1 Introduction

This article examines how different types of donors understand and interpret the term 'partnership' and whether the relationship they actually have with local NGOs fulfills the ostensible meaning of this term. In Cambodia in the late 1990s, following the example of northern NGOs, more bilateral and multilateral governmental aid agencies began to fund local NGOs. Donors – both governmental and non-governmental – often call local NGOs, who receive their funding, their 'partners'. As this article shows, the actual relationships vary from project implementers to partners for social change.[1]

An important concept, which may be useful in examining partnership in practice, is that of accountability. For example, the contributions in Edwards and Hulme (1995) examine the influence of increasing amounts of official aid to NGOs, due to an assumption that they are more efficient and effective than governments in the South. These studies suggest that although NGOs are not less effective than governmental or private organisations, they may perform less well than their image would suggest. The findings warn of the danger of NGOs being co-opted and deviated from their mission for social transformation. The risk is that NGOs and grassroots organisations (GROs) could become more concerned about accountability to their trustees, donors and host governments than to their grassroots constituencies, staff, and supporters. To prevent this danger, the editors emphasise the need for NGOs to take the issue of their own 'downward accountability' seriously. The contributors confirm that the quality of the relationships between NGOs, GROs, donors and governments is important, and a partnership approach emphasising participation, learning, reciprocity and transparency may avoid undermining the abilities of NGOs/GROs to pursue their mission and achieve downward accountability. They argue that NGOs should adopt an 'open systems' approach to development work. This means handing over more control to partners, coupled with non-standardised responses and procedures that promote flexibility and experimentation, while remaining accountable to their multiple constituencies.

Partnership for Whom?
Cambodian NGOs' Supporting Schemes

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How do NGO–donor relations in Cambodia correspond to this type of 'best practice'?

2 The Current Situation of Cambodian NGOs: An Overview

The international trend to support local NGOs in the South has reached into Cambodia, a country which, since the early 1990s, has been struggling to cope with transition from a socialist economy to a market economy. Today, Cambodia is no exception to other countries in the South, where foreign governmental and non-governmental agencies are increasingly interested in funding local NGOs. According to interviews with 28 major donors, the amount of funding which 36 grant-making agencies disbursed to Cambodian NGOs increased from US$6.2 million in 1996 to US$9.4 million in 1999.[2]

Correspondingly, the size of the Cambodian NGO community increased rapidly in the 1990s. Since the first autonomous Cambodian NGO was set up in 1991,[3] PONLOK (1999) estimates that the number of local NGOs and associations has increased to between 400 and 700.[4] This increase in the number and budget of Cambodian NGOs has been encouraged by political reforms and by technical and financial assistance from the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and foreign NGOs since 1991. It became easier to obtain permission to form an association during the UNTAC period and the new Cambodian Constitution stipulates the right to establish such civic entities. Moreover, UNTAC directly assisted the creation of Cambodian human right groups.[5] In addition, a number of foreign organisations supported local NGOs morally and politically by protecting a nascent civic space in Cambodia whenever the authorities tried to restrict them.

However, PONLOK (1999) states that small Cambodian NGOs seem to have greater difficulty in securing funding than their international counterparts in the country. Some larger donors seem to prefer to give bigger grants to more established NGOs. This is one way to avoid the labour-intensive and expensive grant administration required to conduct monitoring, financial follow-up and evaluation. Although the total amount of funding to Cambodian NGOs has increased, on average, donors were funding 25–30 per cent fewer organisations between 1996 and 1999. This means that fewer organisations were receiving larger grants. This is why small Cambodian NGOs are having a hard time securing funding.

On the other hand, there are some donors who provide support for the capacity-building and strengthening institutions of Cambodian NGOs.[6] Since most Cambodian NGOs are young and small, they invariably need to build the capacity of their own organisations.[7] Donors who do support these small Cambodian NGOs are more aware of the needs of the nascent NGO sector in Cambodia. Such donors are not just imposing a ready-made scheme to support local NGOs.

Aware of this gap between the needs of nascent Cambodian NGOs and foreign assistance to local 'partners', this article examines the different contents of the partnership programmes adopted by various donors. What kind of support is most needed for their partners and the ultimate beneficiaries of the assistance?

One indicator of partnering is the extent to which funders are more concerned about NGO accountability to themselves or to local beneficiaries at the grassroots level. In the former case, local NGOs implementing projects fulfilling donors' preferences will typically satisfy the funders first. In the latter case, local NGOs need to have the capacity to meet the needs of beneficiaries, and donors are more aware of supporting such capacity-building. In other words, project implementers may be accountable to the donors, but by practising a truly participatory approach they are not necessarily prioritising accountability to the beneficiaries.

To examine what kind of modality of partnership delivers downward accountability to the ultimate beneficiaries of assistance and whether partnership is understood as an equitable relationship, the next section compares three assistance programmes for NGOs. While the Japanese government provides mainly funding support, two northern NGOs, Oxfam GB and CIDSE, provide both funding and non-funding support (see Table 1).[8]

Table 1: Features of NFGO assistance schemes by different donors

		Japanese ODA	CIDSE	Oxfam GB
Partners		Mainly Japanese NGOs	Cambodian NGOs and GROs	Cambodian NGOs and indirectly to GROs through NGOs
Funding targets		Projects	Projects and capacity building of organisations	Projects and capacity building of organisations
Target sectors		Mainly infrastructure building of schools, clinics and wells. No support for ongoing maintenance	Mainly to rural development but also support for peace and human rights activities	Half to rural development focusing on credit and NRM[9]. The other half to education, health, peace and human rights
Type of support	Provide funding	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Technical support/ capacity building	Little organisational capacity-building	Main objective	Main objective

3 Japanese Government Grants to NGOs

The Japanese government supports NGOs through four main schemes. First, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) finances the development cooperation activities of Japanese NGOs in developing countries through the NGO Project Subsidy. This scheme is for Japanese NGOs that apply to the MOFA in Japan, and the MOFA decides on the recipients. The amount of subsidy for each project will not be more than half of the total cost. The subsidy goes mainly to school and centre buildings, vocational training, medical care service and education projects conducted by Japanese NGOs (MOFA 1999).

Some Japanese NGOs that have received the subsidy state that the cycle of grant decision making, grant provision, and the final accounting report of the NGO Project Subsidy is too short. In some cases, they applied during March to May, grant decisions were made in October and they were expected to finish the projects and the final accounting reports by the end of February of the following year.[10]

The second Japanese government scheme to support NGOs is Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects (KUSANONE), which supports both NGOs and local government authorities.[11] This scheme provides non-refundable financial assistance to development projects by international or local NGOs, hospitals, primary schools, research institutes and other non-profit associations. The only requirement for an eligible recipient is to be a non-profit organisation implementing development projects at the grassroots level. The Embassy of Japan in the country determines the recipients. The grant ceiling is usually US$100,000. Exceptional cases may receive up to US$200,000, but not more than that. The embassy asks applicants to supply competitive pro forma estimates for each budget item to ensure value for money. Again, exceptions can be made in certain circumstances, including emergency situations or the presence of only a limited number of suppliers. At the discretion of the local Japanese embassy, the recipient organisations are asked to provide interim reports during implementation. A final report is required at the end of all projects. The final report must be accompanied by a financial statement and receipts showing how the funds have been utilised.

The grassroots grant scheme has some points that make it difficult for NGOs to utilise the scheme. For

example, exempt from subsidy are: regular salaries, fuel, travel expenses, *per diem* charges, and other administrative and recurrent operating costs of the organisation.[12] Requirements for pro forma estimates from three different suppliers can be overly strict. In addition, the selection criteria do not seem to prioritise the needs of, or accountability to, the beneficiaries. Rather, choice is predominantly in favour of the construction of infrastructures, including schools, hospitals and training centre buildings.[13] In selecting recipients, the scheme relies on the willingness of other donors to fund the human and logistical costs of the organisations. Moreover, this scheme seems to prefer geographic areas near the capital and 'sightseeing' spots that exclude the poorest or remote areas.[14]

Several Japanese NGOs receiving grassroots grants from the Japanese embassy pointed out numerous shortcomings of the scheme.[15] They argued that needs assessment carried out by proper evaluation missions were necessary in order to select those projects that met real needs in Cambodia, and not just those providing for hardware construction. Some projects have no prospect of sustainability and it is important to carry out post-evaluations using an evaluation system that ensures the participation of neutral third parties. However, this seldom occurs. The grassroots grants scheme was originally intended to support local NGOs and community organisations, but the recipients are mainly Japanese NGOs, some international NGOs and local governments, but hardly any Cambodian NGOs. Assistance for the capacity-building of local governments, local NGOs, or community-based organisations (CBOs) is also important, since all of them are potential counterparts. It would be useful if this scheme covered labour and running costs, for example for the maintenance of the buildings.

The capacity of the Japanese embassy to provide grassroots grants is limited. In 1998, one staff member handled funding for 25 projects. Due to the mounting workload and infamous prolonged period in selecting the applicants, the number of staff increased from one to two workers and one assistant in 1999. Yet, they still have little time to monitor or follow-up the recipient projects. They request interim reports but provide little support for capacity-building or monitoring. A critical assessment is that the restrictions imposed on the

funding of projects allows the embassy to make disbursements with a minimum commitment both to the life of the partner organisations involved and to the ultimate impact of their resources.

The other two Japanese government schemes to support NGOs are separately planned and implemented through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the executing agency for technical cooperation of Japanese government grant assistance.[16] Recently, JICA has started two schemes to support NGOs. They are the Community Empowerment Programme, which started in 1997 (JICA 1999a)[17] and the Partnership Programme with NGOs/Local Governments/ Institutes, which started in 1999.

In Cambodia in December 1998, the Community Empowerment Programme began to support the first two cases implemented by Cambodian NGOs. One project is Model Social and Mental Health Services, which is implemented by the Social Services of Cambodia (SSC). The other project is Promotion of Women's Reproductive Health and Rights. Its local counterparts are Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA) and the Khmer Women's Voice Centre (KWVC). While the former project had already been implemented for several years when JICA started to support it, the APHEDA–KWVC project was combined by JICA. JICA provides financial and technical support to SSC, including the provision of a short-term Japanese psychotherapist and funding for training SSC staff in English, accounting and computing. The case of APHEDA–KWVC is discussed here in detail since this project is a new venture facilitated by JICA.

The Promotion of Women's Reproductive Health and Rights project aims to improve human resources, particularly those of women. The local partner is the Women's Development Centre of the Kompong Cham province. Intended beneficiaries are rural women and female leaders.

According to the mission report (JICA 1999b), one of the weak points of this project is that APHEDA and KWVC work separately. APHEDA trains trainers who visit rural women to inform them about reproductive health.[18] APHEDA also trains trainers for labour seminars, who then pass on their expertise

to factory workers and pre-workers. In parallel, after assessing the leadership situation and deciding on the training method and curriculum, KWVC conducts gender training for women leaders.

Yet gender perspectives seem to be weak in the training given by APHEDA. This shortcoming suggests that APHEDA and KWVC did not participate fully in the policy planning of this project. According to the report (JICA 1999b), 'There is almost no cooperative relationship with KWVC and the involvement of KWVC had already been decided when APHEDA decided to cooperate in implementation of the project. Also, the discussion was not enough since the project planning and implementation had to be done in a very short period.' To the extent that partnership implies good communication and complementarity, a necessary precondition for this appears to be sufficient time, which in this case was lacking.

The capacity of the JICA Phnom Penh office to handle the Community Empowerment Programme is limited. While JICA contract experts provide some technical assistance regarding gender and psychotherapy to the partner NGOs, they do not support organisational capacity-building. The formation of two projects was carried out separately by two different JICA workers: the Model Social and Mental Health Services project by a contract-based Project Formulation Advisor; and the Promotion of Women's Reproductive Health and Rights project by a JICA gender expert. Two different JICA workers: the contract-based Project Formulation Advisor and the Assistant Residential Representative are in charge of following-up each project.Considering that the scheme had just started, the absence of one specialist in charge of the entire programme at this vital time probably contributed to its lack of transparency and a critical assessment of its appropriateness. Under such conditions, little can be expected by way of achieving downward accountability to intermediary NGOs, let alone to their beneficiary constituencies.

The fourth scheme for the support of NGOs by Japanese bilateral aid is the Partnership Programme with NGOs/Local Governments/Institutes.[19] This scheme aims to support the projects of Japan-based NGOs, universities, local governments and public or private organisations, including private companies,

in sectors including social development, environment and intellectual assistance. The scheme will be implemented as a JICA-funded project based on the international agreements between the Japanese Government and the recipient governments.

In Cambodia, the first project was planned for 1999. The first recipient was a Japanese NGO, Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), for the project, Improved Access to Basic Education in Rural Areas through Community Participation. It plans to support school building and facility construction, education materials supply, library and literacy education. According to a SVA staff member, JICA did not alter SVA's original plan significantly. However, suggestions and discussions about the project took place not in Cambodia, but mainly in Tokyo, so that the respondent felt that decision-making was centralised and minimally consultative to the SVA field office.[20] But, related to the project implementation, the SVA Phnom Penh office can consult a different Assistant Residential Representative from the one in charge of the Community Empowerment Programme if necessary.

Japanese bilateral aid's four schemes to assist NGOs seem to have few procedures for making NGOs accountable to the Cambodian target beneficiaries, or even to the partner intermediary organisations, such as NGOs. The schemes predominantly tend to support Japanese NGOs and infrastructure building. There is little support for capacity-building of local NGOs. The schemes are run with very limited human resources, resulting in poor needs' assessment of target beneficiaries and poor evaluation of their effectiveness or impact.

Each scheme described above offers a window through which NGOs can access funding. What none seems to offer is a structure for relational dialogue beyond project-by-project negotiation. This limitation is compounded by the fact that both the Japanese Embassy and JICA appear to lack the interest and organisational capacity for dealing with NGOs as living organisations. Put another way, partnership is not conceived as an organisation-to-organisation relationship but as a contractual arrangement, with projects as the currency in question. Moreover, having four different schemes to support NGOs, while lacking organisational capacity, invites administrative overload at the cost of the

deeper conversation required for real partnership to evolve. Consequently, it may be better for Japanese aid to adopt an integrated approach to sharing its information and knowledge, and free up capacity for relational dialogue.

4 Partnership for Oxfam GB[21]

Oxfam GB works through local counterparts wherever possible. It aims to promote local ownership of programmes and projects and encourage sustainability of the benefits achieved. Oxfam GB takes a non-operational approach. It does not implement projects itself but gives assistance to local counterparts to implement them. For Oxfam GB, partnership means that they: share a vision and goals based on a common analysis of the situation; share commitment to poor and marginalised groups, to participatory approaches and to gender equity; have mutual accountability (between constituencies of Oxfam, local counterparts, and their beneficiaries); and have a spirit of mutual learning, openness, and sharing.

To identify and select counterparts, Oxfam staff assess the programme interests and capacities of relevant organisations working in their areas of strategic concern. Oxfam and potential counterparts discuss their mutual interests. Oxfam appraises potential counterparts in terms of their values and beliefs, their accountability to the poor, and their strengths and weaknesses in management and administration.[22] With the agreement of a potential counterpart, Oxfam supports capacity-building in areas of organisational weakness. Thus, to become an Oxfam partner, sharing beliefs, values and approaches with Oxfam is crucial. Why? Because, if this condition is fulfilled, Oxfam can then choose to provide non-funding (organisational) support to potential counterparts lacking operational skills, capacity or experience.[23]

Since it began its activities in Cambodia in 1979, Oxfam GB's local partners have changed. The organisation began in the country by delivering emergency relief, including food and medicine. There were no Cambodian NGOs at that time, and Oxfam GB worked with the communist state structure that was faced with the burden of rehabilitating and reconstructing a shattered country without major aid from the West during the 1980s. Oxfam

GB established its country office in Phnom Penh in 1981 and started the Rural Drinking Water Supply Programme (RDWSP) to support infrastructure development. During 1986–89, Oxfam GB repaired water works, industrial plants, and rural water supplies, while supporting the Russey Keo Technical Training College to promote education in water-related engineering skills.

Cambodian NGOs began to emerge in the early 1990s and Oxfam GB started to work with them. The first partner was *Khemara*, the first Cambodian NGO. Subsequently, in 1992, Oxfam GB changed its partners from government institutions to NGOs and villages, focusing on capacity-building. Oxfam GB held workshops for its staff and local partners on participatory environmental assessment, planning, analysis and planning for gender and development, so that they could understand and deal with such development issues. In 1992–93, Oxfam GB also started an operational community development programme in Battambang and Takeo provinces, where there were few local NGOs. These operational community development programmes ended in 1996, when two local NGOs were created to take over the operation. This was when Oxfam GB in Cambodia became completely non-operational, since it had already handed over the RDWSP to the Provincial Department of Rural Development in 1993.

By 1999, the main partners of Oxfam GB in Cambodia were local NGOs. Oxfam GB provides non-funding support to train the staff of partners as one dimension of capacity-building. This input is to improve the effectiveness of their work, to ensure partners use funds wisely, and to give their staff the skills and confidence to develop as individuals and potential leaders in the future. The programme of Oxfam GB covers four main areas: livelihoods; peace and rights; education and health; and disaster management.[24] Development and emergency relief work often provide only a partial solution to the problems of the poor and vulnerable. Oxfam GB is therefore also active in advocacy, trying to influence policies and practices to enable vulnerable people to have a say in their own lives and to protect their rights. For the financial year ending in April 1999, Oxfam GB in Cambodia spent US$877,599. It gave grants to 25 local NGOs.

Oxfam GB does not work directly with local communities, but community development is crucial for Oxfam GB programmes. This is because various programmes, including credit and savings schemes, rice and animal banks, health training and infrastructure activities, are set up within communities and managed by committees. Membership of such committees often overlaps with those of village development committees (VDCs) and of commune-level associations. In 1998, 18 Oxfam GB partners worked in community development and they worked with more than 55 VDCs.

In translating partnership into practice, Oxfam GB invested in its own internal capacity to provide non-funding support to Cambodian NGOs. It believes that Cambodian NGOs need not only funding but also non-funding assistance for human resource development and organisational management. It has five Cambodian Programme Officers supporting 25 Cambodian partners. Regarding the selection of new projects, decisions are usually made within one month of the application submission. Staff have the authority to select, investigate and provide funding. If new organisations submit applications, officers obtain information from others who know the organisations, visit and talk with the staff. If the project is considered potentially worthwhile, officers visit the beneficiary community and provide funding subject to the needs and commitment of the target beneficiaries. If they find that community requirements are greater than those addressed by the proposed project, officers can encourage the formulation of a project that can meet the requirements. Furthermore, if they find an organisation with a creative idea but lacking capacity for the participatory design of a project proposal, Oxfam staff provide the necessary assistance. Programme Officers conduct internal evaluation of projects at least once a month to check accounting and whether they are following objectives, and to discuss with staff of partner organisations problems and solutions. In addition to these internal evaluation by Oxfam staff, external project evaluation takes place once every two or three years.[25]

Overall, the Oxfam stance towards partnership is one that treats local organisations as more than carriers of projects. For example, attention to mutuality in values and in the interpretation of poverty and its causes, signals a deeper level of relational engagement. Further, on the ground, investigation of organisational behaviour helps to determine the extent to which potential partners are really listening to and accountable to communities. However, there is little evidence that local NGOs have applied the same rigour in selecting Oxfam as a partner. Indeed, given the 25 to 30 per cent reduction in the number of local NGOs gaining foreign assistance noted at the beginning of this article, it is unlikely that they would be much inclined to do so. In the competitive situation facing Cambodian NGOs, any donor is likely to be welcome. In other words, mutuality does not necessarily imply symmetry in decision-making power.

5 What Partnership Means for CIDSE[26]

CIDSE started to work in Cambodia in 1979. Its initial partners were government structures under the communist regime. Responding to political and social changes, it was only in 1993 that partners of CIDSE began to shift from government to non-government entities. During the first phase from 1979–85, CIDSE activities focused on emergency and rehabilitation assistance by providing materials. During the second phase, 1986–88, CIDSE started to provide more technical assistance. The organisation trained and transferred skills to central government counterparts and others. During the third phase in 1989–92, CIDSE started to move its assistance towards the grassroots level in sectors including agriculture, health, education irrigation, and rehabilitation. In phase four, 1993–97, CIDSE programmes shifted from a sectoral to an integrated approach to emphasise the community management of development activities. Other programmes were added, including (1) partnership with local NGOs, (2) development education and advocacy, and (3) training in gender and community development.

Today, CIDSE provides training courses for government counterparts but the main local partners of CIDSE are local NGOs and communities. The Partnership Programme supports Cambodian NGOs and local initiative groups through funding and non-funding support. The Integrated Community Programme focuses on building the capacity of communities to coordinate development activities that prioritise the needs of the poor. In

1998, CIDSE restructured its programme to focus on two approaches: indirect local NGO capacity-building by the Partnership Department and direct community intervention by the Integrated Community Development Department.

The first key programme, the Partnership Programme, was initiated in 1994 following the emergence of Cambodian NGOs. The Partnership Department was formed in January 1998 after the internal restructuring of CIDSE. CIDSE seems to have taken care to build good partnership relationships. CIDSE had 16 key local partner NGOs, all of whom, except four, focus on rural development. Among four exceptional groups, two are human rights groups, one is a peace and non-violence group, and one is an NGO support group.

Each CIDSE staff member from the Partnership Department is responsible for four to five partners, allowing an intensive capacity-building approach. The Partnership Department has two units: a Training Support Unit and a Funding Support Unit. The former unit has provided skills development to 206 staff of partner NGOs. Courses have included: civil society, accounting, agriculture, participatory rural appraisal and environmental protection. In addition, there have been exposure visits, sponsorship to other institutes, and workshops on networking. CIDSE holds training workshops three or four times a year for its partners on the management of organisations and projects, including project design, monitoring, and evaluation. CIDSE staff also provide face-to-face individual consultations, management guidance, and assistance in sending partner NGO staff on training courses run by other organisations.[27]

Accountability to beneficiaries is a criteria for partners of CIDSE. CIDSE also asks its partners to commit to and practice participatory decision-making in their organisations and in the communities where they work. Also, CIDSE encourages their partners to negotiate contributions from the community in terms of cash, kind, or labour, which is crucial for sustainability (CIDSE 1998a; Hean and Singh 1999).

Strengthening the institutional capacity of Cambodian NGOs is the key objective of the Partnership Department of CIDSE. CIDSE believes

that the NGO movement is newly emerging in the country. Consequently, Cambodian NGOs need capacity-building support at the same time as funding assistance for development work. During the infancy of a Cambodian NGO, capacity-building support is more necesssary than funding. CIDSE identifies 22 capacity areas that are needed for CNGOs to be efficient organisations. In order to provide appropriate capacity-building support, CIDSE checks in detail the present capacity level of CNGO partners. Based on the capacity indicators, the progressive growth of capacity is divided into four stages: infancy, growing-up, adulthood and maturity. CIDSE provides capacity-building support based on the identified level of capability (Singh and Kuy 1999).

CIDSE encourages the participation of its partners in identifying their needs in capacity-building. During an annual programme review workshop in December 1998, partners participated in the validation of the draft report on Capacity-Building Needs Assessment of Partners. Partners prioritised their needs for capacity development out of the 22 capacity areas. They also reviewed 16 centralised training courses conducted by CIDSE from 1994 to 1998.[28] Local partners particularly valued this 1998 workshop since CIDSE was the first donor to lay a relational agreement on the table for open discussion in a participatory fashion. Partners also appreciate the solidarity, continuity and moral support provided by CIDSE. This was particularly evident during 1997–98 after the July *coup d'état*, when bilateral and multilateral donors suspended their aid to Cambodia, and protecting the role of civil society became crucial (CIDSE 1998b).

The other key programme of CIDSE is the Integrated Community Development (ICD) programme. Its local partners are Village Development Committees (VDCs). Since the concept of VDCs is new, CIDSE assists the formation of VDCs and provides capacity-building training. The ability of VDCs to function as real representatives of villagers and benefit the poorest has been significantly influenced by CIDSE's training.

VDCs are elected by the entire community and they are responsible for coordinating development activities within their communities and for linking with external development agencies. CIDSE helped the

formation of 96 VDCs during 1994–98, providing training to them all. Through training and exposure visits, VDC members learned how to create their own village development plans, identify and prioritise problem areas, organise village meetings, mobilise community participation and implement project activities. VDC training covers all the sectors prioritised by the ICD; namely, credit, health and education. In turn, CIDSE learns about local conditions and how best to respond to the basic concerns of poor people.

The goal of the ICD programme is to improve quality of life for people in key areas such as health, education, food security and income generation. CIDSE takes an integrated approach, since it is aware of the interrelations between, for example, food security, health and poverty. CIDSE selects relatively poorer communities, those vulnerable to natural disasters, those without external development assistance, those with limited access to resources, and those with a high rate of women-headed households. Thus, beneficiaries are selected from the poor and the poorest, women-headed households, the handicapped, and from ethnic minority groups. CIDSE aims to ensure the participation of the most neglected members of society, so that they not only derive material benefits, but also build solidarity and community through direct participation.

Selection criteria for VDC members include: whether permanent residents of the community; those with a high moral disposition; whether supportive of majority interests; leadership abilities; and a willingness to volunteer their services. Women have been also elected as VDC members. CIDSE provides capacity-building training to VDC members on topics including taking hold of rural life, community development, project design, project management, gender sensitivity, and credit and bookkeeping techniques. After induction training, VDC members would hold a meeting of the entire village to identify development needs and to prioritise appropriate solutions. The community would identify the most urgent needs, which include food security, income generation, adequate health care and education. In response, VDCs have introduced – with support from CIDSE – such projects as a rice bank, a pig bank, agricultural training, cash credit, health education, immunisation, well and school

construction, adult literacy, rice-vegetable-animal production, and animal health care. VDC members work without financial remuneration.

The past political and social situation in Cambodia has not allowed people's democratic participation in development. VDCs are a new attempt to introduce such a system. In the case of the VDCs supported by CIDSE, they are beginning to facilitate villagers' voluntary participation in decision-making in their own villages.

Three elements stand out in CIDSE's approach to partnership. First is a strong emphasis on participation. Second, is *validation* of CIDSE's choices and activities by partner NGOs and communities organised around the national VDC initiative. Third is the emphasis on enhancing local organisational capacity: the ability to make choices and to set priorities as a core feature of gaining equity in a relationship which, given the relative youth and newness of many local organisations, is inevitably unbalanced initially. An additional feature is the mix of indirect and direct support. In theory, at least, CIDSE's direct capacity-building assistance to communities should, if learning and internal communication takes place, inform the nature and quality of its indirect support in capacity-building of partner intermediary NGOs. This is an important consideration for international NGOs in the switch to becoming non-operational. In other words, what is the engagement and experience base from which their non-funding support is provided? How do international NGOs ensure that they do not live in the past, but stay in tune with the shifting reality of a transitional country like Cambodia?

6 Comparative Conclusions

Three cases of partnership have been described. The question is what determines the extent to which authentic partnership (see Introduction to this bulletin) is achieved, particularly in terms of downward accountability. Table 2, draws on the case material to suggest some key variables.

A key feature of partnership in which power is asymmetric (see Introduction) is the willingness and ability of power holders to accept constraints on their choices and behaviour. Seeking validation from the relatively powerless, cosmetic as this may

Table 2: Variables affecting partnership

Variable	Japanese Aid	CIDSE	Oxfam
Staff competence	Non-specialist	Specialist	Specialist
Staffing/partner ratio	Low	High	High
Location of authority	Rather centralised	Decentralised	Decentralised
Mutuality of values etc.	Inconsequential	Desirable	Vital
Local validation of donor behaviour by NGOs/GROs	Ignored	Built in to relational process	Desired but not obligatory
Project or organisation focus?	Project	Organisation	Organisation
Relationship	Contractual	Strongly mutual	Possibly mutual
Downward accountability	Negligible	Strong	Possibly strong

be, is one way of moving towards relational balance. This, in turn depends on the strength of the weaker party and their capacity to assert their interests. Without serious attention to local entities as capable and viable organisations, not just as project carriers, such a balance is unlikely in the short term. A project-only way of relating is unlikely to produce partnership worthy of the name.

A precondition for donor adjustment is for the local authority to negotiate and make agreements that are context-specific – in other words, that appropriate 'bounded authority' is delegated to the people on the ground, as is the case with CIDSE and Oxfam.[29] Another precondition is that partnership is not treated as an add-on but as an intrinsic part of mutual adaptation. An immediate implication is for donors to invest in their own competence as partnering, as opposed to simply project-funding, organisations. This requires dedicated skills available in sufficient quantity. The presence of specialist staff and their ratio to partners becomes significant; an area in which Japanese aid does not appear to score highly. In other words, partnering requires thoughtful, long-term specific investment by donors in themselves as partners.

The notion and presence of 'community' has been seriously damaged by Cambodia's pogroms and civil war. Therefore, community – the grounding of a future social order – must be rehabilitated, making accountable community organising essential to any approach to development in the country. Consequently, donors who assist organisational capacity-building of local NGOs, and those who are particularly concerned about community organis-

ing, are likely to be more effective and achieve some degree of downward accountability to beneficiaries. Donors who do not support capacity-building of local NGOs and provide mainly funding support for (physical) project implementation, lack interest in accountability of their projects to the poor. Employing partnership for such an approach is essentially of public relations benefit to donors themselves, with little real meaning for their partners and their beneficiaries.

Notes

1   In writing this article I am grateful for the assistance of Dr Alan Fowler and development workers in Cambodia. Any misunderstandings or misinterpretations are my sole responsibility. The article does not represent the opinions of my current employer, Oxfam.

2   PONLOK (1999) states that the rest of the grant-making agencies not included here provide small grants and this will probably not affect the trend.

3   The first Cambodian NGO headed by a Cambodian was KHEMARA. It was created in August 1991 and recognised by the government (Bennett and Benson 1995). In December 1991, 15 personalities independent from any political parties established the Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) (ADHOC, 1998; van der Kroef 1991).

4   According to CDC (1998), it had records of 159 Cambodian NGOs as of June 1998.

5   See ADHOC (1997), Brown and Timberman (1998); Charny (1992); Doyle (1994); Findlay (1995); Heininger (1994); Moser (1995); and Mysliwiec (1994).

6   PONLOK (1999) identifies three types of donors sup-

porting local NGOs at different phases of their organisational development. First, large governmental or non-governmental donors without offices in Cambodia, which provide large grants, often without support for capacity-building. The recipients are often limited to well-established NGOs. Second, large international NGOs providing financial and capacity-building assistance, including technical assistance, access to training, regular monitoring and follow-up. They often have long-term partnerships. Third, some organisations whose assistance to local NGOs has recently developed and who are committed to intensive hands-on support for capacity building.

7   In an interview on 30 November 1999, Carol Strickler, Executive Director of Cooperation Committee for Cambodia, stated that local NGOs needed training for capacity-building without charge. There are donors like the World Bank Social Fund, which finances local NGOs to build infrastructure, but there is greater need in community development. Also, Cambodian NGOs need training not only in proposal writing for funding, but also in the values and models of good NGOs.

8   Most information was collected by the author through interviews and existing documents in Phnom Penh from 28 November 1998 to 12 December 1999.

9   Natural Resource Management.

10 Interviews with SVA, SHARE, JVC, 24 hours TV, JHP, and ASAC in December 1999. These statements are not agreed by all.

11 See the website: http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/category/g_roots about the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects.

12   This is the daily base operational cost and not about temporary events, including workshops and seminars.

13 In 1998, 80 per cent of projects were for building construction and the rest for equipment, according to the list provided by the Embassy of Japan.

14 Checklist at the receipt of application forms provided at the interview with the Project Formulation Advisor, JICA Cambodia Office, and Second Secretary, Embassy of Japan in Cambodia in December 1999.

15 Interviews with SVA, SHARE, JVC, 24 hours TV, JHP, and ASAC, in December 1999. These statements are not agreed by all.

16 For this section, additional information was provided from the JICA headquarters and Phnom Penh office in June 2000. The MOFA and JICA exchange information about the recipient projects to avoid an overlap in funding, according to a telephone inquiry to the Technical Cooperation Section, Economic Cooperation Bureau, MOFA, 2 June 2000.

17 The direct translation of its Japanese name is 'development welfare assistance programme'.

18 See JICA (1999b).

19 JICA leaflet 'Partnership Programme with NGOs/Local Governments/Institutes'.

20 Conversation with a SVA staff in Tokyo on 14 April 2000.

21 Based on Oxfam GB (1999).

22 Two key elements in deciding whether to support an organisation are: the organisational capacity of the partner to be effective and empowering to beneficiaries, and the accountability of the partner to its relevant stakeholders, including beneficiaries (OI 1999).

23 See Oxfam GB (1997).

24 For example, some projects are land ownership, agriculture, common forestry and fishery management, and management of arms reduction. Interview with the Programme Representative of the Oxfam GB Phnom Penh office in December 1999.

25 Interview with the Programme Representative of the Oxfam GB Phnom Penh office in December 1999.

26 Based on CIDSE (1999).

27 Interview with Bijay Singh, Adviser, and Hean Vuthy, Coordinator of Partnership Department of CIDSE in Phnom Penh, 1 December 1999.

28 To ensure that the knowledge and skills gained from these training courses were applied, CIDSE Partnership Training Support Unit (PTSU) staff regularly conducted follow-up visits and provided coaching to all partners on issues pertinent to them.

29 Boundaries are normally set by regionally or centrally approved strategies that ensure sufficient coherence across the countries in which an international organisation works.

Glossary

24 hours TV	24 hours TV Charity Committee
ADHOC	Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association
APHEDA	Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad
ASAC	Association of School Aid in Cambodia
CBOs	community based organisations
CDC	Council for the Development of Cambodia
CIDSE	Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité
GROs	grass-roots organisations
ICD	Integrated Community Development
JHP	Japan Team of Young Human Power
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JVC	Japan International Volunteer Center
KWVC	Khmer Women's Voice Centre
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
NRM	natural resource management
Oxfam GB	Oxfam Great Britain
OI	Oxfam International
PTSU	Partnership Training Support Unit
RDWSP	Rural Drinking Water Supply Programme
SHARE	Service for Health in Asian & African Regions
SSC	Social Service of Cambodia
SVA	Shanti Volunteer Association
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
VDCs	village development committees

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