

## Partnerships II: Partnership Typologies

Considering partnerships in Cambodia based on a typology of form and function

Partnerships come in a wide range of shapes and sizes in Cambodia. The primary focus of partnerships between state and non-state actors (NGOs or community-based organizations) to date has been to enhance service delivery at the local level. These partnerships are often well established and successful in meeting objectives. Increasingly however, partnerships are focused on other, more complex ends such as accountability, learning, and the sharing and development of skills. Supplementing an earlier learning note, this DFGG Project Learning Note discusses the different ways actors work together, making a distinction between the *function* of the partnership and the *form* it takes. Understanding this distinction will help maximize the potential of partnerships and ensure that experience from elsewhere is brought to bear in the future development of partnerships in Cambodia.

### Introduction

The working definition for *partnership* set out in DFGG Learning Note 15 (Partnerships I) introduces the concept of time-bound partnerships meeting “synergistic goals” to address particular issues that could not be addressed as effectively if an organization acted on its own. The definition emphasizes that finance and contracts are not the factors which generally define partnerships.

In Cambodia, strategic and systematic partnerships between state and non-state actors are relatively new. Elsewhere in the region, stakeholders are generally more familiar with each other, with the benefits different kinds of actors bring to the table, and how roles and responsibilities can be defined. Through the DFGG project, working with state and non-state actors, the Ministry of Interior Governance Resource and Learning Center has sought to better understand partnerships in Cambodia. Although this work has only just begun, this note sets out some of the key issues and lessons. It builds on and supplements Learning Note 15 which provides an initial overview, and describes the next steps can be in the process of developing effective partnerships. The note first looks at the function of partnerships in Cambodia and then considers the different forms they take.

### Defining Partnerships by Function (or Purpose)

In Cambodia, state-non-state partnerships generally fit into one of four functional categories. They are focused on (service) delivery, accountability, resource transfer and/or learning partnerships. Each brings a different attitude to the relationship and requires different commitment and ways of working together.

### Partnerships with a Project or Service Delivery Function

Project or service delivery partnerships are common in Cambodia. They are often formed when government institutions partner with local, national or international NGOs to deliver much-needed services and infrastructure to poor communities. These might be routine immunization efforts or one-off school-building projects.



Project partnerships are highly dependent on the non-state partner having funds and on the types of funding that has been secured. While some funding may be adapted to suit local needs, the overall focus is often determined by the financing from donors. For instance, an NGO will receive funds for improving maternal health care, but may have some flexibility to focus on inputs that align with the needs of women in a particular community. Alternatively, funds are geographically-focused to suit the footprint of an international NGO and local NGO partners. In many cases, local NGOs will have developed relationships with different parts of government, and this enables one stage of work to lead to another.

The process for developing partnerships focused on local service delivery in Cambodia is generally well understood by national and local actors alike. An increasingly effective mechanism at the local level is the District Integration Workshop, which helps communes identify potential NGO partners to assist in the delivery of services. By linking demand and supply, this seeks to ensure that NGO activity is targeted on agreed commune plans. In the main, the incentives for NGOs to partner with Government have been sufficiently high for partnerships focused on providing services and sub-projects in Cambodia to flourish. The

partnership mechanism tends to be simple and fairly straightforward: NGOs provide the service in a predictable way and local administrations value the contribution.

More complicated, and possibly more effective project partnerships emerge when an NGO provides an input (e.g. infrastructure) on the agreement or condition that government supports recurrent costs. Though more challenging, examples of this kind of partnership are especially seen when communes partner with an NGO to build a pre-school, and the commune agrees to fund the costs of the early learning teacher.

Some project partnerships at the national level are more specific (e.g. the inputs of learning partners to the Governance Resource and Learning Center at the Ministry of Interior) – they may stem from an invitation from government to NGOs, or from NGOs to government. These partnerships are generally collaborative and constructive in Cambodia, efforts are made to clearly allocate roles and responsibilities, jointly develop goals, and align (but not necessarily jointly-manage) all resources. Typically a partnership focused on delivering a project encounters less challenges than others, but the difficulties that might emerge include the different working cultures of state and non-state actors, the hurdles encountered to deliver on time and the unequal status of the state and non-state partner that is typical of relationships in Cambodia.

### **Accountability-focused Partnerships**

Partnerships focused on enhancing accountability are emerging in Cambodia and have been the focus of many of those developed under the DFGG project. Typically, these partnerships bring state and non-state actors/organizations together for one of three reasons: (i) to develop policies, practices and standards, be they at the national or local level (e.g. the development of the Social Accountability Framework involved 80 NGOs, the government and donors); (ii) to support processes to enhance accountability for performance and finance (e.g. local NGO monitoring of health centers); and (iii) to provide mechanisms aimed at overcoming conflict between stakeholders which emerge due to different interpretations, or the absence of standard, laws or procedures (e.g. the Arbitration Council's mandate to resolve labor disputes involves a partnership between employers, workers and government, and is supported by an NGO).

The spirit of 'accountability-focused' partnerships varies, but they typically deal with controversial issues on which there are diverse opinions, they may be driven by discontent or conflict, and most will require more shepherding and compromise than service delivery partnerships if they are to work. Partners come together to find a way out of a challenge that affects them all; they seek a pro-active way forward that is mutually agreed by all parties. In the Cambodian context, the principle

of constructive engagement is commonly established at the outset to create a pre-agreed interface for dialogue between stakeholders. By getting parties to agree to procedures and targets, they avoid an impasse. A key tenet is that the right actors are involved – legitimacy is dependent on whether partners are seen to have the mandate to make the agreements.

A neutral and independent convener or intermediary often plays an interlocutor role in sensitive initiatives, at least initially. This helps to ensure that decisions and activities of partnerships are not captured by (or perceived to be captured) by a particular organization or stakeholder group, by a particular context, or by a particular issue that does not affect the majority. Managing or shielding these partnerships from vested interests becomes paramount. Consistency and some predictability in approach combined with clear communications that show why certain actions or decisions were taken are critical to keep stakeholders on board.

Often watched closely by external critics and skeptics, accountability-focused partnerships are challenging to manage and, along with management skills, require diplomacy, patience and facilitation skills. Designing such partnerships with an eye on what will incentivize and encourage influential partners to sign up and stay engaged is critical. Ultimately, as illustrated by the experience of the employers and unions that rely on the Arbitration Council in Cambodia, a model becomes more institutionalized, and relies on defined standards and procedures that create predictability in the partnership mechanism.

### **Resource transfer partnerships**

Partnerships that are focused on the transfer of resources, recognition or rewards bring organizations together to make resources available to local or national projects. Cambodian examples include the multi-sector grant-making committee for DFGG developed as an approach to allocate grants to non-state actors.

Typically, partners bring different skills and knowledge into these kinds of partnerships. This might include monitoring or auditing, local knowledge, logistical expertise or planning skills. They will also contribute their individual reputations and hopefully bring along the constituencies that they represent. The rationale for these collaborations is to ensure resources go to those recipients most deserving – as mutually agreed by a multi-stakeholder group of partners.

Partners come together usually (though not always) at the invitation of those holding the initial resources (funding, pharmaceuticals, school supplies). A key challenge is that those with the resources generally have the highest interest in ensuring the credibility or worthiness of the recipients. On the other hand, those asked to

collaborate, or to bring technical or other skills, may themselves be interested in applying for those resources. A key lesson of the DFGG project is that, typically, the most qualified candidates for partnering in decision-making (e.g. over the allocation of resources) are also those most qualified to do the job. This created difficulties in keeping partners in their defined roles. (See Learning Note 2)

Although the spirit of the engagement is different to accountability-oriented partnerships, many of the mechanisms of resource transfer partnerships are similar: (i) clear and agreed principles, (ii) clear expectations of participating partners, (iii) transparent communications, timely decision-making, (iv) clear protocols and procedures for both applicants and decision-making processes, and (v) a neutral review or selection panel. Selection panel partnerships need to be seen to be “mainstream”, and in Cambodia, to have a certain status to reassure applicants of the fairness and the robustness of the process and selection criteria. A key challenge is thus to ensure that there is no perceived or actual conflict of interest where the decisions, or votes of an individual can be construed to lead to direct or indirect, personal or organizational benefit. Those influencing or taking decisions may be asked to sign a code of conduct to suggest that they will act with integrity, respect confidentiality and other agreed principles of the partnership.

### Learning and Innovation Partnerships

In Cambodia, partnerships focused on learning and innovation are usually framed as networks – developed to bring organizations and individuals together for the exclusive purpose of sharing or generating innovations and learning. Actors are either state or non-state and the spirit of engagement is generally creative. By bringing a range of stakeholders together, new solutions can be found for different challenges. Often such partnerships will begin as loose networks that incentivize participation by meeting learning interests of participants or by being seen to be innovative / at the cutting edge.

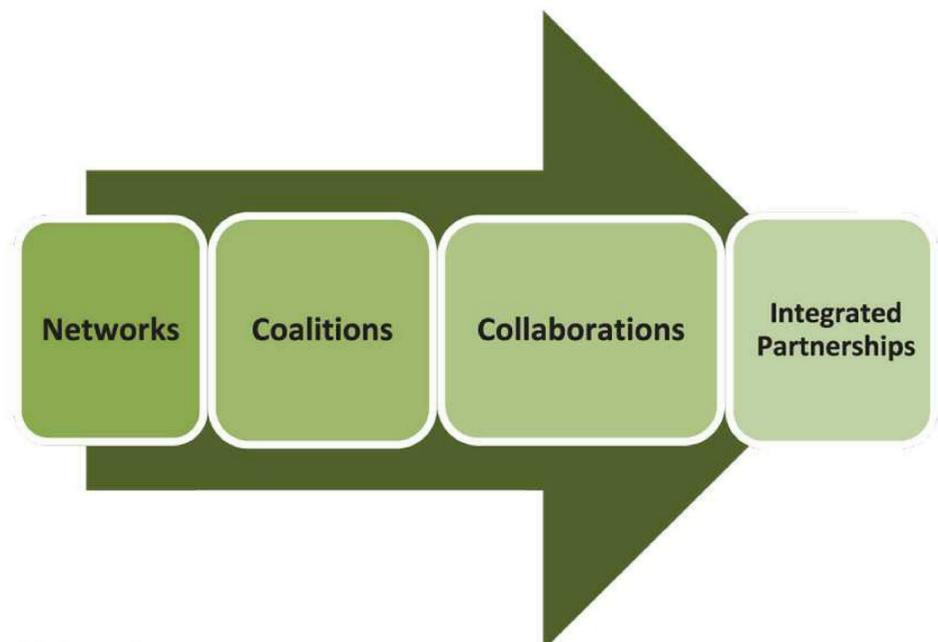
Successful learning partnerships generally bring leading and experienced thinkers to the learning agenda. They are typically informal and inclusive. The goal is to draw in more and more experiences of practitioners, policymakers and academics from a wide range of disciplines. The style of the partnership is facilitative, rather than procedural, and needs to encourage intellectual honesty to challenge constructively to move issues forward. Examples in Cambodia include the roundtables and the think tanks established for the development of the social accountability framework, and the informal network of health NGOs working in malaria control.

Learning partnerships sustain their momentum through events that bring people together. They do not

need to balance the interests of different stakeholder groups or partners. The key to the partnership is the facilitation and the dynamic for change. The risks of participating are low, although challenging the mainstream could be threatening for some participants. A further challenge is that many partners may actually be competing for the primacy of their ideas with implications for their reputation, funding, staffing or other aspects. Weaker partners may tend to worry about an open critique of their work. An emphasis on group learning is therefore critical, to ensure learning is non-threatening. Key challenges include maintaining the focus of the learning and mainstreaming the work of the partnership so it is relevant to the everyday work of the participants.

### Categorizing Partnerships by Form

Cambodia also provides illustration of different *forms* of partnerships. Each of the models described below has different characteristics, forming a spectrum from networks to integrated approaches with increasing levels of commitment and contribution, obligation, risk, blurred branding and mutual accountability.



### Networks

Networks bring a wide range of organizations together to share information on a theme of mutual interest. They are fairly uncomplicated and allow relatively risk-free participation for government and/or NGOs operating at all levels. Membership is usually open, with few restrictions on joining. Examples from Cambodia, show that participants in networks, such as the NGO Forum, Medicam or the Working Group of Partners in Decentralization (WGPD) can generally contribute as much or as little to the network as they choose.

Among other benefits, networks offer opportunities to strengthen staff capacity, generate and create a body of joint learning, and create good will and familiarity among member organizations. This familiarity may lead to more intensive joint working between members.

The key challenge for networks is to sustain momentum and manage expectations of members. Effort is needed to



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maintain connections between participants, drive learning agendas, and provide opportunities for each to showcase work. Many networks have a permanent or revolving secretariat that requires skills (salesmanship, leadership, and charisma) to encourage participation, balance contributions from members, and spot trends that influence members' work and thinking in the future. Often insufficiently funded, the amount of work involved in ensuring a thriving network is generally undervalued.

### Coalitions

Coalitions bring organizations with similar goals together to advocate for a common cause. Membership is usually more restricted by founders to ensure that there is similarity of message. Coalition leaders generally work behind the scenes to shape the message as well as to identify the primary targets for influencing.

Key challenges for coalitions revolve around who speaks for the group and varying degrees of adherence to the main messages in members' own advocacy work. Coalitions are events-oriented; momentum is developed around, for example, elections, the development of new legislation or large investments, etc. Key opportunities as well as risks are vested in being associated with other members of the coalition, sometimes with little choice but to join – members may need to be seen to be in support of the cause. Coalitions can depend on personalities and rallying around a charismatic leader. Ultimately the legitimacy of the coalition comes from the quality of the message, the reputation of the participating organizations, and the impact that the coalition's efforts have on specific issues.

### Collaborations

Collaborations bring organizations working in the same locality or sector together to align activities, avoid duplication and provide opportunity to leverage greater impact. Resources are not jointly managed but discussions are held to determine the best use of each organization's skills, finances, connections, etc. Collaborations often involve a somewhat understated competition between partners with significant efforts required to value and strategically make use of the different resources brought to the table. Collaborative efforts require close attention to the timing of inputs. Sufficient resource and context mapping is required to make collaborative partnership worth the effort. It is somewhat easier to remove duplication than it is to ensure that resources are used strategically or that the collaborative effort is sufficiently ambitious to add up to the sum of more than the parts.

Further challenges include ensuring that one organization does not overshadow other participating organizations; that participating organizations become accountable to each other as well as to funders, communities or other critical stakeholders; that partner representatives have

sufficient delegated authority and can thereby overcome delays in decision-making and implementation; and that staff turnover does not undermine joint efforts.

### Integrated partnerships

Integrated partnerships are the most complex as they combine resources from participating organizations. This approach requires careful planning with clear written agreements setting out each partner's contributions and how such resources are going to be managed. Emphasis needs to be placed on joint decision-making, an understanding of the risks each partner brings to the table, whether partner representatives have the appropriate delegated authority to take decisions, and most importantly how one partner organization may have to oversee or manage staff or resources from another partner.

Partners in this form of partnership are clearly reliant on each other to deliver on commitments. Risks around internal partner decision-making or delayed access to resources that slow projects or initiatives down prove very real as different organizations will operate at different speeds. As organizations blend and pool their resources, the partnership also may directly or indirectly create its own identity. This partnership identity needs to be open. Partners need to be mindful that each participating organization's immediate reasons for joining beyond the ultimate expected impact or outcome will be quite different – to build a reputation for the organization, to procure funds for activities, to build skills amongst staff, and/or to be seen to be delivering for constituencies or otherwise. Each of the last three forms also requires clear efforts to build trust between participating organizations and not only between partner representatives.

Perhaps because of their less risky nature, networks and collaborative partnerships appear to be the most prevalent forms in the Cambodian context.

**It is early days in the development of state-non-state partnerships in Cambodia. The first step in creating effective partnerships is to determine the type of partnership that best fits specific objectives and the capacity of actors. Understanding how partnerships do and can work in the context of Cambodia will provide significant benefits to their development. This learning note provides some basic principles to enhance understanding of both state and non-state information stakeholders. DFGG Learning Note 15 provides more for interested readers.**