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Civil Society Organisations and Youth Civic Engagement in Cambodia

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Acknowledgments

1. Introduction

Civic engagement is "how citizens participate in the life of a community to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future" (Adler and Goggin 2005, p. 236). In Cambodia, civic engagement has been promoted by civil society organisations (CSOs) since 1993. The organisations covered by the abbreviation "CSO" are many in Cambodia, but they consist of, and are not limited to, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), youth associations, community-based organisations (CBOs), self-help groups and small clubs. There are around 3,000 NGOs registered officially with the Ministry of Interior as local NGOs and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation as international NGOs (INGOs) (Suárez and Marshall 2014). The core development work of many of these NGOs is not focused entirely on human rights, democratic development and governance, and environmental issues: they are also working to improve livelihoods by integrating rural development approaches within their agendas (Mansfield 2008). The exact figure of CBOs remains obscure (Brown 2008; UNCT 2009) as some have not registered officially with the relevant authorities while others have merely emerged to address a particular development issue and then halted operations. CBOs still exist in every village and are visible or invisible to outsiders (Öjendal 2013). Those NGOs and CBOs focus more broadly on local development; however, there has been an emerging trend of NGOs funding youth civic engagement, seeking not only to enhance youth capacity for employment opportunities, but also to engage in democratic development and participation (OECD 2017). The ultimate aim of promoting youth engagement in civic activities is to mobilise young adults to be members of NGOs and CSOs (BBC Media Action and UNDP 2014; Ginwright and James 2002; Rogers, Mediratta and Shah 2012; Terriquez 2015). Past studies have demonstrated that young people tend not to associate with CSOs (UNDP 2010; CDRI 2017; Heng, Vong and Chheat 2014). In the context of funding channelled towards youth programs, the relevant NGOs and CSOs have a role in promoting youth civic engagement. The question is, could CSOs engage more fully and successfully with youth, not only to promote capacity development for employment opportunities, but also to enable civic activities, especially when those young people are disenchanted? This is coupled with the rise of political pressure on particular civic activities of CSOs after the 2013 national election, and constitutes a core context for this study. At a time of changing "space"[1] for CSOs, this study will address the following questions:

1) How do CSOs, including organisations, associations and clubs, keep young people engaged?

2) How do CSOs motivate and enrol young people in civic activities at a time when the "space" relating to civil society and polity in the country is changing? and

3) How can CSOs be supported to provide long-term mobilisation of young people to sustain civic engagement?

Addressing these questions will contribute to an understanding of youth and civic engagement in an era of changing space, and advance previous studies in the country (Mansfield 2008; BBC Media Action and UNDP 2014; Heng, Vong and Chheat 2014; OECD 2017; Peou and Zinn 2015; Eng and Hughes 2017; Eng et al. 2019).

This paper draws on comparative discussions with three types of organisation chosen for this study in terms of their strategies relating to, and effectiveness in, promoting civic engagement

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1   The term "space", used in this paper, relates to an arena in which input from citizens is continually being received and taken into account by the governing authorities.

according to their agenda. The first is an independent organisation – A – receiving funding from international donors. Organisation A's program activities and approaches to promote youth civic engagement are, however, characterised as "co-optation or integration" as they implement their program with local government/ local authorities, and the ruling party. The second organisation – B – received funding from international donors but operates its programs independently. The third organisation – C – is classified as State-dependent. It is operated in alignment with the State, and has a central office headed by a senior government official. This organisation's structure is entwined with the State system, from national to provincial, down to commune and village levels.

This paper argues that organisation C, the State's and ruling party's de facto union of youths, dominates civic forms of youth engagement in Cambodia as its operational activities and branches are affiliated with the structures of the State systems and the current leading political party - the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). With sustained financial and political support, organisation C has been capable of engaging more youths to take part in its activities. Meanwhile, organisations A and B have manoeuvred their strategies of civic engagement through limited "spaces", leveraging activities under the control and monitoring process of the State. In this context, organisation C has been more sustained in promoting youth participation in the activities that it has identified, given the diverse sources of financial support it has access to. Organisations A and B appear less sustainable in terms of their strategies to engage with young people and they rely substantially on international donors to fund their activities.

To unpack the preceding arguments further, the remainder of this working paper will begin with: (i) a review of the relevant literature on the "space" CSOs occupy and on civic engagement in Cambodia; and (ii) the detailed methodologies of data collection and data analysis. It will then present: (iii) the empirical results, and (iv) the concluding discussion.

2. Space of Civil Society Organisations and Civic Engagement in Cambodia

Following a prolonged period of rampant civil wars that lasted for three decades, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) mushroomed as foreign aid flooded into the country (Young 2016; Schröder and Young 2019). These NGOs have arguably evolved in three phases of development: from the early to late 1990s, those organisations were known as "money followers". From the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, they were localised, devolving from international to local organisations. Finally, from the mid-2000s onwards, CBOs flourished due to support from NGOs (Öjendal 2013). In the last two phases, organisations induced a village-based and grassroots form of civic engagement in the guise of CBOs. In those stages of evolution, Young (2016) argued that most NGOs were transformed from what can be described as "service delivery" in the early 1990s, to advocacy, employing a "human rights-based development approach", in the early 2010s.

In the early 2000s, local NGOs expanded their activities to promote civic (youth) engagement to enhance democratic development and participation. NGOs joined hands with the government to alleviate poverty and to promote the rural economy. They also enhanced human rights and good governance to tackle corruption (Un 2006; Young 2016). As is clear, from 2005, for example, local organisations supported collective action, in the form of activism, to secure land and natural resources, to protect the environment, and to support human rights (Young 2016; Curley 2018; Young 2019; 2021a). The popular collective activities of these NGOs might also have gleaned unintentional benefits from the surge in the popularity of the opposition party,

as was evident in the 2013 national election, a turning point in Cambodia's historical political development (Young 2016; 2021b).

When the link between the local advocacy activities of NGOs and the rise of the opposition party became evident, there was a surge of repercussions against them. Some were closed/ shutdown and had the imposition of large fines/levies (Schröder and Young 2019; Young 2021b). Many also drew allegations about a lack of transparency and leadership issues, as well as a lack of unity (Un 2006). In such a situation, advocacy organisations were subjected to State or government criticism. Acknowledging that those organisations had tended to be antagonistic, the State has been increasing repressive measures - as can be seen from early 2013 onwards (Young 2021b). This has, among other means, been pursued through a stricter legal framework (Curley 2018).

The advocacy organisations have been much pressured by the controversial Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGOs), promulgated in 2014. LANGOs has diminished the "space" for dissent of civil society groups, and has equipped the State with a tool for the control and surveillance of civil society activities at the national level, reclaiming the government's hegemony. It has equipped the State with the means to control NGO activities through demands for the disclosure of financial matters, by detailing bank accounts, and by providing affiliation information between international NGOs and the receipt of funding (Curley 2018). Non-registered NGOs have been criminalised, with the imposition of burdens on registration, as well as limited independence (Henke 2011). Such burdens have imposed challenges on the activities of local advocacy organisations, and on their ability to support CBOs, as well as limiting their contribution to sustainable development and civic engagement (Schröder and Young 2019).

Coupled with legislative pressure and the political situation, local NGOs have also faced challenges with international donors and NGOs that have imposed stringent restriction policies, leaving little room for local organisations to design their programs to address local needs (Catalla and Catalla 2001 cited in Ou and Kim 2013; Un 2006). As such, local NGOs have been required to show strong accountability upwards in their programming towards those who were funding their activity, rather than to beneficiaries, making efforts to democratise ineffective (Malena and Chhim 2009). Yet local NGOs are still playing a positive role in promoting grassroots engagement in development activities. Based on a case study in Takeo, Ou and Kim (2013) argued that donors' funding through local NGOs was not only saving local social development groups, especially farmer associations in the province, but that their model was also being replicated in other provinces. Likewise, national farmer associations, even if they focus on agriculture, presented an avenue to promote civil society (Waibel et al. 2013). The so called "revolution" of fishery communities is an example of how livelihood support and income generation activities promoted collective activism that demanded a moratorium on allocating of private fishing lots in Cambodia (Henke 2011).

The community engagement activities of local NGOs are also challenged by the control of the family and other elders. Two national surveys revealed that the percentage of young people associated with local NGOs, associations and clubs was low. Out of the 2,000 youths surveyed by the UNDP in 2010, only 21 percent had associated membership with community groups/ CBOs and 14 percent with youth associations (UNDP 2010). In the following seven years, the percentage of youth engagement dropped even lower. Out of the 1,600 youths and adults surveyed by CDRI in 2017, just 4 percent of young people reported that they were members of clubs and associations. One of the reasons behind this low rate of youth engagement was the

issue of kinship and family-centred control. Such issues are not new to Cambodian society: it has been documented that, since the 1960s, kinship and a family-centred focus dominated by parents and the elderly, has been holding sway (Ebihara 1968). In this context, young people might have little interest or "space" in their lives to sign up for membership, or to associate themselves with local organisations, associations or youth clubs.

Another reason could be because few NGOs focus on civic engagement, or on mobilising youth membership in civic engagement. Only 7 percent of local NGOs have a focus on democratic participation and governance (Ou and Kim 2013). Those local NGOs had few operational activities in the coastal and plateau provinces, limiting a broadening of the agenda of citizenship in democracy and human rights, and hindering efforts to combat sexual violence and child exploitation in those areas (Catalla and Kem 2009; UNCT 2009). Young people cannot find such local organisations to be associated with in their communities (Heng, Vong and Chheat 2014).

The local advocacy NGOs have continued to operate under political duress and within a shrinking "space" (Schröder and Young 2019). The promotion by them of youth civic engagement would not be easy. Heng, Vong and Chheat (2014) reported that local governments/authorities disapprove of young people being exposed to a wider discussion about human rights, democracy and good governance. However, the involvement of youths in the 2013 election, which caused a significant change in the proportional share of the election results between the ruling and the now-dissolved opposition party, suggests that youths have started to engage in socio-political issues that matter to their livelihoods and society. As a result of the growth in the opposition's electoral support, as discussed above, the ruling party has started to restrict the activities of organisations and youth actions at grassroots level (Young 2021). Since then, there have been political movements for young people, promoted through different channels including universities, political party working groups, and other grassroots movements, including CBOs and local government structures. There have been no previous studies investigating the strategies of CSOs to promote youth civic engagement in the aftermath of the 2013 national election, when political pressure has been paramount. There has also been no study documenting how effective organisations' strategies have been in instilling in Cambodian youth a desire for civic engagement that would be sustainable in the long run. This paper will help to plug this gap in the literature.

3. Methodology

To investigate the roles of CSOs in promoting youth civic engagement, this study focuses on three types of NGOs (classified as A, B and C) whose program activities are designed to engage young people in public service delivery by improving civic and democratic participation. Therefore, the deployment tools/mechanisms/strategies these three organisations use to engage young people need to be identified before a discussion of the results can be presented. The first organisation (A) deployed a tool called the Implementation of Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) to mobilise youths. This sought villagers' demands and preferences for improving local public service delivery, and is a framework co-designed by the Cambodian government and the World Bank. The design of this framework also mirrors the decentralisation and de-concentration (D&D) mechanism by enabling ordinary people to voice opinions and preferences. The other two organisations (B and C) do not employ any specific tools for mobilising young people.

There are some similarities and some different characteristics between the three organisations in term of the strategies they use in mobilising youths to advocate for a better service delivery at the commune level. For instance, organisations A and B deploy similar strategies. Both endeavour to identify voices and preferences for local development and for local public service delivery through democratic participation that reflects the opinions of youths and other villagers. They do, however, use different mechanisms: organisation A uses ISAF for youth mobilisation, but B uses the approach of educating young people about transparency and accountability. However, some of these civic engagement activities have been interpreted by the ruling party as antagonistic (e.g., especially after the 2013 national election): in contrast, the rival C organisation appears to counterbalance and reduce the influence of those two organisations (A and B) on young people through the use of strategies that exploit the existing structure of the government for youth mobilisation. This type of organisation is, therefore, a de facto agent of the ruling government and political party. Young people have been exposed to the agenda of organisation C more broadly in the context of support for victims in time of crisis (e.g., floods, droughts and other natural disasters) and social protection (e.g., support for the ID Poor and vulnerable people) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 1). Such engagement has appeared to appease the rural stronghold supporters in its determination to help rural voters, whatever the circumstances.

Table 1: Program activities proposed by the three organisations

Organisation types	Areas of focus to improve local public service delivery	Type of project	Target youths and young adults
Externally-funded organisation A	• Improving local public services at commune levels • Identifying key issues and prioritising public services to address them • Empowering villagers to voice concerns • Using community scorecards to identify weaknesses and strengths of public service delivery • Enhancing the leadership concept	Using ISAF to improve citizen demands for public service delivery and for democratic development	Local youths from communes
Externally-funded organisation B	• Improving knowledge of social accountability • Increasing knowledge about counteracting corruption and improving public service delivery • Enhancing and increasing leadership participation and influencing decision-making	Mobilising youths to monitor and advocate for better service delivery at commune level	Young adults recruited from complete/ incomplete high school attendance, to tertiary education
State-dependent organisation C	• Enhancing youth skills in science technologies to improve the quality of public service delivery • Increasing youth capability by promoting all development plans and associated leadership skills • Mobilising young volunteers to enhance civic activities and prevent any perceived opposition in communities	State-dependent organisation	Local youths and adults from national levels (Phnom Penh and the ministries), youth party members, university and high school students

The three (A, B and C) organisations have implemented many projects. However, this study focuses only on youth civic engagement in rural areas. Its results are based on the data analysis and triangulation of interviews from three provinces (Battambang, Kampong Thom, and Kampong Chhnang) and the capital city of Phnom Penh (Table 2). Since the analysis of this paper focuses on civic engagement among rural youths, data were collected from areas in which young people were mobilised. At the organisations' central offices in Phnom Penh, data were collected from people who play a central role in management, resource mobilisation, and youth civic engagement planning. Data from all sites, from national down to provincial levels, took place from 29 October 2019 to February 2020. The fieldwork planned for Kampot was interrupted by inter-province restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 40 interviews were held involving both key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussion (FGDs) (Table 2).

Table 2: Different levels of interviews

Tools	Tools					FGD	
	District	Commune chief	Commune councillor	Village head	NGO	Active youths	Inactive youths
Kampong Thom	0	1	5	5	0	3	1
Battambang	1	1	4	1	0	3	2
Kampong Chhnang[2]	1	2	2	0	1	2	0
Phnom Penh	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Total	2	4	11	6	6	8	3
Grand total	40						

KIIs and FGDs, using semi-structured questionnaires, were, therefore, the two data collection tools employed by this study. KIIs involved key representatives from villages, communes, districts, and NGOs, and focused on strategies for youth mobilisation and their effectiveness. FGDs gathered information from active and non-active youths by identifying why some were active and others were not. The discussions also aimed to identify the motivations and challenges young people experienced when they participated in local development. Between eight and 12 young people (aged from 18 to 30), coming from the three (A, B and C) organisations, joined each group discussion. The data collected from the national to the sub-national interviews came from organisations A and B. In respect of organisation C, however, it was not possible to interview its representative at the national level. This was due to the complexity of needs, and dealing with communication and approval from the organisation C. Data were, therefore, collected only from district, commune and village levels from young people who were from this organisation.

Approaching youths from the three organisations for interviews was not difficult. They were chosen by, first, linking to the representatives of the three organisations at national (for organisation A and B) or district (for organisation C) levels. Once the three representatives of the organisations confirmed their participation in the interviews on behalf of young people, they were contacted directly to prepare places for the interviews. In most cases, the chosen venues were outside the commune offices or in local communities (i.e., in sacred places like Salabon[3] and pagodas, in the houses of youth representatives, community youth clubs and other

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2   A pilot test was conducted in this province prior to actual fieldwork in the other two provinces and the capital city, but some data could be used for triangulation.

3   A centre for religious gatherings and cultural celebration events in some villages where pagodas do not exist.

places). The places where the interviews took place were specifically chosen to ensure that the interviewees were free from interruption and would not be subjected to interference from influential people (i.e., local authorities or the representatives from the three organisations). In that free environment, it was observed that youths were open in their responses to the interviews.

The discussions with district and commune leaders and commune councillors were similarly open. They warmly welcomed the interviewers and were happy to share their perceptions and ideas about youth civic engagement. For example, some mentioned the past modality of people's mobilisation for road construction, using labour for which rice packages were used as compensation. They reckoned that this modality should be replicated and re-shaped to fit current needs in order to mobilise youths today. They also commented that young people are the bamboo shoots that need to be re-positioned for leadership in society.

Given that the discussions with youths and local authorities were open and free from interruption, the data analysis and discussions about results relied heavily on qualitative data. Therefore, the qualitative data analysis in this study contains no paralleled quantitative survey. In relying on a single form of data analysis, it might be biased towards the perceptions of interviewees and the authors' interpretation of data triangulated from those qualitative interviews. The interpretation depended on summary notes and audio recordings from all of the sites visited across the geographical locations of the three organisations. To improve validity and credibility, the collected data were also compared with the views and experiences of three different groups of youths from universities in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap at a later stage, when the results of this study were being drafted. The perceptions of those three groups presented a paralleled understanding to this study's findings.

4. Findings

NGOs (with non-political and political affiliations) have established many programs to engage young people in civic and voluntary activities. Those NGOs have established program activities to build capacity for youths to enhance employment opportunities and to promote democratic participation. The research findings and the associated discussion, organised according to the themes that emerged, are detailed below.

4.1 Recruitment strategies

As this result discussion is entirely focused on rural youth civic engagement, the three (A, B and C) organisations had some strategies that were similar and others that differed, depending on the tactics of engagement. Organisations A and C adopted more conventional tactics, mainly based on local authorities and networks. Organisation B used new communication technologies in the form of social media, and peer-to-peer connection to engage with youths. How the three organisations initially engaged with their young targets are discussed as follows:

Organisation A: The tactics of recruiting youths for civic engagement under this organisation much relied on local authorities (Figure 1). The reasons for such tactics of recruitment could be that the ISAF tool requires co-implementing partners involving CSOs and local authorities. The tool requirements that CSOs needed were designed to find a mediated team (youth team), comprised of different members from different villages within a commune[4]. In such a case, when a youth team was the facilitator, villagers acted like a demand side, and local authorities as the supply side. To ensure the demand side had their opinions and preferences heard by the

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4   In this case it might be hard to use other means of i.e., social media (Facebook for example) as they need only youths who came from the villages under a commune administration.

supply side, the youth team needed to create a "space" via a dialogue platform, engaging both citizens and local authorities. In most cases, the youth team held dialogues only with citizens and brought their concerns to local authorities by using community scorecards that were used to evaluate public service delivery (i.e., education, health, security and commune administration). In running the ISAF tool, organisation A needed to discuss and launch program activities with the full support of local authorities (the supply side). In most cases, youth recruitment at the communal level relied substantially on local authorities to identify active young people to take part in the project. In essence, a majority of the youth team members were well connected to, and were known by, local authorities.

Alternatively, organisation A were also connected to some local organisations that had implemented similar civic engagement projects within that commune (Figure 1). For example, they connected with World Vision, an organisation that had, in the past, implemented ISAF in the same commune of the organisation. In doing so, they sought to identify young people who were active to participate in civic engagement. They were also connected to the Cambodian Organisation for Women Support (COWS) that had implemented the ISAF tool in the same commune. Both World Vision and the COWS were co-implementing partners using ISAF. They had trained some youths in the commune, but many had migrated and others still had a close affiliation with the local authorities. Recruiting a youth team to be part of the organisation (A) from the networks of the two organisations (World Vision and COWS) for civic engagement, was also influenced by local authorities, who exercised significant power. Therefore, the use of such tactics for youth recruitment could be biased towards those youths who were already engaged in a network with local authorities. This could have some implications when the ISAF tool was implemented.

Organisation B: The tactics organisation B[5] used to recruit young people for civic engagement were through the use of social media, like Facebook, that have penetrated the wider youth digital and online community (Figure 1). They used this social media platform as one of the most influential channels to reach out to youths. The representative from organisation B stated that when they needed only 40 to 50 youths to engage with their civic programs, they tended to receive more than 1,000 applicants who applied for the opportunities through this social media platform. A representative from the organisation said:

> "… young people follow us on Facebook - a platform through which they connect to us… they join our voluntary activities and training on democracy, climate change, and politics…" (Phnom Penh, 21 February 2020)

The deployment of social media by organisation B to reach out to a large community of youths has been prompted for various reasons: this organisation needs youth outsiders from a certain commune (i.e., they come from high schools or universities) to engage with villagers, other than solely youths in a particular commune, and local authorities in a particular commune. Social media platforms offer cross-boundary information to attract and recruit youths for their program activities. By using social media, organisation B had no problems connecting with young people: even though most live in remote and rural areas and are more likely to be mobile, the internet and social media offer widespread communication these days. In 2017, a survey conducted by CDRI with 1,600 youths and adults suggested that two-thirds of Cambodian youths owned smartphones, 61 percent of which were connected to the internet via the cellular service (Eng et al. 2019). Given that mobile internet services and networks now cover almost 90 percent of the

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5   This organisation mobilised outsider youths (i.e., from high schools or universities) to engage with citizens or other youths within a certain commune to oversee and improve public service delivery.

country (Young 2021b), it could be convincingly argued that young people have no constraints in connecting within the digital community. Young people subscribe to the internet for various purposes: for entertainment and connection to their friends, and for employment opportunities. These explanations have been supported by a nationally representative survey conducted in 24 provinces with a total of 2,597 youths aged 15 to 24, indicating that 73 percent of youths used the internet to read the news, 63 percent used it for social networking, and 42 percent for general web browsing (BBC Media Action 2014). Although the conventional form of youth recruitment was employed by CSOs and political parties before the 2000s, the representative of organisation B reported having useful engagement with youths through social media, many of whom had attended a course on democratic participation, accountability and transparency for which they had enrolled via the Facebook channel[6].

Organisation B could engage large numbers of young people because they use social media platforms, which are trusted by Cambodian youths; according to a study by BBC Media Action (2014) at least 79 percent of youth access social media, trust the information and circulate it within the digital community. The trust given to information on the internet was higher than the trust given to outsiders who had been personally contacted (Eng et al. 2019). Such a level of trust was also endorsed by a youth from organisation B who stated that "… information that is circulated for recruiting young people is trusted …it has contact details…these details are available to enable young people reach out for further explanations…"[7].

Even though organisation B was using social media, which had a high chance of achieving youth engagement, this method might not be friendly for non-Facebook users. For this reason, the organisation did have many educated youths (i.e., from high schools or universities) to engage in their program activities. This is because 98 percent of educated youths had smartphones compared with only 59 percent of those who had completed only primary school (BBC Media Action 2014). Of those with smartphones, 97 percent subscribed to Facebook (Phong, Srou and Solá 2016) through the use of 3G or 4G cellular data or through broadband at cafes or in stores located in malls. Thus, recruitment strategies conducted via social media could lead to exclusion, mainly of youths who did not have a high level of education, own smartphones, or use social media platforms.

Since inclusivity is matter of concern for most NGO program activities, organisation B also reported employing alternative engagement via peer-to-peer networks (i.e., word-of-mouth) (Figure 1). They relied on those young people who had attended previous events, including capacity development on countering corruption, accountability and transparency, civil and political rights, and social protection, to act in a peer-to-peer capacity: these participants shared knowledge with their peers. A representative from organisation B confirmed that young people tend to emulate each other when they are looking for learning opportunities[8]. In the context of Cambodia, word-of-mouth communication is still powerful. After the most effective vehicles of communication - for example, TV and Facebook - word-of-mouth communication is still a vital source of information-sharing (Phong, Srou and Solá 2016). In this context, organisation B used word-of-mouth communication for connecting with, and enrolling youths in civic activities because it was still relevant and useful.

Organisation C used tactics similar to those of organisation A (connecting to youths through local government/local authorities) and B (using social media especially Facebook). It also

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6   Interview with an organisation B representative in Phnom Penh (10 February, 2020).
7   Interview with youths from organisation B in Battambang (30 November, 2019).
8   Interviews with the organisation representatives in Phnom Penh (10 February, 2020).

exploits the existing structure of the government/State vis-a-vis the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and local media (TV and radio) to publicise its activities (Figure 1). Since most of the commune councils (CCs) are members of the CPP, organisation C asks CCs directly to recruit and nominate young people to take part in its civic activities. However, these types of activity may contribute to strengthening political propaganda and may not improve public service and commune accountability. Given the closeness of the recruitment strategies to the existing State and party structures, the youths who were recruited were sometimes of an age that was above that of "young adults" – they were in their 40s and 50s. Last but not least, youths who participated in organisation C were also introduced by their friends. Since this mode of communication remains strong among the key sources of information for Cambodian people, the approach employed by organisation C was particularly relevant and powerful.

Figure 1: Youth recruitment strategies
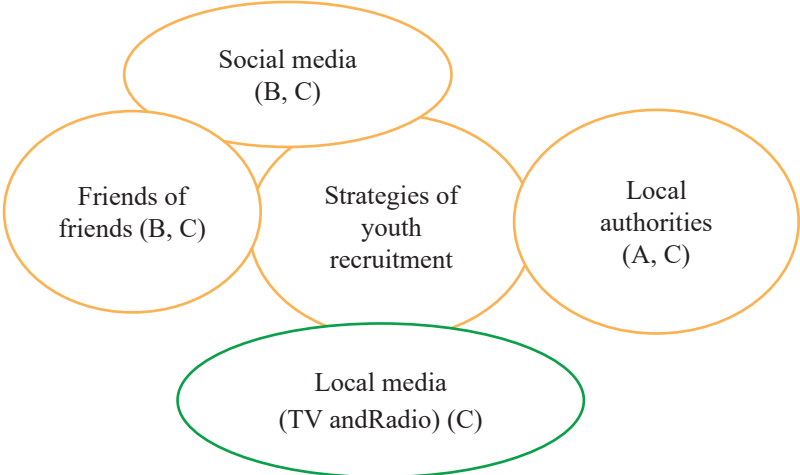
4.2 Detailed steps in recruitment strategies

In this section, we review and analyse the recruitment processes of the three organisations to engage youths as has been identified in this study.

Organisation A: First, organisation A implemented a project involving co-optation[9] connected with local authorities at a commune office. This was achieved by deploying different steps in the recruitment process (Figure 2). As the first step, they introduced a project to local authorities - commune chiefs and commune councillors - on the ISAF project and activities in the commune. Second, they informed the local authorities about the criteria for youth recruitment to be part of the ISAF project in the commune. Then, they worked together with the commune councillors and commune chiefs to approach young people who were known to the commune office and who were active and experienced in participating in voluntary activities with the commune offices and other NGO projects, political parties, or youth federations, including the UYFC (Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia) (Figure 2). As a result, the majority of youths recruited for the organisation's project had been associated with some previous NGO activities in their commune, or had joined in political activities in the past. Most young people who were recruited were also known by the communities, and one or two had represented their villages. In the final process, the young people were put into teams of six or seven, or even more if there were several villages within a commune. Then, they were trained in how to use the community

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9   This project requires co-option with the local authorities to implement activities.

scorecard, a tool that was needed for collecting the views of other youths and citizens from their villages in respect of issues relating to public service delivery. Since the youths recruited to the team comprised members of political parties, or the UYFC or other NGOs, there was a possibility that they might not act purely as mediators in collecting and evaluating youths' and citizens' opinions and preferences. The opinions that were collected, along with preferences expressed, needed to be agreed among the youths and citizens, and, in most cases, they also needed the support of organisation A, who would sort out the priorities in terms of opinions and preferences, before submitting them to the commune office.

Figure 2: The recruitment processes of organisation A for youth civic engagement
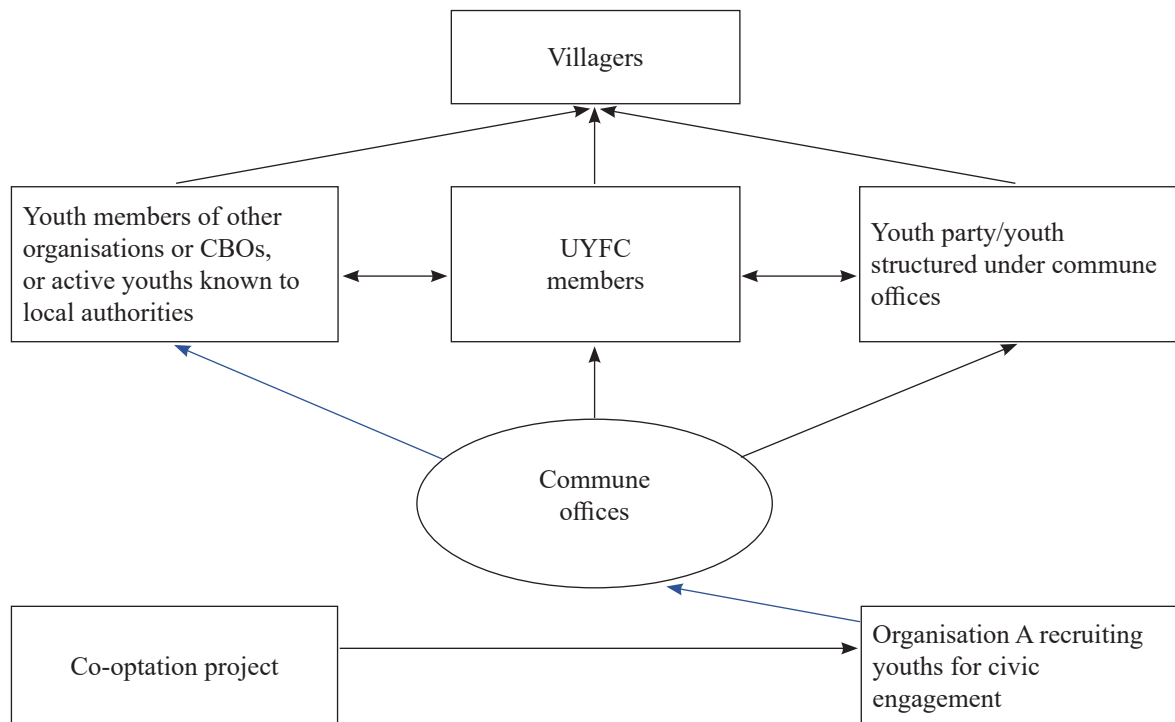
Organisation **B** implemented a project, namely non-co-optation[10], focusing on mobilising students to be part of their strategies to promote civic engagement. They did this by connecting students from universities or high schools to work together with rural youths in a specific community. By working together, they could expect to influence the commune office to design and develop a commune investment plan, which needed to be more inclusive (Figure 3). Organisation B expected that high school and university students had acquired sufficient knowledge and were able to train only short courses. Such training could promote the greater capacity development of the youth teams who were recruited, so that they could mobilise other young rural people and citizens in their communities to tackle the issues of public service delivery at commune level. Connecting with those youths who had been recruited, organisation B's tactics involved the use of social media, such as Facebook, and peer-to-peer communication. Such recruitment tactics resulted in a team that could consisted of UYFC members (Figure 3).

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10   This project is not associated with affiliation to the State and local authorities to implement activities.

Figure 3: The recruitment process of organisation B for youth civic engagement
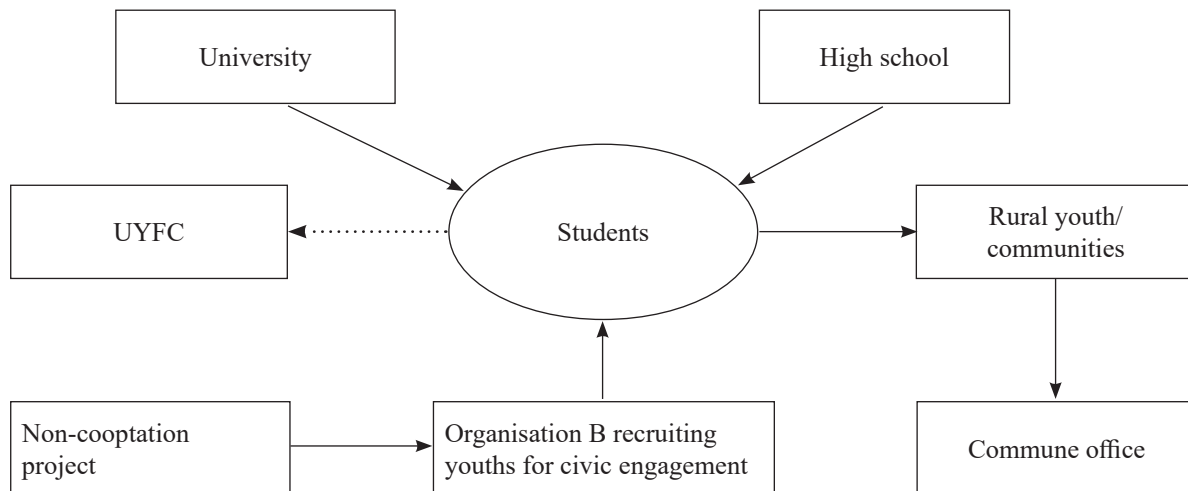
Meanwhile, organisation **C**, a State-dependent organisation, implemented a hybrid project[11], and has received crucial support from the State. They have enjoyed sustained financial backing from individuals within the State party, or from corporations. Organisation C's steps for engaging young people have perpetuated the existing State structures, and the government's hierarchical systems including public universities/schools, provinces, districts and communes. Despite the support they have received from the State's existing structures, most young people recruited from the commune and village levels had received capacity building from development partners or local organisations. Therefore, organisation C has benefited from both the existing State structures and development partners or local organisations. Those youths who were affiliated with organisation C were well-connected to the State systems and were well-trained by development partners or local organisations (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The recruitment process of organisation C for youth civic engagement

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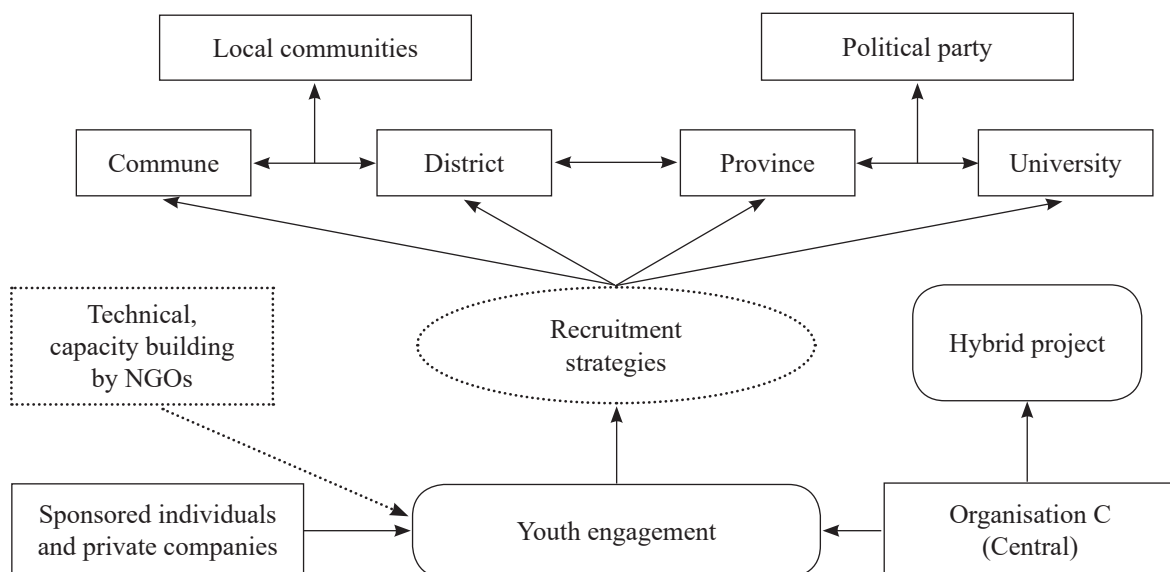
11 Organised activities offer both political and non-political support for communities.

4.3 Strategies and effectiveness of youth civic engagement

In this section, we explore the deployment by the three organisations of the strategies for achieving sustained youth civic engagement, and highlight the opportunities for, and challenges faced by CSOs in terms of strategic deployment in local communities.

4.3.1 Strategies for youth civic engagement

In mobilising young people to implement the ISAF tool, organisation A, first of all, provided capacity development for the youth team that had been recruited. As illustrated in the literature section, youth participation in civic activities represents a quid pro quo in terms of experience, knowledge acquisition, and contribution to development. Driven by the notion of social accountability at the decentralised level (commune), organisation A trained the youth team in the use of community scorecards and leadership skills. A citizen's scorecard is a tool not only for young people to monitor public service delivery at the commune level, but is also a means to empower grassroots citizens. They could use the tool to demand accountability and improved services at the commune level. In tandem with scorecards, organisation A also provided training for the youth team in leadership skills - mainly facilitation and communication skills. They worked well with both villagers and local authorities. A good example was a participatory workshop that was organised by the youth team of organisation A to gather villagers' development grievances and concerns, which they later brought to the local authorities.

As a result, from the training on ISAF, organisation A influenced the youth team in terms of knowledge acquisition. They learned about the ISAF tool, and absorbed leadership skills including facilitation and communication skills. They also learned more about accountability under various themes: upgrading infrastructure; the issues of irrigation systems; gender-based violence; and important elements/needs to improve local governance[12]. The learning process established the capacity of the youth team to engage with local development and increased their confidence in raising opinions and preferences for the consideration of local authorities. Such increased confidence among the youth team could help to improve public service delivery at the commune level. As could be seen, the youth team from organisation A had identified issues, including infrastructure development, education, village security, and health concerns, for consideration by local authorities.

In fact, organisation (A) appeared to have achieved a good level of knowledge acquisition among the youth team, but challenges remained in terms of how implementing the ISAF affected commune investment planning. For instance, the youth team from organisation A worked with the villagers to identify problems in local public services. They brought the top five priority issues to local government: 1) safe communities without drug use; 2) affordability and accessibility to electricity; 3) the ethical performance of health service providers; 4) the performance of schoolteachers; and 5) safe water, sanitation and hygiene. These common issues echoed the survey conducted by CDRI (2017), which argued that these five priorities had been integrated within commune investment planning, but no budget had been allocated for addressing them. The common priority, however, was infrastructure upgrading and road rehabilitation for the commune under the ISAF project[13]. This priority was also echoed nationwide according to the CDRI's survey of 2017.

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12   Interview with a young adult group in Kampong Thom (30 October, 2019).
13   Interview with the commune chief and commune councilors in Kampong Thom (30 October, 2019).

Organisation B did not take approaches that differed from those of organisation A. Organisation B provided training for the youth teams that were recruited, coming from either high schools or universities at the provincial level. Organisation B's members could be much younger than 18 years as they were at the 11th or12th grades. Others were in their early or late 20s as they were already in the first or second year as university students. Organisation B trained these youth teams in the concepts of transparency and accountability, political rights, inclusive development, and democratic participation, human rights, and anti-corruption. Although these topics were very sensitive, organisation B believed its approach was essential for youth civic engagement to promote public engagement and improve local service at the commune level[14]. On top of that, organisation B trained youth teams in proposal writing and fund-raising skills[15].

As knowledge on various subjects was seen as vital, the youth teams from organisation B confirmed that they had learned "… inclusive participation, anti-corruption, accountability, and transparency for local development…"[16]. They added that they had learned how to write technical proposals to raise finance to support their events[17]. The youth teams from organisation B also confirmed that they had learned problem analysis skills, and were able to analyse why corruption took place, and why transparency was needed in service delivery. Such learning could be vital for the youth teams who were looking for more resource mobilisation and were keen to engage more closely with communities to improve public service delivery by local authorities.

Organisation B also provided funding for the youth teams who graduated from the training through competitions, which was awarded depending on their technical proposals and the locations in which these proposals would be implemented. The budget for the proposal winners could be between from USD500 to USD1,000 which could be used to implement activities in local communities relating to the selected and approved topics. Many proposals chose topics that would improve accountability and transparency in order to promote a society that was free of corruption. The youth teams from organisation B were, however, aware of the dangers from implementing proposals that touched on sensitive political issues. Consequently, some avoided those issues.

Organisation B also faced some challenges in mobilising the youth teams. First, the organisation offered one-off project funding, without regular monitoring, to understand the impact of community activities at the time of visits/interviews. A youth team claimed that to ensure that commune councils were being transparent in the civil registration process for citizens, a follow-up was needed. Second, the control exerted by local authorities, especially policemen[18], made it difficult to implement the proposals, mainly at a time close (before or after) to elections. At those times, the youth teams from organisation B were in fear that the expression of ideas or opinions about sensitive topics - such as corruption, transparency, and any irregularities - might crop up at the commune or district levels. To cope with this surveillance, they conducted peer-to-peer education rather than organising training in large groups[19]. Another challenge was the recent recruitment and the need for some adjustment in the youth teams. A youth team from organisation B had recently been selected to join the program. They did not know what to do at either local community or provincial levels[20]. While other youth teams were members

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14   Interview with a representative from organisation B in Phnom Penh.
15   Interview with a representative from organisation B in Phnom Penh.
16   Interview with youths from organisation B in Battambang (30 November, 2019).
17   Interview with youths from organisation B in Battambang (30 November, 2019).
18   Interview with a youth team from organisation B in Battambang (30 November, 2019).
19   Interview with a youth team from organisation B in Battambang (30 November, 2019).
20   Interview with a youth team in Battambang (30 November, 2019).

of organisation B when they were at high school. Once some members entered universities, they did not have sufficient time to actively engage with the local commune or were not able to implement their proposal very well, other than among student networks at the universities.

Organisation C did not provide any formal training for its members, but its orientation program focused on nationalism and they contributed to community development in the name of peace and prosperity in the Kingdom. Guided by such an orientation, new recruits were encouraged to participate locally, either downward to communities or upward across the different dimensions of local government. They were inspired to participate, for example, at a school event to clean up a campus, which was attended by different members from senior local government. Organisation C also mobilised their young people to receive capacity building from different providers focusing on local development. For example, the young people from organisation C received training from development organisations about gender and the need for society to be inclusive. In this context some members of organisation C might also be part of organisations A and B, or of other organisations. Therefore, organisation C was in a more advantageous position to benefit youths (as their members) who had been trained by development partners.

Figure 5: Strategies to ensure effective and active youth civic engagement
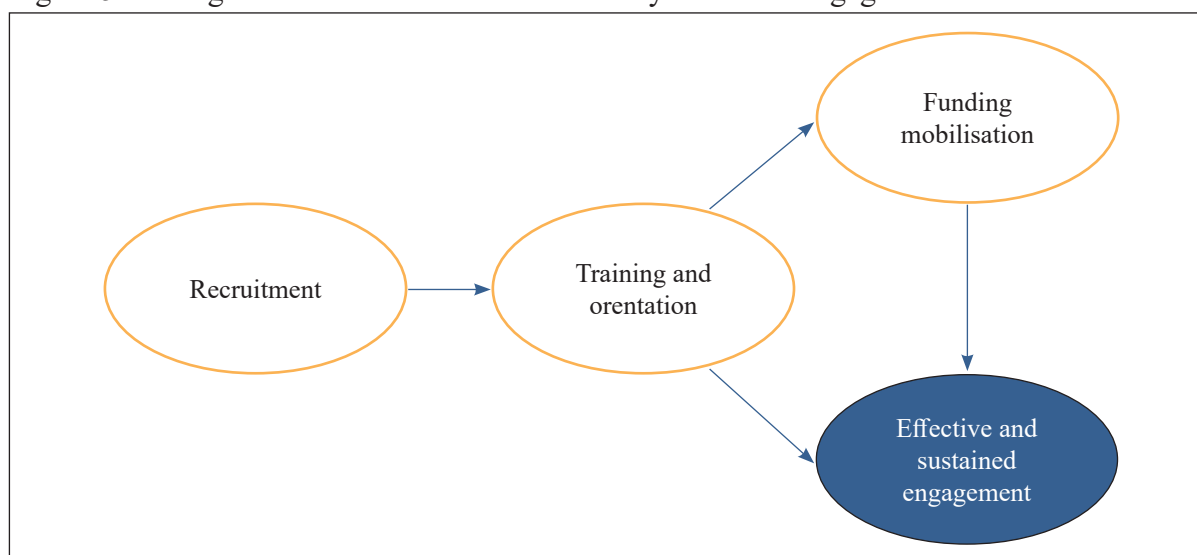
4.3.2 Effectiveness of youth civic engagement

Whether or not the strategies of capacity development for young people from the three organisations were effective remains to be discussed. Providing capacity building for young people is important to promote youth participation in different aspects of activities at grassroots level - be it non-political or political - to ensure long-term and active engagement. It is of critical concern, especially after the donor-funded projects have ended. Organisation A provided an allowance or commission for the youths' performance to ensure long-term engagement. With this incentive, organisation A expected the young people to organise activities to educate villagers and general communities about local public services. They also needed them to help their communities to gain enhanced knowledge about governance-related development. Organisation A wanted the young people to inspire their friends and communities to engage in civic activities, including by mobilising villagers to address issues relating to local public service delivery and in engaging local authorities so that they were able to understand local concerns. Although organisation A's mobilisation of young people enabled villagers to bring up the top five concerns to the commune office, their influence on the commune to implement

measures to counter those concerns remained limited. The commune office did not allocate budget to address those issues although they were integrated into the commune investment plan. So, the voices and preferences of youths and communities remained limited in terms of the influence they had on the commune office.

The effectiveness of organisation B's mobilisation of the young people in promoting civic engagement was difficult to measure. These youths were under pressure to promote accountability and transparency among young rural people and communities, with one reporting that, "…sometimes, even if we are safe to organise our civic activities with the approval of the provincial government, it does not guarantee that local authorities will permit us to put our activities into operation…"[21]. In this context, local authorities were being cautious when the youths from organisation B conducted capacity development with young people in their local communities relating to awareness of transparency and accountability. To progress what they had planned, those youths had to revise the topics of discussion, avoiding politically sensitive topics. Instead of discussing transparency and corruption, they talked, for example, about the environment: water and sanitation, hygiene and rubbish collection. Such topic adjustment constituted precautionary measures for safety and security reasons to avoid pressure from the local authorities. Nevertheless, some other youths from organisation B still discussed the topics of anti-corruption, transparency, and accountability within local public service delivery. They could, however, do this only through peer-to-peer connection. For that reason, the extent to which it reached larger audiences was limited.

The effectiveness of organisation C's mobilisation activity differed from the above discussion (relating to organisations A and B): it appeared to have youths subordinated to the political youth alliance stemming from the ruling party. Members of organisation C mobilised young people to organise and prepare political gatherings and to welcome senor political leaders who visited the villagers in certain districts, in particular before commune or national elections took place. They mobilised the young people to distribute resources to the victims of national disasters and provided immediate support in terms of emergency relief. The mobilisation of young people, achieved by organisation C, seemed to have been achieved with very little emphasis on accountability and transparency, or on upholding local authorities to improve public service delivery.

The mobilisation of young people, achieved by organisation C, seemed to be effective in making an immediate response to need relating to emergencies. For example, in Battambang there was a flash flood during which young people from organisation C supported provincial, district and local authorities in mobilising emergency relief funds for victims. In such scenarios, organisation C worked closely with young people to support the government's civic activities and political propaganda. In a context in which the young people of organisation C had become subordinates of the government within ad hoc civic activities, engagement seemed to have immediate results and also had the potential to enable them to exercise their rights to participate freely without any pressure. However, answers to questions about how such promotion could promote long-term civic engagement remained obscure. Teaching these young people to share and contribute resources to others in need could provide opportunities for learning and sharing, but they are normally hampered by insufficient resources. Instead of creating civic engagement, this approach could create more dependency on the State. Although this could induce empathy, it might not develop to promote a culture of participation for democratic development.

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21   Interview with a young person from organisation B in Battambang (30 November, 2019).

Therefore, organisations A, B and C all aimed to ensure effective youth participation, but, based on our observation, the associated activities sponsored by these organisations remained/ seemed to be ineffective when the results were evaluated. The concerns of young people were not fully addressed. Although members of organisation A were less constrained, the proposed top five priority issues for commune development had not been fully implemented and had not been integrated into the commune investment plans. To address these challenges, local authorities cited the need for infrastructure development as a priority, and there was commune budget rigidity, caused by vertical control from the provincial treasury. There was "some petty cash for flexibility that local authorities could use to make an advance payment, but disbursement is difficult to claim from the provincial treasury"[22]. Also, the young people from organisation B were monitored. Often, they needed to adjust the topics covered by their capacity development, or they were forced to disseminate information within limited audiences. Organisation C's mobilisation of young people was also difficult to measure. For them, such activities revolved around support for ad hoc events depending on emergency needs and calls from central, provincial, district and commune levels. For that reason, it is vital to understand why some youths are associated with organisations A, B and C and why others are not.

4.3.3 Opportunities for effective and sustained youth civic engagement

To promote youth engagement, the organisations recruited (A, B and C), trained (A and B) and orientated (C), and provided incentives (A, B and C). But what factors encouraged young people to engage with them? As illustrated in Figure 6, the attraction of the three organisations for young people revolved around employment opportunities, resource connections/mobilisation, and network building.

Figure 6: Organisations A, B and C participation and employment ladder for young people

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22   Interview with the commune chief and commune councilors in Kampong Thom (30 October, 2019).

To achieve active civic engagement among young people, it is helpful to understand the main reasons why the three (A, B and C) organisations motivate youths to participate in the various activities. Improving civic activities (for the organisations A, B and C) and democratic participation (for organisations A and B) were the main reasons or objectives behind youth mobilisation. However, the main factors and objectives for taking part, may not match results. Since organisations A, B and C can provide hands-on experience and knowledge that could be useful for achieving decent employment, young people are willing to participate. The reasons why young people want this hands-on experience and knowledge outside of the classroom relates to the issues around job hunting (Figure 6). The recent increase in the number of students and graduates from universities, both private and public, have forced new graduates to compete for jobs - and that could explain why young people are keen to attach themselves to the organisations in this study. For example, in 2013 alone there were approximately 210,000 students studying at the various universities (Khieng, Madhur and Chhem 2015). Without experience, it can be challenging to find a job they like, thus, in this context, sustained youth civic engagement may be associated with employment enhancement and the opportunities provided.

First of all, in the context of young people looking for decent employment opportunities, when the organisations A, B and C presented opportunities to gain experience and knowledge, youths were happy to be associated with them (Figure 6). For example, organisations A and C, in the eyes of young people, could provide jobs as civil servants, or to be staff members of local authorities either at district or commune levels. Tactically, organisations A and C could also engage the young people with a wider community of commune youths, the UFYC, and women's savings groups, or members of village health centres. This engagement could enhance the popularity of jobseekers and could potentially mark them out as candidates for elections at commune level. Similarly, organisation B, in the eyes of young people, might expose them to experiences that would enable them to get a decent job in the future.

Second, a triangular connection between the youths of organisation A with villagers and local authorities might present potential for sustained civic engagement at local level. Organisation A provide opportunities for young people: allowances/per diems for performance and skills development. They also connect with villagers through training them about rights to participate and to monitor the performance of local authorities. Organisation A has mainstreamed the notion of citizens' rights and responsibilities to villagers, and, by doing this, they mobilise villagers to monitor local authorities to improve public service delivery. This might help those youths to build connections with the villagers and local authorities. As a youth from organisation A explained:

> "…we want our villagers to understand their rights and duties so that they can hold local government accountable… we want villagers to fully engage with local governments… we want our community developed...." (Kampong Thom, 30 October 2019).

Third, the provisional support for implementing initiatives brought up by the young people, and further opportunities provided by the organisations, were important for sustained youth civic engagement. Organisation B provided skills development for the young people to help them to prepare a budget plan with specific activities for sponsored proposals to organise civic activities. In such cases, youths gained experience and knowledge that could enable them to be effective at resource mobilisation. Organisation C, as confirmed by the district governor, could provide the youths with the opportunity to win scholarships for higher education at one of the universities in Battambang, or to connect with powerful people or officials from Phnom Penh

and relevant ministries[23]. In a group discussion, a youth from organisation C confirmed that *"by being active, we can gain experience and support from local authorities...such benefit not only helps us to support ourselves to grow, but also promotes our community development...."*[24]

Fourth, organisation C's approaches involving the integration of young people into different networks (levels of government structure) and grassroots organisations were vital for sustained civic engagement: organisation C was linked with various associations and clubs at the grassroots levels. In Battambang province, for example, the young people from organisation C held membership of the UYFC, of the health centre, the youth commune, a political party, and the women's savings group. This membership provided those people with multiple roles and responsibilities, ensuring that they were well connected with the community and local authorities. As members of the UYFC, organisation C's young people were able to link to the head of the UYFC at the district level. This gave them a useful connection with influential people in central and provincial government. A member of organisation C in Kampong Thom province had also played multiple roles - as a focal person at the commune office, a party member and a key facilitator of organisation A. Being a member of different associations and local institutions of government provided the chance to connect and build networks across different fields of NGO activity and local government areas of intervention to promote local development. For instance, the young people of organisation C helped villagers to register as part of the national ID Poor project: they had mobilised youths from their community for identified poor households (for ID Poor purposes). Therefore, by their involvement in different sectors and by playing multiple roles, the young people from organisation C enjoyed opportunities to connect with the networks of local authorities and development partners.

Young people from organisation C also had the opportunity to gain financial backing from development partners, as well as emotional support from local authorities: this enabled them to give back to communities. In Battambang, for example, a young female had worked as a messenger and as a liaison person between villagers and a commune health centre for over 10 years. She trained villagers about tuberculosis, contraception and the nutritional needs of young children. She was also involved in the referral of patients for treatment at a commune health centre. Through this work, she received a commission from the health centre with funding from development partners when she accompanied the patients to the health centre. Meanwhile, she had strong backing from the commune councils for the work she was doing. She always referred to the local authorities as her "father"[25]. In addition, young people from organisation C, who were members of the UYFC from both Kampong Chhnang and Battambang, were also presented with opportunities to connect with existing resources from local authorities to support local needs in emergencies. For instance, they supported national, provincial and local governments to distribute rice packages in response to storms, floods and house fires. They also assisted elderly people, those with disabilities, and poor villagers, as well as occasionally joining environmental clean-up campaigns, and tree planting excursions.

4.3.4 Challenges for sustained youth civic engagement

Apart from the opportunities presented by all three organisations to promote youth civic engagement, they had also encountered substantial challenges. The channel for empowering voices from the decentralization and deconcentration reforms had not been fully accepted. As a young person from organisation A confirmed, "...I am not participating in the activities

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23   Interview with the district governor in Battambang province (29 November, 2019).
24   Interview with the young people from organisation C in Battambang (29 November, 2019).
25   Interview with youths in Battambang (30 November 2019)

of organisation A at the local community level[26]…I feel upset when local authorities do not accept my voiced proposals for local development"[27]. The young person who was formerly a member of organization A was not satisfied when, for example, proposed suggestions for local development made to local authorities, were not fully addressed. The failure of local authorities, in this case, to respond to the voices and preferences of youth for local development, could be the result of centralised budget planning at the provincial treasury: infrastructure development was always prioritised. In some cases, local authorities did not know how to claim budget from the provincial treasury for uses that could address young people's concerns and preferences[28]. In others, organisation A's former youths and youths who had never participated in any of the three organisations, confirmed that only household heads have been directly invited to participate in the meetings about local development, and that those youths had been excluded[29]. Such engagement practices ignored the young people, and excluded their voices and preferences from the relevant meetings.

The three organisations also faced issues resulting from the power of family ties (Figure 7). The control exerted by parents could pose challenges for all three organisations in their efforts to effectively mobilise young people to pursue youth civic engagement. Youths, who had not been associated with the three organisations, confirmed that, in Kampong Thom, illegal logging was a major issue contributing to climate change. That issue could negatively affect local livelihoods. They wanted to bring this issue to local authorities[30]. In Battambang, youths raised concerns to local authorities about the fluctuation of paddy rice prices and insufficient irrigation systems. They were, however, warned against taking this action by their parents[31]. It can be assumed that past experiences relating to precautionary measures against foreseen risks taken by the parents, might not fuel youths' desire for civic engagement. Such issues were also echoed by a study which stated that parents often restrained their children from participating in any civic activities that could be perceived as political, not only to keep them safe, but also to avoid bringing problems home (OECD 2017).

Last but not least, the three organisations faced a range of issues in enhancing youth civic engagement (Figure 7). The operational context and control by local authorities were among the challenges for organisation B: although it operated in a commune, some youths were not aware of its operational activities, so they could not associate with its activities. In addition, the young people of organisation B were under surveillance by local authorities who had restricted other youths from participation in its events. Furthermore, even though some youths knew about the operational activities of the three organisations in their communes, they were not able to join given their time constraints with studies, migration and household chores. This was especially the issue among female youths who tended to be busy with household chores, or had migrated to urban areas or abroad to generate income for their families[32].

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26 Bottom channel of D&D reform for democratic participation.

27 Interviews with a youth group who were not active in NGOs, associations or clubs in Kampong Thom, 1 November 2019.

28 Interview with commune chiefs and commune councils in Kampong Thom (30 October 2019).

29 Interviews with a youth group who were not active in NGOs, associations or clubs in Kampong Thom, 1 November, 2019.

30 Interviews with a youth group who were not active in NGOs, associations, or clubs in Kampong Thom, 01, November, 2019.

31 Interviews with a young adult group who were not active in NGOs, associations, or clubs in Battambang, 30 November, 2019.

32 Interviews with a youth group who were not active in NGOs, associations, or clubs in Kampong Thom, 01, November, 2019.

Figure 7: The challenges faced by the three organisations in promoting youth civic engagement
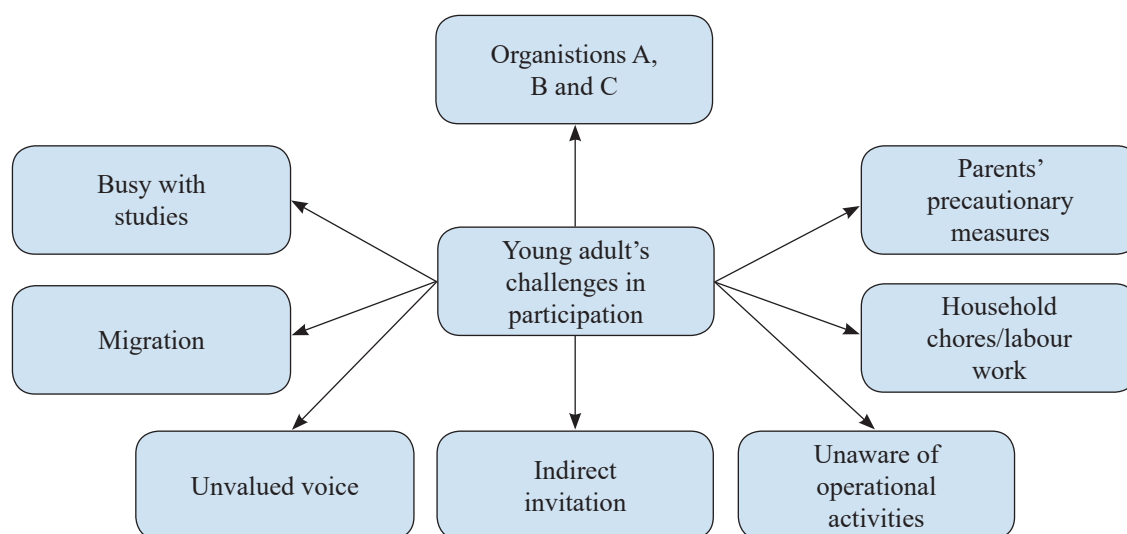
5. Concluding discussion

It can be observed that many projects have emerged to engage youths in promoting civic activities, notably after the 2013 national election. The projects under analysis in this study relating to organisation A were formed and integrated within a co-designed framework of democratic development between the Cambodian government and development partners including the World Bank and other donors. That co-designed framework is known as ISAF, and requires both implementing development partners (organisations) and local authorities to work together to improve local public service delivery and to achieve democratic participation. The main purpose of organisation B in this investigation is to improve public service delivery and to promote integrity, and the third organisation (C) in this study is State-dependent, which makes it a de facto agency of the ruling party. Organisations A and B seemed to operate simply for survival as their effectiveness in promoting youth civic engagement was hard to observe in that their operations were restricted and controlled. Organisation C, however, manoeuvred itself within the existing structure and powers of the State. In most cases, organisation C dominated the other two since some members of organisation C were drawn from, and integrated within the other two organisations.

As illustrated in the findings sections, not only did organisation C dominate civic forms of youth engagement in the country, given its large-scale operation, it also infiltrated the other two organisations youth civic engagement activities. The young people in organisation C have been embodied in the State hierarchical structures (e.g., universities, high schools, province, district, commune and village). In other words, some of the young people from organisations A and B were already members of organisation C. Such domination could affect the original set of project outcomes and goals (youth civic engagement to improve democratic participation and local public service delivery) of the organisations A and B. For example, the young people from those organisations (who were also members of organisation C) might not have enough voices to pressure local authorities when they brought local development issues into discussions for integration into commune investment plans.

The domination of organisation C could result from the recruitment strategies of the other two. Those of organisation A depended on local authorities looking for youths from their communities. In that case, it was inevitable that they would select someone with whom they were familiar. This selection process might inevitably end up taking only those youths who were well connected with the commune office. In some cases, the youths recruited for organisation A could also be the ones who volunteered with the commune office. As respect is highly valued in Cambodian culture, obeying and listening to old people, in particular leaders, is vital. In such cases, organisation A youths who were already connected to the commune office might be passive rather than active participants in discussions with local authorities to implement commune investment plans based on the voices and preferences of villagers and young people.

The domination of organisation C in promoting youth civic engagement could also be the reason behind the strategies of using the social media, like Facebook, employed by organisation B. The majority of youths currently use Facebook or other online platforms to access news and information, and those from rural and poor families might be excluded from selection for civic engagement. Many of those poor youngsters might have access to the internet and own smart phones - the most popular tools for connecting online these days. But, in reality, only young graduates would look for the opportunity of civic engagement, intending not only to increase their opportunities for civic activities, but also to broaden their chances of securing decent employment. Since some young people from organisation C could be fresh graduates and recruited by organisation B, those young people might continue to weaken its agenda. From that tactic of recruitment, some members of local and community-based organisations, or outspoken youths, could be excluded from participation. In essence, organisation B has been much dependent on external funding, so the quota of young people selecting its agenda to promoting accountability and transparency might be limited by its budget.

With organisation C dominating the other two organisations, performance and effectiveness in promoting youth civic engagement among the latter have not been convincing. The potential of other youths, who were also keen to contribute to local communities but did not exist within the loop, has been missed. For that reason, the local authorities have been recruiting organisation A youths who tend to be the most obedient. Therefore, the approach of organisation A, which has sought to ensure accountability from the commune councils, could be ineffective. For example, the commune councils had verbally accepted the five priority issues for local development. These priorities were integrated into the commune investment plan, but had not been implemented for a myriad reasons. Since the recruits were submissive to the local authorities, they did not dare, and were not empowered, to advocate to ensure the accountability of the commune councils to implement the priorities of local development.

The effectiveness of organisation B in promoting youth civic engagement could also be difficult to measure in terms of long-term sustainability. The original set of goals and outcomes were to promote accountability and transparency in respect of local public service delivery, and for youths in the communities to have a wider understanding of integrity. Since it was difficult to reach out to a larger audience, especially during election periods, the implementation of the project was monitored and restricted by the local authorities. To carry out any activities at the village and commune levels, the youth members belonging to this category (organisation B) were often asked to obtain approval from the provincial office. In some cases, even if they did achieve this approval, the local authorities prevented them from organising the events they had planned. So, some youths opted to educate people on a peer-to-peer basis to avoid pressure and surveillance from the local authorities. Originally, organisation B tended to encourage youths to implement the proposed agenda of accountability and transparency, but some opted for

education activities focusing on water, sanitation and hygiene, thereby shifting to topics that were less politically sensitive.

The effectiveness of promoting youth civic engagement for long-term sustainability could also be influenced by individual youths whose intentions may not be about improving democratic participation and local public service delivery, but who were rather looking for decent employment opportunities. The youths who joined organisations A and B wanted to gain experience and additional knowledge so that they could build for future employment. Such intentions might deviate from the original set of common goals of the two organisations. Meanwhile, the activities of organisation C appeared to meet their goals, mobilising youths to work for the prosperity of the country under the political ideology of the ruling party and its leaders. Hope remained, however. Some of those who joined the three organisations were committed not only to obtaining knowledge but also to contributing to an improvement in local development, governance and service delivery. This reflects what Brown (2008) argued, that, although youths had some participation constraints, they were keen to address issues of local governance and development if they were fully inspired and motivated.

The effectiveness of promoting youth civic engagement, the notion of which is a blend of political and civic activities, can, therefore, be complicated given the recent change in the "space" between civil society and State/government. For example, even though organisation B claimed to be non-political, using the civic and political rights of citizens, their activities were often perceived to be political by the local authorities. This has made youth civic engagement challenging, harking back to the cultural and historical events that led to such calamity and that traumatised not only the older generations but also the younger ones. Cambodian people are more strongly attached to their families than they are to their communities (Ebihara 1968; Eng et al. 2019), and collective action is difficult (Chea et al. 2011; Ros, Ly and Thompson 2011). The intention to demand reform to further accountability and transparency in public services and democratic participation from local authorities by the organisations A and B is not, therefore, particularly evident.

Overall, the rapid expansion of organisation C (the de facto organisation of the ruling party) has penetrated every corner of State institutions and other non-governmental sectors. The organisations A, B and C and the donors who back them, should find alternative ways to fully engage youths from different backgrounds to participate in civic engagement and to promote civic engagement in the national curriculum. For future study, an in-depth investigation should focus on how the type of civic engagement exemplified by organisation C influences democratic participation and improved public service delivery at the commune level.

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