time. Our assessment is however that D/HR has become increasingly important in Swedish development cooperation with Cambodia, as evidenced in country strategies (see section 5.1.3).

**Figure 4: Disbursement of Swedish aid to Cambodia 1980–2017, MSEK, constant prices (2016=100)**



Source: Sida (1999), [openaid.se](http://openaid.se). Note: An annual loan disbursement of SEK 42.5 million from Swedfund to Aceda Bank for 2015–2016 is excluded.

**Figure 5: Percentage shares of decentralisation, education and civil society support in Swedish aid 1998–2017**



Source: [openaid.se](http://openaid.se)

Two main ‘sectors’, decentralisation and education, have continued to dominate in Swedish disbursements since the early 1990s, together representing on average 56 per cent of total annual disbursements in 1997–2017 (Figure 5). Other important areas have been infrastructure (1998–2002), mine clearance (1999–2005), statistical development (2006–2017), environment/climate (2009–2017) and election support (1997–2008). Sweden further provided substantial support to the Khmer Rouge tribunal, ECCC (2013–2017). The share of ‘support to civil society’ increased from 14 per cent in 1998 to 28 per cent in 2017 (further discussed in the civil society case study, section 6.3).

The quite dramatic decrease in the share of Swedish aid allocated to decentralisation, down from 50 per cent in 2011 to less than 10 per cent in 2015, required Sida to rethink its strategies and to find new areas of cooperation in order to fill the resulting space within the overall country allocation. To some extent this was achieved through the expansion of support for education, especially the School Improvement Grants (SIG) programme. Another strategy was to prepare a large number of new programmes with new Cambodian partners, often in cooperation with Swedish institutions. Many of these programmes were innovative in their approach and related to the D/HR objectives.<sup>8</sup> While a deeper analysis of these new initiatives might contribute an additional understanding of the Swedish role in supporting D/HR in Cambodia, we maintain a focus on contributions which can be traced during the entire study period. The implementation of these new initiatives started between 2013 and 2017, and it is thus too early to draw any long-term conclusions from them.

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<sup>8</sup> Including: Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI): *Human Rights Education and Capacity Development*, 2013–2019; UNDESA: *Khmer Rouge Tribunal*, 2016–2019 (ECCC); PACT: *Promoting Citizen Engagement in Democratic Development*, 2016–2018 (PROCEED); Transparency International Cambodia (*component in EU-Sida Programme* 2016–2019); UNDP *Gender Equality Programme in Cambodia*, 2017–2020; Future Forum: *Policy Research*, 2017–2020; Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia: 2017–2020; UNESCO: *Access to Information* 2014–2017; Arbitration Council Foundation Cambodia, 2014–2018; H&M/ILO: *Industrial Relations*, 2014–2017, BBC Media Action: *Loy 9*, 2014.

## 5.1.2 Channels and partners

For many years, Sweden channelled its aid to *government programmes via other donors or through joint funding arrangements*. This was seen as the most effective way to provide support to Cambodia, and remained the dominant channel for support for decentralisation (via the UNDP) up to 2010, and for education (via UNICEF) to 2012. Thereafter, funding changed into mainly *direct funding of government programmes* until 2017, when it was decided, due to the political state of affairs in Cambodia, to end all direct funding of government programmes, except for education.

Sweden has also *supported government institutions via foreign (mainly Swedish) institutions*. The most important long-term support of this kind has been to the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) via Statistics Sweden, with part of the support channelled directly to the NIS. During the later years of the study period, a number of similar forms of support have been established (such as the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, the Swedish Tax Agency and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights). In some cases, Sweden provided *direct support to international organisations*, the most significant being the Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (COHCR).

*Support to civil society* has mainly been channelled via Swedish organisations. Sweden has not normally provided direct support to local CSOs. Exceptions are two organisations with international links (Transparency International and PACT) and three independent local organisations:<sup>9</sup> the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-CAM) and the Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia (PIC).

The selection of channels and partners has to a large extent been influenced by the Swedish organisational management of its support to Cambodia, which has changed over the years. A Swedish development cooperation section, attached to the Embassy of

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<sup>9</sup> These are not normally included in the definition of civil society and are not covered by this study.

Sweden in Bangkok, was opened in Phnom Penh at the end of 1996. For the first few years this office was staffed by one Swedish officer from Sida and one local administrative officer. The office had limited power and most decisions were taken by Sida HQ. The weak capacity was one reason for the ‘Cambodia model’, channelling approximately 70 per cent of resources through the UN system. This was however combined with a relatively active role of Sida in dialogue with the Government and other donors. In the early 2000s, the capacity was increased through additional staff, but the office only became a fully delegated unit according to Sida’s principles in 2008. The upgrade to a fully delegated unit included the establishment of an integrated ‘Cambodia team’ with representatives from both the local office in Phnom Penh and Sida HQ. The team was led by the head of the Phnom Penh office, although the formal Swedish representative in Cambodia remained the Ambassador in Bangkok.

When Sweden opened an Embassy in Phnom Penh in 2010, headed by an Ambassador, the local development cooperation team became part of the Embassy, but was led by a Development Counsellor from Sida. The team in Phnom Penh was expanded, had quite a strong capacity, and was relatively independent of Sida HQ. Sweden now started to provide direct support to the Government and became even more active in Government-donor relations.

The donor composition also changed, from dominance by ‘Western’ donors, including the UN system and the World Bank, to an increasing role of Asian donors, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB). When ‘like-minded’ bilateral donors (such as the DFID, Denmark, Canada, etc.) left Cambodia around 2010, Sweden/Sida became increasingly integrated into the EU cooperation, in particular after the European Development Cooperation Strategy was agreed in 2014.

### **5.1.3 Swedish development cooperation 1997–2017 divided into five phases**

1997–2001: The first country strategy covered 1997–98 and was followed by the second strategy for 1999–2001 (Regeringen 1996

and 1998 respectively). In 1995–96 Sweden had a positive view of the Government's policy and was considering direct support for government programmes. The July 1997 military confrontation and the following turbulence however resulted in Sweden abandoning these plans. Instead the previous humanitarian assistance was consolidated to the same areas and partners as before, i.e. into long-term support for basic education (via UNICEF), into a rural development programme via the UNDP (CARERE), and into support for demining via the national Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC). At the Consultative Group (CG) Meeting in Tokyo in 1999, Sweden joined most other donors in praising the Government's policies and ambitions. Sida viewed 1999–2001 as a test period for future broadening and deepening of cooperation with a possible move towards more direct and bilateral cooperation (Sida 1999:26).

During this period the perspective definitively changed toward long-term institution building and more integration of democracy and human rights into the projects and programmes. An important position for the future was the assessment of the elections as relatively free and fair. This, together with the positive economic trends and the transition to a market economy, led to the conclusion that pre-conditions existed for the construction of a democratic society based on the rule of law (Regeringen 1998).

Support for gender equality was not mentioned in the context of constructing a democratic society. In the first country strategy (1997–1998), women were noticed as one 'group' which was largely excluded from the democratic decision-making processes. The strategy for 1999–2001 mentioned the specific situation of women after the Khmer Rouge regime and also the inequality in terms of school attendance and literacy, but no programme for gender equality was included (Regeringen 1998:5).

2002–2007: The strategy for 2002–06 (extended to 2007) described the situation in Cambodia by then as characterised by relative stability and development, after three decades of civil war and violence. The strategy was however very cautious and stated that Swedish cooperation should continue to be channelled primarily through the UN system (Regeringskansliet 2001).

A major change during 2002–2003 was that the Cambodian Government (with substantial input from donors) formulated a national development plan and eventually a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) which was a condition for support by the IMF and the World Bank. The Government also presented a Governance Action Plan (GAP). These strategies and plans were assessed as improved conditions for closer cooperation with the Government. Another important factor was the commune elections in 2002 and the creation of a system of local government which allowed for the possibility of integrating the ongoing support for decentralisation into the Government's programme.

Overall, the 2002–2006 strategy was quite open in considering options for future cooperation. Decisions depended on the 'political will' in the area of democratic governance, with contradictory signals from the Cambodian Government. The Swedish strategy included promoting cooperation between the Government and civil society. The possibility of contributing direct support to the state sector was also an option to be considered. In the 2002–2006 strategy, women were again mentioned as an example of a 'vulnerable group' (Regeringskansliet 2001:5).

In 2006, the Swedish social democratic Government was replaced by a conservative/liberal Government which started a process of concentrating Swedish aid to fewer countries. Cambodia was the only country selected in South East Asia (Proposition 2007/08:1).

2008–2011: A new country strategy was decided for 2008–10 (Government Offices 2008), and subsequently prolonged to 2011. This country strategy related more than previous strategies to Cambodia's own development strategy, while at the same time being more selective in the areas that would be supported: democratic governance, rule of law, human rights and primary education. A number of facts about women's status were mentioned in the background analysis but nothing was said about how Sida would deal with these facts.

It was concluded that there had been no developments in a clearly positive direction for democracy and human rights during the previous strategy period (2002–2007). The new country strategy was

nevertheless rather optimistic about the Government's National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) for 2006–2010, which was assessed as being a good base to build on. There was a clear vision of long-term Swedish development cooperation, based on closer cooperation with the Government and a more active role for Sweden in donor coordination. The traditional modality, to channel aid via multilateral donors, was questioned for the first time and it was stated that Sida should keep the issue of forms of financing on the agenda.

In this strategy period, Swedish policy was strongly influenced by the aid effectiveness agenda. Sida was the lead donor for decentralisation support, and Swedish support for decentralisation reached its highest level in 2009–2011 (Figure 5), with support partially provided as programme support to the communes (via the Commune/Sangkat Fund), channelled through the UNDP. Sweden was also active in preparing for general decentralisation programme support to the Government, and an agreement for such a mechanism was reached (Memorandum 2011). Sweden however became one of only a few donors to apply it. In 2008, Sweden joined with a group of donors in supporting the Government's public financial management reform programme, and took on a leading role in supporting the Government in its implementation of the aid effectiveness agenda.

2012–2013: In this strategy, there was a significant change in the interpretation of aid effectiveness (away from ownership and alignment and with more focus on accountability and results management). The view of the decentralisation process became more critical, identifying a risk that the decentralisation reform might counteract the development of a pluralistic political system (Government Offices 2012).

It was concluded that because Sweden was regarded as an actor without its own geopolitical interest in Cambodia, Sweden had good opportunities to influence Cambodian actors including in 'difficult' areas. Support for cooperation between the state and enterprises, in order to increase the relevance of education and the employability of students, was seen as a growing special role of Swedish cooperation. It was stated that Swedish cooperation should focus

on supporting potential agents of change in public institutions, civil society, the private sector and education and research. Women and young people were particular target groups. Gender equality and environmentally sustainable development were mentioned as thematic issues for the cooperation (Government Offices 2012:1).

2014–2017: The strategy for 2014–2018 followed the new results format introduced by the Swedish Government in 2013 (Government Offices of Sweden 2014). It was based on the formulation of expected results, but included little about how the support should be implemented regarding for instance dialogue and forms of cooperation. The ongoing cooperation was assessed as being still relevant, and no strategic changes were included. After the Cambodian election in 2013, Sida assessed that the scope for reforms within public administration had increased (Sida 2014:3).

The strategy stated that activities should be part of the joint EU 2014–2018 strategy for Cambodia (European Development Partners 2014). This implied a big change: for the first time Swedish aid became part of a multi-donor country strategy. The Swedish contribution is specifically linked to the EU context. It was stated that “Sweden has a special role to play in promoting openness, accountability and equal rights and opportunities for all, not least for women. This, together with Sweden’s strong presence in the field of gender equality, constitutes clear added value that Sweden can bring to Cambodia and in the context of the EU’s joint programming”(Government Offices of Sweden 2014:3).

The EU strategy was aligned with the Government’s Rectangular Strategy Phase III and the NSDP 2014–2018. In the EU strategy, the shared values regarding democracy and humans rights between the Cambodian Government and the European partners are underlined. These included space for vibrant participation by civil society in national development policies and programmes.

## 5.2 The Swedish role in promoting democracy and human rights in Cambodia

A key question for our study is whether Sweden has played a special role in donor assistance for D/HR in Cambodia. In this section we discuss this in relation to three factors: *understanding* of the Cambodian context/system, *dialogue and conditionality* and *selection and design of programmes*.

To *understand the context*, the decision by Sweden to start a long-term cooperation with Cambodia was based on substantial analysis (in particular Vickery and Amer 1995). During the period 1997–2007 the cooperation was further backed up by annual country reports and/or country analyses of the Cambodian context and the role of Swedish aid. These analytical reports were based on research studies on the economic and social situation (e.g. by CDRI). There was no D/HR officer based in Phnom Penh, but the office was supported by a regional D/HR adviser at the Swedish embassy in Bangkok. In 2001 Sida contracted a Sida Advisory Team (SAT)<sup>10</sup> in relation to Sida's work on democratic governance in Cambodia. This team undertook eight missions during 2001–2005 and their reports included substantial analytical work regarding D/HR in Cambodia.

In 2008 the office in Phnom Penh received full delegation. It was extended by one D/HR officer and became more integrated into the overall Sida system. The country reports were replaced by strategy reports which were aimed mainly at portfolio management with a focus on results-based management and budget utilisation. The Sida team drafted the political reports for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), and development cooperation on D/HR became more integrated into Swedish foreign policy. One example of this was the introduction of a bilateral dialogue on D/HR between Sweden and Cambodia in 2009, carried out by a specially

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<sup>10</sup> SPM Consultants. Sida also contracted advisory teams for decentralisation and education.

assigned Human Rights (HR) Ambassador from the MFA in Stockholm (see further below).

When the Sida office in Phnom Penh was upgraded to an Embassy in 2010, this created improved conditions for cooperation between Sida and the MFA in Cambodia. The Embassy played the major role in preparing the country strategy to follow from 2012 onwards (Sveriges Ambassad 2010). Sweden had by then become the bilateral donor that had most consistently supported democratic development, based on a partnership approach. An increased emphasis on D/HR was proposed and, based on several studies (e.g. Kim and Öjendal 2011), the decentralisation reform was singled out as the most important entry point, by creating conditions for building democracy from below, through transfer of power to the commune level. The MFA however concluded that because “the reform may counteract the development of a pluralistic political system... Swedish support will decrease during the strategy period” (Government Offices of Sweden 2012:10).

Results-based management (RBM) was introduced as a basic tool for Swedish development cooperation in 2012–2016 (Vähämäki 2017: ch. 7). This influenced the processes at all levels. The country strategies were transformed into ‘result strategies’ and Sida introduced a new system for ‘contribution management’. It has been concluded by many researchers that this has had a number of negative effects (e.g. Shutt 2016). Important implications were the risks of less focus on analysing the broader context, and thus less understanding of conditions for change with incentives for a ‘blueprint’ approach, working against innovative and counterfactual thinking.

An ensuing question of importance is whether the understanding of the situation has been used in any particular way in development cooperation. Sweden has given high priority to *dialogue*, but has rarely used conditionality regarding D/HR. Many issues have been identified as ‘dialogue issues’, although it is not always clear how these have been pursued. Sweden has participated in the general dialogue between donors and the Government but has mainly relied on other donors (the EU, the UNDP, the World Bank, etc.) in these.

The first HR dialogue by the MFA HR Ambassador took place in February 2009 and focused on the land issue which was one of the greatest HR problems in Cambodia. Later dialogues have focused on other specific issues, many of which were directly related to Swedish development cooperation, such as the role of CSOs, access to information, gender equality and labour rights. In 2016, the dialogue took place in Sweden and included a broad range of issues and study visits to Swedish institutions.

In recent years, Sweden has become increasingly active in dialogue within the EU, and Sweden has joined the EU delegation in dialogue and cooperation with the Government, especially regarding decentralisation, education and public financial management. Dialogue has thus been connected to EU budget support and conditionality in these areas. A special case is the joint EU-Sida support for public financial management through the Partnership for Accountability and Transparency 2016–19 programme.

The *design* of Swedish support is one way in which Sweden may have played a special role compared to other donors. Sweden has been more open to providing programme/core support, and thus to avoiding specific conditions and procedures for support to both the Government and CSOs. Swedish has also provided long-term support. In its support for decentralisation, education and civil society Sweden/Sida has continued to cooperate with the same partners (both recipients and other donors) for more than 20 years. Sweden/Sida has also differed from other donors through more decentralised decision-making which has given the local mission substantial flexibility in designing the country programme.

The *selection of programmes and partners* for long-term support is probably the most important way in which Sweden has been able to influence relations and create opportunities for change. Sweden's long-term support for education, decentralisation and civil society is further analysed in the three 'case studies' (chapter 6).

### **5.3 Comparing the Cambodian and Swedish perceptions of democracy and human rights**

During the study period, 1997–2017, the assessment of the political situation in Cambodia, as expressed in several country strategies, has been rather negative concluding that there has been no progress regarding D/HR. Sweden has always belonged to the ‘Western’ donors, although this has not been a homogeneous group, and has shared the belief in democratic elections as a condition for democratisation. Elections have been assessed as being relatively free and fair (based on the assessments by the UNDP and the EU), and even if the assessments have been more critical since 2008, the official Cambodian system has not been questioned by Sweden. The basic assumption has been that there were still democratic actors and processes within the Government (Sida 2018).

In the strategy report for 2017 Sida assessed that in elections from 2013 to 2017 there was a positive movement towards increased openness and improved governance (Sida 2018). After the events of 2017, Sweden decided to make some adjustments to its development cooperation, but there was only one major change: ending all support for decentralisation reform. Sida clearly expressed that apart from this, the programme remained relevant (Sida 2018).

Sweden has viewed the Cambodian policies and strategies as being basically sound and based on the liberal democracy model of the Paris Agreement and the Constitution. Some risk factors have been identified but on the whole it has been assumed that continued foreign assistance can support development towards D/HR. Economic development has been assessed as being positive and Sweden has viewed the national strategies and plans (rectangular strategies, national development plans, national programme for sub-national democratic development, public financial management plan, education sector strategies, etc.) as useful frameworks for Swedish development cooperation. The main risks have been identified as weak capacity, lack of political will, corruption and the weak judicial system. All country strategies, and underlying reports

and evaluations, have however concluded that the overall results of Swedish development cooperation have been positive.

Sweden, like other Western donors, has implicitly assumed that the Cambodian Government shared Sweden's (and other Western donors') view of D/HR. Consequently, weak capacity has been viewed as the major problem, and reforms and institution-building as effective means of support. The identification of 'political will' as a risk factor is based on the same assumption. Corruption, which has always been seen as a major problem, has been regarded as a weakness in the system, while it could also have been seen as a fundamental part of the system (Hughes 2010).

As for human rights, Sweden, as a donor to Cambodia, prioritises civil and political rights highly. The Cambodian Government's view is that, in Cambodia's current situation, the highest priority must be given to peace, stability, economic development and social development. This has been made clear in a recent paper shared with donors (Kingdom of Cambodia 2018). In discussions as part of this study, we were consistently told by Government officials and other observers that D/HR has been a key objective in Cambodian policies and strategies since the 1990s, and remains so. D/HR is however seen as a long-term process which must be developed from within, and it was emphasised that Western donors must understand the need for consensus-building. Elections and a multi-party system are regarded as elements, but state-building is seen as more important and too much democracy with a weak state is seen as dangerous.

This recently expressed view of the Government can however be contrasted with many statements by Hun Sen, in particular before around 2005. For instance, in his opening speech at the Tokyo 1999 CG Meeting for Cambodia it was stressed by the Prime Minister that the Royal Government of Cambodia "has irrevocably adopted a pluralist democracy as the only way ahead. A rule of law with equality of opportunities and redress to all will be ensured." He furthermore stressed that the Government's agenda "comprehensively covers protection of human rights in all aspects as internationally understood and practised, both with regard to political and economic rights" (Sida 1999, p. 14).

The changing views on democratisation are paralleled by changes in views on the role of foreign (Western) donors. While in 1999 donors' 'constructive criticism' was welcomed, the tune changed in 2001, and a turning point came in 2005 in a speech by the Prime Minister when he said that the government of a sovereign country was under pressure from donor countries (Ear 2009). Today it is stated that there are "great difficulties that Cambodia has to put up to maintain peace and advance its development in the face of constant foreign interferences that inflexibly insist on changes towards a 'pure and perfect democracy' that exists only in theory" (Kingdom of Cambodia 2018).

It can be debated whether the Cambodian leaders fully shared the basic elements in the Paris Peace Accord and in the 1993 Constitution, or whether they already had another vision at that time of how to implement the post-conflict reconstruction. There is however agreement among most, if not all, observers that there has in practice been limited implementation of a liberal democracy since 1991. One conclusion is that there has not been a democratisation in the form of a linear 'transition', but rather that the introduction of some democratic elements into a traditional system based on patronage has created a 'hybrid democracy' (Lilja and Öjendal 2009:297).

## 6. Case Studies

Critical junctures (CJs) can be defined as points in time/shorter periods when institutions are particularly open to change, in contrast with other periods when development is more ‘path dependent’.<sup>11</sup> These CJs can be caused by one or more specific events. We have identified four such CJs over the 20-year study period, defined primarily based on the Cambodian political economy framework, including the general role of international donors (see Box 1). We analyse how these changed Cambodian institutions have affected development cooperation and interacted with Swedish aid in three ‘cases’: decentralisation, education and civil society.

**Box 1: Critical junctures for development assistance to Cambodia**

Period/critical juncture	Justification
1997–1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consolidation of CPP power at national level</li> <li>- Western donors start providing more long-term support</li> <li>- The RGC starts pursuing Western-influenced reforms</li> </ul>
2001–2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commune/Sangkat elections provided opportunities for alternative power structures and democratisation at local level</li> <li>- More donors opting for direct support to the RGC, based on perceived stability and will to reform</li> </ul>
2008–2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CPP winning majority in parliament for the first time</li> <li>- Aid Effectiveness Agenda given high priority</li> <li>- The RGC’s ten-year plan for decentralisation including all levels</li> <li>- Donors shifting focus from elections and HR to broader democratic governance and support for national reform programmes</li> </ul>
2013–2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CPP legitimacy crisis after 2013 election</li> <li>- Shrinking political space</li> <li>- Dissolution of the CNRP in 2017; 2018 national election therefore held without the opposition party</li> </ul>

Under a parallel structure, and with the same/similar CJs, each case is presented and analysed on its own terms. They are all introduced

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<sup>11</sup> See Cappocia and Kelemen (2007) for an analysis of the critical juncture concept.

with definitions and a discussion of the respective case area's possible contribution to democracy, followed by an overview of the field in Cambodia and a review of the nature of Swedish engagement. After this follows an empirical presentation of the four CJs aiming to analyse in some detail the Swedish value added for democracy and human rights. Each case study ends with conclusions.

In order to understand the influence and added value of Swedish aid, we trace the key processes leading up to each of the four critical junctures, the results and the Swedish involvement in the processes that determined outcomes. Each process is traced within the constraints of the specific political economy context of Cambodia surrounding each of the four critical junctures.

At the end of each case, conclusions are drawn in three consecutive steps, starting with an analysis of the evolution within the case/sector, the sector's significance for overall democratisation and the Swedish value added in this development. This analysis of the cases provide the basis for a cross-case analysis in chapter 7. Eventually, conclusions are drawn regarding Sweden's contribution to democracy and human rights through support for decentralisation, education and civil society during the period 1997–2017.

## **6.1 Decentralisation and democratic development in Cambodia**

Decentralisation has been named a 'quiet revolution' (Campbell 2005) in the wake of, and being a part of, the third wave of democratisation and as such is deeply steeped in the idea of democracy. However, it takes on many different forms and shapes, especially in a context of both reconstruction and democratisation, such as Cambodia, where neither local elections nor participatory processes have been pursued historically. The decentralisation and deconcentration process in Cambodia is in fact many different creatures in a common field, and as such is not easily defined.

### 6.1.1 Decentralisation and democratisation

Decentralisation refers to a process where state power is formally transferred from a central level to a more local level and where the local political institution is downwardly accountable according to a legal framework. The commonly added ‘democratic’ prefix implies that the composition of these local political institutions is pursued in a democratic framework (such as multiparty elections of a free and fair nature). Deconcentration refers to a process where state power is delegated to a lower level in the system, but where accountability may primarily be upwards or horizontal (Ribot 2002). The establishment of commune councils as in CJ2 below is an example of the former, whereas the ‘Organic Law’ in CJ3 below resembles the latter.

Under the right circumstances, placing decision-making closer to citizens and offering a higher degree of participation generates a higher degree of accountability from local politicians (Crock and Manor 1998; Blair 2000; Agrawal and Ribot 1999) and a higher degree of responsiveness to citizens’ needs and ambitions, including development processes (Grindle 2007; Öjendal and Dellnäs 2013; cf. Kim 2013). It is also commonly maintained that democratic decentralisation promotes political awareness and education among citizens as a whole. The prevalence of local political elections institutionalises these features and adds a concrete democratic dimension.

A decentralisation and deconcentration (D&D) process has the potential to contribute to the democratisation of a society in several ways. It can contribute to procedural democracy *inter alia* through the establishment of formalised participatory structures, a system of local elections and a law on the reformation of the sub-national authorities. It can contribute to a substantive democracy through grounding democracy more deeply and allowing processes of inclusion and development to be a part of ‘democracy’. It may contribute to participatory democracy through the mobilisation of people for local decision-making, drawing on political education of the grassroots and on the dynamics of an invigorated local civil society, which will eventually permeate society and crystallise

democratic culture. It should, however, also be noted that decentralisation may allow for elite capture and social control for political purposes, subduing the democratic potential dimensions of the process.

Swedish support for D&D in Cambodia started as a participatory and inclusive rural development programme with very thin formal institutions, and with an interest in supporting institutional reconstruction. The aim was to re-connect the local state with local citizens, create (local) state legitimacy and work as an inclusive and conciliatory mechanism, while at the same time channelling development aid to local areas in order to provide small-scale infrastructure interventions. In its initial phase it contributed primarily to a *participatory idea of democracy*, while still working on *substantive and development* oriented issues. With the formal decentralisation law and the law on commune elections, the reform conformed increasingly to a regular model of *liberal democracy*, and less to a *substantive* and/or *participatory democracy*.

### **6.1.2 Decentralisation in Cambodia – overview and evolution**

The 1992/93 UN intervention and the establishment of the post-war political order in Cambodia were formative for the subsequent democratisation attempts. Although local democracy was not mentioned in the peace agreement (United Nations 1991), the hasty return of external refugees in 1992/93 required financial support and political presence at a local level, hence interaction with local authorities. From a modest beginning, a programme for local rural support (CAREERE1) transformed into CAREERE2 and into a local governance programme named ‘Seila’ (see below), and gradually into a full reform of democratic decentralisation and further reformation of the sub-national administration (SNA).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>The earlier phases of decentralisation are described in e.g. Evans 2000; UNDP/UNOPS 2001; Rudengren and Öjendal 2002; McAndrew 2004; Mansfield and MacLeod; 2004; Manor 2008; Öjendal 2005; Kim 2012; Öjendal

By 1996, when the acute phase of repatriation had been taken care of, presence at a local level was still seen as necessary (Regeringen 1998). A decision was taken to formalise and scale up the hitherto ad hoc emergency aid. A vision inspired by the UNCDF (tested elsewhere) and presented by consultants won approval from Sida, the DFID and the UNDP, and political support from the RGC. The initiative was scaled up to a rural development programme with distinct ambitions to improve local governance. Sweden chose to finance it as a rural development programme aiming at local institutional development for enhanced bottom-up influence, to be ‘safe’ (Regeringen 1996:7). Somewhat later it was viewed as “a driver for democracy” in the Swedish strategy (Regeringen 1998: 15). The new Government-owned programme, set to gradually expand to national level, was named ‘Seila’ – ‘Foundation in stone’ – aiming to give the impression of building a base for a greater evolution. It was supported by the donor programme CARERE2.

This 1996 Seila local governance programme grew quickly towards national coverage, and deepened towards a full institutional reform of decentralisation. In 2001, the laws on local elections and on decentralisation were accepted by the Parliament, representing the start of the formal system of local democracy (building on seven years of participatory and democratic practices pursued under CARERE1, CARERE and Seila). It was concretely launched in 2002 when the first nationwide elections for commune councils were held. This was a milestone in democratic development in Cambodia since they were the first proper democratic local elections ever held in the Kingdom and represented a considerable deepening of the existing democratic system (COMFREL 2007). It was generally

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and Kim 2006; COMFREL 2007; Kingdom of Cambodia 2007 and Romero 2013. These generally emphasise the somewhat surprising success of the intervention. There are also more critical voices from this period, e.g. Turner and Blunt, 2005, especially questioning the sustainability of the reform and to what extent it actually fits Cambodia. In its later phases more sceptical reports appear, including Öjendal and Ou 2013; 2015; Eng 2014, Ph D Diss; Smoke 2013; Eng and Ear 2016. These typically criticise the shallow participation, the lack of accountability and the CPP’s ability to control the local level through soft power, or simply the slow progress.

considered a success at the time due to its clean elections, high participation, (aims at) gender equality, and the fact that democracy was for the first time experienced directly and concretely by the majority of the population in a way national elections had not been. In addition, a vast number of collective and small-scale development projects found their way to the local level under these auspices, with considerable processual, attitudinal, and developmental effects (IRI 2008; 2013; COMFREL 2007; Öjendal and Kim 2013).

However, a range of critical perspectives were also aired in the process (e.g. Turner and Blunt 2005; Eng 2014). The majority of councils were led by the CPP and the process could be seen as a legitimisation of the regime of the dominant party. Moreover, it was occasionally argued that despite the clean elections, the participatory accountability processes were not as deep as was expected. Instead, critics said, it was a more or less orchestrated elite capture of local politics. Finally, there were concerns that the process was neither culturally acceptable nor politically sustainable, and did not involve a very deep level of accountability (Eng and Ear 2016).

The system of local elections deepened and the democratic space at the local level widened during four consecutive elections. The commune councils had for over a decade done a fairly good job overall of including people and managing development interventions in a transparent manner. Citizens were generally appreciative of and positive towards the work of the commune councils, and the political opposition viewed the process of gradually deepening democracy at the local level with confidence (Öjendal and Kim 2013; Öjendal and Ou 2015). After the 2017 election, the CNRP controlled 489 communes (and the CPP controlled 1 156 communes).

The system of elections for commune councils was the first and most efficiently pursued formal reform of local governance, and the one with the deepest democratic traits. The process was expanding, aiming to spread the democratic system to district and province levels, although with indirect elections to these councils. This was formalised in the Organic Law promulgated in 2009, setting up a system of district and province councils, elected by the commune councillors. While the local governance system established at

commune level was rather swiftly introduced and well received overall, the political reform of the districts and provinces under the Organic Law were far more difficult to pursue, due to their scale, their complexity and political resistance (Smoke 2013).

Even after the Organic Law was put in place in 2009, the evolution of the reform was painstakingly slow, and so was international funding. However, after a 2011–2013 gap where Sida was the only external supporter to SNDD (Sub-National Democratic Decentralisation), the EU and the SDC (Switzerland) joined and provided support from 2013 to 2017 (Larsson and Eng 2017). There were also other significant donors, such as the ADB, which had no interest in the democratic components of the reform. With this evolution in the donor community, the focus gradually slid towards service delivery and functional reassignment at the expense of more ‘pure’ democratic ambitions (which Sweden had advocated and pursued). Due to the democratic collapse on national level in the autumn of 2017, funding was withdrawn.

Although the first commune election in 2002 was the ‘revolution’, the local election in June 2017 was the real breakthrough for local democracy in Cambodia in terms of local power-sharing. In spite of an electoral system favouring the larger ruling CPP, the opposition (CNRP) made an excellent result, which eventually would have made a solid dent on the power monopoly of the CPP at district and province levels. This was a distinct indication that democratic space had opened up with the decentralisation process. However, this could be seen as ‘too good’ since it alerted the CPP to the fact that it might lose the subsequent national election in 2018; it is now widely believed (several interviews, November 2017) that the progression of the opposition at commune level in 2017 was the trigger for the dissolution of the CNRP in November later that year. Hence the local democracy had become so substantial that it threatened the power monopoly of the dominant party. After 17 November 2017, CNRP councillors lost their seats on the commune councils which in essence meant that the local political system returned to a single-party structure. The commune council as an institution formally remains in place with its

democratic structure, and the CPP argues that nothing in the system has changed except the banning of the CNRP.

### 6.1.3 Swedish engagement in decentralisation in Cambodia

A summary of key messages on decentralisation from Swedish country strategies for development cooperation with Cambodia is shown in Box 2.

**Box 2: Decentralisation in Swedish country strategies 1996–2017**

Period	Key messages from Swedish country strategies
1997–1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued support for CAREERE/Seila was one of three sub-goals under rural development to i) contribute to improved conditions for agricultural production, and ii) strengthen local level institutions for decision-making regarding resource allocation.</li> </ul>
1999–2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CAREERE/Seila is viewed as rural development but is also viewed as a driver for democracy.</li> <li>- Support is to be given to i) investments in infrastructure for rural development, and ii) institutional development for enhanced citizens' influence in local decision-making, especially in cooperation with the UNDP/CAREERE.</li> <li>- There shall be a particular focus on women's participation in decision-making.</li> </ul>
2002–2006 (extended to 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seila is viewed as contributing to combating rural poverty and to democratic governance.</li> <li>- Important considerations for further policy and methodological development within the Seila programme include poverty issues, gender equality, popular participation and sustainable development.</li> <li>- The ongoing process of decentralisation and the upcoming commune elections are both seen as strategically important for strengthening democracy in Cambodia.</li> </ul>
2008–2010 (extended to 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Democratic governance objective: A decentralised public administration with greater capacity to satisfy the rights of poor women and men living in rural areas.</li> <li>- Establish and implement appropriate structures and forms for the reform programme for decentralisation with the aim of reaching vulnerable and poor women and men in rural areas.</li> <li>- Work to strengthen and improve the current decentralisation reform and the establishment of an efficient and competent public</li> </ul>

2012–2013	<p>administration for local development with a particular emphasis on rural areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The focus shifts away from decentralisation and towards more general support of democratising public administration.</li> <li>- Increased knowledge within elected assemblies and public administration at central and local levels with regard to civil rights and liberties and principles of rule of law, and strengthened institutional mechanisms capable of ensuring that these are observed.</li> <li>- Greater democratic influence and public accountability at local level through a successful decentralisation process.</li> <li>- Increased transparency and efficiency in public administration, particularly with respect to financial management systems.</li> </ul>
2014–2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased democratic influence and greater accountability for citizens at local level.</li> <li>- Improved local autonomy.</li> <li>- Improved knowledge of human rights, gender equality and the principles of the rule of law among citizens and in the public sector.</li> </ul>

As we have seen, Swedish support for democracy in Cambodia dates back to the early 1990s. In the process of transforming CAREERE 1 into CAREERE 2 in 1996/97, as well as in the subsequent development into Seila, including a rapid expansion and budget increase, Sida was one of three major donors (the UNDP and the DFID were the other two, with GTZ joining at a later stage). For this period, Swedish support to this sector was almost entirely focused on CAREERE2, but also aimed to address ‘rural development’ and ‘peace’ (Regeringen 1998:6–7). In addition to considerable funding, Sida (and the DFID) was engaged to work proactively on visions and designs for where to go and what to do with a future CAREERE2. The funding was channelled through multilateral organisations, administered by UNOPS under the auspices of the UNDP. This was the preferred arrangement until basket funding was agreed upon among donors much later on. Sweden co-financed Seila/decentralisation with the ADB for a period, despite having different democratic ambitions and reporting systems and few synergies. It may in hindsight actually have been the best available solution (relieving the RGC of having to swallow the burden of adaption in connection with differing donor

preferences), ‘allowing’ the ADB to focus on infrastructure and Sweden on local democratisation, participation and process.

During the period 1998–2000, Swedish support to this sector continued to go almost entirely to CAREERE2, which was seen as a main reason why Cambodia was heading towards local elections (Regeringen 2001:9–10). By 2001, due to the perceived success of Seila and the advanced and concrete plans on democratic decentralisation – including planned elections on commune level – the core donor group of Sida, the DFID and the UNDP had widened. However, many (like the World Bank, UNICEF and the ADB) were primarily interested in certain non-political sectors and certain technical activities within the wider decentralisation process (hence limited as democracy support), making Sweden’s and the DFID’s contributions all the more important for democratic advancement (CAREERE2 Director 2001). Following the above analysis of Swedish aid (chapter 5), it was natural to be interested in a substantive and participatory form of democratisation in an early phase. Following the evolution of the Swedish policy for democracy aid for the early years of the millennium, the contribution became increasingly focused on more formal aspects of democratisation (i.e. the institutional and formal aspects of democratic decentralisation).

The early 2000s marked the peak of international interest in supporting democratic decentralisation in Cambodia (Kingdom of Cambodia 2007). By 2008/9 funding and international enthusiasm had started to shrink, reinforced by slow and only semi-credible reforms of the province and district administrations (Particip 2016; cf. Larsson and Eng 2017). Swedish support was channelled through the UNDP until 2008 and generally supported the implementation of the government programme Seila. It should be noted that, at this point, the RGC was less receptive to advice compared to the 1990s/early 2000s, and the ‘partnership policy’ was less conducive to proactive engagement (Sida representative, personal communication 2008). During the period 2008–2011, Sida aimed at continued engagement in the D&D process, but gradually shifted its interest towards NP-SNDD and central level institution-building, and away from the commune level and more concrete interventions.

In 2011, Sida was the only donor providing core support for the ten-year roadmap of further reform work outlined in the National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD). Other donors provided support for related and supporting activities. Representatives from both the RGC and the NP-SNDD itself strongly expressed the centrality of Sweden remaining a core donor for this programme (several interviews carried out in Phnom Penh in 2017). Sweden was however increasingly hesitant about the efficiency of this support and to what ends it was leading, but maintained its support albeit at gradually shrinking levels (Government Offices of Sweden 2012:5). Subsequently in 2013, the Swiss and the EU joined Sida in supporting the NP-SNDD. This ‘troika’ harmonised tightly, and cooperated successfully around the development plan for NP-SNDD up until the autumn of 2017, although Swedish ambitions and engagement to support democracy through decentralisation waned (Government Offices of Sweden 2014). The democratic collapse at national level in November 2017 created turmoil around donor support and the future of the programme.

#### **6.1.4 Critical junctures – tracing processes and assessing value added**

In order to understand the added value of Swedish aid, we trace the key processes leading up to the critical junctures and the Swedish involvement in the processes that determined the outcome. Each critical juncture is scrutinised under the following headings: *Defining the CJ*, *Tracing the process towards the CJ*, *Tracing the results of the CJ* and *Assessing the value added from Swedish aid*.

*Critical juncture 1 – Transforming emergency aid to sustainable democracy support*

*Defining the CJ:* The first critical juncture is in 1997 when CAREER1 was transformed into CAREER2 and where Seila was created from the Government’s side (Rudengren and Öjendal 2002). This is critical for two reasons. Firstly, it was when the ‘emergency aid’ of CAREER1 was transformed into a sustainable and institution-

building programme of CAREERE2/Seila where democratic, inclusive and participatory processes were introduced and demanded. It thereby made use of a huge amount of unique experience and knowledge on local dynamics from the preceding years in CAREERE1 (knowledge which at the time was scarce and valuable). Secondly, this was a central step on the trajectory towards Seila and the subsequent reform of full-scale democratic decentralisation; at stake here was whether democratic decentralisation would take place in the foreseeable future with democratic content (Rudengren and Öjendal 2002).

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* There were primarily three different international interests in this process.<sup>13</sup> The first was the resources and prior engagement of the UNDP, included in CAREERE1 due to massive funds being accumulated during the long embargo and released after the peace agreement, and due to the UN system's integration into the implementation of the peace agreement. In reality, the UNDP had little choice but to find a way to continue CAREERE1 due to the need for a local governance portfolio, due to the imperative of spending funds available for Cambodia in this field, and due to the low absorption capacity in Cambodia leaving no realistic alternative. In spite of this, the UNDP's interest in design, revenue-raising and negotiations with the RGC was limited. This may have been because of the fragmented and volatile nature of transforming CAREERE1 into CAREERE2, and because of the risks involved in working in the rural areas of Cambodia at the time (personal communication, UNDP representative, 1998 cf. Rudengren and Öjendal 2002).

The two engaged bilateral donors who eventually provided funding were Sweden and the UK (the UK somewhat later). They had similar interests and a similar understanding of the situation, which included the need to move 'beyond' national interventions, to support/repair the rural society and to deepen democracy

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<sup>13</sup> Notably, up until 1997, CAREERE 1-2 operated without an agreement with central government, viewing province authorities as their counterparts. Although some influential policymakers in the RGC were highly engaged in its early stage, the initiative passed under the radar and eluded central government interests for a long time. With Seila, towards the end of 1997, an agreement was finally struck with the RGC.

(Regeringen 1996). In the process leading up to the decision to move to CAREERE2/Seila, Sweden was particularly keen and 'bold'. The situation was anything but clear. It included reforming a massive emergency aid project CAREERE1 with massive difficulties in terms of establishing sustainability, working with a divided government with a questionable urge to democratise, manoeuvring a fragmented (not to say confused) donor community, and addressing issues in the deeply broken rural society. "We are not sure what kind of creature this really is, but it seems like it could be very right for Cambodia at this moment in time" (Sida representative 1996, personal communication).

The situation in Cambodia at this time was not 'normal'. It was very much a post-conflict country with broken institutions, volatile politics and endless needs in terms of poverty reduction and democratisation. In such a situation, there is typically scope for enterprising individuals to pursue their ambitions. In this case, there was input from and cooperation between the management of CAREERE1/2, key individuals at middle level in the Cambodian state administration, the UNCDF and key consultants constituting a core cluster in the drafting of Seila. Sida, and later the DFID, risked interacting with this loosely composed grouping, and was bold in supporting a programme which was neither pursued under a normal process nor prepared with all the regular 'securities'. Put differently, Sida realised, it seemed, that working in the particular political climate of Cambodia at the time required risk-taking, but also unusually thick preparatory research studies (several preparatory studies were commissioned) and ongoing monitoring (a special 'permanent' monitoring team was put together for constant feedback).

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* So, a broken but localised programme with valuable local experience received base funding from the UNDP, but needed further funding in order to realise the visions of the management's core cluster (including a selected number of individuals from the Cambodian counterparty). Sida believed in the vision and became a core funder of the move towards CAREERE2/Seila, and hence a key actor in the creation of the trajectory towards democratic decentralisation. This support

permitted the extension into a nationwide programme which became a blueprint for the subsequent democratic decentralisation. It was also the beginning of a phase where far more donors dared to put their faith in Seila and the move towards democratic decentralisation.

*Assessing the added value of Swedish aid at the CJ:* The funding that came from Sweden in the transition phases was probably decisive for the high ambition and bold design of CAREERE2/Seila (which in turn was key for the its future success and the progress towards democratic decentralisation, see below), as well as for the timing and the maintained momentum. It also gathered knowledge and experience that was beneficial for its own further engagement in the sector. Our assessment is that Swedish aid had added unusually direct and decisive value to the evolution of this sector in this particular phase. The situation was volatile and the visions for good development were in great need of a funder that would dare to take these risks.

### *Critical juncture 2 – Creating a reform of democratic decentralisation*

*Defining the CJ:* The second critical juncture comes in the period 1999–2001, when CAREERE2/Seila was expanded and developed into a full democratic decentralisation reform. This is critical for three reasons. Firstly, CAREERE2/Seila was a development programme that was extensive and successful, but it was far from evident that it would be scaled-up to national coverage and to a full political reform. Secondly, a reform of democratic decentralisation was a deeper democratic commitment from the Government side than before, and it was not clear to what extent this reform was desired by the Government, and if so, how. Thirdly, whereas CAREERE2/Seila was to a large extent driven by foreign donors (both funding and visions), this time the RGC had to be in the driver's seat and the process was thus at their pace and according to their design. Overcoming these three obstacles was a serious challenge.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This was covered in five consecutive reports by a Sida-commissioned 'permanent' monitoring team engaged solely for the purpose of monitoring this process (SPM 1–5).

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* A multitude of interests were involved around 1999 (in distinction to at the time of the creation of CAREERE2/Seila). The CPP-led Government wanted a reformed commune level where the development dimensions of CAREERE2/Seila could be expanded and where the positive climate of this intervention could be used for political purposes. The donor community was keen to continue, formalise and deepen the democratic nature of CAREERE2/Seila (Sweden/the DFID/the UNCDF), as well as opening it up as a national development financing mechanism for the rural areas (the World Bank, the UNDP, the ADB). Finally, there was also a more diffuse interest (but nevertheless a distinct pressure) from the SNAs to be included (for those not yet included in CAREERE2/Seila) and to receive more funds for local development (for those that had already benefited). Among these three interests there was obvious common ground.

The key obstacles were, on the one hand, to obtain funding for making national coverage sustainable and, on the other, to manoeuvre the politics of the reform. In the background and surrounding the process, a number of consultants were working closely with the donor community and the RGC, and were instrumental in pushing the reform. The DFID was pushing hard for a more local approach whereas Sida was more or less pleased with the suggestion of putting the focus on communes, commune councils and commune elections, and hence offered funding for the process after a thorough preparation phase. The donor community financed an international consultant who worked on the drafting of the two relevant laws, but he also worked close to the Government, reducing the influence of donors on the content of the reforms. When the draft law emerged it sufficiently satisfied all major interests including in terms of its democratic content. Both international 'democracy support' and international 'development aid' were in favour of the draft and came forward with funding and political approval; the CPP-led Government managed to introduce a strongly democratic local reform which nevertheless allowed them to control the outcome of local elections for the foreseeable future with mostly legitimate means (Öjendal 2005).

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* The result of this CJ could briefly be described as moving from a rural development programme to a

formal reform of democratic decentralisation. When the idea of ‘scaling up’ was first launched by the UNCDF in 1999, it was commonly seen as risky or even unrealistic. The ‘scaling up’ implied moving the emphasis from village to communes, politicising the intervention, sharply increasing funding demands and abandoning a hitherto (unexpectedly) effective formula. Initially, few in the donor community were keen on this move, typically seeing it as premature and too grand. Interestingly, the ones who initially pushed for this radically democratic reform were the UNCDF (who had experienced a similar process elsewhere) and the RGC (who saw an opportunity for funding and an avenue for regaining control over the local political arena). The RGC was also encouraged to act fairly towards its underlings since some areas had received a lot of support in recent years and others none. Soon, however, other donors followed suit in spite of imperfections in the drafted law.

Over the course of four years, a rural development/local governance programme moved from an emergency intervention to a full-scale democratic decentralisation reform. This happened due to three interacting processes: Firstly, there was a vision emanating with the UNCDF and a few bold individuals (including within the RGC). They saw this opportunity early on and influenced their respective constituencies. Secondly, the RGC needed this reform (for the reasons mentioned above). Within the RGC, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) pushed for this reform, seeing a way to regain lost control of the rural areas. Finally, donors were keen on deepened democratisation, being willing to take a risk and being knowledgeable enough to do so (from having been involved since CARERE1 but also due to the commitment to fact-finding through commissioning background and monitoring studies). As with CARERE1, these were primarily Sida, the DFID and the UNDP, the two former being the most active. There were others (like the ADB) engaged in the sector, but largely within technical matters (SPM 1997–2001: reports 1–5).

*Assessing the added value of Swedish aid at the CJ:* In this phase of the reform’s development, Sida and the DFID were unusually active in terms of their own knowledge-generation and funding, and were also unusually coordinated with a common value base. To some extent they pushed the UNDP ahead and put pressure on the RGC.

Other institutional donors like the World Bank and the ADB joined with earmarked money for particular parts of the decentralisation reform. Sida's value added (and the DFID's) is deemed high, building on both intellectual engagement and consistent funding, and also on their early commitment, putting pressure on other donors to join.

*Critical juncture 3 – Reforming and democratising the district and province levels*

*Defining the CJ:* The reform of the communes, creating local elections and multiparty councils in an authoritarian context, was a highly visionary and experimental process. Some enterprising individuals – both on the donor side and within the RGC – had a vision that this could be repeated for the district and province reform, as codified in the Organic Law. The formula from the commune process was to present a vision, win backing for this within the RGC and the donors, start the process with confidence and on a small scale, deliver results and convince key actors that this was the right path to take, and then scale up. However, by this time, and for these levels, the complexity had grown and the political stakes were far higher, creating a volatile process. At stake at this critical juncture is whether – starting with the Organic Law and the district elections in 2008/9 – this vision could be achieved at district level and thereby enhance democracy in the state administration.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* The decision to scale up the D&D to district and provincial levels was a painstaking one operating in an antagonistic climate with some very sceptical key actors and adverse interests. This included highly divided government agencies, opposition parties, NGOs and donors. These can be put into two opposing groups:<sup>15</sup> The first group were against the decision to expand and establish indirectly elected councils at district and provincial levels, underlining that such an initiative would undermine political independence and the accountability of the commune councils, hence becoming dependent on hierarchical and personal relationships. The second group, who eventually won the

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<sup>15</sup> There was also another grouping, mainly consisting of donors, that did not at all see the D&D process as a way forward for democratisation and development at all.

support of the government elite, justified the decision to scale up the D&D with the simple reason that it would be too costly to give the commune councils the capacity to provide services as there are too many of them. The district, in contrast, was as a suitable level of government to deliver administrative and public services.

The impetus to scale up the D&D from commune to district/provincial level also came at the point when major donors and the Government were discussing the future arrangements to replace Seila. Seizing the moment, the Secretariat of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (an interim national body responsible for policymaking on decentralisation) and the MoI Secretary of State demanded that a decentralisation programme “should not be about moving donor money, but must be a Cambodian product and owned by the Cambodian Government” (Prum Sokha’s lecture at Royal School of Administration, Phnom Penh, April 2005). From this point, a new decentralisation and donor support programme emerged, and the MoI took over leadership from the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF).

The Strategic Framework for Decentralisation and Deconcentration (drafted by donors’ consultants) was circulated and later adopted by the Government in 2005. The Framework suggested that the district and provincial councils would be indirectly elected by commune councils (Government of Cambodia 2005), and would be required to work for the communes. The framework was then translated into the Law on Administration and Management of Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts, and Khans, adopted in 2008. This Organic Law paved the way for the establishment of district and provincial councils and their boards of governors in May 2009 (UNDP 2010).

In 2007, with stronger national ownership, the Programme Support for Decentralisation and Deconcentration (PSDD) continued Seila’s legacy. This also resulted in the creation of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) as a national body chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior and consisting of senior ministers (UNDP 2010). This new PSDD provided some of the security and protection donors needed, and funding for D&D was secured for

the period 2007–2010. As in the previous phase only Sida, the DFID and the UNDP provided discretionary funding to the new programme. In 2010, a ten-year National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD) 2011–2019 was adopted, which provided a long-term plan for the new phase of decentralisation aiming to promote a deeper and more substantial transfer of power and resources to district level (Particip 2016). Hence, the district level became the focus of the Government’s new decentralisation agenda.

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* The main goal of the reform as articulated in the ten-year NP-SNDD was to restructure the district as the main level of government to deliver services while communes remained the lowest level tasked with channelling local demands upward. This allowed for an increased focus on service delivery and functional reassignment, possibly at the expense of ambitions of democratisation, serving interests that were less interested in democratisation. The major initiatives outlined in the NP-SNDD for the district have been extremely difficult to accomplish, hence value added is limited. The mid-term review of the first phase (2011–2013) implementation plan stated that: “The delays, notably those with regard to SNA financing, are to a large extent due to lack of ownership and lack of consensus amongst the identified implementing parties, whereby individual ministries can opt to ignore, or at least delay the implementation of the NP-SNDD.” (NCDD-S, 2012:73).

Line ministries considered the D&D reform to be a ‘political order’ with which they were forced to comply. Despite several interventions by the Prime Minister to get line ministries’ compliance, little progress has been made even for limited functions to be transferred (for instance urban waste and the maintenance of rural wells and rural roads). The MEF continued, in spite of the central political decree, to resist giving more autonomy and larger budget to districts. This lack of trust included implementing a rigid financial management system, impeding an efficient implementation of the reform. The accountability of commune councils to their constituents was undermined by the general lack of progress in the D&D reform that affected their ability to respond to local needs,

undermining the effect of the indirect province and district council elections (NCDD-S 2012; cf. Particip 2016). One of the distinct advancements, however, was on gender equality in the process where improvements were noted in terms of policy, technical expertise, women in decision-making and organisational culture (NCDD 2017).

*Assessing the added value of Swedish aid at the CJ:* Sweden/Sida was one of the consistent donors in terms of both funding and direct engagement in the process and its design. As such, Sweden was crucial for supporting the slow and vulnerable process towards the creation of the Organic Law, the (start of the) democratisation of the district and province levels, and the efforts to enhance the capacity of the districts and province level to deliver services locally. However, the process stalled and delivered only very limited democratic gains and minor service delivery enhancements (Smoke 2013). Hence, the Swedish value added to the process and the creation of the Organic Law was major, but the democratic effects from the Organic Law were small.

#### *Critical juncture 4 – Opposition is banned and commune councils become mono-party structures*

*Defining the critical juncture:* This CJ is dramatic, internal, and generally political with limited possibility for donors to add value. In November 2017, the opposition was banned which had a considerable impact on the D&D process, with the commune councils turning into mono-party structures. At stake at this CJ was the democratisation of district and province authorities, as well as the sustainability of the political pluralism in the D&D process. This led to a sharp defining moment in November 2017.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* After the shock electoral results in 2013, where the CPP lost 22 seats to the united opposition party CNRP, the Government attempted to address some of the D&D challenges discussed above. To improve service delivery, the Prime Minister ordered line ministries to transfer functions to communes and districts, but this order achieved little progress as ministries dragged their feet. To improve responsiveness, Prime Minister specifically suggested public forums where responsible officials from ministers down to commune chiefs could meet with the public

as mechanisms for criticism and getting close to the people. Public forums were actively implemented, but the responsiveness of the government ministries was weak. The EU, Switzerland and Sida were still supporting the D&D process and its plans, but this support had little effect on the overall political evolution.

The growing popular frustration with a lack of tangible and comprehensive reforms and the presence of a united opposition seemed to be the defining force in the 2017 commune elections, when the CNRP gained control of more than 25 per cent of the communes for the first time (Transparency International Cambodia 2017). The growing popularity of the opposition party and the diminished ability of CPP commune chiefs in mobilising votes would lead to clear challenges for the CPP in the 2018 national elections. The CPP/Government decided that the CNRP ‘had to’ be banned in late 2017 (interview with opposition representative November 2017).

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* There was a general sentiment that the reform was stalling and not delivering on democratic promises, doing little to generate popular approval. The outlawing of the opposition party in 2017, and the repression of the political civil society through legislation and intimidation, has had significant implications for D&D reform. Opposition councillors at all SNA levels were stripped of their positions, unless they became CPP councillors. Dual tactics of intimidation and favourable rents were used to persuade opposition councillors to take up CPP council positions, and a large number accepted the new positions. Those who remained loyal to the opposition lost their positions and were reported to be subject to surveillance and harassment if seen interacting with and mobilising local constituents for the CNRP. Local councillors have become increasingly occupied with managing local level political dissidents and now pay less attention to local level participatory processes. CSOs are unable to carry out their activities as cooperation with SNAs has turned sour after a series of crackdowns on CSOs. All of this took place at a time when technical support from provincial and central levels through the expensive system of advisors was dramatically reduced due to budget cuts from donors to NCDD-S. The implementation of the ten-year NP-

SNDD continues albeit on a more technical level and with limited funding.

*Assessing the added value of Swedish aid on the CJ:* Swedish aid had systematically supported the ongoing reform work in line with how it had been outlined by the RGC in the ten-year plan (see above CJ3), and in what seemed to be a slow but consistent implementation of the Organic Law from 2009. Swedish input during this period was important for the continuation and coherence of the process. The reform in this CJ itself however had little effect on the democratic practices in the sector or on the democratisation of the overall society. In addition, in this CJ it became obvious how difficult it was for the donors to add value to the outcome of the process – i.e. since it involved high politics and securitised stakes. Withdrawing and limiting aid in the aftermath of the crackdown was inevitable, but foreseeably inefficient. Swedish value added to democratisation was very limited in this CJ.

### **6.1.5 Conclusions**

Conclusions are drawn in three inter-related sequences: first, an analysis of the evolution within the sector in the chosen timeframe, second, an assessment of the sector's contribution to overall democratisation, and finally, a scrutiny of Swedish value added to sector evolution. Swedish value added to relevant features of democracy is summarised in Table 5, and thereafter carried over to the report's concluding chapter 7, together with similar summaries from the other two cases, for cross-case comparison and to synthesise findings.

#### *Analysing evolution in the sector*

Through the four critical junctures above, we have seen an area-based participatory rural development programme grow into a decentralisation reform and then into a major reform with distinct democratic features of a significant part of the state apparatus. The initial focus was on participation, inclusion and instilling bottom-up thinking. Funding was conditional on a certain participatory process where grassroots issues were to come to the fore, and where transparency and accountability were paramount (Rudengren and

Öjendal 2002; Kim 2013; World Bank 2012; 2013). This worked well and created both a (more) inclusive local governance and a better local development process. It evolved, primarily under pressure from donors and the local communes, into a full decentralisation reform, ultimately designed by the RGC. This extended and formalised the democratic features of the development programme, including local elections, multiparty councils and a formal autonomy from central level.

These two phases (CJ1 and CJ2) were generally seen as successful and have been validated by a vast number of quantitative and qualitative evaluations. They introduced developmental, democratic and participatory features not previously seen in rural Cambodia. In addition, the local civil society was encouraged to become empowered (including allowing human rights CSOs to operate), gender equality was encouraged and political awareness rose in the relatively free political climate locally. However, the process was far from perfect, with the CPP maintaining political control, and gender and human rights issues were half-heartedly supported with limited buy-in (although evolving organically by their own strength). Having said that, institutional development and political education/awareness within/from the process are undeniable, as is the developmental progress within/from the process.

The latter evolution of the reform (CJ3), dictated by the Organic Law, involved higher stakes and central level politics, where – in addition to the neo-patrimonial dynamics mentioned above – the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Economy and Finance had different agendas, and the line ministries protected their positions in the resource flow system. Hence powerful interests were blocking the process (Larsson and Eng 2017). In addition, this was a much more administratively complex undertaking, at times amounting to an entire overhaul of the political administration of the state machinery, making it technically difficult; this was especially the case after service delivery and functional reassignment came to the fore. The ‘method’ of ‘learning by doing’ (Rudengren and Öjendal 2002) was efficient and effective at commune level, but too weak at this higher level, and ultimately there was never a massive buy-in from the donor community (i.e. for the democratic aspects of this reform)

that could push the vague compromise that existed within the RGC. Efforts are still ongoing and benefits may materialise at a later stage, but probably with a focus on service delivery rather than democratisation. The fourth critical juncture implied a massive setback for local democracy, especially its formal aspects. In spite of this, in terms of substantial democratisation, developmental effects, popular expectations, general knowledge, political awareness and experience have been genuine and remain fundamental values and important aspects for future further democratisation.

#### *Analysing the sector's contribution to overall democratisation*

The democratic decentralisation process (as in CJ-CJ2) is one of the deepest aiming democratisation processes in post-war Cambodia. This statement however requires two important qualifications: Firstly, these processes could have been deeper and broader, with more significant results. That is, measures could have been implemented that forced a deeper form of public participation, and a process which engaged people in a broader sense could have been attempted. Secondly, although these practices were democratic in nature, they were efficiently exploited for the purposes of political control by the CPP. However, by 2017, deepened substantiated democratic values and democratic space in society turned against the CPP's ambition to control and contain political opposition, with the opposition gaining control over a significant number of commune councils. This established a strong pressure for overall democratisation in the country. The reform of the districts and provinces (CJ3) has had less of a democratic impact, although the potential is high should it accelerate and be implemented according to plan. The de-democratisation in late 2017 (CJ4) was driven by national politics, in part because local democratisation was 'too successful'. Overall, local democratisation was substantial and authentic, but not powerful enough to withstand national power politics.

#### *Analysing the Swedish value added to sector development*

Sweden's value added to the evolution of this sector has been high. CJ1-CJ3 depended on a limited number of donors who believed in this process, and who were active partners and reliable/significant funders. In the early stages (CJ1-CJ2), Sweden played this role

together with the DFID and the UNDP (and to some extent GTZ), and later (at CJ3) with Switzerland and the EU. In each of these phases, Swedish support was formative for the process, especially in the earlier parts, whereas in CJ3 Sweden had less backing for its emphasis on democracy. The last CJ4, implying a setback for local democratisation, was not primarily driven by a ‘failure’ in aid design or input (if anything, the opposite is true), but by ‘high politics’ that are difficult for donors to alter. Although this was a massive setback, tangible benefits from the previous phases are likely to remain and are likely to turn into key assets if and when democratisation resumes at some point.

*Summing up the democratic added value of Swedish aid in the decentralisation sector*

The features of democracy to which Swedish development assistance to decentralisation are likely to have contributed are summarised in Table 5, constituting a summary of features of the three models of democracy detailed in Table 1A: *procedural liberal democracy*, *substantive liberal democracy* and *participatory democracy*.

**Table 5: Summary of value added to democratisation from Swedish development assistance to decentralisation**

Feature of democracy	Assessment of value added from Swedish development assistance to decentralisation	
	Value added a)	Comment/justification
Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties	Highly likely	This was initiated in the early phases and became a core quality of the commune election/decentralisation reform from 2002 up to 2017 (at local level). There were four consecutive elections of good quality and multiparty councils were up and working for 15 years.
Separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government	N/a	This was not part of the reform.
Rule of law and independent judiciary	Less likely	This was not part of the reform. There are, however, cases where individuals and

		communities have been supported by commune councils in pursuing their legal claims.
Upholding of human rights	Likely	There was a higher degree of local political accountability and a more conducive climate for HR-CSOs to work locally. Economic rights have been improved as decentralisation programmes attracted, administered or allocated major development resources for local development over two decades. Local/rural society has benefitted primarily in terms of local infrastructure improvement.
Gender equality	Likely	Gender awareness training and acceptance/support for female politicians have been a part of the reform programme, although with varying degrees of success.
Vertical separation of independent powers	Likely	Commune councils established a local government with independent powers and its own budget, formally disconnected from the vertical chain of command.
Bottom-up processes	Highly likely	This was a key goal from the beginning and has been a central aspect from CARERE, to decentralisation, to the Organic Law. In each phase, bottom-up processes have been introduced where they did not exist before. This introduction was more successful in the early phases.
Growth of independent civil society	Highly likely	In accordance with the general liberalisation of society, decentralisation was supportive of the growth of independent civil society.
Grassroots mobilisation/public participation	Highly likely	This was a key goal from the beginning and has been a central aspect from CARERE, to decentralisation, to the Organic Law. In each phase, bottom-up processes have been introduced where they did not exist before. This introduction was more successful in the early phases.
Empowerment and community development	Likely	The local level has been empowered and has often been seen to raise its voice in political contexts outside the commune. However, if it encounters high politics it has been subdued.

Education level	Likely/Less likely	This was neither a core part of the reform nor under the responsibility of the communes. It is likely that the increased responsibility and accountability of the commune councils has improved the level of primary education. Many school buildings have also been built during this period.
Political awareness	Highly likely	Fifteen years and four consecutive elections under a relatively successful participatory regime have created a political awareness and political education.

a) Graded at four levels: highly likely; likely; less likely; not likely.

So, which model of democracy has support for D&D actually contributed to? Seemingly, it has contributed distinctly to procedural democracy in that it has generated local elections, built local democratic institutions, (started to) reform the state administrations at district level and vertically separated state powers. However, although these are concrete and constitute major progress in Cambodian democratisation, they proved to be of limited durability when colliding with the interests of ‘high politics’. Central decrees could fairly easily limit, or even reverse, these procedures of local democracy. Instead, decentralisation’s strength lies somewhere in between substantive democracy and participatory democracy. In contrast, it has contributed qualities to these models of democracy that are not that easily removed. Local democracy has established itself during this phase as a natural part of a political system, political awareness and political education have increased, and politically driven development remains. It is in the shape of participatory democracy that decentralisation has added the deepest value: grassroots mobilisation, bottom-up processes, the growth of a local civil society and community empowerment are all qualities that are distinct and remain even under the repression of the formal party system.

Decentralisation may have contributed to the CPP staying in power. In spite of opening up local democratic space, the CPP’s dominance in politics at local level facilitated control over the outcome of national elections through social control and local pressure. It is likely that the depth of local democratisation was alarming to the CPP and a factor in the decision to dissolve the

opposition. In general, decentralisation has added limited value to procedural democracy at national level, but has contributed to substantial and participatory democracy locally.

## **6.2 Education and democratic development in Cambodia**

Education is not a single concept. The child is provided with initial education in terms of basic social skills and preferences by its family. Primary education offers support and reinforcement for literacy and other basic skills, whereas the attainment of higher education may provide the most marketable skills. Swedish support has been provided primarily to basic education in Cambodia.

The universal basic education<sup>16</sup> in Cambodia comprises six years of primary school followed by three years of lower secondary school. In addition, children are offered the opportunity to continue to upper secondary and higher university level education. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) also manages pre-school/early childhood education and non-formal education.

### **6.2.1 Education and democratisation**

A correlation between education and democracy has been pursued by social scientists since the beginning of the 20th century when Dewey published his work on democracy and education (Dewey 1916), and many scholars have since linked increases in education with improvements in democracy (e.g. Dahl 1971; Lipset 1959). It is now well established that there is a correlation between education, especially primary education, and democracy (Barro 1996, in Geddes 2011). Since the mid-1990s, the increasingly sophisticated econometric research on democratisation has suggested various

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<sup>16</sup> “... basic education [...] include[s] the primary cycle (including preschool), together with the junior-secondary cycle at least where this is becoming part of universal education, and equivalence programmes out of school. A broad definition of basic education will also include non-formal activities for adults from literacy work to some of the activities of extension agencies...” (World Education Forum, Dakar, April 2000).

processes through which growth and the related spread of education, urbanisation and individual mobility might lead to demands for democracy.

Evidence is most consistent with a view that human capital is to be seen as social capital. Education has been found to be one of the most important predictors of many forms of social engagement, from voting to chairing a local committee and trusting others (Helliwell and Putnam 2007). Education improves interpersonal skills, and thereby facilitates civic involvement. While large popular movements cannot readily compel their members to vote or demonstrate, educated people are better able to express what they know, to inform and to persuade others to join in. They are also better able to acquire new information, to understand and to learn.

Along similar lines it is proposed that education, in particular in less developed countries, generates altering attitudes and values, thus strengthening the mobilisation capabilities of pro-democracy groups (Aleman and Kim 2015). Gender equality in primary education is another way in which education might promote democratisation. A relationship between mass education and democracy, and how general education can produce the civil society needed for liberal regimes, has also been demonstrated (Sanborn and Thyne 2013, citing Brown 1999). Globalisation, availability of information and foreign influence enhance the effect of increased education on democratisation. As interconnectedness increases, news about democratic systems and movements may reach into a broader range of states (Sanborn and Thyne 2013, citing McAdam and Rucht 1993; McAdam, Tarrow, and Charles 2001).

When political success is determined by the raw number of supporters, education thus favours democracy relative to dictatorship (Glaeser et al. 2007). However, the positive impact of education on economic growth and development also gives authoritarian leaders a strong incentive to educate the population, to placate the people and stimulate the economy, aiming at not undermining regime stability, which nevertheless often leads to their downfall (Sanborn and Thyne 2013).

Today, states and international organisations push education to improve democratisation, among other factors (Spring 2008). In the initial Swedish position on democracy and human rights in development cooperation, education was seen as being a determining factor for democracy (Regeringskansliet 1998). In addition to education, areas mentioned as being of special importance for supporting human rights and democracy were public administration, decentralisation, judiciary systems and grassroots democracy. Swedish support for basic education started with education being one of three components in a *participatory and inclusive* rural development project in selected provinces (Regeringen 1996).

A decade later, Sweden added more emphasis to *procedural liberal democracy aspects*, while applying a *substantive liberal democracy* view in decisions on what to support and emphasising a ‘rights-based approach’ to be applied in all Swedish development cooperation (Government Offices of Sweden 2008). In educational support for Cambodia, this translated into more emphasis on marginalised groups and on ensuring gender equality in the provision of basic education, in addition to the improved quality of basic education.

## **6.2.2 Basic education in Cambodia – overview and evolution**

The Khmer Rouge regime left behind devastated socio-cultural settings and human resources. The great strides made in literacy and education during the two decades following independence were systematically eradicated. Schools were closed, and educated people and teachers were subjected to harsh treatment and, at worst, execution.

During the 1980s all levels of schooling were gradually reopened. It is however estimated that only 12 per cent of trained primary school teachers had remained in the country, and that 30 per cent of the children in primary schools had no father, 10 per cent had no mother and 5–10 per cent were orphaned (Dy 2004). The KPRP (the Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party – the forerunner of the CPP, the Cambodian People’s Party) viewed primary education

as a tool for state-building and establishing legitimacy, thus aiming to place as many children in school as quickly as possible, while the quality of education was not seen as a main concern (Ayres 2000). In spite of strenuous efforts by the Government and local communities to rebuild the education system, a severe lack of infrastructure and human and financial resources, together with the rapid growth of the school age population, led to a levelling-off of enrolment rates towards the end of the 1980s.

The 1993 Constitution established that the state shall protect and uphold citizen's rights to quality education at all levels, guaranteeing that all citizens will have equal opportunities to earn a living (Article 66). It is further established that the state controls public and private schools and classrooms at all levels (Article 67). Education has since featured strongly in the strategies of the Government and the ruling party (the CPP). (For an overview of the five-year political and economic agenda of each elected government since 1993, refer back to section 4.2.)

Following the national election in 1993, there was a transition from emergency relief to support for rehabilitation and reconstruction and for long-term development assistance.<sup>17</sup> School enrolment now expanded faster than the population. From 1998, when the political turmoil lessened with the final dismantling of the Khmer Rouge's machinery, and in particular after 2000, the revenue situation increased markedly with more funds channelled to the education sector from government budgets. Simultaneously, Western donors increased their funding for education, joining forces with the Government under global initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>18</sup>

The MoEYS's vision and strategy for education development has been embedded since 2001 in its five-year Education Strategic Plans (ESPs), formulated in consultation with development partners and

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<sup>17</sup> Relief and emergency assistance decreased to 29 per cent of total disbursements in 1993 compared to two-thirds in the previous year.

<sup>18</sup> Throughout 1998–2017 the most important Western donors to education have been the World Bank, UNICEF, Sida, the EU and NGOs.

civil society. A subsequent Education Sector Support Programme (ESSP) translates each ESP into a rolling plan and a programme of specific interventions aimed at producing agreed educational outcomes. Annual education sector performance reviews are conducted jointly by the MoEYS and development partners, constituting the basis for open and transparent discussions among all stakeholders during the Annual Education Congress about achievements, challenges and future targets.<sup>19</sup> Donors and the civil society NGO Education Partnership (NEP) umbrella also contribute reports and findings from separate independent monitoring, evaluations or research, as deemed to be adequate and necessary.

Partnership mechanisms have been established. A Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) comprising senior government officials from the MoEYS and other relevant government agencies together with donor representatives meets regularly to review progress and discuss critical issues. An Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) brings together representatives from all development partners and civil society working in education on a regular basis to discuss issues within the ESP/ESSP framework, including jointly agreed monitoring indicators (JMIs).

The institutional capacity of the MoEYS has grown continuously, and in particular at the national ministerial level, so that by 2009 the ESP was for the first time said to be genuinely ‘nationally owned’. The annual sector performance review, conducted jointly by the ministry and development partners, was also under enhanced the MoEYS’s leadership (McNamara 2013).

Statistics from the school year 2016/2017 point to significant achievements in basic education (MoEYS, 2017:36–37). Within primary education (including private schools) the net enrolment rate stood at 97.7 per cent (and a higher 98.2 per cent for girls), whereas the average completion rate reached a comparatively low 79.9 per cent (but a higher 83.2 per cent for girls). Drop-out rates from primary schooling had decreased to 4.6 per cent in total and to a lower 3.8 per cent for girls, with a repetition rate of 6.6 per cent in

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<sup>19</sup> Documentation is available on the MoEYS website: <http://www.moeys.gov.kh>.

total (and a lower 5.1 per cent for girls). The transition rate from primary to lower secondary reached 85.5 per cent (88.3 per cent for girls), while the completion rate was considerably lower (46.5 per cent in total and 51.1 per cent for females). Among new grade 1 students, 64 per cent had pre-school experience. The share of child-friendly schools at middle and advanced levels is estimated at 79.4 per cent.

Gender inequality remains a challenge within the education sector workforce, with few women at management level. Among teachers, women's representation decreases the higher the level of education: women represent 96 per cent of early childhood education/pre-school teachers, 55 per cent of primary teachers, 45 per cent and 31 per cent of teachers at lower and upper secondary levels respectively, and a low 18.6 per cent of higher education faculty teachers (MoEYS 2018).

Despite numerous schemes to improve educational quality, the quality of primary education has remained low and unequal, with remote rural areas lagging behind. The number of districts achieving the targeted primary gross completion rate of at least 80 per cent has continuously decreased in recent years; down from 133 districts (out of 197 districts) in the school year 2012/2013, to 105 in 2014/2015, to 91 in 2016/2017, and further down to 89 in the school year 2017/2018. The spread below the targeted rate is wide, ranging from a primary gross completion rate of less than 50 per cent to close to the target (70–79.9 per cent).<sup>20</sup>

Cambodia has a very high average pupil-teacher ratio (47:1), and in the poorest areas the average number of students per teacher is close to a hundred, thus more than twice as high as in richer areas. While the average statistics show that girls perform better than boys in basic education, the school enrolment rate is lower among children from poor families, and lower among girls than boys from poor families, in particular in the remoter areas with longer distances to cover to reach schools (Eng 2015). Behind these discrepancies

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<sup>20</sup> Consultancy inputs to 2018 Education Congress and Retreat (calculations based on the MoEYS Education Management Information System (EMIS) data).

are the high private costs of schooling. The World Bank estimated in 2011 that Cambodian families contribute as much to the education budget through informal fees and payments as the Government contributes through formal financing (World Vision 2016; Eng 2015).

A report on the state of education sector reform in Cambodia pointed out three key challenges (CDRI 2015; WB 2015). First, teacher pay has been a major problem for wider efforts at education sector reform, since the extraordinarily low wages received by teachers caused entrenched problems of corruption, absenteeism and poor performance within the ministry. This also means that teachers either do not turn up to work, instead pursuing alternative employment outside the civil service, or turn up but jostle for money-making opportunities within their schools. Second, the deployment of teachers from urban areas to rural and remote areas has been challenging, with schools encountering difficulties attracting and retaining motivated and qualified teachers. Schools in better off areas tend to be overstaffed and schools in rural and poor areas tend to be understaffed as teachers resist relocations to rural and poor schools. Third, the quality of teacher training and ongoing capacity development of teaching staff for the sector remain weak. Currently, the ministry struggles to attract the best and brightest to enrol in the teacher training programmes, and there are limited professional development opportunities for incumbent and incoming teachers.

### **6.2.3 Swedish engagement in basic education in Cambodia**

A summary of key messages on education from Swedish country strategies for development cooperation with Cambodia is shown in Box 3.

### Box 3: Education in Swedish country strategies 1997–2017

Period	Key messages from Swedish country strategies
1997–1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education is one of three sub-goals under rural development. Continued support through UNICEF with three main components: i) support for reforms in primary schools; ii) informal education; and iii) health education/information.</li> <li>- Dialogue with implementing organisations and the Cambodian administration shall take place, with crucial questions being overall sector policy, donor coordination within the sector, gender equality, and programme policy, approach and methods.</li> </ul>
1999–2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued support for primary education through UNICEF, and for strengthening capacity for enhanced donor coordination under Cambodian leadership.</li> <li>- Attention shall be paid to the need for informal education for women.</li> <li>- Enhanced educational quality and repair of schools shall be given priority over the construction of new buildings.</li> </ul>
2002–2006 (extended to 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support to help achieve the goal of ‘education for all’ within the framework of a broad human rights and development perspective, channelled mainly through UNICEF (incorporating national, provincial, district and village levels).</li> <li>- Areas for support: a) sectoral capacity, institutional development; b) awareness-raising; c) decentralisation; and d) partnership development and assistance coordination.</li> </ul>
2008–2010 (extended to 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved access to and quality of primary education for girls and boys living in poverty to increase the number of poor and marginalised girls and boys who get the opportunity to go to school, and to help to improve the quality of teaching.</li> <li>- A greater proportion of Swedish support will go via programme support.</li> <li>- A gender equality perspective will permeate the strategy, including a focus on girls’ and boys’ equal rights to education.</li> </ul>
2012–2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved quality of, and access to, teaching and learning at all levels of education.</li> <li>- The proportion of children who complete the nine-year basic education had risen to 54 per cent by 2012, in accordance with the nationally established objectives.</li> <li>- Provide continued aid to the education sector and broaden support to include the entire sector, from primary and secondary school to higher education.</li> </ul>
2014–2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better opportunities for people living in poverty to contribute to and benefit from economic growth with a focus on good education and increased employment, requiring:</li> </ul>

(extended to 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more girls and boys in the formal education system leaving school with basic knowledge and skills; and</li> <li>- more young people with knowledge and skills for the world of work.</li> </ul>
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Part of Sweden’s emergency aid in 1994/95 was channelled through UNICEF’s multi-sector programme, earmarking Swedish support for education. Throughout 1996–2017 Sweden has continued to channel its development support for basic education through UNICEF (with the currently agreed support continuing into 2019). This support has evolved from being one of three components<sup>21</sup> under a rural development project to selected provinces, becoming support to achieve the national EFA goal, with attention being increasingly paid to quality and inclusiveness aspects.

There has been an emphasis on sector policy and donor coordination, initially through dialogue in the first country strategy for development cooperation with Cambodia, evolving into joint programme support. In 2011 Sweden partnered funds with the EU and UNICEF in order to cooperate with the MoEYS on capacity development at national and sub-national levels. With the joint Capacity Development Partnership Fund (CDPF), the MoEYS has been in a position to develop and secure financing for an overarching capacity development plan. The CDPF is administered by UNICEF, and a third phase has been agreed starting in 2018.

Gender equality was introduced as an explicit perspective for Swedish support for basic education in 2008, with a focus on the need for literacy education for women as early as 1999. Since then the importance of gender equality within education has consistently been emphasised in Swedish strategies and in discussions with the MoEYS and its implementing partner UNICEF.

In 2013, Sweden entered into an agreement to channel funds directly to the MoEYS for the first time. Through the School Improvement Grant (SIG) programme support is provided to strengthen the capacity at the school level, including predictable access to funds, and to facilitate the participation of teachers,

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<sup>21</sup> The other two components being support for SEILA/CARERE and support for mine clearance.

parents and communities. This programme was initially planned for three years but its implementation has been extended to a fourth year, and in 2018 evolved into a joint MoEYS/Swedish School Improvement Budget. While the annual budget to schools remains the same, the Swedish share will decrease during 2018–2021 and will thus be picked up by the MoEYS. In 2013, Sweden responded positively to a proposal to support a twinning cooperation between the MoEYS and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI) on quality assurance in pre-school and general education in Cambodia.

## **6.2.4 Critical junctures – tracing processes and assessing value added**

In order to understand the added value of Swedish aid, we trace the key processes leading up to the critical junctures and the Swedish involvement in the processes that determined the outcome. Each critical juncture is scrutinised under the following headings: *Defining the CJ*, *Tracing the process towards the CJ*, *Tracing the results of the CJ* and *Assessing the value added from Swedish aid*.

*Critical juncture 1* – *Reinforced prioritisation of universal access to basic education*

*Defining the CJ:* This first CJ coincides with the time when both domestic and overseas financing to education increased markedly, following pledges for increased donor funding during the 1996 Consultative Group (CG) meeting in Tokyo, and then again at the next CG meeting in 1999. Sweden decided to transform its aid to education from relief and emergency assistance into support for rehabilitation and reconstruction of the education sector.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* Pro-poor economic growth and social development were core priorities of the Government's strategy after the 1998 national election. The Priority Action Plan (PAP) identified basic education as one area for which priority financing from the government budget should be made available. Simultaneously, Western donors were prepared to increase their development financing to include education. The Government's priorities implied a continued, and intensified, effort geared towards

providing education services to broad layers of the population. These efforts had been embarked upon since immediately after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, but with severe limitations in infrastructure and in financial and human resources.

Cluster schools had been piloted for six years starting in 1992 by Save the Children Norway and, with financial support from Sweden, through UNICEF's basic education programme, and had become national policy in 1995. In evaluating the 1993–1998 cluster school pilots (Wheeler 1998), it was concluded that their contributions had been significant, with most benefit occurring during the initial phase (1993–1996), while a higher than intended share of funding was thereafter used for school constructions. Increased supervision through the Local Cluster School Committee (LCSC)<sup>22</sup> had contributed to improved individual school performance and better information for the ministry's district and provincial education offices on problems faced by the schools that had a negative effect on performance. A major lesson learned was that future interventions should concentrate more on teacher training and less on construction. A warning was also issued against establishing cluster school administrative systems outside existing government education structures. The cluster school model and in-service teacher training were consequently planned for nationalisation and scaling up in 1996, funded by USAID. The funding was however withdrawn following the political events of July 1997 (Zhang 1998).

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* Acting under global initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) there was a big push to expand educational access and infrastructure. The Government's wish to be seen to be providing something concrete for the electoral constituencies and the interests of Western donors in demonstrating progress on the global initiatives aligned around this. The Government put more energy into outcomes that were easily and visibly achievable in order to earn

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<sup>22</sup> The Cluster School Committee consisted of the village chief, as Honorary Chair, the Cluster School Head, head teachers of schools in the cluster, elected teacher representatives from each school, an elected representative of the parent-teacher associations (PTAs), the Head of the Cluster Technical Committee and a member of Sangha (monks) according to the wishes of the community (Dykstra and Kuchita 1996).

the most political capital, thus directing spending mostly towards infrastructure. Donors' interest in quality was accepted, but quality aspects were not really integrated into the national education institutions and engendered less political commitment from the Government (Kelsall et al. 2016.).

Sweden had channelled its relief and education emergency assistance through UNICEF's multi-sector programme, earmarking Swedish support for education. Donor coordination was a crucial consideration for Sweden when transforming Swedish support into development cooperation, and so Sweden now decided to channel its support through UNICEF's basic education programme that was active in selected provinces. UNICEF in turn cooperated with CARE and VSO in one province each.

Simultaneously expanding access and improving quality would most likely also have been very difficult, if not impossible. It was for instance concluded that the low level of salaries provided to teachers imposed a constraint on efforts to improve the traditional, highly teacher-centred methods of instruction emphasising rote memorisation. It was spelt out that a teacher's meagre salary in effect forced a teacher to get a second job, or to find another additional source of income (Wheeler 1998). This implied a continued negative cementing of the practice that had been established during the 1980s of explicitly allowing all civil servants to collect informal fees to compensate for low salaries. Those who found alternative jobs left the teaching profession.

*Assessing the value added from Swedish aid at the CJ:* Sweden was one of a handful donors in the education sector, others being the ADB, the WB and NGOs (e.g. Save the Children Norway). Sweden decided to focus on lower levels of basic education and on informal education for adults in rural areas in order to enhance and secure more active participation in development processes, while other donors were already focusing on higher levels of basic education (Regeringen 1996). It thus seems reasonable to assume that Swedish support for basic education in Cambodia during this period contributed to expanding access to basic education. Contributing to improving the social human right to education is a crucial feature of

achieving meaningful participation which is in turn a prerequisite for establishing a functioning democracy.

### *Critical juncture 2 – Initiating decentralisation of education management*

*Defining the CJ:* The 2001–2005 Education Strategic Plan (ESP) had been formulated with strong donor support (including technical support from UNICEF with Swedish financing). One prioritised policy target was the institutional development and capacity-building for the decentralisation of education planning and management systems. Putting in place elected commune/sangkat councils in 2002 created new opportunities for local level management, coordination and participatory processes within education.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* In the view of the development partners, the 2001–2005 ESP represented an important step forward, not only in its content but also through the process of consultations with various stakeholders. The scale of donor transfers of resources, combined with tendencies towards donor control, had however led to the financial and mental dependence of the MoEYS on foreign aid. Donors had their own interests and objectives, which could be difficult to reconcile with those of the Government. As a means of overcoming this problem, the Government adopted a sector-wide approach (SWAp) in 2001 to reform and enhance effectiveness in basic education. The Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) was also established, consisting of the Minister and department heads from the MoEYS together with representatives from development partners, including NGOs. In parallel, the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) was established as a coordinating body for the development partners and NGOs working in the sector.

The concept of decentralisation of basic education had been pushed by donor agencies since the late 1990s (NGO Education Partnership (NEP) 2011). The necessity for decentralised education service provision had also been recognised by higher-level MoEYS staff who were open to the piloting of it through for instance the Swedish-financed UNICEF basic education programme (Gray 1999). Experience from local level involvement in the management of schools had been gathered throughout most of the 1990s through

cluster schools. The cluster schools built on active village-level community and teacher involvement, and the ensuing positive effects on school performance were acknowledged by the MoEYS, development partners and civil society (Bredenberg 2002)<sup>23</sup>. Small-scale pilots with child-friendly schools (CFS) – a major priority of UNICEF’s global education programme – had been initiated to gain additional experience about how to further enhance quality performance in schools, through stronger emphasis on inclusiveness with gender equality, academic effectiveness and the meaningful participation of communities, parents and students (UNICEF 2016).

The Government introduced a prioritised strategic policy in the 2001–2005 ESP (MoEYS 2001) to build up capacity to put in place planning and management systems that would allow for greater responsibility for decision-making at districts, community and school levels. Besides allowing for greater responsiveness to local needs, the move towards decentralised management modalities was deemed necessary considering the huge sector expansion, which was particularly notable at basic and upper secondary education levels. Roles, responsibilities and organisational structures were to be aligned with those being discussed in the process of government preparation for decentralisation at the communal council level and for strengthened deconcentration through the ministry’s vertical structure at the provincial and district levels (PoEs and DoEs – Provincial and District Education Offices). This required a change in the hitherto practices of offices at sub-national level having most often been confined to an implementation role, executing national level instructions. The required joint government process was to be

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<sup>23</sup> In 2002 there were a total of 325 school clusters with external support, from the World Bank/EQIP (157 since 1998); from UNICEF (60 since 1993); from Save the Children Norway (41 since 1992); from Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (14 since 1999); from World Education (approx. 50 since 1999); and from CARE (3 since 1998). There were an additional 435 school clusters functioning without external support. The EQIP programme alone estimated that it was providing aid to about 23 per cent of the primary school-enrolled population while UNICEF’s cluster school programme provided aid to approximately 7 per cent.

agreed with other relevant government agencies (i.e. the MEF, the MoI and the MoP).

Donors assessed the 2001–2005 ESP policy priorities in the area of basic education to be highly relevant. They were pro-poor and aimed to increase the number of schools and teachers in rural areas and to reduce the private education costs to families so that primary education would become affordable. In a pre-appraisal comment to the second draft of the eventual 2001–2005 ESP the donors emphasised that education is not only a fundamental human right; it is also a right that enables children and adults to access many other rights throughout their lives. The latter approach, it was argued, would help place the 2001–2005 ESP more explicitly in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the Government in 1992) as well the constitutional guarantee of universal basic education, and would in addition serve to emphasise issues of quality, which in general were considered not yet adequately addressed. The donors proposed that the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) should also be included in enhancing education access and a quality of education that would be more in line with the requirements of globalisation (Donor Education Sub-Working Group 2001).

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* Through its implementation of the EFA policy, associated with the MDGs, the Government and the ruling CPP invested significant resources in delivering educational infrastructure and increasing universal access to basic education across Cambodia. As a pro-poor measure, the Government formally ended the official request for parent/student contributions to schools in 2001. This policy was however not successfully enforced, as became evident a few years later (NGO Education Partnership (NEP), 2013; further discussed under CJ4).

Sweden had added earmarked financing through UNICEF to support the SWAp preparatory process, intending to support enhanced justice, efficacy, quality and access to education. Nevertheless, only the EC provided budget support to adapt to the SWAp. The established ESWG and JTWG however provided important partnership platforms to coordinate as donors continued their project and programme approach. Since their formation they

have served to enhance closer cooperation between the ministry, development partners and civil society engaged in the education sector.

Sweden continued to channel its support through UNICEF. However, in response to the evaluation warning against establishing cluster school administrative systems outside existing government education structures (Wheeler 1998), Swedish support through UNICEF's basic education programme was geared towards more of a focus on sectorial capacity building, decentralisation, and community participation and empowerment, as opposed to the earlier emphasis on rehabilitation of infrastructure.

In 2002 the MoEYS issued guidelines on the establishment and functioning of school support committees (SSCs), thereby putting in place the legal framework for decentralising education decision-making authority from the national level to school communities. The anticipated roles and responsibilities of the SSCs as detailed in the guidelines were wide-ranging, from budgeting management to internal educational governance.<sup>24</sup> Survey findings however indicate that the mobilisation of resources for school improvements was the one primary task performed by all SSCs (Nguon 2011). The guidance on appointing members to the SSCs was however vague.

The school leadership consists of administrators and directors. These are in effect political appointments, with shortlisting of candidates completed at the local level by party officials before being submitted to the Minister for a final decision. Successful candidates are required to display political loyalties. In 2002 the school directors were given more influence over school budgets in particular, and have thereafter been given responsibility over the years for deciding not only on how school budgets are spent, but also on staff performance evaluations and management as well as making

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted from Nguon 2011, p. 120: (a) raising community contributions, (b) strengthening interactions revolving around student learning, (c) making school plans pertinent to children's basic learning needs, (d) preventing pupil repetition and drop out, (e) making decisions on school expenditure, (f) developing plans for purchasing school materials, (g) establishing a friendly school environment, (h) monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and (i) supervising the spending of school funds.

decisions on training opportunities and the distribution of benefits to staff. This gave the politically appointed school directors immense powers in relation to teachers, and over time school directors became the second most commonly cited source of dissatisfaction among teachers (survey results discussed in NGO Education Partnership (NEP)/VSO 2008).

*Assessing the value added from Swedish aid at the CJ:* While there were no direct Swedish contributions to the preparatory steps taken to decentralise education, Sweden had contributed through UNICEF to providing the required empirical experiences and tangible results upon which the Government's decision to further decentralise education service delivery was based.<sup>25</sup>

Sweden provided additional financial resources through UNICEF to specifically support the planning and establishment of the sector-wide approach that was adopted in 2001. However, when approving its next phase of support for basic education Sweden decided to continue channelling this through UNICEF rather than joining the EC sector support for basic education. In doing so, Sweden missed out on an opportunity to contribute to aid effectiveness. Through its continued support for basic education, Sweden did however continue its contribution to upholding the child's right to education, including efforts to improve the low quality of education. Through participation in the JTWG, Sweden and other donors further contributed to the introduction of a rights-based approach to education in Cambodia, aiming at ensuring the inclusion of less privileged children.

### *Critical Juncture 3 – Enhancing effectiveness in the delivery of education services*

*Defining the CJ:* Since 1993 each elected government has published its five-year political and economic agenda. In 2008, when adopting the second Rectangular Strategy, the Government requested that national development strategies be updated in order to ensure consistency in terms of hierarchy, role and substance, and to synchronise the timeframe of these with the Government's political

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<sup>25</sup> In addition, Sweden had been one of the main partners in the decentralisation and deconcentration reform process leading up to the Government's political decision to establish elected commune/sangkat councils.

mandate and the corresponding term of the Rectangular Strategy. This enhanced ownership on the part of the Government was also reflected in the leadership of the MoEYS in updating the second 2006–2010 ESP to create the third 2009–2013 ESP, with the MoEYS taking on a stronger leading role than in previous ESP formulation processes. At the same time, the ‘Aid Effectiveness Agenda’ had become a platform around which both the Government and donors agreed, and which Sweden supported. At the sub-national level, the MoEYS was prepared to further strengthen decentralised educational service delivery.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* Development assistance to Cambodia remained characterised by project support and technical cooperation, in spite of the SWAp adopted in 2001. The ministry’s preoccupation with administration and project management in the immediate and short-term situation had constrained medium and long-term planning and policy/strategy development. The shortage of qualified human resources and the heavy dependence on foreign aid had curbed the implementation and sustainability of education reforms, and this was further exacerbated at the school level by continued low teacher salaries and requests for various fees from parents.

The capacity of the MoEYS had grown steadily over the years. The joint government and donor efforts in the implementation of two previous sectorial strategic plans (ESP 2001–2005 and ESP 2006–2010) is one reason for this. Another is that the partnership mechanisms, with Sweden represented by Sida (through the Embassy) together with UNICEF (its implementing partner), have proven valuable in forging enhanced mutual trust between donors and the MoEYS. The commitment from the MoEYS to include findings from independent donor evaluations as well as independent performance assessment from the NGO sector, facilitated through NEP, in the annual sector reviews has created greater scope for openly discussing and searching for solutions to evidenced negative practices. Over time, this has no doubt contributed to enhanced capacity within the MoEYS, while acknowledging the supportive effects of continued technical support available from donors.

The second 2006–2010 ESP outlined an appropriate service delivery model with execution at various levels. An appropriate service delivery model at decentralised levels was particularly important in light of the ongoing decentralisation and deconcentration reforms.<sup>26</sup> In preparing continued EC sector budget support for basic education, the second ESP had been assessed to have an appropriate foundation for monitoring the outputs and outcomes of the interventions of the government entities active in the sector (European Commission, 2006). The Education for All Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund (FTI)<sup>27</sup> had approved considerable additional funding for primary school teaching in Cambodia for 2007–2009.<sup>28</sup>

Sweden's decision to maintain its channelling of support for basic education through UNICEF had resulted from a perception of remaining institutional weaknesses within the MoEYS, thus requiring continued technical support, including continued provision of good examples to support future strategies on how to enhance quality in education and address persisting inequalities in access to basic education. Sweden placed explicit requirements on paying attention to gender in relation to Swedish support for basic education (Government Offices 2008).

The previous small-scale pilot of the CFS scheme initiated by UNICEF/Sida in 2001 had resulted in adopting CFS as a national policy in 2007. While the percentage of schools considered as CFS is now reported within the annual education sector performance report, the intended addressing of vital quality issues such as academic effectiveness and learner-centred teaching is yet to materialise. Advocacy efforts were geared to include the most marginalised children, focusing on rights issues such as minority groups' access to education through piloting multilingual teaching together with early childhood schooling and child-friendly schools.

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<sup>26</sup> Swedish value added to these reform processes is discussed in the decentralisation case study above (section 6.2).

<sup>27</sup> Now the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

<sup>28</sup> The volumes of the EC and FTI programmes were EUR 10 million and USD 57 million respectively.

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* The 2009–2013 ESP is appreciated, and referred to, by development partners as the ‘first nationally-owned’ plan. A Master Plan for Capacity Development 2011–2015 was subsequently adopted by the MoEYS, and beginning in 2011 the MoEYS gained access to financial and technical support through the Capacity Development Partnership Fund (CDPF) to continue to systematically strengthen its capacity base. The partnering of funds from the EU, Sweden, UNICEF and the MoEYS itself into the CDPF implied enhanced aid effectiveness, and provided the MoEYS with an opportunity to lessen its previous mental and financial dependency on scattered shorter-term financing.

Through the CDPF numerous capacity building short-term training sessions and workshops were arranged, contributing in particular to institutional and personal capacity strengthening (Van Gerwen et al. 2018). It was noted however that capacity outcomes at the organisational level were less pronounced, and this was mainly because capacity development, particularly in the first years, had focused on training and workshops. It was further noted that most capacity development changes occurred at the national level, but much less change could be observed at the sub-national level, particularly at the provincial level. At the district and school levels, capacity development effects were also less visible, while capacity constraints at these levels were much more pronounced.

The MoEYS formally outlawed informal fees in 2008, in an effort to enhance access to basic education, and thus the effectiveness of basic education. However, as emerged during the following years, this reform was never enforced in practice (NGO Education Partnership (NEP) 2013). The persistence of informal fees is not surprising given that teachers’ salaries remained below subsistence level. The problem with informal fees is not restricted to education but prevails in all government agencies, and its solutions are thus closely linked to overall reforms such as the public administrative reform (PAR) and the public financial management reform (PFM).

*Assessing the value added from Swedish aid at the CJ:* The CDPF – of which Sweden is one of three external partners (together with the EU and UNICEF) – has been a crucial instrument for the MoEYS

in strengthening capacity following its Master Plan for Capacity Development 2011–2015. This support does not directly provide support for democratisation per se. However, as the capacity of the MoEYS and its decentralised structures becomes more effective in the delivery of educational services, there remains a possibility that it will contribute to upholding the social right to access education, and possibly better quality education, and an ensuing enhanced average level of education within the population.

*Critical Juncture 4 – Intensified educational reforms to enhance educational quality*

*Defining the CJ:* In response to the 2013 national election, in which the ruling CPP lost more seats than expected to the main opposition party (the CNRP – the Cambodia National Rescue Party), the Government moved towards enhanced education reforms through a change of leadership of the MoEYS, whose mandate was to strengthen the quality of services and the performance of the ministry. Evidence of comparatively widespread nepotism and corruption within the education system had become convincing, and a young, well-educated and reform-minded minister replaced a conservative minister. Sweden entered into an agreement with the Government to channel part of its education sector support directly through government structures.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* Education has been an important source of legitimacy for the Government over the last 20 years. Despite the fact that most donors have focused on encouraging the adoption of international goals such as the post-1990 EFA initiative and the MDGs, the education sector in Cambodia continued to be under-resourced, and the quality of education remained below expected standards. A national assessment of student achievements found that 39 per cent of grade 6 pupils had a below basic proficiency rating for reading in Khmer (MoeYS 2015).

Pressure increased on the Government to enhance education standards in Cambodia as the 2015 economic integration into ASEAN approached. Without a highly skilled population Cambodia stands high risks of not being competitive. Despite improved access to basic education, with high net enrolment rates and improving

retention rates, the persistent low level of educational quality remains a concern (Kelsall et al. 2016).

Numerous schemes to improve educational quality have been piloted and implemented, such as projects on education quality improvement, student-centred learning, cluster schools, the child-friendly school approach and life-skills curriculum development (Kelsall et al. 2016). Two approaches – cluster schools and child-friendly schools – resulted in national policies (in 1995 and 2007 respectively). Notwithstanding, key issues related to the quality and performance of the sector continued to hamper the new Minister's reform efforts. Educational reform efforts have instead continued to be occupied with the expansion of infrastructure and increased access, seemingly as part of the Government's and the ruling party's populist strategy. CPP campaigns through the provision of politicised rural development projects, delivered by the party patronage network as personal gifts. So for instance it is published on Hun Sen's Cambodia New Vision website that the Prime Minister Hun Sen and his wife have built more than 3 458 school buildings (Eng 2015).

Families continue to bear a high share of costs for education, while qualitative improvements in schools thus remain extremely limited. Despite the formal outlawing of all kinds of fees in 2008, families continue to be forced to contribute through fees collected by schools that are approved by the Government, e.g. contributions to school development, tutoring outside normal class time and tutoring during vacations (NGO Education Partnership (NEP) 2013).<sup>29</sup> In addition to the required legally approved fees, households are also contributing to education costs by paying regular informal fees to schools and teachers. Parents who fail to conform find that their children are neglected in class, and are not provided with feedback or sufficient teaching to pass exams and

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<sup>29</sup> The importance placed by schools on 'community contributions' was also witnessed in field discussions as part of this study, as was the importance attached by school management to providing visible signs of successful collection of community contributions in terms of for instance playgrounds in the school yard, while considerably less importance was attached to teacher performance.

advance to the next grade the following year, in effect reducing their chances of completing basic education (Eng 2015).

In addition, informants at central ministries and commune level suggested that civil servants surprisingly voted against the CPP in the 2013 national election. Teachers constitute the largest group of civilian public service employees, accounting for 60 per cent of all civil servants in Cambodia. Teachers are subject to the same kinds of control measures as other civil servants, while the rents available in the education sector to supplement a below-subsistence salary are much less than in, for example, customs, land registrations, inspections or contracting for major infrastructure (Eng 2015). The negative consequences for educational quality from excessively low teacher salaries have been identified as a hampering factor since efforts were made to improve educational quality under the cluster school pilots during the latter part of the 1990s, and again in relation to teacher capacity development to achieve child-friendly schools.

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* An immediate result in 2013 of the change of leadership of the MoEYS was the establishment of an Education Research Council from the universities and civil society, and from ministerial staff especially at the level of secretary of state.

In 2012 the MoEYS issued revised guidelines on the functioning of the SSCs, with eight official mandates (NGO Education Partnership (NEP) 2013).<sup>30</sup> In 2013, Sweden entered into a direct agreement with the MoEYS to provide School Improvement Grants (SIGs), thus providing additional funds to the schools to be used in accordance with guidelines issued by the MoEYS. Through this support Sweden intended to help schools to become more participatory and student-centred. One of Sweden's requirements was that the Swedish funds should be transferred to the schools through the banking system in order to ensure timely and full

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted from the NGO Education Partnership (NEP) 2013: (1) designing the school development plan, (2) enforcing school enrolment, (3) monitoring student learning, (4) collecting and managing funds, (5) developing and maintaining school infrastructure, (6) experience and life skills sharing, (7) irregularity prevention, and (8) capacity-building.

disbursement to the schools (Sida and MoEYS Agreement 2013: article 6.3).

The SSCs include representatives from relevant local level administrative structures as well as from the commune/sangkat councils that had by now been put in place, and were to be a mechanism for community participation in school planning and budgeting. It was expected that the SSCs would become a body to support achieving EFA goals. The guidelines however include detailed activities and contents listed under each responsibility, suggesting that the focus of the role of the SSCs is on information dissemination, sharing from school to communities and fundraising, rather than on community participation and overseeing school performance (Eng 2015). In practice, the activities of the SSCs have also been found to centre mostly on fundraising and school contributions, while the rest of the responsibilities listed in the guidelines have remained unfulfilled (NGO Education Partnership (NEP) 2015). It has been concluded in monitoring reports that the SSCs function in the sense that they are properly established and meet regularly as requested, but that the engagement and active participation in the planning and implementation of the SIG varies from school to school (Sida 2017).

One constraint working against the intended broader functioning of the SSCs is that the SSC members are elderly and frequently lack adequate education to deal with issues regarding school quality and performance (NGO Education Partnership 2013; Nguon 2011). Another constraint is ‘power imbalances’ in the sense that the school directors have a strong mandate to decide on school finances as well as school human resource management, and are politically well connected to the ruling CPP. The SSC structures are in that sense vulnerable to political capture. The quality of education services is also monitored through the I-SAF (Implementation of Social Accountability Framework<sup>31</sup>) under the democratic decentralisation framework. The I-SAF is assessed to be constrained in similar ways to the SSCs (Eng 2015).

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<sup>31</sup> Within the I-SAF framework the quality of health, education and local government administrative services are monitored.

In 2015, the Government announced a pay raise for primary school teachers to USD 167 effectively immediately, and a promise of USD 250 by 2018 (Phnom Penh Post, cited in Eng 2015). The pay rise was coupled with strict enforcement of attendance registration to be implemented at school level. In addition, salaries were from now on strictly paid on time and in full through direct bank transfers to each teacher's bank account, thus getting rid of the 'facilitation fees' teachers had previously been burdened with in order to access their lawful salaries. This salary disbursement reform however met with sub-national level resistance given the implied 'cut-off' of previous extra-salary incomes at that level.

Aiming to introduce 'true' meritocracy in examinations, a clampdown on cheating and corruption followed for students sitting grade 12 national exams (leaving upper secondary schools). The elaborate measures introduced resulted in a mere 26 per cent of students passing the exams – a striking contrast to the 87 per cent that passed the previous year, and reflecting a system which, while successful in building infrastructure and getting large numbers of children into school, has been much less adept at delivering educational quality (Kelsall et al. 2016). A similar attempt in 2002 had not been successful but saw a return to cheating as normal, whereas this time it appears to have been upheld several years later.

*Assessing the value added from Swedish aid at the CJ:* In 2013 Sweden entered into two agreements for education. Through the School Improvement Grants (SIG) Sweden intended to support the strengthening of school management capacity, including helping the schools to become more participatory and student-centred through the functioning of the SSCs. As the SSCs do not yet fully function as intended, the contribution to this democracy feature must be assessed as not strong for the time being, but with a possibility for growing stronger, while unfortunately also risking becoming a convenient channel for political top-down influence. The SIG has nevertheless had direct anti-corruption and positive system changing effects in the sense that the transfer of money from national level to schools' bank accounts, which was requested for Swedish funds, is now also applied by the MoEYS for transfers of government funds to schools.

The twinning project implemented by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate with the MoEYS has contributed to establishing a quality assurance system, which however remains under political control in the current Cambodian context.

The second phase of the Capacity Development Partnership Fund jointly financed by Sida, the EU and UNICEF to support the MoEYS's second Master Plan for Capacity Development 2014–2018 was initiated in 2015. This programme has strongly contributed to the growing capacity of the MoEYS, in particular at national, individual and institutional levels. More attention was gradually paid to longer-term and organisation-focused capacity development, particularly in the CDPF-funded projects of VSO and CARE, to replace the previous excessive focus on short-term training and workshops (Van Gerwen 2018). There is however no immediate democracy-enhancing effect from this.

## 6.2.5 Conclusions

Conclusions are drawn in three inter-related sequences: first, an analysis of the evolution within the sector in the chosen timeframe, second, an assessment of the sector's contribution to overall democratisation, and finally, a scrutiny of Swedish value added to sector evolution. Swedish value added to relevant features of democracy are summarised in Table 6, and thereafter carried over to the report's concluding chapter 7, together with similar summaries from the other two cases, for cross-case comparison and to synthesise findings.

### *Analysing evolution in the sector*

Over the study period 1997–2017 a disrupted system for the basic education sector has been successfully re-established. As the capacity of the MoEYS has grown stronger, donors' leading role in education reforms was gradually replaced by enhanced national ownership and stronger leadership by the MoEYS. There is however a remaining dependence on technical assistance to support efforts to counteract persistent corruptive tendencies within educational administration, which in effect work against the implementation of

approved quality reforms in education. This in turn is closely linked to a failure of the Government to push through long-overdue governance reforms such as PAR which would be required to ensure reasonable civil servant salaries and thus provide incentives to all civil servants to more vigorously translate agreed educational reforms into actions.

Considerable results have been achieved in terms of coverage and broader inclusion of marginalised groups, and thus of increasing the general level of education in the population, in particular in the baby-boom generation following the expelling of the Khmer Rouge regime. In particular, the basic educational system has on an average level been successful in closing the gender gap, even seeing the emergence of a ‘reversed’ gender gap in the sense that on average more girls than boys now graduate. Gains have been made in educational quality, although to a lesser extent than hoped for.

#### *Analysing the sector’s contribution to overall democratisation*

Universal access to basic education is in itself a feature of democracy, and the successful expansion of basic education in Cambodia is consequently adding value to democratisation in its own right. Gender equality is another feature of democracy which has been achieved in basic education. A third ‘given’ feature from expanded basic education is the enhanced average education level in the population achieved over the study period.

Besides contributing to the three above features that are directly linked to education results, empirical research has established a positive influence from education on attitudes, values, engagement and voter behaviour, and in particular when accompanied by access to information from international sources (section 6.2). Whereas it is not possible to conclude such a causal relationship from the above tracing exercise, a notable increase in political awareness is visible among the post-Khmer Rouge generation in particular. In the most recent national election no less than a third of voters were below the age of 30 (COMFREL 2016), thus belonging to the generations which have benefited the most from the strengthened Cambodian education system. These young voters voted for a party other than the ruling CPP to a larger extent than their parental generation (ibid). When also taking into account the simultaneously enhanced access

to a variety of sources of information through the increasing access to information technology, it seems even more likely to conclude that the improved access to, and level of, education has positively influenced voters' attitudes, values and behaviour.

A positive correlation between higher levels of education and the growth of civil society has also been empirically established (section 6.2). It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that the growth in local level civil society (section 4.5) has been facilitated by a simultaneous increase in average level of education within the communities. Education brings not only knowledge but also higher self-confidence and skills to facilitate civic involvement, to take advantage of opportunities or to react against perceived wrongdoings/injustices. The importance of level of education to achieve active and meaningful participation was evidenced above (CJ4) in relation to the school support committees (SSCs).

The SSCs were set up to facilitate community participation in school planning and budgeting, as such potentially becoming a mechanism for democracy features such as grassroots mobilisation, participation and empowerment. These channels do function with regular meetings. Members contribute primarily to fundraising, while meaningful participation in planning and budgeting is not yet strong. There are certain risks that the SSCs are becoming a government/CPP channel for the dissemination of views and instructions in a traditional top-down fashion, facilitated by the political appointments of school directors who have determining influence over all school-level decisions. The SSCs do however constitute a strong potential for enhanced community, parent, teacher and student participation and influence.

#### *Analysing the Swedish value added to sector development*

There has been constant, yet changing, value added to basic education from Swedish support over the 20-year study period. In its earliest support through UNICEF, Sweden played a catalytic role. Through this early support empirical evidence was gained, which was subsequently translated into policies and also provided the basis for the MoEYS to take the required educational reform decisions, such as on the decentralisation of education management. Sweden's

continuous support for basic education through UNICEF has throughout the 20-year study period consistently aimed to push for further steps to improve quality in basic education, and also to achieve better quality in education for the most marginalised groups of children. The long-term Swedish-UNICEF partnership in cooperation with the MoEYS has been a prerequisite for building sufficient trust for successful advocacy and influence. It is for instance widely acknowledged, by the MoEYS as well as by other donors, that Sweden has played a significant role in successfully pushing gender mainstreaming within education, in enhancing inclusiveness, and in child-friendly schools becoming national policy.

Through joint programming arrangements, with the EU and UNICEF since 2011, Swedish support contributed to ending fragmented and short-term approaches to capacity strengthening within the MoEYS, including decentralised structures of the MoEYS. While this improved aid effectiveness will not support democratisation per se, there remains a possibility that as the capacity of the MoEYS and its decentralised structures becomes more effective in the delivery of education services, the upholding of access to better quality basic education will be further enhanced.

Sweden supports (since 2013) the improvement of school management by providing school improvement grants. This support includes the strengthening of channels (SSCs) to facilitate community, parent, teacher and student participation in planning and budgeting and a certain degree of quality performance monitoring. Through the SSCs there is the potential for Swedish direct value added to democracy features such as community empowerment, grassroots mobilisation and participation. This however hinges on the future development of the SSCs. There is a possibility that the SSC structures will grow stronger over the coming years, but these structures are unfortunately also vulnerable to political capture (CJ4). There have however been visible anti-corruption and positive system changing effects from these grants (CJ4), directly benefiting teachers.

*Summing up the democratic added value of Swedish aid in the education sector*

The features of democracy to which Swedish development assistance to decentralisation are likely to have contributed are summarised in Table 6, constituting a summary of features of the three models of democracy detailed in Table 1A: procedural liberal democracy, substantive liberal democracy and participatory democracy.

**Table 6: Summary of value added to democratisation from Swedish development assistance to education**

Feature of democracy	Assessment of value added from Swedish development assistance to education	
	Value added <sup>a)</sup>	Comment/justification
Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties	Not likely	Education is likely to have influenced voters' attitudes and their ability to make informed choices, but is not likely to have influenced procedural electoral arrangements.
Separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government	N/a	N/a
Rule of law and independent judiciary	Less likely	Cambodians have now formed expectations of rule of law, but do not trust the legal institutions as the accountability of these bodies is weak.
Upholding of human rights	Highly likely	Upholding of the social human right to education through the expansion of access to basic education. Contributing to economic rights; even a low level of educational improvement in the labour force attracts investments, leading to the creation of jobs and a broader spread of income.
Gender equality	Likely	Girls now graduate to at least the same extent as boys from basic education; this is a necessary yet insufficient achievement in order to establish gender equality in society.
Vertical separation of independent powers	N/a	N/a

Bottom-up processes	Likely	Structures have been set up for community participation in monitoring school performance, but do not yet function as intended. Meaningful participation requires education.
Growth of independent civil society	Likely	A likely medium to longer-term effect, but no direct causal linkages proven between education and the increasing number of national CBOs.
Grassroots mobilisation/public participation	Likely	SSCs opened up a channel for expanding public participation in school matters, but have hitherto been used more as a channel for 'information dissemination' from 'top to bottom'. Meaningful participation requires education.
Empowerment and community development	Likely	SSCs opened up a channel for expanding public participation in school matters, but are not yet open to real influence as they are used more as a channel for 'information dissemination' from 'top to bottom'. Meaningful participation requires education.
Education level	Highly likely	Access to basic education has become considerably more widespread since the mid-1990s. While the quality of education remains a concern, the average level of schooling in the population has increased. Attribution for this achievement is shared across the Government and contributing donors.
Political awareness	Highly likely	Young voters showed different voting patterns to their parents' generation in recent elections. It is reasonable to attribute at least part of this change in attitudes and behaviour to education, in particular when combined with increased online access to information.

<sup>a)</sup> Graded at four levels: highly likely; likely; less likely; not likely.

The features of democracy to which Swedish support for education has added value are relevant to two models of democracy: the *substantive liberal* model of democracy and the *participatory* model of democracy (Table 1A). Support for education has not directly added value to any of the features under procedural liberal democracy. It is however likely that education support may indirectly have influenced the 'demand side' of free and fair elections, thus

contributing to the potential for demand for future changes towards unbiased/fair procedural election arrangements.

As discussed above (section 3.3), there may have been unintentional consequences from Swedish support intended to support democratisation. Education is a feature of substantive liberal and participatory democracy models, but is equally a feature of competitive authoritarianism (Table 1B) – although for diverging reasons. In the Swedish perspective education is seen as a determining factor to facilitate democratic transition, whereas a competitive authoritarian regime will value education as a prerequisite for economic growth and social development, which in turn may be a prerequisite for maintained legitimacy.

As seen from the tracing exercise, education has carried along a change in voting behaviour among young Cambodians, which from a Swedish perspective is a ‘sound sign’ of an ongoing democratisation process in which voters make informed decisions before casting votes, rather than casting votes ‘as usual’. From the perspective of an authoritarian leader, however, changing voting behaviour poses a threat to the continued power of the ruling party, and is thus perceived as a threaten to political stability. As for Swedish education support, the participatory structures supported at school level in particular run the risk of becoming a useful tool to uphold party control, while simultaneously being a promising mechanism for community influence.

### **6.3 Civil society and democratic development in Cambodia**

The definition of ‘civil society’ has been widely debated. It has often been defined as a wide array of organisations (e.g. the World Bank).<sup>32</sup> In this study however we use the definition of civil society in

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<sup>32</sup> <http://go.worldbank.org/4CE7W046K0>

Swedish policies,<sup>33</sup> which has been formulated as: “*an arena, distinct from the state, the market and the individual household, created by individuals, groups and organisations acting together to promote common interests*” (Government Offices of Sweden 2009).

There are a many different civil society actors. In this study we use the term civil society organisations (CSOs) for all these actors. We distinguish between three main categories of CSOs: i) international non-governmental organisations (I-NGOs) (formal organisations with international activities; ii) national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (formal, national organisations in the recipient countries; and iii) community-based organisations (CBOs) (formal and informal local organisations in the recipient country).

A distinction must also be made between CSOs working primarily with D/HR issues and CSOs working with service delivery for public welfare goals or for the interests of their members (e.g. trade unions and professional associations). Swedish support to civil society in Cambodia has focused on the objective of democracy and human rights. Our study thus focuses on CSOs working primarily with D/HR issues, constituting a small portion of CSOs in Cambodia, but the major recipients of Swedish support for D/HR within the country strategies for Cambodia. CSOs working only with service delivery (e.g. in health and education) have not been supported within the country strategies, but have however been supported through the general support to Swedish CSOs (see 6.3.3.).

### **6.3.1 Civil society and democratisation**

It is often assumed that there is a positive correlation between the strengthening of civil society and democratisation and increased respect for human rights (e.g. Diamond 1999). This can be achieved through four main processes for CSOs focusing explicitly on D/HR issues (e.g. SPM 2003):

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<sup>33</sup> Political parties could be defined as civil society actors according to this definition. However, we do not treat them as such and in any case no Swedish support has been provided for political parties in Cambodia.

- By supporting civil society as a *counterbalance* to the state and thereby contributing to pluralism. It includes checking, monitoring and restraining the government's exercise of power and advocating for changes.
- By supporting civil society to *complement* state reforms for democratisation by strengthening the demand side through training, raising awareness and channelling the ideas and concerns of citizens.
- By supporting civil society in the *mobilisation* of citizens and thereby empowering the public and stimulating political participation.
- By supporting civil society to *influence* the state, e.g. through dialogue or lobbying.

CSOs not explicitly focusing on D/HR may also create potential for promoting democratisation through the functions they perform (Sida 2002). It can be argued that the educational function of civil society can shape people's values, attitudes and behaviour through learning democratic practices. In this case it is participation per se, rather than the purpose of the collective action, that helps individuals develop democratic skills. Another such function is the potential of civil society to create social capital.

The assumptions about the positive role of formal CSOs (or NGOs as they are often referred to) have however been criticised by many authors, in particular in relation to the situation in Cambodia. One argument is that the CSOs in Cambodia are mainly created by, and accountable to, donors and do not represent civil society, concluding that supporting them will not contribute to democratisation but rather to eroding the local forms of civil society (e.g. Ou and Kim 2013).

### **6.3.2 Civil society in Cambodia – overview and evolution**

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Cambodia were severely repressed and violently harassed from Independence in 1954 to the end of the Cold War (Ovesen et al. 1996). After the first general

election organised by UNTAC in 1993, CSOs in Cambodia emerged as a result of financial support from Western donors. While state capacity was weak and CPP power was uncertain, CSOs enjoyed a political space that was protected by the international community. CSOs played a significant role, almost like a shadow government, and provided services ranging from the protection of women and children, to digging wells and building schools and hospitals, to the provision of legal aid and social services. The majority of them were concentrated in Phnom Penh, with weak grassroots linkages, and were heavily dependent on foreign aid.

The CSOs operating in Cambodia can be classified into three main groups (UNDP 2010; Un 2018). The first group consists of local and informal organisations at commune and village levels (CBOs). They are mainly small, ad hoc associations geared towards sharing communal resources. These are a target of co-optation and control by the ruling party. The second type of CSO consists of professional and prominent local non-governmental organisations. These are engaged in service delivery, social work and capacity-building. They are independent of the Government but due to the nature of their work, these CSOs collaborate closely with the Government and tend to avoid criticising it (Malena and Chhim 2009). There is important ongoing interaction between government representatives and these CSOs in arenas such as courts, prosecution, the police and frontline service providers which has led to government responses and improved access to services and resources for marginalised communities and for victims of human trafficking, poor people and victims of gender-based violence (Brofeldt et al. 2018; CCHR 2016; LICADHO 2018). The third group of CSO works at general level in the areas of human rights, anti-corruption, forestry, land and elections. These organisations are consistently targeted and discriminated against by the Government. In addition to these groups of CSO there are also faith-based groups, professional/student associations and prominent labour unions.

Relations between the Government and CSOs in Cambodia had somewhat improved from the overt oppression and public intimidation documented in the 1990s to a general atmosphere of cooperation and engagement at various levels in the 2000s (CCC

2013). Since the middle of the first decade of this century, freedoms of association and expression have been greatly reduced and are under renewed threat of political repression: the freedom to hold public demonstrations and to engage in criticism of government policies has been severely restricted in both law and practice (Un 2011; McCarthy and Un 2015). A new observable phenomenon in the field of civil society in Cambodia has been an increasing number of CBOs. Some of these CBOs were created by NGOs to assist them in the implementation of local level development projects. Others are networks of activists and associations created on an ad-hoc basis by local communities. Their numbers have been on the rise in response to immediate threats to community property and livelihood (Oxfam 2015).

For democracy support, donors concentrated on financing a group of D/HR-CSOs with a good record of delivering donors' expected outputs, which created a small group of strong CSOs playing a key role in political development as 'representatives' of civil society and as watchdogs of the Government. Since the late 1990s, many of these CSOs have established national networks and supported local initiatives and CBOs. The establishment of commune/sangkat councils in 2002 provided the scope for CSOs to engage at local level, while the national political level was increasingly dominated by the CPP. CBOs and provincial level CSOs were increasingly working at commune level. Since the middle of the first decade of this century, CBOs have been established in every village and it is correct to see this as a 'Cambodianisation' of civil society, even if many CBOs are still financially dependent on foreign funding (Ou and Kim 2013).

After some opening up of political space, an unprecedented process of shrinking democratic space and increasing CPP control began following the 2013 national election. An important event was the final adoption of the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) in 2015 (Royal Government of Cambodia 2015). The LANGO had been discussed for almost 20 years with every draft heavily criticised by the CSOs. The final law is viewed by local and international CSOs as a tool for the Government to threaten the CSO sector. The intention of the

RGC is however expressed as: “Further strengthening partnership with non-governmental organizations through enforcing the law on associations and non-governmental organizations in order to promote efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the cooperation” (Royal Government of Cambodia 2018:19).

The basic foundation of the LANGO is the requirement for all associations and NGOs to register. Local CSOs must register with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and foreign CSOs must sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC). The law requires a complex registration process with provisions for denial of registration on vague grounds of undefined ‘legality’. Registration is essentially mandatory, as unregistered organisations cannot fully function under the law. The law also provides for the involuntary dissolution of organisations via a court order, but does not give clear grounds on which such a court order might be based. The law requires that associations, once registered, inform local authorities of their activities on an ongoing basis, a provision that places an onerous burden on organisations. The law makes procedures for the CSOs much more cumbersome, but it states as its aim to protect their legitimate interests (Article 1). However, it provides a legal potential for the RGC to control and restrict their activities; this has been used in some cases and has led to self-censorship among the CSOs. The law also makes the registration of foreign NGOs more complex and burdensome. There have been some closures of human rights NGOs and a number of others are being closely monitored by the authorities. It should be noted that CBOs and associations are not covered by the LANGO, but are normally covered by sector laws (e.g. forestry, land and fishery).

The CSO ‘sector’ has been growing significantly since the mid-1990s. It was estimated that in 1995 there were around 100 local and around 200 foreign NGOs active in Cambodia (Vickery and Amer 1995). In 2018 a total of 5 300 local CSOs were registered according to the LANGO (personal communication with the MoI, September 2018). In addition there are around 25 000 community-based organisations (CBOs) which address specific issues at village/commune level (CCC 2018). It is estimated that the overall budget of the CSO ‘sector’ in Cambodia accounts for nearly as much

spending as the Government in the social sectors (CCC 2018). The last decade has seen a relatively rapid increase in self-funding by foreign CSOs of their own activities (from USD 50 million in 2006 to USD 230 million in 2015). This self-financing by international CSOs is however sometimes indirectly funded by donor governments, mainly for health, education, rural development, etc. In addition, around USD 100 million has been funded by donors for specific CSO programmes annually. These funds have been the major source (around 90 per cent) of CSO governance-related work (all figures from the Royal Government of Cambodia 2014; 2016).

### 6.3.3 Swedish engagement in civil society in Cambodia

A summary of key messages on civil society from Swedish country strategies for development cooperation with Cambodia is shown in Box 4.

**Box 4: Civil society in Swedish country strategies**

Period	Key messages from Swedish country strategies
1997–1998	– Dialogue with Swedish CSOs. Very limited role of support through CSOs.
1999–2001	– Support through Diakonia mentioned as contributing to knowledge of human rights for special target groups (police, military and public administration) and cooperation with COHCHR in monitoring violations of human rights.
2002–2006 (extended to 2007)	– Civil society assessed as weak and underdeveloped and CSOs as questionable representatives due to their dependence on external funding. Still, they were seen as positive in serving as a counterbalance to the Government. The CSO sector was assessed as having great capacity and the weakness of public institutions relative to the CSOs was seen as a problem. It was stated that there were many advantages in stepping up cooperation between CSOs and public institutions. –The support to Diakonia and Forum Syd through the D/HR programme was assessed as having positive results in raising awareness in this area.

<p>2008– 2010 (extended to 2011)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support to CSOs was seen as complementing the support for primary education and democratic governance in order to spread increased awareness of democracy and individuals’ rights.</li> <li>- A dialogue objective was to encourage the Cambodian Government to hold improved dialogue with civil society on issues concerning respect for and protections of human rights.</li> <li>- Synergies between support to civil society and other programmes were planned in order to determine how poor women and men react to the programmes.</li> <li>- Support to civil society via Swedish CSOs was stated as a priority, with a focus on human rights and environment- and climate-related problems.</li> <li>- Positive signs of support were noted as an increase in general awareness of the principles of human rights and democracy as well as greater popular participation in drafting new laws.</li> </ul>
<p>2012– 2013</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One objective for democratic development and human rights was “More effective dialogue and regular cooperation between representatives of public authorities and actors in civil society at both national and local levels”.</li> <li>- The focus was on enhancing capacity regarding D/HR in public administration and on supporting civil society engaged in advocacy work aimed at strengthening the democratisation process or actively seeking to further strengthen the ability of the public to demand political accountability.</li> <li>- Support for decentralisation reform was planned to be reduced and linked to support to civil society at local level.</li> <li>- It was stated that, if support to civil society was to lead to concrete improvements regarding human rights and rule of law, dialogue and collaboration between the Government and civil society had to be strengthened.</li> </ul>
<p>2014– 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One of three sub-objectives is “Strengthened democracy and gender equality, greater respect for human rights and freedom from oppression”.</li> <li>- Under this, three points can be related to civil society: 1) increased democratic influence and greater accountability for citizens at local level; 2) improved knowledge of human rights, gender equality and the principles of the rule of law among citizens and in the public sector; 3) more citizens, in particular young people, actively involved in combating corruption.</li> <li>- The role of civil society is not explicitly mentioned in the strategy.</li> </ul>

The Swedish policy regarding support to civil society has always been primarily based on the role of Swedish CSOs (Odén 2012). The policy formulations have mainly been used for support to Swedish CSOs, according to the system of Swedish ‘Frame

Organisations' (FOs) which was introduced during the 1970s. This system implied that a number of Swedish CSOs were selected for direct support from Sida. These organisations receive allocations, based on a special strategy with a special budget. The basic condition has been that the FOs contribute their own funds (20 per cent, later reduced to 10 per cent). Sida has however also increasingly funded Swedish CSOs within the country strategies to implement specific D/HR programmes.

Civil society plays an important role in Swedish development cooperation with Cambodia. During the period 1997–2017, approximately 20 per cent of Swedish aid to Cambodia was allocated to CSOs. In total, an average of 50 per cent of Swedish CSO support in Cambodia has been funded through the FO budget to Swedish CSOs for their own programmes.<sup>34</sup> The remaining share of funding has been through specific Swedish/Sida programmes, within the country strategies, all implemented by two Swedish CSOs: Diakonia and Forum Syd. In this study we focus mainly on the support through Diakonia and Forum Syd within the country strategies, since this support is guided by the specific objectives for Swedish development cooperation with Cambodia. The basis for selecting Diakonia and Forum Syd is not quite clear. Diakonia had some experience of working with CSO programmes in Cambodia, while Forum Syd had only been involved through a volunteer programme which then became a major element of the programme under the Swedish country strategy (the term 'volunteers' was later replaced by 'advisors'). A basic difference between the organisations is that Diakonia is a more traditional CSO, while Forum Syd is an umbrella organisation for Swedish CSOs. Both organisations were however trusted in Sweden and shared all major Swedish objectives regarding D/HR.

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<sup>34</sup> Some of the most important organisations are the Swedish Mission Council, RFSU (the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education), We Effect, Plan Sweden, Union to Union and the Church of Sweden.

### 6.3.4 Critical junctures – tracing processes and assessing value added

In order to understand the added value of Swedish aid, we trace the key processes leading up to the critical junctures and the Swedish involvement in the processes that determined the outcome. Each critical juncture is scrutinised under the following headings: *Defining the CJ*, *Tracing the process towards the CJ*, *Tracing the results of the CJ* and *Assessing the value added from Swedish aid*.

#### *Critical juncture 1 – From election support to democratic governance support*

*Defining the CJ:* The period 1997–2000 was a critical juncture when the government of the Second Legislature was elected and, with the encouragement of international donors, turned its attention to an ambitious reform agenda, although with limited human resources. This was a period when CPP consolidated its power both through legal measures and by extending the patrimonial structure (Hughes 2010). However the dependence on donor funding was high and this created space for civil society organisations. The 1998 election can be seen as a critical juncture because it laid a foundation for the start of more long-term support by Western donors.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* Civil society in Cambodia in the late 1990s was dominated by formal CSOs, supported by donors and international CSOs. Informal CSOs/CBOs were operating at village and commune levels, but normally without any broader D/HR agenda. The human rights CSOs were mostly focused on the protection of human rights in specific cases but had no strategy for advocacy (SPM 2001). Cooperation between the state and the CSOs was very limited and the government perceived the D/HR-CSOs as a political threat. Donor support was fragmented and driven by the individual agencies' agendas.

The commencement of more long-term support to Cambodia was well prepared for by Sweden, through substantial studies and discussions (most importantly Vickery and Amer 1995). A key factor was the long-term support to the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) and the way Sida kept close contact and used the work of CDRI in strategic analysis. An important step was the establishment of a Sida Advisory Team (SAT), which delivered

continuous analytical background reports for Swedish development cooperation on democratic governance and support to civil society during the period 2001–2006. The SAT reports played a key role in providing knowledge and advice for planning Swedish support for democratic governance. They were also a source of information for other donors and researchers.

Sweden had started specific election support via Diakonia (DK) and Forum Syd (FS) but soon developed a democracy and human rights programme which influenced Swedish support for a long time. This programme included three main parts (Sida 1997): 1) support to the Cambodia Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (COHCHR), 2) support to Cambodian CSOs through the two Swedish CSOs, Diakonia and Forum Syd, and 3) support to the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI). All these support programmes have been continued throughout period up to now. This is important since it established a concept of walking on ‘three legs’: the UN, civil society and public administration (via CDRI).<sup>35</sup> Sida also included support to the media in a plan, but this did not lead to a support programme (Karlstedt 2001). One main intention behind the Swedish support to CSOs was to promote cooperation with – and capacity development of – the Government, in a situation where direct support to the Government was considered not yet possible. The Swedish election support in 1997–98 soon developed into more general D/HR support, with an emphasis on gender equality, although this was still seen as a test period with no long-term strategy (Sida 1998). There was however a basic difference in time perspective between Sida and DK/FS; where Sida considered the support as a test for a limited period, DK/FS had a much longer timeframe (10–15 years) for their cooperation with Cambodian partners (Karlstedt 2001:15).

DK/FS worked through financial and technical support to local CSOs. The local CSOs supported by DK/FS were mainly human rights organisations, and some of them actively confronted the Government while others aimed to use ‘constructive engagement’. The confrontations were mainly at national level, while work at

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<sup>35</sup> CDRI is mainly a research organisation, but was originally seen by Sida as a means of support for civil service training and public administration (Sida 1997).

provincial level was more effective (Vijhgen 2001). A major problem was that the CSOs had no local constituency and were in most cases dominated by their leaders.

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* The CSOs had substantial resources in terms of international donor funding and technical expertise, and had to a certain extent taken over implementing functions from the state in human rights areas. The state had little capacity and commitment to implement D/HR reforms and the cooperation between CSOs and the Government was very limited (SPM 2001). During this period mechanisms for partnership and dialogue between the Government and donors were put in place, in some cases with civil society participation. At the Consultative Group (CG) meeting in Paris 2000, the atmosphere was positive and for the first time representatives from civil society (and the private sector) were present.

This was however also a period when protests over land conflicts increased, especially the increased granting of Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) which led to growing environmental and land activism and grassroots networks.

*Assessing the added value of Swedish aid at the CJ:* Swedish support during 1997–2000 treated civil society as part of a broader ‘democratic governance’, which was rather unique among donors at that time, and this contributed added value of Swedish support in the longer run and eventually also influenced support from other donors. Other important aspects were that Sweden raised the issue of internal democracy of the local CSOs as a high priority at an early stage, and that gender equality was a key priority from the start. In both these respects, the actual changes were however limited in the short to medium term. (Logarta et al. 2005). According to one evaluation, Swedish support had positive effects on assistance to victims of human rights violations and raising awareness in many cases, but coordination and links to the communities were limited and the work of the local CSOs was assessed as mainly symptom treatment without sustainable results (Vijhgen 2001).<sup>36</sup> The overall assessment is that Swedish value added to D/HR was limited during

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<sup>36</sup> This evaluation was however quite controversial both within Sida and among the Swedish CSOs.

this CJ, but that some decisions were taken which had an influence in the longer run.

### *Critical juncture 2 – Bridge to decentralisation*

*Defining the CJ:* The first commune elections in 2002 were an important event since, even if decentralisation was supported by CPP as part of a strategy to consolidate its power at local level (Eng 2014), it also opened up possibilities for alternative power structures: political parties, CSOs and CBOs, and participation by the villagers. For Phnom Penh-based CSOs it was a useful entry point for working with the commune level in local planning and development. Cooperation between CSOs also increased, supported by the role of the network organisations, like the NGO Forum and the Cooperation Committee of Cambodia (CCC). As a whole, a study found that during this period (2001–2002) “the rapid growth of NGOs and the open environment in which the government allows them to operate are distinct advantages for advocates in Cambodia” (Mansfield and MacLeod 2002).

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* The CSOs had acquired a protected space due to donor funding but had also developed a stronger local structure. One example of this was in election monitoring where CSOs played a very active role, although with limited results (Sullivan 2016). The number of CSOs increased, although many of them were run by the CPP (SPM 2003).<sup>37</sup> The most positive trend was the growth of CBOs. During this period Sweden selected decentralisation as the key area for CSO support, while general support to the legal sector was given less priority (although legal aid was in many cases included in the programmes of the local CSOs supported by DK/FS). As early as 2001, Sida had started to discuss with Forum Syd how it and its partners could be more involved in the decentralisation process (Sida 2001). A SAT report (SPM 2003) recommended prioritising cooperation with organisations that were instrumental in supporting provincial and community-based organisations, and that current decentralisation reforms should be seen as an opportunity to systematically stimulate

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<sup>37</sup>These were formally registered as CSOs, but should rather be seen as governmental NGOs (GONGOs).

popular participation and empowerment. These recommendations influenced the proposals of Diakonia and Forum Syd as well as the decision by Sida on future support (Sida 2003).

Swedish support to civil society continued to be channelled to local CSOs via Diakonia and Forum Syd, even if the issue of alternatives was raised by the SAT (SPM 2003). The democracy programme had developed since 1998 from support for FS/DK to channel resources to local organisations, to support for the two Swedish CSOs to implement their own programmes. This was part of a strategy for a more 'hands-off' approach from Sida (SPM 2003). A consequence of this was that direct Sida support became more similar to the general CSO (FO) funding, and this was seen as a benefit. One reason was that it was more cost-effective than other alternatives in a situation where Sida's management capacity was constrained (Sida 2003). It was also based on the view that civil society should ultimately be supported only through the general support to Swedish CSOs via the FO programme, while the use of CSOs (as 'contractors') in the strategic support was seen as risky for their independence (Sida 2003).

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* Even if the commune election improved the prospects for democratisation and the role of civil society, the future was uncertain. In contrast to 1997, the RGC had more capacity and the CSOs had less influence (SPM 2003a). This was also an effect of the weakness of the CSOs, with a low degree of voluntary participation, a lack of democratic structures and low sustainability. The overall result was limited; a SAT report concluded that the rich and powerful continued to monopolise and consolidate power and that the Government's capacity to control public life had increased and narrowed the prospects for democratisation (SPM 2004). After the election, the ruling elite increased control of the opposition and became less tolerant towards critical voices (SPM 2003a), and this tendency continued after the national election in 2003.

*Assessing the added value of Swedish aid:* Swedish aid was assessed as having positive effects on the awareness and development of civil society in terms of knowledge, capacity and internal democracy. FS and DK worked actively to increase gender awareness within their

programmes, and gender equality was assessed as one of the areas where the support had contributed added value (SPM 2006). It was however assessed that the gender mainstreaming of many partners was rather superficial, while bottom-up processes, grassroots development and public participation were strengthened at local (commune) level. Partner CSOs were assessed to have been instrumental in strengthening the rule of law and in pushing for legal and judiciary reforms regarding elections, resource management and the rights of women (Logarta et al. 2005). Sweden observed the potential of a stronger link between support to civil society and decentralisation, including support to CBOs and local communities, but it took long time before this was implemented on a larger scale.

Overall, Swedish aid contributed some added value to D/HR through civil society support, in particular in supporting CSO capacity development and promoting awareness and participation at local level. The effects were however limited by reduced democratic space and a lack of dialogue between the RGC and civil society at national level. The Sida policy of a more ‘hands-off’ approach towards DK/FS led to a missed opportunity for more strategic support to civil society.

### *Critical Juncture 3 – Demand for good governance*

*Defining the CJ:* The CPP won a majority for the first time in the 2008 national election and continued to consolidate its power and control. The high priority of the aid effectiveness agenda for the RGC, donors and CSOs created new arenas for cooperation and dialogue. ‘Good governance’ became a major objective for donors. The role of civil society, in this perspective, was mainly as a complement to government reforms, often labelled ‘demand for good governance’.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* The RGC introduced a number of new laws which had the potential to control civil society space. The first was the Penal Code 2009, followed by the Law on Peaceful Demonstrations 2009 and the Anti-Corruption Law 2010. Western donors became increasingly critical of the situation for human rights and democracy, especially regarding corruption, illegal logging, land concessions and evictions. CSOs (local and foreign) played a very

important role in revealing this, at both macro and micro levels. At the same time, donors became more willing to directly support government reforms.

Most D/HR-CSOs were still totally dependent on donor funding and internal democracy continued to be a major problem. The objective of Swedish aid was to support civil society as a promoter of democracy and human rights, but this was increasingly seen as part of democratic governance, which included support for government reforms, in particular for decentralisation and public financial management. In the country strategy, support to civil society was seen as a complement to the two major 'sectors': primary education and democratic governance.

After the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, aid effectiveness dominated all discussions about aid by the RGC, donors and CSOs (until the next meeting in Busan 2011, when everything changed). The RGC established a highly advanced structure for dialogue and discussion. The outcome was more limited and rather unsustainable, but there were several effects which led to changing relations. The issue of local ownership strengthened the role of the Government, but it also opened the door for representatives from civil society to take part in dialogue at national level. The most important forums were the annual Government-Donor Development Cooperation Conference (GDCC) and the 19 Technical Working Groups (TWGs) for different sectors/issues. Selected CSOs participated actively in many of the TWGs.

In some sectors, donors took steps towards harmonisation, coordination and using programme-based approaches, but there was hardly any progress regarding support to CSOs, and donor support remained heavily fragmented and project dominated. Few donors provided core funding (Sweden was an exception). Instead most donors required organisations to apply for project funding, which has always been a key feature of donor support to CSOs, but which became more recognised during the 'era of aid effectiveness'. This further 'projectised' the work of CSOs and in practice the programme management skills developed by CSOs were often developed to fit the specific donor requirements (EU 2017).

In 2006, the SAT presented a report (SPM 2006) which recommended that the two Swedish CSOs phase out some of their support to some of the traditional Phnom Penh-based CSOs, in order to foster a 'CBO-friendly' environment. The SAT also repeated its view from earlier studies that so called mutual-benefit organisations, like trade unions, should be supported. Finally it proposed that funding local CSOs via a Cambodian foundation could be considered.

Sida's response was mainly to continue as before (Sida 2006b). It rejected the alternative options for support proposed by the SAT report but concluded that the gradual increase of Cambodian staff in Forum Syd and Diakonia was a positive step towards local ownership. Sida stated that it would delegate management of the programmes fully to the two organisations and focus on results reporting, dialogue and follow-up. Sida did not see the need to continue the monitoring of civil society and democracy in Cambodia by a Sida Advisory Team (Sida 2006). Shortly after this, an important change process started within Swedish aid: the increased focus on results-based management (RBM). This was clearly spelled out in the directives from the Swedish Government to Sida in 2008 and had a substantial influence on support to CSOs. A subsequent general evaluation of Sida support to CSOs found that the scope for contributing to positive changes in enabling conditions was significantly constrained by the time requirements and opportunity costs of Sida's results-focused aid management system (Pettit et al. 2015).

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* Corruption was the key issue for many programmes during this period. After some failed attempts by donors, which met with strong resistance from the RGC, the World Bank launched the Demand for Good Governance programme in 2008. This provided substantial volumes of funding for CSOs but also targeted selected state agencies. One objective was to overcome the long-standing distrust between the RGC and the Cambodian civil society. The focus was on social accountability as an approach to move the CSO activities from advocacy to constructive dialogue, since the confrontational nature of many advocacy efforts had often been met with government resistance (World Bank 2009:52 ff.).

The approach however did not achieve its objective but rather underlined the conflicting interpretations of concepts like good governance and social accountability. While most donors and CSOs saw this as advocacy for change, the Government saw it as only complementary to its own reforms. According to one author, it encouraged citizens to engage with the Government in ironing out questions of effectiveness, rather than developing powerful non-state movements that might challenge the Government's overall trajectory (Hughes 2010:12). Social accountability efforts were more effective at local levels. After 2008, grassroots mobilisation increased further, both because a platform for influence had been created by the commune reform and because donor support had become more in favour of support at local level (World Bank 2009).

Sida had encouraged DK/FS to work more with CBOs and with local authorities at commune level for many years. Forum Syd took the initiative by creating a CBO fund through which funds were channelled via local CSOs to CBOs (Sida 2010). Diakonia, in contrast, concentrated more support on the big Phnom Penh-based organisations which had become more active in supporting community initiatives (Diakonia 2011). In 2009, the Swedish Government presented a special initiative regarding climate change, with extra funds allocated for Cambodia during the period 2009–2012, and in 2010 Sida started to support a programme set up by three international CSOs – one of which was Forum Syd – the Joint Climate Change Initiative (JCCI). This included an integration of human rights and climate change adaptation. From 2010 Sida changed its approach towards DK/FS. It was no longer seen as one programme but rather as two separate programmes, with different focuses: Forum Syd focusing on climate change, with a rights-based approach in support of rights-holders to demand their rights, and Diakonia focusing on local democracy (Sida 2009b).

In a strategy report, Sida concluded that its support had contributed to a stronger and more robust civil society, but that the human rights situation was continuing to deteriorate and that the HR support should therefore be directed more towards supporting change actors within the Government and public administration (Sida 2010).

*Assessment of the added value of Swedish aid.* During this period partner organisations funded through DK/FS contributed to improving awareness of the rights of Cambodian citizens at the local level and to improving national legislation relating to the protection of human rights (Bryld et al. 2012). There were however no examples where a constructive dialogue with central government was established (Sassarsson-Cameron and Winai 2009). This may be explained by a lack of power and capacity, but also by some organisations having been inclined towards a more confrontational approach in their activities. In summary it could be assessed that even if support to CSOs had substantial positive effects on democracy and human rights in many specific cases, it had not resulted in significant changes in the governance structures or political power of the ruling party. A positive value added by Swedish aid may have been the integration of a human rights approach with climate change adaptation. This, according to some of our interviews, facilitated the adaptation of CSO strategies to a situation with shrinking space for explicit human rights activities.

It was recommended in evaluations (Sassarsson-Cameron and Winai 2009; Bryld et al. 2012) that Sweden should become more proactive and more specific in its conditions for support to Cambodian organisations and should also consider direct support to local CSOs. These recommendations were however not implemented and Sida continued its hands-off support to DK/FS (Sida 2009).

Overall it can be assessed that Swedish aid through CSOs contributed some added value by supporting local CSOs and indirectly also CBOs. The evaluations however emphasised that this support could have been more effective, e.g. by selecting partners. Due to a 'hands-off' approach from both Sida and DK/FS, no active selection of local CSOs was made and the pressure for internal democracy and efficiency was rather weak (Sassarsson-Cameron and Winai 2009).

#### *Critical Juncture 4 – Closing the democratic space?*

*Defining the CJ:* The 2013 election was a critical juncture because it started a process – up until the 2018 national elections – which

included a number of events, the most important being the dissolution of the CNRP in 2017, in order to increase control by CPP and Hun Sen over civil actors (political parties and CSOs) in Cambodian society. For civil society this period led to a process of closing the political space, especially at national level. During the first few years after the election, the process was however mixed, with some opening up of this space. However an important event was the final adoption of the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) in 2015.

*Tracing the process towards the CJ:* In the period after 2011 the aid effectiveness agenda turned away from a focus on national ownership and donor alignment to a focus on monitoring and accountability for results. In Cambodia this was also a period when Asian donors and investors replaced Western donors as the dominant source of foreign development funding. The CPP faced a legitimacy crisis after the 2013 national election; this allowed for alternative strategies to address this situation, and the following years showed some contradictory trends. For CSOs, the overall trend was however negative. The CSO Sustainability Index (USAID 2016) deteriorated during 2014–2016 and the most negative development was regarding legal environment and financial viability.

The legal environment changed mainly due to the LANGO. The financial viability of the CSOs is assessed to have decreased in recent years, due to reduced ODA funding (USAID 2016; CCC 2018).<sup>38</sup> Some CSOs are also generating extra income by selling goods and services. It must be emphasised that there are many different types of CSOs. The majority of the formal organisations deliver social services and have a limited (or no) political agenda. Many are directly supported by the Government and, in recent years, increasingly by China. The platforms for CSOs to collaborate with and influence the Government have been largely inactive. However there has been more CSO engagement at sub-national level, e.g. in the Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (I-SAF), while CSOs' advocacy and lobbying efforts at national level did not lead

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<sup>38</sup> This is based on information from CSOs. It is not confirmed by the RGC (CRDB/CDC) ODA database.

to significant achievements. The view of the Government has been increasingly negative, in particular regarding the alleged role of some CSOs in a ‘colour revolution’ via support to the CNRP (Kingdom of Cambodia 2018). Even if this has been presented as covering only a few CSOs, it has influenced the overall political space.

The overall objective of the Swedish country strategy for 2012–2013 was to “strengthen conditions for a sustainable and democratic development with increased respect for human rights”, thus firmly placing human rights at the very centre of Sweden’s development cooperation with Cambodia. However, unlike in the 2008–2010 strategy, no direct reference was made to human rights monitoring, raising awareness or an evidence-based human rights dialogue. Regarding civil society, the strategy clearly stated that support to civil society could only lead to improvements if dialogue and collaboration between the Government and civil society was strengthened. This referred to both local and national levels. The strategy was fairly optimistic about the possibilities of influencing government reform through dialogue, but at the same time it presented a negative view of the decentralisation reform and stated that there was a risk that the reform may counteract the development of a pluralistic political system. Therefore, Swedish support would decrease during the period.

A new, social democratic government took office in 2014 and the focus on RBM which had been introduced by the former government continued in the 2014–2018 country strategy (a ‘result strategy’, approved in March 2014 by the former government). The first sub-objective of the strategy is: “Strengthened democracy and gender equality, greater respect for human rights and freedom from oppression”. According to Sida’s strategy reports, a large number of projects/programmes are contributing to this,<sup>39</sup> one of which involves support via Diakonia<sup>40</sup> (Sida 2014; 2016; 2018). This shows that the portfolio has been substantially diversified in recent years. One explanation is that Sida has been forced to find new ways to

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<sup>39</sup> A list of programmes involving support for D/HR is provided in a footnote in 5.1.1.

<sup>40</sup> Support via Forum Syd is classified as support for the environment and climate.

disburse the financial country frame when facing decreased support for the decentralisation reform (interview with Embassy staff). Some of the new programmes directly support CSOs. In 2012 Sida started direct support for anti-corruption measures through Transparency International Cambodia (later channelled through a delegated cooperation with the EU). Since 2013 Sida has supported a programme implemented by PACT, a US-based international CSO. The Promoting Citizen Engagement in Democratic Development (PROCEED) programme is fully funded by Sida with the overall goal of “citizens exercising increased power to affect governance”. These are the first cases where Sida has directly supported CSOs for specific programmes regarding D/HR in Cambodia.

*Tracing the results of the CJ:* A distinction must be made between the dissolution of the CNRP and the shrinking democratic space for CSOs. In both cases it is about CPP trying to increase its power and control. In the early stages some CSOs clearly joined the opposition in advocating D/HR issues and criticising the Government. As civil society has developed, it has however become more of a force of its own, in terms of trust by and empowerment of the communities and the population. The shrinking space has led to increased cooperation among the CSOs as a way to adjust to the new situation, but also to increased suspicion in some cases.

The RGC cannot and will not try to ‘dissolve’ civil society; on the contrary it tries to find ways for more peaceful cooperation within a controlled framework. One example is that the MoI issued a Notice to Provincial and Capital Administration in 2017 to create favourable conditions for activities of CSOs that are duly registered. The MoI recently organised a forum for partnership between the Government and civil society where it was recommended to establish a technical working group with representatives from key line ministries and CSOs to work on improving the implementation of the LANGO. We were informed by the MoI that it had established contact with one coordinating CSO (CCC) regarding this.

Diakonia has kept a low profile during this period and has worked as partner and facilitator of the local CSOs. Some of its

partners have however been on the Government's 'black list' and one of them (ADHOC) had five of its leaders arrested in 2017. A mid-term review concluded that the Diakonia country office had not been sufficiently proactive in its dialogue and coordination with other actors (Nilsson and Chhiv 2018). It is also our impression that Diakonia (at all levels) regards its role in Cambodia as mainly an intermediary and not as a human rights organisation in its own right (interview with Diakonia, Phnom Penh). One consequence of this is that Diakonia does not support any CBO, either directly or via the registered partner CSOs. This is mainly a strategy for risk minimisation, although CBOs can still benefit from the funding through the activities of the partner CSOs.

Since March 2017, with funding from Sida, Forum Syd has been working on a three-year programme, Green Ownership (GO!), which aims to increase community access, the sustainable use of natural resources and community climate change resilience (Forum Syd 2018). In this programme, FS provides sub-granting to 15 partner CSOs for their work with more than 400 CBOs. Forum Syd also provides sub-granting to CBOs and to other organisations that receive direct short-term support. For capacity development, FS provides training according to their Rights Ways Forward model for community mobilisation. Monitoring is focused at community level.

Sweden has become more active in EU coordination in Cambodia. The country strategy for 2014–2018 is formally a part of the EU joint strategy and has been one of the most active EU members in recent years, in particular regarding D/HR issues. In 2014 the EU presented a roadmap for support to civil society in Cambodia, and this was updated in 2017 (European Development Partners 2017). The priorities of this roadmap share the basic principles of Swedish support, such as strengthening the enabling environment, internal governance of CSOs, dialogue between the Government and civil society, and coordination and core support.

*Assessment of the added value of Swedish aid:* The support to civil society has been given relatively limited attention by Sida and the Embassy in Phnom Penh, even if the volume of support has increased. One example is that there is no specific goal or result indicator for support to civil society in the Results Strategy 2014–

2018. The focus has been on diversification, new actors (within the Government, civil society and the private sector) and increased cooperation with the EU.

It is assessed that Sweden has contributed some added value to D/HR through support to CSOs. Initiatives like links to decentralisation, climate change and anti-corruption have contributed, but the lack of a specific strategy for civil society support in the new situation has probably reduced the overall effect.

### **6.3.5 Conclusions**

Conclusions are drawn in three inter-related sequences: first, an analysis of the evolution within the sector in the chosen timeframe, second, an assessment of the sector's contribution to overall democratisation, and finally, a scrutiny of Swedish value added to sector evolution. Swedish value added to relevant features of democracy are summarised in Table 7, and thereafter carried over to the report's concluding chapter 7, together with similar summaries from the other two cases, for cross-case comparison and to synthesise findings.

#### *Analysing evolution in the sector*

Civil society in Cambodia has undergone substantial development during the period studied. In 1997 it was a 'sector' which had important influence on society, due to foreign resources and the weakness of the state, although the number of CSOs was quite limited and concentrated in Phnom Penh. In 2017 it covered a large number of formal and informal organisations in all parts of the country which are of key importance for social service delivery. The capacity of civil society to fulfil the roles in supporting democratisation has increased, but the space for doing this has been shrinking, due to the increased government restrictions.

The CSOs are still dependent on funding from donors and international CSOs, but a national network with substantial capacity has been created. Several strong national coordinating organisations have been established. The overall enabling environment does not however accommodate the capacity and dynamism of the civil

sector. Many factors, including the legal framework, actions against many CSOs (in particular those active in D/HR area) and political polarisation have hindered CSOs from fulfilling their roles in democratisation.

#### *Analysing the sector's contribution to overall democratisation*

In the first part of the period studied (around 1997–2007), the ‘CS sector’ played an important role as a watchdog of and counterforce to the Government. International CSOs (e.g. Global Witness) provided much of the background for this. During the ‘aid effectiveness period’ (2008–2011) the national dialogue structure was opened up for participation by some of the leading local CSOs. This was of particular importance in some of the technical working groups (TWGs). The RGC reluctantly accepted this, due to an interest in keeping Western donors satisfied. The structure started to be dismantled in 2012 when the RGC suspended the annual overall meetings and the roles of the TWGs have since declined. All this happened at the same time that the role of China as a donor, and investor, increased.

On the other hand the role of civil society as an actor in the substantive and participatory aspects of democratisation has increased, due to the increase in CBOs and local associations all over the country. These are more difficult for the RGC to control since they are informal and work on specific issues, not on overall D/HR advocacy. The decentralisation process increased the space for these actors, although the political measures (in particular the dissolution of the CNRP) after the local election 2017 have reduced this. However the potential remains, and this may be a key force behind democratisation in the future.

#### *Analysing the Swedish value added to sector development*

During the period studied Sweden has been an important donor to civil society, not so much in terms of volume of funding (the USA has been the dominant funder during the entire period), but rather due to three specific characteristics of Swedish support: the *concentration* on a few programmes and partners, the *long-term* approach and the principle of providing *core support* to the local partners. The main channels of support have remained the same

throughout the period: Diakonia and Forum Syd. These organisations (in particular Diakonia) have also used a long-term approach in the selection of local partners. This has been positive for the capacity development, planning and networking of the CSOs, and has led to some influence regarding democracy and human rights. Since Swedish support has been long-term (and core), it has however also created a dependence relation and therefore a risk of loss of legitimacy. All local CSOs supported by Sweden are heavily dependent on funding from foreign donors. This situation has not changed much during the 20-year period. Some CSOs have been able to diversify their funding to more donors, but in many cases the CSOs are still specifically dependent on Swedish funding.

Diakonia's portfolio of partners has been very stable. Some CSOs have been supported for 20 years (ADHOC, LICADHO, GADC). The focus is on established and well-known organisations, and Diakonia contributes on average 12 per cent of their budgets. Due to the approach of long-term core funding, the role of Diakonia for these organisations has been even more important. Many organisations stated that their development would not have been possible without the Swedish funding. The latest mid-term review concluded that the flexible funding from Diakonia to some partners has enabled them to survive in times of funding gaps and management crisis (Nilsson and Chhiv 2018).

The definition of 'core support' is not quite clear, but the difference between Sweden and most other donors is substantial. Swedish support is not earmarked for specific projects, attributed to the donor, but provided for the development of the organisation according to shared objectives regarding human rights and democracy. Swedish funding can be used for all types of expenditure, including administration and staff development. This is certainly a comparative advantage which is very much appreciated by the local CSOs. At the same time it has, in the same way as the long-term approach, led to continued dependence on Swedish funding.

Although all studies and evaluations have made very positive assessments of the work of DK/FS, a recommendation (in the SAT reports and evaluations) to Sida has often been to explore alternative

channels. Sida has however always rejected this. One reason is that it has been a basic assumption that there is an advantage in supporting Swedish CSOs, since they can feed back experiences to Swedish society and thereby get a better understanding of the conditions in Cambodia (Sida 2003). The selection of local partners has been left to Diakonia and Forum Syd, and Sida has not intervened in this process. Diakonia has mainly selected established, Phnom Penh-based CSOs for long-term support, while Forum Syd has had a more diversified portfolio of partners, including both established and new CSOs with more specialised agendas.

The need for coordination of donor support to CSOs and for improved cooperation between CSOs has often been pointed out by studies and evaluations. Donor coordination in this area has been even more difficult than in other areas, mainly due to the fact that support to CSOs is more project-oriented than other forms of support. Sweden/Sida may have been more positive towards coordination than other donors, but very little has been achieved.

We will finally look at the four processes we identified as ways to support civil society, and how these can be assumed to improve democracy and human rights: counterbalance, complementing, mobilisation and influence.

Swedish aid has to some extent been provided with the objective to *counterbalance* the state, by supporting CSOs engaged in advocacy work. Sweden has supported some of the key national CSOs (ADHOC, LICADHO, COMFREL, GADC, NGO Forum etc.) which have often been regarded by the Government as ‘anti-government’. Sweden has played a key role in providing core support to these organisations for a very long period, and this has helped to strengthen the role of civil society as a counterbalance to the state. It has however also in some cases been an obstacle for cooperation and dialogue with the Government (World Bank 2009; SPM 2003).

In other cases Swedish support via CSOs for training and increased knowledge has led to increased public demand and some dialogue with the Government (mainly at local level). Support for improved internal democracy of CSOs has made this more effective.

As a whole there have been positive effects on awareness and the development of civil society in terms of knowledge, capacity and internal democracy. However the effect on policy at national level has been insignificant.

Swedish support to civil society has, in particular during the period 2008–2013, been provided with an objective to *complement* government reforms in areas related to democracy and human rights. This was based on the assumption that CSOs could be more effective in their D/HR work by moving from sometimes aggressive advocacy towards more ‘constructive engagement’. This has been successful in some areas where Sweden/Sida has played an active role, in particular decentralisation (I-SAF), but also environment-climate and public financial management (budget transparency via Transparency International).

In some areas, Sweden has provided support to civil society with the objective of supporting popular *mobilisation* in order to increase participation in democratisation processes. Election support, including voter education, was provided in the early phases as was legal education. Support for gender equality has, in particular, focused on empowerment. In the later period, anti-corruption has included the mobilisation of young people.

In the Swedish country strategies and in key Sida documents, the main emphasis has been on the role of CSOs in *influencing* the Government, mainly through increased dialogue and cooperation. It has been assumed that CSOs can enter into dialogue with the Government at different levels. This has turned out to be inaccurate. There have been very few platforms for dialogue at national level. CSOs have played a role in some sectors (e.g. through the TWGs) and at local (commune) level. There may also have been examples of successful lobbying in certain cases.

#### *Summing up the democratic added value of Swedish aid to civil society*

The features of democracy to which Swedish development assistance to decentralisation are likely to have contributed are summarised in Table 7, constituting a summary of features of the three models of democracy detailed in Table 1A: procedural liberal

democracy, substantive liberal democracy and participatory democracy.

**Table 7: Summary of value added to democratisation from Swedish development assistance to civil society**

Feature of democracy	Assessment of value added from Swedish development assistance to civil society	
	Value added <sup>a)</sup>	Comment/justification
Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties	Likely	Election support via CSOs leading to raising awareness (voter education), improved procedures (election monitoring) and legislation. Some positive effects, in particular at local level, in early phases.
Separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government	Less likely	Support for legal education via CSOs leading to raising awareness and demand for reforms.
Rule of law and independent judiciary	Less likely	Dialogue/lobbying for new legislation. Some effects on legislation.
Upholding of human rights	Likely	Support via CSOs for training and increased knowledge, leading to increased demand, advocacy and dialogue with the Government. Support for improved internal democracy of CSOs which makes this more effective. Positive effects on awareness and the development of civil society in terms of knowledge, capacity and internal democracy, but little effect on policy at national level.
Gender equality	Likely	Support via CSOs for training and increased awareness and knowledge. Support to CSO structure for communication and dialogue with the Government. Positive effect on awareness and to some extent on empowerment. Also Government-CSOs dialogue.
Vertical separation of independent powers	N/a	N/a
Bottom-up processes	Highly likely	Support via CSOs for raising awareness and capacity-building at local levels, including local government authorities. Support for mobilisation at local level. Strengthening at local levels, but not at national level.

Growth of independent civil society	Highly likely	Support to CSOs and networks/coordination. Civil society has developed and become more independent, but is still dependent on foreign funding.
Grassroots mobilisation/public participation	Highly likely	Support to CSOs for mobilisation and training. Increased grassroots mobilisation and public participation at local levels.
Empowerment and community development	Highly likely	Support to CSOs for mobilisation, training advocacy and community development. Empowerment and community development at local levels.
Education level	N/a	N/a
Political awareness	Likely	

<sup>a)</sup> Graded at four levels: highly likely; likely; less likely; not likely.

Swedish aid to civil society in Cambodia has been based on all three models: *procedural liberal democracy*, *substantive liberal democracy* and *participatory democracy* (Table 1A). Our assessment is that during the period 1997–2017, the most sustainable contribution has been regarding features of the participatory model but also to some extent the substantive liberal model, while contribution to the procedural liberal model has been rather limited. We have not found that the support to civil society has in any way caused unintended support for features of a hybrid democracy regime. We have also not found any examples where Swedish support has contributed to eroding local civil society. On the contrary it has supported CBOs and local movements through support to Cambodian CSOs.

## 7. Overall Concluding Analysis and Lessons Learned

In this concluding chapter we address our specific questions (section 2.1): *‘Has Swedish aid played a role in influencing changes relevant to D/HR in Cambodia over time, and if so, in what way and to what extent? What important lessons can be learned and how can they inform Swedish cooperation on D/HR today?’*

Empirical observations from the case studies have been used in three steps: The *first step* centred around four ‘critical junctures’, which were analysed at the end of each case study (chapter 6) with conclusions drawn in three sub-sections: the evolution in the sector; the sector’s contribution to overall democratisation; and Swedish value added to sector development. In the *second step*, the value added to democratisation from Swedish aid that we found was coded and entered into tables, arranged around the core features of the democracy models that were theoretically identified (chapter 3) and were presented and discussed at the end of each case study (chapter 6). Finally, in the *third step*, the assessment and values given to these indicators have been brought into the overall conclusions in this chapter, where they are compared and assessed. These assessments, in combination with the analysis of the Cambodian context (chapter 4) and the analysis of Swedish aid (chapter 5), make up the basis for the overall conclusions presented in this chapter.

This chapter starts with an analysis of the combined data from the three case studies, and how it has contributed to D/HR (section 7.1). We thereafter analyse how the process and results from the cases, in combination with historical and contextual factors, have affected the overall added value of Swedish aid on democratisation (section 7.2). In section 7.3, we present key learnings, followed by policy implications in section 7.4.

## 7.1 Contribution to democratisation and human rights as seen in the cases

All cases have a plethora of interventions and results. All three cases conclude that there has been democratic value added from Swedish aid, although in various ways and in relation to different conceptions of democracy. There have also been failures or even counter-effects. The case study assessments on features of democracy from chapter 6 are firstly synthesised and analysed in section 7.1.1. Section 7.1.2 then features an assessment of which models of democracy have in effect been supported by Swedish development assistance for decentralisation, education and civil society.

### 7.1.1 Value added to features of democracy

The findings of value added to features of democracy, previously presented in each case study (Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7), are synthesised in Table 8 to provide a basis for an assessment of Swedish overall value added to features of democracy.

**Table 8: Overview of findings on empirically researchable features across the study's three cases**

Case studies: Significance of value added <sup>a)</sup>	Decentralisation	Education	Civil society	Value added for democratisation and human rights per feature <sup>b)</sup>
<b>Features of democracy</b> (Drawn from the various models listed in Table 1)				
Free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties	High	Low	Medium	Less significant
Separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government	N/a	N/a	Low	Insignificant
Rule of Law and independent judiciary	Low	Low	Low	Insignificant

Upholding of human rights - political rights - civil rights - social, economic and cultural rights	Medium (political, civil, and socio-economic rights)	High (children's social right to education)	Medium (civil and socio-economic rights)	Less significant
Gender equality	Medium	High (among children attending school)	Medium	Less significant
Vertical separation of independent powers	Medium	N/a	N/a	Less significant
Bottom-up processes	High	Medium	High	Significant
Growth of independent civil society	High	Medium	High	Significant
Grassroots mobilisation/public participation	High	Medium	High	Significant
Empowerment and community development	Medium	Medium	Medium	Less significant
Education level	Low	High	N/a	Significant
Political awareness	High	High	High	Significant
<b>Value added for democratisation and human right per case (as per most relevant features)</b> b)	Significant	Significant	Significant	<b>Significant</b>

a) Using a scale of high-medium-low to indicate assessed significance of value added from Swedish aid.

b) Using a scale of significant-less significant-insignificant for overall assessment.

Sweden's value added to *free, fair and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties* is assessed as *less significant*. This was a core quality of the commune election/decentralisation reform (at the local level). There have been four consecutive elections of

acceptable quality resulting in functioning multi-party commune/sangkat councils. In 2017 these were however directly affected by the banning of the opposition on national level and the councils *de facto* (but not *de jure*) transformed into single-party bodies. Whereas education has not directly influenced electoral arrangements, it is reasonable to expect that enhanced access to education has influenced voters' attitudes and ability to make informed decisions. Voter education and election monitoring via CSOs has directly contributed to increased awareness and improved procedures. Citizen participation in elections has been enhanced through the provision of information, education and protection, and citizen's expectations of improved transparency of election processes have been mobilised.

*Separation of powers into legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government* has not been influenced by Swedish support through either decentralisation or education, and only marginally by civil society. Sweden's value added is consequently assessed as *insignificant*.

*Rule of law and independent judiciary* has not been directly supported by Swedish aid. However, successes in broadening access to basic education together with the advocacy work of Swedish-supported CSOs are likely to have contributed to Cambodians now having formed expectations for rule of law and an independent judiciary, although they do not trust the institutions as the accountability of judiciary bodies remain weak. Swedish value added to this feature of democracy has been assessed as *insignificant* overall, as only ad-hoc, but no systematic, evidence has been found.

The *upholding of human rights* is the one feature of democracy where synergies across the case areas are obvious. Swedish aid through decentralisation, education and civil society have – in combination – contributed to strongly enhanced expectations and demand for political, civil and social rights among Cambodians. In particular the social right to education has been enhanced with support from Sweden (among others). Civil society advocacy has improved civil rights in many cases. Decentralisation has directly added value to local level political rights, and the institutions fostered through the decentralisation reforms have further opened up access for closer

cooperation with civil society and the delivery of basic education. Regarding economic rights, the various phases of the decentralisation reform process and associated programmes have attracted, administered and allocated major resources for local development over two decades. Local/rural communities have benefited primarily in terms of local infrastructure improvement. Nevertheless, the overall value added from Swedish aid to the upholding of human rights is assessed as *less significant*.

*Gender equality* has been pursued by Sweden in all three case areas. The most obvious success is within education, where gender gaps on average among schoolchildren have been closed (or even slightly reversed, with girls on average achieving better results than boys), but with varying degree of success when disaggregating across districts and urban vs. rural areas. Swedish efforts to mainstream gender in decentralisation reforms have been strong, albeit with little evidence to prove them successful in implementation. The main results remain constrained to raising awareness with little means to push gender equality through in practise, such as in use of commune/sangkat development funds or in enhanced acceptance for female politicians. Support channelled through Swedish-supported civil society organisations has also had gender mainstreaming as a focal cross-cutting issue and does show some evidence of gender equality in the execution of activities. In summary, Sweden's value added to this feature of democracy is assessed as *less significant*.

*Vertical separation of independent powers* is fundamental within decentralisation reforms, although it has not been entirely successful. Sweden's support for the establishment of local-level elected bodies (commune/sangkat councils) has been consistent, but results in practice have been deemed *less significant*. These potentially democratic institutions remain in place in the current situation of having been captured of the incumbents.

Instilling *bottom-up processes* was a key goal within what was initially rural development programmes, and has thereafter been a central aspect in each consecutive phase of the decentralisation reforms, with successes being more marked in the early phases of decentralisation. CSOs have offered training and capacity-building

at local levels, including government officials, creating synergy effects in combination with decentralisation. The overall assessment is that the value added to bottom-up processes from Swedish aid has been *significant*.

*Growth of independent civil society:* Decentralisation reforms have been supportive of the growth of independent civil society. Civil society has continuously developed and become more independent with stronger networks/coordination, although it is commonly dependent on foreign funding. The development of national community-based organisations in particular is also likely to continue to be strengthened through higher levels of education within the population. The overall assessment is that Swedish value added to the growth of independent civil society has been *significant*.

*Grassroots mobilisation/public participation* was a key goal within what were initially rural development programmes, and has thereafter been a central aspect in each consecutive phase of the decentralisation reforms, with successes being more marked in the early phases of decentralisation. Civil society has developed from a few Phnom Penh-based CSOs into a network of local CSOs, CBOs and associations all over the country, with substantial mobilisation and participation at all levels. Within education, one aim of the school support committees was to provide a channel for enhanced community participation in school matters that often involve commune councillors, but this is not yet effective in all aspects. The overall assessment is that the value added to grassroots mobilisation/public participation from Swedish aid has been *significant*.

*Empowerment and community development:* the local level has been empowered by decentralisation reforms and has often also been noted to raise its voice in political contexts outside the communes/sangkats. Mobilisation and advocacy training efforts from civil society organisations have contributed to this state of local level empowerment. However, if and when local level representatives come across higher level politicians/politics they have been subdued. Sweden's value added to empowerment and community development is assessed overall as *less significant*.

The *education level* of the population has increased significantly in Cambodia since 1997. The credit for this positive result has to be shared between the Government, participating donors and implementing multilaterals and CSOs. It is nevertheless assessed that Sweden's value added has been *significant* given Sweden's consistent presence within the basic education sector since the times of providing emergency support.

*Political awareness* is an area where value added from Swedish aid has been *significant*, and where there have been positive synergy effects across the three areas studied. Within decentralisation, the four consecutive commune/sangkat council elections over 15 years, and under a relatively successful participatory regime, has enhanced political awareness and provided political education. In the most recent commune/sangkat election this was evidenced in particular among the younger voting generation. The changing voting habits are likely to also have been influenced by improved access to basic education and an enhanced level of education among the population. Sweden's value added to political awareness is therefore assessed as *significant*.

*Unintended effects:* Democracy aid in a context of a dominant party controlling politics in a hybrid regime could easily end up supporting the opposite of democracy, instead propping up the dominant party and its interests in maintaining power. In this sense, democracy support may be fungible with limited precision. Support for education may end up benefiting the urban elite, support to civil society risks creating an alternative politicised elite, and decentralisation may pave the way for local-level elite capture. However, it is our overall assessment that Sida has avoided this: support for education has focused on basic education benefiting broadly across geography, class and gender; support to civil society has (at least in the second half of the period) had benefits beyond urban, educated and elite circles, and also been increasingly concerned with the democratic content of the supported organisations (which are often in disagreement with the dominant party); and support for decentralisation and the invention of commune councils opened up accountability mechanisms, political plurality and a political space in which the opposition grew stronger

over time as evidenced by the local election results in June 2017. However, it can also be argued that decentralisation and the invention of commune councils in particular facilitated the CPP's political control and legitimacy locally, both initially and when eventually reacting towards the threats to its local level monopoly power: with one measure – forcefully taking over the seats of opposition councillors – the CPP *de facto* reinstalled its power monopoly at local levels, controlling the flow of money and local development investments. Nevertheless, this authoritarian trend on the part of the RGC is not likely to be due to unintentional effects of Swedish support, but rather in spite of them and driven by other forces.

There are *three key issues worthy of note* regarding Swedish value added as seen from findings across the three cases. *First*, Sweden has contributed to the Cambodian public being in a position to put more effective pressure on the Government to improve social service provisions, and this shift strongly reflects the changing socio-economic status of the Cambodian electorate who are increasingly better educated, mobile and connected to diverse sources of information. *Second*, Sweden has contributed to the growth of local CSOs and CBOs in Cambodia which are engaged in local level development projects developed through negotiations between Cambodian actors, which has in turn generated new patterns of interaction between local CSOs and CBOs and local level service providers. *Third*, Sweden has contributed to decentralisation which has in turn further increased closer interactions between local CSOs and CBOs and local state officials, and which has thus facilitated new relationships of power and authority on the ground. It enables a serious dialogue between local CSO actors and the government interlocutors about the role of governance reforms and the need for improved government responsiveness, and thus builds trust between citizens and local power holders. These local level opportunities have attracted interest from the national-level Cambodian Government, and these relationships continue despite the radical political shift after the 2013 election. However, this change has yet to transform the state-society relationship at local level into one of full democracy and genuine accountability.

In summary, our assessments lead to the conclusion that Swedish democracy aid has contributed to significant positive value added for D/HR, according to the models of democracy presented in chapter 3.

### **7.1.2 Which model of democracy has Sweden fed?**

As we have seen above, Sida has contributed to Cambodia's democratisation in a wide sense, across a broad segment of democratic features (see Table 1A for the features of models of democracy). This begs the question of how this broad spectrum amounts to a comprehensive understanding and which features/models lend themselves best to external support under a development aid paradigm. What is actually supported? What is effective, what is efficient and what is sustainable?

The most obvious features of democratisation are those belonging to the procedural aspects at the core of the liberal paradigm (Table 8); i.e. those procedures pertaining to elections, rule of law, separation of powers, etc. Sweden has contributed to several of these features, rather successfully and especially in decentralisation, in that local elections and supporting institutions were created from scratch with a very strong role from Sweden. However, these procedural features are also the easiest to remove if they are at odds with the RGC's preferences, and if and when authoritarian interests get the chance. Elections at the commune level are likely to have their strongest long-term effects in instilling a local culture, history and expectations of democracy, rather than the actual power-sharing and decision-making they made possible. The events of late 2017 support this view; the multi-party quality of the commune councils were quickly abolished, whereas people's expectations of having democratically elected commune councils, and their empowerment from having had these, have not gone away.

The strongest value added by Sida through its democracy support to Cambodia is likely to be to the substantive model of democracy. We have seen that features belonging to this model such as education level, economic development, political awareness, gender equality, and the upholding of human rights have been successfully

supported and deemed to have a high added value. These features are also durable, long-term investments, and are organically significant; they are also – to a greater or lesser degree – necessary aspects of a long-term and sustainable democratisation (in any country).

Contributions to a participatory model of democracy have also been deemed successful. Features such as bottom-up processes, the growth of an independent civil society, grassroots mobilisation/public participation, and empowerment and community development rank consistently in our assessments as medium or high. Support to civil society has typically created popular organisation, the growth of people's engagement and broad(er) political participation. Decentralisation has empowered local communities, stimulated local political activity and created its own brand of a local culture of democracy. These also harbour synergetic effects that have a mutually reinforcing effect on democratic dynamics. These qualities will be highly valuable when the struggle for democracy resumes, or even a prerequisite in order for it to resume (at some point).

So, in our view, the support for substantive and participatory models of democracy has been more effective, efficient and more sustainable than the support for procedural aspects of democracy. In many ways this support is also more predictable and can be modified according to what is possible at a particular point in time and space. It may be seen as defensive to focus on these underlying qualities in a democratisation process, but according to most research on democracy, no sustainable democracy can be upheld without a fair share of these qualities; Cambodia had very little of these by mid-1990s, and is still in need of more. Having said that, we would like to emphasise the significance of support for the procedural aspects at the right time, pursued with sufficient underpinning. Without correct timing and sufficient resources the added value of procedures is easily erased.

In our view, Sida's democracy support has only unintentionally supported undemocratic interests to a limited extent. For civil society, we have not found any such tendencies. For education there are signs of efforts to hold on to the CPP's top-down influence

through the decentralised education structures. For education, there is also a hypothetical risk that curriculums and teaching methods could be geared in favour of the dominant party, although we have not seen this materialise. For decentralisation, the CPP has manipulated the opened democratic space to its advantage, at least in the short term. It succeeded in doing this through its superior presence locally, its historical role and soft power. The authoritarian gains from this may, however, have been short-sighted. Although this should not be taken for granted, demographics – with two thirds of Cambodians being under the age of 30, implying an increasingly better educated electorate in the coming years – may work against longer-term authoritarian gains. To date, the younger generations have demonstrated a wish for political change in elections. To this may be added the growth of civil society organisations, including in rural areas, providing mechanisms for coordinating and channelling legitimate demands.

## **7.2 The Swedish overall contribution to democracy and human rights in Cambodia**

In assessing the value added from Swedish pro-democracy interventions in Cambodia over the period 1997–2017, it is, *firstly*, essential that one does not focus on the day-to-day development of ‘democracy’. If we did, the assessment of Sweden’s democracy aid from 1997 to 2017 would be very different depending on whether we carried out the analysis in August 2013, June 2017 or November 2017. Recent macro-developments in 2017 cannot reduce the value of interventions in 1997, 2002 or 2008 (for instance). *Secondly*, the fact that Cambodian democratic development takes a certain turn depends on a wide range of factors – many of them far more powerful than Swedish aid – and of course Swedish aid may when decided on have been thoughtful, correct and both efficient and effective, even though other forces later pushed macro-development in another direction. *Thirdly*, even though Cambodian development has taken an un-democratic turn, it is of course fully

possible that this could have happened earlier, more violently or more definitively without the decades of Swedish intervention.

***Processes towards democracy:*** We begin by noting that our case study findings (discussed in chapter 6 and synthesised above in section 7.1) seem to confirm our hypotheses (in section 2.2) that Swedish aid has added positive value to the Cambodian political process heading towards democracy. We then note that there are two distinct periods in Swedish aid to Cambodia 1997–2017, with the turning point around 2008. The change seems to have resulted from a combination of internal Cambodian reasons, related to the CPP’s consolidation of its power, and external reasons related to the aid effectiveness agenda and new donors (in particular China) coming to Cambodia, and in addition to Swedish internal organisational and methodological factors. Together, these have been reflected in more limited value added from Swedish aid, being particularly visible within the Swedish support for decentralisation reforms.

Cambodian internal political reasons in particular raised concerns in Sweden and affected Sweden’s willingness to continue cooperation on decentralisation, with Swedish support decreasing after 2011 and eventually ending in 2017. Although democratic development processes had been slowly progressing at the local level, there were few signs of genuine democratic processes at the national level with the CPP having gained dominance of the elected national assembly. Developments at national and local levels may have been different, but were nevertheless mutually dependent, as evidenced by the drastic steps taken in 2017 when the Government banned the opposition and in the process transformed the elected commune/sangkat councils from being multi-party to becoming *de facto* – although not *de jure* – one-party bodies.

Within education, Sweden has on the other hand moved along with the institutional processes and developments in the sector, which were not negatively affected by either the CPP’s consolidation of power or changing donor structures. The interests of the CPP coincided with the interests of donors in terms of education, and the aid effectiveness agenda rather worked to consolidate support within education. Sweden stepped up its support for education, and

thus its influence on processes, after the 2008 turning point, and in particular in 2013 when initiating direct support to the Government for strengthening processes towards decentralised education management, aspiring towards meaningful community participation to address local challenges.

In general, the Swedish development cooperation from around 2008 moved towards a more technocratic approach, with a focus on portfolio management, increased risk aversion and a stronger emphasis on results-based management of programmes. Sweden thereby became a donor with less potential for contributing added value to democratisation. A new potential opened up however through the closer relationship with the EU.

***State-society relationship and institutional development:*** In the earlier stages, decentralisation fundamentally transformed the local state-society relationship from one of fear and repression to one of respect and responsibility, which is an absolutely crucial transformation in any post-conflict society, whereas the continued decentralisation reforms have not transformed the state-society relationship at local level to one of full democracy and genuine accountability. For the latter phase the ruling CPP dominated Cambodian politics and development, adhering to the formal system, while simultaneously operating via a system of ‘mass patronage’. While efficient during the first decade of the 2000s, the political economy of Cambodia became too large and too dynamic to smoothly control the voting outcome this way. In spite of this, the CPP held on to its historical mode of operation, but with decreasing results, hence the election trend in 2013 went against the party, and so did the commune elections in 2017. It was therefore evident that it had to resort to cruder methods for retaining power and control.

An early Swedish insight, as expressed in the policy for democratic development and human rights in Swedish development cooperation (Government Office of Sweden, 2010), was that an absence of a ‘democratic culture’ cannot be changed by reforms of procedures and institutions. Nevertheless, the Swedish analysis in relation to continued support to Cambodia remained confined to perspectives of formal procedures, systems and structures within

both decentralisation and education, with less attention paid to perspectives of the increasingly visible patrimonial system and/or with an absence of building sustainable democratic structures from below. This may in turn have contributed over time to decreasing added value from Swedish aid on democracy and human rights in Cambodia.

One reason for a less positive assessment is that Swedish democracy aid has been based on unrealistic assumptions of the strength and democratic role of institutional development and reforms, without adequately regarding (and/or understanding) the logic of the political system. We noted (in chapter 5) that official documents have assessed democratic development negatively, but still kept an optimistic view of the possibilities to improve the situation through support for national reforms, and kept believing in dialogue between the Government and civil society as a main option for democratisation. It has been mentioned in our discussions with staff at the Embassy and Sida that there has always been a clear awareness of the situation, but the question is then why this has not been fully reflected in either Swedish country strategies or Sida's official reporting.

***The remains of democracy:*** Over time, the CPP has moved away from the expressed intentions of establishing a liberal democracy in the country to in effect transforming itself into a state of competitive authoritarianism, while Sweden has continued its focus on fostering the systems and structures required for a functioning liberal democracy, seemingly based on the assumption that the two governments of Cambodia and Sweden had a shared view of establishing such a functioning liberal democracy. This begs the question of for how long the governments of Cambodia and Sweden have taken decisions based on two different basic models. This is a question which we do not have sufficient information to answer, but which would merit more in-depth study. However, democracy support for government reforms and institutions is support for the political system, and Swedish aid in general may during the latter study period have involuntarily supported the CPP's efforts to turn Cambodia into a competitive authoritarian state.

Established participatory and democratic structures nevertheless remain in place as promising mechanisms. As demonstrated by case study findings, the Cambodian people were far more politically aware, educated, gender sensitive, involved, experienced and engaged in the democratic development of their country in 2017 than in 1997, and have far greater capacity to pursue a struggle towards eventual democracy.

### 7.3 Lessons learned

*Experience from working in an unstable and conflict ridden environment:* Although Sweden stepped in decisively at an early stage of the post-conflict reconstruction (Bernander et al. 1995) and during the early stages of democratisation, two defining features of Swedish aid were that this was done on the condition that it should or could leave rapidly were things to go wrong politically, and that for a long time it preferred multilateral channels for financing aid (partly for the same reason). Obviously, this reflected a sense of vulnerability when engaging with a post-conflict country such as Cambodia. In hindsight, as it turned out, at least for two of the three areas reviewed here, this vulnerability was actually an ‘asset’. With a combination of limited risk-taking under well-informed conditions, proactive engagement and an astute choice of development partners, Sweden contributed tangibly to reconstruction, reconciliation and democracy. Support for education required a capable institution/partner to work with, hence it only came up to speed later on with enhanced capacity in education sector institutions.

The lesson learned would be that in certain sectors, the post-conflict status offers a possibility to engage with and contribute to decisive results. Having said that, it is also true that this is not the case for all sectors, as some form of aid demands a recipient with competent institutions in order to obtain good traction. However, successfully engaging in an unstable and conflict-ridden environment requires a preparedness to inform oneself and to be flexible. Given these qualities, overall, Cambodia’s volatility seems not to have diminished the results of Swedish aid.

***Supporting state building for democratisation:*** Supporting reconstruction and democratisation may not overlap perfectly; reconstruction may not always be able to progress according to purely democratic principles. Hence, a donor may at times have to choose which to prioritise. To exemplify: supporting a dynamic political civil society seems natural in a liberal democracy, but supporting it in a semi-democratic environment may also spark violence; supporting decentralisation had a high democratic potential in a substantive meaning, while also creating conditions for increasing the CPP's control. In other words, the imperative of supporting state-building – necessary for both reconstruction and democratisation – is vulnerable to the political elite's ability, and genuine interest/will, to define the content of the politics and the nature of the state being built. In Cambodia, post-conflict reconstruction and state-building has succeeded to a fairly high degree, whereas procedural democratisation is in jeopardy.

Swedish aid to Cambodia has to a large extent included support for state-building, through institutional development. This has implied striking a balance between building a necessary basis for full democratisation and the risk of providing conditions for an authoritarian hybrid democracy. It has been rather successful in supporting D/HR, by concentrating on underlying fundamentals for a broad democracy, through support for basic education, local development and democracy, and a democratic civil society. Having instilled a broad understanding of democracy, this may also endure beyond a political setback to formal democracy emanating from the national level.

Support for underlying features and substantive aspects of democratisation – such as education level, local level political awareness and experience, mobilisation for gender equality and the growth of a development-oriented civil society – generally endures even when politics turn more authoritarian. They may, however, have a less direct relationship to the core of democratic transition, producing low-risk interventions with uncertain long-term effects on D/HR.

***The added value of long-term democracy aid:*** Sweden has been one of the bilateral donors with the longest and most consistent engagement in Cambodia. This has paid off in various

ways: *Firstly*, it has gained respect and a good reputation in Cambodian elite and professional circles. *Secondly*, the long-term approach allows for building up knowledge and a good understanding of the inner workings of society, its institutions and power structures. This is exceptionally important for a society in transition. *Thirdly*, it is only with long-term engagement that interventions can be carried through and meet their potential. For example, decentralisation predictably benefited the CPP in the short term, but in the longer term it would allow for a pluralist politics at local level. Demanding more democratic internal structures with NGO partners can only pay off if consistently demanded and pursued in the long term. *Fourthly*, since donor-RGC dialogue has been one of the ambitions of Swedish aid, the long-term approach allows for building up personal rapport and adequate fora for this, although it may not have been used to its full potential. *Fifthly*, and specifically important for democracy support, democracy takes time to establish and is bound to go back and forth. The long-term approach allows for riding out the lows and bounce back on the highs, hence being less sensitive to temporary setbacks and providing real value for the process of democratisation.

It is our assessment that the consistent long-term approach in Swedish democracy aid has contributed value added to democracy and human rights in Cambodia. However the potential of this approach has not been fully exploited.

***The importance of strategic risk-taking – but with an explicit risk management strategy:*** In all democracy and human rights support there is a political risk involved. Democracy and human rights aid will consequently sometimes fail, but if one is not willing to take risks it will almost certainly fail. The decentralisation case shows that there was an element of risk-taking underpinning the early success, whereas it was also initially minimised by preparatory fact-finding. Political power structures would however merit being taken into account more seriously in the planning and design process, in order to identify appropriate risk management strategies to revert to throughout implementation. Education has been successful in seeking the highest level government commitment for additional reforms as well as continued

development aid from Sweden beyond 2017 – possibly due to the perceived apolitical nature of education by both the Cambodian and Swedish Governments. Sweden further attaches high importance to children’s rights to education, with implicit expectations of education’s role to further indirectly promote a democratisation process in the medium to longer term. Decentralisation on the other hand was met with greater resistance from various government agencies when the higher status actors were involved.

Providing aid for D/HR by supporting local civil society organisations was quite risky in the late 1990s, due to their weakness in terms of low capacity, weak social base and hierarchical structure. Sweden, like most other donors, preferred to provide support via established international CSOs. The decision to channel support through only two organisations, Diakonia and Forum Syd, also involved risk-taking, since their experience in Cambodia was limited (particularly in the case of Forum Syd). This turned out quite well however, mainly thanks to their long-term perspective of capacity-building. In the longer term the focus on the two Swedish organisations however became more an issue of convenience and cost-effectiveness for Sida. DK/FS selected a mixed portfolio of partners and took some risks in supporting new and small organisations and also experienced some failures, but the long-term focus was on large and established CSOs. The incentive for such a risk minimising strategy was strengthened by the increased Swedish emphasis on control and results reporting. This has been an obstacle for support to CBOs and local associations and movements, since by definition they have weak capacity to fulfil formal requirements. Instead of relying only on Swedish CSOs, Sida could have used more of the local initiatives for good practice which have been established (e.g. the NGO Governance and Professional Practice, launched in 2004).

Working locally with substance issues is a core quality of Swedish aid for decentralisation and to CS, but this has also been pursued where appropriate in the education sector. Daring to engage with grassroots activities, participation and bottom-up processes, and consistently working with slow but substantial processes engaging regular citizens and the development of local institutions, may be

time-consuming and messy with temporary setbacks, but has proved to be a fruitful approach over time; particularly in the early stages of supporting decentralisation, with more mixed results in the latter phases. This approach may not deliver ‘big bang’ effects, but it builds up with time, and is in many ways more sustainable than only working with macro/structural issues. Having instilled a broad understanding of democracy, this may endure beyond a political setback to formal democracy emanating from the national level.

During the second half of the period studied, however, Swedish development cooperation – and in particular support for D/HR – became more risk averse, regarding both political and fiduciary risks. This was partly a general trend among donors, but also a result of Swedish aid to Cambodia becoming more adapted to the general management policy for Swedish development cooperation. Cambodia was no longer a special case and portfolio management became the overarching principle (see chapter 5). The political risk associated with decentralisation support led to reduced disbursements for this area with diversification to innovative new projects/programmes and new partners (see 5.1.1).

***The value of political economy contextual analysis:*** Broad, long-term analyses were provided by Sweden during the first half of the period studied, for example through the democratic governance Sida Advisory Team (SAT). However, project evaluations and a focus on short-term results reporting later on replaced longer-term analyses, in line with the enhanced Swedish focus on results-based management. The capacity resources assigned to the Embassy were not primarily decided based on strategic planning and analysis needs, but rather on requirements for project management and control. Thereby the focus was geared towards assessing achievements of agreed technical results, whereas overall assessments of the political economy development, including the high-level political interest required to push through more uncomfortable reforms, have been omitted. A lack of political economy analysis has probably contributed to the unrealistic expectations of implementation and democratic value of national reforms.

Swedish enthusiasm for reforms in decentralisation, education and civil society is not necessarily shared by the Cambodian elite on

the ground. Nevertheless, the local elite may respond opportunistically to the reform agenda. Such an opportunistic response is characterised by rapid movement by the Government on parts of the reform agenda, passive resistance to other parts of the agenda, and a response that shifts tactically over time as key government actors react to both donor pressure to advance the reform and the conflicting demands of domestic constituencies. Political economy analysis offers a useful tool for understanding the pressures on elites and explaining apparently inconsistent responses to donor pressure, as well as identifying emerging opportunities.

Sound technical solutions and enhanced technical and management capacities are indispensable, but are not sufficient to certify a process towards behavioural change to enhance democratisation. Within education, the MoEYS was committed to decentralising the delivery of education services, acknowledging the benefits of this in order to more effectively reach out to all parts of the country, and to picking up needs in the various areas of the country. To this end the School Support Committees were institutionalised. While the delivery of education may be seen as a technical matter, the intended performance oversight to be performed by these committees was in effect a political matter. Political economy analysis and political risk management were however not explicitly discussed as necessary prerequisites for promoting the intended functioning as part of the decision of the School Improvement Grant support to these.

***The virtue of proactivity in strategic planning and in implementation:*** In general, Sweden has implemented less proactive and strategic planning during the second half of the study period. This has probably reduced the possibilities for innovative and effective contributions. In democratic decentralisation since 1997, a major pattern has been that *proactivity* and focus have gradually turned into *reactivity* and a more general/broad approach. It was initially an explicit attempt to strategise around a selected number of Cambodian and international policymakers which paid off. An ambition to be a part of forming and designing the nature of democratic interventions however gave way to a broad-based acceptance of the Government's leadership, which has coincided with less value added.

Within civil society a ‘hands-off’ approach was increasingly practised towards DK/FS, implying that support through the country strategy was applied in a similar way to the general framework support to Swedish CSOs. This probably led to less value added and missed opportunities for a more active Swedish role in its specific programme support to civil society in Cambodia. Since 2010 civil society has received more Swedish funding than ever before, but Sweden/Sida has paid less attention to the specific role of civil society in supporting D/HR. The democratic governance approach, including both the Government and civil society, that was used by Sweden at an early stage was more useful since it made it possible to include all mechanisms for supporting democratisation through civil society, not only focusing on the role of civil society as a counterforce to government.

In education the pattern has been somewhat different, with Sweden exclusively channelling funds through UNICEF’s global blueprint programmes until 2016. In 1997 and a number of subsequent years, this implied a ‘catalytic’ approach in order to ground ambitions and visions, although this was not directly driven by Sweden but by UNICEF. Since entering into direct partnership with the MoEYS in 2016, Sweden’s proactive role has become more pronounced, increasingly exploiting Swedish expertise.

***The virtue of mutual trust and respect in partnerships:*** In all three cases, one of the best practices is (an attempt at) dialogue, interaction and trust-building with partners. Donor coordination has been explicitly sought, at least in education and decentralisation; for the former it has been a success overall and for the latter it has been productive although awkward at times.

Sweden has been consistent over time in its support for decentralisation. Especially in the period 2011–2013, Sweden was the only remaining donor and prevented a stop-go process which would have been disruptive. Sweden has also consistently engaged in close dialogue and advanced cooperation with other donors (the UNDP/the DFID; later the ADB and the EU/Switzerland). Even if this did not lead to the definitive success of the intervention, it has nevertheless been useful in order to avoid fragmentation and confusion. It has been based on a ‘special relationship’ between the

RGC and Sweden in this area, but after the change in Swedish policy in the 2012–13 strategy, Sweden reduced its funding (and ultimately suspended it in 2017).

Within education the two partnership mechanisms of JTWG and ESWG have provided platforms for technical discussions around successful as well as less successful performance and results. The ‘working climate’ within these two platforms has been conducive to learning and has thereby been capacity enhancing. Less positive empirical findings have been presented as a basis for improvements rather than as a criticism. On the other hand, there has been a strong commitment and openness from participating MoEYS staff to learn from experiences. Effectiveness and accountability issues have been part of the technical discussions, with sufficient trust among partners in order to aim at finding solutions to weaknesses. In many of its interventions through UNICEF in the education sector, Sweden has contributed to a catalytic approach, piloting and successfully feeding up lessons for broader adoption. This has been possible largely thanks to the trust and respect among partners, with initial competition among donors being replaced by efforts for complementarity.

Sweden has channelled nearly all its strategic support to civil society through Diakonia and Forum Syd during the entire period. The performance of DK/FS has overall been very positive and the two organisations are highly trusted within civil society. DK/FS have been providing core support to a number of local CSOs, some of them during the 20 years studied, which has been very positive for capacity-building. However, the long-term concentration of support to a few partners also implies a risk of unhealthy (mutual) dependency.

As a whole, Swedish development cooperation with Cambodia has been built on long-term, concentrated support to relatively few areas and partners. Trust and relationships between civil actors and government officials have been a consistent underlying concept, although not always easily achieved. Sida has also focused support on areas and actors where there has been the potential for positive

synergy effects.<sup>41</sup> The diversification of the support in recent years has partly been based on such a potential for new synergies.

## **7.4 Policy implications for future democracy support**

In 1997, the state-building process in Cambodia was based on the primary objectives of achieving peace and stability, as it must be in an immediate post-conflict situation. The democracy support from Western donors was however mainly based on the liberal principles of the constitution. These differing objectives created risks of inefficient support for democratisation. Our conclusion is however that Swedish aid managed this as it contributed to democratisation through support for democratic fundamentals for state-building, primarily basic education and local governance structures, but also through support for capacity-building of a democratic civil society.

This broad support for democratisation, based on procedural, substantive and participatory models of democracy, explains the relatively successful Swedish democracy aid, underpinned by the long-term approach taken. However, the strategy has to be continuously adapted to changes in the political context. Providing apolitical support for democratisation is not viable, and donors should take stronger note of underlying cultural and political structures, at the outset and throughout the entire process of supporting institutions and organisations. Empirical research in the field provides an important source of information to be taken on board when frequently re-assessing the political economy situation in the recipient country. For instance, an abundance of empirical research coming online since the middle of the first decade of this century raised concerns and provided insights into an authoritarian trend in Cambodia, away from the liberal intentions expressed in the Constitution.

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<sup>41</sup> The best example is probably the support to the CDRI. Although we have not defined the CDRI as a CSO, it is important to note this, since it is a key lesson from Swedish development aid to Cambodia during the last 20 years.

A key implication for donors in their support for democracy in post-conflict contexts is to address the high level of distrust in the political system through assistance in creating space for the better functioning of institutions, and for better quality interactions between state actors and between the state and civil society. Donor funding spaces for interaction between the state and civil society at national and local levels could be useful, enabling civil society to raise issues with the state without fear of being branded ‘oppositional’ as a result. The ruling elite has an interest in developing channels of communication with civil society, and civil society organisations welcome donor input for such spaces. Donors should also focus on key institutional reforms that contribute towards and are essential to the delivery of key electoral promises, and areas with a clear tangible outcome that the public can clearly perceive. The combination of donor support with electoral pressure may be transformational, particularly in situations where the political leadership strongly desires a reform and simply needs assistance in overcoming a critical mass of minor frictions.

During the period 1997–2017, Cambodia has developed from a volatile/post-conflict country into a stable society, in political and economic terms. State-building nevertheless remains concentrated on peace and stability, not on liberal democracy. On the contrary, state-building has become increasingly authoritarian. As a consequence, democracy support becomes more complex. Pure institution development support will not promote democracy and human rights, but rather the opposite. On the other hand, focusing support only on civil society is also counterproductive since it will probably lead to increased polarisation. Future democracy support will therefore require an enhanced approach based on inbuilt flexibility and preparedness to change, based on an understanding of political economy processes at all levels in the recipient country.

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## List of abbreviations

ADB	Asia Development Bank
ADHOC	The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BLDP	Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party
CARERE	Cambodia Resettlement and Rehabilitation Programme
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CCC	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia
CDC	Council for the Development of Cambodia
CDCF	Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum
CDPF	Capacity Development Partnership Fund (education)
CDRI	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
CFS	Child-Friendly School
CG	Consultative Group
CJ	Critical Juncture
CMAC	Cambodia Mine Action Centre
CNRP	Cambodia National Rescue Party
COHCHR	Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

COMFRE	Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia
L	
CPP	Cambodian People’s Party
CRDB	Cambodia Rehabilitation and Development Board
CSD	Council for Social Development (inter-ministerial body)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DC-CAM	Documentation Centre of Cambodia
DFID	Department for International Development
D/HR	Democracy and Human Rights
DK	Diakonia
EBA	Expert Group for Aid Studies
EC	European Commission
ECCC	Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (commonly known as: Khmer Rouge Tribunal)
EFA	Education For All
ELC	Economic Land Concession
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
ESSP	Education Sector Support Programme
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group

EU	European Union
FO	Frame Organisation
FS	Forum Syd
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GADC	Gender and Development for Cambodia
GAP	Governance Action Plan
GDCC	Government-Donor Development Cooperation Conference
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPE	Global Partnership Education
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GNI	Gross National Income
HR	Human Rights
HRP	Human Rights Party
HQ	Headquarters
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
I-NGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation

I-PRS	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy
I-SAF	Implementation of Social Accountability Framework
JCCI	Joint Climate Change Initiative
JMI	Joint Monitoring Indicator
JTWG	Joint Technical Working Group
LANGO	Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations
LCSC	Local Cluster School Committee
LICADH O	Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Sweden)
MFAIC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (Cambodia)
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MTR	Mid-term review
NCDD	National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development

NEC	National Election Committee
NEP	NGO Education Partnership
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NP-SNDD	National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development
NPRS	National Poverty Reduction Strategy
NR	Nary Rattanak (Cambodian five-year Gender Equality Strategic Plan)
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistance Committee
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAP	Priority Action Plan
PAR	Public Administrative Reform
PFM	Public Financial Management
PIC	Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia
PM	Prime Minister
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy

RBM	Results-Based Management
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
RS	Rectangular Strategy
RWI	Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights
SAT	Sida Advisory Team
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
SEK	Swedish Crowns
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIG	School Improvement Grant
SNA	Sub-National Administration
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
SSC	School Support Committee
SSI	Swedish Schools Inspectorate
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
TIC	Transparency International Cambodia
TS	Triangular Strategy
TWG	Technical Working Group
UN	United Nations

UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WB	The World Bank

## Appendix: The authors' previous work in Cambodia

### *The composition of the evaluation team: 'insiders' versus 'outsiders'*

All the members of the evaluation team have long experience from working with development assistance to Cambodia. In most cases this has in some way been related to Swedish development cooperation. It can be argued that this is a problem since it may imply identification with Swedish policy and performance.

EBA has requested us to respond to four questions:

- 1) Clarify the former roles and responsibilities of the team members
- 2) The projects, areas and roles that are the focus of the evaluation
- 3) How we plan to handle the fact that we have been working with and influenced development assistance to Cambodia
- 4) How we will approach the embassy, partners etc., from our new role in writing a report for EBA which implies a critical and scientific approach.

We present information about each of the team members below. The second question follows on from our proposal. Our approach will be to focus on long-term learning which can be regarded as added value from Swedish development cooperation. We have chosen to concentrate on the three main areas of Swedish support: decentralisation, education and support to civil society. We have been working in different functions, but none of the members have been responsible for any of these programmes or for overall Swedish development cooperation in Cambodia. The question of influence is of course difficult to assess, but we think this has been very minor. We will be very explicit about cases where a team member may have influenced the planning and implementation of any programme or project. The fourth question makes the assumption that someone who has been working with a programme may have problems shifting to a critical and scientific approach. This relates to the distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider', which we discuss below. We do not see this as a problem in our team. It is

however important that we make our roles very clear in every contact regarding the evaluation.

From a scientific point of view within the behavioural sciences, it is often an ideal to come as ‘close’ as possible to the study object/process, to be on the ‘inside’, and to understand the situation from ‘within’. This approach generates precise data from the most knowledgeable sources, as seen from their perspective. In contrast, more theoretically oriented researchers argue that one cannot trust the insiders due to the risk of eschewed perspectives and overly personal views, preferring a more neutral approach with a greater emphasis on external analysis.

Anthropologists/linguists are perhaps the grouping that has dealt most thoroughly with this generic dilemma in their distinction between *emic* (the former) and *etic* (the latter) approaches. That is, “an emic account comes from a person within the culture” (here: the development professionals or Cambodian informants). In contrast, “an etic approach aims to be ‘culturally neutral’, limiting any ethnocentric, political, and/or cultural bias”, having greater confidence in the investigators’ ability to make correct interpretations from the outside. This latter feature is criticised for being comparatively distant and ignorant. While this distinction was once developed as opposites and mutually exclusive poles, it is now widely considered not only to be possible to combine them, but also that this – when done well and in a balanced manner – generates a deeper form of knowledge combining the insiders’ superior knowledge with the outside researchers’ independent role.

While this is not explicitly stated in the original proposal, the team composition adheres tightly to the idea of *emic* and *etic* complementarity. In terms of understanding the development of the world’s perceptions, we occupy three different positions: Karl Anders Larsson has thorough experience and knowledge of the development profession both generically and in the particular case, yet less experience as an outside consultant. Henny Andersen strikes a balance being occasionally employed for longer stretches ‘inside’ the profession as well as extensive experience as an ‘outside’ consultant. Joakim Öjendal has predominantly worked as an ‘outside’ and critical researcher/consultant, with less extensive employment on the inside. In terms of the Cambodian experience a similar pattern emerges: Joakim Öjendal here represents the dual

identity of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ from having lived and worked in rural areas and performed a dozen ethnographic fieldworks in the country, but also from being an academic researcher. Karl-Anders Larsson and Henny Andersen have more of an ‘outside’ perspective on Cambodian development, but with knowledge gained from working in the country for several years.

As such, our view of knowledge generation, our data collection and our team composition speak of the idea of *emic* and *etic* complementarity, with an awareness of the risks of each approach in isolation.

*Details of each team member’s prior involvement in Cambodia*

**Karl-Anders Larsson** worked for Sida in Phnom Penh between 2008 and 2013. His function was as an analyst and his main responsibility was aid effectiveness and relations with other donors. Within the Sida office/the Embassy, his role mainly involved coordination and the provision of methodological support to the programme officers. He was also responsible for the coordination of general documents, including the results strategy and strategy reports, with his own contributions to these mainly involving economic analysis. He was not responsible for any reporting on democracy and human rights, and he has not been responsible for any of the major programmes which will be the focus of the study.

Karl-Anders Larsson was responsible for two programmes which have some relevance for democracy and human rights: 1) Support for the Public Financial Management Reform, via the World Bank, 2) Support to the Cambodia Development Research Institute (CDRI). In the event that these are studied in the evaluation, he will not be responsible for this.

**Joakim Öjendal** has been involved in Cambodian democratisation since the UN intervention in 1992, mainly in three different capacities. In 1992/93 he was employed by the UN as a District Electoral Supervisor, based in rural areas. This is Öjendal’s only formal employment with any Cambodia-based agency. Secondly, he has been active first as a PhD candidate and later as a full researcher on Cambodian reconstruction, democratisation and development. This has been pursued from a position at the University of Gothenburg and in close cooperation with Cambodian partners. The research has been carried out continuously through half a dozen consecutive research projects and is still ongoing. Finally, Joakim

Öjendal has worked as a short-term consultant for a wide variety of organisations active in Cambodia during the last two decades. This has included some minor tasks for Sida. He has never had any decision-making role as a consultant, but typically worked as an advisor or as a critical investigator. It is worth mentioning Öjendal's focus (as an outsider) on the early phases of decentralisation, and his close collaboration with CDRI on a series of research projects.

**Henny Andersen** has worked as an independent consultant since the beginning of 2000. In this capacity she has undertaken several evaluations and reviews of projects in Cambodia, some financed or co-financed by Swedish development assistance. As an independent evaluator she has not been in a position to directly influence the direction of the evaluated/reviewed projects. Management responses to evaluation findings and recommendations are formulated within the project in question, and are thus beyond the reach of the evaluator, as is the extent to which Sida or other donors follow up on recommendations with project implementers.

The current decentralisation programme, co-financed by Swedish development assistance, is included in the proposed EBA study. Henny Andersen has independently evaluated/reviewed previous phases of this programme (in 2003, 2005 and 2008). More recently (in 2011 and 2012) she has also served within the programme as Gender Policy Adviser, tasked with operationalising a gender policy that had been decided on prior to her involvement in the programme. She will not be responsible for the decentralisation case study.

Other independent consultancies in Cambodia for Sida/the Embassy in Phnom Penh include i) analysis of Swedish support for gender equality (2015); ii) participating in a Joint Formulation Mission for EC Funded Sector Policy Support for Education Sector Support (2006) to provide an assessment of potential Sida Education Sector Budget Support; iii) a study on tentative options for Sida's involvement in natural resource management, rural livelihoods and land management (2005); and iv) an assessment of the feasibility and viability of proposed Sida general budget support to Cambodia (2003). The most recent consultancy for Sida/the Embassy to support the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the formulation of a gender equality project is still in the process of

internal Sida/Embassy assessment, and its implementation will thus not be included in the EBA study.

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