



# រដ្ឋវិទ្យា ពលរដ្ឋសកម្ម សំរាប់ការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍ប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ

## KECHHNAY<sup>1</sup>

### Strengthening the State, Empowering Citizens for Democratic Development

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Proposal for a Four-Year Policy Research and Capacity-Building Programme under the Democratic Governance and Public Sector Reform Programme of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This proposal presents a new research programme emerging from Cambodia Development Resource Institute's (CDRI) current Democratic Governance and Public Sector Reform (DG&PSR) Programme, funded since 2002 through a generous grant by SIDA and DFID under the auspices of the Policy-Oriented Research Programme on Decentralisation (PORDEC)<sup>2</sup>. This new programme reflects the five fundamental principles of development assistance policies of both SIDA and DFID:

1. The promotion of democratic governance through a rights-based approach to development;
2. A 'demand-driven' approach to development programmes and projects with clear local ownership;
3. Institution-building and civic engagement;
4. The integration of gender as a cross-cutting issue; and
5. A focus on local human resource capacity development.

This proposal reviews existing research findings and then presents a framework for a future research agenda, providing an outline of key research questions and studies which have emerged from engagement with: 1) international theoretical literatures, 2) Cambodia's current political environment; and 3) an analysis of key stakeholders for whom the research will have policy implications. In particular, the new programme is designed to focus on two aspects of Cambodia's current political and administrative environment: the 'dynamics of change' Cambodia is currently experiencing and the 'hybrid' system that is emerging which is a mix of both democratic structures and local traditional political orientations. The proposal closes with an articulation of a professional staff development and policy outreach strategy, highlighting the importance of promoting local ownership of both the research design and findings.

The DG&PSR research team is uniquely positioned to take on this ambitious research agenda, having developed a deep understanding of the evolution of the government reform process since its establishment in 2002. As Cambodian researchers, the team holds extensive local knowledge and is able to promote Cambodian ownership of international-standard research, injecting a rigorously formulated and independent Cambodian perspective into international assessments of Cambodia's post-war development trajectory.

### Programme Objectives

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<sup>1</sup> *KECHHNAY* is a metaphor which connotes initiative and process to innovate, transform, brighten, sharpen, improve, and polish an ongoing piece of work to achieve the best outcome.

<sup>2</sup> In mid-2006 the Policy-Oriented Research Programme on Decentralisation was renamed the Democratic Governance and Public Sector Reform Programme.

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The proposed programme will extend the CDRI research programme to achieve five objectives:

1. Analyse the emergence of democratic governance in Cambodia and the dynamics of public sector reform, focusing on the informal, invisible and intangible variables that have been given insufficient weight in previous policy studies;
2. Develop and disseminate policy-relevant findings which inform and influence policy makers confronting contemporary problems of democratic governance and public sector reform in Cambodia;
3. Draw upon international theoretical work to inform a Cambodia-specific research agenda as well as contribute empirical research back to the international dialogues on DG&PSR;
4. Develop the knowledge and professional skills of the emerging generation of Cambodian public administration and political science specialists and researchers at CDRI, in other academic institution in Cambodia, and in the government and donor community; and
5. Promote local ownership of the research programme and stakeholder ownership of the findings.

### **Achievements of Current Programme**

PORDEC was established in late 2002 to provide policy analysis support for the Decentralization & Deconcentration (D&D) reforms. The research programme plays a invaluable role in providing objective and informed analysis on both the progress and fundamental challenges of these reforms to major stakeholders, who include government officials at all levels, donors, civil society groups and other research institutions. To date, the programme has completed six major studies: The Challenges of Decentralisation Design, Fiscal Decentralisation, Commune Service Delivery, Local Government Responsiveness, an Election Study, and a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey.

CDRI is currently conducting two studies on public sector accountability and local government responsiveness of sub-national governments which reflects Cambodia's shift towards a new reform era. The current phase encompasses a broad set of D&D reforms and the development of Organic Law that will restructure every level and function of government in the coming decade. The accountability study, focused on the provincial level in particular, has already produced a substantial literature review and empirical evidence which provides evidence of the key accountability challenges the country currently faces. In particular, this work explores the dynamics within the neo-patrimonial administrative environment, studies their influence on the future of Cambodia's reform process, and identifies potential accountability mechanisms upon which to base such reforms. The local government responsiveness study is conducted to investigate whether citizens can demand accountability from their commune representatives. "Responsiveness" was defined as a function of three concepts: speed, quality and quantity. The responsiveness of commune councils determines the impact of decentralisation on poverty. This study is also used for a PhD dissertation currently in progress by one of the research team.

### **Summary of Key Research Findings**

Under the initial PORDEC programme, CDRI has focused on studies which explore various dimensions of institutional development and facets of state-society relations, including strategies for state interaction with society, as well as forms of civic engagement back towards the state. The findings suggest that the reform process is in a state of 'permanent stalled transition' based on three major conclusions, which form the basis for the next proposed phase of the research:

1. Although the battery of formal democratic and bureaucratic structures are evolving, public sector reforms are running up against a range of informal institutions, cultural predispositions, invented 'traditions,' and politicised networks, many of which are either non-democratic or anti-democratic.
2. The hybrid system generated by these processes has powerful implications for the ways that state officials regard their role and their relationship with non-state actors, and consequently, for democratic governance.
3. It is taken for granted that people 'want' better and more democratic governance, but it is not clear how they view themselves as citizens, the kinds of responsibilities they think citizenship imposes upon them, or the kinds of strategies they believe are possible or appropriate to use in engaging with the state.

### **Analytic Framework and Guiding Questions for Next Programme Phase: Beyond D&D**

In order to bring these questions regarding *institutional development* and the D&D Reform into focus, major questions need to be investigated about *how the state relates to Cambodian society* and *how Cambodian*

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*citizens, in turn, relate to their state.* The overall theme for CDRI's next research programme is thus encapsulated under the notion of the '*dynamics of change*' within institutions and processes that are affected by the D&D reform. The following broad sets of questions correspond with these three spheres, as well as allow an expansion from a focus on study of the formal reform process to consideration of fundamental and inter-related issues such as poverty reduction, gender equality and conflict management:

1. *How does the Cambodian state function at present? What are the institutional arrangements necessary for Cambodia to achieve its D&D reform objectives? To what extent does ongoing implementation of the reforms reflect these arrangements and what obstacles are there?*
2. *How are state-society relations organised in different policy areas, and at different levels of government? How do state actors understand their relationship with non-state actors? How far does the state penetrate society? Where state penetration is limited, what intermediaries operate to bridge the gap?*
3. *What is the Cambodian concept of good citizen and how do members of Cambodian society understand their role as citizens? How does this affect the strategies they use when they engage with the state in various ways?*

This research also uses the concept of '*hybridity*' as a starting point for re-evaluating what works, and how, within the Cambodian state, as well as in relations between state and society. 'Hybridity' refers to a situation where democratic structures merge with local/historical political cultures and institutions; exhibiting both authoritarian and democratic characteristics (Diamond, 2002); operating through both formal/bureaucratic and informal/patrimonial mechanisms (van de Walle 2001). Such a frame suggests the following kinds of questions:

1. Which aspects of the system are based on formal institutions, technical objectives, rational administrative procedures and democratic values? Which are based on informal institutions, partisan political objectives and, "traditional" forms of organisation and display values that are not democratic (although not necessarily undemocratic)?
2. Why do different parts of the system display different combinations of these characteristics? What is the nature of the relationship between these two different aspects of the system—contradictory, mutually supportive, or varying? Which characteristics dominate in different policy areas?
3. What are the implications of this for the way that state officials perceive their role and their relationship to wider society? How do women participate as officials in the hybrid state, and how does the state engage with gender equality, poverty reduction, and conflict management?
4. What are the implications of this for the way that ordinary Cambodians understand their status as citizens and their relationship to the state? How do women and other marginalised groups articulate their demands and needs to the hybrid state and its officials?
5. How are all these factors, in combination, likely to promote, constrain or otherwise affect the direction of institutional reform—including the current fundamental restructuring of the state implicit in D&D? How will the reforms affect state officials' perceptions of their roles and citizens' strategies for engaging the state?
6. How can we evaluate this type of dynamic hybrid system in terms of its mode of functioning and its political, administrative and socio-economic effects?

We propose two sets of criteria which we can use to evaluate the trajectory of public sector institutional reform, state-society relations and civic engagement. First, we evaluate how 'hybridity' affects the state's ability to perform some of its central functions; namely, the making and enforcement of rules; the extraction and redistribution of resources; and the ability to conceptualise and guard the public good. Secondly, we use case studies of selected policy areas to focus on governance outcomes in the reform context. The following sub-sections highlight specific studies within the three core areas of this framework.

***Institutional Development:*** Institutional development in the public sector represents both the continued evolution and the deliberate reform of state agencies. In the context of a hybrid state, the existing functions and activities of states do not emanate from just the formal legal framework. Specific study topics under this theme are:

1. Organic Law Analysis

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2. Implementing the Decentralisation and Deconcentration reforms: Effects on the Province and District
3. Political Economy of Sectoral Decentralisation and Deconcentration
4. State Coordination and the Public Good
5. Implementing Fiscal Decentralisation in a Neo-Patrimonial Context

***State-Society Relations and their Intermediaries:*** The state's ability to exercise its core functions (e.g. the production and enforcement of rules; the extraction and redistribution of resources; and the ability to conceptualise and guard the public good) is not only determined by institutional arrangements; it is also determined by the state's relationship with society. To be effective, this relationship should be characterised by responsiveness, representativeness, and perceptions of reciprocity. However, in the Cambodian context, a large body of literature regards the gap between rulers and ruled as the main historical shortcoming in producing a state-society relationship that facilitates the core functions of the state and produces positive outcomes in policy terms (eg. Chandler 1998; Mabbet and Chandler 1996; Peang-Meth 1991). Specific study topics under this theme are:

1. Consequences of the Electoral System: The Concept of Opposition in Cambodian Political Culture
2. State Responsiveness in a Democratic Society
3. Leadership in Local Politics

***Civic Engagement:*** This is defined as the sphere in which individuals, families, communities, and non-state actors interact with one another and with representatives of the state. Once again, this is a sphere which is governed by formal regulations and procedures (e.g. elections); informal relationships; and cultural values and norms. In this case, it is understood as the study of a bottom-up process focused on values and attitudes governing political strategies used by civil society to engage the state. Specific study topics under this theme are:

1. Concepts of Citizenship
2. The Rise and Role of the Middle Class
3. Reciprocity between State and Society: the Foundations for a Tax System
4. Neo-Patrimonialism from Below: A Study of Cambodian Grassroots Political Culture

***Cross-Cutting Theme and Cross-Unit Collaborative Studies:*** Gender has been identified as an intersecting theme for a majority of the above studies and will be incorporated and reflected in each of the studies throughout the programme period. These include a focus on: (i) the participation of women in institutions as decision-makers and state officials at the national and sub-national levels; (ii) the engagement of women as citizens with the state and its institutions and mediators; (iii) the capacity of the state to promote gender equality, and to mainstream gender within institutions, including through policy, programmes and budget arrangements; and (iv) the impact of the hybrid state on gender relations more broadly, including whether state responses enable or constrain gender equality. Specific study identified under this theme is the study on Gender in the Hybrid State in Cambodia.

CDRI also recognizes that issues pertaining to social and economic development and poverty reduction are in fact multi-dimensional. As a result, policy relevant research often requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Future research projects at CDRI will involve more cross-unit collaboration among the five research units. Specific study topics under this theme are: Natural Resource Management and Governance, and Public Finance and Trade Reform.

### **Research Design for the Programme**

***Output:*** Over the proposed four-year term, the programme is envisioned to produce six substantial Working Papers as a result of explorations within the 3 key streams of *Institutional Development, State-Society Relations and their Intermediaries, and Civic Engagement*. Additional working papers will be produced for the cross-cutting topic of gender, mainstreaming its increasing importance across all areas of CDRI's research. Working papers serve as the basis for an edited volume at the end of the project. The study findings could also be expanded into other publication formats, such as short policy briefs, *Annual Development Review* articles, conference papers or journal articles. Khmer-language products, designed specifically with accessibility to a broad spectrum of Cambodians (e.g. policymakers, researchers, and regular citizens) in mind, will make up an increasing percentage of CDRI products.

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**Professional Development:** The team has identified a range of skills that are critical to the next phase of the programme, including an improved understanding of multi-disciplinary and cross-collaborative research approaches; better analytic conceptualisation; research methodologies; and a more comprehensive understanding of general development topics. As such, the proposal includes a professional development programme focused on enhancing individual research skills through a graduated process of training supported by a Research Advisory Team, which results in incremental career advancement based on the attainment of new skills.

**Research Support:** An important component of this output schedule will be on-going internal and external support from the Research Advisory Team (RAT), which is composed of an internal Research Advisor, Research Director, and group of external Research Advisors who will take mentoring responsibility for each substantive research area of focus. A new form of relationship between local researchers and international technical advisors will be established where the research advisor plays a role more closely resembling that of a PhD supervisor. The internal Research Advisor for the research team will play an important role in backstopping team members in their individual projects between external advisor visits and work with the Research Director and Research Manager to coordinate the ongoing work process of the research team as a whole.

**Promoting Cambodian Ownership:** Local professional development and Cambodian researcher ownership over the research programme is key and will be accomplished through three key activities. First, the research agenda will be driven by Cambodian policy problems, appropriately guided by theory, with the explicit goal of informing and recommending policy options to policy makers. Second, the research framework and study design are to be conceptualised by Cambodian researchers and prioritised with regard to the need to strengthen existing skill areas, as well as build new ones. The outputs of the research results will be disseminated in such a way as to promote ownership by the Cambodian stakeholders most affected by the issue areas covered. Relevant and timely feedback and information sharing will be facilitated through policy-relevant findings, including short briefs which provide both analysis and recommendations to government officials, as well as simplified and illustrated summaries which deepen knowledge of the policy process for local communities. As part of this strategy, Khmer language will be the primary language for designing, conducting and writing up research.

### **Policy Outreach**

During the PORDEC programme, CDRI learned that there is a need for a more coordinated and consistent policy outreach program for research and policy products. The Cambodian policy environment represents a difficult environment in which to monitor policy impacts, as the hybrid nature of the state means that policy decisions are often taken, or at least influenced, by informal coalitions within state bodies. The focus of research finding dissemination will thus be through a wider range of products, both in terms of written outputs and opportunities for verbal discussion. In particular, the following principles will guide this process:

1. Greater focus on developing a variety of innovative products, ranging from policy briefs for busy government officials, to simplified and illustrated summaries for sharing with local communities.
2. Greater attention will also be paid to assessing impact by creating forums for feedback by means of dialogue, rather than written products. In particular, stakeholders will be included in research conceptualisation and design. This process will increase our accountability to both local citizens and public servants, who we envision not merely as research subjects, but *co-researchers*, by feeding results from our fieldwork back directly to those who were studied. The research team will also seek partners who are in a position to take our specific findings and apply them in a broader setting (across different localities, institutions, sectors etc.) through their daily work.
3. Use of the Khmer language, rather than English, as the primary language for designing, conducting and writing up research. This will help to strengthen the terms of political discourse in Cambodia and will promote local ownership of concepts emanating from international policy prescriptions. This will make our research findings easier for Khmer readers to understand, debate, and act upon, as well as potentially contributing to the quality of discussion in a variety of forums.
4. Greater attention to producing policy relevant findings in the form of options for Cambodian policy makers, presented with analysis of their implications.
5. Proactive engagement with an international audience so that CDRI is able to inject a rigorously formulated and independent Cambodian perspective into international assessments of Cambodia's post-war trajectory, promoting a degree of Cambodian ownership over the way that problems of

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post-conflict states and societies are represented and understood by international policy makers and analysts.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

During the inception phase of the programme, a detailed annual work plan will be prepared providing a specific timeline, output and strategy to achieve professional development objectives and policy outreach goals. In addition to biannual reports to the CDRI Board of Directors and Activity Reports to SIDA and DFID (quarterly and annually), regular progress will be monitored internally by the team, as well as reviewed periodically by a team of independent external evaluators as part of CDRI's ongoing evaluation process. Evaluation of the research outputs will take place via a number of mechanisms, including:

1. Internal peer review, including establishment of a formal ethical review process;
2. Ongoing monitoring and feedback as to the scholarly rigour of the fieldwork and analysis from the international research advisory team;
3. Ongoing feedback as to the timeliness and usefulness of the results from government sources via the Cambodian Advisory Team and key working groups;
4. Periodic evaluation of the scope, direction and content of the programme by a team of independent external researchers, appointed with the assistance of the international research advisory team;
5. External peer review of articles submitted for publication in international journals;
6. In addition to the overall programme monitoring and evaluation, a stakeholder analysis, as well as complementary communication and policy outreach strategy, will be developed for each specific study to further assess impact.