

# A Case Study of NGOCRC prepared for ODI

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# **1. Background to the research**

The extent to which networks can influence policy or carry out other functions is affected by different constraints in any given location. In Cambodia, there are varying constraints, including political and social factors. The study of networks in Cambodia is a new area; there has been comparatively little research carried out in this field. It is important to note how constraints can affect the potential of a network to carry out its mandate and/or influence policy, and what specific strengths and weaknesses there are in Cambodia affecting the environment in which networks operate. A previous research study on the COSECAM network identified preliminary findings on networks in Cambodia. Building on this study, this research project aims to supplement these initial findings by analysing a further three networks in the country.

## **1.1 Objectives**

This research project was contracted by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The aim of the project was to produce case studies of three NGO networks in Cambodia to back up the initial COSECAM study, which dealt with the effectiveness of the network model within the country in terms of influencing policy and carrying out its own mandate. The project used the function/form framework (as detailed by the RAPID website) to identify: i) the functions of the network; ii) the network's structure and how this affects its functions; iii) the ways in which it attempts to carry out its functions; and iv) its successes and failures to do so.

## **1.2 Methodology**

The research was carried out over 45 days between 1 April and 15 July 2006. It was decided to select three NGOs (the NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child – NGOCRC; MEDiCAM – membership organisation for NGOs active in the health sector in Cambodia; and ECPAT Cambodia) as the networks for focus. The reasons for these choices were as follows: i) NGOCRC and ECPAT Cambodia were selected owing to the background of the researchers, both of whom work or have worked within the fields of child sexual exploitation, trafficking and children's rights in Cambodia, and owing to the significance of the issue in Cambodia (which makes for a great deal of funding and therefore a great many NGOs/networks); ii) MEDiCAM was selected owing to its prominence in Cambodian society and the its importance of the work it carries out.

Research took the form of a brief literature review of background information on i) the network itself; ii) the context in which the network carries out its activities; and iii) the current debate on networks and the function/form framework. This was followed by the development of a questionnaire for participants. Three members of staff from each network and one staff member from each of four NGO member organisations for each network were to be identified to be interview participants. Interviews were for the main one-on-one, although some respondents worked by email with the questionnaires.

## **1.3 Constraints and caveats**

Despite the proliferation of NGO and other reports on Cambodia, there has not been much research carried out in this area. The idea of studying the significance and impact of networks is relatively new (although see Bradley, 2005, for the exception to this, on networks in natural resources management, and RAPID's preliminary findings on the MEDiCAM network on its website). This means that the findings from this report are preliminary and should not be taken as confirmed conclusions: it is recommended that findings lead to further discussion in the future. It is hoped that findings of all four studies will be synthesised as a first step towards this.

Cambodia faces many problems in its attempt to develop. Identified in this report is the lack of trust resulting from Cambodia's significant and recent problems of war and political and social upheaval. This has resulted in a climate of distrust and competitiveness (see the initial report on COSECAM). As a result, it was found that some participants found it difficult to answer questions surrounding strengths and weakness. Participants do not like to appear to be criticising their organisation or network. This research has made an effort to reassure participants that the report is an attempt to assess conditions for networks in Cambodia and not merely a critical review of the network itself. There were also some difficulties in terms of understanding of the concept of networks and the purpose of the current study. The team attempted to clarify these issues.

The biggest issue was that the network had issues of clarity, funding and structure which led to unwillingness to interview, a lack of information, and a lack of confidence in answering questions. NGOCRC is in need of restructuring and many staff are new. Consequently, this report may reflect the current paucity of information; it will also show problems arising from the difficulties NGOCRC is facing at the present time. One of the impacts of this on the project was that it was not possible to interview the full number of participants as originally hoped. Only one member of the network was available for interview, and only two member NGOs showed a willingness to respond to questions. While this represents a constraint to the project, it also helps to underline constraints to the network's ability to function.

#### **1.4 Structure of the paper**

Interview participants spoke of issues of relevance to all sections of the report. It was therefore decided that findings from interviews were to be incorporated throughout the paper: there is no individual section on findings. Section 1 has introduced the research. Section 2 of the paper will detail a background of NGOCRC, looking briefly at its background, structure, objectives and activities. This section will analyse the functions of the network. Section 3 will supply a brief analysis of the country context, for the purpose of identifying major challenges faced by a network in carrying out its mandate in Cambodia (external environment). Section 4 will then look at the successes and failures of the network in carrying out its mandate, according to participants and according to further analysis of the primary and secondary information. Section 5 will make an analysis of the ways in which activities are constrained by the form of the network and the challenges identified in Section 3. Section 6 will give brief initial conclusions. Annexed to the document will be a brief bibliography, a list of NGOCRC members, organisation details, a list of interviewees and a summary of the questionnaire used.

## 2. Organisational overview<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 Structure of NGOCRC

NGOCRC (NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child) was established in 1994 and registered as a local NGO in 2002. It has 46 member organisations, most of which are local Cambodian NGOs. It is a national coalition of NGOs, and is in nature non-governmental, independent and democratic. Its aim is to provide a network for organisations working together to help children in Cambodia receive full respect of rights. Membership is currently free and open to all organisations working on child rights, although it is hoped in future to charge US\$10 for NGOs and US\$20 for IOs per year in the future to help with running costs. This is under review at the current time.

The main funder is Save the Children Norway. Other small grant donors have included Red Cross Norway, University of Singapore, Plan International, UNICEF and World Vision International. The organisation is based in Phnom Penh but some work occurs in the provinces through the activities of its local NGO members.

The structure of NGOCRC is under review: the secretariat is hoping to restructure and to revise and update the policy and statute. At the present time, information on structure is rather unclear, perhaps owing to the new staff in place and the identified need for change. The structure is hierarchical, consisting of three levels (see Figure 1). At the top is the full NGOCRC, under which lies the Executive (Steering) Committee. Under this lies the Secretary General (an individual); the last level includes five cross-member Working Groups and the information, administration and child rights components (network staff). The five working groups work on: i) Child Freedom; ii) Child Rights and Family Union; iii) Health Foundation and Child Welfare; iv) Education Leisure and Culture; and iv) Child Rights in Special Situations. Network staff include IT, administration/finance and child rights departments.

The Executive Committee consists of five individuals from member NGOs and takes direction from the full committee above it. Both meet monthly. The members of the Executive Committee have been voted for by NGOCRC members and serve for three years. Roles are Director, Vice-Director, Secretary, Finance and Member. A list of names/origins of Executive Committee members was not made available for this project. The Executive Committee has the role of decision making regarding network activities. The Secretary General does not have the power to make decisions: his role is to support the network staff and the Working Groups and direct activities according to Executive Committee decisions.

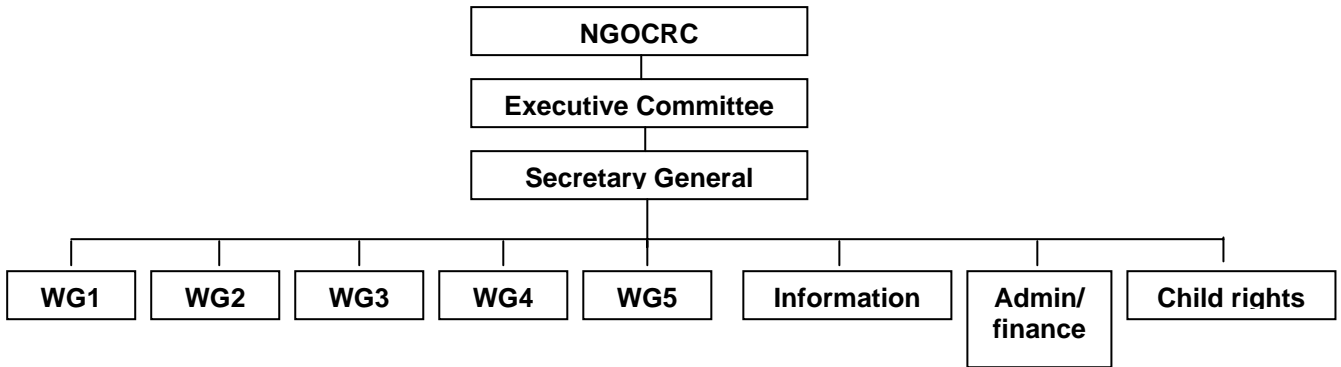
The network staff are responsible for coordination and support of member organisations in implementing programme activities through the Working Groups, in terms of technical, capacity-building and administrative support. Staff are also responsible for studying child rights to enable production of extra documentary support for the network. Eight staff are employed full time in the IT, admin/finance and child rights department. A staff list was not available.

The Working Groups are made up of members of the network. Their roles, in their respective areas, are to provide documentation, opinions and recommendations on government draft reports on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and to provide consultants for government planning. Again, a list of members was not made available.

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<sup>2</sup> This section is taken from the NGOCRC background document and from various supporting interviews, where an attempt was made to clarify points.

**Figure 1: Organisational structure of NGOCRC**



Source: adapted from NGOCRC background document.

See Annex 2 for a list of members.

## **2.2 Objectives and activities**

NGOCRC's vision is to network and collaborate towards helping children in Cambodia receive full respect of rights. Its long-term plan is to monitor enforcement of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Cambodia. Its mission is as follows:

- 1 To raise CRC awareness to children and their parents and all relevant government officials and encourage its effective implementation.
- 2 To advocate for children's rights, especially to encourage government to formulate and amend laws and policies for children. This involves working with the CNCC (Cambodian National Council for Children) and holding roundtables with government.
- 3 To monitor and develop a supplementary report on the implementation of the CRC in Cambodia and submit to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- 4 To build capacity of NGO members and follow up on activities.

Currently, this is taking the form of activities for 2006 as follows:

- Gathering and sharing documentation on child rights to the network, and encouraging the network to do likewise with their partners and contacts (Obj. 1).
- Conducting awareness raising on children's issues in public areas to government and families during national or traditional events and in the media (Obj. 1).
- Producing dissemination materials: a bulletin every trimester along with other materials, such as posters, website and video spots (Obj. 1).
- Distributing case documentation to parliament members, officials, embassies, donor agencies, ministries, NGOs and INGOs, children and media (Obj. 2).
- Organising meetings with parliament and relevant officials to lobby and follow up their commitments on child rights (Obj. 2).
- Encouraging the attendance of law-related members of NGOCRC in government meetings where there is a need for recommendations on draft laws, such as that on juvenile justice, and encouraging the cooperation of legal aid organisations and government institutions in this (Obj. 2).
- Organising a press conference on child abuse annually (Obj. 2).
- Producing and analysing a database of information on the child situation for annual dissemination, with the aim of being able to compile a future shadow report to the UN, including research on child rights and production of a definition of at-risk children (Obj. 3).
- Providing knowledge training for the network on child rights, relationships and problem solving (Obj 4).
- Providing training to Working Groups on information collection, analysis and reporting.

Activities also include strengthening and updating the structure of NGOCRC and putting in place procedures and principles to reinforce the efficiency of the network's work. Currently, there are no strategy documents in place.

### **2.3 Functions of NGOCRC according to the RAPID framework**

RAPID uses the network definition of Portes and Yeo (2001) which suggests that networks can fulfil six, non-exclusive functions: filter; amplify; invest/provide; convene; build communities; and facilitate. According to Bradley (2005: 8), 'networks may function in a variety of ways, but generally speaking, they aim to either bridge the gaps between different sectors and interest groups or else to build consensus and capacity within one particular group, so that it can advocate for its own agenda'. RAPID also details the supra-functions or roles which guide their work: **agency**, which 'denotes a network that is charged by its members to become the main agent of the change they aim to achieve' and **support**, which 'supplies the network members with the resources (goods and services) it needs to carry out their own research and policy advocacy'.

In terms of the **functions** of NGOCRC, an analysis of the above objectives and the roles and responsibilities of the various parts of the structure of the network shows that, to differing extents, NGOCRC covers all six of the functions mentioned above (with the possible exception of community building, which can be included within investment/provision and facilitating). NGOCRC's objectives and activities do not fit neatly into a one-factor-per-function pattern; mostly, the functions carried out are covered by more than one objective or activity. In fact, the functions of NGOCRC follow those of COSECAM, reviewed in a previous study.

#### *Filtering*

NGOCRC filters information from its members and from current events in its field to its members and the general public, in its attempts to raise awareness and advocate in the area of child rights. For members, this is mainly discussed at meetings, as there is a lack of high-level technology available. For external actors, the role is mainly an amplification one.

#### *Amplifying*

NGOCRC also plays an amplification role, in terms of channelling information into documents and reports, particularly for government officials and for use by children and the families, to raise awareness on child rights issues and to advocate for policy. Dissemination occurs through communication and networking externally.

#### *Investing/providing*

NGOCRC aims to provide capacity building for staff and for local member NGOs, as well as for relevant officials, although no financial investment is made into individual NGOs.

#### *Convening*

NGOCRC fulfils a convening function within the network to ensure that activities can take place and to enable cooperation and coordination among member NGOs. Convening also takes place externally, in meetings and roundtables with officials.

#### *Building communities*

NGOCRC does not build communities directly, except in terms of its **investment** function above.

#### *Facilitating*

NGOCRC does not carry out facilitation activities except in terms of its other functions as described above. In this sense, in its **agency** role, NGOCRC contracts researchers, produces documents and carries out advocacy activities towards effecting policy change. In

its **support** role, NGOCRC aims to invest in capacity building activities for members and non-members (although this is constrained by budgetary problems).

Please see Figure 2 for a breakdown of NGOCRC’s objectives, responsibilities, activities and functions. Included here as an objective is the activity of strengthening and updating the structure of NGOCRC and putting in place procedures and principles to reinforce the efficiency of the network’s work, as this is key to the future of the network. This objective will have a great impact on the form of the network, which is currently reflected as the main constraint to its functioning.

**Figure 2: NGOCRC objectives, responsibilities, activities and functions**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Function</b>
1. To raise CRC awareness to children and their parents and all relevant government officials, and encourage its effective implementation	Working Groups, network staff and Executive Committee	Gathering and sharing documentation; conducting awareness raising on children’s issues in public areas to government and families; producing dissemination materials	Filtering Amplifying Convening Facilitating <b>Agency and Support</b>
2. To advocate for children’s rights, especially to encourage government to formulate and amend laws and policies for children. This involves working with the CNCC	Working Groups and Executive Committee	Distributing case documentation; organising meetings to lobby; encouraging cooperation of legal aid organisations and government institutions; organising annual press conference on child abuse	Filtering Amplifying Convening Facilitating <b>Agency and Support</b>
3. To monitor and develop a supplementary report on the implementation of CRC in Cambodia and submit to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child	Working Groups and network staff	Producing and analysing a database of information on the child situation for annual dissemination, with the aim of compiling a shadow report to the UN, including research on child rights and production of a definition of at-risk children	Filtering Amplifying Facilitating <b>Agency and Support</b>
4. To build capacity of NGO members and follow-up on activities	Network staff	Providing knowledge training for the network on child rights, relationships, and problem solving; providing training to Working Groups on information collection, analysis and reporting	Investing/providing (Building communities) Facilitating <b>Support</b>
5. To strengthen and update the structure of NGOCRC	Executive Committee, Secretary General and network staff	Putting in place procedures and principles, creating strategy	Facilitating <b>Agency and Support</b>

### **3. External environment: challenges**

Findings in this sector come both from interviews with the network and member NGOs, and also from research analysis of current conditions. However, this is an overview of general conditions in Cambodia, not a specific review of issues that may have occurred within the network. This section primarily reviews challenges, particularly in the child rights area, which could impact a network's operations. Much of the base information here is drawn from the previous study on COSECAM and is reflected in the reports on the other networks, as external environment challenges are similar for all networks.

#### **3.1 Cultural challenges**

According to Bradley (2005: 36), 'it is important to consider Khmer culture and how it can affect networks and their functioning'. Cambodian culture has been through a difficult recent history. This is exemplified most famously in the Pol Pot era and its tearing asunder of local relationships and communities. As villages were separated and as the population was turned against one another during the purges and the 're-education' of the era, so trust between people became impossible. Families were compelled to betray each other; marriages were forced; and the paranoia of the central regime meant that nobody was safe and anybody could disappear at any given time. This regime was then followed by years of poverty, instability and guerrilla warfare from the deposed Khmer Rouge.

This has had an effect on present-day Cambodian society and its institutions. All interviewees responded that trust was a big problem in networking in Cambodia. Although organisations in Cambodia may be working towards a common goal, the issue of jealousy and suspicion leads them to hide their work from other 'competing' organisations, making it difficult for local NGOs who are interested in networking to cooperate with others. In some cases, it is difficult to organise workshops or meetings because participants do not want to share information or do not trust other participants because they do not know them. But, even when people are known, trust can be absent: as one interviewee stated, 'I don't trust anyone in my country, except my family, and often not even them'. This is also identified in Bradley (2005: 43), 'according to a member of the Forestry Network, "Some people are active, while some are free riders. For example, I myself tried to develop a proposal and then other members copied from me. Some people do not accept others' ideas for improvement.'

This is exacerbated by other aspects of Khmer culture: some of these are traditional and some have been adopted as a result of the recent history of the country. As Bradley (2005: 36) states, 'many Khmers hesitate to ask others for help ... questioning is not common in Asian culture. Questioning may be perceived as a way of accusing or looking down on someone.' This is a part of the wide Asian concept of 'losing face' and often leads to actors preferring not to communicate with others so as not to seem lacking in knowledge, or to them agreeing with something without really being committed. Khmer reluctance to 'lose face' means that participants are often not motivated to join training or to admit failure. Capacity is growing steadily, and many Cambodians are fully involved in building the capacity of other Cambodians. These actors can be treated with suspicion or jealousy. Capacity is generally seen as low of local NGOs in the countryside: it is hard to attract staff with capacity to fill jobs outside the capital, as conditions are poor and infrastructure is weak. It can be difficult to reach those outside Phnom Penh with capacity building. Khmer society is also hierarchical, which means that people build relationships within the patron-client system so that they can obtain 'security and opportunities in return for support and agreement with his/her decisions. This system makes it very difficult to ensure genuine participation' (ibid: 37).

#### **3.2 Challenges in the NGO climate**

It is often hard to motivate people to attend meetings; in some cases, participants will not attend without receiving a per diem, even if the meeting is close by and short. This is in



particular because of the high prevalence of NGO meetings and jargon in Cambodia, much of which is difficult for members of local NGOs to cope with and which can contribute to workshop/bureaucracy overload. This has an effect on efforts to coordinate among members, particularly if they are outside the capital and the network is heavily centralised: Cambodia is sometimes as seen as the 'Republic of Phnom Penh' because of the difference in infrastructure and conditions between the capital and the provinces.

In addition, the NGO climate in Cambodia is hard to work in. The format for proposals and reports for local NGOs is difficult to master, and concepts such as indicators, objectives and other are not widely understood. As such, it is difficult for participants to understand or agree on comprehensive approaches and strategies. Capacity is growing, but donors find that preparation of the necessary documents, accountability and monitoring are still weak. Furthermore, 'donors have a disproportionate amount of influence over policy process in Cambodia and therefore research needs to be aware of donor considerations' (ODI, 2005a). There is a high level of competition for funding; CSOs, donors and the government often blame each other for a lack of trust between stakeholders; and 'more money often equals a louder voice' (ODI, 2005b). At the same time, there is a 'general environment of mistrust, and 'finger pointing' between CSO community and the government'. CSOs are sometimes seen as confrontational, rather than as engaging with the government and providing constructive criticism (ODI, 2005a).

### **3.3 Challenges in the political arena**

As Bradley (2005: 8) suggests, 'In Cambodia, civil society has been given a relatively large degree of freedom to form associations or networks, both formal and informal.' However, the recent political climate in Cambodia has made it difficult for people to speak out or to perform advocacy activities. At the end of 2005, human rights activists were jailed for defamation of political authorities; some prominent figures were forced to flee (Development Weekly, 6-12 Feb 2006). All have recently been released, pardoned and/or allowed to return, and Prime Minister Hun Sen has made claims that he is going to work towards decriminalising defamation. Many believed that such actions were orchestrated for the benefit of donors prior to the Consultative Group meeting whereby donors allocate aid to Cambodia (Cambodia Daily, 2006b, 23 February). Whether or not this is the case, the temporary stability appears at the current time to be holding, although it can still be difficult for NGOs to appear to be criticising the government. This makes it hard to hold dialogue and promote advocacy.

Corruption still plays a big role in Cambodian politics. In terms of addressing sexual exploitation of children, it is vital to impact policy, particularly because it is alleged that high-ranking officers are involved in trafficking and other issues. There is a need to clarify the trafficking stance at all levels, especially government. There have been problems also in the area of the CNCC, which has a lack of personnel and is acknowledged as low in capacity and difficult to make contact with (NGOCRC, 2006: 49). There is a need for the CNCC to receive further human and financial resources, to implement an effective information management system, and to hold an institutional position. Without these factors, it is difficult for it to operate and, consequently, for networks to communicate with it and advocate/affect policy.

The judicial system is weak and the legislative power suffers the burden of heavy bureaucracy. There are often many actors involved and issues can cross ministries. For example, the Ministry of Justice has drafted the anti-trafficking law; the Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department exists within the Ministry of the Interior to address trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children; there are also departments within the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) (ActionAid Vietnam, 2006 unreleased: 9) which deal with the issue. This can cause confusion, leading to a lack of enforcement of existing laws. Laws for minors/juveniles are currently stuck at negotiation stages, and there is no juvenile court and no real understanding of child-sensitive approaches in legal issues.

## **4. Strengths and weaknesses**

This section arises from interviews with the staff of the network and the member NGOs, and an analysis of information emerging from these. It concludes by summarising strengths and weaknesses according to the six functions the network carries out (see Figure 2). It was difficult to analyse strengths and weakness owing to the reluctance of interviewees to respond in this area. As a result, the analysis is mainly limited to the external researchers' opinions on the knowledge gathered.

### **4.1 Raising awareness on CRC**

#### *Strengths*

NGOCRC has had a number of involvements in high-level meetings, including the Cambodia Consultative Group meeting, where donors allocate aid to Cambodia. The network has also published a number of key reports, including that to the Consultative Group which is accepted as the NGO position on child rights for the donor allocation meeting. NGOCRC is recognised nationally by the government and accepted as representative on the child rights issue. NGOCRC prioritises the awareness of its members and has convened a great many dissemination meetings with the network to enable the supply of information.

#### *Weaknesses*

NGOCRC has weaknesses in terms of information supply and dissemination, as the website and database systems are not yet up-to-date. NGOCRC has funding problems, and has a shortage of staff able to coordinate activities. Additionally, activities are hampered by difficulties and delays in making decisions (on the part of the Executive Committee) and lack of strategy. Often, staff of member NGOS do not attend meetings, or send different staff, which leads to confusion and lack of coherence on issues discussed.

### **4.2 Advocacy**

#### *Strengths*

NGOCRC's activities in its objective on awareness raising have led to its high profile in advocacy and lobbying activities. NGOCRC has had a number of involvements in high-level meetings, including the Cambodia Consultative Group meeting, where donors allocate aid to Cambodia. T The network has also published a number of key reports, including that to the Consultative Group which is accepted as the NGO position on child rights for the donor allocation meeting. NGOCRC is recognised nationally by the government and accepted as representative on the child rights issue. NGOCRC has hopes to increase activities here in the future through a focus on its website and database activities.

#### *Weaknesses*

NGOCRC has weaknesses in terms of the reach of its advocacy, owing partly to the external difficulties in the child rights arena and partly to shortages in funding and structural confusions regarding remit. These hamper its ability to form a coherent force. NGOCRC also has a shortage of staff able to coordinate activities. Additionally, activities are hampered by difficulties and delays in making decisions (on the part of the Executive Committee) and lack of strategy. Often, staff of member NGOS do not attend meetings, or send different staff, which leads to confusion and lack of coherence on issues discussed.

### **4.3 Strengthening capacities of local NGOs**

#### *Strengths*

NGOCRC places a high priority on strengthening the capacity of its members, and has conducted workshops and education on child rights and other issues. It has also provided

training of trainers. Feedback has shown that this training has been successful and well received. NGOCRC has hopes to increase training activities here in the future.

#### *Weaknesses*

NGOCRC has weaknesses in terms of shortages in funding and staff able to coordinate activities. Additionally, activities are hampered by difficulties and delays in making decisions (on the part of the Executive Committee) and lack of strategy. Often, staff of member NGOS do not attend meetings, or send different staff, which leads to confusion and lack of coherence on issues discussed.

### **4.4 Monitoring and developing supplementary report**

#### *Strengths*

NGOCRC's activities in its objective on awareness raising are reflected in these activities, and work is underway regarding the supplementary report. Strengths are similar to those in Section 4.1.

#### *Weaknesses*

NGOCRC has weaknesses in terms of information supply and dissemination, as the website and database systems are not yet up-to-date. NGOCRC has funding problems, and has a shortage of staff able to coordinate activities. Additionally, activities are hampered by difficulties and delays in making decisions (on the part of the Executive Committee) and lack of strategy. Often, staff of member NGOS do not attend meetings, or send different staff, which leads to confusion and lack of coherence on issues discussed.

### **4.6 Strengthening and updating the system**

#### *Strengths*

There is a keen interest in improving the form/structure of NGOCRC, and the new staff in place are prioritising this as key to the network's future success. Although NGOCRC is currently identified as weak in this area, it is clear that this has been accepted as a problem and a focus has been directed towards finding a solution.

#### *Weaknesses*

NGOCRC has weaknesses in terms of funding and a shortage of staff able to coordinate activities. Additionally, activities are hampered by difficulties and delays in making decisions (on the part of the Executive Committee).

### **4.7 Additional point**

It has also become clear through the course of these studies that many of the same activities/objectives are carried out by COSECAM and ECPAT Cambodia networks in the area of child rights. It seems that there is great potential here for needless duplication, where better coordination or joint networking may have a greater impact. This could result from Cambodia-specific factors, such as the reluctance to share information with 'outsiders' or to work together (see Section 5.7).

### **4.8 Summary: strengths and weaknesses in implementation of functions**

- The network is identified as having weaknesses in **filtering** information through databases and websites to member NGOs, although strengths were identified in terms of ability to filter other information, such as through conferences, reports and press releases.

- The network is identified as strong in **amplifying** in terms of advocacy and dissemination, with weaknesses in terms of reach and amount of information, owing to lack of structural organisation and funding.
- The network is identified as strong in **investing**, with many examples of successful workshops and trainings. However, there are some constraints encountered in terms of seeking funding for activities for training.
- The network is identified as strong in **convening**, with many examples of meetings organised and involvement with government officials on NGOCRC issues. However, often, staff of member NGOS do not attend meetings, or send different staff, which leads to confusion and lack of coherence on issues discussed.
- The network is identified as having weaknesses in **facilitating** information and dissemination, particularly because of funding shortages and strategic/structural problems.

## **5. Impact of form on function**

According to RAPID, it is necessary 'to define how [a network's] structural characteristics (organisation, skills, resources, etc.), or organisational practices affect its capacity to carry out its functions satisfactorily'. In the case of NGOCRC, it is clear that any major problems encountered by the network have as primary cause a lack of clarity in the form/structure of the network (something which the network staff themselves identify as a priority for future development). Here we use RAPID's key factors to analyse the contribution of the different areas to the strengths and or weaknesses detailed above. These are: governance; localisation and scope; capacity and skill; resources; membership; communications; external environment; and strategic and adaptive capacity.

### **5.1 Governance**

Governance is identified as a non-issue. There are no strategy documents in place, and no governance agreement. The current structure is unclear and lacks transparency: it was not possible to obtain information on the names/positions of members of the Executive Committee. In addition, the role of the Secretary General was not clarified, nor his position in the hierarchy of the organisational structure. This hierarchical structure also is a hindrance to clear and democratic decision making.

NGOCRC is a well known brand within Cambodia and within the field. However, much of this arises from the fact that the UN CRC is a key issue at the current time. NGOCRC activities are working to support the network's reputation. However, members were not clear as to the objectives of the network, or their role in terms of future strategy. Members also did not often attend meetings, which led to further weaknesses in terms of activity implementation. It is hoped that the future structural reassessment will take this into account. NGOCRC duplicates activities of ECPAT Cambodia and COSECAM to some extent, which causes some confusion as to its, and the other networks', remit. See Section 5.7.

### **5.2 Localisation and scope**

NGOCRC is based in Phnom Penh. Although many of its member NGOs carry out work outside the capital on a decentralised basis, and although interviews claimed that the structure was decentralised 'as well as centralised', it seems that activities are focused mainly within the centre. The exception is capacity building, which does enable provincial NGOs to participate. Information dissemination will also enable further decentralisation, but is hindered by lack of funding for electronic activities. NGOCRC works mainly on policy formulation and policy implementation, areas where its active members have considerable expertise. This has contributed to its strength in terms of advocacy, where it has had numerous successful impacts on influencing policy.

Again, a lack of clarity regarding activities and strategy leads to some confusions regarding the remit of the organisation and future plans.

### **5.3 Capacity and skill**

There is a shortage of network staff in NGOCRC – with only eight staff members (two of whom are at the level of guard/cleaner), support activities are limited. It is noted that four of the staff have high capacity (according to interviews with staff), with Bachelor or Masters degrees. The Secretary General believes that there is a need to focus on building NGOCRC's staff capacity and number to be able to support the future overhaul of the organisation's structure. This would mean that the implementation of activities could be more thorough.

NGOCRC does employ specific staff for IT, and there are also specific staff members for administration and finance. However, there is a shortage of staff regarding communications

and advocacy, and there is limited managerial-level support. There is also no staff focus on fundraising or strategic development. Fundraising is difficult for all NGOs in Cambodia (see Section 5.7): it is noted here that extra funds seem key to the potential of NGOCRC to grow in the future. Staff are in the main new; it may be that the new focus on structure and strategy, along with the learning curve, brings an improvement in staff coverage.

As with COSECAM, it has been considered that members are sometimes unclear on the mission and vision, particularly in terms of strategy. This could be addressed in the strategic overhaul, and hopefully will be improved when additional work is done on the website and database system (planned for the future).

#### **5.4 Resources**

NGOCRC has issues of low funding, and has limited technology and systems. NGOCRC does have library resources and documentation, but limited knowledge management systems (for the network and its members) mean that dissemination is constrained. As we have seen, there is reasonably high human resource capacity in terms of the network staff, although many are currently new, and the number of staff is insufficient. It would be useful if future plans focus on capacity building for current and new staff, particularly in the areas of organisational management, strategy and planning, and communications.

#### **5.5 Membership**

Membership criteria are under review. Currently, membership is voluntary and free, and is subject to voting by the NGO members. Members work generally within the area of child rights, and can include NGOs working on legal aid, providing shelter, and finding child scholarships abroad. NGOCRC aims to cover all areas related to children in terms of its membership. This could potentially lead to disharmony although, in the case of NGOCRC, the central goal is to address child rights, which unites all members. Members are organised in a hierarchical structure by the network. An overhaul of the structure of the network will hopefully provide more clarity as to the roles of members and enable a more democratic decision-making process. Currently, decisions are made by the Executive Committee, and this takes a long time.

#### **5.6 Communications**

The network does not have an appropriate communications strategy and staff members responsible for it.

#### **5.7 External environment**

The external environment in Cambodia has been identified as key in this report. There are some difficulties in the policy context, in terms of civil and political freedoms and room for manoeuvre at the government level. This makes it difficult to have an influence on policy, although NGOCRC has nevertheless had some successes in advocacy. Demand is assured (child exploitation is an acknowledged issue).

One of the major factors affecting work in Cambodia is the cultural milieu. Trust has been identified as significant in impacting both the network and the policy arena. Lack of trust makes it difficult for actors to work together and to share work. In addition, the NGO climate in Cambodia is peculiar, particularly in terms of the issue of sexual exploitation: as we have seen, donors have differing attitudes towards the issue, and this can be reflected in different missions of member NGOs in a network. Seeking funding can be competitive; this also has an effect on fundraising, as does the requirement by donors for those seeking funding to go through complicated funding processes which are hard for those with fewer skills to understand.

Relations between individuals in Cambodia, both in and outside a network, are traditionally hierarchical, such as patron-client. Young give way to old and less powerful give way to more powerful, regardless of experience or education. This can lead to difficulties in generating a participatory process, whereby all voices are heard. In addition, it would be difficult to maintain a horizontal structure against the traditional culture of Cambodia. Added to the issue of distrust in Cambodia, both within and outside the network, this can impact the success of functions of the network.

One major factor for NGOCRC is that it is often difficult for actors in Cambodia to admit failures or lack of understanding, for fear of reprisals or shame. Overriding in the case of this study was the realisation that the concept of networking was not fully understood, as was the case with the process of upgrading strategy and structure. In addition, there was a general unwillingness to admit this, coupled with an unwillingness to interview in depth or to allow staff members to interview; this could make the restructuring process difficult.

Many of the same activities/objectives are carried out by ECPAT Cambodia, COSECAM and NGOCRC networks in the area of child rights. It seems that there is great potential here for needless duplication, where better coordination or joint networking may have a greater impact. This duplication often results from Cambodia-specific factors, such as the reluctance to share information with 'outsiders' or to work together. This leads to confusion in work and jealousy/suspicion, fuelled by competition for donor funding.

It is important to be aware of the impacts of these factors in programming; as Bradley (2005) states, 'encouraging the openness of networks ... ensures that the network broadly reflects community interests', and this can lead to better implementation of all functions.

## **5.8 Strategic and adaptive capacity**

The network was identified by interviewees as able to deal with changes in interests and able to deal with external changes. This reflects positively for all of the functions. The network responds well to external environment demands and has been able to organise itself to work with changing situations and requirements in the government position and activities (such as drafting of laws, etc). The network is flexible and covers a number of functions. Additionally, prioritising the upgrade of the network's form/structure and funding options could mean that things improve greatly for the network in future.

However, there is a clear concern regarding such future development. Interviews were confused and information often contradictory or non-existent. An assessment by the network staff interviewee showed that the network was keen to expand without being clear on its own goals and objectives, and the idea of networking was not broadly understood. There is a chance, though, that this has arisen from the fact that many of the staff, including the Secretary General, are new, and are sorting through new issues.

The network is not sustainable financially, as it is dependent on international NGO/donor funds, which are insufficient. It seems impossible currently for NGOCRC to be financially sustainable, at least in the near future. As Bradley states (2005: 58), 'networks are highly dependent on NGO/donor funds'.

## **6. Brief conclusions**

This paper has given a brief review of one network in Cambodia, detailing its form, its functions, its strengths and weaknesses, and the effect of these on the former. It has also given a particular initial focus on certain areas of the external environment which impact its functioning, namely the social and cultural milieu.

NGOCRC is identified as having some strengths in terms of its activities (awareness raising, advocacy, reporting and capacity building). However, all of these activities are hampered by a generally untransparent and unclear form. A lack of strategic planning, organisational management and clear objectives shows that, in this case, the form has affected the functioning to great effect. Improvements in form would have a great impact on the clarity and coherence of activities. More constraints exist, though, in terms of low awareness on the objectives of networks and the low levels of funding available. A shortage of staff able to deal with fundraising and strategic planning leads to a vicious circle, whereby funding to improve is not available. There is also an issue of crossover with other networks: it would be useful for NGOCRC to consider this issue.

At the same time, the network shows awareness that these issues are the key factors in its own improvement. Additionally, many staff are new: a fresh approach, and the learning curve, may impact on the ability of NGOCRC to adapt itself and face its future with more clarity and cohesion. It is hoped that any plans for the future will also focus on involving members more actively in the network.



## **Annex 1: References**

### **Networks**

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### **NGOCRC documents**

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NGOCRC (2005) Background document.

## Annex 2: NGOCRC members

Cambokids	
CAMP	Child Assistance for Mobilisation and Participation
CCBO	Catholic Child Bureau Organization
CCD	Cambodian Children Development
CCH	Centre for Children's Happiness
CCASVA	Cambodian Children Against Starvation and Violence Association
CCPCR	Cambodian Center for the Protection of Children Rights
CCPSO	Children Protection and Saving Organization
CKIMHRDA	Cham/Khmer Islam Minority Human Rights and Development Association
CLA	Children & Love Association
CPCDO	Children and Poor Communities Development Organization
CRF	Child Rights Foundation
CVCD	Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development
CSF	Children Support Foundation
E&D	Enfants et Développement
EDCS	Education and Development of Cambodian Skills
Hagar (for women and children in crisis)	
HCC	Health Care Centre for Children
ICM	Intergovernmental Committee on Migration
KHEMARA (Cambodian handicrafts NGO)	
KKKCO	Khmer Kampuchea Krom for Children Organization
KKKHRDA	Khmer Kampuchea Krom for Human Rights and Development Association
KnK	Kokkyo naki Kodomotachi (Children Without Borders)
Krousar Thmey (for vulnerable Cambodian children)	
KYCC	Khmer Youth Camp for Culture
LAC	Legal Aid of Cambodia
LICADHO	League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
Mith Samlanh (for street children)	
Plan International Cambodia	
PJJ	Protection of Juvenile Justice
SCAPD	Street Children Assistance and Development Programme
SCA	Save the Children Australia
SCCO	Save the Cambodia Children Organisation
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SFODA	Sacrifice Families and Orphans Development Association
SIT	Save Incapacity Teenagers
UKYD	Kampuchea Krom Youth Association
USG	Urban Sector Group
VCAO	Vulnerable Children's Assistance Organization
VDTO	Vocational and Development Training Organization
WLA	Women's Light Association
WP	Wathnakpheap (child welfare and rights)
WVI	World Vision International

NB: only 43 members are shown here, of the 46 current members. This was as supplied by interviewees.

## **Annex 3: NGOCRC details**

### **Contact Information**

NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child (NGOCRC)  
c/o Children's House  
#8A, Street 138  
7 Makara  
Phnom Penh  
Cambodia  
Tel: (855) (0) 23-882412/12-869826  
Email: [ch.ngocrc@online.com.kh](mailto:ch.ngocrc@online.com.kh)

## **Annex 4: Interviewees**

### **NGOCRC**

Mr Soum Chamrong, Secretary General

### **Members**

Mr Chea Phy Den, Executive Director, Vulnerable Children Assistant Organization

Mr Mech Sokha, Director, Centre for Children's Happiness

## **Annex 5: Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is a summary of questions asked: it was adapted as necessary, and more questions were posed as necessary as seen on the RAPID function-form webpage. Interviews were carried out in Khmer and English as necessary.

### **A: Background**

1. When was the network formed?
2. Why was it formed?
3. Who are its major donors?

### **B: Functions**

1. What are the main objectives of the network?
2. How do you rank them in terms of importance?
3. What activities have you carried out/do you carry out to fulfil each objective?
4. What else does the network carry out, outside its objectives?
5. Does the network have a long-term business plan? What is it?

### **C: Management and organisation**

1. Do you have a governance agreement? Including what? Is it a formal document?
2. What kind of management system is there? Are there incentives? Is there a clear structure? What is it?
3. What kind of organisational mission is there?
4. Is the network centralised? What work does it do outside Phnom Penh?

### **D: Resources and communications**

1. Does the network have access to research from non-members?
2. Does the network have access to databases and sources?
3. How is knowledge shared within the network and outside?

### **E: Staff**

1. Are there staff employed specifically to network and make links with others?
2. Do staff have relevant skills and capacity?
3. Are there staff capacity-building initiatives within the network? What kind?
4. Does the network as a whole have sufficient and adequate staff?

### **F: Membership**

1. Is membership voluntary, free, fee-based, means-tested, open, or by invitation only?
2. How diverse are the members?

### **G: Strategic and adaptive capacity**

1. Can the network address differences in the interests/values of its members?
2. Can the network respond to opportunities in the policy context?
3. Is the network sustainable? How?
4. Does the network have the capacity to adopt new skills?
5. How does the network make decisions?

### **H: External environment**

1. At what stage of the policy process does the network intervene (agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, M&E)?
2. Who are the key policymakers and institutions?
3. How does the policy process work?
4. What is the extent of civil and political freedoms?
5. What difficulties are there with advocacy?

6. What determines the attitudes inside and outside the network? Are people united towards the common goal?
7. Does the issue of trust/unwillingness to share achievements affect NGOCRC? How?
8. Does the issue of trust/unwillingness to share achievements affect the network as a whole? How?
9. Does the issue of trust/unwillingness to share achievements affect the policy arena? How?
10. Is there a demand for the network's products and services? Who demands it? Government, civil society, donors?

**I: Other**

1. Please can we have as much documentation on the network as possible (annual reports, website address, organisational chart, mission statement etc).
- 11.