

# Getting to the Decision-Making Table in Educational Governance: The Emergence of Cambodian Civil Society within the New Global Geometry of Power<sup>1</sup>

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This chapter focuses on the emergence of civil society as a central pillar in Cambodian educational governance. By re-tracing how the NGO Education Partnership (NEP), a federation of education NGOs, became a recognized actor in national education policy making, this chapter documents the re-scaling of educational governance through the internal politics and transformations of one organization and its connections to the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a transnational network of civil society organizations. Through an in-depth case study, this chapter details how NEP not only navigated the globalization of educational governance in Cambodia but also impacted the structures of national educational governance by becoming an active member in policymaking. This chapter shows how NEP made it to the proverbial “decision making table” in Cambodian educational governance by strategically using its global connections while tactically navigating the historical and political context.

The detailed look at NEP offers a case study of the “new global geometry of power” influencing education policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 172). Within contemporary globalization, the geography of the state has been re-scaled and, as such, is continuously in contact with international actors and objects (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011). As national education policies are influenced by non-state, multi-national, and transnational actors, “the boundaries between state, economy, and civil society...[have become] blurred; there are new voices within policy conversations and new conduits through which policy discourses enter policy thinking; and there is a proliferation of policy networks nationally and globally” (Ball, 2012, p. 9). What was once solely the responsibility of the nation state is being re-scaled to include actors and processes that are simultaneously non-state and non-national.

The chapter progresses as follows. First, we discuss our methods, including the morphogenetic analytic approach that we employ. Second, we present our findings on the emergence, engagement and impact of Cambodian civil society. We then reflect in section three on the nature of—and the lessons from—changes to educational governance structures and processes in the case of civil society emergence in Cambodia. We conclude by discussing implications and by suggesting future avenues for research.

## Methods

### *Data Collection*

The present chapter is based on research conducted in Cambodia during July and August 2012, and was funded by the GCE. The research evaluated the impact of the GCE’s Civil Society Education Fund (explained later) within Cambodia. Our findings stem from 36 interviews, conversations and focus groups with 38 different individuals. Interviewees included staff and leadership of NEP, Cambodia’s national coalition of education-related NGOs; the GCE Leadership Committee; representatives of NEP member organizations; representatives of multi- and bi-lateral development partners (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency

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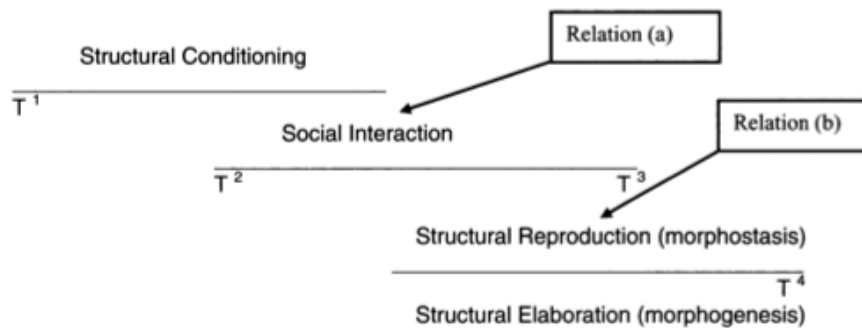
<sup>1</sup> The present chapter is a revised and shortened version of Edwards and Brehm (2015)

[JICA], and Asian Development Bank [ADB]); international NGOs; policymakers; leadership from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS); representatives of media (radio and TV stations); and members of academia. In addition, internal NEP documents were reviewed and analyzed.

***Analytic Framework***

We employ the work of Margaret Archer (2010a, b)—i.e., her morphogenetic approach to social change—because it provides a way to examine the dynamic interaction of structure and agency over time, just as we intend to do in this chapter. Specifically, the morphogenetic approach perceives that “the broader context conditions the environment of actors whose responses then transform the environment with which the context subsequently has to deal, the two jointly generating further elaboration as well as changes in one another” (Archer, 1982, p. 476). In this way, the morphogenetic approach artificially constructs a static moment within an otherwise dynamic environment in order to analyze the changes within social structures by actors and/or vice versa. The value of the morphogenetic approach is thus its ability to incorporate chronological time into the analysis of structures and agents that are co-constitutive and constantly evolving.

The key is to begin with the notion that structures and agents develop and evolve over chronological time such that structure always pre-dates action that attempts to transform it. By extension, emergent structures—i.e., what results from “structural elaboration” (Archer, 2010b)—post-date action. This recognition of a temporal difference between structure and agency within the morphogenetic approach is captured in Figure 1 where “T” stands for time in a chronological sense.



*Figure 1: The morphogenetic sequence (Source: Archer, 2010b)*

Because the morphogenetic sequence separates the development of structure and agency over time, it is necessary to understand the “structural conditioning” that pre-dates the action under investigation. Then, during “social interaction,” agents relate to other agents who interact with the “structural conditioning.” Principally, two outcomes can result from this process of interaction (i.e., social relation). On one hand, there is structural reproduction of the social order (i.e., “morphostasis”), while on the other hand the social order experiences some degree of modification through structural elaboration (i.e., “morphogenesis”). In both cases, with the passage of time and action, a new structure results within which future moments of agential (non)change happen. Thus, with reference to Figure 1, T<sub>4</sub> in first sequence becomes T<sub>1</sub> in the next sequence. This is how the morphogenetic approach opens for analysis the cycle of events and actions that relationally

constitute the structures and spaces in which subjects act, a cycle which would otherwise remain analytically inaccessible.

In terms of the present chapter, the morphogenetic approach is useful because it provides a manner in which to examine the dynamics of global education governance. In employing it, we are tasked, first, with identifying the structural conditions within which actor agency is embedded, second, with unpacking the social interaction and processes through which actors attempt to change those structural conditions and, third, with what the outcome of the process of change or non-change is.

## **The Cambodian case of civil society in education**

### ***Structural conditioning***

The contemporary Cambodian context is the result of a particular set of circumstances and developments that began under French colonialism and proceeded through multiple systems of governance, genocide, international isolation, and then an international/Western effort to rebuild, liberalize, and democratize the country (Ayers, 2000). One must begin by mentioning the interplay among multiple structural forces that led to the genocidal atrocities of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s: the emergence of a socialist movement in rural Cambodia in the 1960s that had global connections (albeit mainly with Vietnam), the official state neutrality during the Cold War, and the escalation of the US war in Vietnam that resulted in a “secret” bombing of Cambodian territory (see Vickery, 2010). The devastation of the country cannot be understated when the Khmer Rouge lost control of governance in 1979:

[Cambodia] had no currency, no markets, no financial institutions and virtually no industry. There was no public transport system; no trains ran and the roads were damaged and unrepaired. There was no postal system, no telephones and virtually no electricity, clean water, sanitation or education. (Mysliveic, 1988, p. 11)

In the post-Khmer Rouge period, Cambodia (known at this time as the People’s Republic of Kampuchea) was internationally isolated between 1979 and 1989 because the West perceived the Vietnamese liberation of Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge as an invasion of communism supported by the Soviet Union (Kieran, 1982). This resulted in an economic and political blockade by the West, leaving the Soviet Union and Vietnam to provide the only development assistance during this time (Vickery, 1986; for education see Clayton, 2000). After the transitional period from 1989-1993, which resulted in an international effort to conduct elections in 1993, that the Kingdom of Cambodia was recognized within international organizations and institutions.

Politically, Cambodia has remained under the tight control of a single ruler, Hun Sen, since 1985. He came to power with the Vietnamese occupation and has remained there through strategic alliances (e.g., with the Soviet Union, during the Cold War). Although there was social unrest during and after the 1993 and 1998 elections, Hun Sen has solidified his political power with each passing election through the politicization of the civil service, the military, and the police. It was only in the 2013 election that his political party, the Cambodian People’s Party, saw its lowest election rate to parliament since the 1998 election, when his party won majority control. Nevertheless, Hun Sen’s power remains near absolute. As one interviewee noted, the longevity of

Hun Sen's rule has meant the continuation of "authoritarian thought" because the current elite rose to prominence during the time of Vietnam's occupation (CAM10, 2-3).

One result of this "authoritarian thought" has been that criticism of the government and of politicians is not well tolerated and is often accompanied by harsh consequences. Freedom of the press is minimal, especially considering that political parties control most Khmer-language newspapers.<sup>2</sup> This leads many people and organizations to be cautious when it comes to critiquing the actions and performance of those in power.

Another salient aspect of the contemporary political economy is that, since the early 1990s, NGOs and other development partners have had a significant degree of latitude to operate (Bandyopadhyay & Khus, 2013; Dy & Ninomyia, 2003). Given that the education sector was reestablished in the 1980s and that the capacity of the central government was extremely low at that time, these organizations were able to pursue their projects freely. One interviewee commented:

Ten years ago certainly. It was so easy. You run a small NGO, you get some money from wherever and you can do whatever you like, you know? Because you are sitting on this bag of money and everyone wants to have your money. And that time also the government capacity was just so weak (CAM3, 33).

Although the capacity of the government has increased significantly over the course of the previous two decades, as many interviewees attested, the government still relies on the capacity and technical expertise of international organizations. A prime example is that an education specialist from JICA works inside the Planning Department of MoEYS directly with the Director of Planning on key issues. International aid also continues to account for half of Cambodia's annual budget (Springer, 2011).

There has generally been an adversarial relationship between the government and NGOs, as the latter have frequently confronted and pressured the former on a range of issues. Due to this, and the fact that the Cambodian government does not tolerate criticism well, it has tried to control the NGOs—a difficult task given the total number of NGOs is estimated at 3,492 (Bandyopadhyay & Khus, 2013). A recent attempt by the government has been the creation of an "NGO law," known as the Law on Association and Non-Governmental Organizations, that would have allowed the government to dissolve any NGO that it felt was harming (or not upholding) Cambodian culture and morality (CAM16). This effort produced a strong backlash, both domestically and internationally, and has been tabled by parliament. Nevertheless, it indicates the government's stance towards NGOs generally. That said, NGOs in the education sector generally have a better relationship with the government for two reasons: (1) because these NGOs tend not to be as confrontational and critical (as, for example, labor unions or NGOs working on corruption, human trafficking, etc.) and (2) because the government sees education NGOs as key to providing a vital public service and as helping to meet international development targets, such as those in the Education for All (EFA) initiative and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Despite the progress made since the end of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia's education system continues to face formidable challenges. Student dropout and the transition from primary to secondary levels of education are key challenges (Chinnh & Dy, 2009). Although the Education

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<sup>2</sup> According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2014, Cambodia ranks 144 out of the 180 countries included (<https://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>).

Management Information System, which is a database derived from schools and commonly used by MoEYS, reported a net enrollment rate of 96.4 percent in 2011, other data sources depict a different story: the Commune Database, which is a database compiled by commune offices, reported the enrollment at 87.9 percent, and the Cambodian Socio-Economic Survey, which is a national survey of households, reported the net enrollment rate at 84.3 percent (UNICEF, 2013).<sup>3</sup>

Another challenge is educational finance. The share of recurrent expenditures for MoEYS has decreased between 2007 and 2012 (with the exception of 2011, which saw a slight increase from the 2010 budget), despite the fact that the Cambodian economy has steadily increased since 1998 (Brehm et al, 2012). As a percentage of GDP, Cambodia's MoEYS receives less than half the world average (2.3 percent in 2012 compared to 4.8 percent) and less than the average for East Asia (3.8 percent; Edwards, 2012). Relatedly, corruption and the levying of unofficial fees are both deeply engrained in the education sector (Springer, 2011). Though the government has promised reform in this area, the extent of its action appears to be limited to rhetoric. Students continue to confront fees for educational services, including: registration and enrolment, classroom materials, examinations, lesson handouts, and exam papers (see Brehm, this volume, for more).

Within the larger historical context, the structural conditioning of educational governance has been dominated by MoEYS and the development partners. These two groups of actors have, since the 1990s, developed a structure of educational governance that responds to each other. For instance, when the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) prioritized non-formal education in its international reform agenda, MoEYS responded by beginning a Department of Non-formal Education within its organizational structure. Likewise, the Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG, defined below) provides an avenue for the development partners to support the education sector plan developed by MoEYS. The two structures are intertwined and somewhat dependent on each other, and often actors participate across spaces. For its part, policy advice from non-ministry, civil society actors is generally non-critical if it is to be taken seriously by MoEYS. Evidence-based research and engagement through government-sanctioned processes are both acceptable practices, while pursuing openly critical and confrontational advocacy strategies are not. With this structural conditioning in mind, we now turn to the new actors and spaces that have entered and impacted educational governance in recent years.

### *Social interaction*

The evolution of Cambodia's education system in the post-conflict epoch has occurred in parallel with—and has been impacted by—the globalization of education policymaking (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Consequently, a range of actors and ideas have been circulating within Cambodia and influencing the system's development. This is not to suggest, however, that actors within MoEYS have been ineffectual. To the contrary, interviewees repeatedly asserted that the most important person in the realm of education is MoEYS Secretary of State, Nath Bunroeun, whose biographical history suggests he is invested in the improvement of the education system. To be sure, he has placed much emphasis on channeling all available energies (from the government, development partners, NGOs) in order to meet the MDGs and the goals of the EFA initiative. Having attended the 1990 conference on EFA in Jomtien, he has been a leader in the MoEYS for over two decades and thus a conduit through which the global circulates.

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<sup>3</sup> See Brehm and Edwards (2014) for further discussion and examples of how the MoEYS manipulates such statistics.

Numerous international organizations have also been present in up-stream policy discussions with the government, particularly UNICEF, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, and the European Commission. UNESCO, for its part, participates in processes of educational governance and advances particular interests, but is limited by a relatively small budget. In contrast, the World Bank, which has a comparatively large budget and a strong connection with the government, acts more independently by not engaging with formal processes to harmonize development partner assistance. Finally, the U.S. Agency for International Aid (USAID) and JICA primarily dedicate themselves to project implementation. Close relationships between the government and the development partners, as well as among the development partners themselves, can be attributed to the fact that many have been working in Cambodia for over two decades.

The civil society organization examined here—NEP—is thus a relatively new entrant to the politics of educational governance. This organization, which represents and works on behalf of all education-related NGOs, originated in 2002 with its *raison d'être* to channel civil society feedback and interaction through a single organization. Both the government and the development partners were in favor of this, as the number of NGOs had grown exponentially and become unwieldy. With continued financial and technical support from international and national organizations alike, NEP has managed to survive (though at times barely, at least before 2009) and to grow from a coalition of 12 to 118 members by 2012.

As of 2012, NEP employed 15 personnel spread across four organizational areas: Research and advocacy, Educational Programming, Finance and Administration, and Membership and Communication. These areas are overseen by a Director and a Board of Directors, the latter of which has seven (inter)national members and is responsible for approving the budget, setting the direction for NEP, and approving policy changes. The director implements policy and oversees day-to-day operations. NEP's purpose is to engage with the government on education policy issues (particularly around quality and access), to advocate for civil society, and to augment the capacity of its members. Noticeably, however, prior to 2009, NEP was struggling both financially and in terms of its own capacity. On this latter point, the leadership style of the previous director of NEP (who served until early 2008) was drastically different from that of the director who took over in 2009. For example, the former director did not engage in collaboration with MoEYS, did not establish a common understanding between NEP and MoEYS regarding important issues and how they should be addressed, and did not develop a clear plan of action for NEP. Instead, this director brought critical feedback to policy discussions with the government (CAM8, 1). Not surprisingly, NEP was not only failing to affect education governance processes more generally but was also failing at realizing its own mission. It was marginalized and ineffective in education governance, and it “almost disappeared,” save for intervention by its board of directors, which managed the organization for about six months during mid-year 2008 (CAM6, 13).

Subsequently, NEP hired a new, politically savvy director, who engaged MoEYS in a culturally sensitive manner, unlike his predecessor. This director served from 2008 until 2014. In addition, the new director was able to use the funds provided by GCE, as well as the (inter)national legitimacy that comes with a transnational partnership, to create new spaces within and outside NEP that it was able to leverage to gain a seat at the decision-making table of educational governance. We detail and further discuss these actions in later sections.

An additional issue here is that education policy in post-conflict Cambodia has been influenced by the Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) to development, where the government and national and international stakeholders come together to plan and harmonize educational priorities,

policies, and strategies (Brown et al. 2001). This has meant the creation of two working groups. The first is the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG). This group meets monthly and counts among its members UN and bi-lateral aid agencies as well as a few international NGOs. UNESCO began to chair the ESWG since November 2011 (prior to that, it was chaired by UNICEF). Through the ESWG, its members come up with direct feedback for the government on issues that are being discussed at the moment (usually those issues that the government prefers to discuss). Prime examples include the annual operating plan of the government or the Education Sector Plan. The second group is the JTWG, which can be defined as the ESWG plus the government. The Minister of Education chairs it and there are two vice-chairs – the MoEYS Secretary of State and the chair of the ESWG. There are sub-technical working groups under the JTWG for specific issues. In addition, there are two major events in the education sector held each year. There is the government’s annual education retreat, which is a high-level event held over the course of a few days with a group of 20 stakeholders from within and outside government. There is also the annual education congress attended by MoEYS, development partners, and NGOs to look at “what works, what doesn’t, and what should be improved” (CAM13, 7).

For our purposes, however, the most important point regarding the above is that NEP was awarded a permanent seat in both groups, attends the annual education retreat, and helps plan the education congress. NEP has, subsequently, been able to create and strategically use these new spaces to influence education governance processes and the making of education policy. Indeed, NEP often meets with directors from within MoEYS (e.g., directors of Primary Education and the Planning Department) to provide feedback on the specifics of certain policies and to share its own reports, which have been perceived as valuable (CAM5, CAM7). In view of these recent achievements, one can conclude that NEP has, especially considering Cambodia’s authoritarian context, evolved from an organization on the fringe to one that has a voice and a place in educational governance. Put differently, NEP has succeeded in effecting structural elaboration by becoming both a key actor within—and an essential component of—the structures of education governance in Cambodia. We address how this happened below.

### *Global civil society in Cambodia*

GCE has been integral to NEP’s transformation. The former organization, in addition to being a transnational advocacy organization, is also “the globally recognized voice for civil society actors on the issue of Education for All” (Mundy, 2012, p. 17). Having itself begun in 1999, the GCE has “grown enormously ... [and now] has affiliated members in over 100 countries, including the participation of major international and regional non-governmental organizations” (p. 17). From this position, the GCE decided in the mid 2000s to enhance its support of national level education advocacy coalitions through the creation of the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF), funded at USD\$17.6 million by the Fast Track Initiative. From 2009 to 2012 the funding was distributed to participating national coalitions, among which NEP was one. In terms of Archer’s morphogenetic sequence (Figure 1) 2009 corresponds with T<sub>1</sub> and 2012 corresponds with T<sub>4</sub>.

NEP’s participation in CSEF meant, in the first place, that its budget immediately doubled.<sup>4</sup> Thus, not only did support by GCE lend NEP symbolic legitimacy in that the latter had the endorsement of an influential transnational actor, but GCE’s financial support meant that NEP could bolster its core capacity. Indeed, NEP utilized the majority of the CSEF to cover the salaries

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<sup>4</sup> For details see Edwards (2012).

of its key personnel and to hire three additional staff members in the areas of research coordination, advocacy, and financial management. Beyond this, however, CSEF also entailed the support of regional organizations linked with GCE. Given its geographic location, NEP has worked with the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)—with assistance being in the form of monitoring, coaching, and regional workshops where, in the case of the latter, information, lessons, and strategies are shared with and among national coalitions from across the region.

NEP has taken the financial and institutional resources afforded by CSEF and carefully used them to expand its strategic activities in the areas of research, campaigns, and policy engagement. Importantly, over the course of CSEF, by initially concentrating its energies on research and campaigning, it has later been able to access and create spaces where policy engagement with the government and development partners occurs. A key point is that, with assistance from GCE in the form of the CSEF, NEP was able to sufficiently elevate its stature such that it was recognized as a relevant actor in relation to education governance. This would then be followed by strategic social interaction aimed at structural elaboration.

In terms of research, CSEF not only made it possible to hire a research coordinator in 2009, but it also increased NEP's ability to carry out its own studies, from which it produces 2-3 reports annually. The reports' foci are intended to overlap with NEP's top advocacy priorities but are nevertheless influenced by non-national actors through its regional and global connections from the GCE. Notably, the importance of NEP's research has increased since 2009 and has resulted in NEP working with international organizations like Volunteer Service Overseas to find international volunteers to build the capacity of its research department.<sup>5</sup> In terms of NEP's legitimacy, the fact that it has the consistent ability to carry out policy-relevant studies has placed the institution in a positive light and has contributed to its rising profile. Relatedly, when NEP now researches an issue, it adds to the gravity of that particular issue among stakeholders in the education sector both inside Cambodia and on the global scale through GCE. For instance, NEP's report on informal fees was published by ASPBAE as part of its Asian South-Pacific Education Watch initiative (NEP, 2007). Even though NEP's research is not on par with development partners' larger and more expensive studies, the fact that NEP is researching an issue adds weight to it because doing so shows that civil society is aware of and focused on certain problems (CAM11, 29). Finally, NEP's research has helped to reinforce and elevate its position in the ESWG and JTWG. Studies on school fees and teacher motivation were particularly impactful in this regard (CAM19, int2).

Campaigning is the way that NEP highlights certain issues, with events and actions being targeted at the government itself and/or the general public. These events and actions tend to relate to themes that have been established by GCE. NEP has gained recognition for hosting well-executed promotional and informational events for representatives of the government, development partners, and civil society groups, as well as for the public at large. Examples include media productions (e.g., television segments about inclusive education, radio programs about teaching for gender equity); student enrolment campaigns; and special events for World Teacher Day, Literacy Day, and Global Action Week (GAW). Specifically, for 2011's GAW—which focused on gender marginalization, per GCE's choosing—NEP organized a launch event for 174 education stakeholders (including high-level members of the MoEYS and development partners),

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<sup>5</sup> Volunteer Service Overseas is an international federation of non-governmental organizations that recruits skilled volunteers to work in developing countries for two years.



held workshops for civil society organizations, created and distributed 10,000 posters on education-related gender issues, and produced a book of personal stories on gender discrimination. It has gotten to the point where multiple TV stations will now cover NEP's special events. Moreover, NEP is now able to recruit the MoEYS' Secretary of State and other top education officials to speak at ceremonies.

The aforementioned research and campaign (or general advocacy) activity during 2009-2011 garnered respect and credibility for NEP, which in turn has helped to open more doors for policy engagement at new levels. That is to say, in addition to attaining a permanent seat on the ESWG and JTWG, which constitute the formal mechanism through which NEP regularly participates to contribute feedback and share its research findings, NEP's involvement has extended to other spaces. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Annual Government Retreat: The Education Retreat is a high-level event that is held over the course of 2-3 days once per year outside of Phnom Penh by a small group of 20 stakeholders from within and outside government who attend in order to have formal and informal discussions on salient education issues. NEP is able to solicit feedback from its members that it attempts to incorporate in both the Education Retreat and the Education Congress (see below). Taking place in September, the topic is the state of the education sector. One purpose is to plan the annual education congress (in March). By virtue of its attendance in this event, NEP is able to communicate directly, and often informally, with the small group of high-level education officials who are in attendance. NEP is recognized as having provided very good feedback at this event (CAM6). NEP attended in 2009 and 2011; no retreat was organized in 2010.
2. Annual Education Congress: The congress is held in March. Here, the purpose is to look at "what works, what doesn't, and what should be improved" (CAM13, 7). NEP is involved in the planning and delivery of the education congress. The result of the congress is a report with analysis on the progress made in the education sector during the previous year. Yet, some assert that very little analysis and genuine discussion occur at this forum because it is more of a "political celebration of the sector" attended by 1,000 people (CAM3, 30/31).
3. Research Dissemination Events: NEP has begun to host high profile events at which they present the results of their research. A prime example of this is when, on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012, NEP held an all-day conference-style event to present the results of research that it had done on ECCE. The event was held at the Phnom Penh Hotel, a five-star Hotel and one of the nicest in the country. It was attended by 150 stakeholders from the government, development partners, and the education sector. NEP has also met with the minister of education to discuss research directly.
4. Individual work with MoEYS Departmental Directors: NEP often meets with a few of the directors from within the MoEYS (e.g., directors of Primary Education, the Planning Department) to provide feedback on specifics of certain education policies and to share its own reports. Interviews with the directors of both the Primary and Planning Departments indicated that they value the ground-level, practical knowledge and suggestions that NEP contributes (CAM5, CAM7).

These various accomplishments suggest that initial social interaction in the form of research and advocacy enabled NEP to engage in additional forms of social interaction that brought it into close and consistent contact with the existing actors and structures of education governance. Thus, during this time (which we can think of as spanning T<sub>2</sub> and T<sub>3</sub>, which represent periods of social interaction), NEP's agency worked through education governance processes and structures that were facilitated by the global (i.e., GCE) and constrained by the local (i.e., the position of NGOs vis-à-vis the government).

Following on this strategic and purposeful engagement, NEP finally, and crucially, attained a permanent seat on the ESWG and JTWG. That is, through its ability to consistently demonstrate its relevance and usefulness with regard to research, analysis, and policymaking, which was in turn made possible in part through its connections with GEC, NEP became a fixture of the education governance spaces and processes that impact education politics and that facilitate education policy formation in Cambodia. To state this more directly: By 2012 (T<sub>4</sub>), NEP had been formally integrated into the official structure of education governance, thereby modifying that structure in the process.

Having identified the sequence of events that lead to structural elaboration, we further discuss in the next section the tensions that were evident between morphostasis and morphogenesis and how NEP responded to them in order to achieve structural change.

### **Morphogenesis in the geometry of Cambodian educational governance**

Analytically, the emergence of civil society in the education sector in Cambodia reveals, first, that the transition from social interaction to structural elaboration (or morphogenesis) is mediated by historical structures and, second, that civil society actors, or any new entrant, must often accommodate this structure before it can modify it, particularly in repressive contexts like that of Cambodia. Put differently, in the case of Cambodia, while NEP has more recently been able to push, in its own way, for structural elaboration, it first had to demonstrate its ability and willingness to serve the interests of the status quo (structural reproduction). NEP had to do this because other approaches—such as confronting the government or working outside the development partners—would only have resulted in NEP's continued marginalization, as was the case for NEP under its director prior to 2009.

By NEP's own admission, they purposefully became a non-threatening complement to the machinery of educational governance. To that end, NEP's director commented: “[Advocacy—] it's a little bit about strategizing, especially because in the past, you know, we say, ‘okay the government wants to do something,’ and then we do advocacy based on that” (CAM19, int1). One outcome of this approach has been the government's inclination, in turn, to engage with NEP. For example, whereas the government previously declined offers to join in NEP's research planning activities, they now participate. Of course, as a result of these dynamics, NEP ran the risk of only reproducing the government's perspective; yet, NEP had to first engage in this way in order to access and then to become part of the existing structures, for only then could it pursue a strategy of being tactfully critical.

Since 2009, NEP has positioned itself as an extension of the official structure of educational governance and, over time, gained the trust of MoEYS. NEP was able to gain this trust by responding appropriately to the structural conditions of the context within Cambodia and by strategically employing the resources made possible through its relationship with GCE. In

elaborating on the relationship that has resulted between NEP and MoEYS, NEP's director echoed an observation made by numerous interviewees:

For example, like teacher policies, they [the MoEYS] put the name of NEP in the small working group as well as in the technical working group .... In the retreat, they [MoEYS] say, "okay, NEP has to be there." In the committee they formed to prepare for the education congress, they also have NEP there. And the midterm review ..., they also invite NEP. So every time they have meeting or consultation or develop any new policy or revise policy or something—the name of NEP always appears in the list of invitations. (CAM19, int1, 21)

To continue, NEP's service to the structure is further evident on two accounts. First, MoEYS sees NEP as the coordinator and filter for education NGOs—as evidenced by the fact that, when a local NGO attempted to communicate directly with the MoEYS, that NGO was told, "No, don't talk to us, talk to NEP. NEP will talk to us" (CAM11, notes). Secondly, MoEYS utilizes NEP as a means to reach out to other education NGOs across the country (CAM7, 1).

NEP has thus cooperated with MoEYS on its initiatives and has served as a conduit through which the government can access the capacity and knowledge of education NGOs more broadly. Because NEP has acted as a facilitator of "practical" information from those areas of the country where the government has difficulty monitoring (there are over 6,449 primary schools), it is seen as a "good partner" by the government and has become one of the three main pillars of the education sector, along with development partners and MoEYS.

Only once reaching this point, where NEP was considered one of the three pillars of the education sector, could NEP be formally incorporated into the structure of education governance, an act which was made official by its attainment of a permanent seat in the ESWG and JTWG during the first quarter of 2012 (CAM19, int2, 8-9). The importance of this result should not be understated, for these two spaces represent the pinnacle of Cambodian education politics. Subsequently, from this position, NEP has been able to shift from structural reproduction to structural elaboration.

To that end, for example, it could begin to focus on raising its concerns and pushing to change both the dynamics of educational governance as well as the content of education policy itself, though this has had to be done in ways that are sensitive to the nature of the context. As one representative of NEP stated, "[we] want to convince the government in a way that won't upset the government" (CAM10, 02). This often means working closely with the technical departments of MoEYS and voicing feedback in the form of suggestions. NEP's director explained the dynamic this way:

We [(NEP)] try ... to make sure that we include as much input as possible from the other side [(i.e., MoEYS)] into the draft policy developed by development partners. .... For example, ... child friendly schools ..., we work with the Department of Primary Education. We raise our concern, you know, we raise them together. And sometimes we also invite them to conduct a presentation for us, and during that time [NGO] members can make some suggestions and ask some questions and so on. So this is another way, you know, to provide input through the technical department. (CAM19, int1, 12-13)

Yet the clearest evidence of NEP's growth and changing role came from the development

partners themselves. Whereas NEP previously had to work through the development partners, they can now push for change on their own. On this point, the words of an education specialist from ADB are particularly revelatory:

Before [a] couple years ago [MoEYS would] ... not consider the point raised by NEP .... [unless] the donors support that point. So, basically, I told NEP, if you find anything interesting, you have to convince DP [development partners] and DP will... I mean donors like ADB, World Bank, [those] more influential to the government – send through them, if they support. But now they [NEP] can even do it. You know they can say “hey government! What I have done, we have a team of professionals ... This is evidence-based, ... I just want to let you know—and if ... you need justification, you need any information from this finding, ... they are ready.” You know, they say “Take it, this is my recommendation. Take it.” You know, you are not feeding the government, but make the food available if they want to eat, and you know they have choices. (CAM8, 4)

Clearly, then, by integrating itself into the structural conditioning of educational governance over time NEP can now separate itself a bit. It can now plan its own initiatives and strategies for engagement with the government, such as research dissemination events and work with MoEYS departmental directors. The morphogenetic sequence thus begins anew.

## **Conclusion**

As the newest member at the educational policy making table in Cambodia, NEP is evidence of morphogenesis caused by the new geometry of power in educational governance. The fact that NEP now comprises one of the three pillars of educational governance signals that the structure has, in fact, been modified, which will necessarily affect the agency of all those involved in educational governance just as the initial structural conditioning affected the agency of NEP. Into the future, it remains to be seen whether NEP can engender further structural elaboration.

NEP’s ability to become part of the structure of educational governance in Cambodia was significantly influenced by the GCE generally and the CSEF in particular. The organizational agency that produced morphogenesis would have been impossible without GCE’s transnational support of NEP through the CSEF, which provided more than simply financial infusions. As noted, it also allowed members of NEP to learn from and to increase its capacity through regional and international meetings of civil society, such that it could more effectively engage with the MoEYS and development partners’ structure in Cambodian educational governance.

It should be remembered that although NEP finds itself in a position to influence education policy-making, which was mainly the result of the re-scaling of actors and spaces in global educational governance, it may nevertheless legitimize and re-produce state power. As NEP navigates the politics of policy making going forward, it may find itself agreeing with MoEYS more often than challenging it. Since the government has a history of repressing critical voices in various sectors, it is likely NEP will confront a moment when it has to weigh its institutional survival as a pillar of educational governance with effective policy reform that may be critical of MoEYS. A critical assessment of the impact of NEP on policy is a future topic of research to see if NEP can engender genuine change or whether it becomes a conduit through which state power is re-produced.

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