



## Does corruption create additional challenges for Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in their partnership work with the Cambodian government (in education)?

### **Abstract:**

Both 'corruption in education' and 'partnership work' have been given increased attention in international development sector over the last 20 years. This dissertation brings these issues together with a focus on the impact of corruption on NGO-government partnership work in Cambodia. This paper outlines challenges to NGO-government partnerships work under four key themes - definition, authority and legitimacy, advocacy and identity, and effectiveness. Cambodia is then put forward as a case study as it suffers from widespread systematic corruption in the education sector. The country has also had significant input to rebuild its education system through outside organisations, including significant support from NGOs. This dissertation draws on academic work, grey literature and eight interviews with NGOs manages to discuss "Does corruption create additional challenges for Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in their partnership work with the Cambodian government (in education)?". It concludes that numerous additional challenges can be identified when looking at NGO-government partnerships through the 'lens of corruption' and partnership may not be the most appropriate model for addressing issues of corruption in education.

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## **Glossary of Terms**

DPs	Development Partners
EFA	Education for All
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (Cambodia)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance (grants and loans)
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
UN	United Nations
WB	World Bank

## **Introduction**

Over the past 30 years the number, size and influence of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) has risen significantly, leading to those outside the state system holding a much larger stake in formal education provision in the developing world (Bray, 1999). 'Partnership' has been cited as the only type of relationship which counts when establishing links between NGOs and state governments (Fowler 2000). Throughout the Education for All (EFA) narrative, from the Jomtien conference in 1990, to more recent reports such as the 2009 Global Monitoring Report (which focused on governance) partnership work between NGOs and governments is heavily endorsed. During this period, there has also been increased attention within the International Development

sphere on accountability and transparency, including a significant rise in interest in the impact of corruption (Harrison, 2007). Corruption is viewed as a major source of inefficiency and inequity in the education sector and formal education provision is less likely to become equitable and efficient if issues of corruption are not tackled (UNESCO, 2009; Transparency International, 2005). The literature analysing the impact of corruption on formal education provision is growing, but there remains an extremely limited body of work surrounding the impact of corruption on NGO-government partnerships in education. Given the rise in partnership working and the increased focus on corruption, work that draws these issues together deserves more attention. Extensive consideration should be given to additional challenges that NGO-government partnerships face in countries which experience high levels of corruption. This dissertation will analyse education partnership work between state governments and NGOs through the complex 'lens of corruption' and will focus specifically on Cambodia as a country example. I intend to bring together the limited academic work, research reports and interviews which have been conducted with NGO management staff.

Cambodia provides an interesting national case study because it has been provided with substantial support and investment in its education sector from International Development Partners (DPs) and much of this has been delivered via NGOs. The NGO sector in Cambodia is large and diverse and makes a significant contribution to public services, governance and civil society. The key education strategy paper put forward by Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) (2009 – 2013) outlines aims to strengthen partnership work between the Ministry and NGOs. Cambodia suffers from extensive corruption and questionable legal regulation (Gellman, 2010). Despite efforts by the Cambodian government to legislate against corruption, by introducing anti-corruption measures in 2010 (Nowaczyk, 2011), the country still ranks 160 out of 177 in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (2013). Although academic research surrounding corruption in Cambodia is somewhat limited, the grey literature published in this area highlights the serious impact which corruption has on education across the country.

Having lived and worked in Cambodia for two years, initially as an Education Adviser to a Provincial Office of the MoEYS, through a large INGO and then as an Education Management Consultant with another International NGO, I saw first-hand the impact of corruption on the equity and efficiency of education provision. I talked with teachers who had not received their salary for several months, or whose school budgets never arrived, this seemed a huge injustice for schools, teachers and children

already in challenging circumstances. During the two years, although there was much talk, and a striving toward effective partnership work with MoEYS, I never heard issues of corruption discussed with local authorities – this provided me with the motivation to write this dissertation.

This work should be premised with the statement that there are many committed teachers, school directors and government officials within the Cambodian education sector. Corruption affects everyone, but many professionals in Cambodia put the needs of students above their own.

This paper will be structured as follows; Chapter two will critically analyse partnership work between NGOs and governments, reviewing the international discourse, why NGO-government partnerships have grown to be so significant and outline four areas where challenges arise. Chapter three will look at corruption in education from a theoretical perspective, specifically examining how corruption is defined, how corruption is viewed in the international discourse on improving education and what types of corruption exist in the education sector. Chapter four will embed the above in a country context, looking at Cambodia's history, current education provision, corruption issues and the work of NGOs. To support this interview comments from eight managers across six NGOs, who work in partnership with the government, will be presented. This will begin to fill a gap in the literature surrounding the impact of corruption on NGO-government partnerships in education. Chapter five will bring these themes together to focus on the research question central to this discussion:

Does corruption create additional challenges for Non Governmental  
Organisations (NGOs) in their partnership work with the Cambodian  
government (in education)?

The Chapter will revisit the four key areas of challenge for NGO-Government partnerships looking at these through the lens of corruption brought into focus by the case studies to explore any additional challenges. Chapter six concludes the paper.

### 1.1 A note on interviews and methodology

Due to the limited amount of published research on the topic of NGO-government partnerships in education and the impact of corruption, I have made efforts to speak to people working for NGOs in Cambodia who can provide expertise. Due to time and resource limitations this is not a fully comprehensive research project, therefore responses should be taken as anecdotal evidence to support other findings in this paper and back the call for further research in this area. I was able to talk with eight experienced development practitioners from six different NGOs (see Appendix 1) who provided key insights. The NGOs were chosen because they work closely with the government and contact was established through my professional network. All identifiers have been removed to maintain the confidentiality of participants, including transcripts.

## **2: NGO-Governmental Partnerships**

The 1980s and 1990s saw a significant increase in the amount of aid channeled through non-government actors, causing their importance on the international development stage to rise dramatically (Rose, 2009; Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Although there are no detailed figures reflecting how much aid is provided outside state systems, to give an idea of scale it is thought around US\$23 billion, or one third of overseas aid, was provided through NGOs in 2004 (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Non-government actors include community organisation, faith-based groups, philanthropic and private sector organisations (Rose, 2007). This paper will focus specifically on NGOs, defined by Najam (2000, p.378) as:

the broad spectrum of voluntary associations that are entirely or largely independent of government and that are not primarily motivated by commercial concerns. These organizations are principally motivated by the desire to articulate and actualize a particular social vision and they operate in the realm of civil society.

This dissertation will consider both NGOs focused on education issues and those which are involved in a number of development issues, including education. International NGOs (INGOs), local NGOs registered at national levels and Community Based Organisations, who usually operate at community levels and are not registered nationally, are all included under the heading of NGO. The definition is left expansive as NGOs vary significantly in size, approach to development, role sought within education provision, type of provision offered, motivations, capacity and intensions (Berry,

2010; Rose, 2009). Reflecting this diversity NGOs support the education sector in a variety of ways, most commonly filling gaps in service provision, participating in policy dialogue, increasing technical capacity or advocating on behalf of communities (Macpherson, 2009; Matlin, 2001). An area where NGOs play a significant role, particularly in the context of EFA, is the provision of non-formal education for hard to reach groups (Rose, 2007). This paper will focus on NGOs involved in more formal education provision in primary and secondary schools to allow for depth of analysis. Rodgers (2004) provides the definition of formal education which is used in this paper, this is, “education which does not change when new participants join”.

Recent literature highlights a global trend of increased cooperation between NGOs and governments surrounding education development (Najam, 2000). At the 1990 Jomtien conference, which resulted in the majority of countries committing to EFA, both NGOs and partnership work received particular prominence. The conference preparation documents called for “new and revitalised partnerships” (Interagency Commission, 1990a, p.38), referring to partnership as being at the “heart” of the commitment to EFA (Ibid., p.47). The final conference documents state:

Partnership of government authorities, intergovernmental agencies, and nongovernmental organisations is a very significant characteristic of the *Education for All initiative* (Inter-Agency Commission 1990b, p.2).

The challenge of Education for All may appear daunting...partnerships could well produce the "revolution" required (Ibid., p.8).

Several NGOs participated in the conference discussions and helped shape the outcomes, which reflected the changing times for NGO–government partnership work (Bray, 1999; Inter-Agency Commission, 1990). The sentiments were reaffirmed at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, where 164 countries adopted the ‘Framework for Action’ which further mobilised international budgets to support EFA goals (Dridi, 2013). This meeting stated that:

To complement the efforts of national governments, UNESCO, as the lead agency in education, will co-ordinate and mobilize all partners at national, regional and international levels: multilateral and bilateral funding

agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector as well as broad-based civil society organizations (UNESCO, 2000, p.3).

The 2009 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) suggested that “achieving EFA requires partnerships at many levels – between schools and parents, between civil society organisations and governments, between state and non-state education providers” (UNESCO, 2009, p.185). The international discourse surrounding EFA has put forward ‘partnership’ work as the only type of relationship which counts in relations between governments and NGOs (Fowler, 2000). Partnership work is seen as key in achieving EFA (Courtney 2007), and within this NGOs hold a role as, “alternative education providers, innovators, advocates, and policy dialogue partners” who will work closely with international donors (Miller-Grandvaux et al, 2002, p.1).

Although partnership work is consistently put forward as an effective way to establish NGO-government working relationships in the development sector, there is no consistent agreement on its meaning (Courtney, 2007; Brinkerhoff, 2003; Bray, 1999). As Brinkerhoff (2002, p.20) states, “partnership is in danger of remaining a ‘feel good’ panacea for governance without a pragmatic grasp of what it is and how it differs from business as usual”. Although hard to define specifically, partnership does imply a long-term commitment to mutual goals, shared responsibility for joint activity, balanced power relations and dividing the risk or benefit from a joint venture (Barber & Bowie, 2008; Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Further challenges in defining partnership work are analysed below. Although partnerships are difficult to define, looking at how NGO–government relations evolved provides necessary context in understanding why these relationships are seen as so important, and why NGOs are so heavily involved in service provision, advocacy, policy development and technical support in the formal education sector in developing countries.

In the 1980s many large western donors were tiring of investing funds into bureaucratic and often ineffective state governments. NGOs were seen as good alternatives as they were often project based, flexible and, through work at grassroots level, closer to underserved populations which encouraged a culture of local participation (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). NGOs popularised new buzzwords such as - gender, participation, livelihoods and sustainability - which were seen as contributions to a generation of new ideas (see Chambers, 2012). The 1990s brought Structural Adjustment Plans which encouraged governments to liberalise (Archer, 1994). The international economic policy agenda of the time was pushing for a reduction in the input of the state and cut backs to public

expenditure (Rose, 2009). Again NGOs stepped in, presenting a cheaper and more efficient way to deliver quality public services which added value to donor investments (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Destefano & Schuh Moore, 2010). A number of NGO mobilisation campaigns around education, such as Action Aid's Elimu Campaign and Oxfam's Education Now Campaign, launched at the end of the 1990s, in response to inadequate progress on national education targets. These campaigns attempted to hold governments to account on their commitments and raised the profile of NGOs further (Verger et al, 2012). More recent involvement by NGOs in the education sector has been in response to recognition that many governments will not be able to meet the EFA goals or the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) without external support (Rose, 2009). Miller-Grandvaux's 2002 report on partnership work and NGOs in Africa found that donors prefer working with NGOs as negotiation is easier, donors had more leverage due to funding ties and there were less political, legal and bureaucratic constraints (Miller-Grandvaux et al, 2002). Lewis & Kanji (2009, p.44) explain, "NGOs have become such a global phenomenon partly because they represent a flexible form of organisation under an increasingly ubiquitous neoliberal global governance system that places a strong emphasis on flexibility".

In reviewing the literature related to NGO-Governments partnership work in education it has been possible to draw out three key areas of challenge - definition, authority and legitimacy, advocacy and identity, and effectiveness – these themes are explored below.

## 2.1 Definition

There are a number of challenges which relate to the associated rhetoric of 'partnerships'. A difficult task is set for NGOs to hold mutually beneficial, effective, responsive and non-dependent relationships with their government partners and this is not always the reality in NGO-government relations (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As introduced in the attempt to define partnerships above, relationships are often, "unclear in principle and obscure in practice" (Matlin, 2001, p.11) and it is not always obvious who holds real power and who benefits (Fowler, 2000). Partnerships are difficult to achieve without a real shared vision and philosophy for education and development. Instead the different parties often bring to the relationship varied philosophical understandings of development and education, a multitude of objectives and a difference of opinion (and levels of transparency) on critical issues (Matlin, 2001). As Bray (1999, p.50) states, "partnership can have multiple meanings and implications, which leads to fuzzy conceptualisation and imperfect implementation".



It could be said that what is ultimately important in defining partnership work is that NGOs have some engagement with state governments. When NGOs do work independently of national governments they risk setting up alternative systems which don't fit with state policies and priorities and can lead to confusion or duplication. Instead NGOs must have clear and accountable relationships with the government (Barber & Bowie, 2008) to ensure there is not a fragmentation of efforts (Berry, 2010). In many developing countries the regulatory frameworks for engagement between NGOs and governments are not well developed (Barber & Bowie, 2008) and have different meaning for different partners. Miller-Grandvaux's (2002, p.11) study of NGO-government partnership in Africa found for governments 'partnership' was defined as a way to control NGO activity:

"Partnership" in the discourse and actions of government officials often means (re)gaining control for the government and often a compromise in what NGOs wish to implement. Governments talk about better defining the role of NGOs in the sector, but assume that they will be the ones doing the defining

Defining the terms of NGO-government partnerships is complex and cannot be resolved here. Instead, following an analysis of corruption in education and presenting Cambodia as a case study, I will re-examine the complexity in defining NGO-government partnerships, using the 'lens of corruption'.

## 2.2 Authority and legitimacy

Democratic governments receive their authority and legitimacy through election. This provides a mandate to govern on rights and duties, and to make decisions on policies and public resources, in a way which develops a country in the interests of its people (Matlin, 2001). The legitimacy and authority for the actions of NGOs is less clear and is derived from their relations with (and accountability to) beneficiaries, government endorsement through registration and developing partnerships, and donor support. NGO-government partnership work can strengthen the legitimacy and authority which NGOs hold (Bray 1999). Challenges related to authority and legitimacy in NGO-government partnership work arise when state systems or NGOs are not acting a way that reflects the best interest of those they claim to represent or are accountable to. This deficient could be due

to capacity of staff, political will or issues of corruption. What is important in regard to partnership is - if true partnerships do exist, both parties become somewhat culpable.

Using Cambodia as an example this dissertation will seek to understand if issues of corruption lead to additional challenges related to authority and legitimacy within NGO-government partnerships.

### 2.3 Advocacy and Identity

Questions have been asked as to whether, in partnering with governments, NGOs compromise their role in advocacy and in turn this calls into question their identity. Traditionally NGOs held a role within the International Development sector advocating on behalf of communities, however alongside the rise in the number and scope of NGOs there has been a rise in NGO involvement in service provision. Almost 20 years ago Archer (1994, p.232) pointed to partnerships with state government as a risk to the roles of NGOs stating:

Service delivery in the education sector on any scale can now rarely be a comfortable role for NGOs and should only be pursued in very selective cases...It is essential for NGOs to avoid becoming agents of privatisation even where the withdrawal of the State appears to leave primary education provision as grossly inadequate.

If advocacy is a key identifying role for NGOs, in entering into partnerships with the state, questions need to be raised about how willing this leaves NGOs to advocate, ask difficult questions and challenge governments on behalf of communities. Edwards (1999, p.25) suggests that many INGOs are reluctant to enter challenging conversations, citing their “unwillingness to confront deep-rooted questions of politics and power”. Batley and Rose (2010) found a basic strategy of all NGOs was to avoid confrontation with the government. Najam (2000, p.379) questioned where increased cooperation leaves state sovereignty and NGO autonomy, believing that if tensions between NGOs and governments were to dissipate it would call into question the character of both those institutions:

Even when they work in unison and demonstrate the friendliest of relations, the tension remains palpable; when they do not, it becomes inescapable. This tension—sometimes latent, sometimes patent; sometimes constructive, sometimes destructive—is always present, and is in many ways a defining feature of all NGO–government relations. Arguably, if it were to somehow disappear, it would mean only that at least one of the two has ceased to be what it essentially is.

Edwards (1999) points to a confusion in the identity of NGOs as a key factor leading to challenges in partnership work. NGOs can be said to be market based in that they provide services for a lower cost than government, whilst at the same time are trying to be social actors in a political process. This split in identity leads to different implications and tensions which makes it difficult to perform well in either role. Brinkerhoff (2003) takes this further and sees the unique identity of different types of organisation as the foundation for partnerships. The loss of an organisation’s identity means loss of the unique offer they can bring to partnership work, which can impact of legitimacy and effectiveness (Ibid.). Confusion in identity may occur when NGOs undertake a mixture of service provision, advocacy and technical support and through this engage with governments in both positive and negative ways (Matlin, 2001).

Taking advocacy as a defining role for NGOs, this dissertation will explore if additional challenges arise around advocacy and therefore the identity of NGOs within their NGO-Government partnerships, when these are analysed through the lens of corruption.

## 2.4 Effectiveness

It is claimed that NGOs have advantages over government provision in regard to quality, cost-effectiveness, innovation, choice and accountability which provides motivations for NGO-government partnership work. However, the evidence supporting these claims is somewhat limited (Rose, 2007; Edwards, 1999; Srivastava & Oh, 2010). Edwards (1999, p.28) questions both questions and the scale and sustainability of NGO work and states that, “careful research over the past 5 years has cast doubt on many of the cherished assumptions about NGO comparative advantage—closeness to poor people, cost-effectiveness, high levels of innovation and flexibility”.

This dissertation will seek to understand whether corruption adds further challenges to questions around the effectiveness of NGOs and the impact of this on their partnership work with governments.

This chapter has briefly outlined how the partnership discourse developed, why NGOs came to have such significant roles in formal education provision and the challenges associated with NGO-government partnerships. This provides the context for looking theoretically at issues of corruption in the education sector. I then continue to focus on corruption and NGO-government partnerships in education, taking Cambodia as a country example. The paper will then return to the four key themes of challenge outlined above to understand whether corruption leads to additional issues in NGO-government partnership work which aims to improve the efficiency and equality of education provision.

### **3: Corruption in Education Provision**

Kofi Annan opens the (2004, p.iii) UN Convention on Corruption document stating:

Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies.

It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish.

On the World Bank (WB) website, corruption is described as, “among the greatest obstacles to economic and social development” (World Bank, 2013). Corruption does create major barriers to development and should remain a concern for governments and International Development Organisations. However, these descriptions bring to mind greedy senior bureaucrats stealing and embezzling huge amounts of public funds. The reality is much more complex.

The term ‘corruption’ infers something which has an impact on development and the lives of those living in poverty. The high level international discourse is inadequate in describing the scale, scope, moral complexity and real impacts of corruption (Harrison, 2007). In the education sector corruption can exist at all levels of governance and across all aspects of provision. Low level

corruption which takes place in daily exchanges at school and district level, is referred to as 'petty corruption' and is often more difficult to challenge as it may be a last resort for low paid government staff. Riley (1999) notes that factors such as family obligation, culture and weak administration processes can all contribute to levels of petty corruption. Referring to low level corruption as 'petty' is unhelpful terminology as it is seen by many as more harmful than corruption in the senior realms of ministries (Chapman, 2002). Actions which prevent a child passing important examinations, or being admitted to school, are not experienced as 'petty' by those who encounter them (Riley, 1999). On the other end of the scale is 'grand' corruption which usually exists at national levels, where high level government staff make decisions involving large contracts and significant amounts of public funding (Hallack & Poisson, 2001).

### 3.1 Defining Corruption

Given the above extremes in the nature of corruption and the variety in the behaviors which can be seen to be corrupt (explored below), care must be taken when defining corruption to not limit the definition or forget the impact it has on people's daily lives (Pillay & Dorasamy, 2010). Bribery, nepotism, extortion, blackmail, embezzlement and fraud are all forms of corruption and the definition must reflect this (World Bank, 2013). Definitions should also be nuanced to reflect culture, impact and context, however all too often when issues of corruption are discussed all nuance disappears (Harrison, 2007). Grouping all corruption together as a singular exploit not only over simplifies, it also overlooks the ways in which people engage with morality and, "underplays the very different meanings that are attached to diverse transactions" (Harrison, 2007, p.676). Heyneman (2004, p.637) suggests that the definition of corruption in education should be, "the abuse of authority for personal as well as material gain". Hallak and Poisson (2001, p.7) include the impacts of corruption in their definition; outlining it as, "the systematic use of public office for private benefit whose impact is significant on access, quality or equity in education". Although still overly simple, including the impacts of corruption in the definition does slightly broaden its scope and this definition will be used in this paper. The types of corruption which are placed under this definition are explored below.

This dissertation focuses on corruption within state governments. NGOs themselves are also vulnerable to corruption, however there is very little academic work or grey literature which examines this. To do primary research in this area would involve both, developing longer term relationships with NGOs, and speaking with those who they work with, this has not been possible

within the scope of this research. Throughout this dissertation I have used the terminology, the '*lens of corruption*'. This is because corruption permeates all levels of education provision, is difficult to refer to as one particular thing, and can create a 'fuzzy' view of the real picture of education provision; a lens implies a look at the issues through different means. Later, I discuss using Cambodia to bring into focus the issues; corrupt can only be brought into focus at national (or even local levels) because of the significant impacts of culture and social structures on how corruption is defined.

### 3.2 Corruption and the International Education Discourse

The international discourse surrounding education provision in the developing world recognises effective governance as being central to improvements. Although corruption has huge implications for governance, up until the last decade comprehensive research was limited and there was a reluctance to tackle the issues (Hallack & Poisson, 2001). Corruption advanced up the list of issues effecting development in the late 1990s, but prior to this it was seen as a specialist academic subject and avoided as taboo (Ibid., 2001). However it is now a research area heavily funded by the WB and other global institutions (Polzer, 2001). The WB estimates corruption costs 1 trillion dollars annually, in a global economy of 30 trillion (Poisson, 2010), given the proportion of national budgets allocated to education, the impact of corruption must be significant.

In the education context, the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, which set out goals and strategies to achieve EFA, recognised corruption as, "a major drain on the effective use of resources for education and should be drastically curbed" (UNESCO, 2000, p.17). It continued to state that in the decade since the Jomtien conference the need for improvements in governance with a focus on efficiency, accountability and transparency has been further emphasised. The Framework committed to, "develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management" (UNESCO, 2000, p.19). The 2009 EFA GMR also pointed to corruption as a key concern, stating, "corruption is a major source of both inefficiency and inequity" (UNESCO 2008, p.14). In 2007 Patrinos & Kagia raised questions around whether the MDGs concerning education could be reached without a stronger emphasis on governance issues related to corruption. Dridi (2013) outlined the growing consensus that corruption undermines international attempts to meet the EFA targets and education MDGs. In his research he shows that countries furthest away from international education targets have the highest rates of corruption (Ibid., 2013).

The rapid growth of funds directed to the education sector through Fast Track Initiatives (partnerships established to accelerate progress towards EFA), movement toward a Sector Wide Approach (which brings together governments, donors and other stakeholders) and a focus on decentralization (redistribution away from centralised decision making), opportunities for corruption in the education sector are rising. Understanding corruption in education is particularly important in an international development context because national education systems are especially vulnerable. There are numerous reasons for this; firstly, in many countries education is the largest area of government expenditure and the biggest national employer (UNESCO, 2009). Secondly, representation in education provision extends from top levels of government down to community levels, meaning, “education is an attractive structure for patronage and manipulation of local sentiment” (Chapman, 2002, p.3). Thirdly, decisions about how much education people receive is controlled by gatekeepers, including teachers and District Education Officers (Patrinos & Kagia, 2007). Fourthly, money allocated to the education sector is spent in small amounts across a variety of locations, many of which don’t have strong accounting processes in place (Chapman, 2002) and finally most countries have a monopoly over their education provision, which can lead to a reduced focus on controlling costs and less accountability (Patrinos & Kagia, 2007).

### 3.3 The Implications of Corruption

Within the education sector corruption has particularly significant impacts on efficiency and equity of education (Hallack & Poisson, 2001). The 2009 GMR (UNESCO, p.139) notes, “efficiency suffers because corrupt practices mean part of the benefit of public investment is captured in the form of private rent. Equity suffers because corruption acts as a regressive tax that hurts the poor the most”. Corruption effects equity in education because it has a bigger impact on the poor - they are more reliant on public services, are unlikely to have the luxury of choosing the private sector, have limited resources with which to respond to instances of corruption, thus costs (such as bribes) are likely to represent a higher proportion of household income, and they usually have fewer options through which to seek redress (UNESCO, 2009). Corruption effects efficiency as it erodes public confidence in services, distorts how education management decisions are made and undermines social values (Hallack & Poisson, 2001). Tackling corruption is essential to developing effective and equitable education systems. However, significant difficulties exist within this, not least because corruption is difficult to define, hard to measure and gaining a full understanding of its effects is almost impossible. Information on corrupt practices is concealed from official documentation and unlikely to be openly discussed (UNESCO, 2009). Furthermore is difficult to separate instances of corruption and weak institutions which lead to increased levels of corruption (Kasuga, 2011).

Issues of corruption cannot be considered separately from a country’s culture of governance and management. Levels of corruption will be shaped by who has decision making power, how hierarchy is viewed and through socioeconomic factors (Pillay & Dorasamy, 2010). This will be examined more closely in the Cambodian context. Corruption tends to be more common in less economically developed countries, as systems of governance are less well developed and less stable (Kim, 2011). More specifically corruption is more likely to occur in countries which lack a strong legal system, free media channels, transparent public information, open political debate and effective political opposition. These are often lacking in states where democracy, transparency and the rule of law is weak, leading to accountability and participation also suffering (Pillay & Dorasamy, 2010; UNESCO, 2009; Hallack & Poisson, 2001).

### 3.4 Types of Corruption in Education

Bilateral and multilateral donors, organisations such as Transparency International and the discourse which surrounds EFA point to key areas of corruption which include; teacher appointments or promotion not based on skill, non-payment, late or incorrect payment of staff salaries, teacher absenteeism, money allocated to schools not reaching it’s destination, illegal fees, bribes for admission, payment for examination entry or additional tuition to pass examinations and misappropriation in procurement of textbooks or other educational materials (World Bank, 2013; Transparency International, 2013; Transparency International, 2005; Chapman, 2002). Corruption in education appears in a variety of forms, the following table summaries these; these headings are used to explore key issues in more detail within the in the Cambodian case study.

<b>Table 1. Summary of some of the main practices of corruption observed within the education sector, and their possible impact on access, quality, equity and ethics</b>		
<b>Area of planning / management involved</b>	<b>Corrupt Practice</b>	<b>Element of education system most effected</b>
Building of schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public tendering</li> <li>• Embezzlement</li> <li>• School mapping</li> </ul>	Quality
Recruitment, promotion and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favouritism</li> <li>• Nepotism</li> </ul>	Quality



appointment of teachers (including systems of incentives)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bribes and pay-offs</li> </ul>	
Conduct of Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Ghost Teachers'</li> <li>• Bribes and pay-offs (for school entrance, for the assessment of children)</li> </ul>	Access Quality Equity Ethics
Supply and distribution of equipment, food and textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public tendering</li> <li>• Embezzlement</li> <li>• Bypassing of criteria</li> </ul>	Equity
Allocation of specific allowances (compensatory measures, fellowships, subsidies to the private sector, etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favouritism</li> <li>• Nepotism</li> <li>• Bribes and pay-offs</li> <li>• Bypassing of criteria</li> </ul>	Access Equity
Examination and diplomas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling of information</li> <li>• Favouritism</li> <li>• Nepotism</li> <li>• Bribes and pay-offs</li> <li>• Academic fraud</li> </ul>	Equity Ethics

*Figure 1: from Hallack and Poisson, 2001, p.20*

Corruption is a highly complex issue which, like partnerships, is difficult to define. However issues associated with corruption do have an impact on equality and efficiency at all levels of education provision. The discourse surrounding international improvements in education recognises governance as key to improving educational outcomes and within this corruption is a leading concern. Using this as theoretical context the next chapter will explore corruption and NGO-government partnership work in Cambodia.

#### **4: Case Study: Cambodia**

By 1979, the last year of the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia had no currency or financial institutions, no markets, industry, public transport, telephones, postal system, virtually no electricity, roads were badly damaged, there was minimal sanitation and tragically 1.7 million people had been killed, many through genocide (Ayres, 2000). Between 1975 – 1979 the education system had also been almost completely destroyed, with around 75% of teachers escaping the country or being murdered (Engel, 2011; Pellini, 2005). Despite ongoing tension following the signing of the Paris Peace Accord in 1991, Cambodia held its first democratic elections in 1993 and over the last 20 years the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has made efforts to rebuild its education provision with significant involvement from outside parties. MoEYS was established in 1992 and has built 6,600 primary schools and 1,500 secondary schools (Engel, 2011), leading to the country more than doubling primary enrollments between 1989 and 2007 (Kim, 2011). It appears that the education system has made significant gains since the 1990s, and to an extent this is true, however the genocide and resulting civil war still mars political and social spheres (Kim, 2011). Cambodia has the least educated citizens in the Southeast Asian region (UNESCO, 2011). School infrastructure, curricula and access to resources have improved, but governance has held back improvements in quality, most specifically at school level (UNESCO, 2011; Bredenberg, 2008). High drop out rates are a key concern and significant numbers of children repeat grades (Prasertsri, 2008). Cambodia is still, “plagued by poverty, corruption and violence in what writers have termed a culture of impunity” (Tan, 2008, p.563).

#### 4.1 Corruption in Cambodia

Corruption is a serious concern in Cambodia (Kasuga, 2011). A 2010 survey of corruption in Cambodian households, which interviewed over 2000 people, found that after the cost of living, corruption was considered the second largest social problem. 82% of people cited it as an issue and 14% of those surveyed named it as the **most** serious social problem, a rise of 11% from 2005 (PACT, 2010). At an institutional level, in 2003 the WB found the Cambodian government guilty of corruption, leading to the government paying back \$2.8 million to prevent further aid been withheld (Moore, 2006). Donors agreed to \$504 million in aid in 2005, if the government could progress anti-corruption measures. In 2006 the WB again withdrew funds from 3 key programmes and cancelled 43 contracts worth \$11.9 million citing corruption as the reason (Moore, 2006). In its Corruption Perception Index Transparency International (2013) shows Cambodia as among the most corruption countries, ranking them 160 out of 177. The RGC does acknowledge corruption as a national issue and it is given high priority in the National Strategic Development Plan 2006 – 2010 (VSO, 2008). In an attempt to make improvements an Anti-corruption Law was passed in Cambodia in 2010, this

created two new government departments, the Anti-Corruption Unit and overseeing them, the National Council Against Corruption. However, the law is considered weak internationally and inadequate time has passed to see how it will be implemented (Nowaczyk, 2011).

Corruption in any country is seeped in social, cultural and political context and a broad understanding of this facilitates clearer insights into how and why it can impact on the efficiency and equality of education provision. Highlighting the complexity of this context, are the 47 terms in Khmer<sup>1</sup> which can describe occurrences which can be seen as corruption (Nissen, 2004). Research shows that participating in corruption helps secure provision of public services in Cambodia (PACT, 2010). The same survey also showed that corruption is largely systematic, in 60% of cases where gifts or bribes were given this was done of the households own accord and 30% of people surveyed reported to know before how much to offer. Gift giving is part of the fabric of Khmer society (Nissen 2004) and accounts for around one third of all payments which are recorded as corrupt (PACT, 2010). However in their responses to the 2010 Survey a significant number of people indicated corruption was not acceptable, even when everyone is doing it<sup>2</sup> and generally disagreed when asked if corruption was a fact of life<sup>3</sup>. Nissen's (2004, p.88) research found that those who take bribes publically deny this, indicating it is not socially approved, corruption is instead seen as an, "institutionalized system of immorality and inequality". Corruption is viewed as normal and is a part of social and economic structure in Cambodia, but is not culturally acceptable.

An understanding of patronage networks helps to further explain why corruption is so widespread in Cambodia given its cultural non-acceptance. Patronage networks, based on where you are from, family networks and political ties, are highly important and deep rooted in Khmer society. They have historically been the basis on which state and society interact (Engel, 2011; Pellini, 2005) and offer, "a social safety net that is not provided by government" (Bredenberg, 2008, p.4). These implicit hierarchical structures permeate Cambodian society and are taught in the home where children cannot challenge the authority of their parents and in school where students cannot challenge teachers (Pellini, 2005). They are also linked to Buddhist beliefs which teach that, your position in this life are based on actions in another life, and encourages the acceptance of ones suffering in order to be born into a high position in the future. It is widely felt that social order is dependent on

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<sup>1</sup> National language of Cambodia

<sup>2</sup> 67% selected either 'neither disagreed or agree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' when asked "You can't call something corruption if everyone is doing it"

<sup>3</sup> 70% selected either 'neither disagreed or agree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' when asked "Corruption is a fact of life. It is the normal way of doing things"

this social hierarchy being upheld, which opposes the democratic ideas of the west (Pellini, 2005). Patronage networks impact on Cambodia's political structures, the country is officially democratic but is effectively a single party system. Following the Arab spring the Cambodian People's Party leader, Hun Sen, is one of the longest serving leaders currently acting as head of state. Sen's rule is upheld by Cambodian patronage networks. The damaging implications of this include the censorship of media, lack of political dissent and political expression, fear and intimidation of those opposing the government and weak legal infrastructure (UNESCO, 2011). As noted in Chapter three these factors are evident in countries with high levels of corruption.

#### 4.2 Corruption in Education in Cambodia

Before focusing more closely on the impact of corruption on NGO-government partnership work, specific types of corruption frequently mentioned in the literature are explored. Each issue is considered briefly at a global level, then research done nationally within Cambodia is outlined and finally the views of NGO managers, given during my interviews are included to highlight the views of NGOs. The headings used below reflect the headings in the table in Chapter 2, however 'building of schools' has been omitted as it was not mentioned in any interviews and there is limited information in the literature.

Issues of corruption seen nationally are reflected in the Cambodian education sector. 20% of people interviewed in the 2010 Corruption Survey (PACT) reported giving money or gifts in return for educational services within the last year and in a quarter of education visits a bribe was offered. However, government schools were highly rated on honesty which indicates that households may be paying bribes with some sincerity (Ibid., 2010). Nissen's 2004 research found that in 33% of contacts with education officials a bribe was paid and public education was responsible for more than half the funds Cambodian families spend annually on bribes.

#### Recruitment, promotion and appointment of teachers

Both the recruitment and the payment of teachers are key to efficiency and equity in education, not only are teachers vital in service delivery, but staff salaries account for a significant proportion of education spend. Patrinos & Kagia (2004) found that across 55 low income countries staff salaries accounted for an average of 74% of education expenditure. In countries where teachers are unpaid, paid late or given less than they are entitled, staff become demoralised and may seek alternative

employment (see Transparency International, 2005). In some cases this also leads to teachers charging fees where education is supposed to be free, or requiring students to have extra tuition to pass exams, causing additional strain particularly on poor parents. There are also issues with fraudulent credentials which allow staff to be employed in roles above their true level of qualification (Patrinos & Kagia, 2007). In numerous countries, officials accept bribes to secure certain employment positions, which impacts on the quality of teaching, as less qualified teachers can gain promotions more quickly (UNESCO, 2009; Transparency International, 2005).

These issues seen globally are reflected in education provision in Cambodia. Nissen (2004) found teachers were often asked to pay a fee for enrollment to teacher training college, to pass exams in college, to secure a job, transfer schools or to gain a promotion. Cultural norms are evident and Cambodian teachers and education managers often looked to their patronage networks, not to their skill set, to gain a job or a promotion (Ibid., 2004) and where staff are not competent in their role they often draw on the protection of their patronage network (Bredenberg, 2008). “Buying” government jobs is also an issue. The 2010 Corruption Survey found one in five applicants for public sector jobs had to pay a fee for employment and MoEYS was seen as a more problematic organisation (PACT). Nissen (2004) found that teachers continually cited between \$300 and \$500 as the cost of a teaching role. VSO’s 2008 research, which interviewed over 140 teachers, found that staff often paid a fee to avoid being sent to a remote province, or as much as USD\$1000 to work locally to their family. This issue is made more complex with the expectation that, because a position was purchased, employees expect a return on investment leading to them seeking ways to generate additional funds within their role (UNESCO, 2011). There were a number of comments surrounding the purchasing of teaching posts during my interviews with NGOs managers, one commented:

Many government officials buy their jobs rather than achieve them through qualification and skills, leading to government offices full of people who lack skills and expertise (or interest) related to education...the same government staff who bought their jobs are able to keep them through patronage networks, despite their inability to do their jobs. Performance management of education staff is non-existent due to the protection afforded by the money changing hands and patronage (Interviewee 1b, 11/12/13).

Some countries also report problems with 'ghost teachers'- people who are not teaching but receive a salary or their salary is received by other officials. This was reinforced in the interviews with NGO managers:

Directors or district office staff keep portions of the salaries of teachers who are frequently absent from school i.e. they benefit financially from teachers not going to work (Interviewee 1b, 11/12/13).

Once a teaching role is secured staff salaries are also problematic. VSO's (2008, p.8) research found teachers felt they were, "underpaid, undersupported and working in under-resourced schools" and the most frequent reason given for feeling unmotivated was low salary. Teachers earn between \$30 and \$60 per month, yet WB data estimates that a typical family of five in Cambodia needs around \$150 to meet reasonable expectations (UNESCO, 2011). VSO's (2008) survey showed that 93% of teachers held second jobs and 99% felt their salary was not enough to survive. School directors, District and Provincial Education Officers earn little more than teachers, so many also hold second jobs (Ibid., 2008). In Cambodia, government salaries are currently paid in cash making payments very vulnerable to corruption due to the number of times cash changes hands. VSO's (2008) survey found 50% of respondents did not receive their salary in a regular way each month. This means that many teachers have poor living conditions and cannot afford basic necessities like food, housing, clothing and medicines (Ibid., 2008). Issues surrounding teacher salaries were reflected in my interviews with NGO managers and in all eight interviews low salaries were cited as a key issue. Comments included:

Even though they [teachers] get low salaries people working at district level take some of the money. Sometimes they don't even provide salaries to teachers on time, which upsets the teachers. (Interviewee 3, 10/12/13)

There was one case where teachers were paid but when they took their money home the ink started to come off and they had been paid counterfeit money. Teachers are often paid less than the full amount or extremely late and this impacts teacher motivation. (Interviewee 7, 8/12/13)

Teachers don't get paid enough, on time, and teachers are demoralised about that, they need to take second jobs, which impacts on the hours of instruction and the quality. (Interviewee 2, 9/12/13)

The majority of the NGO staff interviewed felt that an increase in teacher salaries was the most pressing issue in improving education provision. Overall, NGO managers interviewed seemed sympathetic to the plight of teachers, and to an extent somewhat sympathetic to issues of corruption in the classroom, as it was recognised that this was a consequence of the low salaries received.

#### Conduct of teachers / Examination and diplomas

Globally, teacher conduct is also very significant in relation to equity and efficiency of education, impacting on school effectiveness, pupil achievement, pupil absence and how teachers are perceived as role models (Patrinos & Kagia, 2007). In some countries there have been reports of teachers 'selling' test answers to students, but more common are fees for private lessons, for teaching that students should receive as part of the school day (Engel, 2011; Patrinos & Kagia, 2007).

Again issues seen globally are reflected in Cambodia. Nissen (2004) found that some of the most common payments made to teachers were for enrolling a child in school, receiving better exam results, snacks or drinks (which children felt obliged to buy) and private classes, which cover the curriculum outside school hours. During Nissen's (2004, p.26) research a student stated, "the teacher will ask us to put money inside the exam-paper. The amount depends on how good you want your marks". Cambodia abolished school fees in 2004 and children became entitled to nine years of free education. This led to a significant increase in primary enrollment, particularly in rural areas. In 2004 households were still covering 56% of the cost of primary school, but this was a reduction of 22% from 1998 (Engel, 2011). Informal fees were made illegal under the 2008 Education Law (Engel, 2011), but are still common and are often the result of the very low salaries received by teachers (Tan, 2008; VSO, 2008). Many teachers earn relatively good money providing private tutoring to their own students, which can lead to them omitting parts of the syllabi so that students have to attend extra classes in order to pass exams (UNESCO, 2011; Tan, 2008). This was reflected in my interviews with NGO managers:

Many teachers are said to hold back lessons or information so that students have to attend the private classes in order to learn the required material. At the high school level, students can buy their grades or pay the exam invigilator to be allowed to cheat or to be given answers (Interviewee 1b, 11/12/13).

teachers sometimes charge daily informal school fees to students, which negatively impacts attendance. Some teachers say they allow all children to attend school, even those who cannot pay, but the reality is that those children are often too embarrassed to go to school if they do not have money for their teacher (Interviewee 7, 8/12/13).

You can buy your points at the end of the quarter for \$20 or \$30 dollars. That's why parents wonder how their son or daughter can't read but they always get good points. (Interviewee 4, 14/12/13).

Whilst teacher conduct is a consequence of the system in which staff are operating, the impact that this has on education, particularly for poor parents is very significant. Furthermore, the impact of students being able to progress through schools based on the amount they can pay, instead of their abilities, undermines formal education.

#### Supply and distribution of equipment, food and textbooks

Corruption can affect procurement in education, which places additional burdens on budgets and can lead to students being unable to access learning materials (see Berkman, 2013; Transparency International, 2005). The production and distribution of text books are usually controlled solely by the public sector making this another area vulnerable to corruption (Hallack & Poisson, 2001). Cambodia has also experienced problems here. A recent report by the Khmer Institute for National Development showed that textbooks, which were supposed to be delivered free to school as part of a project funded by the Asian Development Bank, were found on sale in markets around the country (Santos, 2014). The NGO managers made fewer comments on this but it was still mentioned in four of the eight interviews:



Text books, which were printed by the Ministry, fell off the truck somewhere on the way to schools and ended up for sale in the markets (Interviewee 7, 8/12/13).

#### Allocation of specific allowances

Cambodian schools receive a budget known as the 'PB budget', a part of this is dependent on how many children are enrolled. Corruption can affect both the PB budget and how the number of children in school are recorded. VSO's 2008 study found that a widespread practice was to compile two sets of figures relating to exam results and pupil numbers, one was given to the Ministry in response to their targets, the others were kept as the true figures. Both of these issues were reflected in my interviews with NGO managers:

I have worked with around 20 different schools. I've heard from community members, and sometimes teachers, that PB budgets haven't reached the school. It's not clear where the money goes or where the corruption happens, it could be at MoEYS level, Provincial, District or school director level (Interviewee 7, 8/12/13).

The number one problem is the number of students; it has no bearing on reality. The principal has to adapt the number of students in classes to what MoEYS says (Interviewee 3, 10/12/13).

We do a count and see that only 60% of students are left in the school and want to report that, but school staff get very upset...this is undermining their income, because they are sharing the income for the ghost students, which is an engrained system of adding to your meager salary (Interviewee 2, 9/12/13).

Resource management is a key area in improving education provision, school budgets are essential for purchasing resources for learning and enrollment and attendances figures are used to consider how resources and support is allocated - not just nationally, but also internationally.

The above section highlights how issues of corruption impact on the efficiency and equality of education in Cambodia. The formal education system in Cambodia appears modern but masks an underlying agenda of maintenance of political power and traditional leadership. This has created a crisis in education, there is a huge gap between provision and the communities education intends to serve (Kim, 2011; Ayres 2000). Issues are rooted culture, politics, poor systems and low management capacity, which leads to resources not being used to their best effect or in their intended way (Bredenberg, 2008). The above discussion brings to focus issues with governance in the Cambodian education sector. Overall management and accountability can be said to be weak, which leads to high tolerance of incompetent behavior (Bredenberg, 2008). However, it is easy to blame low capacity, or a lack of budget, for issues of inefficiency in education. Kim's (2011) study, points not to capacity, but to how it is dealt with as the real challenge. The research involved interviewing 51 policy makers in Cambodia and many challenged the idea that low capacity was leading to lack of progress in education provision. Instead they understood the problem as "systemic politicisation and corruption" (Kim, 2011, p.502). A Cambodian working for the UN explained "we are not lacking money, but leaking money" (Ibid., p.500). Brendenbury (2008) notes that even where behaviors are criminal they usually goes unpunished, stating that over the last two decades no-one has been suspended from their position within the government education sector based on corruption issues.

#### 4.3 Overseas Development Assistance and NGO support to Cambodia

Cambodia is heavily dependent on development funds from overseas to support social services and governance and this financial support has increased over recent years. Between 1990 and 1999 Oversea Development Aid (ODA) support totaled around USD\$50 million per year leading to the 1990s to be referred to as the 'donorship' phase of development (Engel, 2011). However, aid has increased even further in recent years and the total ODA provided between 1992 and 2007 equaled USD\$7.9 billion (Ibid., 2011). However, aid has increased even further in recent years and the total ODA provided between 1992 and 2007 equaled USD\$7.9 billion (Ibid., 2011). Between 2005 and 2011 ODA accounted for between 9% and 10% of Gross National Product (Khieng, 2013). In 2007 USD\$790 million was provided in development support, of which, 8% was provided by NGOs (Engel,

2011). Much of Cambodia's ODA is not provided as direct budget support, as donors have concerns about the financial management of public funds and issues of corruption (UNESCO, 2011). Instead technical assistance accounted for around half of financial support and investments project account for the other half (Greenhill, 2007).

Aid specifically targeted at education in Cambodia has mirrored national increases and between 1994 and 1999 more than half of the Cambodian education budget was provided by external donors (Courtney, 2007). Financial support reached around £70million per year between 2003 and 2008 (Engel, 2011) and totalled USD\$385.6 million between 2003 and 2007 (Prasertsri, 2008). Between 2003 and 2008 there were 133 different organisations facilitating 233 education projects in Cambodia with a combined budget of US\$225million (Tan, 2008). For 2013 the National Education Partnership website lists 122 NGOs supporting education provision. This international contribution has allowed the rapid reconstruction of the Cambodian education system. However, throughout the 1990s much of this was uncoordinated, lacked medium term planning, capacity development and was not owned at national government level (Engel, 2011). Although financial assistance to Cambodia has increased significantly since the 1990s this has not been coupled with strong actions to prevent corruption, this may suggest NGOs and their donors do not place a heavy emphasis on accountability (Bredenberg, 2008).

#### 4.4 NGO-Government Partnerships in Cambodia

As part of the international investment in Cambodia's development, NGOs play a vital role in complementing and supplementing the government provision particularly in education, health and agriculture. NGOs have played a particularly important role in rebuilding the Cambodian national education system (UNESCO, 2011), having been involved in service provision even before the major influx of aid in the 1990s. Improvements in education quality across Cambodia are more pronounced in places where NGOs have been most active (Engel, 2011). The number of NGOs in Cambodia dramatically increased between 2000 and 2011 and these organisations provided around USD\$1.1 billion, or 10% of total aid, between 1992 and 2011 (Khieng, 2013). In 2006, 19% of all aid was disbursed through NGOs, 10% of this was from multilateral and bilateral donors and 9% was from NGOs own funds (Greenhill, 2007). By 2010 NGOs were contributing USD\$127 million of funds and managing an additional USD\$93million given by other donors (Khieng, 2013). In the past no USA government funding was permitted to go directly to the RGC, so this was instead channeled through NGOs (Greenhill, 2007). A survey in 2012 estimated around 500 INGOs and 800 local NGOs were

active in Cambodia, 52,650 Khmer people were employed by NGOs and their programmes benefited one million people across the country (Kheing, 2013). This boom in activity mirrors the international rise in NGO work described in Chapter 1.

Following international trends, the RGC aims to strengthen partnerships with NGOs. The Education Strategy Plan 2009 – 2013 calls for, “continued and improved partnership among RGC, development partners<sup>4</sup>, private sector, non-governmental organizations, communities and parents” (MoEYS, 2010, p.i) and continues to assert that stronger partnerships with DPs and NGOs will improve the effectiveness of aid. In 2001 the RGC set up the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) and Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) both of which aims to coordinate donors and provide an forum for active partnership work between donors, NGOs and MoEYS (Prasertsri, 2008; Courtney, 2007). Both NGO representation on these boards, and increased involvement in the development of the Education Strategic Plans has lead to an increased in partnership work. However, NGOs working in Cambodia have over the past 30 years focused more on service provision and less on advocacy. This is because the RGC have a low tolerance for advocacy and NGOs who are critical, particularly on human rights, have been imprisoned or threatened (Greenhill, 2007).

Chapter 4 has shown that corruption in Cambodia, mirroring global patterns, has a serious impact in several ways, on the efficiency and equality of education provision. Issues of corruption are complex, systematic and embedded in social structures. Although this causes people to be sympathetic it does not lead to the conclusion that civil society, particularly the poorest, deem it permissible. NGO–government partnerships, although not always straightforward, are being put forward as an effective ways for governments and NGO to work to improve the efficiency and equity of education provision in Cambodia. Again this mirrors global trends. In the next chapter this paper will return to look at the research question and ask whether the systematic and widespread corruption which exists in the Cambodia education sector leads to additional challenges for NGO–government partnerships which aim to improve the efficiency and equity of education.

## **5: Corruption: Challenging NGO-Government Partnership Work in Education**

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<sup>4</sup> Cambodia’s Development Partners in Education include: Asian Development Bank (ADB), Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), European Union (EU), French Agency for Development (AFD), International Labor Organization (ILO), Japan (JICA and Japanese Embassy), Sweden (Sida), World Food Programme (WFP), UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA3, UNICEF, USAID, World Bank

In Chapter two, four areas of challenge for NGO-government partnerships were identified. Using the analysis of corruption in education and the country case study, these four areas are now revisited. Here, I will draw further on comments made by NGO managers during my interviews, in considering any additional challenges which arise when NGO-government partnership work is understood through the lens of corruption, brought into focus through the Cambodian case study.

### 5.1 Definition

As outlined in Chapter two “partnership” does not have a clear definition. However, it does indicate that both parties have a long-term commitment to mutual goals, shared responsibility for joint activities and balanced power relations. Seven out of the eight NGOs interviewed described their work with the government as partnership, this supports the claim made in the literature that partnership work is seen as the only relationship that counts in International Development.

Comments included:

We believe you can achieve you goals and be sustainable by working in partnership with the existing system. The only way to scale up is in partnership with the government, the community and other NGOs.

(Interviewee 4, 14/12/13)

We have a different approach now to development than we had 10 years ago, and that includes working much more through partners...this is not unique, more and more international NGOs completely work through partners, both government partners and other NGOs. (Interviewee 2,

9/12/13)

We say partnership when talking internally or working the government, for me it seems that’s what everyone uses these days. (Interviewee 6,

28/12/2013)

The interviews also supported claims in the literature that partnership may not always be the most appropriate term to describe the relationship between governments and NGOs (see Courtney, 2007; Fowler, 2000):

Partnership has been overused in the development industry. I've been talking about our partnership with the Ministry, my colleagues use it in presentations - like this is a 'great partnership' - and when I talk to the Ministry I will talk to them about our partnership. But in reality I don't think that word fits, it's more a collaboration with the government. The government has a very different status, power and duty level to an NGO. We are a non-government organisation and they are a government.

(Interviewee 2, 9/12/13)

This raises issues of power in the relationships between NGOs and governments. Partnership implies equal power relations, but in Cambodia there are clear imbalances relating to power and issues of corruption. Corruption has a serious impact on education provision, however the government is making somewhat limited changes and can be said to be culpable for many of the issues. One NGO manager summarised the issue:

The government doesn't want to change it [corruption] (since they benefit from it), and NGOs don't want to challenge it (since it will damage their relationship with the government and make it harder to continue their work). This leads to either: 1) government and NGOs working independently, with NGOs providing aid (eg. resources, scholarships, their own training programmes in schools, supporting schools directly...i.e. doing the government's job for them) rather than development support (capacity building, technical support, coaching, etc at the government level); or 2) collaboration "on the face of things" leading to international standard policies, laws, and commitments that are never enforced or implemented, satisfying both donors and government staff. (Interviewee 1b, 11/12/13)

NGOs have little control over corruption and limited space to challenge it. As noted by Bredenberg (2008) for many donors corruption presents insurmountable challenges as there is modest space for recourse. Where NGOs do challenge systematic corruption there is a risk they may not be able to continue to work in the country:

They [the government] can terminate the cooperation if they see fit, for example if we would be seen as engaging on a political level. (Interviewee 2, 9/12/13)

Balanced power relations are not an identifying feature of NGO-government partnerships in Cambodia. The comments above also call into question another defining feature of partnership work - the long-term commitment to mutual goals. Corruption in Cambodia is systematic and happens at all levels of education provision, at classroom level teachers supplement their income through corruption, this is just one example where practices are in conflict with NGO goals to make improvements. Taking another example, NGO managers recognise that increases in teacher salaries are key to making education improvements, but this is difficult to address with their government partners:

every body knows that increasing teachers salary is the main tip to sort out education in Cambodia...they don't want to talk about that anymore because have been talking about this for a long time and it never gets sorted out. (Interviewee 5, 9/12/13)

The improvements that the RGC has made over the last 30 years in education provision shows they are committed to change, however in relation to challenging corruption it appears that NGOs and governments don't have mutual goals.

In conclusion, when work taking place between NGOs and governments is understood through a lens of corruption, using Cambodia as a national example, partnership is not the most appropriate definition for the relationship. Corruption adds to the imbalance of power, all goals cannot be seen as mutual and issues are not tackled equally by both partners. The international discourse surrounding EFA should reconsider what types of relationship are best suited to different country

contexts, approaches should be more nuanced and flexible. Furthermore, terms such as collaboration, cooperation, coordination and association should be explored as an alternative to the term 'partnership'.

Further considering issues of definition, 'corruption' may not be a beneficial term. Corruption is an over used and highly value laden, a focus on accountability and governance may be more appropriate (Hallack & Poisson, 2001). In outlining the significance which the cultural and social context has on corruption in Cambodia, this does raise questions around how helpful the term corruption is. The communication style in Cambodia is very indirect, therefore talking directly about corruption may not resolve issues. More consideration should be given to the language used around instances which maybe seen as corrupt. These could be better articulated within NGO–government partnership work. This will increase the depth of understanding of a complex issue, which exist in different forms, at all levels of education provision. This supports Nissen's (2004, p.81) view that, "corrupt practices are fully a multidimensional social phenomenon and should be treated as such".

## 5.2 Authority and legitimacy

As outlined in Chapter 2 significant legitimacy and authority for NGO programmes is derived from state governments. Interviews with NGO managers echoed this:

MoEYS permits NGO3 to work in public schools and validates all the programmes. (Interviewee 4, 14/12/13)

We do always try and involve people from government departments partly for legitimacy and partly because they can give very good input and in the end it has to go through the government systems, due to protocols. (Interviewee 6, 28/12/2013)

The Ministry would say we get technical advisers and NGO1 get legitimacy. (Interviewee 1a, 9/12/13)



Also noted in Chapter 2 were challenges for NGO-government partnerships, which relate to authority and legitimacy; when one partner is not acting in the best interests of those they are accountable to, this can significantly impact on the other partner. The case study shows high levels of systematic corruption in Cambodia, and NGOs are reliant on the RGC to authorise and legitimise their work. Put differently, the system which NGOs look to for legitimacy suffers from corruption. This raises several important questions; if genuine NGO-government partnerships do exist then are both parties responsible for corruption issues? Are additional responsibilities placed on NGOs to act in a way that minimises opportunities for corruption for their government partners? Does working in partnership with a government system suffering from high levels of corruption call into question the legitimacy of NGO programmes? These questions are wide reaching cannot be resolved here, but do add further weight to the argument for additional research in this area.

Also within this theme, additional challenges arise for NGOs within their government partnerships when they are not prepared to offer bribes. The interviews showed failure to offer bribes meant government officials were less likely to attend workshops being run by NGOs. In turn, this reduced the legitimacy of NGOs in the eyes of the community:

If we organise a meeting with the community, and we want to invite someone from the government to join, we go to them and say it is important but they don't come, they say they are busy, because we don't give them any money. And if we don't have anyone from the government there then the community say that we aren't really collaborating with the government, so they don't value us. (Interviewee 3, 10/12/13)

NGOs look to their government partners to authorise and legitimise their work but systematic corruption calls in questions how credible this is. In an international context NGOs should consider how they legitimise work programmes in countries which are suffering from high levels of systematic corruption. Further research is called for in this area to better understand how authority and legitimacy is established within NGO-government partnership work.

### 5.3 Advocacy and Identity

As established in Chapter 2, advocating on behalf of communities is a key role for NGOs. More recently the role of NGOs in providing services and giving technical advice (in partnerships with governments) has grown. This can compromise the role of NGOs in advocacy, creating challenges within NGO-government partnership work. Corruption adds further challenge to this. The interviews showed that NGOs are less likely to advocate on behalf of communities, around issues of corruption, if this has an impact on their ability to work in partnership with the government in other areas:

NGO1's partnerships with the government are strategic, and NGO1 is generally both hesitant to pull out of a partnership and unwilling to engage directly with overly sensitive issues, such as corruption. (Interviewee 1b, 11/12/13)

For larger organisations, who have built a relationship with the government, and for whom the government has respect, they feel they are treading on thin ice. Discussing corruption could jeopardise their relationship with the government.  
(Interviewee 7, 8/12/13)

Under old minister you just couldn't mention it. He didn't want to know. You were jeopardising your organisational relationship if you tried to mention it.  
(Interviewee 1a, 9/12/13)

If NGOs are not in a position to advocate on behalf of communities their identity and role within the International Development sector has to be questioned. In Cambodia, NGOs are not always willing to directly advocate around issues of corruption on behalf of communities, as this is likely to have a negative impact on other aspects of their partnership work such as technical support. However, in a number of interviews it was clear that NGOs look to both DPs, for example UNICEF and the WB, and the national network representing NGOs, to raise issues with the government through the official channels of the ESWG and the JSWG. Comments included:

We gain the support of the big DPs and they support us to raise the issues with the government...DPs can raise the issues in a friendly way with MoEYS and normally they talk honestly. (Interviewee 5, 9/12/13)

Within their partnership with DPs, NGOs managers saw a role for their organisations as commentators on implementation:

Multilateral and bilateral donors have been successful in advocacy work at policy level...they [DPs] don't have strong enough capacity at implementation level, they work as consultants providing guidelines and policy but they don't have enough to bring it to practical ground level. (Interviewee 4, 14/12/13)

The challenge for Development Partners is that they will most often be working at a national level and once the policy (e.g. May 2010 anti-corruption law) is passed, they might think that everything will be okay because there's a law, but the problem is actually the implementation of things. NGO1 has a good relationship with them [DPs] in that we can report back on the implementation of policies and public financial management systems (Interviewee 1a, 9/12/13).

This conclusion is supported by Greenhill's 2007 paper which found that NGOs see large donors as the main way to influence the government, however Greenhill also found organisations such as the WB felt uncomfortable bridging the gap between citizens and the state. In Cambodia the tripartite relationship between NGOs, DPs, the RGC appears to be the route in which NGOs address issues of corruption. Whilst corruption does further reduce NGO's ability to advocate on behalf of communities, NGOs have found alternative means to approach this.

On an international level there is scope for further exploration, and strengthening, of the tripartite relationship between NGOs, governments and bilateral and multilateral donors (DPs), in advocacy work which addresses corruption in education provision. Within the international EFA discourse a closer look at this should be taken to further clarify the roles in which NGOs and DPs take in tackling systematic corruption in education provision. This needs to take into account (or redefine) organisational identities.

#### 5.4 Effectiveness

NGO–government partnerships develop from a recognition that NGOs are more effective at delivering certain aspects of service provision and may be able to offer technical support and policy advice. As noted in Chapter two the supporting evidence around the effectiveness of NGOs is somewhat limited. Reconsidering this through the lens of corruption, there was some indication from the interviews that NGO effectiveness is reduced further. For example:

The challenge in partnership working is knowing that the impact of what you are doing is lessened...what sometime happens is it gives an excuse to not use the money they are supposed to use. So whilst they are using our money in accordance with how we have given it, it would have a bigger impact were they using they using their own money properly. (Interviewee 6, 28/12/2013)

Partnership work in countries with high levels of systematic corruption may mean that NGOs ‘fill a gap’ in service provision. This impacts on NGO effectiveness within partnership work. Conversely, if NGO were not acting issues could be more damaging. So, by entering into partnerships with the Government, NGOs are contributing to positive change and improving the effectiveness of education provision. As noted here:

We can achieve something by being part of the partnership and trying to counter the corruption. (Interviewee 1a, 9/12/13)

The case study shows that NGO managers felt that their partnership work would be more effective if corruption was reduced. However, in entering into partnership work with governments, NGO can have a positive impact on issues of corruption.

## **6: Conclusion**

This paper has sought to analyse the question, “does corruption create additional challenges for Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in their partnership work with the Cambodian government (in education)?”. This question is important to the International Development discourse as both NGO–government partnership work and corruption have both received increased attention in recent years. Challenges to NGO–government partnership work were looked at under four headings –

definition, authority and legitimacy, advocacy and identity, and effectiveness. These issues were then re-examined following an indepth analysis of corruption in education using Cambodia as a case study. This paper concludes that, for each of the four areas, additional challenges are found within NGO-Government partnership work caused by the high levels of systematic corruption evidenced in Cambodia. This raises numerous critical questions both for NGOs in their partnership work with nation states and for the International Development sector in promoting partnership work.

With regard to definition, when analysing NGO-government partnerships work through the lens of corruption, it is clear the relationship do not hold many of the defining features generally associated with partnership. With regard to authority and legitimacy, NGOs look to legitimise partnership work through state systems which suffer from high levels of systematic corruption, this may call into question the creditability of their work. Looking at advocacy and identity, corruption presents additional difficulties for NGO to advocate on behalf of local communities, NGOs have found ways to mitigate this through working with DPs and national networks. Finally, corruption does impact on how effective NGO partnership work is, however NGOs may have some impact on corruption by entering into the partnership in the first place.

Cambodia is a special case; the social structure of patronage networks interplay with corruption. There was huge level of violence in the 1970s, followed by a civil war. The country then opened its borders, with virtually no education system, at around the same time as the NGO boom. However, Cambodia is not the only country with a unique set of conditions. One clear conclusion from this paper is that when the two key issues of NGO-government partnership work and corruption in education are taken together, there is a significant gap in the research and literature. Organisations publish very limited information relating to their approach to corruption in comparison to what is available about partnership. The propagation of NGO-government partnership work in countries, where high levels of corruption can clearly be identified, should receive more attention from academia, international institutions and NGOs themselves.

Partnership has been the mantra of the International Development sector for the last 20 years but if EFA targets and education MDGs are to be met, a closer look at governance, with a particular focus on corruption is needed. Corruption should be understood as a complex and “multidimensional social phenomenon” (Nissen 2004, p.81). If NGOs are to hold a role in addressing issues of

corruption in education, a partnership approach with state governments does not appear to be the most appropriate model.

### Postscript

Since the national elections in June 2013 Cambodia has experienced civil unrest. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2014 this escalated when the national police force opened fire on civilians protesting about garment factories wages, killing four people. During my interviews which took place in December 2013 many NGO managers noted a change in the lead up to, and following, the elections, in the tolerance among civil society toward corruption. This could represent the beginnings of change in Cambodia, which is likely to come through the actions of grassroots civil society. I hope as things change violence is minimal, Cambodia has suffered enough, and that the efforts of Cambodia people can be supported by NGOs and DPs.

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## **Appendix 1 – NGO and Interviewee Details**

### **NGO 1**

A large International NGO who have been working in Cambodia since 1991 and work across a variety of sectors all across the country. They have worked with MoEYS for 20 years and are regarded as a leading organisation in the Cambodian Education Section. Projects include technical support, training and supplying some resources from school to Ministry level.

#### **Interviewee 1a**

Non-Cambodian National. Has worked in Cambodia since 2010, initially with an organisation supporting Cambodian teachers, then as the Education Programme Manager and is now Head of Programmes for NGO 1. Interviewed on: 9/12/13.

#### **Interviewee 1b**

Non-Cambodian National. Worked in Cambodia since 2011 in a remote province. Community Development Adviser - work includes developing student councils, parents' associations and supporting community engagement at schools. Date of interview: 11/12/13.

### **NGO 2**

A large International NGO who have been working in Cambodia for the last 40 years, supporting programmes across a variety of sectors across the country. Education projects include early childhood work, bilingual education and supporting lower secondary schools in partnership with the Ministry. This includes technical support, advocacy, training and supply of resources.

#### **Interviewee 2**

Non-Cambodian National. Worked in Cambodia for over 10 years. Programme Coordinator and part of the senior management team for NGO 2. Date of interview: 9/12/13.

### **NGO 3**



A small local NGO working in collaboration with junior high schools supporting creative learning, critical thinking skills and English classes. Other projects include scholarships and soft skills training.

### **Interviewee 3**

Cambodian national. Worked for NGO 3 since 2008, current role is Senior Programme Manager, prior to this was an English teacher. Date of interview 10/12/2013

### **NGO 4**

A medium size International NGO, who have worked in Cambodia since 2003. This organisations works across in 10 countries focusing on literacy, gender equality in education and life skills. In Cambodia they offer technical support, training and supply resources to schools.

### **Interviewee 4**

Cambodian national. Has worked in the social sector since 1995 and in education since 2004, has been a senior manager in an INGOs for 7 years and has been the Country Director of NGO 4 for over 4 years. Date of interview 14/12/2013

### **NGO 5**

Represents NGOs across the country and has over 100 international and local members and 12 staff. Work includes capacity building and advocacy particularly around Education Policy. NGO5 support members to build relationships with MOEYS.

### **Interviewee 5**

Cambodian National. Currently the campaigns and Advocacy Coordinator of NGO 5. Date of interview 9/12/13.

### **NGO 6**

A large local NGO who have been working in Cambodia since 1999. Focus on education and have 150 working across 11 provinces. Work includes Supporting the government implement the Child Friendly Schools policy at primary and lower secondary, scholarships and programmes to improve access to education.

#### **Interviewee 6**

Non Cambodian National. Worked in Cambodia for 8 years in various roles including teacher training. For the last 4 year has worked as an adviser for NGO 6 Date of interview 28/12/2013.

#### **Interviewee 7**

Non-Cambodian National. NGO consultant. Has worked in Cambodia for over 7 years between 2005 and 2013 (for parts of 2009 and 2010, was outside Cambodia). Their work in the education sector has included general management of a small UK run organisation and consultancy for three other NGOs – two medium sized INGOs and one large INGO. Date of interview 8/12/2013

#### **Appendix 2: Key Interview Questions**

1. Can you describe the project/s you have worked on? Years employed, job roles, current position.
2. Please describe your NGO - education work you are involved in, size of organisation, number of staff, number of school supported, etc.
3. What type of support do your NGOs projects provide to the government?

Technical support

Advocacy

Training

Education service provision – what type?

Policy development

Funding

Supply of resources

4. Do the government provide any support to you?

- a. Technical support
- b. Advocacy
- c. Training
- d. Education service provision – what type?
- e. Policy development
- f. Funding
- g. Supply of resources

5. Which of the following words best describe the working relationship with the government?

Collaboration

Dependency

Partnership

Co-operation

Association

How do you discuss the relationship internally? With the government?

6. Please describe the ways in which your organisation interacts with the government?

7. How much impact do you feel that corruption has on the quality/efficient of education in Cambodia?

Serious impact

Some impact

Low impact

No impact

If some or serious, in what ways does it impact on efficiency?

8. How much impact do you feel that corruption has on the access to / equity of education in Cambodia?

Serious impact

Some impact

Low impact

No impact

If some or serious, in what ways does it impact on access?

9. Have you encountered, or been told about instances of corruption through your partnership work with the government at any level (child, school, DOE, POE, MoEYS)?
10. Did you raise this directly with the government?
11. Did you raise this indirectly with the government?
12. Have you ever been involved in open discussions with the government on corruption? In what context? Who was involved?
13. How far does your organisation tolerate corruption? Do you have a policy on corruption?
14. Do you feel culture and patronage networks relate to issues of corruption?
15. What do you feel are the main impacts of corruption on partnership work for your NGO?



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Editor: Andrew S Crines

SSB 13.28 | Woodhouse Lane  
Leeds | LS2 9JT | United Kingdom

Tel: +44 113 343 92 04

Fax: +44 113 343 4400

Email: [a.s.clines@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.s.clines@leeds.ac.uk)

Website: <http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/about/journal/>

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